This article advances and defends three claims: (1) that the proper ethical criticism of environmental art requires a production-oriented approach—an approach that appraises the ethical merits or flaws of the work in terms of how the artwork is created as well as the consequences of its creation; (2) that, depending on contextual factors, ethical flaws in environmental artworks may, but do not necessarily, constitute aesthetic flaws in those works; (3) that, because environmental artworks appropriate part of the environment as an aspect of their identity, an aesthetic flaw in an environmental artwork necessarily also creates aesthetic disvalue in the environment—disvalue that exists in virtue of the creation of the artwork. I conclude with one further, more speculative claim, which deserves further investigation: the aesthetic flaws of an environmental artwork, which result in aesthetic flaws in the natural environment itself, are always ethical flaws of the artwork. This seems to make environmental art distinctive; in the case of non-environmental art, aesthetic flaws do not necessarily (if ever) constitute ethical flaws.

I. Introduction

For a week in December 2015, during which the United Nations Climate Summit (COP21) was held, twelve ten-ton blocks of glacial ice from Greenland adorned Paris’s Place du Panthéon. Arranged in the shape of a clock, the ice blocks were part of an artwork entitled Ice Watch, devised by Olafur Eliasson with the assistance of geologist Minik Thorleif Rosing. According to Eliasson’s published comments on the piece’s companion website, the motivating idea behind the piece was to “make the climate challenges we are facing tangible . . . [and] inspire shared commitment to taking climate action” (Eliasson and Rosing 2015, “Project Info”). Yet, Ice Watch’s reported thirty-ton carbon footprint is significant, and one might justifiably wonder about whether sending an expedition crew to “harvest” ice blocks in Greenland was an ethically justified means by which to attempt this artistic statement. Other environmental artworks by Eliasson have come in for criticism on similar grounds: New York City Waterfalls (2008), which involved the construction of four large-scale waterfalls on Manhattan’s East River, reportedly killed numerous plants and trees along the Brooklyn Heights Promenade by spraying them with saltwater (Portlock 2008; Fernandez 2008).

Not too far across the river, however, at the corner of LaGuardia Place and West Houston Street, the flora of another environmental work, Alan Sonfist’s Time Landscape (1965–present) was simultaneously—and is still—thriving. As described online by The New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, which sponsors it and other environmental reclamation projects, “After extensive research on New York’s botany, geology, and history Sonfist and local community members used a palette of native trees, shrubs, wild grasses, flowers, plants, rocks, and earth to plant the 25’ x 40’ rectangular plot” (n.d.). And as critic Robert Slifkin writes, “Like a traditional monument . . . [the work] points not only backwards in time, recalling lost natural phenomenon, but towards a future of continued awareness of humanity’s place in the world”.
within the natural environment” (2015). In contrast to Eliasson’s pieces, which are plausibly ethically compromised by their means of production despite his good intentions, Sonfist’s Time Landscape seems to be a paradigmatic case of an environmental artwork that is ethically meritorious in virtue of how it was produced.

As the pieces by Eliasson and Sonfist indicate, the legacy of the Land Art movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s is still with us today—both in works of that period that have endured and in contemporary works that are finding new ways to manipulate and appropriate the natural environment. For this reason, and because questions about the interaction of ethics and aesthetics in Land Art have never been addressed in a sustained fashion, it seems worthwhile to revisit the Land Art movement as part of an exploration of these questions in relationship to environmental art more broadly.¹

I am thinking of environmental art along the lines proposed by Allen Carlson, who claims that this category of art comprises works “in or on the land in such a way that a part of nature constitutes a part of the relevant aesthetic object [or, simply, the relevant artwork]” (2000, 150). Although this characterization of environmental art seems intended to encompass more than the Land Art movement, Carlson is admittedly working with Land Art as prototypical cases. Therefore, the characterization really ought to be expanded such that “in or on the land” is replaced with something like “in, on, or incorporating a part of the natural environment,” and this is how I will conceive of environmental art for my purposes here.²

Carlson’s essay is also important in this context because although he recognizes the ethical issues raised by environmental art, he sets them aside in order to focus on the question of whether such artworks constitute “an aesthetic affront to nature” (2000). This is surely an interesting and important question, but I suspect that ethical issues are not hived off from it so easily. In part, this is because, I will contend, an environmental artwork that constitutes an aesthetic affront to nature is necessarily also morally defective insofar as it degrades the environment aesthetically (and, of course, sometimes ecologically). The invariance of this relationship, I claim, is something that distinguishes environmental art as a particular class of artworks. But more on this in due course.

