CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT

Towards a Pluralistic Ontology of Environments

A Phenomenological Perspective

by Cecília Lippai

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD in Philosophy

Supervisor: Professor David Weberman

Budapest, Hungary

2013

I hereby declare that this dissertation contains no materials accepted for any other degrees in any other institution, and no materials previously written and/or published by another person unless otherwise noted.

Abstract

The starting point of this thesis is a critical observation, namely that contemporary environmental philosophy neglects to ask the ontological question ‘what is an environment’ and tends to suppose – explicitly or tacitly – that the environment is nature, planet Earth or a global ecosystem. On close analysis these global conceptions turn out to be less than helpful in capturing the being of an environment, and quite inefficient in environmental arguments due to their abstractness and remoteness from people’s everyday lives and concerns. Contrary to these approaches, this thesis attempts to grasp environments in their plurality through the analysis of everyday environmental experiences. The method used is a version of generative phenomenology, inspired by the works of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Jan Patočka, but adapted to the study of historical and dynamic phenomena such as environments. As a result of this pluralist phenomenological approach the being of environments is revealed to have two inseparable and co-generative aspects: an autonomous existence as a field of possibilities (affordances) and a hermeneutical realm composed of human ways to make sense of the surrounding world. This pluralistic, flexible and open-ended ontology turns out to have not only theoretical benefits in mediating between realist and constructivist positions, but also important practical consequences. Specifically, the last chapter of this thesis is dedicated to demonstrating that closer attention to patterns of experience leads to less prejudiced, more communicative, collaborative, and democratic environmental actions.

Contents

INTRODUCTION **1**

CHAPTER 1: GLOBAL NOTIONS OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND THEIR ARGUMENTATIVE INNEFICIENCY **9**

A. Popular substitutes for what environment means **10**
1. Save the Earth! Save the Planet! 12
2. Save nature! 13
3. Save our ecosystem! 26

B. The argumentative inefficiency of global notions of *the* environment **29**

CHAPTER 2: FROM ENVIRONMENTAL EXPEREINCE TO ENVIRONMENTAL PLURALISM **37**

A. The ontological consequences of experiential diversity **41**
1. Hermeneutical reality 42
2. Autonomous reality 46
3. The co-generative relation of autonomous and hermeneutic realities 50

B. The fluidity and flexibility of environmental boundaries **56**

C. The importance of scale **61**

D. The difference between involvement and attachment **63**

E. The practical consequences of a pluralistic experiential ontology **64**

F. Possible counter-arguments **70**

G. Other pluralistic views **72**
Phenomenological approaches 73
Actor Network Theory (ANT) 75
New trends in geography 77
New trends in ethnography 78

CHAPTER 3: PHENOMENOLOGIES AND ENVIRONMENTS **81**

A. Phenomenology as a method **82**
1. Methodological principles and guidelines 85
2. The worry of subjectivism and idealism 89
3. Confronting experiences 94
4. Patterns of experience 97

B. Three philosophers – three inspiring ideas 99
1. Husserl's generative phenomenology 100
2. Heidegger's notion of homeless dwelling 118
3. Patočka's ontology of movement or how to get from local experience to global understanding 140

C. Environments as generative sources of meaning 153

CHAPTER 4: THREE GENERATIVE PATTERNS OF EXPEREINCE: PERCEPTIONS, PRACTICES, AND CONCEPTIONS 155

Patterns of experience and the study of environments 156

A. Perceptual patterns 165
1. Seeing the forest or the trees 165
2. Hearing the forest and the trees 169
3. Gibson's ecological theory of perception 174
4. Perceptual affordances 180

B. Practical patterns 182
1. Practical affordances 183
2. Practical protection and protecting practices 188

C. Conceptual patterns. Nature and wilderness 192
1. The consequences of conceptual diversity 193
2. The example of "wilderness" 198
3. Ideas of nature in environmental protection 207

CONCLUSION 213

BIBLIOGRAPHY 222

INTRODUCTION

There have been five massive extinctions of living beings on our planet, all of them resulting in the disappearance of at least 50% of species. Many scientists believe that we are on the verge of a sixth such cataclysmic event, this time brought on by human activity and destruction.[1] The rise of environmental sciences and environmental philosophy is a sign of attempts to understand and possibly stop such a mass extinction. Environmental philosophy and action strives to convince people worldwide to save, protect, preserve, and restore the environment.

My own interest in environmental philosophy, however, did not emerge as a result of arguments about massive extinctions and global warming. Since I have lived most of my life in big and even bigger cities, it was my own exposure to pollution (both CO2 and noise) that got me interested and wondering about environmental issues. It also struck me that in spite of such everyday experience of pollution and an abundance of images and arguments about global problems (coming from the popular media, NGOs, academics, political forums, and so on), the petition to stop car traffic and build bicycle lanes in my home town's center was treated as a matter of traffic control, and not of environmental protection. Why should this be the case? Intuitively, I found that this has at least two reasons. First, such simple local measures seem to be "too small anyway" when compared to the sheer magnitude of environmental problems and arguments regarding the entire planet Earth – thus, they are not regarded as environmental as they are not perceived as contributing to the big issues of global warming, climate change, and so on. Second, there seems to be a tacit presupposition at work,

[1] See, for example, Edward O. Wilson: *The diversity of life*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1992. Others have coined the term 'anthropocene' to name our era in the history of the Earth: Paul Crutzen, Eugene Stroemer: *The 'Anthropocene'*. *Global Change Newsletter* 41, 2000, 17–18.

namely that environmental protection regards nature or in any case, more natural environments, thus cities do not qualify as worthy of such protection.

So I started reading more about such apparent gaps between global principles and arguments and local realities. I found startling examples of environmental conflicts all over the world which made the case of my home town fade in comparison. The most disturbing were instances where the implementation of sound global environmental principles has led to violent conflicts with local communities. I will only mention a few cases here:

- In Cameroon, the National Parks of Faro, Benoue and Bouba-Njida were established as conservation sites without the knowledge of local communities. The hunting grounds of locals were transformed into educational and recreational sites for park visitors, ignoring locals and robbing them of their livelihood. When locals continued to hunt and provide food for themselves, they were arrested for poaching, prompting violent clashes between park rangers and locals. [2]
- The Himalayan National Parks in Nepal were also established and administered without including the local Khumbu Sherpa communities, although the latter were revealed to have long-established conservation-values and even institutions.[3]
- In the Zambian National Parks hunting by locals was prohibited, while park authorities organized controlled safari hunting for rich tourists. After years of violent conflicts, and uncontrollable poaching, park authorities generously granted 40% of

[2] Elisabeth Andrew-Essien, Francis Bisong: *Conflicts, Conservation and Natural Resource Use in Protected Area Systems: an Analysis of Recurrent Issues. European Journal of Scientific Research*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2009, 118-129, 122. The article is an excellent overview of environmental conflicts, as well as a comprehensive analysis of reasons, scopes, classifications, and possible solutions.
[3] Stan Stevens: *Conservation Through Cultural Survival: Indigenous Peoples and Protected Areas*. Island Press, Washington, 1997, 81.

safari revenues to local communities. This simple measure had an impressive success: within three years poaching of elephants stopped altogether.[4]

- But such practices of forceful wilderness creation are not limited to so-called third world countries. In fact, their precedents are rooted in US national park establishments. William Cronon offers several examples where indigenous peoples were forced to move so that "tourists could safely enjoy the illusion that they were seeing their nation in its pristine, original state, in the new morning of God's own creation."[5] Or, consider Gary Paul Nabham's detailed case-study about the Papago people. The US National Park Service forbade all Papago Indian farming in what is now Organ Pipe National Monument in Arizona, and then in 1962 destroyed all non-historic Papago structures in the making of Organ Pipe Wilderness Area.[6]

Other than a more generally unjust and profit-oriented attitude, what I believe is at the heart of these conflicts is also an unreflected an unquestioned impositions of apparently global-scale conceptions, terms, values, and practices. They also exemplify the ignorance or at least marginalization of conceptions, values and practices resulting from long experiential, bodily interactions with the protected environments. These cases reveal lack of cooperation, arrogance, and general ignorance for different ways of life and their relations to the environments in which they unfold. It is at best ignorant, at worse cynical that indigenous peoples have so often been excluded from nature-reserves, since the reason why such areas still have rich natural ecosystems is presumably due to the sustainable modes of living of locals. Local people obviously regard the environments they inhabit as their territory and tend

[4] Elisabeth Andrew-Essien, Francis Bisong: *Conflicts, Conservation and Natural Resource Use in Protected Area Systems: an Analysis of Recurrent Issues*, 126.
[5] William Cronon: *The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature*. In: William Cronon (ed.): *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*. W.W. Norton &Company, New York, 1995, 69-90, 77. For example, the Blackfeet tribe continues to be accused of "poaching" on the lands of Glacier National Park that originally belonged to them.
[6] Gary Paul Nabham: *The Desert Smells Like Rain: A Naturalist in Papago Indian Country*. North Point Press, San Francisco, 1987, 89-93.

to regard nature-preservation projects (which, in all cases, comes 'from above' and 'from the outside') as intruding on their land and depriving them of food, firewood, building materials, grazing and hunting lands – all of which are necessary for their survival.[7] This can easily bring about the suspicion that locals are paying an unfair price for others' devastation and damages done to their environments elsewhere.

Turning to environmental philosophy, I found surprisingly little that would provide help in understanding or solving such conflicts. Instead, I found debates about 'nature' and 'culture', 'eco-centrism' and 'anthropocentrism', 'the inherent value of nature', animal rights, 'naturalism', and so on. I noted three features of contemporary environmental discourses and debates, features that I suspect makes them blind to the problems and conflicts I listed above:

- Most of today's environmental philosophy is actually environmental ethics, revolving around normative claims about what *ought to* be done, felt, changed with respect to environmental attitudes. One rarely even encounters questions about *what* and *how* environments are. That is to say that there is not much interest in ontology in environmental philosophy.
- Environmental philosophers have the tendency to use environment in the singular (*the* environment is deteriorating, *the* environment needs saving, *the* environment is our responsibility, and so on). This supposes, even if only tacitly, that there is one big global entity or thing called environment, identifiable through some features.
- In most environmental writings the term *environment* seems to be interchangeable with one or more of the following: *nature*, *the planet*, *Earth*, *the natural environment*, *ecosystem*. It is rarely questioned or analyzed what the relationship of these terms might be to each other.

[7] Elisabeth Andrew-Essien, Francis Bisong: *Conflicts, Conservation and Natural Resource Use in Protected Area Systems: an Analysis of Recurrent Issues*, 124.

Corroborating the examples of conflict with such idiosyncratic use of terms in environmental discourses, and noting the fact that today's environmental thought and action is still mostly a Western endeavor (or at least has Western roots), a question emerges. Could it be the case that specifically Western cultural presuppositions are imposed as global principles in top-down environmental projects? Could it be that one of the sources of conflicts is supposing *the* environment to exist in the singular? Doesn't this presupposition disregard other possible conceptions and attitudes than the dominant Western-scientific-universalist? Or, to put in more bluntly, don't we run the risk of identifying *the* environment with our own conception of nature? These and similar questions have led me to inquire into presuppositions and practical consequences of singular notions of *the* environment. What I found is that such global conceptions and attitudes are abstracted and remote from everyday human experience, precisely in order to have a relatively simple and adequate way to deal with environmental problems on a scientific-technical level. While this could be considered a legitimate move in scientific endeavors, avoiding complexity is hardly a virtue of philosophical thinking.

So I decided to ask the question: what is an environment? My purpose with this is not to find a correct definition of 'environment' but rather to understand what it is that is deteriorating and needs protection. How do we start answering such a question? One could turn to existing definitions and conceptions about the environment, analyze them, and see what one can learn from them. But also, one can turn one's attention to the actual surrounding reality as it unfolds and reveals itself through the experiences of its inhabitants. I opted for the second approach presuming that focusing on everyday environmental experiences such as big city pollution, declining water quality and quantity, or extreme weather conditions point towards the possibility of an environmental philosophy and ontology that would be able to approach and understand different environments, their inhabitants and their problems in their

own terms. This thesis will thus be an attempt to outline precisely such a possibility – a pluralistic ontology of environments, crafted to fit specific cases rather than global conceptions.

Here is a brief outline of the structure of this thesis. The first chapter will be dedicated to setting up the problem and arguing for the argumentative inefficiency of singular, global notions of the environment. I will start with arguments showing that global notions usually used interchangeably with environment, notions such as the planet, the Earth, nature or the global ecosystem, do not adequately capture what an environment is. Moreover, I also note that identifying the environment with the planet, nature or ecosystem all suppose tacitly that what environment is can be captured in universal terms, globally. I argue next that while such global notions might indeed give us scientific knowledge, they offer no efficient argumentative tools, and no effective communication strategies for addressing local problems or implementing global principles locally.

In the second chapter, I will argue that focusing on people's specific environmental experiences points toward the possibility and, indeed, necessity of a more complex, pluralistic ontology of environments. I will offer an outline of a pluralistic ontology that is based on the unity of humans and their environments in experience, realistic (recognizing the autonomous being of environments) and flexible (recognizing the diversity of possible understandings). I will discuss some possible counter-arguments to my approach and I will briefly sketch its relations to other pluralistic approaches to reality, from within and outside philosophy.

In the third chapter I will consider the possibility of an environmental phenomenology. I will argue that even though there has been ample and justified reluctance to use phenomenology in environmental philosophy, certain phenomenological methods and certain ideas of phenomenological thinkers offer unique insight and original philosophical

solutions to environmental issues. To illustrate my point I will present my own phenomenological method fitted to environmental questions and realities. Then I will address the connections and influences of my own approach to certain methodological and philosophical insights drawn from three very different phenomenologists. First, I will argue for the environmental application of Edmund Husserl's generative phenomenology. Second, I will discuss Martin Heidegger's notions of homelessness and dwelling as capturing the complex and nuanced relationship that humans have with their surrounding worlds. And finally, I will consider a phenomenologist completely disregarded by environmental philosophy, Jan Patočka, and argue that his asubjective phenomenology and ontology of movement offers an original solution to the apparent conflict between global and local interests when it comes to environmental action.

In the last chapter of this thesis I will demonstrate *how* my generative phenomenological method might work in environmental thought and action by relying on my generative method and my notion of *patterns of experience*. I will argue that all instances of actual and immediate experience follow certain larger contextual patterns: inherited and, to some extent, learnt ways of experiencing, acting or making sense of our surroundings, certain regularities of ways in which "one" usually experiences the surrounding world. This means that experience is always already shaped and informed by a complex set of background assumptions and inherited ways of experiencing something, and these experiential tendencies should be revealed, compared and addressed in open discussion and negotiation about specific (local) environmental problems and solutions. I will consider the diverse contents of three patterns of experience, with special attention to their embedment in specific surroundings, and to their importance in pluralistic environmental thought and action: ways of perceiving, practical habits, and conceptual schemes.

I will conclude this thesis by pointing out the theoretical and practical benefits of my pluralistic and experiential approach in environmental theory and action. Specifically, I hope to be able to conclude that my pluralistic phenomenological approach offers a fresh perspective previously neglected but able to both complement and amend existing efforts. I will also conclude that environments are no mere 'conditions for life' composed of air, soil, geography, climate, and biological organisms, but complex places that afford different experiences and various modes of understanding. The ways in which environments are experienced and understood have a crucial effect on their future affordances, so should be considered integral part of their ontology. This ontology, though, will not describe a fixed structure – rather, the reality of an environment is an ongoing dynamic process. As different affordances of an environment are actualized, its reality is constantly changing to include new understandings, practices and values, or to exclude existing ones.

I also hope to be able to show that my approach can offer practical guidance in pursuing specific goals towards changes and actions. If I propose that environments be understood as dynamic realities affording various experiences and thus including various practices, ideas, values or affections, this is no mere theoretical interest to capture what environments are in their concrete specificity. Understanding what a certain environment is will also entail a case-specific, dynamic process of communication, negotiation and collaboration about the current state and future of that environment. As such, it will provide guidelines for a communicative, collaborative, and democratic course of action regarding environments. It will also offer a general practical criteria for such actions, namely to reveal and keep open as many affordances as possible in a given environment and thus to be able to accommodate as many different experiences as possible.

CHAPTER 1: GLOBAL NOTIONS OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND THEIR ARGUMENTATIVE INNEFICIENCY

The term 'environment' was first used in 1827 by Thomas Carlyle to translate the German term *Umgebung*[8] and it roughly meant the natural circumstances in which a person or a being lives. The more specific, ecological sense (the physical and biological conditions in which an organism develops and lives) is used from the 1950s.[9] Etymologically, the root of the term is the noun *environs* which comes from the French *environs*, the plural of the Old French *environ*, meaning "compass, circuit". This latter word comes from the adverb *environ*, "around", composed of en ("in) + viron ("circle, circuit"), derived from the verb *virer*, "to turn".[10] From these early definitions and the etymology, a couple of questions already arise: Is the environment identical with nature? Do all living organisms share the same environment or do they all have distinct environments that must be considered separately? What is the relationship between the being surrounded and the being that surrounds?

The most important question, for me, regards the scale of the notion of environment: if we understand the environment as the sum total of conditions surrounding a living organism, doesn't this mean that the focus on one living being or another will determine in each case what is surrounded and what is surrounding? So isn't the notion of the environment relative to the *chosen* point of focus? Indeed, one of the most important theses of ecology (the science currently considered the ultimate environmental science) is the contention that each

[8] The context was a Goethe-study and the translation not without problems. For details and textual arguments pointing out that Carlyle omitted the 'affective' sense of Goethe's notion of *Umwelt*, see Leo Spitzer: *Milieu and Ambiance: An Essay in Historical Semantics* (Part 2). *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 3, No. 2, 1942, 169–218.

[9] The ecological sense of the environment takes 'natural circumstances' to be 'physical and biological conditions', thus leaving out other possible senses of nature. Also, ecology identifies persons or living beings with 'organisms' thus opting for a biological understanding of personhood. Both ecological specifications restrict the sense of what an environment is to a scientific-biological sense which is currently the most common understanding of an environment. I will not argue that this understanding is flawed or incorrect; I will merely try to point out throughout this thesis that there are other, richer and more inclusive ways to understand what our environments are than the ecological one that dominates contemporary discourses.

[10] Taken from the Online Etymology Dictionary: http://www.etymonline.com/ accessed on 16.02.2010.

living organism has its own specific environment, which is connected to and overlapping other environments. However, for ecology, the environed being is understood in biological terms, as a certain species. But my question is: can we go one step further? In the specific case of human beings, do we have a single, universal human environment? If we do, what would be the conditions which are universal in all human environments? If we do not, then how do human environments differ from each other and what are the consequences of such differences?

My aim in this thesis is not to provide an alternative definition for *the* environment and not even for environments, in the plural. Instead, I want to argue for a pluralistic approach to specific environments in the sense of relying on many different ways in which environments manifest in human experience in order to capture and understand what a certain specific environment is.

But before presenting this alternative approach, I will start by some negative arguments. I will address the possible candidates for what is meant by *the* environment in current environmental discourses and I will argue for the argumentative inefficiency of global environmental conceptions.

A. Popular substitutes for what environment means

As I already noted in the introduction, environmental philosophy (both in its academic and its more popular form), tends to make unproblematic references to *the* environment, and argue that it is deteriorating, declining, needs protection, and so on. With a few notable exceptions,[11] the question as to what '*the* environment' actually means is not posed. To give a very telling example, in a paper entitled *Meanings of Environmental Terms* and published

[11] For example, David E. Cooper: *The Idea of Environment*. In: David E. Cooper, J. A. Palmer (eds): *The Environment in Question*. Routledge, London, 1992, 163-178. (critical paper); Nigel Dower: *The Idea of the Environment*. In: Robin Attfield, Andrew Besley (eds): *Philosophy and the Natural Environment*. Cambridge University Press, 1994, 143-156. (paper defending the notion of *the* environment).

in the influential *Journal of Environmental Quality* the ten (!) authors manage to define ten terms 'related to the environment' without even questioning what *the* environment could be.[12]

If the question about *the* environment is generally avoided, this is presumably because everyone assumes that there is broad agreement about what is meant by the term. But this is far from being the case. On the contrary, terms and concepts like 'environment', 'nature', 'natural environment', 'Earth', 'the planet', 'ecosystem' are irrevocably tangled up and confused in popular thought,[13] but most importantly, the vocabulary and conceptual confusion is also present in more 'respectable' circles such as NGOs,[14] political[15] and academic discourses.[16]

[12] D. L. Johnson, S. H. Ambrose, T. J. Bassett, M. L. Bowen, D. E. Crummey, J. S. Isaacson, D. N. Johnson, P. Lamb, M. Saul, A. E. Winter-Nelson: *Meanings of Environmental Terms*. *Journal of Environmental Quality*. Volume 26, Issue 3, May-June 1997. Ironically, the authors write in the abstract: "Certain terms and expressions that relate to the environment are problematic in that they vary widely in usage within and between disciplines, and several have been used as synonyms. In an attempt to correct the problem and standardize usage, this paper defines or redefines 10 of the most common environmental terms."

[13] I urge anyone to go to Wikipedia and try to untangle the confused vocabulary – the task seems utterly impossible.

[14] For example *Earthtrust*, http://earthtrust.org/ promote themselves as 'the global innovators for wildlife and the environment' and are 'celebrating 35 years of success at impossible missions for wildlife and the earth'. As a closer look reveals, the organization actually deals with seal, dolphin, and whale protection in specific marine environments. *Nicodemus Wilderness Project*, http://www.wildernessproject.org/ who claim to be 'inspiring humanity to protect our planet' are actually organizing volunteer programs (called 'apprentice ecologists') to collect garbage and focus on increasing local volunteering. At *TakingItGlobal* http://www.tigweb.org/ we also find a curious mix of rhetoric and information about 'the environment' which is identified with 'the earth': "There was a time when people thought of the environment, they thought of its beauty; but now as the natural beauty of the earth that disappears, many people around the world have awoken to the realities of just how fragile our earth actually is." My point is not to criticize these organizations and their work, which is important and admirable, but to point out the gap existing between the rhetorical and promotional level, and the actual actions they perform.

[15] Most European states have environmental agencies. For example, Hungary used to have a Ministry of Environment which was then turned into the Ministry of Rural Development, and still kept the mission of the first ministry: "The Ministry, taking into consideration the three large areas under its auspice (environment, nature, and water protection) would like to fulfill its role as the founding pillar of increased environmental conscience by implementing environmental education and development of ecological sustainability." http://www.kvvm.hu/index.php?lang=2 accessed on 19.07.2012

[16] Bill McKibbon, one of the fathers of deep ecology shifts unproblematically between 'environment', 'nature' and 'Earth', diagnosing the current environmental crisis as *The End of Nature* (Random House, New York, 1989), or using even more surprising terms such as 'American Earth.' Similar uses of terms are to be found at other influential academics such as Erazim Kohák, Aldo Leopold, Carolyn Merchant, Michael Zimmerman, and others.

In this section I will address the three most popular candidates for what environment means in environmental philosophy, and argue in each case for the inefficiency and problematic character of such use of terms.

1. Save the Earth! Save the Planet!

It is not only in popular environmental slogans that we hear the urgent demand to 'Save the Earth!' or 'Save the planet!' Indeed, even more philosophically informed texts sometimes presume that *the* environment that all humans inhabit (thus the referent of the global and singular definition) is planet Earth.[17] And certainly, it seems to make sense to say that all of us inhabit this planet on which life has evolved, since this statement is trivially true. But what does it actually *mean* that we inhabit the Earth? It no doubt means that we live in certain specific earthly environments, with undeniable geographical, climatological, geological, and other differences. So clearly it is never the entire planet that we inhabit at once, but a certain very specific place on it. And it is precisely the specificity of earthly environments that is lost when we identify *the* environment with planet earth.

Furthermore, it seems to me that it is quite incoherent to talk about saving the planet. Planet Earth is small planet in a small solar system in a relatively small galaxy, however, this astrological body is only exposed to astrological conditions and dangers with respect to its existence (for example, the impact of comets, the death of its sun, the collision with another astrological object, and so on). So what would it mean for us to save the planet? To be sure, the planet will not perish because of human pollution. It will certainly change a lot, possibly even rendering life on it impossible, but this is a whole other issue then, namely: how does our behavior influence the conditions for life on this planet. And who is this 'us' that is supposed to save it? Talk about saving the planet is inevitably tied to an abstract and

[17] For examples, see Georgina H. Endfield: *Environmental History*. In: Noel Castree, David Demeritt, Diana Liverman, Bruce Rhoads (eds): *A Companion to Environmental Geography*. Blackwell Publishing, 2009, 223-237, 225.

problematic notion of global human community in which, again, important differences in means, responsibilities, powers and ways of life are lost. [18]

So what is actually meant by saving the planet is one or more of the following: save humanity, save biodiversity, save certain ecosystems, and so on. But all of these different aims need particular considerations, which are lost if we simply identify environment with the planet.

To conclude, slogans of saving the earth are at best metaphors, translated roughly as 'save the conditions for life on Earth.' At worst, the same slogans are signs of hypocrisy or arrogance, equating the existence of a planet to the existence of life on in, and ultimately, with our existence on it.

2. Save nature!

Another very popular presupposition is that *the* environment is 'nature'. Saving *the* environment is commonly expressed in slogans such as: Save Nature! or Nature matters! But identifying *the* environment with nature, rather than solving any of the questions related to our environments, opens a veritable Pandora's Box of conceptual and actual problems, raising more questions than answers. If our environment is nature, then what is nature? The sheer abundance of (often contradictory) meanings and conceptions attributed to the term 'nature' reveals its deep ambiguity. Given the extraordinary popularity of 'nature' in environmental philosophy, it will take a somewhat more detailed analysis to support my claim that identifying environment and nature breeds more problems than solutions.

[18] Tim Ingold also argues that "the image of the earth as a globe, implied in such phrases as 'global environmental change', is one that actually expels humanity from the lifeworld, such that rather than the environment surrounding us, it is we who have surrounded it. Far from reintegrating human society into the world of nature, the idea of the earth as a solid globe of opaque materiality marks their final separation. Thus the biodiversity of locally distributed life-forms presents itself to a universal, globally distributed humanity. The conservation ethic entailed in such a global vision, which places nature on the inside and humanity on the outside, is at once ecocentric and anthropocircumferential." Tim Ingold: *The Perception of the Environment*. Routledge, London & New York, 2000, 154-155.

The heterogonous meaning of the term 'nature'

The terms 'nature' and 'natural' have different meanings in the common use of most European languages. Arguably, three important meanings prevail:

Nature as opposed to the supernatural

In this sense nature is all that is in the visible, experiencable realm of reality. In Christianity[19] and other religions close to it, Judaism[20] and Islam,[21] nature was conceived as opposed and subordinated to the supernatural realm. This conception featured in it an evaluation, with many important consequences: nature was somehow less than the so-called "spiritual world" beyond. All endeavors of making sense of nature were at best tolerated as temporary occupations within the main goal of human life: a break into that other, more valuable, sacred and divine realm of existence. And this way of conceiving nature as somehow "less" turned out to be a powerful value-judgment deeply embedded in the cultures dominated by these religions.

Moreover, even later conceptions which emphasized the sacredness of nature simply reversed the terms of the opposition or collapsed one end (nature) into the other (sacred). For example, different forms of pantheism claimed God to be identical with nature, with the

[19] See Lynn White Jr.: *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis*. *Science* 155.37/1967, 1203-1207. This is a classic text arguing for the Christian roots of our current aggressive and damaging attitudes toward nature, as it reveals the full extent of the contemptuous and despotic Biblical program of exploitation of the earth. Apologetic texts are many, see for example Robin Attfield: *Christianity*. In: Dale Jamieson (ed.): *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*. Blackwell Publishing, 2001, 96-110. In contrast, Judeo-Christian authors are often all too happy to blame humanism, science, or modern philosophy for the environmental havoc, for example see Robin Attfield: *Christianity*, 104-106, or David Albertson, Cabell King (eds): *Without Nature? A New Condition for Theology*. Fordham University Press, New York, 2010.

[20] See Steven Schwarzschild: *The Unnatural Jew*. *Environmental Ethics* 6/1984, 347-362. Schwarzschild argues that Judaism is the religion of alienation from nature (based on absolute transcendence of God, emphasis on life of reason and a human community that is urban, guided by human and religious institutions rather than natural laws) for which the natural world is inferior, worthless, and even evil, as it draws human attention away from matters of the soul and study of the Torah. This view is questioned in Eric Katz: *Judaism*. In: *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, 81-95. This latter, apologetic text focuses on the idea of stewardship and tries to argue that Judaism, in its practices, actually manifested care for the natural world and especially animals. The defense is taken to absurd when Katz suggests early practices of protection of animal species in Judaism and quotes a passage from Leviticus 22:28 that prohibits the killing a cow (or ewe) and her calf (or lamb) *on the same day*! (p. 88) He also stresses that humans are required to care for and be compassionate toward the well-being and suffering of *domesticated animals*. (p. 89)

[21] See S. Nomanul Haq: *Islam*. In: *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, 111-129.

result of projecting certain religious or mystical types of experiences and values onto nature. A modern version of such mystification is stressed several times and by several authors with respect to the Romantic conception of wilderness.[22] In all these examples the arguments and reasons for valuing nature stem from its alleged sacred origin or the presence of the sacred within, i.e. nature's value is derived from the supernatural.

It could be argued that this meaning of nature has lost importance by now, but I believe one can easily identify traces and tendencies of it in many current environmental discourses. Deep ecology's urge to revere nature above all is reminiscent of religious sentiments,[23] and even expressly religious arguments for 'respecting nature' are common and popular.[24]

Nature as opposed to the artificial or the cultural

In this sense nature is taken to be all that is not created by human intervention. We employ this meaning of the term when, for example, we praise someone for their "natural beauty" (we mean free of artificial enhancements) or when we say someone died of "natural causes" (we mean not by human aggression). This meaning and sense of nature incorporates a dualistic logic that opposes matter to mind, nature to society, body to soul, and so on. It has also become and still remains the dominant understanding of nature: whatever is *not* humanly created or crafted. Certainly, this conception too can have many different meanings: nature can be thought of as a place or portion of nature untouched in any way by human intervention (this is roughly the idea of wilderness discussed in the fourth chapter of this thesis), but it can

[22] For example, William Cronon draws attention to a change in the religious sentiments and experiences of wild nature in the second half of the 19th century: "As more and more tourists sought out the wilderness as a spectacle to be looked at and enjoyed for its great beauty, the sublime in effect became domesticated. The wilderness was still sacred, but the religious sentiments it evoked were more those of a pleasant parish church than those of a grand cathedral or a harsh desert retreat." William Cronon: *The Trouble with Wilderness*, 74.
[23] For examples see David E. Cooper: *The Idea of the Environment*, 163-178.
[24] See, for example, Robin Attfield: *Christianity*, 96-110; Eric Katz: *Judaism*, 81-95; S. Nomanul Haq: *Islam*, 111-129.

also be thought of as the underlying non-cultural reality of scientific facts. Also, nature in this sense can either mean not created by humans or not influenced by humans (and note that the two are not the same). But in all these cases, the underlying opposition and logic remains: nature is that which is (in some sense or another) not a human creation.

Arguably, some of the biggest (and I would say, quite unfruitful) debates in environmental philosophy revolve around the nature-culture opposition, or some version of it. Are we part of the natural order ('naturalism') or essentially different from it ('anti-naturalism')? Are we at home in nature or have we ever been? Do we inhabit nature or construct it within our social-cultural world? Does nature have inherent value or all value is imposed by humans? Much of today's environmental philosophy and ethics seems like an exercise in taking sides on these debates; however, the basic assumption shared in all these debates is that nature is (in one sense or another) opposed to culture or society.

The problem with identifying environment and nature understood in opposition to human intervention, is that it rules out the possibility of addressing environmental problems affecting people in non-natural environments (such as exposure to different toxins, access to resources) and environments considered 'artificial' (cities, agricultural lands, or factories). [25]

Furthermore, if the environment in need of protection is nature and nature is all that is not humanly crafted, than it seems that the optimal state of the environment is to be as free of human intervention as possible. Such an ideal is quite dangerous. Given that there are 7 billion people living at this point of history, the ideal of nature free of human intervention might suggest the need to remove some people from the environments they currently inhabit.

[25] William Cronon also argues that focusing environmental action on nature or wilderness preservation rules out important problems of environmental justice. See William Cronon: *The Trouble with Wilderness*, 83.

This raises a whole range of sensitive questions as to who shall be removed and where to, as well as quite suspicious suggestions for reducing human population.[26]

The fact of 7 billion people also makes suggestions of 'returning to nature' or ways of life supposedly more 'natural'[27] illusory and futile. How is this supposed to happen? Where is that nature to return to? Which ways of life are we willing to abandon as 'unnatural'? Of course, an environmental theory or argument is free to take up such position and claim that drastic measurements against the human species are needed. But then any such position should be held openly and ready to answer all the questions and worries that such position implies. If some deep ecologists want to argue for a type of primitivism or return to nature, they should either have a solution as to how such a return is possible for 7 billion people or be ready to have and defend criteria as to who gets to return where and who gets to be "decreased" in such process.

To conclude, identifying environment with nature and idealizing a nature free of human intervention offers no guidelines how to actually inhabit nature or our environments without destroying them. If nature is that (or there) which (or where) we are not, then protecting it means letting it be. But I believe the point of environmental theory is precisely to reveal the possibility of non-destructive human ways of life in environments, and not taking for granted the claim that human intervention is somehow opposed to the flourishing of natural environments.[28]

[26] Even if we all agree that future population growth will have disastrous consequences, the proposed methods to halt population growth or to reduce current numbers are not at all indifferent or unproblematic. For example, Hungary has signed global environmental treaties which state that the human population of the Earth should decrease, but at the same time, Hungarian population growth is encouraged to the point of being rewarded financially by the state.

[27] This suggestion is often proposed by primitivists, and sometimes tacitly promoted by deep ecologist. For example, Christopher Manes in his *Green Rage: Radical Environmentalism and the Unmaking of Civilization* (Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1990) argues against industrial civilization and "a resurgence of the primal culture that has been quiescent since the Neolithic." 237.

[28] In fact, deep ecologists have been charged of promoting such a paradoxical view and thus offering no possibility or insight on how to actually live in nature – the same nature that according to their claim is the

Nature as the inner constitution and structure of a being or organism

In this sense, nature refers to the inherent way of being of particular beings, sometimes also expressed in terms of 'essence' or 'character'. This is also the sense most commonly employed in moral theories that aim to find normative principles founded on what is 'natural', or how the 'natural' way of being of something is. It can also refer to 'human nature', for example in expressions such as 'it is in the nature of human beings to pursue happiness/procreation/power.' The problem with all these references to what is 'natural' is that whatever we regard and call 'natural' has very different evaluative assumptions in different times, cultures, and contexts. For example, some sexual positions are/were considered unnatural hence wrong, certain types of medical treatments are considered natural, hence good, some human institutions, like slavery, were once considered natural and have become unnatural, and so on.[29] So once again, this meaning is not really helpful in addressing environmental questions.

The contingency of conceptions of nature

Beyond the terminological ambiguities associated with the use of 'nature' in environmental discourses, there are a myriad of conceptions and ideas about nature, [30] the sheer abundance of which should warn anyone against an unproblematic identification of nature and environment.

original home of humans. For details about this debate see Bruce Braun: *Nature*. In: *A Companion to Environmental Geography*, 19-36; William Cronon: *The Trouble with Wilderness*, 69-90.

[29] For more examples, see John J. Clarke: *Nature in Question. An Anthology of Ideas and Arguments*. Earthscan Publications, London, 1993, 10.

[30] A number of excellent works deal with such diversity. To name just a few: Robin George Collingwood: *The Idea of Nature*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1945; John J. Clarke: *Nature in Question. An Anthology of Ideas and Arguments*. Earthscan Publications, London, 1993; Michael G. Barnhart: *Ideas of Nature in an Asian Context*. *Philosophy East and West*. Vol. 47, No. 3, Jul. 1997, 417-432; Helaine Selin: *Nature Across Cultures. Views of Nature and the Environment in Non-Western Cultures.* Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003; Dale Jamieson (ed.): *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*. Blackwell Publishing, 2001; J. Baird Callicott, Roger T. Ames (eds): *Nature in Asian Traditions and Thought*. State University of New York Press, Albany, 1989; Michael E. Soule, Gary Lease (eds): *Reinventing Nature? Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction*. Island Press, Washington D.C., 1995.

There is no simple correspondence between certain ideas of nature and certain periods in history, nor between conceptions and cultures. Conceptions of nature are never homogenous, i.e. in any given time or place there are several concurring, complementary or contradictory conceptions that shape people's contact with their surroundings.[31]

So the question inevitably arises: which of the known conceptions of nature is supposed to capture what our environment is? The first problem of identifying nature and environment is that the identification is almost exclusively tacit. Authors tend to identify the two without questioning their relation or arguing for their identity. But in order to support an interchangeable use of 'environment' and 'nature', one should be able to show why the two are identical.

So how would one go about arguing for the claim that the environment in need of protection is nature? No doubt, such a claim would have to be broken down into two questions: what is environment and what is nature. Then we could compare the results and show that the two are the same. My point is that the ontological question about what environment is cannot and should not be avoided by saying (expressly or tacitly) that environment is nature.

And what about the question referring to nature? What do people mean when they say or suggest that we should protect nature? Given that today's environmental philosophy is mostly a Western endeavor it is safe to presume that Western conceptions of nature figure crucially in its arguments, movements, and debates. So in order to understand what is meant by nature, we should try to examine current Western conceptions of nature.

It has been extensively argued that the most commonly accepted Western conception of nature today is highly indebted to the way nature was conceived by the natural sciences

[31] This is even true with respect to a single individual who can have different conceptions of nature at different times, different places or, in general, different life-contexts.

starting roughly from the 17th century.[32] Developed by Mersenne, Gassendi, Descartes, and others, this view explained nature as composed of neutral, interchangeable, mathematically describable and technologically malleable parts that move according to mechanical laws of motion. This approach tells us that in spite of an overwhelming complexity that we experience, nature is just like a machine composed of inert matter, driven and ordered by simple and elegant mathematical principles. Indeed, even today nature is often and most commonly understood as a collection of natural things and processes, plants and animals, "stuff out there." This makes nature something essentially external (i.e. a collection of conditions external to human beings), composed of matter divided into smaller and smaller units, moving (growing and deteriorating) according to more or less predictable laws.[33]

But when we walk through a forest on a nice summer day, our experience of nature does not readily comply with such approaches, and keeps overflowing the frame of the mathematical-mechanistic-formal theory and conception with an abundance of colors, sounds, scents, fearful and beautiful beings, and so on. There seems to be more to nature than matter and laws of motion. Question is, what do we do about these aspects of nature that experience reveals to us? We could label them 'merely' subjective, suggesting that they are not so important in understand what environments really are. Or, on the contrary, we could consider them constitutive in what environments are, and ask how and why such abundance is possible at all. The arguments for taking the second road instead of the first are many. If we want to understand more and better what an environment is, the logical thing would be to include more information, not less. It is not our experience of nature that should be fitted to

[32] For example, see Martin Heidegger: *What is Metaphysics?* In: Martin Heidegger: *Pathmarks*. Cambridge University Press, 1998, 82-96.

[33] "The mechanical view of nature now taught in most Western schools is accepted without question as our everyday, common sense reality-matter is made up of atoms, colors occur by the reflection of light waves of differing lengths, bodies obey the law of inertia, and the sun is in the center of our solar system." Carolyn Merchant: *The Death of Nature*. In: Michael E. Zimmerman (ed.): *Environmental Philosophy. From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*. Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ, 2001, 273-286, 281.

elegant and simple formal definitions,[34] but we should be able to revise our conception of nature to fit the changing, adapting, evolving dynamism of nature as experienced from different perspectives and points of view.

Thus, the main problem in identifying environment with the dominant scientific conception of nature is that the latter leaves out certain experiential features which, in my view, are important if not essential in understanding our environments. The practical consequence is the following. If we are to consider subjective-experiential qualities of environments to be somehow less relevant or secondary to objective, measurable, quantifiable features, we run the risk of overlooking important environmental problems. For example, experiential claims of pollution ("the air at the intersection of Bajcsy-Zsilinszky and Andrassy stinks of car gas) will be disregarded in favor of scientifically determined levels of pollution. The latter only measures pollution in terms of conditions for survival, or to avoid illness, and not in term of quality of life. But our relations to our environment are not merely in these terms, i.e. of surviving. We humans also tend to value aspects of our surroundings deemed 'useless' for survival, such as lack of bad smells, presence of beauty, harmony, diversity, and so on. A conception of nature as matter in motion might be scientifically accurate and useful; however, it might turn out to be less useful in environmental arguments where the attitudes of people are expected to change. In this respect, more affective or aesthetic features of environments should be included.

Certainly, there are several other conceptions of nature which are not as restrictive to formal-mathematical-material laws as the nature as machine conception. So even if we cannot identify environment with a scientifically understood nature, maybe we can identify it

[34] A scientific approach supposes that only experience in strictly controlled laboratory conditions counts as a candidate for valid empirical information. In contrast, I will argue (drawing also from the phenomenological tradition) that everyday experience holds just as much and just as important information about what environments are, and thus should not be dismissed as a source of knowledge.

with other understandings of nature. After all, how dominant or how homogenous is the Western-scientific conception, and if it is dominant, why should that matter at all?

The non-dominance of scientific-materialistic account of nature becomes clear once we turn to consider rival conceptions of nature within the cultural milieu dominated by science. In their introduction to a volume entitled *New Visions of Nature*, the editors argue that present conceptions of nature can be interpreted and categorized according to their position on a spectrum of disciplinary interest ranging from the natural sciences to the humanities. Such interpretation results in five conceptions of nature, ranging from the most scientific to the most humanistic: evolutionary nature, emergent nature, malleable nature, sacred nature, and nature as culture.[35] The concept of *evolutionary nature* is the present dominant scientific vision of nature, entailing that nature and the diversity of living systems is a result and stage of evolutionary processes.[36] According to the concept of an *emerging nature*, which is mostly a product of complex systems theory, nature is an emerging hierarchy of different spatio-temporal scales, so no analysis of its parts can sufficiently explain the whole. The third concept, that of *malleable nature*, claims that the whole of biophysical reality (including humans) is subject to human alteration, and this alteration can include anything from scientific manipulation (for example gene manipulation) to cultural determination. *Nature as sacred* is both a popular and a theological conception, implying that nature is a spiritual reality ruled by spiritual forces. Finally, on the humanities-end of the spectrum the dominant conception of nature is that *nature is produced or constructed by*

[35] Martin Drenthen, Jozef Keulartz, James Proctor: *Nature in Motion*. In: Martin Drenthen, Jozef Keulartz, James Proctor (eds)*: New Visions of Nature. Complexity and Authenticity.* Springer, 2009, 3-18.
[36] Collingwood also draws attention to the fact that the modern scientific vision of nature is based on processes of becoming rather than eternal structures, as some of the critics of this view suppose. Cf. Robin George Collingwood: *The Idea of Nature*, 12-13.

culture (this conception, of course, is based on an epistemological and not an ontological claim).[37]

This already complex net of conceptions becomes even more complicated when we turn our attention to other, more or less powerful and more or less marginalized conceptions of nature, both within and outside our cultural context. Consider personifications of nature[38], animism[39], conceptions of East-Asian religions or myths[40] – these all promote very different ideas of nature, so much so, that we cannot even be sure to be talking about the same thing anymore. If I don't go into details about these conceptions it is not because they are less worthy of consideration, but because my knowledge and insight is limited and I would run the risk of misrepresenting them.

---

[37] For details see Martin Drenthen, Jozef Keulartz, James Proctor: *Nature in Motion*, 4-5.

[38] The Incas conceived nature as the *Pachamama*, the Maori as *Papatuanuku*, both meaning mother earth. Some version of such personification was the dominant conception in all Native American cultures: nature as a nurturing, protecting and sometimes punishing mother. (See James J. Clarke: *Nature in Question. An Anthology of Ideas and Arguments*, 24) In Hinduism Devi Vasundhara was the Goddess Earth, a benevolent provider of nourishment who rules over and cares for her extended family which includes all entities and organisms. (See O. P. Dwivedi: *Classical India*. In: *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, 37-51, 40.) In a remarkable book, *The Veil of Isis*, Pierre Hadot follows the history of another personification and related conception of nature: nature as the goddess Isis who loves to hide and veils her secrets from men. (See Pierre Hadot: *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature.* Harvard University Press, 2006.)

[39] This is the notion and idea that nature is moved and activated by spiritual forces working within all beings. This is/was the dominant conception in Hinduism, some Native American cultures, and shamanistic religions, and it takes many forms and variations. On such a view there is no fundamental difference between humans and the rest of the natural world, everything is inter-related and endowed with spirit or soul.

[40] In Hinduism according to the Vedic tradition there are five elements that compose and sustain everything there is – all beings emerge from them and fade back into them after seizing to exist. These elements are *Prithivi* (earth), *Vayu* (air), *Akash* (space), *Apah* (waters), *Agni* (light or fire). Together they constitute the universe or Brahman which goes on forever. See O. P. Dwivedi: *Classical India*, 38.

Jainism and Buddhism also rely on the Ancient Vedic texts, but they are more influenced and shaped by the teachings of humans. Jainism conveys the teachings of 24 spiritual leaders called *Tirthankaras*, the last of which is said to be contemporary with the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) the source of Buddhism who lived in the 5th or 6th century BC (See Christopher Key Chapple: *Jainism and Buddhism*. In: *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, 52-66, 52.)

Buddhism denies any noumenal reality subtending or transcending the phenomenal realm, and refuses to make any elimination or reduction of the phenomenal reality (See Michael G. Barnhart: *Ideas of Nature in an Asian Context*. 424.) Moreover, this is done by insisting on the emptiness, *Śūnyatā,* of all phenomena, including emptiness itself.

Chinese Taoism and the related Confucian tradition understand the whole of reality as the process of the Tao, the way: a spontaneous and creative interaction of the opposite principles of yin and yang. The Tao is a process of *ch'i*: matter-energy, a vital force which includes what we call the mental, and in fact everything there is. Classical Chinese thought was characterized by so-called correlative thinking, i.e. thinking that recognizes not only analogy or similarity between human and non-human worlds, but effective correlation and interlocking: intricate systems of correspondence between cosmic, natural, and communal events, processes, rhythms, and organizations. (See Karyn L. Lai: *Classical China.* In: *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, 21-36, 21.)

Given such overwhelming abundance of conceptions, which one are we supposed to take to be our environment? One might claim we do not have to choose at all, nature in any sense can be identified with our environment. But the problem is first, that some of these conceptions are contradictory and second, that they rarely admit rival interpretation.

With respect to the contradictory character of ideas of nature, it is not hard to see that if nature is mindless matter it cannot be a person, if its vital energy it cannot be a machine, and if it's a result of millions of years of evolution it cannot be God's creation. The fact that conceptions of nature rarely admit rival conception is related to the point about contradiction. The term nature is used in the singular, just as *the* environment, and such use is always a much or less open claim to exclusivity of one particular conception of nature. And this brings me to another important reason why we should be reluctant to accept tacit identifications of environment and nature. If we do not expressly question what environment is, what nature is, and what their relationship is, we run the risk of identifying the environment with our particular historical and cultural conception of nature or even with a personal preference or inclination.

