



Makale Geliş | Received: 15.01.2025
Makale Kabul | Accepted: 09.03.2025
Yayın Tarihi | Publication Date: 28.03.2025
DOI: 10.20981/kaygi.1667264

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Is Climate Change Ugly? Considering Climate Change as an Aesthetic Problem

Abstract: Climate change inherently involves moral considerations, including the unequal distribution of responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions, the growing problem of desertification, the alarming loss of biodiversity, and other related issues. The central discussion revolves around three distinct aesthetic approaches. First, the paper critically evaluates formalist and subjectivist accounts, arguing that these perspectives are insufficient for comprehending the ethical and moral dimensions of climate change. Because, while formalist aesthetics develops a disinterested and abstract view on nature, the subjectivist approach is problematic due to the impossibility of reconciliation on the aesthetic judgments of nature. However, second, by integrating both cognitivist and moralist accounts, the paper offers a comprehensive perspective on climate change-driven aesthetic loss, incorporating both scientific objectivity and the moral significance of the issue. Illustrating this argument, in the paper, it examines specific examples of climate-related aesthetic loss, including Arctic ice melt, wildfires, and the aesthetic transformation of urban environments, framing these losses within the context of negative aesthetics. In conclusion, at the end, this paper aims to demonstrate that climate change should not be perceived solely as a political and ecological problem. Aesthetic theory, through a hybrid cognitivist and moralist account, offers crucial insights into the experience of climate change, while the moralist account offers the ethical and moral involvement, the cognitivist approach offers the scientific foundation for nature.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Climate Change, Negative Aesthetics, Cognitivist Account of Aesthetics, Subjectivist Account of Aesthetics, Moralist Account of Aesthetics, Formalist Account of Aesthetics.

İklim Değişikliği Çirkin midir? İklim Değişikliğini Estetik Bir Problem Olarak Düşünmek

Öz: İklim değişikliği, sera gazı emisyonlarının sorumluluğunun eşitsiz dağılımı, artan çölleşme sorunu, biyolojik çeşitliliğin endişe verici kaybı ve diğer ilgili konular da dahil olmak üzere doğası gereği ahlaki değerlendirmeleri içerir. Metnin ana tartışması üç ayrı estetik yaklaşım çerçevesinde şekillenmiştir. İlk olarak, bu metin biçimci ve öznelci yaklaşımları, iklim değişikliğinin etik ve ahlaki boyutunu kavramada yetersiz olduklarını ileri sürerek eleştirel bir şekilde ele almıştır. Biçimci estetik, doğaya ilgisiz ve soyut bir bakış açısı ortaya koyarken, öznelci yaklaşım ise doğanın estetik yargıları üzerinde uzlaşının mümkün olmaması nedeniyle sorunludur. Buna karşın, ikinci olarak, bilişsel ve ahlaki yaklaşımlar bir arada ele alınarak hem bilimsel nesnellik hem de iklim değişikliğinin ahlaki önemi bir arada değerlendirilmekte ve böylece iklim değişikliği temelli estetik kayıplara ilişkin kapsamlı bir bakış açısı önerilmektedir. Bu argümanı açıklamak için metin, kutuplardaki buzulların erimesi, orman yangınları ve kentsel çevrelerin estetik dönüşümü gibi iklimle ilgili estetik kayıp örneklerini ele almakta ve bu örnekleri negatif estetik bağlamında değerlendirmektedir. Sonuç olarak, bu metin, iklim değişikliğinin yalnızca siyasi ve ekolojik bir mesele olarak algılanmaması gerektiğini göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Estetik teori, hibrit bir bilişsel ve ahlaki yaklaşım aracılığıyla iklim değişikliğine dair önemli görüşler sunmaktadır; ahlakçı yaklaşım etik ve ahlaki katılımı öne çıkarırken, bilişsel yaklaşım doğa için bilimsel bir temel ileri sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Estetik, İklim Değişikliği, Negatif Estetik, Bilişsel Estetik Yaklaşım, Öznelci Estetik Yaklaşım, Ahlaki Estetik Yaklaşım, Biçimci Estetik Yaklaşım.

Introduction

Climate change traditionally been conceptualized as a domain of political philosophy, primarily characterised by analyses of the unequal distribution of greenhouse gas emissions, the projected consequences for future generations, and the rights of indigenous communities (Brady 2014: 551). The discourse surrounding the global implications of climate change has often adopted an anthropocentric lens, primarily focusing on the ramifications for human populations (Gaard 2018: 185). However, while acknowledging the impact on human societies, scholarly attention frequently overlooks the critical role and susceptibility of non-human life within a changing climate. This paper investigates a central question: Can the analytical scope of climate change studies be expanded by integrating both anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric perspectives within the framework of political philosophy? This inquiry will motivate a re-examination of climate change and its diverse effects on the global environment.