First, let me sketch the article’s overall claims and then proceed with them in order:

1. that the proper ethical criticism of environmental art requires a production-oriented approach—an approach that appraises the ethical merits or flaws of the work in terms of how the artwork is created as well as the consequences of its creation;
2. that, depending on contextual factors, ethical flaws in environmental artworks may, but do not necessarily, constitute aesthetic flaws in those works;
3. that, because environmental artworks appropriate part of the environment as an aspect of their identity, an aesthetic flaw in an environmental artwork necessarily also creates aesthetic disvalue in the environment—disvalue that exists in virtue of the creation of the artwork.

I conclude with one further, more speculative claim, which deserves further investigation: the aesthetic flaws of an environmental artwork, which result in aesthetic flaws in the natural environment itself, are always ethical flaws of the artwork. This seems to make environmental art distinctive; in the case of non-environmental art, aesthetic flaws do not necessarily (if ever) constitute ethical flaws.

II. ENVIRONMENTAL ART AND PRODUCTION-ORIENTED ETHICAL CRITICISM

For all the recent scholarship on the relationship between ethics and aesthetics, most contemporary philosophers have narrowly focused their attention on a single approach to ethical criticism. On this approach, artworks are ethically appraised in terms of their meanings, broadly construed to include the endorsement of a proposition, the expression of an attitude, the prescription of a response, and so forth (for example, Carroll 1996; Eaton 2003; Gaut 2007). Although this approach has generated a good deal of insight, our near-exclusive focus on it has blinkered us to some of the other ways in which an artwork can be subject to ethical evaluation. Given this approach’s emphasis on the attitude or perspective an artwork endorses (or solicits), it will be useful to refer to it as “perspectivism.” In addition to
perspectivism, Robert Stecker has helpfully identified three other ways in which an artwork is open to ethical evaluation: “in terms of how it was created, in terms of its consequences . . . and in terms of the richness with which it explores ethical issues” (2008, 150). There is an obvious reason why perspectivism has dominated the literature: most of the artworks under discussion are narrative artworks, and it is harder to see how the ways in which a narrative is created could be relevant to the work’s ethical value.

Nevertheless, I submit that the proper ethical evaluation of environmental art necessarily approaches this category of artworks in terms of how they were created and what effects their creation has on the environment. Why? It is not controversial to suppose that, on any one of a number of metaethical views, there is value in nature. To the extent that nature provides resources and habitats that allow humans and non-human animals, and other forms of life to flourish, it has instrumental value. It might also be the case that nature has intrinsic value in virtue of it or its constituent parts being natural, being rare, being good of their kind, or having aesthetic value, although this is a more controversial thesis (see Rolston 1982; Taylor 1986; Callicott 1989; Elliot 1992). Admittedly, the idea of nature possessing intrinsic value is a hard sell for some philosophers, and I do not have the space to defend the claim here. One could gloss the claim more pragmatically, however, as the claim that we value nature intrinsically, and still acknowledge that there is something ethically blameworthy about diminishing something that we value intrinsically (Jamieson 2002, 234).

Whether one prefers to conceptualize value in nature as intrinsic or instrumental, the conservation of or harm to things we value is subject to ethical evaluation. Given the above characterization of environmental art as essentially involving part of nature, environmental artworks are open to ethical appraisal in virtue of the fact that their creation involves the intentional appropriation of something we value—the environment—in a way that may be beneficial or harmful to it. This sort of argument could be run in a variety of ways. One might, for instance, prefer to emphasize our moral duty to preserve the environment for the benefit of future generations, rather than for “us” or for its own sake. The point is that such considerations ought to lead us to ethically evaluate environment-tal art in terms of how it is created and, relatedly, what effects it has on the environment.

Here one might raise the objection that what an artist does to produce an artwork is conceptually distinct from the work itself. In one of the few pieces of scholarship to address the ethics of environmental art, Sheila Lintott claims, “There is a difference between saying that the work is unethical and saying that the way the work was created is unethical” (2007, 268). This is true, but as Lintott acknowledges, there are some cases in which such claims overlap. As I suggested above, the reason some philosophers have objected to the production-oriented approach to ethical criticism seems to be that this gap between claiming that the work is unethical and that the way the work was created is unethical tends to be particularly wide in the case of narrative art (for example: Harold 2006, 261; Eaton 2012, 282). Imagine a novelist murders a number of people for the purposes of helping him create a serial killer character in his novel. Clearly the novelist has done something unethical, but there does not seem to be any good reason to suppose the novel itself is ethically flawed.