But what if we do ask the question and do expressly want to argue that the environment in need of protection is nature? In this case, we will need to argue for a specific conception of nature and against others. How do we decide between the many concurring ideas of nature? What will be the criteria in deciding which captures more truly or accurately what nature is? I believe that this is a futile aim. In order to know which one of the concurring conceptions of nature refers more accurately to 'nature as it really is', we should have an objective access to nature 'as it really is' or 'in itself.' We should have an access free of presuppositions and untainted by human affect, error, value-judgment, conceptual tools, and so on. That is to say, we would need an access outside of any specific human perspective. However, such an outside position is not available to us humans. There is no privileged

human position or perspective that would have access to how nature or the environment 'really and objectively' is, if 'really and objectively' means outside of any perspective.[41]

I contend that any claim to exclusivity of a single interpretation of nature or reality is a result of the prejudice of confusing one's own point of view with universal truth. And this is not a mere theoretical danger. Such a claim to exclusivity quickly transforms conceptual differences into specific power relations. If one kind of interpretation, for example the scientific-exact-controlled or the practical-utilitarian, claims exclusive access to the truth about our environments, certain alternative (not necessary contradictory, just different) views, like those or artists, or children, or women, or indigenous people, or hikers, will sooner or later be deemed marginal and disregarded in decision making processes. The examples of conflict I mentioned in the introduction could be construed as warnings about what happens when one conception (for example, that of wilderness) is imposed at the expense of all others.[42]

When I write this I sit at a desk in a small flat which is in a 19th century building on a concrete street in a densely populated district of Budapest. I live in this urban environment which is not nature in any of the senses mentioned above. So how does it help me understand my environment and its problems if I identify environment with nature? It would seem that I do not live an environment. Or that the environment I inhabit is not the object of environmental philosophy at all. And given that today many people live in environments similar to mine, to restrict the concept of the environment to nature in any of the senses mentioned above might have the effect of alienating environmental problems from people's

[41] For an argument that in lack of any privileged perspective on reality one should practice "ontological abstinence" see Jim Cheney: *Postmodern Environmental Ethics: Ethics as Bioregional Narrative*. In: Max Oelschlarger (ed.): *Postmodern Environmental Ethics*. State University of New York Press, 1995, 23-42.

[42] Ramachandra Guha also argues against notions of wilderness claiming that they privilege American experience and geography over realities in the rest of the world. See Ramachandra Guha: *Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Rreservation: A Third World Perspective*. *Environmental Ethics* vol. 11, 1989, 71-83. I will come back to this point in the last chapter when analyzing the practical impacts of ideas of nature, and the idea of wilderness in particular.

everyday lives. If environmental problems concern nature, then they fall outside of city dwellers immediate concerns,[43] become remote problems, such as the need to protect the rainforest, and so on. But the problem is that most of our environmental problems, such as pollution, greenhouse effect, and others, are rooted in industrialized and urban ways of life. So rather than removing such environments from the concerns of environmental philosophy, and concentrating in places that we believe are natural in one sense or another, we should strive to understand the environments we inhabit in their own terms, and not in terms of an opposition between 'artificial' and 'natural' places.

In conclusion, it seems that it is difficult if not impossible to determine just which sense of nature is supposed to be our environment. So contrary to the tendency to identify environment with nature, I believe that nature – in any of the senses presented above – is not identical with our environment, but it is always, to a larger or lesser degree, *part* of our environments in the sense that *ideas of nature* are important aspects of our attitudes towards the surrounding reality. Just because I argue against identifying environment with nature this does not mean that I consider concepts of nature useless in environmental philosophy. On the contrary, I take ideas of nature to play a crucially important role in pluralistic environmental theory and action, as I will demonstrate and exemplify in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

3. Save our ecosystem!

One could say that the ontological question about environments is omitted in environmental philosophy because there is consensus about what environment is, thus the use of term is unproblematic. It could also be argued that environmental philosophy need not question and define what environment is, because such definition is offered by environmental

[43] One could argue that nature is still present in the city and that it is precisely this aspect of cities that is worth protecting or even increasing. This is certainly true, but this 'city-nature' is probably not what most environmental philosophers refer to when they demand care, respect, or protection for nature.

sciences. Indeed, it often seems to be the case that environmental philosophers have some version of scientific definition in mind when referring to environment. The most standard scientific definition of the environment today is given by ecology: "the air, water, minerals, organisms, and all other external factors necessary for the survival and development of a given organism at any time."[44]

Indeed, it seems that today there is a broad consensus that ecology knows best what environment means, so when authors use the term without questioning its content, it is because they refer to an ecological understanding of environments, namely in terms of ecosystem. And certainly, our environment does include these conditions, and no one would question this. However, my question is different: is our environment only composed of necessary conditions for (in this case) human development and survival? Moreover, conditions which are the same "at any time"? Everyone will agree that the reality which we inhabit is infinitely richer and more complex than what can be captured by the ecological definition. The question here is similar to the one I raised with respect to the scientific conception of nature: what can we make out of those aspects of the surrounding reality that are not captured by the definition? Do we deem them unessential, marginal, subjective and,

[44] Definition taken from www.dictionary.com accessed on 16.02.2010.
One could argue that the science most prominently referred to in environmental philosophy, namely ecology, uses its environmental term, ecosystem, mostly in the plural, thus signaling that there are several different ecosystems on the planet. However, on closer examination the ecological conception also turns into one big ecosystem (see the definition quoted above), considering the fact that smaller ecosystems are nested into each other on larger and larger scale until reaching the scale of the global ecosystem in which everything is said to be related to everything. Such an understanding of the environment, with its emphasis on inter-relations, results in a universal functional environment in which all local particularities are reduced to their function within a larger net of relations. Local ecosystems and relations are merely instances of the same global process that connects everything to everything else. So on closer look, the ecological approach to the environment does not turn out to be much more useful than others when it comes to capturing and addressing specificity and uniqueness. There have been other arguments as well against the use of ecology in environmental philosophy, namely that ecology does not seem to be able to provide any normative claims, or rather, it can provide many different, even contradictory normative claims. There are several authors who convincingly argue for this, for example, Neil Evernden: *Constructing the Natural: The Darker Side of the Environmental Movement*. *The North American Review*. Vol. 270, no. 1, Mar. 1985, 15-19.; Arne Naess: *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle. Outline of an Ecosophy*. Cambridge University Press, 1989, 39; David Wood: *What is Eco-Phenomenology*? In: Charles S. Brown, Ted Toadvine (eds): *Eco Phenomenology. Back to the Earth Itself*. State University of New York Press, Albany, 2003, 211-233, 225.

ultimately, unimportant? Or do we strive to include them in our understanding of what an environment is?

For us, humans, the environment we live in is never a mere place for survival. For example, the quality of air does not only mean that is has the necessary amount of oxygen and is free of toxins, but includes smells, some of which are familiar, some strange, some good, and some bad. Also, we are surrounded by many beings and objects irrelevant to our survival – pets, artworks, toys, means of transportation, and so on. All of these contribute greatly to the quality of our lives in the sense that they offer us possibilities of experiences and activities that are not merely about survival and development, but nevertheless belong to the core of being human.

My point is not that the ecological definition is somehow wrong but that it does not capture the complexity of the reality which environs us. Certainly, this is not a mistake of ecology. Ecology is a science with specific aims and goals with respect to which their definition of the environment *works*. My aim is not contrary, but different – I do not wish to find a definition of the environment which would be true of any environment at any time, but I want to understand and capture the complexity of any given environment in its own terms, as the surrounding reality we inhabit, beyond the conditions for survival that it offers. But before presenting my approach I will discuss some of the worries and shortcomings of global conceptions, approaches and arguments referring to *the* environment.

B. The argumentative inefficiency of global notions of *the* environment

As I observed at the beginning, environmental philosophy tends to use the term environment in the singular, without explaining or defining it. Even without supposing that this use of terminology alludes to the planet, nature or an ecosystem, it clearly supposes that there is one global environment and that its singularity is given by some universal features of all specific environments. Indeed, the environment often seems to refer to one big global environment shared by all living species. But what could these universal features of *the* environment be? What is common to my Budapest environment and that of a beaver in Northern Alaska? One could answer many things to this question: point out that they both have air, water, some sort of nourishment, and so on. Everyone would agree that the quality of air is very different in Budapest and in Northern Alaska. But how is the air of *the* environment? Obviously, such a question makes no sense because when we say the environment includes air, we mean this as a formal feature of all environments – that they have air, regardless of what composition and quality. And we could say this about all the 'universal features' of a global environment: the universality of its features is given by their formal character and by the fact that they are abstracted from specific, experiencable qualities of any given environment.

To avoid any misunderstandings, I must stress a few important things with respect to my aims here. I do not wish to argue against the correctness, truth content or coherence of global, scientific or formal notions and definitions of the environment. My worry is solely practical, namely about their efficiency in environmental arguments. And even in this case, I do not believe they are altogether useless or inappropriate. No doubt, there are problems which can only be adequately addressed on a global level, such as climate change, ozone depletion or global warming. Nevertheless, it is also true that most environmental problems,

due to their specificity, cannot be addressed on such a global level, for example questions of environmental justice (like the uneven effects of global warming on people of different social backgrounds), exposure to toxins (industrial or agricultural) of specific human, animal or plant communities, protecting certain animal species from extinction, recycling, and so on.

Furthermore, even global problems identified with formal-scientific measurements and methods (rather than direct experience) such as climate change need to be addressed, communicated, argued for, and fought against locally, given that any solution to halt global warming will have to be implemented in specific places inhabited by specific humans in specific social, cultural, economic, and political contexts. So while I have no doubts that universal concepts of *the* environment address certain real global-scale problems, I have serious doubts as to their efficiency in addressing and solving these problems in concrete, [45] as well as their efficiency to address other, more specific environmental problems.

If I argue against the efficiency of global-scientific notions this does not mean that I also argue *for* local conceptions of any kind. My point is not about the scale of the argument, so whether it regards global problems or local ones. Rather, I want to stress that abstracting or removing environmental problems from everyday human experiences and concerns runs the risk of failing to convince people of anything. In this section, I only discuss the shortcomings of global conceptions in this respect. Later on in this thesis I will also argue as to why linking environments and environmental problems to people's everyday experiences might be beneficial for environmental theory and action.

The following points are, I believe valid against the argumentative suitability of all global notions of *the* environment which suppose one (universal or planetary) environment,

[45] David E. Cooper also argues that the notion of a global environment is distended, too big, as it includes the whole natural order which extends everywhere. David E. Cooper: *The Idea of Environment*, 163-178. Cooper argues more specifically against the universal notion of nature and environment employed by deep ecologists, but also notes the largeness in scope of all tendencies to use the global environment and the environment interchangeably: "even when the adjective [*global* – L.C.] is omitted, the definite article and singular noun indicate that there is just one big environment – the biosphere, the order of things." 165.

including the ones I discussed above. The arguments are interrelated and point towards the necessity of complementing global environmental arguments with arguments closer to everyday lives and concerns.

a. Abstraction and remoteness

How can we arrive at universal notions of *the* environment? We presumably take different environments, compare them, leave out their differences, and keep only their common features. These features, as we have seen above, become more and more formal and more and more remote from any concrete environmental quality. That is to say that we abstract from actual manifest differences of various environments in order to arrive at a universally valid notion which is simple and elegant, and certainly scientifically sound. However, it is also an abstract, bare and neutral concept which is very remote from concrete environments we inhabit and problems we are facing or the measures needed to overcome these problems.

b. Experiential emptiness

In order to abstract from manifest environmental differences, one must leave aside the fact that humans develop differently in different environments. In fact, human experience of the world is irrelevant or at best secondary to universal or objective features shared by all environments. Global environmental concepts leave out all experience as 'merely subjective' in preference for 'objective features'. This is not a mistake in itself, but a conscious strategy and choice of any scientific approach with undeniable scientific benefits both in terms of knowledge and in terms of planning. But I am interested in approaching the environing reality as it is lived, and in this respect, global notions are not very helpful. They are not relevant to my question about what an environment is because they denote a reality that is not

only different in scale from specific environments in which people live, but different in kind. And the main difference is the fact that the reality named by global notions such as the planet, nature, the Earth's ecosystem, and so on is impossible to experience.[46] It is not the reality we live in, but the reality we reveal or deduce with the help of or theoretical-speculative-scientific aptitudes. Certainly, notions like 'the sum total of external conditions necessary for life' bridges through places, times and cultures, it can be learned, thought and understood by everyone. However, one can legitimately ask the question: are universal notions of the environment valid because they refer to a common reality, or rather because they refer to no reality at all? It is clear that abstracting from experience does not get us a common reality in which we all live, only a set of formal features, which, as Arne Naess puts it "belongs to reality, but it is not reality."[47]

c. Shifting responsibility towards specialists

Closely linked to the abstract and experientially empty character of universal notions is the danger of considering such concepts 'the worry' of sciences and specialists. This is a tendency to which environmental protection is highly vulnerable, namely the feeling of lack of agency that many people experience when faced with overwhelming global problems, such as climate change. Most people have only a mediated access to expert institutions that

[46] One could object that the planet can and has been seen from space by some people. But that could hardly be called an environmental experience as it did not turn the planet into the environment of astronauts. In fact, theories and narratives about the global environment were called 'environmentalism through the astronaut's perspective' by Wolfgang Sachs in his *Sustainable Development and the Crisis of Nature: on the Political Anatomy of an Oxymoron*, In: M. Hajer., F. Fisher (eds): *Living with Nature*. Oxford University Press, 1999.

[47] Arne Naess: *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle. Outline of an Ecosophy*, 50. Naess' argument is similar to mine: formal features describe certain important aspects of reality in a certain very specific way, so in this respect, they are not independent from reality. However, since we do not and cannot experience features such as 'space' or 'air', only a specific space and specific air, universal-formal features do not belong to the reality we live in.

analyze, frame, and respond to environmental risks, which results in suspicion and ambivalent attitudes to these experts.[48]

If *the* environment seems and is claimed by specialists to be a scientific reality and if it is defined in scientific terms, it seems almost reasonable to assume that science should deal with them. It might induce the confortable conclusion that is not all of us who are responsible for the fate of our environments; after all, science knows best what environment *really* is, while us 'ordinary folks' have a mere 'secondary' understanding through our varied, subjective, and non-scientific experience of our surroundings. This line of argument is popular, although, of course, not philosophical, and not sound.[49] But since the implementation of successful environmental actions depends on convincing large segments of populations living in very different environmental conditions, it seems highly doubtful that an abstract universal notion would bring environmental worries closer to personal agency and responsibility. On the contrary, it seems to remove and severe it from everyday human concerns, rendering it an exclusive task of sciences.

Certainly, the danger of considering environmental problems the task of specialists does not only arise on a global level, but even when dealing with specific local problems. My point is, however, that this is more easily prevented or overcome by focusing environmental theory, action and arguments on the personal involvement of people with their specific environments, i.e. by revealing how environmental problems or solutions are related to everyone's personal agency.

[48] See Phil Macnaghten: *Embodying the Environment in Everyday Life Practices*. *The Sociological Review*, 2003, 63-84, 68.

[49] This way of arguing is also doubled by another popular cliché, namely the broad tendency to blame science and technology for current environmental havoc. And since 'they' produced the mess, 'they' should be the ones dealing with it and fixing it.

d. Ineffective communication strategies

Against all my arguments in this section one could raise a simple point: it might be the case that global notions and slogans serve more of a rhetorical function than a theoretical one. And it is certainly true that saving the planet, caring for the earth, or demanding reverence towards nature can be construed as simply rhetorical tools in the popularization of environmental issues. However, I have two objections to this contention. First, talk and confusion about such notions as the earth or nature are not restricted to popularizing discourses, but abound in more theoretically and philosophically minded circles as well. Second, if we consider such globalizing talk attempts to popularize and implement ideas about global change, i.e. if their aim is to convince people to become more involved and active, then their inefficiency to reach this goal should be a further argument against them.

An empirical study commissioned by Greenpeace and conducted by Phil Macnaghten in Britain offers ample evidence for all my critical points above. Macnaghten studied people's responses to global environmental symbols and arguments, comparing them to the same people's reaction to environmental issues closer or connected to their own lived experiences.[50] Several different focus group discussions and in-depth interviews revealed that people had a strong, visceral, immediate response to talk about the earth and global issues such as ozone depletion, loss of biodiversity, or global warming; however, this initial emotional reaction quickly settled and was interpreted as problems 'out there', far away and detached from their everyday lives. Accordingly, participants soon declared themselves powerless with respect to such problems, thus relieving themselves of responsibility too. Responses to more localized, specific issues, such as animals in factory farming, the image of a polluted lake or people in smoggy traffic jams, were not as emotional and immediate, but

[50] For the detailed presentation of the research methods and results, including several passages from transcribed conversations, see: Phil Macnaghten: *Embodying the Environment in Everyday Life Practices*, 63-84.

lasted longer and in the end were deemed more thought-provoking. These issues were found to have connections with people's own personal experiences or concerns, and also resulted in clear ideas about people's personal conduct or impact with respect to such problems (for example, buying or not buying meat from animal factories). Macnaghten concluded that "people tend to value their personal environments, not as part of universal and generalized abstractions, but when connected to particular everyday practices and leisure pursuits."[51] These results, as my arguments above, might seem trivial and are certainly not at all surprising. Yet, they remain surprisingly ignored.

The need to contextualize environmental arguments and bring them closer to people's real life concerns has also been stressed in environmental ethics, although it is certainly not a part of mainstream debates. In his article *Narrative, Imagination, and the Search for Intelligibility in Environmental Ethics* Roger J.H. King argues that failing to contextualize arguments – i.e. to fully situate both those who are making an argument and the audience who they wish to appeal to – leads to lack of intelligibility and persuasiveness, to a "disembodied environmental discourse" incapable to influence either 'ordinary folks' or policy makers.[52] King's arguments are very similar to the ones I presented above. He argues that ecocentric notions and arguments (roughly similar to the notions I examined above, but from the field of ethics, so concepts like 'intrinsic value') address abstract audiences and fail to impact particular, historically situated individuals, practices, or policies. Similarly, he shows that the speakers or those constructing ecocentric arguments also "emerge from an abstract and unlocated place."[53] Furthermore, he objects to arguments that only appeal to rational and logical elements of our understanding and do not connect to the 'imaginative

[51] Phil Macnaghten: *Embodying the Environment in Everyday Life Practices*, 69.
[52] Roger J.H. King: *Narrative, Imagination, and the Search for Intelligibility in Environmental Discourses*. *Ethics and the Environment*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1999, 23-38, 23.
[53] Roger J.H. King: *Narrative, Imagination, and the Search for Intelligibility in Environmental Discourses*, 25.

frameworks that structure the audience's expectations, understanding, and practical engagement with the world."[54]

However, King goes beyond a mere pragmatic need to reach and connect to an audience, and suggests that ecocentric concepts and arguments are not only inefficient but sometimes also unintelligible in their own milieu, in environmental ethics. The notion of inherent value of nature is such an idea that was simply taken over from political thought but remains without actual content when applied to non-human beings. The reason is similar to what I argued, namely the lack of connection to lived experiences and possible life practices, which inevitably turns some environmental theories into a kind of fiction, "stories of lives that no one is leading."[55] So King's intentions go beyond mine. He argues that a contextualized approach is not only pragmatically necessary (i.e. in order to make ourselves intelligible and have an influence on people) but also theoretically relevant and indeed, unavoidable for environmentalists and philosophers, in order that they become clear about their own intentions and conceptual apparatus. While I tend to agree with King's arguments, I focus here only on the practical implications and shortcomings of global environmental concepts in order to stress a pragmatic, rather than a theoretical or conceptual point. This way I hoped to make room for the alternative approach I am about the outline, without having to question the soundness or intelligibility of the globalizing points of view.

[54] Roger J.H. King: *Narrative, Imagination, and the Search for Intelligibility in Environmental Discourses*, 26.
[55] Roger J.H. King: *Narrative, Imagination, and the Search for Intelligibility in Environmental Discourses*, 33.

CHAPTER 2: FROM ENVIRONMENTAL EXPEREINCE TO ENVIRONMENTAL PLURALISM

If we pay attention to human experience in a specific environment, the question of what our environments are and how we are environed by them becomes a much more complex and nuanced issue than single global conceptions would have us believe. In what follows I will outline an approach which is an attempt to answer the question 'what is an environment' is from the point of view of diverse everyday experience.

Is ordinary, everyday environmental experience the same in polluted big cities and ice-cold northern plains? Does a 21st century Parisian have the same environmental experience as a Medieval French peasant? Does a hunter have the same experience of a forest as a painter? If the environment were to be understood only in terms of external conditions necessary for life, the answer to all the questions above seems simple: we all experience the same environmental reality in the sense that we all breathe air, drink water, get energy from food, are exposed to climate, and so on. And certainly there are always such common features to human experience. But it seems to me that important nuances and differences are lost by focusing on these common features. Do these common features make up for the disregarded differences? If we want to understand how people inhabit their environments and what their relation to their specific environments entails, doesn't it make more sense to pay attention to experiential differences?

There are several benefits for basing environmental theory and action on human experience. While this would presumably be recognized as a trivial truth by many, it is actually not taken into account in current environmental philosophy. Most authors, even if admitting the relevance of experience, do not make a philosophical point about the overwhelming diversity of environmental experience and its importance for successful

environmental action.[56] Contrary to this attitude, my aim will be to reveal the ontological and practical consequences of the overwhelming difference in the ways people experience and make sense of their surroundings.

First, I will inquire into how environmental experience happens and what its diversity reveals about the surrounding world. I will argue that an approach based on experiential diversity entails a 'fluid' ontology rather than a fixed structure, and reveal the philosophical implications of such an approach. Second, drawing from the ontological arguments, I will inquire into the practical implications of such a fluid ontology and its benefits for environmental action. Third, I will consider some possible counter-arguments to such a pluralistic approach, and finally, I will situate my position among other pluralistic views and theories.

To be able to illustrate the points I will make in this section, it will be useful to start from a concrete example, namely a specific environment. There is a forest next to my home town called Bükk (Beech). Its name refers to the trees that make up this forest and which are, arguably, the most important features of its ontology (i.e. that the forest exists as a place where beech trees are), together with other types of vegetation, numerous species of birds and other animals – to this extent, it is a 'natural' environment. But this forest is administered by the local council and it has paths, clearings with benches, trash cans, and other 'artificial' elements, since it has been made accessible to different kinds of human activities and experiences – to this extent, it is also an artificial (humanly created) place. Furthermore, the

[56] For example, the authors of an important volume that aims to inquire into the possibility of combining phenomenological insight with ecology, all abstract from the overwhelming historical and cultural differences in experiences, and make references to 'human experience' as if it were universal. Charles S. Brown, Ted Toadvine (eds): *Eco Phenomenology. Back to the Earth Itself*. State University of New York Press, Albany, 2003. The result is the same as in the case of universal notions that I addressed above: the notion of a phenomenological environment is just as universal and the others, but this time characterized by 'subjective' or 'practical' conditions rather than 'objective' and 'theoretical' features. So while I value and welcome the attempts to an eco-phenomenology, I believe that it needs to become more sensitive to experiential-hermeneutical-cultural differences.

forest also has a legal status: it is a nature-reserve within legally defined boundaries. This has important consequences regarding ownership, rules of administration, and the duties and rights of different persons and organizations with respect to this forest – to this extent, the forest is a legal entity. The locals attach various recreational and emotional values to this forest, some praising it for its clean air, others for its beauty, yet others for the possibility of studying different species of birds in it, and so on – to this extent, it is also a symbolic entity. But inevitably, this forest is also an economic entity. In the past 20 years larger and larger segments of the forest were cleared to build houses and a shopping mall, despite its legal status as a protected area. This was possible due to the fact that economic interests were able to influence the decisions of the local council in the sense to modify the legal boundaries of the reservation to allow deforestation and construction. Civilians and environmental organizations are in constant conflict with such political-economic practices, in an attempt to prevent further destruction of the forest. To this extent, the forest is also a site of a complex power-struggle. This list could go on to show that the forest is also a scientific, aesthetic, or political entity.

To understand what Bükk forest is and to build an efficient environmental project for its protection, it will not be enough to selectively consider one or a few of the different modes of being of the forest. However one would wish to claim that it is an entirely natural environment, its artificial elements would resist such classification (and vice-versa). However one would want to deny its legal or economic mode of being, such legal and economic aspects are just as part of what the forest is as the trees and rocks are, in the sense that the sheer being and future development of the forest as an entity depends on these 'human' aspects.[57]

[57] In another telling example, Cronon inquires about the ontological status of Rocky Mountain Arsenal, in Denver, Colorado. This place was a designated place for the disposal of toxic waste but during the course of

My aim, however, is not to point out the obvious that a forest can mean different things to different people, but to argue that this forest *is an essentially pluralistic entity and that is why it can mean different things to different people.* In what follows I will argue that the forest is a pluralistic reality in the sense that it affords different experiences and understandings which, in turn, influence the range of possibilities that the forest affords. The pluralism that I aim to reveal is threefold:

- First, it refers to the plurality of possibilities that any environment affords in terms of experience and understanding.
- Second, it refers to the uniqueness of each environment in terms of its 'affordances', i.e. to the difference of one environment from the other. This is why I propose that the term 'environment' should rather be used in the plural.
- Third, it refers to the plurality of elements that count as essential in the being of an environment, namely to the fact that feelings, ideas, values, or attitudes are just as essential in understanding what an environment is as trees or rocks or any other 'material' or 'objective' features.

In the next section I will argue for plurality in all of these senses, taking my clues from everyday environmental differences and examining the philosophical conclusions to be drawn from such experiences.

several years a rich plant and animal eco-system has emerged on top of the toxic dump. So the question emerges: is this a natural environment or an artificial one? Which of the two aspects should prevail? Should it be preserved as a toxic dump or as a natural site? See William Cronon: *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature,* 27-28. According to my arguments here, it is a matter of negotiation which mode of being prevails over the other.

A. The ontological consequences of experiential diversity

As the example of Bükk forest illustrates, there are many kinds of human experiences in a given environment. Not only different people have different interactions with the forest, but one and the same person can have various experiences and ideas about it. For example, if I walk through the forest on a nice summer day, this experience and my 'idea' of the forest will be very different than the ones I will have if I get lost in the forest during the night. So what changed between day and night and what are the consequences of such different experiences for environmental theory and action? This will be the main question that I will attempt to answer in this section.

To start, it will be useful to consider what an environmental experience is, or to be more precise: what does it mean to experience an environment and how does such an experience unfold? The most basic condition for having an experience of a certain environment is actual, immediate bodily contact and involvement with that environment. Experience is first and foremost a bodily encounter. To experience an environment is to be exposed to it through our senses (possibly all of them), to get up close to its texture, i.e. to *live* the perceptual, practical, or theoretical possibilities that a certain environment offers us. The condition of actual, sensuous, bodily involvement is all the more important as such an experience implies closeness and intimacy, and thus yields immediate or 'first-hand' understanding of specific environments. This understanding, however, need not be propositional (it need not be a consciously held theoretical stance) but it can be (and most of the time actually is) practical, affective, or evaluative. But in all these different forms, understanding is always situated, in the sense that it is shaped and determined by the concrete circumstances of experience, i.e. on the context of experience.

This is to say that different bodily encounters with an environment result in different ideas, attitudes, values and actions with respect to this environment. And this is because 'normal' everyday experience reveals to us that our access to the surrounding world is not a purely mechanical response to material-physical stimuli. We do not experience patches of light reflecting from the surfaces of solid bodies, but colorful objects; we do not experience indiscriminate sounds, but birds singing or cars passing by. It could be objected that we do experience according to mechanical laws and only then we go on to interpret the information we receive from the environment with the help of our conceptual or linguistic apparatus. However, we are clearly not aware of having two sets of experiences: one mechanical-material- not interpreted and other projecting meaning upon the first.[58] Rather, we always already experience our surroundings as meaningful. That is to say that we always take everything we experience to be in some way or another, in the sense that we act, feel or evaluate it as being present and being somehow. As such, every experience is a specifically human way of making sense of the world, be it practical, theoretical, emotional, or scientific.

1. Hermeneutical reality

The sheer presence of humans in any given environment is always a hermeneutical presence in the sense that our awareness of our surroundings is an interpretative awareness, even if this interpretation is implicit (in the sense that it doesn't amount to a coherent theory about what or how that environment is). When I get lost in the forest and I am afraid, my fear is an interpretative attitude without being a full-blown theory about the forest. And this is because my fear is my way of understanding the forest as a potentially dangerous place - this is evident from my feelings and my actions, not necessarily from any ideas that I entertain at

[58] Tim Ingold also argues that we humans do not have two different sets of experiences: one as biological organisms reacting automatically when affected by outside stimuli, and another as cultural beings interpreting, constructing and imposing meanings. Rather, we experience the world around us at once, as unitary persons. See Tim Ingold: *The Perception of the Environment*, 3-5.

that moment. Or consider another example: if I walk in the forest to pick berries or mushrooms, my activity there is also a way of interpreting the forest as a place where berries and mushrooms can be found. And if someone else walks through the forest and sizes up trees estimating their value on the timber market, this person interprets the forest as resource, even if the thought 'this forest is financial resource' does not cross his mind.

I will call these interpretative elements present in any environment (where human are present) the hermeneutical reality of that environment. This notion is similar to what Martin Drenthen, following Nietzsche, called 'appropriations', [59] namely all human ways of making sense of the surrounding reality (of 'appropriating it', 'making it accessible to ourselves'), from the more practical to the more theoretical ones. To explain what I mean by the term hermeneutical reality, two further clarifications are necessary. First, I call these different ways of understanding an environment hermeneutical not because I consider environments 'texts' to be interpreted, but because I consider all our activities, attitudes, values and ideas to reveal something about that environment – they are hermeneutical because they interpret that environment one way or another, even if this interpretation doesn't become explicit. Second, I call this aspect of an environment its reality because I consider human ways of making sense of an environment just as part of that environment as stones or trees are. To be more precise, I consider them inseparable from stones and trees because the hermeneutical reality of an environment is not an 'ideal' linguistic, conceptual or cultural meaning superimposed on a meaningless reality. I will come back to this point later.

For now I will contend, following the examples above, that the hermeneutical reality of an environment is composed of very diverse and even contradictory elements. This might even seem trivial to point out. But my question is: where does this diversity of experiences

[59] Martin Drenthen: *Wildness as a Critical Border Concept: Nietzsche and the Debate on Wilderness Restoration*. *Environmental Values* 14**,** 2005, 317–337, 329-330.

and understandings stem from? What makes it possible, what is its source? Why is it that different people (or even the same person) can have contradictory attitudes, values, or ideas with respect to the same forest? And what are the implications of such diversity with respect to a given environment?

The first possible answer to these questions is the constructivist view. Those who hold this stance argue that since the only access we have to nature (or our environments) is through our own points of view, conceptions, practices, and aims, there is no possibility to access reality in itself objectively.[60] The consequences of such a claim vary from author to author, but usually involve some version of 'culturally constructed nature'. While I agree with this basic epistemological claim of constructivist views (namely that we have no objective access to reality), I disagree with the conclusion often drawn from it, namely that all of 'nature' is actually culture in the sense that nature is through and through shaped and influenced by cultural factors such as human conceptions, aims, or activities. I believe this conclusion remains within the logic of the nature-culture opposition, but it collapses the terms of the opposition into one end, namely culture. However, such a conclusion is based on the acceptance of the original contention: whatever can be qualified as culture, cannot be nature, and the other way around, whatever is nature cannot also be cultural. So can we question such a contention?

To go back to my original question as to the source of hermeneutical diversity, the answer to this following from a constructivist stance will be to argue that hermeneutical diversity is due precisely to the fact that all ideas about reality are constructed, thus contingent attempts to make sense of the world. Or, to put it even more clearly: our understandings are diverse and contingent *because* they are constructed, i.e. conventions that

[60] For an extreme constructivist view see Lawrence E. Hazelrigg: *Cultures of Nature. Essay on the Production of Nature*. University Press of Florida, 1995. For an attempt to reconcile constructivism with realism, see Sarah Whatmore*: Hybrid Geographies. Natures, Cultures, Spaces*. Sage Publications, London, 2002.

can go either way. This implies that it makes no sense to look for their reference in a non-constructed reality and thus to decide about their 'correctness'. If all of reality is made up of different 'appropriations', the only way in which we can decide between them is by examining their coherence, and not their reference. So, for example, Bükk forest is a culturally (or, in my terms, hermeneutically) constructed reality because all of our attempts to make sense of it (all of our answers, definitions given to the question 'what is Bükk forest') are human constructions, inventions, as it were, with no possibility to access any further reality of the forest. And all those ideas about nature that I mentioned in the first chapter are contingent conventions too, just a matter of how humans choose or prefer to construct reality (consciously or unconsciously).

But if this would be the case, then why are these conceptions held rather than others? And most importantly, can we have any criteria to decide which one is more appropriate or more detrimental to environmental action? This is where the main problem of all constructivist stances becomes evident: there remains no sense in talking about human intervention or modification or destruction of the surrounding world anymore, if all human interventions only affect a reality that is humanly constructed anyway. So if everything is culturally constructed, it makes no sense to talk about 'real' changes anymore. If we cannot coherently talk about an independent reality, i.e. an environment independent of our ways of making sense of it, there is no way of deciding which of our actions or attitudes, i.e. which of our 'constructions' are more beneficial or more destructive than others. So in a constructivist stance environmental questions or interventions basically lose sense as they have no reference to reality.

Contrary to these constructivist conclusions, I hold that just because we cannot determine if or how our ways of making sense of the world refer to an objective reality, it does not have to follow that they have no link whatsoever to an underlying reality or that the

forest itself has no reality outside these constructed ones. So in what follows I will attempt a different answer to the question of hermeneutical diversity, one that is able to preserve basic realism about the surrounding world.

My experience of Bükk forest presents me with trees, stones, flowers, birds, paths, and benches. Just because these were all named and categorized by humans (some of them even planted or manufactured by humans) and just because there are certain pre-conceived ideas or attitudes about them, does this make them cultural products? Or, to put it in more radical terms, just because our ways of making sense of them are contingent, does this make trees or stones exist in a way that is contingent to our construction? When I touch the bark of an old beech tree, I am aware of its presence and existence independent of any definitions, classifications or even feelings I might have toward it. Just because I also make sense of it in a myriad of different ways, when I touch it I am not at all inclined to consider it a cultural product. Ordinarily and for the most part I am not experiencing an interpretation but a tree. And this is true of other elements of our environments too. Just because our ways of making sense of animals, other people, mountains, or cities are constructed (culturally, socially, linguistically, and so on), this does not mean that they do not have their autonomous existence and reality, where by autonomous I mean not created by us and independent of our attempts to make sense of.

2. Autonomous reality

I will argue then, that it is precisely experience that prompts us to preserve a basic realism about the autonomous existence of the surrounding world.[61] To recognize that all human ways of making sense of the world are culturally constructed and contingent, this is NOT to say that the world surrounding us is somehow less real, nor that it does not exist

[61] Drenthen's position is similar, as he argues for the basic and impenetrable otherness of nature in *Wildness as a Critical Border Concept*, 327.

without our interpretative presence, nor that the autonomous reality of the world is completely severed from human understanding. The arguments I will now provide by referring to lived experience.

First, there are certain experiences in which we can actually experience the autonomy of our surrounding world. These experiences reveal to us the limitation of all our approaches to our surroundings by revealing the fact that our surroundings or objects or aspects of it keep overflowing our approaches – we experience this by becoming aware that our attempts to understand, conceive, classify and control do not fit neatly and certainly do not exhaust reality. We sense that there will always be more to the surrounding reality than we can grasp or explain or understand. I call these types of experiences boundary experiences as they reveal the limits of our understanding. I argued elsewhere that the experience of the sublime is such a boundary experience facing us with the utter otherness and indifference of 'nature' (i.e. an experience of failure to capture, understand, exhaust, order, structure or control a certain environment).[62] Drenthen offers a similar argument that the experience of wildness can make us realize the break-down of all our categories with which we attempt to understand and explain nature.[63]

But these experiences reveal something else too, namely that there is a reality and autonomous existence to the surrounding world that is outside our reach, does not depend on us and remains indifferent to our attempts to make sense of. This is what Drenthen calls the otherness of nature,[64] and what I will call it the autonomous reality of any environment,

[62] For example, when immersing oneself in the image of a clear starry sky, or being exposed to a powerful thunderstorm, one might experience that one's previous ideas about nature did not capture everything about nature, or worse, that maybe they missed something essential about it.
Other examples for boundary experiences include Heidegger's boredom, Sartre's nausea or Camus' absurd. See Lippai Cecília: *The Sublime as Boundary Experience of Nature*. *Philobiblon*, vol. XIV, 2009, 48-71.

[63] Martin Drenthen: *Wildness as a Critical Border Concept*, 329.

[64] For Drenthen the otherness of nature also has ethical connotations, it is morally significant. I am only concerned with the ontological sense of otherness here, so for me the otherness of environments has a primarily ontological meaning. I do agree with Drenthen that on the recognition or realization of such radical otherness or autonomy of nature significant ethical principles might also be based, such as awe or respect for the dignity of

namely the obtrusive but negative presence of our immediate surrounding world in our experience. This presence is negative in the sense that it appears in our experience as a certain inexhaustibility by any or all human attempts to grasp.[65] Examples might include very different experiences, from giving birth to witnessing death, from encounters with wild animals to being lost in strange places, from thunderstorms to starry skies. I am of course not claiming that these experiences every time and necessarily reveal the otherness or inexhaustibility of the surrounding reality, but that they have the potential to induce feelings of inadequacy, of not being able to capture or understand. Such incapability, in turn, can result in awareness of the problematic character of any reduction of an environment to a single interpretation. By reducing an environment to one way of understanding it, we also reduce the affordances or possibilities available to us, and thus limit what that environment can be or become. On the contrary, when experiencing the ungraspable complexity and irreducibility of reality to any of our human ways to make sense of it, we not only reveal its autonomy from us, but also what Heidegger called the dignity of its being, the sheer fact that it is and it is present!

The examples I listed above for boundary experiences might suggest that such occasions capable of revealing the autonomous reality of our environments are rare and somehow extraordinary. But I believe that even ordinary experiences hold the potential to reveal to us the inexhaustible reality of our surroundings, for example when we realize how very different our experiences of one and the same place can be. If I compare my experience of Bükk forest during the day with my experience of it during the night, what this difference reveals to me is not that I have constructed the surrounding reality differently, but that the

the surrounding reality. But since such ethical considerations far exceed the limits of this thesis, I will only refer to them briefly and concentrate on ontological senses of otherness or autonomy.

[65] Just because we cannot make sense of this givenness (or being) of the surrounding reality, it does not stop being present in our experiences. On the contrary, the self-givenness of the world is all the more obtrusive and evident the less it fits into our expectations and categories.

surrounding reality is autonomous from my interpretative grasp and it doesn't conform to either of my ideas of feelings – the forest is present and manifest irrespective of my contention that it is beautiful during the day and to my fear during the night. Furthermore, we can also become aware of the limitation of our approaches and the autonomy of the surrounding reality when we are confronted with the experiences of others, i.e. when others reveal their ways of making sense of the same place, and we find that they are quite different from ours. For example, if I compare my experience of accidentally falling into a lake with the experience of a diver in the same lake, it becomes clear that the lake is a reality independent of our activities within. It could even be argued that any experience has the potential to become boundary experience - if an experience can make us question the conformity of our own taken for granted categories, conceptions or attitudes to reality, it also has the potential to reveal to us the autonomous existence and indeed, the dignity of the surrounding world.

So far I have argued that experience reveals to us the autonomous existence of our environments. This would still not offer a different explanation for the diversity of the hermeneutical reality of an environment from the constructivist view. Constructivists can still claim that even though we conclude that environments have such an autonomous reality, since this reality is inaccessible, inexhaustible and never fully conforms to any of our attempts to name, categorize, order or understand, these attempts remain mere cultural conventions superimposed on an unknowable reality. So in order to provide a different explanation for their diversity, further arguments are needed, namely, I would have to show that there is a relation between the autonomous and the hermeneutical reality of any given environment. In what follows, I will argue that such a relation can be revealed by paying attention to the unity of experience in which our interpretative presence in an environment is never severed or separated from the autonomous presence (or reality) of that environment.

3. The co-generative relation of autonomous and hermeneutic realities

When I experience an environment, for example plant flowers in a garden, *what* I experience (plants, soil, digging, heat, and so on) and *how* I experience it (as plants, as soil, as green, as black, as exhausting, and so on) ordinarily and for the most part form a unity. As I argued before, I am not aware of experiencing something and then interpreting it. Any separation between the environment and my interpretative presence within is an ulterior act, prompted either by a boundary experience I described above (so when my understanding breaks down and proves unfit or limited) or by a theoretical attempt to give an account of either my surrounding or myself or the relation of the two. But in its original, unreflected mode of unfolding, experience occurs as the mutual and inseparable presence of the surrounding world and our making sense of it.[66] The autonomous presence (being) of the surrounding world and our interpretative presence within are fused in lived experience.[67]

To see the philosophical implications of such an original relation (in fact, fusion) of the autonomous and hermeneutical features of an environment, it will be worthwhile to start again from examples. Consider again two qualitatively different experiences one might have when walking in the forest during the day and when being lost in it during the night. This experiential difference can hardly be explained by the fact that I have or entertain different (constructed) ideas of the forest. This would imply that I fear the forest at night because I now have (or construct) a different understanding of it from the one I had during the day. But why do I have a different understanding now, why did my way of making sense of the forest change? Constructivists cannot give an answer to this question: since both of my

[66] This is why, in a sense, the expression 'environmental experience' is a tautology, as there is no experience that is not environmental – all experiences are of an environment understood as such and such. But does this mean that, for example, reading about an environment, or seeing pictures of it does not qualify as experience? Obviously, this experience, too, has its own environment, which is, however, the environment of the reader, not that other environment of which one merely reads or sees pictures.

[67] I will come back to this point and discuss it in more detail in the third chapter, when considering Patočka's asubjective phenomenology which is based on the unity of appearance and awareness of such appearance.

understandings are conventional and constructed, nothing can account for the change occurring in my understanding after sunset.

Does it not make more sense to suppose that my different ways of understanding are different because of the qualitatively different experiences that I have? That is to say that there is some discontinuity in my experience (in this case, a qualitative difference in my visual experience in light and in darkness) and this is not sufficiently explained by the fact that I can construct or entertain different ideas about reality. On the contrary, I presumably construct different ideas about this reality precisely to note the qualitative difference that I experience.[68] So the answer to the question about the diversity of understandings is in the diversity of experiences.

But this still does not explain why or how we can have different experiences of the same reality. What makes it possible for us to have different experiences of Bükk forest? Since we saw that experience unfolds as the unity of an autonomous presence and our hermeneutical presence, and since our hermeneutical activities cannot sufficiently explain qualitatively different experiences, I propose that it makes sense to presume differences in experience to stem not from contingent cultural conventions but from different **affordances** that reality provides for us in terms of experience. That is to say that the autonomous reality of Bükk forest (although we cannot access it epistemologically, only through the non-conformity of our attempts) is such that it affords or allows or makes possible different experiences, which, in turn, result in a myriad of different ways to understand (construct) that forest. I will try to explain this idea in more detail.

[68] To make this point clearer, consider another example. When I hold a bird in my hand, I can hardly doubt its presence, and I hardly ever separate it from my understanding of it (that it is a bird). If I let go of the bird and turn to a tree next, the qualitatively different tactile sensation of touching the tree bark will be different from the sensation of touching the bird, and it is this difference that prompts me to understand the tree as different from the bird, thus to name it differently, and so on.

When I say that the autonomous reality of a forest *affords* different experiences and hermeneutical realities, by this I mean two things. First, that there is no experience without something presenting itself in it, so in this sense, the presence of an environment makes all or any experiences possible. Second, I also mean that a certain specific environment (or even certain specific being, such as a tree) provides the possibility of certain experiences, and not others. There are always a set or range of experiences that are possible in and of that environment (or tree). If I talk about affordances here is to emphasize that the relation between the autonomous reality of an environment and its hermeneutical reality is not fully determined and it is not causal. I am not arguing that certain features of autonomous reality must and will cause certain experiences and thus interpretations to occur. If this were the case, we would not have an abundance of different experiences or conceptions of the same forest. Rather, the relation between the autonomous and hermeneutical reality of a forest is potential in the sense of affording (providing) a set of different possibilities, some of which are actualized, some not, but all of which occur within the limits circumscribed by one set of possibilities and not others. For example, a forest affords different experiences than a lake just as a tree offers different experiences than a bird. Taking this observation one step further I would also argue that these different sets of affordances make up the ontological difference between a forest and a lake. Some of these experiences overlap some do not. I can admire (have a visual experience) of both the forest and the lake, although the two experiences will necessarily present some qualitative differences. I can walk, run, sleep, hunt or climb trees in a forest, but I cannot swim in it, nor can I sleep in a lake.[69] So when I say that a certain environment affords certain experiences, this does not mean that it causes or determines

[69] In the same vain, I can consider a tree many things, I can use it in many ways, and I can have very different experiences of it; however, I cannot consider it identical with a bench next to it, I cannot push it 5 meters to the left and I cannot drink it.

them, but that it makes them possible – and that it makes certain experiences possible and not others.

So what does this tell us about the hermeneutical reality of the forest? Since I argued that the overwhelming abundance of the hermeneutical reality (i.e. the various ideas, attitudes, values or practices) stems from various environmental experiences and since the various experiences we have of the forest are actualized possibilities afforded by the forest, it follows that the hermeneutical elements of this environment are **embedded** in the autonomous reality of the same environment. By embedment I mean that they are to some extent shaped, though never fully determined by the set of experiences afforded.[70] Important works in the history of cultures and civilizations reveal the complex and deep connections between ideas about the surrounding reality and experiences afforded by that same reality.[71] I will dedicate the fourth chapter of this thesis to provide examples for this claim and to inquire into its important practical consequences for environmental theory and action.

For now, I want to go back to the idea that the hermeneutical reality of an environment figures just as importantly in its ontology as the autonomous reality of the same environment. Just because we cannot have a single correct understanding of an environment, this does not make our attempts 'unreal' or merely invented. First, they are real in the sense

[70] It would be useful to prevent some possible misunderstandings here. When I argue that ideas, values, attitudes, and actions are shaped by experiences and thus embedded in environments, I do not deny, in any case, the role of human creativity and freedom in constructing myriads of different interpretations, theories, and so on, about reality. I do not want to deny that a substantial part of our hermeneutical reality is indeed constructed through human convention, imagination, and invention. However, I do not subscribe to the contention that the hermeneutical reality is a purely conventional one, solely and completely determined by human creativity. On the contrary, it is precisely the abundance of our different ways of making sense of reality that brings about the experience of their non-conformity with something else which cannot be exhausted by any or all of our categories. I also do not subscribe to a dualistic view which would claim that our ways of making sense of the world are contingently superimposed on a meaningless or 'raw' reality, because experience reveals that they are shaped by the autonomous reality of the surrounding world.

[71] For example, see Felipe Fernandez-Armesto: *Civilizations, Culture, Ambition, and the Transformation of Nature*. The Free Press, New York, 2001; J. Donald Hughes*: Ecology in Ancient Civilizations*. University of New Mexico Press, 1975; J. Donald Hughes: *The Environmental History of the World*. Routledge, 2009; Owain Jones: *After Nature: Entangled Worlds*. In: *A Companion to Environmental Geography*, 294-311, 297.

of stemming or resulting from experiences afforded by that environment, so in the sense of being embedded in the autonomous reality of any environment.

