Everyday Aesthetic Experiences

by

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Abstract

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This dissertation explores the everyday aesthetic experiences that lay people find meaningful in their daily encounters through a phenomenological approach. This topic has not been adequately explored within environmental psychology, as it largely draws from philosophy and art and focuses on visual qualities and the exceptional. In contrast, this study explores the multisensory nature of everyday aesthetic experience through in-depth interviews with a small and diverse sample of adults in New York City. It reveals clearly that aesthetic experience is not primarily about the formal qualities of objects; it is a transactional relationship between the affective state of the perceiver and diverse and idiosyncratic range of features of the physical environment. Aesthetic experiences are meaningful because they are a blend of affect, (pleasure, happiness, excitement, contentment and relaxation) cognition, (contemplation, reflection) and conation (planning, arranging and striving). The stories of the participants reveal that everyday aesthetic experiences are those small surprises that seem to come out of nowhere and, are also more elaborate engagements that are planned and, when woven together, are not a supplement to one's life but a way of life. It is a quality of being in the world. The relevance of the research to environmental planning and design, for the raising of environmental awareness and for future research are discussed.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Within the interdisciplinary field of environmental psychology, which studies the relationship between people and their surroundings, I was interested in exploring everyday aesthetic experiences. I was surprised that everyday aesthetics has not been the focus of much research in this field. Historically, the study of the aesthetic experience has been mostly associated with formal art theories. Also, the focus of study of such experiences has only recently shifted from indoor settings to include outdoor environments.

Empirical studies that explored human responses to nature, including aesthetic dimensions, were developed within the field of landscape perception (Kaplan, 1987; Sell, Taylor & Zube, 1984). These studies were designed to identify those scenes that people preferred most over others. This landscape perception research typically followed the line of traditional mainstream psychology where subjects were asked to evaluate scenes taken out of context. Researchers used statistical techniques to uncover commonalities between observers. Even though these studies explored important aspects of person-environment relationships, they failed to consider that our perception of the environment changes from one event to another and that individuals may react differently to a single scene.

The aesthetics of human environments and everyday life was taken up by scholars working within the field of environmental aesthetics – a sub-field of philosophical aesthetics. The contemporary positions in environmental aesthetics developed from different points of view concerning aesthetic appreciation of the natural environment. These are frequently divided into two models: (1) cognitive, which stresses the importance of knowledge and information in aesthetic perception and (2) non-cognitive, which focuses on the experience of engagement

when there is a total immersion of the appreciator in the object of appreciation (Godlovitch, 1994; Eaton 1997, Carlson and Berleant, 2004). There are also a number of studies that are neither cognitive nor non-cognitive that inform our understanding of more specialized environments, such as a shopping center (Brottman, 2007). Instead of focusing on large, public environments, the aesthetics of everyday life focuses on the cumulative power of aesthetic experience and how its meaning becomes relevant to peoples' individual existence. It not only investigates the aesthetic qualities of smaller, more personal environments, such as individual living spaces, (Melchionne, 2002) but also the aesthetic dimensions of normal, day-to-day experiences (Leddy, 1995, 2005; Saito 2001, 2007; Haapala 2005) and everyday activities (e.g., playing sports (Welsch, 2005) and dining (Korsmeyer, 1977). The research of this study is in line with the filed of everyday aesthetics because it concentrates on the individuals rather than on particular settings or activities. It addresses the full range of types of settings and experiences. I am more "grounded" in the person and how people differently select and combine these dissimilar experiences.

Aesthetic experience has been described as an "extremely ambiguous notion" and there is no universal agreement on what is constitutes by it (Shusterman, 2004). Philosophers have argued about this for millennia dating back to Plato and Aristotle. Some have argued that it is impossible to identify its core characteristics (Dickie, 1997) while others give the event a different name, such as Taylor's "illuminated experience" (Taylor, 1986), Csikszentmihali's concept of "flow experience" or Maslow's "peak experience" (Csikszentmihali, 1990; Maslow, 1971). One reason for the lack of agreement is that different thinkers have different interests. Also, Smith argues: "The difficulty facing all these attempts at definition and theorizing [aesthetic experience] is, of course, the diversity of our experience of things ..." (Smith, 1989, p.

190). Like Smith, I believe that aesthetic experience resides in the subjective domain of our lives where we seek personal and societal gratification in our experience of the world. In this view one interpretation does not rule out the existence of others, and alternative interpretations and the source of experience can range from shared experiences of sunsets to personal pleasures of dipping one's hand in a basket of dried beans. However, for the purpose of this dissertation I set some boundaries to focus on experiences outside of the traditional notions of the aesthetic experience associated with art. My goal was to explore the range of aesthetic experience from which lay people find meaning from their everyday encounters. Instead of focusing solely on the visual and auditory sources of aesthetic experience, I included other sensory modalities that are equally important in such encounters.

Through the use of phenomenological and narrative tools, the description of everyday aesthetic experiences challenges the longstanding, primarily occulocentric hierarchy of the senses. Everyday perception is not the perception of single stimuli from one source mediated by one sense organ, but a multisensory experience where all the senses interact; it is mediated by our bodies, our experiences (learned) and culture. As proposed by many scholars, there is always some influence of the past that shapes our experience of the now. In other words, as participants in cultures and societies, our personal responses to experiences are shaped by cultural norms and our prior aesthetic encounters. Aesthetic engagement is not about setting strict rules, but about being more in tune with one's immediate surroundings as experiences, such as the unplanned route home, which might be a source of a rich and meaningful aesthetic experience. It is not just about built or natural environments, but the total ambient environment around a person, including the sky, the weather, and other people. These experiences are meaningful because they are a blend of affect (pleasure, happiness, excitement, contentment and

relaxation) cognition (contemplation, reflection) and conation (planning, arranging and striving).

I chose to focus my research on interviews with a small number of people who work at a botanical garden The choice of a botanical garden as a field research location was not related to any desire to link people's personal accounts of aesthetic experiences to nature or to dominant notions of aesthetics. Working with a population that was partially bound to a place through their work gave me an opportunity to closely work with them to understand how their aesthetic experiences might in part be related to their everyday work lives. Even though botanic gardens are self-consciously designed to fulfill formal understandings of beauty, my participants were not asked to limit or focus their comments on this setting. However, because they all shared a large part of their days at a kind of setting that is conventionally seen as a place of beauty and aesthetic value, there was the opportunity for me to see a range of responses to commonly experienced space. By working with people who share a common environment for part of their day, I hoped to learn more about how people arrange their lives differently in relation to the environment in order to find beauty and meaning.

Having now described the purpose of this research, in Chapter Two I attempt to set the stage for the need to understand everyday aesthetic experience in the light of well-established theories of aesthetics. In Chapter Three I describe the research approach used in this dissertation, including the research setting, participants and data analysis. In Chapter Four I present a sketch of each of the participants, as well as my own reflections on everyday aesthetic experiences. In Chapter Five I explore the multi-sensuous world of ordinary engagement. Chapter Six reveals the qualities of everyday aesthetic experiences (simple contact, receptivity, surprise, fleeting moments, and existential space), and in Chapter Seven I discuss five factors that influence everyday aesthetic experience: sharing, reminiscence, strategies, barriers, and

education. In Chapter Nine I conclude with some practical implications of the research and suggested direction for further research

CHAPTER TWO: OUR UNDERSTANDING OF AESTHETICS AND THE NEED TO INVESTIGATE EVERDAY AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Since the seventeenth century, there has been a tendency to distinguish between perceptions and sensations. They have been placed in a hierarchical dichotomy--sensations as inferior and subjective, and perceptions as superior and cognitive. In order to understand the separation we have to understand what space they have occupied in our experiential and intellectual realms. The term sense has an important duality; sense or the senses can refer to the specific sense modes. This is the sense as sensation or feeling. On the contrary, sense can be "making sense" in order to understand. This is the sense as meaning. The two aspects are closely related and often implied by each other. Perception also has a dual meaning; one meaning speaks to the perception of the sensation of feeling and, the second is perception as cognition or insight. Historically, the senses of touch, smell, and taste were remaindered as mere sensation because they only reveal the world closest to us including our bodies. While the senses of sight and hearing were more highly esteemed since they gather more information about the world, and they are the source of human understanding and knowledge. The sensation of distant sights and sounds makes our external and far-external world more accessible. Sight gives us the most information about the world. We can perceive an object's qualities, such as shape and color and we can see its movement and relationship to other objects. Sound has a variety of qualities, in addition to its crucial role for our communication, learning, and sharing of experiences. Since distancing became crucial to aesthetic experience in the Western world, the aesthetic possibility of proximate senses was largely omitted from consideration. This transformation has its roots in the philosophy of Descartes. Leading thinkers degraded the senses of smell, touch, and taste and gave way to rationality that replaced the sense of wonder. Instead of following the tradition of science that places value on predictability and certainty, my

goal was to find a way to get closer to the lived experience and call into question the modern assumption of a single objective reality (Veryzer, 1993; Hommel & Bretz, 2008). It was natural for me to turn to phenomenology as in participants' experienced reality in order to understand our ordinary, everyday experience of the world around us. The goal of this dissertation is not to explain, or predict or control, but to describe and become familiar with the everyday aesthetic experiences of a small number of people with as much precision as possible. The goal is not to build a grand new theory, but to contribute to our understanding by giving a greater voice to the everyday and to what many writers seem to have assumed to be mundane.

Review of Theories Relevant to the Problem

Aesthetics as an area of inquiry is a challenging topic because it offers diverse theories. I will guide the reader through some of the theoretical accounts of aesthetic experiences that became relevant to my own investigation into everyday aesthetic experience. I will not provide a summary of the entire field of aesthetics, but rather focus on relevant areas of inquiry found in the social science literature. Through my critique of the theories, I hope to explicate my own stance towards such inquiry, not only theoretically but also methodologically. Attempts to understand the principles of aesthetics are not new. As an area of inquiry it has a long history in scientific research. Philosopher Alexander Baumgarten (1714-1762), who helped to establish the study of aesthetics as a separate philosophical field (Baumgarten, 1735, 1954), first used aesthetics as a descriptive word, which defined beauty as perfection and information as gathered through the senses. However, it was Immanuel Kant who solidified the modern usage of the term, in which beauty became a subjective relation. For many subsequent years the definition of aesthetics was very narrow. It was associated with the visual qualities of art and carried with it an elite connotation. In recent years, the concept of aesthetics has become broader and more

focused on the aesthetic experience resulting from the interaction between the person and the environment. Environmental aesthetics is one area that moved away from "indoor aesthetics" to study the interaction between people and natural environments. Since the study of aesthetics has its roots in philosophy, this will be my starting point. However, I would like to stress to the reader that the study of aesthetic experience has been the focus of many disciplines, and has its roots both in art and nature appreciation. Thus, I will draw broadly from the social sciences and humanities in this account.

My review begins in eighteen-century continental aesthetics, which is the foundation for much of the research in environmental aesthetics. During the eighteenth century the founders of modern aesthetics began to focus on nature as a source of aesthetic experience. The concept of disinterestedness, a mark of such experience, originated with the publication of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790), in which nature was the object of aesthetic appreciation. Kant argued that natural beauty was superior to that of art because it best complimented the human mind. The central point of the concept of disinterestedness is that the observer should disassociate the aesthetic appreciation of nature from his/her particular and private interests, any of which could impede aesthetic experience. The theory of disinterestedness gave way to three dimensions of aesthetic experience each focusing on different aspects of nature's diverse and often contrasting moods: the beautiful (applied to cultivated gardens and landscape), the sublime (applied to untamed wilderness and mountains), and the picturesque (Kant, 1790; Burke, 1757). Out of the three dimensions the picturesque; meaning "picture-like", became the dominant theory of nature appreciation. Initially, its meaning alluded to a particular way of seeing the natural world as if divided into art-like scenes, which resemble works of art in subject matter and composition. This type of appreciation of nature dominated much of the nineteenth century and is currently

associated with the varied guides and brochures connected with travel and tourism, or coffee table books laden with photographs of nature. At the end of the nineteenth century, the ideal of disinterestedness lost its momentum giving way to a new dimension of nature appreciation in North America. Influenced by the idea of the picturesque, it has its roots in the nature writing popularized by Henry David Thoreau and later by John Muir. However, the philosophical interest in nature appreciation quickly gave way to an analytic aesthetic of art and it was not until the end of twentieth century that nature appreciation again became of interest to philosophers (see Shusterman 1997; Dickie, 1997). In concert with the development of the field of environmental aesthetics, different points of view concerning appreciation of natural environments emerged. Cognitive and non-cognitive approaches are two dominant positions in environmental aesthetics. The cognitive approaches stress the importance of knowledge and that information about the object is central to its appreciation. The cognitive models were influenced by art theory and draw heavily on the aesthetic experience of art. According to Carlson (2002), just as proper appreciation of art must start with a correct historical understanding of the object, the correct appreciation of nature must be based on relevant information. He proposed that the information must be supplied by nature itself because "nature is natural- not our creation," and from scientific knowledge of naturalists and ecologists from which we understand facts about nature that are independent of our involvement. I agree with Carlson's cognitive view to a degree. Even though natural sciences provide much of the information about nature their primary focus is not on its aesthetic qualities. For example, a tornado might be aesthetically appreciated by a layperson and not by a meteorologist because the latter might be solely interested in scientific knowledge. Other quasi-cognitive approaches reject the idea that scientific knowledge about nature can reveal the actual aesthetic qualities of natural objects and environments in the

way in which knowledge about art history and art criticism can for works of art. Fisher points out that unlike the case with art, significant aesthetic dimensions of natural objects are influenced by the conditions of observation. Havner, a psychologist (1937), emphasized cognitive and perceptual skills required to have an aesthetic experience. She wrote that knowledge, past experience, and training can help increase the intensity and frequency of the experience. Even though Havner's ideas may have more relevance to the aesthetic experience of art, many of her points may nonetheless be adapted to the aesthetic experience of nature. For example, past experiences that became meaningful may influence our perspective and anticipation of an aesthetic experience.

In contrast to cognitive models, the non-cognitive models hold that there is something other than knowledge or cultural tradition that influences the aesthetic appreciation of both nature and art. The leading non-cognitive view, often referred to as the aesthetic engagement model (see Berleant 1970), argues that the theory of disinterestedness involves a mistaken analysis of the aesthetic concept. According to the engagement approach, "disinterested appreciation, with its isolating, distancing, and objectifying gaze, is out of place in the aesthetic experience of nature, for it wrongly abstracts both natural objects and appreciators from the environments in which they properly belong and in which appropriate appreciation is achieved" (Carlson, 2002). Hence, the aesthetics of engagement stresses the contextual dimensions of nature and our multi-sensory experience of it, which challenges the traditional dichotomies between the subject and object and immerses the participant in appreciation instead of distancing him.

Berleant (1970), the advocate of the engagement model, believed that aesthetic experience results from the fusion of three conditions: the perceiver, a focus of perception, and a

situation in which perception takes place. The situation encompasses both the perceiver and the event experienced, as demonstrated by this example from my pilot study:

> "I remember walking down the street, on my way to work, it was about seven in the morning. The sun was beginning to rise and the air was crisp and fresh. With pleasure, I noticed I was entering the aura of the morning rush. The world around me seemed busy, but peaceful at the same time. I was aware of my body in relation to the other as we tried to cross the street… I lost time... I had a complete control of my world…what a powerful and pleasing feeling it was."

For Dewey, every experience results from the interaction between a person and some aspect of the world in which that person lives (Dewey, 1958). For an experience to be called an aesthetic experience, the action and its consequence must be joined in perception. Walking in the street is an experience that is simultaneously kinesthetic and somatic. According to Dewey, the aesthetic quality rounds out an experience into completeness and unity, and it is emotional. Experience is emotional but not the composite of separate units of emotions. Emotions are thus generally what guide the intuitive aesthetic encounter with the world by "reach[ing] out tentacles for that which is cognate, for things which feed it and carry it to completion" (Dewey, 1958). In sum, the aesthetic experience takes place at the crossroads of inner and outer worlds, is guided by an intense focus, strong emotions, and active reflection, and results in stored knowledge within our cognitive framework. For Dewey, the aesthetic experience is the "experience in which the whole creature is alive" and most alive**.**

A number of writers such as Schachtel (1959), a psychoanalyst, and Reid (1969), an arts educator, also recognized that characteristics of each individual also affect how they experience an environment. In the developmental chapter of his book *Metamorphosis*, Schachtel describes the way a child learns to differentiate between the perception of its own feelings, and the

perception of things that exist independent of these feelings. In this way the capacity to experience attentively and consciously is developed and forms the foundation for an allocentric attitude in coping with the world, in which interest in what is strange and unfamiliar takes precedence above one's own needs. The allocentric attitude is a condition for attentive involvement in the world. The allocentric attitude makes it possible to have aesthetic experiences when looking at a piece of art, listening to music, attending a liturgical celebration or in any situation in which we are surprised by something. He argues that the degree, to which people engage with the world in an allocentric way, rather than an autocentric way, varies greatly. Each person responds to the environment in a unique way because personality, affective state, intentions, and sociocultural experiences affect individual responses.

In the above example of walking down the street, aesthetic experience is not understood primarily as functional or instrumental for another goal, but meaningful in itself or what Csikszentmihalyi calls "flow." Flow is an experience characterized by action and awareness; the individual is aware of what is happening and there is a loss of self-consciousness, a focus on activity, and heightened awareness. The experience is not confined to a type of activity and is not determined by time. Csikszentmihalyi's research on "flow experience" in an individual's daily life informs the question of everyday aesthetic experience. In the pilot phase of my research perceivers did refer to the characteristics that would suggest being in a state of flow. The research of Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990), which focused on the aesthetic experience of art and what it means to the individuals who are having it, is also relevant to my research. They started with the premise that if the ability to derive pleasure from the contemplation of works of art is indeed an acquired skill, then they themselves may acquire this skill by interviewing skilled art perceivers. Using interpretive methods, their main goal was to

represent accurately what goes on in people's minds when they encountered works of art and how such experience related to the rest of their goal-directed behavior. This is relevant to the proposed research in that it recognizes that people purposely develop their aesthetic engagement with the world. Even though these interviews were part open-ended, they did not allow individuals to speak freely and in their own words about phenomena that they have themselves identified as being aesthetically important to them.

In recent years, more attention has been given to perception through all of the senses, not just sight and hearing (Ackerman 1990; Vapa 2002). Inclusion of the other senses leads to a further awareness of the importance of aesthetic experience in daily life. I strongly suggest, however, that there is a rich private world of active aesthetic experience including aesthetic activity in the proximate senses of touch, taste, and smell. If we were to investigate these, we might uncover private experiences that have been largely disregarded. Furthermore, if we were to investigate the strategies that people sometimes use to create the conditions for aesthetic experiences, we might be able to help one another expand our own aesthetic opportunities in everyday life.

Culture, Nature, and Aesthetic Experience

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the social construction of the senses, especially in the field of cultural anthropology (Classen 1994; Howes 2009). Classen has argued that even though the proximate senses of touch, smell, and taste have been excluded from 'high' culture, they have been part of popular culture and range from the practice of "manual" crafts, such as weaving and carving, to the multi-sensory aesthetics of the carnival. According to Classen: "the objective of the anthropology of the senses…is neither to assume that… [certain senses] will not be dominant in a particular culture nor to assume that they will be marginal, but

to investigate the ways in which meanings are, in fact, invested in and conveyed through each of the senses. In general, anthropological research on the senses extends beyond the preliminary sensations and into the meaning conveyed and formed by such experiences" (Howes, 2003). The goal of theories guiding the researcher is the formation of the "…sensory meanings and values…espoused by a society, according to which the members of that society 'make sense' of the world…" that will grow out of a particular and local culture rather than general/global ideology. Furthermore, David Howes (2003) has been involved in multiple research projects looking at the importance of the five senses in different cultures. His results indicate that the significance of objects/situations can be conveyed through multiple sensory channels and stresses that the senses are best understood in combination instead of singularly. This same argument is relevant to my research because our sensory bias results in our missing important meaningful information about the world around us.

Yi-Fu Tuan (1993) has argued that our senses are deeply informed by the culture into which we are born. In *Passing Strange and Wonderful,* Tuan educates us on the relationship between aesthetics, nature, and culture. He starts with the most personal-- our five senses, which form the basic blocks of aesthetic experience. Taking us on a journey through different cultures, he expands his analysis to include "the most elaborate of human constructs," including among others, art, literature and landscape, and how the aesthetic dimension can become a moral force within the society. In order for personal aesthetic experiences to become a societal force, they should not remain on the private, individual level, as they would never penetrate society. I would agree with Tuan "the aesthetic is shown to be not merely one aspect of culture but its central core--both its driving force and its ultimate goal." If aesthetics is the driving force, how does it happen and where do we begin? I suggest that there should be opportunities in society for

individuals to speak richly with one another about their own everyday aesthetic experiences, including individuals with very different cultural backgrounds and with different kinds of occupational engagements with the environment. I think it would enable us to make connections between the most diffuse aspects of our existence. This dissertation research is designed to contribute, in some way, to this vision.

Empirical Research in Environmental Social Science

Much of the empirical research in environmental aesthetics has been devoted to understanding environmental influence on affect and how designers, architects, and planners can use that knowledge to better fit the preferences and activities of the users**.** Most investigators in landscape perception have chosen preset categories and attributes on the basis of their own ideas or theories of what is important, and little is known about whether individuals *themselves* construe aesthetic experiences in these terms. These studies have focused exclusively on the visual realm and completely omitted the detailed and varied environmental qualities related to movement through the environment or fluctuations in temperature or scent, and how these attributes affect the human response in everyday encounters. Emphasis is on people's response to visual qualities of a man-made or natural environment designed for viewing.

A number of contributors to the growing body of environmental psychology literature have argued that in order to fully understand the person-environment relationship more emphasis has to be given to the varied individual experience to the surrounding and to the meaning endowed upon an environment by an individual's stories (Seamon 1982; Auburn & Barnes 2006). The theoretical framework of "environmental perception", outlined by Ittelson (1973), promotes a transactional worldview in which people and the environment are conceptualized as one unit of analysis. Perceivers are assumed to be sensorially immersed in the world that

"surrounds, enfolds, and engulfs them" (Ittelson 1973, p.13). Similarly, phenomenological geographer Edward Relph (1976) was interested in a more experientially based approach to understanding the person-environment relationship. In *Place and Placelessness* he brings our attention to nature and the meaning of place and its importance in ordinary human life. He begins by examining the relationship between space and place and how, in order to understand the complexity of place, we need to conceive of space not as an invisible void, but as something that is experienced by real people in real places. To better understand spatial experience, he argues that there is "a continuum that has direct experience at one extreme and abstract thought at the other…" (Relph, 1976, p.9). He identified six modes of special experience: pragmatic space, perceptual space and existential space that are on the direct experience side of the continuum, and planning space, cognitive space, and abstract space, which are on the opposite side of the continuum. In the first half of his book Relph describes how each of the modes by which we can experience space varies in intensity and function in everyday experience. He argues that before we can describe why certain places are meaningful to people in everyday life we need to focus on people's identity with place, which he defines through the concept of insideness – the degree to which a person or a group belongs to and identifies with place. Thus, the more the person feels inside a place, the more that person will identify with that place. On the contrary, a person may feel separate from a place, or what Relph defied as outsideness. Relph argued that the experiential relationship between insideness and outsideness is a fundamental dialectic of how we experience the world, and also, through the different combinations of experience places take on different identities for different people. In the second half of the book, Relph examines the way a person experiences the world as it is and not how other people describe it through the concept of authenticity and inauthenticity. When we are

open to the environment and experience a place according to its unique features we may develop a sense of attachment to that place and a need to preserve it. On the other hand, if we do not preserve places that are unique and allow mass culture and technology to take over the result will be placelessness of which Relph speaks " the casual eradication of distinctive places and the making of standardized landscapes that result from an insensitivity to the significance of place" (Relph, 1976, Preface).

In his book *A Geography of the Lifeword*, geographer David Seamon extended Relph's notion of insideness to examine what he calls *everyday environmental experience* – " the sum total of a person's first-hand involvement with the geographical world in which he or she typically lives" (Seamon, 1979, p.5). The aim of the book is to help people become more aware of their environmental experience, and how understanding the basic patterns of people's day-to-day experiences may be helpful to environmental designers. Through a phenomenological analysis of autobiographical descriptions made by 19 individuals who met regularly to discuss their personal relationship with the geographical world, Seamon identified three major categories of environmental experience - *movement*, *rest*, and *encounter*. The sections that deal with movement explore both habitual body movements such as gestures, and 'place ballets,' which refer to routine in our day-to-day life such as always crossing the street at the same place. The remaining sections examine people's attachment to place, with rootedness and being at home in a place. The sections on encounter describe the different ways people observe and notice the world around them. The continuum of awareness ranges from being oblivious to the immediate surroundings to the heightened awareness that occurs when " the person feels a serenity of mood and vividness of presence; his awareness of himself is heightened, and at the same time the external world seems more real" (Seamon, 1979, p.111). Seamon argues that movement, rest

and encounter are linked in a "triad of environmental experiences" that reinforce and complement the other. The section on encounter is most relevant to my research as the aim is to pay close attention to a phenomenon that is not easily observed as it deals neither with inner situations or external events. The goal is to explore moments of perception as experience. Seamon argues that people encounter their immediate environment in a variety of ways and that moments of encounter relate to other aspects of the moment, the persons mood, past experiences and knowledge. Encounter is thus not one type of experience, but the sum of several kinds of experience described as a continuum of awareness. The several modes of encounter that Seamon identified are: *obliviousness, noticing, watching, heightened contact*, and *basic contact*. The different modes of encounter should not be understood as exact points of encounter, but rather as a particular range of encounters on the continuum of awareness.

