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## Agriculture, Aesthetic Appreciation and the Worlds of Nature

*Pauline von Bonsdorff*

### Abstract

Agriculture has received relatively little attention in environmental aesthetics, given its importance culturally for the physical sustenance of societies and from an eco-system perspective. In this article I take some steps towards developing a life-world approach to the agricultural landscape, where the intimate and long-term relationship between farmer and land is understood as having the potential for being a norm rather than the opposite of an aesthetic appreciation of landscape. This requires a narrative understanding of landscape, where culture and nature are seen as plural and relative to each other. I claim that the aesthetic competence of the farmer is inseparable from personal interest, which makes appreciation more acute and vivid both in perceiving nuances and in realising the existential drama of landscape. Finally I suggest that practicing agriculture is a genuine way of knowing nature and that some familiarity with agriculture should be included in all environmental education.

### Key Words

agriculture, aesthetics of landscape, nature, culture, aesthetic appreciation, interested attention, life-world, diversity

### 1. Introduction[1]

The agricultural landscape epitomizes aesthetically problematic but central features of cultural landscapes that are related to their status between nature and culture.[2] These features are problematic from the point of view of aesthetic and ethical value because they have placed the cultural landscape in a no man's land between culturally and naturally generated values, instead of giving it access to both. Admittedly, the problem is not only one of wrong categorization: agriculture and other practices that transform the natural environment have often made it worse, not better, at least if we judge from the standpoint of beauty and diversity. But a one-sided criticism of agriculture contributes little to developing aesthetically and ethically better practices of farming. In this article I shall therefore look at the values of agriculture from the standpoint of the life-worlds of those most closely involved in it: the farmers. Perhaps through better understanding, the tensions inherent in the practice of agriculture, such as those between nature and technology, freedom and utility, beauty and utility, purity and pollution and diversity and efficiency, we become better prepared also for understanding and managing the agricultural landscape in a sensitive way.

Aesthetic appreciation plays a central role in my argument because it does not set out to define or categorize its objects but approaches them openly, with a view to possibilities and an acceptance of ambiguity and different, even conflicting characteristics.[3] I understand aesthetic values broadly, as including ethical and existential issues but also practical ones. A central question will be to what extent interest is necessarily

part of agriculture and what this means for appreciating the landscape: does self-interest on the part of the agent or appreciator mean that there can be no aesthetic appreciation, as has been claimed? Agricultural land is sometimes deemed as aesthetically uninteresting and perhaps even unattractive because it is taken to express the dominion of humans over (wild) nature. This is not necessarily true; much depends on how agriculture is practiced and what the actual existential relationship between farmer and land is like. It is also important to consider that the farmer's perception of the landscape may not be bound by his practical interests: he might suspend them and attend to values that do not directly serve him while performing his job.

In the following, I take a narrative approach to both the ethics and aesthetics of the agricultural landscape. This means, first, that the landscape is approached in terms of drama (or theatre) and as processes rather than as a vista or view. Both the past of the landscape and how its future appears are, second, relevant for how the landscape is aesthetically and ethically perceived and assessed. Third, history, present, and future are understood to be plural and heterogeneous rather than single and unified. In the cultural landscape plurality is, however, not only a cultural characteristic but also one of nature, if nature means species, processes and areas which exist in relative independence of human intentions and activities but which can be (and to some extent mostly are) influenced by and interact with them. Especially in an aesthetic context, but also ontologically, nature can be fruitfully approached from several and differing perspectives and understood as consisting of several worlds rather than being one.

I start with the idea of agriculture as a form of culture: a life-world perspective where cultivation, continuity and co-operation with nature are key terms. Then I discuss the interdependence of aesthetic appreciation and agricultural know-how, arguing on the one hand that the practice of agriculture requires aesthetic sensibilities and, on the other hand, that a deeper aesthetic appreciation of agricultural landscapes requires knowledge of agriculture. In a third section I describe more closely the intimate relationship between the farmer or agricultural laborer and the landscape, which mutually shape each other in a process where basic existential issues are concretely present. I then focus upon the conflict between professional interest and aesthetic appreciation, if the latter is appreciation of a thing for its own sake rather than for some purpose it may serve. The conflict is real, yet agricultural experience also brings a person closer to the landscape and enriches understanding and aesthetic appreciation. In a last section I suggest that even diversity and wildness, often thought to be wilderness values, can be deeply understood and felt in agricultural work.

