

In What Sense Can Art Be Ecological? Art as an Event Flash of Nature According to Henri Maldiney

PETR PRÁŠEK, Department of Contemporary Continental Philosophy, Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, Czech Republic

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Art or at least what is called “eco art” or “environmental art” knows numerous ways in which to respond to environmental issues and become ecological. This article is not an analysis of art history, which would map the various tendencies or themes within eco art, but a philosophical study attempting to describe the most profound sense in which art literally *is* nature: according to French phenomenologist Henri Maldiney, art is a “flash of being” (*éclair de l'être*) or, more precisely, a flash or glimpse of sensually experienced nature. The article attempts to clarify this thesis thoroughly and then briefly traces the link between eco art and eco-phenomenology, a branch of environmental ethics.

Keywords: art – eco art – phenomenology – eco-phenomenology – Henri Maldiney – sensation – event – nature

Introduction: Eco Art

Despite some people’s misgivings, art, like philosophy, evolves in response to current social issues. In this respect, it is no surprise that it is now increasingly confronted with the ecological crisis. More specifically, the environmentalist movement – whose second, major wave began in the late 1960s and 1970s and sought to improve the polluted natural environment – also began to permeate the arts. The first works of so-called “eco art” were created at this time in Europe and North America and attempted to engage in a debate on the ecological impact of human activity that later, especially in the last decade, became a commonplace part of everyday life. Today, everybody takes part in it: scientists, politicians, artists, philosophers, representatives of various business spheres, but also “ordinary citizens,” especially via various social media or in the role of

voters. It is a debate full of arguments, but also of belittling, fabrications, and denial of facts, in which neither environmentalism, ecology as an objective science, nor ecological philosophy always have a privileged position, which is associated at best with a rejection of urgency, and at worst with ignorance of the very existence of the ecological crisis or its various aspects, such as climate change.¹ One of the biggest challenges today is the question of what can be done in such a situation in which a blind eye is turned to a serious problem whose existence has been confirmed by thousands of scientific studies.²

It is not my intention here to further discuss the current, extremely complex situation which also includes many other phenomena, such as animal and plant species extinction or pollution, and which we call the environmental crisis. The aim of this introduction is only to indicate the context in which eco art enters. In such a situation, in which scientific, objective rationality often fails, one could follow what eminent environmental journalist Bill McKibben suggested: what the warming world needs is art (Bill McKibben 2005). Indeed, artists enter the debate with truly powerful weapons: they can hit the viewer emotionally, i.e., from the inside, quickly, directly. In the words of one of them, Olafur Eliasson:

One of the great challenges today is that we often feel untouched by the problems of others and by global issues like climate change, even when we could easily do something to help. We do not feel strongly enough that we are part of a global community, part of a larger we. Giving people access to data most often leaves them feeling overwhelmed and disconnected, not empowered and poised for action. This is where art can make a difference...I believe that one of the major responsibilities of artists—and the idea that artists have responsibilities may come as a surprise to some—is to help people not only get to know and understand something with their minds but also to feel it emotionally and physically. By doing this, art can mitigate the

¹ The deliberate denial of climate change as a premeditated strategy of some representatives of the fossil fuel industry has been written about, for example, by B. Latour (2018, chapter 5) or, more recently in the Czech Republic, by V. Pecka (2023).

² As confirmed by the 2021 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, based on thousands of studies, it is now indisputable that climate change is occurring and that human activity is the cause. The paragraph A.1 of the Panel's sixth assessment report, which began publication in August 2021, says: "It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean, and land. Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have occurred" (Masson-Delmotte et al. 2021, 4).

numbing effect created by the glut of information we are faced with today, and motivate people to turn thinking into doing (Eliasson 2016, 1).

The particular ways in which art awakens sensitivity to environmental issues are very diverse. If eco art can be very broadly defined as “a range of contemporary practices that investigate the interconnected environmental, aesthetic, social, and political relationships between human and nonhuman animals as well as inanimate material through the visual arts” (Cheetham 2018, 1), then it encompasses a whole range of trends or strategies. Only three basic ones will be mentioned in what follows.³

1) The broadest meaning of eco or environmental art encompasses all works depicting that which is somehow related to ecological issues, without even having to thematize the ecological crisis, e.g. an exploration of the very notion of nature as constructed by humans, as attempted, for example, by Sean Martindale in his work *Curbed Concepts: NATURE* (cf. Cheetham 2018, 106 – 108).