Second, hermeneutical elements are to be considered real parts of an environment because they have important practical implications that effectively determine the future fate of that environment. The ways in which humans intervene and modify their surroundings, depend on ideas and attitudes about 'nature', humans, reality, as well as politico-economic powers and interests, and so on. So the conceptions, values, interpretations and categories at work in different perspectives about a specific environment are not merely theoretical or discursive disagreements but have practical and even ontological consequences: they can modify an environment's set of affordances. Here is what I mean: if a beech forest is considered exploitable for short-term economic benefits, this idea or attitude certainly does not capture and it definitely does not exhaust what that environment is; but nor would any other idea. However, if such an idea somehow gains privilege over others, the attitudes and actions that follow from it could have the effect of clear-cutting the forest and replacing it with a shopping mall. Such activity will have effectively modified the ontology of the forest and not only its hermeneutical reality: the place has not only become a different cultural construct (a mall instead of a forest) but an altogether different environment, with a different autonomous reality affording different experiences. Or, to give another example, the idea that 'nature' is a place without human intervention can, paradoxically, result in practices of excluding humans from that place, (as it happened in many of the examples cited in the introduction) thus effectively rendering human experience of that environment impossible. These and other examples show that ideas about our environments are not merely held but performed.[72]

[72] Martin Drenthen offers an excellent case study about how different ideas about natural environments are enacted, performed, and negotiated in a particular place when it comes to deciding the future of that place. See

My point is also that the autonomous being of a forest and its hermeneutical elements are not simply added to each other as different realms or levels of reality, but mutually shape and generate each other.[73] At any given time a certain environment will afford certain experiences and thus shape the hermeneutic reality of that environment. In turn some or all elements of the hermeneutical reality have the potential to shape the set of possibilities that the environment will have in the future. Although none of our attempts to make sense of an environment can fully explain what that environment is, nevertheless, their outcome will effectively modify the ontology of that environment, limiting or changing its affordances. In this sense, limiting the range of interpretations that are deemed significant with respect to an environment is at the same time violence towards the potential richness of affordances, i.e. violence against the environment itself as a field of possibilities. And this is because actualizing certain possibilities (for example, the possibility to clear-cut the forest) will overpower and ultimately make some other possibilities disappear (for example, the possibility to sit in the shade of a beech tree).

To conclude, environments are no mere 'conditions for life' composed of air, soil, geography, climate, and biological organisms, but complex places that afford different

Martin Drenthen: *Developing Nature along Dutch Rivers: Place or Non-Place*. In: *New Visions of Nature*, 205-228.

[73] The hermeneutical background within which our experience occurs is not a cultural reality different and opposed to a natural reality. Rather it is a realm that can include elements from both ends of the traditional divide. A certain landscape (for example, that of my childhood) can be part of the hermeneutical background in which I experience other places where I move or travel. The same is true of the autonomous reality, which, as I already mentioned, is not describable by the term nature. This is not a realm independent of human intervention, as it can very well include artificial elements or objects as well. That is to say that not only the trees or stones of our surrounding have autonomous reality overflowing human attempts to make sense of, but so do buildings, cities, or machines. First of all, many of our 'artifacts' are made of and contain so-called natural materials. And second, even if they were once constructed by humans, they too can be experienced to possess autonomous being independent of out ordering ideas or categories. For example, just because a city was built by humans, this does not make it less autonomous or more exhaustible/controllable by human understanding. In fact, there is an entire science dedicated to cities, namely urban studies, which reveals the independent 'life' of cities from our ways of making sense of them. Third, cities are just as complex of ecosystems as forests are, it is just that they have a differently mixed ontology in that they offer a different set of affordances; they too are natural and artificial beings at once, it is just that the scale or degree or importance of the artificial aspect is larger than in the case of forests. In both cases, what the forest or a city actually is should be understood as a result of a complex negotiation process between different people for which that environment affords different experiences.

experiences and various modes of understanding. The ways in which environments are experienced and understood have a crucial effect on their future affordances, so should be considered integral part of their ontology. This ontology, though, will not describe a fixed structure – rather, the reality of an environment is an ongoing process, a dynamic of actualizing possibilities and thus constantly modifying the range of possibilities that are open. As different affordances of an environment are actualized, its reality is constantly changing to include new understandings, practices, and values, too, or to exclude existing ones. Thus we could say that an environment is always the outcome of complex interactions with that environment, because such interaction constantly re-shape and re-structure both the hermeneutical and the autonomous reality of an environment. To explain what I mean, and to be able to show that our environments offer us more possibilities than we can actualize in one experience, the question of environmental boundaries has to be raised.

B. The fluidity and flexibility of environmental boundaries

If I said that environments should be used in the plural and considered as processes of becoming consisting of an autonomous reality affording various hermeneutical realities, the next question has to be this. How do we delimitate, identify and differentiate one environment from another? And how do we identify structures (or beings) within an environment? As I have already argued, experience shows us the surrounding world as having qualitative, sensible discontinuities: we can sense the visual difference between day and night, the tactile difference between a bird and a tree bark, the auditory difference between two birds singing (or silence), and so on. Such discontinuities in the surrounding world signaled by qualitative differences in experience, I will call *bona fide* boundaries,

following Barry Smith's theory and classification of boundaries.[74] Examples include the boundary between a tree and its surrounding, the boundary between a lake and a forest, or the boundary between me and my environment. On the other hand, *fiat* boundaries are introduced by human convention and can but need not overlap with *bona fide* ones. For example, the equator, county-limits, the limits of Bükk forest, or the limits of continental waters are *fiat* boundaries.

Of course, this classification is much more complicated than a simple opposition of physical and mentally drawn boundaries. There are discontinuous and vague boundaries, for example the boundary between a mountain and a valley. There are also combinations of *bona fide* and *fiat* boundaries. For example, the boundary of Bükk forest protected area was drawn by human fiat, but on one end it runs on an experiential discontinuity (end of the forest and beginning of residential areas) while on the other it doesn't (here Bükk is conventionally delimited from another forest, which is not protected, although there is no discernable discontinuity between the two). But what is most important, on closer examination it turns out that environmental boundaries (*bona fide* or *fiat*) are rarely fixed and stable.

To start with, *bona fide* boundaries change in time – a coastline is eroded, a land is flooded, and so on. Furthermore, what constitutes a discernable experiential difference changes from person to person (a pathfinder or even a boy scout can detect more discontinuities in a forest than I can), or with the aid of tools (a microscope allows us to discern smaller and smaller discontinuities, a telescope to detect objects further and further away). This is closely related to what I argued above about environments affording us different experiences: at any given moment an environment offers a multitude of potential

[74] For the distinction between *bona fide* and *fiat* boundaries see Barry Smith*: Fiat Objects*. *Topoi* 20: 2, 2001, 131–148.

experiential discontinuities to discern, out of which some are detected, some not, depending on the context, the person experiencing, the aim of an activity performed, and so on.

Then there are several discernable differences on which different demarcations or *fiat* boundaries can be drawn. For example, there is a discernable difference between one ant and the next, but also between the ant colony and its surroundings. So whether one considers one ant one organism or considers the entire colony one colonial organism, is a matter of context, or basically, a matter of *fiat*. Humans too seem to share some of this ambiguity: it is not at all clear where the boundaries of the human body are. If our boundary is our skin (the surface), then what about our hair and what about the holes in us? If we have a more functional or phenomenological limit, then how do we draw this? It is also not clear if a human being should be considered one well-defined and separate entity, or maybe a symbiotic entity. We do have in our intestines bacteria essential for our survival, but also, some parts of our cells act quite as independent beings: mitochondria replicate separately and independently of the cells, and are made up of RNA quite unlike the RNA of the cells. Or maybe the human species should be considered a colonial entity.[75] These examples (and many others) illustrate that it is not clear how and to what extent *bona fide* discontinuities determine *fiat* boundaries.

Furthermore, purely *fiat* boundaries (i.e. those that do not mark any discontinuity) are also constantly changing, with subsequent conventions that re-write them. Just consider how the legal (fiat) boundary of Bükk forest was changed in order to give over large areas for deforestation and construction. On a more conceptual level, the boundaries between 'natural'

[75] Consider Evernden's thought experiment about an alien ecologist who has to categorize the human species. After many attempts, this alien ecologist puts us in the category of unstable but resilient creatures, just as budworms and locusts. "Outbursts" of these creatures result destruction, which is also followed by a kind of refurbishing of the forest with other species, i.e. they have a role of rejuvenation. So the alien ecologist concludes that humans are some sort of "global budworms", their essence as a species is destruction, so actually, all it is doing right now is fulfilling its destiny and obligation. Once it achieves its responsibilities on a planetary scale, its numbers will again be reduced to minimal. Evernden argues that ecology can be used to justify a "budworm ethic", so in the end, it should be treated with suspicion. He concludes that nature does not justify anything: "Apparently, it is a risky business, seeking advice from nature. The oracle changes with the questioner." Neil Evernden: *Constructing the Natural: The Darker Side of the Environmental Movement*, 18.

and ‘cultural’ aspects of an environment are extremely difficult if not impossible to determine, as they depend on the definition one accepts for delimitating nature from culture. For example, city parks could be deemed natural by some and cultural by others.

These remarks make it obvious that there is also no clear-cut separation between different environments: there is no one correct way in which we can separate a mountain from the conjoining valley, or the valley from the river that flows through it. What we consider in each case ‘an environment’ depends on how we delimitate it from its surroundings. For example, I can consider a lake in a forest a different environment or part of the forest environment, depending on the context of the demarcation.

Such constant shift and change of environmental boundaries in both their *bona fide* and *fiat* form entails dynamism and pluralism in the ontology of any given environment: dynamism in the sense that the beings that are included are in constant change and movement, and pluralism in the sense that there are always alternative ways to delimitate that environment from others, and to structure it from within. The way we understand the ontological structure of an environment turns out to be a complex process of detecting *bona fide* boundaries and drawing *fiat* ones, i.e. a process of delimitation, individuation, and negotiation.

Another important point to be made here is that since environmental boundaries are not fix and stable, they should not be thought of as means of isolation and separation of certain entities or environments from each other. Boundaries are shifting and changing means of delimitation, illustrating the inter-relatedness of temporary delimitated entities. This contention is in line with Irene Klaver’s analysis of environmental limits: “Boundaries are places where different entities, different modes of being, different ontological domains, meet,

interact with each other, give and take from each other—places of heterogeneity and diversity that call for negotiation, or translation."[76]

I too want to stress that a pluralist approach to environments does not amount to separation or isolation of environments, species, peoples, or understandings, since it takes into account the fluid interplay of environmental boundaries. The complexity that stems from taking different possible experiences and demarcations into account provides us with the possibility to accommodate and include several different aspects, phenomena, and points of view. This results in FLEXIBLE ontology (in the sense that it can include different elements at different times) which is as such always PROVISIONAL in the sense that it is open to inclusion/exclusion of further elements and aspects.

[76] Irene J. Klaver: *Phenomenology on the Rocks*. In: *Eco Phenomenology. Back to the Earth Itself*, 155-169, 162. There have been other authors too to draw attention to the significance of environmental boundaries, although most of these remain marginal considerations within current environmental trends. For example Christian Diehm, clearly following the phenomenological tradition, argues that "the somatic integrity of the organism is formed in communication with what is other, through a process of constant response and adaptation that integrates the environment into the body and reintegrates the body into the world." Christian Diehm: *Natural Disasters*. In: *Eco Phenomenology. Back to the Earth Itself*, 171-185, 181. The fact that organisms communicate at their boundaries and depend on each other is also a source of tension which lies at the heart of current environmental crises, because the permeability of boundaries entails and reveals vulnerability, or what Diehm calls overexposure: "the organism's inability to fend off, once and for all, the forces that threaten to overwhelm and overtake life itself. In all of this, we find that the organism can be challenged by both deficiency and excess, presented with circumstances to which its responses are inadequate, conditions to which it cannot creatively adapt, at which point the relation between organism and environment ceases to be productive and becomes destructive, issuing in decay, corruption, and failure. Hence the corporeal boundary established by the organism is fluid but not absolutely so; it is flexible but not infinitely malleable." Christian Diehm: *Natural Disasters*, 182.
David Wood also notes the fact that boundaries in the biological world "are, in part, the products of the very processes that maintain them. Boundaries are the way stations between insides and outsides, the sites of negotiation, of transformation, of sustenance, of protection." What is important for this paper is that boundaries understood like this host a special kind of experience and a special kind of phenomena, constituted by difference. David Wood calls this "limina" and the phenomenology dealing with them "liminology": "Such a liminology deals not only with the maintenance of boundaries within individual organisms but the ways in which the shape and location of boundaries is transformed during growth, adaptation, and the struggle to survive, (…) which deals with symbiotic and productive relations of dependency between species, and which deals with the psychic formations necessary both for the maintenance, mobilization, and transformation of such boundaries." David Wood: *What is Eco-Phenomenology*? 220.

C. The importance of scale

I started my outline of a pluralistic ontology by drawing attention to the fact that making sense of the surrounding world is no mere theoretical endeavor, but it is closely tied to the bodily interactions which provide our contact with our surroundings. Our experience of the surrounding world is made possible by us being phenomenological bodies. But our bodies also impose a certain scale (a limit) on which experience can occur. There are realities that are too small or too large, to short or too long for us to experience.[77] Although the limits of experience are flexible to some extent (our senses can be refined, trained to discern more and more) and modifiable with the aid of tools (for example, microscopes or telescopes), these limits are never fully surpassable, we will never be able to experience the whole of reality at once.

This experiential scale is important when it comes to understanding the difference between global environmental notions and the pluralist approach I am outlining here. The difference between the two might be interpreted by some as a merely technical question of dividing the global into local parts, and then opposing the two scales. However, this is far from the case. My argument against the efficiency of universal notions is not only that they refer to a reality that is too large, but that they do not refer to an experiential reality at all. Actually experienced environments are not merely smaller parts of *the* environment. The difference between specific environments (such as, for example, Bükk forest) and universal notions of the environment (such as, for example, 'nature') is a difference in kind, given by the fact that 'nature' as such cannot be experienced. The importance of experience or lack of

[77]With respect to the time-scale it has been suggested that human beings might not even possess the right attention span to understand and manage environmental changes. See Anne Whinston Spirn: *Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted*. In: William Cronon (ed.): *Uncommon Ground. Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, 91-113, 110. I will argue later on in this thesis that analyzing historical, generative patterns of experience has the methodological significance precisely of overcoming such temporal limitations of understanding.

it becomes obvious if we consider the tendency (especially in the Western world) to want to 'protect' environments elsewhere. The popular adherence to saving *the* rainforest is such an example, as most people subscribing to this aim have not had any actual contact with such environments. This is not to say that their intentions or aims are wrong or somehow flawed, but that they can have ambiguous and questionable results, precisely due to lack of direct, experiential understanding of the actual environments they mean to protect.

In fact, in a pluralistic and experiential approach to environments the question of scaling, i.e. of where to draw the boundaries of an environment, is never a technical matter. This is because environmental boundaries are fluid (in constant change depending on the perspective and context) and there is no one right way to delimitate an environment. Moreover, different scales might be present in the same place at the same time. For example, one could consider a forest a different environment from a lake in the same forest, and study their interaction. As Uexküll's famous example showed, an oak tree actually *is* several different environments for different beings, environments which overlap, connect in several key aspects, come in conflict with others, and are all simultaneously present.[78] This shows that scales too are matters of perspective, convention, and negotiation, and not merely a question of drawing an imaginary line around a previously chosen center.

So a pluralistic approach towards environments does not necessarily mean local in the geographic sense, because it does not simply refer to the size of an environment but to its experiential affordances and related phenomena.

[78] Jakob von Uexküll: *A Stoll through the Worlds of Animals and Men*. In: Claire H. Schiller (ed.): *Instinctive Behavior. The Development of a Modern Concept.* International Universities Press, New York, 5-80, 73-76.

D. The difference between involvement and attachment

Since I emphasize the importance of bodily involvement in understanding an environment, it might seem that I presuppose some priority or privilege that 'locals' or 'inhabitants' have over their environments. However, bodily involvement can but need not amount to stronger senses of attachment or belonging, as some phenomenologists have suggested.[79] Being bodily involved with an environment also need not imply feeling at home in it. In fact, most of us do not have strong attachments to one environment; rather, during the course of our lives, we live and move in different environments, acquiring different degrees of attachment, involvement, and knowledge about them. We have experiences of several places which at one point or another have environed us and of which we have 'first-hand' experiential knowledge.[80]

Attachment, feeling of belonging or feeling at home in a certain environment does not render anyone a privileged position or extra rights about that environment.[81] First, because these feelings are not necessarily related to richer experiential knowledge, second, because according them any priority would imply excluding or disregarding the possibility of new, fresh points of view and perspectives. When I presented examples of environmental conflicts in the introduction my point was not to argue that indigenous peoples hold a privileged position in such environments, and should be the only ones to decide about their fate. My point was that their position *too* has to be considered and included. They might indeed have valuable practical knowledge, but in turn lack technological or organizational knowledge

[79] Notably, for instance, David E. Cooper talks about familiarity and sense of home in *The Idea of the Environment*, 166. See also my examples from other phenomenological perspectives below.

[80] Just consider that we need not feel to belong to a forest, we need not consider it home, in order to have arguments from bodily involvement to protect it from industrial logging.

[81] A similar argument is made by Martin Drenthen in *Ecological Restoration and Place Attachment: Emplacing Non-Places*? *Environmental Values* 18, 2009, 285–312, and Martin Drenthen: *Landscapes Devoid of Meaning? Environmental Values* vol. 22, 2013, 17-23. Drenthen argues that estrangement or lack of attachment can also result in meaningful relationships with places, based on the recognition of the ineffable character or reality.

which can prove crucial in maximizing benefits and minimizing damage in their environments.

Moreover, bodily involvement need not even be a positive valuation of the experienced environment. On the contrary, most of the times environmental engagement and action stems from a sense of dissatisfaction or a negative evaluation of the current state of a certain environment.[82] The most powerful argument for pollution is the negative experience *of* pollution.

So when I stress the importance of experiential knowledge in understanding specific environments, this is not to give preference to some feelings over others, but to give preference to first-hand experiential encounters over mediated, conceptual, or symbolic approaches. My approach to environments seeks deeper understanding through concrete involvement, but not through attachment. One does not need to be attached to a forest or consider it home, to understand what that forest affords us. However, in order to understand what a forest is, one needs to experience its presence, that dynamic ground of various possibilities that would be disregarded, if we were content to consider it a set of conditions for life.

E. The practical consequences of a pluralistic experiential ontology

For me, environmental theory should not be pursued as a disinterested search for truth, but has to become active(ist) in pursuing specific goals towards concrete changes to deal with various environmental problems. This can only be based on an intimate understanding of the different experiences each environment affords as well as understanding the ideas, interests, and powers involved. If I propose that environments be understood as

[82] For example, people demanding traffic restrictions in city-centers base their arguments on negatively valued experiences of smog.

dynamic realities affording various experiences and thus including various practices, ideas, values, or affections, this is no mere theoretical interest to capture what environments 'really' are in their concrete specificity. Rather, given the flexible, provisional and negotiated character of such an approach, its consequences for environmental practice will also become evident.

Understanding what a certain environment is will entail a case-specific, dynamic process of communication, negotiation, and collaboration about the current state and future of that environment. Thus for me, the main criterion of a 'good' pluralist approach (or, as a matter of fact of "good" environmental theory) is to reveal as many affordances as possible in a certain environment, and to take as many interpretations or points of view into account as possible. This will not only lead to a more complex 'truth' about that environment, but also has a practical aim and consequence built into it. Environmental action (or protection) is not a matter of removing as many humans as possible from environments; on the contrary, the challenge of environmental action is to accommodate as many different experiences as possible without limiting other, current or future experiences. This criterion can also be used to rule out or exclude ideas about an environment not because they are wrong or morally questionable, but because if enacted, they have detrimental practical consequences in the sense of limiting the range and variety of experiences of/in that environment. I will come back to this idea in the last chapter and compare ideas of nature in terms of their impact on the affordances of certain environments. My point with all this is that successful environmental protection keeps open as many affordances as possible, i.e. ensures the possibility of as many different kinds of experiences as possible without limiting others or rendering them impossible for the future.

Such a challenge and aim certainly requires complex environmental management. Yet, the idea of management is not the most popular in environmental philosophy. The

resistance to the idea of environmental management might just stem from the focus of mainstream environmental ethics on the notion of 'inherent value' in nature. Certain discourses, especially within deep ecology, would have us believe that we either value nature in itself (and thus respect it) or we value it instrumentally (and thus destroy it). This is obvious from the accusations deep ecologists put forward against those questioning the inherent value of nature, namely that their refusal to value nature in itself amounts to anthropocentrism, utilitarianism, and so on.[83] This is, nevertheless a false opposition (probably stemming from a certain way of conceiving nature as realm free of humans) and it suggests a number of conclusions that are questionable. First, it suggests that that we cannot use something that we value or respect in itself; second, it suggests that we cannot use something without destroying it; and third, it suggests that we cannot value in itself or respect something that we use.[84] Contrary to these suggestions, think of a simple example: a chestnut tree that was once planted by my grandfather in our garden to keep shade and give fruit (instrumental value) can also have a strong emotional and aesthetic value for those of us resting in its shade. The latter are not instrumental values, and they can even be claimed to be respecting the 'inherent value' of that tree (if such a notion makes any sense). Moreover,

[83] See, for example the debate between deep and social ecologists: Bill Devall, George Sessions: *Deep Ecology: Living As If Nature Mattered*. Peregrine Smith, Salt Lake City, 1985; Arne Naess: *The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements: A Summary. Inquiry* 16, 1973; Alan Drengson, Yuichi Inoue (eds.): *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology*. North Atlantic, Berkeley, 1995; Warwick Fox: *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology*. Shambhala, Boston, *1990*; George Sessions (ed.): *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*. Shambhala, Boston, 1995; Michael Tobias (ed.): *Deep Ecology*. Avant Books, San Diego, 1985; Eric Katz, Andrew Light, David Rothenberg (eds.): *Beneath the Surface: Critical Essays on Deep Ecology*. MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2000; Murray Bookchin: *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy*. Cheshire Books, Palo Alto, 1982; Murray Bookchin: *Social Ecology Versus Deep Ecology*. *Socialist Review* 1988/3, 11–29; Hwa Yol Jung: *Marxism, Ecology, and Technology*. *Environmental Ethics* 1983/5; Richard Sylvan*: A Critique of Deep Ecology, Part I. Radical Philosophy* 40, 1985, 2–12; Richard Sylvan: *A Critique of Deep Ecology, Part II. Radical Philosophy* 41, 1985, 1–22.

[84] J. Claude Evans has a similar argument against mainstream environmental ethic's focus on 'inherent value' which, for Evans, implies the false conclusion that if we use something that has inherent value we necessarily violate that value and fail to respect it. Against this assumption he argues that all living beings have to take energy and nutrition from their environment, so basically the inherent value of any living thing is inseparably bound up with its instrumental value. J. Claude Evans: *With Respect for Nature. Living as Part of the Natural World*. State University of New York Press, 2005.

there is no reason to suppose that the autonomy or dignity of that tree is somehow 'disrespected' just because it is also used for shade or fruits.

The suspicion towards managed landscapes is all the more surprising since many of the places considered symbols of nature protection are actually managed landscapes. In an insightful study on the work of Frederick Law Olmsted, Anne Whintson Spirn argues against the hypocrisy and lack of knowledge involved in popular and academic attitudes towards, for example Yosemite National Park, Niagara Falls, or Central Park NY.[85] These sites, considered symbols of nature and wilderness in the US and elsewhere, were actually carefully planned and constructed by Olmsted precisely to allow the kind of reverence-of-nature experiences which make those sites famous. Olmsted's work consisted in altering and managing those landscapes in a way that would afford different kinds of human experiences but without the destructive effects of human presence. Wintson Spirn argues that ironically, it was Olmsted's extraordinary success as a manager that has come to seclude his nature-construction activities[86] – he removed constructions, cleaned up river beds, organized garbage disposals, cut and planted trees, and so on, all to ensure that large numbers of tourists can visit those places and have 'wilderness-experiences'.

There is no reason to suppose that a respectful attitude to an environment entails refraining from any instrumental action or use of that environment. Respect is not only distant admiration or lack of intervention. On the contrary, true respect stems from bodily interaction with an environment, which often includes some practical use; however, this interaction has to be carefully planned and organized so that it causes least damage, in the sense that it doesn't render other or future experiences impossible. This brings us back to the criterion of good environmental management: to afford various experiences and pursue long-

[85] Anne Whiston Spirn: *Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 91-113.
[86] Anne Whiston Spirn: *Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 108.

term goals.[87] So the challenge is to allow as many interactions with that environment (both in number and in type) as that environment can support without being destroyed. This is certainly no easy task, but in what follows I will argue that a pluralistic-experiential approach provides ample ground for achieving such task.

First, as I argued before, bodily involvement with an actual environment yields involved knowledge about that environment, impossible to arrive to without experience. Starting environmental theory and action from such insider understandings about a certain environment implies building **bottom-up and collaborative theories**, **measures and actions**, rooted in different experiences afforded by a particular environment. Contrary to this, a top-to-bottom implementation of universal principles often fails precisely because of lack of involved understanding and lack or collaboration. In the examples I put forward in the introduction, nature-protection was implemented with the presupposition that humans have to be removed from an environment and instrumental use (as resource) has to be stopped in order to preserve that environment. This implementation disregarded the experiences of indigenous peoples, thus failed to recognize the possibility of long-term practical involvement and instrumental use of an environment without destroying it.

A pluralistic ontology that is closer to lived reality is able to accommodate many different, sometimes even contradictory points of view as the example of Bükk forest has shown.[88] Since all claims about specific environments are necessarily contingent and provisional, whatever will count as part of an environment (and to which extent) is dependent on the particular context in which such question is asked and on a complex process of communication and negotiation of all those involved. This, I believe should be relevant to any environmental action or management that aims to be **democratic**. And in the face of

[87] Cf. also Anne Whiston Spirn: *Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 102.
[88] Roger J.H. King also argues that we use narratives and histories to reconcile the different values that are at play in our relationship with our environments. See *Narrative, Imagination, and the Search for Intelligibility in Environmental Ethics*, 35.

many accusations of authoritarian imposition and unfair treatment that environmental organizations and actions are exposed to today,[89] such a more democratic way of approaching environmental problems should be preferred to assure that decisions in particular cases come as a result of negotiations, communications, and collaborations, and not from arbitrary and arrogant interventions.

Furthermore, a contextual approach paying attention to particularities and differences provides deeper and richer understanding – as such, it is able to cope with diversity and different needs, and thus provides **better adjustment of environmental arguments to particular situations** and problems, by fitting plans and action to everyday experiences and particular perspectives.

And finally, a pluralistic and contextual approach not only broadens the horizon of understanding but also brings forth the disciplinary multiplicity of possible approaches to environments, thus **crossing through disciplinary boundaries**. Such an endeavor shows that no matter the claim to universality that any or all approaches to environment put forth, nevertheless all approaches are and remain rooted in a particular perspective and emerge from a particular point of view or interest. That is to say that neither ecology or biology or politics or economics or cultural studies can automatically have a preferential say in what environments are and what their fate will be. So once the legitimacy of plural or even contradictory understandings of environments is recognized, all professionalization and imputing of specialized responsibility loses its sense. All decisions much be negotiated and collaborated between environmentalists, local inhabitants of that environment, and other specialist with specialized kind of knowledge about that environment (for example botanists, economist, historians, and so on).

[89] For example, many forms of deep ecology (Earth First! especially) are accused of preferring nature to humans or of being eco-fascists; social ecologists are accused of being anthropocentric for their claim that environmental crises are results of social-economic problems; Greenpeace is accused of terrorism, international environmental organizations of undermining the sovereignty of countries, and the list could go on.

F. Possible counter-arguments

There are several possible counter-arguments to a contextualized and pluralistic understanding of environments. I will only mention a few here, and try to respond to them.

The isolation of environments or problems that are inter-related

One might say that if we approach all specific environments in their own terms and specificity this approach might suggest or make us believe that the problems of one environment are isolated from those of others or from global problems. To this I answer that pluralism and context-relativity does not in any way imply that environments are or can be isolated from each other, even theoretically. There is a complex inter-relatedness and gradual transition between environments, as I already showed when discussing environmental boundaries. The inter-relatedness of environments is not due to any overlapping common feature but it is brought about by shifting boundaries, similarities, links, and practical relations which constitute a complex net of connections. Understanding specific environmental problems in their own context does not mean to isolate them from other problems or other environments. On the contrary, the context of each specific environment includes other, different environments too, insofar as they are related in some way or another.

Lack of big picture

It could be argued that focusing on case-specific, local, individual cases can result in uncoordinated local measures that might even come into contradiction with each other or with global principles.

This is certainly a threat, but certainly not necessary either. To start understanding, arguments and measures from the bottom up is not to rule out a ‘bigger picture’ or more general principles of action. But it assumes that we arrive to more general principles through

negotiating and corroborating specific perspectives, and not through a position free of perspectives, as the latter is not accessible to us.

According to my pluralist approach, the true sense of 'global' is not the sum of all environments, but lies in a type of understanding that although is rooted in a particular perspective manages to see larger and deeper connections, including the possibility to understand one's own situation as integrated in a larger and larger contexts of meaning.[90] As such, each and every particular situation contains within the possibility of understanding it as part of a 'bigger picture.'

Material determinism

When linking modes of human understanding to the affordances of their surroundings, aren't we just saying, like Marx, that different material, physical conditions determine different social and economic outcomes? After all, since I construed 'modes of human understanding' in the broadest sense, to include all human ways of making sense of reality, then certainly our social and economic systems can be thought of as modes of understanding. If so, my approach will be exposed and will have to answer all the criticism directed to Marxist theory, namely that it is too deterministic, it disregards other aspects and conditions than the material, and so on.

To this I answer that my approach is different from any versions of material determinism, first, in that I do not suppose the autonomous reality of an environment to be material or physical. In fact, claiming reality to be material is just another appropriation, a way of making sense of what is present in our experience. Instead, I argued that even though we can experience *that* there is such an autonomous reality to the environments we experience, we can never know *how* that reality is in itself.

[90] I will come back to this point and discuss it in more detail in the third chapter, since such an understanding of "wholeness" or "global" stems, I will argue, from Jan Patočka's ontology of movement.

Second, I argue for the essential pluralism of affordances, in the sense that different environments offer different possibilities for experience and understanding, and not that they determine experiences or understandings.

Third, when I argued that our ways of making sense of our surroundings are *embedded* in these surroundings, I also argued that they are not determined by them causally, and that human imagination and freedom also plays a substantial part in how different experiences come to be interpreted and transformed into values or actions.

Fourth, I argued that the relation between the autonomous and the hermeneutical reality of an environment is not causal in the sense that any would determine the other, but co-generative, in the sense that they shape each-other's potentials, i.e. the limits of what is possible to experience or understand.

G. Other pluralistic views

In the next chapter I will discuss in more detail the phenomenological roots and features of my approach in various insights of Husserl, Heidegger and Patočka. In this section I will briefly discuss some other pluralistic views and approaches relevant or close to my own. Some of these are not even environmental theories as such; however, I mention them here as my approach shares with all of them the idea of a fluid, non-foundational, and provisional ontology. Sadly, the impact of these approaches ranges from marginal to non-existent in mainstream environmental philosophy. I will start by briefly addressing two phenomenological approaches that have provided some context and inspiration for my own account, and then I will present other pluralistic approaches from different disciplines: sociology, geography and ethnography.

Phenomenological approaches

Tim Ingold's 'Dwelling perspective'[91] was inspired by Martin Heidegger's notion of dwelling and J. J. Gibson's ecological theory of visual perception. Drawing on these two main sources as well an impressive amount of anthropological evidence, Ingold works out a theory of environmental immersion (similar, though not identical with what I called embedment) according to which humans are experientially, practically, and existentially environed in a world which "continually comes into being around the inhabitant, and its manifold constituents take on significance through their incorporation into a regular pattern of life activity."[92] Thus, for example, the world of hunter-gatherers takes shape in active involvement with their environments rather than as a culturally constructed layer of meaning imposed on an otherwise meaningless material base or foundation. Ingold also stresses the importance of bodily, sensual experiences and practical knowledge of environments, and argues that the depth of such involvement makes the difference between realist and idealist approaches to environments desolate.

I also find Heidegger's notion of dwelling to provide valuable insight, and I will address it in more detail in the next chapter. For now, I would like to point out two differences between Ingold's overall position and mine. First, it seems to me that in an attempt to emphasize sensual and practical involvement, Ingold tends to disregard or play down the generative power of conceptions and ideas of reality. In contrast, I take conceptions about nature, for example, to be not only results of experiential interactions with our surroundings, but also inductive of certain environmental experiences and practices, as I will argue in the last chapter of this thesis. Second, I believe Ingold inherits a peculiar problem from Heidegger, namely the contention that being immersed and inseparable from a

[91] Tim Ingold: *The Perception of the Environment*. Routledge, London & New York, 2000.
[92] Tim Ingold: *The Perception of the Environment*, 153.

particular environment is a more authentic way of dwelling or being-in-the-world than others. This problematic aspect of authenticity becomes a criterion for a privileged position in a certain environment, a privilege of 'insiders' which in my view is not justified. Just because someone is immersed and attached to an environment does not necessarily give them a privileged over others, who might be less immersed and still hold valuable insight about a certain place. As I argued before, any privilege about an environment has to be negotiated and does not belong automatically to anyone.

The second phenomenological approach which serves as context and inspiration for my own is composed of different phenomenologies of place. In the early 70s, there was growing dissatisfaction with philosophically and experientially lacking conceptions of space, especially among geographers. This resulted in a number of ground breaking works from Edward Relph, Yi-Fu Tuan, Anne Buttimer and Edward Casey, to only name a few. These thinkers, sometimes called "humanistic geographers," aimed for an understanding of place as it plays an integral role in human experience. Their method of differentiating between space and place was phenomenological. Whether we consider absolute Newtonian, relative Leibnizian or transcendental Kantian space, the common feature of all these conceptions is that they presume space to be universal, objective, and entirely neutral, i.e. devoid of considerations regarding attachment, value, power and domination, human agency, or meaning. From this stance, space is taken to be homogenous (without center or periphery), structured solely by measurable, geometric units. On the contrary, the notion of place, as it was worked out by the authors mentioned above, refers rather to a medium which is specific and relational. It includes space plus human involvement, because it is structured by human experience - it is practical, value-laden and full of contradictions. Place has no universal essence, but depends on who is experiencing it and how. And, of course, place-experience is

never neutral, but relative to social position, gender, power relations and other kinds of relationships.

I take the difference between space and place to be analogous to the difference I worked out in this thesis between singular notions of the environment and experience-based environments, making it possible to claim that environments as I understand them are actually places as understood by humanistic geographers. However, there is also an important aspect which makes my approach different. One of the most important points of place-based phenomenologies is to emphasize attachment or belonging to place and – just as in the case of the dwelling perspective – they argue for some kind of privileged position that inhabitants of that place have over others.[93] The counter-arguments I presented above are valid here as well.

Actor Network Theory (ANT)

Relying mostly on the work of Jonathan Murdoch,[94] ANT is a method that draws attention to complex networks of heterogeneous connections that can be revealed in studying any phenomena from the more simple to the more complex. For example, a power station can be analyzed in terms of a vast network of machines, technological devices, information, power-consumption, politics, economy, people, and so on.[95] In such a network, it is not individual elements or aspects that have agency or power, but the network itself. The diversity of elements brought together in a network reveal the utter hybridity of all

[93] Other critics have gone even further and accused place-based thinking of being inherently exclusionary, i.e. of implying the exclusion of others (outsiders, not-belonging, non-dwellers, and so on). David Harvey and Doreen Massey both argue along these lines in David Harvey: *The Condition of Post-Modernity*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, and Doreen Massey: *Power-Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place*. In Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, Tim Putnam, George Robertson, and Lisa Tickner (eds.), *Mapping the Futures*. Routledge, London, 64-67. Contrary to these authors, I do not take place-based thinking to be necessarily exclusionary, although, of course it can and often is. Certainly an exclusionary politics presupposes the idea of a space from which "others" are excluded, but this does not establish that place is an intrinsically exclusionary or reactionary idea, only that it may be employed to reactionary or exclusionary ends—and this would seem to be true of just about any important concept one may care to name.

[94] For a good overview see Jonathan Murdoch: *The Spaces of Actor-Network Theory*. *Geoforum*, 29(4), 1998, 357–374.

[95] Owain Jones: *After Nature: Entangled Worlds*, 300.

ontologies, because not only the network itself will be hybrid, but on closer analysis the elements themselves turn out to be ontologically hybrid as well.[96] This idea of a non-foundational, fluid ontology is what ANT shares with other post-structuralist theories, and also with my proposal for a pluralistic environmental ontology.

What is different in my approach is that I regard the merging of elements in any ontology to be power-laden, and not neutral, as ANT. As I argued, the different aspects and elements that enter into the ontology of an environment are not equal in power and potential influence - the weight of each point of view has to be negotiated (and sometimes even fought for). In any environment there are long and deeply rooted tendencies to disregard certain experiences or phenomena of reality in favor of others. That is why, for example, the experiences of the elites are imposed upon the understanding of what an environment is at the expense of marginalized social groups. While ANT has been charged that it fails to deal with specific conflicts in specific places,[97] my approach presupposes that the emerging ontology of an environment is a result of an ongoing struggle and negotiation between different points of view and aspects. I argued that ideally, it should include as many aspects as possible as well as be open ended about inclusion of others, however, this does not mean that I take all differences to come together on equal terms. Environments are realities shaped by power, so getting heard and getting our point of view to matter is often nothing less than a power struggle. Such power-laden environmental reality is also able to explain the many different and curious shapes and forms that, for example, environmental protection takes.

[96] Sarah Whatmore: *Hybrid Geographies: Natures, Cultures, Spaces.* Sage, London, 2002.
[97] Nigel Thrift: *Steps to an Ecology of Place*. In D. Massey, P. Sarre and J. Allen (eds): *Human Geography Today*. Polity, Oxford, 1999, 295–352.

New trends in geography[98]

Recent post-structuralist and post-materialist trends in geography have brought on fresh approaches to conceptualizing the presence and the importance of geographical reality. David Harvey's influential and controversial *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference,*[99] focuses on social and environmental justice and uses dialectical methods to work out a relational or dialectical ontology in which the geographic environment and social practices within are revealed to mutually 'produce' and 'influence' each other. As other critics have also noted, the problem with this approach is that it still presupposes the existence of some kind of dualistic realms, as if two different levels of reality, although these are shown to be in a dialectical relation to each other. This is still within the logic of the nature-culture divide, so it brought criticism to Harvey from more radical new-materialists.[100]

So-called new-materialist geographers such as Peter J. Taylor, Doreen Massey, Matthew Kearnes, and others, effectively deny that the world is divisible or separable into two realms of reality. They posit one single ontological plane from which all ulterior differentiation comes to be. That is to say that no beings are either part or product of nature or culture, but we assign them to such separate realities by 'purifying' them, i.e. by omitting or explaining away some of their aspects.[101] So the nature-culture divide is not the name of ontologically diverse realities, but of performative practices in an ongoing process of sorting out and identifying things in our surroundings. These authors are called materialists, because they challenge the constructivist view that nature is constructed through ever shifting ideas (cultural constructions). They argue that entities, things in the world are no mere meaningless matter that humans can then fill up with meaning, but they are active in the formation of

[98] I rely here mostly but not exclusively on Bruce Braun: *Nature*. In: *A Companion to Environmental Geography*, 19-37. This paper is a good overview of the trends I mention here and similar ones.
[99] Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 1996.
[100] Bruce Braun: *Nature*, 26.
[101] Bruno Latour: *We Have Never Been Modern*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1993.

ideas. The topology of the world is creative, as Matthew Kearnes, following Deleuze notes.[102] There is no fixed underlying ontology, only a complex emerging order.

My approach takes shape rather as a combination of the two theories – Harvey's and new materialism – mentioned here, but with important differences from both of them. Like Harvey, I take environments to be dialectical realities, i.e. composed of two inseparable and co-generative aspects. But unlike David Harvey, the dialectics in my view is not only between two different ontological realms, but between any and every element of an environment (beings, ideas, values, practices, and so on). This implies a complex variety of dialectical relations between many various elements and aspects. As new materialism, I contest extreme constructivist views and emphasize the importance of an autonomous reality in shaping hermeneutical realities. Against them, I do not suppose this autonomous reality to be material, nor an ontological plain out of which everything else flows.

New trends in ethnography

Recent methodological and theoretical developments in ethnography, especially the attentiveness to different forms of knowledge, has revealed its potential to produce intersubjective and situated understandings not only of distant places and peoples, but also political elites, environmental NGOs and other important actors in environmental protection.[103] Unfortunately, however, ethnography remains quite disregarded in environmental philosophy. Contrary to this mainstream attitude, I consider ethnographic works and insights to be crucially important in understanding specific environments and their problems. In the last chapter of this paper, when I will discuss how environmental experience

[102] "The singularity of matter is alive with the creative potential of endless evolution and innovation." Matthew Kearnes*: Chaos and Control: Nanotechnology and the Politics of Emergence. Paragraph,* 29(2), 2006, 57–80. Quoted in Bruce Braun: *Nature*, 30.

[103] Akhil Gupta, James Ferguson: *Discipline and Practice: 'the Field' as Site, Method, and Location in Anthropology.* In: Akhil Gupta, James Ferguson (eds): *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1997, 1–46, 37.

should figure in environmental actions and projects, I will use many case-studies from anthropology and ethnography to substantiate some of my philosophical claims. But for now, consider a few examples of important works in ethnography providing insight for a pluralistic approach to environments. Cindi Katz struggled to understand and to include local environmental knowledge of a particular place in Sudan into larger socio-political and economic contexts[104], while Arun Agrawal coined the term 'environmentality' to refer to processes of interaction in which both environments and environmental subjects are produced in the Kumaon region of India.[105]

Moreover, ethnography has proven to be an excellent methodological tool to study the effects of global processes (for example global warming[106]) in specific places and communities. As such it has become possible to understand the local scale not just as a matter of size but as the actual recipient of impacts, as the 'ground of globalization'[107] and to provide just the kind of situated understanding that my own pluralistic approach aims for. Moreover, the other important reason why I believe environmental philosophy should be more open to ethnographic insights and results is that the latter often pursue specific political aims and grounds of negotiation, which should be, in my view, the aim of environmental philosophy as well.

The theories and approaches I presented here come from various fields and disciplines and confirm my contention that environmental philosophy, which is nowadays still largely

[104] Cindi Katz: *On the Grounds of Globalization: A Topography for Feminist Political Engagement. Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 26(4), 2001, 1213–1235.
[105] Arun Agrawal: *Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects*. Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2005. All examples in this section are taken from Kevin St. Martin, Marianna Pavlovskaya: *Ethnography*. In: *A Companion to Environmental Geography*, 370-384.
[106] Ethnographic research has revealed that global warming affects different people differently, depending on economic power, and even race or gender. See Robin Leichenko, Karen O'Brien: *Double Exposure: Global Environmental Change in an Era of Globalization*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2006; Philip E. Steinberg, Rob Shields (eds): *The Urban After Katrina: Place, Community, Connections and Memory*. University of Georgia Press, Athens, 2007.
[107] Kevin St Martin, Mariana Pavlovskaya: *Ethnography*, 377-378.

and solely inspired by ecology, should open and transcend disciplinary boundaries and find insight and inspiration in other fields, such as anthropology, geography, or ethnography.

Since I base my pluralistic ontology on differences in experience, this contention implies two further questions:

If we were to consider experience as revealing something essential about our environments, what would be the method by which we can gather such understanding from various experiences? How do we examine which experiences? Natural sciences might rely on experiences conducted in laboratory conditions. Poets and novelists may relate extraordinary experiences of extraordinary individuals to capture the reality in which they happen. My approach will be different from these. My starting point is in ordinary everyday environmental experiences of various subjects. Such an object of study requires a methodology by which it can be put to philosophical use and transformed into a philosophical theory. In the next chapter I will propose a phenomenological approach to understanding environments, and I will discuss some key conceptual and methodological tools that my approach inherited from three very different phenomenologists: Husserl, Heidegger and Patočka. Through this I also hope to argue that phenomenology as a method, as well as some specific insights of phenomenologist thinkers can provide new and valuable directions in environmental philosophy.

Even if we would all agree to base environmental theory and action on various everyday experiences studies with a certain phenomenological method, the question still remains: how is this supposed to actually happen in practice? Whose experience and which aspects of experience should figure in actual environmental practices or projects focusing on a specific environment? I will address these questions in the last chapter by proposing that not individual experiences, but patterns of experience should be considered, and I will demonstrate this through three experiential patterns: perceptions, practices, and conceptions.

CHAPTER 3: PHENOMENOLOGIES AND ENVIRONMENTS

The philosophical outline of a pluralistic ontology of environments that I attempted in the first chapter already suggested the necessity of a special kind of methodology in approaching the question of what our environments are. When I proposed we try to answer the ontological question about our environments from the study of various experiences within, this proposal poses a question and a challenge. The question is how should experience be studied and which experiences should count. The challenge is to come up with an adequate method which would have fruitful application and indeed, practical consequences in environmental theory and practice.

Since my aim is to base understanding of specific environments on the ordinary everyday experiences of people within, it is clear that my method should regard this kind of experiences. The philosophical discipline traditionally dealing with and focusing on such ordinary experiences and their philosophical consequences is phenomenology. However, in environmental philosophy there is quite a lot of suspicion towards the phenomenological tradition in terms of its suitability to tackle environmental problems. So if I still opt for a phenomenological method, as I will in what follows, I will need to address some of the worries about such an approach.

Thus in this chapter my aim will be to work out a phenomenological method suited for an experience-based, pluralistic approach. I will also discuss some critical points about phenomenology being relevant and beneficial in environmental philosophy. I will argue that in spite of some reasonable worries, the phenomenological tradition is so rich and multi-faceted that it cannot be altogether dismissed as a genuine and fruitful partner for dialogue by environmental philosophers. To illustrate my point, I will discuss some of the methodological and philosophical roots of my own approach, offering them as examples for a beneficial

dialogue between phenomenology and environmental philosophy. I will address some ideas or concepts of three very different phenomenologists. First, I will present the Husserlian idea of generativity as the root of my own concept of patterns of experience. Second, I will put forward Heidegger's notion of homelessness and dwelling as offering original and radical ways of conceiving the human-environment relationship as a unity in constant tension. Third, I will present Patočka's ontology of movement as a useful conceptual tool in re-thinking our notion of 'global perspective' not as opposed to but as rooted and situated in a local, bodily perspective on the surrounding reality.

A. Phenomenology as a method

Phenomenology is not very present in current environmental philosophy, and with some good reasons, as I myself will readily admit in what follows. However, I will argue that there are some definite benefits involved in a phenomenological approach to understanding the complexity of our relationships with our environments, and that phenomenology as a method and with the proper adjustments, can offer fresh insight and possibilities for a filed dominated by ethical inquiries.

There have already been a few important attempts to intersect the phenomenological tradition with environmental concerns. Erazim Kohák's arguments for a sensuous-mystical immersion in the surrounding world (which he calls nature) were inspired by Husserl and Patočka.[108] There is some sporadic interest in controversies about Heidegger's 'ecological stance'.[109] There are various attempts at ethical environmental principles drawn from

[108] Erazim Kohák: *The Embers and the Stars. A Philosophical Inquiry into the Moral Value of Nature*. University of Chicago Press, 1984.