## **2. Agriculture and Culture**

One way of looking at agriculture is to see it as a specific activity and profession among many. In this view, agriculture is part of culture, Finnish agriculture being part of Finnish culture. But although this is not wrong it is also not sufficient for understanding the existential, ethical and aesthetic values

involved in agriculture. The complementary and, in my view, more fruitful view is to regard agriculture as a form of culture. The claim is, then, that agriculture, in various ways, gives rise to meaning and values, articulates the world in certain ways and provides insights into existentially important questions, for example about life and death or about the relations between humans and the rest of nature. Agriculture is not only a profession but also a way of life and includes a way of perceiving and thinking about things. The emphasis is, in other words, on certain basic similarities between agriculture as practiced in different countries. In phenomenological terminology, agriculture constitutes a life-world.[\[4\]](#)

Even if one should not put too much weight on etymology, it is interesting to note that 'culture' has its root in 'cultivation,' meaning growing and raising as well as improving, refining and developing.[\[5\]](#) What makes this origin worth noting is some features that it highlights and that are important both in culture generally and in agriculture if practiced responsibly to both the non-human environment (or nature) and to coming generations of humans. In the idea of cultivation I want to pay attention to two aspects: continuity and co-operation with nature. Cultivation implies, first, a continuous and long-term relationship.[\[6\]](#) For to cultivate is to tend and transform something so that its best sides thrive and develop, or so that the thing cultivated becomes a better version of itself.[\[7\]](#) What remains, yet changes. One consequence of agriculture as a long-term activity is that such practice is likely to give rise to a sense of belonging of both farmer to land (I belong in this landscape) and of land, whether owned or on lease, to the farmer (this land belongs to me).[\[8\]](#) Second, if agriculture is cultivation, it is based upon co-operation with nature rather than exploitation only. This means that the human influence upon the land takes place through dialogue rather than violence: the wise farmer certainly wants big crops but knows that she has to work with the land, not against it.[\[9\]](#)

In ways that I shall try to illustrate further on, I suggest that continuity and co-operation with nature are value-generating features of agriculture. Together with other features, they contribute to making it a form of culture. As to the aesthetic appreciation typical of agriculture, it pays attention to the productive and functional aspects of the landscape.[\[10\]](#) 'Productive' and 'functional' may sound overly utilitarian in aesthetic discourse, where a connection between an object's usefulness for the perceiver and its perceived beauty is mostly disallowed.[\[11\]](#) However, these adjectives do not point to utilitarian aspects only but more fundamentally, especially when applied to nature, to life. Second, it may be important to reflect upon for whom or in relation to what something is judged to be productive or functional: an animal's or a plant's functional form serves primarily the animal or plant itself. Third, to say that productive and functional aspects are aesthetically relevant in agriculture is not to say that they always enhance the landscape. They can also degrade it.

For the rest of my discussion, it is important to keep in mind that there are different ways of practicing agriculture.[\[12\]](#) The values I suggest as values of agriculture are not relevant for all kinds of agriculture. Yet I see them as possibilities inherent in agriculture generally, due to some fundamental

features of that activity. However, the kind of agriculture most immediately relevant for this discussion and where my suggestions are most readily applicable is family farming or other kinds of farming where there is a long-term and personal relationship between the person who works on the land and the land.<sup>[13]</sup> The examples that follow refer to that kind of farming.

### **3. Aesthetic Know-how and Praxis**

Farm work is practical work or labor much in the same way as work in factories or in the household. Nevertheless, the profession of agriculture does not demand only qualities such as strength, industriousness or efficiency from the farmer, but also a sensitivity which is at least akin to the aesthetic. It demands acuity of perception as well as the abilities to remember and compare, that is, to keep in mind or represent to oneself the larger picture of which the present impression is part and in relation to which it should be judged. What is the state of the crops right now, as compared to earlier years and to the right time of harvesting? More than merely sharp perception is involved when we discuss the farmer's aesthetic capacities. I shall first illustrate this and then discuss in what sense the farmer's sensitivity can be held to be aesthetic.

Farming is a highly contextual activity, for although the phases of growing can be learnt theoretically, in actual practice they depend thoroughly both on the weather and on individual features of soil and topography. Each year is different, but the fields are also different: in one place, there is more sun; on lower lands it is wetter. Some features are invisible to the bare eye, however sharp, and need background knowledge in order to become part of the perception of the landscape.

Professional knowledge and know-how rely on both cultural heritage, including both science and what colleagues in the profession have told and how they have acted, and on a training of the senses, and they develop simultaneously from these. To know when a field is ripe for sowing or harvesting demands the ability to judge many factors and to weigh them against each other as well as against the experience of previous years. The judgment involves many senses: the color and smell of the earth or the crops, as well as how the grains feel between the fingers or how the crops sound when moved by the wind or the taste of the grain of corn.