However, one of environmental art’s distinctive characteristics is the fact that artists’ appropriation of (a portion of) the environment is partly constitutive of the artwork itself. I mean “constitutive” in the strong sense of being an essential part of the work’s identity. Underlying this thought is an assumption about the plausibility of ontological contextualism that I cannot defend here. But there are, in any case, plenty of examples of environmental artworks in which the action the artist takes upon the natural environment is straightforwardly an essential component of the work itself. Consider, for example, Robert Smithson’s Glue Pour (1969) and Concrete Pour (1969), in which the pouring of a substance over part of the natural environment is an essential part of the work, or Joseph Beuys’s 7000 Oaks (1982), a land art and urban renewal project hybrid, which, as the title suggests, involved planting 7000 oak trees around the city of Kassel. In the latter case, the planting of the trees is (partly) constitutive of the work’s identity, so the ethical evaluation of the work must be, in part, an ethical evaluation of the planting of the trees.

There are, of course, less happy cases, too. According to A Report—Two Ocean Projects (1969), authored by Dennis Oppenheim and Peter
Hutchinson, a little-known work of Oppenheim’s off the coast of Tobago involved him creating a line of fire in the ocean by setting ablaze a mixture of dye and gasoline. Oppenheim was quite explicit about his motives: “I had this feeling that my activity on land had to carry with it some form of violence—something akin to the real world . . . So I did a thing based on collision. I traced a red line in the ocean and started fire” (quoted in Boettger 2002, 187). And it is worth mentioning that, apparently, Smithson’s Concrete Pour in Chicago was originally intended to involve pouring the concrete into Lake Michigan rather than an already-despoiled dumpsite (Graziani 2004, 205n81). Such cases are immune from objections to ontological contextualism because here the environmental artworks just are the actions the artists take upon the natural environment—actions which are surely open to ethical criticism.

In her discussion of the ethical criticism of land art, Lintott specifies somewhat stricter conditions for the means of production to be relevant to the ethical appraisal of the work itself. As she puts it, “some art’s aesthetic features testify to the unethical process of creation; appreciating such art requires attending to the harm done” (2007, 268). This is surely right as far as it goes, but it also marks the remit of production-oriented criticism too narrowly. I think it is an open question as to whether an environmental artwork like Ice Watch or, to suggest another example, Carl Andre’s Rock Pile (1968) possess any aesthetic features, properly so called. This question attends a number of environmental artworks, the aims and purposes of which often include the embrace of a postminimalist, “anti-aesthetic” style (Boettger 2002).

Consider, as another example, Dennis Oppenheim’s Contour Lines Scribed in Swamp Grass, in which the eponymous counter lines were produced by placing aluminium filings in the swamp. Reportedly, the piece was underwater within a few hours and “took three or four months to deteriorate completely” (Boettger 2002, 143). Art historian Suzaan Boettger contends, “The distribution of this industrial waste was undoubtedly detrimental to the swamp ecosystem” (2002, 143). Whether concentric circles marked in swamp grass with aluminium fillings possess aesthetic properties is up for debate; yet in this case, even if the work had any appreciable aesthetic features, they became imperceptible within a few hours. Nevertheless, Contour Lines Scribed in Swamp Grass is surely open to ethical evaluation in terms of what was done to the environment to create the work, even though our appreciation of the work cannot, conceptually speaking, involve attending to aesthetic features that manifest or embody the harm done; those features are not available for our perception. Furthermore, even if the circles had not been submerged so quickly, there would have been no point of view of the work from which one could perceive that they were constituted by aluminium filings. That is, if we could perceive the work’s putative aesthetic features, those features would not “testify” to the harm done to the environment. Rather, to assess the harm done and thus ethically evaluate the work, we would need to know the details of the work’s production—that is, that the circles were created with aluminium filings rather than some sort of organic, biodegradable material. Such examples suggest that environmental art is open to ethical criticism in terms of its means of production not only when its “aesthetic features testify to the unethical process of creation,” but when an unethical process of creation is (partly) constitutive of the work’s identity more broadly.