Another environmental social scientist, Clare Cooper Marcus, researched the intimate ties people have with their former and present residences. She collected "environmental autobiographies" to reveal people's conscious and unconscious affective ties to their environment. She discovered that people have deep memories of childhood homes that they carry forward into adulthood and attempt to reproduce in their subsequent residences. Her argument can be stated as follows: " As we change and grow throughout our lives, our psychological development is punctuated not only by meaningful emotional relationship with people, but also close, affective ties with a number of significant physical environments, beginning in childhood" (Marcus, 1997, p. 2). In their book *The Meaning of Gardens,* Francis and Hester (1990), suggest that the meaning of gardens operates on multiple levels simultaneously. They suggest that for some people the garden is an ideal that develops in early childhood as memories, events, and places, and then carries into adulthood. The garden is a

physical place-- an everyday place that is part of our common landscape-- a composite of plants, water, materials arranged in three-dimensional space. The garden is also a source of action-- a process requiring direct physical involvement. Their interviews with gardeners revealed that *being* in the garden affords meaningful personal experiences where people can connect to themselves and to nature (Francis & Hester, 1990). Experiencing nature has the potential to make a difference in the way people experience the world, improving their physical and mental well-being, as well as providing them a context within which to adapt and grow.

Aesthetic Experience and Education

Following the philosophy of Dewey and others, aesthetic education, which recognizes the interconnectedness of body, mind, emotions, and spirits, is viewed as perceptual in nature. But since each of us develops idiosyncratic ways of perceiving the world, a systematized set of criteria for excellence in aesthetic education is much more difficult to achieve than in other areas of our lives. For many years post hoc evaluative devices were used to determine the quality of aesthetic education in schools. Curricula in arts education were designed by groups of experts in specific areas (music, art, drama and dance). Some scholars argue that art educators have used the term "aesthetic education" so frequently that it has become a disembodied ghost (Reimer 1972).

Reid (1969) and Eisner (1983) argue for a distinction to be made between aesthetics and art, namely that art is concerned with the creation of artifacts, whereas aesthetics is concerned with the experience and not necessarily related to any specific art-object. Likewise, Korsmeyer (1977) promoted the aesthetic as separate from the artistic and argued that until this division is made clear the aesthetic concept will continue to be obscured and remain vague. In recent years, more educators have turned to understanding the nature of aesthetic engagement and how it can

be used in aesthetic education. Central to this approach is the development of the individual through increased aesthetic awareness, attending to the notion of empowerment and potential for increased sense of community (Greene 2001; Bannon & Sanderson 2000). Drawing on art theories, as well as phenomenological views, Maxine Green's intention is to incorporate the artistic-aesthetic in the school curriculum as she believes arts have the potential of arousing persons to what Alfred Schutz called "wide-awakeness," defined as " a plane of consciousness of highest tension origination in an attitude of full attention to life and its requirements" (Schutz, 1967, p.213). Education, and especially artistic engagement, provides a pathway for individuals to become self-aware and teaches them to be conscious about the world around them. It is a means of providing opportunities for seizing of a range of meanings by persons open to the world.

Emphasis has also been placed on the physical experience of the world beyond specific artistic domains. Promoting direct contact with nature was used as a way to educate people in aesthetics. In order to develop a sense of place it is essential "to get students back into their senses" (Weston, 1996, p.23) and to guide their thinking so that they devote attention to the living world. This is much of what Rachel Carson meant by "The Sense of Wonder" (Carson, 1965). These authors argue that in order for environmental experiences to become educational it is not sufficient merely 'to do' things in contact with nature --we must "think what we are doing" (Weston, 1996, p.23). No experience yields any meaning without reflective thinking. Only when the mind reflects on the experience does significance emerge. Students should be educated to assume an attentive posture in which the mind receives the disclosure of things. Schachtel (1959) suggests the cultivation of a contemplative disposition in which the mind lets itself be fully absorbed by the surrounding world. This *allocentric attitude* implies a withdrawal from

involvement in those ordinary activities whose "hectic deeds entrap the mind, withdrawal from involvement in the usual thoughts which invade the mind" (Schachtel, 1959, p.35). Being contemplative means caring for making the mind open to revelations.

Bennet Reimer (1971), a music educator, argues that in order to have a sufficient aesthetic education people have to develop sensitivity to aesthetic qualities no matter what the mode being experienced is (a flower, sculpture, religious ceremony, etc.). He argues that in order to put aesthetic education to work people must be involved in several behaviors that can improve aesthetic sensitivity; they must have opportunities to perceive and respond to a variety of aesthetically compelling objects. Thus, there should be more opportunities in schools for people to do more than just listen and look aesthetically. Others have suggested that importance should be given to how individuals interpret the range of their experiences, as this will influence their ability to take advantage of the opportunities created by and afforded to them (Bannon & Sanderson, 2000).

The review of related literature does not end here. It will be a continuous process as this study unfolds. A lot is known about the structure of aesthetic experience. It is a (multi)sensory, deep engagement with objects and situations that stimulate the emotions, fulfill the individual, and become meaningful upon reflection. It is an experience that is not confined to a particular sensory modality. Through everyday aesthetic experience, people not only derive knowledge about themselves, but also see others and the world in a new light. Following the thinking of Csikszentmihalyi, I see two major dimensions of organization in the "occasions for" aesthetic experience: one everyday that runs from action to contemplation and one from self to other. In my own exploratory research, I have found, like Csikszentmihalyi that some people cultivate objects in terms of memories, others in terms of experience, and some emphasize a reference to

self. Schachtel suggests that there are great differences in the degree to which people are active in the use of their senses but this has not been the subject of much/any investigation. The investigation of the different ways actual people engage with their concrete social, cultural, and historical contexts that result in aesthetic experiences may be of considerable practical, as well as theoretical interest. The significance of this type of research will reveal that thinking about aesthetics not as a fixed objective idea, but rather as something that we do and we can change. Aesthetically pleasing objects/situations are not just encountered in one's everyday life; they are created through continuous engaging with one's surroundings but are rarely acknowledged.

Conclusions and the Need for Research on Everyday Aesthetic Experience

In conclusion, I have argued that a lot has been written about the way people experience settings that are explicitly designed as sites for aesthetic engagement, such as museums and art galleries, but very little has been written on the experiences of people in all of the settings of their everyday lives. For this reason I have designed a study to further our understanding of the place of aesthetic experience in people's everyday lives, and the different ways that people seek out and set the stage for aesthetic experiences.

To many the 'everyday' is a vague concept that sometimes implies something that is shared universally and that we understand as given. Everyday life as such has been characterized in research by concepts such as 'time,' 'space,' 'rhythm,' 'bodily movement,' and 'tradition' (Lefebvre, 2004). I see everyday life as a contextual process that is subjectively experienced where the present, past, and future intertwines making it meaningful. By everyday life I mean a practice that consists of constant reflection, evaluation, and steering, but one that we are mostly unaware of engaging in. In a way we are making our everyday lives. This review of literature

led me to believe that research is needed that delves into particular individuals' everyday lives as uniquely managed and varied. Everyday life and aesthetics are worthy topics for scholarly endeavors, and it is necessary to focus on the lives of lay people and to discern how through aesthetic engagement they make their everyday life meaningful. If such experiences are not going to be appreciated by more scholars then the value of such experiences will be considered as unnecessary superfluous. I learned from prior exploratory research that some people use the words "aesthetic" or "beautiful" interchangeably in everyday conversation about various experiences. As such a concept and a word of everyday use, "beauty" orients us "to concentrate on the desirable in our lives at present evaluating it in light of the past, and replication and protecting it for the future" (Scarry, 1999, p.6-9).

CHAPTER THREE: THE RESEARCH

The Research Aims

This research focuses on the particular, everyday lives of a small group of people in concrete social, cultural, and historical situations. The specific research questions are:

- What are the varieties of everyday aesthetic experiences and in what ways are these notable in one's everyday life?
- Does a person plan/strategize/ arrange for aesthetic experiences in any way? If so, how do they become aware of these experiences in the course of their everyday lives?
- Are there barriers or difficulties that people face in having these kinds of experiences and if so, what might they be?
- How do they make sense/meaning of these experiences?

The Research Approach

The qualitative approach is best suited for learning about the everyday aesthetic experience as it is "a field of inquiry that crosscuts disciplines, field, and subject matter" (Danzin & Lincoln, 1994).

"The world, or reality is not fixed, single, agreed upon or measurable phenomenon that it is assumed to be in positivist quantitative research. Instead, there are multiple constructions and interpretations of reality that are in flux and that change over time. Learning how individuals experience and interact with their social world, the meaning, it has for them, is considered an *interpretive* qualitative approach" (Merriam and Associate, 2002, p.4).

An interpretive approach is appropriate for this research because it allows the researcher to find out more about the structure of everyday aesthetic experiences, the perspective of the participants, and the interplay between participants and the environment. In this chapter I will

guide the reader through the conceptual and methodological choices that I have made throughout the research to understand the place of aesthetic experiences in people's lives. The research approach used in this study draws both from phenomenology and narrative inquiry. In this chapter I focus on the goals of phenomenology followed by an account of the value of narrative inquiry for understanding how people make sense of their everyday aesthetic experiences. I believe both frameworks seem a perfect match for the purpose of this inquiry. As demonstrated below, narrative inquiry was chosen as the methodology for this study for its potential to gain insights into both rich subjective contexts of research, as well as understanding how the participants constructed the experiences in stories. Also, in this chapter I will explain my role as a researcher, the setting, the participants, the interview, and the analysis process.

Goals of Phenomenology

This exploration will begin with a reflection upon the roots of transcendental phenomenology as seen by Husserl and then move to explore the influence it had on evolving phenomenological movements and traditions such as existential, hermeneutical and the phenomenology of practice. This exploration will guide the reader on how these different philosophical perspectives impacted my research ontologically, epistemologically as well as methodologically. As a final preface, I would like the reader to view this exploration as changing and developing over the course of doing this research.

The phenomenology of Husserl (1859-1938), and the hermeneutics of Heidegger (1889-1976) and Gadamer (1900-2002) share some similar points. Both of these traditions arose from German philosophy, and each philosopher sought to uncover the human experience as it is lived. Edmund Husserl often referred to as father of phenomenology (Polkinghorne, 1983; Scruton, 1995), initially focused his attention on mathematics but slowly, after completing his studies in

philosophy under Franz Brentano, began to perceive phenomenology as an equal objective. Husserl was critical of psychology as a science because it attempted to apply methods of natural science to studying human issues. He believed that this pursuit was misguided in that living subjects are not reacting automatically to external stimuli, but are responding to their own perception of what it means in a given context. Thus, phenomenology became essentially the study of lived experience. Its emphasis is on the world as lived by a person, not the world or realities as something separate from the person. Polkinghorne (1983) identified this focus as trying to understand meanings of human experience as it is lived with intention to return and re-examine experiences taken for granted and possibly discover new or forgotten meanings. Husserl saw this as a new science of beginning, a way of reaching true meaning. His main focus was on the study of how phenomena appeared through consciousness.

Husserl developed the process of phenomenological reduction to get to the true nature of phenomena. He proposed that one needed to bracket out the world, as well as individual biases, in order to come in contact with it and see it as it really is (for variations to his method see Klein & Westcott, 1994; Polkinghorne 1983; Osborne 1994). But how does one go about the process of bracketing? This question and many others became important as I proceeded with my research.

Alfred Schutz, more than any other phenomenologist, attempted to relate the thought of Edmund Husserl to the social world and the social sciences. He was especially concerned with understanding the social distribution of knowledge in society. That is how individuals understand and make sense of the surrounding social world. He attributed importance to the "common knowledge" and went on to argue that rather that remaining on the level of science, researchers should attempt to register the common sense, practical rationality by which

individuals make sense of their surroundings. Because unlike scientists, people in everyday life assume a correspondence between the world as it appears and the world as it is. His teachings and ideas influenced social constructionism, which became prominent with the publication of *The Social Construction of Reality* (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Berger and Luckmann use phenomenological analysis to explain the reality of everyday life more specifically everyday knowledge: the kind of knowledge which enables us to know where we are, what we are doing, who we are, where we are going, how we are going to get there, etc. What Berger and Luckmann mean by knowledge is what the average person takes to be "real" about the world in which they live.

According to Berger and Luckmann, everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by individuals and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world. It not only refers to the nature of the experience but also to the social and cultural world in which we find ourselves**.** The experience of everyday life is a social process shared with others. The intersubjective world is in face-to-face situations where I objectify my own being by means of language. In the face-to-face interaction language provides us with ready- made possibilities that help us objectify the world around us. It also typifies experience allowing us to place it under broad categories in terms of which they have meaning to both others and us.

Other philosophers such as Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty criticized Husserl's transcendental phenomenology because it focused on cerebral reflections rather than on actual human experience within everyday life. They argued for an existential, embodied understanding of beings or phenomena. It too is concerned with the human experiences as it is lived, but the way this exploration of lived experiences proceeds is different. Instead of focusing on understandings of beings, Heidegger focused on 'Dasein' or 'the mode of being human'. In

contrast to Husserl, who was mainly interested in thinking about the world where human beings were understood as knowers, Heidegger viewed humans as being concerned with their fate in the world. Consciousness is not separable from the world, but is a formation of historically lived experience. Heidegger believed that understanding is not a way we know the world, but rather the way we are (Polkinghorne, 1983). To understand what it is for someone to be, he developed what he calls the a priori conditions of being: *being-with*, *being-in*, *being-there*, and most importantly *being-in-the world*. According to Heidegger (1996), our being is never alone but always 'with' other beings. For example when we are working, our activity is not self-contained but refers to other people in the sense of the tools we use. All that is available for my use came from someone else and what I produce will go to someone else. I am also at a particular place of work, that is, I inhabit a particular position in the world and perceive it from that position (*being-there*). This concept is related to *being-in*, mainly that this position in the world always means that we are intertwined in a multitude of relationships. From this perspective our being is neither located in ourselves nor in the objects we are dealing with, but in between, in our relationship with the world and being is always *being-in-the-word*. Merleau-Ponty elaborated on this by including the active role of the body in the human experience. If we want to understand ourselves, we cannot assume the objective perspective of science, as objects in the world must be explained from the outside because we ourselves give meaning to the concepts used in science. Merleau-Ponty argues we have to start from ourselves since we are "the absolute source." The subjective view of one's own body must be primary. One must have experience of the world before one can develop knowledge of it. To be an embodied subject is to be an active being, with needs that motivate actions that are in relation to which elements in the environment that are meaningful (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Meaning is found as we are constructed by the world while

at the same time we are constructing this world from our background and experience. A key to this process of understanding is interpretation and when its method is taken to be interpretive phenomenology it becomes hermeneutical. Since I too believe that one's historicality can not be eliminated from understanding, I do not pretend that I can fully bracket my own background and influences from this research.

Influenced by the work of Husserl and Heidegger, Gadamer extended his interpretation into practical application (Gadamer, 1976). He viewed hermeneutics not as a procedure for understanding, but as a way to make explicit the conditions in which understanding itself takes place: "Hermeneutics must start from the position that a person seeking to understand something has a bond to the subject matter that comes into language through the traditionary text and has, or acquires, a connection with the tradition from which it speaks" (Gadamer, 1960/1998, pg.295). Gadamer viewed interpretation as a fusion of horizons, a dialectical interaction between the expectation of the interpreter and the meaning of a text. Gadamer defines horizon: "Every finite presentation has its limitations." We define the concept of "situation" by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence, an essential part of the concept of situation is the concept of "horizon", the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. A man who has no horizon is a man who does not see far enough and hence overvalues what is nearest to him. Contrariwise, to have a horizon means not to be limited to what is nearest, but to be able to see beyond it. Following Husserl, Gadamer believed that our understanding is essentially embedded and conditioned by our prejudgments and that all understanding takes place within a certain horizon. However not all horizons are mutually exclusive. Our horizons are open to other horizons and are overlapping. Mutual understanding comes from consensus or fusion of horizons.

As a philosophical tradition, phenomenology has changed significantly. In recent years there has been a growing number of works that discuss the relationship between phenomenology and scholarly disciplines that emphasize the human-environment relationship. In anthropology, Tim Ingold developed the dwelling perspective of human habitation where "the world continually comes into being around the inhabitant, its manifold constituents take on significance through their incorporation into a regular daily pattern of life activity"(Ingold, 2000, p.143). Ingold further argued that cultural knowledge, rather than being imported into the setting of practical activity, is constituted within these settings through the development of specific dispositions that lead people to orient themselves in relation to their environment" (Ingold, 2000). We know the world through our active involvement in it and our active movement through it. An architect and phenomenologist Pallasmaa has advocated a turn towards heptic experience of architecture. He criticizes the supremacy of vision in both Western Philosophy and architecture by pointing out that: "Experience of architecture is multisensory; qualities of matter, space and scale are measured equally by the eye, ear, nose, skin, tongue, skeleton and muscle." He argues that when architecture experienced in this way strengthens "one's sense of being in the world, essentially giving rise to a strengthen experience of self. (Pallasmaa, 1996, p.28). In geography, Seamon (2007) working phenomenologically is concerned with the geographical, environmental, and architectural dimensions of the world and focuses on themes such as sense of place and environmental experience and behavior. In philosophy, Casey (1994, 1996) wrote extensively arguing that place is a central ontological structure founding human experience: "place, by virtue of its unencompass-ability by anything other than itself, is at once the limit and the condition on of all that exists. To be is to be in place" (Casey, 1994, pp. 15-16). Drawing on Merleau-Ponty (1962), Casey emphasizes that place is a central ontological structure

of being-in-the world partly because of our existence as *embodied* beings. We are "bound by body to be in place" (Casey,1994, p.104). Home and at-homeness is another aspect of the world that scholars have focused on (Bachelard 1964; Cooper Marcus 1995; Seamon 1993; Shaw 1990; Casey, 1993; Chawla, 1994, 1995). To identify the meaning of home Day (1995) asked individuals to describe a time when they felt most at home. The conclusion of the study suggested that in the last two centuries home has taken on new, ambiguous meanings, and argued that its uniqueness experientially is in danger of being lost in the midst of an ever-increasingly technological and mobile society.

Cultural phenomenological approaches (Ochs & Capps, 1996) theorize about the relationship between autobiographical memory, narrative, and self-concept. They believe that narratives are a critical link between memory and self, and that language and social interaction are of importance. By their nature, narratives are culturally prescribed forms for organizing events. Even though events in the world might be organized in space and time, it is through narrative that they take on human meaning (Carr, 1986; Ricouer, 1984-88). In the following section I will lay out the argument for using a narrative approach to my phenomenological analysis of aesthetic experiences.

Phenomenology as a Research Method

Over the years many different research methods and techniques have been practiced under the name of phenomenological research. Some scholars such as Giorgi (1997) work in a Husserlian tradition and focus on the psychological phenomenological approaches to understanding psychological problems. The research is rigorously descriptive, uses phenomenological reductions (the act of suspending judgment about the phenomenon prior to analysis), explores the intentional relationship between persons and situations, and discloses the

essence through the use of imaginative variation (understanding a phenomenon from a different perspective). Others follow Giorgi's framework based on reduction and search for essence and also add their own emphasis (for further discussion see van Mannen 1990; Halling 2006;Garza 2007, and Ashworth 2006). Other phenomenological approaches such as Smith's interpretive phenomenological analysis focus on the rich description of lived experiences and meaning, but do not use phenomenological reduction. Smith argues that his idiographic and inductive method, which seeks to illuminate personal lived experience, is phenomenological because its main emphasis is on individuals' perception. As opposed to Giorgi, his method supports the hermeneutic tradition, which recognizes the central role played by the researcher. As Wentz (2005) has observed there are qualitative approaches that borrow and build upon phenomenological philosophy and techniques. No matter which method one chooses it is important to be clear about which philosophical tradition influences one's practice of data collection and analysis-- the focus of research. As I mentioned earlier, many questions came to mind at the beginning of this project with regard to following one method over the other. I see phenomenology as a methodology to understand phenomena through their perception by actors in a situation. Gathering 'deep' information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions and participant observations, and representing them from the perspective of research participants, were my main goals. However, the question then became whether I should focus on the general or specific structure of experience, but it seemed the topic under investigation requires a middle ground where particular and general can be reconciled. Halling (2008) accepts both positions by arguing that idiographic research can also be general in that it can illuminate general structures of experience. He suggests applying three levels of analysis: a) looking at the particular, such as one person's story of everyday aesthetic

experience, b) looking at themes common to the phenomenon of what everyday aesthetics is in general, c) probe at the universal and philosophical aspects of being human, what is it about our nature and relationships that create to need for aesthetic experience. Thus, the starting point is in describing the experience as it reveals itself and then identifying general themes about the essence of the phenomenon. It is important to go beyond the surface and read between the lines to gain access to hidden dimensions. While all phenomenological research aims at describing rather than explaining phenomena under investigation, there is a distinction between descriptive versus interpretive phenomenology. I would argue as others have that it is a continuum (Smith 2007) and in practice it is really difficult to set boundaries between the two. As a researcher one has to be open to the data in a way where all possibilities can be worked out.

My research is more in line with Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). As a qualitative approach it seeks to understand how individuals experience and ascribe meaning to the events of their lives (Smith & Osborn, 2003). IPA recognizes the active role of the researcher in the process of interpretation, and the subjectivity and biases he/she brings to the project, but requires careful attention to ones' intentions in the research endeavor. I think it is well suited for this project because it allows me to understand the individual's lived experience. It requires the research participants to convey their personal experiences and it leaves me open to other processes that might be influencing particular stories of everyday aesthetic experience. Among the assumptions of IPA is the appreciation that a person is a cognitive, affective, linguistic, and physical being, and that there is a meaningful connection between the language that people use to describe a meaningful event and the event itself. In an IPA study, researchers often make links between the findings of their investigations and their own experiences, as well as to broader discussion within a given field. Epistemologically, the interpretivist framework

sees a relationship between the knower and the known, viewing the researcher and the participants as interactively linked in the creation of findings. It supports the ontological perspective of belief in the existence of not just one reality, but of multiple realities that are constructed and can be altered by the knower. Reality is not something out there, but rather something that is local and specific (Danzin & Lincoln, 2000). Methodologically, the interpretivist perspective aims to understand and reconstruct experience and knowledge.

The Use of Narrative Inquiry

The literature review suggests that everyday aesthetic experience needs an exploration of the meaning systems that form such experiences. I see narrative as a tool that will afford accounts of particular situations and events rather than general explanations of everyday aesthetic experiences. It has been argued that narrating is a primary form by which personal experiences are made meaningful by individuals. For this reason, narratives are also likely to be a valuable means of revealing meaning making. By using narratives we can learn about the possible and the actual. It suggests rather than convinces. It offers the opportunities to learn about aesthetic experiences and meaning making within the fabric of everyday. I will be drawing from various narrative researchers who used the storytelling approach to understand the way people construct their stories to reveal meaning in everyday aesthetic experiences. Dan P. McAdams (2008) developed a life-story model of adult identity. According to the model, people living in modern societies begin to organize their lives in narrative terms. People create internalized and evolving life stories that serve to reconstruct the past and anticipate the future in ways that provide their lives with some degree of unity and purpose. I believe aesthetic experiences are part of the participants' identity and have a place is steering their lives. In their narratives participants described as beautiful the different meaningful relations they had formed

over time. These relations were changing as the participants changed over time. I will elaborate on the relationship between aesthetic engagement and participants' identity in Chapter 7.

As a form of qualitative research, narrative inquiry uses interpretation of stories as both method and phenomenon of studying people in some context (Clandini & Connelly, 2000). The purpose of narrative inquiry in this study is to understand and make meaning of personal interpretations of how ten participants who work at the botanical garden engage in aesthetic experiences.

The use of narrative research can be classified into three domains (Lieblich, 1989):

a. Studies in which the narrative is used for investigation of research questions,

b. Studies that investigate the narrative as their research object, and

c. Studies on the philosophy and methodology of qualitative approaches to research.

This research is situated in the first domain. I use the terms story and narrative interchangeably. I see the stories as a powerful site for interpretation because, in addition to providing meaning, stories can also be used in remembrance. Since the experiences that participants shared with me were past events, I had insight into the structure of experience and how they have re-created the self.

I believe narrative inquiry, rooted in hermeneutics and phenomenology, is well suited for this research as it strives to "to preserve the complexity of what it means to be human and to locate its observations of people and phenomena in society, history and time" (Josselson, 2006, p.7).

My Role as a Researcher

My role as researcher was to engage in a conversation with participant that will elicit personal stories of their aesthetic experiences. In qualitative research, the researcher plays an important role in establishing reliability and credibility, while attempting to describe the structure and provide findings of an inquiry. It is also important to focus entirely on the participants' experiences and how they interpret the occurrence. It is through these experiences that I will examine the meaning of the phenomenon -- the meaning of aesthetic experience in the everyday life of ordinary people. It has been argued that while engaging in phenomenological inquiry the researcher should set aside all previous judgments to understand a phenomenon. This procedure is called bracketing (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher must first identify the biases and prejudices. These predetermined thoughts are then bracketed so the phenomenon could be seen without them. I believe it is impossible to bracket all preconceived thoughts about the phenomenon in question. It is because of my interest in aesthetic experience that I wanted to study it. However in trying to truly understand the experiences of others I spent some time reflecting on my own everyday aesthetic experiences and the degree to which they influence this research and realized that rather than trying to remove myself I should focus on how I'm temporally and autobiographically involved with the participants. As Gadamer (1989) pointed out it is important that we acknowledge and value the interpretation of research texts through the lens of our own history and experience. Whether we intend to or not, we make sense of the experiences of others and weave them into our own embedded background and experience. Time will not stand still and those involved will learn and change throughout the process.

The Setting

The Queens Botanical Garden (QBG) is set on 39 acres in the heart of New York City's largest borough, which is the nation's most ethnically diverse county. The mission of the

Queens Botanical Garden is to educate both young children and adults about plants and their unique cultural expression. The educational and research efforts promote the responsible caretaking of flowers, trees, and plants in order to sustain their future generations. This setting "a place where people, nature and culture meet" gave me an opportunity to engage in a conversation with a small group of people who are dedicated to environmental education. I saw the botanical garden as a unique opportunity to engage participants who spend a large portion of their time in a setting that might influence their aesthetic experiences. I have created a visual map of my perceptions that highlights the areas where they spend most of their time and including their favorite places in the garden (see appendix).

