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Anticipating Aesthetic Transformations in the Face of Climate Change

Abstract: Recently, within the field of Environmental Aesthetics, there has been some attention paid to how taking into consideration the environmental impact of Global Climate Change (GCC) generates new problems and issues. Among different questions that Environmental Aesthetics needs to face under the impact of GCC, we can distinguish, at least methodologically, those which address the impact of GCC in the aesthetic experience of the environment we currently inhabit and those concerned with the possible aesthetic character that future environments might possess as a result of GCC. In this article, I would like to focus on how to characterize the possible impact that the awareness of GCC may have on the aesthetic experience of current environments. In particular, I would like to clarify this issue by exploring the roles that knowledge, forward-looking emotions, and imagination play in this experience.

Keywords: environmental aesthetic appreciation; GCC; irrevocability; solastalgia; environmental ruin.

Introduction

In the last decade, Environmental Aesthetics' scholars have paid some attention to how taking into consideration the environmental impact of Global Climate Change (GCC) involves new problems and issues for Environmental Aesthetics.¹ Most au-

¹ View, for example, Matthew R. Auer, "Environmental Aesthetics in the Age of Climate Change," *Sustainability* 11, 18 (2019): 1–12; Emily Brady, "Aesthetic Value, Ethics, and Climate Change," *Environmental Values* 23 (2014): 551–70; Emily Brady, "Global Climate Change and Aesthetics," *Environmental Values*, Special Issue: Philosophical Aesthetics and the Global Environmental Emergency, ed. Jukka Mikkonen and Sanna Lehtinen, 31, 1 (2022): 27–46; Emily Brady, "Environmental Aesthetics and Climate Change," in *Handbook on the Philosophy of Climate Change*, vol. 1, ed. Gianfranco Pellegrino and Marcello Di Paola (Cham: Springer, 2023), 395–414; Jonathan Prior and Emily Brady, "Environmental Aesthetics and Rewilding," *Environmental Values* 26, 1 (2017): 31–51; Paul Haught, "An Impossible Peace: the Aesthetic Disruptiveness of Climate Change," in *The Poiesis of Peace: Narratives, Cultures, and Philosophies*, ed. by Klaus-Gerd Giesen, Carool Kersten, and Lenart Škof (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 202–220; Ariane Nomikos, "Place Matters," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 76, 4 (2018): 453–62; Benjamin J. Richardson, *The Art of Environmental Law: Governing with Aesthetics* (Oxford: Bloomsbury, 2021) and the articles published in the special volume in *Environmental Values* by Sanna Lehtinen, Emily Brady, Jukka Mikkonen, Mădălina Diaconu, Marcello Di Paola and Serena Ciccarelli, *Environmental Values*, Special Issue: Philosophical Aesthetics and the Global Environmental Emergency, ed. Jukka Mikkonen and Sanna Lehtinen, 31, 1 (2022).

thors converge on the idea that GCC imposes a new set of conditions on our aesthetic experience of the environment. Some of these conditions are the large-scale spatial and temporal impact of GCC, the global dimension of a different natural dynamics affected by GCC, and the irreversibility of some of the predicted environmental changes caused by GCC. In this sense, there is a consensus that environmental aesthetics needs to incorporate this large-scale perspective and the temporal dimension that is often made vividly available by scientific models and detailed projections of future scenarios.² Other significant aspects to be considered are the awareness of human responsibility in GCC and its global environmental outcomes,³ and the sense of irreversibility that accompanies some of the predicted changes.⁴

However, as Brady has remarked, a comprehensive Environmental Aesthetics agenda encompassing the issues that arise due to GCC is still underdeveloped. This is reflected, for example, in various aspects and problems that current aestheticians have addressed in relation to GCC, but also in the unsystematic manner in which these problems are presented. Although this may just be a normal feature of how the state of art within a field is responding to new challenges and problems, it makes the discussion about these new problems arduous.

In response to this, Brady⁵ has tried to offer a comprehensive list of problems and challenges caused by these new conditions imposed by GCC on environmental aesthetic appreciation.⁶ Some of these are (i) the impact of GCC in some neglect-

² One fundamental resource is the annual Climate Change Report produced by Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. To see the last Summary of this report see IPCC 2023, “Summary for Policymakers,” in *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, ed. The Core Writing Team, Hoesung Lee, and José Romero (IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, 2023), 1–34.

