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Aesthetic Environments: Contemporary Italian Perspectives

A cura di Gioia Laura Iannilli

Indice

Aesthetics of the Environment and Environmental Aesthetics

di Gioia Laura Iannilli

Abstract

The thesis underlying this paper is that "the aesthetic" intrinsically possesses an environmental feature (and that therefore this latter should be a feature of aesthetics, too). In order to prove this claim viable I will tackle the implications of a so-called "environmental tension" in aesthetics. This tension, signaling a specific "environmental momentum" for contemporary aesthetics, will be understood in a threefold sense. First, in the sense of a relationship between academic/theoretical/thematic and practical/operative environmental aesthetics emphasizing the pluralistic character of the aesthetic. Second, in the sense of a relationship between backgrounds and foregrounds in aesthetic experience emphasizing the potential character of the aesthetic. Third, in the sense of a relationship between quantities and qualities in aesthetic experience emphasizing the irreducible first-hand, situated, or embedded character of the aesthetic. Ultimately, I will give an overview of seven different theoretical endeavors carried out in the framework of contemporary Italian aesthetics addressing the topic of "aesthetic environments" and whose common denominator – as I shall try to show – is precisely the environmental feature of the aesthetic and aesthetics.

Keywords
Environmental Aesthetics; Environmental Tension; Contemporary Italian Environmental Aestetics

1. Introduction

Environmental issues are indeed at the center of contemporary international debates in aesthetics. An extremely detailed and updated account of the various forms in which these issues have historically been and are currently addressed can be found, for instance, in Carlson (2020). Resorting to his contribution is helpful in order to get ahold of the extremely wide-ranging coverage of themes and problems that an aesthetics concerned with environments provides. Here Allen Carlson offers a rich historical-conceptual reconstruction from the 18th century until today, while also hinting at possible future directions of the field. He addresses basic orientations between cognitive and non-cognitive views and analyzes

two main conceptions of the field beyond natural environments (i.e. aesthetics of human environments and of everyday life). He also offers a survey of new approaches linked to the challenging and promising question of the globalization of environmental aesthetics via the question of this latter's hotly debated relationship with environmentalism. Another useful way to connote the manifold relationship between environmental issues and scholarly aesthetics is provided by D'Angelo (2008, and partly retrieved in Feloj 2018), who subsumes this relationship under four main models: the cognitivist model (whose main advocate is Carlson), the non-cognitivist and formalist model (see Berleant 2013, Brady 2003, Carroll 1993, Budd 2002, Zangwill 2001), the atmospheric model (Böhme 2017, Griffero 2017) and the geophilosophical model, drawing from the term coined by Guattari and Deleuze (see Bonesio 2002). He also suggests a fifth way of dealing with environmental questions from an aesthetic point of view by making the notion of landscape their core and testbed (aiming at overcoming the traditional oppositions between nature and art and nature and history). This complex understanding of the appreciation of nature is also central in Brady (2003), where the imaginative, relational or even "integrated" aesthetic characters of appreciation are emphasized. A further way to look at the question is then seeing practically aesthetic value as an orienting factor of our choices and behaviors either for the preservation of environments in terms of a "green", "eco-friendly", "eco", or ecological aesthetics (see for instance Saito 2007, Lintott 2006, Feng 2019, Toadvine 2010, and with a focus on the arts Morton 2007[1]) or in the sense of it being an accelerator of the current global environmental crisis in terms of an aesthetics of consuming, or even of a consumer aesthetics (see for instance Saito 2018). And if a wider approach to how environmental-aesthetic questions affect human experience in general is adopted, interesting and crucial points are made by currently thriving investigations that stress anthropological and evolutionary implications of environmental aesthetic experience (see at least Ingold 2000, Davies 2012, and Bartalesi, Portera 2015).

Evidently, this is only a sample of the present wide-ranging and flourishing reflections on the topic at stake. However, this seems to be enough to show how addressing the relationship between aesthetics and environments today means entering an already densely

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[1] Although most of the more recent sub-disciplines of aesthetics such as Environmental Aesthetics originated as a reaction against an exclusively art-centered aesthetics neglecting certain aspects of experience not directly concerned with the arts, Land or Environmental Art play an important role in the aesthetic discourse on environments.

populated and adequately mapped field of research. Therefore, it won't be the goal of this essay to repeat what has already been extensively analyzed and nicely put by scholars worldwide. Instead, I would like to expand on a general question about the meaning of an environmental inquiry for aesthetics, namely a question that is intrinsically underlying the theme "aesthetic environments" on which the contributions collected in this issue of "Aesthetica Preprint" are focused.

One aspect that I would like to ponder in this paper has to do with the difference that can be drawn between reflections that address the environment as an object of aesthetic analysis and reflections that focus on the constitutive environmental component of aesthetics. A third element that shall be involved is a more general environmental modality that intrinsically and practically constitutes the quality of that relationship that we call aesthetic. This difference has been heuristically marked in my title by using the labels "Aesthetics of the (natural, built, etc.) Environment" and "Environmental Aesthetics". They are not mutually exclusive but are simply different ways of dealing with or experiencing something. The aim of this contribution, in other words, is to compare approaches that 1) tend to thematize the environment and those that 2) focus on the constitutive and more general environmental component of aesthetics, while also taking into account the 3) overall environmental endowment of our aesthetic experience. What I am interested in specifically are these latter two options.

In particular, in order to address the question of a more general environmental feature of the aesthetic and aesthetics I will focus on one specific side of the problem: the nexus between nature and artifice. When we speak of environments today we don't exclusively refer to natural surroundings, but also to life-contexts in which artificial components are embedded, overlap or even "take over". Calling into question such a couple of terms – "nature and artifice" – in turn indeed opens a gate through which a great deal of aesthetic thinking has passed already. Just think of the very idea that thematizing (referring to, conceptualizing, reproducing, enhancing…) environments *per se* implies the creation of a "non-natural break", that is to say, a taking a distance from a "natural operative flow" in which we are personally immersed (also by dwelling in, inhabiting it) anyways, and that concerns our environmental experience *qua* experience. This is true inasmuch as there is a reflective attitude towards environments and thus what is at stake is that typically anthropological dimension of the reflective artifice, namely thematization, which is expressed already in the production of a language,

images, functions or, in general, in the forms of so-called "aboutness". In this sense, the environmental tension between naturality and artificiality is something that intrinsically pertains to human experience, especially when the "difference" between "non-natural breaks" and "natural operative flows" becomes as blurred as it is today, namely, when it does not concern merely the production and consumption of an "object", but when it involves experiential wholes in which we are immersed.

For this reason, what I aim to focus on is not an aesthetics of "the environment", in the sense of something that would point to the determination of a factual content, but instead an "environmental aesthetics" bringing to the fore the inherence of aesthetic experience in qualitatively environmental structures in which one is relationally situated, embedded. It is a non-object-oriented environmental aesthetics, so to speak. This is also why I would discern the label "Environmental Aesthetics" from the label "Ecological Aesthetics". An ecological investigation is characterized by what it examines thematically, as the term eco-logy clearly states. It can therefore also converge with empirical-factual investigations or tend towards the identification of "quasi-things" (i.e. atmospheres) that possess an ontological status opposing, or rather affecting the subject so much so that they can imply also a pathic aesthetics (Griffero 2019) (and this justifies the use of "Ecological Aesthetics" in the field of atmosferology; see Gambaro 2020). But the ecological investigation will also be "environmental" insofar as not only does it thematize somehow the environment but it also stresses the relational, active and passive, quality of the aesthetic providing an overall environmental description of this experience (as it happens in Perullo 2020)[2].

In this framework, the aforementioned nexus, or rather, the environmental tension in aesthetics that I aim to tackle, will be located in the specific context of everyday practices and will be understood in a threefold sense. First, in the sense of a relationship between academic/theoretical/thematic and practical/operative environmental aesthetics emphasizing the pluralistic character of the aesthetic. Second, in the sense of a relationship between backgrounds and foregrounds in aesthetic experience emphasizing the potential character of the aesthetic. Third, in the sense of a relationship between quantities and qualities in aesthetic experience emphasizing the irreducible first-hand, situated, or embedded character of the aesthetic.

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[2] We refer the reader also to Morton (2018) and to his idea of an "ecological thought".

The emphasis on the pluralistic character of the aesthetic is useful for bringing to the fore the friction between the conceptual determination and the phenomenological description of aesthetic features of experience (or in other terms the friction that occurs on the threshold between quantitative determination and qualitative processes) both in scholarly and in practical aesthetics. This is reflected in the tendency aesthetics has to exist in many and diverse sub-disciplines. The very existence of the latter is due to the fact that the aesthetic is practically manifested in a variety of ways and forms, which can hardly be "tamed" in absolute categories. For this reason reference will be made to markers of the aesthetic which tend to signal its presence and hence to express well precisely its untamability. In the course of the text we shall see, however, that environments do not constitute a sub-theme of aesthetics. Rather, they constitute the general matrix of the relational status of the aesthetic as such. If anything, environments understood in this sense are conducive to and make the various pluralizations of the aesthetic possible when we focus on given regions within the wider aesthetic-environmental relationship as such.

The specific trait of the "markers of the aesthetic" that will be made the core of this contribution is precisely a somehow gratifying[3] first-hand experience, namely the fact that as far as aesthetic experience is concerned, we are talking about individuals who are (enjoying their being) qualitatively situated, embedded in and interacting somehow with qualitatively charged environments. The point is that these interactions taking place between individuals and their surroundings are not totally pre-determinable – even if they can be strongly infrastructured – and hence any of them can potentially become gratifying, aesthetic, or take on an aesthetic "configuration". In order to explain this point we will resort to a series of spatial metaphors that have been used in the philosophical tradition, which interestingly strengthen *per se* already the idea that the aesthetic, and aesthetics, are inherently environmental. My specific take on this question will concern the relationship between foregrounds and backgrounds, or between someone's everyday and shared neighborhoods.

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[3] Gratification is meant here in the sense that a certain experience "was worth it", despite the fact that it may concern both harmony and dissonance, taste and disgust. It is hard to deny, in general, that aesthetic is that experience which, in its occurrence, keeps on promising to "reward" or, precisely, to "gratify" the energy involved in taking part in it, whatever the reason or the factually determinable content. An experience that is not somehow appealing and inviting in this sense could hardly be considered aesthetic. And this is even compatible with the fact that there are aesthetic (gratifying) *experiences* of non-aesthetic (unappealing) *objects* (see for instance Matteucci 2019, pp. 201-202, 240-243).

In particular, my focus will be on three types of cooperative "knowledge" contributing to the current dynamics informing everyday practices. The first one is linked to ecology, the second one is linked to aesthetics, and the third one is linked to design. On the one hand the first and the third type tend to rely on "quantities", or on measurements and reductions aimed at making qualitative aspects of experience easily "readable", or "usable". On the other hand, as far as an aesthetic standpoint is concerned – that is to say a standpoint in which the first-hand, gratifying component of experience is concerned –, as seen, the (attempted) quantitative determination, the measurement or reduction of certain qualitative aspects is not enough. Mentioning the cooperative character of these types of knowledge is no coincidence. As we shall see, it indeed brings to the fore, again, that fundamental environmental tension between naturality and artificiality which is at the center of this contribution.

Our testbed to prove the irreducibility of the qualitative dimension of aesthetic experience will be a preliminary analysis of the current and widespread digitalized forms of experience which, despite the de-humanizing power generally attached to them, actually corroborate our point, that is to say, that aesthetics implies experiential modalities that are chiefly environmental. Resorting to digitalized forms of environmental experience will also allow us to identify some trend lines within this overall environmental and experiential momentum of aesthetics also by presenting in the last paragraph (to which we directly refer those who are not interested in the path that I have just outlined) the main concepts addressed by the essays included in this issue of "Aesthetica Preprint".

2. *Looking for "the" Aesthetic*

How many aesthetics can there be? Many, apparently.

What do I mean by this? One good starting point for justifying this claim could be simply looking at the English word "aesthetics", or its original Latin version "aesthetica". As trivial as it may be to make this "technical" remark, (what at least looks like) the plural form of the noun should not be ignored, as it seems to suggest that we are dealing with a plurality of aesthetics, or at least with a plurality, a diversity of "aesthetic things". Etymologies and grammar aside, though, I believe there is much more behind this claim. Generally speaking, it can be linked to a particular tension that emerges any time one tries to pin down "the essence" of something while at the same time making an effort in preserving the irreducible par-

ticularity, or diversity, of that something. More specifically, within "aesthetics meant as a philosophical discipline" this tension has to do with the theoretical, academic efforts to pin down something that pertains to "aesthetics meant as a set of practices" carried out immersively, operatively, experientially by an individual, or organism, interacting with an environment, or milieu. I am referring to the tension that exists between what we may call "quantities" (something that can range from measurable aspects to aspects that can at least be thematized, labeled, or made explicit through conceptual determination) and what we may call "qualities" (something that can range from non-measurable aspects to aspects that tend to remain implicit, and that can at best be described). Nevertheless, we will get back to the specific treatment of the relationship between quantities and qualities later in this text. For now, suffice it to say that they represent the extreme polarities constituting the tensive relationship we have referred to.

What interests us at this point is something else. It is also worth stressing the fact that aesthetics meant as a philosophical discipline – not coincidentally – has several sub-disciplines, and this, as such, already signals aesthetics' pluralistic status. These sub-disciplines, though, should not be seen as closed in themselves, but as specialized fields that equally aim at providing accounts and making sense of diverse and various aspects of human nature, namely of the wider concept of aesthetic experience. Of course, there are sub-disciplines that are more or less at the center of aesthetic debates, but this is something that has to do with how predominant, or urgent a certain topic or philosophical tradition is in a certain period. Right now, for example, it cannot be denied that what is trending, for several reasons, is a research that is concerned – just like this issue of "Aesthetica Preprint" is – with environments in their various instances: ecological, natural, built, imagined, artificial, human, personal, social, extended, virtual, augmented, biological, cultural, emergency-related, etc.

However, when it comes to defining what "the aesthetic" is, that is to say what the qualifying element of a wider "entity" called aesthetics is, the tension recalled between quantitative determination and qualitative processes becomes particularly poignant. When we speak of the aesthetic, we generally refer to a sensory, perceptual, and emotional dimension of experience. This has great implications when it comes to provide sufficiently stable definitions of what the aesthetic is. If it is true that aesthetics has generally to do with what is sensed, perceived and felt, it necessarily has to do with individuals who personally, bodily, and uniquely experience things,

events, etc. In these terms, although there can be commonalities in experience that can be identified and categorized, as far as the aesthetic is concerned, experience can hardly be reduced to a set of determinable features once for all. This is true to the extent that philosophers with an anti-essentialist approach to aesthetics have resorted to more dynamic concepts such as "symptoms" (see Goodman 1978), or "indicators" (see for instance Naukkarinen 2017) of the aesthetic, rather than getting ahold of it by enucleating its properties or necessary and sufficient conditions. They "signal" its presence or, in other terms, that something has somehow acquired an aesthetic relevance.

It must be noted, though, that a similar tension can be found also within aesthetics in its practical, immersive, operative, or experiential dimension, that is to say outside of its strictly theoretical-academic field. One instance of this can be represented by our aesthetic conceptions, considerations, and evaluations. They can be expressed discursively through the usage of specific terms, but they can be equally expressed through certain actions, gestures, behaviors, choices, or lifestyles, that *per se* tend to exceed propositional contents, as Wittgenstein (1966) has nicely put it in his lectures on aesthetics. Sometimes these expressions do not fully do justice to the ways we actually *dwell in* our aesthetic sphere of experience *qua* experience, and we keep looking for the "right expression", able to account for them to others; sometimes these conceptions, considerations and evaluations are not communicated at all (or at least not consciously), insofar as certain "things" are dispersed in the flow of our experiences, or are tacitly part of our taken-for-granted experiential background. Particularly in this latter case, these "things" are not in our aesthetic experiential focus (yet), but they can potentially become part of it as aesthetically meaningful ones[4]. It is important to clarify that all the aspects that I mentioned concern degrees that run on a spectrum, or on a continuum, and don't mutually exclude each other. They are aspects that imply things that can contingently become salient, or conspicuous, and then be re-absorbed in the already mentioned flow, or background; they are not absolute "crystallizations", so to speak, endowed for good with aesthetic value. This is a further way of saying that when we speak of aesthetics, we do it in the plural.

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[4] On the relationship between perception and attentive processes see also Nanay 2016.

3. *Aesthetics Between Backgrounds and Foregrounds*

What I would like to emphasize is that something, when aesthetically meaningful for us, takes on a particular and distinctive experiential configuration. At the same time, the latter can be re-shaped according to the energies that are each time in force in the specific context in which we are experiencing, and in which we are contributing vectors ourselves. In order to emphasize this dimension of dynamic potentiality of the aesthetic, it is useful to discern the content of this experiential modality from mere factual elements. As we have seen before, the aesthetic is connoted not only by determinable, measurable elements, but also by processual and dynamic elements, namely relational elements intrinsically in-hering in an environment. Precisely with the aim to free from pure-ly factual contents the contents of this experiential modality, some scholars have suggested not to resolve, or rather, not to reduce, the aesthetic content to a simple *aistheton*, to a determined, given content (namely to a sensed, perceived, felt one) – to a content of *aisthesis*. A very effective way of describing the emergence of these dynamic configurations – which indeed exceed those factual contents – has been put forward through the somewhat similar – Aristotle echoing – concepts of "aisthema" (Matteucci 2020) and "aestheme" (Naukkarinen 2020).

In the case of the former, an "aisthema" is something in which

the aesthetic […] appears as something with which we experience – that is: when we experience with something, we are faced with aestheticity as a relational modality. In this case, the object, instead of being the target of a subject, performa-tively generates an experiential field which is aesthetically qualified as a whole. […]

Since this manifestation pertains to operative, and not substantial elements, the kind of experience at issue here is radically contingent, as well as intrinsically crea-tive. It hence forces to an exercise of competences: the organism does not merely at-tend to, but participates in the apparition of the *aisthema*, even when it plays the role of the "author" of an aesthetic structure, by also making use of itself, and not only of those same contents that are mere functional terms for its experience-of, that is, of the matter it interacts with. In the practice of the aesthetic, activity and passivity pertain to both *relata*, according to a performative intertwining between feeling and feeling-oneself that produces reflexivity. By virtue of this involvement the organism, in fact, from its interaction with the environment acquires plastic competences about the "self-in-the-world" (a non-quantifiable formula within itself) that are outside of merely functional relationships and whose ownership is to be ascribed to the field as a whole. (Matteucci 2020, p. 176)

And in the case of the latter an "aestheme"

expresses someone's views on the aesthetic dimensions or features of something. It reveals how they perceive the aesthetics of a specific target. […] The neologism

aestheme simultaneously refers to the various pieces in the shoreless space of aesthetics as well as the process of estimating, assessing or outlining. The result of the evaluative process is a statement on how the observer perceives the aesthetic dimensions of a specific part of the surrounding world (which could manifest itself as, for example, a commentary in a periodical or an oral expression of opinion) or how they themselves want to change and manipulate them (manifested as, for example, a work of art, a meal or a choice of accessory). However, an aestheme does not necessarily have to be a fully-formed and stable end result; it can also be a changing and developing process; for example, an ongoing discussion or debate. The entire space of aesthetics is, in other words, filled with different aesthemes, and in some cases, they form entire aesthetics. (Naukkarinen 2020, pp. 33-34)

It is interesting to note how both these concepts, if considered within the wider work of the authors who used them, hint at a spatial account of aesthetics also in the more directly "galactic" sense of the word: an aisthema is understood according to a conception of aesthetics as a constellation (or in an even more Adornian sense, according to the somewhat similar ideas of firework and apparition), and an aistheme is understood according to a conception of aesthetics as canopies of stars with their own lifecycle.

Spatial metaphors, or ways to visually render conceptions of aesthetics, or the experience of the aesthetic, are actually quite frequent in the field. This is not surprising, given the intrinsic character of "inherence in an environment" of the aesthetic that has already been pointed out. More historicized versions of this "environmental status" are, for instance, that of Stimmung, aura, constellation (more or less critically central in the aesthetic reflections of various philosophers such as – historically – Simmel, Benjamin and Adorno) – but we could go even as back as to Plato's cave and Leibnitz's monad insofar as their aesthetic resonance is concerned. More recent ones are Arnold Berleant's notion of field (Berleant 1970), neo-phenomenology's atmospheres (as in the philosophies of at least Gernot Böhme 2017 and Tonino Griffero 2014), and the notion of niche (as developed by Richard Menary 2014, Richard Richards 2017, Giovanni Matteucci 2019, etc.). Also all those thematizations of the notion of world, space, place, borderline, and of various "-scapes" should be mentioned. Although it has been developed not necessarily in the specific domain of aesthetics, even Peter Sloterdijk's notion of spheres (as bubbles, globes and foams) could be included in this partial list.

In the case of this contribution, the usage of the word "background" is not coincidental. Of course, the way it has been used earlier seemed more evidently to refer to its meaning as the totality of one's own "experience, knowledge, and education". Literally, though, "background" also means, for instance, "an inconspicuous

position", or "the conditions that form the setting within which something is experienced"[5]. Indeed, it has a particular relevance in the arts (i.e. in paintings) and in science (i.e. in physics), but it is also synonymous with "environment" and "milieu". These latter terms perhaps convey better the idea that when we are experiencing something, we are inevitably and irreducibly immersed, situated, or embedded personally, in the first person – as experiencing individuals – in certain contexts – which yet can be of a shared kind, as they belong to the "common world". Even when the kind of experience we are having is one of a contemplative kind, we are still having that experience *as* we are immersed somewhere, sometime. We could even go as far as claiming that, after all, aesthetics is always (Dewey echoing) environmental.

It seems worth delving deeper into this problem as it can give us useful indications in order to grasp more precisely the nexus between aesthetics and environments. Significantly, a background necessarily implies that also a foreground exists. Perhaps it is no coincidence that nature has entered the scene in Western painting in the specific form of landscape painting along with the adoption of the technique of perspective, which is entirely played out on the different planes between foreground and background. The by now classic case of Giorgione's *The Tempest*, as interpreted by various scholars (above all: Wind 1969, Settis 1978) can be recalled here. And the relationship – the continuity relationship, as mentioned above – between background and foreground is what interests us here. In this sense it should be noted that in the context of this contribution these terms are being used in a descriptive and not in an honorific way. There is no hierarchy in this relationship, but cooperation, between "back" and "fore". A foreground is something that emerges *against* a background, stems *out of* it as something conspicuous, salient. The emphasis should be put not on the fact that background and foreground are somehow distinguished yet interacting aspects of experience, but what I aim to emphasize is precisely the fact that it is their interaction in itself, their permeability, or continuity relationship, that dynamically and mutually endows each one of them in a specific (yet contingent) manner. Whatever the "propositional" content is, that is, whatever appears in the foreground of our experience, it acquires aesthetic significance insofar as it is grasped in its dynamic interaction with that which sustains it tacitly, with its background. The simple content in the foreground is no

[5] See https://www.merriam-webster.com/.

guarantee, nor unquestionable proof, of an aesthetic experience. Foreground and background are such by virtue of each other. So much so that, to return to Giorgione's example, landscape painting could arise almost by chance when what should have occupied the proscenium of the representation had simply disappeared (due to the fact that the painter did not have time to produce it). And so, it is as if one had realized that even in that operational background, which had by then become extraordinarily refined, there was an intrinsic aesthetic significance that could even become thematic itself.

This means that the terms of this couple should not be taken as an essentially "natural" given, "natural" datum, so to speak, or even as "authentic" and immutable, since they are the outcome of processes and, as such, they imply a certain degree of artificiality, and hence they are constituted. These processes, most of the time, take place obliquely and are thus hard to grasp as such but – at least up to a certain point – they can equally be intentionally controlled and constructed, clearly following certain procedures that can be explained, labeled. We will get back to this point later.

If we were to find in the history of philosophical concepts one instance of this operative "background", surrounding space, we could resort to the phenomenological concept of *Lebenswelt* (as it has been put forward at least starting from Husserl 1936), and even to the concept of *Lebensform* (see for instance Wittgenstein 1953; 1980). It is not my aim here to discuss in detail how they are related (for a work providing such an analysis from a phenomenological and pragmatist point of view we refer the reader to Renn et al. 2012). What I deem useful from introducing this consolidated philosophical pair of concepts is that they are, interestingly, something that is simply taken for granted, that is unquestioned, carried out automatically, with spontaneity, *and*, at the same time, something that is historically, materially constituted through processes of which it keeps the traces. They can be considered as historical-material apriori.

As for philosophical takes on the notion of "foreground", we could resort, again, to phenomenology, by referring to the concept of "emergence", but also to the Deweyan notion of "an" experience, in which those "things" dispersed in an experiential flow, or stream, become meaningfully prominent. It is important to define the peculiar nature of such prominence. As far as aesthetic experience is concerned, it generally has the feature of positivity, it is gratifying. The gratification linked to some kind of aesthetic prominence, though, can also be generated by the experience of negative

elements connected with dissonance, puzzlement, suspense, fear, and the like by virtue of the dynamic tension they have with their energetic (qualitative) background, so to speak. In the 18th century, with Burke and then with Kant, for instance, there has been a magnification of the experience of the sublime. This magnification is precisely due to the fact that the seeming dissonance, the seeming disorder that constitutes the spectacle which is typical of a violent nature actually reveals an aesthetic, gratifying background for the subject who is experiencing with those surrounding natural, or even, according to Burke, social forces. The sublime is not merely terrifying precisely because it is not merely "a foreground" which is experienced. Its aesthetic significance is intrinsically environmental. Significantly, there is also a background which, in this case, can be understood as the instance of being part of a powerful living context, but also of being able to take a distance from it. This latter case is possible because there is a foreground "behind which" we can take shelter and feel safe. The sublime is a spectacularized form of the environment. If the aesthetic weren't environmental, a phenomenon such as the sublime wouldn't be justified from an aesthetic standpoint.

These negative elements, along with more positive ones, can be typically found in the experience of certain critical or speculative forms of design, artworks, and, as seen, even in natural phenomena. If the sublime is one instance of the environment in its aesthetic "gigantism", another way to look at this question, but also to define in a more specific way the kind of prominence we are referring to, is through the more "man-sized" lens of everydayness, that is to say, the qualifying aspect of an area (another spatial metaphor, by the way) of our experience with specific features which generally concern such elements as comfort, seamlessness, and the like. I deem useful taking on this perspective for several reasons, which I will illustrate in the next paragraph.

4. *Aesthetics Between Qualities and Quantities*

What are the advantages of an analysis of the "environmental aesthetic" through the lens of everydayness, that is to say for how it acts in the "smaller" frameworks of everyday life? First, an everydayness perspective provides an instance of the twofold, or rather polarized, characterization of aesthetics as both an academic, theoretical endeavor – namely as a sub-discipline of aesthetics known as "Everyday Aesthetics", which is aimed at giving accounts

of our everyday aesthetic experiences – and as a set of aesthetic practices carried out in our everyday environments – namely the aesthetic transactions we have with our surroundings, whatever they might be.

Second, it provides an instance of that inextricable mixture of inconspicuousness and conspicuousness, vagueness and focus, spontaneity and construction we mentioned earlier when we described the features of a "background" and a "foreground". Our everydays, particularly today, are not merely a matter of "spontaneity", "naturality", so to speak, since they are strongly designed, "infrastructured", and also partly dependent on the technological constraints of the devices that innervate them. They are neither merely a matter of "artificiality" though, as the human component is irreducible, since the experiences we have – as far as the aesthetic is concerned, as we have seen above, when I referred to some anti-essentialist approaches to aesthetics – are always, and irreducibly, carried out in the first person. In this sense, perhaps, it would be better to speak of s*omeone's* everyday, rather than of a more general notion of "everyday" or "everydayness".

Third, speaking of someone's everyday brings to the fore an important set of aspects of our experience, which include familiarity, normalcy, security, and identity (see at least Haapala 2005, Lehtinen 2013, Saito 2017). These are all aspects that, as far as someone's everyday is concerned, are generally deemed positive, they are what we generally aim at. Of course, since here we are subscribing a processual, continuist, dynamic, and anti-essentialist conception of aesthetic experience, this set of aspects can be reshaped (positively or negatively, suddenly or slowly; see Naukkarinen 2013) by unfamiliar, strange, challenging aspects. For instance, they can take on a negative connotation, insofar as they generate boredom, or we feel like they are holding us back or also, more generally speaking, when they exclude some kind of gratification. In this latter case we tend to escape from them. Yet, as far as someone's everyday is concerned, even if only at a contingent level, we are speaking of a specific and gratifying dimension of experience which we effortlessly dwell in or inhabit as our own. In other terms, it is an environmental scenario we are living in as long as we are feeling ourselves belonging to it, "owning it".

That is why speaking of this dimension of own everydayness helps to clarify the conception of "prominence" we have introduced as a key notion for the understanding of our actual environmental experience: someone's own everyday is for her/him something that is highly recognizable (that is, familiar), but that at the same

time both shapes the environment and is shaped by conscious and unconscious processes and transactions with the environment that cannot always be unequivocally, sheerly or explicitly pinned down. It is prominent but at the same time dwelled in operatively. Somewhere else (Iannilli 2020), I suggested that what I have tried to explain here in terms of a "background-foreground" relationship can be understood as the relationship between a "fully rounded" area of experience and something that (following the corresponding mathematical concept) I have labeled "neighborhoods". In the first case, "fully rounded" would be a rather (that is, again, contingently) stable, focused, saturated, foreground that we deem our own, personal; in the second case, "neighborhood" would be a proximal surrounding in which we are immersed, an environment, a milieu, a background that we share with others.

Significantly, the emphasis that has been put on processes, continuism, mutuality, contingency and anti-essentialism sheds light, again, on the concept of potentiality. From this perspective, potentially anything can become salient and – as far as the aesthetic is specifically concerned – aesthetically meaningful for us, just like it can be re-absorbed in the operative flow of experiences from which it stemmed out in the first place. Again: aesthetics in its plurality.

It should be clarified, though, that speaking of someone's everyday as something personal, individual, and of neighborhoods as something proximal should not be seen as a narrow-minded, short-sighted, or parochial, individualistic conception of aesthetic experience. Quite the contrary. It actually aims at stressing at least two implications: 1) the fact that as interacting experientors, we are always personally situated, or embedded, in certain situations, and this both gives us a relevant role, that as such preserves our diversity as individuals, and also calls for greater responsibility and respect in the management of such interactions, because they take place in a shared environment; 2) the fact that in a globally interconnected, ubiquitous and reactive world such as the one where we are experientially situated, or embedded, the notion of neighborhood should be understood as widely as possible.

5. *Types of Environmental Knowledge: Ecology, Aesthetics, Design*

Our own neighborhood, or (everyday) environment, and our choices and behaviors within it forge more directly our own identities and contribute to or interfere with our well-being. At the same time, the choices we make and the behaviors we have with-

in our own neighborhood, or (everyday) environment here and now can impact greatly, although perhaps more indirectly, other neighborhoods, or (everyday) environments, and the quality of life somewhere else at some other time, and vice versa (Maskit 2011, Naukkarinen 2011). This point can be better explained through the comparison between the concept of Aesthetic Footprint, coined by Ossi Naukkarinen, and the concept of Ecological Footprint, made known by Mathis Wackernagel.

> The Aesthetic Footprint can be defined as the aesthetic impact of any object or action on the environment, here and everywhere, now and at other times. It is activity's total aesthetic effect. For example, if I buy a T-shirt in New York how does it make the environment look and feel like in the cotton fields of India or Pakistan? How will it affect any environment aesthetically anytime and anywhere? How have the producing and marketing processes of the T-shirt already affected the world as we can aesthetically sense it? (Naukkarinen 2011, p. 92)

> The Ecological Footprint is the measure of how much biologically productive land and water an individual, population or activity requires to produce all the resources it consumes and to absorb the waste it generates using prevailing technology and resource management practices. The Ecological Footprint is usually measured in global hectares. Because trade is global, an individual or country's Footprint includes land or sea from all over the world[6].

Both concepts take into account the impact that certain everyday actions, and production and consumption choices can have: they are very important and especially today we must be aware of both of them. Yet, they also greatly differ. In the case of the latter, the definition of the Footprint is based on measurable, empirically identifiable elements which can then be easily pinned down, defined, and indicate, or make understand, how to act accordingly. In the case of the former, we are dealing with elements which instead are not as easy to be pinned down or defined, since they more directly concern the aesthetic sphere, where judgments of taste are not objectively universal, and it is not as simple to reduce them to data and hence prescribe unequivocally what is good and what is not good (on this topic see also the distinction between ecological value and aesthetic value in Naukkarinen 2011, p. 107 *vs* Saito 2007). Also, as far as the Aesthetic Footprint is concerned, understanding data and their implied impact is not enough. Awareness is certainly central, but, as Naukkarinen shows (Naukkarinen 2011, p. 95) also a typically aesthetic faculty such as imagination, combined with a planning ability is important in its framework. This is a faculty that, moreover, as the author holds, is able to "compensate

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[6] https://www.footprintnetwork.org/resources/glossary/ [accessed June 30, 2020].

for" the impossibility of being bodily present – i.e. the fundamental first-hand mode of experience which is typical of the aesthetic – anywhere in the globe in order to "check" what our Aesthetic Footprint might be[7].