2) In contrast, environmental art in the narrower sense aims to draw attention to the crisis itself, to its roots and consequences, to the need for urgently addressing it and striving for harmonious coexistence between man and nature, which is certainly the case with Brazilian photographer Salgado, known for his transformation of an arid ranch into a subtropical rainforest, who shows places threatened by climate change in his recent *Amazonia* exhibition;⁴ or with the project of many Czech and other artists, among them M. Vojtěchovský and D. Šubrtová, called *Frontiers of Solitude*, exploring three places in the landscape fundamentally transformed by human activity⁵ (cf. Remešová 2018); and as shown by the case of A. Balkin – who tried to register the atmosphere as a UNESCO monument, for which she did not hesitate to pressure the German and other governments with the help of the viewers of her works (cf. Navrátil 2021, 45) – these and similar efforts might sometimes result in political pressure or engagement.

3) Finally, art can strive to become environmentally friendly by not leaving behind a carbon footprint, working with recyclable materials, etc. such as the artists from four different countries whose works – minimally energy-intensive

³ The following very rough overview draws mainly upon the following publications: Weintraub (2012); Cheetham (2018); Navrátil (2017, 2021); Remešová (2018); Zemanová (2020); Špinková (2022); Vaculová Repová (2023).

⁴ See online: <https://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/what-was-on/amazonia>

⁵ See online: <https://frontiers-of-solitude.org/>

to produce and transport – were gathered in the Rudolfinum Gallery for the *UNPLUGGED* exhibition.⁶

The consequence of this diversity that could only be hinted at here is that art history books on eco art are “panoramas of different examples” (Weintraub 2012, 7) that, at most, attempt to summarize some universal features, including what seems to be the universal goal of ensuring the long-term, sustainable functioning of humans and life systems on Earth (Weintraub 2012, 31; cf. Navrátil 2021, 290). However, this article is not historical but philosophical or, more precisely, phenomenological, as its strong belief is that phenomenology describes the deepest sense of the ecological nature of art. If artists can affect us on the emotional level, it means that art is able to capture something essential for us. What is it? How does it relate to the natural environment? And isn't the phenomenological perspective an obstacle to capturing nature “in itself”? I am not asking this last question at random. Phenomenology is not entirely outside the interest of eco art theorists, but the truth is that artists themselves and their interpreters seem to draw mainly from philosophical trends that define themselves against phenomenology. Or, more precisely, they define themselves against “correlationism” (to which phenomenology belongs) according to which reality cannot be approached in itself but only through our subjective perspective. By contrast, the popularity of object-oriented ontology or speculative realism even among eco artists (cf. Navrátil 2021, 31) rests, among other things, on how they work with notions of nature or natural beings as completely independent of human perspective and, as a result, as immune to the dangers of anthropocentrism. Behind this, however, lurks a certain prejudice against phenomenology: while phenomenology is indeed based on how things appear to human subjectivity, this does not mean that it is necessarily anthropocentric. In this paper, I will demonstrate that the phenomenological notion of nature, while understandably linked to subjectivity, involves a value independent of humans. More precisely, together with French phenomenologist Henri Maldiney, I will examine the process of the creation of a work of art, which will reveal the deep inner bond between art, human existence and nature. This will finally allow me to briefly address the parallel between eco art and eco-phenomenology, which, like eco art, builds on the lived experience of the artist, but also branches out into the realm of critical discussion about ecological issues, which can – and, as in the case of eco art, does – reach into the realm of politics.

