

# ‘Line of Wreckage’: Towards a Postindustrial Environmental Aesthetics

JONATHAN MASKIT

Department of Philosophy, Denison University, Granville, OH, USA

*ABSTRACT* Environmental aesthetics, largely because of its focus on ‘natural’ rather than artificial environments, has ignored postindustrial sites. This article argues that this shortcoming stems from the nature–culture divide and that such sites ought to be considered by environmental aestheticians. Three forms of artistic engagement with postindustrial sites are explicated by looking at the work of Serra, Smithson, and others. It is argued that postindustrial art leads to a successively richer ability to see and thus think about such sites. Finally, a new category is proposed, the interesting, in order to capture the aesthetic experience of postindustrial landscape art that eludes current terminology.

## Introduction

What might environmental aesthetics have to say about postindustrial sites? It would seem, based on the literature to date, not much. While artists, urban planners, community activists, government officials, and others have been thinking about what we might call the problem of the postindustrial for 40 years or more, philosophers in general, and environmental philosophers and aestheticians in particular, have not, with few exceptions, paid much attention to postindustrial sites. We might take this as analogous to what Andrew Light referred to as the ‘urban blind spot in environmental ethics’ (Light, 2001). Yet former industrial sites—played-out mines and quarries, shuttered factories, abandoned rail yards, etc.—form a growing part of the human environment, particularly, but not exclusively, in urban areas. What, if anything, is to be done with such sites and how might art and aesthetics help answer this question? In many cases what is done with such sites is nothing: the site is simply surrounded with a locked fence and abandoned. Yet doing nothing is usually a bad idea. Such sites are usually contaminated, threatening nearby watersheds and human and animal populations. Even if unpolluted, postindustrial sites, when enclosed and abandoned, form depressing ‘holes’ in the spatial fabric of a place. They must be circumnavigated, contributing a certain discontinuity to one’s experience of time and space. Since they often form an eyesore as well—or may at least be perceived as such—making one’s way around them means both a longer and less interesting trip. Worse, while active industrial sites draw people, creating communities around themselves, those sites, once abandoned, quickly spawn a cancerous disintegration of

---

*Correspondence Address:* Jonathan Maskit, Department of Philosophy, Denison University, Granville, OH, USA. Email: maskit@denison.edu

those communities, leaving a sort of secondary zone of abandonment around the site. It seems that doing nothing is in fact doing something, even if only passively so. Far better, it seems, to put some thought into doing something actively, although exactly what remains to be decided. Before engaging with such sites, however, we need, I argue below, to be able to *see* them. The question of how we do, can, or ought to see something is a question, at least in part, for aesthetics. Thus environmental aesthetics can offer a useful analysis of how we can see these sites differently, in order to enable us to think of them differently.

Environmental aesthetics often begins by attempting to differentiate environments into natural and artifactual (or less-than-natural; see, for example, Carlson, 2000; Budd, 2002; Brady, 2003). Having drawn this distinction, or at least suggested it (often while admitting the difficulty of drawing it cleanly if at all), many environmental aestheticians immediately turn to the aesthetics of nature. That is, the terms 'environment' and 'natural environment', even in the moment of recognizing that they need to be distinguished from one another, are taken as synonyms, thus making environmental aesthetics synonymous with the aesthetics of nature. However, if we consider our environment in the sense of the world around us, we quickly realize that most of it is hardly natural at all. The places where most of us live, while they may have plant and animal life, are hardly natural, if what we mean by 'nature' is 'pristine nature'. Where we work is often even less natural than where we live. Industrial plants, because of their rigidly controlled character, are exceedingly unnatural. Nevertheless, such places form an important part of our environment and deserve to be taken seriously by environmental aestheticians. For if 'environment' means 'the human environment', limiting environmental aesthetics to the aesthetics of nature means, paradoxically, making it *less* about *our* environment. Since many environmental aestheticians are motivated by environmentalist concerns, this focus means only being able to talk about preservation and not about restoration. Finally, postindustrial sites make clear just how difficult it really is to disentangle the cultural and the natural, which shows us why we need a 'mixed' aesthetics.