This paper considers climate change to be as an aesthetic problem. The first section elucidates this premise, demonstrating the aesthetic impact of climate

change on both natural and built environments. An overview of the topic of natural aesthetics is given in the second section, which divides its scholarship into four different accounts: formalist, cognitivist, subjectivist, and moralist. In the third section, we critically evaluate these accounts to develop our understanding of climate change as an aesthetic issue. We propose that the moralist account, augmented by Carlson's cognitivist perspective, offers the most compelling framework for analyzing the aesthetics of climate change. The paper concludes with a brief recapitulation of its core arguments.

1. The Need to Understand Climate Change as an Aesthetic Problem on Account of Negative Aesthetics

Climate change, as Emily Brady notes, poses a threat to both natural landscapes and species and perhaps more subtly, to our very appreciation of them (Brady 2014: 552). This aesthetic dimension of climate change becomes clear when we consider not only its ecological and political ramifications, but also the complex issue of greenhouse gas emissions and their potential to reshape the global climate (Randall 2016: 249). In fact, it is possible to view climate change as a significant disturbance of the global equilibrium.

Plato's aesthetic theory provides a valuable framework for analyzing the relationship between climate change and aesthetics. It is our contention that a Platonic perspective facilitates the conceptualization of climate change as an aesthetic problem. Plato posited that art should serve to reveal "the pure charm of truth" (Badiou 2004: 2). Conversely, he also recognized the potential for art to engage in deception, thereby obscuring our understanding of truth (Plato 1991: 55). Given these factors, climate change may be seen as a reasonably accurate assessment of the condition of the global environment.

However, the nature of this "truth" requires further examination. How does climate change specifically become an aesthetic problem? To answer this, this section will briefly review the general discourse within the climate change literature. This overview will establish a foundation for comprehending the

aesthetic aspects of climate change. A key question guiding this exploration is whether climate change should be understood as exclusively an environmental problem, or if its effects extend beyond the natural realm.

Building on the above ideas it is evident that a wide range of experiences are involved in climate change scholarship. Scholars like Coventry and Okereke (Okereke 2018: 336) address the unequal distribution of harms and benefits, the marginalization of certain groups, and the failures of political and social systems. Simultaneously, others, such as Caney, examine the concrete impacts of climate change on phenomena like desertification, sea-level rise, and agricultural productivity (Caney 2006: 261). These diverse perspectives converge on the understanding that climate change is not simply an environmental crisis, but a complex challenge that affects our social and political existence. Therefore, when we consider climate change as an aesthetic problem, we must acknowledge its dual nature: an aesthetic problem of the natural environment and an aesthetic problem of everyday life. While the explicit discussion of aesthetics within the climate change literature remains limited, it is a critical component of our analysis, and we will now discuss how some scholars have approached this important link.

Niemela-Nyrhinen and Uusitalo identify climate change as an aesthetic problem rooted in its "image problem" within mass media. They propose that visualization practices, by sharing the lived experiences of individuals impacted by climate change, can foster a more human-centered approach. Representing climate change visually underscores the importance of human agency and its relationship with the natural world. The authors critique both the scarcity of climate change-related art and the insufficient nature of media depictions, ultimately calling for aesthetic practices to fully address the urgency of the climate crisis (Niemela-Nyrhinen & Uusitalo 2021: 166-168).

While Niemela-Nyrhinen and Uusitalo offer valuable insights, their argument for climate change as an aesthetic problem remains incomplete. Their critique of media representation highlights the media's failure to engage with

climate change, suggesting aesthetic practices as a potential solution. However, this does not sufficiently explain *why* climate change itself should be considered an aesthetic issue. Their characterization seems to arise from this perceived media gap rather than a robust articulation of its aesthetic dimensions. This gap is also evident in other scholarships. Mia Bennett, for example, frames climate change as an aesthetic problem through the lens of Arctic melting. She describes this melting as an "aesthetic event," where human destruction of nature creates a picturesque problem. Bennett values the Arctic's aesthetics based on its visual decline, suggesting works like Einaudi's "Elegy for the Arctic" can evoke emotion and raise awareness. She argues that emphasizing the picturesque and sublime transforms environmental representation into a radical political act (Bennett 2020: 1-9).

