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BERLEANT AS EDUCATOR

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Abstract

Berleant was and is an educator in a variety of ways essential to aesthetics and philosophy of the arts. I use both tenses since Berleant's contribution to an environmental and holistic approach to aesthetics is both historical and ongoing. Foremost has been the impact of his key idea of "engagement" on a generation of younger aestheticians (he was unfortunately neglected by many of his contemporaries) in such areas as feminist, nature, landscape, architectural, and everyday aesthetics. Berleant was/is an educator of both national and international scope, not only for his contribution at the highest institutional levels but also for his creation and nurturing of the groundbreaking journal, *Contemporary Aesthetics*. But, more, through the great range of his writings he has touched for the first time a multitude of aesthetic topics, including, even, riding a canoe down a river. Finally, Berleant has educated by bridging chasms between many schools of thought on several continents. For some, he has played a role much like that of Schopenhauer for Nietzsche, hence the title of this paper, not so much in ideology as in being a philosophical exemplar. This paper is also a personal deeply felt Thank-you from a younger admirer, and, in a sense, follower.

Keywords

Berleant, Engagement, Aesthetic Field, Aesthetics, Philosophy of Art, Everyday Aesthetics, Aesthetics of Nature, Education

Arnold Berleant is a rebel, a radical. He wants to get to the root of things. His approach to aesthetics has scope. For him, the stakes are not just aesthetic ones. He is talking about philosophy itself. Like Dewey and the rest of the pragmatist tradition he seeks to dissolve boundaries, overcoming assumptions about strict categorical distinctions, and to overcome the myth of objectivism: dualism is anathema. He is not just attacking analytic aesthetics, but the entire essentializing and universalizing tradition of the Enlightenment. His greatest enemy is the concept of disinterestedness, which we inherited from Kant. He wants to rethink aesthetics in a non-Kantian way, one that stresses our embodied being: we are sensuous beings. He is also critical of other conceptual divisions. For instance, you cannot ultimately separate percept from concept.

As a result of this iconoclastic approach, Berleant has challenged the very boundaries of aesthetics, and on many fronts. Aesthetics is certainly not limited to fine art, neither is it limited to art. It expands out into the environment: it includes social relations. He wants an aesthetic criticism not only of the arts but also of culture, including knowledge. Aesthetics, then, is pervasive. But it has been largely misconceived. As opposed to disinterestedness, an idea first popularized by Kant's aesthetic theory, engagement is Berleant's central notion. We should not look at art just from the perspective of the detached observer. Instead, there is a dynamic relation between artist, artwork, subject matter, and audience. This approach to what Berleant has called the aesthetic field is originally Deweyan in inspiration. However, Berleant has taken stimulus from many places, including Nietzsche and Phenomenology, and even from the analytic tradition, from which he gets his clear style and his respect for scientific knowledge. Berleant, in testing boundaries, has opened up new areas of aesthetic exploration.

Rather than trying to arrive at strict procedures of evaluation, or to create a scientific aesthetics, Berleant stresses context and continuity.

OK, that's a quick summary. Now let's go back to the beginning. I title this paper "Berleant as Educator" as an allusion to Nietzsche's "Schopenhauer as Educator," a work that Nietzsche published early in his career, shortly after his great *Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*. At that time Nietzsche was still under the influence of Schopenhauer, although he was beginning to have some doubts, especially concerning Schopenhauer's pessimism, his dualism, his ethics and his metaphysics, which would eventually lead him to reject that philosopher almost entirely. And yet he was still inspired by Schopenhauer as his educator, as well as, of course, the educator of Wagner, Germany, and Europe. But Nietzsche's main interest was in Schopenhauer as an exemplar of philosophy, as someone who lived his philosophy, as Nietzsche tried to live his. Although Berleant would reject many of the same features of Schopenhauer that Nietzsche overcame (no doubt there being some, perhaps mainly unacknowledged, tie between Berleant and Nietzsche) it is Berleant as educator, as someone who, like Schopenhauer in at least this respect, has been a true philosopher throughout his life, a philosopher whom, in my introductory paragraph, I referred to as having scope.