Although this thesis may seem intuitive in cases when the artist’s actions are the work or, at least, a central part of it, there are also less straightforward cases that lead to some difficult questions about the ontology of art. In particular, there are some cases in which the production-oriented approach to the ethical criticism of environmental art might seem stymied by uncertainty around the necessary conditions for the artist’s creative actions to indeed be partly constitutive of the work itself or, at least, relevant to its artistic and ethical appraisal.

In a previous article, I tried to forestall objections to the production-oriented approach by showing that some cases met a test proposed by James Harold (2006) (see Nannicelli 2014). The aim behind Harold’s test is to distinguish two kinds of reasons why an artwork might be immoral—circumstantial and artistic. On Harold’s view, the artistic reasons “have to do with artistic properties of the artwork. [They] are distinguished by the role they play in judgments of the aesthetic merit of the work, in other words, in the value of the work qua work of art” (2006, 260). In contrast, circumstantial reasons “refer to properties that would not be appropriately cited in making judgments about the aesthetic merit of a work” (2006, 260). Harold’s test to determine whether a
reason is circumstantial is this: “For some artwork $P$, if $P$ is immoral for [a circumstantial reason] (and only for these reasons), then we can imagine some artwork $P^*$ on twin-earth that has all the same artistic properties as $P$, but that has been produced differently . . . so that none of the problematic moral considerations apply” (2006, 260). The cogent thought behind Harold’s test is that there is a relevant distinction between ethically-evaluable aspects of the work’s production that bear upon the ethical criticism of it qua artwork and ethically-evaluable aspects of the work’s production that do not bear upon the ethical criticism of it qua artwork.

Applied to environmental art, the test suggests that there are a number of cases in which the ethics of a work’s production process is indeed relevant to our criticism of the work qua artwork. Clearly, the cases discussed above involve, in Harold’s terminology, artistic rather than circumstantial reasons for ethical criticism of the works qua artworks. For example, it does not seem possible that Oppenheim’s ocean-based work could have been imbued with “some form of violence,” as he intended, had it been produced in an ethically neutral manner. Yet there are other, more complex cases, in which the process of creation will also turn out to be an artistic reason for an ethical judgment of the work. In the next section, I discuss Michael Heizer’s Double Negative (1969–1970), which, I argue, is aesthetically flawed in virtue of its ethically-flawed production process. But here is an opportunity to briefly consider the underlying assumption that the ethically-flawed production process is relevant to our evaluation of the work qua artwork. Consider Suzaan Boettger’s claim that “the starkness of this work evinces a bold and aggressive artist” (2002, 195). If Boettger is right, then it is precisely the ethically dubious aggression enacted upon the natural environment in the production process that yields the aesthetic feature of “starkness” in the work. In such cases, the production-oriented approach identifies ethically relevant aspects of the production process that result in aesthetically and artistically relevant features of the work.

III. CONTEXTUALISM ABOUT THE INTERACTION OF ETHICAL VALUE AND AESTHETIC VALUE IN ENVIRONMENTAL ART

Notwithstanding my suggestion that some environmental artworks are bereft of aesthetic properties and that they are, nevertheless, open to ethical criticism in terms of their means of production, other environmental artworks plausibly do have aesthetic properties. For these artworks, a distinct question arises—one about the nature of the interaction between aesthetic value and ethical value in the works. In this section, I will argue for a contextualist position about this interaction, according to which the relationship is variable. In particular, I claim that, in environmental art, an ethical flaw may constitute an aesthetic defect, but does not necessarily.

With a view toward recent debates in the literature about the interaction of aesthetic value and ethical value, we might ask: in cases in which environmental artworks are ethically praiseworthy or ethically blameworthy, what is the relationship between the works’ ethical features and their aesthetic features? Before proceeding, it may be helpful to quickly sketch the background from which this question emerges. In recent years, a number of contemporary philosophers of art have lodged criticisms against the doctrine of autonomism, which holds that the domain of the aesthetic (including art) is, by its nature, sequestered from the moral realm. That is, whatever aesthetic value and ethical value a work has are autonomous; they do not interact in such a way that they affect one another. As Noël Carroll puts it, for the autonomist, “An artwork may be aesthetically defective and morally defective or vice versa. But these different levels of value do not mix, so to speak. An aesthetically defective artwork is not bad because it is morally defective” (1996, 231). In contrast, “interactionism” names a family of views that oppose autonomism because ethical and aesthetic value putatively interact. As several philosophers have noted, autonomism has recently fallen on hard times; most contemporary philosophers of art who have engaged in these debates advocate for some form of interactionism (Harold 2011; Thomson-Jones 2012).