³ Although the role of human activities and the corresponding awareness of human responsibility are present in studies of mixed environments (Prior and Brady, “Environmental Aesthetics and Rewilding”), or in examining practices such as rewilding (Martin Drenthen, “Rewilding in Cultural Layered Landscapes,” *Environmental Values* 27, 4 (2018): 325–30; Jamier Lorimer and Clemens Driessen, “Wild Experiments at the Oostvaardersplassen: Rethinking Environmentalism in the Anthropocene,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 39, 2 (April 2014): 169–81; Mateusz Tokarski, *Hermeneutics of Human-Animal Relations in the Wake of Rewilding: The Ethical Guide to Ecological Discomforts* /Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019/), the issue of responsibility in relation to GCC has some peculiarities derived from its large-scale and pervasiveness as well as with its resulting from a set of factors that can only be understood globally. In this sense, there may be some aspects of our awareness of human responsibility in GCC that impact on our aesthetic experience that may be distinct or unique. Thus, for example, issues of intergenerational responsibility have been recently considered in relation to environmental aesthetic experience. Remei Capdevila-Werning, Sann Lehtinen. “Intergenerational Aesthetics: A Future-Oriented Approach to Aesthetic Theory and Practice,” *Philosophical Inquiries* 9, 2 (2021): 175–98; Emily Brady, “Global Climate Change and Aesthetics”; Nanda Jarosz, “Indigenous and Local Knowledge and Aesthetics: Towards an Intergenerational Aesthetics of Nature,” *Environmental Values* 32, 2 (2023): 151–68.

⁴ Jukka Mikkonen also explores the impact that a certain unpredictability can have. Thus, we need to assume a certain ignorance or incertitude concerning the environmental conditions that will predominate in future scenarios. Jukka Mikkonen, “Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature and the Global Environmental Crisis,” *Environmental Values* 31, 1 (2022): 47–66.

⁵ Brady, “Environmental Aesthetics and Climate Change,” “Aesthetic Value, Ethics, and Climate Change,” “Global Climate Change and Aesthetics”.

⁶ She also invites accommodating our current aesthetic tools to these challenges and problems.

ed environments within classical approaches to Environmental Aesthetics, such as cryosphere and aerosphere; (ii) a reconsideration of the tools provided by Negative Aesthetic to address the environmental changes and losses caused by GCC; (iii) issues related to Future Aesthetics⁷ and Intergenerational Aesthetics; and (iv) “understanding the relationship between aesthetic and ethical values as they arise in regards to GCC.”⁸

While this list allows us to identify and address some of the issues derived from the impact of GCC in Environmental Aesthetics, I propose to distinguish, at least methodologically, those issues which address the impact of GCC in the aesthetic experience of the environment we currently inhabit and those which address the possible aesthetic character that future environments will possess as a result of GCC - or what Brady refers to as ‘Future Aesthetics’.⁹

Current scientific tools that help us to recreate - sometimes visually - future environmental scenarios not only provide us with a basis for aesthetically assessing those possible future scenarios, but also permeate, through several emotions and imaginative states, our experience of current environments. As a result, our current experience of the environment is infused with the awareness of its likely future radical changes. Some authors have explored the character of this experience in terms of certain emotions, such as solastalgia,¹⁰ uncertainty and a feeling of dislocation¹¹, melancholia, anxiety,¹² worry, despair, guilt, anger, consolation¹³ or hope; others have drawn attention to the role that imaginative processes, like projection or anticipation,¹⁴ may have in this experience.

In this article, I would like to focus on how we should characterize the impact that the awareness of the expected environmental changes caused by GCC has on the aesthetic experience of current environments. And in particular, how this awareness can be considered to be aesthetically relevant by examining the roles that knowledge, forward-looking emotions, and imagination play in this experience.

⁷ As characterized by Brady, ‘Future Aesthetics’ explores how scientific knowledge about GCC’s expected impact upon our environments – including the visual models and simulations of the new morphologies of those environments – can be the source of an anticipated aesthetic experience that may, in turn, guide or motivate certain actions concerning those environments. See Brady, “Global Climate Change and Aesthetics”, and Brady, “Environmental Aesthetics and Climate Change”.

⁸ Brady, “Aesthetic Value, Ethics, and Climate Change,” 27.

⁹ Brady, “Environmental Aesthetics and Climate Change”, “Aesthetic Value, Ethics, and Climate Change”, “Global Climate Change and Aesthetics”.