One similarity between the judgment involved in farming and aesthetic judgment is that what is judged is the whole where the features interact, not the separate features one by one. Farming also demands aesthetic skills in the basic sense of refined perception. Further, before practical interests come into play, the object must be perceived as what it is. In other words, before applying a more narrowly utilitarian perspective on the field or the cow the farmer must see it as a whole. Of course there are key features relevant for production to attend to, but if the farmer restricts her attention only to these, something significant and perhaps unpredictable may be overlooked. The contextual and complex nature of farming, which is interaction with nature, means that the competent farmer gains knowledge and understanding of the landscape and its processes as a whole. In fact, the complex and alive character of the whole with which she deals makes it possible

to apply the term diagnosis here: there is knowledge (*gnosis*) gained in dialogue with the environment.[\[14\]](#)

The relevance of knowledge about natural processes for the aesthetic appreciation of environment has been argued by Allen Carlson, and it is easy to agree that research in biology, ecology, geology and related areas of knowledge provides knowledge that helps us to appreciate and understand nature and discover its richness.[\[15\]](#) Carlson has, however, been reluctant to include cultural knowledge about the environment in the knowledge that is aesthetically primarily relevant. The reason is that it is not fundamental in the same way, being knowledge about our ideas about the environment rather than about the environment itself. However, granted that natural science is one kind of knowledge about the environment and cultural knowledge is another, the knowledge of farming does not quite fit into either category. One reason is that agricultural knowledge is practical, in addition to building upon both natural science and cultural tradition. But if this were the only specific feature about agricultural knowledge one might, following Carlson, say that it is irrelevant for the appreciation of nature, since it is knowledge about what humans do to the environment rather than knowledge about the environment itself.

Cultural and agricultural landscapes are, however, different from the ones we call natural in that they are so clearly shaped through human activities, both historically and as ongoing processes in the present. Without sowing and harvesting, the Finnish fields disappear quickly and change into forests. Other examples abound. Particularly significant from the aesthetic point of view is that without continuous human intervention the landscape soon changes its character, which is doubtlessly an aesthetically central feature. We can now ask how to read the character of a cultural landscape. Agricultural landscapes may, for example, be described as fertile, barren, majestic, prosperous or meagre, and it seems that such characterizations often rely both on knowledge about the natural conditions and the culture of the community that inhabits the land. The competent appreciator, in other words, perceives both what nature offers and how people take advantage of it. Further, admiration or criticism often has a moral flavour: the inhabitants are perceived as industrious, lazy, careful, efficient, mean, generous, etc., through how they tend the land.[\[16\]](#) But what does the competence of the appreciator consist of? It seems that at least some knowledge about the labor that shapes the land is needed in order for anyone to be able to perceive a landscape as fertile, barren, majestic, prosperous or meager. Here it is important to note the difference between knowing that a landscape is prosperous and perceiving it as such. Perceiving is necessary for aesthetic perception and, in the case of the agricultural landscape, it is in part based upon practical knowledge.

If these suggestions are correct, the farmer has an irreplaceable competence for appreciating the character of agricultural landscapes. This does not mean, of course, that all farmers are actually interested in enjoying the aesthetics of landscapes. It only means that they are among the most competent perceivers, including aesthetic perceivers.[\[17\]](#) But even when looking at the agricultural landscape from the

layman's angle, some familiarity with agricultural processes and practices is a condition for the ability to read the landscape. Any sensitive perceiver can enjoy formal features of a landscape, but without knowledge about the human and non-human elements and processes that interact in and constitute the area, this is much like hearing a poem in a language one does not know. The experience can be rewarding but is different, even in kind, from the experience of one who knows the language.

I have argued that farming requires a perceptual competence that forms a basis for a full aesthetic response to the agricultural landscape. The other necessary component of this response is an understanding of agriculture, since the practice of agriculture constitutes and supports the character of the landscape and, in order to be able to read this character, the appreciator must have at least some understanding of how agriculture is practiced. Further, there is an interdependence between perceptual skills, practical skills and theoretical knowledge that may even be inseparable. So far I have focused upon the aesthetic and ontological relevance of agriculture for the landscape. Next I shall discuss more deeply some aspects of appreciation.

#### **4. Embodied and Existential Insights**

A farmer tests if her crops are ready for harvesting by looking at the color of the field, by taking an ear in her hand and trying its hardness or by biting the grain, not by looking at the calendar or by consulting a book. Theoretical knowledge has been (and is, since learning is unfinished) internalized as part of the building up of professional competence, which consists in knowing how and when to do things.

To know nature in a practically useful way includes knowing how it behaves, grows and ripens, and this knowledge can only be had if it is based at least in part on personal experience. According to Michael Polanyi, personal knowledge is, in fact, the basic mode of knowledge; it precedes theoretical knowledge.<sup>[18]</sup> Personal knowledge is intimate and complex; it is primary but not necessarily primitive. Good examples are the ways in which we know other persons or places. To emphasize personal knowledge does not imply a denial of the usefulness of theoretical studies; yet a person with only theoretical knowledge and no experience of natural environments, plants, animals, etc., would be unable to guide other persons in a natural environment. To know nature by personal knowledge is more than having knowledge; it is also being skilled in perceiving and coping with nature.