Let us begin with a little Nietzschean praise of Berleant (setting aside all of the bad things about Nietzsche, for example his near-praise of cruelty, his anti-feminism, and his anti-democratic instincts, none of which, of course Berleant would endorse). Berleant, Nietzsche would say, has exercised his will-to-power most authentically as an outflow of creative cultural energy subtly seeking to impose his perspective on the entire field of philosophy, and especially on the field of aesthetics – all for the good, in my view. Berleant says "yes" to life, yes to "the earth," and "no" to "the last man," as described in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

So how is Berleant, as educator, to be praised? I will have nothing to say about his work as a professional teacher, as I know little about that. This essay will be more a personal memoir, and perspective, on Berleant, and perhaps a little struggle with him. What student does not struggle with their master? My first contact with Berleant came in another institutional context and I was never literally his student. Yet he has been my educator in many ways, as he has been for many other philosophers, academics, artists, and nature-lovers.

Nietzsche saw Schopenhauer as an educator not just through his books, but through his life. To understand Berleant as educator one needs to understand him through the broad scope of his intellectual life. He has educated through the breadth of his interests and activities, not simply as an aesthetician and philosopher of art, the scholarly areas in which he is most well-known, but as a musician, a connoisseur, an urban flâneur, and a cultural critic. He has never been an armchair philosopher. He always has done applied philosophy. One wonders, in Isaiah Berlin's terms, whether he is a hedgehog or a fox. The answer is, marvelously, both. He knows much about many things, AND he also knows one very important thing, although it has many names, one of which I have already mentioned: "engagement." His many essays on such diverse arts and aesthetic enterprises as architecture, gardens,

urban environments, everyday life, celestial aesthetics, environmental design, virtual space, and on and on, show that he is up for learning, and saying something about, just about anything.

But let us turn to his prominent impact on the institutional side of “aesthetics,” which term, for me, here, will be used as shorthand for the combined disciplines of aesthetics and the philosophy of the arts, as well as the cultural criticism coming out of these, and even the political theory coming out of that. Berleant’s scope is ever-expanding. There are three areas, perhaps four, that I know of, in which Berleant has had monumental impact on the institutional side of this hybrid discipline. There is his work as Secretary-Treasurer of the American Society for Aesthetics, as Secretary-General and past President of the International Association of Aesthetics, as founding editor of the online journal *Contemporary Aesthetics*, and finally, his development and nurturing of a vast network of scholarly connection, which itself goes beyond the four strictly institutional contexts mentioned: this last making Berleant himself an institution.

My first encounter with Berleant, which I cannot remember precisely, would not have been in person, but by way of becoming a member of the American Society for Aesthetics in the Fall of 1974 while I was a graduate student in Humanities at San Francisco State, and had taken a class from the late Anita Silvers in aesthetics, which set me on the path that led me to a career in philosophical aesthetics, which also meant a teaching career. He was a Trustee of the ASA at the time, as I can see from my copy of the Fall issue of the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, which was, and still is, published by the ASA. But my first direct encounter with him was probably at my first national conference in Banff, probably in 1978, when I was a graduate student in Philosophy at Boston University, writing my dissertation under Marx Wartofsky and Erazim Kohak. Berleant was still a trustee then, and continued until 1979. But in 1980 he became Secretary-Treasurer, and it was surely *then* that I first got to know him, since Hilde Hein was then editor of the society newsletter, and she needed some help. She lived in the Boston Area, and Wartofsky was a good friend of hers. So I became her assistant, and later, co-editor, and later still, editor of the newsletter. So, for a while, Berleant was my boss. He was gracious, organized and encouraging – a good boss for a graduate student and, later, for an assistant professor.

This part is more personal, but I will say it here, that Berleant was my educator in a special way at a time when I made a major career mistake by writing an editorial criticizing the American Philosophical Association for not having enough papers on aesthetics at their various meetings, a criticism I made, not thinking about who might be the leading figure behind the Pacific Division of the APA (the same Anita Silvers!), someone who might see my editorial as a direct criticism, and who, at the national meeting of the ASA in Montreal, that October, challenged and castigated me in front of the society business meeting. Berleant tried to mediate, and probably did ameliorate the situation, for which I owe him. But, more than that, in something like a reversal of the situation of C.S. Peirce, who always had a nemesis blocking his career-path unknown to him, I somehow think, surmise, or perhaps just imagine that Berleant acted as a kind of guardian angel for me in my career,

helping me get accepted to various things, for which I am also thankful. He was my educator in that he made it possible for me to continue as an educator myself.