Also by drawing from these considerations, using the lens of everydayness in order to explain that peculiar – or even, to a certain extent paradoxical – aesthetic, gratifying prominence we have mentioned earlier in this text is then useful because it makes emerge more clearly that tension we have initially referred to in the relationship between quantities and qualities, measurable and non-measurable aspects. This environmental tension can be addressed from the point of view of the relationship between ecology and aesthetics (as we have just seen), but if we enlarge our perspective and we include in the conception of environmental experience also "artificial" features that qualify human surroundings as such it can equally be addressed from the point of view of the relationship between design and aesthetics – showing how ecology, design and aesthetics are deeply intertwined.

In particular, I am referring to design meant in its specifically experiential connotation. Experience Design can be understood from the point of view of a designer as a research activity and as a practice that is aimed at making certain experiential functions available to a user by enhancing them, by making them more conspicuous while keeping the user engaged in that experiential construct as seamlessly and naturally as possible. Experience designers are hence concerned with the design of overall experiences rather than with the design of discrete, individual things such as objects. From the point of view of a user, Experience Design can be understood as what facilitates, is conducive to certain experiences that otherwise would need more effort or would not be possible at all. It is something that gratifying-

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[7] "To imagine does not have to mean inventing something completely fictional and unreal; it may often involve simply thinking about how things may actually be in reality even if one cannot go and check the situation on site. Accentuating this does not mean promoting the so called 'imagination mode' of environmental aesthetics versus the '(scientific) cognitive' one because both points of departure may have their place in approaching the environment aesthetically and in both perspectives some versions of imagination can be used. It is a perfectly normal to have a capacity to imagine, and that is what we have to use in thinking about Aesthetic Footprints. The important point is that very often when we think of aesthetic considerations we have something quite local in mind, something that deals with what we can perceive here and now (e.g., a work of art in front of us, a landscape), but that is not enough for environmental discussions. Just as the rest of environmental discussion takes note that actions, objects and organisms exist in large, even global networks, so should aesthetics. This does not mean that our personal experiences would not take place in particular, local contexts, but just underlines that whatever we do may affect how we ourselves and other people may experience the environment on some other occasion and in some other locale" (Naukkarinen 2011, pp. 96-97).

ly affords conditions for operativity. For an "experience consumer" what counts is not possessing an object, but the experiential process as such (see Lipovetsky 2006). In general, Experience Design concerns the *(direct) "manipulation" of quantities in order to (indirectly) obtain quality*, the attempt to make something "artificial" be felt positively and effortlessly as if it were "natural", or "cool"[8], and the interaction between pre-constituted experiential frameworks, or environments, and personally involved or immersed individuals. In this sense Experience Design can also be understood within a so-called (interacting, operative, cooperative) "experience-with" paradigm (Matteucci 2019) of aesthetic experience. Interestingly, this shift towards experience which is particularly made explicit in a label such as "Experience Design" has a specifically aesthetic endowment. Experience Design is a further, more radical, step within a progression from the mainly cognitivist and minimalist/simplicity-oriented approach typical of Usability – something for which a central goal is to make functions "available" in an easy and efficient manner – to the more aesthetically oriented approach of User Experience Design – in which it is important to make functions available in a way that is also gratifying (by emphasizing such features as fun, emotion, delight, performance, style, identity, etc.).

This leads us to a further point. It is worth resorting to one statement we made earlier in this text. We stated that when we deal with backgrounds and foregrounds, with neighborhoods and someone's everyday, etc. and their mutual relationships, we are not dealing with clear-cut or fixed procedures. We are instead dealing with complexities, with experiential processes that, most of the time, unfold and take place obliquely and are thus hard to grasp as such. Yet – at least up to a certain point, as showed with the example of Experience Design – they can equally be intentionally controlled and constructed, or reduced, clearly following certain procedures that can be explained or labeled (granted that we must at least try to make sense of things that seem to be ineffable, even if we do not fully succeed in doing that). In this context I am going to tackle some aspects implied by an element which is particularly relevant to the construction of our environments as we experience them today also from an aesthetic point of view: the digital. This point further corroborates the need to take on an environmental perspective in aesthetics in the widest sense possible.

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[8] We refer the reader to Russell (2011) for a philosophical analysis of the concept of the effortlessly cool person precisely in the sense of a tension between spontaneity and construction of a certain attitude. Russell's conception of coolness has led me to recommend an understanding of Experience Design as a "cool design" in Iannilli (2020).

6. *"How Much" Quality?*

Human Computer Interaction is "a multidisciplinary field of study focusing on the design of computer technology and, in particular, the interaction between humans (the users) and computers [covering] almost all forms of information technology design"[9]. It is one important step in the overall development of the design of environments meant in the sense of a broadening, also beyond nature, of our environmental experience, namely in terms of our environmental experience via the digital.

Significantly, the digital 1) has an ever increasing role in our everyday practices, personal spaces and for our creativity as users and consumers, or also as producers and practitioners engaged with a certain technology[10], strengthening that idea of a shift "from objects to experiences" in design that has already been mentioned; 2) it has also spurred a research direction in fields that have traditionally relied on empirical data such as scientific disciplines, or the "harder" sciences, which is now trying to give accounts of less measurable and conceptualizable elements, namely of experiential and aesthetic elements. In the first case, a technical term has been used in order to describe those processes of increasing digitalization of certain areas of experience, namely that of "technological adoption" (see Denning, Lewis 2020). Interestingly, it has been noted that the most recent groups of technologies playing a role in this process of adoption and re-shaping of more consolidated areas of experience are: Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things, and Extended Reality, this latter including both Virtual and Augmented Reality (see Marfia 2020, and Noruzzi et al. 2019). In the second case, I am referring to a research direction grossly coinciding with a so called "third wave" of Human Computer Interaction. This third wave is one instance of a shift in design research towards the (both practice-based and speculative) investigation of non-measurable elements defining experience and interactions (see Bødker 2006 and Spence 2016). Another example of this shift could be represented by a certain version of visualization design concerned with the measurement not only of commonalities, or patterns, but also of aesthetic diversity. A scholar who has recently delved into this field

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[9] https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/topics/human-computer-interaction [accessed June 30, 2020].

[10] Making the link between sustainability and digital practices very clear, i.e. fashion collections or shows, or retailing that exist only in digital, not materially wasteful worlds. Perhaps they do produce some sort of "digital pollution", as far as the digital element is exclusively concerned, and the ever developing and obsolescent technologies that physically support it are not taken into account.

from the standpoint of AI aesthetics is Manovich (2019). Although his book mainly focuses on the level of the analysis of users' image production (yet aiming at accounting for cultural products in the wider sense of the word), it is emblematical as it precisely stresses the idea of a plurality of aesthetics against (total) reduction through the challenging and, perhaps, in Manovich's own words "utopian" task of measuring cultural variability also by making it visually intelligible through quite elaborated configurations, or visualizations (he has developed a project called "Cultural Analytics". Here, so-called "Data Humanism", an interesting project carried out by information designer Giorgia Lupi, should also be mentioned).

It almost seems as if, on the one hand, "qualities" needed to give away a bit of their specificity in order to be enhanced and, on the other hand, "quantities" had to sacrifice a bit of their efficiency, in order to make things work better, in a more "all-encompassing", "overall", even environmental, ecosystemic, way. Or also: it is almost as if (sometimes consciously and sometimes not) the "human environment" and the "digital environment" broadly speaking modified themselves while co-existing, or even had to modify themselves in order to co-exist with each other[11].

So, be it the point of view of a user, or of a designer, the role of "the digital" in the current processes of design of experiences seems to bring even more to the fore, or even to radicalize that tension between qualities and quantities that has already emerged as characterizing aesthetic experience especially in today's environments saturated with designed, intelligent, experiential functions.

In the case of users (both seen as practitioners and as consumers), this tension has been explained in terms of a technology adoption which is ever increasingly environmental and experiential and less objectual, and of the related issue of the modification of the quality of everyday practices which can take place also according to a specific technology adoption. In the case of designers, the tension has been explained by making reference to their inevitable tendency to quantify qualities, and to the unavoidable (at least to a certain extent) undertaking of processes of reduction of a complexity (i.e. of experience). Yet, this tendency and undertaking take place while

[11] So much so that we could speak of a sort of mutual "Deep Learning" for both sides. However, one way to understand this "co-constitutive" relationship from the specific point of view of AI is also provided by two concepts which are central in Floridi (2019): "ludification of interactions and tasks" and "enveloping of realities around the skills of our artifacts". Interestingly, Floridi holds that "Ludifying and enveloping are a matter of *designing*, or sometimes re-designing, the realities with which we deal […]. So the foreseeable future of AI will depend on our design abilities and ingenuity. […] The very idea that we are increasingly shaping our environments (analog or digital) to make them AI-friendly should make anyone reflect […]" (Floridi 2019, p. 13).

attempting at enhancing experiential wholes, totalities, in which individuals are situated, embedded, rather than exclusively focusing one's efforts on discrete and easily measurable entities, while also maintaining the relevance of diversity and differentiation. In either case, it is not an easy task to keep things together[12].

It is maybe too soon to draw some conclusions about the implications of the ever-increasing digitalization of our experience, and in particular our aesthetic experience[13] (i.e. a sensory, perceptual, emotional, taste-related, etc. kind of experience). As far as the aesthetic is concerned, though, as we have seen, the experiential turn in design already emphasizes *per se* aesthetic components of experience, and does so by precisely valorizing the qualitative characters of first-hand, personal – human – experience, situatedness and embeddedness. Interestingly, this seems to be the case also in its more evidently digital specification, which is usually seen as making experience less "human". In the various instances where its experiential, environmental connotation is more evident, such as the ones we mentioned already (AI, Internet of Things, Extended Reality), the role of "the digital" seems, in fact, also to bring to the fore that specifically environmental connotation of aesthetics we suggested earlier. I made that suggestion when I advocated the idea that a) as we are experiencing something, we are inevitably and irreducibly immersed, situated, or even embedded personally, as experiencing individuals, in certain contexts, which yet can be of a shared kind, as they belong to the "common world"; b) as we are experiencing something environmentally, that is to say, in the interactions or transactions between individuals and (also digital, shared) environments, mutual modification processes take place[14]. When, in other words, I advocated the idea that aesthetics, after all, is *always* environmental.

7. *Contemporary Italian Perspectives on "Environmental Aesthetics"*

I started off this paper by asking the question "How many aesthetics can there be?", and a preliminary answer was: "many", basing this claim on a pluralistic and anti-essentialist conception of aes-

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[12] And, perhaps, as far as design theory and practice is concerned, it is precisely in a good interdisciplinary environment that this ability can and should be developed.

[13] For specifically aesthetic investigations which just like Manovich's are not limited to an analysis of AI as an "art generator", but that deal with questions such as perception and the like see also Marfia, Matteucci (2018) and Naukkarinen (2019). On algorithms and aesthetics see Melchionne (2017) and Arielli (2018).

[14] And as we have seen all this calls not only for gratification but also for greater responsibility.

thetics and of the aesthetic. In the course of the analysis developed in the previous pages a further, radical, claim was also made, namely, that aesthetics is always environmental. This second claim was based on a (Dewey echoing) immersive, experiential, relational, processual and non-object-oriented conception of aesthetic experience.

Here it seems useful to resort to the analysis, carried out by D'Angelo (2008), of the difficult relationship between an aesthetics concerned with the landscape and an aesthetics following an environmental paradigm. In particular, he refers to the limits of a reduction of the notion of landscape to that of environment, hence the limits of the way too easy dismissal of the relevance that the landscape has for aesthetic experience. D'Angelo sets the problematic origins and development of this relationship between the 1960s and the 1990s, when ecological thinking and various environmental concerns surfaced and flourished[15] leading to a stigmatization of the notion of landscape. In recent years, though – D'Angelo says – in aesthetics there has mostly been a "reconciliation" between landscape (which he understands as a relational, properly aesthetic, concept) and environment (which he describes as physical-biological, hence as a concept that, as such, is non-aesthetic). Two ways of understanding this reconciliation, so to speak, can be: a re-gained importance of the landscape; a conflation of the term landscape into the term environment (a view, as said, of which he is particularly critical). The kind of value D'Angelo attaches to the landscape is of an irreducible yet relational kind, and bringing to the fore this aspect allows him also to provide elements for overcoming a narrow and biased conception of the landscape (see D'Angelo 2010). Such conception would suggest for instance that 1) only those landscapes with some extraordinarily beautiful features actually deserve the recognition of aesthetic value – while, actually, aesthetic value concerns also more ordinary, and negative experiences, and 2) the fact that the appreciation of the aesthetic value of a landscape tends to be based on a projection of aesthetic values learned from landscape painting – while, actually, landscape aesthetic appreciation is the outcome of a dense mixture of natural, artistic, artificial, historical, memorial, and imaginative (see in particular also Brady 2003) features of experience.

Landscape is indeed a well-defined portion of a wider environment endowed with aesthetic value for the experientor. Maintaining this while subscribing a general environmental mode of aesthetic experience does not entail at all the dismissal of the aesthetic rel-

[15] Interestingly, one specifically Italian philosophical endeavor countering this general tendency in the 1970s is represented by Assunto (1973), who aimed at preserving the aesthetic specificity of the landscape also by stressing its intrinsically historical dimension.

evance of the landscape, on my part. In my view, the relationship between landscape and environment, in fact, concerns the same foreground-background relationship already addressed in this paper. In a sense, a landscape can be understood as a "kernel", as that prominent fully rounded area of experience that we deem aesthetically meaningful while we are situated, or embedded, in wider "neighborhoods" of experience. I have so far referred to an "Environmental Aesthetics" rather than to an "Aesthetics of the Environment", and this is not another technical remark, just like the one that I made at the beginning of this essay in reference to the plural form of the noun "aesthetics" was not. Emphasizing the adjectival form of "environment", that is to say using the word "environmental", rather than stressing a factual content such as "the environment" would be, is useful in order to make a distinction between "the how" and "the what", that is to say, in order to stress the fact that it is not a realm of objects, or events ("the what") – factual contents – as such that makes our experience aesthetic, but it is the way we experience them, that makes our experience aesthetic. Again, it is not a matter of an aesthetics concerned with "the" environment, but of an aesthetics that is intrinsically environmental. This can be explained in the same terms as that wider shift "from objects to experiences" taking place both in design theory, practice and consumption, namely, as that shift in focus from single, individualized entities, to larger experiential, environmental wholes and totalities.

The shift from objects to experiences seems to be generally also at the center of the contributions included in this issue of "Aesthetica Preprint". They represent another example of the pluralistic nature of aesthetics, being at least seven instances of different styles with which one common topic, that is to say "aesthetic environments", can be addressed. Paolo Furia deals with this topic from the point of view of the relationship between geography and aesthetics. He intertwines a phenomenological notion of geographical experience with an analysis of some of the metaphorical underpinnings of the geographical notion of place and with an understanding of the geographical notion of landscape based on aesthetic appreciation. Alberto L. Siani puts at the center of his contribution the interpretation of art and nature of which he aims at providing a unified conception by adopting a consistent pragmatist framework. In order to do so he compares Emily Brady's and Umberto Eco's takes on interpretation. He emphasizes the several similarities between the two authors but at the same time suggests that Eco could provide some fruitful indications that would make some of Brady's claims even more consistent, that is, avoiding not only a hedonistic relativism

but also a form of naïve realism. Lisa Giombini proposes a revision of the notion of heritage site. By specifically locating her analysis in the scenario of the aftermath of an extreme natural event, she suggests that in the context of the reconstruction procedures of damaged sites, besides more technical elements, it is necessary to take into account and preserve the value people attach to certain sites, which makes them places of human significance. Marcello Barison intersects the discourse on Anthropocene with current philosophical research on architecture in the light of various shortcomings that can be found in each of these two fields and which he aims to overcome. In particular, he focuses on the general and unifying "philosophical-architectural" concept of world-formation. This focus allows, Barison says, both the disciplinary establishment of a philosophy of architecture and a better understanding of Anthropocene. Martino Feyles addresses environments in their augmented form phenomenologically. His thesis is that if it is true that what distinguishes human perception is its being intrinsically bound to language, it is always, in fact, of an augmented kind. He identifies what differentiates the kinds of perceptual activities at stake in the animal-environment and human-world exchanges in the relationship between pre-determination and openness of perceptual and operative possibilities, which is now partly reshaped in augmented environments. Stefano Marino puts forward an idea of "second-nature" as a chiefly aesthetic concept. By focusing in particular on the mimetic component of experience he aims at downsizing the almost exclusive and too narrow focus on rationality and language that has been generally put forward by certain philosophical views when providing accounts of the difference between animal ways of inhabiting the environment and human ways of shaping a world. Nicola Perullo, by retrieving some of the concepts recently addressed in Perullo (2020), lays the grounds for an ecological aesthetics based on a "haptic perception". The "integral" ecological aesthetics he recommends follows a specifically participatory logic implying attention, intimacy and care, thus excluding any isolationist, predetermined attitude while emphasizing instead a relational and processual – a so-called "perceiving with", haptic – model of experience.

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Connections Between Geography and Aesthetics

di Paolo Furia

ABSTRACT

There are some interesting connections between epistemological issues concerning geography and the main interests of environmental aesthetics. Environmental aesthetics has already dealt with the issue whether certain kinds of scientific knowledge are relevant or not to aesthetic appreciation. What we hold here is that aesthetic appreciation of the environment plays a relevant role to the scientific knowledge of it. The argument unfolds in three steps. First, I will establish a phenomenological notion of geographical experience. This includes an overview of the debate in human geography between two epistemologies: a quantitative, nomothetic and an-aesthetic one and a more qualitative, idiographic and phenomenological one. Second, I will discuss some of the aesthetic metaphors that geographers and social scientists, who have adopted the second epistemology, have been using to build the geographical concept of place. Third, I will show that aesthetic appreciation serves as the basis for the geographical notion of landscape.

Geography is connected to aesthetics in at least two important ways. First, the original and indispensable task of geography, which can be found in its very etymology, is to draw the Earth. The primary tool of geography is the map. However accurate and exact a map may be, it always has a fictive trait which reveals something about the illustrator: her research objectives, the scientific conventions she is adopting, the technological support she uses for observations, her cultural heritage. The cartographic rendering is always also a matter of imagination. The neglecting of this evidence has been object of criticism in Cultural Geography (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988, Farinelli 2009). Second, geography includes field surveys, first-hand explorations, travels, and qualitative methods. In this sense, aesthetic experiences are at the heart of many geographical inquiries. Yet, the link between aesthetics and geography through experience is controversial. It depends on how one defines aesthetic experience, how one conceives the re-

lationship between aesthetics and science, and what epistemology of geography one adopts.

This paper addresses the second of these aforementioned issues. Environmental aesthetics has already dealt with the issue of whether certain kinds of scientific knowledge are relevant or not to aesthetic appreciation (Brady 2003, Carlson 2008). What I hold here is that aesthetics plays a relevant role in geographical knowledge. The argument unfolds in three steps. First, I will establish a phenomenological notion of geographic experience. This includes an overview of the debate in human geography between two epistemologies: a quantitative, nomothetic and an-aesthetic one and a more qualitative, idiographic and phenomenological one. Second, I will discuss some of the aesthetic metaphors that geographers and social scientists, who have adopted the second epistemology, have been using to build the geographical concept of place. Third, I will show that aesthetic appreciation serves as the basis for the geographical notion of landscape.

1. *Geographical Positivism and Phenomenology*

Experience is very relevant for both aesthetics and geography. An approach centred on the notion of experience will provide the first clear linkage between the two domains. In the case of geography, the assumption is as strong as it is simple: for humans, being always implies being in a place. This means that geographical knowledge, which makes use of concepts such as space, place, and landscape, develops from a primary set of spatial experiences. In the case of aesthetics, its consideration as a qualification of experience takes its connection to art and extends it towards different aspects of existence[1].

Phenomenological geography emerged during 1960s as a reaction against the predominant positivist attitude of Second World War geography. Tim Cresswell (2013) outlines five principles that form the basis of positivist geography: first, scientific knowledge is based on observable and measurable reality; second, scientific knowledge excludes unobservable, unquantifiable forces as explana-

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[1] We will not discuss aesthetic experience here. Yet it is clear that the broadening of the scope and the objects of aesthetics from the artistic domain to the entire dimension of experience will facilitate interdisciplinary dialogue with geography at the level of its very source, which is the sensitive, interpersonal, and social experience of places and landscapes. Aesthetic experience in this case refers especially to Arnold Berleant's work, epitomized in the book *Sense and Sensibility. The Aesthetic Transformation of the Human World* (2010).

tions of phenomena; third, testable theories are required – there is no room for value judgements; fourth, scientific knowledge should be useful and potentially applicable (a principle which quickly turned into the following: technological and practical applicability is the primary aim of theoretical knowledge); and fifth, knowledge is an ongoing process in which future results may correct prior ones. Under those assumptions, geography becomes spatial theory, where space is mostly understood as a neutral backdrop for the action of social forces, and places are reduced to mere locations identified through objective spatial coordinates. Through a broad application of mathematical and statistical tools, graph theory, and more recently, sophisticated network analysis, where places are conceived as "nodes" occupying certain "positions", geography assumes the guise of an advanced but somewhat trendy positivist science that seeks the general and overlooks the particular. The earlier account of geography as an idiographic discipline, which understood the qualities and characteristics of different regions to be unique and irreducible, was thus branded "intellectually inadequate" (Cresswell 2013, p. 79). Quantitative methods are therefore important in geography, as they are likely to produce impacts at the policy-making level. Transport geography, for instance, accompanied the massive development of traffic infrastructure both in the United States and in Europe after the Second World War[2].

These qualities notwithstanding, spatial theory has often produced "a number of mistakes also in practises and thus leads to irrational land uses" (Mazúr 1983, p. 140). More than once, efficient architectural or planning projects on paper turned out to be dangerous for lived ecosystems or threatening to local cultures. The apparent rationality of spatial theories may also serve irrational or unjust purposes. As the philosopher John Pickles puts it:

> Method and technique become arbiters of social understanding and truth, instead of establishers of certainty. In that move extra-scientific forms of knowing and dwelling in and with the world are relegated to secondary positions. From this point on we begin to live in a world where man is patterned as machine, information processor, or gene pool. When such reductions occur, not only do we run the danger of forgetting the nature of human being, but science itself can no longer say anything at all about human experience as such. (Pickles 1985, p. X)

According to authors such as Yi-Fu Tuan (1971; 1977), Anne Buttimer (1976; 1994), John Pickles (1985), and Ed Relph (1977), geography must not ignore the qualitative relationship between in-

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[2] In order to approach transport geography from both an historical and theoretical point of view, cf. Rodrigue (2020).

dividuals and place. Something of its old idiographic practice has to be rediscovered. The retrieval of the qualitative does not imply that quantitative methods in geography are wrong, but rather that quantitative methods provide only abstractions of the complexity of the lifeworld and the plurality of contingencies and unplanned consequences in human actions. In fact, there has been much debate between phenomenologists of geography about how to assess spatial theory and quantitative methods. There were those who, by denying the tenets of positivism, ended up espousing existentialism or, as Pickles denounced it, "naïve subjectivism" (Pickles 1985, p. 68). There were also those who remembered that phenomenology is a method that aims to ground science on experience, not to delete science on behalf of the alleged ineffability of experience. If experience and science are separated, both in the forms of objectivism and subjectivism, it is impossible to reconcile aesthetics and geography as a science. In fact, objectivism requires that science be sharply separated from its experiential ground in order to be constituted as a complex of logically consistent theories and statements about phenomena, taken in their set-characteristics[3]. On the other hand, subjectivism, by implying that individuals' spatial experiences are *de jure* unquestionable and unintelligible, re-affirms the same divide between an alleged objective reality and subjective experiences. In the first case, the central concepts of geography – space and place – are devoid of their lived, experiential meanings; in the second case, no theoretical reflection over space and place is possible, reduced as they are to individuals' private intentionalities. Phenomenology considers lived experience to be the source and the end of scientific inquiries, and the theoretical abstractions to be necessary fictions suitable for the analysis and the elucidation of some kinds of phenomena, or at least some of their specific aspects. For instance, the notion of absolute empty space, immobile and homogeneous, first adopted in the framework of classical mechanics, is an important abstraction when the geographer's task is to measure objective distances between two locations. The objective distance between two locations does not explain spatial behavior (for instance: people who travel between nations for leisure; people who migrate in search of better fortunes), in the same way that the mechanical force of an arm does not explain why a man raises

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[3] "Every individual is, by definition, different, but the most significant statement which can be made about modern scholarship in general is that it has been found to be intellectually more profitable, satisfying and productive to view the phenomena of the real world in terms of their 'set characteristics' rather than to concentrate upon their individual deviations from one another" (Haggett and Chorley 1967, p. 21).

his hand in the air. Spatial behavior and processes cannot be fully understood in terms of set characteristics. Spaces and places, in their diversity, have impacts on people's behaviors and choices. An idiographic approach in geography must be preserved in order to better comprehend the qualitative variety of human actions.

2. *The Aesthetic Metaphors of Place*

Phenomenologists have supported the notion of "geographical experience" in many ways, but we will focus on two: first, the affirmation of the priority of place over space; and second, the argument that human cognition and action is place-based. A pivotal contribution for the first argument is the philosopher Ed Casey's "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Sketch of Time" (1996). The paper aims to revert the classical objectivist hierarchy according to which objective space comes before lived places. Casey calls into question the very basic distinction between an external objective world and an interior, private world of the subject comprised of its sensations: a distinction which, by the way, both idealism and realism assume. Following Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, Casey states that everything depends on how we conceive perception. If it is primary, remarks the author, then "its primariness must be its ability to give to us more than bits of information about the phenomenal and epiphenomenal surfaces of things" (1996, p. 17). When we perceive, we situate the objects in "a scene of which we form a part" (*ibidem*). This scene, or perceptual horizon as Husserl puts it, is what we can call "place", according to a phenomenological insight. A decisive argument against the empiricist conception of sensation revolves around place: "precisely as surrounded by depths and horizons, the perceiver finds herself in the midst of an entire teeming place-world rather than in a confusing kaleidoscope of free-floating sensory data" (*ibidem*). As perception is always emplaced, place is neither an object among the others, nor a scientific abstraction through which to pursue this or that inquiry. Place is instead presupposed in every knowledge, as it is constitutive of experience itself.

Casey also supports the second argument, according to which human cognition and action are place-based, by introducing the idea that the constitution of place is always also cultural and symbolic. Our experiences are always conditioned by cultural and social structures, which engrain themselves into the deepest levels of perception. Bodies and places are together the vectors of this

radical, ineludible affection. The power and the performativity of social symbols do not depend on some secret force of the human spirit, but on their embodiment in spatial dimensions, as they are integrated into those depths and horizons which make experience possible. Spatial experiences can both reproduce and challenge the social order. The geographer David Seamon, in his seminal book *A Geography of the Lifeworld* (1979), introduces a telling aesthetic metaphor to express the interanimation of lived bodies and places: the *place-ballet* metaphor. More recently, Seamon has defined place-ballet as "an interaction of individual bodily routines rooted in a specific environment that often becomes an important place of interpersonal and communal exchange, meaning, and attachment" (Seamon 2018, p. 15). The typical routines regularly happening in a place define its very character and atmosphere. However, an aesthetic metaphor only works when the rules of a system are followed according to a certain degree of interpretation and social creativity. A place is recognizable thanks to its unique character, which dwells in reciprocal action with the body-ballets sustaining it. Place-ballets reproduce the ordinary and expected attitudes of people towards and within a specific place: bodily movements and behaviors follow cognitive and even moral dictates which are attached to the place's social function and meaning in the community. But spatial experiences in places can also include unexpected meetings and unsuspected possibilities of interaction with the environment. Unforeseen events may occur and display the unrealized and concealed possibilities that lie beneath the surface of ordinary life. The apparent stability of place is rather the precarious result of an ongoing process of morphogenesis, where socio-spatial forms are continually challenged by new possible interpretations or also by the explicit rejection of the already achieved forms. Place's stability is fragile and requires the constant reproduction of the acts and the repetition of the routines and rituals attached to them. Through the reproduction of a set of distinct spatial experiences and place-ballets, place is always on the verge of achieving itself; and yet, it is at the same time never achieved once for all, for interruptions of the material spatial practices or challenges to the symbolic meanings attached to them are always just around the corner.

Here the aesthetic metaphor of dance has the same role as the metaphor of play in Gadamer's *Truth and Method*: place, like art and dance, includes "an immersion (…) which cannot be fully anticipated or controlled by individual consciousness" (Davey 2016). Place, like art and play, requires an understanding of its rules and conventions; yet, place's vitality does not reside in the mere fol-

lowing of rules. They can be interpreted by its inhabitants. In other words, place always has its spatial rules and organizations, but they can be lived in multiple and sometimes unforeseeable ways: "changes in the character of these paths are part and parcels of the transformation of social relations" (Tilley 2012, p. 25). Spatial experiences in places cannot be considered to be mere repetitions of the pregiven.

A powerful aesthetic-political interpretation of spatial experiences is provided by the seminal work of Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). In his book, the author divides spatial experiences into strategies and tactics. Strategies presuppose an institutional power capable of giving shape to space in accordance with aesthetical and political aims. Examples of strategies include the construction of large squares linked by wide boulevards, or the adoption of a certain architectural styles for institutional or religious buildings. Strategies, rather than just being spatial experiences, master them by imposing a spatial order. Tactics, instead, are the actual spatial experiences of the inhabitants and always include a certain degree of manipulation of the strategic spatial order. De Certeau focuses on the act of walking. It is, he claims, "a process of appropriation of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian" (De Certeau 1984, p. 99). According to her aesthetical, social, political vantage point, which do not necessarily correspond to the ones of those who planned the social order, the walker re-invents it: "the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, trans-form or abandon spatial elements" (*ibidem*). Place is here associated with language, as both spatial and linguistic practices are considered to be arts:

> There is a rhetoric of walking. The art of "turning" phrases finds an equivalent in an art of composing a path (*tourner un parcours*). Like ordinary language, this art implies and combines styles and uses. Style specifies a linguistic structure that manifests on the symbol system of communication manifests itself in actual fact; it refers to a norm. Style and use both have to do with a "way of operating" (of speaking, walking, etc.), but style involves a peculiar processing of the symbolic, while use refers to elements of a code. They intersect to form a style of use, a way of being and a way of operating. (De Certeau 1984, p. 100)

Seamon and de Certeau have implanted two relevant aesthetic metaphors in the field of human geography. The interplay between people and environment follows non-mechanistic patterns which can be expressed successfully through aesthetic metaphors. They must be understood correctly. The ballet performance in particular is not social interplay unfolding upon a backdrop which serves as the place. The place is not the "where" in which things and social events happen. On

the contrary, it has to be considered as the very ballet performance itself, which consists in the social interplay as always interwoven with the spatial dimension of experience. Place is circularly understood as both the condition and the result of the ballet performance. Actual and historical places act as active forces and help to form human motivations and moral drives. The aesthetic metaphors of place-ballet and the art of walking help to conceive the geographical notion of place as a processual totality, characterized by both its distinguished character and also the range of its possibilities for change.

3. *Aesthetic Appreciation of Landscape*

Even though aesthetic ideas help to develop deeper insights into geographical concepts such as place, aesthetic appreciation as such is also useful in geographical knowledge. This is clearly evidenced by the fact that geography shares one of its core concepts with the history of art: landscape. Along with geography and art history, in recent years the theoretical discourses on landscape have increased their presence in the domains of architectural studies, planning, juridical studies, physical and cultural anthropology, psychology, economy, demography, not to mention geology, geomorphology, and pedology. However, it seems most promising to focus on the dispute between art history and geography in order to uncover the ambiguity at the core of the very notion of landscape.