Participants

In order to elicit personal narratives of everyday aesthetic experiences I conducted ten in-depth interviews with the staff members at the QBG. Participants were recruited via contacts at the QBG, as well as flyers distributed and posted in the garden. There were six women and four men of diverse backgrounds and ages. Interviews with the informants elicited personal narratives about their everyday aesthetic experiences. Participants were encouraged to reflect on specific experiences they found notable, and relate them to their personal values and relationship to other experiences in their life.

Table 1.

Name	Department at Botanical Garden	Age range	Years at the garden
Ania		30-35	
Adam The Gardner	Visitors Center	30-35	3

Name	Department at Botanical Garden	Age range	Years at the garden
Sophia The Educator	Education	50-55	8
Sylvia The Rock Climber	Education	35-40	4
Farah The Grad Student	Administration	25-30	1
Jena The Landscape Architect	Planning	35-40	4
Sean The Fisherman	Security	40-45	10
Jeff The Awe Seeker	Education	35-40	2
Natalie The Traveler	Planning	30-35	1
Mary The Giver	Administration	60-65	8
Bob The Botanist	Education-Emeritus	65-70	15

The Interview

I selected an interview design that emphasizes narratives as the research strategy for this study. Interviews have become a common medium of communication and understanding the world beyond the bounds of academic research. The ubiquity and significance of the interview in our daily lives has prompted David Silverman (1997) to suggest that, "perhaps we live in what might be called an 'interview society,' in which interviews seem central to making sense of our lives" (Silverman, 1997, p.123). This 'everydayness' makes it a good context for getting at people's everyday aesthetic experiences. In order to provide some commonality of experience for a possible comparison, I used a particular site that the participants experience on a daily

basis. In order to further set the conditions that might offer me interesting comparative data across a range of participants, I chose a natural setting because the literature suggests that such settings offer special qualities for affording aesthetic experiences. This choice of place was not made with the intent to limit my participants' commentary to that particular setting. However, working with a population that was partially bound to a place through their work gave me an opportunity to closely work with them to understand how their aesthetic experiences are related to their everyday lives. My questions were not limited to the experience of this place or natural environments in general, but I felt that by working with people who share this common daily setting I would gain valuable insights into the variability and commonality of individual experience and meaning making.

'Memoing' (Miles & Huberman, 1984) is another important data source in qualitative research that I used in this study. Throughout this research I kept field notes of my experiences and thoughts in the course of collecting and reflecting on the process. There were times when I became so absorbed in data collection that I failed to reflect on what was happening. However, I tried to maintain a balance between descriptive and reflective notes. At this point it is important to mention that field notes are already a step towards data analysis.

Analysis Process

The objective of data analysis, in phenomenological research, is to make sense of the information obtained from the interviews. This process involves identifying categories of information, which are labeled as recurring themes, among the data sets. The use of this analysis method challenges the researcher to construct themes that "capture some recurring pattern that cut across the preponderance of evidence" (Merriam, 2002, p.18). However, my goal was not just to assemble a list of reoccurring themes but, with the use of narrative analysis, to gain a

better understanding of what the aesthetic experience is like for each individual and how they have reconstructed this experience during our conversation.

The analysis process is not a fixed stage of the research process, but a fluid interpretation that is continues throughout the research. Before the interview process I reflected about my own aesthetic experiences. Before and after each interview I made notes of anything that struck me as interesting about the place where the interview took place and my initial feelings about the interview process. Two strategies guided the analysis of the interview data. First, drawing on the more inductive strategy, I read the transcripts and listened to the interviews a number of times. In this process I attempted to dwell in the world my participants have created by actively absorbing the way they feel and understand the world and attempting to illuminate themes that emerge both within and across interviews. At this stage my interpretation was data driven and I remained open to the themes not originally anticipated. Within the interview and across interviews, I identified excerpts that fit within these analytical categories. At this stage of the research I examined the phenomenological aspects of their experience; that is I paid attention to the existential relationship between the person and their surroundings. In the process I began to write sketches of the participants that are presented in Chapter Four. A second strategy involved a more deductive, theoretically oriented approach. My analysis was guided by pre-existing themes and especially by the role of the senses in everyday aesthetic experience presented in Chapter Five. For example, I wanted to learn if lay people construct their stories based on hierarchy of the senses and thus, I read through the narrative and extracted particular instances that were supported by the existing literature. Even though my approach utilized both strategies, there were times when my analysis cut across both. When I started the interview process I completely abandoned reading anything related to this dissertation except the interview data.

Partly due to fear that I would try to look for similarities between what my participants have told me and the existing themes in the literature. I wanted to actively engage with the stories of the participants. Soon I realized it is impossible to remove myself in such a way and it was not needed at all. The writing process became important in that it helped bridge the gap between my reflection on the research and reading and writing. It is difficult for me to exactly articulate how this process worked for me. It is not just a way to make internal knowledge external, but also a way of making contact with things in the world. Thus, Chapters Six and Seven emerged from the combination of both approaches in the writing process. It is also helpful here to mention that the writing process is based on the idea that no text is ever "perfect, no interpretation is ever complete, no explication of meaning is ever final, and no insight is beyond challenge. It behooves us to remain as attentive as possible to the ways that all of us experience the world and to the infinite variety of possible human experiences and possible explications of those experiences" (van Manen, 2002). Language itself was an obstacle both for my participants as well as for me in the writing process. This was not an easy process; however, I hope I did justice to their experiences.

CHAPTER 4: SKETCHES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The following sketches are designed to introduce the reader to the ten participants of this study. I begin with my own sketch followed by a sketch of each participant presented in the same sequence as my interviews. I have changed their names and distinguish each with a nickname.

My Own Reflections

Because my interest in the aesthetic experience is both academic and personal, and because the two are inevitably intertwined, I decided to include a sketch of my own aesthetic orientation in the company of the other sketches. Before I embarked on the research with others I recorded some of my own stories of remembered aesthetic experiences. I did not know at the start of the study that I would include my sketch as part of the report, but I felt an obligation both to my informants and to this undertaking to conduct this self-reflection. During walking trips to the Botanical Garden I audio recorded my own feelings about the variety of sensory experiences I have had in my life and what they mean to me. After listening to my stories I realized that I cultivate my olfactory and auditory experiences from childhood memories of meaningful places. When I think about my great grandmother's woodland cottage in Poland, I remember the wonderful summers I spent there. My whole existence was about exploring the woods, the stream and the home's basement, where I was not supposed to go. Even though a lot of those experiences were multisensory the olfactory modality prevailed. When I think about those summers I think of the scent and how it organized my day. In the morning I remember smelling boiled milk mixed with the aroma of a hint of burning wood. In the mid afternoon I usually spent time playing in the stream or in the woods behind the house. I remember that the scent of the stream was very refreshing and the sand and pebbles reminded me of the ocean. But my favorite time was around sunset. That's when the surroundings offered the most olfactory

satisfaction that, combined with my evening routine, offered a nightly progression. I used to walk or bike around to fully enjoy this experience. At first there was a sweet and pleasantly intoxicating scent of the lilac and common lime. Then as the sun went down the scent became increasingly overpowering as if the trees from the depths of the woods wanted to be sensed. The scent was heightened by coolness and darkness. By evening the house, especially the walls in the bathroom, emitted a dampened scent of rock that was just fascinating to me. Those encounters are especially meaningful because each of those olfactory moments formed a storyline of my early childhood memories. Even though the cottage is now gone and I haven't been back in the area for many years, all those olfactory moments rest strongly in my memory.

Another meaningful aesthetic experience that I enjoy is the sound of the turtledove. I remember the first time I heard this mystifying sound when I was sitting on my grandparent's balcony. It was a late August morning. I remember how peaceful it made me feel. There was not much more to that experience --just feeling at peace. For a long, long time I thought it was an owl and it was not until recently that I discovered that it was a turtledove. I always heard this sound when I was in Poland and, when I later heard it here in New York for the first time I was surprised and happy. Now, when I hear it I stop whatever I am doing. I take a deep breath, relax and take it all in. It is a reminder to slow down.

When I have time I take long walks around Manhattan usually around the early morning or early afternoon. It is not for the purpose of going and looking for an aesthetic experience, but just walking. I find walking in the city very relaxing even though it is overcrowded, noisy, and filled with strange smells. I like to walk along the east river and be guided by the sun's rays and colors of the buildings. There are times where I like to stand a few blocks away from the United Nations building, or as I call it the "chameleon", to capture the changing colors of its surface. (I

also call the building the chameleon because of how international relations correspond to its colors.) I enjoy spending time close to water. When the water is warm enough I love to immerse myself and feel the water all around me. Swimming, like skiing, makes me aware of the primacy of my body and how I do not need to think but to just feel, breathe and listen. Skiing is probably one of my most consistent, but not necessarily highly rewarding aesthetic encounters.

Sophia- The Educator

We met a few times before our first interview. Actually, Sophia was the first person at the Queens Botanical Garden to whom I introduced myself. Because we did not agree on a specific site for the interview I showed up at her office. It was a small office filled with various books, photographs, and posters. She decided it would be better to go outside instead of staying in her office. She said it was too small and the phone might ring interrupting our conversation. We walked around a bit until we found a bench to sit on. Because it was before 10 am the garden was fairly empty. In the distance I could see a group of Chinese elders wrapping up their Tai Chi class. There was a group of kids touring the garden. Once in a while we could hear the planes overhead. However, as the wind changed it was less and less noticeable. The smell of plants was lingering. We sat on a bench close to the rose garden. Sophia's curly blond hair was pulled back, happiness was radiating from her smile, and her brown eyes conveyed intelligence. I could tell she was very confidant, relaxed, and ready to share her experiences. Because my recorder was turned on from the minute we walked out of her office (with her consent), I did not have a chance to formally start with my questions. I realized at that moment that she had full control of the interview, which I had to reclaim. It is easy to get lost in peoples stories especially if they are interesting. Before Sophia came to work at the Queens Botanical Garden she was

teaching physics and meteorology at the State University of New York. She also became interested in recycling and waste management. She joked that her two interests in weather and garbage will always be around to keep her employed. Even though she enjoyed teaching she wanted a change. Together with her then partner she decided to move to another city and, after a two-year search they found Eugene, Oregon.

Sophia's sensory aesthetic experiences are varied. Some are very personal while others are shared with friends and family. She considered herself to be very sensual and open to the environment. She likes physical contact whether it is with the people she loves or plants in her garden. She gets pleasure from the natural scents unmasked by constant preoccupation to deodorize, especially of the human body. She likes to garden with her gloves off because it makes her really feel the soil and plants. She enjoys the sound of various birds and can tell the change in weather based on the pitch of their song. She likes to listen closely to the environment. One of the reasons why she wanted to move to Oregon was because it afforded an array of visual aesthetic experiences. She felt at home. It was the greenest place she has ever seen. The climate varied in the state. In the south you do not have "the cold foggy weather you get in Portland or in San Francisco because they have a small mountain range there and that locks the marine air and they have the cascades to the east that block of all the cold Canadian air, so you've got this beautiful valley… they have palm trees 'cause the climate is so mild so that at one part of the coast they have dunes, natural dunes, they are just breathtaking, they have these rocky cliffs and caves, the pacific highway, you know that whole costal highway is just gorgeous from end to end." Even though the place was full of beautiful vistas, it was too secluded from people. It took 40 miles to get to the nearest store, and that distance proved to be too great. However, they never moved. One day she saw an ad in the local paper for a compost instructor

at the Queens Botanical Garden and decided to apply. She has been at the garden since the summer solstice of 1994. In a few years she plans to retire from working at the botanical garden, but to continue to inspire and educate others. Sophia's aesthetic experiences are related to different stages in her life. However, I am calling her "Sophia-The Educator" because there is a common pattern that runs in her stories: being receptive, sharing, and education. Her formal training afforded her an opportunity to be receptive to various changes in the environment. By being receptive to the shift in wind and sound she is able to tell whether the noise of jet engines will be pervasive at the botanical garden or not. This is especially important to her in late spring early summer as the garden is filled with different species of birds performing a repertoire. With this in mind she knows it will be a day to stay indoors. This type of receptivity allowed her to branch out to different aspects as well and cultivate her own openness to the environment because "if you are not receptive then you can't feel, hear, or understand." She said it is easier to be open if you care about what's around you. This is why she enjoys sharing her experiences with others and educating children and their parents about the value of nature. Because parents and their children do not spend quality time outdoors they have a hard time relating to nature and often times destroy it. Teaching people how to become responsible for the environment helps our society globally and results in aesthetic experiences locally.

Adam – The Gardener

Our interview took place in a conference room overlooking the garden. It seems very different from all the other interview settings. Unlike the other ground level offices, this space was elevated and housed in the newly constructed building. At the beginning of the interview I could not help but notice how physically different the interviewee was. In contrast to the other interviewees who were dressed casually he was wearing a suit. Because I did not know the

interviewee I did not really know what to expect and I was a little intimidated by his serious looking attire. For a second I felt like I was there for a job interview. Once I explained why we were meeting the situation became less tense. As we talked the sun went down and the lights came on in the room. We did not realize the transition until the interview neared its end.

Before Adam told me about his experiences he paused and we sat in silence for a moment. He started with telling me how he, together with his wife, one day decided to start a garden at their home in Queens. This past spring was their second year of activities at the garden. When spring is just around the corner they get ready and the process starts all over again. Once the plants and flowers are in their places, not necessarily a place they both agree on, Adam enjoys their accomplishment. During the day he enjoys looking at their different shapes and colors and towards dusk he likes to sit on his porch and watch the sunset while breathing in their fragrances. It is a private moment for him, a time when he feels a part of something bigger than himself. The feeling is also sustained by his satisfaction that something constructive came to life. It is an unspoken feeling he shares with his wife. Sometimes they glance at each other and just smile knowing what the other is thinking. Once the garden is in full bloom they invite friends to share and give them a "piece" of their garden as well.

Another sensory experience that Adam considers to be beautiful and longs for is time spent with his family. Before the holidays he "can visualize the smell of certain foods that will be prepared for that occasion." The anticipation of familiar comfort foods makes his mouth water as he remembers the taste of homemade olives. As his mouth waters he thinks of his childhood and how as a child he hated olives. The smells of fresh cannoli bring back memories of his grandfather with whom he used sneak into the kitchen to steal a few before dinner. When Adam spends time with his family he feels most content, but it is one of his experiences that also

inspires the sense of loss. Even though it seems like it will always be the same he knows nothing stays permanently. That's why he savors every moment spent with the family, because "one never knows when reality will be become a memory."

Adam strives for balance in his life. There are different ways in which he engages with the world to achieve it. The garden he created is a place where he can engage his whole body, focus on the different sensory channels, be actively engaged, and have a place to reflect. In the aura of calmness he contemplates his existence and is more in touch with himself. When the garden is transformed by the winter, Adam finds other ways to find beauty in it. He finds the stems and branches of trees sometimes covered by ice or snow to be quite delightful. He purposely leaves the perennials to get that effect. It is his strategy to keep a part of the garden alive. In winter the garden does not withhold sensory aesthetic experiences, as he says, it disguises them.

Other sensory aesthetic experiences in which he participates in his day-to-day life are equally valued. Some are spontaneous and surprising, some are planned and traditional, and others are not yet discovered. However, all make his life more "colorful and inspiring…happy."

Sylvia-The Rock climber

It was at the end of the day. It seemed unusually quiet. Our interview took place in the classroom where she usually teaches children about nature. There were dried acorns around, dried leaves, posters of nature and instructional materials on how to plant. The ambiance and smell of soil and dried leaves immediately transported me to my childhood experiences. I smiled, introduced myself, and explained the purpose of our meeting.

Sylvia started with a visual experience at the botanical garden. To her it is one of the most visually pleasing aesthetic experiences. A few days before our interview, as she was leaving the garden, she was drawn to the vibrant colors of a pear tree. A familiar tree, yet not fully discovered. There was something special about the moment when she fully engaged with its presence. The brief moment was filled with delight and she did not think about it much. Then upon reflection, the feelings made her happy and more excited about work. It made Sylvia excited to show it to the kids and see them be excited. Visual experiences are important to her but she also stresses the importance of the unity of sensory modalities in aesthetic experiences. It is important both for Sylvia's work with the children and for her own exploration of the environment. As a rock climber the sense of touch is extremely important to her. One has to trust the senses completely. It is a way of "feeling" the way, but also a source of sensory aesthetic experience. Feeling the rock and its "suchness" is a way of orienting in and with the environment. Being surprised and discovering the way adds to the excitement.

On many occasions Sylvia paused and struggled to find words to describe her tactile experiences. However, she did not seem frustrated with not being able to articulate them in detail. She would say "I don't know" a lot, but after reading and listening to our interview it became clear to me that it was not that she did not know, but that she "knew" it bodily. While rock climbing she can also get away from the displeasing noise of the city and fully appreciate the much taken for granted silence.

Sylvia finds smell to be an important part of her relationship with people. She said it is weird but the smell of people is very interesting to her. How his or her natural scent, not a scent disguised by perfume or cologne, gives each person a unique personality. Through the sense of smell she can better connect to them and to her biographical past spent with them.

Since she started vegetable gardening she loves the smell of fresh vegetables. Not the ones at the supermarket that look pretty, but the ones you pull from the ground. To her the smell of fresh vegetables is more aesthetically pleasing than the smell of flowers because they are less showy. You have to engage with them and discover their unique qualities.

At this point in her life there are no barriers that prevent Sylvia from aesthetically exploring the world. Relatedness and restoration are two themes that flow through her stories. She finds beauty in the familiar objects, situations, and activities that she feels connected to. It is the recognition of the familiar that makes her feel centered and comfortable. She rarely plans or thinks about arranging her immediate space in aesthetic ways. She enjoys planning hiking trips with friends and tries to spend as much time outdoors as she can. Nature is a source of restorative powers. It provides contexts for her to be able to relax and participate in activities that are not possible during a regular workweek. Being away from daily annoyances and conflict give her enough restorative power to be able to deal with it. She said that most of the experiences unfold naturally in her life, and some are probably forgotten after a while because she does not make an effort to remember them. When she knows that an exciting and intriguing experience will resonate with a friend, she is more than happy to share. She credits her mother, with whom she often shares her aesthetic experiences, for teaching her the importance of sensory engagement. As a young educator Sylvia tries to share and pass this skill to her students.

Farah- The Graduate Student

The interview took place outdoors, in a shady area underneath maple trees and fallen acorns. It was before noon. A faint scent of evaporating rainwater mixed with mulch was pervasive. The sound of crickets was very noticeable, but occasionally overshadowed by planes flying overhead. It was a beautiful summer day. We were sitting on wooden logs opposite each

other. Right away we felt very comfortable with each other. Even though she was the very first person I formally interviewed I did not feel pressure to get it "right." Having met Farah a few times before the interview I knew she would be willing to share her experiences and was interested in the project. I think our being close in age and our joint pursuit of graduate degrees added to my decision to interview her first.

Farah's sensory aesthetic experiences are very much influenced by her childhood memories in Bangladesh. Her memories of childhood experiences had a powerful influence on her aesthetic experiences, as well as her decision to pursue a graduate degree in social work. Not long after our interview she left the botanical garden to focus on her graduate work.

The first memorable and visually pleasing experience occurred when Farah was five years old. One afternoon instead of taking a nap she slipped out to the backyard to climb a tree. It was her first time being up high and looking at things below. She remembered looking down at the quiet, lush green space below the shrubs and the busy unpaved road behind the fence. She was by herself, the air was warm, the sun was setting, and there she was contemplating the unexpected feeling of power and sense of ownership of the space below. She felt happy and content. From that moment onwards trees and green spaces played an important role in her life. In high school, she used to pass by the botanical garden everyday but it was not until graduating from college she decided to get a position there. There are specific trees and plants that remind her of that childhood experiences in Bangladesh (even though they might be accessible in the US). Once in a while she goes out of her way to enter the botanical garden from the parking lot where she can spend a few moments at the biotope (an area of uniform environmental conditions providing a living place for a specific assemblage of plants and animals). It is a little enclave on a higher ground surrounded by trees. Because of her busy schedule she does not have the time to

get out of New York and spend time in the woods. Once in a while seeks out those private moments around the garden, but it is the higher ground above the street that she now seeks.

Among the few places that Farah enjoys are roof top bars in Manhattan. Even though the sensory experience is different depending on the place and its height, the feelings of power and content are often present. There are some places just above the street level where she enjoys the sound of the busy street; the view is focused on people and cars passing by. Other destinations offer the view of the Hudson River. The faint scent of the water draws attention to the beautiful view of the water further intensified by the refreshing taste of a mojito. It is a romantic place where she enjoys spending time with her boyfriend. It is a place where she enjoys the close proximity to the river. Places that are even higher off the ground afford a different experience. It is more about appreciating the view from a distance. Everything around her seems small, the sound of busy streets below does not reach this height, and it is calm and peaceful. At that moment, "the visual pleasure …I feel with my eyes and feel content it makes me happier." A similar experience where the she feels content and happy is on the beach. In the summer, but also during other months she enjoys the shifting texture of sand**.** Unlike the water, which can be found everywhere, sand is special and its texture is not easily experienced; "feeling the warm or cooler sand is fantastic…you have to make an effort to go and feel it…it makes me happy."

Just like the other interviewees Farah mentioned that time is the biggest barrier to her aesthetic engagement with the world. There are demands and the routine of everyday life is not so easily inescapable," but I'm better off knowing that they can happen to me, and having them even once in a while makes me happy."

Jena –The Landscape Architect

The first time we meet was in the winter of 2007. I stopped by the Botanical Garden to find someone to whom I could present my idea for this project and hopefully get permission to interview the staff. From my previous trip to the garden I knew exactly where to find Jena. I immediately proceeded to her trailer. When I entered her trailer I remember being surprised by its size. There was an open area in the middle surrounded by a few offices. I was immediately struck by the various architectural plans for the garden that where hanging on the walls. There was also a big table in the middle of the space where even more plans were laid out. I said "hello" a few times and finally a person emerged from one of the offices. I introduced myself and soon after I realized that this was the person I came to see. Jena seemed intrigued with my topic. She moved the plans to the side and we sat down at the table to chat some more. I remember feeling more excited about the project as we were talking. Looking back at our first conversation, it was not that long, but at that time it seemed as if we talked for a long time. We mostly discussed organizational issues, the number of interviewees, the project time frame, interview duration, etc. However, I could feel the topic of my interest was close to her hear. It was not until the summer of 2008 that I found myself in her trailer again, this time for the interview. I was very excited when Jena agreed to share her experiences with me. During that time she was overseeing new construction at the Botanical Garden and I knew her time was valuable.

Jena rushed in wearing a plain black t-shirt, dark pants, and boots. Her brown hair was pulled back. She did not wear any make up. We sat at the same table as before. I briefly explained the purpose of my project, tuned the recorder on, and asked if she could tell me about her meaningful aesthetic experiences. Jena's immediate response was "for my whole life? " We

both laughed and then in a more serious tone she said: "I am aware of my surroundings… outdoor views are always a big deal to me." From early on she remembered being attracted to various trees in her parents' backyard and the moon in the sky, but the experiences that are memorable have to do with vast landscapes such us the ocean, sunsets, or the Great Plains. Jena seems to have a special relationship with the sun. She often takes pictures of dramatic sunsets and hangs them in her office as reminder of the experience. Her office window faces west, and when the weather is just right the sunsets are irresistible to the point where she actually stops whatever she is doing and goes outside to participate in their beauty. The experience is further enhanced by the accompanying sound of birds and crickets. She seeks out visual experiences all the time, at work, home or on vacation. Her husband sometimes makes fun of her because she always wants to visit places and see things as though she were still working, but she says, it is not work --it is who she is. She explains that this is not only because their explorations are informative for her work as a landscape architect, but also because they make her feel relaxed and more in touch with herself.

The majority of her experiences are visual in nature, but there are times when vision makes way for the other senses to dominate. In the spring and the fall the transformed visual landscape unveils a plethora of smells and sounds. In the spring her senses are awakened by the warm smell of the air, the long awaited smells of soil and burgeoning plants. In the summer the plants release their fragrance, the crickets become noticeable and once again the countdown starts.

Sean -The Fisherman

I first met Sean on one of my trips to the garden before the project was approved. I remember it was Monday because all the gates were closed and the only way to get it was

through the parking lot. He was sitting in the security booth. Before I got close he asked me how he could help and where I was going because the garden is closed to the public on Mondays. I did not have an appointment nor did I know the garden was closed to the public on Mondays. I was supposed to drop by to get an ID card. I introduced myself and then give him a lengthy explanation as to what I was doing and who I was supposed to see. It turned out I was supposed to see him, but no one told him I was coming. We had a few laughs and then we started talking about the project and he asked me specifically what the word aesthetics means. I explained what I was interested in researching. Sean seemed interested and asked whom I would interview. I said anyone who was willing to share his or her experiences with me. I guess at this time I unknowingly asked if he would be interested because he told me "we'll see" and laughed.

Most of the time when I was at the garden I would see him in the distance patrolling the garden and talking to visitors. About a month after our initial conversation I asked if he would be willing to sit down and talk about his experiences. I had a feeling he had spoken with others whom I interviewed because he agreed. I think he was curious or maybe felt obligated. He asked again about the topic. In a way I think he wanted to prepare.

We met in his trailer around lunchtime. Sean was sitting behind his computer desk. He seemed relaxed but still unsure about what I would ask. Throughout the interview he was paying attention to my questions and tried to answer as honestly as possible. His everyday sensory aesthetic experiences are very much about his relationship with others and nature.

For Sean, the botanical garden is a source of mostly fleeting visual experience from day-to-day. While working at the botanical garden he learned to appreciate different kinds of plants and animals and because of that he thinks of the garden as the closest place to the Garden of

Eden that he will ever know. Even though they are fleeting experiences it is possible to have them and they will always be a little different. There are some experiences at the garden that remind him of other experiences that he values. After a big rainfall, a small lake formed at the garden attracting people and birds. He remembered how seeing different kinds of birds and people around that lake made him happy. This happiness made him think of fishing and how he enjoys spending time in his time-share in the Poconos. Being out on a boat, smelling, and seeing clean water where he can relax and take the beauty in without having to worry about anything else is like meditation. Because Sean does not go fishing as often as he would like, the closest he gets to this experience is around his time-share in the Poconos. The smell of the morning dew and the river behind the house make him smile and reminisce about fishing. Bringing people together whether at the garden or getting together with family is being a part of something beautiful. It is participating in a communal happiness that makes one appreciate the beauty of the world. However, being able to witness the birth of his daughter was one of the most awe-inspiring experiences of his life. A transforming experience one can never anticipate, where all the senses come to life, and tears of joy can not be stopped. It was a touching experience for him, and his passionate narration touched me as well.