Another body-related aspect of the human-nature-relationship in agriculture is that the work is physical in various ways. It requires bodily efforts of many sorts, both single efforts, such as lifting or pushing heavy things, and perseverance. Although agricultural labor has certainly changed as machines have taken over a large part of it, the physical character of work has not disappeared. The human body is the ultimate motor that affects the landscape either indirectly through machines or directly, swinging the axe or helping the cow to deliver her calf. Through bodily efforts, we know qualities of the land or of its inhabitants such as resistance, weight, narrowness: we know what processes are in and behind fences, cornfields,

roads.<sup>[19]</sup> This is aesthetically relevant if the aesthetic includes a full response to the landscape: what it evokes and awakens in the appreciator, what echoes it gives rise to.

Labor is aesthetically relevant in agriculture also because the work that continues over years on the land or with animals establishes a deep and intimate relationship between farmer and land. The farmer inhabits the land and lives with the creatures and plants: this is shared life and not just an instrumental relationship. The physical nature of labor is, then, the basis for an intimate interdependence between farmer and environment. Not only does the farmer mould the land, it also affects her body which carries memories of working on the land in the form of scars, strains, injuries or habits. Labor involves the body not just as an active agent or subject but also as itself subject to work.

Through labor person and place become parallel, coexisting narratives, which are anchored in the material world (the human body and the land) and therefore cannot be taken for mere fictions. Also, with memory images the farmer's experience typically differs from the layman's. A farmer may have memories of beautiful moments when the senses open in enjoyment but also of moments of stress and pain. While any sensitive person can enjoy the beauty of nature, the dynamics and even conflicts between what the farmer hopes for and what nature gives brings depth and poignancy to her aesthetic experience. In addition, together with immaterial memories there is the effect of labor on the body -- an aching knee, a bent back, a scar -- which anchor the narrative in the person and make the narrative real.<sup>[20]</sup> To the farmer, there is a story perceptible both in the landscape and in herself and these stories are connected and run parallel, although they do not fuse into one. As a consequence, also landscapes where she has not actually worked but which belong to a familiar type have a taste of the real, even when only contemplated. This means that they have a stronger emotional impact and existential weight than they would otherwise have: they regard her.<sup>[21]</sup>

Of course the interaction between farmer and land is not pertinent to experience only. Plants, animals and ecosystems differ from inanimate objects in the way they respond to human action, and interaction takes place on both the macro- and micro-levels of the agricultural landscape. But not only do plants and animals respond, they also act according to their nature and independent of human intentions. The farmer therefore moulds the landscape through entering a process which is always already going on. She introduces seeds, fertilisers, and pesticides, which then react with each other and with other species. The ability to foresee how the landscape or an individual species will react is a central part of the farmer's professional know-how, just like climatic, ecological and chemical knowledge of the land and of the growth cycle.

In emphasizing embodiment as a cause and even a condition for the intimacy between person and environment, my idea has not been to reduce the human being to an animal but to open up the reflection on being human to elements of nature that are part of our constitution. While farming can create a

feeling for the analogy between the human self and the plants and animals as being subject to time -- to growing and ageing -- the human animal is of course inseparably a full person, who thinks and reflects, plans and hopes. This is relevant in reflecting upon the existential insights one may have through the practice of agriculture.

In relation to existential values, the role of agriculture is both to make visible and make real. Existential values are found in understanding the processes of life and death, where the realization of finitude and the limitations of human and personal power may result, for example, in attitudes of humility and generosity or in sentiments of joy and gratitude. [22] Further, both in making visible and in making real, there is a point in emphasizing the aesthetic character of the experience. Existential insights are gained through lived experience, not through theoretical understanding only, where 'lived' means personal and thus embodied but also imaginative and reflective. We do not perform the job mechanically; we enter the task and live it. For this reason also it is appropriate to think of farming as more than a profession. And while any profession may influence its practitioners' views on life, this may be more true of farming and other professions where people directly meet the forces of nature, life and death.

## 5. Interested Attention

Agricultural work strongly contributes to both the engagement and participation, to use two key terms of Arnold Berleant, of a human being in the landscape. [23] Yet it is by no means clear that labor and professional interest can be harmoniously wedded to aesthetic appreciation, at least if we accept the traditional view of what it means to approach something aesthetically. The principal obstacle to combining farming and aesthetic appreciation is the utilitarian perspective that dominates farming and seems to expel it from the aesthetic sphere. Surely if a person looks at the land only with what it can give him in mind, he does not approach it aesthetically.

