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## Thoughts on a Holographic Aesthetics of Nature

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## Thoughts on a Holographic Aesthetics of Nature | Vol. 14 (2016), Short Notes

Tom Baugh

The following Short Note on environmental aesthetics was guest-edited by Tom Baugh.

Things change and what was once considered suitable material for aesthetic appreciation now has a lot of company. Changes in subject matter have been accompanied by new models and even new methods for assessing that subject matter. Over the past century Aesthetics has been subject of studies in sensation and perception and, more recently cognition and consciousness. And over the past several decades, the development of science and technology has presented a number of challenges to Aesthetics. For example, did the displays at the Lumiere London Light Festival represent art, artifice, both or do we or should we care?

Since the mid-part of the last century Environmental Aesthetics has evolved as a subdiscipline of Philosophy facing the same challenges of inclusiveness and exclusiveness as the broader discipline. The rapid development of the live sciences and environmental studies enhanced by technology present beauty in new and different ways. In this regard, I have suggested that the science of Ecology allows for the development of a multidimensional perception of the aesthetics of living systems. Increasing experience with living systems thus helps develop a more holographic perception of the beauty of 'nature' subjects. (The term holographic as used here does not refer to a laser generated three dimensional image but rather is adapted and adopted to refer to a condition of perception (and cognition) that views nature as multidimensional). In this same regard, consider the beauty of W.L. Kubiena's soil profile illustrations (<http://blogs.agu.org/terracentral/2015/06/14/art-in-science-kubienas-soil-profiles-in-watercolors/>) where the roots of a plant penetrate the substrate and its leaves reach for the sky.

Kubiena's color renderings are beautiful but two-dimensional. Think for a moment how the view would change if you could see 'into' the prints, into the third dimension of space where a holographic image emerges...the roots become round, the grains of soil are increasingly granular. We come closer to holographic perceptions with the Cosmic Spider Web sculptures of Tomas Saraceno (<http://thecreatorsproject.vice.com/blog/enter-the-cosmic-spiderweb-sculptures-of-tomas-saraceno>). In these sculptures, living spiders create three dimensional webs in transparent cubes. These webs are not static creations but develop over time thus adding a fourth dimension to the hologram. The evolving tools of virtual reality may also provide a possible vehicle for similar immersion in and appreciation of the beauty of living systems.

Think about this as if you were looking into a round, clear plastic cylinder, perhaps a cylindrical aquarium or terrarium stretching floor to ceiling a crystal tube without distortion. The cylinder descends into the sand of a pond or lagoon. Your eyes move upward passing the roots of aquatic vegetation such as seagrasses or rushes and then up the stalks, through the water into the air above where a mollusk or a damselfly rests near the top of one of the stalks. All of this in three dimensions with small fish darting about and among the stalks, snails crawling along the stalks and small insects or crustaceans buried in the muck below.

Can we see all of these things at a glance? No. But those of us who have worked with these living habitats and systems can see them in our mind's eye. We're immersed in them. They surround and envelop us. Ecologists who work in a watery environment, with snorkel and mask or SCUBA, may experience the beauty of these living holograms, more than others, just as those trained in art appreciation or architecture are aesthetically involved with a painting or building.

A holographic appreciation of the beauty of nature helps develop an aesthetic appreciation that includes an understanding of nature in depth, as living systems, and in process with the dimensions of time and motion. In these holograms beauty is, indeed, more than surficial. As Adorno (1997) tells us "It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore." As we shall see in the following Notes, things change.

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### Reference

T.W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Athlone Press, 1997), p. 1