Living in NYC for 42 years makes him think about different ways he can escape the city and be closer to nature. Sometimes finances come in the way of his experiencing happiness and beauty, but there are also times when he does not have to spend a dime to experience beauty. As far as he's concerned it works both ways. Even though his stories were not as lengthy and detailed the unifying factor was camaraderie. There was a need for social bonding in places that play a part in his aesthetic experiences. This included bringing people together at the garden for an annual barbecue, getting friends together for a fishing trip or reconnecting with relatives for a

reunion at his summer house.

Jeff – "The Awe Seeker"

We met in the morning before the buses with children arrived. We initially met in the educational building and then walked over to the kitchen of the maintenance building for the interview. In the kitchen, which was unexpectedly quiet and filled with light, we talked about his everyday sensory experiences. Jeff was the second person I interviewed and I think we both felt a bit tense about the process. We talked before the interview and even minutes before the tape-recorder went on everything was fine until the first "on the record" question. I remember seeing confusion in his eyes when I asked him about the different kinds of everyday aesthetic experiences he has and the role that different senses play in them, especially kinesthetic senses. At first I was stuck, but after telling him about my own kinesthetic experience he relaxed and after a few pauses the interview was rewarding for both of us.

The types of experiences that are surprising and awe-inspiring are the most meaningful to Jeff. His fascination with wildlife started after reading a book on nature, and since then both professional and personal interaction with nature has been the source of his meaningful sensory experiences. Even though most of the experiences he shared with me were nature-related, the binding or necessary ingredient for his aesthetic experience is surprise and awe. Some of the more unusual experiences that he started with were about his interaction with a stingray. He remembers how surprised he was by their sand paper-like skin texture or his awe-inspiring experience with the great white sharks. Some of his rewarding experiences are at the botanical garden. Because the arboretum and the perennial garden are more on the wild side, he can draw in its changing ecosystem from hour-to-hour, day to night and season-to-season. He observes the graceful movement of praying mantises, hears chirping before the sun goes down and scratches

the bark of trees to release their beautiful scent.

On his way back home one of the most beautiful visual experiences he used to encounter was the Manhattan skyline. Now that he moved to Brooklyn, he takes a different route. Driving on the Belt Parkway when the weather is just right, he can smell the ocean. The salt in the air makes him smile, roll down the window, stick his hand out, and enjoy. For that moment it makes him relaxed enough to forget about the "everyday stuff." The drive back home on the Jackie Robinson is different, the trees and turns make him feel as if he on a country road away from the city. It makes him think of past experiences such as hiking, a field trip to Buffalo, and exploring the swamps of the Everglades. And then sometimes on Mondays he is greeted with a smell that he particularly finds meaningful- the smell of his father's mushroom soup. On some days when the farmers market is open the smell of strawberries draws him in from a distance and to him it is an indicator they will taste good.

At this stage of his life Jeff feels well balanced and appreciative of the type of activities that result in aesthetic experiences. Some experiences are controlled and repeated, such as choosing a particular route home. Choosing a route home affords him an opportunity to break away from the practical aspects of his life. Some activities that are goal-oriented and have to be done. Other experiences are surprising and new, such as discovering a new scent at the garden. They are like unexpected gifts but always come at the right time to uplift his spirit. There are other more subtle experiences that result from careful attention to details of the unfolding situation. These include his observations of insects and birds at the garden. Yet, a common thread that runs through them is Jeff's need for cultivating the feeling of being open to the environment and sustaining these experiences over time. These types of experiences reaffirm what he called his "mission statement" and what he is trying to do with his life both personally

and professionally.

Natalie – The Traveler

Even though the weather was getting cooler we decided to talk outside. We found a sunny bench in the arboretum and spent the next two hours talking. Leading up to the interview Natalie was thinking about her sensory experiences and which ones were more memorable than others. Natalie started with visual experiences. She remembered driving home from work one evening and seeing this amazing fog that had fallen on the road, and how the lights intercepted it making it beautiful. Driving to work in the morning over the George Washington Bridge was another visually stimulating experience. Seeing the sunrise in the horizon added something special to the day. While she was talking she quickly realized that it was more than just a visual experience. It was kinesthetic as well. She did not realize it until that moment. Not every trip from and to work was aesthetic in quality. Because Natalie got used to the drive it became habitual in nature and automatic. There were times when she did not even know how she got off one highway end ended up on another. The routine had to be broken intentionally or something unexpected had to happen, such as the fog, for her to take notice. Her driving experience made her think of society in general and how people always rush to get home from work, they cut each other off, curse when the light changes to red just when they approach the intersection. It made her think about other cultures and how driving in Kenya is culturally different than driving in the US. She recently moved back from Kenya after living there for almost a year. She remembered how growing up in the city one tries to block the noise or gets used to it, and how a year abroad can make a huge difference. She noted how quickly we can get used to silence and how quickly things change "you forget how it was in the past and you have to say to yourself oh that's how it is now and when I came back that's how it was…"

Everyday something in the environment evokes memories of time spent in Kenya. Seeing papayas at the supermarket triggers memories of the store she used to go to in Kenya. The store where she first learned about the different types of papayas, their smell, and taste. In Flushing seeing women in burkas evokes images of women in Nairobi dressed in colorful saris. She often thinks about how experientially different life in Kenya was and how people were more connected to nature than people in the western world. For her, the smell of fresh spices at different times of the day was indicative of the time of day. Walking around the markets in Kenya made her reflect on the artificial smell of candles as one enters Bed Bath and Beyond back in New York City. Being away from the US seemed to have significantly broadened her sensory awareness. Natalie is a calm person by nature and the fast pace of life she faced back home shook her aesthetic balance. She realized she needed to adapt to her new lifestyle to be able to engage with the world in aesthetic ways. Instead of longing for past experiences she looked for aesthetic pleasure in and around everyday activities. She discovered that taking the time to go for a walk in the garden or around her apartment became an important strategy. She allowed the immediate environment to guide her through the different configurations of sights, scents, and textures. Walking on Main Street in Flushing became a rewarding source for aesthetic experiences. She developed an awareness of the environment through primary (walking) as well as secondary (photography) sources of experience. Walking allows her exploration through multiple senses - the sounds of traffic, the scent of curry, and the taste of a scallion pancake. Taking photographs at the garden at different times allowed her to capture the ambient qualities of the vegetation, fog, and sky. These together make the experience of an area where she spends most of her time more meaningful. Another strategy is taking pleasure in activities around her apartment. She leaves the window open in her bedroom to let the scent of

freshly baked donuts wake her up in the morning, followed by the scent of freshly brewed coffee. Caring about one's appearance is also important to her. Just because she works at a garden does not mean she can not be well put together and "even when you don't feel so good you should try to at least look good." Her overall strategy is to take a "beauty break" to form new habits of aesthetic engagement and take time to reflect on where she finds beauty in every moment.

Mary -"The Giver"

It was a rainy day in early October. The interview took place in her office. We were sitting opposite to each other. The office door was open. The noise from the outside could occasionally be heard, but it did not interrupt the flow of our conversation until her phone rang a couple of times. At the beginning of the interview I felt as if our conversation took place in between the context of her day-to-day activities, but as the interview progressed it felt like nothing else occurred before or after.

At the beginning of our conversation she quickly went through the senses. Sight, the first one, is a way to evaluate people; feeling different textures of cloth and the way things are woven together were second, smell and taste did not seem important. Sound took her back to her earliest memory and became the first story of aesthetic experience she shared with me - that of the pure joy of music. She remembered how her mother would "pop through the kitchen door and sing every part of whatever Broadway show there was including the instrumental. I did not know it was called scatting until I grew up and got into Jazz."

She called herself more of the observer type, an audience for her artistic family, "until recently and then I decided it is time for me to find my own voice too… and I have plans in my retirement of expressing myself through the arts. It would be manipulative, it would be soft sculpture, it would be weaving, it would be knitting, it would be that kind of thing."

Her most memorable and rewarding experiences are those of her family. Once every year in October, something special happens. She prepares a traditional lunch just as her mother, and probably her grandmother used to make. It is a certain kind of tuna fish salad; it is baked chicken in a certain way, and it is a bag of cut up vegetables to eat. Blankets are in the back of the car. She and her husband pick up everybody and they drive to an orchard for an exciting day of apple picking. It is a day full of colors, smells, and sights. Trees are changing colors and it is just a wonderful day "I want them to be, I want them to feel as connected to the family and as safe as we feel when we do that, here we are in the midst of nature."

She enjoys passing along her skills and sharing her experiences with others "because it plants the seed in another person." She remembers her mother and her mother's sister's lives during the war and without their husbands and how important their craft of knitting became. How their knitting, which she did not understand until she became older, was an attempt to stop the negative feeling while making something you had control over. The aesthetic experience of knitting gives us freedom to express ourselves in a non-verbal way and is crucial to our existence. These activities are avenues through which we deal with things and help us grow making tomorrow a better day. The promise of today and tomorrow is what counts "apple picking next year will be better than apple picking 10 years ago."

Bob- The Botanist

We meet for an interview in one of the classrooms where children learn about nature. The interview started immediately and as soon as I finished with my first question it was obvious that the story will be compelling. His story was interwoven with past and present personal and professional experiences with nature. He attributed his first encounter with plants to his parents and grandparents who had a garden, but his most memorable childhood experience came around

fifth grade: “I went to a very strict, old school. Teacher, a lot of them were from Germany and in one of the classrooms there was a Jerusalem Cherry and she also had a fuchsia purple and magenta and I remember thinking that's the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. I look at it, and I ask the name of it, and that was a specific instance where just seeing or touching and another thing was I was at a party with relatives. We were playing games and I won this little packet of heavenly Morning Glory seeds and I planted them in the back yard and those grew so big and I have never seen flowers this sort of pastel sky blue and I thought that was the greatest thing to be able to plant these and have them grow and that really affected my whole life and it only takes a little thing like that.” His continuous relationship with nature afforded him some of the most meaningful sensory experiences and the opportunity to pass this practical knowledge to others.

Throughout the interview he stressed that exploration of one’s surroundings is important. In response to my question regarding meaningful sound experiences he said: “… I remember when I was in Connecticut being out and working with the plants it made you more aware of other sounds outside. One of the more unusual experiences I was working late, out in the field and I was coming back carrying all the equipment and so on. I was going by this tree and I heard this rustling in the tree, and I looked up at one of the branches and it was shaking and I though what's up on the tree and I got closer and it was getting toward dusk and I hear this classic sound and I see this big owl it was shaking this branch and I probably annoyed it and at this point I could see how early people would attribute mystical qualities to things like this they did not have scientific knowledge to ... and then sometimes I walk around Ally Pond and you hear all kinds of sounds but do not see the animals and it makes sense that people believed in things like fairies because you're in the sound it is all around you but you can't find what's making it. So being out

makes you aware of different things … there are also the sounds of being quite like walking in the park trees create their own world even a small group of trees when you get in there it is noticeably quite you are less aware of the street. So even a small number of plants can create a different sensory environment."

Bob is older than the other participants and I think his age has a lot to do with the distinctive nature of his sketch. I decided to write his sketch around four themes that best embody the meaning everyday sensory aesthetic experiences have for him: *getting (it) out*, *closeness*, *re-connecting*, and *isolation*. *Getting (it) out* is at the heart of his experiences.

Getting (it) out, as getting his message out, is also his conscious effort to teach others about the benefits of meaningful sensory experiences "… part of my role even if I'm with friends is to call their attention without trying to be overly annoying so I'd say "this feels kind of interesting I'm enjoying it" and that's what we try to do with the children here when we have family days and we have adaptation stations here we have people go around to smell, touch, and hear different things … I purposely bring children to particular places in the garden …like the herb garden for the smell, the woodland for its spirit quality and sound…and started to teach children to look at things and feel them…that feeling of plant they know it is alive….you need to get away from your computer and experience a little bit of this and I mean it's nice to see things on television or on the computer you can experience things you couldn't get to otherwise, but is shouldn't be the end…"

But just being in an environment does not necessarily afford meaningful sensory experiences. " It takes a little more time than just walking through ... it's harder than going to the library and getting a book, you have to sort of know where to look, and you have to take the time

to go there and share." Understanding the ways in which plants reveal themselves to us means that we have to intentionally engage their itness with our whole sensory apparatus, we need to *get close* "and by getting close to them and experiencing their different ways they almost become like like friends you know there are some that have been with me for years. I have some plants that belonged to my friends who have passed away and I inherited the plants… by going to this sensory aspect, noticing how they smell how they feel touching them it's a way of getting close… I think it's that that closeness it's like it's like a friend that you know really well and when you see them you want to hug them or hold their hand." Closeness, being able to appreciate the relationship he has with plants, is like a bridge between past, present and possible future. Just like close relationships develop over time, learning to appreciate nature is such way happens over time. Its s special type of relationship that goes beyond here and now, it has a pervasive quality.

Now that he is retired and does not work as much he finds himself seeking out places: "…where I can just go and it's quieter and there are birds, and I can think…" The active pursuit of places is very much related to the third theme in his story*, re-connecting.* I think the following paragraph best illustrates the transformative nature meaningful experiences have for him:

"Things become increasingly hectic. I don't know why it is maybe people are getting more done but it seems more busier like the people I work with they always are "wait a minute I have to take this call" I don't really use my cell phone because I don't really like the idea of people reaching me at any time. I like being away and these experiences make me feel… they bring peacefulness, but also on the flip side of that I always feel sort of excited about sharing and I know that sometime people don't care if… but I would say look at this but I feel there are so many people who just walk through and miss some of the sensory side of it because they are always in a hurry, talking I think we become and certainly around New York we become very distanced from nature and I think these kinds of experiences make me feel good because they are sort of like a reconnecting so it gives me a kind of peace it gives me a kind of reinforcement it make me feel grounded … and I think it's experiencing the world in a kind of basic way where

you feel reconnected you are more aware of the living entities or the world through the sensory input touching, the smells ,the sounds it's an affirmation we are still part of the earth at the time now where it seems like a lot of might be taken away you know you realize that a lot of it it's really fragile."

His understanding of the temporality of being leads to the fourth theme *isolation*. His story reveals that getting older, realizing his own mortality (and that of his friends) becomes a barrier in his ability to "reach out and touch these things", but he enjoys it more as time goes by. The loss of his hearing isolates him from certain pleasurable sound experiences and in some ways gives rise to regret. He said: "I always regretted that I haven't really learned to recognize birds and insects…I really never applied myself and learned that I enjoy hearing the different sounds of birds…" This personal barrier reflects in a more global meaning of aesthetic experiences. Towards the end of the interview I asked what would happen if we could not have these experiences. This is what he said, "I think people would cease to exist…will have much poorer lives and it would lead to more isolation…feeling of alienation not grounded in anything." If we collectively do not try to take a moment and appreciate this sensory closeness and share its meaning with other it will sees to exist and we "will suffer environmentally and aesthetically."

At the end of the interview this is how he summarized it, "I better experience things while I still can and these things are not always there …I think some of it we preserve the sense of wonder when you touch, smell, see, or taste something like the idea that a great spirit was in everything and I feel like getting close and experiencing things this way leads to more of respect towards life in general."

CHAPTER 5: QUALITIES OF THE SENSES

In this chapter, I focus on the extent to which different sensory modalities play a role in my participants' reminiscence of their aesthetic experiences. For the sake of discussion, I introduce each of the senses separately. To some degree we have control over our senses but for much of the time we forget about them and rediscover their importance only when we are periodically awakened from our daily routines. The insights from my informants will be elaborated upon with discussion from primary and secondary texts. The reader might be surprised that I start with the event of seeing, but similar to my participants, I find it hard to escape my own culture that places so much importance on vision.

Seeing

I asked my participants to think about different senses and the role each of them played in their everyday aesthetic experience. I was not surprised when most of them immediately began their accounts with a visual experience. There are some characteristics of visual experiences that are shared among individuals, but they also vary considerably. Aesthetic experiences where sight dominated were characteristically associated with large-scale environments, such as the botanical garden, one's home, and the route to and from work. In particular, when the everyday landscape changes due to weather conditions, time of day, and seasonal cycles it creates new possibilities for visual enjoyment. In the following description, an unexpected lake that formed after a heavy rain attracted birds and people in a rather stable part of the garden, and for a few weeks, became a visual attraction for Sean-The Fisherman:

"We had that big, big rain storm a lot of water fell and all. The streets were flooded, but one of the most beautiful things that caused that …they had like a lake back there maybe for a week or two because there was so much rain and there was ducks in the water and it was goose in the water and there were people walking around and it was like a, uhm, uhm, an attraction that I

always thought we should have in the arboretum. The arboretum doesn't have but just having that week with the ducks and birds and everything in the water. And the people all the children they were all enjoying it … yeah that was a very nice visual thing."

The primacy of sight is undeniable. Without much effort we have access to the sensual qualities of the world. It is not only sensual, but also intellectual. To see is to think and understand. Sylvia-The Rock Climber remembers:

"…I was walking the other day out of the garden and there was a tree, and everything around it was very dirty. I think it was a pear tree and the bottom of it was yellow the middle was orange and the top of it was like maroon deep red color and it stood out among all of the garbage as being beautiful you know like something beautiful that's in the park when you look at all the other stuff that's not (laughs) I have never seen that tree before I did not even know trees changed colors like that."

Visual experiences are more than pervasive. The landscape around us changes, and our bodily orientation changes us consequently. Seasonal changes play a significant role in what we see. In the above example, a tree that otherwise might be invisible to us comes to life. In our daily life we pass by and notice different objects as a way to get by or move from one thing to another. Often we take these sights for granted. In our day-to-day practices we do not fully attend to everything we perceive until there is a change in our intentionality. The never before seen tree jumps out of its ordinary surroundings and invites our attention. The presence of unsightly garbage becomes visible first, and then the tree's vibrant colors invite her attention, just enough to be noticed. Now, her focus is on the tree and she contemplates its beauty. The person moves from just noticing to "seeing" the tree in its fullness. There is an interaction of a mutual exchange between consciousness and the world. The switch from noticing to seeing is an attitude of openness to the living world (Schachtel 1959; van Mannen 2002; Dewey 1958). The surprise of seeing the tree as if for the first time may also invite a feeling of self-doubt (how

could I have missed it, if it's here every day?). However, the moment of seeing for the first time is a moment of attentiveness. It is a moment of choosing to look and at the same time a moment of being chosen. It is a moment of two-way inclination. Berger (1973) observes that, "soon after we see [the landscape on the other side] we are aware that we can be seen [from that landscape]" (Berger 1973, p. 9). The moment of seeing as if for the first time is a magical moment.

Some of the visual experiences that people shared with me were common or traditional, such as a sunset or the Manhattan skyline. The way the sun is about to set at certain time of a day for Jena-The Landscape Architect is a reoccurring, visually pleasing experience:

"I also even here actually, I notice the sunset a lot because my window faces west and it's very dramatic and some nights I just go outside because it's you know all of the sudden my office would be red and then I would go outside and the sun is just hanging over and it's pleasant."

In this example there is a bond already established between the perceiver and the perceived, as if they had an ongoing conversation. The sunset invites, literarily comes into the office and she goes outside to meet it halfway and to more fully engage its presence.

The timing of the moment has to be just right. Less dramatic, but evocative is the sunrise, which is often described as a more subtle experience. As the rays gently caress the surface of her skin, Jena-The Landscape Architect closes her eyes and smiles, takes a deep breath, and studies the way her body responds to the morning breeze of the ocean.

But the familiar scene is appreciated even though one has seen it before. However, when the familiar is made strange it becomes more appreciated. Jeff-The Awe Seeker said:

"Like last night were driving back from Astoria and the Manhattan skyline is right there, and they just lit up torches for the 9/11 memorial. So it was just a very beautiful serene kind of view… it's absolutely mind blowing."

One could still see it differently by switching the focus from the whole to its parts as Natalie-The Traveler has done:

"Like everyday driving over the Whitestone Bridge you see a different view of the city. It's always different it seems compelling ... In the morning and in the evening just different compositions of how the color of the sky or or the way the light is hitting the buildings and how far you can see so that's always enjoyable and different."

The interplay of different elements influences what and how we see. For Natalie-The Traveler the world reveals itself as she moves in it:

"I remember one night going back home on Hutchinson North. There was this crazy fog that had fallen on the road and it was mysterious, and there were two emergency vehicles that did not have their sirens on they were not going really fast they had their lights on, and I was noticing how their lights cut through the fog you know and how it kind of slowed down and it was beautiful how they lights kind of changed the fog and I remember thinking how peaceful it was. It's was dark and the sirens were not on and these different colors of red and white going through the fog it was pretty."

The combination of different visually interesting elements is unexpected to this individual. The situation presents the mystifying qualities of the fog, darkness and lights and this particular, momentary presentation become appreciated.

The fleeting quality of the experience makes it memorable. However, there are some places where the visual landscape, once altered, becomes appreciated on many occasions. Such a visual experience has a profound impact on Jena-The Landscape Architect:

"I think one thing that was memorable is the … There is a prairie a remnant prairie in Ann Arbor where I went to school that we helped manage and burned it every year. And all that and in the fall this time actually it was just unbelievable how spectacular it was because the grasses are 8 feet 10 feet tall so we had one remote path you walk through and if you lay down you just see the tops of these grasses and the sky and it's really dramatic… it was very relaxing you know very relaxing and away from everything."

Here, Jena reflects on a recurring experience in the past. An experience that becomes meaningful because of its familiarity and comforting features. The experience starts with

appreciating the visual qualities (spatial awareness) of the scenery and leads to feelings of relaxation (awareness of oneself).

There are certain objects or situation that we try to make more visually pleasing to others and ourselves. Mary-The Giver mentioned:

"I think that's part of bringing in something bigger than the everyday experience. I like when I bake and it should look pretty not just taste good. My husband would say what's the difference it's going in your stomach, but I like it to be pretty. I like it to have a certain sense to it, certain feel to it that's what I'm aiming for."

Creating something that is pleasing to look upon and sharing it with others is also important to Adam-The Gardener, who enjoys working in his garden:

"I like to present to other people and when they come and see the flowers and they say it's nice that's when I get more of the satisfaction that is it's in the sharing I think."

Seeing in a significant way that includes seeing unexpected things, seeing in a new way, and sharing in seeing as if for the first time indicates a moment of experiencing a new self.

Hearing

How does the world present itself to us when we listen to it rather than look at it? The soundscape of our everyday environment, like vision, is varied and filled with unique possibilities for aesthetic experiences. The pleasures of auditory experiences shared with me ranged from pleasing and soothing ambient tones to more melodic, multi-tonal arrangements that were, on occasion, interrupted by irritating and discordant sounds.

Of the many environmental sounds, the human voice seems to be most important sound. A child's laughter is one of the purest sounds. It has such a big impact on us that we must resist smiling. Sylvia- The Rock Climber values the sound of children interacting and learning in the classroom:

“It’s very exciting for me. I always like when I'm teaching a class and at the very end when the kids are doing they’re planting. They are very excited and they talk to their friends where they are going to put it and this and that about their plants and they're excited and then what I really like is when kids come up and ask me questions about something even if it's about the class or asking more specific questions I think it's a good follow up it shows that they're actually pay attention I like the excitement of kids it's great and pleasant and they show it in their voices.”

We can almost feel what Sylvia described. There is a rhythm to the class. There is a lecture, physical activities, comments, and questions. The separate and private joys of discovery combine in united, shared excitement and then, the moment of enjoyment emerges. She is aware of enjoying herself. She seems to vacillate between enjoyment and being aware of enjoyment (reflection). Kierkegaard seems to point to this essential aspect of enjoyment when he says, "the essence of pleasure does not lie in the thing enjoyed, but in the accompanying consciousness.”

Nature produces a plethora of pleasing sounds. A common appreciated sound from nature is wind on foliage. Mary- The Giver remembers:

“…The sounds when I walk through the garden in the autumn of the wind through the trees to me that's music I love that sound I can't tell you how much I love that sound to me that’s one of the… people go to see flowers and plants … When you have the wind particularly near College Point Blvd coming in through those trees and you have the birds to counterpoint I think it's right up there with Beethoven not everybody does. So there is avid flow to the sound there is crescendos there are sound from the wild life and birds that is sort of question and answer going on but not really cause and effect kind of it's the most incredible thing.”

According to the participants the botanical garden is overflowing with different sounds. There is a rhythm. In the morning, especially in the spring and summer, it is noisy. And, as the day goes by, the noises subside and the soothing sound of crickets takes over. The sound of birds seems to be the most noticeable to Bob-The Botanist:

“I enjoy hearing the different sounds of birds in the garden. I have birds in my own garden and I allow things to get kind of brushy and have things that are kind of old logs that birds like and I

get some nice birds, but I never really learned to distinguish them. I enjoy insect sounds in the summer it's really hard you know I couldn't learn you know there are so many things out there that you hear and if you listen long enough and even if you don't know what they are you can pick out the different voices."

There are also unexpected sounds that come at us. Bob-The Botanist shared with me this memory when I asked him about memorable sounds:

"One of the more unusual experiences I was working late, out in the field, and I was coming back carrying all the equipment and so on I was going by this tree and I heard this rustling in the tree and I looked up at one of the branches and it was shaking and I though what's up on the tree and I got closer and it was getting toward dusk and I hear this classic sound and I see this big owl it was shaking this branch and I probably annoyed it and at this point I could see how early people would attribute mystical qualities to things like this."

The sense of wonder in the above example takes him to an unexpected experience and then through reflection he is connected with the distant past and experiences of people who attribute mystical qualities to extraordinary situations.

Jeff-The Awe Seeker had a more of an embodied experience of sound:

"…The first concert I went to was really cool if I'm not mistaken it was a Bruce Springsteen concert at Madison Square Garden. It was really the first time and the sheer power of the speakers and being around so many people you could feel the bass vibrate and people singing along or clapping or cheering all together and cacophony of sound…it was unforgettable."