However, referring to the perceptual know-how of the farmer described in an earlier section, I believe one can describe the farmer's approach to the farmland as interested attention, comparable to the disinterested attention of an aesthetic landscape admirer who has no part in the landscape. [24] Now disinterestedness does not mean that the perceiver is uninterested in what he perceives: to attend to, appreciate or perceive something one must indeed be interested in it, since these are intentional activities. To illuminate what is at stake, one can distinguish being interested from having an interest in something. First, having an interest means that the object is of more than theoretical interest to a person and that the existence of the thing and how it develops makes a difference to him. The difference is, in other words, a difference in reality and not just in how it is possible to think of the thing. Second, having an interest in something is, mostly, to be interested in a particular, concrete thing rather than in a type or in an example. Third, to have an interest is to care for the thing. [25] Now the farmer's attention is interested precisely in the sense that he has an interest in the land: he is dependent upon and cares for a particular area.

My claim is that the farmer's interested attention is

aesthetically relevant and can constitute a basis for deep aesthetic appreciation of agricultural landscapes. Even more, an understanding of the farmer's perspective may be necessary for a deep aesthetic appreciation of the agricultural landscape. In earlier sections I have indicated aspects of the farmer's relationship to the land; now I want to highlight what they mean for aesthetic appreciation.

The farming experience - working on the land - is a physical, personal and interactive experience. Not only the farmer's own body but also the (body of the) land present themselves as undeniably real. The reality of both self and environment cannot be subtracted from the farming experience without destroying it. However, reality has typically been bracketed in aesthetic experience, where the object's existence should not matter: how something appears has been the primary question, not what it is.<sup>[26]</sup> But the reality of the farming experience does not mean that farmland and farmer are just real and actual, are simply what they are here and now. Far from it.

Let us think of a situation where the farmer only looks at the fields. To start with, his previous farming experience spills over to such moments of rest. In the eyes of the farmer, the farmland therefore has a particular weight, comparable to how we perceive a person whom we know well and like in a group of strangers: He stands out and appears as if with more features and qualities than the others.<sup>[27]</sup> This is because personal experience is a source of meaning and memories, both of single situations and of the habits and repetitions that importantly contribute to making the world what it is for us. When we look at an object our personal knowledge is hardly detachable from it: it is among what makes the object special. Now, in our example, the farmer may not be looking at his own fields. Still, also when looking at another's fields, his personal experience is a path to meaning that is more collective in character and is indicated by traces and marks in the landscape itself. When looking at the agricultural landscape the eyes of the farmer therefore communicate a more complex world, compared to what a disinterested observer sees. Further, because of the farmer's interest in, involvement in and dependence upon the landscape, his experience is also more intense.<sup>[28]</sup> Interest vivifies perception and brings into play the perceptual competence that may add intensity to the view. Likewise, knowledge of agriculture can involve anyone in the agricultural landscape while ignorance of it leaves the viewer an outsider.

In sum, then, how does interested attention and, in particular, having an interest affect aesthetic appreciation? To start with the easy part, know-how adds cognitive and imaginative complexity and magnitude to the perceived landscape. In other words, complexity and intensity follow from interest and make the landscape more attractive and fascinating. However, it is still possible to maintain that if a person looks at the land only with what it can give him in mind, we do not have a case of aesthetic appreciation. But the farmer seldom looks at his land with only this in mind. Enjoying the growth of the crops is more than enjoying merely the thought of future income; it is also enjoying the fertility of the land, the good climate that year or even the careful work one has done. None of these

goods can be reduced to mere personal benefit: the last belongs to the moral realm and the other two articulate attitudes of the human-nature relationship. How often do we indeed perceive a landscape with only one thing in mind? Aesthetic elements, attention, even aesthetic appreciation can be present in a situation even if it is not totally aesthetic.[\[29\]](#) There is plurality in the agent: he is farmer, aesthetician, urbanite, friend of nature - not all of these at once, but more than one. While the utilitarian perspective is there, it can be in the background or suspended.

## **6. Nature, Diversity and Wildness**

In what sense can we say that nature is appreciated through the aesthetics of agriculture? The life-world perspective is indeed explicitly anthropocentric. Is nature, as confronted through agriculture, then, always tame, appropriated and subdued, never wild nature or nature as it is in itself? Or is the distinction between wild and tame nature, and the humans-contra-other-species-dualism this rests upon, itself a cultural fiction, an error of perspective caused by a human overestimation of ourselves? Why, in other words, put humans against the rest of nature?