[109] Led mainly by Michael E. Zimmerman in various writings, the most important ones being: Michael E. Zimmerman: *Toward a Heideggerian Ethos for Radical Environmentalism*. *Environmental Ethics* 5, no. 3,

phenomenological theories or authors.[110] Finally, we have a well-structured attempt to solve classical environmental problems with specifically phenomenological tools and approaches in Simon P. James' *The Presence of Nature*.[111] What all of these have in common are the same 'faults' I noted about environmental philosophy in general. First of all, none of these authors asks the question about what environment is, but "naturally" assumes it to be identical with nature.[112] Second, most attempts to intersect phenomenology and environmental philosophy are focused on ethics, 'skipping over' ontology, as it were.

Phenomenology is notoriously hard to define, as the term tends to be used in many different senses and tends to refer to many different theories or philosophers. No single definition can capture the entire range of possibilities and varieties of interest emerging from within the phenomenological tradition. This is why any discussion about phenomenology should specify what is meant by this term. I consider phenomenology to be the **hermeneutic study of ordinary everyday experience with the aim of revealing reality as it is directly given to us in such experiences.** My understanding of phenomenology implies that a phenomenological approach is always and inevitably an act of interpretation and that this act focuses on what is immediately given in experience.

Most importantly, I take phenomenology to be essentially **ontological** in its aim, in the sense that for me the primary concern of phenomenology is to describe and understand

Summer 1983, 99–131; Michael E. Zimmerman: *Implications of Heidegger's Thought for Deep Ecology*. *The Modern Schoolman* 64, November 1986, 19–43; Michael E. Zimmerman: *Heidegger's Phenomenology and Contemporary Environmentalism.* In: *Eco-Phenomenology. Back to the Earth Itself*, 73-101; Michael E. Zimmerman: *Martin Heidegger: Anti-Naturalistic Critic of Technological Modernity*. In: David Macauley (ed.): *Ecological Thinkers*. Guilford, New York, 1995; Michael E Zimmerman: *Contesting Earth's Future: Radical Ecology and Postmodernity*. University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1994.

[110] The most prominent and interesting ones were collected in the volume *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself* edited by Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine (State University of New York Press, 2003).

[111] Simon P. James: *The Presence of Nature. A Study in Phenomenology and Environmental Philosophy*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2009.

[112] Not even the most promising and consistent attempt at a phenomenology of the environment, namely James' book raises the question as to why or which sense should environment be equated with nature. The relevance of his book is then, for me, not ontological but methodological. James argues convincingly for a phenomenological approach being relevant in environmental philosophy.

what things (phenomena) are. This idea would be contested by many phenomenologists who could argue that the aim of phenomenology is to reveal the constitution in human consciousness of meanings or structures of meaning. However, I believe that such a constitutive stance is Husserlian and not a necessarily trait of all phenomenologies. Other philosophers of the phenomenological tradition, such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre or Patočka were all critical of Husserl's idea of subjective constitution. I believe that if we focus on the initial Husserlian slogan, 'Back to the things themselves!' and, contrary to Husserl, we remain true to that aim it can be argued that phenomenology originally had an ontological purpose. The primarily concern of phenomenology was to describe as truly as possible the surrounding reality as it manifests in experience. All other philosophical goals (such as metaphysical or normative ones) had to follow from this initial 'pure' description of what and how phenomena are in everyday experiences.

The phenomenological question I want to raise is the following: what and how are our environments as revealed by our ordinary everyday experience? By asking this question I do not aim for a definition, "only" for deeper understanding. That is to say, I am not interested what the common feature or essence of all environments is, rather, I aim for an understanding based on direct, bodily immersion into a specific environment. I do not offer my approach as opposed to other methods of studying environment, such as the scientific-ecological, the empirical, historical, and so on. I believe that a phenomenological approach focusing on people's everyday environmental experiences is beneficial in its own right in understanding what environments are and what our relations to them are. I believe that the results of such an approach can be used in combination with other types of knowledge about environments, but most importantly, I believe that the benefits of experiential knowledge lie in their power to raise awareness about specific environmental problems and induce certain 'environmental virtues' that I will discuss in what follows.

1. Methodological principles and guidelines

My contention is that the question concerning the way environments are lived or experienced is relevant to the question of our future possible directions we want to take concerning our environments. As I argued in the previous two chapters, environments are diverse phenomena, thus they should be approached in the plural, i.e. contextualized as the places of actual lived experience and understanding. Such a notion of environments requires a specific philosophical methodology that can capture, describe and draw philosophical conclusions from everyday environmental experiences. My aim here will be to reveal the possibility of a version of phenomenology that provides a good way of approaching and understanding environments.

The first principle of my phenomenological approach is a version of Husserl's "Back to the things themselves!" adapted to the object of my interest, namely environments. I believe that everyone should start studying what environment is by focusing on the specific environment surrounding them, whichever that environment might be. This does not imply that one person can only have genuine access to one environment (something that would roughly be identical with 'home') nor that we can only understand environment in which we live for longer periods of time. Throughout our lives we get in touch with several different environments due to our increasing mobility, and such experiences benefit our understanding of the specificities of different environments.

So the starting point of a phenomenological approach to environments is to describe our experiences within specific environments. We should do this as accurately and free of presuppositions as possible.[113] Although this might seem obvious or trivial for any

[113] I am well aware of the inherent impossibility to approach anything completely free of presuppositions, as of the sometimes positive effect that presuppositions have in guiding our understanding. My claim here is strictly

philosophical inquiry, the history of philosophy shows that it is far from an easy task to free oneself from prejudice and allow the studied phenomena to manifest freely. To translate this requirement into environmental terms, one should not question or decide in advance which elements or aspects of an environment are important or worthwhile to pay attention to. We should try not to presume anything about the surrounding reality, but to describe it as attentively and closely as possible. In this respect a phenomenology of environments is similar to what Ihde called the hermeneutic of things,[114] namely a detailed interpretation by all possible means and angles of the reality that surrounds us. For example, one should not worry which parts of that environment are 'natural' and which ones are 'artificial', no matter how one understands the two terms. Also, one should not prioritize one's experiences according to feelings, practical aims or value judgments. For example, when describing environmental experiences positive experiences should not count more than negative ones, aesthetic experiences should not be given priority over instrumental ones, or the other way around.

We should suppose everything to be equally relevant in understanding how that specific environment is.[115] This will hopefully provide us with complex sets of observations and information which will no doubt enrich our knowledge of and relation to that environment. Certainly, the study should not stop at observation and accurate description. Subsequently, one will have to select, combine, compare and confront experiences. I will come back to this point shortly.

methodological and tentative in the sense of requiring of those examining experience a suspension of their beliefs, and most importantly, patience in allowing that experience to be experienced as it occurs, as it is.

[114] Don Ihde: *Whole Earth Measurements. How Many Phenomenologists Does It Take to Detect a Greenhouse Effect? Philosophy & Technology*, Winter 1997, 61-72, 71.

[115] Again, this is a methodological claim, not an ontological one in the sense that clearly there will always and inevitably emerge points of focus or importance in any understanding. However, I want to stress the importance of open-mindedness about other, different possibilities. This implies that we subscribe to an initial (though ideal) position of equality of all points of view.

The second principle I already mentioned, and it is also implicit in the first one: the importance of direct bodily contact with an environment. Actual, direct, bodily experience of an environment should be considered inevitable when trying to understand what or how that environment is. This is not because bodily contact would provide better information about an environment than, for example, reading reports about it, or viewing scientific measurements of its air and soil composition. Bodily experience is important because it can provide knowledge that cannot be achieved by mere 'secondary' contacts with an environment. Being exposed to an environment with all our senses constitutes a certain specific type of access which reveals qualitatively different information than other approaches. Our bodily involvement with the surrounding reality has another important aspect, namely an affective one. The more closely, frequently and directly we experience an environment the more sensitive we become to its complexity, structure, and possibilities. This increased sensibility can then be turned into powerful affective environmental arguments which are based on care and awe. Thus environmental philosophy can benefit from the richness, ambiguity, depth, and immediacy of phenomenological descriptions. Also, direct environmental experiences can (but need not necessarily) strengthen our sense of belonging and unity with our surroundings. A hunter in Werner Herzog's documentary film *Happy People of the Taiga* says: "There is something soothing about the ways in which the landscape changes with the seasons. It's a sense of achievement, even though I had nothing to do with it. But just by being here, I feel like I am part of the whole process."

It is, of course, not enough to be bodily involved with a specific environment in order to understand it. It is important to be able to notice and describe or experiences in as much detail as possible. So the third important phenomenological principle is attention. Most people would consider this a trivial point to make. But I believe that precisely because it is so obvious that we should pay attention to the surrounding world if we are to understand it, it is

rarely discussed how this attention can be trained, enriched, and put to philosophical work. One of the exceptions is Simon P. James who argues that attention is an important virtue of phenomenology.[116] While I agree with James, I believe that attention is also a necessary skill of a truly fruitful phenomenological method. This skill consists of an open and diligent attitude of attending to details and nuances in order to understand what and how the studied phenomena are. As a skill, it can be trained, taught and learnt, much in the same way as any other skill. One should train one's attention to remain focused, to be patient, to expand to more and more complex observations, and in general to provide as rich of a 'picture' as possible about an environment.

To give an example as to how attention might be trained, consider that attention can be nuanced with respect to different senses. Our culture currently tends to favor vision and pay privileged attention to visual experiences, often at the expense of others. But giving our full attention to how an environment is manifest in our experience also means to be attentive to other senses and the information they provide. This is all the more important as certain sensory qualities of environments are almost completely disregarded by environmental philosophy or action, such as, for example, auditory qualities of environments. This might or might not be related to the fact that the noise quality of an environment is not considered a necessary condition for the development or life of a human being. But as city dwellers know all too well, noise pollution can have serious effects on our life quality, so there is no reason why it should not be a genuine environmental issue. But even without pollution, auditory or tactile contacts with an environment can provide priceless ways to understand how certain processes work, how that environment is structured or what kind of possibilities it offers. In the fourth chapter, when I will discuss environmental perception, I will come back to some of

[116] Simon P. James: *The Presence of Nature*, 9-10.

these aspects. For now I merely want to stress the methodological importance of cultivating one's attention skills when approaching an environment phenomenologically.

Our attention can and should be trained, cherished and perfected not only in order to become more sensitive to environmental problems and our inseparable entanglement with them, but also to be able to realize the magnificent and obtruding autonomy and dignity of the surrounding reality. There are reasons to presume that the result of close phenomenological attention is not only awareness but also awe and respect.

So far I have only mentioned the most basic requirements of my phenomenological method which to some might seem trivial. There are also more complicated methodological questions to answer. The most important ones regard experience as the object of study. Whose experience do we describe and why? Why should we assume that describing experience tells us anything about the environment and not just about that experience? Finally, how do we get from describing experiences to understanding long environmental processes happening over long periods of time? These questions are related to the most important critical points against phenomenology being used in environmental philosophy, namely subjectivism and idealism. So before attempting to answer to the questions I raised, it will be worthwhile to address these two important worries and try to come up with a way to overcome them.

2. The worry of subjectivism and idealism

The most common arguments against phenomenology being relevant in environmental philosophy concern phenomenology's idealist (or non-realist) and 'merely subjective' stance. I believe that both labels are to some extent true but neither is a general or a necessary characteristic of all phenomenologies. One can hardly call Heidegger an idealist or Patočka a subjectivist.

The worry of an inherent **lack of realism** in phenomenology should be a genuine concern for all of us attempting to tackle environmental problems starting from phenomenological premises. If we assume phenomena to be constituted in subjective experience and we bracket judgments about the existence of the world, how can we argue for an environmental crisis happening 'out there'? Basically, this worry implies that phenomenology is essentially constructivist with respect to what environments are.[117]

While I recognize this worry as genuine and important, I do believe that charges of anti-realism or idealism accurately refer to Husserl's philosophy. Anthony Steinbock formulates the problem succinctly: "It has long been held that Husserl, following Descartes, remained committed to a philosophical perspective that recalcitrantly reduced structures of meaning and sense to a purely subjective foundation, to the so-called 'transcendental ego'. As 'transcendental', as 'foundational', one objects, phenomenology is deaf to the question of history and to its own place in a historical context, it vitiates otherness and the social world, it is unable to treat the political life, ethics, gender, ecology, and so forth."[118]

While I agree with most of the critical points formulated in this quote against Husserlian philosophy, namely that is it foundational, subjectivist and idealist (and I myself consider these to be faults, especially in an environmental context), I do not agree with the subsequent tossing out of the baby with the bathwater. Phenomenology is not identical with Husserlian thought, and even the latter is not as "coherently flawed" as some might believe.[119]

[117] See my remarks on constructivism in the second chapter of this thesis.
[118] Anthony J. Steinbock: *Home and Beyond. Generative Phenomenology after Husserl*. Northwestern University Press, Evanston IL, 1995, 2.
[119] I will come back to this issue shortly when addressing the three main 'stages' of Husserlian thought.

Husserl's ever-lurking constructivist stance is absent in Heidegger's fundamental ontology which is realistic with respect to beings and the surrounding world.[120] Patočka also argued repeatedly against the Husserlian idea of constitution and for an asubjective phenomenology based on the manifestation of the surrounding world.

Furthermore, idealism is not in any way inherent in phenomenology's attention to human experiences. Paying attention to our experience of the world and drawing conclusion from such observations does not it any sense have to imply that the surrounding world is dependent on humans or our constitutive presence. In the same vain I argue in the second chapter that the hermeneutical presence of humans in an environment does not make that environment dependent on humans or less autonomous from human ways of approaching it.

But the most important evidence that idealism is not inherent in a phenomenological stance is the fact that in our most common experiences our **environments always show up as real.** Ordinary and proximal experience does not doubt the reality of the 'thing' experienced.[121] We can construct ulterior skeptical arguments with the help of logical and speculative arguments, but we cannot live or act as if there was no world around us. For example, I can construct a complicated speculative theory about the world being the product of my imagination, but I cannot act accordingly in the sense that I cannot walk through walls, fly or not see things around me when I look around with my eyes open. Our most basic and common experiences always refer to include the surrounding reality, only an ulterior and quite complicated frame of mind can construct skeptical arguments.

[120] Cf. also with Don Ihde: *Whole Earth Measurements. How Many Phenomenologists Does It Take to Detect a Greenhouse Effect?* 65. Ihde convincingly argues for Heidegger's 'practical realism'. Heidegger might be considered an idealist with respect to Being, in that he claims that Being is insofar that it is manifest to and understood by Dasein. However, this too can be questioned as an idealist claim, but most importantly, Heidegger does not in any way subscribe to any form of constructivism with respect to the reality of beings or the surrounding world.

[121] Husserl's methodological requirement to bracket decisions about the existence of the surrounding world does not amount to doubting its existence. Husserlian bracketing was inspired by the Kantian contention and arguments that existence is not a real predicate, in the sense that it does not add any plus information to the phenomena studied, which is always already taken to be real. Understood like this, the reason for this bracketing is precisely to concentrate on how the world is given in experience.

The second important set of worries formulated against phenomenology concerns its alleged **subjectivism**.[122] The problem, translated to an environmental context, can be formulated like this: if a phenomenological approach focuses on experienced environments, will the result be a phenomenology of the environment or of the experience of particular people or groups within that environment? In other words, will we find out about environments or only about people's experience of them?

Lurking in the background of these questions is the presupposition that the two are somehow incompatible, i.e. that we are either studying one or the other (persons or environment) and that the two are fundamentally different aims. So this worry rests on a typical dualist presupposition of separation between subjective experience and objective reality. To this any phenomenologist can answer by pointing out that the two kinds of knowledge (about experiences and about the world) are not only non-exclusive but also impossible to separate and address in isolation. That is to say that if we want to understand environments, we can only do so by also understanding the being who "does" the understanding, and on the other hand, to know about an understanding and experiencing being is impossible without also knowing what he or she experiences or understands.

I do not wish to enter into a dispute with dualistic presuppositions here; I merely want to point out that the most basic presupposition of phenomenology, in fact, possibly the only common presupposition of all different phenomenological theories and authors is the original and essential unity of person and world. Phenomenology in all its forms emphasizes the complete **entanglement** of humans with their environments. What phenomenology reveals is that ordinarily and for the most part we do not experience the surrounding world as different from or opposed to us. Rather, our ordinary experience happens as the unity of us who

[122] Anthony J. Steinbock: *Home and Beyond. Generative Phenomenology after Husserl*, 2-3; Jan Patočka: *Body, Community, Language, World*. Open Court, Chicago and La Salle, Illinois, 1998, 174.

experience and that which is experienced. We just take it as obvious that there is a world around us and that it is such and such. Husserl's lifeworld, Heidegger's being-in-the-world and Patočka's natural worlds are all versions of the same basic presupposition that humans are inseparable from their surrounding world and that this unity is manifest in ordinary experience. This presupposition can, of course, be questioned and argued against, if one is so inclined. My aim here is not to decide this classical philosophical debate, nor do I believe that it can be definitely solved. Instead, I propose to understand the unity of person and world not as a metaphysical but as a methodological principle of phenomenology. So rather than arguing about the claim of such unity, we should allow that phenomenological method strives and aims to reveal a certain level of experience on which one does not separate oneself from the surrounding world, supposing this state to be more original than subsequent others.

The charge of subjectivism rests on the presumption that describing human experience leads to 'mere subjective' results. It is undeniable that phenomenology more often than not has a 'subjective' starting point: an experience lived by a person. But the question is: does phenomenology have to remain 'closed' within a personal-subjective perspective? A certain early form of Husserlian phenomenology (static) would seem to suggest that phenomena are to be described as they are constituted within the experience of a (albeit transcendental) subject. But even in Husserl's case the analysis of phenomena moves further in the direction of inter-subjective (genetic) and inter-generational, historical experiences (generativity).[123] What we have in Husserlian phenomenology is in fact an understanding of objectiveness as inter-subjective or generative constitution. While of course this notion of objectivity is not identical with what is usually understood as objective (i.e. mind independent), it is, nevertheless, an alternative notion of objectivity worthy of serious consideration.

[123] I will come back to these shortly when addressing Husserl's importance to my phenomenological method.

3. Confronting experiences

To continue the discussion about my own phenomenological approach to understanding what environments are, I will now provide an alternative answer to the charge of subjectivism, one that can also be construed as an attempt to overcome subjectivism.

As I already mentioned, I propose to start by describing as accurately as possible our own bodily experiences of a certain environments. But the question is what will be the next step? There are several possibilities which are available at this point. I could consider my experience to be proxy for 'experience as such' and so generalize my understanding of that environment into an answer about the being of that environment.[124] I could suppose that my experience holds the key to understanding the truth about that environment. Needless to say, I will be charged with subjectivism, and rightfully so. There is no reason to suppose one's own experience to be proxy for experience as such and thus no basis on which to generalize. Rather, after paying attention to one's own experiences in an environment, the next step should be to confront them with others: with different experiences I have of the same place, with others' experiences as they relate them to me, to experiences I have in other environments, to other's different experiences, and so on.

A further question is why should we compare and confront experiences, with what purpose? Most phenomenologists put forward a method that starts from single subjective experiences and aims to arrive at general knowledge about the studied phenomena by

[124] The most common reason why this is sometimes admitted or argued for as a coherent philosophical move is that one might argue that our own private experience is the only experience we have actual access to. However, I believe that just like skeptical arguments, this assumption is also more speculative than experiential. First, in our actual experience of the world we do have lots of ways of knowing about others' experiences (we can see others have different experiences which we understand as being such and such from their behavior, we can listen to others relate and describe their experiences to us, we can have experiences in common, and so on). Second, paying attention to one's own experiences can also bring about questions as to how private those experiences are. If it can be shown, for example, that the experience of someone invading my personal space is culturally relative, in the sense that it depends on inherited and learnt ways to experience others – then how private is my experience of 'personal space'?

comparing many such experiences and revealing the common traits in them.[125] These common traits are said to be relevant information about whatever the studied phenomena might have been, as it is supposed that they reveal something 'objective' or at least 'intersubjectively valid'. I do not want to dispute the benefits of such an approach, but I will nevertheless propose a different strategy. In the case of a specific environment, I believe that it is not only experiences shared by many people or common aspects of many people's experiences that can provide us with information and understanding about that environment. A poet's experience of Bükk forest might have little or nothing in common with the experience of a hunter. Why should we suppose that only that which is common to the two experiences matters or describes accurately what the forest is? The same can be said of other different experiences – why should we suppose that we find valuable information in common traits and not in differences? If my pluralistic presuppositions make any sense, it is precisely the range of very different experiences that tells us most about a specific environment, as they reveal its richness and complexity thus increasing awe and respect and requiring more complex and nuanced attitudes.

So as a further methodological principle of my approach I propose that different experiences be compared and combined, or, when their combination is not possible, confronted and negotiated with each other. While I believe personal experiences are crucial in a phenomenological description or understanding of any environment, I do not think that the two are identical. Phenomenological descriptions might start from first-person descriptions of private experiences; however, they should not stop here. Nor should we simply draw general conclusions from such private experiences. Rather, the next step after observing our own

[125] David Seamon: *A Way of Seeing People and Place: Phenomenology in Environment-Behavior Research*. In: S. Wapner, J. Demick, T. Yamamoto, and H. Minami (Eds.): *Theoretical Perspectives in Environment-Behavior Research*. Plenum, New York, 2000, 157-178.

experience in all its complexity should be to confront one's own experiences with that of others. Why? For many reasons.

First, because I take phenomenology to be a qualitative rather than a quantitative inquiry, which means that the quality of each different experience counts on its own right and not it its frequency or its being shared by others. For example, if and when we want to understand "people's attitudes" about an environment, the "people" that we ask are not interchangeable in terms of their experiences. It is not like we can take a random sample of people and presume their answers to be relevant for an entire group just because the sample is statistically (quantitatively) relevant. The responses given to phenomenological questions are not generalizable.[126] Rather, these responses need to be taken into consideration and weighed together. For example, local farmers might have insider practical knowledge about a place, but this does not make that place identical with what farmers conceive it to be. A visiting painter or an experimenting scientist may be less involved or involved differently, and still, none of their experiences can in itself tell us what that environment is. What, then, is the use of asking about their experiences? If we are to achieve understanding about that environment, the more different experiences we are confronted with, the better. This reveals that particular environment as being complex, multi-layered, multi-faced, and with many possibilities.

Second, we should confront our experiences with those of others to test our own prejudices and hidden assumptions, to avoid projecting our own experiences onto others or the surrounding reality – in short, to become more flexible and open-minded about the studied phenomena, and less 'locked in' within our own presuppositions.

Third, if we aim at confronting different experiences this makes questions or suspicions about the trustworthiness of subjective experiences obsolete. The question of

[126] Cf. also David Seamon: *A Way of Seeing People and Place: Phenomenology in Environment-Behavior Research*. Seamon has a similar claim relying on certain qualitative phenomenological studies. However, he also argues that the purpose of such qualitative descriptions is to compare them with each other and discover underlying commonalities which we can then use to formulate 'general truths' about the studied phenomena.

reliability is not that important if we do not offer an experience as proxy for 'experience as such'. Our understating of the studied phenomena will not rely or private experiences but will take contour after reviewing and taking into consideration many different experiences over long periods of time. Since we do not describe experiences in order to generalize them or to find their common traits, the important thing is not to find out how accurately one experience reveals some phenomena, but to different experiences to enter into a fruitful dialogue in order to provide understanding. In this sense, my approach to understanding environments is essentially dialogical, even if this dialogue is not always collaborative but sometimes confrontational. What I believe results with such dialogical confrontation will be the subject of my next section.

4. Patterns of experience

Let us go back now to the question of whose experience counts in understanding an environment. If it is not everyone's own experience, nor the common experience of others, but, as I suggested, all different experiences should count in their own terms, then a further question should be raised with respect to the temporal dimension of our inquiries. Our personal and interpersonal experiences are by definition contemporary, and given the relatively short lifespan of human beings, our experience would only provide us with a contemporary understanding of an environment. This might represent an important problem in environmental philosophy where the phenomena, problems and changes that we study or debate are usually processes happening over long periods of time. For example, it is difficult to approach the effects of deforestation experientially based solely on contemporary experiences – we would need to provide something like a history of experiences to show the experiential changes involved in deforestation and their effect on ways in life or the quality of life. It is not enough to have present experiential knowledge to genuinely understand an

environment. One needs to know about previous experiences in order to be able to compare and understand the process that resulted in the current state of affairs. The current state of any environment is the result of long processes of becoming.[127] How could phenomenology study such historical phenomena if it only had access to contemporary experiences – personal or intersubjective?

This raises a serious problem for my phenomenological approach, however, not without available possibilities to overcome. In the next section I will discuss Husserl's attempt to respond to the need to approach historical phenomena as a major source of inspiration for my phenomenological approach. For now I will only say that if phenomenology is to be applicable to phenomena ranging over long periods of time, it will need to be adjusted to such phenomena, namely it will need to be able to capture changes and information from experiences that occur over many generations of humans. The way I propose to do this is with the methodological tool of supposing experiences to manifest certain historical and cultural patterns.

A comparative approach to different experiences (different in time and different in place) reveals that there are certain features of average everyday experience that show clear signs of difference in different historical, cultural and geographical contexts. These large-scale experiential differences I will call **patterns of experience** to refer to results of several encounters and actions of several subjects over a long period of time, results which form

[127] The reverse of this contention was called "the missing baseline syndrome" by biologist Daniel Pauly who observed that people tend to use the beginning of their experience as a reference point for the "original state" of that which is experienced. Pauly observed that the lack or abundance of fish was evaluated both by fisherman and by experts according to the state of fishery at the moment when fishermen and experts started experiencing (or studying) those fisheries. This masked long term changes and declines in fish populations, and conflated the 'natural state of the fisheries' with the experiences of this one particular generation of observers. See Daniel Pauly: *Anecdotes and the Shifting Baseline Syndrome of Fisheries*. *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*, 10(10), 1995, 430. This is to show that if we consider change only in terms of observable by one person, or one generation, historic scale changes will be lost to our view, and we will miss something important about our environments.

certain pre-given (inherited) ways of experiencing that influence and shape all present and actual experiences. What this observation amounts to is the claim that we take the surrounding world to be such and such in light of underlying historically, culturally, and geographically changing modes of experiencing and understanding. The ways in which these can be revealed and studied, as well as their importance for environmental theory and action will be the subject of the last chapter of this thesis.

B. Three philosophers – three inspiring ideas

After I presented a brief outline of my phenomenological method, in what follows I will address the broader phenomenological context of my approach. I want to show that phenomenologically minded thinkers offer fruitful dialogue on environmental issues, even if no full-blown, coherent environmental theories. My argument will be by way of example. I will illustrate my claim by revisiting certain key elements, aspects and concepts in the phenomenological tradition, focusing on ideas that were inspirational for my own approach, either methodologically or in terms of philosophical solutions. I will put forwards Husserl's idea of generativity as a methodological tool for studying historical phenomena that range over several generations; I will show that Heidegger's idea of homeless dwelling is a fresh way of thinking about the relationship of humans and their environments, as well as an original way of dissolving the tension between being at home or alien in nature; I will offer Patočka's ontology of movement as an original solution to the conflict of local and global perspectives, so pertinent in environmental philosophy.

1. Husserl's generative phenomenology

Husserl's writings manifest an internally motivated shift and evolution of three phenomenological dimensions: static, genetic, and generative.[128] These do not represent developmental stages in Husserl's thought, in the sense that one should not suppose them to improve on previous approaches. Rather, they are different dimensions of phenomenology employed by Husserl throughout his work with respect to different phenomena recognized by him as requiring different approaches. This is important to stress as it makes clear that Husserl's philosophy, often identified with phenomenology as such, shifted and changed along the lines of methodological considerations. While the static and genetic dimensions are present together from the earliest writings of Husserl, the notion of generativity appears only after the introduction of the notion of lifeworld in Husserl's late writings, some of them unpublished even now. Each method is used to capture different dimensions of experience. Since the idea or dimension of generativity is not well-known outside the Husserl literature, I will dedicate some pages to explaining its difference from the other two methodological approaches, and then I will discuss how the idea of generativity was inspirational for my own approach.

Static, genetic and generative phenomenology

Already in his early writings Husserl distinguished static from genetic phenomenological descriptions. Static phenomenology is a constitutive analysis that describes how something is given (bracketing the question of what something is). It aims to capture the constitution of phenomena in subjective experience, i.e. it analyses the structures

[128] While the first two were generally recognized by all commentators, the third dimension was explicitly uncovered by Steinbock in his own attempt at a non-foundational transcendental phenomenology.

of consciousness. This method is found prominently in Husserl's *Logical investigations* and *Cartesian Mediations*.[129] We find such approaches with regard to single, isolated and static objects, such as a table or an apple. It presupposes that one can capture experiences in terms of their essential possibilities for a subject. As a result, both constituted phenomena and the self are conceived as fixed and already developed, and linked together by intentionality (*noesis-noema* structure).

In the 1920's there was a significant change in the initial static approach, starting with Husserl's attempts to grasp the phenomenon of time. In a temporal context, the self can no longer be understood as fixed and fully developed, as it is given in time and through time. This genetic self has a history and is personal, it has different capacities and beliefs that refer to and imply previous experiences and dispositions, habits developed in time. A temporal (genetic) explanation of the self also leads necessarily to others as the medium of the becoming of the self.[130] So while a statically understood ego leads to a view of the world as composed of static phenomena as constituted by the static ego, the attention given to time and movement modifies this picture substantially. In his genetic approach Husserl moves from describing structures to describing processes of becoming, he addresses the temporality of constitution and of the constituted objectivity.

The main idea on which constitution is based in a genetic context is reproductive association. I perceive the actually given object by referring it to/associating it with the meaning of the object, i.e. perception that has already been habituated, has become a faculty.[131] It has been given in its 'original form' a long time ago, then the experience was

[129] Edmund Husserl: *Logical Investigations*. Routledge, 2001; Edmund Husserl*: Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1973.

[130] According to Husserl our own self is not directly given to us in experience but comes to be constituted in time through our interactions with others in the sense that we develop in an intersubjective context that is the background and condition for the development of our idea of ourselves.

[131] Reproductive association is not mechanical, and not a thematic memory or remembering of some first/previous experience. It is not a return to some finished/fully formed experience of meaning to reproduce it

repeated many times and thus it became fixed. Now, when actually perceiving, I associate the presently perceived/given object (that can be described statically) with capacities habituated in time (that can be described genetically).

With the 'discovery' of the temporal ego, the notion of the phenomenal world corresponding to it also changes. It becomes a dynamic world constituted in time that Husserl captures with the introduction of his notion of lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*). Since this is one of the key concepts of Husserlian thought and, indeed, of phenomenology as an attempt to think humans and their world as a unity, it will be worth to consider it more closely. The lifeworld understood as the surrounding practical, everyday reality is an intersubjective and historical phenomenon. It is intersubjective in the sense that the principles of intentionality link our experiences to others, and it is historical in that it is not a world of beings but one of constant becoming. One can venture to suppose that the notion of lifeworld would be a good candidate for Husserl's notion of the environing world. And its description turned out to be impossible in a genetic context in which constitution – while intersubjective – is still studied as the correlative of contemporary experiences.

The notion of generative phenomenology was never explicitly used by Husserl but coined by Anthony Steinbock. Husserl referred to generative problems or simply *Generativität* when describing historical and cultural intersubjective processes of sense-constitution. One of the earliest mentions of such issues is in *Cartesian Meditations*: "…genetic problems of birth and death and the generative nexus of psychophysical being have not yet been touched. Manifestly they belong to a higher dimension and presuppose such a tremendous labor of explication pertaining to the lower spheres that it will be long

in the present. The model is the same in which Husserl captured the flow of time: the present moment includes retention (past) and projection (future). This is how each experience (present) changes all the others, even backwards as it rearranges and restructures the whole of habituated capacities of experience. Corresponding to this idea in generative reflections Husserl admits the relativity of historical past with the argument that it is constantly shaped by shared, generative memories (narratives). See Husserliana XXIX, text 30, quoted in Anthony J. Steinbock: *Home and Beyond*, 304.

time before they can become problems to work on."[132] Clearly here Husserl already starts differentiating between genetic and generative dimensions and methods, as determined by their problems and phenomena. Generative problems refer to "the dimension of sense-constitution which takes place historically, geologically and intersubjectively."[133]

However, this was just a first hint toward the possibility of entering another dimension of phenomenology, which will turn into actual analyses in Husserl's later writings, when the previously developed (genetic) theory of constitution acquires historical and intersubjective significance. It is not merely the sedimentation of retention anymore, more the sedimentation of a tradition. Our present everyday experiences reactivate a historical past by taking up (appropriating) sense coming from a tradition. These features of experience become central in Husserl's writings after the introduction of the notion of lifeworld, especially in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*[134] (in what follows I will refer to this work as *Crisis*), *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass,*[135] and unpublished manuscripts. [136]

Lifeworld – home and alien worlds

The lifeworld was first used in order to approach objectivity as not mere objective things (i.e. the ways in which the objectivity of a thing is constituted) but the larger context of objective reality, which in its most general sense refers to a place and time shared by a community. Thus it is historical, cultural and originally intersubjective. In the genetic

[132] Edmund Husserl*: Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, 142.
[133] Anthony J. Steinbock: *Home and Beyond*, 59.
[134] Edmund Husserl: *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology.* Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1970.
[135] Husserliana XIII-XV: *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass.* Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1973.
[136] These unpublished materials were only available to me as quoted by Steinbock in his *Home and Beyond*, where he puts forward a generative phenomenological philosophy that is transcendental, yet not foundational, following a detailed research into late Husserl writings.

description, the constitution of the lifeworld is still said to be egological, but in the context of generativity, the lifeworld is irreducibly intersubjective, and its constitution already refers to and questions the ways in which normal (home world) and anomalous (alien world) communal spheres come to be. I will return shortly to the notions of home and alien world, but first, I want to discuss briefly the notion of lifeworld as the best candidate for a Husserlian notion of environment.

The lifeworld can be characterized in two interconnected ways:

1. as the possibility of lived experience in general, and ground for all other human activities (such as sciences), and
2. as the co-constitutive and co-relative relationship of home world and alien world.

In the case of (1) cultural differences are bracketed and Husserl aims to discover the universal structures of one, unique lifeworld that we all share,[137] while in the case of (2) his attention turns specifically to different lifeworlds and attempts to describe their differences.

Lifeworld as the place of lived experience

Husserl's attention turned to social and historic phenomena already in the 20's and this interest motivated the introduction of the notion of lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) in *Ideas II*.[138] He used the term to refer to the intuitive and aesthetic world, the environing-world (*Umwelt*) of average everyday experience, in sharp contrast to the objective worldview of natural sciences. While scientific activity reveals the surrounding world to be a collection of objective things, a phenomenological *Umwelt* is an environment which is affective (revealed by and through feelings), aesthetic (felt, sensed rather than analyzed), intuitive, and practical (structured and understood through practical goals).

[137] This notion would be very similar to singular notions of the environment that I criticized in the first chapter.
[138] Edmund Husserl: *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy - Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution.* Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1989.

Husserl offered a sensitive analysis of the interrelations of nature and sciences by arguing in detail in *Ideas II* that the activity of scientific theorizing performed by specialized sciences can be compared in important respects to the behavior of animals and humans in their respective natural environments. There is a deep-rooted analogy between the relationship of animal/human behavior to the lifeworld on the one hand, and the relationship of scientist (or a special community of scientists) to the corresponding scientific subject matter on the other. The analogy is presumably given by Husserl's notion of constitution. Just as intentional contents are correlates of specific intentional acts, physical things, too, are nothing but the correlates of certain physical acts, namely those of the theoretical acts of physicists. Physical nature is then the common surrounding world of physicists just as they know of it in their theories: extended to infinite and perfectly regular. There are other such special or specific surrounding worlds (mathematical, legal, football, and so on) that are accomplishments of interpersonal, cultural, i.e. purposeful human associations.

The most prominent Husserlian work on the lifeworld is of course the *Crisis,* in which the characterization of the lifeworld takes many forms and interpretative approaches:

- it has epistemological priority as that surrounding world which is in principle intuitable (always already known by way of intuition), and originally known by all of us (even if this knowledge does not become propositional or thematic), given in our average everyday experiences;
- it has ontological priority as foundation of sense for all kinds of humans activities, in that the meaning-structure of the lifeworld functions as context and condition for further (higher level) constructed meanings according to specific human endeavors in specific fields;
- it is the realm of subjective-relative truths, such as affective or aesthetic judgments;

- it is the perceptual world that has an essential ontological structure (it is, for example spatiotemporal) and a transcendental structure (in the sense that it functions as horizon, ground, and source for other, more specific fields of human activity).[139]

Husserl argues that natural sciences disregard our common everyday experience when depicting nature in exact formulas, and thus they create or add a world of formulas to the more fundamental natural world (lifeworld). The lifeworld is the ground and source of all idealizing processes (including scientific endeavors); it is in fact our common, naively experienced world. He contrasts the potentially perceivable lifeworld as the real possibility of all experience with the not even potentially perceivable world of theoretical, logical constructions (science). The lifeworld has ontological and explanatory priority. The ontology of the lifeworld has to ground the ontology of science and it can do that because there is continuity between everyday/naïve and scientific ontology so there is also methodological continuity.[140] The continuity is given by the fact that the larger context of science and the site of scientists or scientific experiments is the lifeworld. For example, the questions or goals of science have their roots in our lives in the lifeworld and their reference and application, too.

If we were to consider the lifeworld Husserl's notion of environment, the question of its singularity or plurality arises just as in the case of the environment. Husserl tends to consider the lifeworld one, with universal transcendental structures. However, his reflections on the subjective-relative nature of truth within the lifeworld open up the possibility of allowing for diverse cultural words. The lifeworld manifests clear and important differences and is experienced and apprehended in so many clearly different ways. So should the lifeworld rather be used in plural and understood as belonging to particular socio-historic

[139] Steinbock analyses these in detail as separate, provisional concepts of the lifeworld. See Anthony J. Steinbock: *Home and Beyond*, 88-96.
[140] Edmund Husserl: *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, par. 33.

groups? Troubled by the thought of relativism and still looking for universal essential structure of *the* lifeworld Husserl solves the problem in his usual way: he brackets in the first instance the realm of objective sciences, and then the cultural differences too, because he presupposes a shared lifeworld that has an essential structure and is universal. But curiously enough, after having argued that the natural sciences abstract and idealize the world, and clearly rejecting that way of "unifying" the world, we find out that after the eidetic reduction the lifeworld according to Husserl has the same essential structure as that of the sciences. It is always and already in space and time, it is causal, it is composed of objects and so on.

The problem as I see here is similar to the one I presented in the case of *the* environment. Husserl aims at discovering the basic structures of *the* lifeworld, supposing those to be the same everywhere and every time. In a manuscript from 1931, Husserl characterizes phenomenology as "archeology" stating that its task is to "dig up" the constitutive structures of the world of experience.[141] This takes the form of a regressive inquiry into the *arché* of experience. But all in all this formulation is still static as it presupposes that the structures of the lifeworld to reveal are universal and stable. But on closer analysis the actual patterns that shape and characterize experiences are shifting and ever-becoming, so the methodology they require is generative.

Home world/alien world

Well aware of the fact that bracketing does not really solve the problem of obvious historical and cultural differences, Husserl turns his attention to the constitutive role of a shared tradition and sketches in the same *Crisis* (an unfinished work compiled by Eugen Fink) and other late works the problem of generativity (*Generativität*). This presupposes that the lifeworld is the result of historical and cultural intersubjective constitution. Thus he

[141] "Phänomenologische Archäologie, das Aufgraben der in ihren Baugliedern verborgenen konstitutiven Bauten, der Bauten apperzeptiver Sinnesleitstungen, die uns vertig vorliegen als Erfahrungswelt." Quoted in Anthony J. Steinbock: *Home and Beyond*, 284.

arrives at the recognition of differences in the lifeworld, more precisely two special cases of lifeworld: home world (*Heimwelt*) and alien world (*Fremdwelt*).

Generative phenomenology refers to the process of generating intersubjective, historical, normative, and cultural structures of the lifeworld shared by a specific community. Generation comes to be over several generations, so it is a long historical and social process.[142] The constitution of meaning thus exceeds the individual subject (static) and the transcendental subject (a priori structures of becoming - genetic). The generative approach exceeds the static by introducing temporality, but exceeds the genetic too, because personal temporality is replaced by social, historical generativity. Generative phenomenology no longer tries to identify essences, but tries to capture the historical becoming of structures that are described.

Furthermore, static and genetic phenomenology was only applicable to contemporary others (because they relied heavily on some notion of empathy) and their experiences, it could not deal with unknown, dead, past or future others, since we cannot have an intersubjective bodily connection with them. Generative intersubjectivity includes the constitutive meanings of ancestors - meanings we inherited through language, common practices, habits, and so on, and of descendants - meanings we shape and leave to future generations.[143] Our experiences, thus the structure of our lifeworld is co-constituted, i.e. constituted together with past generations (possibilities, inclinations, preferences, values, and so on that we inherited) and future ones (in the sense that we 'leave behind' for them certain possibilities and not others.

Generative phenomenology supposes that we can have access to temporal phenomena happening over many generations, in constant becoming, i.e. historical phenomena. I believe

[142] Edmund Husserl: *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass,* 43.
[143] Anthony J. Steinbock: *Home and Beyond*, 193.

that our environments are also historical phenomena in constant becoming thus Husserl's attempt to come up with a method for capturing such complex historical structures became very important for my own approach. The question is: how do we have address historical phenomena phenomenologically if they cannot be revealed by our own experiences alone?

The clues for generative phenomenology – Husserl claims – are to be found in ethnology, cultural anthropology, and history of ideas.[144] Generative analysis offers a variation on the classic sense of constitution as it can include the "constitutive roles of appropriation and renewal of sense that stems from normative territories and traditions."[145] Also for the first time in Husserl's writings, birth and death, language and communication become constitutive problems, as they all play central roles in the process of appropriation. To offer an example of the change of perspective offered by this novel dimension, consider the problem of communication. In a genetic description the mode of communication that will constitute a community is dialogue. In the generative dimension this is not possible, of course, as communication has to be described as functioning over a chain of generations, and thus will take the form of narrative.[146]

The main theme of Husserl's generative descriptions is the co-constitution of home world and alien world.[147] Home world is a net of intersubjective connections in which we usually and for the most part live: it is what Husserl calls normality. It is the way we

[144] Edmund Husserl: *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass,* 181.
[145] Anthony J. Steinbock: *Home and Beyond*, 14.
[146] For a detailed analysis of the role of narrative in generative constitution, as well as the brief history of this Husserlian insight see Anthony J. Steinbock: *Home and Beyond,* 62, 208-218.
[147] „Ist jeder normale Mensch historisch, konstituiert als seiend in einer historisch dauernden Gemeinschaft, so is seine Umwelt, die Welt, die für ihn konkret konstituiert ist, umgrenzt als historische, unerachtet eines offenen Horizontes einer 'leeren' Raumzeitlichkeit und Welt, so, wenn wir die totale historische Gemeinshaft nehmen, die als totale sich in Sondergemeinshaften gliedert." Edmund Husserl: *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass*, 139.

'normally' experience and take the surrounding world to be. Alien world, in turn, represents anomaly, strangeness.[148]

Our experience is normal when it has a coherent continuity, is mostly concordant, some optimality prevails, and has some constancy. If such, it becomes typical and thus, familiar. So the home world is a meaningful historical, cultural, social lifeworld that is constituted together with 'home partners'[149] and through its opposition to the alien world. The phenomenology of generative association is used to explain taking over and passing on meaning that can be both theoretical and pre-theoretical – a generative process that stretches over generations. This happens through repetitions, rituals, communication – in and through these a home world is constituted as normal, typical and familiar, „thus bequeathing originally, generatively and bequeathing the customary tradition, historically. Everything is association. Coincidence is transfer of sense."[150] There is no private sphere inside the home world, in the sense that my private experiences are in some important sense learnt and shaped by the way 'one' lives or experiences, i.e. by an already existing context. Through being born and raised in a specific time and place I become like others with whom I share that home, I experience like others, and through others I acquire a home identity.[151]

Generative processes are of two kinds: active and passive. Passive generative genesis brings about the surrounding cultural world and the culturally not yet cultivated natural world that would serve as soil for the actively shaped, cultural world. The surrounding cultural

[148] The notions of normality and anomaly are not used here in the psychological sense, but as referring to constitutional processes of sense-unity and difference, respectively. The basic claim of generative phenomenology is that we live in a home world characterized by normality and in a co-constituting relationship with an alien world characterized for us by anomaly. Normality and anomaly are further characterized by Steinbock, following Husserl along four oppositions:

Home world - normality	Alien world - anomaly
Concordant	Discordant
Optimal	Non-optimal
Typical	Non-typical
Familiar	Unfamiliar

[149] Edmund Husserl: *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass,* 161-63.
[150] Quoted in Anthony J. Steinbock: *Home and Beyond,* 191.
[151] Edmund Husserl: *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass,* 463.

world is our "inherited sense of environment"[152], our sense of 'ancient land', 'ground', our spiritual habitat inherited from our ancestors. These are basically readily found patterns, sedimentations, meanings that are like our reflexes. Appropriation and taking-up of a tradition is automatic and brings about unquestioned validity of sense for each individual born into that tradition. But before concluding that generative processes are inevitable fates that befall us, Husserl turns to describe active generative genesis as spiritual formation, cultural sedimentation and spontaneous modifications of meanings in communications, through renewal and critique: "We are human beings, freely willing subjects who together actively intervene in our environing-world, constantly shaping it, along with others. We do so whether we want to or not, whether for better or worse."[153]

While Husserl has a lot to say about the home world and the way it is constituted, the notion of the alien world remains rather formal, namely that which is the opposite of home world and that in contrast to which it makes sense to recognize our surrounding reality as home and familiar. Husserl claims that we cannot experience an alien world other than as strangeness within a home world. The reason for this is the experiential inaccessibility of the alien world, a claim which I consider to be the main flaw of Husserlian phenomenology and which I will address next.

Critical points and adjustments to the Husserlian position

Home and alien are correlative worlds in simultaneous constitution, originally belonging to each other.[154] They are also irreversible (experience of alien world from within the home world is not identical with experience of home world from the alien world) and not

[152] Quoted in Anthony J. Steinbock: *Home and Beyond*, 192.
[153] Quoted in Anthony J. Steinbock: *Home and Beyond*, 200.
[154] Edmund Husserl: *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass*, 214.

interchangeable.[155] Husserl considers experience in and of a home world to be analogous to private subjective experience, while experience which occurs in an alien world analogous to the experience of others. And since we cannot experience the experiences of others (only our experiences of them and the ways in which they relate their experiences to us), he concludes that in the same vain the alien world is in principle inaccessible from the home world other than in its strangeness, so negatively. This means that we are unable to understand other worlds alien to ours in their own terms, only as opposed to what we come to know as 'normality'. This conclusion is not only intuitively wrong, but also based on false premises. It is my contention that that the analogy on which Husserl rests his claims does not work. The experience of and in a lifeworld different from ours might be difficult to understand, but it is not in principle inaccessible for the simple reason that in both cases we are talking about inherited and learnt *ways* of experiencing something, so precisely that which is social about our experiences, and not their privacy (or qualia). The fact that we experience the surrounding world according to some inherited and historically, culturally specific patterns does not mean that we cannot understand or even learn other, previously strange ways of experiencing.