Many classical definitions of landscape display a keen awareness of this ambiguity. The geographer Richard Hartshorne, for instance, defined landscape as "the concrete unified impression that an area gives us, the objects in the area producing that impression (…) and the area itself" (Hartshorne 1939, pp. 149-150). The impression an area gives to the geographer works as a bridge towards a deeper scientific understanding of the area itself. What matters here is that geographical knowledge emphasizes the systematic connections of elements in an area. It can be properly interpreted as an ensemble of physical and anthropic spatial phenomena, susceptible to being objectively framed and explained. Another seminal definition of landscape in geography was the one proposed by the morphologist and phenomenologist Carl Sauer in 1925:

Landscape is the English equivalent of the term German geographers are using largely and strictly has the same meaning, a land shape, in which the process of shaping is by no means thought of as simply physical. It may be defined, therefore, as an area made up of a distinct association of forms, both physical and cultural. (Sauer 1996, p. 300)

Landscape, in Sauer's thought, consists in a distinct association of spatial forms. Its elements can be tracked, recorded, classified, and explained. If we stress the objectivist side of both the definitions of Sauer and Hartshorne, we would be tempted to consider the mapping of landscape as the primary aim of geographical knowledge. Landscapes are susceptible to objective representation and, in this sketched full-scale modeling of landscape, geography as a science would finally find its legitimate end. Nevertheless, the definitions of landscape proposed by both Hartshorne and Sauer do not fully embody an objectivist attitude towards landscape. Of course, it is considered to be something real, materially encompassing human and non-human beings. But its total nature cannot be entirely displayed in maps. Landscape's distinct character can be fully appreciated only experientially and aesthetically. Sauer made it very clear when he wrote about the importance of qualitative field methods for geography:

> Being afoot, sleeping out, sitting about camp in the evening, seeing the land in all its seasons are proper ways to identify the experience, of developing impression into larger appreciation and judgement. I know no prescription of method; avoid whatever increases routine and fatigue and decreases alertness. (Sauer 1956, p. 296)

In order to "develop impression into appreciation and judgement", the lived experience of and within landscape is considered to be irreplaceable. Geographical experience alone leads to a proper geographical knowledge. Maps, here, no longer figure as the ends of the geographical knowledge; rather, they retrieve their legitimate role as tools for the empirical orientation of geographers along their journeys. According to Sauer, geographical knowledge is accomplished through and within the researcher's connection to environment, not by leaving this connection aside in the pursuit of an allegedly objective ideal of "scientificity." Moreover, Sauer does not emphasize experience alone, but, more specifically, aesthetic appreciation: "The best geography has never disregarded the aesthetic qualities of landscape", revealing "a symphonic quality in the contemplation of the areal scene" (Sauer 1996, p. 311). Landscape, the very object of geography, deserves "a quality of understanding at a higher plane which may not be reduced to formal process" (*ibidem*).

The recognition of a symphonic quality of landscape fits with the generally accepted derivation of the concept from the domain of art history and aesthetics in the broad sense. Art history and aesthetics locates the origins of landscape painting in the Italian Renaissance in the XV century. According to the French philoso-

pher Alain Roger (1997), the very origins of landscape are artistic and its determinations belong with art. Landscape painting reveals a privileged connection of landscape with the visual perspective of the painter or of the interpreter. This also means that a geographical ensemble can be an object of aesthetic appreciation and that it will be painted only as long as it evokes feelings of harmony, peace, fear, or sorrow, fright, and enthusiasm. The modern aesthetic category, articulated in the sublime, the picturesque, and the beautiful, introduces the possibility of considering nature (and anthropic nature too) through more subjective and emotional lens. Romanticism and its intellectual figures such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe or Alexander von Humboldt, promised a deeper knowledge of nature through the aesthetic category. But with time the paths of science, geography included, and aesthetic appreciation diverged from each other. The diagnosis proposed by the French philosopher Augustine Berque is severe:

> The historical process that I should call modernity first of all set in motion, almost simultaneously, and certainly interrelatedly, both a landscapist and a scientific view of nature: then caused them to evolve, paradoxically, more and more independently of one another; and finally – and even more strikingly paradoxically – rendered impossible a unified vision of nature and a coherent genre of landscape painting. (Berque 1993, p. 33)

Berque falls in line with the guiding thread which begins with Georg Simmel and leads to Joachim Ritter. The basic idea of this legacy is that landscape is the product of a spiritual gaze. The eye of man, and especially of the artist, turns an environment into a landscape by attributing a recognizable *Stimmung*[4] to it. However, the spiritual gaze produces no more than an aesthetic compensation for the loss of unity between mankind and nature. The aesthetic sense of the unity of nature, reflected into the landscape, tells something of the cultural condition of modern mankind but says nothing about nature itself. After the classical geographers such as Sauer and Hartshorne, it has been remarked, "the inescapable ambivalence of the concept led most geographers, concerned with giving their discipline and indisputable scientific foundation, to dismiss the category of landscape" (Pagano 2015, p. 12). This divorce is reflected in Berque's distinction between environment and landscape: the first is "the factual aspect of a milieu" while the second "relies on a collective form of subjectivity" (Berque, 1993, p. 33). In this

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[4] What Simmel calls *Stimmung* is difficult to translate in other languages. It is a "mood" which "permeates all its separate components" (Simmel 2007, p. 26) but at the same time is "a mental state, and can thus reside only in the emotional reflexes of the beholder and not in unconscious external objects" (Simmel 2007, p. 27).

way, how environment is experienced, lived, and modified by man is separated from how it is seen and represented as a landscape. The French geographer considers this distinction to be a "product of a modern mentality" (*ibidem*).

Our purpose was precisely to reconnect what in modern common sense has been divided: the aesthetic and the scientific, the experiential and the objective, the cultural and the natural. In order to do so, many ways have been attempted. Berque's (2013) suggestion is to draw on Eastern philosophy and culture, to integrate the analytical attitude of Western thought with more analogical and synthetical traits coming from Eastern culture and thought. Geographers are now reframing the phenomenological focus on experience within so-called nonrepresentational theories, where the refusal of the Cartesian divide between the object and the representation is seen as an opportunity to reconcile geographical explanation with human affection and aesthetic values[5]. Key for nonrepresentational theories is the focus on the materiality of landscape, which can be experienced through the different senses. There is no room for the divide between reality and appearance, as images and symbolic values are always at play in the ongoing interaction between mankind and environment. Lastly, the morphological definition of landscape as a totality composed by synergistically interrelated parts[6] fully innervates the recent scientific field of ecology. Contemporary ecology's idea that everything in nature is interconnected, human action included, redeems the holism of von Humboldt and Sauer, which was too quickly dismissed as outmoded and naïve during much of 1900's geography. With holism, cooperation between aesthetics and scientific knowledge can be resumed. Von Humboldt claimed that the aesthetic experience of landscape as "the total character of a region" stood at the source of both the "differentiated analysis of the nested structure of reality" (Fränzle 2001, p. 61) and its artistic reinterpretation. It follows that landscape art, far from being a mere subjective reinterpretation of nature, is charged to "bring about the best and immediately comprehensible representation of nature" (*ibidem*). The artistic sentiment is of prime importance in this effort to comprehend landscape, and thus the entire Earth, as a totality; this comprehension is today the charge of ecology, with the help of aesthetic appreciation:

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[5] "The event and affect are two key terms at the heart of NRT" (Cresswell 2013, p. 230).
[6] About the distinction between synergistic and analytical relations cf. Seamon (2018, pp. 22-23).

The significance of a global ecosystem is not a matter of biological interest only; one can also find aesthetic properties present. Like any ecosystem but on the all-inclusive scale of the whole, a global ecosystem can exemplify the formal aesthetic features of harmony, proportion, and unity in variety, as well as a range of enhanced perceptual pleasures emerging from an enlarged repertory of styles, traditions, and media. (Berleant 2010, p. 134)

With nonrepresentational and ecological geographies, a decisive step has been taken to regain the long-lost connection between aesthetics and geography.

We can conclude our essay by claiming that aesthetics relates to geography in many ways. It provides geography with key metaphors suited to build up its main notions, namely place and landscape; it emphasizes the importance of field experiences; it helps to rediscover a symphonic, or dissonant quality in landscape, and it helps to overcome the persistent Cartesian divide between subject and object, paving the way for an ecological understanding of regions. Hence, some issues are delivered to future inquiries: the role of aesthetics in triggering spatial criticism and geographical change, and the heuristic function of aesthetic categories (the beautiful, the sublime and the picturesque) today in relation to place and landscape.

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Unifying Art and Nature: Brady and Eco on Interpretation

di Alberto L. Siani

ABSTRACT:

The issue of interpretation is a fundamental one in aesthetics, whether we are dealing with artworks or with natural environments. Whereas interpretation of art is an established topic in philosophy, this is less the case for interpretation of nature. Emily Brady's article *Interpreting Environments* is an illuminating instance in this regard. While I mostly concur with the framework she proposes, in this paper I address two interconnected points that appear problematic and which derive from a postulated difference between artworks and nature as objects of interpretation. The first is the *ad hoc* introduction of a notion of respect for nature as an aim of our interpretive processes, juxtaposed to the pleasure we may gain from these processes themselves. The second is a still rather essentialistic or naively realistic conception of nature. I suggest that, by avoiding the above mentioned postulated difference, both points can be reformulated without prejudice to her overall approach and to its further development. To this aim I will establish a dialogue between Brady's paper and Umberto Eco's theses on interpretation in general and of literary texts in particular[1].

1.

One of the most important distinctions between aesthetic experience and enjoyment in art vs. nature seems to be that, in the former case, aesthetic experience and enjoyment are somehow connected to the search for the artwork's meaning, whereas talking of the meaning of a natural environment does not seem to make much sense. This distinction plays a role also in Brady's discourse, though she underlines that it must be weighed against the type of

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[1] I intended to present this paper at the 2020 annual congress of the SIE – Italian Society of Aesthetics and to discuss my theses with Emily Brady, who was invited as a keynote speaker. The congress should have taken place in Bologna in April, but had to be rescheduled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I had chosen to bring in dialogue Brady with Umberto Eco as an homage to "his" city. Hopefully a live dialogue will be possible soon.

environment we are interpreting:

> […] Artistic intention becomes the focus of debate on what is relevant […]. Aesthetic appreciation of the environment involves interpretation to a greater or lesser degree, depending on several factors: the type of landscape – cultural or natural; the nature of the particular aesthetic object; and the situation of the individual and context of appreciation. With nature, which has no content, the boundaries of interpretation are less clear, and there is more freedom on the part of the interpreter in terms of what sources they draw upon for interpretation. (Brady 2002, p. 62)

However, already beginning with Barthes' assertion of the "death of the author", the role of the author's intention in the interpretation and appreciation of artworks has been more and more challenged, if not straight-out rejected in many theories. Brady herself notices this point, while at the same time remaining committed to the classic difference between art and nature in this regard:

> Theories of interpretation in the arts are often distinguished according to the role of 'biographical studies' in guiding and justifying interpretation. Although this is a complex debate with many different positions, basically, 'intentionalists' argue that interpretation is tied to the artist's intention, where an actual or hypothetical intention determines a correct interpretation. 'Anti-intentionalists' cite problems associated with understanding artistic intention and they argue that the artwork is more free-floating, which allows for pluralism in interpretation. More radical views hold that appreciators have a hand in constructing the work through interpretations of it. The intentional distinction is not applicable to more natural environments where humans have a minor role. (Brady 2002, p. 58)[2]

I will argue that the persistence of a structural distinction between artworks and natural environments based on the presence vs. absence of intention leads to some problematic implications in Brady's argument, which can be avoided through a more consistently pragmatist reformulation. To this aim, I now refer to Eco's theory of the interpretation.

I begin by taking a look at Eco's 1990 Tanner Lectures. Eco's lectures and the ensuing debate with Rorty and Culler are illuminating for my topic, as we find there a broad spectrum of theories of textual interpretation. Eco, after advocating in previous works a broadly conceived reader's right to contribute to create the meaning of the text, is concerned in these lectures with contrasting an "anything goes" version of this right. To this aim, while still maintaining that the meaning cannot be explained in terms of the *intentio auctoris* (the intention of the author), he introduces the notion of *intentio operis* (the intention of the work)

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[2] For a broader presentation of her point of view on the relationship between art and environment, and between culture and nature, including the issue of interpretation, see also the third chapter of Brady 2003.

as a counterbalance to an unlimited, relativistic right of the *intentio lectoris* (the intention of the reader). The claim is hence that meaning coincides neither with a goal set by the author, nor with whatever the empirical reader sees in the text, but rather it needs to be conceived as an open, yet not unlimited set of possibilities contained in the work itself. Rorty straightforwardly dismisses the whole idea of a meaning immanent to the text. He does so by rejecting the distinction between "interpretation" and "use": all we do when reading a text is "using" it for any purpose we like, and the issue of an alleged correspondence between our reading and an inner meaning of the text should not concern us. Finally, Culler rejects both Rorty's arbitrary criteria and Eco's criticism of Deconstruction's own arbitrariness by pointing out the constrains imposed by the given context on each textual interpretation, highlighting at the same time the potential infinity of contexts, as well as the meaningfulness of what the text does *not* say. He also points out the cognitive and critical value of investigating the mechanisms through which a text produces meaning.

It is clear already from these brief remarks that, despite their irreconcilable differences, none of the authors involved in the debate and covering a wide spectrum of positions in the philosophy of interpretation attributes importance to the author's intention with regard to the discovery of the meaning of the text. In other terms, none of them believes that whatever the author thought or intended puts a constraint on our interpretation. The "death", or at least the absence of the author in our interpretive practices seems to remove an apparently obvious difference between artistic and environmental interpretation and to put them in a similar situation. If this is the case, then, rather than focusing on this classic difference, it may make more sense to start with a fundamental similarity, and to look for philosophical positions on interpretation that seem plausible independently of their object. I suggest to downplay the difference in Brady's discourse by showing how her "moderate anti-intentionalism" shows a significant similarity to Eco's approach. Both authors attempt to design a middle ground between full relativism and full monism, i.e. between the thesis that every interpretation is acceptable and the one that only one interpretation is true. Eco writes, for example: "I have stressed that it is difficult to say whether an interpretation is a good one, or not. I have however decided that it is possible to establish some limits beyond which it is possible to say that a given interpretation is a bad and far-fetched one. As a criterion, my quasi-Popperian stricture is perhaps too weak, but it is sufficient in order to recognize that *it is not true that everything goes*" (Eco 1992, p. 144).

Brady supports

critical pluralism rather than critical monism. Searching for a single, correct interpretation, being guided by just one story, would be counterproductive not only to what environments themselves demand, but also to what we should expect from ourselves as engaged participants. Critical pluralism sits between critical monism and "anything goes", the subjective approach of some post-modern positions. It argues for a set of interpretations that are deemed acceptable but which are not determined according to being true or false. (Brady 2002, pp. 64-65)

Besides, both authors develop this middle ground through the idea that an acceptable interpretation sits, again, somewhere in the middle between the unlimited right of the interpreting subject and the community's established consensus. Eco writes:

C.S. Peirce, who insisted on the conjectural element of interpretation, on the infinity of semiosis, and on the essential *fallibilism* of every interpretative conclusion, tried to establish a minimal paradigm of acceptability of an interpretation on the grounds of a consensus of the community […]. What kind of guarantee can a community provide? I think it provides a factual guarantee. Our species managed to survive by making conjectures that proved to be statistically fruitful. (Eco 1992, p. 144)

As for Brady, we read:

An interpretation must be defensible, it cannot be outlandish, irrelevant, or the whim of one person. Besides cohering with the aesthetic and non-aesthetic descriptions of the aesthetic object, the validity of interpretations must also be relativized to the background beliefs, values and cultural and historical context of interpreters. This will allow for flexibility, especially in respect of contrasting cultural meanings given to environments. (Brady 2002, p. 65)

Hence, both for Eco and for Brady, even though it is not possible to establish a univocal and universal criterion to assess, in each case, which is the correct interpretation, it is possible to evaluate the acceptability and defensibility of any given interpretation based on some minimal, weak, fallibilist standards. Both authors clearly employ a pragmatist strategy[3], according to which we should no longer aim to find "strong" criteria for interpretations that are "true", but rather "weak" ones for interpretations that are "acceptable" or "reasonable". As Brady states:

Widening the scope of knowledge drawn upon does not, however, take away the problem of how we distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable interpretations of the environment. We have to pin down not those interpretations that are true, but those that are reasonable, given particular cultures and types of environments. (Brady 2002, p. 62)

[3] Here I am not able to focus on Eco's distinction between Peirce's pragmaticism and Rorty's pragmatism.

This striking similarity between the two authors also seems to further support the idea of having at least a general theoretical framework in philosophy of interpretation, valid both for artistic and environmental aesthetics[4]. On the contrary, as I will show in the next section, holding on to the classic, intention-based difference between the latter may have problematic implications, as Brady's reflections on the aim of interpretation, in my opinion, show.

2.

As with the issue of meaning, also with regard to the issue of the aim of interpretation, positions are quite varied within philosophy of art, as Brady herself notices:

In debates about interpretation in the arts, philosophers have disagreed about the proper aim of interpretation, that is, what it is that we should be doing when we interpret works of art. Some argue that the aim of interpretation is to achieve an understanding of an artwork, and this is done by reaching a correct interpretation by reference to the artist's intention. Others argue that the proper aim is to maximize enjoyable aesthetic experience, and this is achieved through a range of acceptable interpretations of the work. Still others argue that there is no single proper aim, but many" (Brady 2002, p. 61)

But, she continues, "this issue has relevance to the environment too, where we need to ask what exactly is the point of interpreting the environment in the *aesthetic context*" (Brady 2002, p. 61). Once again, she opts for a middle ground between cognitivism and humanism/hedonism, while still underscoring a general difference between artefacts and environments:

Geographers and ecologists interpret landscapes to achieve knowledge. Indigenous people living in the land want to understand and give significance to the environment that is their home through spiritual, mythological and other means. Although I find it a little on the humanistic (or even the hedonistic) side, the second position is more appropriate to the environmental aesthetic context. When no longer dealing with straightforward artefacts, […] the proper aim of interpretation is to enrich aesthetic appreciation in ways that enhance our aesthetic encounters with the environment. Interpretive activity ought to involve a variety of imaginative ways to discover meaning in our environment, ways that increase the value we find there. (Brady 2002, p. 61)

[4] I should clarify that I am not arguing for an undifferentiated, monolithic theory of interpretation. I am saying that we should aim for a unitary framework, and that differences are to be made not so much between artworks and natural environments, or between specific artistic forms/types of environments, but rather on a case-by-case basis.

She then further specifies that "this activity ought not be directed, however, at increasing our pleasure. Rather, we should hope for, as side effects to some extent, greater sensitivity to nature's qualities and with that, greater respect for nature. This is more familiar ground to an aesthetic approach than seeking understanding through a single, correct interpretation" (Brady 2002, p. 61). While this approach seems consistent with Brady's proposed "cultural pluralism", one may ask why the interpretive activity should not be directed at maximising our pleasure and instead produce a greater respect for nature. After all, our pleasure and our respect for nature do not seem to necessarily contradict each other. In fact, in many cases, they may be seen as corroborating each other. In my understanding, Brady's point is that our aesthetic pleasure should not be the only or ultimate aim of interpreting the environment, as this may lead, first, to a reductively humanistic or humanizing view of nature (and hence, to interpretations that would be "unreasonable") and, second, to conceiving, shaping, and even destroying the environment, seen as a fully disposable human playground rather than a complex, independent, sophisticated organism deserving our respect.

These concerns are certainly cogent, but the way they are presented is, I think, problematic in two respects. First, the idea that the aim of interpretation is building a greater respect for nature, without further qualifications, seems to abruptly introduce a legitimate ethical concern whose systematic connection with the developed theory is however unwarranted. Second, this idea implies conceiving of nature in a rather essentialistic way, as an entity endowed with an internal essence and meaning independent of our relation to it, which is at odds with Brady's main pragmatist interpretive tenet: "With environments that are mostly natural, this question would be odd since there is no meaning internal to landscapes. We bring meaning to them or assign meaning through cultural frameworks. There is still an attempt to make sense of something, but not in terms of searching for meaning that already exists" (Brady 2002, p. 58). As I will show in short, this apparent inconsistency has to do with the persistence, in Brady's discourse, of the structural difference between artefacts and natural environments mentioned above.

I think it is possible to avoid these problems while at the same time preserving Brady's philosophical intention, with which I concur. To this goal, I suggest we consider Eco's answer to the issue of the aim of interpretation to see whether it may contribute to a reformulation. Following Peirce, Eco argues in general that the

issue of meaning involves some reference to a purpose. The notion of purpose marks the persistence of a realistic element in Eco's Peircean approach:

A purpose is, without any shade of doubt, and at least in the Peircean framework, connected with something which lies outside language. Maybe it has nothing to do with a transcendental subject, but it has to do with referents, with the external world, and links the idea of interpretation to the idea of interpreting according to a given meaning. (Eco 1994, p. 38)

This realistic element is then better qualified in a non-naïve, but rather conjectural sense, i.e. as "Habit":

The Habit is a disposition to act upon the world, and this possibility to act, as well as the recognition of this possibility as a Law, requires something which is very close to a transcendental instance: a community as an intersubjective guarantee of a nonintuitive, nonnaively realistic, but rather conjectural, notion of truth. (Eco 1994, p. 39)

The Habit is hence conceived as a disposition to act, external to the interpretive process, where the latter provisionally stops and reaches the intended meaning:

If for the pragmatic maxim […] the meaning of any proposition is nothing more than the conceivable practical effects which the assertion would imply if the proposition were true, then the process of interpretation must stop at least for some time outside language at least in the sense in which not every practical effect is a semiosic one. (Eco 1994, p. 38)

Reconceiving meaning via the notion of habit allows to overcome the extreme relativism, or even solipsism of an infinite interpretive "drift"[5], to reconnect the interpreting subject with the external world, and to make space for a conjectural notion of truth, which is not objectively, but at least intersubjectively established:

There is something for Peirce that transcends the individual intention of the interpreter, and it is the transcendental idea of a community, or the idea of a community as a transcendental principle. This principle is not transcendental in the Kantian sense, because it does not come before but *after* the semiosic process; it is not the structure of the human mind that produces the interpretation but the reality that the semiosis builds up. Anyway, from the moment in which the community is pulled to

[5] The term "drift" designates in Eco the idea, that he criticizes, that interpretation can never reach an end, but rather floats endlessly and rather arbitrarily from meaning to meaning. He distinguishes two forms of drift, the contemporary one, associated with Deconstruction, and an older one, associated with Hermetism: "Contrary to contemporary theories of drift […], Hermetic semiosis does not assert the absence of any univocal universal and transcendental meaning. It assumes that everything can recall everything else provided we can isolate the right rhetorical connection because there is a strong transcendent subject" (Eco 1994, p. 27).

agree with a given interpretation, there is, if not an objective, at least an *intersubjective* meaning which acquires a privilege over any other possible interpretation spelled out without the agreement of the community.[6] (Eco 1994, p. 40)

3.

There are, I believe, several points of contact between what Eco is saying here and Brady's overall intention, based on which it would be possible to develop the latter in a more consistently pragmatist fashion. First, Eco and Brady agree that even anti-intentionalist theories of interpretation should be conceived as realistic, in the sense that interpretation always entails the possibility of a reference to an object existing outside the interpretive process. Second, while Brady does not make specific reference to the concept of "habit", I maintain that the latter fits well with her idea "that the aim of interpretation ought to be one that sits easily alongside the spirit of aesthetic appreciation as an enriching encounter with the natural world" (Brady 2002, p. 62). Interpreting the environment for aesthetic purposes does not aim at an endless, self-sufficient interrogation about the possible net of references of every natural object in our interpretation, but at a provisionally satisfied, active disposition of interaction with and appreciation of nature, which could well be characterized as a habit in Eco's sense. Finally, the sense-making, sense-giving, and sense-confirming role of a community of interpreters is an obvious common tenet of the two authors. For both of them, the community acts as a kind of control device of the reasonableness or acceptability of interpretations. There is surely a "communitarian" element in both theories, which however should not be understood in a closed or even authoritarian sense: interpretive communities are construed in a broad, pluralistic, historically and culturally open fashion.

On the basis of this tight proximity between Eco and Brady, I would now like to suggest that some of Eco's points can contribute to ameliorate the above mentioned weak spots in Brady's discourse. First of all, in Eco, the pleasure we gather from interpretive acts and the respect toward the interpretation's object are not juxtaposed, but rather tightly connected. This is quite evident, among others, from Eco's answer to Rorty's theorized purposelessness of literary and linguistic studies:

Rorty asked for what purposes we need to know how language works. I respectfully answer: not only because writers study language in order to write better […],

[6] This is also the groundwork for what Collini calls Eco' s "cultural Darwinism" (in Eco 1992, p. 16).

but also because marvelling (and therefore curiosity) is the source of all knowledge, knowledge is a source of pleasure and it is simply beautiful to discover why and how a given text can produce so many good interpretations. (Eco 1992, p. 147)

An increased respect for the object of our interpretation, be it a literary text or an environment, can be grounded in the pleasure and sense of marvel intrinsic to the interpretative effort itself. This answer, I believe, is fully consistent with Brady's general framework, but it avoids the *ad hoc* introduction of an external aim, i.e. of an increased respect for nature independent of our pleasure.

Second, Eco's Peircean and conjectural realism allows to think of nature as a real entity, not just the product of our interpretation, without however committing to an essentialistic or naïve conception of nature as already endowed with a meaning that our interpretive acts should simply be able to discover and correspond to. This is so because Eco blurs the distinction between natural objects and artefacts, which on the contrary, as anticipated, still plays a role in Brady's approach. Confronted with the assertion of a structural difference between texts and sense data from the point of view of interpretation, Eco states: "Such a distinction seems to me much too rigid. To recognize a sense datum as such we need an interpretation – as well as criterion of pertinence by which certain events are recognized as more relevant than others – and the very result of our operational habits is subject to further interpretation" (Eco 1992, p. 149)[7].

Hence, for Eco, consistently with his pragmatist approach, each and every action entails an interpretive effort. Accordingly, when aesthetically appreciating an object, be it an artwork or a natural environment, interpretation necessarily comes into play. This idea is counterbalanced, as we saw, by the reference to the community of interpreters, which Eco conceives as a transcendental element, which however, unlike the Kantian one, is configured as a somewhat paradoxical, at any rate always provisional and conjectural, *a posteriori* established truth guarantor:

There is community because there is no intuition in the Cartesian sense. The transcendental meaning is not there and cannot be grasped by an eidetic intuition […]. But if the sign does not reveal the thing itself, the process of semiosis produces in the long run a socially shared notion of the thing that the community is engaged to take as if it were in itself true. The transcendental meaning is not at the origins of the process but must be postulated as a possible and transitory end of every process. (Eco 1994, p. 41)

[7] I think it is safe to say that what Eco asserts here concerning the need for interpretation of sense data in general applies, even more so, to sense data as objects of aesthetic appreciation.

The adoption of this consistent pragmatist framework overcomes the structural difference between artefacts and nature as objects of interpretation, avoids a naïve realistic conception of nature and the respect we owe to it as interpreters and aesthetic appreciators, and leaves ample space for a fruitful development of the notion of community, a central one in Brady's argument.

To summarize and conclude: Brady sees the artist's intention as the (main) content of an artwork and, based on this, she proposes a distinction between interpretation of art and interpretation of nature. This distinction then leads to the argument that the interpretation of nature is freer and less subject to contenutistic constraints than that of art. In turn, this argument results in the assertion of nature as a more autonomous entity than artefacts, deserving recognition and respect independently of our interpretive pleasure. This assertion, I believe, is at odds, in the letter if not in the spirit, with Brady's general pragmatist framework. With the goal of avoiding a full-blown hedonistic relativism or solipsism, it risks introducing an element of naïve realism, whereas a Peircean conjectural realism, as Eco shows, would suffice to that goal. I think rephrasing the above mentioned "weak spots" of Brady's discourse in these terms would contribute to corroborate and bring forward her own framework.

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Heritage Sites and the Challenges of Tomorrow

di Lisa Giombini

ABSTRACT

As climate change alters the environment, many coastal cities and other places of historical and cultural significance are at risk of being damaged, if not disrupted altogether. How should we confront the prospect of these disasters? And how are we to cope with the reconstructions that will be needed as these phenomena occur?

In this paper, I articulate some conceptual tools for thinking more deeply about the philosophical implications that surround choices concerning heritage sites conservation. Recent work in environmental psychology has investigated people's emotional bond to places and the threat that changes in a place's structure may pose to individual and social cohesion. In a similar vein, everyday aestheticians have emphasized the role played by quotidian intercourse, relationship and attachment for the ascription of aesthetic qualities to a site and the environment.

Drawing on these debates, I argue that strategies for a sustainable reconstruction in the aftermath of a natural catastrophe must emerge by considering the affected community of people, then the affected artefact. In this regard, rather than being whether potential replicas and copies may constitute a threat to a site's authenticity, the question should be whether reconstructions are able to keep the values alive for the people for whom the site is perceived as significant.

KEYWORDS:
Climate Change; Heritage; Reconstruction; Place Attachment; Everyday Aesthetics

1. Introduction

We can now be pretty sure that before the end of the century the effects of anthropogenic climate change will become widely perceivable. Even if we were to keep global temperature increase to two degrees Celsius – in fact, an optimistic expectation – by the year 2100 the predicted rise in global sea levels would bring thousands of kilometres of coastal areas to be flooded[1]. This threatens to make a substantial part of our coastlines unhabitable if not completely devastated in the next future, with 300 million people living

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[1] As estimated by the last Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as to September 2019. Available at: https://www.ipcc.ch/srocc/ [accessed May 28, 2020]

in areas submerged by the ocean at least once per year.

With its 7,456 kilometres of shoreline, home to 70% of its total population[2], Italy will be strongly affected by events of extensive flooding. The phenomenon of rising waters might concern a rather vast area ranging from Veneto, Romagna, the Five lands in Liguria, part of Tuscany and Lazio to the coastline of Sardinia, Calabria and Sicily (Antonioli et al. 2017; Marsico et al. 2017). Several old towns like Venice, Ravenna, Portofino, Noto, Ragusa, Marsala, and many others are at risk of being frequently and repeatedly inundated, let alone the rest of the territory that will be affected by global warming effects – including extreme weather events like hurricanes or severe droughts.

Given that Italy, as a single country, possesses the largest number of heritage sites listed by UNESCO[3], a substantial part of what constitutes today's world cultural heritage might be severely injured if not completely destroyed in the next few years. How should we approach the prospect of these disasters, with all these valuable places being sooner or later devastated? And are we to cope with the on-going reconstructions that will be needed as these phenomena occur?

The aim of this paper is not to adjudicate different measures against climate change, or even to address any particular environmental policy, though this is certainly a question of the utmost importance. Rather, I confine discussion to the conservation of places, in particular the built environment and public areas of historical and cultural significance, which are going to be harmed by the consequences of climate change. I will focus on articulating some conceptual tools for thinking more deeply about the philosophical implications that surround choices concerning the reconstruction of these places in the aftermath of extreme natural events.

A revised understanding of the notion of heritage site suggests that symbolic, aesthetic and broadly conceived affective factors may be as important as political, scientific and engineering issues when it comes to reconstructing sites that have been damaged. These sites are included as part of our heritage primarily because they matter to us. People live in, form relationships with, and derive existential meanings from them. In this sense, climate change poses a challenge that is more than just a challenge to our material properties (Adger et al. 2011; Allison 2015; Nomikos 2018). It is also a

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[2] Compare with the 2018 Environmental Data Directory of the Higher Institute for Environmental Protection and Research in Italy (ISPRA). Available at: https://annuario. isprambiente.it/content/annuario-dei-dati-ambientali-2018 [accessed May 28, 2020].

[3] More than fifty. The Unesco World Heritage List can be consulted at: https://whc. unesco.org/en/list/ [accessed May 28, 2020].

challenge to the values these properties embody as a result of the role they play in the everyday life and social practices of people, who transform them into places of human significance.

2. *The Notion of Heritage*

What makes a place a piece of 'heritage'? And what makes it part of the "world's heritage"? Heritage is a familiar concept, but one that is also hard to pin down. Most people seem to have an idea of what heritage is, and what kinds of thing could be described using the term heritage. Most people, too, would recognise that heritage sites and historically significant objects and places demand preservation, perhaps above and beyond other valuable things (Matthes 2019, p. 175). Things get tougher, however, when it comes to providing a convincing definition of heritage. Heritage is in fact a controversial notion (Davison 2008), a "conveniently ambiguous" concept (Lowenthal 1998).

In the last decades, we have seen an exponential growth in the number of things that are defined, conserved and exhibited as 'heritage' (Lowenthal 1985, p. xv). Heritage can be understood to encompass *material objects* as diverse as historic buildings, paintings, stone tools, handicrafts, books, heirlooms; *places* including archaeological sites, ruins, urban and natural landscapes, parks, gardens, natural sacred sites, museums, art galleries; *practices* such as rituals, oral stories, languages, festive events, rituals, music, culinary traditions etc., that have some significance in the present which relates to the past.

As this list shows, heritage is invoked today to describe anything from the most solid (buildings and monuments) to the most ethereal (songs and languages); from the largest (whole urban and natural landscapes) to the smallest (fragments of bone and stone in archaeological sites); from the grandiose (grand palaces and natural sites) to the humble (ordinary objects such as domestic objects). Despite the elusiveness of the notion, for the purposes of this paper I am only taking into account so-called 'heritage sites' – places and environments, particularly built and architectural ones, endowed with historical and artistic significance.

