

PREFACE

The philosopher has his eyes fixed on the whole...and the whole character of each within the Whole.

Plato, *Theaetetus*

The True is the Whole.

G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*

This work is a sequel to *Placing Aesthetics*,¹ which “placed” aesthetics, or reflection on the phenomena of Art and Nature which we have come to call “aesthetic,” in a threefold manner. It placed it within the structures of the field of experience by locating it in relation to “the heart” producing and responding to “charged presences.” It placed it in the history of selected high points of philosophic reflection from Plato to Heidegger. Finally, it placed it within the overall conceptual scheme of each thinker. It began with a sketch of the phenomenological field for the arts.²

The current work develops in the direction indicated in that sketch. It aims at a sense of *aesthetic regionality*, the entire aesthetic region with the affinities and differences the region of each art form shows. Each of the

¹*Placing Aesthetics: Reflections on the Philosophic Tradition* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999) (henceforth PA).

²See the chart in the Introduction to the current work.

art forms appears in the niches of human life determined by three parameters—sensory base, spatio-temporal relations, and language—: as spatial arts appearing to seeing, temporal arts appearing to hearing, spatio-temporal arts to seeing and hearing, with linguistic arts operating in differing media.³

This text was developed in a course based on *Placing Aesthetics* which provided the context for reading classic philosophical texts on matters aesthetic.⁴ The current text had its origin in the treatment of a particular art form at the end of each course. This eventually enabled me to bring them together into the current text which now plays counterpart to my treatment of the differing philosophers from Plato to Heidegger. It is intended for upper-level courses on art and aesthetics. But the style of writing I have used should appeal also to educated individuals interested in matters aesthetic.

Following Plato's claim that the philosopher always has his eyes fixed on the Whole and the whole nature of each kind within the Whole, and following the direction Hegel gave to the system of the arts, the current work applies a descriptive method to delimit the spaces—the "regional ontologies," to employ Husserl's term—within which each of the several major art forms make their appearance. In a sense I have tried to do too much. But in the contemporary climate of opinion, the attempt is necessary to get and keep in mind the entire regionality of the aesthetic, however sketchily. Philosophical discussions tend either to go into the ethereal or descend to complex particulars without first securing a comprehensive view of the eidetic features of each region within which discussion—and in this case, discussion of the arts—takes place. In the current situation, the tendency is to focus on particular aspects of a given art form or to deconstruct whatever holistic claims have been made. The result is the atrophy of any sense of the Whole. This work is directed at the first steps in regaining such a sense.

One has to go back to the unglamorous task of a careful preliminary description of the humble features of each art form to make sure one has identified all the relevant features of the space within which it appears.⁵

³We will discuss this further in our Introduction.

⁴*Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, edited by A. Hofstadter and R. Kuhn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) provides a large segment of text from each thinker.

⁵In "Phenomenology of the Mailbox," I carry out that unglamorous task in showing the intelligible strands present in the field of our "operative intentionality." See *Philosophy Today*, Summer, 2003.

The reader is asked to attend carefully to these features to make sure the entire round has been covered and, in the process, practice getting a sense of the whole region in each case within the encompassing regional-ity of the aesthetic. I have also given a historical perspective on each art form by assimilating remarks of leading artists as well as writers on art, philosophical and art-historical, in the history of the West. This text gives experiential grounding that should lead back to the thinkers introduced in *Placing Aesthetics* to establish an ongoing dialogue.

The current book is also connected with *Placing Aesthetics* insofar as the thinkers involved in the latter hover over the text as dialogical partners. Plato's Beauty Itself and its erotic correlate, Hegel's system of the arts, Dewey's rootedness in nature, Heidegger's lived relation to the Whole playing in tandem with rootedness in the Earth,⁶ and Buber's dialogic existence are the central figures.⁷

In each of the art forms we can see how different thinkers come at the same phenomena and are able to enrich our approaches to them. As Nietzsche advised, it is necessary to have 1000 eyes to do justice to what is the case. The present work is consequently not a treatise but a dialogue. However, dialogue presupposes an ontological structure on the part of each partner and on the part of the regions one will be dealing with in the art forms to be investigated. Hence, as starting points, we will lay out the eidetic structures involved: the fundamental character of the human being and the regional ontologies of the various art forms.

Originally we followed Hegel's scheme of the classic art forms. But, taking up the recent turn back to an aesthetics of Nature, we have inserted a chapter on Nature and on Landscaping before the treatment of the classic art forms.⁸ Film is also added to the list as the contemporary *Gesamtkunst*. Further, following the more recent turn to the

⁶For a comparison of Dewey and Heidegger that yields remarkable overlap on several crucial themes, see my "Aesthetics: The Complementarity of, and Difference between Dewey and Heidegger," *John Dewey*, D. Anderson and J. McDermott eds, Special Issue of the *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 87, no. 2. Spring, 2013.

⁷I did not include Martin Buber in *Placing Aesthetics*, but I did produce my first book on his thought and he has remained in the background of my thought: *Martin Buber's Ontology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969).

⁸See for example the collected essays in Allen Carlson and Arnold Berneat eds, *The Aesthetics of Natural Environments* (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2004) (henceforth ANE) and Allen Carlson and Sheila Lintott eds, *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism: From Beauty to Duty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) (henceforth NAE).

aesthetics of everyday life, a final chapter pays attention also to that turn.⁹ We add as an Appendix Kierkegaard's presentation of the aesthetic life to situate the aesthetic project within the larger framework of human life.

Three of these discussions have already appeared in print and we wish to acknowledge the sources. The architecture chapter appeared as "Architecture: The Confluence of Art, Technology, Politics, and Nature," in *On Technology*, Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, 1995/1996. The chapter on film appeared in a less developed form as "Toward an Ontology of Film," in *Film-Philosophy*, vol. 5, no. 24 (August, 2001). The chapter on landscaping appeared as "Martin Heidegger and Environmental Aesthetics: Towards a Philosophy of Domestic Landscaping" in *Current Studies in Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*, vol 1, no. 1 (Winter, 2001) (online journal).

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⁹See Andrew Light and Jonathan Smith eds, *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) (henceforth AEL).

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