Husserl also underestimates the importance of mobility and the fact that there are no absolute separations between different historical or cultural worlds, but home and alien are transitions and interconnected. If I am a Hungarian city dweller and have usual ways in which I go about my ordinary life this does not mean that other cultural worlds or other environments are in principle inaccessible to me. On the contrary, my way of experiencing is subject to change, training, and learning. We are not 'locked' inside our cultural or historical patterns as we are inside the privacy of our direct experiences. We cannot learn or hope to

[155] Edmund Husserl: *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass*, 431.

feel what another person feels, but we can in time acquire different 'usual ways' in which we take the surrounding world.

The other problem with Husserl's claim that home and alien worlds are inaccessible to each other is that as an idealist, Husserl does not take into consideration the differences in the autonomous being of lifeworlds, so he fails to consider the effect that such real conditions might have on people's experiences, namely how a change in 'scenery' can bring about correlative changes in experience and, eventually, change the patterns of one's experience. For example, if I were to move to a South American jungle, my experience of the surrounding world will be largely influenced and shaped by the different possibilities offered by that environment, and in time I will learn different ways of experiencing – for example, I will develop a much more sensitive hearing or a more practical attitude towards trees.

In spite of the fact that generative phenomenology has some questionable or even wrong claims as a philosophy[156] I believe it can still be valuable as a method, with certain adjustments. This is because it enables us to capture complex phenomena such as our environments in their generative generation, thus offering the possibility of understanding our environments and our being from the perspective of lived experience with special attention to features of this experience that are the results of long generative processes.

It has been argued that the phenomena disclosed in phenomenological approach are determined or circumscribed by the method used to disclose it. "What appears in virtue of the way it which it is investigated, the type of phenomena which are disclosed depend upon the research perspective."[157] Contrary to this, I believe that the order is quite the opposite: it is the type of phenomena that is already disclosed (given) that will determine the adequate method of describing and understanding the phenomena. For instance, there are some given

[156] For me the most disturbing ones being the claim of inaccessibility of the alien world or the impossibility to know of an alien experience.
[157] Anthony J. Steinbock: *Generativity and Generative Phenomenology*. In: *Husserl Studies* 12, 1995, 55-79, 56.

phenomena that must be described in terms of structure and others in terms of genesis. Considering phenomena to be determined by the method describing them relies on a notion of transcendental constitution which I believe is not a necessary element of phenomenology. It is, however, one of the main features of Husserlian philosophy and in that case, it seems to be true that the way the self-evident givenness of a thing is described will determine the type of phenomena it reveals. This is true to some extent in the case of static and genetic methodology.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, Husserl's philosophy allows for an alternative interpretation that I defend. The different dimensions and methodologies envisaged by Husserl show an internal development along the lines of different phenomena. It is precisely the realization that some phenomena cannot be adequately revealed through a static constitutional description that motivates the introduction of genetic constitutions, while the need to capture other – historical and social – phenomena brings about the generative dimension of late Husserl writings.

Thus my claim is twofold:

1. Phenomenological method is not a neutral instrument or tool that can be applied in an undifferentiated manner to all phenomena, but it needs to evolve according to the nature of the phenomena to be revealed.
2. Phenomenological method can be adjusted to capture and support philosophical claims and aims very different from Husserl's. Thus employing phenomenological method does not necessarily imply subscribing to the presuppositions or conclusions of Husserlian (or any other) phenomenological philosophy.

The most important adjustment that I wish to make to the generative method is one that Husserl himself hinted at but never actually took seriously: generativity takes its clues

from ethnography, anthropology, and history of ideas.[158] I believe this to be of utmost importance in order to *compare* and thus reveal differences in different historical and cultural points of generation. Generative phenomenology as I want to use it will thus take the form of comparative analysis of differences in an attempt to understand and link these differences to specific generative processes.[159]

Experience of a strange environment (an alien world) or being confronted by another person's different experience can be interpreted in the sense that what we experience is *difference*. And what such difference presents me with is not an inaccessible 'other reality' but another generativity. Husserl conceives of experiential difference as absolute and irreducible, but this is not necessary nor the case in actual intercultural experience. Rather, the next step after experiencing difference is to understand it as "other normality" - as something that is equally valid, but not ours.

The fact that I want to emphasize the differences manifest between environments obviously means that I do not accept Husserl's view that there is an absolute boundary between historically or culturally specific experiences or worlds. This seems not only questionable but obviously false. Just as there is historical continuity to be traced along the lives of several generations and captured by a common tradition (Husserl himself rests his theory of generative constitution on this continuity), there is also cultural and spatial continuity. This is not to say that there are common structures to be discovered but that environments understood as geo-cultural territories are not separated by sharp boundaries that would make them inaccessible to each other or each other's inhabitants. Rather the boundaries are made up of several forms of contact, ranging from war to trade.

[158] Edmund Husserl: *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass*, 431, 436.
[159] See the fourth chapter of this thesis below.

Another adjustment that I believe needs to be added to the Husserlian sense of generativity is to include the autonomous surrounding world as an element of the generative process. Following up on my arguments in the second chapter, my contention here is that the original and concrete differences manifest in different historical and cultural worlds have their sources in the fact that environments are different in that they provide different possibilities for experience and understanding. Which experiences and understandings are actualized might be a question of cultural preferences, but the fact that environments are different is not merely the result of cultural constitution. Rather, specific environments in their autonomous reality and the cultures that emerge in them are co-generative in the sense that they mutually shape each other. That is to say that my specific environment (home world) is not a result of mere intersubjective constitution but of a long process of interaction with an autonomous surrounding reality. Understood this way, environments are ever-changing products of historical co-existence and co-generation of natural-geographical-geological and cultural specifics.

I will use the notion of environments to refer not to fixed structures but to actual surroundings in which a certain community lives, surroundings that are revealed from practice, shaped by a complex and co-relative net of natural and cultural boundaries (present structure) and an even more complex process of natural-cultural co-generation (becoming). Each environment represents a world ‘carved out’ by a certain community from their actual surroundings at a certain point in history.

I want to defend an experiential sense of environment by considering the lived experience of human communities as an integral component of the world. This experience has two aspects that require different approaches. There is the immediate and actual experience that can be described by static and genetic phenomenological method, but there are also deep patterns of experience that are generative results of historical and cultural

experiential processes. The generation of these patterns – analogous to evolution – marks actual experience by giving it certain predispositions and features that stretch beyond any individual sense-constitution.

The notion of generativity also yields the possibility of a realist notion of constitution that is no longer subjective. Constitution is not the creation of a world in some transcendental realm, rather it is the carving out (through historical, cultural, social, generative processes of communities) of specific environments on the grounds of already existing autonomous realities. The possibilities offered by the surrounding world are not uniform throughout this planet and the specific sets of possibilities yield specific ways to understand (to take our surrounding world to be such and such), which, in turn will yield specific modifications in the set of possibilities offered by the autonomous reality surrounding us.

2. Heidegger's notion of homeless dwelling

The philosophy of Martin Heidegger has stirred lots of interest and controversy in environmental thinking.[160] Many have argued for considering him a forerunner of current ecological movements and many (often the same) authors have questioned the "worth" of Heideggerian thought in this context. The grounds for both positions are many and diverse. Those who argue for Heidegger usually focus on his life-project to overcome the subject-world dualism and his critique of techno-science, while those who argue against him rely on his connection with National Socialism and/or his alleged "anti-naturalist", "anti-Darwinist", or "anti-humanist" stance.[161] My overall contention is that if we are expecting theories or solutions to be taken simply "over" to environmental arguments, then Heidegger is certainly not the philosopher to offer these. But perhaps if we cannot "use" Heidegger in this way, we can still allow him to make us think with him. And this together-thinking might even result in a meaningful reinterpretation of our relation and responsibility towards non-human reality.

As a preliminary indication of my position in the Heidegger-debate, I want to point to a possible overall narrative emerging from Heidegger's thought. For Heidegger, humans are

[160] Probably the most important author in this context is Michael E. Zimmerman, but see also: Bruce V. Foltz: *On Heidegger and the Interpretation of Environmental Crisis*. *Environmental Ethics* 6/4, Winter 1984, 323–342; Bruce V. Foltz: *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature.* Humanities International Press, Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1995; Nancy J. Holland: *Rethinking Ecology in the Western Philosophical Tradition: Heidegger and/on Aristotle*. *Continental Philosophy Review* 32, 1999, 409–420; George S. Cave: *Animals, Heidegger, and the Right to Life*. *Environmental Ethics* 4, 1982, 249–254; Laura Westra: *Let It Be: Heidegger and Future Generations*. *Environmental Ethics* 7/4, Winter 1985, 341–350; Leslie Paul Thiele: *Nature and Freedom: A Heideggerian Critique of Biocentric and Sociocentric Environmentalism*. *Environmental Ethics* 17/2, Summer 1995, 171–190; Kevin Michael Deluca: *Thinking With Heidegger. Rethinking Environmental Theory and Practice. Ethics & The Environment*. 10/1, 2005, 67-87; Daniel Berthold-Bond*: Can There Be a "Humanistic" Ecology? A Debate Between Hegel and Heidegger on the Meaning of Ecological Thinking. Social Theory and Practice,* vol. 20/3, Fall, 1994, 279-309; George Seidel: *Heidegger: Philosopher for Ecologist? Man and World* 4, 1971, 93-99; Ruth Irwin: *Climate Change and Heidegger's Philosophy of Science. Essays in Philosophy,* vol. 11, 2011, 16-30; Catherine Frances Botha: *Heidegger, Technology and Ecology. South African Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2003, 157-172; Lawrence W. Howe: *Heidegger's Discussion of "The Thing": A Theme for Deep Ecology. Between the Species*, Spring 1993, 93-96.

[161] "Heidegger's lack of interest in cosmology, his antinaturalistic stance (including his insistence that humans are not animals), and his relation to National Socialism create obstacles to reading his thought as consistent with contemporary environmentalism and/or Green politics." Michael E. Zimmerman: *Heidegger's Phenomenology and Contemporary Environmentalism*. In: *Eco Phenomenology. Back to the Earth Itself*, 86.

and have always been part of a primordial process of emergence: *physis* or Being. We are distinguished from other beings by representing the only island or clearing of understanding in the unfolding processes of being. We are beings for whom Being is at stake; we are Dasein. Our openness to the manifestation of Being is not our own doing or achievement, and it is always already frustrated by a tendency of Being to conceal itself. Thus, in this tension of manifestation and concealment of Being, limited and mortal humans cannot exist otherwise than by building a world for themselves, a world of language, reason, values, meanings, and so on. Such a world is never and can never be fully in harmony with *physis* or Being or earth. Nevertheless, it can be more or less respectful, and closer or further from the true manifestation of Being (aletheia). The history of Western civilization and philosophy is the history of slowly drifting further and further away from the original and simple manifestation of being: the marvel and recognition that things are and that they are manifest in their independent dignity. The course of this drifting has resulted in a distorted conception of *physis* called 'nature' and a systematic and gradual elimination of all other modes of revealing or understanding beings around us but the instrumental mode. Thus we have come to regard everything, including ourselves, as resource. But is this the unavoidable destiny of humans? Is this falling or drifting away from being part of the essence of man? If so, is there any hope for a change? Are there any possible solutions or ways out from such a predicament?

I don't believe Heidegger has all the answers or even that he poses all these questions. I also don't believe that there are no alternative narratives to be constructed from Heideggerian thought, or that this narrative is Heidegger's own or fully coherent. My aim with discussing Heidegger in an environmental context is not apologetic. Neither am I looking for a "Heideggerian" ecology. I merely want to point out some important possibilities that I believe emerge from Heidegger's questioning. I find these possibilities not only worthy

of consideration in themselves, but also as serving some thought-urging incentives that can move debates of contemporary environmental philosophy away from futile dichotomies and into meaningful (even if contradictory) discussions. For lack of space, I will only present two interconnected notions that illustrate my point, namely homelessness and dwelling. I offer these as possibilities to think about our relation to our environments in ways that are inseparable yet in tension, thus overcoming the seemingly necessary urge to decide whether we are 'at home' or 'aliens' in the surrounding world. Most importantly for me, these notions inspired my way of thinking about the relationship between the autonomous reality and hermeneutic 'appropriations' of an environment.

Heidegger never used the term "anti-naturalism" to refer to his views. As mentioned before, the label was tagged on him by some commentators, especially Michael Zimmerman. While I agree with the label in some senses, I strongly disagree with the claim that this makes Heidegger "useless" for environmental philosophy. Before one makes such hasty claims, one should try to understand what this so-called "anti-naturalism" implies in Heidegger's thought. In environmental philosophy anti-naturalism can have different meanings. First, it could simply mean "against nature" and this would be correct in Heidegger's case but for a very specific reason that 'nature' for Heidegger is a concept of western natural sciences.[162] He argues repeatedly against this concept so in this sense, he might be said to be against nature. But if we want to understand and radically reconsider the human-environment relation with Heidegger, it is not 'nature' that we must turn to. Rather, we should pay attention and understand Heidegger's insights on what **world** and **being-in-the-world** implies, and we must understand the difference between **'nature' and *physis***.

[162] Heidegger tends to use the term in quotes, sometimes capitalized: 'nature' or 'Nature'. In what follows, if I use the term as 'nature' is to refer to Heidegger's notion and critique of nature as understood by natural sciences.

The other possible content of the "anti-naturalist" label, the most common one, is the claim that humans are not natural the same way animals or plants are. We are discontinuous with the rest of nature, not fully adapted to it but somehow aliens (whether essentially or just recently). This sense of anti-naturalism is also present in Heidegger's philosophy and it is actually composed several closely connected theses:

- Humans are essentially **homeless** on earth, the most **uncanny** of beings. We do not have a predetermined or fixed place or existence on earth. We are never and have never been fully integrated into our surroundings. But we do strive to make a place for ourselves, and we mostly do this by aggressively intruding into our surroundings and modifying them to fit our needs and wants.
- The specifically human way of **dwelling**, i.e. inhabiting our surroundings, is by **building** - turning indifferent space into a place for human life.

Both ideas – homelessness and dwelling – lead in the same direction: we human beings are not automatically and immediately 'at home' in our surroundings, but we continuously strive and struggle to carve out such a home, a human world from the surroundings which exist independent of us and into which we are thrown. This process of building a world necessarily modifies our surroundings, although in different degrees.

Homeless being-in-the-world-on-Earth

Probably the most important philosophical outcome of Heideggerian thought is the contention that there is no separation between subject and object, or subject and world. We are not discrete, readily structured existing beings standing in front of a world composed of things different from us. Indeed, human beings cannot be properly understood without the surrounding world into which we are always already embedded in a way that makes any

separation or isolation ulterior and artificial. Hence Heidegger coins the term being-in-the-world as the basic state or being of Dasein (the only being for whom being is at stake – the only being who understands). In Heidegger's thought on the human-world relation we are not dealing with traditional concepts but inseparable experiential and existential realities that are like two sides of the same coin: Dasein and world. So to start to understand what environment means or implies in Heidegger's philosophy, we must first understand what world means and implies.

Heidegger tackles the problem of the meaning or essence of the world in different texts and with different methodological strategies. He discusses the history of the concept in *On the Essence of Ground*. He describes the most immediate and mundane manifestations and experiences of world as concern and dealing with tools in *Being and Time*. He draws on a comparison between things, animals and humans with respect to their relation to their surroundings in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics.* Finally, he characterizes world in opposition to Earth (roughly meaning *physis* – the original Greek understanding of nature) in *The Origin of Work of Art*. Since the last two are the most important for my understanding of our relations to our environments, I will only concentrate on these in what follows.

World, environment, and 'nature'

In Heidegger's philosophy world is inseparable from Dasein and Dasein is inseparable from the world. They do not stand over or against, in or around each other but originally belong together and can only be understood in this togetherness.[163] The relation of Dasein and world is not like the relation of a thing being contained in another thing. The relation is not merely spatial, but original and ontological: Dasein *is* being-in-the-world. I will explain this point and its significance in what follows.

[163] "Ontologically, 'world' is not a way of characterizing those entities which Dasein essentially is *not;* it is rather a characteristic of Dasein itself." Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time*. Blackwell, Oxford and Cambridge, 1962, 92.

According to Heidegger, the world we originally and primarily encounter is not a collection of objects present-at-hand (objects of theoretical gaze understood as composed of an unchanging substance or substratum and different characteristics to be perceived, measured, and made object of knowledge). The original world of humans is a world of practice – of things ready-to-hand, "understood" not theoretically but in use and practical involvement. So the world is first of all a world of equipment and tools which make sense and hang together not as parts of a theoretical or scientific system but as a practical referential whole with which we are dealing with in our everyday mode of being. All theoretical endeavors, including high science, are only possible as rooted in and based on this primarily practical being-in-the-world in which we are familiar with things in their use.

Such world of practice is not only the object of our concerns but also and more originally the place where we live: the most familiar and closest environment.[164] The term and notion of environment has a very specific use and meaning for Heidegger, one that is derived from the notion of world. This conception should be considered very seriously by environmental philosophy. First of all, environment is not used to refer to all of the things around Dasein that are not human or not created by humans, but to the immediate surroundings made up by non-human entities, humans, meanings, attitudes, values, models, practices, traditions, and so on. Second, environment is the world which is closest to us. This proximity does not necessarily or only refer to actual physical distance but has an existential meaning of familiarity, unreflected acceptance, and unquestioned validity. As such, according to Heidegger, the environment is the easiest to "skip over" and take for granted precisely because of its "closeness."

[164] "World" can be understood in another ontical sense - not, however, as those entities which Dasein essentially is not and which can be encountered within-the-world, but rather as that *'wherein'* a factical Dasein as such can be said to 'live'. "World" has here a pre-ontological existentiell signification. Here again there are different possibilities: "world" may stand for the 'public' we-world, or one's 'own' closest (domestic) environment." Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time*, 93.

Third, Heidegger's environment is no mere spatial notion, although it necessarily also has spatial aspects: "That world of everyday Dasein which is closest to it, is the *environment.* (…) The expression "environment" [Umwelt] contains in the 'environ' ["um"] a suggestion of spatiality. Yet the 'around' ["Umherum"] which is constitutive for the environment does not have a primarily 'spatial' meaning. Instead, the spatial character which incontestably belongs to any environment can be clarified only in terms of the structure of worldhood."[165]

So as we can see, environment is first of all characterized by being a world to Dasein, and only second as space inhabited by Dasein. Heidegger criticizes the tendency to focus on the spatiality of the environment (he takes this to lead to the flawed notions of *res extensa* as in the case of Cartesians) as he argues that this way of thinking jumps over precisely what is most important about the environment: its existential importance for Dasein – the fact that Dasein's world is never mere *res extensa* but always already a world of significant relations, meanings, values and attitudes: "The kind of dealing which is closest to us is as we have shown, not a bare perceptual cognition, but rather that kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use; and this has its own kind of 'knowledge'."[166]

We do not arrive at the notion of our "real environment" theoretically or by abstracting differences in different physical environments – rather, we understand what environment and being environed means by paying attention to our most immediate and closest dealing with our surroundings. And these original contacts are mostly practical. Our rootedness and mutual influence with our environment are pre-theoretical and should be revealed and understood as such. Without understanding this primary connection to our closest environment important possibilities of actions or arguments might be passed over.

[165] Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time*, 94.
[166] Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time*, 95.

For Heidegger, then, contrary to most of contemporary environmental philosophy, the environment is emphatically *our* world, not the world of nature. In fact, the first emergence and consideration of the notion of nature in Heidegger's philosophy is of 'nature' as a historical construct rather than an original phenomenon. He argues that we encounter something which we call 'nature' only based on our state of already being-in-the-world, i.e. never free of presuppositions, prejudices, and previous understandings. Thus the world (which includes human understanding and meaning) is prior to 'nature' – not in any ontological sense, but existentially and experientially. We do not experience or even perceive 'nature' directly as it were, but based on prior understanding of what it is and what it means.[167]

But if what we primarily encounter in our most immediate surrounding is equipment, i.e. things to be used in order to do something or produce something, how do we encounter natural things then? Do trees and animals also appear to us as ready-to-hand? Heidegger suggests that we first encounter natural things or element as referred to by tools and equipment, and that they are accessible to us precisely as materials or elements of tools.[168]

Several problems emerge from the claim that natural things are encountered as equipment. It seems to me that Heidegger is talking about a historically and culturally specific experience of the world, one that cannot be generalized. While it might be true that some of us do encounter the world by hammering and natural beings only as hinted or referred to by tools, this certainly cannot be generalized to any historical way of being. The

[167] "Nature is itself an entity which is encountered within the world and which can be discovered in various ways and at various stages." Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time*, 92.

[168] "In the work there is also a reference or assignment to 'materials': the work is dependent on leather, thread, needles, and the like. Leather, moreover is produced from hides. These are taken from animals, which someone else has raised. Animals also occur within the world without having been raised at all; and, in a way, these entities still produce themselves even when they have been raised. So in the environment certain entities become accessible which are always ready-to-hand, but which, in themselves, do not need to be produced. Hammer, tongs, and needle, refer in themselves to steel, iron, metal, mineral, wood, in that they consist of these. In equipment that is used, 'Nature' is discovered along with it by that use-the 'Nature' we find in natural products." Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time*, 100.

experience of animals, trees and flowers cannot be explained merely by their connection to equipment, at least not for all Dasein everywhere. It is only within an urbanized, industrial, techno-scientific context that it might be claimed that we are left with a "second-hand" experience of nature in which trees are primarily present as the material of tools or the existence of animals emerges in the context of an equipment-whole.

The second problem with Heidegger's insistence that natural objects turn up as referred to by equipment is that this seems to lead to a quite problematic instrumental view of nature. At least in *Being and Time* Heidegger seems to insist that the most originally being of natural entities is readiness-to-hand: "'nature' is not to be understood as that which is just present-at-hand, nor as the *power of Nature.* The wood is a forest of timber, the mountain a quarry of rock; the river is water-power, the wind is wind 'in the sails'. As the 'environment' is discovered, the 'nature' thus discovered is encountered too."[169]

Heidegger's suggestion that we understand 'nature' as readiness-to-hand can be (and has been) approached in two ways. Either we have to consider the analyses of *Being and Time* as referring to the specific, historical and cultural Dasein's relation to the surrounding world – so to consider this attitude through and through practical and instrumental. If we opt for this, it would seem that precisely this attitude and mode of revealing comes to be criticized later in *The Question Concerning Technology* and other essays.[170] Or, we can read *Being and Time* as analyzing a more general conception of usefulness and pragmatic attitude towards the world and nature, i.e. the original pragmatism of our encounter with the world.[171] But if this is the case then the later criticism would lose its edge to a certain type of fatalism. For if it is an essential and necessary human condition to take the world and nature as

[169] Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time*, 100.
[170] Hubert Dreyfus: *Heidegger's History of the Being of Equipment*. In: Hubert Dreyfus, Harrison Hall (eds): *Heidegger: A Critical Reader*. Blackwell, Cambridge, 1992, 173–185.
[171] Bruce V. Foltz: *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature.* Humanities International Press, Atlantic Highlands, N.J, 1995, 34.

something for something, then it is not the technology of the present era, nor the metaphysical effects of historical natural sciences that are responsible for revealing the world instrumentally as standing reserve.

I do not wish to decide between these two possible interpretations, but I want to point towards a third possibility. I want to argue that what we actually have in *Being and Time* is a sustained argument against considering our theoretical attitudes as our primary or deepest access to the world, environment, or nature. Heidegger's main concern here is to show that our theoretical possibilities and endeavors are rooted in pre-reflected practical attitudes and states (a very Husserlian argument): "Equipment can genuinely show itself only in dealings cut to its own measure (hammering with a hammer, for example); but in such dealings an entity of this kind is not *grasped* thematically as an occurring Thing, nor is the equipment-structure known as such even in the using. The hammering does not simply have knowledge about the hammer's character as equipment, but it has appropriated this equipment in a way which could not possibly be more suitable. In dealings such as this, where something is put to use, our concern subordinates itself to the "in-order-to" which is constitutive for the equipment we are employing at the time; the less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is-as equipment."[172]

Heidegger's concern in *Being and Time* is not with nature in the sense that is commonly understood in environmental philosophy, i.e. as a realm opposed to culture. We must note that 'nature' is used in quotation marks, and refers to the conception of nature of natural sciences. Heidegger takes this conception to be flawed and distorted precisely as it presupposes the primacy of theoretical attitude and conceives of 'nature' as a mere collection of things understood in their measurable qualities, present-at-hand as objects of our

[172] Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time*, 98.

knowledge. In later works Heidegger makes it clear that such a conception is a historical construct and mistake derived from a gradual misunderstanding of the original notion and experience of *physis* as emergence and self-generating motion.

A further argument for considering the 'nature' of *Being and Time* part of the larger critique of the primacy of theory is Heidegger's claim that we encounter 'nature' within the public world,[173] which for Heidegger tends to have the negative connotation of falling, idle talk, and unquestioned prejudices. That is to say that the 'nature' we relate to in this context is not the realm of real, emerging and manifesting beings but a conceptual filter built by tradition and taken for granted as reality.

All of this suggests, then, that we should read Heidegger's thoughts on 'nature' *in Being and Time* as referring to a conception of nature later explicitly opposed to *physis* and criticized for being an abstract theoretical construct that has replaced original experience. However, in *Being and Time* Heidegger is content to show that we do not encounter things of the world, not even things of nature neutrally, as it were, but always already in a context which is primarily practical. Notice that there is no determinism in such a view, because our so-called attachment or absorption is not an explanatory fact of how we are determined by our environment. Nevertheless, it is a condition for the possibility of discovering or encountering the world. We do not discover the world in a theoretical gaze.

The conclusion relevant to my topic here is that environments are proximally encountered worlds in the sense that they are merely one aspect of an inseparable whole which is human-being-in-environment. As such, environments are primarily practical and always already "humanized", i.e. filtered by and through human ways of understanding and approaching it. The immediate consequences of such a notion of environment are indeed far-reaching:

[173] Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time*, 100-101.

1. Environments are practical surroundings to be understood and treated as such, and not as objects of theoretical concerns.

2. Environments have to be understood contextually – and their specific context is given in each case by their human aspect, closely related to and inseparable from non-human realities.

World and Earth

In *The Origin of the Work of Art* Heidegger expressly opposes two closely connected notions: Earth and World. While World represents the entire web of significant relations in which Dasein exists (relations of all what is ready-to-hand, useful, practical, instrumental, activities such as working, building, cultivating, creating), Earth represents nature or natural materials, all that is outside the ready-to-hand, and that cannot be approached instrumentally. Heidegger says Earth is the autonomous realm of reality that is essentially self-secluding. Dasein's home is not the Earth, but the tension between Earth and World, which means that Dasein's presence in itself always and already "re-shapes", "re-works", "builds" its surrounding. Since the two notions can be considered roughly analogous to my notions of hermeneutical (World) and autonomous reality (Earth), the way Heidegger tackles their relation was inspirational for my approach, so I will consider it in somewhat more detail here.

Just as for me, in Heidegger's thought the opposition of Earth and World is not a simple opposition of nature and culture. The Earth is the ground for the world, and it is only through the presence and activity of Dasein that it becomes present, visible (though never fully intelligible), i.e. only by becoming World to Dasein. What Heidegger calls Earth he expressly identifies with the original Greek meaning of *physis*: "Tree and grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket first enter into their distinctive shapes and thus come to appear as what they are. The Greeks early called this emerging and rising in itself and in all things *physis.* It clears and illuminates, also, that on which and in which man bases his dwelling. We call this

ground the *earth.* What this word says is not to be associated with the idea of a mass of matter deposited somewhere, or with the merely astronomical idea of a planet. Earth is that whence the arising brings back and shelters everything that arises without violation. In the things that arise, earth is present as the sheltering agent."[174]

So if Earth is self-manifesting emergence, why doesn't Heidegger just say *physis*? I believe this is because in this context he is not trying to show the difference of *physis* and 'nature',[175] but to reveal the different manner in which we humans dwell or exist: by being-in-the-world which is different from being-in-*physis* or being-on-earth. Surely, humans are also in *physis* and also on Earth, but in a specifically human manner of turning *physis* or Earth into human World: "Earth is that which comes forth and shelters. Earth, self-dependent, is effortless and untiring. Upon the earth and in it, historical man grounds his dwelling in the World."[176]

This short quote gives us essential clues to understand the relation of Earth and World and what Heidegger is trying to reveal by it. First, he says that World is grounded on Earth – this means that there is no simple opposition here, but a relation of grounding and relying: the human world depends on earth, while the earth is self-dependent.[177] Second, the world is not a spontaneous manifestation, but something that is set up, i.e. constructed by humans. Third, the world of humans sets forth the earth, which means that it reveals the earth by making sense of its self-manifestation, by being the site where understanding occurs. Fourth, it seems

[174] Martin Heidegger: *The Origin of the Work of Art*. In: *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Harper & Row, New York, 1971, 17-86, 41.
[175] He did this in Martin Heidegger: *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Yale University Press, New Haven-London, 2000, 14-16.
[176] Martin Heidegger: *The Origin of the Work of Art*, 46.
[177] Elsewhere in the text and also in other writings, Heidegger seems to suggest this relation to be symmetrical, as he takes the almost personified Earth to "want" and "need" to manifest and thus to be dependent on humans to manifest to: "The earth cannot dispense with the Open of the world if it itself is to appear as earth in the liberated surge of its self-seclusion." Martin Heidegger: *The Origin of the Work of Art*, 43. He talks about the manifestation of Being needing and using humans to manifest elsewhere, too, for example in Martin Heidegger: *Conversations on a County Path about Thinking*. In: *Discourse on Thinking*. Harper & Row, New York, 1966, 84.

that the original mode of revealing the earth is by letting it be what it is, allowing it to come out of concealment and into *aletheia* (unconcealment or truth).

Thus we could say that the world is the earth as understood by humans. And there need not be an opposition between earth and world, although sometimes or even most of the time, there is. If earth and world are in conflict this is not to be understood in the sense of some futile opposition or essential hostility, but in the sense of a conflict and alternation of concealment and unconcealment (truth): "Earth juts through the world and world grounds itself on the earth only so far as truth happens as the primal conflict between clearing and concealing."[178]

So for Heidegger, Earth seems to mean the "in-itself" dignity of things and reality. The two examples he provides are both in the sense of self-closure and concealment of Being which we, humans try to penetrate with our very human means and methods. His first example is of a stone which has a weight that manifests and thus may be experienced, but which is inaccessible to our measuring devices. The second is of color which loses its "colorness" when analyzed into wavelengths. The conclusion is that all of our attempts to make sense of the Earth in exclusively human terms are in fact intrusions and forms of violence we perform upon reality. Obviously, this point is related to humans being the most uncanny of beings in the sense of *Introduction to Metaphysics* that I will discuss next. But here this uncannyness is expressly identified with destruction and tied to a technological mode of revealing the Earth: "Earth thus shatters every attempt to penetrate into it. It causes every merely calculating importunity upon it to turn into destruction. This destruction may herald itself under the appearance of mastery and of progress in the form of the technical-

[178] Martin Heidegger: *The Origin of the Work of Art*, 54.

scientific objectivation of nature, but this mastery nevertheless remains an impotence of will."[179]

How are we to do adjust our attitudes to this self-seclusion then? How can we understand our surroundings yet not do violence to them? In Heidegger's thought that which reveals the earth without "using it up" or without doing violence to it is mostly considered to be art, or, as Heidegger puts it in this context, work. All human activity and attempt to make sense of the earth result in world, but in very different manners. The modes of revealing Being or reality are many, and while works of art or meditative thinking tend to do more justice to the autonomous self-seclusion of reality,[180] modern technology, for example, is work that reveals being as nothing but standing-reserve for use and abuse.

The 'uncanny' human condition: homelessness

Even though Heidegger understands Dasein as part of *physis*, the human-*physis* relation is far from unproblematic bliss. The essential mode of being of humans is far from being in harmony with the surroundings. According to Heidegger in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, humans are the most uncanny of all beings. The context and occasion of this swift and ominous remark is a fragment from Sophocles' *Antigone*, which in Heidegger's own translation reads as follows:

"Manifold is the uncanny, yet nothing
uncannier than man bestirs itself, rising up beyond him.
He fares forth upon the foaming tide
amid winter's southerly tempest
and cruises through the summits
of the raging, clefted swells.
The noblest of gods as well, the earth,
the indestructibly untiring, he wearies,
overturning her from year to year,
driving the plows this way and that

[179] Martin Heidegger: *The Origin of the Work of Art*, 45-46.
[180] Meditative thinking is offered as a solution against instrumental and metaphysical ways of revealing Being in Martin Heidegger: *Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking*.

with his steeds." [181]

What does it mean that human being is the most uncanny of all beings? The German term used by Heidegger is *unheimlich* which means uncanny, but it can also mean unsettled or a condition in which someone is not at home. What does this actually imply? It implies not only that humans are unfamiliar, unsettled and uncanny, but in another possible sense of the world: unearthly! And, of course, the root of *unheimlich* is *Heim*, home, so humans are also homeless (*unheimich*).

Heidegger uses the term *unheimlich* to translate the Greek *deinotaton*, which comes from *deinon* and has two meanings: terrible and violent. There has been lots of criticism addressed to the way in which Heidegger translates and interprets Greek terms. However, it is not within my expertise or even skills to decide on this issue. And from the point of view of reconstructing Heidegger's view on the place of humans within the world, it really makes no difference whether these verses from *Antigone* were accurately translated or not,[182] as Heidegger is not using the *Antigone* as an argument but as an example of what he takes to be poetic sensibility to the true human condition. It is he, Heidegger, who argues that humanity is *unhemlich*, so rather than splitting hairs on etymologies, maybe it would be better to try and reflect with him on the possible meanings of such human condition.

The contention that we are homeless could be interpreted in two ways:

1. We humans are always "thrown out" of our familiar, accustomed and usual surroundings to face danger and overwhelming otherness. This interpretation is suggested by the fact that humanity "makes routes" for itself in all the domains of beings, without being home in any of them.

[181] Martin Heidegger: *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 156.
[182] For an alternative translation of the same verses see Ian Johnston's translation: http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/sophocles/antigone.htm

2. We humans are homeless not only in the sense that we step out of the familiar to face dangers and do violence on other beings, but we are essentially not at home anywhere. Just as our existence, our place on earth is also in constant becoming.

I believe that both interpretations are present and make sense in the context of Heidegger's thought. But in the first case, homelessness is expressed as an uncontrollable urge that almost forces us to step out of our familiar realms, while the second suggests we never have such familiar realms in the first place. In either way, since we are talking about the essence of humans, the claim remains that humans are always outside of anything like home.

This amounts to the claim that humans do not have a fixed set of attributes that would fit them automatically into a pre-existing situation. Humans are never completely adapted to their surroundings, so in this sense, we are not automatically at home in any specific place. On the contrary, we adapt all kinds of surroundings to fit with us. We do not have a specific, determined place on earth or in nature – we tend to venture into all areas and to modify all kinds of natural surroundings into fitting our expectations. We are homeless because we do not have just one type of environment or surrounding in which we can live and settle, but we are capable of inhabiting any part of the world, while still remaining within a constant state of not-belonging, not being natural in the sense that trees or animals are.[183]

Heidegger's claim is supported by evidence from historical ecology. Ecological historians Felipe Fernandez-Armesto and J. Donald Hughes[184] both present an overwhelming amount of evidence as to the fact that humans never had a fully natural way of being in their respective environments. In *Civilizations, Culture, Ambition, and the Transformation of*

[183] Heidegger argues in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (Indiana University Press, 1995) that animals are more at home, more adapted, more fitted into their surroundings because they are less free. See 178-179, 264.

[184] Felipe Fernandez-Armesto: *Civilizations, Culture, Ambition, and the Transformation of Nature*. The Free Press, New York, 2001; J. Donald Hughes: *Ecology in Ancient Civilizations*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1975.

Nature Fernandez-Armesto traces the ways in which humans intervene into different types of natural environments. He calls human intervention into natural surroundings "a paradox of construction and destruction at the start of the civilized tradition: the urge to warp unyielding environments in improbable ways; the itch and risk to improve on nature."[185] His point is that humans inhabit and transform all types of environments in the course of building a place for themselves, and that this intervention takes specific forms in different environments. If this is right then Heidegger merely gives a more poetic formulation to a historical and ecological fact.

Dwelling on Earth by Building a World

In *Being and Time* Heidegger argues that Dasein is not contained in the world as a thing would be in another thing, but dwells in the world with involvement and care. But what does dwelling actually consist in? The answer we find in *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*. By analyzing the etymology of the world building, Heidegger finds that it also includes the sense of dwelling.[186]

So here we find that Dasein's dwelling manifests and consists in the activity of building. We have to build in order to dwell. Or, to put it otherwise, we do not have a readily fixed placed in the world, we have to make room for ourselves. This can rightfully be interpreted, once again, as saying that we can never simply be natural and fit naturally into our environments as other animals.

But in its original and authentic sense, building is also synonymous with cultivating – it is a kind of activity that preserves and protects while building. This is the true sense of

[185] Felipe Fernandez-Armesto: *Civilizations, Culture, Ambition, and the Transformation of Nature*, 12.
[186] "The Old English and High German word for building, *buan*, means to dwell. This signifies: to remain, to stay in a place. The real meaning of the verb *bauen*, namely, to dwell, has been lost to us. But a covert trace of it has been preserved in the German word *Nachbar*, neighbor. The neighbor is in Old English the *neahjjebur*; *neah*, near, and *gebur*, dweller. The *Nachbar* is the *Nachjfebur*, the *Nachjfebauer*, the near-dweller, he who dwells nearby. The verbs *buri*, *bilren*, *beuren*, *beuron*, all signify dwelling, the abode, the place of dwelling." Martin Heidegger: *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*. In: *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 143-159, 144-145.

care: to cherish. Care does not only mean to be involved or tangled with things, to be interested in them and how they are (as the term *Sorge* might suggest in *Being and Time*). Genuine care preserves and nurtures.[187]

Furthermore, Heidegger says building is "being on the earth." If we read this in the light of *The Origin of the Work of Art*, we can conclude once more that we humans inhabit the earth by building a world on it for ourselves. The real challenge then is to make room for ourselves while still allowing things to be what they are: "*The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving.*"[188] And I believe nothing could express better the challenge of environmental philosophy. Can we make earth our world and still preserve it? How are we to do this?

Our relation to the surrounding reality

Michael E. Zimmerman and deep ecologists insist that humans are equal partners in the "natural web of life" with other beings, and that this sense of "naturalism" provides us with the possibility to identify with the rest of nature and care for it as if it were identical with us.[189] Heidegger was labeled "anti-naturalist" precisely for refusing the possibility of such community or identification. Zimmerman expressly charged him for his claim that humans seem to be "destined to intervene in and to do violence to "nature" (*physis*), humankind so distinguishes itself from other beings that humankind becomes homeless, not a member of the

[187] And as such it cultivates, hence the original meaning of the term culture: "Latin *colere, cultura,* and building as the raising up of edifices, *aedificare*—are comprised within genuine building, that is, dwelling." Martin Heidegger: *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, 145. So culture is part of human dwelling in the world, part of the world humans build to dwell in it.

[188] Martin Heidegger: *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, 147.

[189] "Once ontological boundaries between living beings are recognized as illusory, one realizes that biospherical interests are one's own. Devall and Sessions assert that ''if we harm the rest of Nature then we are harming ourselves. There are no boundaries and everything is interrelated.'' See Bill Devall, George Sessions: *Deep Ecology: Living As If Nature Mattered*, 68. In the words of the environmental activist John Seed, the statement ''I am protecting the rain forest'' develops into '''I am part of the rain forest protecting myself.' Cf. Michael E. Zimmerman: *Rethinking the Heidegger-Deep Ecology Relationship*, 224.

natural community."[190] It seems that the main argument against Heidegger in environmental circles is that he refuses to think of humans in biological terms, and he stresses the metaphysical difference of human beings.[191] This is considered to be a mistake as it is supposed to lead inevitably to subjugation and violence of nature and natural beings.

In my view there is something absolutely twisted in this way of arguing. First, it implies that if we do consider humans part of the natural process, this will avoid violence. Clearly, as history shows, this is not true. Environmental history offers ample evidence that there have never been fully "natural" communities in the sense that they all modified and destroyed their surroundings to some extent. It is only from the point of view of the most destructive culture, ours, that we tend to (dis)regard or mystify some other peoples as "natural". Second, arguing that if we consider ourselves different from animals or nature, this difference leads to aggression, suggests that humans will avoid hurting what they consider akin to them. This is also, clearly, not true. And at last, it seems to suggest that humans could only respect and cherish things that are similar or essentially identical with them. This might be true, but are we willing to accept it and build environmental arguments on it? Are we giving up on the possibility that we humans can respect and care for something other than ourselves? Many of the deep ecological arguments seem to presuppose this as a silent premise when arguing that only a deep and "spiritual" connection and identification with "nature" can put an end to destructive human behavior. For example, only if we identify with the rainforest can we protect and save it from destruction, since we recognize that we are performing self-defense. This is quite a sad position to take as it amounts to accepting that humans cannot act otherwise but in self-interest.

[190] Michael E. Zimmermann: *Heidegger's Phenomenology and Contemporary Environmentalism*. In: *Eco-Phenomenology. Back to the Earth Itself*, 73-101, 80.
[191] The main arguments for these claims are to be found in Martin Heidegger: *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 193-247.

Contrary to Zimmerman's contention that Heidegger is an anti-naturalist, I believe that his analyses of our relation to *physis* or Earth offer a fresh perspective outside the usual dichotomies of home or alien. He emphasizes the radical independence of Earth from humans and the dignity following from such independence and autonomy, dignity which is rightfully expected to induce respect and awe in us. He also considers ways in which humans understand the surrounding reality to be rooted in and determined by Earth but necessarily non-congruent with it – in this sense, our present is an obtrusion on earth's independent being. Yet, nor can we do much else but intrude, since this is the specifically human way to exist – we have to build, modify, and shape our surroundings because we cannot help (mis)understanding. We are essentially beings who inevitably understand or take the surrounding reality as such and such.

These ideas were inspirational for my own approach to environments and the way I conceive the relationship between the autonomous being of an environment and the human modes of understanding that develop on them. Unlike Heidegger, however, I do not think that the reason for our failure to fully capture reality is in the concealment of reality or our tendency to force our ways of understanding onto reality. Rather than supposing self-concealing realities, it makes more sense to suppose that environments are complex fields of possibilities that none of our mode of understanding can alone capture. We can never understand the full range of what an environment can be or mean. It is also not the mistake of our understanding to fail to do this. As finite, situated beings, we approach and understand the world from our own perspective, based on our own experiences and inherited ways of understanding. This situated understanding is not necessarily wrong, but it is always incomplete. And I suppose that the more experiences and understandings we can take into consideration, the deeper our understanding of an environments will be, even if it will probably never be complete. This way of thinking about our relationship to the surrounding

world is beyond the options of home or alien. We are not completely home, nor completely aliens. We are inseparable from yet in tension with environments.

The challenge presented here through an attempt at together-thinking with Heidegger is precisely to care for something different from us, however we call it: *physis*, Being or autonomous reality. We should not care for it because it's like us, or we are like it, or because we need it to survive. We should care for it because it exists; it shows, manifest itself to us (and to us alone), it is something. We should care for its difference and its diversity.

3. Patočka's ontology of movement or how to get from local experience to global understanding

The thought of Czech philosopher and student of Husserl Jan Patočka provides valuable insight about the possibility of overcoming Husserlian transcendental subjectivism and revealing the co-constitutive and non-hierarchical relation of humans and their surroundings. While there has been some discussion and debate in phenomenological philosophy about the potential ecological and environmental benefits of Heideggerian thought, Patočka has been completely neglected in this respect. In what follows I want to suggest the possibility and necessity of further consideration of Patočka's thought in environmental philosophy. However, since the space for this is limited here, I will only concentrate on one important point. I will argue that his ontology of movement offers an original solution to the opposition of global and local perspectives in environmental philosophy. His position inspired my notion of global perspective in environmental philosophy, which is not the perspective of the planet or a global ecosystem but a perspective of ultimate meaning and 'reason for it all'.

Asubjective phenomenology

One of Patočka's most original contributions to philosophy stems from his critique of Husserlian subjectivism. Patočka was always convinced of the irreducible "hardness" or "autonomy" of reality, thus couldn't accept Husserl's reduction of object and objectivity to subjective constitution. He aimed to capture the relationship of subject and object not in terms of one subsuming the other, but dialectically: as the relationship, and indeed, struggle,

of two fundamentally non-identical, non-reducible realities, but aspects of the same process: appearance or manifestation as such.[192]

The way we arrive at appearance as such is to radicalize the original phenomenological *epoché* and differentiate it clearly from reduction to pure immanence.[193] Patočka proposed that we perform a radical *epoché* without reduction. This implies moving beyond Husserl and putting the subject into brackets as well – hence the term 'asubjective' that Patočka used to characterize his own phenomenology. This bracketing basically means the end of the transcendental stance and focuses on 'appearance as such' which for Patočka is synonymous with the manifestation of the world as such.[194] What appears or what shows itself within this sphere is just as impossible to create or constitute by man as man's being itself. The phenomenal sphere is not the creation of the subject; it is not composed of subjective processes and not constituted in these.

The asubjectivity of the appearance of the world means the original presence of the world or environment in which we are, independent of any constituent activity of the subject or subjects. Thus the first valuable insight of Patočka's thought is his radical realism, which insist over and over again not only on the autonomy of the appearance of the world, but also, the autonomy of nature.[195]

---

[192] Jan Patočka: *An Introduction to Husserl's Phenomenology*. Open Court, Chicago and La Salle, Illinois, 1996.

[193] The original Husserlian *epoché* was meant to suspend judgment on the existence of the world that is experiences, effectively bracketing questions about the reality of the surrounding world. This bracketing was supposed to provide us access to the experience of an experiencing subject as it unfolds. What Patočka objects to this is that the realm described by phenomenology is supposed to be the experience *of a subject*. He thinks we need not suppose this and can in fact also bracket judgments about the experiencing subject. This, in turn, will give us access to 'appearance as such'. For a detailed account of this critique see Steven Crowell: *"Idealities of Nature": Jan Patočka on Reflection and the Three Movements of Human Life*. In: Ivan Chvatík, Erica Abrams (eds): *Jan Patočka and the Heritage of Phenomenology*. Springer, Dordrecht, Heidelberg, London, New York, 2011, 7-22.

[194] For a detailed analysis of the philosophical problem of appearance see Renaud Barbaras: *Le mouvement de l'existence: Études sur la phénoménologie de Jan Patočka*. Les Editions de la Transparence, Chatou, 2007. See especially the second and the fourth chapter.

[195] Erazim Kohák interprets this realism as the first step in a more ambitious attempt to reveal the possibility of discovering meaning in the world as a whole: "Patočka's realism, which may well be at the root of his kinship, however critical, with the existentialist strain in phenomenology, taking as its basic problematic the place of an intrinsically moral human subject in a world which is not only perceived as, but in some sense actually is,

Patočka believed, along with Heidegger, that the world is not only autonomous, but radically other and indifferent to us. But this indifferent otherness always already "has us" in the sense that it is the condition for our existence in the world – we are beings in constant becoming and this becoming is dependent on and filled by the experience of the self-manifestation of the world. This entails a non-symmetrical relationship: the world exists without us, but we can not exist without a world appearing for us. Not only did we not create the world in any sense, we don't even have any privileged or specific place in it. What human existence and freedom means, then, is an actual struggle against the indifference of the world; we strive to be at home in the world. This tension remains an ultimate challenge: the world is the condition for our existence, yet freedom has to be lived and accomplished "against" the world, as it were.

