Several essays are too accepting of pragmatist slogans. For example, in Kelley Parker's overview of pragmatism, not enough was said to explain, "The venerable distinction between subject and object is thus a convenience of speech that does not bear up under metaphysical scrutiny (23)." Sandra Rosenthal and Rogene Buchholz's thesis that "pragmatic ethics, properly understood, is by its very nature an environmental ethics (38)" was unconvincing because of the many meanings of all the key terms.

Most of the articles were written for the anthology; the reprinted articles are well-integrated and particularly meritorious. In addition to philosophers, the inclusion of several economists and communication theorists adds greatly to the book. While the anthology's general structure is excellent, the editing details are mixed. The reprinted essays should be more clearly indicated. The editor's introduction and the first two essays each give three different lists of "the classical American pragmatists." It is puzzling that in the final essay, one co-editor speculates on what the other co-editor would say if asked.

I hope that this volume contributes to putting "environmental pragmatism" on the map. Too many current writers assume that environmental ethics is the search for a grand theory that can then be "applied" to particular issues and too many philosophical pragmatists do not sufficiently test their abstract ideas against current issues.

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Drew Christie


This fine book is a call to the practical applications and possibilities formed in exploring connections between aesthetics and environment. Two seemingly unconnected conceptions, one of contrived activity, delving into the meaning of art and beauty, and the other, the natural uncontrolled world, brought together, offer something fuller.

Berleant writes:

One of the most important discoveries that emerges from these various inquires is that aesthetic values pervade environment. This carries powerful consequences: that aesthetic values, broadly understood are a necessary part of environmental understanding and action, and that these values must be included in any thoughtful proposal for environmental change (p. 178).

Berleant, like any good artist and thinker challenge boundaries and ask good questions. His arguments criticize the dualisms, limits and habits of old perceptual models. He provides the word "engagement" to describe the new interactive aesthetic model of subject and environment. Berleant begins by disassembling and breaking down the driving formal 17th and 18th century notion of observer and object that have continually plagued aesthetic thought and frozen its appeal and interests. The adoptions
of the scientific conventions of objectification, disinterestedness, objectification and distancing have falsely broken observer from observed.

Aesthetics is a total somatic experience involving an interaction of mind/body/environment. The power of "framing," of objectifying an "object" of art, involved standing over and against it, making it available for our use for higher intellectual contemplation. The old dualistic view closed off "engagement," and rendered aesthetics to mere "mental" contemplation. Berleant consistently makes the point regarding the difficulty that the old formulations of aesthetics have had in categorizing fields such as architecture since it involves an actual immersion and affection that cannot easily be distanced or framed. "Perceiving environment from within, as it were, not looking at it being in it, nature become something quite different. It is transformed into a realm in which we live as participant not observers" (p. 170). Places like gardens are immersive aesthetic spaces of engagement. They clearly illuminate the false boundary of contemplator contemplated.

Berleant's arguments for the dissolving of dualisms, formulated by recent ecological thought regarding the boundaries of self/environment, create a bond between valuing and environment. Berleant's hope is that engagement will solve more problems than it creates, and may open up areas of aesthetic appreciation presently shut down, and resolve some of the old problems still sticking in aesthetic theory.

In a chapter entitled "The Aesthetics of Art and Nature," he writes:

Earthworks and environmental art extend far beyond the traditional model by the use they make of natural substance and by the bond they may project to their site. These works involve the viewer as well, not only through the forceful message they may embody about our relation to nature, but the direct physical participation that appreciation often requires. We are beginning to discover that the history of modern arts is more a history of perception than a history of objects, and that perception, moreover, is not just a visual act but a somatic engagement in the aesthetic field. Such a development the traditional object-oriented theory is hard to put to account for (p. 165-6).

Berleant explores the power of aesthetics and valuing formed through new ecological understandings of beings in environment. The old model of aesthetics as disinterestedness and passive contemplation is transformed into an aesthetics of engagement. The connectedness and underlying power of aesthetic experience is no longer a broken experience of passive (usually visual) contemplation of pictures in a museum, but now blooms into a complete sensual experience. Human beings under the new conceptions are not longer just subjects, but are environment. Berleant interestingly explores what might may come from these new ideas where one might "Replace an aesthetic of objects with an aesthetic of experience" (p. 118).
This book is relevant, non-technical, and well written. It would be of interest to a wide variety of readers from ecophiles to artists. The chapters are connected, yet different enough to appeal to a variety of interests. For example, the narratives of descriptive aesthetics are wonderful. A later chapter thoughtfully provokes the reader’s imagination in a discussion of outer space and aesthetics. “How do moral and aesthetic factors figure in the design of any community, in particular, one that is extraterrestrial” (p. 100)? Beyond the designs required for survival needs, space offers a great imaginative potential for design possibility since it is unbounded by gravity, orientation or culture. If shape and design form community, then a space station’s designs potentially offer a great platform for playing with and understanding the interactivity of humanity and environment. What kind of environment is possible?

Berleant persuasively argues that changes in habits of thought and valuing about ourselves in the environment offer us more. His insights regarding the specialness of place and meaning hit the mark in an era of strip malls and cookie cutter houses, arguing that aesthetically uninspiring or depressive living conditions are mutually reinforcing. This book offers a framework and places to begin to change that. His critical voice offers avenues for contemplating long term consequences in the construction of environments that foster community and meaningfulness for all the beings that dwell there.

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Bob Zellman


The standard account regarding the history of American philosophy that our students take from their philosophy classes runs something like this: Before the nineteenth century, there were a few philosophical insights recorded by Colonial writers, among them Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. But these, though important figures in American letters, were not philosophers proper—they stumbled upon philosophy more than created it. In the nineteenth century a few notable thinkers appeared, especially Emerson. Even so, they favored poetic expression a bit too much and were too engaged in something like cultural criticism to be as systematic as their European contemporaries. But things really got moving when Peirce arrived. American philosophy truly matured, and now we can compete in the international, philosophical market.

But for those willing to strain their ears, there has always been a low murmur of challenge to the standard account. What about Jonathan Edwards? Why doesn’t he count? There are quite a number of factors contributing to why he has not counted. First, most of us read Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God as undergraduates. No philosopher, we all thought, could write such a foul piece intending only to scare us. Second, Sinners was