But I am not the only one, and Berleant's way of nurturing the younger academics he mentored went far beyond these merely personal matters. I remember once being at a conference and picking up, and purchasing, a copy of, I think, *Living in the Landscape*, and seeing Berleant in the same room being visibly pleased that I had done so. That would have been, probably, in 1997 shortly after I published my first piece on everyday aesthetics, i. e. on neatness and messiness. I offer here a list of these younger academics, necessarily incomplete, for almost all the people who did work in the English-speaking world in the aesthetics of the environment or, more specifically, of the natural environment, were influenced and/or nurtured by Berleant during the 80s and 90s. Names would include Allen Carlson, Glen Parsons, Noel Carroll, Stan Godlovitch, Yuriko Saito, Emily Brady, Marcia Eaton, Cheryl Foster, Ronald Moore, John Fisher, Donald Crawford, and Thomas Heyd, all of whom appeared in his anthology, edited with Carlson, *The Aesthetics of Natural Environments*, published in 2004, but based on a special issue on Environmental Aesthetics that was published by the *JAAC* in Spring of 1998. Other names include Sally Schaumann, Kevin Melchionne, Barbara Sandrisser (the architect), Judith Miller (the artist), John Carvalho, Ivan Gaskell, David Goldblatt, Mary Bittner Goldstein, Kathleen Higgins, Jo Ellen Jacobs, Carolyn Korsmeyer, Estella Lauter, David Macauley, Mara Miller, Jos de Mul, Monique Roelofs, Larry Shiner, and Julie van Camp. But that is only scratching the surface, since, as previously mentioned, Berleant cultivated a larger community from every country of the world (it sometimes seemed) at least from Poland, China, Finland (Ossi Naukarinen, Yrjö Sepänmaa, and Arto Haapala), Mexico (Katya Mandoki), and no doubt many others, including the editors of this issue of *Popular Inquiry*.

So, in fact, Berleant, through his many writings, his conference papers, his institutional involvement, his personal loyalty, and his many correspondences, has been an educator not only as a teacher and as a mentor but as a world-class organizer and instigator of aesthetic investigations. Moreover, his capacity to cross boundaries between different philosophical traditions, styles and contexts, always combatting the misunderstandings arising from prejudices within the philosophical world, almost literally made "World Aesthetics" as a concept and a reality possible. As a consequence, I suspect, I found myself in the 1990s teaching a textbook called *Perspectives in Aesthetics* by Kathleen Higgins, the first text to approach aesthetics from a World perspective, including articles on Japanese, African, Aztec and Chicano aesthetics, among others. Later, Michael Kelly edited the great *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, originally four volumes, now six, which significantly expanded the field in terms of what are considered to be legitimate and serious areas of inquiry, and in a way that is both cross-cultural and capacious. Neither of these forays would have been possible without the internationalizing efforts of Berleant.

The last area of an institutional sort in which we can say that Berleant has been our educator is through his founding of the online journal, *Contemporary Aesthetics*, in 2003, which continues

to be free, open-access, blind-refereed, and nurturing of its authors. Full disclosure: I am a member of the Board. The journal publishes several articles a year as well as issues put together by special editors. Berleant was its founding editor, the editor now being Yuriko Saito, while Berleant retains a seat on the Board. The journal exemplifies many, or perhaps all, of the virtues I have already ascribed to Berleant himself. It is international in scope and not tied to any specific school of thought. It does cutting-edge work in emerging new sub-disciplines within aesthetics, offering an alternative, or supplement, to the more established, and mainly analytic *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, and the similar *British Journal of Aesthetics*. It has been the main source of work in the relatively new field of everyday aesthetics, but has also made significant contributions to a number of other sub-disciplines within the field.

Now I wish to turn to Berleant as educator in another sense, more related to my opening paragraph. An educator in the deepest sense is someone who reshapes a field. Berleant has been, and still is, an educator in this sense. Throughout his career he has taken on a number of key causes. Perhaps the most central is his advocacy of engagement over disinterestedness. The idea of “engagement” seems as though it would find its origins in existentialism, a school of thought popular amongst American intellectuals when Berleant was just getting started. For those who accept the definition of it, “existence precedes exists,” it can easily be seen that the emphasis is on the actions of humans as embodied beings in a surrounding environment, terminology which also reminds us of Dewey. One could speak of Berleant as a phenomenologist, an existentialist, and a pragmatist, among other things. In any case, it was a great innovation on his part to stress engagement in all of its manifestations.