¹⁰ Glenn Albrecht, “Solastalgia: A New Concept in Human Health and Identity,” *Philosophy, Activism, Nature* 3 (2005): 41–55; Glenn Albrecht, “Negating Solastalgia: An Emotional Revolution from the Anthropocene to the Symbiocene,” *American Imago* 77, 1 (2020): 9–30.

¹¹ Nomikos, “Place Matters”.

¹² Timothy Morton, “This Is Not My Beautiful Biosphere,” in *The Cultural History of Climate Change*, ed. Tom Bristow and Thomas Ford (London: Routledge, 2018).

¹³ Robert S. Fudge, “Aesthetic Consolation in the Age of Extinction,” *Philosophical Papers* 50, 1–2 (2021): 141–62.

¹⁴ Brady, “Environmental Aesthetics and Climate Change”; Haught “An Impossible Peace: The Aesthetic Disruptiveness of Climate Change”; Justin White, “Revelatory Regret and the Standpoint of the Agent,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 41 (2017): 225–40.

To do so, I will present, first, some characteristics that derive from the distinctive character of GCC and its pervasive environmental consequences. Second, I will consider how these characteristics can, and often do, manifest themselves in a set of cognitive, emotional and imaginative responses to the environment. Thirdly, I will examine how these responses can enter into an aesthetic experience of the environment and which role, if any, they play in such experience. In particular, I will examine (i) whether the overall negative character of these responses implies that the proper aesthetic experience of current environments under the perspective of GCC is necessarily negative as well, and (ii) whether aesthetic categories such as the sublime or terrible beauty adequately capture the aesthetic character of this experience. I will end by summarizing the main points of this paper.

Temporal and existential dimensions of experiencing current environments under the perspective of GCC

As a result of an increased awareness of GCC and its manifestation in different phenomena, we may adopt, in perceiving and appreciating our current environments, a perspective in which the thought about GCC and its future consequences is present.¹⁵ It is part of adopting this perspective that certain aspects (cognitive, emotional, and maybe imaginative) related to GCC enter into our experience. In tune with what other authors have pointed out in a more or less direct manner¹⁶, I think that when adopting this perspective, at least two aspects of the experience of our current environment become especially salient under the perspective of GCC. The first one is the temporal dimension that accompanies our experience of current environments and that manifests itself in a sense of irreversibility of certain environmental changes and the termination of certain natural dynamic equilibrium. The second one is an existential dimension that emphasizes our dependency on the natural environment. I will now expand on these aspects to explore how their presence enters into our aesthetic experience of current environments.

¹⁵ For the purposes of this paper, I will not assume that this awareness should be always part of the aesthetic experiences of current environments. A cognitivist position of environmental aesthetic appreciation à la Carlson (Allen Carlson, "Appreciation and the Natural Environment." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 37 /1979/: 267–76; Allen Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture* /London: Routledge, 2000/) will likely make this awareness a condition for a proper appreciation. Other alternative views about environmental aesthetics may consider this awareness a possible component of our experience but deny it is required for a proper aesthetic appreciation of the environment. Nevertheless, I think it is quite plausible that this awareness enters in some form or another into an aesthetic experience of the environment and my purpose here is to explore its contribution to that experience.

¹⁶ Although there is no exhaustive characterization of the experience of our environment under this perspective (and maybe it is unlikely that there is just one characterization that fits all possible experiences), a number of authors (Auer, "Environmental Aesthetics in the Age of Climate Change", Brady, "Aesthetic Value, Ethics, and Climate Change", Brady, "Global Climate Change and Aesthetics", Brady, "Environmental Aesthetics and Climate Change, Haught, "An Impossible Peace: the Aesthetic Disruptiveness of Climate Change", Nomikos, "Place Matters") coincide in some aspects as being characteristic of our experience. In this paper, I will rely on this minimal agreement and explore how these features impact in the aesthetic experience of current environments under the perspective of GCC.

The temporal aspect refers to the awareness of the progressive transformation of certain environmental dynamics and of their particular manifestation in different phenomena that we can observe as indications of this transformation. So, when we perceive certain changes in some natural regular patterns or cycles as a result of GCC, we come to experience these changes not only as singular accidental occurrences but as part of a greater pattern of change that affects an ecological equilibrium as a whole. Clear examples that can trigger this awareness can be the progressive desertification of certain areas, the reduction of the cryosphere, or the extinction of certain species as a result of severe changes in the quality of their environment. On a more local level, people involved in agricultural activities are noticing certain changes in the patterns of growing, ripening and harvesting of certain crops, with the corresponding changes in landscapes' forms. These changes are often caused by changes in rain cycles and temperature patterns.

