

Environmental Aesthetics and the Anthropocene



New Perspectives on Global Environmental Image International Conference organised by GIS Climat-Environnement-Société with the support of ADEME

October 9 & 10, 2014 from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm Espace Isadora Duncan, Paris-Meudon, France

Environmental Aesthetics in the Anthropocene

- What do environmental humanities have to say regarding the emergence of a geological era to be defined primarily by the human impact upon the living world?
- How do we find the proper or improper terms by which to bring a crisis of such magnitude into perspective?
- An environmental aesthetics reflexion might be relevant.

INTRODUCTION Kantuta Quirós et Aliocha Imhoff Glissements de terrain p. 7		Giovanna Zapperi Narrations cartographiques p. 29	
CAHIER ILLUSTRÉ P.17-28		John Pickles, Sebastian Cobarrubias et Maribel Casas Cortes Le regard cartographique, les nouvelles cartographies des frontières, et les responsabilités du cartographe p. 37	
Kantuta Quirós et Aliocha Imhoff Entretien avec Jennifer González p. 73		Sandro Mezzadra, Brett Neilson Fabrica Mundi: Dessiner des frontières et produire le monde p. 55	
Bertrand Westphal Carte paradoxale du mythe méditerranéen. Mona Hatoum p. 89		Pedro Lasch Huit manières de lire une carte Déclarations modulaires tirées de la série LATINO/A AMERICA p. 83	
Franco Farinelli La production spatiale de la société p. 111		Beatriz Preciado Cartographies queer p. 99	
Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann La géographie de l'art: historiographie, questions, et perspectives p. 145		Cuauhtémoc Medina Sud, sud, sud, sud p. 119	
Piotr Piotrowski Du tournant spatial ou une histoire horizontale de l'art p. 123		CAHIER ILLUSTRÉ P.133-134	
Joaquín Barriados Un cosmopolitisme esthétique ? p. 157		PORTFOLIO Estefanía Peñafiel Loaliza Méridiens et parallèles p. 164	
<h1>GÉO-ESTHÉTIQUE</h1>			
Sous la direction de Kantuta Quirós et Aliocha Imhoff			
Avec les œuvres de : Francis Alÿs, Gloria Anzaldúa, Arnaldo di Arnoldi, Anna Artaker, David Avalos, Marcos Avila Forero, Ricardo Basbaum,			

Environnemental Turn



History



Born together

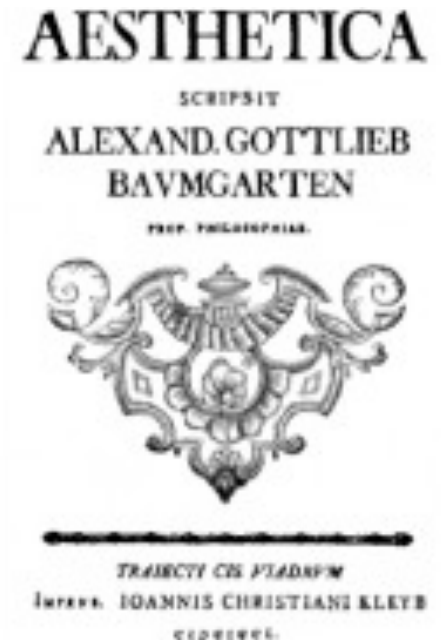
- When did the Anthropocene actually start? It is clear that in 1750, the Industrial Revolution had barely begun but by 1850 it had almost completely transformed England and had spread to many other countries in Europe and across the Atlantic to North America.
- When was Aesthetics born ? In between the moment Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714-1762) gave it its name (1735 *Meditationes*, 1750 *Aesthetica*) and Kant gave it its full theoretical depth (*Critique of Judgment* 1790).
- Though aesthetics had been part of philosophy since Plato attacked the educational value of many forms of art in the *Republic* and Aristotle briefly defended them in his fragmentary *Poetics*.

What is it

- Taking up where the *Meditations* had left off, Baumgarten begins the “Prolegomena” of this work with his famous definition of aesthetics:
 - Aesthetics (the theory of the liberal arts, the logic of the lower capacities of cognition [*gnoseologia inferior*], the art of thinking beautifully, the art of the *analogon rationis*) is the science of sensible cognition (*Aesthetica*, §1).
- Aesthetics is a philosophy of sensible cognition, which can link art, beauty and human sensibility in a project of knowledge necessarily difficult as philosophy then confronts what is naturally obscure and risk escaping rationality.