How does a place become a 'heritage site'? Technically, the process of selecting a place for inclusion on the World Heritage List is managed by a body representing the sovereign state of the territory in which the site exists and is submitted to a committee in charge of assessing the nominations (the UNESCO world heritage commit-

tee). The process by which a site receives formal recognition as heritage and is placed on a heritage register constitutes the dominant '*top-down*' approach to the creation and classification of "official" heritage: "a set of professional practices that are authorised by the state and motivated by some form of legislation or written charter." (Harrison 2013, p. 23).

Relevantly, how national and international institutions choose which sites deserve to be part of heritage, alongside how they decide how to conserve and preserve them, inform an understanding of how they represent themselves as a civilization and shape ideas about the past, but also about the present and future. Heritage is indeed not a passive process of keeping and conserving places, but "an active process" of selection "that we choose to hold up as a mirror to the present, associated with a particular set of values that we wish to take with us into the future" (Harrison 2013, p. 4; Lowenthal 2004, pp. 19-23; Graham & Howard 2008, p. 1)[4].

Although a place only becomes 'heritage' in a formal sense upon inclusion in the official UNESCO list, heritage sites are more than mere items on a catalogue. A place becomes heritage in a substantial sense when it is *perceived* as a site of human significance – when its particular features come to matter to individuals and communities. As such, heritage can exist only in relation to some individuals or group of individuals (Smith 2006). So, while the notion of 'heritage' may be ambiguous in itself, the understanding of heritage sites as places of human significance is relatively uncontroversial, and it is the one I will assume in the rest of this paper.

I understand this significance as an 'intangible heritage' that 'wraps' around the tangible objects – buildings, places, constructions. Sites of heritage are embedded in an experience created by various kinds of recipients and by the people who are entrusted to manage this experience. This ties the notion of heritage to that of a work of art. Whatever our definition of art is, we assume that there is no artwork without a recepient, and what the recepient (and critic) makes of the artwork sits alongside what the artist intended and what official culture designates in a discursive and often contested relationship (for this kind of approach, see, among the many, Danto 1964, 1986; Dickie 1974, 1984). Similarly, around each individual heritage site, there is a series of intangible

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[4] This also accounts for the substantial difference that insists between 'heritage' and 'history'. As David Lowenthal has convincingly argued, heritage is not history at all: "It is not an inquiry into the past, but a celebration of it […] a profession of faith in a past tailored to present-day purposes' (Lowenthal 1997, p. x). It is the result of a choice of *re-packaging* the past for some present purpose, as it occurs in museums and sites throughout the world.

aspects (the language we use to describe it, its cultural significance, its contribution to social, historical and cultural processes, its associations of local or national identity, its role in everyday life etc.) which are crucial to determine what we may call the 'perceived' significance of the site and contribute to decide its formal recognition as part of heritage.

An important point is that part of the intangible significance heritage sites possess depends on their being *reference points* by which a certain group of people understand themselves in relation to the world around them. Apart from their officially recognized relevance, heritage sites function as landmarks for the individuals who interact with them on a daily basis, and shape their ways of knowing, making sense, and valuing their everyday experience. Here, I place particular emphasis on the 'everydayness' of this experience, a notion to which I shall later return. Although not explicitly protected by heritage legislation, everyday practices are indeed responsible for what may be called a '*bottom-up*' process of heritage creation, which is not in conflict but rather adds to the official significance of a site as heritage. As we are about to see, everyday practices can be understood to generate perceived heritage significance.

3. *Heritage and Place Attachment*

Drawing on the work of anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996), heritage scholar Denis Byrne (2008, p. 151) has referred to the ways by which communities quotidianly use heritage sites to strengthen their connection to particular places and to each other the "production of locality". The locality production process is all the stronger when the heritage site is a public place, as it happens in the case of many historical centres or urban tourist places in Italy, which are recognized as part of the World Heritage. In these cases, the site plays the role of a unifying hub around which the daily routines of local people unroll. Locality is produced for example in most old towns' historic squares, where the gathering places are located (the market, the church, the cafés etc.), (see Andreotti 2001, pp. 55-68).

Consider for example *Piazza del Campo*, the main square of the city of Siena (Tuscany). The official heritage status of the square resides in its legislative protection as part of the historic centre of Siena World Heritage Site, which was inscribed in 1995 on the basis of the city's undiscussed historic, architectonic and artistic value. However, the site's everyday significance might be seen as residing in the set

of practices surrounding its use by a range of different groups of people, who gather there to meet, stroll, perform their daily activities. As is well known, the square is also the setting for the ancient practice of *Palio*, a horse race that dates back to the Middle Ages. *Piazza del campo* works thus as a daily source of sociality, conviviality and recreation for many inhabitants and foreign visitors from around the world. These and similar present-day uses demonstrate the ways in which a heritage site can create a sense of connection between people and place (Clemente and Salvati 2017, p. 13).

It would be inaccurate, however, to consider this as a conflict between the "past" and "present" values of the site, according to Alois Riegl's (1903) classic terminology. In the same ways in which contemporary visitors make and remake the meaning of *Piazza del Campo* from the past in the present, its architectonic, artistic and historic significance also represents a form of ascribed value assigned to it by generations of recipients – architects, archaeologists, art scholars, engineers, historians as well as common citizens and visitors – who have remade the meaning of the place to address contemporary interests. As museum scholar Laurajane Smith (2006) has argued, value is something that is *attributed* to a site by particular people at a particular time for particular reasons. This value resides on the role the site has played in shaping the dynamics of human daily and social life throughout time (Cresswell 2009, pp. 176-177).

The special bond that arises between people and places like for instance public heritage sites can be described using the notion of "topophilia", a term invented by the Chinese-American geographer Yi-fu Tuan in the Seventies. According to Tuan, *topophilia*, the love for a place, refers to both a sense of belonging to a place, the acceptance of a local identity, and a 'sense of community' (Tuan 1974). In recent years, the analysis of the feelings people develop toward certain places and the function these places fulfil in their lives has been receiving increasing attention on the part of environmental psychologists. Since the pioneering work of psychologist Mark Fried (1963), studies have gone further into explaining people's emotional bond to places, showing that places may have a dramatic influence on how people self-represent themselves and their relations with a given territory (Hidalgo & Hernàndez 2001). This sentimental relationship is known in the literature as "place attachment"[5]. In general, place attachment is defined as the affective rapport, link

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[5] Although the phenomenon has been also referred to as "community attachment" (Kasarda & Janowitz 1974), "place identity" (Proshansky 1978), "place dependence" (Stokols & Shumaker 1981), "sense of place" (Hummon 1992; Haapala 2005), etc. For

or involvement between individuals and specific locations of their everyday life (Low & Altman 1992; Hummon 1992), which develops over time often without awareness. Interestingly, according to many authors, place attachment is an integral part to identity-creation processes, both for individual subjects and for members of cultures and communities (see Kyle, Graffe & Manning 2005; Raymond, Brown & Weber 2010). One of the ways in which humans build their personal identity is indeed through relation to the physical environment that surrounds them (Hernandez et al. 2007).

Although there is still no agreement among scholars over what kind of places people mainly develop attachment to, or what place aspects or dimensions are more likely to awaken attachment, it is widely acknowledged that heritage sites represent strong purveyors of attachment feelings (see for example Byrne et al. 2001; Avrami et al. 2000; Smith et al. 2003, p. 66). Indeed, heritage sites seem to be deeply embroiled in the construction of personal and group identities, and not merely in their reflection. In so doing, they act as cultural symbols and create the basis for shared narratives that reinforce feelings of belonging and 'being in place'. Again, these feelings are not wholly dependent on the 'official' values of a heritage site itself but are rather generated collectively through the everyday practices of people. Collective attachment occurs because there is a basic agreement on the part of present-day users that a place has some value to them. If people no longer attach value to a place, the place simply loses its (heritage) status (Muñoz-Viñas 2005, p. 152). For this reason, as Smith (2006) contends, all 'sites of heritage' need to be constantly re-evaluated and tested by current social practices, needs and desires that link the values, beliefs and memories of communities in the present with those of the past.

4. *Everyday Aesthetic Value and Heritage Sites*

Interestingly, there seems to be a close relationship between the attachment generated by a heritage site and its aesthetic character.

On a first glance, one could notice that one main criterion for a place (archaeological, natural, artistic) to be inscribed on the World Heritage list rests on its having exceptional aesthetic value. In this regard, the UNESCO reports that a site must be either a unique "masterpiece of human creative genius"; "an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or

discussion, see Gerson et al. 1977.

landscape" […]; or contain "areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance"[6].

Here, however, I am interested in a notion of aesthetic value other than that summoned by traditional aesthetic theory[7]. In particular, I refer to the enlarged understanding of aesthetics that has been developed in recent work in the area of everyday and environmental aesthetics[8], and that considers quotidian intercourse, relationship and interaction central for the ascription of aesthetic qualities to objects and places.

It is widely assumed by authors working in these fields that our everyday lives have a characteristic aesthetic import that emerges when we are involved in, engage and interact with the objects of our daily experience (Saito 2007, 2017; Berleant 1992; Leddy 2005). In this sense, the attribution of aesthetic value is an experience of pleasure and meaning that results when a special relationship exists, or is established, between a subject and an object, or between several subjects brought together and coordinated by an object. In her oeuvre, Yuriko Saito, for example, has extensively supported the claim that our appreciation of an object cannot be dissociated from the personal, as well as cultural and societal, relationship we have with it. Particularly regarding environment, our personal relationship and affective response should not be detached from the perception of its aesthetic value. Referring to Tuan's notion of 'topophilia', Saito believes that people's involvement and engagement toward a place should be fully considered in an account of the aesthetic value ascribed to places (Saito 2017, p. 107). Attribution of aesthetic value is inseparably linked to how we feel in a given environment and what meaning we give to it, which indicates the existence of a significant *relational* component in our aesthetic appraisal of environment.

In line with this approach, many environmental aestheticians (Brady 2003, 2008, 2014; Berleant 1992; Haapala 2005, among the others), have pointed the way to appreciation of aesthetic qualities of a place by focusing on the entire lived experience we

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[6] Cf. with the list available at: https://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria / [accessed May 28, 2020].

[7] The relationship between everyday aesthetics and 'traditional' aesthetics is a problematic one. For the purposes of this paper, I take the difference between the two approaches as relying mainly on the role they attribute to personal associations and investments in the context of aesthetic judgments. As Saito points out: "If we subscribe to the traditional, art-oriented aesthetic theory, our personal relationship to and stake in an object should be irrelevant to its aesthetic value" (Saito 2017, p. 106). Conversely, this idea lies at the basis of the 'engaged' approach promoted by everyday aesthetics.

[8] Although the fields of everyday aesthetics and environmental aesthetics do not coincide, there is considerable overlap. In particular, environmental aesthetics meets everyday aesthetics by focusing on the entire lived experience of our environment.

make of it. Whether the subject is native to a particular place, having lived and worked there their entire life, or just a tourist passing by, will affect how (perhaps even whether) aesthetic value is attributed and what kind of aesthetic experiences are engendered. Emily Brady (2003; 2014), for instance, has contended that aesthetic value cannot be reduced to any of the place's constituent aesthetic qualities; nor can it be inferred from any set of non-aesthetic qualities. In this sense, to grasp the aesthetic value of a place one must experience it first hand, because aesthetic judgments, especially those concerning natural and built environment, have always a strong experiential basis (2014, p. 554). To this extent, according to Brady, the aesthetic qualities that we perceive, our emotional responses to those qualities as well as the meanings we attach – all upon which aesthetic value rests – vary depending on the subject's bond with a particular place, and so does the attribution of aesthetic value (Nomikos 2018, p. 454)[9]. The important bond established between the subjects and the place is also acknowledged by philosopher Arnold Berleant, who describes it as a sort of "sympathetic interrelationship"(1992, p. 149). This interrelationship, he argues, lies at the basis of our aesthetic appreciation of the built environment and architectural works in particular. What we call 'a place' is indeed the result of a combination of factors – among which the people who live in the place, the built structures and the meanings associated with them, our perceptual involvement and the shared spatial dimension of the place itself – that together are responsible for engendering an aesthetic experience. All these factors, according to Berleant, testify to the profound "interpenetration, indeed the continuity" that exists between people and places (Berleant 1992, p. 149).

Interestingly, as Arto Haapala (2005; 2017) has suggested, this interpenetration can be seen as reflected in the two basic modalities we have to relate to a place, what he refers to as 'strangeness' and 'familiarity'. Strangeness is the basic experience we all have when we find ourselves in a new environment, for example when visiting a foreign city for the first time (2005, p. 43). Familiarity, on the contrary, is the quality of everyday living environments, which bring us aesthetic pleasure through a feeling of "comforting stability" (2005, p. 50), the awareness that, as he puts it: "things are in their places; they are there where they should

[9] In this sense, the question for everyday aesthetics is not what are the *formal properties* of an object or place that make it aesthetically valuable, but rather what is the *relation* between subject and object that makes this particular experience of that object valuable. Aesthetic properties of places "are emergent on interaction between the communities and their surroundings" (Leddy 2005, p. 19).

be, where I am used to seeing them" (2005, p. 6). When we have settled down into an area, Haapala claims, not only do we recognize the buildings and sites, we also establish a personal relation to them. Again, this relation is as much *existential* ("It is part of my existence, and accordingly part of my essence, that I live in a particular city rather than in another" 2005, p. 45) as it is *aesthetic*, because it generates a specific form of aesthetic appreciation (2005, p. 52).

The interaction between aesthetic and existential aspects helps us understand the role that place attachment plays in our every-day experience of the environment, influencing how we perceive a place's overall aesthetic quality, and how we experience and evaluate it. Particularly when it comes to culturally significant places like heritage sites, the importance of this affective dimension for our aesthetic appraisal should not be ignored. Our appreciation of a heritage site – even more clearly than that of other places or environments – seems to be a complex 'holistic' phenomenon involving perception, interpretation, evaluation, personal memories, and abstract knowledge (Jaśkiewicz 2015), all contributing to the complex "webs of meanings" (Muñoz-Viñas 2005, p. 160) that are conveyed by a site, and makes it appreciated and valued. Bluntly put, mere places become heritage sites when they become particularly significant; they become significant as they are perceived as familiar (in both an aesthetic and an existential sense, as described by Haapala 2005); and they are perceived as familiar precisely because people feel they are attached to them. So, whereas the specific historical, artistic and material features of a site are key for the attribution of official heritage status to it, the happenings of the everyday are key for the formation of feelings that are responsible for, and constitutive of, the site's perceived heritage value.

This is not to say that the two sets of values are independent from each other. There is an essential interplay between a site's 'official' significance and its perceived significance. So for example, the aesthetic value of a site as recognized by the UNESCO is contingent upon, and emerge from the continuous ascription of aesthetic qualities by generations of recipients, who have renewed their aesthetic interest in the site over time through their life experience.

This challenges a model that sees aesthetic value as an intrinsic property of an object. An intrinsic property is one that is 'built-in' to an object; it belongs to the basic and essential features that make the object what it is. Under such model, heritage sites are attributed particular aesthetic value by professionals such as architects, art historians, and archaeologists through a process of 'uncovering' the

value that already exists in an object. The idea that aesthetic value is intrinsic also leads to a focus on the physical fabric of a site. If aesthetic value is inherent, it follows that it must be contained within the physical fabric of a building or a place.

Drawing on recent work in everyday aesthetics, we can argue that the aesthetic value of a place lies instead in the relationship between the subjects and the place. In Brady's words, aesthetic value is rather sensitive to "the appreciative situation of the subject" (Brady 2003, pp. 236-237) with regard to the place itself. As we shall see in the remainder of this paper, this has interesting consequences with regard to the issue of heritage conservation, leading us to reconceive the importance given to the authentic material of a site in reconstruction.

5. *The Challenges of Change*

Whether construed in the light of the everyday aesthetic character of a site, or of the kinds of activities we engage in within those environments, or of the cultural meanings we ascribe to them, attachment is at the heart of the perceived significance of heritage sites. In fact, we might say that attachment *marks* sites as meaningful to us – as *heritage*. Importantly, attachment is also a crucial element to understand what happens when a site is severely damaged or destroyed, for example as a result of an environmental catastrophe.

Causing a variety of effects on the geophysical system – including globally rising temperatures, increased heavy precipitation, glacial retreat and sea levels rise – climate change poses one of the most significant threats to our environment, bringing about an extraordinary amount of uncertainty concerning our future, and challenging any assumptions we have regarding the continued existence of our built and natural surroundings, and traditional ways of life. This threat may manifest as a multitude of attacks on our material heritage: the drastic and unexpected destruction of historic buildings, the sudden decay of entire cities and historic centres, the erosion of urban and natural landscapes. Glimpses of this future we saw already in November 2019, when Venice experienced an extraordinary 187 centimetres tidal peak, with St Mark's Basilica being flooded twice in just one single week. According to Gianmaria Sannino, oceanographer and head of the Laboratory of Climate Modelling and Impacts of the ENEA, what happened then "is just a sample of what awaits us in the coming years". With the Mediterranean Sea level 40-50 centi-

metres higher than today, every time the tide is high Venice will be flooded: "Normal weather conditions will suffice to render 'ordinary' circumstances that appear 'extraordinary' to us now"[10].

Climate change brings us to face important tangible losses: a massive part of our artistic and historic properties, historic centres, landscapes and cityscapes may be endangered as a result of the environmental transformation that is underway. But along with the material loss, a profound intangible loss of meanings, histories, and memories comes, and this inevitability is nothing short of tragic either. Although this latter challenge is often neglected – largely due to what Adger et al. (2011) call a dominant "material paradigm" of climate change, focused mainly on the physical, biological, and economic dangers resulting from the weather alteration[11] – especially when heritage sites are involved, climate change should be seen as a menace that jeopardises equally the external environment *and* a community of human actors. This "dual threat" is all the more frightening when considering the Italian case, for a large part of Italy's heritage properties consists of urban and architectural clusters – ranging from single buildings to entire districts, town centres and whole cities – that have never ceased to be populated and inhabited over the centuries.

Empirical research has shown (Kyle et al. 2004; Vorkinn & Riese 2001) that people who are more attached to a place – those who make the place significant through their daily routines and practices – are also more sensitive to negative changes occurring in that place. In particular, in the aftermath of a natural catastrophe, people of a certain community tend to feel that they have been 'robbed' of a part of their identity together with the disrupted place. Importantly, as long as the place is disrupted, this identity remains taken away from them (Brown & Perkins 1992, pp. 291-293). To a similar extent, it is possible to see climate change as a harm done to a generation that it is robbed of something it cares about by forces it has no control over and contributed only very little to the existence of. This brings about the moral claim that victims of climate change have some kind of right to reparation that what has taken away should be restored to them (Matravers 2019, p. 191). Justice demands that we compensate them for their loss. Seen in this light, the important question becomes, therefore, in what way people can get what they deserve: in what way a 'robbery' that has been done against value and identity

[10] Interview available at: https://www.agi.it/fact-checking/venezia_cambiamenti_climatici-6544013/news/2019-11-14/ [accessed May 28, 2020].
[11] As Nomikos notices (2018, p. 453) however, this "materialist interpretation" is somewhat inevitable, firstly because the material threat is easier to discern, and secondly because the nonmaterial threat is largely dependent on the material one.

can actually be compensated or restituted.

6. *Reconstruction and Conservation*

This argument – the claim that what has been taken away from a community should be restored to them – has consequences upon the whole logic of reconstruction. One first lesson to draw is that if the harm caused by climate change acts on both the tangible and the intangible level, reconstruction too should be carried out accordingly. Although this does not give us clear instructions on what to do in all circumstances of heritage destruction, it provides us with a rationale for deciding which considerations should play a role and which should be sacrificed when it comes to reconstructing a damaged site.

In the first place, we may want to reconsider skepticism about so-called stylistic reconstructions, that is, reconstructions designed to reproduce the original object in its basic form. Up until present days, the dominant view from those professionally concerned with cultural heritage has been to err on the side of caution with respect to issues of stylistic reconstruction. Much resistance in this regard is based on a commitment for the material authenticity of the original place (Petzet 1995; Jokilehto & King 2001; Lowenthal & Jenkins 2011). Reconstructions are considered fakes; we might know they are fakes (we might not, of course) but they are fakes nonetheless. Philosophers, on their part, have traditionally questioned the idea that a replica or an exact reconstruction might ever replace the original work. Most consider art objects of aesthetic interest only insofar as they could prove to be original, namely, genuinely created by the creator to whom they are attributed, and genuinely of the era and location to which they are said to belong (Goodman 1976; Sagoff 1978; Danto 1981; Korsmeyer 2008; 2012). Architectural works, in particular, are seen as instances where authenticity is especially prized, the salient fact about these sites being that they have been constructed in a long-gone era; to this extent, if they were built neither in the time, place or manner so attributed to them – it is argued – they would fail to attract aesthetic attention (Fischer 2019, p. 108). Some authors also contend that replicating a destroyed site or building may be counter-educational with respect to the way in which people in a society conceive of their own past. Replicas may, in fact, be a prompter of deception for future generations, who will thereby be misled in their evaluation of history (Korsmeyer 2008, p. 121; 2019).

Emphasizing the role of place attachment in our dealings with cultural heritage turns the tables. Once the 'perceived' everyday

significance of heritage sites is acknowledged, respect for material authenticity simply ceases to appear the most pressing criterion to be followed in reconstruction. Rather than being whether reconstructions would or would not comply with an abstract claim to the authenticity of the original site, the issue is now whether interventions are able to keep the values alive for the people for whom the relevant place is valuable. Reconstruction works in this sense as a 'value-restoring' process, focused more on the subjects than on the objects themselves. Indeed, we reconstruct the site not (or not only) because of its material features, but because of the symbolic, aesthetic and affective harm that its unwarranted disruption has caused to the subjects that make up society.

Notice that this does not amount to a plea for reconstructions 'in the style of'. Reconstructions may reproduce a destroyed site exactly "where it was, how it was"[12], but may not be able to recreate the value and the meaning that a place had acquired over the same time. Restoring the physical fabric of a heritage site cannot be effective if the perceived significance of the site is not equally taken into account. As Clementi and Salvati argue (2017, p. 2), although the reconstruction process should aim to reconstruct an "image of the ancient villages where the inhabitants can recognize their own place identity", this does not mean that "everything has to be preserved".

A consequence of this approach is that people with a greater degree of attachment to a site – those who are more affected by the site's disruption – should have a greater degree of authority than those for whom the object has less perceived significance. These people are generally called 'stakeholders' in the literature (Goral 2015; Myers, Smith & Ostergren 2016; Avrami et al. 2019), a term which is especially apt: metaphorically, stakeholders own a small part of something bigger; as such, they are affected by the decisions that are taken regarding it, so they have the right to have a say in relation to it. The authority people have on heritage objects is thus based on two closely related factors: (a) their perception of the site's significance, (b) their being affected by the site's alteration (Muñoz-Viñas 2005, p. 161). In this regard, although the number of people involved when a heritage site is disrupted can vary from a single individual to all humanity (since sites included on the World Heritage list are supposed to have global value), people's right to

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[12] The slogan "where it was, how it was" was used for the first time by the major of Venice during the aftermath of the collapse of the San Marco Bell Tower, in 1902. The Venice Bell Tower collapsed because of the deterioration of the bricks walls and the Venetians wanted to rebuilt it "in loco", like a copy of the ancient one, against the opinion of many architects of that time, who proposed a new design (Jokilheto 2007, p. 345).

impose their views should be proportional to their involvement with the place[13]. Insiders' or inhabitants' (aesthetic) interests, needs, and priorities should take precedence over those of outsiders or visitors. Again, this is because the appreciation or depreciation of residents is rooted in their intimate interaction with the site and invested with their life values – it affects their lives profoundly on a daily basis.

The realization of this idea opens up new space for rethinking how we conceive of our conservation activity. Particularly when designing a reconstruction project for a damaged heritage site, the affective dimension of people's everyday experience should be addressed, possibly with the hope of turning it into an asset. As everyday aestheticians have argued, people's direct involvement with a site generates affection and attachment, which then leads to a positive aesthetic appreciation. One effective way to recreate a positive experience of a particular harmed place is thus for people to be participants in creating it, which helps strengthen their affection, attachment and aesthetic appreciation of the place (Saito 2007, p. 214). This thinking can be referred to a newly emerging ethic approach called civic environmentalism (see especially Light 2003), which recognizes and emphasizes citizens' commitment in planning solutions to various challenges facing the environment. No matter how sound and well-intentioned a certain goal, policy, or project may be, if it is perceived as something imposed on citizens from above or outside, such as by a government or an outside institution, its success and cultural sustainability are doubtful. On the contrary, when citizens are enfranchised, this sense of empowerment will positively affect their appreciation of the place and project (Saito 2017, p. 107). In the field of conservation, civic environmentalism gives us an argument in favour of actively involving local communities in the rebuilding process that follows an environmental catastrophe. Obviously, most decisions require scientific expertise and have to be taken on technical grounds: no common citizen can be authorized to decide which material is best suited to withstand humidity, or what thickness a reinforcing wall should have. The conservation profession has many experts-only aspects, but it also has many aspects in which no technical knowledge is involved, aspects which call into question people's feelings, memories, preferences and interests. Importantly, it is on these aspects that the significance of

[13] Clearly, since a site recognized as part of World Heritage matters (at least culturally) not only to local people but also to the world community, there is the potential for a range of different ways of relating to, understanding the meaning of, and feeling attached to this place. In certain cases, this kind of differences may give rise to conflicts over who has the right to determine access and management of the site. In these cases, the official and the local can be thought of as competing (see, for example, Silverman 2010).

cultural heritage is based (Smith 2006).

7. *Conclusion*

In this paper, I have argued that an effective reconstruction strategy for the compensation and mitigation of future heritage harm caused by climate change should not only provide the site's refurbishment, but also include a more comprehensive strategy for preserving the social meanings and values connected to that site. From the perspective of environmental aesthetics, heritage resides in the "sympathetic" interaction between humans and a given place, to which significance is attached. So, while a 'place' is seen as the background of human action, the setting where social and personal dynamics take place, 'heritage' reflects the societal perception of such dynamics, acting as both the 'producer' and the 'product' of collective and individual identity. Within this perspective, everyday significance and attachment are considered key elements on which to base an effective reconstruction's program. Emphasizing the relationship between people and places is indeed essential to achieve interventions that are both positively received and aesthetically appreciated by the affected community. Allocation of value (and aesthetic value especially) depends and is contingent upon people's familiarity, involvement and engagement with a site.

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L'Antropocene architettonico.
Sulla formazione di mondo

di Marcello Barison

ABSTRACT

One of the most significant cross-disciplinary research fields which recently underwent a major development is the study of the Anthropocene. Intersecting the Anthropocene discourse with the current research in philosophy of architecture, I detected two major lacks in the state of the art:

1. Even if architecture is indisputably one of the main factors modifying the surface structure of the Earth, the discourse of the Anthropocene did not elaborate any satisfactory conceptual paradigm to interpret its role.

2. Although in recent years philosophy of architecture has undergone a notable development, there still is no clear general definition of its scope and objectives: the discipline completely lacks a systematic foundation.

My paper's approach will consist in addressing 2 with 1 and 1 with 2, i.e., in turning each of these lacks into a powerful strategical tool to tackle and overcome the deficiency of the other:

I address 1 with 2: a philosophical understanding of architecture, based on an extension of the concept of world-formation, allows to systematically conceive the architecture of the Anthropocene.

I address 2 with 1: questioning the architecture of the Anthropocene allows the philosophy of architecture to ground its entire disciplinary field on the unitary concept of world-formation.

KEYWORDS
Anthropocene; Architecture; World-formation; Animals; Plants

I. *Inquadramento*

La Terra vista dal satellite: incominciamo da qui. Non ci sono perturbazioni. L'atmosfera è limpida e i confini dei continenti si distinguono con nettezza. È qualcos'altro, tuttavia, a catturare il nostro sguardo: qualcosa che, per quel che ne sappiamo, non ha equivalente da nessun'altra parte del cosmo conosciuto: la Terra appare come un groviglio di arterie elettriche e conurbazioni lumi-

nose. Se potessimo disporre di una fotografia satellitare del pianeta prima della diffusione dell'energia elettrica ad uso civile, avrebbe un aspetto affatto differente: vedremmo un globo opaco, caratterizzato, dal punto di vista macroscopico, anzitutto dalla morfologia dei suoi continenti. Che cos'è successo? Siamo entrati nell'Antropocene, la prima epoca geologica nella quale la modificazione del pianeta è in larga parte dovuta all'azione umana. Il termine *Antropocene* è stato coniato per la prima volta negli anni Ottanta da Eugene F. Stoermer. Le prime pioneristiche teorizzazioni di quest'idea vanno però ricercate nel concetto di *era antropozoica* proposto da Antonio Stoppani (1873, p. 732) e nella nozione di *noosfera* introdotta per la prima volta da Vernadskij (1994, p. 208). Tuttavia, solo all'inzio del Ventunesimo Secolo il concetto di Antropocene ha incominciato a imporsi nel dibattito scientifico, quando Paul Crutzen, Premio Nobel per la chimica, vi ha fatto ricorso (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000) per indicare l'attuale epoca geologica, nella quale la più imponente forza di trasformazione dell'ambiente terrestre è quella esercitata dalla specie umana.

Nel corso di un processo il cui punto di svolta può essere situato all'epoca della Prima Rivoluzione Industriale, ma che è andato incontro a una drastica accelerazione a partire dalla metà del secolo scorso (Engelke e McNeill 2014), l'azione umana ha infatti modificato in maniera radicale una vastissima porzione del pianeta. Il discorso sull'Antropocene, sviluppatosi inizialmente nell'ambito delle scienze geologiche, e specificamente in stratigrafia, è stato poi gradualmente esteso a cosiderazioni concernenti il cambiamento climatico e i processi di modificazione ambientale (Bonneuil e Fressoz 2016, pp. 33-59, pp. 195-222). L'ecologia si è senza dubbio rivelata la disciplina più ricettiva rispetto a questo tipo di orientamento e, prendendo in considerazione l'impatto del capitalismo globale sull'evoluzione del pianeta, ha posto la necessità di una critica dell'attuale modello di sviluppo, includendo nel suo approccio anche la richiesta di un ripensamento epistemologico delle teorie economiche che lo hanno supportato (Bonneuil e Fressoz 2016, pp. 223-279).

Va però segnalato che il discorso relativo al clima, allo sviluppo ambientale e ai differenti modelli economici possibili, ha evidentemente limitato la considerazione di un altro elemento, altrettanto essenziale per la caratterizzazione dell'Antropocene: *tutte le modificazioni paesaggistiche e strutturali del pianeta di cui l'architettura è responsabile in maniera diretta*. I contributi davvero significativi, a questo riguardo, sono molto limitati e largamente confinati in volumi collettivi e riviste di settore (Turpin 2013,

Chiambaretta, Sassen e Huyghe 2015, Spanedda 2018). Manca, tra questi, un approccio epistemologico sistematico al tema, ossia un suo coerente attraversamento filosofico. Ed è proprio con l'intento di porre le basi per sanare quest'assenza all'interno del dibattito contemporaneo che il presente contributo si propone di affrontare con specifico strumentario filosofico il tema dell'architettura dell'Antropocene.

II. *Focus e questioni poste*

Come hanno mostrato Bonneuil e Fressnoz (2016, pp. 281-315), i primi segnali dell'Antropocene possono essere retrodatati almeno al 1750. Facendo riferimento a un vero e proprio cambio di passo nell'affermarsi del processo, avvenuto nel 1945, Engelke e McNeill (2014) indicano invece con questa data il periodo a partire dal quale il fenomeno globale dell'Antropocene ha incominciato ad assumere la sua attuale proporzione. Il mio contributo non ha come oggetto una datazione dell'Antropocene; mira piuttosto a dimostrare che l'architettura rappresenta uno dei suoi maggiori strumenti di implementazione. Per questa ragione, a far da implicita cornice temporale delle considerazioni che seguono è un periodo che, dall'architettura del Movimento Moderno, si estende fino a oggi[1].

Muovendo da una definizione filosofica dell'Antropocene su base archettonica, le domande cui s'intende rispondere sono: Qual è il ruolo della pratica architettonica nell'Antropocene? In che maniera l'architettura agisce come fattore determinante per dar luogo alla modificazione geologica del pianeta? Perché, al fine di concepire l'Antropocene da un punto di vista architettonico, è necessario fare riferimento alla filosofia dell'architettura? Perché quest'orientamento paradigmatico è necessario per definire la cornice disciplinare della filosofia dell'architettura in maniera sistematica e rigorosa? Quale specifico paradigma concettuale e che concetti architettonico-filosofici rendono possibile descrivere in modo adeguato le trasformazioni dell'ambiente antropocenico? Perché proprio l'architettura, oggi in modo privilegiato rispetto a ogni altra disciplina, è capace di proporre modelli teorici e concrete soluzioni costruttive realizzate a partire dall consapevolezza che, in conformità ai principi della teoria dell'Antropocene, non vi è, tra natura e cultura, alcuna possibilità di distinzione?