For the rest of this paper, I will, for the purposes of not, myself, being overwhelmed by Berleant’s vast corpus, focus on one book, *Aesthetics and Environment: Variations on a Theme* (2005). However, Berleant’s overall corpus is highly consistent, and one could do the same with almost any of his works. In this book, as he enters into his most extended discussion of engagement, he shows how the scope of his thought is not only international but expansive in so far as it connects to ancient, tribal and primitive traditions. So, here, he draws on Taoist, Native American, and Aboriginal belief, (34) stressing the continuity of the human and the natural. Here he asserts that these traditions approach nature through engagement, and not, as is true in the Western tradition, through objectivist and distanced assumptions. Berleant also features the idea of “continuity,” drawing from Dewey. For him, “Aesthetic engagement recognizes the primacy of our immediate perceptual experience, that is sensory yet colored by the personal and cultural dimensions that enter into all human experience.” (35) Another quote sums up the challenge Berleant poses to the entire tradition of philosophical aesthetics, and even to philosophy itself “we have been taught by those who organize perceptual space, such as environmental artists, landscape painters, and landscape architects, not to distinguish too sharply between art and nature.” (35) One thinks immediately of the sheer pragmatist impulse of this statement: let’s go to people engaged in real-life practices for guidance in these matters!

To test the significance of this move, one should note that a great philosopher in the analytic tradition, Arthur Danto, makes the mistake of going in the opposite direction, holding that there is something problematic about sensuous beauty and that something becomes a work of art when it is taken out of the realm of “mere real things” and enters the realm of art, the “artworld,” where it achieves art status just by being there, observed by those with appropriate art-historical knowledge as being art, and as having the “is” of artistic identification, thus breaking any notion of continuity shared by the American Indian, the Taoist, the Aboriginal, the landscape architect, and both Dewey and Berleant. For Danto, art is all about aboutness: two pieces can be indistinguishable and yet completely different merely because of having different titles. Thus, on Danto’s view, aesthetic difference makes no difference in terms of artistic identity. This key notion of discontinuity, and the attendant downgrading of the material sensuous side of art, can also be found in the work of Collingwood, writing at the same time, but not in Heidegger’s “Origin of the Work of Art,” which is more a forerunner of Berleant’s assumptions. And, of course, Berleant does not limit engagement to one narrow form of practice, but acknowledges that there are many different kinds of engagement, ranging from the one we take in a French formal garden to the kind we take in an English garden, for example. Both of these, by the way, are taken as “arts” in a broad sense that includes crafts and practical arts. They could not have been sanctioned by Danto or his followers who saw art as distinctly institutional and, even, one could say with slight exaggeration, New York-based. Berleant goes so far as to distinguish two types of landscape, observational and “of engagement,” each generating their own concepts of design and experience, as exemplified, for example, in the participatory garden of the maze in contrast to the observational formal garden of symmetry and control. (38) Problematic here is that the participation evoked by the maze can be strangely formal, whereas the best way to appreciate a formal garden may itself be participatory in its own way. Moreover, gardens in general are experienced in more participatory way than movies, although, maybe we engage in movies in a very different way, with its own validity and distinctions. Berleant, of course, recognizes this, holding that even the “observational garden” can evoke engagement insofar as, to view it, we must move through it. (38)

Another way in which Berleant is an aesthetic educator, exploring new territory and challenging embedded tradition, is in his advocacy of an expanded approach to the sensuous appreciation of nature. In a phenomenological description of a canoe trip down a New York State River, Berleant makes clear that engagement between human body and nature is not simply a matter of sight: it is also a matter of hearing and smelling. (58-60) Nor is it simply engaging with a thing called “nature” itself, abstracted from human incursions. Instead, he speaks not only of the sounds of birds, but also of the roar of traffic as he and his fellow canoer approach a bridge or highway; not only of the pleasant smells of fresh water and verdant surroundings, but also of the uglier odors of sewage effluent – that is, of the negative aesthetic as well as of the positive.