For the present purpose, I am going to assume the truth of interactionism. In part, this is because this is not the right context for addressing the autonomist’s challenge. It is also because there are prima facie reasons for thinking that, in the case of environmental art, specifically, aesthetic value and ethical value interact. Therefore, I want to focus on the question of how aesthetic value and ethical value interact in environmental art, and, moreover, whether there is anything specific about the
Earthworks: has been subject—as “marring are “an aesthetic affront to nature,” there environmental artworks. In this case, and the (intended) functions it serves. Perhaps the best-known example of the invariance stance in the literature is ethicism, developed by Berys Gaut. Ethicism, as described by Gaut, “holds that an artwork is aesthetically flawed in so far as it possesses an ethical flaw that is aesthetically relevant, and conversely that an artwork has aesthetic merit in so far as it possesses an ethical merit that is aesthetically relevant” (2007, 10).

Now, it might seem, at first glance, that environmental art of all sorts would be grist for the ethicist’s mill. For it is plausible that, in many cases, the ethical goodness of an environmental artwork contributes to its aesthetic goodness insofar as its creation preserves or enhances the beauty of the natural environment. Consider, for example, the works that emerged from The King County Arts Commission’s land reclamation project (exhibited in 1979 in Earthworks: Land Reclamation as Sculpture at the Seattle Art Museum). With funding from the local government, artists such as Robert Morris, Dennis Oppenheim, and Herbert Bayer created earthworks intended to support “the rehabilitation of technologically abused land . . . [that is] environmentally damaged sites such as abandoned gravel pits, surface mines, and landfills” (King County 2013, “Introduction”). Among the most impressive are Bayer’s Mill Creek Canyon Earthworks (1982), a sort of sculpted parkland whose aesthetic beauty plausibly results from a combination of its natural beauty and its function as an environmental regeneration project that now offers recreation activities and facilitates storm water control (The Cultural Landscape Foundation n.d.). In this case, part of the aesthetic pleasure afforded by Mill Creek Canyon Earthworks derives from the ethical goodness of the aims with which it was created and the (intended) functions it serves.

The ethicist may also be keen to avail herself of the inverse sort of case, in which an environmental artwork’s aesthetic value is diminished by ethical blemishes resulting from its production process. Double Negative, in the Nevada desert, comprises two deep incisions into the land, separated by a 1500-foot chasm. As Suzaan Boettger details, to excavate the two fifty-footdeep, thirty-foot-wide troughs in the facing sides of the mesa’s projected fingers, [Michael] Heizer dynamited and then removed by bulldozer 240,000 tons rhyolite and sandstone and pushed them into the chasm between his “cuts,” which then constituted a huge mound as if generated by an avalanche. (2006, 219)

The sort of negative aesthetic appraisals to which Double Negative has been subject—as “marring the land” for example—often make tacit reference to the ethical dubiousness of so drastically altering the natural landscape with “the bravado aggression of a maverick pioneer” as Boettger puts it (Masheck quoted in in Kastner and Wallis 1998, 30; Boettger 2007, 221). It seems to me that when critics and philosophers like Carlson make claims to the effect that works like Double Negative are “anesthetic affront to nature,” there is a tacit ethical judgment of how the work’s creation defiled the natural environment underlying and contributing to the negative aesthetic judgment. In cases like Double Negative, it is plausible that the ethical disvalue that attends the work in virtue of its defacement of the natural environment plausibly yields an aesthetic flaw in the work or contributes to the work’s aesthetic disvalue.

Yet while such cases appear to establish that in some environmental artworks ethical flaws constitute aesthetic flaws and ethical virtues constitute aesthetic virtues, it is far from clear that these relationships hold in all environmental artworks. In fact, I suspect that there are at least some environmental artworks whose aesthetic merits are unaffected by ethical flaws resulting from their creation. Consider, for example, one of the best-known pieces of Land Art: Robert Smithson’s Spiral Jetty (1970). Suzaan Boettger writes that Spiral Jetty, a 1500-foot rock configuration in The Great Salt Lake, “called for rearranging 6,650 tons of rock and dirt” (2006, 220). Even if, as Boettger suggests, the creation of Spiral Jetty did not damage the ecosystem of which it is now a part, there is plausibly something ethically dubious about altering the landscape for one’s personal interest. And, at the very least, one might have ethical worries
about the distal environmental impact of running the machinery required to move such enormous amounts of land. In Boettger’s words, our contemporary understanding of the ethical implications of environmental art suggests that, today, we would be much less insouciant about the artists asserting “their right to such aggressive acts” (2006, 221). I would suggest that this is because we have, over the past fifty or so years, developed a deeper, more sophisticated conception of our moral duties to the environment.