[1] Per una discussione critica della datazione storica dell'Antropocene, cfr. Braje (2015).

III. *Breve discussione dello stato dell'arte sulla filosofia dell'architettura*

III.1 *Filosofi per architetti*. L'intersezione tra filosofia e teoria dell'architettura occupa una posizione preminente nel dibattito filosofico contemporaneo. Paradigmatica, a questo riguardo, anche per il successo che ha incontrato, la serie *Thinkers for Architects* edita da Routledge fin dal 2007 con l'intento di introdurre singoli pensatori al pubblico degli architetti. Su questa base, tuttavia, il rapporto tra filosofia e architettura è concepito in modo affatto estrinseco: gli architetti che necessitino di 'stimoli' concettuali, possono 'prenderli in prestito', già ben 'torniti', da questo o quest'altro pensatore. Quest'approccio è condiviso da una nutrita serie di pubblicazioni: Illies e Ray (2014, pp. 121-144) si concentrano su come alcune specifiche pratiche architettoniche non siano altro che una sorta di applicazione materiale di posizioni filosofiche determinate; Mitrović (2011) descrive una serie di problemi filosofici che possono essere rilevanti per la teoria dell'architettura; Chiodo (2011) elabora un'articolata comprensione degli oggetti architettonici attraverso gli strumenti dell'estetica, soffermandosi su dieci nozioni formali di carattere generale (ordine, natura, foma, utilità, ornamento, spazio, tempo, autonomia, eteronomia e civilizzazione); Rocca (2008) e Panza (2014) presentano una serie di testi filosofici fondamentali per comprendere la relazione tra estetica moderna e architettura; Labbé (2017), al contrario, presenta una serie di testi scritti prevalentemente da architetti che discutono classici problemi filosofici.

III.2 *Architetti per filosofi*. La modalità senz'altro più rilevante in cui la relazione tra filosofia e architettura si è recentemente sviluppata è limitata all'interazione diretta tra singoli pensatori e singoli architetti:
– Fichte/Schinkel. Lohmann (2015) rende esplicito il ruolo che il concetto idealistico di autocoscienza riveste nel lavoro di Schinkel secondo l'interpretazione fichtiana.
– Hegel/Romanticismo. Mentre l'incidenza della pratica architettonica sul pensiero kantiano non ha ispirato un ampio numero di studi (Guyer 2011), nel contesto dell'idealismo tedesco il ruolo dell'architettura nella filosofia hegeliana (Whiteman 1987, Kolb 2007, Berendzen 2008, Ladha 2012) ha dato luogo a notevoli approfondimenti, dovuti in larga parte allo spazio dedicato al tema dall'autore medesimo (Hegel 1988, II, pp. 630-700).
– Heidegger/Scharoun. Fin dalla trascrizione del Darmstädter Gespräch tenutosi nel 1951 (Conrads e Neitzke 1991) e dal semi-

nale articolo di Christian Norberg-Schulz (1983), la relazione di Heidegger con l'architettura (Barison 2011) occupa una posizione centrale nel dibattito novecentesco sulla filosofia dell'architettura.

– Derrida/Tschumi/Eisenman. Il confronto di Derrida con l'architettura (Barison 2015) si è precisato a partire dall'attraversamento dell'opera di due architetti, Bernard Tschumi (Derrida 1986) e Peter Eisenman (Derrida 2008).

– Jean Nouvel/Jean Baudrillard. Il loro dialogo (Baudrillard e Nouvel 2000) si concentra su alcune tematiche specifiche: l'oggetto singolare in architettura, la relazione tra reale e virtuale, il concetto di metamorfosi e l'architettura della disparizione.

– Sollers/Portzamparc. Il loro dibattito (de Portzamparc e Sollers 2003) concerne il tema della relazione tra architettura e esperienza della scrittura.

– Philosophers/Architects. In tempi più recenti ci sono stati tentativi di associare le categorie concettuali definite da alcuni filosofi a opere architettoniche particolari: Pourdy (2011) legge Libeskind con Hegel; Damish e Williams (2002) ricorrono a Kant per analizzare Ledoux; Amato e Ferrara (2009) interpretano filosoficamente il lavoro di Oscar Niemeyer.

In generale, tutte le posizioni richiamate in III.1 e III.2 condividono i seguenti aspetti:

– Non riconoscono nell'architettura un autonomo laboratorio di pensiero capace di produrre i propri concetti indipendentemente dalla tradizione filosofica.

– Si limitano a una discussione della relazione tra un singolo pensatore e un singolo architetto.

– Mirano a mettere in luce dove, in una specifica pratica architettonica, può essere identificata un'applicazione diretta di principi filosofici quali la decostruzione derridiana, il concetto heideggeriano di luogo, ecc.

– Non pongono mai in questione la relazione tra filosofia e architettura come tale.

III.3 *Filosofia architettonica*. In anni recenti si è visto lo sviluppo di una tendenza ermeneutica particolarmente promettente che ha posto a tema una considerazione della pratica architettonica come autonomo atto di pensiero avente in sé rilevanza filosofica in ragione della sua capacità di pensare e configurare la realtà in maniera efficace e innovativa. È questo l'intento della (recentemente istituita) International Society for the Philosophy of Architecture (ISPA), e ancor più esplicitamente della serie *Architekturdenken*, pubblicata da Transcript. Diversamente dalla summenzionata col-

lana di Routledge (*Thinkers for Architects*), i testi inclusi in *Architekturdenken* non discutono posizioni filosofiche applicate o applicabili all'architettura, bensì il contenuto di pensiero espresso autonomamente in termini archittettonici. Precursore, quanto alla teorizzazione di questo tipo d'approccio, è stato il lavoro di Andrew Benjamin (1990, 2000), il quale – per la prima volta in modo sistematico – ha concepito *una filosofia propria agli architetti*, non, dunque una filosofia *per* architetti o un semplice, depotenziante approccio filosofico all'architettura. Queste le posizioni principali relative all'impostazione richiamata:

– Benjamin (2000) concepisce un'originale interazione tra i concetti di funzione architettonica e di ripetizione: al centro della pratica architettonica sarebbe la ripetizione di una singola funzione, ricorrente nei dettagli compositivi di opere differenti. I casi presi in considerazione sono quelli di Eisenman e Reiser + Umemoto.

– Jarzombek (2009) prende le mosse da un testo di Eisenman (Eisenman 1970) per riflettere sull'intrinseca prestazione concettuale dell'architettura, discutendo la relazione tra storia e spazialità testuale.

– Kremer (2011) argomenta in favore della determinazione di un piano concettuale comune – che egli chiama *ontologia architetturale* (Kremer 2015) – per superare la separazione disciplinare tra architettura e filosofia.

– De Bruyn e Reuter (2014) interpretano la specificità dell'architettura alla luce dei concetti di *teoria dei network* e *rizoma*, il secondo dei quali è in tutta evidenza mutuato da Deleuze e Guattari (1980).

– Bojanić e Dokić (2015) hanno recentemente esaminato la relazione tra architettura e filosofia, interpretando la definizione eisenmaniana di *filosofia architetturale* facendo in particolare riferimento all'opera di Derrida.

– Gleiter e Schwarte (2015), Gleiter (2015) e Schwarte (2009) implementano una forma integrata di riflessione unitamente architetturale e filosofica per giustificare e spiegare il ruolo dell'architettura, intendendola come quella pratica culturale di assoluta rilevanza attraverso la quale l'uomo crea un ambiente interamente appropriato alla sua forma di vita e proprio per questo distinto da quello naturale.

– Goetz (2018), facendo riferimento a Damisch (1981) e introducendo il concetto di *dislocamento*, definisce l'architettura come una fisica dello spazio, nella misura in cui, agendo spazialmente, contribuisce a costituire e produrre l'articolazione del mondo materiale.

Comune a tutti i contributi elencati in III.3 è l'idea che l'architettura non diventa filosofica quando incorpora concetti o contenuti filosofici. E nemmeno il legame tra filosofia e architettura è determinabile come relazione estrinseca di tipo metaforico o analogico.

Negli studi menzionati, tuttavia, il ruolo attribuito all'architettura risulta ancora generico. Le seguenti criticità debbono pertanto essere poste in evidenza:

– Non viene elaborato alcun modello teoretico generale che renda possibile esplicare perché ci si debba rivolgere all'architettura quale disciplina fondamentale per pensare l'attuale forma del mondo.

– Quest'approccio teorico non include il discorso dell'Antropocene quando discute la relazione tra filosofia e architettura.

– L'impostazione comune a questi tentativi si muove ancora all'interno di una cornice teorica di tipo classico che mantiene attiva la distinzione tra mondo naturale e mondo artificiale, una distinzione che viene invece completamente a cadere nella prospettiva dell'Antropocene.

– Gli approcci summenzionati sono spesso elaborati prendendo in considerazione non la pratica architettonica come tale, bensì il lavoro – pratico e teorico – di singoli architetti.

– In alcuni contributi emerge inoltre la tendenza a concepire il legame tra sapere filosofico e pratica architettonica facendo leva su un concetto specifico; è quel che accade ad esempio coi concetti di *ripetizione* (Benjamin 2000), *dislocamento* (Goetz 2018), *decostruzione* (Bojanić e Dokić 2015), *teoria dei network* (de Bruyn e Reuter 2014, pp. 50-67) e *rizoma* (de Bruyn e Reuter 2014, pp. 68-75). Questo tipo di 'soluzione' nasconde l'incapacità di trovare motivazioni di ordine paradigmatico per fondare epistemologicamente e in maniera unitaria la relazione tra filosofia e architettura.

IV. *Verso una nuova fondazione della filosofia dell'architettura*

Nel loro insieme i contributi citati confermano le osservazioni di Jameson (1991, p. 2) e Donougho (1987, p. 65), secondo le quali la riflessione teorica sull'architettura avrebbe dato origine a una rilevante porzione del pensiero contemporaneo, particolarmente significativa per lo sviluppo del postmodernismo. La ricostruzione proposta mostra tuttavia come, benché numerosi, tutti questi studi manchino di stabilire una cornice generale per la filosofia dell'architettura come disciplina specifica. Riassumendo i limiti delle posizioni individuate in III, è chiaro che:

– Si limitano per la maggior parte a discutere la relazione tra un singolo pensatore e un singolo architetto.

– Si concentrano su testi filosofici specifici senza mai indagare la rilevanza filosofica dell'architettura come tale e l'autonoma produzione di concetti di cui è capace.

– Non giustificano mai in maniera sistematica la necessità di stabilire una relazione tra filosofia e architettura.

– Non si confrontano mai col tema dell'Antropocene.

Rispetto a queste mancanze, suggerisco d'intraprendere i seguenti passi per una rigorosa fondazione della filosofia dell'architettura:

– Anziché focalizzarsi sull'impiego architetturale di singoli concetti o sulla relazione tra singoli architetti e filosofi, propongo l'elaborazione, su base filosofica, di una teoria dell'architettura fondata su di un unico concetto generale: la formazione di mondo (*Weltbildung*) (vedi V).

– Operando un significativo mutamento di paradigma, si tratta di riconoscere nell'Antropocene il fenomeno al quale il concetto filosofico architetturale di formazione di mondo può essere applicato nel modo più proficuo (vedi VI).

V. *In alternativa allo stato dell'arte: il concetto di formazione di mondo*

V.1 *Architettura e formazione di mondo: contro e oltre il modello heideggeriano*. Tra i più salienti dibattiti che hanno caratterizzato la filosofia contemporanea nelle ultime decadi bisogna certamente annoverare la discussione circa la distinzione tra uomo, animale e pietra articolata da Heidegger (1983). In base alla sua prospettiva, tre tesi-guida corrispondono a questi tre 'generi' fondamentali: "la pietra è priva di mondo, l'animale è povero di mondo, l'uomo è formatore di mondo" (Heidegger 1983, p. 261), dove il mondo dev'essere inteso, nella sua specifica interpretazione heideggeriana, come l'orizzonte esistenziale primario all'interno del quale soltanto è possibile, per le cose, manifestarsi ed essere pertanto incontrate dall'Esserci (Barison 2009, pp. 267-431). Solo l'Esserci, infatti, l'ente che "è *sempre mio*" (Heidegger 1977, p. 56) incontra le cose, nel senso che solo all'Esserci le cose sono esistenzialmente dischiuse in maniera esistenzialmente significativa. "Esistendo, l'Esserci *è* il proprio mondo" (Heidegger 1977, p. 482). Questa capacità di dischiudere il mondo costituendolo di volta in volta attraverso la propria esistenza appartiene, secondo Heidegger, unicamente all'essere umano. La formazione di mondo è pertanto un'attività che il filosofo ascrive soltanto al 'fare' umano, escludendo dalla capacità

di formare il mondo tanto gli animali che le cose inanimate (identificate, nel suo 'gergo', con le pietre). Nel modello heideggeriano, tre altri 'tipi' di entità risultano, oltre alle pietre, altrettanto esclusi: piante, cose e macchine.

Il paradigma, ancora marcatamente antropocentrico, proposto da Heidegger è esattamente ciò che intendo criticare e oltrepassare per fondare in modo rigoroso il ruolo della filosofia dell'architettura. Ad essere in gioco è la possibilità di dimostrare che la formazione di mondo non è una prerogativa dell'uomo soltanto. Contrariamente a Heidegger, propongo un approccio filosofico alternativo, che coincide anzitutto col mostrare che ciascuno dei 'generi dell'essere' esclusi da Heidegger – l'animale, la pianta, la pietra, la cosa e la macchina – instaura col mondo una relazione capace di costituire e determinare realtà in modo attivo e produttivo, in altre parole: capace di *formare il mondo* esattamente come fa l'uomo. La modalità specifica nella quale questa formazione di mondo trasversale si attua dev'essere ricercata nell'architettura – *un'architettura antropocenica costruita da animali, piante, pietre, cose e macchine.*

V.2 *La formazione di mondo antropocenica oltre la separazione tra natura e cultura.* Dobbiamo all'opera di Bruno Latour (1991, pp. 71-122) l'idea, essenziale per il modello dell'Antropocene, che la separazione tra natura e cultura materiale, fondativa della condizione moderna, debba essere abolita. Se applicate alla filosofia dell'architettura, le tesi di Latour acquisiscono un significao rivoluzionario: postulano il venir meno di una chiara linea di demarcazione che discrimini la morfologia dell'ambiente naturale dalla costruzione dell'ambiente aarchitettonico. Seguendo il modello elaborato da Latour, si è costretti ad ammettere che *l'architettura non è soltanto un fatto umano, ma la modalità essenziale in cui, nell'Antropocene, le forme del pianeta vengono strutturate.* L'architettura, quindi, è il modo generale in cui, da un punto di vista integrato, *indistintamente* naturale *e* artificiale, lo spazio dell'Antropocene viene materialmente organizzato.

Affermando che l'umanità è il fattore determinante nella trasformazione del pianeta, l'Antropocene non teorizza infatti una nuova forma di antropocentrismo. Al contrario, sostiene che l'azione umana dev'essere intesa come una forma di azione naturale. Gli esseri umani – le loro produzioni e le loro costruzioni – modificano l'ambiente fisico allo stesso modo in cui lo fanno animali, piante, pietre e forze geologiche. L'incisività dell'azione umana è divenuta preponderante a causa dei recenti sviluppi delle moderne tecnologie e dell'impatto su larga scala dei processi che regolano l'economia

globale. Tuttavia, anche l'intervento umano non è elemento univoco di cui tener conto e dev'essere pertanto concepito all'interno di un quadro olistico che prevede l'azione combinata di ogni altra forza naturale, in linea col discorso dell'Antropocene che teorizza la fine della distinzione tra azione umana e trasformazione naturale. L'approccio qui proposto è pertanto assolutamente coerente con i fondamenti epistemologici dell'Antropocene: si sostiene infatti che solo ammettendo che il principale fattore di trasformazione del pianeta sia costituito dall'architettura, e che essa sia effettuata indifferentemente da uomini, animali, piante, pietre, cose e macchine, sia possibile interpretare l'Antropocene rigorosamente, portando a effettivo compimento l'abolizione della soglia epistemologica che, classicamente, divide natura e cultura. Il 'fare' dell'architettura, integrando nel medesimo paradigma concettuale la formazione di mondo performata da tutti i 'generi dell'essere', descrive con precisione l'insieme delle trasformazioni terrestri, naturali e artificiali, unificate sotto il segno del costruire. Ciò mostra che l'Antropocene è concepibile soltanto mediante la mossa filosofica essenziale che indica nell'architettura la modalità universale di formazione di mondo che, al di là di ogni possibile divisione tra natura e cultura, è operata da uomini, piante, pietre, cose e macchine. Si mostrerà nel prosieguo come questo espressamente accada, considerando ciascuno di questi tipi di entità separatamente.

VI. *La formazione di mondo a fondamento dell'architettura antropocenica*

VI.1 *Animali.* Nel dibattito contemporaneo la posizione heideggeriana – secondo la quale "l'animale è povero di mondo" – è stata ampiamente ripresa: in alcuni casi per confermare la separazione tra uomo e animale e ripensarla radicalmente (Agamben 2002), in altri per criticarla aspramente (Derrida 2006). L'intero settore degli *animal studies* (Wolfe 2003, Lynn 2013, Ryan 2015) è infatti orientato verso l'abolizione di ogni rigida distinzione tra uomo e animale, nel tentativo di oltrepassare il pregiudizio antropologico che caratterizza le ricerche sul mondo animale. Internamente al discorso sull'Antropocene, questi approcci implicano l'eliminazione della distinzione tra un 'fare' artificiale, performato dall'uomo, e uno naturale, attribuito all'animale. Superare la differenza antropologica tra uomo e animale è dunque un passo fondamentale per concepire l'indistinguibilità antropocenica tra cultura e natura. L'approccio di questi studi, tuttavia, è piuttosto limitato perché l'abolizione della differenza antropologica tra uomo e animale non si produce mai

dimostrando che anche l'animale è formatore di mondo. Di qui l'esigenza di compiere una svolta filosofica di portata decisiva: attribuire la formazione di mondo all'architettura animale – cosa che non è finora mai stata fatta in nessuno dei lavori menzionati.

Il libro di Marc Denny e Alan McFadzean (2011), *Engineering Animals*, fa esplicito riferimento all'attività ingegneristica performata autonomamente dagli animali. Analisi affatto approfondite si sono focalizzate sull'architettura animale (von Frisch 1975, Gould e Gould 2007). La prospettiva teorica che soggiace a queste analisi è ben esemplificata da Karl von Frisch (1975, p. 9):

> L'uomo osserva con ammirazione e devozione le cattedrali, i templi, le piramidi e le altre sue creazioni architettoniche vecchie di secoli o millenni. La Terra conosce anche altri architetti, attivi da molti milioni di anni, la cui opera non deve la sua esistenza all'ingegno di spiriti eletti ma all'inconscia, continua forza delle leggi vitali. / Senza attrezzi e senza alcuna evidente forma di intervento attivo, i polipi corallini dei mari caldi hanno eretto le loro poderose strutture calcaree, grandi talvolta come montagne.

Emerge con nettezza che, in quanto architetto, anche *l'animale è formatore di mondo*.

VI.2 *Piante*. Studi recenti hanno vieppiù enfatizzato che le piante sono state i primi attori evolutivi ad aver determinato il modo in cui si è sviluppata la vita sul pianeta (Beerling 2007), essendo pertanto ampiamente responsabili per quel che concerne la sua attuale conformazione (Clement 2011). Il mondo delle piante ha pertanto giocato un ruolo decisivo nel configurare la superficie della Terra, tanto che il regno vegetale dev'essere a tutti gli effetti considerato in maniera prioritaria se si mira davvero a comprendere la morfologia del pianeta. Coccia (2016), Kohn (2013) e Hall (2011) argomentano in favore del superamento della differenza antropologica tra uomo e pianta, accordando la capacità di pensare e comunicare anche al regno vegetale (vedi anche Gagliano, Ryan e Viera 2017, Gagliano 2018, Baluska, Gagliano e Witzany 2018). L'insieme di questi studi ha condotto a una vera e propria *plant turn* – Mancuso (2017) parla di *plant revolution* – nella filosofia contemporanea. Non si tratta però né di un'antropomorfizzazione delle piante né di una naturalizzazione dell'uomo, bensì della concezione di attività trasversali (quali il pensiero, l'impatto biologico e geologico) performate sia dalla vita umana che da quella vegetale al di là della distinzione tra natura e cultura.Anche in questo caso, al fine di superare la differenza antropologica tra pianta e essere umano, manca però il passo decisivo finalizzato a mostrare che anche la pianta è formatrice di

mondo. Quest'*impasse* può essere disinnescata soltanto ponendo a tema l'architettura delle piante, nel doppio senso del genitivo, che le veda pertanto concepite certo come oggetti, ma altresì come soggetti dell'architettura. Da un lato, è necessario notare come (VI.21) la struttura delle piante manifesti in sé un carattere architettonico. Dall'altro (VI.22), un'intera serie di progetti architettonici sono informati dalla struttura e dalla biologia delle piante e possono pertanto a rigore essere compresi come esempi di *architettura vegetale*. I due punti necessitano di essere ulteriormente esplorati.

VI.21 Tra i molti studi esplicitamente dedicati all'architettura delle piante, si vedano: Barthélémy e Caraglio (2007) per un approccio dinamico all'ontogenesi vegetale; Fitter (1987) per un'analisi architettonica della radice delle piante; Costes, Godin e Sinoquet (1999) e Bucksch e Chitwood (2017) per un approccio topologico.

VI.22 Bahamón, Campello e Pérez (2009) hanno dimostrato l'esistenza di opere architettoniche che incorporano sistemi, *pattern* o processi che attengono al monto vegetale. In Barison (2016) ho discusso l'esempio del BIQ House, un edificio vegetale artificiale la cui facciata è costituita da un insieme di 129 pannelli di materiale organico che operano come fotobioreattori, producendo cioè tramite fotosintesi l'energia necessaria al funzionamento dell'abitazione.

I riferimenti citati dimostrano in modo inequivoco come la morfologia vegetale esprima una geometria (o una funzione) di tipo architettonico che, configurando il mondo naturale, può essere a ragione chiamata, *contra* Heidegger, formatrice di mondo.

VI.3 *Pietre*. Secondo il modello heideggeriano, una pietra non abita il mondo, nel senso che essa, benché 'fisicamente' presente come una cosa, non si rapporta alle entità circostanti in maniera tale da generare senso: non trascende se stessa per porsi in relazione con le altre cose – non parla e nemmeno agisce in (o processa una) rete di significati che le consentano di instaurare una relazione di tipo morale o strumentale con l'ambiente. Soprattutto, non costituisce il mondo come orizzonte di presenza a partire dalla propria esistenza determinata.

Propongo pertanto di rovesciare il paradigma heideggeriano concependo la formazione di mondo realizzata dalle pietre su base architettonica. In due maniere fondamentali:

VI.31 Nel primo caso, più ovvio, è in gioco il ruolo della pietra come materiale costruttivo attivo, come ha mostrato nel dettaglio Dernie (2003), muovendo da una ridicussione degli studi di Pevsner (1991) e Benevolo (2009) dedicati all'architettura moderna. L'architettura delle pietre è tema centrale sia per quel che concerne

la costruzione del singolo edificio (Dernie 2003, pp. 36-107), sia per ciò che concerne l'architettura del paesaggio (Dernie 2003, pp. 108-163) e la pianificazione urbanistica (Dernie 2003, pp. 164-227). Analizzando il caso della Cattedrale gotica di Chartres, Ball (2008) ha posto le premesse per comprendere che la pietra non è soltanto un materiale impiegato per costruire, ma, in virtù delle sue stesse caratteristiche strutturali, un *materiale agente*, che cioè costruisce: la pietra come formatrice di mondo.

VI.32 La pietra è essa stessa morfologicamente attiva. Ciò emerge in tutta chiarezza dall'importante contributo di Papapetros, specialmente dalla trattazione che egli ha riservato a *The Afterlife of Crystals. Art Historical Biology and the Animation of the Inorganic* (Papapetros 2016, pp. 113-159), dove combina il concetto di "animazione dell'inorganico" con quello di "estensione della vita". Sotto quest'aspetto, il caso forse più stupefacente riguarda la mofogenesi minerale dell'architettura così come viene concepita de Meuron e Herzog (2002, pp. 113-121).

VI.4 *Cose e oggetti*. Il temine 'cosa' non appare nei cinque 'generi' presi in considerazione in relazione a Heidegger: uomo, animale, pianta, pietra e macchina. Con l'eccezione dell'ultima, tutte queste tipologie di ente sono classificabili come esseri naturali. Che dire tuttavia delle entità che, pur non presentando le caratteristiche della macchina sono comunque artificiali, dunque 'cose' e 'oggetti' d'uso? Le due espressioni non sono sinonime, tanto che sulla loro differenza, ancora una volta teorizzata da Heidegger (1977, pp. 90-119), si è concentrato l'intero campo di studi della *thing theory* (Brown 2004, 2004[2], 2016). Una prima elaborazione di quest'approccio è dovuta a Bruno Latour, il quale ha addirittura perorato l'istituzione di un 'parlamento delle cose' (Latour 1991, pp. 194-198), testimoniando così il fatto che la modernità ha visto proliferare la presenza di oggetti ibridi, rendendo la distinzione tra umano e non umano completamente obsoleta (Latour 1991, pp. 36-39).

Un'assai significativa porzione del pensiero contemporaneo è impegnata nella 'riabilitazione' del concetto di cosa e mira infatti a sottrarre quest'ultima dal regime di passività ontologica e geologica nel quale essa è stata relegata dal moderno soggettivismo. Cose e oggetti sono in grado di produrre e condizionare la prassi in maniera indipendente, allo stesso modo in cui contribuiscono alla creazione di estese aree di significato in maniera attiva. Non soltanto, infatti, essi possono essere conosciuti, ma producono costantemente conoscenza. In altre parole, le cose configurano la realtà in modo autonomo e sostanziale. In che senso, allora, questa specifica for-

mazione di mondo può essere a tutti gli effetti detta architettonica? Si propone di chiamare *design* l'architettura delle cose in quanto formatrici di mondo.

VI.5 *Macchine*. In Barison (2016), discutendo le opere ingegneristiche di Theo Jansen, ho mostrato le caratteristiche fondamentali dell'architettura delle macchine. Quest'ultima non va intesa in maniera semplicemente metaforica, cioè come l'inclusione, in architettura, di suggestioni futuristiche che contemplino un elogio delle macchine del tutto estrinseco, non accompagnato da scelte costruttive concrete, come accade con la *machine-à-habiter* di Le Corbusier (1925, p. 219) e con le sue riflessioni sulla relazione tra industria dell'auto e architettura (Le Corbusier 2008, pp. 101-117). Come ha notato Reyner Banham, dopo il Movimento Moderno, che egli chiama la *prima età della macchina* (Banham 2005), assistiamo, con la *seconda età della macchina* (Banham 2004), all'imporsi di una reale capacità strutturale, da parte delle macchine, di determinare attivamente la formazione di mondo operata dall'architettura.

VII. *Conclusioni: verso un nuovo paradigma*

Criticando l'approccio heideggeriano, ho dimostrato che l'architettura è pensabile come quella pratica unificante che rende possibile, per tutti i diversi 'generi dell'essere', diventare formatori di mondo. Ciò implica alcune conseguenze concettuali d'estremo impatto se considerate all'interno del dibattito filosofico corrente:

– Il concetto di formazione di mondo giustifica in maniera sistematica l'istituzione, per la prima volta, della filosofia dell'architettura come disciplina rigorosa e unitaria, dal momento che il modello proposto permette di ricondurre l'impatto della pratica architettonica a un'unica idea filosofica chiara e portante.

– Poiché, grazie a una innovativa estensione del concetto di formazione di mondo, la filosofia dell'architettura considera le trasformazioni che interessano il pianeta al di là della distinzione tra natura e cultura, essa si dimostra essere una cornice teoretica privilegiata per interpretare l'Antropocene.

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Phenomenology of Augmented Environments

di Martino Feyles

ABSTRACT

In this article I analyze the notion of augmented environment from a phenomenological point of view. Referring to the work of J. von Uexküll, I will define environment as the set of perceptual and operational possibilities that a living being projects into its surroundings. Recalling the distinction between world and environment proposed by Scheler and Heidegger, I will show that augmented perception implies a redefinition of the openness that defines the human world.

1. *Describing Technology and Describing Experience*

Phenomenology is based on a methodological premise: it is necessary to distinguish the reality of things from the way we experience things. This distinction is fundamental in order to analyze augmented environments. An augmented environment is the object of an augmented perception. But what does augmented perception mean? In the scientific literature, the most common expression to describe this complex range of phenomena is "augmented reality" (AR). This expression, however, is misleading. Generally, the expression "augmented reality" refers to a certain type of technology which has developed considerably over the last ten years and is likely to become increasingly important in the near future. By using this technology, a subject can have several different experiences. One must therefore be careful not to confuse the description of a certain technology, in terms of hardware, software, technical problems, etc., and the description of the experiences that are made possible by this technology. While the first issue is outside the research field of aesthetics, conceived as a theory of sensible experience, the second is absolutely relevant from a philosophical point of view, and it is the issue that I am going to analyze in this essay.

To illustrate the fundamental difference between the description of a certain technology and the description of the experience made possible by a technology, I would like to consider a type of images to which we have long been accustomed, namely television images. What kind of experience do I have when I watch a football match on television? In some ways it is a perceptual experience, because my eyes actually see something – the images of the match – and my ears actually hear something – the voice of the commentator. The images that I see and the sounds that I hear are not fantasy images: in phenomenological terms they are not "represented" images. However, the experience that I have when I watch a football match on television is different from "natural" perception and has something in common with the experience of a representation: the objects I am looking at are absent, they are not actually "present". The players are not in my room even though I see them. I hear the noise of the supporters, but they are not actually with me. I listen to the commentator, but I do not see his face and I know that he is not "present" either, because the players cannot hear him.

In the lessons on *Phantasy and Image-Consciousness,* from 1904/1905, Husserl proposes to distinguish between "phantasy" and "imagination". He calls imagination the experience that we have when we represent something absent on the basis of the perception of an image (Husserl 2005, p. 89). Imagination is partly similar to perception, because it is grounded in the presentation of an intuitive content, but it is also similar to phantasy, because it represents something absent. It is important to note that the phenomenological distinction between different types of intuitive act does not necessarily correspond to the ontological distinction between real and unreal objects. Normally, perception is the intuitive experience that allows us to know reality. However, it is possible to have a perceptual experience that does not correspond to the reality of things: this is the case, for example, with optical illusions. In the same way, even if pure phantasies are representations, not all representations represent unreal objects. Recollection, for example, is a representation that posits the reality of its object. When I close my eyes and I remember the face of someone I know well, the experience that I have from a phenomenological point of view is similar to the experience of pure phantasy: nevertheless, the object that appears in the recollection is a real object (Feyles 2013). The correspondence between experience and reality is not even automatic in the case of imagination. When I watch a football match on television, images of a real event appear to me. On the contrary, if I watch a science fiction movie on television, the images that I

perceive do not represent a real object or situation. As a result, we cannot consider television images real or unreal in themselves. Through the same medium, i.e. through the same technology, one can either experience something real (for example the Juventus players) or something fictional (for example the Avengers)[1].

These remarks help us understand why the notion of AR is misleading and why it is more useful, from a philosophical point of view, to talk about augmented environments and augmented perceptions. As a matter of fact, the technology that makes AR possible can be used in very different ways and provoke very different experiences. The first step of any phenomenological analysis of augmented environments is to recognize this variety. Jon Peddie rightly pointed out that AR "is not a thing, it is a concept that can be used by many things, and it will be a ubiquitous part of our lives just like electricity" (Peddie 2017, p. 4). Electricity makes television and radio possible, but it would make no sense to ask whether "TV reality" or "radio reality" are actually real or not.