My argument begins with identifying how a particular form of the nature–culture distinction implicitly informs some contemporary literature on environmental aesthetics, particularly the work of Allen Carlson. Contrary to the trend in environmental aesthetics since the 1970s and 1980s, which has treated, for the most part, art and nature as importantly different from one another, I hold that our very idea of nature is deeply cultural, which makes comparing art and nature a far from straightforward proposition (cf. Haapala, 2002; Berleant, 2005). I shall not argue this point here, but rather show how the focus on natural environments has made it difficult for environmental aestheticians to address postindustrial sites.

I then turn to environmental art, drawing on Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, to argue that art can play an important role in shaping how we see the world around us. I show how the work of several contemporary artists transforms our vision, allowing us to see our environment in ways that both enrich our aesthetic experience and enable us to think differently about the world. I sketch three stages of artistic engagement with the postindustrial arguing that these aesthetic engagements transform how we see postindustrial sites.

Finally, I argue that such work requires a new aesthetic category. I propose, at least provisionally, the category of the *interesting* to capture what captivates us in

conceptual art in general and environmental, conceptual art in particular. In the wake of postindustrial, environmental art, this category too can be applied to postindustrial sites more generally. Its application here, however, must always be temporally inflected. For, as suggested above, the question of such sites is not only one of appreciating them as they are, but also as they might be. These postindustrial sites, constituting as they do a certain sort of return of the culturally repressed, are often close at hand. Knowing what to do with them requires, in part, environmental aesthetics taking them seriously.

### **What Are the Proper Objects for Environmental Aesthetics?**

Contemporary environmental aesthetics often begins by distinguishing nature from art and then seeks to elucidate just what an aesthetics of nature ought to be like. This starting place has several consequences. First, it usually means that the environment with which one is concerned will be primarily the ‘natural environment’. This first consequence also means that environments that are less than fully natural will receive little consideration or will receive consideration only in comparison with natural environments or only insofar as they are natural (Budd, 2002, pp. 7–9). Second, the theoretical aspects of one’s aesthetic theory will need either to differentiate nature from art or to treat the two of them as two aspects of one unified aesthetic theory. Third, because one’s aesthetic theory is likely to have distinguished rather strongly between nature and art, it will sometimes be difficult for one to see the ways in which nature is itself a (partial) product of human agency and, conversely, that human endeavors are (partially) a result of our ‘nature’. Fourth, this initial distinction between nature and art, indeed, culture, often will have the effect of reifying nature such that artistic engagements with nature can only be seen as affronts to it.

As Emily Brady writes, ‘In environmental aesthetics, “natural environment” is often used rather loosely to cover more natural rather than more cultural landscapes (and I am also prone to this usage)’ (Brady, 2003, p. 54). Brady immediately admits that this usage is ‘pragmatic’, but makes clear that her primary focus will be on natural environments, although she also has a deep interest in landscapes that are more cultural, such as agricultural landscapes, and admits that just how we are to draw the distinction between the natural and the cultural is far from clear. Allen Carlson too recognizes that the environment is broader than ‘mere’ nature:

We appreciate not only art, but also nature—broad horizons, fiery sunsets, and towering mountains. Moreover, our appreciation reaches beyond pristine nature to our more mundane surroundings: the solitude of a neighborhood park on a rainy evening, the chaos of a bustling morning marketplace, the view from the road. Thus, there is a need for an aesthetics of the environment, for in such cases our aesthetic appreciation encompasses our surroundings: our environment. The environment may be more or less natural, large or small, mundane or exotic, but in each such case it is an environment that we appreciate. Such appreciation is the subject matter of environmental aesthetics. (Carlson, 2000, p. xvii)

Carlson thus seems to take environmental aesthetics to be concerned with environments more generally, although it will turn out that his primary interest also is in 'natural' environments. Carlson agrees with Brady, at least implicitly, that we can distinguish between natural and cultural environments ('more or less natural') and I suppose, by extension, between nature and culture in general. However, like Brady, he is never fully clear on just how this distinction should be drawn.