SCRIPSIT

Before Baumgarten, aesthetics meant 'sensation' (aesthesis in greek). Since Baumgarten, the meaning has shifted to 'sensibility' or 'sensitivity', usually to describe an artistic experience ;

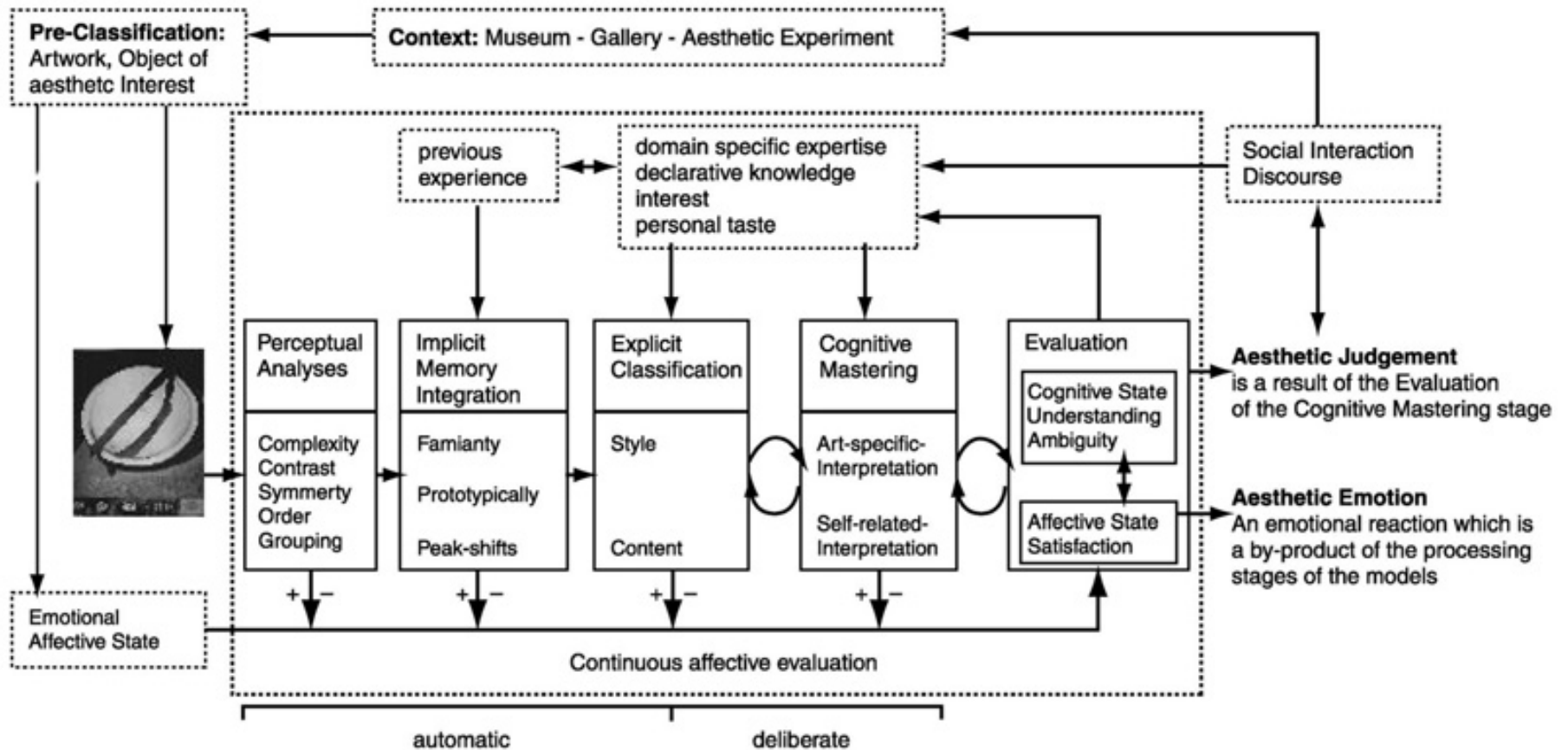


Science of sensitivity

- Baumgarten proposes what he calls an « aesthetic art of experience » ; whoever reads the works of Musschenbroek, Boyle, Malebranche and Bacon, says Baumgarten, whoever is familiar with their experimental efforts, will be capable of determining « a few general laws of pure sensual experience. »
- Based on these, the senses should be amplified and expanded by the aid of instruments and « weapons of the senses » such as the telescope, the microscope, artificial ears, speech-tubes...

The equal to other sciences

- That discipline should be equal to other sciences; but that is also an opportunity to assess and experiment the possibilities of feeling ; the first steps of a naturalist program, the cognitive one?
- From the analysis of Baumgarten's original programme, we might think that aesthetics needs to be added to the body of technics part of the development of a society of discipline, born in the late 18th century, that Michel Foucault has described.