In part the dualism may be due to a conceptual approach to nature: nature is one concept and in the nature-versus-(human) culture polarity there are two entities against each other. But if we go into nature, if we instead approach nature as world and environment it appears in a much more plural and heterogeneous way. On the one hand, there are the many different ways of being in nature: farming, fishing, recreation, admiration, and so forth. Different aspects, features and species are fore-grounded depending on what we do and why we do it. On the other hand, the environment is always local and so nature is different in different places. Thus while nature as environment does not give us a definition of Nature (Real Nature), nature as environment is always factual and real.[\[30\]](#)

Agriculture means working with nature and taming it - making it co-operate and exploiting it - for human ends. Yet lastly I want to suggest that agricultural work offers insights into wildness and diversity, two central features of our idea of nature untouched by humans. To start with diversity, the local character of farms and farmland is due to different topographies, climates and micro-climates, species and biotopes. Places are individual, and the other face of individuality is plurality. Understanding local character so that one is able to cope with it means understanding the interacting elements. But this understanding is never complete, nor need it be; it should only be sufficient. The farmer may accept that many things she does not know exist in the landscape that, parallel to the human world, are life-worlds of other species.[\[31\]](#) In this view diversity is more than a quantitative concept referring to the number of species or biotopes; it is also a qualitative one referring to many different ways of inhabiting and perceiving the world. Because of her intimate contact with nature and the repetitive character of much agricultural work, the farmer may be more apt to become aware of the existence of these worlds than many others.

The second characteristic of nature, wildness, is central to our

idea of nature because it stands for the autonomy and integrity of the non-human world in relation to the human world. However, wildness and wilderness are by no means synonyms.<sup>[32]</sup> The wildness of nature, by which I mean the experience that something is wild, is not always encountered in the wilderness, and wild things do not necessarily exist outside the bonds of human culture. In fact I want to suggest that the farmer, or some farmers, may experience the wildness of nature in a specific way and perhaps more intensely than most aesthetic nature admirers. This is because the wildness of nature confronts the farmer. Storms, draught, a winter that comes too early, wolves that kill the sheep are all wild to her in a way that is not so much sublime as ferocious and threatening.<sup>[33]</sup> Wild things are not enjoyed, they are feared. This is a basic meaning of the wild: a wildness that is no more threatening has lost some of its core meaning.<sup>[34]</sup>

At the same time, there is a similarity between the farmer's relationship to natural and cultural landscapes. The wilderness is appropriated in hunting and fishing or in the gathering of berries and mushrooms. Appropriation is making something one's own, in this case making it part of one's territory, with or without changing the appearance of the landscape. But even if nature is part of one's territory, it still contains the wild. This is also true of the fields where crops may be destroyed by a nature that shows its wildness in continuous rains or kills animals by lightening; also the animals themselves can unexpectedly harm their tender. Appropriating an area can also mean making it one's home or inhabiting it. Thus a farmer may indeed deal with nature in a technical and practical way, ordering it according to his needs. Whatever this is, it is not alienation, and it is wise to remember that in the farmer's technical and practical approach to nature she preserves its wildness.

## **7. Final Remarks**

I have argued for an understanding of both the agricultural environment itself and the farmer's relation to it as more open and plural than might be supposed if one starts from the opposition between instrumental and intrinsic value that is part of our philosophical heritage. Let me end with some further remarks on the nature-culture dichotomy and some recommendations for environmental education.

With respect to the agricultural environment's status in relation to nature and culture, we do not have to choose one or the other. Nature is with us, and culture does not replace nature, it merely transforms it, more or less. But so do other species; nature is dynamic and changing, not stable. Wildness and cultivation are not opposites and they do not exclude each other either in landscapes or in landscape experience, but can co-exist in several ways. Thinking nature plurally may be one key to understanding this co-existence. But it also seems that such plurality is one reason for the aesthetic attractiveness, the inspiration and even hope suggested by some cultural landscapes. While the perceiver may conclude that all is not well with this place, fertility or life against the odds can be clearly present. Farming is not the key to a harmonious, convivial relationship between humans and the rest of nature but it is certainly one key area in this respect. As I have

shown, practicing agriculture in the best way for both humans and other species is important, not just in the perspective of ecology and the natural sciences, but culturally and existentially as well. Among the holistic ideals we might seek are conviviality, harmony, mutual adaptation and symbiosis. But no less existentially valuable is the presence of violence, adversity, enmity.

As a practical conclusion I want to suggest that insights into the practices of agriculture should be included in environmental education on all levels. We all eat, and ultimately the agricultural landscape therefore concerns all of us. It is a loss both collectively and individually if the drama of this landscape becomes invisible, a loss that seems already to have taken place in many urban and semi-urban communities. Such invisibility in turn allows the real shrinking of agricultural land: the meaningless ends quickly in the cultural dumping-ground.

### Endnotes

[1] My conviction about the relevance of the farmer's perspective stems from my experience of working on a dairy farm. Working with cows grazing in the summer changed my relationship to landscape: it became deeper, richer, more meaningful. This experience started as a daily afternoon hobby (whenever I was on the farm) in my early teens and developed into regular work during the summers and, finally, on winter weekends too. As a former amateur I have a deep respect for the profession and some understanding of the qualities and values involved in it, but few illusions.

This piece has been under way for more than a decade; the first germs were presented at the conference *Meeting in the Landscape* at Koli, Finland, in June 1994, and the last version given at the conference *Aesthetics of Agriculture* in Hattula, Finland, in August 2004. I am grateful for the feedback and stimulation from participants at these and other meetings, but in this field my primary debt is to the cows.