Bennett's examination of Arctic melting as an "aesthetic event" offers a more grounded aesthetic perspective on nature compared to Niemela-Nyrhinen and Uusitalo's discussion, focusing on the picturesque (to be discussed later). However, this approach raises two key interconnected challenges. First, its case-specific focus limits the development of a holistic aesthetic evaluation of climate change. While the picturesque value of the Arctic is acknowledged, the analysis remains partial and incomplete. Second, this specificity creates difficulties in aesthetically evaluating non-natural aspects impacted by climate change, as climate change's effects extend beyond the natural environment. Therefore, while Bennett's work provides a helpful entry point for considering climate change through the picturesque lens, it does not offer a detailed exploration of climate change as a comprehensive aesthetic problem.

In stark contrast to the limitations of the previous arguments, Emily Brady provides a more fully developed account of climate change as an aesthetic problem. Her work, *The Ugly Truth: Negative Aesthetics and Natural Environment*, offers a valuable framework for understanding this complex issue. A key element of her approach is the consideration of both positive and negative aesthetics in relation to the natural environment. This contrasts with perspectives like that of Allen

Carlson who argues for an exclusively positive aesthetic appreciation of nature, viewing it as intrinsically beautiful. Carlson contends that introducing negative aesthetics would necessitate a view of nature as inherently bad, making a coherent aesthetic understanding impossible (Carlson 2005: 73).

While Allen Carlson dismisses the application of negative aesthetics to nature, Emily Brady offers a contrasting perspective. She proposes a framework that includes relative, inherent, and apparent ugliness as valid categories for aesthetic consideration. Brady emphasizes apparent ugliness as a key to understanding nature's aesthetic value. She challenges Carlson's prioritization of knowledge in aesthetic appreciation, highlighting the importance of apparent ugliness, which she links to the unpleasant and unattractive. Brady argues that our fascination with ugliness allows us to expand our emotional repertoire and deepen our understanding of the natural environment. Critically, she also addresses the overemphasis on cognitivism in positive aesthetics, arguing that it neglects the inherent narrative of nature. Brady suggests that through negative aesthetics, we can develop a sense of care and concern for the natural world (Brady 2011: 85-99).

While agreeing with Brady's use of negative aesthetics in relation to the environment, we find her concept of "apparent ugliness" problematic. The idea that all nature can be viewed as essentially ugly leads to the undesirable conclusion that all nature is intrinsically bad, making a sound aesthetic evaluation difficult. This ambiguity regarding nature's inherent aesthetic value weakens her argument. We suggest a combined approach, integrating elements from both Carlson and Brady. Following Carlson, we can affirm nature's intrinsic beauty. However, drawing on Brady's insights, we can also recognize that nature is dynamic and its form can be altered by the adverse effects of climate change, justifying the consideration of ugliness in our aesthetic assessments.

Emily Brady delves deeper into the relationship between moral and aesthetic principles in light of climate change. She contends that how climate change affects both the built and natural surroundings (specifically urbanization)

provides a basis for understanding it as an aesthetic problem. This perspective opens the door to considering the aesthetic experiences of future generations and the flourishing of human life through the preservation of the aesthetic integrity of climate spaces. Brady suggests that aesthetic engagement with climate change can be both educational and motivating (Brady 2014: 554-568). Her work offers a valuable framework for a dual analysis of climate change as an aesthetic problem, encompassing both natural and artificial structures. However, while her discussion of the aesthetic value of nature is comprehensive, her analysis of the aesthetics of climate change itself is less developed. It remains largely confined to the moral dimensions of the issue, treating aesthetics primarily as a means to engage with existing climate change challenges.

Thus, in order to establish a robust understanding of the aesthetics of climate change, the following section will delve into pertinent theories of aesthetics.

2. Establishing a Ground of Aesthetic Evaluation of Climate Change

In "Contemporary Environmental Aesthetics and the Requirements of Environmentalism," Allen Carlson highlights the role of aesthetics in protecting the natural environment (Carlson 2010: 291). He notes that formalist or scenic viewpoints are often the focus of conventional aesthetic appreciation of nature. This tendency is reflected in the study of climate change, where the aesthetic aspects of the phenomenon are frequently understood through a formalist perspective.

Additionally, a moralist approach is commonly used to highlight the negative consequences of climate change and inspire public awareness and action. Carlson and Berleant, in their collaborative work *The Aesthetics of Natural Environment*, further emphasize the importance of historical and philosophical context in appreciating nature's aesthetic value (Berleant 2004:76-86). Arnold Berleant suggests that understanding nature's aesthetics requires active

engagement. This interaction encourages action and cultivates a sense of moral responsibility for the ecosystem we live in by fostering a sense of unity and connection with the natural world.