Allegretto.

Karl

Ammonoites

Koats

The image is a composite graphic. At the top, there is a musical score for a piece titled "Allegretto." The score consists of two staves, with the upper staff in treble clef and the lower in bass clef. The music features a series of ascending eighth notes with slurs. On either side of the musical score is a vertical illustration of a DNA double helix, with the rungs colored in a rainbow spectrum. Below the musical score are three distinct panels. The left panel shows a profile of a classical bust, labeled "Karl" at the bottom. The middle panel shows a fossilized ammonite shell, a spiral shell with distinct segments, labeled "Ammonoites" at the bottom. The right panel shows a portrait of a woman with dark hair, resting her head on her hand, labeled "Koats" at the bottom.

- The *Critique of Judgment* was the third and last of Kant's three *Critiques*, the other two being the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, with a second edition in 1787), which deals with metaphysics and epistemology, and the *Critique of Practical Reason* of 1788, which, alongside his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* of 1785, deals with ethics.

Learning commons



- Kant introduces a subjective approach to aesthetic satisfaction as the free play of the faculties. He also proposes a new look at nature.
- Kant does not know aesthetics as a theory. Aesthetic is a type of judgment, not a domain of objects. Aesthetics is a specific idea of thought.
- The shapes are the way that the mind is able to subsume the particular under the general.

Références

Kant E. (2000), *Critique de la faculté de juger* (1e éd. 1787), traduction, présentation, bibliographie et chronologie par Renaut A., Paris, Garnier-Flammarion.

Jimenez m. (2004) *L'esthétique contemporaine. Tendances et enjeux*, Paris, Klincksieck.

Kant aesthetics, a new way

As Kant explains in 1790 (1995, page 344) :

« The propaedeutic to all fine art, so far as the highest degree of its perfection is what is in view, appears to lie, not in precepts but in the culture of the mental power produced by a sound preparatory education in what are called the humaniora so-called presumably because humanity signifies, on the one hand, the universal feeling of sympathy and, on the other, the faculty of being able to communicate universally one's in-most self properties constituting in conjunction the befitting social spirit of mankind, in contradiction to the narrow life of the lower animals... »

Kant aesthetics, a new way

- After a few sentences indicating that a people governed by the law had to learn the art of reciprocal communication of ideas involving the judgment of taste, Kant insists that future time, moving away from nature, requires in this sense, that people of that time learn to assess their work in bringing together « the law directed constraint belonging to the highest culture with the force and the truth of a free nature sensible of its propre worth. »
- Of course such a development implies, adds Kant, the moral sense, because the taste is strongly related to it.
- The distance of aesthetics from the metaphysical and theological sets art off of a divine plan to attach it to a collective human purpose, social, that of culture ; aesthetics is way to developp a collective human purpose



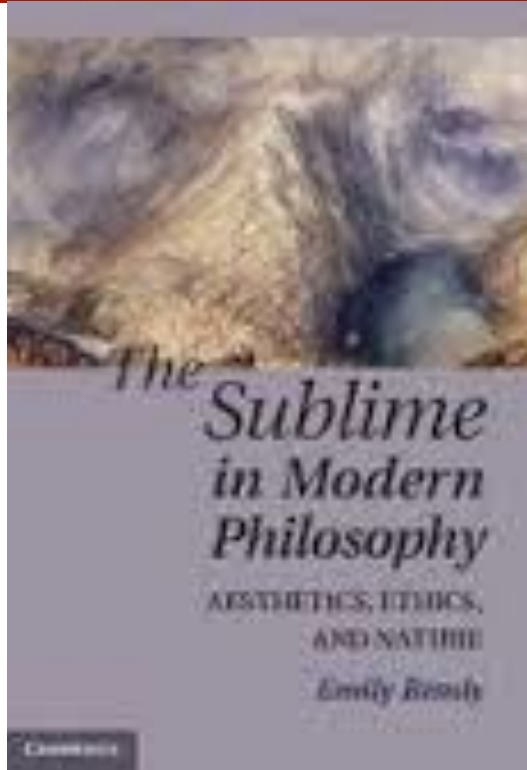
Imagination is a powerful agent for creating, as it were, a second nature out of the material supplied to it by actual nature.