Music was also a source of joy while driving a car. The experience of listening to music while driving a car is a strategy:

"I like road trips... my wife and I we like to pick a destination get in our car and just drive there and there…I get all the CD's ready listening to music in the car is important I guess this is probably the only place where I listen to music. On my way to and from work I always have a CD on. I don't like when I drive and there is no music playing…it's a necessary combination…a solitary experience."

The experience of everyday life is laden with a multitude of sounds. Over the years the sounds of nature have been slowly overpowered by mechanically produced sounds. Historically

the ears have been passive, they let the sound in, and we do not have the same control over what "gets in" as with vision. But with the invention of Walkmans and more recently iPods we can choose what to listen to anywhere with the touch of a button. With the help of technology we can filter the sounds of the world and control their invasiveness.

Now more than ever cities have become the source of ever-present noise. Living in a city, such as New York, can be extremely exhausting. The majority of my informants discussed how the chronic noise of cars, buses, planes, and even cell phones negatively influence the quality of their lives. To escape the unpleasant noise they engage in a variety of activities or strategies that transform the unwanted state of being. Going for a walk at a local park eases the aversive street noise for the Bob-The Botanist:

"Like walking in the park. Trees create their own world even a small group of trees when you get in there it's noticeably quite you are less aware of the street. So even a small number of plants can create a different sensory environment"

But to really enjoy the sound of silence one has to "get out" of the city. Sylvia-The Rock Climber said:

"Sounds of a city sometimes can be very displeasing to me just in a way there is constant noise so that's why I like to climb because you get out of the city and there is silence."

The need to experience silence was mentioned by all of the participants. Our notions of peaceful silence are mediated through culture. On one hand, in the western world silence is often thought of as awkward and something that must be broken or filled. On the other hand, sound is at times highly valued as a solitary event. It is both social and personal. When the solitary silence is broken and nonexistent, is as almost an auditory interruption of existence. The frequency of planes flying over the botanical garden during my conversation with Sophia- The Educator elicited her desire to leave New York:

"One of the reasons why I wanted to leave New York when I was living in Fresh Meadow in a semi attached house and the planes would fly over and the shock waves would reverberate off the windows it almost sounded like somebody was taking a really thick whip and go (makes noise) I couldn't take it anymore and. It was noise pollution and I don't like loud noise I can't stand it. There are certain frequencies that drive me crazy it's torture...at the garden the water has become the background noise and planes drive me crazy...they are loud and annoying and I usually take a deep breath and try to stay calm."

One of the reasons why some people listen to iPods or wear earplugs in the city is to block off the unpleasant sounds. The iPod transforms the sound environment. It creates an atmosphere in everyday life. Earplugs on the other hand are an off button. When we cut ourselves off from the noise entirely we can not even hear the sound of our own breath. In the city we can break the silence or try to escape it. According to the participants this does not work with nature; nature does not have an off switch. If anything we would like to turn up the volume. Many of the informants felt that nature sounds lead to contemplation and transcendence and that technology sometimes interferes with our ability to really hear. Bob- The Botanist mentioned:

" I don't really use my cell phone because I don't really like the idea of people reaching me at any time I like being away and these experiences make me feel… they bring peacefulness…"

To him technology, especially cell phones, has the power of one individual over another. Many of my informants, including Bob, revealed to me that aesthetic experiences are like existential spaces where they can feel peaceful. Being free from man-made disturbances creates tranquility. Being with nature allows people to relax, bring a sense of balance and relief from everyday stressors, and also rekindle a sense of belonging to the natural world. Participants feel awe and wonder to discover reconnection with nature as a central need in their lives.

Sound alters the visual experience, especially the delineation of peripheral from focused attention. Sunsets have been experienced as focused, while everything else fades into the background. Sunrises have been described as a background for other focused activities. For

example, the illumination of the water provided by a sunrise can make the scene more memorable or create a feeling of excitement for the new day. A similar heightening of a visual scene happens with sound. There are sounds that become the focus of our attention, such as when Sophia listens to bird songs and tries to decipher whether it will rain or not, and there are peripheral sounds of birds chirping in the background or a distant sound of a waterfall that takes Sean-The Fisherman back to the his fishing expeditions.

Touching

The sense of touch and its place among the "higher" or "lower" senses has been a subject of disagreement. I would argue that it is not important to assign touch to either category, but that it is vital that we appreciate how touching or being touched conveys the meaning of an object/situation to us. Based on the experiences of my participants, the sense of touch goes hand-in-hand with sight. Usually, it functionally confirms what we see. As the old saying goes: "Seeing is believing, but touching is the truth." Metaphorically, participants described situations of happiness in terms of being touched. Emotions and touch are closely connected as we experience emotion through bodily sensation. The metaphor of touch is thus closely connected with physical feeling. Not often, but a few times participants mentioned that seeing other people happy or listening to pleasing sounds moved them and "touched" their heart.

The human hand best embodies the seeking, searching and appreciation of nature. Working with hands, feeling different textures, and getting to know objects in this way adds to experience. As opposed to sight and sound, touch requires action. Several of my participants mentioned that tactile engagement with objects is an important dimension of their everyday aesthetic experiences. The experiences described by the participants speak to haptic/tactile perception in both the "autocentric" and "allocentric" modes of perceptual relatedness

(Schachtel, 1959). In the autocentric mode the emphasis is on the subjective sensation on the body surface. Perception in this mode is more reactive and the emphasis is on pleasure or displeasure. To Adam-The Gardener, the active engagement with plants is very important:

"I like the garden because you can engage with it literarily you use your hands a lot and you can feel it. I don't know it's great…another thing that I find aesthetically pleasing is creating things out of wood. In terms of that feeling similar to gardening in the sense that I was engaged with my hands and the whole body."

The activity of gardening and woodwork connects him to his work. Being lost as time goes by in the activity only becomes visible when his hands start to hurt. The body is aware of itself. Direct contact, the need to touch and to feel it is so important that Sophia-The Educator can not imagine gardening with gloves on. It is not the same even though it could potentially make her hands look older:

"I need to touch it .I need to know what it feels like. I need to be able, you know I'm great at pulling weeds, people are amazed how I can pull weeds out what seems to be effortless but I know the way to grab and I know how, you can't do it with gloves on even though I was told that hands will give away a woman's age and guess what I'll tell you how old I am I don't care (laughs) So I guess for me... just touching I need to touch."

In the allocentric mode, perception is "characterized by objectification" (Schachtel 1959). The perceiver is not interested in how the hand feels when in contact with an object, but in exploring its intellectual qualities. Looking is related to touching in the allocenteric mode.

For Sylvia-The Rock Climber, the excitement of feeling a rock, moving her hand across its surface and feeling its texture is a highly rewarding experience:

"Again my whole thing is that I am a climber and I relate everything to rock but I mean that's a huge aspect of climbing you have to know what you're holding on to and weather it's going to break or not because a lot of times you grab onto something and it breaks off and as a way to give you direction it's important"

The pleasure of feeling a rock is related to a kinesthetic search, a process that leads to the "feel" of the move, the awareness becomes internalized and effortless. This is a good example of active perception not restricted to sight, but with the whole body. Sylvia-The Rock Climber is not a spectator, but an active actor in the lived experience of climbing. There is an embodied exploration of the present circumstance that always implies the next move. The felt rock is not a passive object, but guides her hands for further exploration to reveal itself.

More than the other human senses, touch is exploratory and its pleasurable rewards may come anytime or anywhere: the texture of wood, the softness of a kitten's fur, the warmth of the sun, or the coolness of a rock.

In our discussions the experiences where touch dominated in the aesthetic experience were the hardest for my participants to narrate. This was especially true in relation to other people. Some participants mentioned the importance of touch for being intimate with another person but left it at that. There might be a few explanations as to why. First, I think the sensation of touch is very private as skin is our first line of defense. People are very protective of what or who can touch them and how their bodies should be touched. Usually, a high degree of trust is involved. Sophia-The Educator is a very touchy and sensitive person, but is on alert while at work especially when working with children. I think to some degree being intimate with another person came to mind for some of the respondents, but all decided not to share any of these experiences. Second, experientially touch plays a big part in their lives, but sharing any aspect of it would make them not only vulnerable, but also uncomfortable.

Smelling

Just as other senses play an important role in sensory aesthetic experiences, olfaction has a special role. Even though we are capable of recognizing thousands of scents, our olfactory

vocabulary is too poor to convey what it is we are trying to communicate. Just as with visual and auditory experiences, my respondents had no problem remembering meaningful aromas, but often struggled to describe their qualities. I think it is because the significance is not in identifying objective qualities of a scent, but in how it makes our experience complete and meaningful. Most of the time they described it in connection with pleasurable/unpleasurable past memories, important "others", and time/space change.

Scent evokes strong emotional responses. Many of my informants said that the pleasure/displeasure of a scent was dependent on their emotional associations. Sophia-The Educator described:

"I had a dog; we had a whole bunch of poodles and one poodles she had the most rotten rottenest teeth and it was all a mother could want I mean it would knock you over her breath I loved it, couldn't get enough of it because it was it was hers it was her scent I am very much into that"

Because the scent is associated with pleasurable emotions, it too is considered pleasurable. Such associations make scents that might be thought of as unpleasant pleasurable and vice versa. Similarly one of my respondents mentioned that he does not like the smell of autumn leaves because it reminds him of a time when his friend committed suicide and the smell brings back painful memories.

As others have theorized scent perception is closely related to memory. In many of my participants' stories it had the strongest biographical bond with the past. The memory of aromas, odors, and whiffs seem not to change overtime, but had a power to transform the present experience. Farah-The Graduate Student spoke of scents that bring her back to childhood memories:

"…The other day I was walking around the wet lands and I smelled the grass and immediately it transported me back to my childhood. I was thinking about the summers I used to spend there and how wonderful it was…careless and fun…The smell of freshly cut watermelon has a similar effect on me."

Particular memorable smells are usually related to people who have a special place in our lives. To Sylvia-The Rock Climber smelling an article of clothing belonging to her friend gives a much stronger impression of that person's presence:

"I climb with him when he is here in NY and when he puts clothes on I like smelling them because I'm not with him all the time and it reminds me of our friendship and … I like that I guess I don't know how to describe it other than that (laughs) but you know when I smell my parents and my family members clothing it reminds me of being with them at a certain time in happy time usually"

Smell is the most direct of our senses. It is very precise. We do not need to think or evaluate what we smell, we sense it although often we may be frustrated in knowing when or where we sensed it in the past or the identity of the smell. It is hard to describe how something smells if one has not smelled it. To convey the quality of the smell Jena-The Landscape Architect made use of metaphoric language:

"…Smells usually have to do with once again where I am at the time. Like actually it was yesterday when I was running along the river I was noticing the temperature and the smell of the river was probably warmer that the air at that time so then you could feel like the warmth coming from the water and sometimes it smells like water, plants and wet soil."

There is a rhythm to scent perception. Seasonal odors are periodic and easily recognized while at the botanical garden. Mary-The Giver said that:

"…The end of March like just before spring comes …and there is actually a smell in the garden just before spring bursts I guess … it's the soil itself is growing alive and you smell that it's sort of a cross between mold but it's not negative but there is a real smell which I never would have noticed not working here never. I'm not a farmer (laughs) I don't work with the soil never but but this is a definite smell that I appreciate."

According to J.Douglas Porteous (1990), the olfactory experience of everyday life constitutes an important dimension of our environment. It helps to situate us in it and orient us towards various parts of it. In his writings he discusses the significance of smell to understand place. He argues that despite the impermanence of smell it enables us to discover meaning in places we find ourselves. Familiarity of smell is necessary to make us feel at home, a feature that grounds a sense of place. The smell of one's home, a friend, or a city becomes important when we are away from it and then return to it. Through this olfactory geography and its changes we are able to interpret and understand our surroundings. Such familiarity through scent is critical to Sylvia-The Rock Climber who feels grounded in smelling her friend's shirt or Mary-The Giver who through smell became more engaged and familiar with the geography of the garden.

Tasting

At times my participants had a hard time recalling particular situations when asked about meaningful aesthetic experiences related to taste or said that taste had nothing to do with aesthetic experience. I think for my participants experientially, taste was part of the experience. However, when it came to going back to past experience they could not separate it from the other senses. I do not believe that it is because they are incapable of thinking aesthetically about food, but from day-to-day they might not think of food in terms of aesthetic categories. Both Jena-The Landscape Architect and Sean-The Fisherman had a difficult time relating to my questions about taste. Jena-The Architect believed that because we need to eat to survive we do not take time to savor meals, but rather look or smell them for aesthetic enjoyment and rarely pause to distinguish minute differences between ingredients. She said that:

"Taste I think taste is … I probably don't use taste very often but smell a lot more."

"Taste is tougher ... I'm not usually eating a lot (laughs) I don't know I can't really associate anything with taste."

Sean-The Fisherman on the other hand described a situation where food played a significant role in a social gathering, but it did not take center stage. The combination of many elements and sharing in festivities created an ambiance that was more enjoyable than parts that make up the whole.

Historically the bodily sense of taste has occupied a low position in the hierarchy of the five senses. Yet, for centuries "taste" has been used as a metaphor to describe aesthetic judgment. More often than not, taste is linked with the act of eating, its enjoyment, and connection with other senses.

However, those that were able to tell me about aesthetically pleasing tastes did so in relation to social contexts. As in Sean's example a combination of elements and sharing with others made this a memorable moment. When his family gathers for the holidays and the women cook traditional dishes the following happens to Adam-The Gardener:

"Maybe the whole process when you know you will have a great meal. There is this anticipation of something great to come it smells good it looks good and then you can't wait to take the first bite and take pleasure in it it's all about that moment the world stops."

Taste and smell are closely affiliated. In the following example, the smell of strawberries lures Jeff-The Awe Seeker into the promise of great satisfaction:

"In the farmers market here they sell strawberries and they are not beautiful or attractive looking like in the supermarket but they smell amazing and I can smell them from a distance and to me that's an indicator that they are going to taste very good because the ones in the supermarket you

see them they are gorgeous huge but they don't smell and then I taste them and it's like crunchy water."

To another person sweetness magically brings her back to infancy. The feeling of familiarity is so strong because it has revived a feeling that has been fused with a particular sensory experience as in Sophia's-The Educator example:

"Taste I'm very much a food addict, a sugar addict I guess for me when I eat something sweet I discover that I literarily revert back to an infant ... my feet start to move I discovered that if I love somebody like when I kiss my husband my feet start to move and I can't control that and I use that as a way of knowing. I actually pursue the feeling I don't eat to live but I live to eat and taste is very much connected to smell.

However, after some reflection she stressed that smell is more important after all:

"…Taste no taste it's not important smell is. I need to smell first to taste it like when I eat something I need to smell it first…"

As we can see from the above examples it's hard to pin point exactly which of the sensory modalities is dominant, in this example taste and smell, separately and together add to the aesthetic experience. Trying to separate them becomes confusing. Experientially they blend together.

I think the cocoon of familiarity is best exemplified in the event of taste. From early childhood we learn how to taste the world and the objects partly to orient oneself in an environment that later becomes a familiar place of tastes. We learn to recognize familiar tastes quickly and we "label" it and store it in its category (pleasure/displeasure, real/fake).

So far the stories of my informants have been in support of the hegemonic sensory ratio. To some extent their experiences could be compartmentalized to fit either "higher" or "lower" senses, but there were also instances in the narratives where the fixed idea of the senses has been challenged.

In the following section I would like to focus on the senses that we tend to forget or take for granted.

Kinesthetics

Rather than sensing external reality, proprioception is the sense of the orientation of one's body in space. This sense deals with sensations of body position, posture, balance, and motion. Sometimes the terms proprioceptive and kinesthetic are used interchangeably. Not all of my informants mentioned meaningful kinesthetic experiences when asked directly. As our conversation progressed it became evident that in fact they are aware of their bodies and find some experiences aesthetic. Yet, my label did not resonate with them. Even though it is one of the oldest senses; probably even more evolutionarily ancient than smell (referred to by some as the sixth senses), it is often overlooked as one of the senses because it is so automatic that our conscious mind barely notices it. However when our body is off balance in a pleasurable way, such us when the jet is about to take off or while skydiving, we can not help but to embrace our bodily feelings. In our day-to-day life we rarely pay attention to the movement of our bodies unless something is off. We drive to and from work automatically -- we do not have to think which way to go our bodies just "know" what to do and at the same time we can focus our attention on what we'll do when we get home. While shopping for groceries we do not think about where certain things are -- we automatically proceed from produce to dairy to meat and the next thing we know we've paid for the groceries. There is a flow to our movement. Because much of it is taken for granted we do not pay attention to the movement of our bodies until there is something off balance or we become conscious about the aesthetic movements of our bodies. I would like to focus on the latter and explain how my informants take pleasure in the movement of their own bodies and those of others. To describe this pleasurable sensation was often quite

difficult, and at times the words did not seem to fit the desired narration of the experience. But they were able to identify a variety of sensations found within physical activity. In the following example:

" When I play tennis with… I'm an avid tennis player. I have to have a tune in my head it keeps me focused. When I'm playing with my friends, and I saw this movie about sports and music, and I though what a great idea! So when I play tennis I like Bohemian Rhapsody. My mind and body are coordinated. There is a rhythm…everything is smooth…we play for hours, we push ourselves and sweat a lot." (Sophia-The Educator)

In this example pleasure of playing, camaraderie as well as tiredness is pleasurable. The encompassing pleasure is the pleasure in action. However, I would also argue that the pleasure is not solely from attention to movement, but also from the unity of intention and movement as Mary-The Giver would say, "I wanted it to look this way." There is also a double perception, one of the environments surrounding the body (being aware of the other player) and the experience of one's own body. Now it is a fact that an environment implies something that is surrounded, and therefore an awareness of the environment implies an awareness of the body existing in the environment. Equally, an awareness of the body entails some feeling of its relation to the surroundings. So there can be no perception without an implied proprioception, nor can there be any proprioception without some awareness, however dim, of the environment in which the body exists. Attention can be directed almost exclusively to either the body or the world, but the other is always detectable (Gibson, 1966).

This reciprocity is clear to Mary-The Giver, who in following example is aware of her awkwardness:

"I think about my own uncomfortableness with driving a car, riding a bike, and skating and I suspect I should have had some of that intervention when I was a baby that she had (talking about her granddaughter). I think she became more comfortable with herself and moving through space and that struck me as learning for me because I see what's missing it. I probably could have compensated for it what other things sense."

Synesthesia

Psychologists have identified synesthesia as a specific condition that occurs when an individual who receives a stimulus in one sense modality simultaneously experiences a sensation in another. Anthropologists have defined synesthesia as "the union of the senses," or the way that sensory experiences can not be compartmentalized, but seem to feed off each other. Synesthesia challenges the classical view of perception, that the five senses touch, taste, sound, smell, and vision have distinct properties. There are numerous examples of experiences where senses seemed to converge. I think that we can only choose to separate the different senses intellectually but not bodily.

Nicole-The Traveler said:

"Those experiences are triggered a lot like I went grocery shopping to Trader Joe's and they had papayas there and I remember looking at the papayas thinking about the store I used to go to in Kenya and learning… that's where I learned about the different types of papaya's the smells there are so many different types of papayas and mangos and they taste so good and in a lot of the stores here you just don't have that."

The convergence of the different senses, especially of taste and smell through memory, has been celebrated by many authors most notably by Proust in his recollection of the madeleine. In the above example the absence of different types of papayas takes her back in time to Kenya, where she first learned to distinguish between different types of papayas (not only visually) and enjoyed their different smells and tastes. A whole different world of sensory possibilities has been triggered. Now, the taste she refers to is only in her memory- itself fleeting.

In the following example, the memory of family gatherings triggers the smells of food:

"…smell has a lot to do with family gatherings I don't see my family that often only on holidays and when it's that time of the year I can visualize the smell of certain foods that will be prepared for that occasion." (Adam-The Gardener)

My participants mentioned memorable scents and tastes as a powerful vehicle that not only connect them with their biographical past in time but also space. A few of my participants mentioned that it connects them to their home country. The experience of food is cultivated synesthetically and emotionally and, eating food from "home" becomes a particularly marked cultural site for reimagining the world displaced in space and time (Sutton 2001, Seremetakis 1996). Experientially I can relate. The taste and smell of Polish food (not prepared by me) immediately connects me with the places and people who I do not get to see that often. It is as if all my childhood memories were gathered in a whiff of a fried pork chop.

As stated earlier scent is a powerful trigger of childhood memories. Farah-The Graduate Student said:

"…The olfactory sense is very strongly linked to your memory so you can smell something and you don't know why it reminds you of a particular time, but it does it draws up memories so … I have shaving lotion that is, smells like orange-crème and it reminds me of orange-crème icicles that I used to eat when I was a child of off the ice cream wagon. So in the morning when I'm very grumpy I would prefer to use that as oppose to something that smelled like random flowers because it gives me, it draws upon my memory and again that sense of childhood, security, and comfort."

In her narrative the childhood memories conjured up feelings of emotional connectedness to music:

"I remember one of my friends from college just died in an auto accident and I was 23 and I was coming back from work and it was raining a few days after it happened and I heard a song on the radio and the vocal quality of really made me think about the emotions I was feeling and so when I parked my car instead of going to the house immediately I turned off the radio and I just kind of thought for a moment, and I realized it was raining obviously, I had a moon roof in my car and I pulled back the divider so I could see the window but I wasn't opening the window because it was raining and I just sat back and I looked up and I watched the rain drops fall at me and I watched it hit on the roof on the glass, and I guess I kind of played that song in my head while

looking at the rain drops, and it wasn't something that would necessary be considered beautiful it was standard ,conventional sense. But because I was feeling that way my emotional quality caused me to see something in that moment, it' maybe wasn't beautiful but it was meaningful and because it was meaningful it became beautiful."

Sensory aesthetic experiences that involve the senses feeding off of each other are especially meaningful because they have the power to transform both the present and the past. When we are fully engaged with all of our senses and become open to how each of them together reveals the invisible to us, the world becomes meaningful. As others have argued, visually based epistemology is both insufficient and often erroneous in its description, analysis, and thus understanding of the world.

The separation of the senses supports the longstanding supremacy of perception over sensation. It is worth emphasizing that phenomenological sensory experiences of how we make sense of the world should be understood as the way our body operates in unity, not by way of the "five sensory peepholes" through which we sample the world. It is possible to identify the dominance of a specific sense in a given event, but on a closer analysis all experiences are made up of a complex of sensuous activities. Even though I asked my informants to speak of meaningful aesthetic experiences for each of the senses they had a difficult time describing each sense in isolation. The visual encounters were probably the easiest to narrate, but on closer examination the events were not purely visual. When Jena-The Landscape Architect was talking about the sunset she did not dispassionately contemplate its beauty, she continued her active engagement with it. The sunset addresses her on a kinesthetic level, calling for her to go outside. This is what Merleau-Ponty (1962) talks about in terms of reversible relations between subject and object. Since the "seen and the seer are part of the flesh, the object has the same power over the looking subject as s/he has over it (looked-at object)." Jena and the sunset are no longer

opposites, but are brought closer together to a point when vision and kinesthetic become part of the sense-making process. In Sophia's narrative something comparable happens:

"…We stayed at a bed and breakfast just north of Eugene, but they were manuring the field and I just love it, most people would be like I hate manure oh! no smell that, walking around I loved it you know. Seeing the green space around and the smell of manure made me feel at home."

In Sophia's example the movement through space is also a necessary element in making the experience memorable. The green fields were visually enjoyed from a distance and then the scent of the manure made the experience more intimate and the event became a lived experience rather than an immobile detached survey of the environment. The sequence of the sensory event unfolds in a way the makes us sense the world around us, not merely in front of us.

In this chapter, I focused on the extent to which different sensory modalities played a role in my participant's reminiscence of their aesthetic experiences. It is possible to identify the dominance of a specific sense in a given event, but on a closer analysis all experiences are made up of a complex of sensuous activities. As others have observed, certain sights, sounds, and smells evoke powerful images of previous events in one's life "allowing one to temporarily recapture thoughts and feelings of an earlier period" (Webster & McCall, 1999). Even though I decided to present the senses in this chapter singularly, it is clear that experientially we experience them in combination and in unison. The participants revealed that each of the senses connect us to the world differently. This implies that encouraging our use of the sense of smell, taste, and touch to learn about everyday life would enhance our understanding of it. For example, over time if we learned to smell through a place we might have a different appreciation of that place. How the participants sometimes self-consciously foster an aesthetic engagement with the world emerges in the following chapters and the implications of this for public

awareness and education will be discussed in the final chapter. In the next chapter I describe the varieties of types of aesthetic engagement of the participants.

CHAPTER 6: QUALITIES OF EVERYDAY AESTHETIC EXPERIENCES

In this chapter I will share the process and ingredients of a variety of aesthetic engagements. Although the participants described a wide range of sensory encounters as aesthetic events, some common patterns emerged. The themes that I was able to identify from my analysis of the interviews were: receptivity, surprise, fleeting moments, existential space (personal/social), and engagement. The interviews usually started with descriptions of simple contacts and, as our conversation progressed, the objects or situations began to transform into rich descriptions of active and interested exploration of the other.

There were simple contacts that remained relatively passive and carried no further meaning beyond the situation. The simple contacts cut across past, present, and possible future. Simple contacts are "the matter of fact" types of sensory situations that we know exist and do not usually reflect on or question. They are part of the taken-for-granted world. For example, Adam-The Gardener remembers:

"There are times when you will just turn your head and see something beautiful or hear something for a split second and you register it and that's that.

Bob-The Botanist stated: "I was attracted to the colors and smells and sometimes textures of plants."

Jeff-The Awe Seeker: "I mean every day I come across different sounds, different textures, different sights and they all, I guess not all but a lot of them, have this kind of awe inspiring effect on me."

This is when we view the world as in front of us; we look, hear, taste, smell and touch objects, not sense, according to their features. The world is experienced as separate from us and things in it are experienced on the surface. Whether we are attracted to the colors of plants as Bob stated,

or come across different objects of appreciation, our attention does not go beyond that. It is a general attitude towards the world. An attitude when we are at the center of the world and everything we encounter in our path is judged according to this ego centered perspective. Things are seen in terms of the value they have for us. The pleasure we derive from them is material and there is a specific function for each object, situation, or action that we interpret as an alternative motive. This superficial skimming of the surface is about the exploitation of experience for the here and now.