Perhaps the roots of this difficulty can be elucidated if we consider that environmental aesthetics has been exercised since Hepburn's time with the question of whether we need a separate aesthetic theory to account for the aesthetics of nature or whether we can make do with just one theory to account for both nature and art (Hepburn, 1966). To be sure, the recent re-discovery of the natural environment as a worthy subject for aesthetic appreciation has been largely a reaction to the history of aesthetics since Hegel. From Shaftesbury to Kant, it was a given that aesthetics not only included nature but was, in many ways, primarily concerned therewith. It was only with Hegel and the consideration of art as part of a development of human culture that nature was no longer to be considered an object worthy of our aesthetic attention. And the history of aesthetics in the twentieth century more than confirms this Hegelian transformation, taking the terms 'aesthetics' and 'philosophy of art' as largely synonymous. Against this background, it is not surprising that environmental aestheticians would seek out those cases where it seemed likely we could encounter nature as something that was explicitly non-artifactual. To the degree that the field has developed in this way, it has simply reinvigorated the distinction between art and nature that Kant himself sought to develop in the *Critique of Judgment*.

We can see Kant's distinction clearly in most of the contemporary literature on environmental aesthetics. Carlson writes, 'Works of art are the products of artists . . . . However, environments typically are not the products of designers and typically have no design. Rather they come about "naturally", they change, grow, and develop by means of natural processes. Or they come about by means of human agency, but even then only rarely are they the result of a designer embodying a design' (Carlson, 2000, p. xviii). In other words, what is important about environments for the environmental aesthetician and what makes them different from art (or part of what makes them different from art at least), is that they occur naturally. This 'naturalness' of the environment means that, despite whatever passing recognition is given to cultural environments, the terms 'environment' and 'natural environment' can be, and often are, collapsed into one another. Indeed, Carlson makes clear that built environments *are* environments not because of their built character but despite it. And, if being un-designed is a desideratum of the environment, then we should expect that 'natural' environments will come to serve as the paradigm of the environment for environmental aesthetics—and indeed we find exactly this. The less natural a place, the less it can be appreciated *as an environment* (although it can still be appreciated as art).

It is true that Carlson is also concerned with environments that are not purely natural. Having developed his object-oriented aesthetics of nature, he asks 'what does the object-focused approach say about appropriate aesthetic appreciation of, for example, roadsides and cornfields, gardens and graffiti, churches and office buildings?' (Carlson, 2000, p. 133). Carlson's question here is spurred by the observation that his own view—that in order to consider an object aesthetically

we need to know nothing of the purpose for which it was created but only about the history of its production—can apply only to two extreme cases of aesthetic objects: pristine nature (if such there be) and pure art (if such there be). Carlson's claim here is that pristine nature and pure art are what they are by virtue of their history of production and that neither of them has a function. He recognizes, of course, that if these were the only types of objects that could even be candidates for aesthetic consideration, then there would be a broad range of objects traditionally considered to have aesthetic worth that have simply been ruled out of account by definition: 'landscapes, countrysides, [and] farmsteads' on one side and 'architecture, industrial design, commercial art', etc. on the other. Objects of both types require an investigation as to their purpose in order to encounter them aesthetically: 'All such things', writes Carlson, 'have a function, a purpose; and they are what they are in virtue of what they are meant or intended to accomplish'. Since such purposes are integral to the being of these objects, their aesthetic appreciation must consider this purpose. Thus Carlson argues that 'to appropriately appreciate a landscape, we must know the different uses to which the land has been put and which have thus shaped its look' (Carlson, 2000, pp. 134–135; see also Brady, 2006, on agricultural landscapes). We can now frame the question of the postindustrial as follows: what about those things that seem to be aesthetically appreciable not in light of their functions and histories but despite them? To see how we can appreciate the postindustrial requires a consideration of how environmental art engages with postindustrial sites.