Allen Carlson proposes a cognitivist method for evaluating the aesthetic worth of the natural world (Carlson 2005: 58-69). According to him, the natural sciences are essential in identifying the proper classifications for comprehending nature. This scientific knowledge, in turn, provides the foundation for objective aesthetic appreciation.

Contrasting with Allen Carlson's cognitivist approach, and in addition to Arnold Berleant's emphasis on engagement, a subjectivist perspective offers another way to connect with the beauty of nature. Drawing on Alexander Nehamas's "An Essay on Beauty and Judgment," we can appreciate nature's beauty by recognizing the distinction between ourselves and the natural world. This provides an alternative framework for understanding aesthetic appreciation.

In particular, formalist, cognitivist, moralist, and subjectivist explanations of aesthetics will be examined in this section, along with other perspectives on the aesthetic perception of the natural world. We hope to achieve a more thorough explanation of these many theoretical frameworks and how they can contribute to our comprehension of natural aesthetics.

2.1 Formalist Account of Aesthetics:

The formalist account of aesthetics focuses on the intrinsic value of a work of art. This aligns with the principle of "art for art's sake" (Dowling). Formalism, unlike subjectivism, seeks objective criteria for aesthetic appreciation. Monroe Beardsley labels formalism the "demarcational-definitional concept of art," emphasizing the distinction between aesthetic experience and subjective mental states (Beardsley 1969: 2-4). To grasp the formalist approach, we must consider Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. Kant emphasizes the importance of separating subjective judgment from the appreciation of art. His concept of disinterestedness

is central to aesthetic judgment (Kant 1987: 54-55). Therefore, personal preferences cannot dictate aesthetic value; instead, a universal perspective is required, one that ideally achieves universal agreement (Nehamas 2000). This underscores the idea that art's intrinsic value requires isolating aesthetic experience from the everyday life, suggesting a separation between art and the integrated experience of life (Curtin 1982: 317-318).

In "Art as Significant Form," Clive Bell makes the case that although aesthetic inquiry begins with human experience, it cannot be the sole determinant of aesthetic value, as this would lead to subjective and irreconcilable judgments. He proposes "significant form" as the essential quality that defines a work of art. Bell argues that this significant form, present in every artwork, evokes a distinct aesthetic emotion. Each artwork, through its perceptible form, generates particular feelings. Therefore, art must be appreciated for its own sake, divorced from the concerns of everyday life, social influences, and the direction of our feelings. In aesthetic appreciation, we should bring nothing from life experience, focusing solely on the art's form, such as its colors and lines (Bell 1914).

Gregory Currie's aesthetic empiricism, in opposition to Clive Bell's formalist approach, holds that a piece of art exists regardless of the precise moment and location of its creation, viewing these elements as coincidental (Currie 1989: 46-65). Currie argues that the aesthetic value of art resides in its inherent structures. He views artworks as constructed upon pre-existing frameworks without experience outside of these structures. Thus, while structure is crucial for understanding artistic form, it is the artist's act of creation that ultimately determines the work's value. This distinguishes Currie's view from Bell's, which prioritizes the form itself rather than the artist who created it.

Nick Zangwill's version of formalism argues that aesthetic pleasure is a non-cognitive state and that aesthetic experience should be understood as a mind-independent process. He cautions that mind-dependent reactions in aesthetic experience and thought can lead to subjective and irreconcilable differences in

aesthetic taste. Furthermore, the normative claim of aesthetic judgment is not derived from moral value. While some artworks may possess moral value, this is distinct from their aesthetic value (Zangwill 2005: 63-79). Zangwill argues against a moralist approach to art. His formalism offers a middle ground, accommodating representational and contextual works. He critiques extreme formalism for its limited perspective, while his moderate moralism acknowledges that some artworks have formal aesthetic properties while others do not. According to Zangwill, art-historical classifications are essential for creating a thorough grasp of aesthetic appreciation since they allow us to group artists, pieces of art, and art trends (Zangwill 2000: 476-493).

2.2 Subjectivist Account of Aesthetics:

Subjectivism, unlike formalism, emphasizes personal experience in aesthetic appreciation. Susan Langer, in her work "Expressiveness," offers a normative account of this perspective. She contends that the significance of art is found in its capacity to shed light on our own emotions as they are portrayed in the piece. Langer considers art a powerful symbol of the world. She objects to formalism's neutrality, arguing that artistic choices—color, shape, form—are always tied to the artist's personal experience. But, because aesthetic assessment is subjective, the experience is unaffected by the artist's objectives.