Receptivity

But what must happen to move beyond the simple contact? According to some participants, one has to be receptive to the environment. Receptivity is a mode of being open to the environment. It is a way of being open to different possibilities and situations that might be unveiled. Receptivity is a way of letting the world know about one's readiness for engagement. At times the world extends its hand to catch our wandering attention and sometimes we have to reach out. Jena-The Landscape Architect embraces her receptivity. From a very young age she was attracted to the outdoors and as she grew older she trained her eye to see beyond the surface. Mary-The Giver said that:

"You have to be receptive to it. If you are not receptive to it …there are a lot of beautiful things but you have to be receptive." Adam shares both Jena's and Mary's perspective that there is a certain mastery and learning involved over time: "Once you have had the experience you know it will happen again I'm more open to the environment and more likely to see something beautiful."

Sean-The Fisherman shares his perspective in the sense that over time you learn what aspects of the environment you find more or less beautiful. Sean pointed out that there is a

certain kind of discrimination involved and you become more receptive to the environment and then this yields familiarity and the understanding that some objects/situations are more beautiful than others, but you always have to leave the door ajar. The receptivity is an interesting concept that relates to what has been named positive aesthetics, the view that insofar as nature is unaffected by man it is always beautiful and never ugly. Some believe that all environments have aesthetic qualities and that based on our aesthetic sensibilities we are more likely to preserve environs that are more pleasing to us than others. Jeff, Bob, and Sophia stress the importance of the unknown. One has to be receptive in a non-discriminatory way and let the object and situation reveal itself enough before our judgment, because as Bob said "it takes a little more time than just walking through it." Bob, as others have revealed, engaged with the environment in a pre-reflexive way without imposing any meaning. Certainly it is not easy as we continue to appreciate nature primarily through historical/cultural/literary associations (Carlson & Berleant, 2004). This is undeniable, however, because when we attached various stories to these objects/situations we are not appreciating them for what they are.

Surprise

The delight of discovering the world as if it is the first time; encourages us to leave all of our senses open to feeling the world in the here and now. The element of surprise was a very important dimension of aesthetic experience for all of the participants, in relation to both familiar and unfamiliar encounters. Most of the time we live in a cocoon of familiarity; we learn how to recognize familiar objects quickly and to label and store them in their appropriate categories. Day-to-day life is taken for granted when we tend to learn new things by searching for them outside of our familiar zone, but upon closer reflection question what we think is familiar and fully explored and become surprised. When we are open to the environment and become

surprised, the most familiar object suddenly reveals itself in a new light. The new perspective leads to a heightened awareness of self because we can fully engage with the object to see it from a new perspective, thus see it anew. For example when Jeff takes the Jackie Robinson Parkway to and from work he enjoys it because there is always something different to explore. Once it becomes exhausted he might find another one, and come back to it at a later time. Surprise sometimes operates as a precondition to the experience and might lead to disappointment. I remember how disappointed I was during my first visit to Niagara Falls. Before my trip I heard the most incredible stories of its beauty and how awe inspiring it was. When I arrived the most unusual feeling of disappointment came over me. It was nothing like I hoped it would be. The photographs I saw prior to my trip were so much better than the actual experience. I was more concerned with getting that "right view" from the point of view of the photographer. The disappointment prevented me from exploring the falls and giving the experience a chance. I had adopted a perspective that might be more appropriate for the gallery where sight is dominant. I had failed to listen to the context's different voices and instead focused only on the visual qualities. The pre-produced image of the falls or any other tourist attraction really affects the actual experience as it forces us to experience it through pre-set categories of how it should be experienced according to the dominating viewpoint instead of how it is experienced (or not). This one-dimensional viewing forces us to be passive gazers, not seers; hearers, not listeners.

There are times when people purposively set the conditions for surprise to happen. During the early days of fall, when the morning sun sits low, Nicole-The Traveler likes to walk from her parent's house to the local bakery. She walks on the east side of the street and she smiles just before she turns the corner to see how the street will be illuminated by the sunlight.

Fleeting moments

In the lived experience of my participants, fleeting moments were related to the surprising aspect of the aesthetic experience. The momentary experience adds to the excitement and opens up possibilities for new encounters. Fleeting moments are like small bursts of energy that give people that extra feeling of aliveness; as if the world wanted to engage in a conversation with us. They exert a certain authority over us because we cannot control them. When we realize the fleeting quality of the experience we have to let go and completely surround ourselves with it. We can not search it out but if we are patient it will come and find us. While reflecting on the surprising and/or fleeting experiences it becomes somewhat clear that the world is not a determined objective place that runs on our schedule. We can not pencil in our calendars "fleeting aesthetic experience at 11am." The world before we try to make sense out of it is its own living field filled with changes and tempers. The memorable fleeting qualities of the environment usually have to do with our engagements with these changes like fog, wind, scent, light, and air. They are the "invisible" objects of perception. The dramatic beauty of shifting environmental features is not a new concept, especially in the traditional aesthetic sense for many artists who studied and captured ephemerals (e.g. Turner 1851, Monet 1926). However, most studies that focus on landscape assessment (e.g. Litton, 1971) neglect the importance of ephemerals claiming that such elements must be analyzed in isolation. I would argue that participants in this research responded to the short-lived events in relation to other features and in the context of surrounding environment:

"The sky was very dramatic and it reflected in the puddle, and as the clouds moved over the sun you couldn't see anything and I just sat there waiting for the reflection again and again…" (Farah-The Graduate Student).

From this example we learn that transitions are a key aspect of everyday aesthetic. Experientially, aesthetically pleasing objects/situations are not just encountered in one's everyday life; they are created through continuous engaging with one's surroundings. They are not a fixed idea, but rather something that we do and we can change.

Even though light itself is mostly noticeable when it hides or reveals things in the environment to some participants, as well as myself, light became an object of perception. Revealing that light as an object of perception makes the environment come alive. Both Jena and Sophia attributed the cool air temperature to the sunsets and this changing air temperature could be considered haptic information about light as an object.

Transcendence: the Existential Dimension of Aesthetic Experience

Some of the participants described aesthetic experiences in terms of transcendence in their stories. While apple picking with her family Mary described and experiences that has more of a spiritual quality:

"We go apple picking every year this my mother started every year we go apple picking, it's not good apples you can do better at any fruit store in Queens on the apples, but it's that sense of being together in such a natural environment. The smell of it, the taste of it the whole thing… I feel my parents' presence looking down and I always had this big feeling that I want to wrap my arms around everybody and not let it change."

To transcend the self and perceive the world without attaching any meaning is no easy task. However, certain contexts create possibilities. Adam's garden:

"In the summer just before the sunset I like to sit, I don't see the sunset, but the light is just right and all the flowers release this scent and I love to sit on the porch and soak it in that's a great feeling like your are part of something bigger that yourself."

The existential space created while appreciating nature is an important dimension of the aesthetic experience. Both engagement and a form of disinterestedness are mediated by imagination or rather by the metaphysical dimensions of imagination. Being in existential space

allows for interpreting nature as revealing insights into the meaning and purpose of life. Reflective thought usually followed when I asked about the value of such experiences in each of their lives. These lived experiences allow the individuals to feel their existence in relation to nature and the world. Some said that it makes them realize how small or insignificant they are in comparison to the world at large. This is not an existential space where the absolute meaning of existence can be answered, but a space where we find subjective meaning and reconnect with nature on a personal level. Bob-The Botanist believes that:

"Getting close to the world… I think it's that that closeness it's like it's like a friend that you know really well and when you see them you want to hug them or hold their hand and I think that's the part the reconnecting sort of an affirmation we are still part of the earth at the time now where it seems like a lot of might be taken away you know you realize that a lot of it it's really fragile we realize that."

The existential dimension of the experience gives Mary-The Giver an opportunity to sense her own aliveness. It is a way to remind oneself about the bigger picture and what's important in life: "happiness in life comes back to feeling in control of your environment." Not in a narcissistic way, but a realization that we do not belong to the world, but the world also needs us to belong to it, since it is only when we inhabit a place that we care for that we assume responsibility for it. This was especially surprising to me. This type of vulnerability is not something that we come across too often. I would argue the opposite; at times we go to great lengths to become oblivious to the world and such realizations about human nature are deeply frightening. A number of personality and developmental theorists have alluded to the role of outdoor experiences in affecting the quality of life (e.g. Silverstein & Parker 2002). Maslow (1971) made the following proposition about human growth, "Not only is man a part of nature, but he must also be isomorphic with it to some extent. This is he cannot be in utter contradiction to nonhuman nature. He can not be utterly different from it or else he would not now exist"

(Maslow, 1971, p.333). Cultivating our fundamental need for nature instead of eliminating it or ignoring will help us grow with it, and in the process reconnect with it, and with ourselves (Robinson 2009).

Feelings of aliveness and connectedness to nature seem to also encourage people to contemplate their own responsibility towards nature and others. Farah and Bob mentioned that having places like the botanical garden help children cultivate their relationship with the natural world. While learning in the classroom is an important part of education, being in nature allows children to physically engage with the wonders of the natural world. This empirical knowledge helps to unveil aesthetic value. Mary believes that

" Working at the garden was the best thing that could ever happen to me. I think it changes my perception about a lot of things including the cycle of life I think when people say stop and smell the roses. I think it's almost impossible in most of life, but here it's part of your job. It's important it's wonderful that's why people should come to gardens it forces you to absorb an aspect of being alive that you don't in your regular life."

All of my participants believe that working at the botanical garden is the most meaningful work setting they have ever had. It encouraged them to become more open to the environment. Farah said that the knowledge gained while working at the botanical garden has led her to appreciate her immediate environment in way that she could not before. Sean said "…it is a job that's closest to heaven because when you think of a heaven you think of it as a garden, Garden of Eden you know and sometimes I think I would not trade it for anything in the world I really wouldn't."

The benefits of environmental education were very important to all the participants in general, but it was also particular and personal to each. It is an education that promotes self-growth as a human being. Such growth in everyday life is about relating to one's surroundings

to allow for reflecting on change and, consideration of one's place at the center of change. My data reveals that aesthetic experiences offer such reflection where one embraces the change and wants to learn.

The term transcendence is often used to imply something religious, metaphysical or outside of the lives of ordinary people. In philosophy and theology it is a commonly presented as movement beyond the actual, embodied, and historical. Similar to Halling (2009), I would argue that transcendence is not only central to human existence, but it is a dimension of the aesthetic experience with nature and people. Transcendence is a puzzling concept with multiple meanings. (I was a bit skeptical of this existential dimension at first because I was not sure if what I was hearing was a particular or general attitude toward the world. Also, the term itself presented a problem because it has been used rather loosely and taken for granted. I asked myself what is it that makes me think of transcendence when I read these passages. It was the direction it pointed to.) For the purpose of this discussion transcendence has two fundamental meanings: openness (us) and that which is beyond us. My reflections were rooted in the concrete lives of my participants, and when asked about the emotional quality of the encounters feelings of being, centered, alive, peaceful, excited, and connected were described. Influential scholars of transcendent experience have observed that natural environments have a close association with transcendent experience (e.g. Jung & Jaffe, 1965; Laski, 1961). Jung's works contain references to nature and the symbolic significance of the natural environment. He believed that if people looked to nature as a guide to find a deeper meaning in life that they would not be disappointed. For example, he viewed water as representing the place of rebirth, which through contemplation could give people a sense of life beyond death (Jung, 1956).

Some believe that symbols and mental structures stored in the unconscious provide a dynamic structure for thought at times of strong emotions. Others have written that spiritual experience of nature is closely related to our sense of place (Altman & Rogoff, 1987). The literature suggests that these emotions occur most often as part of a "peak" experience and, to some extent my data support this. Csikszentmihalyi (1988) believes the core quality of the transcendent experience arises when attention is completely focused on a pleasurable task. The internal and external worlds are fused together into a single stream of being within the time of engagement. Thus, natural places provide the context for flow experience because they are an important setting for leisure activities.

Engagement

To explore nature in its own terms requires active engagement. I agree with Berleant's notion of engagement and its role in the aesthetic experience. Aesthetic engagement refers to all the factors and features of environmental experience, including those that humans contribute that are bound together in continuity. As I listened to the participant's stories it became clear to me that what they find aesthetically pleasing is not necessarily dependent on the objects, sights and so on. A pear tree is not beautiful to Sylvia-The Rock Climber because she like trees, it is beautiful precisely on that particular day when she walked out of the garden and decided to spend her day a little differently. Everyday aesthetic experiences result in engagement with one's surroundings. If we do not stand outside of experience, objectifying and conceptualizing it, then we are able to recognize the initially undivided character of all experience. The act of exploring objects makes it possible to become open to the environment. Here we are not looking in but looking through the different layers. Once we explore a situation (in terms of introspection or we focus our attention on the object) meaning arises not from isolated contacts

but from a stream of relations and interrelations. As Berleant pointed out we are in the state of 'complete perceptual interaction' with all features of the environment. Such exploration produces a special kind of delight and joy of discovering the world. Surprise is seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling anew (see Bearlant, 2010). As I mentioned before, engagement is an important dimension of the aesthetic experience. Some argue that Berleant's participatory engagement is neither necessary nor sufficient for the experience (see Carlson, 1993) arguing that his theory is left without a criterion of the aesthetic and that his theory can not distinguish one type of engagement from another type. I would agree to some extent that not all engagement has to be aesthetic, but that they have a potential to become aesthetic. I believe the focus should not be placed on the predictability and strict categorization of aesthetic experiences. The goal is not to capture or control the experience, but to become familiar with the variety and give voice to its ever-changing patterns. My goal is not to come up with a general theory of aesthetics, but to share what others have shared with me on the place aesthetic experiences have in their lives. Based on their descriptions engagement is a viable dimension. Looking at particular instead of general examples of aesthetic engagement and participating in its presence supports the argument for the engagement model. There were many particular experiences and some were more engaging than others. I asked my participants to share their most meaningful and memorable aesthetic experiences with me, and even though they did, I had a feeling the best ones are still to come. What we find aesthetically pleasing changes as we change the ways in which we engage with our surroundings. The idea of engagement rests on the reciprocity between the perceiver and object. Our life and the world are deeply intertwined. Our bodies play an important role as we constantly improvise and adjust to the shifting world we live in. Our actions are not fully determined because if they were we could not experience anything new or be surprised by it.

This ongoing adjustment of oneself is a dynamic blend of receptivity and creativity by "which every animate organism necessarily orients itself to the world (and orients the world around itself), that we speak of by the term perception" (Abrams, 1996, p. 50). Perception seen in this way is not unidirectional, but a continuous interplay that goes on. It is a form of engagement where we actively keep ourselves in a state of receptivity for what may happen to us.

The qualities of the everyday aesthetic experiences reveal that people are not just passively registering what's around them but instead are actively engaged in the constitution of the personal, interpersonal, and cultural worlds within which they find themselves. In the next chapter my attention shifts to factors that influence everyday aesthetic experiences.

CHAPTER SEVEN: FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE EVERYDAY AESTHETIC EXPERIENCES

Sharing

All of my participants said that working at the garden made them more receptive to the environment, allowed them to uncover aspects of reality that were hidden from them and share their environmental knowledge with garden visitors. They all gave different reasons for not communicating or engaging in conversations about their aesthetic experiences. I have a feeling that it is a very private feeling that helps them define who they are. It is a reality that makes sense to them because they do not have to obey any rules or explain their feelings, and where they won't face ridicule or patronization; they can just be. Nicole-The Traveler wondered if sharing the experience changed it in some way into a different experience. She remembers having shared an experience and her feelings with her roommates in college that was met with confusion. Most of my participants think we most often share our experiences with close ones because of their deep familiarity with us and thus, their understanding of our response to experiences, such as why the changing colors of a pear tree are so meaningful to us and why we have to go apple picking every year because the next one is always better. Sean-The Fisherman believes that society is set up in a way for us to share only the bad experiences and not as much the good and aesthetically meaningful. He admitted that he usually keeps these to himself, unless asked in the right circumstance. Farah-The Graduate Student mentioned that she does not share these private moments and would not really talk about it unless asked. Mary-The Giver and Adam-The Gardener both have the unspoken bond with people who are close to them. Mary and her daughters know of each other's experiences and on many occasions they do not have to communicate what the other might feel. However, she wonders whether nature or nurture contributes to the preference in aesthetic: "Because he would look at a car and think it's beautiful

and I look at a car and think it's transportation (laughs). Big deal! He would really get carried away: look at the lines of a Lamborghini and it's a can on wheel that's what it is (laughs). Whereas when we go shopping for something for the house you know he sort of backs away. He says, "it's your sort of thing I could care less." When Adam and his wife find themselves together in an environment that affords an aesthetic experience they just look at each other as if to acknowledge each other and just feel. Even though the experience might be different for either of them, being together makes it more meaningful. Jena-The Landscape Architect on the other hand is different. She likes to verbally share her experience and said that her husband always laughs at her when she points something out or tells him about an aesthetic experience she had at work. He would say: "Don't talk about work" (laughs) and she would say to him "it's not work it's just something I don't think about, I can't help noticing." Jeff-The Awe Seeker said:

"Sure everyone has aesthetic encounters but what triggers them I know is different for my stepbrother for example (...) the way a car moves is much more significant that it is to me and I'm sure that the texture of the soil in my garden is a lot more significant to me that it is to him and triggers different things I don't think he would realize that there is an experience to be happening and he could have a different experience than I would."

Sofia-The Educator is a self-proclaimed sharer and likes to share experiences that other people might not find aesthetic at all, especially those that have to do with smell and scents. She believes that as a society we have become too removed from the environment; that we can not understand its language and thus we fail to engage with it and that we do not know any natural scents "because our noses only seek out artificial scents that mask and deodorize nature." She enjoys sharing her experiences, especially those with young adults, "because all my years of experience gives me so much wisdom that they just can't have yet."

Sylvia, Jena, and Sean like to share their experiences with their families and with people who know them and have similar hobbies. Jena especially enjoys sharing her experiences with

her father. Because they live miles away they often call each other to exchange stories of beautiful sunsets. Even though Bob-The Botanist enjoys sharing his experiences, it is his behavior (when he brings home plants that are eyesores for his friends) that strikes people as odd. Sharing aesthetic experiences is a solitary and personal dimension of their lives. A few of my respondents hinted at the spiritual dimension of such experiences and described how each person has a right to engage with beauty in any way desirable, because there is no one way to engage. Sharing sometimes transforms an experience from something that is valued and particular to a debate of who is right and wrong. It results in a need to get to the truth or a compromise instead of understanding what meaning the experience has for that individual. Farah said that people in general do not want to understand or feel another's differing feelings because it challenges whom they are. When they fail to perceive an object or situation as aesthetic people usually ask what is so special about it, as if there was one particular aspect. As Farah said, it is at this point that the conversation moves away from aesthetic engagement and becomes an argument about why it is not worthy of aesthetic appreciation. It minimizes the experience to something not valued or needed. The focus is on trying to fit the personal and particular aesthetic into pre-existing cultural categories such as in Bob and Mary's examples. Even though there might have been other stories or insights deliberately left out from their narratives, my analysis reveals that aesthetic experiences are very much a part of peoples' lives even though they remain relatively hidden.

Based on their stories I see two levels of aesthetic experiences when it comes to sharing or the inability to share. On one level is subjective and non-linguistic and the other is intersubjective and communicable. Regardless of whether we keep stories of personal experience private and unshared, or choose to tell embellished stories of past experiences, they

remain culturally mediated because they are usually about people and places. As storytellers we adjust to the situation and tell a story that will be appropriate for and understood by our audience. It is a fluid process that is reconstructed. As my participants narrated their experiences they were able to draw from a reservoir of past aesthetic experiences and paint a scene that represented the most meaningful elements. While reflecting during the interview and by actively contextualizing, they made connections that initially seemed irrelevant so at the end of their thought it all came together. In the process of telling stories they sometimes "filled in the blanks" to make the story more interesting and exciting. Some stories were organized and built around one meaningful idea; others were less organized and spread among many thematic pathways. However, the stories were always based on the ability of the teller to convey a convincing story while reflecting on past aesthetic experiences.

Reminiscence, Reflection, Nostalgia

On a larger scale, reflection plays a significant role in one's openness towards the world. It allows people to contemplate on the aspects of past and potential future experiences. This happens when people re-play the same piece of music or recall a view to experience it again. Reflection on lived experiences reveals new insights about particular aesthetic experiences and strategies for not yet experienced situations and objects. This is what happens between the experiences. The reflection is an anchor that unites all of our experiences.

The process of reliving past experiences reminded some of my respondents about other experiences and to not take life for granted. Sylvia-The Rock Climber was reminded of friendship when she smelled her friend's shirt, Jeff-The Awe Seeker thought of camping and hiking as he drove on the Jackie Robinson, Mary-The Giver was reminded of her satisfaction in

life while apple picking. Bob-The Botanist, while meditating on plants, remembered sound, and why people once believed in fairies; Jena-The Architect reflected on all the other sunsets she had seen and Sean-The Fisherman thought of his children and family. These associations were not only based on visual, but also on other sensory information. Reflections to some degree operate as creative strategies to change ones situation ranging from consciously trying to relax to purposely trying to aesthetisize one's environment. Different strategies are used to adjust to changes in the environment or to barriers imposed from the environment or oneself. It is a platform for negotiation where the memorable aesthetic experiences give way to new possibilities of meaningful aesthetic engagements.

The specific form of memory associated with self-knowing or referred to in everyday language by '*I remember'* is autobiographical memory. This type of reminiscence is "…concerned with the capacity of people to recollect their lives" (Baddeley, 1992). In this research participants were autobiographical when they thought about past persons, experiences and places. The autobiographical memory is not a memory system per se but a self-memory system that emerges "when an interaction between the autobiographical knowledge base and the working self is at hand." (Tulving, 1985) By combining our autobiographical memories with self-understanding we construct a coherent expose of our experiences and our life stories (Bluck, 2003). These memories are typically told as narratives with imagery containing specific and concrete details. According to several authors, autobiographical memory serves three main functions. It gives the self its social position, it creates continuity between past, present, and future (Neisser, 1988), and it guides people's behavior and attitude (Cohen, 1989). In line with the literature I found that participants' autobiographical knowledge base comprised three levels of specificity: life time periods, general events, and event-specific knowledge. *Life time periods*

are the most general and can last for years. They are strongly related to one's conceptual self (Neisser, 1988) and are governed by shared cultural norms that largely determine the ways in which the events of life will be experienced and interpreted. An example from my research included Jena's story as a landscape architect. *General events* are a type of autobiographical memory that exemplifies a common theme; Mary's trip with her family for apple picking is such an example. *Event-specific knowledge* is the detailed blending of perceptual, contextual, and imaginative material during the reconstructive recall of the other two types of events. For example, "I remember when …." in the act of remembering their aesthetic experiences most participants' recollections were around themes of general events related to self, environment, and others (Bluck, 2003;Tulving, 1985; Neisser, 1988). The reflection process depended upon the context in which it occurred. Sensory stimuli, especially olfactory cues, are especially effective as reminders of past experiences; they phenomenologically transport us back in time. Unlike other reminders, sensory stimuli conjure up long-gone but specific episodes of our lives. A particular scent can bring back memories that make up our aesthetic personal identity. We not only remember past experience as a form of self-knowledge, but experientially we relive it in the present. In such context there is a relationship between the mind and body. Autobiographical memory is more than making sense of the continuity of the self and our experience of time.

But not all autobiographical memories originate with the past. There were instances when participants' stories began in the present and were reconstructed backwards. Instead of telling a story from a marked point in the past and proceeding to the present, they directed the narration from the present to past experiences. Memories serve also as important everyday directives that guide and inform future behaviors. Mary and Sophia were the most future oriented in their narratives. Both used their past experiences to construct models that allowed

them to understand the inner world of others and predict the future. Lockhard (1989) has argued that a major function of autobiographical memory is to provide the ability to use past experiences to predict the future. Similarly, based on Tulving's (1985) notion that memory is a knowledge structure that is "not about the past but about the future," Nelson (2007) argues that in an historical period that assumes continuity through repetition of old patterns, an individual does not have to do much in order to predict the future. However, in a society where change, not continuity, is favored the individual is able to form a unique identity based on a unique life history that will allow them to explain and predict the future. In the following sections of this chapter I will focus on how participants' recollections relate to self, environment, and others.

Barriers

Most of the participants use aesthetic experiences as a strategy to calm down and relax. Aesthetic experiences allow them to overcome the constraints of everyday life. Some of the participants said that aesthetic experiences are beneficial to their health. This is neither a new discovery nor surprising to me, many scholars have written about the restorative benefits of nature (Kaplan, Kaplan, & Ryan, 2000). However, I see the strategy of seeking out quiet places, where one can recharge their batteries, take a deep breath, relax, and calm down, as overcoming barriers that have an impact on one's life. Those barriers are not specific to aesthetic experiences, but are part of everyday life in general and overcoming them through experience helps in managing the day-to-day.

When I asked my participants if they could think of any barriers that prevent them from aesthetic engagement most of them cited time, money, and technological advances as barriers. They referred to these barriers both at a personal and societal level. As Sophia-The Educator said, "It's a vicious circle" they are all related to one another. Time is an interesting modifier for

all experiences. It is an inseparable dimension of the experience in particular and in general. It is also a barrier. Jena-The Landscape Architect said that time is the biggest barrier in her life and stated that she thinks that:

"…time is the biggest barrier because when you have tasks to do at work or chores… so time is number one that literarily happens to me when I try to get home or on the weekend I really want to go to a certain place in the park just the other thing I was saying before, when your mind is spinning you're not thinking about you because you're stressed or you have other things on your mind, and you don't allow yourself to. I always felt like there are always interesting things you can engage with, but of you don't have time or you're overwhelmed you are not going to notice. With time it's a race and you can't win. Well you think you can't…and then you have to slow down and these experiences are so important because they pause time."