### Environmental Art

There are three stages to the dialogue between art and the postindustrial that I want to sketch. First, there is *appreciation*, in which the postindustrial is taken up as subject matter for artistic representation. Second, there is *intervention*, in which artists engage more directly with the postindustrial, either through their choice of materials or through the siting of their work. Third, there is *renovation*, in which artists, now in collaboration with architects, planners, and the like, seek not merely to intervene in a postindustrial site for purposes of artistic production, but to transform that site in some way. I treat appreciation and intervention in this section and renovation in the next.

*Appreciation* marks the recognition by artists that there is something worth being engaged with or represented. While artistic representations of industrial sites are as old as industrialism, representations of postindustrial sites are a more recent phenomenon (although postindustrial sites themselves clearly date to shortly after the birth of industrialism).

Contemporary photographers such as Edward Burtynsky, Terry Evans, or Masumi Hayashi take the postindustrial itself as their subject matter (see Hayashi, 2004; Honold, 2005; Burtynsky, 2007; Evans, 2007). Yet we must be careful here, for works of art can be, as Kant points out, beautiful (or at least aesthetically valuable) presentations of a thing, without the thing presented being beautiful (Kant, 1974, p. 246, Ak. 311). This I think is only sometimes the case. Rather, and this is particularly true of Burtynsky's work, these are images that often fail to be beautiful, yet hold our attention nevertheless. What is needed to make sense of such art and of

the postindustrial itself is a new aesthetic category. Before introducing it, however, I would like to turn to interventionist artworks.

Robert Smithson and Richard Serra are both postindustrial *interventionist* artists. Rather than taking the postindustrial as something to be represented, Smithson and Serra take the postindustrial itself (or at least the industrial) as the 'medium' in which they work. Smithson is the more clearly postindustrial of the two: his works often either reference or are sited at abandoned industrial sites; he incorporates within his work the very same natural processes by which nature re-colonizes such sites; and he calls upon us to reflect upon these sites and, by extension, our relationship to industry and industrialism. Serra is perhaps more industrial than post. His medium of choice is often (but not exclusively) Cor-Ten steel; his works are often not site-specific, and when they are, are usually sited either in parks or plazas; finally, his works invite us to see the beauty in industrial materials, with little or no regard for the processes that created them. Nevertheless, I find Serra important for just that final reason, since his work can help us to see possibilities in postindustrial sites that we might not otherwise have noticed. While Serra's works are often monumental in scale, they seem to me, for all their monumentality, to be just as much about rust.

In 'The Origin of the Work of Art', Heidegger suggests that a stone temple once opened up a world in which things could be seen as what they are (Heidegger, 1971, p. 42 and 1980, p. 27). What he does not quite say, but must be the case by his argument, is that the temple as artwork allows the stone itself first to be seen as stone. Something similar takes place in Serra's work, which first allows us to see rust as rust and, moreover, as something beautiful. Serra's work thus transforms our vision in the way that Merleau-Ponty discusses (1964a, 1964b). Having once seen Serra's work, we will never see rust in the same way again. This transformation of our vision is important if we are to see postindustrial sites in a new way. But while Serra helps us see one aspect of the (post)industrial differently (rust), it does not help us see postindustrial sites anew. I thus turn to Smithson, many of whose works constitute an artistic engagement with postindustrial sites.

Amongst Smithson's widely varied gallery works, some re-present particular places.<sup>1</sup> I examine here two types of such work: Nonsites (Smithson's term) and Mirror/Earth works (my term). Nonsites collect and re-present physical materials and maps in order to give a sense of a site that is distinct from the gallery environment in which the Nonsite is displayed. They often are made up of rocks, although occasionally Smithson used sand or slag, displayed in open boxes (usually of metal) together with maps, photographs, or other documentation of the site from which the material came. Interestingly, although Donald Crawford (1983, p. 51) took these Nonsites to be about natural sites, many, perhaps most of them, were evocations of industrial or even postindustrial sites: Bayonne, NJ; Oberhausen or Essen, Germany, etc. The photographs in a Nonsite are almost always of broken rocks, fetid containment pools, or heaps of slag. Smithson's Mirror/Earth works are composed simply of soil, rocks, sand, or shells taken from a particular place and then arranged with a set of mirrors of specified size. Unlike Nonsites, Mirror/Earth works tend not to include photographic or cartographic documentation of the site from which the materials come.