I had spoken earlier about Berleant's expansive treatment of aesthetics, not only in his international scope, but also in the very notion of engagement. So too, the incorporation of all the senses into his idea of sensuous engagement exemplifies this expansiveness. (150) Whereas the typical move of the traditional contemporary academic philosopher in the English-speaking world is to analyze, to break down, to categorize, to logically order, and to bring under control, Berleant's typical move is to expand, to break out, and to soften categories by subjecting them to awareness of grey areas, transitions and continuities. Another area of his expansive aesthetic is the notion that perception is not just a matter of situation of material in space and time, as Kant thought, but also of movement. (71) Hence Berleant appreciates the environment of the Genesee River by slowly moving through it in a canoe with a friend from upstream to its ending in Lake Ontario. This conception of "lived time" is distinguished from mere chronological time, which has its uses, but is phenomenologically limited. (71) It is by way of this concept that Berleant returns his readers to the arts, which, as Dewey had said, intensifies and concentrates the rhythms of ordinary experience. He observes that, in recent art forms, time has also been increasingly manipulated in a variety of ways through memory and imagination. (71) Again, following his expansive approach, Berleant not only stresses movement and change, but also the modalities of movement, even, most recently, the coordination of the actual movement of eyes and hands with the virtual movement of the cursor on a screen in the electronic worlds we now so much inhabit. (72) To sum up: "Every environment, virtual or otherwise, has its own characteristic aesthetic" (72), and, further, "time is environment-dependent and never isolated, separate and self-contained." (72) Thus, the foundations of Kant's aesthetics are overturned by a pragmatist/existentialist alternative. Berleant concludes from this "that there is no virtuality at all, and...what we have are different modes of reality." (72) Drawing from Buchler, he asserts that no complex is more real or natural than any other, including realms of make-believe and fiction, and from Spinoza, that we live in one world which, however, has many modalities.

Berleant is a deceptively easy writer to read. His writing style is not sublime, although sometimes it is lyrical and approaches beauty in his phenomenological descriptions. His philosophical style is another thing, for, as I have argued, he has amazing scope. One could say that his writing is simple, and yet his vision is sublime. This may have been to his disadvantage in the academic races to stardom. I know of no seminars devoted to him, although there should be. Seminars tend to dwell on matters of interpretation, and yet Berleant is not particularly hard to read or understand. When it comes to fascinating obscurity, he is no Nietzsche, Heidegger or Derrida, or even Dewey, Danto or Goodman. His being radically democratic, no doubt, prompted him to write in this way, for he speaks to every woman and every man. If there is any aesthetic philosopher who has taken a similar approach, in terms of writing style, and democratic impulse, it has been Tolstoy in his *What is Art?* Over the years, I have constantly been amazed by how strongly undergraduates can respond to Tolstoy, only matched by their enthusiasm for Weitz's attack on the project of defining art. Similarly,

with Berleant, perhaps the seminar room is not the first place to present his ideas to the people. And yet there should be seminars, for Berleant has thought deeply and radically, like any significant philosopher: it takes time to see the complexity of his thought beneath the simple-seeming surface.

The last chapter of *Aesthetics and Environment* is a case in point. Throughout his intellectual career, Berleant has done a good job of encapsulating his philosophy in key concepts which both secede each other and enrich the previous ones without erasing or engulfing them. These root concepts can usually be captured by the titles of his books. For example, the concept of the aesthetic field, and the concept of engagement. By the time he had written *Aesthetics and Environment* he had come to the twin notions, “aesthetics as contextual” (149) and “social aesthetics,” to encapsulate the latest version of his ever-changing, yet unified, theory. ‘Aesthetics as contextual’ becomes the broad name for the theory, and ‘social aesthetics’ becomes the new domain which, when added to the previous featured ideas, such as ‘field’ and ‘engagement,’ requires the renaming of the overall theory. It is in this concluding chapter of my text here that Berleant gives the best sum-up of his theory so far (the book came out in 2005 and, of course, he has written much since then.)

So, under the heading of “contextual aesthetics,” again, in a deceptively simple way, Berleant lists nine features of his aesthetic theory, followed by the idea of a social aesthetics, divided into three sections. The nine features, together with my characterization of what they mean to Berleant, are: (1) acceptance (openness to experience without judgment, and expansion of the range of aesthetic appreciation), (2) perception (sensory experience as never purely sensation; but sensation as at the center of perceptual depth – findable in our appreciation of, not only art, but of nature, both small and large, as well as social occasions, including love), (3) sensuousness (sight and hearing as not the sole aesthetic senses, although they served the purposes of a distanced, contemplative aesthetics: hearing, touch, taste, smell, kinesthetic, and synesthetic sensation are equally important), (4) discovery (ordinary experience with its practical orientation may reduce perceptual content, but the aesthetic character of the everyday can be rediscovered; aesthetic experience, thus, opening to unexpected objects), (5) uniqueness (that every experience is perceptually unique, is essential for understanding aesthetic appreciation), (6) reciprocity (in aesthetic experience the object, the beholder, and the artist reciprocally influence each other), (7) continuity (the distinction between elements in the aesthetic field, which seem so strong from the traditional, contemplative, perspective, dissolve into continuities), (8) engagement (this concept, still central, summarizes what has preceded, where separations between appreciator and the aesthetic object, as well as other separations, dissolve), and (9) multiplicity (there is no restriction of aesthetics to certain types of object, thus leading to the expansiveness that Berleant will now take into the realm of social aesthetics. But this is not to say that everything is aesthetic, since there are also the religious, the practical and the technological domains. Berleant adds that not only should object, appreciator and artist all be considered in