Only when I asked my participants about barriers did they remark on how aesthetic experiences seem to freeze time. Losing oneself in time while engaging aesthetically is one of the characteristics of flow well documented by Csikszentmahalyi (1990). While they were sharing varied experiences with me, most of my respondents described their experiences in a way that seemed at odds with flow. It was as if there are two levels to the sense of time, one that is trying not to go with the flow of things, such as not having time to take off for vacation or not having time to stop and engage with things around oneself, and a second that allows one to see them for what they are. There is constant pressure in the air to multitask to be productive at work and not having that time is very frustrating to the participants. When we have time, we may feel guilty about having it or using it to engage in an aesthetic experience, as if it is a vanity.

Mary-The Giver, Sophia-The Educator, and Bob-The Botanist see their retirement as a way to escape this trap. Each sees themselves free of daily routine and imagines devoting their time to activities that let them explore a variety of beauty and happiness, and finally reconnect with themselves and nature in a more meaningful way. Bob views time as an unnecessary barrier for him:

"I think the barrier is where people are growing up. It's harder to do this like let say you're living in an urbanized area like here or in the Bronx. It doesn't mean you don't have experiences you have experiences like a crack in the sidewalk or a tree on the street but I don't think as generations of people go along and they have been separated from it… it's not as easy as like if a parent knows how to read they can still share it and teach it to a child and turn them on to books and things. Here it means getting out and looking for and try to experience it."

Being rushed is an obstacle both for Jena-The Landscape Architect and Natalie-The Traveler. Jena expressed how her professional life interferes with her personal life, and how the professional life always takes priority. Natalie views rushing as an illness that pervades everything in our lives, and occludes our ability to see and feel on an individual level. Because she travels a lot, many of her stories and concerns deal with cultural barriers. While traveling she said that she always notices how organized tours in foreign countries prevent people from really understanding different cultures because we only skim the surface. It is a prepackaged experience without any value to her. Everything is seen through the eyes of the guide, for example, and we do not have to make any effort at all " but sometimes it's the people they just want to go down their check list and say I've been there and I've here without knowing anything about the place. I remember when I was in Nairobi the guide actually told me how happy he was because we did not want to rush through it." As I mentioned earlier, traveling made Natalie aware that " here in the US you have everything packaged to go - you're on the run."

Money is an obstacle for Sean-The Fisherman when he wants to take vacation and go fishing. Sean stated:

"Finances! Unfortunately, when you have money you can do anything in the world. You know sometimes an extra bill comes in that you got to pay, and instead you could go away. Finances would stop me from seeing and experiencing beauty or happiness. It has to do with money and sometimes you don't have to spend a dime to see beauty so you know it works both ways."

Bob also commented on the financial aspect; “I think partly it's economic it’s the way society is set up right now a lot of people have two jobs and people do not always have the time or money to travel but you can do this even if you are at a local park.”

Strategies

To better understand the role aesthetic experiences play in people’s everyday life I asked the participants to tell me whether their experiences are facilitated by any strategy, if they occurred spontaneously, or if there were any barriers that might have prevented them from aesthetically engaging with their surroundings. The reason I asked them about strategies and barriers was to help them think of their experiences in a new light. Some of the participants noted a balance between purposely seeking out particular settings that afforded aesthetic engagement and spontaneous experiences. Each of them had a different strategy and a particular degree of planning. Sean-The Fisherman usually sought out experiences during vacation. Departure from the routine of daily chores allowed him to relax and “recharge the batteries.” He usually planned to be in a particular setting that involved fishing. Being surrounded by clean fresh water brought to him the scent of the ocean and thus, fishing afforded a meaningful aesthetic experience. This context also afforded him the opportunity to reflect on the direction of his life and personal growth. I consider such growth in everyday life in relation to one’s surrounding in ways that allow for reflecting on self-transformation and one’s place and direction in it. Symbolically it is a way of self-cleansing: he sought clean, fresh water as opposed to dirty, polluted water in New York. Mary’s annual apple picking with the family was also planned. In this particular context it is a way of self-checking and an affirmation that everything is all right. In that moment she was able to rediscover that everything is in its place. To her it is an ideal state of things. Those moments are instances where past and future collide

and she is able to evaluate her situation and adjust accordingly. Such moments are memorable and do not occur on a daily basis. Other activities, such as knitting and cooking, are less planned but also transformative and affirming. Lefebvre referred to these instances that happen daily, but we rarely notice as "moments." According to him these moments are points where one is able to evaluate one's place and change one's direction, to grow as a human being. They might be fleeting, yet when they become memorable have a potential to be a daily occurrence.

Mary-The Giver mentioned a few times that there are instances where she felt like she was in the audience where nature takes center stage. The spontaneity or surprise that I have described is similar to the concept of serendipity as defined by Amia Lieblich where it is not just luck; serendipity is a coincidence that Mary uses for her benefit. According to Lieblich the accounts of serendipity in telling of one's experience manifest openness to experience (Leiblich, 2008). In her story of apple-picking Mary is looking for something that will surprise her and when it does happen it is beautiful to her. The context of apple picking becomes a space where she encounters serendipitous beauty, which she uses to reflect on her life. In this context beauty can be seen as having a place in steering her life.

Jena's strategies for seeking out aesthetic experiences also happened while on vacation and are associated with sunsets and the moon. Her strategy similarly supports the concept of serendipity. On a daily basis she purposely finds beauty around her and it is important to her both personally and professionally. She seems to be open for something to surprise her. However, what her story reveals is that she finds beauty not in the things that happen spontaneously, but in things that appear to be happening spontaneously because they feel right. Jena said it happens instantaneously. When she pays attention, she realizes that she is very much in tune with her surroundings, always noticing the change in temperature, light, and season. At

the end of summer she said, "with the changing of temperature, light, and season are moments where I find beauty." In Jena's story there is "the willingness continually to revise one's own location in order to place oneself in the path of beauty" (Scarry, 1999). This impulse and the search for beauty is the need for education and growth (Scarry, 1999). Adam-The Gardener and Bob-The Botanist both identified places where they found beauty. For Adam it is his garden, a source of new possibilities and familiar comfort. Bob has a sanctuary of indoor plants and a rugged garden that attracts birds. He often visits museums to learn more about various plants "…when I go to the New York Botanical Garden to see the orchid show I try to get very close and I try to smell them not just see them…but recently I went to The Cloisters and I was enjoying the textures and smells because in some of the courtyards they have herbs and plants that go back to the Medieval times."

Each of the participants wove together different aspects of their life into what prevents them from or allows them to aesthetically engage with the world. I see a connection between Erikson's psychological development theory and the stage each of the participants are in their life. Erikson (1950) described an eight-stage theory of life cycle development; but unlike others who viewed personality as fixed by early childhood experiences alone, he extended the stages of human development to adolescence, adulthood, and old age. The seventh stage Generativity vs. Stagnation is most informative for this research. The seventh stage is that of middle adulthood. It is hard to pin a time to it, but it would include the period during which we are actively involved in our lives. Although the practice of generativity is mostly associated with having and raising children it has been practiced in other areas that contribute to the welfare of future generations. On the other hand people who do not care for others develop a sense of stagnation, are self-absorbed, and feel little connection to others. However, too much generativity leads to

overextension. Some people try to be so generative that they no longer allow time for themselves, for rest and for relaxation. The barriers that participants described illustrate this struggle for balance. When people allowed themselves to slow down, to put aside their habitual ways of rushing through and take time to aesthetically engage with the other open themselves up to other ways of knowing. I see the practice of generativity applied to aesthetic engagement. In participant's stories we can sense an urgency and value that extends beyond the individual concerns. Through aesthetic engagement the participants recognized that they are part of a community. As mentioned earlier many reported a stronger sense of being related to self and others. In solitude for example, a strategy that Bob uses enables us to communicate with the larger world and ourselves in deeper way. Through this type of ecological consciousness we widen the circle of our identification and extend the boundaries of our self-interest, enhancing our joy and sense of meaning in life.

Education – On Being Environmentally Conscious

The value of being environmentally conscious is a common theme among the participants and is an integral part of their own aesthetic experiences. Working in a context that encourages environmental education greatly influences their relationship with nature. Almost every narrative mentioned how being at the garden helped sharpen their sensitivity to nature. Even though aesthetic education is not the main goal of the botanical garden, teaching others how to cultivate their sensitivity to the environment is important. The sharing of being environmentally conscious is not based on just subjective experiences of individuals; it goes beyond an individualistic to a more collective sense of responsibility for nature.

Bob-The Botanist said,

"I think we would cease to exist because we all take care of this place. I think eventually a lot of this will cease to exist. I think if people lose that the value of things, it's a cycle things are not

considered valued like in some parts of Flushing people come in and move into a house and they cement the house around and it's convenient it gives them place to park their car but eventually it's going to have a toll…depression in lack of a pleasant place to live and if nature is not valued there are physical manifestations of that and environmental prices to pay… like cementing your yard well it's not permeable the water doesn't circulate. The Mayor has this plan to plant thousands of new trees, which is a nice idea, but what about maintaining existing trees the tree creates its own aura around it the way it smells, it creates a shade, sounds we have to value these large trees. So in a long run we will suffer environmentally and suffer aesthetically."

It is important to notice, as Bob did, that nature preservation is good, but it has to be preserved in its own terms, not the terms that we impose on nature. This idea goes back to what Burroughs said in his essay on becoming an observer. If we want to understand nature we have to learn its way, we have to sense accordingly and look for that which is not easily seen, we have to become skilled observers and not on the arguments for its preservation. In fact, what we might be doing is talking about our own preservation, not about the preservation of nature. The story, as some have argued, is about us not about nature. Based on the experiences and stories shared by the participants to overcome this anthropocentric view, we have to go beyond self-interest whether, as an individual or as a part of the human race. Many scholars have emphasized the moral dimension of aesthetic experience. Tuan (1990) in his essay summarizes it as follows, "One kind of definition of a good person, or a moral person, is that that person does not impose his or her fantasy on another. That is, he or she is willing to acknowledge the reality of other individuals, even of tree of the rock. So to be able to stand and listen. That to me is a moral capacity, not just an intellectual one." (Tuan, 1990, p.101). Because, as Bob said, we are disconnected from nature it is easier for us to ignore it and we must reconnect with it. In the words of Berleant (1992), "We must develop the capacity to recognize our connections with the earth and treat it with the same care and concern as we do our own personal spaces. To achieve this we need to learn environmental perception…to develop greater perceptual acuity…such as

aesthetic sensibility can have practical consequences." Instead of just focusing on how nature can benefit us, the reflections of the participants reinforce the interconnection of people and nature.

Mary-The Giver and Sophia-The Educator also mentioned that to be able to engage with nature in aesthetic ways we must ensure there will be nature in the future. Sophia said that, "people usually think of nature that is somewhere out there, not in their back yard…they don't think their attitude and behavior harms it at all, but it does not help…staying indifferent is not the way to go." But even the far place can be meaningfully closer to us. Mary and Sophia believe that it is very important for people to take initiative, but that there has to be a precursor to be able to embrace nature in one's surroundings without viewing it merely as a destination. One recommendation would be to attend to the aesthetic elements already present in daily experience and consider that if we learn how to discover and appreciate the aesthetic experiences that are already available to us, that we may be less inclined to cause harm in satisfying our needs. According to Lefebvre, celebrating what is aesthetic in nature is a key to the process of transformation that may result in de-alienation of everyday life. It is a level of being with "higher creative activity" --where rediscovering the spontaneity of natural life and its creative force drive enjoyment of the world. In this rejoicing everyone would "perceive the world through the eyes of an artist, enjoy the sensuous through the eyes of a painter, the ears of a musician and the language of a poet." Regaining our sensuous powers will take us on a "journey back to ordinary life and invest themselves in it by transforming it" (Lefebvre, 2004, p.36).

The factors that influence everyday aesthetic experiences are important in that they fill in the seemingly isolated realms of our life that are lived and experienced and where we perform and act, but are not always aware. However, sharing our perspective on the quality of our

engagement with the world, the strategies that bring us closer and the barriers that stand in the way will set an educational stage where we can learn from one another, from nature and from ourselves. It would unable individuals to sense, think, feel, and act as interdependent beings.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS: REFLECTIONS ON THE MEANING OF "AESTHETICS" AND THE "ORDINARY"

My interest in exploring the everyday aesthetic experience was motivated by my own aesthetic experiences and the realization that there was insufficient research on the ways that people aesthetically engage (or not) with the world around them. Recently there has been a renewed interest in learning about aesthetic experiences outside of traditional settings (Saito 2007; Sartwell 1995). However, I wanted to understand how people find and make meaning in their everyday sensory engagement within every setting in their life. I did not have a structured interview questionnaire or a lot of preconceptions of how the strangers I would interview experienced beauty, or not. With a few questions and an interview guide I recruited participants who expressed interest in sharing their experiences. Because of extensive debate about the role of the senses in the aesthetic experience, I was also interested in understanding the degree to which each sensory modality was integral to participant's experiences. At the beginning of this research I did separate the senses even though my pilot study indicated that the senses of touch, smell, and taste dominate in some experiences. However, after the analysis and even as I drafted the results, it became clear to me that even though I phrased some questions around specific senses that the narrative response of remembered aesthetic experience was multisensory. When people were probed about specific senses, their narration was less fluid and less multisensory. Unintentionally I was sometimes forcing them to tell a story about the experience rather than let them travel back in time and tell me how the experiences appeared to them.

Ordinary Engagements with the Sensuous World

Nonetheless, I arranged the chapter on the Qualities of the Senses looking at each of the senses separately in order to show the reader that, even though some sensory modalities might be more dominant, all of the senses have aesthetic importance and I did not want some to be

forgotten. For example, in Jena's experience light was both seen and felt. Light as an object of exploration becomes richer when it is felt on the skin, not just appreciated for its ability to illuminate objects. Even if we enjoy a place for its visual qualities, exploring it through the other senses gives a more complete understanding and feeling. The stories of the participants reveal that both the world and their experiences of it are constantly changing. The linear structure of language compels us to have a beginning, middle, and an end to our stories, but the narratives of the participants reveal that our lived experiences do not necessarily unfold in this way until they are dressed in language. The unity of the senses is an important dimension of aesthetic experience, but not all aesthetic experiences are purely sensory or cognitive. Some instances in the narratives of the participants parallel Conroy's (2007) argument that a balance between complete sensory engagement and sensory engagement filtered through knowledge must be achieved. It is possible to engage sensory and cognitive faculties in a harmonious and mutually supportive way. Jena's continuous fascination with sunsets is a good example:

"I always go back to my old pictures one of the pictures it's actually on our TV I took it when I was snorkeling I was in Jamaica and I remember the evening so clearly a fisherman was going fishing and he let me hop on his boat so as he was fishing I just jumped in and there were storm clouds coming and I was snorkeling and then I came up and I grabbed my camera and took a picture and it's not that great of a picture I mean it's fine but I remember it so clearly I remember the water what I was feeling everything. That was a place that I really, really love I love Jamaica there is something about sort of ... sensory about it it was the first time I spent so much time in the Caribbean and so just the fact that the water was always warm and the views I mean the sunsets were unbelievable and I met a lot of people it was a great time fun but that day it was one of those moments (speaks with joy) I remember thinking about all the other sun sets as I was swimming and was like you can't take a picture well it's hard to take a good picture of a sunset but I tried and it came out, these heavy, heavy gray clouds and a bit of light so it was very memorable to me."

Clearly, Jena takes pride in the visual modality of the experience; however, her experience is nonetheless multisensory. The sensory quality of the environment is not underestimated but, on the contrary, it is embraced and visible. On a cognitive level, she brings her biographical past to the experience. While exploring the various dimensions of her experience, a fleeting sensory quality is replaced by a need to capture the moment. The photograph serves as a trigger of past sensations that she can reactivate in the present. The photographs are like vehicles that make it possible to access sensations in the distant past. This token plays a critical role in her production of a unique aesthetic experience. However, different contexts require and involve different modes of engagement. Sometimes knowledge can interfere with the fully unified sensory engagement. The scent of autumn leaves can bring back painful past experiences and interfere with sensory immersion with the foliage. In Bob's example his knowledge of his inability to distinguish different bird sounds might interfere with his full absorption. Instead of fully letting go and opening himself to their songs, he is imprisoned at a conceptual level. On the other hand, his full sensory engagement makes the experience aesthetic.

If sensory engagement were the only prerequisite then all experiences characterized by complete immersion could be considered aesthetic. While I agree with Berleant (1992), Carlson (2001), and Dewey (1958) that all encounters with the world have the potential to be aesthetic, I am skeptical that all experience in which we are fully engaged must be aesthetic. I think the mode of engagement makes a difference (e.g. entering a landscape as a listener instead of a perceiver). A few of my participants mentioned that having a child-like curiosity towards the world helped. The naïve stance where everything is new and surprising and not filtered by cultural or personal norms and standards is not easily achieved (if possible at all). Without

warning we are thrown into the whirlpool of existence and do not even remember when we lost the curious nature of our childhood. Bob in particular appreciates that:

"I think that's the thing little children experience things this way naturally and we get away from it as we get older it's a natural thing and we get away from that as we get older it's not dignified and that's why I said there are a lot of people and I think people are realizing like with even with the people here they spent all this time inside in front of the computer when it might be nicer to go to a library to feel a book…"

As my informants have observed, children have the ability to interact in this way naturally, but it is up to us as adults to recognize our own capacity to open ourselves up to the environment to reconnect with the world. When knowledge (biographical, cultural, political, etc.) is assimilated into an experience it can be an important factor in our appreciation. However, it can enhance or potentially overpower the experience. For example, this happens if the focus is on oneself and not on the ongoing reciprocity, such as in Sophia's example:

" I remember staying at the garden after it was closed, it was great I felt as if I had the place to myself, but I was more interested in what I was feeling inside …I had a bad day and all I could feel is pain and nothing could bring me out of this feeling"

The sensation, even though present, is not aesthetic. However, there are times when knowledge enhances the experience, especially when the experience of knowledge is present. When Sylvia was excited to show the pear tree to children in her classroom or when Bob tried to expose his friends to new encounters with nature, they not only tried to share the experiences with others, but also teach them to cultivate their caring feelings for the environment. Helping others to creatively sense the environment encourages them to experience aesthetic qualities of being in the world.

Variety of Aesthetic Experience – the Public, Shared, and Deeply Personal

The stories of my participants revealed a multitude of aesthetic experiences. There were three layers of aesthetic experiences that people shared with me: *the public layer*, *the shared layer*, and the *personal layer*. *The public layer* includes objects and situations created by artists for our aesthetic enjoyment as well as landscapes, oceans, parks etc. *The shared layer* of aesthetic experiences encompasses experiences that are enjoyed with a close other. Shared strolls on the beach, memorable dinners with the family, or enjoyable sharing of past experiences are examples. The public and shared layer were also avenues for people to protect the natural environment and appreciate the importance of cultivating attachment to places such as the botanical gardens, parks and other public spaces in the community. Here the discussion was directed outward to the society at large and how we as individuals need to take action and become more alert to our actions and attitudes toward nature. Finally the least known layer, the deeply *personal level,* consists of those deeply personal aesthetic experiences that are at the center of the other layers. They were more solitary engagements. Some experiences were related to one's immediate surroundings, as when Mary prepared a meal. It not only had to taste good but also look good, however momentary the feeling. Hers was the pleasure of an artist. Another example is Adam's garden, which he attends to for his own and others aesthetic uplift. The large-scale environments that affect and change us are related to a state of heightened emotion --when enjoying oneself having fun or being happy. The hidden retreat when one can just relax and enjoy the experience. It is the solitary nature of a multitude of experiences that adds value to everyday aesthetic experiences. These experiences are rarely shared with others because they are not meant to be shared. When Farah decided to sit on the left side of the bus to have a better view of the garden it was just for her to know. She never told anyone because there

was no need. Household chores are not usually viewed as a source of aesthetic pleasure because they relate to the practical, the opposite of aesthetic. Natalie enjoys ironing. She enjoys moving her hand smoothly across the fabric, harvesting the trace of warmth left by the iron. Folding each piece carefully, transforming a mélange of wrinkled clothes into a neatly organized collection of ready to wear garments. This is a solitary experience just for her enjoyment.

Each of the participants varied in the way they made use of, and the significance they attached to their experiences. However, it is the quality of the person and setting/object relationship that allows one to experience aesthetics. The deeply personal layer reveals that there is a hidden or unspoken quality to the experience that each of us keeps secret or just to ourselves. Some are revealed only to the initiated, designed to elude detection, and others may never surface.

The variety of aesthetic experiences also relates to how people feel about the environment; how they relate to it, how they affect it and how they are affected by it. The stories of the participants reveal that we do " attend to the world aesthetically, not often (it is true) as an art student does in an art gallery or as a nature lover does on the seashore, but often nevertheless, as alert individuals do, glancing, during the pauses and among the interstices of practical life" (Tuan, 1993 p.101). The everyday aesthetic experience is not about the object or the situation but a quality of the relationship. Being alert to one's surroundings is one of the qualities.

Being Alert- Planning, Strategizing, and Arranging

As some of the participants mentioned there is a combination of purposively planning/ strategizing and arranging for these experiences. However, there is no formula that one could follow. Planning usually involved a destination, such as apple picking, fishing, or rock climbing. Strategizing involved picking a different route home or staying later at work to see the sunset.

Arranging involved more of the manipulations of one's immediate surroundings, such as gardening, cleaning, and baking. Even though there are decisions as a way to set the stage for an aesthetic experience, a balance is involved. As some of the participants mention, it is not always about planning/strategizing/arranging. Yes, these play a role in the experiences, but there must be a balance between expectations and being open to the environment.

Sylvia, Jeff, and Farah also mention that they do not necessarily plan for these experiences. Jeff said that beauty lies in the surprise and you can not really plan. Farah often mentioned that she revisits certain places at the garden in the morning and makes an effort to enter the garden from the parking lot. Because it is a habit for her she does not need to think about it anymore. Her body knows the way (Seamon, 1979). Sylvia struggled at times and paused because it was hard for her to share experiences that were so self-evident. She knew that she used both her senses and knowledge to understand her aesthetic experiences in novel ways, but she could not communicate it easily. The distinction between memorable experiences that stand out and those fleeting and familiar moments that take a back seat is in line with the literature that makes a distinction between the extraordinary (strange) experience of art and ordinary (familiar) everyday experience (Saito, 2001). The concept of strange and familiar has been debated. Some scholars feel that the familiar should be valued above the strange. To others it is a dualism to separate the ordinary in the everyday from the extraordinary because it is a dialectical relationship. The extraordinary exists as a possibility within the ordinary and each moment in everyday life is uniquely precious. I would argue based on my data that it is not so simple to favor one over the other or to see them as dialectical. Based on my interpretation of the data, I believe that a few of the participants did not want to think too much about some of their experiences; it as if they wanted to avoid turning their ordinary moments into extraordinary

and idealistic ones in their descriptions. Through reflecting and interpreting their experiences some transformed them into beautiful narrations. As she reminisced about Africa, Nicole asked herself whether sharing these experiences with someone changes the experience and concluded that it does. But she also noticed that even when she reflected on her experiences they changed. The ordinary, when once reflected and made extraordinary, even for a brief moment, is never the same. One has created something new, moved on, and in a word, grown. (Scarry, 1999) There is a constant negotiation between letting go and being open to change and growth compared with trying to stay in the moment and not let anything change. I see this realization as important. Everyday aesthetic experience is not a fixed concept, but a cumulative, fluid action that changes over time. Based on the stories participants shared with me the meaning of everyday aesthetic experience is in the recommendations they have made on how they attend in certain ways to certain features of their daily life. Thinking about aesthetics as such will cultivate openness and sensitivity in us.

I would argue that everyday aesthetics is about the ordinary even if some argue that the transformation of the ordinary into extraordinary makes the experience aestheticized (a term that has a negative connotation because it "adds value"). Mandoki (2007) encourages us to not think of aesthetization in negative terms by acknowledging that it refers to aesthetic as a label that adds value. Based on my interpretation, participants sought aesthetic experiences and aestheticised their surroundings and narrations when they wanted to add value to their experiences. This is a fundamental difference between the lived experience of people and their everyday lives and elite theories of aesthetics. Making things look "pretty" and "beautiful" in their homes and gardens for others to enjoy adds value to their lives. The overarching goal is to add value to one's life by seeking out and aestheticisizing one's surroundings. However, while I learned that aesthetics

plays an important role in my participant's everyday lives and that they feel that these experiences promote self-growth and add value to their life, I also learned that there are some obstacles that interfere in attending to life in aesthetic ways.

The Barriers to Everyday Aesthetic Experience

The barriers that prevent people from experiencing beauty in their everyday lives related to their perception of time or their lack of time to engage aesthetically. Time usually prevented people from planned activities or trips. When time was a barrier they tried to make minor changes to what they could control for example, by arranging flowers at home or looking at old pictures. The barriers that participants mentioned were not that visible in the sense that they were not physical tangible barriers. However, some participants mentioned that in general there are a lot of barriers or obstacles in society that prevent children from developing their sensory experience. Natalie sees a lot of barriers that prevent her cousins from encounters with the environment. She said that school programs often deprive children from direct experience of both people and places. Usually it is a second hand experience modified through books and classroom construction of what the teacher thinks they should know. At home they mostly spend time in front of a computer and even watch DVDs in the car. One way that Sophia and Bob try to break this barrier is to encourage teachers to work with a place such as the Botanical Garden. The development of a curriculum that encourages students to use their sensuous connection to the world as a way of receiving, understanding and expressing that understanding, results in greater environmental consciousness and aesthetic experience. This is exactly what Greene (2001) has been advocating. She sees the curriculum at schools as a way to encourage students (through aesthetic engagement) to become self-reflective. Teachers should enable students to

interpret these experiences, to acquaint them with and free them to reflect on the range of possible meanings.