Art evokes a variety of feelings, or "felt life", as Langer describes it, through the process of intuition. She emphasizes the dynamic relationship between the artist and the audience, suggesting a common ground of "felt life." The artist expresses this feeling through their creation, while the audience engages with the artwork through their own lived experience. The artist's message sparks feelings in the audience, and this interaction constitutes aesthetic appreciation (Langer 1953: 369-413).

Following Langer's subjectivism, Monroe Beardsley argues that aesthetic taste is inherently disputable, unlike the objective standards proposed by Kant.

Beardsley uses "taste" to refer to individual preferences for various art forms, such as poetry and music. He notes that critics often offer a wide range of evaluations for the same artwork, leading to potentially endless disagreements. While he suggests that some aesthetic disputes, like debating a saxophonist's skill, may not be significant, he acknowledges the necessity of authority when making decisions about which movies to produce or which albums to release. Thus, even within a subjectivist understanding of everyday art appreciation, Beardsley recognizes the value of critics as guides, though not as ultimate authorities on aesthetic value. He emphasizes the capacity to discern aesthetic features as the defining characteristic of aesthetic appreciation (Beardsley 1958: 1-5).

2.3 Cognitivist Account of Aesthetics:

The possibility of objective aesthetic appraisal is called into doubt by Beardsley's viewpoint on the function of art critics. Cognitivism, in contrast to the mind-independent approach of formalism, emphasizes the mind's active role in aesthetic experience (Robson, 2022). While both cognitivism and subjectivism, as illustrated by Beardsley's discussion of critics, acknowledge the mind's significance in aesthetic judgment, they differ significantly in their aims. Cognitivism seeks objective standards, whereas subjectivism embraces the subjective nature of aesthetic appreciation. Moreover, cognitivism distinguishes itself from subjectivism by its rejection of perception as the primary basis for aesthetic experience, opting instead for a scientific and non-metaphysical approach (Robson 2022).

Allen Carlson provides a comprehensive cognitivist account, suggesting that the perceived status of artworks varies according to their function (Carlson 2005:56). This contrasts with Monroe Beardsley's perceptual approach, which categorizes aesthetic objects based on sensory fields, relying on art critics to establish objective standards (Wreen 2005). However, Carlson stresses how crucial it is to view a piece of art in the appropriate category. This requires understanding

the factors that define that category and how to perceive works within it appropriately (Carlson 2005: 58).

Carlson argues that because cultural viewpoints frequently result in vastly divergent assessments of an object's aesthetic value, aesthetic appreciation should be separated from cultural descriptions of aesthetics (Carlson 2005: 58-63). Furthermore, Carlson argues against relying on psychological standards in assessing aesthetic value. He contends that a psychological approach, unlike Langer's subjectivism, can emphasize different features of an artwork, resulting in irreconcilable interpretations.

Allen Carlson argues that the best method for creating strong aesthetic judgments is to use a cognitivist framework. With specific reference to the aesthetic appreciation of nature, he underscores the paramount importance of establishing veridical categories of natural objects, a task he contends is best accomplished through the application of the natural sciences. Carlson explicitly rejects the notion, advanced by Beardsley, that perceptual categories are sufficient for ascertaining the veracity of aesthetic categorization. Instead, he posits that only scientifically derived categories can furnish a common-sense and reliable foundation for determining the appropriate classification of natural phenomena. Carlson's perspective exhibits a parallel with Gregory Currie's conception of art. A work of art, according to Currie, is essentially a process of uncovering innate structures that already exist rather than an act of artistic production (Currie 1998: 56-57). Analogously, Carlson suggests that through the lens of the natural sciences, we do not fabricate categories of nature; rather, we discern pre-existing, objectively valid categories. It is important to recognize that science is essential to determining these accurate classifications in its quest for truth and untruth regarding natural objects. Scientists, much like artists in their creative pursuits, establish correct categories of nature predicated upon their knowledge of objective standards within the natural world. By establishing the veracity of aesthetic categories for natural objects, we are thereby enabled to cultivate a more profound

and informed understanding of these objects as aesthetically commendable (Carlson 2005: 63-95)

2.4 Moralism Account of Aesthetics:

As previously articulated, the formalist account of aesthetics advocates for a disinterested approach to aesthetic appreciation. Detaching oneself from worldly influences is essential while considering the aesthetic value of a perceptual object because these can unintentionally result in the development of a biased aesthetic judgment. In other words, the formalist account of aesthetics champions the principle of autonomous aesthetic appreciation.