relation, but various elements and aspects of the creative process, broadly conceived, including creation, recreation, and performance, should be taken into account).

All of these ideas, theses, topics and themes had been set forth before in Berleant's writings, but, here, they are marshalled to introduce the newest expansion of the aesthetic, what I take to be the most compelling and original aspect of his thought in recent years (or at least up to 2000), summed up in the idea of 'the social aesthetic.' Berleant is, here, taking his lead broadly from Schiller; although Plato, Marx, Nietzsche, William Morris, Tolstoy, Adorno and Marcuse had all previously explored this territory in their own ways. My theme, and thesis, throughout this paper has been Berleant's complex status as educator by way of the scope and expansiveness of his conception of the aesthetic. But that scope and expansiveness is not simply spatial; it is also temporal – and not just in an additive, but in a developmental sense.

As has so often happened in previous moments in Berleant's career, his recovery of the thought of a much earlier great thinker has served as impetus for a new development. For instance, Baumgarten's original conception of aesthetics, virtually ignored by the rest of the discipline, perhaps largely because he had not been translated into English (and still is not) played an important role in providing one of the lynchpins of Berleant's aesthetic theory: the conception of aesthetic experience as both sensuous and a form of cognition.

Schiller provides a starting point towards development of a social aesthetic. Berleant, as I have suggested, following the footsteps of Marx and Marcuse, has adapted Schiller's idea of 'art as play' to modern times. More specifically, for him, Schiller saw the ability to harmonize the sensuous and spiritual aspects of ourselves as essential to liberation, this found already in childhood play, and issuing forth in the experience of beauty and harmony brought by taste, which is to say by 'developed sensibility,' or by a harmony of "all aspects of human perception," (154) i. e. a "full integration" of the social and the personal.

When does a social situation exhibit aesthetic character? When the aesthetic features of it are predominant. This happens with, as Berleant puts it, "full acceptance of the other(s), heightened perception, particularly of sensuous qualities, the freshness and excitement of discovery, recognition of the uniqueness of the person and the situation, mutual responsiveness, and occasion experienced as connected and integrated, abandonment of separateness for full personal involvement, and the relinquishing of any restrictions and exclusivity that obstruct appreciation." (154) In other words, Berleant has applied his nine elements of a contextual aesthetics to his theory of social aesthetics in which we see, much as with Dewey, that aesthetic experience, at its best, is closely associated with the synthesis of democracy and freedom in an ideal social situation.

Berleant goes on to offer some concrete examples of a social aesthetics: (1) Etiquette can sometimes be cultivated to the point that it achieves grace. An example of this, that he does not mention here, is the Confucian ideal of the ritual dance as practiced by the ideal scholar in conjunction with

possession of *ren*, or humaneness. But more than Confucius, he stresses the way in which aesthetic delight can attend such rituals, even in the more formalized ones associated with religion. We are not talking here about a low-level form of etiquette, which is all about form and no real content or soul. (2) Moreover, also like Dewey, Berleant finds a living exemplar of a social aesthetic in certain primitive societies, in this case the Papua New Guinean tribe of the Foi, where “society is constituted aesthetically,” (155) and the boundaries between mind and body, and life and death, are never established. (3) Within family life, there is, too, an aesthetic, almost totally neglected by contemporary theorists, associated with how we (adults and older children) relate to small children especially in terms of the delight we take in their “freshness, delicacy, fragility of expression [and] coloration,” expression of such delight taking the form of belief in their beauty. Rubens captured this in some of his paintings. (4) The nine elements of the aesthetic may also be found in friendship. (5) And in love. As Berleant says, “the deepest and most intense occasions of a social aesthetic occur in the many forms that love may take,” (155) this point hearkening back to Plato’s *Symposium*, and particularly to Diotima’s account of love, as related by Socrates in that famous drinking party devoted to love and beauty.

