# 文藝美勞研究



# 文艺美学研究

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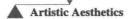
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# Aesthetic Ecosystem Services: Nature in the Service of Humankind and Humankind in the Service of Nature

## Yrjö Sepänmaa

Abstract The term "ecosystem services" refers to the material and spiritual benefits and goods that we receive from nature, in a broad sense from all kinds of environment. The various forms of such benefits have begun to be called "services". Nature serves people by producing the material and intellectual prerequisites for life for them. This is the foundation of our aesthetic well-being too. Does humankind reciprocally serve nature or only itself through nature, with the intention of exploiting it? What do we know of nature's reactions? We see when nature suffers or flourishes, and we also observe our own effect on its state. As much as our well-being is dependent on nature's services, nature's well-being is increasingly dependent on us and our culture. Talking of services brings back the anthropomorphism passed over by the natural sciences, which refers to a similarity to humankind, to its point of view and language. I direct most of my attention to this way of speaking that personifies nature, and to the way of thinking controlled by it. Does the use of language combining humankind and nature bring genuine fellowship and closeness, even love? Does the language of service therefore promote an understanding of our environmental relationship and a rapprochement, or does it lead back to a mystifying concept of nature and the establishment of a mutual system of values involving a servant and the one served, benefiting one over the other? Or perhaps a new age of humankind is arising or has already arisen, the Anthropocene, in which matters and words combine: ecology and philosophy become ecosophy and aesthetics and ethics become aethics?

Key Words ecosystem services; anthropocene; ecosophy; aethics

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#### As servants of each other

The whole of human life is based on goods and services provided by nature. Some are produced directly by nature in a state of nature, but nowadays an ever increasing number are produced by the cultural and built environment. Cultural services-education and teaching, art, leisure activities, recreation-are built on an essential natural foundation, but distance themselves from it and develop into their own species. On the one hand, all kinds of shaping of the environment impoverish, but, on the other hand, increase the richness and diversity of the environment.

Nature serves humankind, but humankind also serves nature, interactively. At its best, this is mutual caring, at its worst it is the subjugation, forcing, and suffocation of one by the other. Besides functioning interaction and mutual dependence one also finds a reluctant service relation, a refusing of the role of servant and even outright opposition. To win the struggle for existence, humankind has had to fight stubborn nature and tame its wildness: frosts, drought and wetness, barrenness, predators and insect pests. Nature has had to be conquered, not only with rationality, but also by violence and cunning. A love-hate relationship has unavoidably remained.

The services obtained from nature are either material(food, raw-materials), or intangible. Typical intangible, i. e. intellectual services are recreational and welfare services, among which aesthetic services are also counted. Of these, beautiful landscapes and impressive natural phenomena, such as rainbows and aurora borealis, which produce sensory experiences, are surface aesthetic. Deep aesthetic services in a conceptual sense are the harmony and dynamism of a system, an unbroken life cycle. Understanding the behaviour of an ecosystem produces intellectual pleasure; admiration of, even surprise at the functionality of a multi-dimensional system tempts one

to think of a higher intelligence hidden behind it, which then appears in common parlance.

Humankind, for its part, serves nature not only by protecting it, but also be developing and refining it, producing something that nature itself is not able to do. This creates a cultural diversity in the environment, not as an intrinsic value, but for our own benefit. Our goals are various. The aesthetic motive of our actions is the preservation, promotion, and creation of beauty, the means being the practices of applied environmental aesthetics and the ethics that support it. (The term aethics is sometimes used to refer to a combination of aesthetics and ethics.)

We are a part of nature, but as we manipulate nature we are always

#### Side by side

distancing ourselves from it and keeping a critical distance to it. Parallel to and in place of nature's system we develop our own systems, a built and designed parallel nature. By its activeness, humankind serves the ecosystem, which responds by producing well-being for it. In a friendly relationship nature gives thanks for protection, environmental care, building protection-all activity that takes the environment into consideration and honours it. Otherwise it is insubordinate-or, if dominated, it disintegrates. An increasingly large part of the environment is designed or made by humankind, made to suit our purposes. The urban environment is the most processed, not only its buildings and streets, but also the gardens, the parks, and the city woods. Our responsibility extends both to the urban nature and the buildings and other artefacts. Cultural ecology and evolution become alternatives to, and replacements for natural process; they all overlap, mix, and merge into one. Humankind is an increasingly important influence; its footprints reach back to natural ecology, often as a form of disturbance, but also in acts of repair.

### ■文艺美学研究 (2015年秋季卷)

Is everything untouched by humankind ecologically healthy? Nature's own disturbances, extreme phenomena, and direct environmental catastrophes are the uncontrolled increase of some species, earthquakes and tsunamis, drought or excessive rain, heat or frost, cold winters. The state of the environment is dynamic, self-correcting, and adaptable, not static.

Nature's own ecology can be compared with a positive all is well aesthetic, cultural ecology with a critical aesthetic, because one thing and another can always be found that needs to be improved and developed. The aim is the mutual well-being of humankind and nature. This is thus a matter of the mutual oversight of interests. Humankind is self-evidently dependent on nature, even if not as greatly and directly as previously. What about the other way round, is nature dependent on humankind? At least cultural nature, the agricultural and urban environment can thank human activity for its existence, appearance, and character. There is a symbiosis between the parties, an interactive relationship-an interdependence.