In a broader sense, this temporal dimension has always been a condition of the aesthetic appreciation of our environments. It is present, for example, when we attend to the size and bearing of a long-standing tree while thinking of its continuous growth over a large expanse of time, or when we contemplate a coastal environment as shaped by the constant erosion caused by the sea waves striking the coastline. The temporal dimension is also present when we contemplate a bare tree with the expectation that it will grow leaves again in the Spring, or the colours of a rice terrace as indicating a particular stage of rice growing. Temporality is, in this sense, built into the aesthetic appreciation of environments and not something unique to their appreciation under the perspective of GCC.

However, I think that we can point to a new dimension of this temporal awareness that is related to the irreversibility that certain changes in the current environmental dynamics will take place as a result of GCC. This sense of irreversibility is, I think, a novel aspect of the temporal dimension of the aesthetic experience of the environment under the conditions of GCC. While in the previous examples, our sense of temporality was either marked by a certain backwards-looking awareness of the processes behind certain appearances or by the awareness of a certain cyclical pattern of change, when we contemplate the environment under the perspective of GCC we tend to become aware of the likely disappearance of certain environments and the loss of their current biodiversity. This primarily cognitive awareness is often expressed emotionally as well as imaginatively. Emotionally it often manifests in feelings of fear, regret, guilt, anticipated sorrow, anxiety, or even anger.¹⁷ Imaginatively, this awareness is often reinforced by the visual information available through scientific modelling. Besides, our awareness of GCC's possible consequences can trigger imaginative projections that feedback into our current experience of the environment. By doing so, the contrast between what we presently experience and what we think we may experience in the future (or at least what we think the future experience of these

¹⁷ Brady, "Environmental Aesthetics and Climate Change", 6–7.

environments will be like) becomes enhanced.¹⁸ As a result, and as the studies done in this field confirm, the characteristic experience of current environments under the perspective of GCC is a complex one, in which certain emotions and maybe also imaginings seem to play key roles.¹⁹

The second aspect that, I think, plays a distinctive role in our experience of current environments under the perspective of GCC is an awareness of a certain form of existential dependency on the environment as a place to live and as a wellspring of vital resources. As the last, and previous, reports on GCC confirm²⁰, in the coming decades, certain areas currently inhabited by large human populations will no longer possess the conditions suitable for human life. Either due to the increasing desertification of large areas that are currently populated or by the rising of the sea level and the corresponding inundation of coastal zones, several areas currently habitable will cease to be so.

Furthermore, given that it is expected that the current population living in the threatened areas will supposedly migrate to those places where human life conditions are more hospitable, GCC will have a further consequence and impact on those areas still habitable in the future. So, the risks of GCC to our existential conditions will not only directly impact locally on certain areas of the globe. They will cause further large population migrations that, in turn, will impact other areas that are in principle less subject to this threat. In this sense, the dimension of this existential threat resulting from the GCC is global. We can find an analogous experience with environments where some (non-natural) devastating event has taken place, such as the areas still affected in Chernobyl (1986) or Fukushima (2011) after their respective nuclear disasters. Although these examples are not cases of deterioration of the environment as a result of GCC, they make vivid the threat of the existential condition that I am trying to capture and that has often been expressed in terms of finding our sense of homeliness in the world at risk.²¹

¹⁸ We can speculate that the recent increase of production in sci-fi works responds to the increase of this awareness and to the effort to imagine how our global environment will be like after some of the effects expected as a result of GCC.

¹⁹ Among the most common emotions reported concerning GCC are worry, despair, anxiety, grief, guilt, nostalgia, and melancholy. Susan Clayton, Christie Manning, Kirra Krygsmann, and Meighen Speiser, *Mental Health and Our Changing Climate: Impacts, Implications, and Guidance* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association and ecoAmerica, 2017); Susan Clayton and Christie Manning, eds., *Psychology and Climate Change: Human Perceptions, Impacts, and Responses* (Amsterdam: Academic Press, 2018) and Paul Hoggett, ed., *Climate Psychology: On Indifference to Disaster* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). These are often produced by thoughts or imaginative states that recreate in a visual or sensorily vivid manner future environments (Richardson, *The Art of Environmental Law*). These emotions and imaginative states are not only characteristic responses to the expected changes due to GCC, but also important motivating states to foster perceptual awareness of the signs of change in our current environment and to initiate action (Birgit Schneider and Thomas Nocke, eds., *Image Politics of Climate Change. Visualizations, Imaginations, Documentations* /Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2014/).