In contrast to the notion of autonomous aesthetic appreciation, formalism does not necessarily exclude considerations beyond the artwork's formal features. Moralism accounts argue that appreciating art involves recognizing both its formal and moral dimensions (Peek n.d.). Arnold Berleant emphasizes the crucial relationship between art and the human world, arguing that neither the artist nor the artwork can be considered in isolation from this context. He suggests that the influence of the human world on aesthetic experience is undeniable. Furthermore, Berleant argues that our aesthetic appreciation is never abstract; it is always shaped, directed, and interpreted by our experiences and understanding of the world (Berleant 2010: 196).

Furthermore, Berleant extends his critique to encompass subjectivist accounts of aesthetics. He posits that the subjectivist emphasis on pure perception is not only misleading but also potentially perilous, as it fosters the illusion of an unmediated perceptual experience. In actuality, Berleant argues, our perception is invariably shaped and influenced by our cultural milieu. From his moralism perspective, aesthetic experience is not merely an end in itself, but rather a potent instrument for the construction of a more harmonious and equitable world. He suggests that beauty possesses a unique conciliatory power, capable of bridging

divides, resolving conflicts, and contributing positively to the fabric of our social existence (Berleant 2010: 196-203).

We have summarized four different and essential accounts of aesthetic enjoyment in this section. Building upon this foundation, the discussion in the next section will be centred around a more in-depth exploration of these respective perspectives.

3. Developing a View on the Aesthetics of Climate Change

We have attempted to provide a foundation for thinking about climate change from an aesthetic standpoint in this study. We started by discussing the ways in which climate change can be viewed as an artistic issue. After that, we summarized four different explanations of aesthetics, which will form the basis of the discussion in this part. Here, we want to answer the question of how artistic experience might help us understand the complicated subject of climate change. In order to do this, we will apply the aesthetic theories discussed above to the particular setting of climate change, comparing and contrasting them. Furthermore, the aesthetic value of natural habitats will not be the only factor we consider when examining climate change. We will also work to create a thorough narrative that takes into consideration non-natural settings, acknowledging how climate change affects man-made landscapes and buildings.

3.1 Formalist Account of Climate Change Aesthetics:

To appreciate the aesthetics of climate change from a formalist perspective, we must engage with both natural and non-natural environments as picturesque landscapes (Carlson 2010: 290). Furthermore, formalist aesthetics requires us to adopt a disinterested stance towards these spaces. The question then arises: Can the problem of climate change be approached from a formalist perspective? Yes, is the answer.

The application of a formalist lens to the aesthetics of climate change necessitates careful consideration of the principle of disinterestedness.

Specifically, it requires abstaining from perceiving climate change primarily through the prism of its associated vulnerabilities. Recalling the fundamental tenets of formalism, we appreciate art for its intrinsic value. Consequently, when adopting a formalist approach to climate change aesthetics, we must direct our attention to the intrinsic values inherent in both natural environments, such as pristine wilderness areas, and non-natural environments, such as urban centres. While the intrinsic goodness of natural environments may be readily apparent, the applicability of this conceptual framework to non-natural environments, often characterized by human intervention, presents a pertinent inquiry.

Formalism, as articulated by Clive Bell, connects aesthetic emotion to the presence of significant form in works of art. We can certainly have aesthetic experiences in natural and non-natural environments, such as being charmed by scenic vistas or feeling excited by encountering wildlife (Walton 1970: 350-351& Carlson 2010: 294). However, Bell's framework centres on the idea of art as an intentional creation by an artist. Cities, as designed spaces, can be appreciated as a form of art (Lefebvre 2000: 147). This leads to the question: can we apply this same logic to nature and posit the existence of a "natural artist"?

One potential answer to the question of nature's "artist" is theism, which posits God as the creator and, therefore, the artist of nature. This perspective allows for a formalist appreciation of the natural world. However, Allen Carlson argues that theists possess a distinct form of aesthetic appreciation, one that is often counterintuitive, particularly when considering the problem of evil within theistic frameworks (Carlson 2005: 82-85). Therefore, Bell's formalist approach may not provide an entirely satisfactory basis for aesthetic appreciation of nature.

In response to the question of intrinsic value in non-natural environments, we must consider the functional role of cities as places where people live, work, and play (Novotny 1995: 61-79). Valuing a city solely for its own sake separates it from its essential purpose and the vital connection between urban spaces and their inhabitants. Furthermore, the fundamental formalism concept of disinterestedness

becomes especially difficult in light of climate change. The concept of climate change is not abstract; it is a tangible and threatening experience that leads to environmental degradation and social disharmony (Brady 2014: 553-554). Thus, a disinterested approach to the aesthetics of climate change is untenable. To overlook the very real struggles caused by climate change and to merely view environments as landscapes is to create an abstracted and incomplete understanding of the issue.