When describing phenomena as experience of a subject, Husserl opted for the primacy of representation in experience, which in turn led to a conception of the world as a spectacle unfolding before consciousness like an image or a film. According to Patočka, lived experience does not begin with the intentional representation of this or that particular, isolated object, but with what he calls "the whole": a non-thematic horizon of experience within which humans always already move.[196] Thus for Patočka it is not representation, but movement that is the most original experience of the surrounding reality.

Movement understood as emergence, as a process of actualization and becoming, is not objective or subjective, but the asubjective and dynamic appearance, generation and concealment of the world. Human existence cannot be understood and examined in isolation,

intrinsically objective, described accurately and, really, truthfully in objective material terms. (…)The realm of the objective must ultimately be subsumed within the realm of the meaningful–but first we must recognize its autonomy as objective." Erazim Kohák: *Jan Patočka. Philosophy and Selected Writings.* University of Chicago Press, 1989, 66.

[196] For an interpretation of Patočka's philosophy as non-intentional phenomenology see Dragoș Duicu: *La phénoménologie asubjective de Jan Patočka, une phénoménologie non intentionnelle?* Bulletin d'analyse phénoménologique, VI 8, 2010, 230-243.

without the movement that places it in a specific region of the world and in between things of the world: "Our life is a movement is Aristotle's sense: it has a whence – the bodily subject (which does not manifest itself) – and its whither – our doings in the world. What lies in between is the realization of possibilities. Our actual movements are based on a primordial movement, an ontological movement in the strong sense of the word – this movement sheds light on the world."[197] This is, then, the specific sense in which we humans are natural: we are movements in a dynamic world. To understand the concrete content of this claim we must turn our attention to the three basic movements of life recognized by Patočka.

The three movements of existence

A few preliminary remarks are in order here, to anticipate the relevance of analyzing the three ontological movements revealed by Patočka, and their importance for my own approach. If read and interpreted from an environmental perspective, and "translated" into environmental terms, Patočka provides an answer to one of the most important questions of a contextual approach to environments (and possibly one of the most important questions of environmental philosophy today): how are we to link local, contextual, and different experiences with or into global principles and actions? How are we to arrive at the global from the local? If we were to assume that all particular environments have some common features and we would use this common feature to ground global principles, we would only arrive at an abstract and detached notion of "the environment".[198] The practical consequences of relying on such concepts in environmental arguments I already discussed in the first chapter.

[197] Jan Patočka: *Body, Community, Language, World*, 80-81.
[198] See my critique of this notion in the first chapter.

I believe that the interrelatedness of environments is in fact not due to any overlapping common feature but it is brought about by shifting horizons, similarities, links, and practical relations which constitute a complex net of connections. The inter-relatedness of forest and city is not because of any common features that they share (although they might share many of these) but given by tourism, lumbering, and a myriad of other activities. For me this kind of interconnectedness gives us the true sense of global: to understand how all particular environments are inter-related and inter-dependent. Thus the global sense of environment is not the sum of all environments or an all-encompassing entity but a global horizon of understanding that integrates all situated and contingent experiences into one global view – the perspective of the whole. As shown in the second chapter, all particular environments are actually experienced places. As such, each and every particular situation contains within the possibility of understanding from a global point of view.

Patočka's ontology of life as movement and the three original movements he identified can provide valuable insight for understanding how humans are environed and rooted in their particular environments, yet still capable of thinking and acting freely and in accordance with global meanings, goals, and principles. Human existence can only be understood as anchored in and determined by a specific, rooted position and existence within the surrounding world, that is to say, a certain place in which the world opens up and manifests to us. The first movement (**anchoring and acceptance**) expresses in fact our deep rootedness in our given environments. In the second movement, of **work, conflict and struggle**, we are beings who are moving away from and surpassing the "natural", we aim to control and use our surroundings, both material and human. We prolong ourselves and project ourselves into our surroundings by tension, domination, or even violence. But then in the third movement (of **truth**) we are able to realize our freedom and our true being by opening up to a cosmic view of the world – the world as a whole. While the first two

movements tie us to a particular situation, the third opens a global perspective, in the specific sense that it opens up the *meaning* of the world as a whole. But this global perspective is only possible from a particular situation. It is not a perspective from nowhere, over and above the world, but centered on each of our specific situations.

Patočka stressed many times that we do not "shake" or "lose" previous movements when moving through subsequent ones. On the contrary, in the third movement, of the global perspective, we integrate the previous two in a truly authentic manner. So the movements are not isolated stages of our lives, but presuppose and conflict each other. That is to say, to some extent, our lives are moving always within all three types of movements, just that there is dominance of one or the other. Even when we realize our truest self by relating to the world as a whole, we always do this from our particular situatedness and rootedness. We channel into our situation the world as a whole, and this is how we become responsible for it.

Thus, what we learn from Patočka is the necessity of all three movements for human existence: our deep rootedness in a specific environment, our self-projection and struggle within that environment, and finally, our capacity to relate to our environments globally, from the global perspective of responsibility.

After these preliminary remarks, it will be useful to examine the three movements of existence in more detail, to reveal their complex implications; but it is also important to keep in mind that their separation is only for the sake of presentation.

First movement: acceptance – being rooted in the world

Patočka's first movement, of anchoring or sinking roots, can be linked, in my view, to Husserl's idea of generativity and Heidegger's notion of primordial understanding. That is because it explains how subsequent generations of humans constitute home and meaningful

surroundings that shape their most primary and original experiences just as material conditions do.

This movement refers to a naïve-natural attitude and existence: that of acceptance, affectivity, and instinctual adapting. It refers to the initial attitude of taking one's surroundings as a given, unquestioned and unreflected – to the state in which we take the world for granted.

The first movement is also the movement of foundation, as our primordial past (temporal dimension), and the movement of the "natural", marked by our corporeity and nearness to things and others (spatial dimension). We must be careful to note an important human specificity of sinking roots in the world, which will amount to a specific sense of being natural: "For most things – elements, natural entities, realities not created by the human hand, indeed for most of animate being – acceptation has no inner significance; fitting in is here, in modern biological terms, a mechanical adaptation."[199] We humans do not fit in automatically into our surroundings, but are affected in our very core by the process of being rooted; our presence is somewhat of a disruption that requires more than "natural" conditions: "The burden which is thus at the basis of the finite placement of humans amid the universe of what is, is their "intrusion" among existents (…)."[200] Of course, this does not make this initial movement of our existence "unnatural"; on the contrary, it is the most "natural" of all three movements in the sense of being un-reflected, un-thematic, embodied, and organic. The intrusion in fact refers only to a different manner in which humans are natural – the fact that their "natural attitude" is actually not natural as an animal's, i.e. not merely biological, but always already mediated by others and thus by complex social contexts. So for humans the instinctual-affective sphere of their existence, as well as their adaptation to their environment

[199] Jan Patočka: *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*. Open Court, Chicago and La Salle, Illinois, 1996, 30.
[200] Jan Patočka*: Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, 31.

is structured differently than in animals because it takes place in a human-produced context, too, the fruit of human creativity and tradition handed down by previous generations.[201] This human context or tradition is mostly "produced" by the next two movements, and is just as an integral part of our surrounding world as the things we come in contact with: "This activity gives rise to the shared environment or surrounding world of a certain community–the world of cultural things which are passed on as the fruit of earlier achievements and of traditional forms of substantive cultural processes."[202]

It might seem strange or even contradictory to speak of tradition and culture as parts of the pre-reflective, "natural" existence. But as Erazim Kohák was right to note, for Patočka culture is a primordial, sui generis part of the world.[203] And this is because the cultural context already affects our most original, even "natural" rooting in the world. So it is not only an empirical fact of the social world (though it is this, too, of course) but an *a priori* condition for the formation of humans. It is due to our unconditional acceptance of our surrounding world that we are located, at once, in nature, culture, and history.

The notion of social context that takes shape from Patočka's description of the three movements is very similar to what I understand by hermeneutical reality. The difference is, however, that Patočka tends to consider the social context as opposed to something instinctual or biological, while I do not see any problem in supposing our hermeneutical attitudes to the world and thus the created social realities in which we live to have close and complex biological, instinctual, or environmental roots. However, raising and examining such a difficult question exceeds the limits of this thesis.

[201] See the Husserl-section for the full explanation of this generativity.
[202] Jan Patočka*: An Introduction to Husserl's Phenomenology*, 166.
[203] Erazim Kohák: *Jan Patočka. Philosophy and Selected Writings*, 44-45.

Second movement: conflict

Humans cannot and do not remain in the warm protection and concealment of the first movement. We always move away and beyond this initial attachment and familiarity. We leave in order to work, to make room for ourselves and prolong ourselves. Thus the second movement is of self-sustenance and self-projection, that of coming to terms with the reality we have to handle. This is the dimension of alienation, distance, conflict, suffering, and guilt. Also, it has its own mode of inauthenticity in the failure to understand oneself or others: "This is a realm of the average, of anonymity, of social roles in which people are not themselves, are not existence in the full sense (an existence which sees itself as existence), but are reduced to their roles."[204]

Existence in this movement is essentially interested and almost exclusively utilitarian. So much so that this is in fact the movement that leads to self-objectification (understanding one's self as a thing among things of the world) and the "humanization" of the world (understanding the world as a set of tools or resources to serve humans).

Inevitably, in this movement our relation to others and in general to our surrounding becomes more complex. We exist in the tension between cooperation and conflict not only with others, but in general, with the environing world. Nature here is objectified and used in order to carve out, build, and consolidate our place in it. This is in a sense what Heidegger means by our essential homelessness – that which drives us away from the natural: our building, dwelling, thinking that gets lost in the world while totally depending on it and constantly objectifying it, missing its meaning. It is of crucial importance to note that this second movement is an essential trait of human existence – to establish itself against or in conflict with its surrounding.

[204] Jan Patočka: *Body, Community, Language, World*, 151.

Third movement: truth and freedom

Life moving within the first two movements contains the possibility of a further step, one of responsibility and authentic understanding. This third movement of existence is in fact a self-achievement, or existence in the true sense: "the movement of existence in the narrower sense of the word, which typically seeks **to bestow a global closure and meaning** (my emphasis – *L.C.*) on the regions and rhythms of the first and second movement."[205] This is the movement which enables us live freely, to seek truth, and to become irreplaceable individuals.

It is not that we see different things within the third movement, but we see things differently. A change occurs in our mode of understanding and relating, in the sense that global questions and perspectives emerge, such as questions referring to "the meaning of it all", "ultimate reasons", "ultimate goals" and so on. This shift of attention and attitude also brings us face to face with all of the aspects of our existence that remained hidden in the first two movements, and brings about the capacity to integrate "finitude, situatedness, earthliness, mortality precisely into existence."[206] So in the third movement we come to understand how we are shaped and determined by the world surrounding us. We are necessarily always in a particular place and situation, and we come to terms with such situatedness. What is more important is that in this movement we learn how to integrate the knowledge of our limits (both in time and space, i.e. mortality and situatedness) into our understanding of ourselves and the world.[207]

[205] Jan Patočka*: Body, Community, Language, World*, 148.
[206] Jan Patočka*: Body, Community, Language, World*, 151.
[207] To exemplify this integration, Patočka urges us to consider our relation to finitude in different dimensions of our lives. Our finitude is contained in the first movement as an instinctual goal – we "know" we must eat or we die. But we "understand" this by acting on it, and we are otherwise actually always overlooking it: "our entire effort is to respond without having this situation ever before us; we are aware of it but do not look it in the face." Further on, in the second movement, we cannot become fully aware of our finitude because we are too preoccupied and too taken up by denying it or fighting it with illusions. The way in which in the third movement we overcome the attitudes of the first two is in no sense an overcoming of death, not even of fear of death. It is

A crucial difference between the first two movements and the third one is that while the first two are necessary and, in this sense, automatic, the third belongs to us as a possibility. As such, it is our task and achievement, thus also our responsibility. What would be the incentive to seek this dimension of existence beyond familiarity and struggle? One possible answer is that the passage from one movement to the other is motivated by the finitude of any and every perspective that we find ourselves in.[208] That is, we seek the dimension of truth precisely because we recognize that although our perspective is always a limited one, we can always move towards new perspectives which – even though they will be just as limited – will provide new possibilities for us. It is not that we enter into an unlimited perspective in the third movement, but new possibilities emerge for us: possibilities of understanding and acting differently.

It is also important at this point to draw attention to the ethical dimension emerging from the third movement. In some sense, the previous two movements also have their specific ethical dimensions and their modes of inauthenticity as well. However, it is in the third movement that the possibility of a global, all-encompassing ethical attitude emerges. It is here that we become truly free to be entirely and truly responsible for everything. To put it in environmental terms, the third movement hints at an environmental attitude that does not care for our surroundings because it is home (first movement) or because it is resource (second movement) but because it respects the independence, integrity and dignity of being as such, the ultimate meaning of it all.

the overcoming of the concealment of death by gaining clarity and understanding and thus being able to accept and integrate death into our existence.

[208] I would like to thank Pavel Kouba for suggesting such an interpretation.

The three movements of existence as described by Patočka carry an important **spatial dimension**.[209] The first movement, spatially understood, would signify center, home, closeness, nearness, dwelling in our immediate environments without questioning anything, taking everything for granted. This is the original, situated, corporeal and affective position of all experience. On the other end, the third movement, understood spatially, would signify the horizon of all our experiences – the remote, far away, global dimension which, however, is present as horizon of all of our experiences, thus shaping our local, everyday experiences. It is only within this horizon that all previous spatial references (near-far, in-out, front-back, and so on) make sense and come to be understood in their true ontological and existential relevance. In between these two spatial dimensions, so between the local and the global, lies the actual in-between-ness of *Umwelt*, environment or surrounding. It lies between the unquestioned and unreflected familiarity of home and the remote global principles of the world as horizon.

In the second movement, Patočka stresses, we cannot remain affective-familiar anymore – we are no longer home. But we are struggling to make something like a home for ourselves in what we believe to be a hostile environment, full of conflicts, but also resources. This is the space of objectification and domination. We aim to use all that is surrounding us and in this process we objectify all that is surrounding us, including ourselves. This is an environment away from the affective-instinctive or "natural", as it is built and carved out by doing violence and distancing ourselves from our initial home. And most importantly, it is not yet responsible and ethical. It does not allow for a true understanding of what it means for us to be in the world, to be rooted in, environed and threatened by it. Only in the third movement in which we open up the world as the horizon-condition of our existence and

[209] For a detailed account of spatiality and the "natural" world see Jan Patočka: *L'espace et sa problématique*. In: *Qu'-est-ce que la phénoménologie?* Jerome Millon, Grenoble, 1988, 17-96.

experience do we truly understand and integrate the previous two spatial dimensions into a full understanding or our relationship with the world.

The three movements applied to environmental philosophy

As rightly pointed out by Kohák, in the mirror of Patočka's analysis it becomes clear that what we usually understand by "progress" is nothing more than an elaborated version of the second movement, of self-sustenance, much like the animals' search for food and shelter: "What modernity has taken as the very meaning of human life, its ever-increasing level of material consumption, proves to be less than fully human."[210]

Far from being a culmination of human activity, for Patočka this dimension of existence is a renunciation of a higher-level possibility – it is a fight with nature for our allegedly "natural" needs and their gratifications rather than a radical asserting of human freedom within and responsibility for the world. The world or dimension of the second movement is in this sense inauthentic or decadent: in the sense that in it human existence loses (or never gains) sight of its own point or reason to be and devotes all of its life to empty, contingent goals, and self-gratification. Also, human existence in this dimension refuses to take responsibility for its own existence, for the existence of others, or for the world in which we exists.

The breakthrough of the third movement is not only a detachment from the more "natural" movements of life. It is also a revolt against our irresponsible destruction of the world, a struggle for responsible living, and the perspective of the whole – a global perspective of what it means to be humans in the world. It is precisely through this that the third movement brings forth and accomplishes not only human freedom and dignity, but within the same move, the autonomy and dignity of the world too. Freedom is openness to the

[210] Erazim Kohák: *Jan Patočka. Philosophy and Selected Writings*, 104.

world, allowing it to appear and be manifest as itself and in itself. The entirely original thought of the third movement echoes Patočka's notion of philosophy as negative Platonism[211]: a metaphysical strive and questioning that asserts no positive (metaphysical) answer, but precisely by refraining from leaving the world for any kinds of transcendences, it becomes and remains open to the being of the world as a whole.[212]

C. Environments as generative sources of meaning

Approached with a generative phenomenological method and understood in light of some inspiring ideas of major phenomenologists, what have we learned about the possibility of a phenomenology of environments? First of all that given its diversity and rather large spectrum of ideas and directions, phenomenology is flexible enough to offer many fruitful questions and points of connection for environmental philosophy. Second, phenomenology need not be identical with any of its classical or lesser known phenomenological philosophies, but can be adjusted to any studied phenomena as a method or attitude of approach. Third, phenomenological philosophers offer a fresh perspective on environmental debates, even though they can give us no coherent environmental theory or ethics. Fourth, the environmental virtues (openness, attention, closeness, awe, care) that flow from a phenomenological attitude can prove to be crucial in a future change of ways of life, even though they have been disregarded by the environmentally minded community.

My phenomenological approach supposes our environments to be generative, historical phenomena in constant becoming. And we humans are ever (mis)understaning beings-in-environments. So environments are no mere collections of matter or facts, nor

[211] See Jan Patočka: *Negative Platonism. Reflections Concerning the Rise, the Scope, and the Demise of Metaphysics – and Whether Philosophy Can Survive It.* In: *Philosophy and Selected Writings.* The University of Chicago Press, 1989, 175-206.
[212] For details about what negative or open metaphysic entails in Patočka's thought see my *The Chances of an Open Metaphysics. A Dialogue with Jan Patočka*. *Philobiblon*, vol. X.-XI., 2005-2006, 200-230.

constructed by and through human approaches. Rather environments are complex places, proximal worlds which give content and meaning to all of our experiences, thus effectively making up the core of being human, being here.

What we discover if we pay close and serious attention to our environments is that they cannot be reduced to matter, facts or values – we discover a complex, layered, always partially obstructed **field of possibilities** and source of meaning or understanding of any kind, even mistakes. The surrounding world or entities within it manifest themselves in a way that makes us realize that they are infinitely richer in meaning and being than we are capable of grasping or doing justice to with our limited conceptual or linguistic tools. This is not to mystify our environments, but to remain open to their possibilities. We should not approach an environment as something given, fixed, structured as such and such, but as a dynamic process and field of possibilities. This has important consequences: for example it implies that adopting an attitude of "letting be" or of withdrawal is misleading. In a very essential sense we do not have this possibility and it is very misleading to assume that we do.

To conclude, I see many benefits of a phenomenological approach for environmental theory and action. I believe that the expected attitudes to follow from a close phenomenological examination of our own surroundings are worthy of being considered environmental virtues. These attitudes can range from awe and respect for the dignity of being to humility, care and responsibility for our surroundings. From a phenomenological point of view environment are inhabited places, i.e. places where people dwell in close involvement with their surroundings.

It remains for me to illustrate just how exactly a generative phenomenological method can figure and work in environmental theory and action. This will be my task of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: THREE GENERATIVE PATTERNS OF EXPEREINCE: PERCEPTIONS, PRACTICES, AND CONCEPTIONS

One of the most important results of the previous two chapters is that environments are no mere collections of physical or material conditions which contain humans as a vessel. Environments humans inhabit are of a complex pluralistic ontology which contains autonomous surroundings and specific ways of experiencing and understanding them in a unity. Environments are also places (or proximal worlds) with manifest differences in terms of their possibilities and in terms of ways in which life in them evolves. Since our presence in any environment is a hermeneutical presence, environmental philosophy can gain valuable insight by studying how or why we take the world surrounding us as being such and such. As obvious as this might seem, the experiential and interpretative aspects of environmental problems are rarely considered as providing arguments in their own right. The way an environment is 'lived' seems rather secondary to other issues, considered more urgent, such as reducing pollution, protecting wildlife, and so on. I also do not want to argue that experience is more important than such issues. If I argue for an approach which studies environmental experience is because I believe such an approach can be helpful is dealing with precisely those urgent matters that preoccupy environmentalists. The study of experience can reveal how deeply embedded we are in our environments. It can also help us understand ways in which we live, think, or act, and the possibility to live, think and act differently. This would bring environmental arguments closer to everyday life and connect them more efficiently to us.

But how do we give proper attention to experience and how can we draw practical benefits from such attention? How do we consider experience in environmental theory and practice? What is it about experience that we should take into account? In this chapter I will

tackle these questions by attempting to show *how* the approach and method I described I the previous two chapters can be used in environmental thought and action.

Patterns of experience and the study of environments

"It requires a very artificial and complicated frame of mind to 'hear' a 'pure noise" says Heidegger in *Being and Time*.[213] Indeed, human experience in any given environment is never merely an isolated, mechanical, or personal affair. It is not merely an automatic and mechanical representation or reception of sense data from the environment, even if – in some specific respect and for specific purposes – it can be described as such. Rather, all instances of actual and immediate experience follow certain larger tendencies: inherited and, to some extent, learnt ways of experiencing, acting, or making sense of our surroundings. I will call these patterns of experience. I take patterns of experience to be certain regularities or ways in which "one" usually experiences the surrounding world. This means that experience is always already shaped and informed by a complex set of background assumptions and inherited ways of experiencing something. A 15th century Buddhist monk does not have the same experience of nature as an 18th century European settler in North America. And the difference in their experience is not reducible to the difference in actual setting, geography, and climate (although, as I will argue, this is also important), nor is it a mere difference of aims. Their experience of a forest is different because they have different background assumptions about what and how forests are and they have learnt a certain way of behaving, acting or relating to a forest. It is also different because they have different aims and purposes within, they know how to perform different activities and how to distinguish and take into

[213] Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time*, 207.

consideration different perceptual clues. They see their surrounding and comport themselves according to unreflected and unquestioned ways of making sense of the world.

However we experience the world or the environment we inhabit, this experience will manifest certain patterns or ways of experiencing. These patterns are generative in the Husserlian sense that they are the results and expressions of long-term human (inter-subjective) experience, and are handed down and subtly modified from one generation to the other. This implies that our personal and immediate experiences of the world are rooted in and conditioned by a larger background composed of unquestioned, taken-for-granted and mostly unreflected ways of being in the world. Generative patterns represent the horizon for all particular lived experiences, although most of the time their influence and role in experience remain hidden.

Given the manifest differences in ways in which people experience their surroundings it is obvious that the generative patterns of experience are not universal or transcendental conditions of experience,[214] but results of historically and culturally specific ways of dwelling in our environments. They can also be understood as a certain order that arranges the world around us according to inherited and taken-for-granted patterns. Or, they can be thought of as a set of prior assumptions or prejudices about the world, reality, nature, human beings and animals, space and time, actions and affections, and so on. Furthermore, they include habitual ways of seeing, listening, moving, touching, or performing certain tasks.

Why analyze patterns of experience? Contrary to my contention that patterns of experience are historically and culturally different (for which I will offer ample examples in this chapter), it could be objected that there are nevertheless universal patterns of experience, and revealing these would be the proper methodological approach that would lead to an experientially informed environmental theory.

[214] They are not transcendental in the sense that they do not belong to 'human being' or a 'subject' as such.

But the problem with supposing universal categories (be they of the world, of nature, of thought, or of experience) is that they are never simply discovered, but always constructed. And most of the time they are constructed by taking one's own historical-cultural background (or even one's own experience) for granted and as criterion for universality. Furthermore, with respect to experience, no matter how many universal categories we assume, and even if they happen to be truly universal categories which accurately capture some *formal* structure of experience, merely describing such universal structures does not take us very far in understanding what they really amount to in *actual* experiences, which are always situated and perspectival. For this, we must always aim to reveal, understand and capture the specific contents of formal-universal categories of human experiences. And these contents manifest a baffling diversity. Consider the following example. One might claim that experiencing everything in space might be a universal pattern of experience and there are several arguments to show this to be true. However, there is a world of difference as to *how* people experience space and how they make sense of such experience. The space-experience of people born and raised in dense jungle areas tends to be different from those born and raised in deserts or big cities; there are also important cultural differences as to what is experienced as too near or too far. So as it turns out, the universal category "space" is only formally universal, but experientially diverse. Disregarding such diversity might make us prone to suppose that just because everyone experiences space or the world in space, everyone experiences it *like us*. That is to say, we are prone to fill up the formal categories with the content drawn from our own experience and take it for granted that our experience can stand as a proxy for "human experience in general."

This tendency towards universalizing one's own point of view is, I believe, amply present in today's environmental theory, policy, and action, resulting in often arrogant disregard for other people's different ways of inhabiting their environments.

But such tendency to take our experience as a proxy for all human experience is not a necessity but merely a tendency, which, with proper critical and hermeneutical effort, can and should be overcome. Even if all human ways of making contacts with the world are historically and culturally conditioned (i.e. have a different generative history) this does not mean that these different ways of making sense of the world are inaccessible to each other. Just because all experience is conditioned by a context, a perspective, a background or horizon, this does not mean that experience is completely determined and limited by such background patterns, nor does it mean that we cannot take on or understand different perspectives. Human experience is also infinitely varied and personal, and this offers a myriad of alternative possibilities. For example, even if there is convincing anthropological and empirical evidence that western culture prefers vision over other senses (this could be considered a pattern) this does not mean that Westerners are completely predetermined to be dominantly visual beings. This pattern is present rather as a powerful cultural tendency, one that penetrates all aspects of life, such as language, art, city planning, teaching and learning habits, and so on. It is in this sense that I said common experience is conditioned by patterns, namely in the sense that to some extent one cannot completely escape being influenced by them. This does not mean that one is incapable of being or experiencing differently. In fact, there are of course lots of people who are less ‘visual’ and lots of situations in which a usually ‘visual’ person comes to be dominated by other senses. My point is, however, not this. Rather, I want to argue that the first and most important step toward entering an open and meaningful dialogue with others of different experiences and other historical-cultural backgrounds is precisely to reveal our own background assumptions and to realize their specificity. Then, as a second step, we must confront our background assumptions with others, different from ours, to reveal and realize their relativity and contingency. This

realization in fact reveals not only that and how we are influenced by cultural patterns but most importantly, it reveals possibilities to experience and do things differently.

Third, we must aim to understand and respect other ways of understanding precisely in their difference, not because we might discover that we share some of the background assumptions that shape our experiences.

Such special attention to the background assumptions or experiential patterns of others is, I believe, crucial for less authoritative and coercive, more dialogical and collaborative environmental projects. But this is not the only benefit of revealing and analyzing patterns of experience. Even when studying our own environments it is crucial that we understand the patterns that our experience follows in order to better understand environmental problems and their possible 'human' roots. For example, we could consider it a pattern of experience that Western culture came to prefer and enjoy high mountain sceneries or views. How this preference evolved has a complex and well-documented history; it also has environmental consequences. In lots of cases, for example in my home town, most of the trees from small hills were cut out to provide better views of the city. With the trees out of the way and the social status given by 'having a view' these hills became densely inhabited. But due to the lack of trees, they gradually also became the most polluted and dangerous places to live, because of frequent landslides. In such cases understanding cultural preference for certain types of experiences and their practical implications helps understand some of the roots of current environmental problems.

There is another reason why environmental philosophy should consider differences in experiential patterns. Experience, as I argued in the second chapter, is always environmentally embedded, so the generative patterns that experience bears are inseparably linked to the surroundings humans inhabit and have inhabited. So if we reveal patterns, we also reveal something about the environments in which they develop. This claim at first sight

seems to allude to a materialistic and deterministic account about how human ways of life develop and differ. However, as I have also argued before, such materialism or determinism loses its sense in the context of a complex pluralistic ontology that moves beyond traditional oppositions of matter and mind, nature and culture, physical and ideal, and so on. Any kind of linear causal explanations that would claim the primacy of one factor over the other (so the primacy of an autonomous setting which determines cultural development, or the other way around, the so-called cultural construction of environment) in the mutual dependency and co-constitution of environments and experiences was rejected as a mere theoretical speculation and, indeed, reduction.

That experience in embedded in environments does not mean that it is strictly determined by them, nor does it mean that experience lacks creativity and freedom. But if there is any sense in talking about human impact on environments and change in environmental attitudes, it is precisely in the relative contingency of our familiar and habitual ways of inhabiting environments. This contingency shows that there are always alternative ways to think, perceive, or act, and that most of what we take for granted as given is actually object to change.

The best way to summarize my point is to say that patterns of experience are never merely contingent with respect to their respective environments, but that environment-experience relations taken as units are contingent with respect to other environment-experience units. That is to say that the relationship between environments and experiences is best understood in terms of constantly re-negotiated and ever-changing co-dependency and co-existence.

To understanding how different patterns of experience are linked to different surroundings is of key importance to a pluralistic approach to environments and to case-specific environmental projects and actions.

In what follows I will consider the diverse contents of three patterns of experience, with special attention to their links to specific surroundings:

a. Ways of perceiving, or how and why the perceptual contact with the surrounding world is different in different environments and cultures;
b. Practical habits, or how our ways of dealing with, manipulating, and orienting in our respective environments result in very distinct modes of experiencing and impacting our surroundings.
c. Prior conceptual schemes, or how different conceptions about nature and wilderness rely on and induce different experiences.

A few preliminary remarks are in order before I go on. I want to stress from the beginning that I do not claim these patterns to be the only patterns of experience, not even that they are universally valid and distinct patterns of all human experience.[215] I chose these three patterns for analytical purposes, and because I believe that conceptual, perceptual, and practical patterns of experience afford a sufficiently clear basis for a comparison of relevant differences in our environmental experiences. I also chose to follow this tri-partition inspired by Heidegger's fore-structure of understanding which includes fore-conception, fore-sight, and fore-having.[216] I interpret Heidegger's notion of primordial understanding and fore-structure to be close and similar to my notion of generative patterns of experience,[217] with the

[215] There are several other possible patterns to consider, such as affections and values, or senses of belonging or alienation, or language, or behavior, and so on.
[216] Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time*, par. 31.
[217] Both notions refer to certain inherited background conditions of all actual encounters of our surroundings. Interpreting the fore-structure as referring to taken-for-granted ways of perceiving, conceiving or acting in the world is not the "orthodox" interpretation of Heidegger scholars, however, I believe that it is a legitimate dialogue with Heideggerian insights. The fore-structure of understanding put forward by Heidegger is threefold:
1. Fore-conception (Vorgriff): grasping something in advance, which means that whenever we conceptually understand or interpret something, this act is always grounded in a prior conceptual scheme, be it a definite or a provisory one, be it derived from an entity or forced upon it.

notable difference that Heidegger is insensitive to cultural differences when it comes to characterizing the fore-structure.

Second, I do not mean to suggest that these three patterns – conceptions, perceptions and practices – should be or even can be separated from each other. We never have purely perceptual, purely practical, or purely theoretical experiences, but in all instances of experience perceptual, practical, and theoretical tendencies figure together, resulting in a unity of lived experience. It is merely theoretical interest which separates these aspects of experience from each-other and from experience as a whole, so if I discuss them here in three separate sections it is merely for the purposes of exposition.

Third, all these patterns are in some sense or another, directly or indirectly shaped by specific environmental conditions. Conceptions and ways of thinking are not mere arbitrary schemas of meaning imposed by humans on a meaningless physical reality, but deeply rooted in the kinds of experiences different environments afford. Perception is not a mechanical reception of bare sense data which is then ordered and made sense of by a conceptual or cultural grid made-up by the mind, but direct access to our environments. And practices are no mere mechanical uses of our bodies or of tools, but ways of being in the world and inter-actions with our environments.

Fourth, I put forward the following sections as further arguments that experience need to be considered in environmental philosophy and action, and indeed, that it needs to inform

---

2. Fore-sight (Vorsicht): seeing something beforehand, seeing things from one particular point of view, point of view which guides or determines the terms in which that which is to be understood will be understood.
3. Fore-having (Vorhabe): having something in advance, more precisely, already having a totality of involvements in terms of which to understand whatever is understood.
Thus, any understanding of the world as such and such (or any interpreting) is always pre-determined by practical involvements, the point of view and direction of the specific act of understanding and the prior conceptions attached to that which is to be understood. We never understand or apprehend anything free of all presuppositions, but always embedded into prior structures that shape, direct and determine the way in which we understand something as something. In the same vain, I argue, we never experience anything free of all presuppositions, but always shaped and determined by a background which forms the horizon of our experiences and makes every experience be *somehow* and of *something*. The patterns I chose here to illustrate this point are not identical with the three elements of the Heideggerian fore-structure, but were inspired by asking further questions about each of the three, as put forward by Heidegger.

and shape environmental programs. Conceptions of nature should be considered to reveal their contingency and to avoid conflicts when in specific environmental programs they come into contradiction with each other. Perceptual patterns of experience should be considered when planning and changing environments, to allow a rich and nuanced, possibly even different or contradictory experiences. And paying attention to mundane practices (our own and of others) has the benefit of revealing the possibility of environmental action “from below”, and also the inclusion of local know-how into environmental protection. As such, considering generative patterns of experience, how they relate to specific environments and to each other, can constitute strong arguments through examples that environmental action and protection needs to be pluralistic, it needs to approach and understand each case in its specificity.

A. Perceptual patterns

The first set of patterns of experience which I want to address in this chapter regards ways of perceiving the surrounding world. Sensory experience has often been conflated with experience as such. Whenever we say we experienced something, it is automatically implied that we had some sensory experience or other. But how does perception figure in our experience? Is it the case that we perceive the stimuli coming from our environments through our senses and then process this raw data with/in our brain/mind to produce the sensations that we usually refer or whenever we are describing our experiences? Or do we experience our environments directly as meaningful and as affording certain possibilities for us? Furthermore, why is it that our perception of the world is reported as being historically, culturally, and even individually different? These are the questions I will try to tackle in this section in attempt to show that

(1) Perception has been proven to be culturally diverse in laboratory experiments.

(2) Perception develops and is performed differently in different environments.

(3) Differences in perception are aligned or can be traced back to differences in environmental settings.

(4) Perceptual differences should figure in environmental philosophy, and especially environmental planning, given that the quality of sensory experience depends on the perceptual clues an environment affords.

1. Seeing the forest or the trees

In his book *The Geography of Thought* Richard Nisbett lists several convincing experiments and references to psychological, anthropological, and historian works to reveal important differences in the way Eastern and Western people make sense of the world, both

perceptually and in other respects.[218] First and most importantly, he finds that the patterns of attention in visual perception are different, as Easterners pay more attention to environments and background features or events, and Westerners focus more on decontextualized objects.

The experiment that showed this (intuitively true) hypothesis to be in fact true was conducted by Japanese scholar Taka Masuda at Kyoto University and University of Michigan. He showed American and Japanese students a complex, color animated scenery depicting an underwater environment. The vignette had one "focal" fish which was larger and of brighter color than the rest of the scenery, and further, it depicted other moving animals, plants, rocks, bubbles, and so on. The scene was shown to participants twice for 20 seconds, and then they were asked to say what they saw. The Japanese made more than 60% more references to background elements (water, rocks, bubbles, plants, animals) than Americans, moreover, their descriptions usually started by referring to the environment (it was a pond… or lake… or aquarium…). Americans mostly referred to the focal fish, and started their descriptions accordingly: there was a fish… After this all participants were shown pictures of objects, half of which were in the original vignettes, half of them were not. Those objects that were seen before were shown half in their original environment, half in a novel setting. The Japanese were highly successful in identifying objects shown in their original environments, more so than in the new setting. This suggested that objects have become "bound" to the setting where there were first seen. In the case of American students there was no difference in the success of identifying objects in the original or a new setting, suggesting that the perception of objects was fully separated from the environment in which it was first shown to them.[219]

[218] For a more detailed list of differences, see Richard E. Nisbett: *The Geography of Thought. How Asians and Westerners Think Differently…and Why*. The Free Press, New York, 2003, 44-45, as well as the whole book for experiments supporting each point.

[219] For details of the experiment and pictures see Richard E. Nisbett: *The Geography of Thought. How Asians and Westerners Think Differently…and Why*, 89-92.

As a second important difference in perceptual patterns, Nisbett points out that Easterners are more likely to detect relationships between objects and events than abstract categories based on rules. Developmental psychologist Liang-hwang Chiu showed pictures of a cow, a chicken, and grass to American and Chinese children, and asked them, which two go together. American children preferred to group objects because they belonged to the same category, so cow and chicken went together as they were both animals. But Chinese children were more likely to group them based on relationships, so the cow with the grass because the cow eats grass.[220]

Furthermore, even if Easterners prefer to refer to relations, nevertheless they too, of course, rely on categories, but, it was found that they do so differently than Westerners. When asked to put things into different groups (categorize) Westerners perform by identifying and following a rule, while Easterners tend to work on family resemblance. In an experiment, two groups of drawings of flowers were shown to Asian and American participants, and then one single flower, of which they asked into which group it most likely belonged. The single flower resembled more the flowers in the first group, and most Asians put it there. However, it had a straight line as its stem, as all the flowers in the second group (rule), so most Westerners put it in the second group.[221]

Nisbett's experiments and others he makes references to in his book are laboratory experiments on perceptual patterns. It can easily be objected that the hypotheses and conditions in which the experiments were conducted influenced their outcome, as the perceptual situations were built precisely to demonstrate the initial hypotheses. I believe these objections are sound and should be considered, were it not for the results which are, as I will later show, corroborated by more "environmental" evidence. First I want to point out that

[220] For details, pictures and a repeated experiment by the author see Richard E. Nisbett: *The Geography of Thought. How Asians and Westerners Think Differently…and Why*, 140.
[221] For details and pictures see Richard E. Nisbett: *The Geography of Thought. How Asians and Westerners Think Differently…and Why*, 142-143.

when it comes to explaining the source of these differences, Nisbett himself advances the hypothesis I wish to rely on, namely that differences are ultimately rooted in complex economic-cultural differences, which, in turn, are rooted in differences in the environments people inhabit. Without going into details or arguments, Nisbett suggests that "The ecologies of ancient Greece and China were drastically different—in ways that led to different economic, political, and social arrangements."[222] He goes on to draw a causal but explicitly non-deterministic relation between the ecologies of Ancient China and Ancient Greece and their subsequent developments. Ancient China consisted mainly of fertile plains and low mountains, which favored the development of an agricultural and centralized society.[223] Greece, in turn, consisted mostly of mountains descending to the see, so favored hunting, herding, and, eventually, trade. These activities do not require such constant cooperation with others as agriculture, so no large, stable, controlled societies formed rather smaller city-states. Accordingly, in Greece even wine or olive farmers were by the 6th century B.C. more like businessmen than peasants.[224]

Nisbett's suggestions that perception is shaped by the environment seems to contradict his own methodology of studying perceptual patterns, and makes us wonder why he chose to study perception under laboratory conditions. Given this inconsistency his ultimate conclusion might seem somewhat sketchy and hasty. Indeed, as I pointed out in the second chapter, one of the most important contentions of phenomenology is that experience should be considered as it unfolds in its ordinary, everyday, habitual setting, not in specially

[222] Richard E. Nisbett: *The Geography of Thought. How Asians and Westerners Think Differently…and Why*, 32.
[223] "This is particularly true for rice farming, characteristic of southern China and Japan, which requires people to cultivate the land in concert with one another. But it is also important wherever irrigation is required, as in the Yellow River Valley of north China, where the Shang dynasty (from the eighteenth to the eleventh century B.C.) and the Chou dynasty (from the eleventh century B.C. to 256 B.C.) were based." Richard E. Nisbett: *The Geography of Thought. How Asians and Westerners Think Differently…and Why*, 34.
[224] Richard E. Nisbett: *The Geography of Thought. How Asians and Westerners Think Differently…and Why*, 35.

constructed laboratory conditions. To do this, we can pay attention to our own perceptual habits in everyday situations, and, most importantly, compare our habits with others'.

2. Hearing the forest and the trees

An important requirement of the phenomenological method I outlined in the previous chapter is to take clues and results from ethnographers and anthropologists when studying experiential patterns that come to be over long periods of time. Ethnographic and anthropological authors and case studies offer a rich source of phenomenological descriptions about how patterns of perception differ in different natural and cultural settings, and thus a good comparative base.

There is, I believe, sense in trying to find connections between the way people perceive the world and the environments which they inhabit. The senses develop differently in different environments, both in their sensibility and regarding their importance or influence on overall experience of the world. Being more or less confined to a certain type of environments makes us not only see different things (have different patterns of attention) but actually see things differently.

There are several examples for both of my above suggestions. Barry Lopez in his book *Arctic Dreams* describes in detail how the Inuit orient and navigate with ease in apparently featureless snow and ice covered landscapes.[225] Of course, the environment only seems uniform and featureless for the untrained eye of the outsider anthropologist, but for locals it is full of perceptual clues and nuances, starting from the color of the snow and ranging through different consistencies of ice.

[225] Barry Lopez: *Arctic Dreams*. Macmillan, London, 1986.

The most important anthropological works linking specific environments to differentiated sensory experience were done, however, by focusing on peoples who live in dense forest or jungle areas, in relative isolation. Alfred Gell has written extensively on the Umeda tribe from the central highlands of New Guinea[226], Steve Feld has studied the Kaluli people's culture in the Great Papuan Plateau[227], and James Weiner has reported in detail about Foi language and poetry.[228]

The striking common feature of these anthropological studies, done separately and in relatively remote and isolated places, is that they all conclude on the primacy of the auditory sense in the languages and cultures studied, and thus note the difference from more visually oriented cultures, such as Western or Judeo-Christian societies. The basic common condition in all three cases is the environment: dense, unbroken, sparsely inhabited jungle areas, where the survival of the people depends on adapting to and living off the forest, mainly through hunting. Although all three anthropologists note the environment and even speculate on its importance, in the end they all chose to focus on language and linguistic cultural products to make their point about these so-called "auditory cultures". Indeed, the evidence is overwhelming that hearing and sound bares way more importance in these cultures than it does in ours.

But what about the specificity of people's sensory experience in dense forests? Could that be a reason why the Umeda, Kaluli and Foi have come to rely more on their hearing than we do? The hypothesis seems very plausible, given that the environments they inhabit offer a very different visual field than grasslands or coastal settings. Rather than accepting the

[226] Alfred Gell: *The Language of the Forest: Landscape and Phonological Iconism in Umeda*. In: Eric Hirsch, Michael O'Hanlon (eds): *The Anthropology of Landscape. Perspectives on Place and Space*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1995, 232-254.
[227] Steve Feld: *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics and Song in Kaluli Expression.* University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1982.
[228] James Weiner: *The Empty Place: Poetry, Space and Being among the Poi of Papua New Guinea*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1991.

conclusion about auditory cultures, I want to concentrate on a few phenomenological descriptions offered by these anthropological studies, and I have decided to concentrate on Gell's studies, as he seemed the most phenomenologically inclined of the three. His texts contain several detailed phenomenological descriptions of his own sensory experience as well as that communicated by his Umeda friends.

In the environment in which the Umeda live the visual horizon is very limited, more often to just few meters, and there is no place or high point for an overview or a birds-eye view on the environment. Gell suggestively describes his frustration and initial unease with such a limited visual field: "One of the most annoying and insurmountable problems I encountered was my inability ever to obtain a decent view of the country in which Umeda is situated. In the end, I spent fourteen months in visual surroundings limited to tens of meters, and at most, half a kilometer or so. (…) I found these restricted horizons profoundly unsatisfactory. Like all middle-class Britishers, I share our national obsession with views and panoramas, despite having to peer at them through ever-thickening spectacles."[229] Given such a natural setting it seems obvious and "natural" that the Umeda have come to depend a lot on their hearing when navigating or hunting through these thick forests. They are sensitive to a rich array of auditory clues and identify them with ease and confidence. This does not mean, of course, that they could not see or did not rely on seeing but that hearing and not vision was the sense of identifying things at a relative distance. When hunting, the Umeda did not look for their prey but listened for it: they walked with eyes cast on the ground to avoid obstacles and to spot animal tracks, while carefully listening and distinguishing crucial auditory clues from the distance.

Although he provides the phenomenological evidence, Gell chooses to draw questionable conclusions from premises foreign to his own description. He states that vision

[229] Alfred Gell: *The Language of the Forest*, 236.

is a sense prone to distancing, alienation, objectification, and abstraction, while hearing is more intimate, emphatic, and holistic sense, suggesting closeness and familiarity. From this he goes on to conclude that since the Umeda rely more on their hearing, their culture is much more empathetic and participatory than ours which is a highly visual, thus "distancing" culture. I have serious doubts about both of these points, and there have been other important critics to such an opposition of the senses and such labeling of vision, the most notable from Tim Ingold. Without going into detail here I just want to point out that Gell's phenomenological descriptions themselves contradict his more theoretical conclusions and suppositions about vision and hearing.

He writes that in the Umeda forest the visual world is "close-range, intimate" and "very far from being anything like what we would recognize as a 'landscape' since it is only a sequence of partial glimpses, which do not cohere around any central point of vantage"; he goes on to note that "Umeda treat sight not as a basic evidential sense, but as a climatic sense with connotations of intimacy and danger," and that for Umeda, "whatever was visible was, ipso facto, relatively close." [230] It is clear that the visual experience Gell himself describes is not the vision he supposes to be distancing and objectifying. In such a specific and close-range environment, vision cannot be the sense of remoteness and abstraction, and if Gell had paid more attention to his own experiences rather than applying a cultural prejudice about how vision is, he might have noticed that for the Umeda vision is just as intimate and participatory as hearing supposedly is for us, moreover, that for the Umeda the sense of distance (for example of identifying things at a distance) is actually hearing.[231]

[230] Alfred Gell: *The Language of the Forest*, 237, 239.
[231] For similar and further criticism of Gell's conclusions see Tim Ingold: *The Perception of the Environment*, 282-287. Ingold argues convincingly that vision can be just as participatory as hearing (especially since the senses are not as separate from each other as we have become accustomed to think). It is rather the appropriation and reduction of vision by an objectifying and scientifically inclined cultural habit that makes it seem that vision distances and abstracts. Mainly, this is due to a gradually learned custom of taking certain specific instances of vision as models for vision in general.

As straight-forward phenomenological descriptions, there is no reason why to discredit Gell's or the Umeda's account on how they experienced things. Especially since the conclusions I wish to draw from them differ from Gell's. Gell failed to take account on the difference of environment inducing a difference in all the senses, not just on the primacy of one over the other. Close-range vision cannot be alienating, abstracting, or distancing precisely because it doesn't involve any distance. I merely want to put forward these examples as phenomenological evidences that our senses "work" differently in different environments, and thus are intimately embedded in their environments

It is nevertheless Gell who offers the most telling and striking example for my point that there is a difference not only in what people see and notice, but also in the way the see things. He talked to a young Umeda man who was taken from his village and imprisoned in the coastal town of Vatimo. This young man was in fact the first Umeda ever to encounter the sea, and he described and drew his experience to Gell. He said the prison was on the coast so when they arrived the prisoners were lined up on the beach, facing the sea. He has never before seen any large water or a distant, flat horizon. And in fact he did not perceive the sea in the horizontal plane at all, but literally saw it as a gigantic vertical fall or wall of water, reaching up to sky. He was terrified by this image as it seemed to him that the "wall" was moving (waving) and about to fall on them.[232] What could be the explanation of such a striking perceptual difference?

[232] Alfred Gell: *The Language of the Forest*, 237.