²⁰ Annual Climate Change Report produced by Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. To see the last Summary of this report see IPCC 2023, "Summary for Policymakers".

²¹ For a characterization of the relation between a sense of homeliness in the world and aesthetic experience, see Arto Haapala, "Aesthetics, Ethics, and the Meaning of Place," *Filozofski vestnik* (Special Issue: XIVth International Congress of Aesthetics, "Aesthetics as Philosophy", Proceedings, Part I) 20, 2 (1999): 253–64; Arto Haapala, "On the Aesthetics of the Everyday – Familiarity, Strangeness and the Meaning of a Place," in *The*

As we have seen with the temporal dimension analyzed above, this cognitive awareness also manifests itself emotionally and imaginatively. Emotionally, we find a similar range of emotions that characterized the sense of irreversibility referred to above. Fear and anxiety may be more prominent since they are the appropriate emotions in response to our sense of losing a place to live. Imaginatively, we can conceive of these future scenarios as having an alienating effect, turning familiar environments into inhospitable sites. Other imaginings that can arise from engaging with these hypothetical scenarios concern how this radical transformation will not only affect basic existential conditions, but a wide range of human relations, making certain experiences and human relations no longer sustainable.

My suggestion is that these two aspects, the temporal awareness of the irreversibility of certain environmental changes and the exacerbation of our existential dependency on the environment, play a distinctive role in the aesthetic experience of current environments under the perspective of GCC. Although certain forms of temporal awareness and existential dependency have always been part of the aesthetic experience of the environment given its role in our existence and development as a species, they acquire a novel dimension under the perspective of GCC which somehow dramatizes it.²² Assuming this, in what sense are these cognitive, emotional and imaginative aspects - related to the irreversibility of certain changes and the existential dimension foregrounded by the perspective of GCC - significant when we address these environments from an aesthetic point of view?

In the following section, I would like to address this question by focusing on three aspects. The first one explores whether there is an aesthetic dimension already embedded in the characteristic emotional and imaginative responses mentioned above that can be responsible for - or at least contribute to a certain extent to - the aesthetic nature of the experience characteristic of current environments under the perspective of GCC. The second looks into the pervasive negative dimension of these responses and its relation to the valence of the aesthetic experience that follows. In particular, I would like to examine whether the alleged negativity of our emotional and imaginative responses to contemplating the environment from the perspective of GCC leaves some room for aesthetically rewarding experiences. Finally, I would like to assess whether categories such as the sublime or terrible beauty are adequate to capture the complexity of our emotional and formal responses to current environments under the perspective of GCC or if we need to explore other forms of capturing these experiences in light of the particular aspects examined in section 1.

Aesthetics of Everyday Life, ed. Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 39–55; Karsten Harris, “What Need is There for an Environmental Aesthetics?” *Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 22, 40–41 (2011): 7–22, and Nomikos, “Place Matters”. For an analysis of the experience of losing one’s place as a result of GCC see Nomikos 2018.

²² I do not present this claim as a novel claim about the kind of aesthetic appreciation that is characteristic of environmental appreciation under the conditions of GCC. My aim is to focus on these two aspects, which I think play a distinctive role in this case, and see which is exactly this role.

The aesthetic experience of current environments under the perspective of GCC

Some of the emotions that, as we have seen, characterize the experience of current environments under the perspective of GCC, such as solastalgia or melancholy, awe, terror, fear or strangeness, are not alien responses in aesthetic contexts. These emotions often feature in many aesthetic experiences in both art and nature and we often speak of them as aesthetic emotions.²³ Thus, for example, Clewis has characterized the notion of the sublime in terms of aesthetic awe;²⁴ Haapala and Brady²⁵ and Maes²⁶ have discussed the aesthetic character of melancholy.

It could even be argued that if these emotions are aesthetic, they will endow our experience with a certain aesthetic quality (for example, by involving a certain global perspective under which a particular situation is endowed with a special significance, both formal and content-like). Assuming this, maybe we can speculate that, to the extent that these emotions typically characterize the experience of current environments under the perspective of GCC, the experience will be, at least to a certain degree, aesthetic. Responding with those emotions will go hand in hand with adopting an aesthetic perspective.