(Immanuel Kant)

izquotes.com

Kant

A philosophy that speaks of nature rather than of art, but that art historians resume thoroughly, even modernist



A philosophy widely discussed and criticized by the theorists of environmental aesthetics (Brady, Berleant)

- **Emily Brady:** it's important to reassess Kant's theory of the sublime – for Kant scholarship as well as for a proper understanding of the history of the sublime and its relevance today.
- Many interpretations of Kant's theory argue for a human-centred sublime, where humans appear to recognize their power over nature through an experience of their own freedom or autonomy. I contest this reading of the sublime as self-admiration and show that for Kant, our distinctive positioning with respect to the rest of nature reveals a deep connection to it, as something metaphysically and actually greater than ourselves.
- There are two other reasons why his theory is especially significant. Kant focuses largely on nature widely understood – human and non-human nature. The overall argument of the book is that the historical and contemporary sublime is largely associated with natural environments. Also, his theory is, arguably, more philosophically rich and sophisticated compared to other early theories of the sublime.

Aesthetics and Anthropocene : To
keep in mind



Regime of aesthetics

- Several authors (Rancière, 2001; Lontrade, 2004) distinguish moments within the history of aesthetics.
- First there is the need for art to have an ethical value; artistic works are to educate morally. For Plato says Jacques Rancière (page 28), the art does not exist. There are only arts, ways of doing: images are based on imitation of a model, other breed mere appearances. "These imitations are differentiated by their origin, then by their destination: by the way in which the images of the poem give children and spectators citizens some education and are part of sharing the occupation of the city ... » Jacques Rancière speaks of « ethical regime of images ».

To keep in mind : Aesthetics and ethics

- From the eighteenth century on, with the Fine Arts, a conception of art was developed saying its uniqueness and aesthetics was described as an autonomous domain of knowledge ; this evolution plays on the separation between ethics and aesthetics.
- Oscar Wilde wrote : « *The first condition of creation is that the critic should be able to recognize that the sphere of art and the sphere of ethics are absolutely distinct and separate* » (O. Wilde, “the critic as artist”, in the Complete Work of Oscar Wilde, Collins, 1966, p. 1048, quoted par C. Lontrade, 2004, p. 93).

News of aesthetic : environmental aesthetics

- The rise of environmental aesthetics: If aesthetics was long limited to the arts, interested in the objects created specifically to exercise the senses, it opened during the last forty years to other objects and situations such as landscape, nature, city, ordinary life...
- The seminal article by Ronald Hepburn "Contemporary aesthetics and the neglect of natural beauty", published in 1966, invited to complete the aesthetic reflection by an investigation of the natural world, at that time largely ignored by aesthetic theory.

Aesthetic activity : a formative regime ?

- Rather to be mostly centered on art and and the analysis of the judgment of taste, aesthetic refer to a specific activity, but that is not separate from other ordinary activities, which involves intra-agentivity.
- That activity is part of a recognition of the self and of the object ; aesthetic is therefore primarily a reflexive activity.
- It occurs strictly an aesthetic activity, and not merely an aesthetic, that opens up the domain of aesthetic towards a pragmatic inquiry ; how do aesthetic intervene in the ordinary course of life.

To keep in mind : modern subject

- The modern subject of Aesthetics has its roots in eighteenth century philosophy and the issue of the essence of art.
- This means that Aesthetics is a theory of the senses that investigates how people approach the world through their senses, either to gather knowledge about it or to enjoy and find pleasure in it.

To keep in mind: aesthetics and experimental practices

- The development of experimental practices since the 17th century forms a historical a priori for the formulation of a science of sensory cognition from 1735 onwards
- Baumgarten's perspective has been revived not only by contemporary trends in aesthetics, such as neuroaesthetics, somaesthetics or everyday aesthetics, but also by new approaches within other philosophical branches, such as metaphysics, gnoseology or phenomenology

Aesthetics and Anthropocene : issues



News of aesthetic : an important critic

- Critique : *Petit manuel d'inesthétique*, Alain Badiou, 1998 ; *Adieu à l'esthétique*, Jean-Marie Schaeffer, 2000 ; *Malaise dans l'esthétique*, Jacques Rancière, 2004
- A relationship to art: art a power of transfiguration unassignable by the philosopher agenda; a relationship to the ordinary life (pop art Danto Arthur Danto, *L'art contemporain et la clôture de l'histoire*, Paris, Seuil, 2000)

Design

- The 20th century has displayed the aestheticization of a set of objects and devices associated with ordinary lives (Design, graphic design, architecture, plastic surgery, rights to aesthetics, etc..). There is now evidence of global design as shown by the book « *La Terre vue du ciel* (1st edition 2002) ».
- The word « cosmetic » is etymologically speaking linked to cosmos : **cosmetic (n.)** c.1600, « art of beautifying, » from Latinized form of Greek *kosmetike (tekhne)* « the art of dress and ornament », from fem. of *kosmetikos*. **cosmetic (adj.)** 1640s, from French *cosmétique* (16c.), from Greek *kosmetikos* « skilled in adornment or arrangement, from *kosmein* « to arrange, adorn, » from *kosmos* « order »

Aesthetics in the light of the Anthropocene

- Design a collective future through the control of senses, an AESTHETIC CONTROL.
- Body and Nature : two sides of the same coin.
- Represent the conditions of the creation of the collective unity of the manifold: the global imagination.
- Restore nature in the light of our needs.