3. Gibson's ecological theory of perception

One possible and indeed, the most popular answer to perceptual differences as exemplified above is that we all perceive the same sense data which is then divided, segmented, and ordered according to different (cultural) conceptual patterns. This answer relies on the cognitivist theory of perception. On this account, perception is a two-step indirect access to the world. The senses which are separate bodily organs receive stimuli from the environment, data which then is processes by the brain/mind and made into perceptual experience. On this view cultures are symbolic-conceptual systems we inherit and we use to make sense of the raw (and meaningless) data our senses collect from the environment. Conceptual schemata are contingent super-impositions upon mechanical perceptual data, so the differences in the above examples are due to symbolic-cultural constructions which cloth the world with meaning and order. That is to say that that the Umeda boy did not *in fact* or *in reality* perceive the sea as a vertical wall but he *thought* he did because he lacked the notion of the sea or some other cultural construct that would make sense of the "data" before his eyes. So basically he just said he saw a wall because that was the only available concept that was closest to what he saw, but what he actually saw was the sea in a horizontal plane.

I believe there is something suspicious about arguments which aim to convince people that they actually see something that they claim they do not (or the other way around). Besides, as a phenomenologist, one could hardly disregard the Umeda boy's own account just on the basis of a scientific theory which, even if it were true, runs explicitly against experience. Just because we are inclined to fit everything into our frame and our "science" of perception, this does not mean that the experience described by the Umeda boy did not happen or he did not report it genuinely. Instead of trying to convince him that he saw something he didn't, we should try to understand why is it that he saw what he saw.

Another, and I contend more plausible approach to manifest differences in perception, can be constructed based on an alternative account of how perception works. In fact, the environmental embeddedness of sensory experience has an extensive, though not quite mainstream literature, especially focusing on the work of pioneer psychologist James J. Gibson, and his detailed critique of cognitive psychologists' theory of visual perception.[233] Gibson's ecological theory of perception has influenced many, including Tim Ingold, who applied Gibson's theory in his own anthropological studies of perception. The phenomenological version of Gibson's theory is Merleau-Ponty's theory of vision according to which vision is a mode of being-in-the-world.

The theory of visual perception put forward by Gibson argues against the presupposition that we perceive our environments by constructing representations of it in our minds. According to him perception is not a two-step achievement of body (senses) and mind, but of the organism as a whole moving in its environment. On this account perception is not a computational act but a learned skill of an organic being (an inseparable biological-cultural unit) living a dynamic life in a richly structured environment. Perceptual information is obtained directly in experience by a dynamic inhabiting of an environment, not imposed on it by conceptual schemata.[234] Gibson's theory denies the most important assumption of

[233] James J. Gibson: *The ecological approach to visual perception*. Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1979.

[234] James J. Gibson: *The ecological approach to visual perception*, 56-57. According to Gibson, then, perception is not mediated but direct: "When I assert that the perception of the environment is direct, I mean that it is not mediated by retinal pictures, neural images, or mental pictures. Direct perception is the activity of getting information from the ambient array of light." James J. Gibson: *The ecological approach to visual perception*, 147.

In an entirely different context, Heidegger also argues that in our everyday dealing with the world around us we see tables and chairs, we hear voices or cars passing by, we feel heat and cold, and so on. We need not have definitions or characterizing descriptions of things in order to see them in a very specific way (which is certainly pre-thematic and practical) as being in a certain net of complex relationships with other things and us, i.e. we understand them in a totality of involvements. (Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time*, 189) This means that seeing (and perception in general) has a non-explicit "as-structure" built into it, structure that can be made explicit or remain implicit. In seeing or perceiving, we do not access the world through bare data or naked fact (like patches of color or pure sounds) to which we later on attach meaning or signification. We see things directly and always already as something, even if this something is not explicit. This is not to say that we do not have moments of merely staring at something. But notice that in this case we tend to say that we don't see it anymore. Heidegger considers this too, and calls the act of "mere staring" a privation: "When we merely stare at

cognitivists, namely that the relation of organism and environment is external, so that the organism can be understood as if it could exist outside of any environment. His theory is ecological as it insists that organism and environment form an indissoluble whole, and so perception should not be studied independent of the environment in which it develops and unfolds. For him Nisbett's experiments would be irrelevant, as he would argue that the ways in which people cope with perceptual situations constructed in laboratories cannot tell us much about how people actually perceive in the real world.

Perception as a skill is learned and practiced in specific environments, both natural and cultural at once. The way perception is developed is through experience and training, and performing certain actions such as walking, hunting, planting, playing, and so on. Gibson calls this process education of attention,[235] a fine-tuning of perceptual skills, while Ingold talks more generally of "sensory education", consisting in the acquisition of perceptual clues, i.e. learning to pay attention.[236] To this I would add that we also learn to perceive things in other ways, for example from a preferred perspective (for example when we learn how to look at paintings) or on a preferred intensity (for example in listening to music, or learning to taste certain wines at a preferred temperature). Perception can thus be understood as a complex activity of developing skills and general orientations or sensibilities in particular environments.

Ingold often refers to a classical anthropological example of how young Inuit people learn to hunt, but we could, of course, imagine more culturally close examples, such as learning to drive. In both cases the novice is accompanied by a more experienced person who instructs him or her to look for and pick up clues that they could otherwise fail to notice, and

---

something, our just-having-it-before-us lies before us as a failure to understand it anymore. This grasping which is free of the "as" is a privation of the kind of seeing in which one understands. It is not more primordial than that kind of seeing, but is derived from it." (Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time*, 190)

[235] James J. Gibson: *The ecological approach to visual perception*, 254.

[236] Tim Ingold: *The Perception of the Environment*, 9-10.

so on. All of this training leads to a sophisticated and action-specific perceptual awareness of surroundings and affordances. For example, the hunter learns to notice some qualities of the surface texture that enables him or her to tell, just by touch, how long ago an animal left his imprint.[237] Or a driver learns to see whether the vehicle would fit in a certain parking space without having to measure it.

So contrary to the cognitivist account, learning to see is not a matter of simply acquiring conceptual schemata (such as a language), but of direct perceptual engagement with the environment. One cannot learn to perceive the environment as a hunter or as a driver by simply acquiring the appropriate conceptual tools in a classroom.

There can be several important consequences to be drawn from Gibson's account with respect to the examples listed above. The Umeda rely on hearing when hunting because in the dense forest visibility is reduced, and hunting is more successful when pursued on auditory clues. The Umeda boy saw a wall of water because his visual perception developed as a skill in an environment which had no open horizons, but the waving sea might have resembled or, why not, sounded like, a "wall" of very high trees.

The major difference of the two theories of perception lies in the perceptual situation which they take to be the model for understanding perception. For example, the Umeda case shows that vision in and of itself is not objectifying and distancing, but such labeling of vision comes from a cultural prejudice that choses as the standard model for visual perception the situation when a static observer is standing in front of a decontextualized and fixed object studying it for its attributes. Gibson, on the other hand, insists that the appropriate model of perception is everyday dynamic experience in an environment rich in perceptual affordances. But what if we chose to rely on a different model? What if we consider the standard example of visual perception looking into another person's eyes? All of these different situations will

[237] Tim Ingold: *The Perception of the Environment*, 37.

lead to different explanations as to how perception "really" works. And although they seem to contradict each other, this need not be the case. If we give up trying to explain how vision "really" works (meaning how it works everywhere and every time), we find that vision works differently in different perceptual situations.

A position that offers some kind of compromise between the two opposing theories comes from phenomenologist Don Ihde, who distinguishes between what he calls micro and macro-perception.[238] Micro-perception refers to the qualitative aspect of sensory perception – of hearing, seeing, touching, and so on. Macro-perception denotes the cultural or hermeneutic context in which all micro-perceptions occur. The relation between the two is not a matter of derivation, but like that of "figure-to-ground" in the sense that micro-perception always occurs within its larger macro-perceptual context, and such contexts are only fulfilled within the range of micro-perceptual possibility.[239] Macro-perceptions vary radically, but they remain tied to our bodily existence and experience, so cultural variations are not superimposed on bodily sensitivity, but the two develop and evolve in constant mutuality. It is not that we experience some raw data (bodily) which is then 'sorted' out according to cultural habits, preferences, or skills. Macro-perception is something that emerges and evolves over time, through an infinite number of micro-perceptions which constantly, subtly, gradually change the macro-perceptual patterns.

According to an important example put forward by Ihde, science itself is a mode of seeing, a macro-perceptual context which determines the actual bodily perceptions we have.[240] This would explain why we are more prone to take as our model for perception itself a case of visual perception in which one stands in front of an object studying it. It would also account for Gell's supposing that vision is objectifying, alienating, and distancing. Gell's

[238] Don Ihde: *Technology and the Lifeworld. From Garden to Earth*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1990.
[239] Don Ihde: *Technology and the Lifeworld. From Garden to Earth*, 29.
[240] Don Ihde: *Technology and the Lifeworld. From Garden to Earth*, 38

understanding of visual perception relies on a scientific model of vision that is so much a part of his macro-perceptual context that he declares himself frustrated when he has to become accustomed to seeing differently.

According to my interpretation, Ihde's theory of micro- and macro-perception parallels my own account of actual "here and now" experiences being shaped by contextual patterns. In his *Postphenomenology: Essays in the Postmodern Context* Ihde defines macro-perception as "cultural perceptions of our sedimented fields of lifeworld acquisitions"[241] which is roughly what I mean by patterns of experience. In both of these accounts, the point is not to reveal how vision or perception "really" works, but to point out that this depends on a larger context in which we are attempting to study perception: when studying actually unfolding perceptual experience, we could concentrate on its bodily-sensory, immediate dimensions, or we could shift our attention to cultural-hermeneutical dimensions of the same experience. Both approaches will have something important to say about perception without being "the whole story" about perception.

To conclude, perception is environmentally embedded and culturally different. But this is not because sense data is differently arranged or ordered by different conceptual schemata or symbolic-cultural categories. It is different because environments are different and ever changing, inseparable from people who dwell in them. It is different because people learn how to perceive. Not only by learning a language and thus concepts (although, of course, this also pays an important part) but also by learning how to read their environments and how to pay closer and deeper attention to it.[242] Perceptions are also shaped by practical

[241] Don Ihde: *Postphenomenology. Essays in the Postmodern Context*. Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1993, 7.

[242] Gibson notes that the perceptual information available to us in "natural" (i.e. not laboratory) conditions in potentially inexhaustible. Throughout our lives we can and in fact do see new things and see them differently, even in the same environment, because we keep training our perception to new kinds of aspect, features and information. James J. Gibson: *The ecological approach to visual perception*, 166-167.

purposes and endeavors, of course, such as when they become fine-tuned to certain practical goals to be achieved, as in hunting or driving.

4. Perceptual affordances

Perceptual patterns, differences in ways of perceiving our environments form over long periods of time and through the direct and dynamic experiences of people. These perceptual tendencies become part of who we are and how we experience the world around us. Disregarding such habituated ways of seeing the surrounding world runs the risk of disregarding who people are and how intimately they are embedded in the environments they inhabit. On the contrary, realizing the importance of learnt perceptual skills means realizing the potentially crucial contribution that intimate insider perceptual knowledge of a certain environment can offer to environmental protection. If we can reveal our own patterns and compare them with others' we can become more sensitive to how our very core is constantly shaped by our surroundings, as well as to how our tendencies shape the environments. And this says something different and, I believe, more than the cliché that we need and depend on environments. The latter is usually understood in terms of survival, and while it is obviously true, my argument for understanding perceptual patterns is that this can lead to a more subtle and nuanced sensitivity to how we depend on our environments. This can prove to be very helpful, for example, in planning and building new (future) environments and reconstructing current ones. This is because this way we can consciously plan to allow and offer the possibility for different experiences.[243]

[243] Consider the following example for I mean. A left-handed friend of mine drew my attention once that the world around us is generally built in accordance with the preferences of right-handed people. This tendency is present from the way doorknobs are oriented to the ways traffic is organized. Of course, this is not a conscious or planned discrimination against left-handed people but a long-term tendency to organize the world in a way that comes more 'naturally' to most people.

The perceptual qualities of different environments are not mere contingent aesthetic features, but figure and actually shape how humans develop and experience the world they inhabit. Being aware of this important connection enables the construction of environments that affords rich and multilayered sensory experience of different kinds. A good example for how environments can sometimes be manipulated into affording different experiences is offered by some of the "nature-building" activities of Frederick Law Olmsted.[244] Consider here the example of Niagara Falls, and how Olmsted carefully planned and constructed the surrounding environment with the explicit aim to accommodate different expectations and different sensory experiences. For most tourist, who arrived in large numbers and were only looking for a painting-like view of the "spectacle" of the waterfall, Olmsted constructed a platform from which to look at it, as well as the "natural scenery" in the background (by removing all artificial constructions that were there before). He offered a snapshot-like landscape. But for others who wished to have a more close-range and solitary experience of this environment, foot-paths were constructed along the river and in the forests to remote areas from where a more intimate and participatory experience of the falls and their surrounding was possible.

As I mentioned in the second chapter, I consider one of the most important aims of environmental action is to assure, provide, construct (or at least strive for) environments that are richest in affordances and aware of the very subtle importance of such often disregarded aspects as the quality of an experience. Here I conclude specifically that the perceptual affordances are crucial and fundamental for the way our environmental attitudes turn out. This suggests the possibility that consciously changing one (perceptual patterns) might result

[244] Anne Whiston Spirn: *Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted*. In: *Uncommon Ground. Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, 91-113, 95-96.

in changing the others too, namely our attitudes towards the environments we inhabit or merely visit.

B. Practical patterns

One of the most important insights of Heidegger's philosophy is that our involvement with the world is primordially practical, in the sense that we always already experience the world around us as affording certain possibilities for us to pursue actively. We are immersed, interested, involved with the world and not mere spectators in front of it who try to figure it out. Our most immediate and initial contact with the world and things of the world is in the process of already coping with them one way or another – we approach things in their availableness, according to what we can do with them, and not in their descriptive properties. In fact, Heidegger argues that the theoretical attitude when we approach things in order to describe and explain them is also rooted in this practical background of involvements. Theoretical detachment and the split of object and subject is not how we usually and for the most part approach reality around us.

Certainly, no one would doubt the importance of our practical being in the world, least of all environmentalists. We humans have different ways of doing things, to perform certain tasks, and to come up with means to achieve certain goals. These may include everything from bodily movement (such as hammering, dancing, or jogging) to tool making and using (such as ship-building, or using a word processor), rule following (such as different navigation practices) or customs (such as cooking or eating habits, rhythms of daily life, seasonal activities).

Needless to say, practices are also not isolated activities that humans perform separately from their perceptual experiences or conceptual apparatus. On the contrary,

practical experience is merely one aspect of experience in general, inseparable from the others. As we have seen in the previous section, Gibson's ecological theory of perception is based on the basic recognition that perception involves movement.[245] If this is the case than it is possible to understand perception itself as a form of action and a learned practical skill.

What I mean by practical patterns of experience is something much more concrete and straight-forward than the more general claim of importance of practice and the need to change some of our practices to stop environmental devastation. I want to emphasize, just like in the case of perceptions, that the way we usually and for the most part perform our daily activities is influenced and shaped by the specific affordances our environments provide for us. Since these practical modes of being-in-the world are environmentally embedded, our practical possibilities become more or less limited and varied according to the types of environments we build for ourselves. I also want to argue that analyzing practical patterns reveals that all kinds of human practices modify environments in which they are performed, but they do so to different extents, thus leaving room for the possibility of performing them better, less destructively. Finally and most importantly, I want to argue that comparatively studying practical patterns and their environmental impact is crucial for environmental projects built 'from below', namely those that are able to incorporate local practical knowledge when it is environmentally sound, and correct detrimental practices by offering effective alternatives in return.

1. Practical affordances

Not all environments afford the same practical possibilities, and there is ample evidence of how humans have developed different practical skills by inhabiting different

[245] This can also be read and interpreted as a special application of Patočka's insight that our entire existence in the world is movement in one sense or another.

environments. Once a certain way of performing a certain act proves successful, it soon sediments and becomes taken for granted, a familiar way in which "one" acts. Felipe Fernandez-Armesto has documented in detail such environmentally embedded practices in his work *Civilizations, Culture, Ambition, and the Transformation of Nature*[246], and J. Donald Hughes has dedicated two important books to the same subject, *Ecology in Ancient Civilizations* [247]and the *Environmental History of the World*.[248]

However, to offer an example for the environmental embedment of practical being-in-the-world, I will rely here Don Ihde's more detailed phenomenological account of Aboriginal culture.[249] There is evidence that the ancestors of Aboriginals were present on the same lands as they are today more than 40000 years ago, so Aboriginal culture might be the longest lasting continuous culture. This culture developed in isolation, sheltered from invasions or migrations, in a harsh and seemingly hostile setting. The key to their successful adaptation rests in incredibly imaginative and resourceful food-procuring practices. Ihde goes as far as to claim that their central cultural axiom was "everything is potentially food". They invented complex, sometimes three-step detoxification methods, made thirty different varieties of breads from grass and seeds, eat baked bats, and several grubs (some of them found only in tree roots, so in order to find them, they had to stomp their feet around the base of the tree and listen to hollow sounds that indicated the grub's hiding places).

The Australian environment only seems empty and impossible to survive for those who do not know where to look for food and water. Apparently Aboriginals were very surprised when many European explorers died of thirst and starvation in the central deserts of Australia. The Aboriginals despised Europeans for their lack of survival skills. They should

[246] Felipe Fernandez-Armesto: *Civilizations, Culture, Ambition, and the Transformation of Nature*. The Free Press, New York, 2001.
[247] J. Donald Hughes*: Ecology in Ancient Civilizations*. University of New Mexico Press, 1975.
[248] J. Donald Hughes: *The Environmental History of the World*. Routledge, London and New York, 2009.
[249] Don Ihde: *Technology and the Lifeworld. From Garden to Earth*, 120-122.

have just found the crack in the dried mud floor at a proper location and dig down two feet to a membrane-enclosed, water-surrounded frog, then drink the water, and eat the frog.

But Aboriginals also had strict rules governing hunting practices, for example, no animal could be killed outside its own sacred territory, which was composed of the animal's breeding and water-hole territory. So at times of drought or in breeding seasons the animal had to be spared. This of course functioned as a preservation rule, as it imposed serious limits on eating animals.

Environmentally conditioned practices are also highly obvious in Inuit culture or in the case of Native American peoples. But the difference becomes more obvious when we compare the above food-procuring activities to our own (post)modern city-life, when most of us have completely lost touch with the source of our everyday nutrition, since in city environments food procuring practice consists in shopping and visiting restaurants. The difference lies, of course, not only in mere laziness or lack of knowledge, but in the actual set of affordances an environment offers us. There are complicated and ingenious food procuring practices in cities too, as proven by our own 'restaurant hunting' skills and also by the specific skills developed by several animal species adapted to city life.[250]

But there is also another sense in which our practical existence is shaped by specific environments. Basically all realms of human practice involve some tools and technologies, and thus are materially conditioned. Stone tools are made differently and require different technologies of production than steel ones, building a wooden hut differs from building an igloo, but all these activities are conditioned by what the environment affords. The tools and technologies people use are not mere neutral instrument in our practices, but proofs of our inter-connection with our environments.

[250] For example, it was shown that today crows never live far away from human habitations, moreover, their number is highest in cities. The same is true of rats and several species of cockroaches which seem to thrive in cities.

Tools and technologies are not neutral in at least two respects. They are not completely what they are in isolation, but only in a complex background system of usefulness and practical involvements. Furthermore, they are also not neutral in the sense that they severely and crucially transform experience. They provide a background setting or a framework for human practices, thus influencing practice patterns and habituated ways to perform tasks. Just think about how communication practices have changed with the introduction of more and more sophisticated devices and technologies. Also, I have recently noticed how my handwriting has changed and indeed, degenerated since I no longer practice it almost at all, preferring electronic devices and word-processors to write.

In industrially developed environments of the world, our lives and experiences are profoundly marked by technologies we use. We live in what Ihde calls technosystems, that is, technologically textured ecosystems.[251] This is highly relevant in all current attempts and programs of environmental action and protection as it poses several important questions. In a more and more globalized world, can we assume that practices and technologies are unproblematically taken over from one environment to the other? When Australian explorers first encountered the tribes of Papua New Guinea, the steel knives and axes that were brought by the explorers were immediately accepted and highly valued by locals. The rifle took a longer time, and was only later admired for its usefulness, while the sardine cans thrown out by Australians were used as accessories, incorporated in elaborate head ornaments in a position formerly occupied by large shells of similar shape.[252] The explanation for the different transfers is quite clear: as the locals already used knives and axes (but made of wood, as this was the only material their environment afforded), they immediately recognized the higher efficiency of steel tools. But they had to learn a lot about rifles and their use before

[251] Don Ihde: *Technology and the Lifeworld. From Garden to Earth*, 3.
[252] All examples are from Don Ihde: *Technology and the Lifeworld. From Garden to Earth*, 125-126.

they could value them, and they used cans based on their resemblance to already familiar objects used in rituals.

The importance of this question of practical transference lies in drawing attention to complex power-relations in a globalized world. To see what I mean, consider the following example. The Puluwateans were a people who navigated the South Pacific by perceptual attention given to wave patterns, without a compass.[253] When they received a compass (and then more) they soon adopted it and used it mostly because it became an object of fascination and prestige for its owner. But once this device was adopted, the more complex and difficult navigation skills of wave-feeling and star-following was gradually forgotten, as they were not thought and practiced anymore. However, the Puluwateans lacked the complex scientific and technological knowledge, as well as other conditions that would enable them to make compasses for themselves, thus they became entirely dependent on another culture in their navigation.[254]

The point is that we cannot expect technologies to replace practices developed over long periods of time through close bodily interaction with specific environments, at least not without making local communities vulnerable to global power relations and market conditions. This entails that it would be more sensible to promote a type of environmental protection which reveals, recaptures and re-introduces simple and effective practices developed over generations. For example, my grandmother still uses an ancient practice of

[253] Navigation from one island to another was thought and learnt in descriptive poems which told the navigators what to pay attention to, what they were supposed to see at different points of the voyage and how to respond to specific concrete situations and conditions. They descriptively captured how one island "moves" (approaches or distances) from the perspective of the navigator, how the star-patterns have to look (contrary to European star-reading practices, their star-orientation was dynamic, since the fixed Pole star is not visible from there; they relied on rising and setting stars and their movements were incorporated in songs which recorded the formulae for each different voyage to another island), and how one reacts to changes in perceived wave patterns. An island was identified from the distance by stationary clouds above it (in contrast with other clouds moving by current winds) or birds flying towards it (with different species and their moving habits indicating the distance from the island) or even refractions from swell patterns which indicated an approaching land. These subtle and hard-to detect navigational clues were learnt, practiced and constantly perfected throughout several generations. Most of these impressive practical skills were lost once the compass was introduced.

[254] Don Ihde: *Technology and the Lifeworld. From Garden to Earth*, 126.

plant cultivation, one that was forgotten in most of the 'civilized' western world and replaced by artificial fertilizers and GMO crops to assure efficiency. This was the cultivation on the same plot of corn, beans, and pumpkin. The corn gives shade to the pumpkin and in return gets more water and nutrition from the weed-free soil provided by the pumpkin. The beans can climb up the corn to grow bigger and in return take more moisture up on the corn so that it can grow bigger. This ancient practice was recently 'rediscovered' and promoted in some European Union countries and called 'the three sisters'. I believe this is an excellent example for good practices replaced and gradually forgotten, and their re-introduction can have many important benefits not only in terms of environmental protection but also as a way of empowering local communities.

2. Practical protection and protecting practices

My point with these examples is not to promote a more "primitive" or "natural" way of life, not to romanticize and idealize certain cultures at the expense of others.

I have already referred to an important work in ecological history, J. Donald Hughes' *Ecology in Ancient Civilizations* as a convincing argument against all types of romanticizing views regarding past, more "natural" stages of civilization. Hughes shows that in spite of sometimes crucial cultural and environmental differences, all Mediterranean civilizations heavily altered and indeed, destructed their surroundings.[255] The Hebrews, the Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Romans all contributed to today's arid climate in the Mediterranean basin by heavy deforestations, over-grazing, unsustainable agricultural practices, and general carelessness towards natural resources. Ihde offers further examples, like the human role in the extinction of large mammals in the late Ice Age, or the more recent disappearance of all the large wingless birds on most Pacific Islands. He concludes that such destructive impact of

[255] J. Donald Hughes: *Ecology in Ancient Civilizations*, 3-6.

humans is a sad but valid cross-cultural universal trait rooted deep within human ways of inhabiting the earth.[256]

However, we can hardly be satisfied to contend that destruction is part of human nature. Clearly, there are important differences in the degrees or extents of human impact on environments, as there are also more positive examples of less destructive cultures. Native American tribes are often cited as managing to build more ecologically minded cultures, civilizations, and indeed, empires. The Aboriginals provide another good case study for more adaptive and less destructive human-environment interactions, as do the Inuit. But my point here is not to advocate Aboriginal or Inuit ways of life or wave-pattern navigation. It is not that we can take over their ways of life or expect their practices to solve environmental problems in different environments. As I noted before, practices and technologies are not easily and automatically imported from one place to another. The point is, rather, to notice how closely and intimately connected our practical endeavors were and are to our environments and to reveal the possibility of more 'collaboration' with the surrounding world and less destructive ways of performing human activities.

Paying attention and importance to specific local practices of coping should be the basis of successful environmental programs from the bottom up. Environmental protection should indeed not only protect environments but also human practices that are endangered, and even try to revive those that were already forgotten. This is not to return to some previous way of life, but to re-learn and apply them to the context of our present. Environmental programs have to include local communities, identify their environmentally sound practices (which are many in all cases) and preserve them together with the natural environment. They should also offer equally sound alternatives to potentially damaging activities. For example, simply banning the cutting of trees in Amazonian forests could not in itself be regarded a

[256] Don Ihde: *Technology and the Lifeworld. From Garden to Earth*, 119.

sound environmental policy, especially since it often fails to offer any alternative sources for locals who have been managing to live off the forest for centuries without destroying it. A successful program of rain-forest protection would include local practical know-how together with the people who perform them and have intimate practical knowledge of that environment.

There are many examples of such local practices worthy of inclusion in environmental preservation projects; here I will only offer two. The Onondaga people have a remarkable principle guiding important public decisions and practices. They have to question and consider how their actions will affect seven generations to come. This normative principle effectively incorporates future generations into current decision-making processes, preventing irrevocable damage on local plants and animals, as well as decisions harming the interests of future humans.[257]

A similar ecologically and environmentally sound rule guides the Mohawk practice of collecting medical plants. According to this, when one finds the first plant of that particular kind, it should not be picked, but thanked and left to live on, as it could be the last remaining specimen. One is only allowed to pick the second plant of that kind encountered, once the survival of that species is certain.[258]

Furthermore, the point of my examples about what is quite inadequately called "simpler" ways of life is not to idealize or romanticize them but to draw attention to what such local communities can contribute to efficient environmental action if preservation projects include the know-how of locals into their program rather than try to remove them altogether from protected areas or limit local access to resources. It is wrong to presume that

[257] Laurie Anne Whitt, Mere Roberts, Waerete Norman, Vicki Grieves: *Indigenous Perspectives*. In: *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, 3-20, 10.
[258] Laurie Anne Whitt, Mere Roberts, Waerete Norman, Vicki Grieves: *Indigenous Perspectives*, 11. For further examples, see Paul Robbins: *Beyond Ground Truth: GIS and the Environmental Knowledge of Herders, Professional Foresters, and Other Traditional Communities*. *Human Ecology*, 31(2), 2003, 233–253.

it is the sheer presence of people that does damage to environments, and aim for human-free nature reserves, often at the expense of peoples whose practices allowed them to inhabit those environments for centuries without destroying them.

The point of becoming aware of different practical possibilities is also to draw attention to our own everyday practical involvements, their peculiarity, and potential impact. While we cannot as individuals control global temperature or oceanic currents, we can in fact easily control our eating habits, for example. By realizing the importance of our direct, engaged effects on own environments, we could be more easily convinced to protect nature "at home" rather than at non-experienced and idealized distances.[259]

I have already contended before that the point of environmental protection should not be to find a way to have no impact on our surroundings whatsoever – this aim is absurd as it would mean the absence of humans. But there is indeed room for significant change in our attitudes and actions. And I believe that much of the change so desperately advocated by environmental activists starts from and is rooted in the seemingly banal and simple everyday existence of humans in their different environments. Rather than simply blaming science, technology or human nature in general for environmental havoc, realizing the impact of our most banal eating, sleeping, and travelling habits has the advantage of empowering people and convincing them that and how their actions count and contribute to environmental future.

[259] For a convincing case for nature conservation through actual, bodily involvement see Glenn Deliège: *Toward a Richer Account of Restorative Practices*. *Environmental Philosophy* 4 (1&2), 2007, 135–147, 146. Deliège also argues for a "conversation with nature based on deep sensual and bodily engagement" in Glenn Deliège: *Restoring or Restroying Nature?* In: S. Bergmann, P. Scott, M. Jansdotter Samuelsson & H. Bedford-Strohm (eds.): *Nature, Space and the Sacred*. Ashgate, Farnham, 2009, 189-199.

C. Conceptual patterns. Nature and wilderness

Whenever we experience something, we do so within a prior conceptual framework that always already "knows" what and how the world, humans and animals, actions and values are, even before we can explicitly formulate such knowledge. That our experience is shaped by prior conceptions means that we always already approach the world with certain assumptions – the world and things around us have already been conceived somehow, and these meanings are handed down from generation to generation constituting powerful (because unquestioned) prejudices about how the world and things in the world are. The basic conceptions about our immediate surroundings are just as part of that surrounding as objects or other people. They make up the conceptual background and context within which all of our actual contacts with our environments happen.

I have already touched upon the crucial importance of conception of nature in environmental philosophy and gave several examples for different ideas of nature. I argued in the first chapter that nature in any of its myriad of senses should not be confused with environment. I also said that this does not make conception of nature obsolete in environmental theory. In this section, I will reflect on the importance in environmental philosophy and action to study conceptions of nature and wilderness.

First, I will ask what the baffling diversity of conception of nature entails, more specifically, whether we can or hope to come up with criteria to decide which one is more beneficial or detrimental to environmental protection. The contingency of ideas of nature would suggest that conceptions of nature are random cultural products contingently imposed on "objective" reality in a human attempt to make sense of it. However, I will argue that this is not the case, and conceptions of reality are never random ideal constructs because they are rooted in experiences in and of specific environments and crucially influencing human ways

of inhabiting (using, damaging, or protecting) those environments. This does not imply, of course, that experiences or ways of understanding are entirely determined by their environments, only that they are deeply connected to them and influenced by them.

Second, I will illustrate my point through an analysis of the concept of wilderness, how its history can be linked to differences and changes in actual surroundings, how contradictory conceptions of wilderness are linked to (inspired by and inspiring) actual lived experiences of nature, and how ideas of wilderness often have questionable consequences in environmental protection.

Finally, I will argue that considering different conceptions of nature is crucial in environmental theory and action.

1. The consequences of conceptual diversity

The examples listed in the first chapter illustrate the overwhelming abundance of meanings that the concept of nature has come to include. Most of these meanings are not compatible with each other (for example, that of ‘nature as a machine’ and ‘nature as a person’) but even if they were, the tendency is to posit them as universal. Furthermore, the underlying experiences of nature expressed by different conceptions are very diverse, as well as the experiences induced or influenced by them. (I will demonstrate this shortly by analyzing conceptions of wilderness) The underlying ontological and metaphysical presuppositions also differ: if nature was created by God, it is not the result of millions of year of evolution. There are also important ethical and practical consequences involved: if nature it is endowed with spirit, it should be treated as a person. If this is the case, what

should be the consequences of such baffling diversity of conceptions and meanings? What would be the criteria for deciding which conception of nature is better than the other?

I already argued that their validity (i.e. to what extent they truly and really refer to reality as such) cannot be verified by as this would imply that we have a pure access to nature (free of all ideas and presuppositions), and we could compare that reality with the content of our ideas. However, such a 'perspective from nowhere' is not available to human experience. But if we have no criteria to decide how much or little conceptions of nature capture about reality in itself, does this means that anything goes? If we have no way of verifying them by referring to some objective reality, do ideas of nature become interchangeable and equal? Or can we come up with other criteria to decide (in certain specific contexts) which one is better than the other?

The extreme constructivist view of nature holds that since there is no access to "real" nature, all of nature is but a cultural construct.[260] Notice the subtle shift from an epistemological to an ontological claim. While I subscribe to and share some of the premises of this thesis (namely that ideas of nature are in some sense culturally constructed), it is not at clear what the consequences of an extreme constructivist view should be. Does cultural constructivism mean that it no longer makes sense to talk about human intervention or destruction of nature?

But extreme constructivist views are not the only postmodern responses to the diversity and relativity of nature-ideas. There is a moderate constructivist view that holds that ideas of nature are indeed culturally constructed, but they are imposed or applied to (physical) reality. On this view, we have no way of knowing how reality is without the filter of our cultural ways of making sense of them: nature is always already "appropriated" by

[260] For an extreme constructivist view see Lawrence E. Hazelrigg: *Cultures of Nature. Essay on the Production of Nature*. University Press of Florida, 1995. For an attempt to reconcile constructivism with realism, see Sarah Whatmore*: Hybrid Geographies. Natures, Cultures, Spaces*. Sage Publications, London, 2002.

culture in one way or another, so there is no access to "pure" nature. A version of this view was formulated by Martin Drenthen who argues that contemporary fascination with nature and especially "wildness" should be considered as expressing both an experience and a longing of post-modern humans. The post-modern experience of nature is in large a negative experience: either of absence or of nature not conforming to any of the contingent and relative ways in which humans attempt to make sense of it, but alluding and constantly overflowing such efforts of "appropriation".[261] This is an experience that is not only aware of its own historicity and contingency, but also of its partaking in a historical process, and the responsibility that comes from such participation. Such a specifically post-modern experience of nature induces a specific longing as well, one that is very different from the Romantic longing for nature. It is actually a wish for something radically other than any of our interpretations, "something that is already there, that is bigger than us", a wish for nature as utter otherness, untouched by our (mis)interpretations. But such nature cannot be experienced but in a negative way.[262] For Drenthen the baffling diversity of ideas of nature is thus symptomatic of our "postmodern condition" as it entails the possibility to experience our finitude and the finitude of our points of views in contact with the otherness of nature.

The main problem with all constructivist positions is I believe the suggestion lurking in the background that cultural constructs, such as ideas of nature, are random and contingent inventions, which have no relation whatsoever with nature which is utter and complete otherness. Or alternatively, ideas of nature could be thought of as symbolic representations, again somehow random. Contrary to this, while I do believe that ideas of nature are contingent in the sense of being historical and cultural products, I do not believe that they are also random. This means that there is always the possibility that they could have been

[261] Martin Drenthen: *Wildness as a Critical Border Concept: Nietzsche and the Debate on Wilderness Restoration,* 327.
[262] Martin Drenthen: *Wildness as a Critical Border Concept: Nietzsche and the Debate on Wilderness Restoration,* 333.

different (this is what contingency means) but not in just any way different. The possible meanings and ideas were to some extent circumscribed by the affordances of specific environments thus making those ideas not completely random.

I also think that a closer attention to their roots and histories reveals that ideas of nature are not representations at all, and certainly not random interchangeable inventions. Our ideas of nature are not simply invented and superimposed on some unknowable otherness, but are connected to the ways in which we experience our surroundings, and thus to the affordances of these surroundings. We do not impose random meaning on a meaningless reality, but meanings are results of the inseparable unity in experience of an autonomous reality and our (perspectival, situated, incomplete) interpretation of it.

In my view, all environments "contain" nature one way or another, in the sense that there are always concurring ideas of nature that shape and guide our experience and behavior. All conceptions of nature convey some specific perspective, some specific experience, or some specific practical context from which they emerge, so they all have their own validity with respect to their own context and their own environment. And given their roots in experience (and the fact that experience is embedded in environments) ideas of nature are never mere inventions.

Contrary to my position here, many have suggested that "nature" should be discarded from environmental philosophy.[263] It has been argued that the concept of nature is too ambiguous and has too many meanings and contents, and as such it is useless for environmental ethics.[264] But just because a concept has many different meanings and layers

[263] For an overview of such arguments see Robin Attfield: *Is the Concept of "Nature" Dispensable*? *Ludus Vitalis*, vol. XIV, num. 25, 2006, 105-116.
[264] Stephen Vogel: *Environmental Philosophy after the End of Nature*. *Environmental Ethics* 24, 2002, 23-39. Vogel also argues in more political terms, namely that the word 'nature' tends to obscure the interpretative moment in our understanding of the world, thus obscuring the political powers involved. By claiming to speak about or on behalf of nature, I am also silencing my political opponents.

of sense, surely this does not make it superfluous. In fact, discarding a concept for its complexity can only be a suggestion of those who regard relativity a flaw or consider that all terms of philosophical discussions must be strictly and universally defined or definable. However, on such grounds we could dispense of all or most of our philosophical terms as they tend to be less than the technical terms employed with strict determination.

I consider the concept of nature to be indispensible because its history and fate is closely and inseparably related to environmental issues. However we make sense of nature has severe consequences on environmental experiences and attitudes. The various meanings attached to 'nature' are far from mere theoretical disagreements about the world. They are reflections and results of different experiences which, in turn, constantly shape and determine current experiences of our surroundings. Disregarding nature for having too many meanings and senses is simply disregarding the complexity of environmental experiences in favor of the illusion of a strict formal definition. Ambiguity in conceptions of nature is not a failure or a crisis of thought, but a symptom and result of the many different experiences and aspects that our environments afford.

Finally, just because there are no criteria to decide which conception of nature is "more real" than the other, this does not mean that they are incommensurable in other respects as well. I have suggested above a criteria on which different conceptions can be compared and evaluated: experience. It is my contention that ideas of nature which do not distort or deny experience (and their own experiential roots) are to be preferred to those that run against experience. For example, the scientific-mechanical conception of nature is inferior to aesthetic conceptions of nature, not because the scientific idea is completely free of experience, but because it operates a double denial of experience: it denies its own experiential roots and the importance of experience as such. When discussing ideas of

wilderness I will suggest and argue for other important criteria to decide which conception is better, namely practical consequences, social impact, and justice.

Further criteria have been suggested by others. Feminist philosopher Sandra Harding suggests that conceptions be evaluated in their negative virtues, i.e. based on what they avoid rather than what they afford. Conceptions that are free of distortions of experience, mystifications, colonizing and totalizing tendencies should be preferred to those that are not.[265] Harding offers these as general criteria for evaluating positions and conceptions in a postmodern world; however, I believe that they are especially suited criteria for evaluations environmental concepts.

2. The example of "wilderness" and the relation of ideas of nature to the surroundings from which they emerge

As I argued above, conceptions of reality are never random ideal contracts. They are not random first, because they are rooted in complex experiences, shaped and influenced by them, and second, because, no experience can be isolated from its surrounding, but should always be considered in close mutual dependence with environments. In what follows I will illustrate both these points through the example of the concept of wilderness.

Usually and most commonly the meaning of wilderness is identical with nature as opposed to the cultural or humanly affected realm. As such, "wilderness" has come to replace "nature" in some environmental debates, especially in the U.S., the most important "intellectual environment" of the concept of wilderness. The ambiguities and changes manifest in the history of the idea of wilderness parallel the ambiguities of western civilization towards nature as opposed to culture. For this reason, the problems involved in

[265] Position presented in Jim Cheney: *Postmodern Environmental Ethics: Ethics as Bioregional Narrative*, 24, referring to Sandra Harding: *The Science Question in Feminism*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1986.

conceptualizing wilderness can serve as an example of the complex implications and actual consequences involved in conceiving nature as strictly delimited from culture or free of human intervention.

a. The history of the idea of wilderness and the parallel changes in environments

There are several works documenting the fate of the idea of wilderness, two of the most important being Max Oelschlaeger's *The Idea of Wilderness*[266] and Roderick Frazier Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind*.[267] While Nash's history is admittedly restricted to the United States (hence "American" mind), more precisely the European colonization of North America, Oelschlaeger attempts to draw a broader picture about notions of wilderness and their possible implications. Nevertheless, Oelschlaeger's work is also – for the main part – focused on US authors and activists of wilderness. This is far from an accidental overlook. Although the idea of wilderness did not emerge on the American continent and has a long and deeply rooted history in European culture, its fate and current centrality in many environmental debates is inseparable from the colonization and gradual transformation of North America.

So-called "natural" peoples, i.e. those groups of people living ways of life and creating civilizations more integrated into their natural landscapes (such as, for example, Native Americans) did not have a concept of wilderness as they did not need to name the opposition between humanly controlled and untamed sections of reality. It was the settled, agricultural way of life that first gave rise to this concept around 10000-8000 B.C.[268] When and where the humanly affected and controlled places represented merely islands within large

[266] Max Oelschlaeger: *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology.* Yale University Press, New Haven, 1991. See also Max Oelschlaeger: *Wilderness*. In: *Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability: The Spirit of Sustainability*. Berkshire Publishing, 2009, 428-431.
[267] Roderick Frazier Nash: *Wilderness and the American Mind.* Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2001.
[268] Max Oelschlaeger: *The Idea of Wilderness*, 28.

untamed, and unknown nature, people began to differentiate between domestic and wild places, animals, or plants. Wilderness was the nature that was on the outside of more or less controlled human environments, the hostile and dangerous "other", indifferent, useless, or even opposed to human interests. Compared to the ordered and humanly adapted domestic environments, wild "outside" territories came to be invested with all the negative connotations and categories of hostile otherness. In both Greek and Roman thought wilderness areas were thought of and portrayed with fear and content, as signs of barbarism and failure to control and put to use. Fueled by dreadful and/or apocalyptic Christian views of the wilderness,[269] some version of such negative assessment of wilderness was dominant in Europe and North America well into the 20th century.

But gradually, as people came to control and modify nearly all of nature around them, a different conception and assessment of wilderness emerged. As untamed and uncontrolled nature was fast disappearing, wilderness became a valuable asset. It is not at all accidental that such a positively idealized notion of wilderness only emerged starting from the 17th century, in an almost fully "domesticated" and heavily urbanized Western European setting.

The first full-blown positive conception of wild nature owes its birth to the Romantic Movement in the 18th century. Its first proponents were mostly wealthy, educated city-dwellers who became nostalgic for the artistic and recreational values of "original" nature. The Romantic conception of wilderness was highly aesthetic, relying heavily on the notions of sublime and picturesque. Also and related to such aesthetic primacy, this idea of wilderness was first and foremost a visual concept, and a visual appreciation of nature. It favored and praised sceneries from high points that provided bird's eye views to picture-

[269] See Keith Innes: *The Old Testament Wilderness in Ecological Perspective*. http://www.ringmerchurch.org.uk/Keith/ (accessed on 18.03.2012).
Paul Shepard argues that the Desert Fathers' notions of nature was a response to the desert landscape, and it was among the first ones to set nature strictly aside from culture, in an opposition – see Paul Shepard: *Nature and Madness*. Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 1982.

perfect landscapes. And last but not least, it was a mystical-religious concept (in later forms, even today, this aspect is called "spiritual"). As if responding to the need to justify the appreciation of nature by recurring to and relying on its sacred origin, promoters of wilderness argued for the presence of God within "wild" portions of reality previously thought to be inhabited by evil forces.

Both the dominant negative conception and the positive Romantic vision of wilderness were taken over from Europe to North America and, as they say, developed a life of their own, often and obviously closely connected to the changes European settlers performed on North American environments.

According to both Oelschlaeger's and Nash's history of the idea, the first European settlers in North America still conformed to the long European tradition of assessing wilderness in negative terms and as a challenge to civilization. But as European history of nature-taming repeated itself in an incredibly fast pace in the "New World", the positive Romantic concept of wilderness was gradually established as not only a pivotal concept of "American" national identity, but also as worthy of praise and preservation. Two figures have become known as the founding fathers of both theoretical and activist wilderness preservation: Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)[270] and John Muir (1838-1914)[271]. Both were transcendentalists and both promoted an idea of wilderness which was a mixture of aesthetic and pantheist arguments for valuing and preserving "wild nature." With the gradual disappearance of such "wild nature" from the American continent and together with enthusiastic celebration of such "progress", the idea of wilderness also grew into cult status by the time there was no more "pristine" nature left outside of reservations called national parks or nature reserves. Today, especially in the United States, wilderness is in danger to be

[270] For details see Roderick Frazier Nash: *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 84-95, and Max Oelschlaeger: *The Idea of Wilderness*, 134-139.
[271] See Roderick Frazier Nash: *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 122-140, and Max Oelschlaeger: *The Idea of Wilderness*, 172-204.

"loved to death" by tourists, as Nash famously asserted. Also, even if the boundary between wilderness and humanly affected world has long been blurred, there is a persistent and insistent tendency to idealize wilderness as "nature without us", even if many of the areas considered symbols of the "American wilderness" were actually designed and shaped into appearing wild to visitors.[272]

b. The relation of ideas of wilderness to experiences

It is my contention that the idea of wilderness, both in its negative and positive form, is an "outsider" concept of nature, in the sense that it is based on a limit and opposition between us and nature. I base this assessment on considering the type of experiences that the idea of wilderness was symptomatic of. The initial fearsome and loathsome aversion against wilderness expressed the attitude of outsiders afraid of the unknown and uncontrollable forces that were supposed to lie hidden in "wild nature", i.e. outside of the humanly constructed and controlled confines of life. The less experience of and within "wild nature" people had, the more negative connotations such area received.

And the positive (Romantic and up to the contemporary) praise of wilderness was/is even more of an outsider's concept. The Romantic concept at first glance does not seem to be based on experience at all. If it is still based on any experience, it is usually not the experience of wilderness itself, but on the experience of a growing dissatisfaction with Western civilization and way of life. Indeed, the positive idea of wilderness seems to be more of an intellectual construct than any previous ideas of nature, more theoretical than practical. Consider, for example, Nash's several examples to the point that the first prophets of wilderness manifested mixed feelings in their writings: while praising wild nature when

[272] The most important works of nature-design performed by Frederick Law Olmsted, namely Niagara Falls and Yosemite are commonly considered symbols of wilderness in spite of the considerable human effort that went into their re-shaping to afford different human experiences. For details on the works and thoughts of Olmsted see Anne Whiston Spirn: *Constructing Nature. The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted*. In: *Uncommon Ground. Toward Reinventing Nature*, 91-113.

looking at it from high mountain tops (like sceneries, or picture landscapes), both William Byrd and William Bartram experienced fear, anxiety, threat, and complained for lack of safety and comfort during their travels, i.e. during actual life in the wilderness.[273] Furthermore, even if or when these authors were describing their experiences in and of nature, this experience was highly informed by learned concepts (such as the sublime or the picturesque), literary examples (of how one "should" experience wild nature), and religious beliefs (which turned nature-experience into a mystical encounter). Nevertheless, visits to the wild were in fact mere visits: most promoters of wilderness remained tourists appreciating the visual scenery, aesthetic values and "spiritual" experiences afforded by natural surroundings. Those who most appreciated wilderness were the ones merely vacationing in it.[274]

Different conceptions of wilderness not only relied on different experiences, but also shaped and induced different experiences. The shifting history of the conception of wilderness is another example to the point that just as inherited conceptions shape and to some extent pre-determine experiences, actual experiences also change and nuance conceptions. The pioneers did experience hostile wilderness partly because their conception of nature was of a hostile "outside". On the other hand, Thoreau's merely aesthetic-theoretical concept of wilderness became challenged when experiencing actual wilderness, when he came face to face with the otherness and indifference of nature. He reported it as "even more grim and wild than you had anticipated, a deep and intricate wilderness," or as "savage and dreary," and he noted that "vast, Titanic, inhuman Nature has got man at disadvantage, caught him alone, and pilfers him of some of his divine faculty. She does not

[273] Roderick Frazier Nash: *Wilderness and the American Mind,* 51-55.
[274] Roderick Frazier Nash: *Wilderness and the American Mind,* 61.

smile on him as in the plains."[275] He came out of this experience convinced that man's place in nature has to be thought of as a balance between wilderness and civilization.

c. The questionable consequences of ideas of wilderness in environmental protection. The possibility to evaluate conceptions of nature not based on their truth-content but on their practical implications

Many have criticized the idea of wilderness and argued against its basic assumptions or extensive use in environmental philosophy.[276] The most popular conception of wilderness required that areas invested with such elevated values be free of people, put a fence around, and revered only through occasional visits, much like museums or churches. This myth of pristine nature had and still has many unfortunate consequences and often casts a suspicious light on wilderness-conservation projects. The most serious and tragic consequences of such a presupposition were suffered by indigenous peoples, whose lives and environments were left in a state of limbo.[277] The concept of wilderness promoted an ideal according to which 'real' nature is only uninhabited nature, and hence protected wilderness areas were often cleared from their original inhabitants.