Although this seems a tempting way to explain the aesthetic significance of the characteristic emotions that the awareness of GCC tends to trigger, we do not need to assume that all the instances of uncertainty, terror, awe, melancholy, or solastalgia are essentially aesthetic or possess an aesthetic character, for acknowledging to these emotions some role in the resulting aesthetic experience.²⁷ They can inform those experiences and provide some orientation to how certain features are experienced or some global emotional character, while preserving their ordinary character. They can dye or color²⁸ our perception of those environments endowing them with a certain emotional character.²⁹

²³ The question of what kind of state qualifies as an aesthetic emotion has been recently revived – see, for example, Joerg Fingerhut and Jeese J. Prinz, “Aesthetic Emotions Reconsidered,” *The Monist* 103, 2 (2020): 223–39, or Jenefer Robinson, “Aesthetic Emotions,” *The Monist* 103, 2 (2020). However, I will not enter into this dispute.

²⁴ Robert Clewis, “Why the Sublime Is Aesthetic Awe,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 79, 3 (2021): 301–14,

²⁵ Arto Haapala and Emily Brady, “Melancholy as an Aesthetic Emotion,” *Contemporary Aesthetics* 1 (2003): Article 6.

²⁶ Hans Maes, “Aesthetic Melancholy” *Contemporary Aesthetics* 21 (2023), <https://contempaesthetics.org/2023/06/20/aesthetic-melancholy/>

²⁷ Given that there is no general agreement on what makes an emotion aesthetic or whether certain emotions are always aesthetic, it may be less theoretically compromising to remain neutral with respect to this question.

²⁸ Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987); Richard Wollheim, *On the Emotions* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1999).

²⁹ Nevertheless, as Pérez-Carreño emphasizes “The psychological tendency to see the world coloured by emotion also plays its part in the aesthetic appreciation of nature. But here it is important to distinguish between this tendency to see the world affected by mental states – something that goes for most of the time unnoticed and takes part of our daily life – and appreciating nature for how she appears expressive of emotions to us.” Francisca Pérez Carreño, “Aesthetic Normativity and the Expressive Perception of Nature,” *Studi di estetica* 4, 1 (2021): 144.

Similarly, the imaginings that may be triggered by the awareness of the GCC need not be necessarily guided by an aesthetic interest to enter into our experience in a way that provides it with a certain order or orientation. There are many instances of imagining possible scenarios that do not necessarily involve aesthetic activity.³⁰

In this sense, and even if we do not need to assume that the emotional and imaginative responses referred to above have a particular aesthetic character, or that they constitute, in themselves, forms of aesthetically apprehending the environment, they can nevertheless play a central role in our current aesthetic encounter by providing some formal structure or orientation. Starting from this, appreciators can engage aesthetically with current environments and arrive at particular aesthetic experiences and judgments.

A second issue that can be considered concerning the role played by emotional responses and imaginings is the question of positive or negative valence of the aesthetic experience stemming from them. As indicated, most of these emotional reactions and imaginings to the irreversibility of certain environmental changes and the dramatized existential dependency tend to possess a negative tone. Does this negative character infiltrate into the resulting aesthetic experience?

In tune with a probable defense of the possibility of aesthetically valuable experiences in damaged or deteriorated environments,³¹ I would like to motivate a similar claim in this case. In my view, we can acknowledge the significant role that these cognitive, imaginative, and emotional dimensions play without assuming that the resulting aesthetic value we will experience will necessarily be negative. I do not mean to underplay the negative character of the emotions and imaginings that the apprehension of the irreversibility of certain environmental changes and the dramatization of our existential dependency may bring into our experience, but I think this character leaves room for grasping the possible aesthetic worth that some of the environments' current features still afford. The form of aesthetic awareness that can be practiced in these contexts, in which our attention is very much guided by the aforementioned features, can make salient certain qualities such as fragility, fleetingness, or uniqueness of certain environments.³² Furthermore, the resulting aesthetic experience can be enhanced by the awareness of its likely impermanence given that it would be unavailable in the future. In any case, each environment would possess a particular aesthetic character that, in turn, would be permeated by the awareness of its fragility given

³⁰ For example, scientific activity makes use of several forms of imaginings as a tool to predict or simulate future scenarios. In principle, these uses are not necessarily guided by any aesthetic interest but by a cognitive purpose.