After deeper analysis there was another level of barriers that people described. Sometimes there is a thin line between the familiar places that one experiences in novel ways and familiar places that one enjoys because they are familiar. This type of a barrier became noticeable if the familiar places were to vanish. Some of the familiar places that people felt attached to allow one to be oneself; the small group of trees that Bob often takes refuge in allows him to act out his existential structure. It was not until we talked about the possibility of it not existing that he grew sensitive to it, even though hypothetically the absence of this particular place interfered with his being in the world. Natalie describes the sense of loss she experienced when she moved closer to work. When she made a decision she did not think about sacrificing the view of the George Washington Bridge on early mornings, yet not having it every morning made her sad. The new way to and from work was short, but not as uplifting. The sense of loss of the familiar becomes felt only when it fails to be there and disrupts the everyday existence. The barrier here is not an obstacle in a singular situation but a disruption of everyday life.

The Meaning of Everyday Aesthetic Experience

Based on the analysis of my participant's stories, it is clear to me that aesthetic engagement plays a significant part in their lives. All of the participants said aesthetics of everyday promises a richer life and if they could not have aesthetic experiences it would affect all areas of their existence, including their mood, work, relationships and overall happiness. In addition, even if the texture of everyday life results in subtle aesthetic satisfaction, continual awareness of satisfaction offers a valuable payoff in the quality of life. Life without beauty would not be possible. Even if "one day we would wake up on a strange planet without any

memories of past aesthetic experience we would have to make new experiences" (Farah). Mary said it is a way of being engaged beyond life's necessities. It is a way of not verbally expressing your feelings; it is needed to keep everything balanced.

Everyday aesthetic experience is a dynamic relationship of varying perceptions, open to change with further experience. It is not merely passive absorption or active response but a creative act -- a reworking of the experience to make sense of it. My participants revealed that outdoor environments generated affective responses that caused them to grow and feel better about themselves and others around them. Everyday aesthetic experiences reveal the essence of the fusion between the person and the world. Features of the environment are a stirring source of affect and as Jung (1960) pointed out, " It is not storms, not thunder and lightning, not rain and cloud that remain as images in the psyche, but the fantasies caused by the affect they arouse. I once experienced a violent earthquake, and my first, immediate feeling was that I no longer stood on a solid and familiar earth" (Jung, 1960, p.154-155). Thus, features of the environment not only give rise to certain emotions, but those emotions can guide a person into images, thoughts and actions that fundamentally affect one's development. They are meaningful because they are a blend of affect (pleasure, happiness, excitement, contentment and relaxation) cognition (contemplation, reflection) and conation (planning, arranging, striving). The stories of the participants revealed that everyday aesthetic experiences are both those small surprises that seem to emerge from nowhere, as well as more elaborate engagements that are planned. When woven together aesthetic experiences are not an addition to one's life, but a way of life. Aesthetic experience is a quality of being in the world.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The purpose of this study was to explore, discuss, and elaborate upon what constitutes the everyday aesthetic experience. This was accomplished through a phenomenological and narrative investigation with ten participants. I was interested in exploring aesthetics in the familiar world of everyday life (lifeworld), and specifically how aesthetics makes a difference for each of the participants. Each of the participants had their own way of describing objects, situations and involved processes, and their meanings and the array of experiences revealed many worthy discoveries. As seen within the framework of everyday life, aesthetic engagement involves the creative play of one's actions and the world and includes the creation of occasions in one's life for aesthetic experiences. These actions become reorganized upon reflection and further refine a part of who we are.

As opposed to explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge is difficult to verbalize to another person. There were moments in each of the interviews where people paused or reflected upon a previous example to revise or add something new that they discovered while narrating. Asking them about strategies and barriers revealed something novel that I might have otherwise realized. At the beginning of the interview I asked them to think of their most meaningful and memorable aesthetic experience and tell me a story about it. Throughout the interview we focused mostly on the meaningful and memorable. However, when we talked about strategies and barriers I also became aware of their more familiar, fleeting, and forgettable experiences. The memorable moments gave way to lesser-known areas of their aesthetic engagement. This is a useful finding regarding methodology, while open narratives about what was aesthetically meaningful were valued in this research they would not have sufficed alone.

The types of experiential relationship with the environment we have are affected and mediated by the senses. I think the way people construct the sensorium in theory and in practice has a profound influence on the way in which we conceptualize the world. Studying different patterns can also open up new areas that have the potential to transform not only the way we see, but also the way we smell, touch, taste, and understand. From a practical perspective, adequately honoring everyday life as a source of meaningful aesthetic experience opens up new possibilities for understanding how such practices add value to our life and promise a richer life. The aesthetics of the everyday also have moral implications. Many of my participants mentioned that the aesthetic dimension in everyday life is important in developing people into more sensible community members. Thus, there should be more opportunities for people in a community to come together in an attempt to share their experiences as they offer insights and concepts distinct from those of traditional models. The everyday aesthetic experiences are available to everyone, even those who have little access to art or nature.

I see the development of everyday aesthetics as a source that needs a refined methodology and clear set of aesthetic concepts. One possible way of enriching aesthetic engagement would be to set up collaborative discussion groups were people would have the opportunity to share their everyday aesthetic experiences. I believe this would be a great vehicle through which we participants could come to learn from their own day-to-day experiential relationship with their surroundings and the types of engagements that are typically taken for granted. It would give people a chance to go beyond the surface and explore the role that everyday aesthetics plays in their lives.

My journey into the everyday world of sensory experience made me aware both of the limits and flexibility of language. In the English language we have a rich selection of vocabulary

to choose from to describe visual, tactile and auditory encounters, but not for those pertaining to taste and smell. Because each of the participants had their own theory on what constituted their aesthetic experience they rarely referred to their experiences in abstract ways or described them with traditional definitions of art. Some did however make implicit comments on how their experiences of nature differ from standard accounts of beauty and taste. Because of the constraints and flexibility of language, metaphors occasionally played a role in their narrative descriptions of aesthetic experiences. They were able to communicate sensuous ideals. Thus, in language there is also evidence that metaphors cut across sensory boundaries and unite feelings in a sympathetic way to convey felt experience. At times participants conveyed their sensory experiences with words that reflected intersensory analogies in terms of sensory metaphors (Lackoff & Johnson, 1980). Here language acts as a medium of communication among the different senses. For example Farah said, "I like to savor every moment when I look down the street." The representation of aesthetic experience seems to call for a more sophisticated level of representation most of us can achieve in language. This is the world of poets and other artists. Even though we may not be able to articulate what it is, we do know what it can do.

Lastly, I want to share some of my impressions of using phenomenology as a way to understand the everyday aesthetic experience. I chose phenomenology in an attempt to understand the meaning and significance of everyday aesthetic experience in people's lives. I think the strength of this method lies in the openness it allows for new and surprising insights to emerge from participants' accounts. It is up to the researcher to stay true to the phenomenon, even if it conceptually appears to not make sense; it might be experientially valid and real. My goal was to bring into the foreground that which is shared among the participants without losing what is unique to individual experience. I tried to include direct quotations from the participants

for the reader to have a better feel for individual participants, as well as similarities and differences between them. The analysis then moves beyond a description of shared themes to integrating the themes into a wider analysis in which participants approach life. This was a challenging balancing act and I am left with an awareness of the tension between my desire to speak of the commonalities of everyday aesthetic experience and my desire to be true to how each of the participants created meaning around their own aesthetic engagements.

CHAPTER NINE: A WAY AHEAD

The Relevance of the Research to Environmental Planning and Design

Through the process of this research I have learned a great deal about the difficult, yet fascinating phenomenon of everyday aesthetic experience, as well as different possibilities for further research in this vein. As I mentioned in the introductory chapters, a lot has been written about how people engage with their environment, yet few people have explored this experiential dimension of our life empirically. A preliminary study by Chenoweth and Gobster (1990) explored the nature and ecology of aesthetic experience in landscapes. Even though I was unaware of their study during the course of my research some parallels and differences exist that offer a valuable contribution to future research. Instead of interviewing participants, as I have done, they used an aesthetic experience diary as their method of data collection. They asked participants (25 college students) to record their aesthetic experiences in two parts. The first part was an open-ended format that allowed participants to describe their experience in terms of where it happened, what happened and how it made them feel. The second part involved a set of rating scales concerning the experience itself. As in my study, their intent was to define and identify the characteristics of aesthetic experiences, how they are subjectively expressed, how they vary across time and space, how they relate to the environment, and what value they might have for an individual. They structured their discussion around several dimensions of the experience:

1. The Nature of Aesthetic Experience – They concluded, as I have, that aesthetic experiences vary greatly among individuals, and that certain dimensions of aesthetic experience are not restricted to a narrow range and that there are many factors that contribute to the experiences (e.g. ephemerals vs. static environment). Their data suggests

that aesthetic experiences are memorable and tend to "just happen" rather than be "sought out." Even though my participants found aesthetic experience to be memorable, my data suggests that these experiences do just happen, but people also set the stage for the opportunities for vivid moments to occur and strategize to be in the path of beauty. One of the discoveries of my research is the role of spontaneity vs. planned aesthetic experience. I showed that it is common for people to strategize and plan for aesthetic happenings that set the conditions for it as "planned spontaneity." One explanation for the difference in findings might result from my participants having spent most of their time at the botanical garden and, by being exposed to its ever-changing patterns they were rendered more aware of their environment, which influenced their experiential engagements outside of this setting. Also, I found that the desire to improve the balance of aesthetic engagements increases with age.

2. Ecology of the Aesthetic Experience – The authors also concluded, as I have, that aesthetic experiences appear to be a solitary phenomenon that mostly occurs in mundane and everyday environments and situations. Further empirical investigation is required of what the particular properties of the environment are that afford aesthetic experiences; we need to know how aesthetic experience is distributed in time and space. We now know from our two research studies that aesthetic experiences happen more often in familiar places. This counter intuitive discovery should lead environmental designers, planners and managers to be as interested in the aesthetic importance of everyday settings as they are in their grand designs of special destinations.
3. Object of the Experience – Analysis of their findings revealed that aesthetic experiences resulted more from engagement with the natural environment than human-made settings,

and that they tended to be "dynamic' and "ephemeral" rather than "static" and "permanent." The stories of my participants also revealed that transitions in the environment played a role in the aesthetic experience and that there are a variety of objects that influence people's aesthetic preference. Participants in my research were not limited to describing aesthetic experiences with specific environmental settings over a short period of time, as in Chenoweth and Gobster's research, but were encouraged to draw from all of the experiences of their lives. By not limiting their experience to predetermined settings I was able to capture what is most important about aesthetic experience: the experiential, affective response of the individual. Both their research and mine revealed that there are reoccurring features of the environment that consistently afford opportunities for aesthetic experience (e.g. dynamic and ephemeral rather than static and permanent). Yet, still more empirical research is needed that would allow us to gain a deeper understanding of the environmental conditions under which aesthetic experiences occur and how this knowledge could help environmental planners design environments that are less static and permanent. Since ephemeral events are difficult to control and study, new research tools need to be developed.

One could also imagine interventional research being designed with urban planners whereby specific types of environmental features would be created as new possible affordances for aesthetic experience. By systematically studying what environmental features of the environment afford aesthetic experiences environmental planners and designers would be able to design environments that increase the probability of vivid moments happening. I think this type of research would be especially useful in urban areas where there might be little biotic diversity. I agree with Abrams (1996)

observations that as human beings sever their reciprocity with the natural world the quality of language itself is diminished. He stated that: "As there are fewer and fewer songbirds in the air, due to the deconstruction of the forests and wetlands, human speech loses more and more of its evocative power…as we drive more and more of the land's wild voices into the oblivion of extinction, our own language becomes increasingly impoverished and weightless, progressively emptied of their earthly resonance" (Abrams, 1996, p.86). Different environmental contexts result in a variety of experiences and there should be more opportunities for people to experience "nature at the doorstep" (Kaplan, 1985).

4. Value of Aesthetic Experience – This was the final issue Chenoweth and Gobster addressed in their study. A large number of their participants described aesthetic experience as a highlight of the week and many said that it improved their mood. Similarly, all of the participants in my study said that everyday aesthetics offer the promise of a richer life and to not have such aesthetic experiences would affect all areas of their existence, including their mood, work, relationships and overall happiness. My participants revealed that outdoor environments generated affective responses that led them to feel better about themselves and others around them. Such comments suggest that even if even if environmental planning and design only makes small changes in the texture of everyday environments it might result in subtle changes in aesthetic satisfaction that are important to the quality of life.

Experiential Workshops as a Means of Discovering the Nature of Heightened Encounters

One important possible direction for development of everyday aesthetic experience as a subject of study is to design interactive workshops that simultaneously offer learning opportunities for participants and lead to increasing insight about the phenomenon. In these experiential workshops participants would have the opportunity to share their moments of heightened environmental experience with one another. Group discussion would produce different kinds of data and insights than provided by the interviews conducted for this dissertation. Listening to the verbalized experiences of others would be likely to stimulate memories, ideas, and experiences in participants. These workshops would be both of practical and intellectual importance. They would be a means of providing people with opportunities to heighten their everyday encounters with the world while continuing to build theory on this issue. Many different techniques could be used in fostering people's heightened encounters. I see the scientific work of Goethe (1749-1832) as one possibility. Goethe was interested in the natural world and investigated among others the nature of light, plants, and weather. His science was – and – is radical and as opposed to Newtonian science of quantities, Goethe's science is a science of qualities. Instead of focusing on the mathematical way of seeing the world he developed a whole new way of looking at nature, oneself, and the world. Goethe though Newton drew the wrong conclusion from his experiments with prism. He showed that color was not quantifiable abstraction explained by wavelength. Instead, he showed that the intensity of dark and light is the true origin of the color cast on the wall by a prism. His method sought to explore things experientially before defining or labeling them. He stressed the importance of creating a moment of openness where the thing explored could be encountered most intimately and fully. Goethe also believed in the interpersonal exploration of the phenomenon and that different

people are sensitive to different aspects of the object and that, with the help of others, one is able to discover previously hidden features of the object studied.

In recent years, Goethean science has been resurrected and its discoveries applied to the study of various natural phenomena (Bortoft 1996; Naydler 1996; Seamon & Zajonc 1998). In *The Wholeness of Nature*, Henri Bortoft argues that Goethe's way of science is especially useful to the scientific worldview of today (Bortoft , 1996). He argues that there is a wide gap between objective, material science on one side and subjective culture of human experience on the other. In order to bring the two sides closer Bortoft calls for the recognition of personal experience and the yearning for meaning and wholeness, advocating a holistic understanding of nature. Similarly, Nayder suggested that because we are so used to a science that can measure the "real" reality behind what we perceive in terms of taste, color, and temperature, we have lost trust in our firsthand experience of the world (Naydler, 1996).

Seamon and Zajonc (1998) argue that Goethe's way of science, understood as a phenomenology of nature, offers value in fostering openness towards the natural world and adds much value to environmental psychology (Seamon & Zajonc, 1998). I also see Goethe's Theory of Color, especially the prism experiments, as a valuable starting point. The exercise of looking through the prism is a good way of introducing participants to phenomenological looking or more precisely to the effort required to produce phenomenological description. This would be especially useful in a group setting as all participants would be looking at the same phenomenon, and through a series of shared observations would move closer to a consensus as to how color appears. Each participant would be able experience looking and seeing in a new way that, by Goethe's "method was to extend and deepen his experience of the phenomenon until he reached that element of the phenomenon which is not given externally to sense experience" (Bortoff,

1996 p.22). It is also necessary to train not just one's power of thought and observation. Goethe also advocated for training our imagination to exclude any fanciful images that do not stem from the phenomena themselves. One does not depend on abstract concepts as these two would limit the true nature of the phenomena, as well as stand between the observer and nature. One has to "stay with" the phenomenon and change our way of seeing in accordance. This would be, as Bortoft noted, a way of seeing holistically and intuitively in which the wholeness of a phenomenon becomes apparent and that wholeness of experience includes oneself. With Goethe's science the aim is to reach the *Urphaenomen*, usually translated to mean "archetypal phenomenon." Seamon and Zajonc (1998) referred to it as the "deep down phenomenology," the essential core of a thing that makes it what it is and explains what it becomes. One reaches it in a moment of intuitive insight, when one suddenly understands the phenomenon and through this realization all other manifestations of the phenomenon and their relatedness can be explained.

The workshops would not be limited to a particular setting, such as a botanical garden or a particular population such as college students, but would consist of a variety of settings and diverse populations. A diary-keeping method could also be incorporated into the workshops. This would allow participants to describe their experiences as well as give them a chance to reflect on the issues raised during the discussion.

The question remains whether experiential workshops would be a better strategy for understanding people's heightened environmental encounters than the kind of individual interview approach used in this dissertation. In my research I began to see that by sharing their experiences people had a more complete perspective on themselves as engaged individuals. I think the workshop methodology would allow me to understand what impact the sharing of heightened environmental experiences can have on people's lives over time and whether people

can learn new strategies for heightened engagement from one another. Even though I did not ask participants whether their participation in the research changed the way they perceive the environment around them, some of them mentioned that the interview dialog changed the way that they become aware of the environment around them. A more systematic investigation of how people's engagement with environments changes over time would be of educational importance. This is related to the concept of the ecology of aesthetic experience discussed by Chenoweth and Gobster (1990). I see potential in paying close attention to where these experiences happen (e.g. home, work, season, time), what the person was doing (e.g. structured activity or free time), whether they were part of a daily routine (e.g. going home or coming back), if the place was familiar or strange and whether it had any meaning or not. These are not the only possibilities yet they would be a good starting point for exploring the distribution of vivid moments in space and time.

In the context of environmental workshops, different types of places or objects could be discussed and how each influences opportunities for heightened encounter. Studying the variety of places and objects, especially the dynamic and ephemeral ones, could be of value to environmental planners and managers. Since most people prefer environments that are dynamic rather than static, and ephemeral rather than permanent, there should be more opportunities for people to be involved in managing the environments in which they live. Giving people more opportunities to experience nature in their daily encounters and helping them to manage it could inform a shift in design practices, which in turn might help reconnect people with nature.

By empirically studying the ecology and objects of aesthetic experiences we can go deeper into the experiential nature of these vivid moments and possibly reveal something of the mystery of perception, that is, perceiving suddenly something that was not there a moment ago.

Discussing experiential dimensions of vivid moments would result in enriching existing themes and forming new ones. As Chenoweth and Gobster's research and mine both concluded there is much more to be revealed about the transactional relationship between the affective state of the perceiver and diverse and idiosyncratic range of features of the physical environment.

Moving forward I think it would also be useful to rethink whether the word aesthetic itself is a proper descriptor of the phenomenon described in this dissertation. At the beginning of the research I did not question it at all since many scholars, in addition myself, saw potential in expanding the definition of aesthetics to include everyday objects and outdoor environments. However, I now wonder if the word "aesthetic" is not too constraining. The experiences that my participants described are more than just a response to places or objects of beauty. I think the word itself carries with it a burden in a sense that it is mostly associated with a branch of philosophy that stresses the importance of knowledge and what it means to know about the world rather than experience and what it means 'to be' in the world. New vocabulary is needed to describe this transactional relationship between a person and an aspect of the world that results in a heightened encounter that would free itself from the constraints of art-centered aesthetic theories. Perhaps a good starting point would be to understand the concept more broadly of how people become aware of their environment in its varying degrees and qualities, as advocated in Seamons's continuum of awareness (Seamon, 1979). Perception, or rather "encounter" as Seamon termed the different styles of attentive presence to the world, should be understood both as a multifaceted conscious process of attention that involves obliviousness, watching, noticing and heightened contact and pre-conscious awareness of the body that keeps the body and world in attunement. Therefore, to understand vivid moments we need to understand them in relation to other modes of awareness and how inner state and past experience of the perceiver influences

their encounter with the world. Only after carefully attending to the different ways we dwell in the world can we begin to formulate language that would best describe particular experiences of real people in relationship to the environment in which they find themselves.

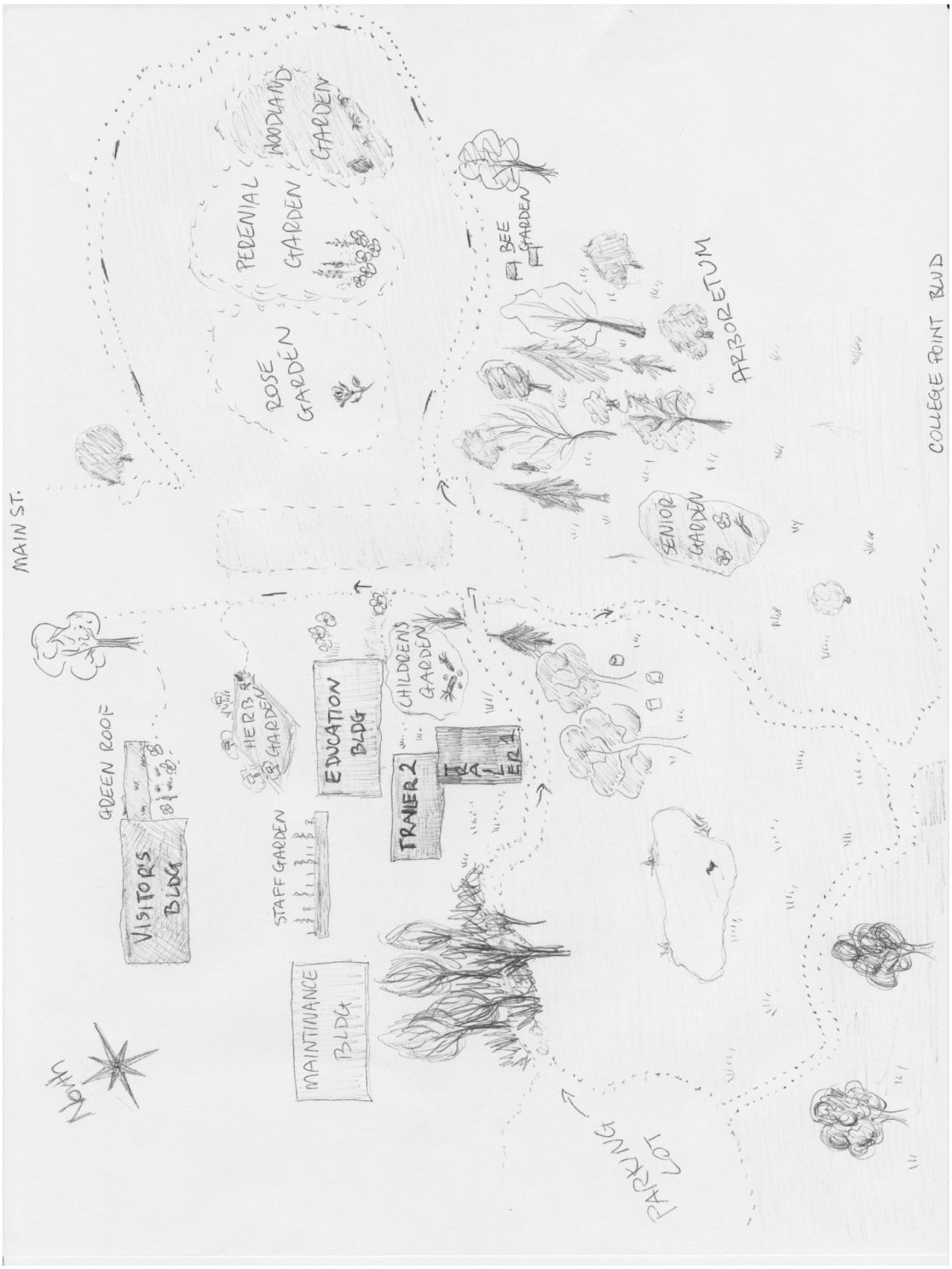
APPENDIX

On my many trips to the garden I mapped its layout and daily and seasonal events in its various sections. Similar to my participants, I have favorite places in the garden. Now, I would like to take the reader on a tour of how I perceive this particular setting.

Most often I entered the garden from the parking lot and this where the tour begins. The path on the left leads through the elevated, shady area where Farah likes to spend time, look down and reminisce about nature, it is also the place that Sean likes to walk through to listen to different bird sounds. It is a small area where one feels calm and secluded from the rest of the garden. In the morning during summer the air is cool and at dawn the sounds of birds and crickets are heard from a distance. The path then leads past trailer 1 where Jena's office is. Next, is trailer 2 where Sean's office is and where our interview took place. Between trailer 2 and Education Blvd is the children's garden. This is one of Rebecca's favorite spots where she plants vegetables with children. It is also where Jeff comes to snack on "veggies." Even though the vegetable garden is not very big, I was very impressed with the variety of vegetables planted there. Although the children's garden is not open to the public I was given permission enter any time to indulge in cherry tomatoes and string beans. The education building houses classrooms where Rebecca and Bob teach children about nature and offices for Rebecca, Bob, Mary, Sophia, and Jeff. The area between the maintenance building, where I interviewed Jeff, and the educational building houses plots designated for staff gardens. The area around the education building, especially in the summer, is surrounded by a variety of colorful plants that attract bees, butterflies, and small lizards. Adjacent to the building is the herb garden. The herb garden is one of my favorite spots in the garden. Mary's office windows face the herb garden and after the

spring rain she likes to open them to smell the soil. Following the path towards Main Street leads to the new visitors building. When I started my research the building was not constructed yet. It is the most advanced green building in New York City that was designed as a veritable encyclopedia of building techniques that conserve water, tap renewable energy, and work with nature to mitigate its contribution to global warming. The first floor is for the visitors. The conference room overlooking the garden where I interviewed Adam is on the second floor. The building also has a green roof that both Natalie and Jena like to visit. The area between the Visitor's building and the Rose garden is divided by a wide walkway with benches on each side. On many mornings I saw Chinese elders practice Tai Chi in the garden. The path around the smaller gardens is lined with benches. Sophia prefers this side of the garden and this is also where our interview took place. She especially enjoys the rose garden. Jeff who likes to observe interactions between different insects frequently visits both the perennial and woodland gardens. Past the bee garden is the arboretum. This is where Bob and Jeff like to retreat because it is more on the wild side and nothing has to be pruned or arranged. It is a self-contained ecosystem. It seems to be a popular place for people to come and sit below the trees in the summer just to relax. Going back past the children's garden is a wooded area where Adam and Farah like to come and sit below the trees. This is also where Farah and I talked about her childhood memories. This is also the place where Sean took pleasure is seeing the lake that formed after the heavy rain. Past the senior garden is an empty wooded area where Mary noticed the beautiful sounds of wind and leaves.

Map of the Botanical Garden



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