In conclusion, we have argued that the principle of disinterestedness prevents a proper understanding of cities and, therefore, that formalism does not provide an adequate account of climate change aesthetics.

3.2 Subjectivist Account of Climate Change Aesthetics:

Among the four accounts of aesthetics we have considered, we find the subjectivist account to be the most problematic, particularly when applied to the complex issue of climate change. We believe that a purely subjectivist approach makes it impossible to develop a comprehensive and proper understanding of climate change aesthetics, encompassing both the natural environment and the urban sphere.

A fundamental question arises regarding the aesthetic appreciation of climate change: can it even be framed as an aesthetic problem? Reaching a consensus on this issue is crucial. Susan Langer's subjectivist account presents two key challenges. Firstly, as previously discussed, her emphasis on the "life of feeling" in aesthetic appreciation makes our understanding of climate change as an aesthetic problem entirely dependent on individual mental activities. This can lead to endless disputes. For instance, someone might find beauty in desertified landscapes, leading to conflicting aesthetic judgments about climate change.

In addition to the problem above, Susan Langer's subjectivist aesthetics, which is akin to Clive Bell's formalist aesthetics, emphasizes the importance of the artist in the aesthetic evaluation process. As we have already discussed, this

emphasis creates a challenge when considering environmental nature, specifically the problem of identifying a "creator" in the natural world. Furthermore, Langer's account provides little guidance on how to appreciate the aesthetic value of environmental nature, making it challenging to develop a coherent understanding of climate change as an aesthetic problem within her framework.

Monroe Beardsley's version of aesthetic subjectivism, while subject to the general challenges of subjectivism, introduces a unique element: the role of art critics. According to Beardsley, art critics can assist in defining objective criteria for recognizing climate change as an artistic issue. The next section will go into more detail about this possibility.

3.3 Cognitivist Account of Climate Change Aesthetics:

It is crucial to recognize the limitations of depending exclusively on art reviewers' aesthetic preferences, even while their contribution to aesthetic enjoyment cannot be denied. It is often difficult, if not impossible, to fully separate an individual's appreciation of a work of art from their own pre-existing biases and prejudices. This inherent subjectivity can make it problematic to develop truly objective standards for aesthetic appreciation (Zangwill 2005: 91). However, despite these challenges, we believe that Beardsley's subjectivist approach, with its focus on the role of critics, can be fruitfully combined with Allen Carlson's cognitivist perspective. While both Beardsley and Carlson rely on knowledgeable authority for aesthetic judgment, Carlson's cognitivism offers a more technically sound approach. Specifically, Carlson emphasizes the role of scientists, whose expertise in natural categories allows them to establish objective standards for aesthetic appreciation of nature. This provides a strong foundation for understanding the aesthetics of the natural environment.

While Carlson's approach offers valuable insights, his cognitivist framework also has significant missing points. His over-reliance on the authority and expertise of scientists, while perhaps understandable given their specialized knowledge,

presents certain problems. Thomas Kuhn, in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, argues that scientists, even the most respected, are not immune to personal biases and can act in idiosyncratic ways when defending their established paradigms. This tendency to cling to familiar frameworks can make the process of paradigm shift, the acceptance of new scientific understandings, a complicated and protracted process (Kuhn 1996: 5).

The connection between Kuhn and Carlson highlights the potential pitfalls of relying solely on scientists for aesthetic judgments. Carlson's approach, while valuing scientific expertise, can lead to flawed assessments of nature's aesthetic value. Nonetheless, we recognize the crucial role of science in providing accurate categorizations of the natural environment, essential for considering climate change aesthetically. These categorizations, potentially subject to change as Kuhn suggests, offer a framework for aesthetic evaluation. Thus, Carlson's scientists, in this context, parallel Beardsley's art critics.

The argument over the aesthetic value of the natural world has been the main focus of our examination of the cognitivist theory. We shall change our focus and delve more into the intricate and multidimensional topic of comprehending climate change as an artistic concern in the following part.

3.4 Moralistic Account of Climate Change Aesthetics:

Prior to exploring the intersection of climate change and moralistic aesthetics, we wish to establish the importance of incorporating negative aesthetics. While we agree with Carlson's assertion regarding the intrinsic goodness of nature, our proposal to consider climate change from negative aesthetics (Brady 2011: 92) acknowledges the non-aesthetic dimensions of its impact on natural environments. Crucially, however, we argue that negative aesthetics is aesthetically vital for comprehending the effects of climate change on non-natural spaces.