³¹ See, for example, María José Alcaraz León, "Morally Wrong Beauty as a Source of Value," *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 40–41 (2011): 37–52; María José Alcaraz León, "On the Aesthetic Appreciation of Damaged Environments," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 80, 4 (2022): 420–31; Brady, "Aesthetic Value, Ethics, and Climate Change"; Nomikos, "Place Matters", or Robert Stecker, *Intersections of Value, Art, Nature, and the Everyday* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

³² If the awareness of the fragility, fleetingness, or uniqueness of certain environments is linked to positive human intervention in the environment, such as cases of environmental remediation or rewilding, it can give rise to a positive experience. I thank Sanna Lehtinen for this suggestion (personal exchange).

the conditions of GCC. The positive or negative character of the resulting aesthetic experience would thus depend on how these two levels of attention intertwine in a particular appreciative experience. But there is no *a priori* form of determining which aesthetic character would a particular environment possess just by reflecting what impact would these characteristic emotions and imaginative responses that typically emerge in this context have upon our experience.

The third issue I would like to comment with regards to the characteristic aesthetic experience of current environments under the perspective of GCC is the adequacy of certain aesthetic categories, such as the sublime, to grasp the aesthetic character proper to these environments. Certainly, some of the expected effects of GCC, like hurricanes or heavy storms, are, due to their magnitude and force, typical examples of sublime experience. This can be a consideration in favor of Brady's suggestion³³ that the category of the sublime may be especially adequate at least in some of these contexts.³⁴

However, and taking on board this suggestion, I would like to qualify this adequacy by noticing an aspect of our experience under the perspective of GCC that seems to be at odds with some of the characteristics proper to the sublime experience. As we have already mentioned, our awareness of the consequences of GCC cannot be separated from an awareness of our role in those consequences and our responsibility as a species in the coming about of this phenomenon. In this sense, both our experience or current environments under the perspective of GCC and the anticipated experience facilitated by imaginative projections bear this understanding of human responsibility. That is, I think, one of the features that distinguishes our experience of typical examples of the sublime nature – such as a storm on the ocean, a volcano's eruption, or an immense desert – from our experience of current environments that may already be possibly contemplated under these traditional negative categories is that the awareness of the human impact and responsibility, in the latter case, is pervasive. Examples of the latter are the reduction of the Aral Sea, Chernobyl and Fukushima's environments, or areas drastically transformed by human activity that are often presented under their most striking appearances through photographs and film.³⁵ In these cases, our experience, however striking and overwhelming, cannot be simply understood in terms of a deep wonder at the acknowledged physical superiority of

³³ Brady, "Global Climate Change and Aesthetics" and Brady, "Environmental Aesthetics and Climate Change," 407–8.

³⁴ Importantly, Brady does not think that the aesthetic category of the sublime captures the characteristic experience that most phenomena that we live through under the assumption of their connection to GCC produce. If the consequences of these phenomena are overwhelming or threaten the existing conditions of human and non-human life, the positive undertone of the sublime experience is absent and, hence, it is hard to think of these experiences in terms of the sublime. Emily Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy. Aesthetics, Ethics, and Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 163–4. Still, it may be, in some cases, a useful category to characterize the aesthetic experience of extreme natural phenomena or processes.

³⁵ A significant amount of photographic and film work produced by artists such as Sebastiao Salgado or Edward Burtinsky focuses on these environments.

nature.³⁶ Our sense of participation and responsibility precludes, I think, the experience of Nature's radical alterity, which is at the core of the experience of the sublime.³⁷

I think a further indication of the inadequacy of the category of the sublime for characterizing environments, whose impressive nature might be partially caused by human activity, is the worry of aestheticizing its harmful consequences.³⁸

Although these considerations do not completely preclude possible adequate instances of the sublime in the kind of cases examined, the awareness of our role and responsibility in the forms and appearances we aesthetically attend to, when appreciating current environments under the perspective of GCC, puts at least some pressure on its adequacy. On the face of this qualification, we could explore other conceptual alternatives that somehow capture the aesthetic power of these environments without ignoring the sense of human responsibility in the deterioration of the natural environment.