One of the most prominent critics of the elitism and injustice of the wilderness cult, William Cronon, offers several examples where indigenous peoples were forced to move so that "tourists could safely enjoy the illusion that they were seeing their nation in its pristine,

[275] Quoted in Roderick Frazier Nash: *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 91.

[276] See William Cronon: *The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature*. In: *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*; William Cronon: *A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative. A Journal of American History*, March 1992, 1347-1376. For a feminist critique of wilderness see Anne Warner: *The Construction of Wilderness. An Historical Perspective*. http://hdl.handle.net/1880/46951 (accessed on 13.03.2012); Carolyn Merchant: *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture*. Routledge, New York and London, 2003.
Mark Wood groups these critiques into five categories and tries to respond to them in Mark Woods: *Wilderness*. *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, 349-361.

[277] See Anne Warner: *The Construction of Wilderness. An Historical Perspective*. http://hdl.handle.net/1880/46951 (accessed on 13.03.2012); Roderick Frazier Nash: *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 7.

original state, in the new morning of God's own creation."[278] At the beginning of this thesis I already listed several examples of 'nature protection by fence', i.e. cases in which locals were removed from their territories to conserve nature free of humans.

Conceiving unaffected nature to be the only real nature also exonerates and justifies using and abusing areas that are not within the confines of wilderness reservations. As if they have given up on the environments we actually inhabit, many wilderness advocates manifest contempt and lack of care for "less natural" environments.[279] As if the trees in our backyard and the animals living in cities were somehow less natural than the trees and animals in Yosemite national park.

Such a conception of nature as "wild" also makes people prone to protect faraway wildernesses, as our own, experienced environment always come short to such wildness. The popular slogan of saving the rainforest is the most telling example in this sense,[280] for, as Cronon observes, protecting the rainforest in the eyes of First World environmentalists all too often means protecting it from the people who live there."[281] It no doubt also means to exonerate some very damaging environmental behaviors 'at home'.

Appreciation of wilderness, both sentimental and scientific, emerged at a time when Western civilization hardly left any forests untouched. But so-called third world and developing countries supposedly do have such "wild nature". So how are we, from the perspective of the West, to approach these areas and how can we argue for their preservation? The most commonplace arguments say they should be protected in the benefit of mankind or,

[278] William Cronon: *The Trouble with Wilderness,* 77.
[279] Cf. William Cronon: *The Trouble with Wilderness,* 84, 87: "In the wilderness, we need no reminder that a tree has its own reasons for being, quite apart from us. The same is less true in the gardens we plant and tend ourselves: there it is far easier to forget the otherness of the tree."
[280] Max Oelschlaeger: *Wilderness,* 428; William Cronon: *The Trouble with Wilderness,* 80-81.
[281] William Cronon: *The Trouble with Wilderness,* 80.

even more hypocritically, the planet. Both of these arguments seem suspicious and questionable, not to mention quite arrogant.[282]

What all these different considerations of wilderness have shown, is that there is indeed a possibility to decide if or when a conception of nature is flawed, namely based on its actual practical consequences. There are several examples as to how wilderness protection does not actually protect nature at all (consider the hypocrisy of Yosemite Natural Reserve that boasts more than four million tourists a year with all the pollution implied by this pilgrimage to wilderness), and most importantly, that it promotes and justifies social injustice and conceptual colonialism.

The main problem with ideas of wilderness, though, is that we are using our own conceptions of nature and wilderness as universal principles which we then try to impose on others. We suppose we know what nature, ecosystem, sustainability, and so on are. We suppose to know what has to be done, for example, to save the rainforest: keep people out of it. But do we really know, or are we just repeating the mistake of taking our own cultural background as ground? Are we ready to understand and take into consideration different points of view and conceptions about reality? These are questions that wilderness conservation has to face and answer in each and every particular case, since in all cases more than one conception of nature and more than one interest will be involved in the decision making process.

[282] Oelschlaeger argues that there are mainly two sets of objections against popular campaigns to save the rainforest: "First, the charge has been made that globalization has exploited the resources of undeveloped nations and created localized ecological havoc and poverty, while economic benefits flow largely to wealthy nations. (…) Second, critics argue that there can be no justification for calls to protect wilderness in undeveloped nations without consequential changes in the lifestyles of the developed nations that combine with efforts to ameliorate global poverty." Max Oelschlaeger*: Wilderness*, 430.

3. Ideas of nature in environmental protection

Why should environmental protection consider different ideas of nature? One possible answer to this question was I believe fully illustrated in the negative by considering what happens when we do not consider alternative conceptions of nature, as in the case of wilderness preservation at the expense of indigenous peoples. Leaving our own presuppositions unquestioned and arrogantly imposing them on other people is an act of aggression. Banning people from their environments to realize some ideal of "wild nature" rather than paying attention to their insider views, practices, and conceptions of reality that enabled them to live in relative harmony with their surroundings for centuries is one of the most absurd and painful consequences of disregarding diversity in ways of thinking and inhabiting environments. The conception of wild nature has often been totalized into universal validity, and real environments were assimilated when they failed to conform to the concept's ideal.

This example, as well as others, constitutes a warning that when constructing environmental theories and especially actions, one must pay serious attention to the differences in underlying conceptual schemes, and especially close attention to what nature means to different people involved in the debates.[283] A carefully negotiated, dialogical, and pluralistic approach to environments tries to tailor and fit understanding and action to specific environments rather than fitting environments into one conception or another.

So the first and most important argument for considering alternative conceptions of nature is to surmount our own prejudices and avoid the arrogance of forcing them onto others

[283] I already discussed an example of misunderstanding in the previous chapter, namely Michael E. Zimmerman's charge that Heidegger is an anti-naturalist, charge which does not take into account Heidegger's meaning or understanding of 'nature', but assumes that nature is unproblematically identical with Zimmerman's (and, presumably, deep ecology's) conception of nature. For a good case-study on how different conceptions of nature figure and play out in actual environmental decisions see Martin Drenthen: *Developing Nature along Dutch Rivers: Place or Non-Place*, 205-228.

as final truths. Certainly, if my own arguments in this chapter make any sense, the way we conceive the world or nature or animals is not a matter of choice (at least not in the first instance). [284] However, the conceptual background which shapes our unreflected and un-thematic experiences of nature is not final, not necessary, and not even homogenous. Our prior conceptual assumptions do not have to constitute a limitation of our experience or understanding. But they are necessary starting points for any ulterior, more reflective ways of conceiving our surroundings. However, to achieve such a result, hidden presuppositions have to be revealed, then transcended. Our presuppositions and prejudices are surmountable by critique, comparison, dialogue and in general, by broadening one's own conceptual horizon by exposing it to others.

It could also be argued, that conceptions of nature different from our own could offer valuable solutions to our contemporary problems, including environmental crises. As indeed concepts are more abstract features of environmental experience than perceptions and practices, they give the impression that they could be more easily "removed" from their setting (be it imagined as natural, cultural, physical, practical) and applied elsewhere. While more scientifically oriented Westerners would have no problem in arguing that, for example, scientific conceptions of nature can and should be exported and applied everywhere, they would presumably not allow the same to be true of all conceptions of nature, for instance that of *Pachamama*.

But of course, scientific ideas of nature are just as relative to their own context as others. Moreover, as I have argued, conceptions are also more or less but necessarily rooted in experiences, and so in specific places. Consider the example of a Native American medicine man who protested the flooding of a valley by arguing that this will not only

[284] Cf. also Martin Drenthen: *Wildness as a Critical Border Concept: Nietzsche and the Debate on Wilderness Restoration*, 332. Drenthen argues that we do not take on different conceptions of nature as pieces of clothing; nevertheless, we do employ different conceptions in different experiential contexts.

destroy medical plants in that valley but also his knowledge of medicine.[285] His knowledge of the natural world was presentational (the valley had to be there, had to be present), not representational as in Western conceptions, according to which we form propositional knowledge about the surrounding world, and we can take that with us anywhere. So the question is, can conceptions be exported at all? If not, why should we even bother considering conceptions different from our own?

Indeed, it is not always clear what we mean when we look for "solutions" in other cultural milieus, although this is widely practiced in environmental philosophy. Michael G. Barnhart in his excellent *Ideas of Nature in an Asian Context* notes the ambivalence in Western literature regarding the merits of Eastern thinking in general, and in special regarding environmental thinking. Some claim that Eastern views are more enlightened and nature-friendly than exploitative Western ideologies, some say if there is such thing as Eastern philosophy, it is distinctively life-denying. Barnhart claims neither is correct, and asks the nuancing question of what it is that Westerners are looking for when they are looking at Eastern views on reality or nature.[286] Especially, Barnhart addresses some strong claims of Holmes Rolston III, who, after a detailed review of Eastern religious and philosophical concepts, comes to conclude that there is nothing in them that could help westerners value nature, they can have no positive application within environmental ethics. It is, however, not clear, why or how they should, or just what would it mean to look to the East for "solutions". It is also not clear what Rolston was looking for, what his question was. Barnhart argues that Rolston was looking for concepts simply opposing the Western ones, but following the same logic. He took the background assumptions of Western scientific understandings of nature for granted; moreover, he took scientific views of nature to be true but ethically neutral. Both of

[285] Laurie Anne Whitt, Mere Roberts, Waerete Norman, Vicki Grieves: *Indigenous Perspectives*, 3-4.
[286] Michael G. Barnhart: *Ideas of Nature in an Asian Context*, 417.

these assumptions are highly questionable. Rolston was looking for an axiology that not only values nature, but that tells us how and why it has intrinsic value, otherwise, he contended, Eastern conceptions would be "too non-discriminating to be operational".[287]

But there could be another argument against looking into other cultural assumptions. If one takes cultural differences to absolute extremes, it might seem that these differences amount to inaccessible otherness. Such absolute inaccessibility would make other ideas simply irrelevant in another cultural context.[288]

Both of these lines of argument dismiss other cultural conceptions because they pre-suppose that the point of understanding such conceptions is their "implementation" or "application" in another cultural setting. However, there are other reasons to try and understand different cultural contexts or ideas. First, even if these different ideas don't turn out to be normatively operational in other cultural contexts, one can see how they are practically operational in their own context, and how they result and inspire different experiences than our own.

Second, this understanding leads to a deeper understanding or our own cultural assumptions, by comparison. Third, it shows our cultural assumptions to be relative and far from necessary, so it increases flexibility of thought and freedom from our own taken-for-granted assumptions.

Fourth, it shows that there are connections and shared assumptions, so otherness is never radical and absolute difference. And finally, it increases tolerance and reluctance to have arrogant attitudes or to assume cultural hierarchies.

[287] Barnhart takes issue here with the arguments of Holmes Rolston III in his *Can the East help the West to value Nature? Philosophy East and West* Vol. 37, No. 2, 1987, 172-190.

[288] A similar argument, although in a much more abstract formulation, can be found in Husserl's fragments dealing with the home-alien opposition in Edmund Husserl: Husserliana XIII-XV: *Zur Phenomenology der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass,* 431-432.

A pluralistic, dialogical and contextual consideration of different points of view and experiences reveals for us the possibility of a non-arrogant and non-totalizing interpretation of our experiences and our relations with the surrounding world. Pluralism entails more possibilities. It also entails more responsibility. What the plurality of possible views and perspectives teaches us is not only the relativity of our conceptions and positions, but also our responsibility for them. If our experiences and understandings of environments are shaped by inherited patterns, it is also clear that it will be up to us what kind of patterns we pass on to future generations. After all, patterns of experience are not fixed and eternal, but dynamic and constantly shaped by contemporary experiences: by us.

In the previous chapter I argued that one of the most important results of an environmental interpretation of Patočka's ontology of movement was the key insight that we are always situated and constantly situating ourselves in dynamic relations with our environments. Our access to "totality" is only possible from this situated point of view, and never outside any perspective. Our situatedness is both geographic and hermeneutic and essentially, always and in all respects dynamic. Thus, the totality that we can aim for is a situated and dynamic totality – we can experience and live our surroundings "as a whole" where this whole is constantly re-structured and re-negotiated by other experiences and others' experiences.

In this chapter the experience of our environments as a whole was examined through the specific contents of its historical patterns. The sensitivity to taken-for granted patterns of thought, perception, or practice (both ours and others') can make any kind of human cooperation and communication a dynamic process of shaping the world together, and being responsible together for the way it turns out. Thus, patterns of experience can be conceived of expressing an intersubjective and inter-generational dimension of the third movement as described by Patočka. We could conclude with Jim Cheney that the truth about our

environments actually consist in sharing, communication, and negotiation.[289] There is always room for a meaningful discussion about environmental experiences, attitudes, and practices, especially if this discussion results in a realization of our place and responsibility in the world as a whole.

[289] See Glenn Deliège: *Toward a Richer Account of Restorative Practices*. *Environmental Philosophy* 4 (1&2), 2007, 135–147, 144.

CONCLUSION

I started this thesis by pointing out that there are often conflicts arising from environmental protection projects around the world between local inhabitants of the protected environments and the organizations or institutions implementing the projects. I hypothesized that at the heart and in the background of such conflicts were unexamined differences in terms of environmental experiences, values, and ideas of the parties involved. I also suggested that current environmental philosophy neglects to question what an environment is, and has the tendency to conceive environment in global terms, both of which have the potential to foster conflicts rather than prevent or negotiate them.

These problems provided the larger background for a more specific theoretical and methodological suggestion that there does not yet exist a realist phenomenological approach to ontological questions in environmental philosophy, and that such an approach might put in a new light or even successfully tackle the problems I noted. A realist phenomenology would be an understanding of environments from everyday experiences, without supposing them to be constituted in such experiences. My thesis was meant to address these problems (or shortcomings) by proposing a pluralistic phenomenological approach to understand what environments are. This approach, I hoped, would not only have theoretical gains but also practical consequences when planning and designing environmental projects.

More specifically, I proposed to attempt an answer to what environment is by taking as our starting point everyday environmental experiences, and by trying to understand their diversity and their root in specific environments. My contention was that given the unity of person and world in ordinary experiences, these experiences offer us the possibility to understand environments in a new light, one that is neglected and marginalized in environmental philosophy in favor of more globalizing or scientific-objective aims and goals.

The knowledge that we might gain about our environments by paying close attention to people's experiences in them is considered by many to be too subjective and not realist enough to deal with urgent and concrete environmental problems. Thus it was my task to outline the possibilities of a phenomenological approach that contributes positively to environmental theory and action. It remains for me to summarize my conclusions and to examine how far I managed to offer an answer to the conflict situations and ontological questions I raised.

My results could be classified in four categories, roughly (not entirely) corresponding to my four chapters. First, I was able to draw some negative or critical conclusions from examining some of the most popular concepts used (expressly or implicitly) in environmental philosophy to capture what the environment might be, namely the planet, Earth, nature, or ecosystem. I showed that none of these concepts adequately capture what an environment is, for different reasons. The notion of planet Earth is too large in scale, the notion of nature is too undetermined and varied, and the notion of ecosystem is too bare and formal to capture what an environment is.

Furthermore, I noted another inadvertency in the use of such terms or the term '*the* environment', namely that they refer to a global notion of environment that would either be valid for all environments, or, alternatively, be able to include all environments. I did not question the usefulness or coherence of global notions of the environment; however, I noted their inefficiency in arguments and actions. Such conceptions are too abstract and remote from everyday concerns to be able to figure strongly in people's environmental attitudes and commitments.

So what I proposed was an approach that would not only lead to a more sensitive and nuanced understanding of what environments are, but also to more efficient argumentative

tools by linking environments to the everyday lives and concerns of the people who inhabit them.

I proposed that instead of trying to answer the question 'what is an environment' through conceptual analysis or other concepts, we might try and take our starting point and our lead precisely from everyday ordinary experience, that which was said to be neglected or disregarded by global conceptions and notions. I was able to draw a set of positive theoretical conclusions by following this direction.

Experience is bodily involvement with a specific environment, not the planet, not Nature, not the sum conditions for life. This immediately presupposes that if we are to understand environments from experiences, this understanding will necessarily reveal *environments*, in the plural, in their own specificity which is reflected in experiences. The difference between global definitions and this experiential approach is no mere technical difference in scale (global and local), but a qualitative difference. Environments are not merely smaller parts of a global environment, but rich experiential realities that need to be considered in all their complexity and diversity if we are to understand them from the point of view of everyday experiences that people have in/of them.

There are overwhelming historical, cultural, and even personal differences in ways in which environments are experienced, and I asked about the possible source or explanation for such diversity. After examining how environments appear in our everyday experiences, and considering possible explanations regarding the diversity of experiences, I concluded that the ontological root of our different environmental experiences is in the autonomous being of environments that affords a myriad of possibilities for human experience. The latter, in turn, give rise to different ways of understanding our surroundings, which I included under the general notion of hermeneutical reality. I discussed both of these aspects of environments – autonomous and hermeneutic reality – and I concluded that they are not opposed or merely

parallel realities, but mutually change and shape each other in historical and dynamic processes of becoming.

Thus, it resulted that experience reveals to us environments that are no mere 'conditions for life' composed of air, soil, nutrition, geography, climate, and biological organisms, but complex experiential spaces (places) that afford different experiences and various modes of understanding.

This also meant that the ways in which environments are experienced and understood have a crucial effect on their future affordances, so should be considered integral part of their ontology. This ontology will not describe a fixed structure – rather, the reality of an environment is an ongoing dynamic process, the co-generative relation of its two aspects: an autonomous field of possibilities (affordances) and a hermeneutical realm composed of attempts to make sense of the surrounding reality. The link between the two, in fact their fusion happens in lived experience. On the one hand, experience is made possible, given content, shaped and limited by the autonomous reality of the proximal world. On the other hand and at the same time, experience grounds and gives rise to various modes of understanding and interpreting the world surrounding us. Although our human ways of making sense of the world never fully capture or exhaust what reality is (since this reality is potential and in constant becoming), nevertheless they are also not purely random, conventional or constructed, because they are embedded in the surroundings in which they emerge through the experiences on which they rely.

All of these conclusions point toward another important theoretical result, namely that a phenomenological approach can function as a unifying ground for realist and idealist (or constructivist) positions regarding environments. This is because our experiences reveal to us an autonomous surrounding reality (realism) that is approached and interpreted in a myriad of different ways (hermeneutical-constructed reality), all of which are intimately connected to

the possibilities provided by the environments we inhabit. As such, there is no use of opposing realist and constructivist positions, or to decide between them, as they both have their own place and source in lived experiences.

The third cluster of results was methodological. The method that I proposed in this thesis was a version of phenomenology I worked out in the third chapter by adjusting some of the shortcomings or criticism usually directed against phenomenology. I argued that phenomenology as a method is not identifiable with any of the phenomenological philosophies; rather it has to be adapted in every case to the subject of study. In this specific case, I aimed to outline a phenomenological method apt to studying environments. And since environments, according to the results of the previous chapter, turned out to be historical, dynamic phenomena, it became obvious that the analyses of private or contemporary experiences can only be the starting point of a phenomenological understanding of what environments are.

When studying historical phenomena, phenomenology must become able to study and reflect on experiences of many generations, in order to be able to detect the birth and development of ideas, tendencies, and values that are crucial in shaping environments. I proposed that a version of generative phenomenology, namely a method focusing on generative patterns of experience should be employed when aiming to understand what and how environments are.

What my method shares with other phenomenologies is a controversial starting point, namely examining everyday environmental experiences. What is controversial about such a starting point is not the importance of experience as such, but the consequences to be drawn from it, and specifically from experience as it happens usually and for the most part. What most philosophers aim to achieve by examining different experiences is to be able to recognize and revel their similarities in order to reach more ‘objective’ conclusions. In

contrast, I put forward a methodology which aims to be as attentive as possible precisely to differences. I did not aim for 'objective' results, but a more nuanced and sensible understanding and practical benefits. I believe that I was able to show how a phenomenological approach is beneficial in both respects.

I argued that sustained and close attention to our environmental experiences has the benefit of revealing our intimate and indissoluble entanglement with our environments, and a sensitive, immediate kind of understanding. Of course, other approaches aim to do the same and succeed in doing so. Ecology, biology and popular forms of environmental arguments all stress how dependent we are on our environments. What a phenomenological approach can add to these is a sense of entanglement with the environments we inhabit beyond necessity and conditions for survival. What I aimed to show is that our intimate connection with the surrounding realities reaches the core of who we are, how we experience, and how we live. This is no small benefit, as it has a great potential to raise our awareness and strengthening our commitment towards the environments in which we live.

This point already brings me to the last set of results I drew from my analyses, the ones that are probably the most important to me. As I already stated in the thesis, I do not consider environmental philosophy a mere theoretical endeavor. That is why some of my most important results were practical, in terms of guidelines, principles and criteria for environmental action and projects. First of all, a pluralistic-experiential understanding provides valuable argumentative tools in the process of committing more and more people to environmental-conscious behaviors and attitudes. If we are able to link environmental problems to the everyday lives and experiences of people, we will be more likely to succeed in increasing awareness and inducing changes of attitudes, and responsibility.

Second, a pluralistic approach based on confronting immediate environmental experiences provides the ground for environmental action which is essentially dialogical in

structure - a democratic process of negotiation. I showed in the second chapter that by becoming pluralistic, environmental ontology can and does become more inclusive, open, and flexible. If we are not aiming to define environments in universal objective terms, but become aware of the differences involved in each case, it becomes not only possible but also necessary to include as many points of view or ideas as possible.

In the methodology I set up, I opted for a comparative study of experiences not in order to discover their similarities but to be able to negotiate their differences. The most important result of the fourth chapter was to show how revealing and examining our own tendencies or patterns of experience, and comparing them with others can increase our critical ability towards our own prejudices, can make us more sensitive and empathetic towards other, different experiences and ways of life, and more successful in communicating and negotiating our positions. This results in a case-specific understanding of each environment in a dialogical and democratic negotiation process. I illustrated how and why the careful and attentive analysis of patterns of experience is beneficial for bottom-up collaborative environmental projects. Namely, revealing, becoming aware of our own patterns renders us more willing to see others' patterns not as anomaly but as another 'normality'. This is the ground of collaborative actions and possibilities of teaching, learning, and mapping out new alternatives together.

Also as a practical result, I was able to work out an experiential criterion for successful environmental action. This consisted in revealing and keeping open as many possibilities for experience and understanding in an environment as possible. This also turned out to be an important argument for environmental management, and against attitudes of merely 'letting be'. Another result I consider important was a criterion for deciding between environmental ideas, namely not based on their truth content, but on practical consequences, for example, with respect to social justice or equity.

I am well aware that some of these communicative and collaborative practices are already applied in some environmental studies and projects, most importantly, anthropological ones. I also believe that they were not yet given a philosophical foundation, but worked in their disciplinary isolation, sometimes even expressly against tendencies in environmental philosophy. That is why my wish was to offer this phenomenological approach also as an interdisciplinary bridge. To what extent I succeeded remains to be seen.

This brings me to the limited scope of my approach. Although in a sense I did aim to fill de gaps that I noted at the beginning, and overcome shortcomings of existing approaches, my approach and my proposed methodology were not meant to substitute or make obsolete other environmental approaches, such as scientific-empirical studies, or ethical-normative considerations. Rather, I proposed my pluralistic phenomenological approach as completing and adding a plus to current efforts to address environmental problems.

Furthermore, I do not suppose that the problems I raised were adequately and entirely solved or even addressed in all their seriousness in this thesis alone. On the contrary, my efforts here were rather to work out the general directions for future studies, and to argue that such directions are worth pursuing since they can contribute something fresh and new to currently existing approaches.

To end on an optimistic note, I would like to link my efforts in this thesis to something that architect Bjarke Ingels coined under the term 'hedonistic sustainability'.[290] This denotes a new idea and direction of environmental awareness, one which is not based on fear, renunciation, or negative feelings. Rather, it is based on the contention and hope that sustainable life can be extremely rich in sensations and positive experiences, if we design and shape environments that allow such possibilities. I believe that a pluralistic phenomenological

[290] http://www.ted.com/talks/bjarke_ingels_hedonistic_sustainability.html (accessed on November 11, 2012).

approach can induce sensible and joyful feelings of inter-dependence and inter-relation with our environments, feelings which can result in a positive commitment to sustainable environments.

I put forward my understanding of environments as autonomous realities with rich experiential affordances in order to pursue a goal similar to Ingels'. I proposed that the main criterion of successful environmental interventions or projects is not in removing as many people as possible or in renouncing as much as possible. On the contrary, the challenge is in maintaining rich and positive possibilities of experience by our environmental planning, designing, or managing activities. The alternative to renunciation can be genuine involvement.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ALBERTSON, David, KING, Cabell (eds): *Without Nature? A New Condition for Theology*. Fordham University Press, New York, 2010.

AMES, Roger T., CALLICOTT, Baird J. (eds): *Nature in Asian Traditions and Thought*. State University of New York Press, Albany, 1989.

ANDREW-ESSIEN, Elisabeth, BISONG, Francis: *Conflicts, Conservation and Natural Resource Use in Protected Area Systems: an Analysis of Recurrent Issues. European Journal of Scientific Research*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2009, 118-129.

ATTFIELD, Robin: *Christianity*. In: Dale Jamieson (ed.): *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*. Blackwell Publishing, 2001, 96-110.

ATTFIELD, Robin: *Is the Concept of "Nature" Dispensable*? *Ludus Vitalis*, vol. XIV, num. 25, 2006, 105-116.

BARBARAS, Renaud: *Le mouvement de l'existence: Études sur la phénoménologie de Jan Patočka.* Les Editions de la Transparence, Chatou, 2007.

BARNHART, Michael G.: *Ideas of Nature in an Asian Context*. *Philosophy East and West*. Vol. 47, No. 3, Jul. 1997, 417-432.

BERTHOLD-BOND, Daniel*: Can There Be a "Humanistic" Ecology? A Debate between Hegel and Heidegger on the Meaning of Ecological Thinking. Social Theory and Practice,* vol. 20/3, Fall 1994, 279-309.

BOOKCHIN, Murray: *Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology*. *Socialist Review* 1988/3, 11–29.

BOOKCHIN, Murray: *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy*. Cheshire Books, Palo Alto, 1982.

BOTHA, Catherine Frances: *Heidegger, Technology and Ecology. South African Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2003, 157-172.

BRAUN, Bruce: *Nature*. In: Noel Castree, David Demeritt, Diana Liverman, Bruce Rhoads (eds): *A Companion to Environmental Geography*. Blackwell Publishing, 2009, 19-36.

BROWN, Charles S., TOADVINE, Ted (eds): *Eco Phenomenology. Back to the Earth Itself*. State University of New York Press, Albany, 2003.

CAVE, George S.: *Animals, Heidegger, and the Right to Life*. *Environmental Ethics* 4, 1982, 249–254.

CHAPPLE, Christopher Key: *Jainism and Buddhism*. In: Dale Jamieson (ed.): *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*. Blackwell Publishing, 2001, 52-66.

CHENEY, Jim: *Postmodern Environmental Ethics: Ethics as Bioregional Narrative*. In: Max Oelschlaeger (ed.): *Postmodern Environmental Ethics*. State University of New York Press, 1995, 23-42.

CLARKE, John J.: *Nature in Question. An Anthology of Ideas and Arguments*. Earthscan Publications, London, 1993.

COLLINGWOOD, Robin George: *The Idea of Nature*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1945.

COOPER, David, E.: *The Idea of Environment*. In: Cooper, D.E., Palmer, J.A. (eds): *The Environment in Question*. Routledge, London, 1992, 163-178.

CRONON, William: *A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative*. *A Journal of American History*, March 1992, 1347-1376.

CRONON, William: *The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature*. In: William Cronon (ed.): *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*. W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1995, 69-90.

CRONON, William (ed.): *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature.* W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1995.

CROWELL, Steven: *"Idealities of Nature": Jan Patočka on Reflection and the Three Movements of Human Life*. In: Ivan Chvatík, Erica Abrams (eds): *Jan Patočka and the Heritage of Phenomenology*. Springer, Dordrecht, Heidelberg, London, New York, 2011, 7-22.

CRUTZEN, Paul, STROEMER, Eugene: *The 'Anthropocene'*. *Global Change Newsletter* 41, 2000, 17–18.

DELIÈGE, Glenn: *Restoring or Restroying Nature?* In: S. Bergmann, P. Scott, M. Jansdotter Samuelsson & H. Bedford-Strohm (eds.): *Nature, Space and the Sacred*. Ashgate, Farnham, 2009, 189-199.

DELIÈGE, Glenn: *Toward a Richer Account of Restorative Practices*. *Environmental Philosophy* 4 (1&2), 2007, 135–147.

HAZELRIGG, Lawrence E.: *Cultures of Nature. Essay on the Production of Nature*. University Press of Florida, 1995.

DELUCA, Kevin: *Thinking With Heidegger. Rethinking Environmental Theory and Practice. Ethics & The Environment*. 10/1, 2005, 67-87.

DEVALL, Bill, SESSIONS, George: *Deep Ecology: Living As If Nature Mattered*. Peregrine Smith, Salt Lake City, 1985.

DIEHM, Christian: *Natural Disasters*. In: Charles S. Brown, Ted Toadvine (eds): *Eco Phenomenology. Back to the Earth Itself*. State University of New York Press, Albany, 2003, 171-185.

DOWER, Nigel: *The Idea of the Environment*. In: Robin Attfield, Andrew Besley (eds): *Philosophy and the Natural Environment*. Cambridge University Press, 1994, 143-156.

DRENGSON, Alan, INOUE, Yuichi (eds.): *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology*. North Atlantic, Berkeley, 1995.

DRENTHEN, Martin: *Developing Nature along Dutch Rivers: Place or Non-Place*. In: Martin Drenthen, Jozef Keulartz, James Proctor (eds): *New Visions of Nature. Complexity and Authenticity*. Springer, 2009, 205-228.

DRENTHEN, Martin: *Ecological Restoration and Place Attachment: Emplacing Non-Places? Environmental Values* 18, 2009, 285–312.

DRENTHEN, Martin: *Landscapes Devoid of Meaning? Environmental Values* 22, 2013, 17-23.

DRENTHEN, Martin, KEULARTZ, Jozef, PROCTOR, James (eds): *New Visions of Nature. Complexity and Authenticity.* Springer, 2009.

DRENTHEN, Martin: *Wildness as a Critical Border Concept: Nietzsche and the Debate on Wilderness Restoration*. *Environmental Values* 14**,** 2005, 317–337.

DREYFUS, Hubert: *Heidegger's History of the Being of Equipment*. In: Hubert Dreyfus, Harrison Hall (eds): *Heidegger: A Critical Reader*. Blackwell, Cambridge, 1992, 173–185.

DUICU, Dragoș: *La phénoménologie asubjective de Jan Patočka, une phénoménologie non intentionnelle?* Bulletin d'analyse phénoménologique, VI 8, 2010, 230-243.

DWIVEDI, O.P.: *Classical India*. In: Dale Jamieson (ed.): *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*. Blackwell Publishing, 2001, 37-51.

ENDFIELD, Georgina, H.: *Environmental History*. In: Noel Castree, David Demeritt, Diana Liverman, Bruce Rhoads (eds): *A Companion to Environmental Geography*. Blackwell Publishing, 2009, 223-237.

EVANS, Claude J.: *With Respect for Nature. Living as Part of the Natural World*. State University of New York Press, 2005.

EVERNDEN, Neil: *Constructing the Natural: The Darker Side of the Environmental Movement*. *The North American Review*. Vol. 270, no. 1, Mar. 1985, 15-19.

FELD, Steve: *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics and Song in Kaluli Expression.* University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1982.

FERNANDEZ-ARMESTO, Felipe: *Civilizations, Culture, Ambition, and the Transformation of Nature*. The Free Press, New York, 2001.

FOLTZ, Bruce V.: *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature.* Humanities International Press, Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1995.

FOLTZ, Bruce V.: *On Heidegger and the Interpretation of Environmental Crisis*. *Environmental Ethics* 6/4, Winter 1984, 323–342.

FOX, Warwick: *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology*. Shambhala, Boston, 1990.

GELL, Alfred: *The Language of the Forest: Landscape and Phonological Iconism in Umeda*. In: Eric Hirsch, Michael O'Hanlon (eds): *The Anthropology of Landscape. Perspectives on Place and Space*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1995, 232-254.

GIBSON, James J.: *The ecological approach to visual perception*. Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1979.

GUPTA, Akhil, FERGUSON, James: *Discipline and Practice: 'the Field' as Site, Method, and Location in Anthropology*. In: Akhil Gupta, James Ferguson (eds): *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1997, 1–46.

HADOT, Pierre: *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature*. Harvard University Press, 2006.

HARVEY, David: *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference*. Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 1996.

HARVEY, David: *The Condition of Post-Modernity*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989.

HAQ, S. Nomanul: *Islam*. In: Dale Jamieson (ed.): *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*. Blackwell Publishing, 2001, 111-129.

HAZELRIGG, Lawrence E.: *Cultures of Nature. Essay on the Production of Nature*. University Press of Florida, 1995.

HEIDEGGER, Martin: *Being and Time*. Blackwell, Oxford and Cambridge, 1962.

HEIDEGGER, Martin: *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*. In: *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Harper & Row, New York, 1971, 143-159.

HEIDEGGER, Martin: *Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking*. In: *Discourse on Thinking*. Harper & Row, New York, 1966.

HEIDEGGER, Martin: *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Yale University Press, New Haven-London, 2000.

HEIDEGGER, Martin*: The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. Indiana University Press, 1995.

HEIDEGGER, Martin: *The Origin of the Work of Art*. In: *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Harper & Row, New York, 1971, 17-86.

HEIDEGGER, Martin: *What is Metaphysics?* In: Martin Heidegger: *Pathmarks*. Cambridge University Press, 1998, 82-96.

HOLLAND, Nancy J.: *Rethinking Ecology in the Western Philosophical Tradition: Heidegger and/on Aristotle*. *Continental Philosophy Review* 32, 1999, 409–420.

HOWE, Lawrence W.: *Heidegger's Discussion of "The Thing": A Theme for Deep Ecology*. *Between the Species*, Spring 1993, 93-96.

HUGHES, J. Donald: *Ecology in Ancient Civilizations*. University of New Mexico Press, 1975.

HUGHES, J. Donald: *The Environmental History of the World*. Routledge, London & New York, 2009.

HUSSERL, Edmund: *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1973.

HUSSERL, Edmund: *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy - Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution.* Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1989.

HUSSERL, Edmund: *Logical Investigations*. Routledge, London & New York, 2001

HUSSERL, Edmund: *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology.* Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1970.

HUSSERLIANA XIII-XV: *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlaß.* Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1973.

IHDE, Don: *Postphenomenology. Essays in the Postmodern Context*. Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1993.

IHDE, Don: *Technology and the Lifeworld. From Garden to Earth*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1990.

IHDE, Don: *Whole Earth Measurements. How Many Phenomenologists Does It Take to Detect a Greenhouse Effect? Philosophy & Technology*, Winter 1997, 61-72.

INGOLD, Tim: *The Perception of the Environment*. Routledge, London & New York, 2000.

INNES, Keith: *The Old Testament Wilderness in Ecological Perspective*. http://www.ringmerchurch.org.uk/Keith/ (accessed on 18.03.2012).

IRWIN, Ruth: *Climate Change and Heidegger's Philosophy of Science. Essays in Philosophy*, vol. 11, 2011, 16-30.

JAMES, Simon P.: *The Presence of Nature. A Study in Phenomenology and Environmental Philosophy*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2009.

JOHNSON, D.L., AMBROSE S.H., BASSETT, T.J., BOWEN, M.L., CRUMMEY, D.E., ISAACSON, J.S., JOHNSON, D.N., LAMB, P., SAUL, M., WINTER-NELSON, A.E.: *Meanings of Environmental Terms*. *Journal of Environmental Quality*. Volume 26, Issue 3, May-June 1997.

JONES, Owain: *After Nature: Entangled Worlds*. In: Noel Castree, David Demeritt, Diana Liverman, Bruce Rhoads (eds): *A Companion to Environmental Geography*. Blackwell Publishing, 2009, 294-311.

JUNG Hwa Yol: *Marxism, Ecology, and Technology*. *Environmental Ethics* 1983/5.

KATZ, Eric: *Judaism*. In: Dale Jamieson (ed.): *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*. Blackwell Publishing, 2001, 81-95.

KATZ, Eric, LIGHT, Andrew, ROTHENBERG, David (eds.): *Beneath the Surface: Critical Essays on Deep Ecology*. MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2000.

KING, Roger J.H.: *Narrative, Imagination, and the Search for Intelligibility in Environmental Discourses*. *Ethics and the Environment*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1999, 23-38.

KOHÁK, Erazim: *Jan Patočka. Philosophy and Selected Writings.* University of Chicago Press, 1989.

KOHÁK, Erazim: *The Embers and the Stars. A Philosophical Inquiry into the Moral Value of Nature*. University of Chicago Press, 1984.

KLAVER, Irene J.: *Phenomenology on the Rocks*. In: Charles S. Brown, Ted Toadvine (eds): *Eco Phenomenology. Back to the Earth Itself*. State University of New York Press, Albany, 2003, 155-169.

LAI, Karyn L.: *Classical China*. In: Dale Jamieson (ed.): *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*. Blackwell Publishing, 2001, 21-36.

LATOUR, Bruno: *We Have Never Been Modern*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1993.

LEASE, Gary, SOULE, Michael E. (eds): *Reinventing Nature? Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction*. Island Press, Washington D.C., 1995.

LEICHENKO, Robin, O'BRIEN, Karen: *Double Exposure: Global Environmental Change in an Era of Globalization*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2006.

LIPPAI Cecília: *The Chances of an Open Metaphysics. A Dialogue with Jan Patočka*. *Philobiblon*, vol. X.-XI., 2006, 200-230.

LIPPAI Cecília: *The Sublime as Boundary Experience of Nature*. *Philobiblon*, vol. XIV, 2009, 48-71.

LOPEZ, Barry: *Arctic Dreams*. Macmillan, London, 1986.

MACNAGHTEN, Phil: *Embodying the Environment in Everyday Life Practices*. *The Sociological Review*, 2003, 63-84.

MASSEY, Doreen: *Power-Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place*. In: Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, Tim Putnam, George Robertson, and Lisa Tickner (eds.): *Mapping the Futures*. Routledge, London, 64- 67.

MCKIBBON, Bill: *The End of Nature*. Random House, New York, 1989.

MERCHANT, Carolyn: *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture.* Routledge, New York and London, 2003.

MERCHANT, Carolyn: *The Death of Nature*. In: Michael E. Zimmerman (ed.): *Environmental Philosophy. From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*. Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ, 2001, 273-286.

MURDOCH, Jonathan: *The Spaces of Actor-Network Theory*. *Geoforum*, 29(4), 1998, 357–374.

NABHAM, Gary Paul: *The Desert Smells Like Rain: A Naturalist in Papago Indian Country*. North Point Press, San Francisco, 1987.

NAESS, Arne: *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle. Outline of an Ecosophy*. Cambridge University Press, 1989.

NAESS, Arne: *The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements: A Summary. Inquiry* 16, 1973.

NASH, Roderick Frazier: *Wilderness and the American Mind.* Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2001.

NISBETT, Richard E.: *The Geography of Thought. How Asians and Westerners Think Differently…and Why*. The Free Press, New York, 2003.

OELSCHLAEGER, Max: *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology.* Yale University Press, New Haven, 1991.

OELSCHLAEGER, Max: *Wilderness*. In: *Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability: The Spirit of Sustainability*. Berkshire Publishing, 2009, 428-431.

ONLINE ETYMOLOGY DICTIONARY: http://www.etymonline.com/ accessed on 16.02.2010.

PATOČKA, Jan: *An Introduction to Husserl's Phenomenology*. Open Court, Chicago and La Salle, Illinois, 1996.

PATOČKA, Jan: *Body, Community, Language, World*. Open Court, Chicago and La Salle, Illinois, 1998.

PATOČKA, Jan: *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*. Open Court, Chicago and La Salle, Illinois, 1996.

PATOČKA, Jan: *L'espace et sa problématique*. In: *Qu'-est-ce que la phénoménologie?* Jerome Millon, Grenoble, 1988, 17-96.

PATOČKA, Jan*: Negative Platonism. Reflections Concerning the Rise, the Scope, and the Demise of Metaphysics – and Whether Philosophy Can Survive It.* In: *Philosophy and Selected Writings*. The University of Chicago Press, 1989, 175-206.

PAULY, Daniel: *Anecdotes and the Shifting Baseline Syndrome of Fisheries*. *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*, 10(10), 1995, 430.

ROBBINS, Paul: *Beyond Ground Truth: GIS and the Environmental Knowledge of Herders, Professional Foresters, and other Traditional Communities*. *Human Ecology*, 31(2), 2003, 233–253.

ROLSTON, Holmes III: *Can the East help the West to value Nature? Philosophy East and West* Vol. 37, No. 2, 1987, 172-190.

SACHS, Wolfgang: *Sustainable Development and the Crisis of Nature: on the Political Anatomy of an Oxymoron*, In: Hajer, M., Fisher, F. (eds): *Living with Nature*. Oxford University Press, 1999.

SCHWARZSCHILD, Steven: *The Unnatural Jew*. *Environmental Ethics* 6/1984, 347-362.

SEAMON, David: *A Way of Seeing People and Place: Phenomenology in Environment-Behavior Research*. In: S. Wapner, J. Demick, T. Yamamoto, and H Minami (eds.):

Theoretical Perspectives in Environment-Behavior Research. Plenum, New York, 2000. 157-178.

SEIDEL, George: *Heidegger: Philosopher for Ecologist? Man and World* 4, 1971, 93-99.

SELIN, Helaine: *Nature Across Cultures. Views of Nature and the Environment in Non-Western Cultures.* Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003.

SESSIONS, George (ed.): *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*. Shambhala, Boston, 1995.

SHEPARD, Paul: *Nature and Madness*. Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 1982.

SMITH, Barry*: Fiat Objects*. *Topoi* 20: 2, 2001, 131–148.

SPITZER, Leo: *Milieu and Ambiance: An Essay in Historical Semantics* (Part 2). *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 3, No. 2, 1942, 169–218.

STEINBERG, Philip E., SHIELDS, Rob (eds) *The Urban After Katrina: Place, Community, Connections and Memory*. University of Georgia Press, Athens, 2007.

STEINBOCK, Anthony J.: *Generativity and Generative Phenomenology*. In: *Husserl Studies* 12, 1995, 55-79.

STEINBOCK, Anthony J.: *Home and Beyond. Generative Phenomenology after Husserl*. Northwestern University Press, Evanston IL, 1995.

STEVENS, Stan: *Conservation Through Cultural Survival: Indigenous Peoples and Protected Areas*. Island Press, Washington, 1997.

ST. MARTIN, Kevin, PAVLOVSKAYA Marianna: *Ethnography*. In: Noel Castree, David Demeritt, Diana Liverman, Bruce Rhoads (eds): *A Companion to Environmental Geography*. Blackwell Publishing, 2009, 370-384.

SYLVAN, Richard*: A Critique of Deep Ecology, Part I. Radical Philosophy* 40, 1985, 2–12.

SYLVAN, Richard: *A Critique of Deep Ecology, Part II. Radical Philosophy* 41, 1985, 1–22.

THIELE, Leslie Paul: *Nature and Freedom: A Heideggerian Critique of Biocentric and Sociocentric Environmentalism*. *Environmental Ethics* 17/2, Summer 1995, 171–190.

THRIFT, Nigel: *Steps to an Ecology of Place*. In D. Massey, P. Sarre and J. Allen (eds): *Human Geography Today*. Polity, Oxford, 1999, 295–352.

TOBIAS, Michael (ed.): *Deep Ecology.* Avant Books, San Diego, 1985.

UEXKÜLL, Jakob von: *A Stoll through the Worlds of Animals and Men*. In: Claire H. Schiller (ed.): *Instinctive Behavior. The Development of a Modern Concept.* International Universities Press, New York, 5-80.

VOGEL, Stephen: *Environmental Philosophy after the End of Nature*. *Environmental Ethics* 24, 2002, 23-39.

WARNER, Anne: *The Construction of Wilderness. An Historical Perspective.* http://hdl.handle.net/1880/46951 (accessed on 13.03.2012).

WEINER, James: *The Empty Place: Poetry, Space and Being among the Poi of Papua New Guinea*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1991.

WESTRA, Laura: *Let It Be: Heidegger and Future Generations*. *Environmental Ethics* 7/4, Winter 1985, 341–50;

WHATMORE, Sarah: *Hybrid Geographies. Natures, Cultures, Spaces*. Sage Publications, London, 2002.

WHINSTON SPIRN, Anne: *Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted*. In: William Cronon (ed.): *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*. W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1995, 91-113.

WHITE, Lynn, Jr.: *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis*. *Science* 155.37/1967, 1203-1207.

WILSON, Edward, O.: *The diversity of life*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1992.

WOOD, David: *What is Eco-Phenomenology*? In: Charles S. Brown, Ted Toadvine (eds): *Eco Phenomenology. Back to the Earth Itself*. State University of New York Press, Albany, 2003, 211-233.

WOODS, Mark: *Wilderness*. In: Dale Jamieson (ed.): *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*. Blackwell Publishing, 2001, 349-361.

ZIMMERMAN, Michael E.: *Contesting Earth's Future: Radical Ecology and Postmodernity.* University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1994.

ZIMMERMAN, Michael E.: *Heidegger's Phenomenology and Contemporary Environmentalism* In: Charles S. Brown, Ted Toadvine (eds): *Eco Phenomenology. Back to the Earth Itself*. State University of New York Press, Albany, 2003, 73-101.

ZIMMERMAN, Michael E.: *Implications of Heidegger's Thought for Deep Ecology*. *The Modern Schoolman* 64, November 1986, 19–43.

ZIMMERMAN, Michael E.: *Martin Heidegger: Anti-Naturalistic Critic of Technological Modernity.* In: David Macauley (ed.): *Ecological Thinkers*. Guilford, New York, 1995.

ZIMMERMAN, Michael E.: *Toward a Heideggerian Ethos for Radical Environmentalism*. *Environmental Ethics* 5, no. 3, Summer 1983, 99–131.