Berleant, surprisingly, does not mention Plato, Socrates, or Diotima at this point, although he does in another context (to be discussed below). He says, again forgetting not only the *Symposium* but the *Phaedrus*, “‘beauty’ is a common term in philosophy but not in describing human relations,” (155) which is false, at least for Plato, although true today. Instead, Berleant simply refers to Aristotle’s inability to distinguish friendship from love (155), which is certainly not a problem for Diotima, Socrates or Plato, who provide precisely what Berleant considers original with himself, i.e. “a philosophy of love about beautiful relationships and...a philosophy of beauty about the relationship of love.” (155) Our Athenian trio also inspired Berleant’s idea that “both beauty and love are relational ideas and not formal features of objects.” (155), although I suspect Berleant would not accept this characterization of Plato’s thought. The neglect of Plato as the originator of this way of thinking may be because Berleant associates Plato, rather, with *The Republic III* where, he says, Plato observes “the seductive power of beauty with distress. [my italics]”

So, did Berleant ignore the Plato from whom he borrowed so much (perhaps unconsciously) in order to trounce the Plato of *Republic III*, i.e. the notorious scold and art censor, who was perhaps the most disagreeable Plato (i.e. Plato as constructed by interpreters) we know? Plato here is a puritan who worries that art is seen as radically separate from love. And yet, if we follow Diotima and Socrates up the ladder of love, we follow them through the love of institutions and sciences, i. e. of cultures in general, which could easily incorporate not only what Plato would have called the arts (techne), but also what we would call the fine arts. Remember that Plato was never opposed to art or the arts, contrary to a multitude of undergraduate essays, but to what he called “the imitative arts” or more briefly, to imitation. Although, to be sure, neither Socrates nor Plato explicitly apply the

ladder of love to the philosophy of art...Diotima, in fact, does, when she speaks of love as a desire for everlasting fame, which was certainly a motive, as she saw, for the poets.

Our (Berleant's and mine) interpretive disagreement about Plato is perhaps deeper than one might first think, which can be seen in the fact that Berleant does mention the *Symposium*, but gives what I consider a shallow reading of it, one that hides his actual deep affinity. As he puts it, his theory of love "is not love of the beautiful or love as the path to the beautiful, which Plato's Socrates learns from Diotima in *The Symposium*. It is rather love as beauty, together both manifold and irreducible." (157) Yet 'love as beauty,' is very much present in the idea of the dialectic between the lover and the beloved which leads, not only, to apprehension of Beauty itself, but, more importantly, to the capacity to shine forth in beauty and love, in and through virtuous progeny and the progeny of virtue, so necessary for redemption in the world of change. This nicely sums up, in my view, Plato's great contribution to social aesthetics, which Berleant has now (unconsciously, again) brought (by way of his being influenced by essentially Platonistic transcendentalists like Thoreau, and romantics like Schiller) into the 21st century.

In any case, Berleant, in speaking of the intimate relation between art and love (in a way that Plato never explicitly captured) has certainly broken through an intellectual barrier, i.e. not so much in the interpretation of ancient aesthetics as in the scope of contemporary aesthetics, and, moreover, in the range of possibility for contemporary cultural advancement. He sees this relation as like one between siblings (156) since both art and love have in common the nine elements of contextual aesthetics. And, as he observes, following Thoreau, this refers to all the things we can love: "landscape, a place, a home, or an object." (156)

I take this to be the place in which Berleant establishes himself as one of the founders of the new philosophical sub-discipline of everyday aesthetics, for a description which see Saito (2021) and Leddy (2012). One might note that Thoreau has been lurking behind all of the considerations of this paper, and that there is something literally geographical about Berleant's affinity with Thoreau. Sometimes Berleant reads like an American Transcendentalist come alive again in our own time. He is, in this sense, an educator specifically for and from America, which is to say the cultural entity of that country called the USA. (Cf. Berleant on Thoreau, pg. 157)

So Berleant finds that, in both art and love, there is a dwelling on the object: the appreciative engagement with the object of art and the beloved is in some ways similar. This shows that the idea of 'the social aesthetic' was always there, implicitly, for example in his idea of engagement, which he spells out for several of the arts; for instance in the "intimate involvement in the sequence of movement in...dance." (156) Similarly, in love, we also find "a sharing of dynamic progression, perhaps a sense of dramatic development, the awareness of a rare human situation or condition that may take the form of...epiphany, or a feeling of...human empathy," (156) as well as a dissolving of boundaries.