Both Nonsites and Earth/Mirror works have much to say about the place they re-present. They also seek, through artistic intervention, to redeem those sites.

By bringing those sites to us, they remind us that we are part of the social and economic system that is responsible for the condition of those sites. And, by re-situating these materials and re-framing them, they show us that possibilities remain in these sites that we might not otherwise have seen. Nevertheless, these works cannot function as full-fledged interventions in their sites, since they dislocate themselves *from* those sites (hence the name *Nonsite*).

Smithson also undertook a number of pieces that constitute what I call postindustrial landscape art. Even *Spiral Jetty*, photographs of which tend to suggest it is located in some sort of natural setting, is in a postindustrial site. Crawford describes *Spiral Jetty*'s location as a 'wasteland site, an expansive backwater portion of a dead sea in the desert adjacent to an abandoned oil drilling operation—useless land and water' (Crawford, 1983, p. 51). As with the *Nonsites*, and despite his having observed that this siting is consistent for all of Smithson's Earthworks, Crawford takes them nevertheless to be about an encounter between art and *nature*. While the siting of such works does not preclude their being about an encounter between art and nature, it would seem to make it less likely than with, for example, Andy Goldsworthy, much of whose work is sited in woods, streams, or shorelines far away from population centers and industry.

*Asphalt Rundown* (1969), a performance piece executed at an abandoned quarry near Rome, entailed Smithson bringing a dump truck of asphalt to the quarry and tipping it out, allowing the asphalt to flow down the hillside.<sup>2</sup> This work is one of several either executed or planned by Smithson in the late 1960s, including cement pours, glue pours, and others. These works come under investigation by Carlson as he attempts to answer the question, 'does environmental art constitute an affront to nature?' Unlike lots of other environmental art, this piece is not set in anything resembling a natural landscape. It is for this reason alone that Carlson dismisses his charge of affront to nature. For if the landscape in question is no longer natural, then Smithson cannot be affronting nature. (Whether the quarry owners previously affronted nature is a separate question.) For me the real question is, does Smithson's intervention in a postindustrial site have aesthetic merit? In other words, does it change how we see? Unlike traditional restoration that seeks to re-create nature to some degree, Smithson's work helps us see a certain sort of remnant 'naturalness' of the site, even if the nature it highlights is more that of physics than biology or ecology. That is, like much of Smithson's work, what *Asphalt Rundown* shows us are nature's laws, in this case, those of gravity, the relationship between liquids and solids, the effects of temperature on substances, etc. Furthermore, the piece highlights for us what has been lost here. Since the biological processes of the site have been gravely interrupted, it is almost only the physical laws—nature at its most basic—that remain.

Moreover, asphalt is, of course, an industrial material. By pouring this industrial material down a cliff rather than applying it to a prepared roadbed, Smithson mimics the material's usual application while highlighting the futility of industrial humanity's 'paving project'. As we all know, improperly made or unmaintained roads do not remain paved: asphalt crumbles, grass returns, the road becomes a meadow. Of course, by executing *Asphalt Rundown*, Smithson has slowed down the workings of exactly the same processes that would have reclaimed the quarry were it left undisturbed. Nevertheless, the artwork does more than the quarry left to its own

devices could to bring us to think about such sites, their pasts, and their various possible futures. This temporal element is important to Smithson's work. Many of his site-specific works were designed from the start to be transient or to develop following the logic of vegetal growth. Thus, for example, *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970) has, in the 37 years of its existence, more or less disappeared, leaving only a small island of forest in its stead.