And yet it is not clear to me that the qualms we have (or ought to have) about the creation of *Spiral Jetty* adversely affect the aesthetic pleasure we take in that work. Or, in other words, it is not clear that the ethical blemishes that may inhere in *Spiral Jetty* as a result of what was done to create it yield aesthetic defects. Rather, the awe and wonder elicited by the immensity of the work and its distinctive imprint onto the land stems, in part, from the knowledge of how much effort was required to manipulate the land in these ways. This is not to say that any such ethical flaws actually contribute to the work’s aesthetic value. An immoralist position of this sort would be obliged to show that it was the moral flaws qua moral flaws that added to the work’s aesthetic value. In contrast, I think the moral valence of the means of production is likely irrelevant to our aesthetic appreciation of *Spiral Jetty*. It is not aesthetically good because altering the landscape is plausibly ethically blameworthy. It is just that our knowledge of the ethically dubious means of production seems not to detract in any way from the aesthetic pleasure afforded by the work; it seems not to imbue it with any aesthetic defect that is a result of those ethically dubious actions. Moreover, it seems likely that there are other instances of environmental art we could characterize in this way—say, for example, Hans Haacke’s *Skyline* (1967), which involved the release of helium balloons into the sky to visually stunning effect, or Dennis Oppenheim’s *Whirlpool (Eye of the Storm)* (1967) a striking juxtaposition of pure blue sky and cloud-like white concentric circles that were, in fact, created by an airplane releasing liquid nitrogen.

In short, contextualism, rather than an invariant position like ethicism, better accounts for the interaction of aesthetic and ethical value in environmental art. In some cases, such as *Mill Creek Canyon Earthworks*, a work’s ethical goodness contributes to its aesthetic goodness. In others, such as *Double Negative*, a work’s ethical blemishes negatively conditions our aesthetic evaluation of it. Yet in still other cases, like *Spiral Jetty*, the work’s ethical flaws do not negatively condition our aesthetic evaluation of the work.

### IV. Aesthetic Flaws as Ethical Flaws in Environmental Artworks

So far, I have tried to make a case for thinking that the way in which ethical value affects aesthetic value in environmental art depends upon the particularities of the work—upon context. However, I now want to suggest that there may be an invariable relationship of another sort in the context of environmental art. It has to do with particular kinds of things environmental artworks are—namely, artworks that incorporate (or, less neutrally, appropriate) a part of the natural environment into the work itself.

Allen Carlson has persuasively argued that it is for this reason that environmental artworks sometimes constitute an aesthetic affront to nature. According to Carlson, the act of turning nature into art alters its natural aesthetic qualities: “[the affront] is a function of changing an object’s kind and thereby altering its aesthetic qualities” (2000, 155). More specifically, he writes, “The environmental site is ... changed from being a part of nature to being a part of an artwork and with this change the aesthetic qualities of nature are altered” (2000, 155). Interestingly, Carlson is circumspect about whether there is a relationship of necessity involved here. My sense is that this is because he is not sure the argument would hold water: “If such ‘redefinition’ of kind necessarily involves an aesthetic affront, then environmental art necessarily constitutes an aesthetic affront to nature” (2000, 155). But he does not attempt to argue for the supposition that a “redefinition of kind necessarily involves an aesthetic affront,” and seems content to leave the question of necessity open. And, this, I suppose is because the claim would be hard to establish. In fact, I am not sure I know how to make sense of it. I think there is a false dichotomy in the assertion that environmental art changes the site “from being a part of nature to being a part of an artwork.” Yes, the work incorporates or appropriates part of nature into the work. But it does not follow...
that what it incorporates or appropriates is no longer nature. In the case of Ice Watch, the huge chunks of ice are part of the artwork but they are surely still part of the natural environment as well. It is not clear how an artist could change something that is part of nature into something that is not part of nature just by incorporating it into an artwork.