The relevance of these remarks becomes clear if we consider four different examples of augmented environments that can already be produced with current technology: (a) let us imagine an individual who needs to visualize precisely how much space is occupied by a table that he wants to buy: instead of taking measurements and trying to mentally imagine the new table in his kitchen, AR technology allows him to superimpose the three-dimensional image of the table on the real space in his kitchen and evaluate the effect it has (Arnaldi, Guitton, Moreau 2018, p. XXVI); (b) let us imagine a surgeon who has to perform a complex surgery to remove a tumor from a patient's brain: in this case, identifying the exact location of the tumor requires a great deal of spatial reasoning and a high degree of sensorimotor skill. Using an AR device, the surgeon can visualize an image that overlaps with the real image of the patient's brain, an image in which the exact location of the tumor is highlighted (Peters, Linte, Yaniv, Williams 2019, pp. 6-7); (c) let us imagine a

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[1] The taxonomy of mixed reality proposed by Milgram and Kishino (Milgram and Kishino 1994), although interesting and accurate, has no value from a phenomenological point of view, precisely because it is based on the description of different technological devices rather than on the description of different experiences. If we assume the taxonomy proposed in their article, when I look at two people inside the well-known Ames room, what I see is a real environment. However, the height of the two people I perceive in such a case is not "real": I am not "really" looking at a dwarf and a giant. It is an illusion. Moreover, according to the taxonomy proposed by Milgram and Kishino, the two cases (b) and (c) that I presented should be placed at the same point of the "virtually continuum". However, the experience of the surgeon who operates using an AR device is an experience of relationship with reality, while the experience of the boy playing an AR video game is a fictional experience.

boy playing one of the many available zombie videogames: instead of looking at a fixed screen, the boy moves freely around his house, shooting at the monsters, which appear in his living room or in the kitchen; (d) let us imagine a driver who needs to reach a place that he does not know: instead of repeatedly looking at the screen of a navigation device, with all the risks that this entails, thanks to AR technology he can see bright arrows on the road, that give him the correct directions; he can also see indicators in his environment that give him information about traffic, shops nearby, points of interest, etc. (Arnaldi, Guitton, Moreau 2018, p. 36).

In all these four cases we have imagined augmented environments, but the experience made by the subject is different in each case: in case (a) the subject is visualizing the future, something that is not yet real (the new table in his kitchen). This kind of experience is equivalent to what Husserl calls "expectation", i.e. the positional phantasy that is directed to the future (Husserl 1991, p. 57). The difference is that in this case it is not a pure phantasy, but a mix of imagination (the representation of the table based on the perception of an image of the table itself) and perception (the vision of the kitchen environment). In case (b) it is not a matter of anticipating the future, but we are still dealing with reality. The virtual image that overlaps with the natural perception of the real brain makes the surgery more efficient, and surgery has very real effects. In case (c), instead, augmented perception puts the subject in relation with a fictional world. Certainly, the zombies' graphic rendering may be very realistic and the environment in which the game takes place is "real" and familiar. However, a game experience of this kind is a fictional experience, (hopefully) associated with the consciousness of unreality. From a phenomenological point of view, this kind of experience is not different from the experience we have when we watch the Avengers on television, being well aware that Scarlet Johansson is a real person and that she is not "really" jumping on a spaceship together with the Hulk[2]. Finally, case (d)

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[2] Nicola Liberati proposed a phenomenological analysis of some games based on AR, in particular Pokemon Go. I agree with him when he says: "Even if the digital objects have the everyday world as a background on which they are superimposed, they are not part of the surroundings as other objects. They are part of the game generated by the device. These Augmented Reality games still produce 'digital fantasies' even if now the digital objects are visualized in the surroundings" (Liberati 2018, p. 218). On the contrary, I'm not convinced that "the intertwinement between digital and everyday world aimed by Augmented Reality is not achieved yet because these objects are still fictitious and they are not part of the everyday world" (Liberati 2018, p. 229). In fact, it seems to me that the misunderstandings linked to the ambiguity of the notion of Augmented Reality remain present in Liberati's text because there is no clear distinction between the description of a technology and the description of the experience of reality that a technology makes possible.

might seem similar to case (b), because the interaction between the subject and the environment is real also in this case: the imaginary driver is not playing a video game, he is "really" driving a vehicle. However, a difference needs to be highlighted here, for in this latter case the information that overlaps with the natural perception is not simply perceptual, but rather it is a mix between symbolic information (the arrows) and verbal information (the indications about the shops nearby, the traffic, etc.).

Considering these distinctions, it is clear that there can be several different phenomenological problems related to augmented environments. The most interesting questions arising from the analysis of cases (a) and (c) are related to the complex relationship between perception, imagination and reality. Probably, the most urgent question is the following: since technological advances make it possible to produce increasingly perfect virtual environments and augmented environments, is it possible that subjects will end up losing the ability to distinguish between fiction and reality? Are we "murdering the reality"? (Baudrillard 1995) Will the reality be completely absorbed in the "spectacle"? (Debord 1967) Although these issues are certainly crucial, in the remainder of this paper I will focus on some different problems. Indeed, it seems to me that the specific novelty of augmented environments is rather related to the subject-environment interaction which is exemplified in cases (b) and (d). In the two situations that I have described (AR surgery and AR driving) and in similar ones that will be more and more produced, the subject has a clear and well-founded awareness that he/she is acting in reality. In both cases, the danger of a confusion between illusion and perception or fiction and reality does not seem relevant. I will therefore refer to *non fictional augmented environment*s to designate situations similar to those I have described in cases (b) and (d).

2. *Environment and World*

In order to analyze the experience the subject has when dealing with non fictional augmented environments, it is necessary to clarify the theoretical meaning of the notion of environment in the first place. The notion of environment has been investigated since the beginning of phenomenology, especially by Heidegger and Scheler. Both refer explicitly to Uexküll's research. Heidegger openly recognizes the philosophical importance of the work of the Estonian biologist:

It would be foolish if we attempted to impute or ascribe philosophical inadequacy to Uexküll's interpretations, instead of recognizing that the engagement with concrete investigations like this is one of the most fruitful things that philosophy can learn from contemporary biology. (Heidegger 1995, p. 263)

What can the philosopher "learn" from Uexküll? First, he can learn that the animal-environment connection is an essential relationship, which precedes and founds the distinction between the two terms of which it is composed. The environment is not simply a physical space within which an individual is placed, just as an object is placed in a box. Uexküll calls this neutral space that has no essential relation with the percipient subject "surroundings" (*Umgebung*) (von Uexküll 2010, p. 43). The environment is clearly distinguished from the surroundings. The environment is the experience horizon of the living being, which essentially belongs to it. The most remarkable consequence of this conception is that different living beings inhabit different environments, even if they are in the same physical place. The same object, which from the point of view of a physical description remains a single entity identical to itself, can therefore "appear" substantially different in the environment of different animals. The example that Uexküll presents in the final chapter of *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans* is enlightening. An oak tree appears to the forester as a pile of wood to be axed. But for the fox who has built his den among the roots of the tree, the oak appears as a protection. For the owl the oak also appears as a protection, but it is not the roots but the branches that are "significant" in its environment. For the squirrel, the same branches have a different significance, because they are passages and springboards. For the ant, on the other hand, the oak tree never appears in its entirety, because what appears to it is only the bark "whose peaks and valleys form the ants' hunting ground" (von Uexküll 2010, p. 131).

In accordance with the different effect tones, the perception images of the numerous inhabitants of the oak are configured differently. Each environment cuts out of the oak a certain piece, the characteristics of which are suited to form the perception-mark carriers as well as the effect-mark carriers of their functional cycles. (von Uexküll 2010, pp. 130-1)

Each animal "cuts" the same reality in a different way, by selecting different significant aspects in the same object. These cuts and selections are not only different, but also contradictory:

In the hundred different environments of its inhabitants, the oak plays an ev-

er-changing role as object, sometimes with some parts, sometimes with others. The same parts are alternately large and small. Its wood is both hard and soft; it serves for attack and for defense. (von Uexküll 2010, p. 132)

It is important to highlight the correlation established by Uexküll between perception and operational possibilities. The oak "appears" differently to the fox, the forester and the ant, because the operations they can perform in the environment are different. Uexküll speaks in this regard of an "effect image", which is an integral part of the perceptual image.

How do we notice the sitting of the chair, the drinking of the cup, the climbing of the ladder, which is not given to the senses in any case? We notice in all objects that we have learned to use the act which we perform with them, with the same assurance with which we notice their shape or color. (von Uexküll 2010, p. 94)

This correlation between perception and the operational possibilities of a living subject allows us to determine a first definition of environment: *the environment is the set of perceptual and operational possibilities that a living being projects into its surroundings*. This definition is particularly significant because it represents a point of intersection between different research fields, namely biosemiotics, ecological psychology and phenomenology. There is a remarkable similarity between the ideas we can find in *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans* and Gibson's analysis of perception. The notion of "effect image", mentioned above, corresponds precisely to the notion of "affordance" elaborated in *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. While reductionist psychology tries to explain perception as an aggregate of sensations caused by an aggregate of objective qualities, ecological psychology recognizes that we never perceive objective qualities; we perceive affordances, that is, possibilities of interaction with the environment. In his analysis of perception, Gibson highlights the priority of the animal-environment relationship (Gibson 2015, p. 4) and insists on an idea that may reach reaches the unanimous consensus of phenomenologists: the animal-environment complementarity is not reducible to the classical opposition between the mind and the physical space (Gibson 2015, p. 129). The animal is not simply a mind, because it is always in an environment. The environment, on the other hand, is not simply a physical space, because it is in relation to a living being. For Gibson, it is clear that every animal has its environment and for this reason the affordances that it perceives "have to be measured relative to the animal. They are unique for that animal" (Gibson 2015, p. 120). Affordances are not abstract physical properties that

have an objective value independently of the subject's perception; even though it is equally true that perception of the affordance is not modified by the particular individual's need and therefore the affordance has its own peculiar objectivity (Gibson 2015, p. 130).

Long before Gibson, Heidegger had already highlighted the originally pragmatic character of perception in *Being and Time*[3]. While classical metaphysical and anthropological tradition considers the relationship between man and world first and foremost as a cognitive relationship, characterized by a purely theoretical attitude of observation, for Heidegger things manifest themselves primarily as "useful things". The relationship with useful things is not a "blind" connection without any understanding. Understanding a useful thing means perceiving its "what for": for example, understanding what a hammer is means understanding what operations can be carried out with that particular instrument. Certainly, this understanding is a form of knowledge; but it is a knowledge oriented towards action and completely distinct from "science". Heidegger calls "circumspection" this form of understanding of the "handiness" or usability of the useful thing (Heidegger 1996, p. 65).

The relationship with the beings encountered in the surrounding world that is made possible by circumspection is not limited to so-called artificial things, such as the hammer. The Heideggerian notion of the useful thing does not coincide with the common sense notion of an instrument. The distinction between environment and surroundings elaborated by Uexküll and that between physical space and environment proposed by Gibson correspond to the difference between world and nature in *Being and Time*. While the world is the set of the useful things which the *Dasein* is related to, the nature of physical science is conceived as a set of simply present things. But the original relationship of the *Dasein* with nature, for Heidegger, is never the simple observation of natural properties.

"Nature" is also discovered in the use of the useful things, "nature" in the light of products of nature. But nature must not be understood here as what is merely objectively present, nor as the *power of nature.* The forest is a forest of timber, the mountain a quarry of rock, the river is water power, the wind is wind "in the sails". (Heidegger 1996, p. 66)

There is, however, an important difference that is made in Heidegger's analysis. The useful thing, as it is described in *Being and Time*, is never isolated. The usability of the useful things is possible

[3] "Our perception of the world, as Heidegger's notion of the 'ready-to-hand' and Gibson's notion of affordances show, is of an environment that affects us and elicits our action" (Gallagher and Zahavi, p. 100).

only in relation to the totality of the useful things. For this reason, the structure of the what-for, which is characteristic of the useful thing, is defined by what Heidegger calls "reference". Each useful thing refers to the other useful things with which it is in relation: a pen makes sense, i.e., it can be what it is, only in a world where there are sheets of paper and ink, and where the operation of writing or drawing is possible (Heidegger 1996, p. 64). This interdependence between the part and the whole introduces a further layer to our analysis. The structure of the reference is also the structure of the sign. Indeed, Heidegger shows that the world is formed according to a structure that he calls "significance". Significance is the ontological basis of language and word (Heidegger 1996, p. 82). In this way, an essential relationship is envisaged, which will be further developed in Heidegger's later texts: namely, the fact that being in the world means being in the language (Heidegger 1971, p. 93; 2000, p. 56).

We can understand, consequently, why Heidegger uses a specific terminology: being in the world is not the same as being in the environment. The world is something "more" than the environment. The difference is provided by language. The correlation between perception, operation and environment, which Uexküll first and Gibson then highlight, is a feature of the experience of any animal able to have complex perceptions. But for Heidegger, only in the case of the man a meaning that language can express is recognized in perceptual experience. Human perception always interfaces with language. We can therefore infer that human perception, unlike animal perception, is always an "augmented" perception. Since the human experience is defined by being in language, the human world is not simply an environment. *But can we also affirm that the human world is always an "augmented" environment?*

3. *Augmented Environments and Experience*

The most commonly accepted definitions of AR highlight the increase in information that occurs in the perception of the environment, through the mediation of a specific technology.

The goal of AR is to enrich the perception and knowledge of a real environment by adding digital information relating to this environment. This information is most often visual, sometimes auditory and is rarely haptic. In most AR applications, the user visualizes synthetic images through glasses, headsets, video projectors or even through mobile phones/tablets. The distinction between these devices is based on the superimposition of information onto natural vision that the first three types of

devices offer, while the fourth only offers remote viewing, which leads certain authors to exclude it from the field of AR. (Arnaldi, Guitton, Moreau 2018, p. XXVI)

According to these definitions, the subject interacting with an augmented environment perceives a real environment, but the specificity of AR is the overlap of information on the basis provided by natural perception. Clearly, the language we find in technical publications dedicated to AR is most of the time inadequate from a phenomenological point of view: for example, a phenomenologist could hardly accept the notion of "information" used by Arnaldi in the passage quoted above. However, these terminological problems, which conceal conceptual problems, should not prevent us from grasping the issue that is implicit in the idea of an increase in information present in perception. Language is certainly an extraordinary source of information for the perceiving subject. Framing a certain intuitive experience in linguistic terms means categorizing an object. Categorizing an object means having additional information available. Strictly speaking, this additional information is not "present" in intuitive data. This is the reason why we can argue that *human perception is always an augmented perception*[4]. When I look at a tank of gasoline and I recognize that it is gasoline, mainly thanks to an olfactory perceptual mark, I immediately perceive a complex set of affordances. For example, I know that I can use gasoline to fuel my car. But I also know that gasoline can easily catch fire and explode and that it is a toxic liquid. Where do I get this additional information from? I did not find it in the intuitive content of perception. I cannot infer the operational possibilities of gasoline from its color or smell. Nor can I say that I have extract this information from a previous experience: in my life I have never seen gasoline set on fire or explode and I have never heard of anyone who was intoxicated by drinking it. This information is part of my linguistic competence, of what Umberto Eco would call the "encyclopedic competence" of a speaker. Understanding the word "gasoline" does not mean knowing its chemical composition or the technological process by which it is produced in the first place. Rather, a proper understanding of the word "gasoline" implies that I know some "schemes of action" (Eco 1997, p. 70): for instance, that we cannot

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[4] As noted by A. B. Craig, it is correct to speak of AR only when the information superimposed on the perception of the world is digital information (Craig 2013, p. 16). However, Craig shows that in a wider sense it can be argued that even "primitive" instruments produce augmented environments: in this sense, we can say that a didgeridoo player adds an artificial sound to his environment and that road signs transform the highway into an augmented environment. This broad meaning of the notion of augmented environment allows us to understand the thesis I want to argue for: verbal language has always been the most powerful instrument that "augment" human-environment interaction.

drink it and that it is flammable. Our encyclopedic competence increases as we gain linguistic competence. Indeed, a small child may have only a partial understanding of the word "gasoline" and he may not know that it is toxic.

Let us now return to the two cases (b) and (d) that I presented earlier. Usually a surgeon knows exactly where to operate. How does he know that? Because he studied, but mostly because he has experience. We can expect, however, that the surgeon, unlike the forester, has no idea where it is necessary to hit the oak with the axe to cut it properly. These skills, which are linked to effect images or perceptions of the affordances, derive mainly from experience. So what can we expect from the development of AR technologies? The hypothesis of a forester performing a complex surgical procedure tickles my personal sense of humor, but I have to admit that it is a very unlikely hypothesis. It seems plausible, however, that in the future the operational skills we are talking about will be less and less determined by experience. We can also expect that the dangerous properties of gasoline will be showed in advance to the children of the future when the object enters the field of vision of their AR devices. It is possible, therefore, that the encyclopedic competence made available by language may be progressively less necessary.

However, this is not the most interesting problem. We have already noticed that Heidegger claims that there is an essential difference between world and environment. One year after the publication of *Being and Time*, Scheler returns to the problem in a reference text for contemporary philosophical anthropology, in which he tries to restate the difference between man and animal: *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*. The animal, for Scheler, is a prisoner of the limits of his environment. The operational possibilities that he can glimpse in his surroundings are predetermined. The morphological form, the structure of tendencies and the perceptual system form a "rigid functional unit" in the animal. So, the way in which the fox or the squirrel can see the oak is predetermined. On the contrary, man is "open to the world": his relationship with things is therefore always open.

Das Tier hat keine "Gegenstände": es lebt in seine Umwelt ekstatisch hinein, die es gleichsam wie eine Schnecke ihr Haus als Struktur überall hinträgt, wohin es geht – es vermag diese Umwelt nicht zum Gegenstand zu machen. Die eigenartige Fernstellung, diese Distanzierung der "Umwelt" zur "Welt" (bzw. zu einem Symbol der Welt), deren der Mensch fähig ist, vermag das Tier nicht zu vollziehen [...]. (Scheler 1998, pp. 40-41)

This ability to distance the environment and objectify the entities encountered is only proper to the man. This ability is closely linked to his ability to speak. Language is the "instrument" of this distancing and objectification. But, at the same time, it is important to note that the openness of the human world is determined by the relationship that the man establishes between the perceptual-operational dimension and the language dimension. Let us return once again to the oak of Uexküll. The forester observing a branch of the oak is able to see different configurations of usability. He is able to see the branch as an instrument for striking, as a support for walking, or as a material suitable for light a fire. These three different ways of seeing correspond to three different ways of categorizing the entity that the forester is observing: "club", "walking stick", "firewood". Human language does not imply that only one of these categorizations is correct. This is the reason why human perceptual world always remains an open world. Now, what possibilities can we see when we imagine the augmented environments of the future? Is it a world where labels have already been stuck on everything? If so, we would have to admit that the augmented environments, while greatly enhancing our operational possibilities, make the world more closed.

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Second-Nature Aesthetics: On the Very Idea of a Human Environment

di Stefano Marino

ABSTRACT

In the present contribution I start from some hints at recent contributions that have profitably intersected an inquiry into 'the aesthetic' with an investigation of the human nature, such as the books by Giovanni Matteucci and Alva Noë. In this context, I argue for the suitability of the notion of 'second nature' as a concept that is capable to grasp the inextricable intertwinement and complex interaction of biological and cultural aspects that are distinctive of the human being. Borrowing the notion of 'second nature' from John McDowell, I offer a brief reconstruction and interpretation of the history of this concept that makes reference to different philosophers (Adorno, Gadamer, Gehlen, Heidegger, Scheler) and that connects the concept of 'second nature' with the difference between animal ways of inhabiting an environment and human ways of shaping a world. On this basis, I suggest to broaden the framework of McDowell's 'naturalism of second nature' (narrowly focused, in my view, only on rationality and language as constitutive elements of a properly human world) in the direction of a kind of 'second-nature aesthetics', especially focusing on the concept of mimesis and the significance of mimetic components in the process of our 'becoming human'. Beside conceptualization capacities and language, that a vast majority of philosophers and scientists have exclusively focused their attention on, also aesthetic practices play indeed a decisive role in the unceasing process of 'anthropogenesis' or 'hominization'. The aesthetic represents one of the fundamental components of the experience in the environment (or, more precisely, in the world) for the 'second-nature animals' that we are: from the point of view of a 'second-nature aesthetics' inspired by 'naturalism of second nature' there is no human environment but strictly speaking only human (and hence also aesthetic) worlds.

KEYWORDS
Aesthetics; Second Nature; Environment/World; John McDowell; Alva Noë.

> I thought the world
> Turns out the world thought me.
> It's all the other way round
> We're upside down.
> PEARL JAM. *Cropduster*

> We are out of our heads.
> We are in the world and of it.
> We are patterns of active engagement
> with fluid boundaries and changing components.
> We are distributed.
> ALVA NOË. *Out of Our Heads*

1.

In their famous radio debate from February 3, 1965 entitled *Ist die Soziologie eine Wissenschaft vom Menschen?* Theodor W. Adorno and Arnold Gehlen, before going into detail on some specific philosophical and sociological questions that they largely disagreed about, agreed anyway that "the expression 'man (*Mensch*)' is not clear or unambiguous", and that "there is 'no pre-cultural human nature' (*keine vorkulturelle menschliche Natur*)" (Adorno and Gehlen 1965, p. 226). This theoretical perspective clearly had important consequences also for the development of Adorno's and Gehlen's philosophies of art, respectively developed in their books *Ästhetische Theorie* and *Zeit-Bilder*. And this theoretical perspective can be understood, more in general, as representative of a certain philosophical 'mood' or 'spirit' that was quite typical of those decades and was not favourable to the development of theories centred on the idea of a determined and stable nature of the human being (see Martinelli 2004, pp. 243-256).

In recent times, however, the question concerning the definition of what we may call the human nature has powerfully re-emerged in intellectual debates of various kind, such as philosophy, psychology, biology, anthropology, neuroscience, etc. Moreover, this question has proved to have important implications also in the field of aesthetics, with various articles and books on the arts and the definition of the human or the so-called aesthetic niche, often developed from perspectives connected to the philosophy of mind and/or evolutionary theories.

In this context, it can be particularly interesting to notice that an influential philosopher of perception and mind of our time like Alva Noë has tried to apply to the field of aesthetics (or, more precisely, to the field of art, thus implicitly limiting the broader realm of 'the aesthetic' to the narrower realm of 'the artistic', as critically noted by Matteucci 2019, p. 33) some basic theses of his original development of the so-called theory of the extended mind first presented in 1998 by Andy Clark and David Chalmers (see Noë 2009, p. 82). In fact, after having presented in *Out of Our Heads* his radical theory of consciousness, understood not as "something that happens inside us" but rather as "something that we do, actively, in our dynamic interaction with the world around us" (Noë 2009, p. 24), in his subsequent book *Strange Tools: Art and Human Nature* Noë has attempted to develop an aesthetic theory connected to the philosophy of mind that understands art as "an engagement with the ways our practices, techniques, and technologies organize us",

and finally as "a way to understand our organization and, inevitably, to reorganize ourselves" (Noë 2015, p. xiii).

Noë's fundamental thesis in *Out of Our Heads* is that consciousness and "meaningful thought" arise "only for the whole animal dynamically engaged with its environment", so that, for example, it is wrong and mistaken to claim that computers or also brains alone (i.e. separated from the whole body of the organism interacting with its environment) can think. As Noë thought-provokingly claims, "computers can't think largely for the same reason that brains can't" (Noë 2009, p. 8). As he explains, the problem of consciousness

is that of understanding our nature as beings who think, who feel, and for whom a world shows up. […] Consciousness requires the joint operation of brain, body, and world. Indeed, consciousness is an achievement of the whole animal in its environmental context. […] The brain – that particular bodily organ – is certainly critical to understanding how we work. I would not wish to deny that. But if we want to understand how the brain contributes to consciousness, we need to look at the brain's job in relation to the larger nonbrain body and the environment in which we find ourselves. […] [W]e need to turn our attention to the way brain, body, and world together maintain living consciousness. Mind is life. If we want to understand the mind of an animal, we should look not only inward, to its physical, neurological constitution; we also need to pay attention to the animal's manner of living, to the way it is wrapped up in its place. […] To understand the sources of experience, we need to see [the] neural processes in the context of the conscious being's active relation to the world around it. We need to take into our purview dynamic relationships that cross the not-so-magical membrane of the skull. Consciousness of the world around us is something that we do: we enact it, with the world's help, in our dynamic living activities. […] [A] careful examination of the way experience and the brain's activity depend on each other makes plausible the idea that the brain's job is, in effect, to coordinate our dealings with the environment. It is thus only in the context of an animal's embodied existence, situated in an environment, dynamically interacting with objects and situations, that the function of the brain can be understood. […] [If] we seek to understand human or animal consciousness, then we ought to focus not on the brain alone but on the brain in context – that is, on the brain in the natural setting of the active life of the person or animal. […] Brain, body, and world form a process of dynamic interaction. That is where we find ourselves. (Noë 2009, pp. 9-10, 24, 42, 64-65, 70, 95)

As one can clearly see from the abovementioned quotation, the concept of environment plays a significant role in Noë's intriguing philosophical project, inasmuch as his conception of mind is fundamentally based on what we may call the 'threefold chord' of brain, body and environment (borrowing the concept of 'threefold chord' from Putnam 1999). However, it must be also noted that Noë sometimes seems to rely on a quite general and undifferentiated concept of 'environment' that, as the abovementioned quotations clearly show, is often used by him as interchangeable with the concept of 'world'. So, for instance, Noë exemplifies his conception

by making reference to such organisms as a bacterium "geared into its environment", "geared into the world", thus arriving to emphatically claim: "With the bacterium we find a subject and an environment, an organism and a world. The animal, crucially, has a world; that is to say, it has a relationship with its surroundings" (Noë 2009, pp. 39-40). Another example used in *Out of Our Heads* is that of sea snails, apropos of which Noë claims:

> the sea snail is what it is thanks to the way it is bound to, affected by, and coupled with a specific situation. The world acts on the snail; the snail responds; how it acts is shaped by how it was acted on; the snail is a vector resulting from distinct forces of the body, the nervous system, the world. Its past history *in the environmental context* and its ongoing dynamic exchanges with the environment make the sea snail what it is. […] Are we so different from the sea snail? (Noë 2009, p. 93)

Notwithstanding Noë's correct acknowledgment of the fact that "it is not the case that all animals have a common external environment", because "from the standpoint of physics […] there is but one physical world" but "to each different form of animal life there is a distinct, corresponding, ecological domain or habitat", and actually "[a]ll animals live in structured worlds" (Noë 2009, p. 43); and notwithstanding his correct acknowledgment of the fact that "[n]o nonlinguistic brute could fashion [a] particular relation to the world" in the same way in which human beings develop "a relation that is linguistically structured" (Noë 2009, p. 87): notwithstanding all this, his quite general use of the concepts of environment and world may sometimes appear as problematic. The same problem, in my view, also occurs with his frequent use of a quite undifferentiated notion of "animal life" or "environment's action on the animal" (Noë 2009, pp. 91, 93). More precisely, the risk is to make this conception appear as too vague and thus incapable to adequately account for the specificity of the human relation to the environment in comparison to other animals' relation to it – while, in using such a general expression as 'other animals', I am surely aware of the fact that the concept itself of 'the animal' should not be hypostasized and, following Derrida's insightful suggestions apropos of 'the *animot*', should rather undergo something like a 'deconstruction' of the hidden and underlying prejudices that are at the basis of our common way of thinking and talking about animals (see Derrida 2008 and also Cimatti 2013; Filippi 2017).

So, when Noë asks the abovementioned question: "Are we so different from the sea snail?", the answer should be (dialectically, so to speak) both 'No!' and 'Yes!'. In fact, the life of a human being is surely comparable to the life of a sea snail or other animals from

the very general point of view of an organism/environment relation broadly conceived. At the same time, however, it is incomparable to it, not only because of certain specific capacities that pertain to the human being but also, at a more fundamental level, precisely because the development itself of those capacities is largely dependent on a "mutual interdependence of organism and environment" (Noë 2009, p. 122) that in the case of human beings is quite specific and unique.

In place of a natural habitat, what we've got to do with here, after "the emergence of culture" (defined by Michael Tomasello as the development of "early human cooperation" hypothetically traceable back to the so-called "*Homo Heidelbergensis* some 400,000 years ago"), is something conceivable as a "cultural common ground" (Tomasello 2014, pp. 78, 81-82). At the same time, the undeniable existence of certain capacities that make human beings appear as unique, that are "products of *social* interactions […] not studied by the *natural* sciences", and that "institute a realm of *culture* [which] rests on, but goes beyond, the background of reliable differential responsive dispositions and their exercise characteristic of merely natural creatures": the undeniable existence of all this does *not* imply that these capacities must be conceived of "as spooky and supernatural" (Brandom 2000, p. 26). In fact, it is surely correct to notice that, at this point, "a distinction opens up between things that have *natures* and things that have *histories*" (Brandom 2000, p. 26), but the fact that human beings are cultural/historical creatures does *not* mean that they are separated from the realm of nature and do not belong to it: namely, it does *not* prevent us from including also culture and history into the human nature, if we are able to develop a sufficiently broad, complex and articulated concept of human nature. As recently emphasized by Michael Tomasello about the process of 'becoming human' that is distinctive of the somehow particular animals that we are:

all humans […] live among their own distinctive artifacts, symbols, and institutions. And because children, whatever their genetics, adopt the particular artifacts, symbols, and institutions into which they are born, it is clear that this societal variation cannot be coming from the genes but rather is socially created. The full puzzle is thus that humans are not only a species of unprecedented cognitive and social achievements but also, at the same time, one that displays a novel kind of socially created, group-level diversity. The solution to the puzzle – the new evolutionary process – is of course human culture. But the traditional notion of culture as something apart from biology and evolution will not do. Human culture is the form of social organization that arose in the human lineage in response to specific adaptive challenges. (Tomasello 2019, p. 3)

In endorsing naturalism as a general philosophical view, but at the same time criticizing the limits of what we may call a narrow-minded scientism, also Noë notes in *Strange Tools* that we must conceive of ourselves as "culturally embedded persons" precisely because of "our nature":

> human beings are animals – we are confined by patterns of activity – but we are more than just animals. We are animals who are never engaged only with the task of living but are always, also, concerned with why and how we find ourselves s occupied. […] We are part of the natural order. […] But crucially: nothing compels us to say that human being is a species of animal being; we can instead say that human being and animal being are each species of a more encompassing natural being. It is dogmatic and unimaginative to insist that we can explain the human exhaustively in the terms we use to explain the nonhuman animal. (Noë 2015, pp. 28, 65-66)

Freely (but not arbitrarily) adapting a fitting expression of Adorno to the purposes of the present article, we might say that the aim is thus "to dialectically overcome the usual antithesis of nature and history [by] pushing these concepts to a point where they are mediated in their apparent difference" (Adorno 1984, p. 111). Namely, the aim is to develop something like a dialectical conception of 'natural history'. From this point of view, an adequate conception of the human nature should *not* limit itself to either 'naturalizing culture' or 'culturalizing nature', but should be capable to conceptually grasp the fascinating intertwinement of both dimensions in such a 'naturally artificial' or 'artificially natural' creature as the human being (Wulf 2018, pp. 43-50). In order to clarify the unique intersection between nature and culture that is characteristic of the human nature, and to account for the latter in such a way that "combines both specificity and continuity" and thus paves the way for a view of "human beings as specific although not special" (Ferretti 2009, p. vii), it is possible to introduce in this context the concept of 'second nature'.

2.

The range of philosophers and also scientists that have profitably used the concept of 'second nature' in the 20th century is really wide, complex and diversified, including such different authors as Marxist intellectuals like Lukács and Adorno, on the one side, and neuroscientists like Gerald Edelman, on the other side (see Adorno 1984, pp. 117-118 and 2004, pp. 356-357; Edelman 2006). In the present contribution I will specifically (but also critically, to some extent) make reference to the intriguing way in which John

McDowell made use of this concept in his book *Mind and World* (1994) to develop a philosophical doctrine known as 'naturalism of second nature' which also includes, as a part of McDowell's theory of the mind *as* part of the world[1], an important discussion of the concepts of (animal) environment and (human) world.

Adopting a 'second-nature' philosophical perspective can have some important consequences for a renewed understanding of the aesthetic dimension. However, it is important to immediately underline that, although focused on the idea of environment and thus ascribable to the topic 'aesthetic environments', the aim of the present contribution is partially different from the aims of other philosophical investigations typically included in the field of 'environmental aesthetics'. In fact, with regard to "the very nature of environmental aesthetics" it has been noted that in the last fifty years "this new field of study has emerged largely in reaction to aesthetics' traditional focus on the arts", attempting to "catalogue and characterize a wide range of aesthetic objects and experiences lying beyond the canonical realms of the arts", and often construing the concept of environment "in an extremely broad sense that includes more or less everything except art" (Parsons 2015, p. 228). Borrowing a famous expression from Donald Davidson's seminal essay *On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme*, what is at stake in the present contribution is rather the very idea of a human environment, i.e. the basic question whether it is appropriate or not to use this concept with reference to the particular 'second-nature animals' that human beings are, and then some implications of this question also for an investigation of the notion of environment from an aesthetic perspective.