Smithson's *Broken Circle, Spiral Hill* (1971) is sited in a working quarry in the Netherlands, i.e., a site on its way to becoming postindustrial. The piece has two components: the *Broken Circle*, somewhat reminiscent of a Yin–Yang symbol some 140 feet (43 m) in diameter with a narrow 'tail' stretching out into the green waters of the lake that has formed in the quarry pit, and the *Hill* of dirt some 75 feet (23 m) in diameter with a spiraling path topped with white sand leading to its summit. The spiral cut on the hill reminds one of a giant drill bit, perhaps referring to an excavator's tools. The two pieces together, working with height, depth, and circularity, evoke the removal that the quarry entails, the building up (in other places) its products enable, and, perhaps most importantly, the cyclical nature of change, both cultural and natural. This work is, for me, rather hopeful. And this is what is of interest in Smithson.

For Smithson's work attempts to recover postindustrial sites, not to make them what they once were but to make them something new. The works highlight for us that these postindustrial sites are part of our environment. But equally importantly, these sites have their own histories, which are a part of what they now are. Smithson's work allows us to see what might otherwise be termed an eyesore as a place where something new and unexpected can happen. Rather than covering it over, Smithson's work acknowledges the industrial history of a site and seeks to incorporate that history into some new use, even if the 'use' is to be a work of art. Smithson's work does not allow us the luxury of forgetting—instead, it helps us see the affront that is the site itself and to realize that all is not lost (even if much is lost). Smithson's work helps us see postindustrial sites anew by turning them into works of art. The final stage in my argument takes up aesthetic engagements with such sites that treat them more continuously with their industrial past, i.e., as places of human activity.

### **Renovating the Postindustrial**

Surely not all postindustrial sites can or ought to be turned into artworks. However, they can (indeed ought) to be dealt with in a way that acknowledges their industrial past. We have seen already that, in both appreciative presentations and artistic interventions, postindustrial sites can evidence an aesthetic value. What remains is the question of whether such sites can evidence this value in the absence of artistic intervention. Yet, if art functions as I have suggested to change our vision, perhaps this is not the right question to pose. Rather, we should ask what further aesthetic interventions we should call for in order to see the potential in the postindustrial and then, more importantly, to realize that potential in actual projects. Before turning to such interventions, let me say more about my proposed category for the evaluation of the postindustrial.