Humankind is a party to ecosystems, in which its effect is increasingly central. It brings with it new types of well-being: cultural, social, and economic, that do not belong to wild nature. We can speak of novel ecosystems (see Marris et al., 2013) and their beauty. This is a matter specifically of the functional, operational beauty of systems.

#### Personification

The service idea humanizes the non-human. The personification of nature and the entire environment acts as an aid to thinking, but it also confuses. In the background, a mythical image of nature acts, though to modern people mainly as an allegory and metaphor. Personification has become literally illustrative. This manner of speaking-which the actual natural sciences carefully avoid-is still common in essay-like nature-writing and lyric nature poetry, which emphasise the interaction between

humankind and nature. The operations of nature are explained in human terms of intentions and goals, predilections and rejections. Nature is seen as an understanding companion, conversational company, to which we are connected by an emotional bond. Arnold Berleant describes this kind of engagement as follows: "As experienced, environment does not stand apart but is always related to humans, to the human world of interest, activity, and use. This is the human meaning of ecology. "(Berleant, 2013, 70.) It is not only organic nature and its individual members that are seen as a partner, it can equally well be a machine, building, or an intellectualized home region, native land, and common world (on cultural ecology see Pagano, 2014). Natural and cultural sites that are regarded as significant to an individual or group have begun to be "adopted", which means a commitment to taking care of them. In cases of displays and performances some have gone even further:involving "marriage" to the Lake Kallavesi in Finland, to the Eiffel Tower in France and the Berlin Wall in Germany. Thus, surprisingly, the natural and cultural sciences, which are the foundation of ecosystem thinking, have had to leave space for metaphorical thinking that sounds mythical. When language takes control, nature becomes, in talking, the image of human body and like humankind, which reinforces an emotional relationship and empathy. For example, one can sorrow for uncultivated fields being taken over by forest, or, for deserted villages-at the same time knowing that the residents who have left may be happier elsewhere. Detaching from where one grew up must, perhaps, be interpreted as taking an initiative and being energetic: being ready to leave to find a better life. The fields that have been left behind, covered in spring by dandelions and in mid-summer by cow parsley, are certainly visually beautiful, but in the eyes of someone who values farming they are melancholy images of work that has lost value and been wasted.

### □文艺美学研究 (2015年秋季卷)

#### Aesthetic welfare services

Welfare can be examined from the point of view of both humankind and nature. One expression of this kind of thinking is precisely speaking about the well-being of nature and the environment. Our conception of what is best for nature is often a narrow mirror image of our own well-being. We think that we know from the model of our own experience what is best for plants, animals, and even inanimate nature.

Aesthetic welfare, which Monroe C. Beardsley examined in his congress lecture "Aesthetic Welfare" in Uppsala, Sweden, in 1968 (published in 1970 and 1972, enlarged 1973), refers not only to the taking care of the preconditions of our needs involving beauty, but also to the pleasure arising from the fulfilment of these needs. A welfare state sets foundations and standards for well-being of its citizens. It arranges and ensures the material, institutional, and social preconditions for happiness and welfare. These include work and income, safety and education, the possibility to practise physical and intellectual culture, leisure pursuits and recreation. Society cannot ensure realization and subjective satisfaction-which, possible or not, remain the responsibility of each person.

According to Beardsley, the environment has aesthetic wealth, capital, from which each person can only take a part for their own use. Use presupposes not only sensory sensitivity, but also conceptual competence and skill, which can be taught and learned, thus permitting one to realize their own possibilities. Prerequisites are given by aesthetic education and culture. Nature itself, the whole environment, guides by its reactions through trial and error. The experience of welfare thus cannot be ensured or proven from outside. However, such preconditions as a beautiful and stimulating environment, and cultural offerings and leisure-activity possibilities can, and should be ensured. The framework of welfare-clean

air, silence and peace, communications, town and country planning with all that is involved-are primarily the responsibility of society. The realization of the welfare of the individual on this basis requires each person's own activeness, knowledge, skill, and sensitivity.

Beauty is, on the one hand, the source of our well-being, on the other hand, the result. The aestheticality of the environment is, as a means too, something that maintains and produces human well-being. The health effects, both physical and mental, are particularly important instrumental values, whereas actual aesthetic well-being is a value in itself, like art. The aesthetic environment has many kinds of instrumental value, but they are, however, secondary. Environmental design and product development that take nature's well-being into account create cultural well-being. Renewable natural resources and the recycling of these resources are preconditions for the sustainability of a system. Through its solutions, design can support sustainable development. The extension of the useful life of things and products by repair and maintenance is one way to save natural resources. Programmatic "trash design" leaves a product's previous stage visible and reminds us of the process's continuity: at the end of one life cycle another starts. This is also represented by ecological nature care, in which signs of deliberate planning are left: that which seems abandoned can actually be intended (Gobster, 1995, p. 9, with reference to Joan Nassauer). Forest fire is nature's renewing ecological act and as such aesthetically acceptable (Kovacs et al., 2006, 63).

#### From eco-culture to eco-civilization and wisdom

An environmental culture is a system of relationships between humankind and the environment at any one time. As such, it is value-neutral. Cultures are environmentally positive and negative. A civilized environmental relationship, environmental civility, is value-positive. It signifies good behaviour towards