In general, we might say that human beings seem to interact in

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[1] McDowell's thought-provoking claim that "the mind is not in the head" (McDowell 1998, p. 276) but is 'in the world' – clearly inspired by Hilary Putnam's famous statement that "meanings just ain't in the head", which also influenced Noë (2009, p. 89) – can be probably drawn close to some results of the so-called theory of the extended mind. As McDowell writes, the main problem in the philosophy of mind "is the assumption that experiences, as mental occurrences, must be themselves internal to their subjects. […] The fundamental mistake is the thought that a person's mental life takes place in a *part* of her. […] [W]e need a way of thinking about the mental in which involvement with worldly facts is not just a point about describability in (roughly speaking) relational terms […] but gests at the essence of the mental. The 'in here' locution, with its accompanying gesture, is all right in some contexts, but it needs to be taken symbolically, in the same spirit in which one takes the naturalness of saying things like 'In my heart I know it', which can similarly be accompanied by an appropriate gesture" (McDowell 2009a, pp. 255-256). Of course, this conception of the mind/world relation also requires an adequate rethinking of the mind/body relation, and in particular the avoidance of what McDowell calls "the Myth of the Disembodied Intellect [that] it is surprisingly easy to lapse into without realizing that one has done so" (McDowell 2009a, p. 322).

a specific and unique way with their environment, which is usually not a merely natural habitat but rather an artificial and historical/ cultural one. Also Alva Noë implicitly refers to this fact when he notices that "[m]ost of us live in cities": that is, for the particular organisms that we are the environment includes "not only the physical environment but also [...] the cultural habitat of the organism" (Noë 2009, pp. 122, 185). Referring to a recent work by Richard Shusterman, we might say that, if human beings can be defined in general as 'bodies in the world', it is possible to understand our condition today as that of 'bodies in the streets' – where the concept of body is not understood in a reductive way but rather in the complexity of the notion of 'soma' that

distinguish[es] the living, sentient, purposive human body from the lifeless bodies of corpses and all sorts of inanimate objects that are bodies in the general physical sense [...]. Embracing both the mental and the physical, the soma is both subject and object. [...] It thus straddles both sides of the German phenomenological distinction between *Leib* (felt bodily subjectivity) and *Körper* (physical body as object in the world). [...] It exemplifies the ambiguity of human existence as both shared species-being and individual difference. Philosophers have emphasized rationality and language as the distinguishing essence of humankind. But human embodiment seems just as universal and essential a condition of humanity. [...] The soma reveals that human nature is always more than merely natural but instead deeply shaped by culture. (Shusterman 2019, pp. 14-15)

One of the fundamental thesis of McDowell's 'naturalism of second nature' is that human beings normally inhabit two different and indeed irreducible 'logical spaces': the 'logical space of nature', on the one side, and the 'logical space of reasons', on the other side. McDowell describes this relationship as a real "contrast between two kinds of intelligibility", as a "distinction between two ways of finding things intelligible" (McDowell 1996, pp. 70, 246), and as a sort of dualism between the dimension of natural laws and the dimension of cultural reasons or justifications. A dualism that McDowell, however, does not aim either at maintaining in its abstract dichotomous character nor at simply denying by opting instead for some kind of reductionism, but rather at simultaneously incorporating and overcoming (through a sort of *Aufhebung*, as it were). This aim leads him to outline an original philosophical perspective that intends to do justice to both the difference between the two logical spaces (and thus, in general, between nature and culture) and their coexistence in the human being.

Starting from a detailed investigation of the relationship between concepts and intuitions (which ultimately leads also to the decisive question concerning the conceptual, non-conceptual or partially,

not entirely conceptual content of perception), McDowell sketches a general view of modern philosophy as trapped in an *impasse* and somehow unable to avoid falling again and again into opposite but equally unsatisfactory epistemological conceptions that, in turn, appear as instantiations of wider and more general philosophical-anthropological questions. Seeking "a way to dismount from the seesaw" and to overcome the fatal tendency of modern philosophy "to oscillate between a pair of unsatisfying positions" (McDowell 1996, pp. 9, 24), McDowell thus advances the idea of rethinking and broadening the basic naturalistic view that has been predominant in the modern age by recurring to the concept of 'second nature'. For him, 'naturalism of second nature' postulates a continuous but not reductive relationship between nature and culture, and finally makes it possible to satisfactorily account for the fact that the capacity of inhabiting a culturally conditioned 'space of reasons' does not position human beings outside the realm of biology but simply belongs to our natural mode of living which is at the same time a cultural one, i.e. 'second-natural'. As McDowell explains:

> human infants are mere animals, distinctive only in their potential, and nothing occult happens to a human being. […] Human beings […] are born mere animals, and they are transformed into thinkers and intentional agents in the course of coming to maturity. This transformation risks looking mysterious. But we can take it in our stride if, in our conception of the *Bildung* that is a central element in the normal maturation of human beings, we give pride of place to the learning of language. In being initiated into a language, a human being is introduced into something that already embodies putatively rational linkages between concepts, putatively constitutive of the layout of the space of reasons, before she comes on the scene. […] Human beings mature into being at home in the space of reasons or, what comes to the same thing, living their lives in the world; we can make sense of that by noting that the language into which a human being is first initiated stands over against her as a prior embodiment of mindedness, of the possibility of an orientation to the world. (McDowell 1996, pp. 123, 125)

Our mode of living is "our way of actualizing ourselves as animals", and if the development of conceptuality and language "belong[s] to our way of actualizing ourselves as animals", this removes "any need to try to see ourselves as peculiarly bifurcated, with a foothold in the animal kingdom and a mysterious separate involvement in an extra-natural world of rational connections" (McDowell 1996, p. 78). With regard to the concept of human nature, McDowell claims that "our nature is largely second nature", and it is so

> not just because of the potentialities we were born with, but also because of our upbringing, our *Bildung*. […] Our *Bildung* actualizes some of the potentialities we are born with; we do not have to suppose it introduces a non-animal ingredient

into our constitution. And although the structure of the space of reasons cannot be reconstructed out of facts about our involvement in the realm of law, it can be the framework within which meaning comes into view only because our eyes can be opened to it by *Bildung*, which is an element in the normal coming to maturity of the kind of animals we are. (McDowell 1996, pp. 87-88)

As has been noted, for McDowell "cultural evolution does not represent a break with biological evolution": "there is no need to postulate a 'non-animal' part of us" because "it is the fulfilment of biological potentialities by means of cultural development that makes it possible for the subject to recognize the kind of autonomy" embodied by the so-called "space of reasons" (Di Francesco 1998, p. 249). In this context, for McDowell it is especially language that is of fundamental importance for properly understanding the acquisition of second nature, a process of "being initiated into conceptual capacities, whose interrelations belong in the logical space of reasons" (McDowell 1996, p. xx). And it is precisely at this point that also the concept of 'world', as indicative of a specifically human environment (and thus also the question concerning the mind/world relation), explicitly comes into play.

In fact, according to McDowell, those "creatures on which the idea of spontaneity gets no grip" (McDowell 1996, p. 48), i.e. animals lacking rationality and language, actually live in an environment, while human beings alone, by virtue of their conceptual and linguistic capacities, live in a world. The basic distinction at issue here is that between environment and world (*Umwelt* and *Welt*, in German): a distinction that McDowell makes use of in order to differentiate the nature of human beings from that of nonhuman, i.e. non-rational animals, and that he openly borrows from some important passages of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* on the linguisticality of the human experience of the world. However, from a historical-philosophical point of view it is important to notice that what McDowell calls "Gadamer's account of how a merely animal life, lived in an environment, differs from a properly human life, lived in the world" (McDowell 1996, p. 117), should be defined as, say, an only indirectly Gadamerian account. In fact, in claiming that he borrows from Gadamer "a remarkable description of the difference between a merely animal mode of life, in an environment, and a human mode of life, in the world" (McDowell 1996, p. 115), McDowell apparently does not take notice of the fact that, just like he borrows from Gadamer the abovementioned description, Gadamer for his part explicitly borrowed it from a long and complex philosophical-scientific tradition that can be probably traced back to some works of the Estonian biologist Jakob von Uexküll

(Gadamer 2004, pp. 441-450).

As has been noted, it was Uexküll who first put the notion of environment (*Umwelt*) at the centre of scientific inquiry, immediately raising great interest in the domain of philosophy as well (Mazzeo 2010, pp. 9-10). However, Uexküll's attention was focused on the continuity between human and nonhuman animals, such that he identified merely quantitative differences between environment and world, i.e. differences pertaining to their breadth and dimension, and eventually conceived "the *Umwelt* [...] as the mere sum of individual *Welten*" (Mazzeo 2003, p. 80). It was rather Max Scheler who, in his 1928 work *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, borrowed from Uexküll the environment/world distinction but interpreted it in terms of a radical and even immeasurable difference between the human being and all other forms of life. According to Scheler, the concept of *Umwelt* should in fact only be used with reference to animals, while the notion of *Welt* is apt to grasp the specific and indeed extraordinary character of the human being, the only living creature that, thanks to its spirit, "is not tied anymore to its drives and environment", and thus "is 'non-environmental' or [...] 'world-open'" (Scheler 2009, p. 27). As Scheler emphatically claims, "the being we call human is [...] able to broaden his environment into the dimension of world":

> Everything which the animal notices and grasps in its environment is securely embedded in the frame and *boundary of its environment*. [...] This is quite different from a being having "spirit". If such a being makes use of its spirit, it is capable of a comportment which possesses exactly the opposite of the above structure. [...] The form of such comportment must be called "world-openness", that is, it is tantamount in principle to shedding the spell of the environment. [...] *The human being is that X who can comport himself, in unlimited degrees*, as "world-open". [...] An animal is not removed from its environment and does not have a distance from its environment so as to be able to transform its "environment" into "world" (or a symbol of the world) as humans can. (Scheler 2009, pp. 27-29)

Also Heidegger, in his 1929-30 lecture course *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, presented somehow analogous ideas, as he dedicated the second part of this lecture course to a long and complex "comparative examination of three guiding theses" ("the stone is worldless, the animal is poor in world, man is world-forming") and he explicitly connected these theses to Uexküll's aforementioned *Umwelt/Welt* distinction (Heidegger 1995, p. 176 ff.). Another significant use of Uexküll's biological thinking can be found in the philosophical anthropology presented in Cassirer's *Essay on Man*, with his famous definition of the human being as *animal symbolicum* understood as "a functional [definition], not a

substantial one" (Cassirer 1992, pp. 23-26, 68). However, it was especially Arnold Gehlen who drew most powerfully on the environment/world distinction and even reinforced it by connecting the two concepts to his famous idea of the human being as a 'deficient', 'unequipped', 'unfinished' and 'undetermined' creature that is "characterized by a singular lack of biological means" (Gehlen 1988, p. 26). As we read in Gehlen's masterwork *Man: His Nature and Place in the World* from 1940, while "the environment is an unchanging milieu to which the specialized organ structure of the animal is adapted and within which equally specific, innate, instinctive behavior is carried out", man is instead "world-open", inasmuch as "he foregoes an animal adaptation to a specific environment":

> In order to survive, [man] must master and re-create nature, and for this reason must *experience* the world. [...] The epitome of nature restructured to serve his needs is called *culture* and the culture world is the human world. [...] Culture is therefore the "second nature" – man's restructured nature, within which he can survive. [...] The cultural world exists for man in exactly the same way in which the environment exists for an animal. For this reason alone, it is wrong to speak of an environment, in a strictly biological sense, for man. His world-openness is directly related to his unspecialized structure; similarly, his lack of physical means corresponds to his self-created "second nature". [...] The clearly defined, biologically precise concept of the environment is thus not applicable to man, for what "environment" is to animals, "the second nature", or culture, is to man; culture has its own particular problems and concept formations which cannot be explained by the concept of environment but instead are only further obscured by it. (Gehlen 1988, pp. 27, 29, 71)

This brief historical-philosophical outline shows that there is a long, articulated and complex conceptual history behind Gadamer's claim that, "unlike all other living creatures, man's relationship to the world is characterized by freedom from environment" – which "implies the linguistic constitution of the world" and which leads to the conclusion that "[t]he concept of world is opposed to the concept of environment" (Gadamer 2004, p. 441) –, and hence behind Gadamer's use of the *Umwelt/Welt* distinction. A distinction, the latter, that McDowell for his part explicitly relies on and further develops in outlining some aspects of his 'naturalism of second nature' that, as I said, aims to account for the complexity of the human nature by resorting to a more subtle and finely nuanced idea of the organism/environment relation that is capable of both preserving the continuity between all animals species and doing justice to the specificity of the human experience of the world.

Of course, the question of whether or not there is an unbridgeable gap certain capacities in human and nonhuman animals, namely the discussion between "the supporters of the point of view of dis-

continuity" and those of "the point of view of continuity" (Cimatti 2003, p. 167), is a very old, much debated and, most of all, still open one. This applies to both philosophical and scientific debates, and McDowell's conception has been criticized for example by Alasdair MacIntyre because of its supposed tendency to ignore, or at least minimize, "the analogies between the intelligence exhibited" by such animals as dolphins or chimpanzees "and the rationality exhibited in human activities" (MacIntyre 1999, pp. 59-60). Hubert L. Dreyfus, for his part, has objected that claiming, as McDowell does, "that perception is conceptual 'all the way out'" implies denying "the more basic perceptual capacities we seem to share with prelinguistic infants and higher animals", and has suggested that McDowell could profit from phenomenological analyses of "nonconceptual embodied coping skills" and "nonconceptual immediate intuitive understanding" (Dreyfus 2006, p. 43). Also Hilary Putnam, who was otherwise philosophically very close to McDowell in many respects, has argued that McDowell fails to see that "the discriminatory abilities of animals and human concepts lie on a continuum" because of his "too high requirements on having both concepts and percepts": according to Putnam, "'No percepts without concepts' may be right if one is sufficiently generous in what one will count as a concept", but is wrong "if […] one requires both self-consciousness and the capacity for critical reflection before one will attribute concepts to an animal" (Putnam 1999, p. 192n).

In replying to these objections McDowell has claimed that interpreting his 'naturalism of second nature' as "a kind of human chauvinism […] would be point-missing", and that "[d]irecting our attention to perception as a capacity for a distinctive kind of knowledge […] need not be prejudicial to the possibility of acknowledging that perception is, on some suitable understanding, a cognitive capacity in many kinds of nonhuman animals". From this point of view, "giving a special account of the perceptual knowledge of rational animals" is consistent for him "with regarding perceptual knowledge in rational animals as a sophisticated species of a genus that is also instantiated more primitively in non-rational animals" (McDowell 2011, pp. 14-15, 20; on perception, see also McDowell 1998, pp. 341-358; 2009b, pp. 127-144).

3.

The shift to the question of perception is surely important for the specific purposes of the present contribution on aesthetics. As

is well-known, it is precisely "from the Greek *aisthesis* (sensory per-ception) [that] Baumgarten intended his new philosophical science to comprise a general theory of sensory knowledge" (Shusterman 2000, p. 264) when he 'baptized' aesthetics in the 18th century. It is also important to note that, while McDowell and many other think-ers (including some of his critics) only seem to focus on perception as a capacity for knowledge, thus especially lingering on its relation to conceptuality and language, the role of perception in human life is not limited to knowledge but is also connected to the broader realm of what we may call our specifically human expressiveness. This leads us to the question of so-called 'aesthetic perception' (see Matteucci 2019, pp. 111-155) and its role in the context of an investigation of the 'second-nature animals' that we are.

As has been noted, aesthetic perception "contributes to struc-ture and shape [our] interaction with the environment", and "the aesthetic dimension is at least a potential feature of the *human experience as such* in its imaginative, emotive and *expressive* im-port": the "expressive (and therefore imaginative and *truly human*) characterisations intertwined with our perception" derive from our capacity to handle certain situations "with *practices* of taste", a ca-pacity that "emanates from an interest in appearances" which ap-pears as uniquely human. "In this sense, the aesthetic is foremost a *practice* that coincides with the ephemeral emergence of a pointful and *expressive*, and thereby meaningful aspect" (Matteucci 2016, pp. 15, 23, 27 [my emphasis]). Although understandable to some extent, the privileged role assigned to language by McDowell and many other theorists (including Noë, by the way [2009, pp. 87-91, 101-110, 125-127]) does not imply that the 'second nature' of the human being must be only characterized in linguistic and strictly conceptual terms. For example, what we may call 'perceptualiza-tion' (following a suggestive passage on beauty from Cassirer's *Essay on Man* [1992, p. 151] further developed by Matteucci 2018, p. 408 and Matteucci 2019, p. 80 *et passim*) is at least as relevant as 'conceptualization' in order to define the human nature: namely, something definitely belonging to the aesthetic dimension.

If "[a]cquiring command of a language, which is coming to in-habit the logical space of reasons, is acquiring a second nature" (McDowell 2009a, p. 247), also acquiring the capacity to perceive the presence of something like expressivity in our surrounding envi-ronment is equally natural (or better, 'second-natural') for a human being, although connected to processes that are at least partially autonomous from the process of acquisition of conceptual capac-ities in the strict sense. And if "[b]ecoming open to the world"

through conceptuality and language (and "not just able to cope with an environment") "transforms the character of the disclosing that perception does for us", thus qualitatively changing the nature of "the responsiveness to affordances that we share with other animals" (McDowell 2009a, p. 315), the same holds true for the world-disclosingness deriving from the acquisition of the capacity to externalize our 'aesthetic perceptions' through appropriate practices and specific devices. We are not only rational and language-using animals but also 'the artful species', and the aesthetic dimension actively concurs to 'the definition of the human' (freely referring here to the titles of important works by, respectively, Stephen Davies and Joseph Margolis): this requires to be adequately understood and taken into consideration also in the context of an investigation of the 'second nature' of the human beings.

Far from being a merely terminological distinction, the abovementioned environment/world distinction – connected to the idea of human beings as 'second-nature animals', and thus to the idea of human capacities as 'second-natural' – is theoretically and conceptually relevant. In particular, a philosophical discourse of this kind also has relevant implications in the field of aesthetics, and can actually lead to the development of a sort of 'second-nature aesthetics' that: (1) sheds light on the way in which, in the particular case of human beings, the organism/environment relation (especially in the present age of widespread aestheticization, understood at the level of what is "intrinsic to perception, that is to say to *aisthesis*" [Matteucci 2017, p. 220]) can be surely 'naturalized' but not in an immediate way, so to speak, but rather in a mediated or, as it were, dialectical way, i.e. paying attention to the inextricable dialectics of nature and culture/history that is clear, for example, in Adorno's use of the notion of *Naturgeschichte*; (2) sheds light on the fact that the 'second-naturalness' of the organism/environment relation in the specific case of human beings does not only rest on our capacity to inhabit the 'space of reasons' (as McDowell assumes), or in general on the possession of conceptualization powers and language, but also on the development of specifically aesthetic capacities and practices which play a decisive role in shaping a properly and uniquely human world, on the basis of a general idea of the aesthetic itself as 'a matter of practices' (Matteucci 2016, in particular pp. 19-23).

If concepts and language surely extend the "abilities that we share with other animals" in ways that "are almost endless" (Putnam 1999, p. 57) and thus lead human beings to "create by themselves their 'nature'" (Wulf 2018, p. 50), there are nevertheless also

pre-linguistic, pre-conceptual and indeed strictly aesthetic aspects that contribute to the definition of the 'natural artificiality/artificial naturality' of the human *Lebensform*. Among other things, acknowledging this fact also allows to account for Walter Benjamin's claim that "[t]he way in which human perception is organized […] is conditioned not only by nature but by history", i.e. it is 'second-natural', so to speak ("[j]ust as the entire mode of existence of human collectives changes over long historical periods, so too does their mode of perception", Benjamin famously adds [2006, p. 104]). No one can deny the world-disclosing role of language that leads McDowell to differentiate an animal life that is led in an environment from a human life that is led in the world. However, as I said, if we broaden the framework of 'naturalism of second nature' beyond the limits of the primacy assigned only to the world-disclosing function of concepts and language, it should also become clear that human beings are world-open – and actually are animals that do not limit themselves to adaptation to a given environment but are 'naturally' led to the creation of their own 'cultural/artificial/historical' world – thanks to a wide set of actions, habits and practices that are also aesthetically connoted. It might even be ambitiously said that "precisely the aesthetic, as emerging phenomenon in the human landscape, acquires the value of a passage at the border between biology and culture, natural dispositions and significations. […] The emergence itself of the aesthetic, characterized as a passage at the border between nature and culture, marks the emergence itself of the human in the evolutionary process" (Desideri 2011, pp. 80, 93).

In this context, I would like to specifically focus on a single aesthetic notion, namely on *mimesis* (deriving from the Greek verb *mimeisthai* that, in turn, derives from *mimos*), which, according to many scholars, far from being simply associated with imitation and thus opposed to expression (as it has sometimes been thought in the history of aesthetics), originally acquired its meaning in the context of expressive cult and ritual practices, especially dance (Velotti 2005, pp. 146-147). For example, trying to understand mimesis "in a universal sense" as "a primordial phenomenon", and tracing it back to both "the ancient concept of mimesis" connected to "the miracle of order that we call the *kosmos*" and the basic human experience of "all the mimetic forms of behavior and representation", Gadamer makes reference to the original situation in which "all the arts were still closely related to one other, through the religious cult and its ritualistic representation in word, sound, image, and gesture", and claims that mimesis basically means that "something

meaningful is there as itself" (Gadamer 1986, pp. 98-103, 121). However, for the specific purposes of the present contribution, it is especially the reflection on mimesis developed by such critical theorists as Benjamin and Adorno that can be fruitful and inspiring.

According to Benjamin's early work *On the Mimetic Faculty*, man is characterized by "[t]he highest capacity for producing similarities" and "[t]here is perhaps not a single one of his higher functions in which his mimetic faculty does not play a decisive role" (Benjamin 2005, p. 720). The persistent actuality of Benjamin's concept of mimesis for an understanding of the human nature has also been emphasized by Christoph Wulf with special reference to his writing *Berlin Childhood Around 1900* and his theory that children first learn 'mimetically' how to experience the world, through "processes of *Angleichung* and *Anähnlichung*, assimilation to the other, becoming similar to the other, proximity to the other" (Wulf 2018, pp. 53-54). Such a general broadening of the concept of mimesis beyond the limits of the notion of imitation (*Nachahmung*) can be fruitfully compared to Adorno's own development of a concept of mimesis that also includes the dimensions of expression (*Ausdruck*) and presentation (*Darstellung*), on the basis of a general attitude toward reality definable in terms of perceiving similarities and feeling kinship (*Verwandtschaft*). Beside stressing the importance of mimetic processes of affective sympathy toward loved figures in children's first experiences of life (as noted by Honneth 2008, pp. 44-45), Adorno anthropologically locates the origin of the mimetic comportment in a phase of development of humankind connected to the experience of "the real preponderance" and radical otherness of "natural events as an emanation of *mana*", and also connected to magic: the latter "still retained differences whose traces have vanished even in linguistic forms" and pursued its ends "through mimesis, not through an increasing distance from the object. [...] The relationship was not one of intention but of kinship" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, pp. 7, 10-11, 15). According to Adorno – whose negative dialectics also relies on the concept of 'second nature (*zweite Natur*)', as I said – mimetic comportment "does not imitate something but rather makes itself like itself", and it can be defined as "an attitude toward reality distinct from the fixated antithesis of subject and object" (i.e. distinct from the attitude toward reality based on representational thinking and conceptualization): an attitude which is mostly seized in art and aesthetic experience, thus emphatically defined by Adorno as "the organ of mimesis" and the "refuge for mimetic comportment" (Adorno 2002, pp. 53, 110-111).

In the context of recent scientific-evolutionary theories, the relevance of what we may call the mimetic attitude or comportment has been analyzed and indeed emphasized by some recent investigations of the 'uniquely human' character of certain aspects of our relation to the world. Michael Tomasello, for example, although mostly focusing on the progressive development of cognition, language and conceptualization powers in his investigation of the 'natural history of human thinking', has nevertheless paid great attention also to the pre-linguistic, pre-conceptual and, in some sense, also aesthetic dimension embodied by 'symbolizing in pantomime' through iconic gestures. According to Tomasello (2014, pp. 60-61, 63, 69), "[n]o nonhuman primates use iconic gestures or vocalizations" and presumably our ability to do this "derives from the ability to imitate, at which humans are especially skillful compared with other apes": early humans "created evolutionarily new forms of natural gestures", and although it is true that "[i]n modern humans pantomiming for communication has been supplanted by conventional language", it is nevertheless possible from an Adornian perspective to lean on the irreplaceable and inexhaustible significance of the expressive-mimetic, the pre-conceptual and the aesthetic as genuine sources of experience that should not be minimized, underrated or even suffocated by the extraordinary growth of our conceptualization and linguistic capacities.

In fact, on the basis of a general idea of mimesis as "the power of qualitative distinction" that is essentially different from the power of 'identifying' or even 'quantitative/mathematizing' understanding that is typical of subsumption under concepts, Adorno arrives to speak of the aesthetic in terms of "expressive-mimetic dimension" and "expressive mimetic element", eventually claiming that "[t]here is no expression without meaning" and "no meaning without the mimetic element" (Adorno 2002, pp. 215, 257, 278, 331). This is surely of the greatest importance for an aesthetic discourse connected to the question of the 'second nature' of the human being and the latter's particular relation to an habitat that is not a natural environment but rather a culturally structured world. As has been noted, expressivity is probably "the primary feature of the aesthetic" (Matteucci 2018, p. 411), and there is an especially significant connection between expression and mimesis, so that, in a sense, "*mimesis* is perhaps simply another word to say *aisthesis*" (Desideri 2018, p. 11).

Still in the context of recent scientific-evolutionary theories, Michael Gazzaniga has defined mimetic processes as "the beginning of a baby's social interaction" and as "a potent mechanism in learning and acculturation", claiming that "*the ability to imitate must be innate*" and that "*voluntary* behavior imitation appears to be rare in the

animal kingdom": the latter, in fact, "appears to exist to some degree in the great apes and some birds, and there is some evidence that it is present in cetaceans", but for Gazzaniga "the ubiquitous and extensive imitation in the human world is very different" (Gazzaniga 2008, pp. 160-161). Namely, it is something uniquely human. This can be matched with another observation by Adorno apropos of "the mimetic heritage", as he defines "the human" as "indissolubly linked with imitation: a human being only becomes human at all by imitating other human beings", and such behaviour can be even understood as "the primal form of love", i.e. as something fundamentally and truly human (Adorno 2005, § 99, p. 154). Following Adorno's insights, we might also add that mimetic comportment – based as it is on a sympathetic sense of kinship with otherness, rather than on a subject/object separation and a conceptual identification of all that is non-identical – represents the primary vehicle for the 'human, all too human' search for expression that ultimately leads to art. The latter, in turn, is also understood by Gazzaniga as something uniquely human, and for him "the aesthetic quality of things is more basic to our sensibilities than we realize": "Art is one of [the] human universals. All cultures have some form of it" (Gazzaniga 2008, pp. 204-205).

Should we want to comment on this sentence and broaden the picture, we might add that, if art is a 'human universal', then aesthetic perception is probably even more universal than art, inasmuch as it is 'the artistic' which is grounded on 'the aesthetic', and not vice-versa (Matteucci 2019, pp. 19-35). "Whatever one calls art", as Gazzaniga explains, "one is acknowledging that it is special in some way", i.e. specific of the human being, like "aesthetic sensibility" and "aesthetic reactions" in general: "The creation of art is new to the world of animals. It is now being recognized that this uniquely human contribution is firmly based in our biology. We share some perceptual processing abilities with other animals, and therefore we may even share what we call aesthetic preferences. But something more is going on in the human brain" (Gazzaniga 2008, pp. 217, 220, 244-245). Should we want to also comment on these sentences and broaden the picture, we might add that: (1) if art is based in our nature, the latter however must also include culture in order to adequately account for the complexity and specificity of the human being, i.e. it must be conceived of as 'second nature'; (2) following such alternative perspectives as those offered for example by Shusterman's or Noë's theories, if 'something more is going on' in the case of human beings (in comparison to other animals), it is not something happening only 'in the brain' but rather 'in the soma' or 'in the brain/body/environment relation'.

In conclusion, in search for a concept that is capable to grasp the inextricable intertwinement and "the complex interaction of biological, social and cultural aspects" that are distinctive of the human being (Wulf 2018, p. 41), in the present contribution I have argued for the suitability of the concept of 'second nature'. Borrowing this concept from McDowell, I have offered a brief reconstruction and interpretation of its history in connection with the difference between animal ways of naturally inhabiting the environment and human ways of culturally intervene in the world. At this point, I have argued for a broadening of the framework of 'naturalism of second nature' in the direction of a kind of 'second-nature aesthetics', especially focusing on mimesis. The significance of mimetic components in the process of our 'becoming human' at both an ontogenetic and a phylogenetic level cannot be underestimated. Although it is obviously not possible to reduce the entire realm of aesthetics to the sole category of mimesis, it is nevertheless possible to maintain that the latter, broadly understood, "refers to […] the auratic moment of aesthetic experience" and that "a mimetic exploration of the world is the condition of possibility for a full and complete development of the emotional resources and sensibility" of a human being, "especially with reference to aesthetic sensibility" (Wulf 2018, p. 57). Beside language – that a vast majority of philosophers and scientists, including many supporters of the so-called theory of the extended mind, have usually assumed as "the most important tool of an externalized mind" (Ferretti 2009, p. 149) – also aesthetic capacities and practices, 'externalized' in specific devices, play a decisive role in the unceasing process of 'anthropogenesis' or 'hominization'. The aesthetic surely represents one of the fundamental components of the experience in the environment (or, more precisely, in the world) for the 'second-nature animals' that we are. From the point of view of a 'second-nature aesthetics' inspired by 'naturalism of second nature', there is no aesthetic environment for human beings but strictly speaking only aesthetic world(s).

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La percezione aptica per un'estetica ecologica

di Nicola Perullo

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I present haptic perception as a general attitude towards life and, *then*, as an approach to philosophy. Within this framework, I propose "ecological" aesthetics not to be understood as a specific domain dealing with natural environment, but as a comprehensive paradigm that has to do with the sentient being in terms of feeling/thinking. Therefore, ecological aesthetics also involves ontology, epistemology and ethics, since these domains, rather than detached, are just *different*. Ecological aesthetics is based upon an ecological logic, which is not the formal logic of isolated items but a participatory logic, calling for attention, intimacy, and care. In order to illustrate this approach, I will review some of the main issues I have developed in my latest book, *Estetica ecologica. Percepire saggio, vivere corrispondente* ("Ecological Aesthetics. Perceiving wisely, living correspondently"), where a relational model of feeling/thinking, that is, perceiving, is proposed. Here, differences are not predetermined but interstitial, made along the relational process of the experience. It follows that perception is always in action and movement; hence, the corresponding ontology is not a fixed ontology of objects, but a fluid meshwork composed of lines.

KEYWORDS:
Ecological Aesthetics; Haptic Perception; Correspondence; Wisdom

I

Prima di entrare nel dettaglio della *percezione aptica* per come suggerisco di intenderla, cioè un approccio coerente e conseguente a un'estetica integralmente ecologica, è opportuno chiarire in breve quale sia l'estetica ecologica qui in gioco e dentro cui tale suggerimento prende significato. Riassumerò quindi, in questo primo paragrafo, le principali linee teoriche che ho cercato di esporre più compiutamente nel mio ultimo lavoro, *Estetica ecologica. Percepire saggio, vivere corrispondente* (Perullo 2020) per descrivere poi, nel secondo paragrafo, la mia proposta di percezione aptica. Nell'ultimo paragrafo chiarirò infine altre conseguenze attinenti questa concezione, in particolare le questioni dell'educazione e della saggezza.

Alla base dell'estetica ecologica come "percepire saggio, vivere corrispondente" c'è innanzitutto un aspetto procedurale, "stilistico", che emerge però da precise motivazioni filosofiche e epistemologiche, risultando così necessario e coessenziale al "contenuto" che viene espresso[1]. Lo spunto che dà l'avvio a tale aspetto procedurale/stilistico/filosofico è quella concezione, da me raccolta ed elaborata attraverso il Wittgenstein delle *Ricerche filosofiche* ma anche da Dewey (non solo *Arte come esperienza*, ma anche il Dewey logico e filosofo dell'educazione), da Merleau-Ponty e, più recentemente, dalle teorie della mente estesa (in particolare da Alva Noë), secondo la quale i concetti, tutti i concetti, "sono" in quanto *si fanno*, crescono e si evolvono, con e nella *prassi*. Ovviamente, questo vale anche per i concetti di mente, mondo, sensazione, percezione, pensiero, etc. Si tratta così di entrare subito in una circolarità autoriflessiva che risulti non viziosa ma fruttuosa, comprendendola e lavorandola. Non si tratta, in altri termini, di relativismo, di contestualismo e tanto meno di storicismo (già solo i riferimenti che ho ricordato dovrebbero bastare a fugare ogni fraintendimento); ciò che emerge da questa concezione è, piuttosto, un radicale *relazionismo*. Il relazionismo, almeno per come è inteso in questo progetto, sente e pensa la realtà come un'unità, nella quale si producono continuamente gradi e differenze ma dove tutto – tanto il cosiddetto "mondo naturale" quanto quello "sociale" – è frutto di incontri e di movimenti, di oscillazioni e di risonanze. Comprendere questa ontologia intimamente relazionale serve a intendere la nozione di *corrispondenza*, centrale nell'intero progetto di questa estetica ecologica e nel suo "strumento" più diretto, cioè il percepire aptico. Con "corrispondenza", riprendendo la posizione di Tim Ingold, non ci si riferisce qui a una relazione ilomorfica, all'adeguazione perfetta tra intelletto e mondo, tra contenitore e contenuto ma, appunto, al *gioco*, allo scambio continuo tra agire e patire, tra domande e risposte, alla stregua di una corrispondenza postale[2].