When considering a moralist account of climate change aesthetics, we find ourselves drawn to cognitivist principles. Climate change inherently involves moral considerations, including the unequal distribution of responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions, the growing problem of desertification, the alarming loss of biodiversity, and other related issues (Harris & Tyrell 2000: 14). When we discuss climate change as an aesthetic problem, it becomes clear that determining the correct categories for aesthetic appreciation requires a broader perspective than simply relying on natural scientists. We must also consider the valuable contributions of social scientists, and especially moral theorists. Just as natural scientists play a key role in identifying and categorizing the natural environment for aesthetic appreciation, so too do social scientists offer crucial insights into the complex social and ethical dimensions of climate change. Furthermore, we must recognize and confront the very real negative effects of climate change if we are to have a truly thorough grasp of it as an aesthetic issue. These ill effects, such as environmental degradation and social disruption, create disharmony in both natural and urban environments, and this disharmony itself constitutes a significant aesthetic problem. Therefore, to fully analyze this aesthetic problem, we must incorporate the expertise of social scientists, who can help us understand the full scope of climate change's impact.

Sculptors Sara Black and Amber Ginsburg's "7,000 Marks" project serves as a compelling example of art's power to illuminate the complex interplay between climate change and ecological vulnerability, specifically focusing on how the former exacerbates threats like sudden oak death outbreaks. In response to the escalating crisis facing California's forests, the artists engaged in a multifaceted intervention, collaborating with scientists and sawyers to not only understand the intricacies of the disease but also to actively participate in its mitigation. The infected trees, once felled and processed under quarantine, were ingeniously repurposed into 7,000 pencils—tangible artifacts imbued with symbolic weight. This transformation, this act of imbuing a utilitarian object with renewed meaning,

becomes a potent commentary on resourcefulness and the potential for regeneration.

Beyond the physical creation of these symbolic tools, Black and Ginsburg cultivated a dynamic space for dialogue through interactive workshops. These gatherings brought together a diverse cohort of individuals—climate activists, scientists, artists, and philosophers—fostering a rich exchange of perspectives that amplified the project's narrative and underscored the interconnectedness of ecological, social, and philosophical dimensions. "7,000 Marks," in its totality, functioned as a moral catalyst, prompting audiences to grapple with the ethical implications of the climate crisis and to introspect on humanity's precarious relationship with the natural world. By translating a complex ecological challenge into a poignant artistic expression, the project facilitated a deeper, more nuanced understanding of our collective responsibility in the face of environmental change (Harrington 2023).

This project exemplifies the confluence of cognitivist and moralist perspectives within the realm of climate aesthetics. Their collaboration with scientists, focusing on the specific pathology of diseased oak trees, serves to amplify public awareness of the severity of climate change and its devastating consequences for the natural world. Furthermore, the project's engagement with climate activists and philosophers, coupled with the interactive workshops, underscores the significance of moralist aesthetics in illuminating how art can deepen our comprehension of the climate crisis and galvanize us towards meaningful climate action.

Therefore, we conclude that integrating cognitivist and moralist perspectives provides a robust framework for understanding climate change as an aesthetic problem.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have sought to explore how we can develop a comprehensive understanding of climate change as an aesthetic problem. We began by establishing the importance of considering climate change from an aesthetic perspective, arguing that it reveals profound truths about the state of our planet. Drawing upon the insights of Allen Carlson and Emily Brady, we acknowledged the inherent goodness of nature while also highlighting the ways in which climate change is leading to its deformation and posing significant threats to non-natural spaces. This analysis led us to propose the necessity of incorporating the concept of negative aesthetics into our understanding of the climate change problem.

In the second section of this paper, we sought to explore how we can understand climate change through the lens of aesthetics. To this end, we examined four distinct and influential aesthetic theories: the formalist account, the subjectivist account, the cognitivist account, and the moralist account. This exploration of these various perspectives provided the necessary basis for the main debate and arguments presented in the subsequent sections of the paper.

In the third and final section of this paper, we undertook a critical examination of four prominent aesthetic theories, analyzing their strengths and weaknesses in relation to the complex issue of climate change. Based on this analysis, we have concluded that formalist approach falls short on developing a plausible view on climate change aesthetics drawing on its disinterested implication towards nature. However, climate change is inherently a political and a moral challenge to the Mother Nature. We do not only see its decay, we also feel we lost our environment. In this regard, climate aesthetics cannot be a disinterested approach because it does not only transform the façade of nature but it also transforms our relationship with the nature. Therefore, we argue that the most comprehensive framework for understanding climate aesthetics is a combination of cognitivist and moralist accounts, as opposed to the disinterested formalist

approach. The moralist account offers the ethical and moral involvement, whereas the cognitivist approach offers the scientific foundation for nature.

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