One suggestion could be to transfer the notion of 'ruin' – that in its ordinary use applies to cases in which natural processes overtake and devour architectural remains and human sites³⁹ – to the scenarios referred to, reverting its characteristic pattern of application. While the notion of ruin typically refers to human-made artefacts that become deteriorated and are eventually devoured by the natural forces and active dynamics of a natural environment, we could characterize extreme examples of environmental deterioration as 'environmental ruins' to convey the overwhelming and destructive effect that a continuous pattern of human exploitative activity has caused on the very sustainability and natural equilibrium of a certain environment. Thus, this reverse pattern of use of the notion of ruin will help us grasp, in an aesthetically vivid way, the effect that sustained and systematic human activity can, in its final outcome, have upon our environment. We can characterize as 'environmental ruins' cases in which human-sustained exploitative activity ends up ruining a particular natural

³⁶ It is important to underline that the moral significance of sublime experience is essentially connected to this aspect. Realizing our radical inferiority in the contemplation of natural vastness and force is, in turn, key to the reflective awareness of human moral superiority. The two aspects cannot be disentangled. For a further characterization of this relation see Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*.

³⁷ Brady elaborates on this aspect as key to the quasi-epistemic value that the experience of the sublime affords. In her view, it is precisely by making our radical dependency and inferiority with respect to Nature vivid, that the experience of the sublime possesses a special capacity to raise our awareness about certain existential conditions governing our place within nature.

³⁸ See Tamara Schneider, "Aestheticizing Catastrophes. A Comparison of the Western and Japanese Approaches to Art Creation in View of the Climate Emergency," in *Degrowth Decolonization and Development. When Culture Meets the Environment*, ed. Milica Kočović De Santo and Stéphanie Eileen Domptail (Cham: Springer, 2023), 149–71.

³⁹ The relevance of the notion of ruin for the questions addressed in this paper is also reflected in some recent approaches to the aesthetic experience of cultural environments that invoke a similar notion - see, for example, Erich Hatala Matthes, "Environmental Heritage and the Ruins of the Future," in *Philosophical Perspectives on Ruins, Monuments, and Memorials*, ed. Jeanette Bicknell, Jennifer Judkins, and Carolyn Korsmeyer (New York: Routledge, 2019), 175–86, where he introduces the expression of 'ruins of the future' to refer to our awareness that many coastal areas will become ruins as a consequence of GCC; similarly, the wide literature on the notion of rewilding and restoration evokes attitudes to the environment that are similar, in some respects, to the ones we endorse towards cultural goods.

environment's equilibrium, impeding its possible restoration. Maybe scenarios like the aforementioned current state of the Aral Sea after its drastic drain or some devastated forests in the Amazonia can be perceived as exemplifying this sense of natural irreversible damage that the notion of environmental ruin can capture.⁴⁰

I propose this way of conceptually grasping the aesthetic experience that certain current environments may typically afford as a possible metaphor to give some sense of the kind of mixed feelings that are involved in this experience. We are familiar with the vastness and impressiveness of some of these environments, but we are also aware of the human responsibility in the processes involved in their configuration. We feel that somehow our unrestricted and careless abuse of particular natural resources has ruined certain natural environments not allowing them the capacity to restore themselves or to recover some of their former natural dynamics.

Conclusion

I have tried, in this article, to emphasize the significance of the temporal sense of irreversibility and existential dependency to our aesthetic experience of current natural environments when they are approached from a perspective guided by GCC. I have also tried to show how these two aspects manifest in a threefold way: cognitively, emotionally, and imaginatively. Then I have explored the extent to which these different components of our experience can determine the aesthetic experience they characteristically afford. I have considered three possible issues about this broad question. The first one is whether we need to assume that the characteristic emotions and imagining typical in these cases need to be conceived in aesthetic terms for them to have some important role to play in the aesthetic experience of these environments. The second examines the possibility of valuable aesthetic experience in the context of this appreciation. The third explores the adequacy of certain aesthetic categories, such as the sublime, and proposes new conceptual metaphors, such as 'environmental ruin', to grasp the peculiar sense of human responsibility involved in these cases.⁴¹

⁴⁰ There may be a possible objection to the adequacy of this characterization that we need to consider. It could be argued that since the characteristic aesthetic experience of ruins comprises a negative as well as a positive feeling or components, there is some danger to aestheticize these scenarios.

⁴¹ This research has been possible as a result of the funding received by the research project "Normative Aspects of Aesthetic Appreciation" (PID2019-106351GB-I00) (Ministerio de Economía y competitividad) and by the Plan de recuperación, transformación y resiliencia – financiado por la Unión Europea – NextGenerationEU. I would like to express my gratitude to Sanna Lehtinen and Emily Brady for carefully reviewing the previous version of this paper and providing valuable feedback and to Pedro Jimenez Guerrero for helping me navigate through some of the resources of climate information provided by NASA.

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Article received: December 15, 2023

Article accepted: February 1, 2024

Original scholarly article