Prendere sul serio questo relazionismo come continua corrispondenza tra ogni forza e forma vivente, "naturale" *e* "sociale", significa passare a un ordine di discorso che slitta dalla logica formale a una logica non trascendentale, ma piuttosto *ecologica*. Nello specifico estetico, quindi, segue che il "percepire" – con cui intendiamo tanto il sentire che il pensare – di un vivente è un evento che accade e che si sviluppa *con* e *nella* prassi; o, come direbbe

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[1] A chiarire questo nesso sono soprattutto dedicati i primi due capitoli di Perullo 2020, rispettivamente *Conoscenza ecologica e percezione estetica* e *Linee, piedi, tempo, labirinto. Per un'estetica ecologica*.

[2] *La corrispondenza delle linee* è il titolo dell'ultimo capitolo di Ingold 2015; tr. it. 2020.

Noë, nell'azione (Noë 2004; 2009; tr. it. 2010). La prassi comprende tanto gli aspetti verbali che preverbali. Nel percepire aptico, questo aspetto è molto importante e va sottolineato. Il recupero del valore estetico del non verbale, infatti, risulta strategico per un modo di sentire/pensare diverso da quello tipico della conoscenza concettuale e non ecologica e delle estetiche che, consapevolmente o meno, su questa sono tarate. Non verbale non significa però conoscenza "tacita" e implicita, come spesso si dice, perché essa può essere rumorosa ed esplicita almeno quanto quella verbale (Polanyi 2002; Ingold 2017a). È importante rilevare anche che siffatta logica ecologica produce, *ipso facto*, un dissolvimento della distinzione rigida tra natura e società, dunque della coppia natura/cultura. Infatti, se ogni entità, concettuale e materiale, non solo esiste, ma *vive e accade nella prassi* o nell'esperienza (termine che si è preferito nel libro, sia per simpatia con il vocabolario di Dewey e di Ingold, sia per mantenere uno spettro di significato più ampio rispetto a quello, solitamente più determinato e specifico, di prassi) allora questo significherà che essa non è dunque più "naturale" di quanto non sia "culturale" perché ogni realtà, secondo il paradigma morfogenetico, partecipa, cresce, si sviluppa e decade lungo quella continua relazione processuale che è la vita.

Cosa vuol dire allora, nel concreto di una ricerca che si professa di ordine estetico, procedere secondo tale logica ecologica? Innanzitutto, significa che *questo stesso* processo di ricerca – quindi la stessa estetica ecologica che si descrive, si propone e si scrive – è sempre situato ed in evoluzione, in senso morfogenetico e olistico. In altri termini: non è possibile, per rigore logico presupposto dalla concezione sopra richiamata, procedere isolando elementi e frammentando parti da analizzare singolarmente. Si passa quindi da un'analisi degli elementi a un'*analisi delle unità* – un termine che viene ancora da Dewey ma anche da Vygotsky (Jornet, Damsa 2019). Questo ha alcune importanti conseguenze, che costituiscono l'ossatura del libro ma che si dichiarano soprattutto nei primi due capitoli. Le riassumo:

a) Ogni processo di osservazione, descrizione e analisi è anche, *ipso facto*, un processo di auto-osservazione e auto-descrizione – ecco il tema della "conoscenza partecipativa" richiamato fin nel primo capitolo – nel senso che l'osservatore è immerso nell'environment che (lo) osserva, in un rapporto di (asimmetrica) mutualità.

b) L'estetica ecologica non ha un "oggetto" tematico, proprio perché risulta impossibile, a rigore, isolare oggetti tematici. Passare dall'analisi degli elementi (quella propria della "teoria dei mattoni", la *Building Blocks Theory*) all'analisi delle unità significa, in altri

termini, passare dalla percezione di oggetti alla percezione di processi, alla sensibilizzazione per una percezione *con* l'esperienza, una percezione immersa nel flusso di cui partecipa. A questo punto, la mia proposta incontra, riprende ed elabora la nozione di *meshwork* avanzata da Tim Ingold. Percepire ecologicamente significa percepire processi, i quali possono essere descritti come fasci di linee che formano annodature; ogni percepire è un'annodatura, cioè un fascio di relazioni costituenti e costitutive di ogni sentire/pensare. Questa estetica ecologica pone la relazione – intesa come intreccio di linee, laddove questa linealogia esprime l'ontologia fluida del *meshwork* – quale "principio fondamentale della coerenza" (Ingold), in un mondo inteso non come contenitore di oggetti ma come ciò che accade; un mondo in cui le cose hanno continuamente origine attraverso processi di crescita e di movimento. Il richiamo alla concezione attiva della percezione in Merleau-Ponty – in particolare alle sue analisi sulla visione – è evidentemente centrale in questo contesto.

Tale intreccio è sia ciò che si percepisce, osservando/descrivendo/giudicando, sia lo sfondo nel quale si è immersi, l'environment in cui la percezione nasce, cresce ed evolve. Anche la tradizionale compartimentazione del sapere non sfugge a tale realtà. Perciò, tale approccio ecologico dissolve ogni rigido confine, ogni *distinzione* rigida tra ontologia, epistemologia ed estetica, laddove si usi "distinzione" in senso ontologico forte (qualcosa di dato all'inizio, in un presunto ordine classificatorio) e "differenziazione", invece, per riferirsi alla continua produzione di interstizi *funzionali* e *posizionali*, che sono appunto tutte le differenze prodotte in seno alla corrente dell'esperienza, della prassi e della vita. Queste differenze sono pienamente legittime e utili rispetto a progetti ed esigenze specifiche ma non giustificabili come distinzioni a priori, secondo la logica ecologica che sorregge questa estetica. L'estetica ecologica opera *in* e *con* un mondo di relazioni, non di oggetti; non perché gli oggetti stiano nell'interno, nella mente dei soggetti, ma perché tanto gli oggetti che i soggetti non "sono" semplicemente, ma *vivono*. Se principio della vita è il movimento (un movimento a cui riporta anche, seguendo l'etimologia che rimanda al ritmo della respirazione – inspiro/espiro/pausa – l'*aisthesis* originaria), allora la vita è relazione. E così ogni concetto e idea che si creano con e nella prassi.

c) Una diversa concezione del "valore" e della validità del percepire, quel che nell'estetica moderna classica è il tema del giudizio, tema ancora oggi molto dibattuto e messo in discussione anche da proposte estetiche recentissime. Nell'estetica ecologica proposta da questo libro, la questione viene esplicitata attraverso due nozioni chiave: quella, che ho già ricordato, di *corrispondenza* e quella di

saggezza. Per i presupposti chiariti, ogni estetica non può che essere sempre ecologica, che lo sappia o no; ma è *compiutamente* ecologica, cioè consapevolmente tale, se si orienta a un approccio che ho chiamato "percepire saggio, vivere corrispondente". Qui prende corpo la rielaborazione dell'aptico.

II

Il titolo originario con cui avevo immaginato *Estetica ecologica* era, in effetti, *Dell'aptico*. A questo si è rinunciato per ragioni editoriali, ma è evidente che, almeno sotto il profilo quantitativo, la percezione aptica è il soggetto principale del mio progetto[3].

Poiché vi è da sempre una filosofia che sostiene il carattere intuitivo della conoscenza della verità, che si coglierebbe non attraverso un processo di osservazione a distanza ma per via di contatto o immersione, è difficile ricostruire una storia filosofica dell'aptico in modo specifico; la si può persino seguire, esplicita o sottotraccia, lungo tutta l'avventura del pensiero, da Democrito fino a Nancy e Serres (Crispin 2014). Questo termine è quindi ambiguo; se a ciò si aggiunge che le più comuni applicazioni contemporanee dell'aptico non riguardano tanto la filosofia bensì la tecnologia digitale, l'informatica e la robotica (dalle protesi mediche ai giochi), nonché alcune teorie mediali, si comprenderà l'opportunità di qualche precisazione preliminare. Il termine "aptico" circola soprattutto a partire dalla fine del XIX secolo, quando viene proposto in modo peculiare, cioè non come mero equivalente o generico sinonimo del senso del tatto ma come una sua alternativa. Questa nozione è stata usata, con significati e in contesti diversi, soprattutto da psicologi, percettologi e filosofi, da Ernst Weber a Géza Révész fino a James J. Gibson[4]. L'estetica, in particolare, inizia ad occuparsi dell'aptico in riferimento all'arte soprattutto sulla scia di Alois Riegl che, nel 1902, riprendendo la distinzione tra visione ottica e visione aptica

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[3] Essa viene discussa direttamente nel terzo e nel quarto saggio di Perullo 2020 (*Dal tatto all'aptico. Un altro approccio all'autentico* e *L'aptico come tempo, temperatura e alimento*).

[4] La prima teoria sull'aptico come percezione non limitata alla mano è da attribuire a Ernst Weber, maestro di Fechner e autore del *De Tactu* (1834) e di *Die Lehre vom Tastsinn und Gemeingefühl* (1851). In seguito, ulteriori ricerche sull'aptico sono state svolte da David Katz, per esempio nel suo *Der Aufbau der Taswelt* (1925). Sulle applicazioni digitali e tecnologiche si vedano Prytherch (2002); McLundie (2002). Per gli aspetti percettologici, Gibson (1962; 1966). In un classico sulla psicologia dei non vedenti, Révész (1950) esamina la relazione tra aptico e arte. Qui, le connessioni tra cecità e creazione artistica sono analizzate attraverso l'esempio della scultura. Negli ultimi decenni, questi studi pionieristici sono stati approfonditi, dimostrati o verificati da specifici studi in campi diversi come la psicologia applicata, le scienze cognitive e l'ingegneria (Gopnik 2016; Klatzky 1993).

proposta da Hildebrand ne *Il problema della forma* (1893) a proposito della storicità della visione, lo utilizza per evidenziare da un lato che c'è un vedere tattile e ravvicinato, dall'altro che il tatto non è limitato alla mano (Riegl 2000). Peraltro, già Bernard Berenson nel 1896 aveva parlato, a proposito della pittura fiorentina del Rinascimento, di visione tattile (Berenson 1997, pp. 61-118)[5].

Nel Novecento, la questione investe anche la scultura, la cui necessità di essere considerata come arte tattile, peraltro, era già stata ampiamente argomentata da Herder nella sua *Plastica* (1778). *Prière de toucher*, scrissero Marcel Duchamp e André Breton sulla copertina del *Catalogo del Surrealismo* realizzato per l'Esposizione Internazionale di Parigi del 1947. Pochi anni prima, il Manifesto futurista sul *Tattilismo* (1921) proponeva una liberazione del tatto attraverso una nuova sensibilità volta a concepirlo non come uno tra i sensi ma il super-senso trasversale con cui produrre un'arte nuova e totale.

Sotto il profilo filosofico, cosa è in gioco nella questione del tatto, e perché suggerire, in suo luogo, l'alternativa dell'aptico? In *Estetica ecologica* se ne discute soprattutto nel terzo e nel quarto capitolo, attraverso l'analisi della posizione di alcuni autori: Deleuze e Guattari da un lato, Derrida e Nancy dall'altro, ma anche Carolyn Korsmeyer, François Jullien, Eduard Glissant e Tim Ingold. *Aptico* è un atteggiamento, un'attitudine complessiva al *percepire con*, un modo di sentire/pensare integrale che cresce e si sviluppa, istante dopo istante, lungo questo continuo fluire che chiamiamo *esperienza*; ciò in cui, immersi, viviamo, scorrendovi e corrispondendovi. L'aptico è così una *postura* nei confronti del mondo, postura sensibile *e* mentale, all'unisono – precisamente ciò che si impegna ad avvicinare ogni dualismo polare, fino a mostrarne l'illusorietà. Percepire in modo aptico significa dunque accostare i processi, sentirli/pensarli lateralmente, trattenendo ogni intenzione e ogni progetto per come invece emergono con la scissione duale provocata dalla percezione frontale, quella di un soggetto davanti a un oggetto. In questo senso, la proposta dell'aptico va al di là dell'idea di un tatto oltre la mano, idea che è stata perseguita soprattutto in riferimento al visivo, come quello spazio in cui l'occhio tocca ciò che vede[6].

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[5] Per un inquadramento del tema, Pinotti (2009). Di aptico parlano anche Ingold (2017b); Bruno (2006; 2016); Fontanille (2004, p. 166 e ss.).

[6] Dalla potenzialità dell'aptico traggono spunto anche Deleuze e Guattari per teorizzare lo "spazio liscio", lo spazio nomade e continuo, in cui opera un corpo senziente, senza sensi e (per riprendere Artaud) "senza organi". Così in *Mille piani*: "Aptico è una parola migliore di tattile, poiché non oppone due organi di senso, ma lascia supporre che l'occhio stesso possa avere una funzione che non sia visiva. […] Il liscio ci sembra a un tempo l'oggetto di una visione ravvicinata per eccellenza e l'elemento di uno spazio aptico (che può essere visivo, uditivo, non meno che tattile)" (Deleuze, Guattari 2017, p. 719).

Ciò che è stato sopra chiarito nei termini di un'ontologia fluida, implicativa e relazionale – quella che alcuni (come la filosofa Lisa Heldke) hanno chiamato *with-y ontology* (Heldke 2018) – viene rielaborato come "percezione aptica". Essa definisce un atteggiamento percettivo trans-sensoriale, unificato e processuale, per contrapposizione a quello che, per chiarezza esplicativa, è definibile come atteggiamento ottico, o "percezione ottica". L'aptico non *intenziona* gli oggetti ma *attenziona* il flusso dell'esperienza di cui la percezione è parte. L'aptico è una modalità di sentire/pensare che chiede una certa postura, una certa disposizione ma che non chiede di fare nulla di speciale e non concerne alcun ambito specifico dell'esperienza. Infatti, l'attitudine aptica si collega anche, in parte, a filoni della *Everyday* e dell'*Environmental Aesthetics* che sono esplicitamente richiamati nel libro (per esempio, il lavoro di Arnold Berleant e di Yuriko Saito)[7]. Si tratta di sentire/pensare il quotidiano altrimenti, il che significa: percependone il flusso della vita che vi scorre attraverso. Da qui, la questione del tempo come temperatura: se l'estetica è sensibilità e percezione, essa è sempre temporale, quindi temperata. Per questo, sostengo che essa è sempre – che lo sappia o no – ecologica.

È importante chiarire che l'esperienza dell'aptico, in quanto percepire *con*, non è più "vera" della conoscenza ottica. Se intendiamo la verità come la continua *corrispondenza risonante* tra entità del mondo e loro descrizione, infatti, secondo la logica ecologica che sorregge questo progetto, ottico e aptico sono due aspetti dello stesso fluire, percepito secondo due posture, due tonalità diverse. Da una parte, quella del processo come morfogenesi "in sé"; dall'altra, quella che coglie il risultato di tale continua produzione, consistente nelle differenze che emergono lungo il flusso e che si cristallizzano, assumendo quelle provvisorie stabilità di posizione che si definiscono "oggetti". La percezione aptica consiste, perciò, nell'aprirsi alla potenzialità di un sentire/pensare aperto e dis-posto

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[7] Berleant (1992; 2016); Saito (2007; 2017a). Più nello specifico di quanto qui ci riguarda, entrambi gli autori propongono un'estetica che muove dalla critica alla nozione di "disinteresse" (Berleant 1994; Saito 2017b). Su questo punto credo sia necessaria una precisazione. Il dibattito su interesse/disinteresse, su cui si è molto impegnata per esempio anche Emily Brady, si basa in gran parte su una questione semantica. Dipende se si associa al termine "disinteresse" quello di distanza e, parallelamente, se si associa al termine "interesse" quello di intenzione e di volontà finalizzata. In questo senso, le osservazioni di Emily Brady risultano utili: ella sostiene l'idea che il disinteresse estetico non vada inteso come distacco e contemplazione né come formalismo ma, al contrario, come coinvolgimento (engagement) attento, senza intenzione e relazionale (Brady 1998; 2003). Allo stesso modo, però, si può sostenere, come fanno Berleant e Saito, che con "interesse" non si intende l'imposizione di un volere intenzionale sulla percezione estetica. La percezione aptica che propongo nell'estetica ecologica è implicata, coinvolta ed intima, ma non basata su intenzioni e desideri specificamente mossi dal soggetto perché è relazionale e attenzionale.

(senza tesi e senza posizione fissa), fluido e flessibile, dove si è *consapevoli* della relazionalità radicale che esprimiamo con il termine "corrispondenza". Per chiarire questo aspetto si possono addurre diversi tipi di esempi. In *Estetica ecologica* ci si sofferma sulle questioni dell'autenticità e della qualità, soprattutto nel terzo, nel quarto e nel quinto capitolo.

Relativamente alla questione dell'autenticità, in *Dal tatto all'aptico. Un altro approccio all'autentico*, si propone l'idea di intendere l'autenticità come *esperienza* dell'autentico; per dirla con le parole di Glissant, essa viene intesa come una poetica delle relazioni. L'autentico è il continuo processo di autenticazione; da ciò segue che l'autenticità, corrispondendo all'esperienza stessa, partecipata e immersiva, dentro al processo, è sotto questo profilo sempre impura e meticcia (Glissant 2007). Tutto è dunque autentico in quanto parte di un processo esperienziale? Certamente no. Infatti, di questa processualità fanno parte anche le prove "fattuali" e le verifiche filologiche – storiche, analitiche, empiriche – come si osserva, per esempio, nel campo dell'arte. In questo modello non si tratta, cioè, di *negare* il normale processo di validazione e quindi di valutazione, anche estetica, delle opere. Si tratta di stimolare e di suggerire la consapevolezza grazie alla quale questa validazione e valutazione non avvengono fuori dal processo stesso in cui è preso e coinvolto il validatore/valutatore, riconoscendo dunque la transitorietà funzionale e interstiziale di tutte le posizioni. In altri termini, si tratta di suggerire, nel senso appena chiarito, un passaggio *dalla distanza critica all'intimità critica* (Miles, Lessard, Brasier 2018).

Questo passaggio permette di sottolineare un punto dirimente. Questa proposta dell'aptico non esprime affatto una metafisica del contatto puntuale e immediato con *qualcosa*, non è strumento dell'epifania di un presunto, permanente e stabile "Autentico" da riconoscere (e in questo senso credo di superare l'obiezione che Derrida pone, nel saggio su Nancy, all'apticità). Esso è piuttosto una disposizione allo scorrimento lungo l'esperienza della quale si è parte, contemporaneamente subìta ed agita, della co-creazione del mondo. La percezione aptica è perciò insieme attiva e passiva, secondo il modello della corrispondenza risonante, dove l'agire (come *Agency*) è rimesso a un'azione (come *Agencing*) più ampia, prima e oltre l'*Io*. In questo senso, si è interpretata la celebre coppia deweyana di *doing/undergoing*. L'aptico non è vitalistico più di quanto non sia vulnerabile ed esposto.

Relativamente alla questione della qualità, nel quinto capitolo – *Il gusto non è un senso ma un compito* – si avanza l'idea che il gusto autentico consista nella consapevolezza dell'autenticità dell'*esperienza*

del gustare. In altri termini, esso non mira a cogliere l'autenticità degli oggetti alimentari, né intesi come un tutt'uno né come capacità di riconoscere le loro caratteristiche; piuttosto, essi e le loro caratteristiche autentiche emergono e si fanno lungo il continuo fluire dell'esperienza. Se il gusto ottico ha di mira l'adeguamento agli obiettivi propri di uno standard acquisito o pregresso (ciò che va sotto il nome, ambiguo e spesso confuso, di "qualità") e la loro realizzazione tramite una *verifica* percettiva, il gusto aptico corrisponde invece all'esperienza del suo farsi, nel senso di una corrispondenza che non deve verificare qualcosa di predefinito. Dove il gusto ottico isola e analizza elementi – i "sapori", gli "odori", le "texture" e tutte le caratteristiche cosiddette "sensoriali" degli alimenti – ambendo a una conoscenza *oggettuale* e *oggettiva*, tarata sul metodo scientifico moderno e sulla parallela estetica del soggetto distanziato, giudicante e valutante, il gusto aptico, invece, percepisce il processo lungo il quale emergono le varie posizioni e le caratteristiche quali *possibilità* non isolate né isolabili, sempre partizioni e posizioni provvisorie, interstizi, di un certo ambiente e di una certa atmosfera. Il gusto ottico intenziona oggetti al fine di conoscerli, apprezzarli e giudicarli, secondo l'attitudine della distanza critica; il suo postulato – come osservò, in un contesto in parte diverso, Derrida nella sua critica a Kant (Derrida 1978)[8] – un gusto "puro", espressione di un soggetto diafano, quasi un io-macchina che *rispecchia e registra* sapori e profumi e li esprime. Il gusto ottico, perlopiù praticato dai "degustatori" professionisti, mima il metodo sperimentale della scienza moderna, aspirando alla medesima oggettività. Di contro, il gusto aptico si basa sul postulato della relazione, del *con*. Esso *attenziona* i processi secondo una modalità intima, complice e senza un obiettivo specifico e prestabilito: l'apprezzamento dell'esperienza gustativa non si misura in base a criteri e standard prefissati e predefiniti, ma si fa nel corso della relazione. La relazione come corrispondenza, nel senso della estetica ecologica qui proposta, è quella socialità originaria che comprende tutto ciò che abita il mondo, ovvero l'ambiente nel quale si vive e con cui si fa, di volta in volta, esperienza.

Il gusto aptico *si sente* mentre gusta; in altri termini, partecipa consapevolmente del processo di descrizione e di osservazione che l'incontro con un cibo o una bevanda produce; un incontro che include sia le annodature tra gustante e gustato, che avvengono attraverso l'introiezione, sia le annodature tra gustante, gustato e l'intorno – tutto ciò che non "è" (nel senso dell'ontologia fluida, posizionale, interstiziale sopra descritta) il cibo né chi lo percepisce

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[8] Per un'analisi del rapporto tra gusto puro e gusto fisico in Derrida, Perullo (2011).

– durante il quale, e con il quale, il processo introiettivo accade[9]. Bevendo un vino (ma vale lo stesso osservando un'opera d'arte) posso, ed è ciò che solitamente si fa, concentrarmi, focalizzarmi sui "contenuti" oggettuali dissezionando e scorporando l'esperienza gustativa, cristallizzando così il flusso da cui emergono gli elementi che compongono tale vino. È la percezione ottica, la quale trascura intenzionalmente il "contesto", tanto quanto i processi interni che avvengono *con* questo bere (per esempio, la forza alcolica del vino non è considerata una proprietà estetica, anzi essa è aliena alle caratteristiche qualitative). La percezione aptica, invece, suggerisce di distendere la percezione in modo più diffuso, orizzontale, distribuito[10]; in questo caso, il sentire si declina dall'"io sento" al "si sente" in cui gustante, gustato e l'intorno si corrispondono, senza frazionamenti o cristallizzazioni. Il gusto aptico allaccia, annoda l'attenzione del percipiente al continuum processuale del quale essa è parte e che contribuisce a creare. Si beve e si sente il vino come sostanza vitale, ma lo stesso accade nel caso si osservi un'opera d'arte con sguardo aptico, come ha osservato Merleau-Ponty nelle sue analisi sul vedere[11]. Sentire/pensare *con* ciò che accade, osservando e descrivendo senza che una oggettivazione sia implicata. Vedere *con* il cielo, udire *con* le onde, toccare *con* le mani, odorare *con* i fiori, gustare *con* il pane e il vino, ma anche prima di tutto ciò, poiché l'atteggiamento aptico sviluppa la consapevolezza che ogni distinzione tra sensi è, a sua volta, una cristallizzazione. Percepire apticamente significa, perciò, anche udire con la vista, odorare con l'udito, vedere con il gusto o gustare con la vista.

Incorporare una sostanza, sentirla e sentirsi mentre la si mastica e la si assapora, un pezzo di pane, un bicchiere di vino, gustati ed assimilati, significa fare esperienza di questa relazione tra un esterno che passa all'interno per restituirsi, variato, di nuovo al di fuori, senza che questa continuità mai si risolva. L'aptico ci apre alla possibilità di sentire e di vivere ciò che accade in quanto evento di un mondo fatto di processi e di passaggi, fluido e temperato, a lato delle cristallizzazioni che rappresentano la narrazione apparente della solidità degli oggetti visti, uditi, toccati, odorati e gustati.

[9] Per l'esempio del gusto aptico con il vino, Perullo (2016; 2018).
[10] Bence Nanay ha fatto della distinzione tra percezione focalizzata e percezione distribuita uno dei cardini della sua proposta di estetica come filosofia della percezione. Nanay propone di intendere la percezione come un'attenzione, distribuita o diffusa, sugli oggetti o sulle loro proprietà. Nonostante quanto qui si propone differisca in generale dall'idea classificatoria di Nanay, perché nell'estetica ecologica non si tratta di oggetti e loro proprietà ma di processi, tuttavia vi sono spunti che possono essere ripresi in questa chiave (Nanay 2016).
[11] Si veda, per una lettura in accordo con questa estetica ecologica, Iofrida (2019, pp. 141-152).

III

L'aptico è relazione, implicazione, partecipazione e impegno. È corrispondenza e risonanza, perciò è esposizione e ascolto, è l'*in-between* tra azione e passione. Sentire/pensare *con*, significa vivere una socialità col mondo prima di ogni frammentazione oggettuale, un'attitudine di intimità (per dirlo con Jullien), di tremore (per dirlo con Glissant) e di consapevole spaesamento lungo una spazialità che non è un contenitore di oggetti ma un fluire di annodature. L'aptico è così una socialità radicale, ciò che Stefano Harney e Fred Moten definiscono anche: "The capacity to feel through others, to feel through you, for you to feel them feeling you, this feel of the shipped is not regulated, at least not successfully, by a state, a religion, a people, an empire, a piece of land, a totem" (Harney, Moten 2013, p. 98).

In quanto non solo implicata ma anche impegnata, la percezione aptica chiama continuamente in causa la questione della responsabilità. Corrispondere significa *rispondere con*; responsabilità significa *abilità di rispondere*. Si è responsabili in quanto si corrisponde a qualcosa. Il percepire aptico è un impegno ed un compito perché, a differenza dell'atteggiamento ottico, *fa la verità* della qualità – il valore di qualcosa – nell'incontro. La qualità è una relazione, cui si giunge non con la mera applicazione di una regola pregressa ma attraverso il suo continuo, al contempo provvisorio, costituirsi e farsi valore comune. In questo paradigma, a ogni passo, per dirlo con Wittgenstein, si reclama una nuova decisione. Ancora una volta, non si tratta di una strategia negazionista, giustificazionista o la notte in cui tutte le vacche sono nere. Piuttosto, si tratta del fatto che il non apprezzamento, la perplessità, il disgusto, l'indifferenza o il rifiuto emergono in base a motivi che non sono predicibili, che le qualità non si danno a priori, che l'esperienza è sempre unica e singolare e sottoposta a un numero potenzialmente illimitato di variazioni e differenze. A partire da questa considerazione, in *Estetica ecologica* si declina un ulteriore gruppo di temi, trattato soprattutto nei due saggi finali[12]. Esso si racchiude nei termini *saggezza*, *cura* ed *educazione*.

Se il suggerimento a favore del percepire aptico ha, in definitiva, un'ambizione, essa consiste nel promuovere un modo di vivere consapevole, riportando la filosofia alla sua dimensione di *scuola* nel significato originario del termine. Una *scuola di vita* che non ha però, in base ai suoi presupposti, alcuna pretesa di dottrina; un'educazione che è perciò povera di contenuti pedagogici, di princìpi e di istruzioni e che, al contrario, si svolge tutta all'interno della specificità

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[12] Essi sono *Per una dietetica della cura: sul mangiare animali* e *Educarsi senza istruzioni: l'estetica ecologica come 'imparare a imparare.*

dell'esperienza che si attraversa. È nella situazione che si producono ed emergono, di volta in volta, quelle potenzialità che divengono concrete possibilità da seguire. L'estetica ecologica qui proposta, così come procede da una logica e da una conoscenza ecologiche, allo stesso modo corrisponde a una *diet-etica situazionale*, che non si basa su princìpi prestabiliti. Nel saggio *Per una dietetica della cura* l'argomento viene sviluppato attraverso una decostruzione dell'animalismo e del vegetarianismo ontologici che realizza un radicale anti-specismo, in conseguenza del quale la domanda etica sulla dieta giusta, frutto di una discussione ontologica, diventa una domanda sul *quando* mangiare *cosa*, giacché la distinzione rigida tra umano, animale e vegetale viene ricusata: non "esistono" il "cibo animale" e il "cibo vegetale" in sé. In *Educarsi senza istruzioni* si propone, più in generale, un modello educativo alternativo a quello vigente. Quest'ultimo si basa sull'istruzione come *trasmissione* di conoscenza in cui s'incuneano, in maniera decisiva, due questioni centrali per un'educazione estetica coerente con il modello ecologico.

La prima riguarda ciò che nel libro chiamo "pensiero artigianale". L'educazione ecologica estetica come "imparare a imparare" propone, in luogo dell'ideologia dell'accumulo propria del modello lineare e progressivo del capitale – anche come capitale culturale – un modello di conoscenza come realizzazione in comune; un modello circolare, resiliente e qualitativo del sapere e della sua condivisione; vengono richiamati, nel saggio, anche Jacques Rancière e Paulo Freire per supportare questa proposta (Rancière 2008; Freire 2018; Irvin 2012; Lewis 2012). Chiamo "artigianale" questo approccio alla conoscenza perché esso è sempre specifico, locale, accurato, esposto, vulnerabile, consapevolmente relazionale. Per contrasto, la conoscenza frammentata e separatista procede programmaticamente per standard che si suppongono avere valore generale ed universalistico[13]; per questo, si può configurare come modalità "industriale" del pensiero. È evidente come le due modalità abbiano implicazioni e conseguenze molto diverse sui processi educativi.

La seconda questione riguarda il rapporto tra maestro e allievo. Nell'approccio ecologico e aptico, il maestro è colui che supera il monologismo dell'insegnamento come trasmissione di contenuti e dell'apprendimento come loro acquisizione attraverso una dis-posizione di sapere che è la sua continua messa in questione; non attraverso scetticismo e negazionismo, ma ascolto ed esposizione alle domande

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[13] François Jullien propone di distinguere tra *universalità* e *universalismo*: il primo termine esprime la continua apertura alla connessione di tutto, e l'attenzione alla messa in *comune* tra differenti (e non distinti) secondo una logica di recupero e di risorse; il secondo, quel pensiero generalizzante che procede per dicotomie e fissazioni ipostatiche (Jullien 2018).

partecipate dell'allievo. In altri termini, si tratta di radicalizzare le caratteristiche dialogiche al fine di destabilizzare l'idea gerarchizzante di cultura come competenza acquisita, non per opporvi un'improbabile apologia dell'ignoranza quanto per suscitare la consapevolezza della cultura come *commoning*, come fare comune e responsabilità sociale, declinato nei suoi propri termini di participio futuro. In questo quadro, il maestro è una *finzione necessaria* e convenuta, che funge da facilitatore del *processo* di conoscenza che l'allievo porta avanti attraverso di lui ma, nello stesso tempo, secondo annodature e percorsi diversi. Il maestro esemplifica un'educazione estetica nel senso di un "imparare a imparare" che concerne tutti perché, nel paradigma ecologico e sistemico, tutto è connesso ma, proprio per questo, tutto è continuamente differenziato. Si tratta di passare dal modello del sapere come acquisizione di una presunta autonomia individuale definitiva, tipica della concezione del soggetto isolato, al sapere come consapevolezza che ogni vita è, comunque, eteronoma. Sotto questo profilo, l'approccio aptico che propongo nel progetto complessivo di un'estetica ecologica come "percepire saggio, vivere corrispondente" cerca anche di corrispondere alla globale, crescente insoddisfazione nei confronti dell'impalcatura, tanto teorica che sociopolitica, che ha sostenuto e sorretto un certo paradigma della modernità occidentale. Questa impalcatura che chiede una profonda revisione se non una rifondazione completa, in coerenza, tuttavia, con quella logica ecologica da cui siamo partiti, che non è mai una logica distruttiva ma circolare, situazionale e inclusiva.

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