Yet I think there is a relationship of necessity here—two of them, in fact—that is easier to establish. The reason Carlson does not pursue it, I suspect, is because it requires us to appeal to ethical issues that he explicitly rules beyond the purview of his article. Let us start with this question: does a redefinition of kind necessarily involve an aesthetic affront? Plausibly, the answer depends upon what sort of kind is involved. If we are talking about an artifact kind, at least, then perhaps not. Presumably, some “redefinitions,” or, as I would prefer, appropriations of one artifact kind to fulfill a function of a different artifact kind are aesthetically neutral or, potentially, aesthetically good.8 When my children make “artworks” out of materials like plastic bottles, egg cartons, bottle caps, and the like, they have not created aesthetic masterpieces, but surely have not made the materials any worse aesthetically in virtue of their appropriation. Although the plastic bottles, egg cartons, and bottle caps are no longer fulfilling their function as particular kinds of artifacts, they are no worse off aesthetically—and, indeed, may be somewhat better off. So, too, it is with “real” art. The musical act Disclosure has an aesthetically pleasurable song entitled “When a Fire Starts to Burn,” which samples from a motivational talk given by Eric Thomas in a web series.9 It is plausible that the motivational talk is no worse off aesthetically, and perhaps improved, by being incorporated into the song.

However, things might be different with natural kinds. In the introduction, I argued that, given a conception of environmental art as essentially involving part of nature, environmental artworks are open to ethical appraisal in virtue of the fact that their creation involves the intentional appropriation of something we value—the environment—in a way that may be beneficial or harmful to it. Whether we value the environment intrinsically or instrumentally does not matter in this context. All that matters is rough agreement about the sorts of reasons for which we value the environment—in particular for the aesthetic pleasure it affords us. Or, in other words, the environment has natural aesthetic value.

This argument offers a clear and plausible way in which to see how environmental art might be an affront to nature—indeed, might necessarily be an affront to nature in multiple senses. First, note that on this account, the argument for environmental art constituting an aesthetic affront to nature is more straightforward than the one Carlson offers. The aesthetic affront is not that the artworks necessarily change the kind of thing that a particular part of nature is. For in almost all cases, the part of nature incorporated into the work remains a part of nature despite its becoming part of an artwork. Rather, the aesthetic affront is that in virtue of incorporating a particular part of nature into an artwork (which necessarily alters the work’s surrounding environment), environmental artworks necessarily alter the particular aesthetic value of that part of the environment. Furthermore, insofar as they incorporate part of the natural environment, they diminish its naturalness. This, I think, is a conclusion with which Carlson could agree and speaks to his qualms about environmental artworks like Double Negative.

That said, perhaps there is one way in which we might make sense of the idea of actually changing something from a part of nature into a part of an artwork—even if we admit that environmental artworks do not necessarily (and perhaps rarely) do this. In some cases, an environmental artwork might actually destroy a part of the natural environment such that we can no longer talk about the object as a part of the natural environment. Perhaps Reinhard Reitzenstein’s No Title (1987) is such a case. To create the work, Reitzenstein inverted eight trees in a way that presumably killed them and, thus, obliterated their existence as part of the natural environment. If you find this plausible, the underlying aesthetic affront would be the same as suggested above—namely, that the artist destroyed the aesthetic value the trees had naturally.

Now, if my account here is right, there are two further things we can say of the relationship between environmental art and the environment. First, and, perhaps unsurprisingly, precisely because environmental artworks appropriate or incorporate a part of nature (rather than changing nature into art), an aesthetic flaw in the artwork is also, by necessity, an aesthetic flaw in the environment. This is, if you will, an additional way or
particular subset of how environmental artworks necessarily constitute aesthetic affronts to the environment. But it is a particularly important sort of example because the claim that “environmental art constitutes an aesthetic affront to nature” is very coarse grained. If the claim is true in the sense I have suggested, and the “affront” is that the artwork alters that aesthetic value that the part of the environment has naturally, it still remains to be seen just how much of an affront a particular environmental artwork is. Presumably, some environmental artworks alter the aesthetic value of the nature they appropriate in very small ways. Richard Long’s *A Line Made by Walking* (1967) did just this to a field in Somerset, England, but this is a far cry from the aesthetic imposition of something like Christo and Jean-Claude’s *Wrapped Coast* (1968). So, “affront” needs to be used very loosely here, if we still want to use the term at all. If we do, we should still want a more precise term for a specific, egregious sort of affront to nature that is enacted by environmental artworks whose aesthetic flaws despoil the part of nature they have appropriated. In any case, the point is that there are two related but distinct relationships of necessity here. First, there is the way in which environmental artworks necessarily alter the aesthetic value of the nature they appropriate. Second, there is the way in which, more specifically, whatever aesthetic flaws inhere in those environmental artworks necessarily constitute aesthetic flaws in the environment insofar as those works incorporate part of nature.