Versions of an aesthetic destiny

- The nineteenth century saw the flowering of utopias drawing upon senses to affirm the collective: Fourier utopia based on human passions including five appetites (taste, touch, sight, hearing, smell).
- Romantic aesthetics also saw the emergence of reflections on the human future, in terms of elevation of the spirit, and community education (Schiller).



Solidarity, June 30, 1917. The Hand That Will Rule the World—One Big Union.



A different vision ?



Art: local and global

- An implicit aesthical Anthropocene global project : an aesthetic totality and a fascination for images
- Versus an art weaving local and global linking « communities »
- In different contexts, both Ranciere and Stengers suggest that such making of worlds is bound up with practices and politics that may enable, disrupt, realign or make strange our everyday material relations
- We consider how practices of arts and sciences that respond to climate change are situated in and emerge from these shifting material and political, natural– cultural relations

FabLab and local projects

- A Fab Lab (short for Manufacturing laboratory) is an open platform for creating and prototyping of physical objects, "smart" or not. It is intended for entrepreneurs who want to pass more quickly from concept to prototype; designers and artists; for students wishing to enrich their experience and practical knowledge in electronics, CAM, design; DIYers twenty-first century ...

Formal commons

- Environmental aesthetics relates to the common environment, i.e. an apprehension of this one that makes it what we discuss, share, and live in.
- It is the ordinary environment. If aesthetics has, primarily, related to art and the art history, it becomes emancipated lately of this first framework of interpretation and becomes, fitting in the wake of John Dewey works, celebrated philosopher and American pragmatist, the problem of the experience as an ordinary sensitivity.
- One can even think that it is a question of well defining this world of the sensitivity which rests on a common faculty, that to perceive (perceptual commons). The forms, which are perceived, could then be very well established as what we have in common and of which we discuss in policy (formal commons)

Art and environment

Illustrations



ECOPLASTIES

- In the 1960' and 70', an explosion of land art and environmental art practices including artists as diverse as Helen and Newton Harrison, Joseph Beuys, Robert Smithson, Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Hans Haacke, a new order of ecological awareness was emerging and influencing the intersection of arts and sciences.

- Founder and director of the Center for Advanced Visual Studies (CAVS) at MIT, Gyorgy Kepes specifically took up the arts - sciences challenge in the realm of the environment, suggesting that the meeting of arts and sciences could potentially alleviate the perceived ills of modernity, from a scorched environment to complex social issues.
- He curated exhibits and edited publications, such as Arts of the Environment (1972) which assembled together a range of artists and practitioners from artist Robert Rauschenberg to cybernetician Jay Forrester, who addressed issues related to the environment.

Homeostasis

- Environmental homeostasis on a global scale', Kepes (1972) wrote, 'is now necessary to survival'. Art in particular could play a critical role in ensuring this balance and regulation, because art allows us 'to register and reject what is toxic and find what is useful and meaningful in our lives' (Kepes, 1972).



Sam Bower, *Carte de l'Environmental Art*, http://www.greenmuseum.org/generic_content.php?ct_id=306

Environmental art



Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970, Great Salt Lake, Utah

In the catalog *Earthworks : Land Reclamation as Sculpture* (Seattle Art Museum, 1979), Robert Morris, who understands the economical stakes, explains the problem: the sites rehabilitations is impossible.



Robert Morris, *Reclamation of John Pitt # 30*, 1979, Kent, King County Public Art Collection

The German artist Hans Haacke in 1970 collected the waste of a beach and erected an ephemeral sculpture, *Beach pollution*. He stigmatized two years later the pollution of the Rhine in Krefeld by exposing a purification system water. *Rhine-Water Purification Plant* (Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, on 1972): after purification of waters soiled until the last stage, after passage in a filter of sand and coal, a pond where goldfishes evolved.



Hans Haacke: Rhinewater Purification Plant, 1972
Afbeelding uit Ecovention (Spaid 2002)

Conclusion

- How the arts address and engage environmental issues beginning at the local level ? How community arts, environmental creativity, and the changing role of artists in the *Polis* contribute to the goal of a sustainable future ?