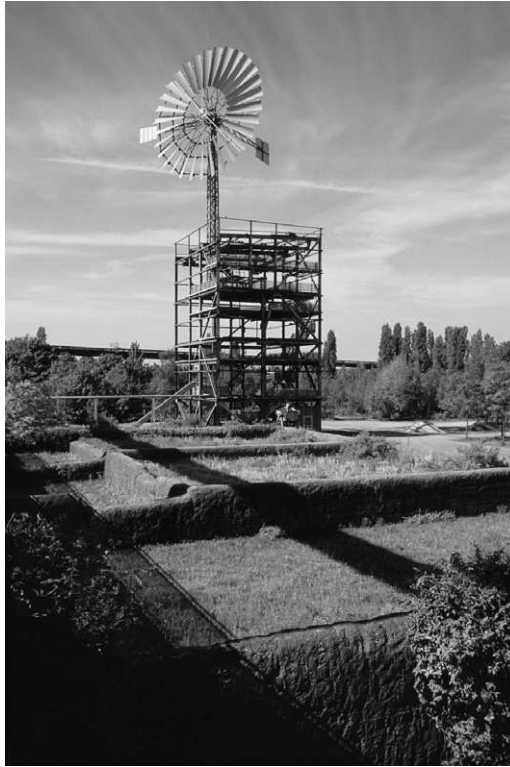




**Figure 1.** Landschaftspark Duisburg Nord, Germany: Cowperplatz. *Source:* Christa Panick (*Latz + Partner*)

The traditional aesthetic categories of beauty and sublimity have long been eclipsed in discussions about art, yet seem still apt when discussing nature. Given that postindustrial sites are as much, if not more, the product of artifice as of nature, we should expect here too the need for new categories of evaluation. For the artists and artworks considered thus far, neither beauty nor sublimity seems adequate to capturing our aesthetic response to their work. I take my clue for the required category from the name given to the movement of which Smithson was a part: conceptual art. While mathematical proofs are sometimes described as beautiful, the terms of praise we use when discussing proofs usually are things such as ‘true’, ‘accurate’, ‘helpful’, and the like. While truth is certainly a value for concepts, it seems not to be appropriate when discussing aesthetics. I thus propose the category I take to be second only to truth in terms of praise for a concept: the *interesting*. The interesting is what I have been discussing all along. It is that characteristic of an object of aesthetic appreciation that leads us to think otherwise. For to see otherwise is also to think otherwise. It is to see things as standing in different relations than we had previously seen. It is to see possibilities previously unseen.

While a full elucidation of the interesting cannot be undertaken here, we can say that it appears in different modalities. The particular modality of the interesting that applies to the postindustrial has perhaps greater similarity with the sublime



**Figure 2.** Landschaftspark Duisburg Nord, Germany: Windrad. *Source:* Christa Panick (*Latz + Partner*)

than the beautiful. For Kant tells us that the sublime both attracts and repels us. And so too with sites such as these. We find ourselves simultaneously awed and disgusted; impressed and depressed. The power of technological culture to transform nature is made manifest here in its starkest form. And yet, we do not turn away. We both rue what is no more and are smitten by what is.

If postindustrial sites are interesting, and our ability to see this is an effect of postindustrial art, perhaps the best thing to do with such sites (or at least with some of them) is to preserve their interesting character while turning them to new uses. I term such a process of aesthetic engagement *renovation*. Peter Latz's *Landschaftspark Duisburg Nord* (1990–; Figures 1–2) in Germany's Ruhr valley or Tilman Latz's proposed project for the *Parco Dora* in Turin seek to do just that (Figure 3; for further images of both projects see *Latz + Partner*, 2007). Similarly Herman Prigann's works are often located at former industrial sites. His interventions in these sites are sometimes rather subtle (e.g., *Der verschwundene Fluss—die Erdwelle* [*Lost River—Earth Wave*] near Bitterfeld, Figure 4; for further images see Strelow, 2004, pp. 148–151 and *Terra Nova*), requiring some fair degree of attention to figure out what is a result of artistic intention and what not. Other times they are more dramatic, as in the *Skulpturenwald* (Sculpture Woods) in Rheinelbe (Figures 5–7; for further images see Strelow, 2004, pp. 132–137 and *Terra Nova*).



Figure 3. Parco Dora, Turin, Italy (sketch). Source: Christa Panick (Latz + Partner)



Figure 4. Der verschwundene Fluss near Bitterfeld, Germany. Source: Hermann Prigann



**Figure 5.** Skulpturenwald, Rheinelbe, Germany. *Source:* Hermann Prigann



**Figure 6.** Skulpturenwald, Rheinelbe, Germany. *Source:* Hermann Prigann



**Figure 7.** Skulpturenwald, Rheinelbe, Germany. *Source:* Hermann Prigann

Prigann's works, like Smithson's, are always conceived as existing in time, and thus not only liable, but intended to change (although not necessarily in predictable ways). In conversation, Prigann makes clear that his work is not intended to stand 'outside' time, but is intended to become simply one more element in the history of a site. Yet, because they are aesthetic engagements with the site, they seek to account both for the site's history and for its projected future. They thus seek not to turn the site into an artwork that can never be altered, but into a place where one can interact with the site aesthetically, as a site of both nature and culture, and always with the recognition that both nature and culture change with time.

Such works—as full-fledged aesthetic engagements with the postindustrial—change how we see, thus opening our vision to an aesthetic engagement with the postindustrial itself, an aesthetic engagement not only oriented to what was and is, but, perhaps more importantly, always also to what might be.