There is plausibly one more relationship of necessity here—possibly the most intriguing one and certainly one that demands further exploration. If you are willing to grant the assumption that there is value in nature partly in virtue of its naturalness and aesthetic value, then it is plausible that an aesthetic flaw in an environmental artwork also constitutes a pro tanto ethical flaw in the work. To the extent that an environmental artwork’s aesthetic flaws negatively affect the aesthetic value of the environment itself, and, as a result, the environment’s intrinsic value or instrumental value to other humans, the artwork is plausibly ethically flawed. The resultant ethical flaw in such cases would be a pro tanto flaw; plausibly, it could be overridden by other ethical merits of the work. To be clear, this sort of case is to be distinguished from a case in which an aesthetic flaw in the work results from an unethical process of creation as is plausibly the case with *Double Negative*. Rather, the idea here is that an aesthetic flaw that resulted from an ethically neutral production process would, in and of itself, yield an ethical flaw to the extent that the aesthetic flaw in the work detracted from the natural aesthetic value of the natural environment it appropriated.

For example, here we might think of Nancy Holt’s *Sun Tunnels* (1973–76)—four 18 × 8 foot concrete pipes laid out in the middle of Utah’s Great Basin Desert. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that *Sun Tunnels* is aesthetically flawed to the extent that the pipes jar with the part of the natural environment the work incorporates. To the extent that the artwork incorporates this part of the natural environment, the aesthetic flaw also afflicts this portion of the natural environment. That is, to the extent that part of the Great Basin Desert is incorporated into *Sun Tunnels*, it is aesthetically worsened. And to the extent that Sun Tunnels detract from the natural aesthetic beauty of the desert, then, on the argument sketched above, *Sun Tunnels* suffers from a pro tanto ethical flaw.

This is fairly speculative and constitutes a topic for further exploration, as does the fact that, as far as I can see, environmental artworks are the only sorts of artworks in which the possession of an aesthetic flaw is also, of necessity, the possession of an ethical flaw. True, we might find an artist ethically blameworthy for making someone else’s artwork aesthetically worse, or perhaps even altering her own work in such a way that it made it aesthetically worse. However, the moral evaluation here is of the artist alone and not the work. On the contrary, it seems plausible that environmental artworks possess ethical flaws insofar as they possess aesthetic flaws that negatively impact the aesthetic value of the part of the environment they appropriate.  

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REFERENCES
1. There have been a few exceptions in which scholars have addressed the ethics of environmental art in some depth. See Humphrey (1985), Boetzkes (2006), and Lintott (2007), the latter of which will be discussed at length in what follows. The title of Boetzkes’s (2010) study is promising, but the author takes a rather idiosyncratic approach to the question of ethics, drawing extensively on Irigaray (1984).

2. This definition deliberately excludes artworks that are not at least partly constituted by part of the natural environment, even if they engage with environmental issues. On my view, such works, which include, for example, renewable energy sculptures like Andrea Polli’s Queensbridge Wind Power Project, are more accurately characterized as instances of “ecological art” or “eco-art.”

3. This formulation is neutral about whether value is better construed as instrumental or intrinsic in this context. 4. Although I am skeptical about the idea of non- perceptible aesthetic properties, I want to remain agonistic about the matter here. A case for avant-garde and conceptual art’s possession of non-perceptible aesthetic properties is made in Goldie and Schellekens (2010).

5. However, Harold (2011) has argued that Carroll’s and similar characterizations of autonomism suffer from a bias toward realism about aesthetic and ethical value, and that autonomism is more plausibly conceived in relationship to the valuer.


7. I will remain agonistic on the question of whether moral merits always contribute to the aesthetic merit of an environmental work. While no counterexamples to this thesis readily come to mind, it is not clear to me how the ethicist could convincingly demonstrate its truth if we conceive of the ethical appraisal of art more broadly than simply tracking the responses prescribed or merited by its content.

8. My view of the ontology of artifacts is that they are not malleable in a way that would allow them to be redefined, strictly speaking, but nothing significant hangs on this point.


10. I am grateful to two anonymous referees for a number of corrections and suggestions.