[2] There may not exist any philosophically viable way to draw the distinction between natural and cultural landscapes: my point is, in fact, that the cultural landscape is also a natural one (and all landscapes are and have always been cultural in the minimal sense that they have been perceived and named by humans). But if and since the distinction between natural and cultural landscapes is itself cultural, it is perfectly legitimate to use these terms as long as one tries to be clear about them and avoid mystification. As I understand 'cultural landscape,' then, it refers to landscapes where the influence of human culture on nature is visible to a knowledgeable perceiver. Besides farmland, cultural landscapes include parks and golf lawns, but also many forests.

[3] Already Kant emphasized the non-conceptual nature of aesthetic experience; Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, [1970], 1990), in particular § 6. Ambiguity and more generally the capacity to give rise to rich and complex experiences is in the modern tradition an established value of art; See, for example, Monroe C. Beardsley's classic in the analytic philosophy of art, *Aesthetics. Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, Second edition

(Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, [1958], 1981), pp. 524-543 and lix-lxi.

[4] Basic references for the idea of the life-world are Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology. An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, [1970], 1997, first German edition 1954), pp. 103-189 (and other passages), and Martin Heidegger's discussion of human existence in *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Neomarius, [1927], 1949), §§ 14-27. Justin Winkler's approach to the aesthetics of agriculture in "The Eye and the Hand: Professional Sensitivity and the Idea of an Aesthetics of Work on the Land," this Journal, Vol. 3, 2005, is in many ways similar to mine, but in addition to different materials and cultural settings there are also different theoretical emphases.

[5] See, for example, *The Penguin Pocket English Dictionary* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books in association with Longman Group Limited, [1985], 1986).

[6] In this connection, Alan Holland's and John O'Neill's suggestion that we should approach nature as a historical phenomenon and an individual is highly relevant. *The Integrity of Nature Over Time: Some Problems* (The Thingmount Working Papers Series on the Philosophy of Conservation 96-08, Lancaster: Lancaster University, Department of Philosophy, 1996).

[7] The best is, of course, an ideal or norm set by someone. In the case of agriculture, this ideal is at least in part anthropocentric, although it may also seek holistic eco-systemic balance or the good for nature.

[8] 'Belonging' is related to 'identity,' both personal identity and identity of place. However, since identity is sometimes interpreted in a rather definite way and since neither person nor place are here confined to their mutual relationship, I prefer the term 'belonging.'

[9] As Holmes Rolston III puts it: "The rural environment is where we command nature by obeying her," *Conserving Natural Value* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 13; see also *Philosophy Gone Wild* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1986), p. 42. This is in line with the principles of organic farming or, more generally, farming that attempts to minimize the use of artificial manure and pesticides. On the "good farmer," see also David Ehrenfeld, "Changing the Way We Farm," in *Beginning Again. People and Nature in the New Millennium* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 163-174.

[10] This has been suggested by Allen Carlson, "On Appreciating Agricultural Landscapes," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 43, 3 (1985), pp. 301-312, and "Productivity and the appreciation of agricultural landscapes," paper given at the conference *The Aesthetics of Agriculture* at Häme Polytechnic, Lepaa Unit, Hattula, Finland, 5-8 August 2003.

[11] Mostly, but not always. The idea that "form follows function" has been influential in architecture and design since

Louis Sullivan's time. In the mid-nineteenth century, the American sculptor and art critic Horatio Greenough argued for this idea by referring to the beauty of a healthy animal; see *Form and Function. Remarks on Art, Design and Architecture*, ed. Harold A. Small (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969).

[12] For example, technologically advanced forms of agriculture can be claimed to be alienated from concrete nature in much the same way as many advanced forms of natural science are alienated from it. Cf. Ehrenfeld, *Beginning Again*.

[13] This implies, among other things, limitations on the size of the farm, so that the maximum size is one that still allows for an intimate knowledge of the area.

[14] Note Wendell Berry (quoted in Ehrenfeld, "Changing the Way We Farm," 170): "An adequate relationship between people and the land is not a monologue but a conversation. If the land has something to say back, the good farmer hears it."

[15] See Allen Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment. The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2000), Part I, especially pp. 6, 11-13, 49-51, 54-71. On the danger of reduced appreciation due to an overemphasis of knowledge, see Ronald W. Hepburn, "Trivial and Serious in the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature," *The Reach of the Aesthetic. Collected essays on art and nature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, [1993] 2001), pp. 1-15: ref. on p. 7.

[16] Compare the quote from William James ("On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings") where a particular farm is described, through an adopted farmer's perspective, in terms of "personal victory" and "a symbol redolent with moral memories [that] sang a very paeon of duty, struggle, and success," in Carlson, "On Appreciating Agricultural Landscapes," p. 310.