### **Acknowledgements**

Earlier versions of this paper were read at the *International Association for Environmental Philosophy* (Salt Lake City, UT, October 2005), Denison University

(April 2006), and the *American Society for Aesthetics* (Milwaukee, WI, October 2006). The author thanks those present for their thoughtful questions and helpful suggestions. The author thanks, too, Andrew Light, who commented on the paper at the ASA and helped refine his reading of Carlson, and Barbara Fultner who commented on earlier drafts. Finally, the author thanks Robert Smithson, whose subtitle from Bayonne Nonsite he has borrowed as his title.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The hyphen in 're-present' emphasizes the presenting of the sites anew.

<sup>2</sup> A film of the performance can be found at *Robert Smithson*.

## References

- Berleant, A. (2005) *Aesthetics and Environment: Variations on a Theme* (Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate).
- Brady, E. (2003) *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment* (Edinburgh and Tuscaloosa: University of Edinburgh Press and University of Alabama Press).
- Brady, E. (2006) The aesthetics of agricultural landscapes and the relationship between humans and nature, *Ethics, Place and Environment*, 9(1), pp. 1–19.
- Budd, M. (2002) *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press).
- Burtynsky, E. (2007) *Edward Burtynsky: Photographic Works*. Available at <http://www.edwardburtynsky.com> (accessed 24 April 2007).
- Carlson, A. (2000) *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge).
- Carlson, A. (2002) Nature appreciation and the question of aesthetic relevance, in: A. Berleant (Ed.) *Environment and the Arts: Perspectives on Environmental Aesthetics*, pp. 61–74 (Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate).
- Crawford, D. (1983) Nature and art: some dialectical relationships, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 42(1), pp. 49–58.
- Evans, T. (2007) *Terry Evans Photography*. Available at <http://www.terryevansphotography.com/home.html> (accessed 24 April 2007).
- Haapala, A. (2002) Art and nature: the interplay of works of art and natural phenomena, in: A. Berleant (Ed.) *Environment and the Arts: Perspectives on Environmental Aesthetics*, pp. 47–60 (Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate).
- Hayashi, M. (2004) *The Masumi Hayashi Museum*. Available at <http://www.masumimuseum.com/> (accessed 22 May 2007).
- Heidegger, M. (1971) The origin of the work of art, in: *Poetry, Language, Thought* (A. Hofstadter, Trans.), pp. 17–87 (New York: Harper & Row).
- Heidegger, M. (1980) Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes, in *Holzwege*, pp. 1–72 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann).
- Hepburn, R. (1966) Contemporary aesthetics and the neglect of natural beauty, in B. Williams & A. Montefiore (Eds) *British Analytical Philosophy*, pp. 285–310 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul). (Reprinted in Carlson, A. & Berleant, A. (Eds) (2004) *The Aesthetics of Natural Environments*, pp. 43–62 [Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press].)
- Honold, R. (2005) New nature photography and the future of nature. Paper presented to the International Association for Environmental Philosophy, Salt Lake City, UT, October.
- Kant, I. (1974) *Kritik der Urteilskraft, Werksausgabe Band X* (W. Weischedel, Ed.) (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp). Pagination provided to both the Weischedel and Akademie editions, which is provided marginally in Kant, 1987.
- Kant, I. (1987) *Critique of Judgment* (W. S. Pluhar, Trans.) (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing).
- Latz + Partner (2007). Available at <http://www.latzundpartner.de/> (accessed 22 May 2007).
- Light, A. (2001) The urban blind spot in environmental ethics, *Environmental Politics*, 10(1), pp. 7–35.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964a) *L'Œil et l'Esprit* (Paris: Gallimard).

- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964b) Eye and mind, (C. Dallery, Trans.), in: J. Edie (Ed.) *The Primacy of Perception*, pp. 159–190 (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press).
- Robert Smithson. Available at <http://robertsmithson.com/earthworks/asphalt.htm> (accessed 18 March 2007).
- Strelow, H. (Ed.) (2004) *Ecological Aesthetics. Art in Environmental Design: Theory and Practice* (Basel, Bern, and Boston, MA: Birkhäuser).
- Terra Nova: Hermann Prigann*. Available at <http://www.terranoa.ws/> (accessed 23 May 2007).

Copyright of Ethics, Place & Environment is the property of Routledge and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.