When appreciating an artwork, such as a cubist painting, one's background knowledge about the genre of cubist painting makes a difference, not only to one's historical appreciation of it, but to one's *aesthetic* appreciation of it as well. According to Walton, to appropriately appreciate a particular cubist artwork, for instance, one needs to approach it with the understanding that certain sorts of properties, e.g., containing only geometric shapes, are, by convention, necessary or 'standard' for such works. Possessing this knowledge, we perceive the work to have different aesthetic qualities than it otherwise would: instead of looking chaotic and random, for example, the painting might appear calm and serene.

Walton's model can be applied to the appreciation of natural objects as well; in this case, knowledge about a natural environment can allow us to perceive order amongst its elements (Carlson 1981; 1993; Parsons 2002). For example, the combination of plants and animals in a given environment may strike us as chaotic and random until an understanding of the ecological and evolutionary forces at work in the area reveal the pattern and order obtaining among these various elements (Carlson, 1993, 220). Another example is provided by the biologist Richard Dawkins, who writes about bats that "their faces are often distorted into gargoyle shapes that appear hideous to us until we see them for what they are, exquisitely fashioned instruments for beaming ultrasound in desired directions" (Dawkins, 1986, 24). In each of these cases, knowledge drawn from natural history and ecology, by revealing the visual order manifest in appearances, plays a pivotal role in shaping our aesthetic responses.

Although the aesthetic character of the built environment has received less attention in philosophical aesthetics, Walton's approach to aesthetic character may also be applied here. Our understanding of which sorts of features 'belong' in a certain kind of structure, or in a certain kind of neighborhood, and which do not, is a powerful factor in determining whether a particular built environment looks, for example, ordered or chaotic. A neon sign flashing 'open' may look ordinary, until one learns that the window in which it hangs belongs to a church: the scene then takes on an 'out of place', somewhat askew character. In many cases, we fail to notice the role of background knowledge in generating sensory order because that knowledge is second nature to us. Power lines, for instance, are a ubiquitous feature of North American cities but, understanding that they are a necessary feature of the landscape, we are able to 'see through' them in appreciating urban landscapes. In the same way that we do not assess the aesthetic merit of a painting in light of its being 'only' two dimensional, or of its being 'cut off' at the edges, we do not focus on the patterns of power lines in our aesthetic assessments of a streetscape.[9] As in

[9]I do not mean to say that we *never* do this: we might, especially if the lines were particularly obtrusive or conspicuous, or interfered with some functional aspect of the environment. I also do not mean that power lines play no role whatever in our aesthetic appraisal of the streetscape. Rather, the point is that the role of power lines in determining our aesthetic assessment is altered by our acceptance of them as necessary elements of the streetscape: instead of standing out as distracting and extraneous elements that disrupt visual pattern, they occupy a peripheral or background place in our aesthetic experience.

the case of artworks and natural environments, a set of background beliefs about the built environment allows us to perceive an order in those elements that are manifest to us in sensory experience, and this order is key in determining the aesthetic character of that environment.

If we adopt this conception of the aesthetic, then, contrary to traditional wisdom, the aesthetic appreciation of the natural and built environment may have a significant element in common. For although the built environment lacks objects conducive to experience of the sublime, as well as the sorts of forms characteristic of nature, the sensory 'order' revealed by appropriate background knowledge may be similar to that of the natural environment. In this event, one might then claim that there is indeed an important continuity in aesthetic character across built and natural environments. However, one might wonder whether my line of thought really advances this claim, since the possibility of continuity that is opened up here rests on the claim that the natural and built environments are similar sorts of environments, requiring similar sorts of background knowledge for aesthetic appreciation. The advocate of the traditional notion that the built and natural environments are aesthetically divergent is likely to simply deny this. In order to support this claim, then, I must directly consider whether the perceptual orders manifested in natural and built environments are similar.

3 Perceptual Order in Natural and Built Environments

This concern is, in fact, a pressing one, because discussions of this issue have tended to emphasize the disparateness of the sorts of order manifested by the natural environment and the built environment. The latter is characterized often as possessing a *functional* order, given that it is composed of elements whose salient feature is their function in some aspect of human life. For example, the appreciation of the visual order in a streetscape, referred to earlier, is thought to take shape because we understand the function, and hence the necessity, of power lines, allowing us to 'see past' them. On this view, to see the harmony or chaos that is manifest in a crowded street or an assemblage of buildings, one must understand the purpose that its elements are meant to serve.

However, philosophers have been reluctant to employ the concept of functionality in describing the order manifest in the natural environment. Functionality, like other teleological concepts, such as 'purpose' and 'end', often have been thought to be conceptually tied to the presence of a designing intellect and thus to fit uncomfortably with a scientific description of the physical world. In light of this, characterizations of the natural order as a 'functional order' have been viewed by some as, at best, a lazy anthropomorphism and, at worst, a disguised form of theism. As Larry Wright put it, amongst philosophers, "wherever it appeared, the smoke of teleological terminology implied the fire of sloppy thinking" (1969, 211).

This general skepticism about the applicability of functional characterization to wild nature is reflected in discussions of its aesthetic character. One well-known