[17] Growing up on a family farm in the northern part of the United States, Allen Carlson told me that his father, his brother and he, himself, used to take the car and go out in the evening to "look at the fields" -- their own or those of the neighbours. This example, he suggested, supports the idea that farmers do appreciate their environment aesthetically.

[18] Michael Polanyi, *Personal knowledge. Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958).

[19] On the relevance of proprioceptive sensations for experiencing the environment, see Gernot Böhme, in particular *Atmosphäre. Essays zur neuen Ästhetik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995) and *Anmutungen. Über das Atmosphärische* (Ostfeldern: edition tertium, 1998). Also interesting is Gaston Bachelard's elaboration on the subjective element of experience in his idea of "material imagination, for example in *La terre et les rêveries de la volonté* (Paris: José Corti, 1948). It should perhaps be noted that the importance of the human body in farming is challenged by the development of robots or unmanned machines. These are, however, still an exception in the practice of agriculture.

[20] On the role of the body in deciding what counts as real, see Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain. The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

[21] 'Regard' in both senses of the term: they are his business and they are felt to be looking at him, like the auratic objects described by Walter Benjamin, "Some Motifs in Baudelaire," *Charles Baudelaire. A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London and New York: Verso 1997), pp. 107-154: ref. on pp. 145-152. Compare also the different impact of hearing the expression "I love you" in a foreign language or in our native language or some other language we know intimately. Only in the latter do the words really mean to us what they say: their emotional impact and existential reality is of a far greater magnitude. (On the other hand, such utterances, when directed to us, establish a language as intimate.)

[22] This is not a complete list of the existential conditions and appropriate reactions; I only want to point to the kind of characteristics and qualities that are involved.

[23] See, for example, Arnold Berleant, *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), and *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

[24] The roots of the concept disinterestedness go back to 18th-century British philosophy, where it had both an aesthetic and an ethical meaning referring to the appropriate attitude of friendship. In Kant and after, it became a necessary element of aesthetic appreciation. Particularly here, as Arnold Berleant has argued, disinterestedness is connected to various dualisms and a ban on the sensuous realm. See Jerome Stolnitz, "On the Origins of 'Aesthetic Disinterestedness,'" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 20, 2 (1961), pp. 131-143; Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, §§ 2-5; Berleant, "Beyond Disinterestedness," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 34, 3 (1994), pp. 242-254. One might add that although disinterestedness can be defended in an aesthetics of nature because it distances the self from practices of manipulating and transforming nature, it at the same time alienates the self from nature.

[25] Care is not always positive and benign. For example, the care of parents for their children can, despite good intentions, be oppressive.

[26] For a discussion focused upon this aspect of Kant's aesthetic theory, see Paul Crowther, "The Significance of Kant's Pure Aesthetic Judgement," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 36, 2 (1996), pp. 109-121.

[27] Compare Walter Benjamin's observations on city-scape in "One-Way Street," *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London and New York: Verso, 1997/1979), pp. 45-104: ref. on p. 49, 69.

[28] Complexity and intensity are together with unity the three pillars of Beardsley's account of aesthetic value; Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, pp. 529, 531. In nature experience,

Ronald W. Hepburn has suggested convincingly the relevance of unity in connection to a cluster of ideas that can be referred to as 'oneness with nature'; R.W. Hepburn, "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty," *'Wonder' and Other Essays. Eight Studies in Aesthetics and Neighbouring Fields* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, [1966], 1984), pp. 9-35, ref. on pp. 17-23, in particular 21-22. Following this line, one might emphasize the sense of mutual belonging that arises from agricultural work.

[29] I discuss this in more detail in *The Human Habitat. Aesthetic and Axiological Perspectives* (Lahti: International Institute for Applied Aesthetics, 1998), pp. 78-92.

[30] The nature-as-environment -approach is less fundamentalistic and arrogant than the nature-as-concept - approach. For whether the latter defines nature or instead emphasizes that it is undefinable, it claims knowledge of what nature is (or is not).

[31] I do not claim that the farmer would put her insight in these terms. Further, my extension of 'life-world' to other species than the human is unorthodox, taken the views of both Husserl and Heidegger, but quite consciously so.

[32] Nature and wildness has been discussed by, for example, Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild* (New York: North Point Press, 1998/1990), and Mia Kunnaskari, "Wild Everyday Experience: Urban Nature," paper presented at the conference *Playing the Wild Card: Un/Disciplined Thoughts on Wild(er)ness*, Banff, Canada, 9-12 May 2002.

[33] In the classic accounts of the sublime, it is emphasized that the experiencing subject is not in real danger but rather appreciates the dangerous and threatening quality of an object; see Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1757], 1990,) and Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, §§ 23-29.

[34] In the contemporary usage of 'wilderness' it seems that this has happened: the wilderness is defended as good without considering how it might be dangerous (and bad) for humans.

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