Another reason why Berleant renounces Plato is that, unlike Plato, but like Dewey and Jesus, Berleant emphasizes empathy. Jesus was, with Plato, an equally important proponent of love in the Western tradition, although of a different sort, as when directed to God or to our fellow human. Berleant speaks of art and love as being “the two most important human experiences,” (157) and finds a “structural similarity” (157) between them, as they are equally “aesthetic situations.” (157) As he says, “[b]oth involve acceptance without judgment and, at their best, both exhibit free value.” He further says that “[a]fter we excise the negative elements of possessiveness, exploitation, insecurity, egoism, jealousy, and power, much of what is left in human relationships is its aesthetic character.” (157) This, fundamental to his philosophy is a vision that has its sources also in the tradition of philosophical aesthetics going back to the 18th century.

And yet, it is a vision of the relationship between ethics and aesthetics which is quite the reverse of what is usually assumed: it is a vision of ethics as something that, through following the Golden Rule, as initiated by Jesus through empathy (and not out of duty, as in Kant), we clear the path for aesthetic experience. Thus, aesthetics gains primacy over ethics: quite shocking, this, for most Anglo-American philosophers.

This is a point at which I would argue for Berleant as an educator of the highest order. By expanding aesthetics into the realm of social aesthetics he, in fact, instigates something like what Nietzsche referred to as a transvaluation of values in which life is only justified as an aesthetic phenomenon. Love and art take us to a separate realm, not the realm of the artworld that we found in Danto, but to something far more significant: love and art bring us to “the perceptual domains of sense, imagination, and memory...[while] attentive to the sensory qualities of the situation.” That is, to use Nietzschean language again, they call on us to be “true to the earth.” And yet Berleant is not a Nietzschean since the Jesus element, which Nietzsche always opposed, is equally present in the idea of empathy.

Berleant is not only stylistically like Tolstoy but is also, like Tolstoy, in his own version of Christianity. Berleant really would like to evaluate everything aesthetic in terms of whether or not it is conducive to the brotherhood of man, or, even better, of all nature. Again, he writes that ideally “[d]ivisions and separations disappear and are replaced by a sense of empathy...for both art and love evoke a sense of shared living, a certain continuity and oneness...[or]...intimacy.” (157)

This vision leads naturally to the final section of his essay titled “The Politics of Social Aesthetics,” where Schiller, again, leads the way insofar as he holds that the reign of taste makes autocracy impossible, and that all should live in an aesthetic state as having equal rights, since, as Berleant says, “[t]he social equivalent of the willing acceptance in an aesthetic situation lies in recognizing the intrinsic value of every person...[which] is the precondition of a social ethics.” (158) In both realms, that of aesthetics as narrowly conceived, and that of social aesthetics (aesthetics as broadly conceived, including this) hold that “judgments of worth...be based on the immediacy of the experience to which they lead...” (158) Further, there is an emphasis, in both, on particularity as opposed to

classification: “People are flesh and blood creatures, not statistics, blocs, classes...” (158) That is, human beings are “ultimately never commensurable” and “individual people possess ultimate and irreducible particularity.” (158)

The other elements of aesthetics are also found in social aesthetics: for example, reciprocity and continuity. Moreover, “the aesthetic community does in fact exist in...limited forms” (199) for example in the above-mentioned Foi community, in situations of familial love, in communal life, and in friendship.

Most essays of this sort end by repeating what has already been said, but I trust the reader to have paid attention. Berleant should receive acclaim for his astounding career, mainly as a kind of universal educator who, not only on an institutional level, or through his many books and other writings, but also through his mentoring of a large tribe of, if not followers, at least admirers, in many disciplines, not just philosophy, in many countries, not just the USA, in many schools of thought, not just phenomenology or pragmatism, in many directions, not just with one idea, and so forth. He is, in short, a true educator of our time.

Note on Bibliography

With the approval of the editors, I would like to limit the bibliography here to just one item. The others are easily accessible through Google.

Berleant, Arnold. *Aesthetics and Environment: Variations on a Theme*. Routledge, London and New York. 2018. [originally published 2005 Ashgate Publishing.] All page citations are to this book.