⁶ See online: <https://www.galerierudolfinum.cz/cs/vystavy/archiv-vystav/unplugged/>

I. Art as Conceived by Maldiney

As the title of one of Maldiney's books on art (2012) suggests, "art is a glimpse/glitter of being" (*éclair de l'être*). Maldiney explains what he means by this in many places in his work: "art is the truth of sensation (*sentir*),⁷ because rhythm is the truth of *aisthesis*" (Maldiney 1985, 195).⁸ Let's unravel this definition. Art is the truth of sensation. Sensation is understood by Maldiney – following E. Straus – in contrast to intentional perception. According to Straus, humans are beings active between the dynamic landscape of sensation and the physical space of perception or science. Sensation is a way of communication between the world and living animal subjectivity, which every individual, and always singular, sensory impression puts into the world in a slightly different way, to which subjective movement might be immediately related. The animal feels immediate danger and nimbly veers off a collision course with a passing car, my nose itches and my hand automatically rises to scratch it, the human body immediately, without distance or thought, follows the music and dance. In other words, neither subjectivity nor the world and its parts are simply given once and for all in sensation; the world and its parts do not constitute objects that we can recognize, but rather a mutable potential that is always actualized differently in each sensation (Straus 2000, 293).

Perception, on the other hand, is characterized by a disruption of this dynamics of sensation: the ever-changing world becomes an intentional object, the moving subjectivity of the sensation acquires a distance from itself and from the world (the structure of perception is always this: I-perceive-object). The thing that was part of the dynamics of sensation becomes a moment in a chain of general facts, that which is constantly changing becomes a permanent, identical thing of universal significance (Straus 2000, 376, 390). In what Husserl calls the natural attitude, we live not in an invisible dynamic landscape of sensation situated on the horizon of the visible, but among visible things offered to us – sovereign subjects with relatively fixed personal identities – for various kinds of manipulation, including cognition. But to return to the main topic of this article, together with his followers such as Maldiney, Deleuze or Richir, Straus claims that painting is that which makes the invisible landscape of sensation visible (Straus 2000, 382). In this it is implied that art has the means of suppressing perception, that register of the already completed, stopped, the

⁷ Although I translate the French verb *sentir* as sensation in this article, it should be noted that Maldiney prefers the verb because of the dynamics of *sentir*, which will be illuminated below.

⁸ The translation of passages from the French originals is the work of the author of this paper (with the help of artificial intelligence).

same, it has the means of suppressing perception and capturing the very genesis of the perceived in the real presence or what Maldiney (2001, 93) calls "the real real" (*le réel réel*), that is, reality as it is experienced in all its diversity by our various senses (cf. Straus 2000, 466):

[A]ccommodated to the intentionality of perceptual acts, sensation is dismantled from itself: the original impression stripped of its originality. One can only find its source sound by following the second path: that of art. Art, not perception, accomplishes the truth of sensation. Refractory to objectification, it perpetuates the original, the *genesis spontanea*, which takes shape in a work which itself has the gushing unpredictability of the event. Event and void demand each other. Science, because it excludes nothing, knows no event-advent, only states of affairs (Maldiney 2010, 57 – 58).

It is in this way that art (as well as the phenomenology of art/sensation) overcomes the all-too-human perspective of perception and meaning, and with it the danger of anthropocentrism. According to Maldiney, all real art is an abstraction: similarly to philosophy, it gains distance from the human perspective, but only rarely does it achieve this through reflection or the abstraction of the human mind (which is the case of conceptual art), but rather through the capture of sensation, so that it still remains anchored in human flesh (*chair*) (Deleuze 2004, 39). It is in this sense that the work of art, for Maldiney, literally *ek-sists*, which was traditionally and most famously in Heidegger a mode of being reserved for humans alone. In a special way, the work of art also *ek-sists* or steps out of itself; it is something more than what is seen (perceived) in the gallery, that is, the frame and what is on the canvas as a representation of the world, of some facts and their states. Impressionists and Post-Impressionists are prime examples of this. In Cézanne's or Van Gogh's paintings there are not only mountains, huts, trees, bushes or ears of grain (objectively perceived things, exemplifications of universal significations). There is something more to them, something that makes the work of art become the expression of dynamic sensation. Maldiney describes this as the unique rhythm of the work's form or configuration. It is only thanks to the rhythm that the painting does not lose the dynamism of sensation, that it is not transformed into a mere representation of the mountain (for example in the form of a mountain logo, which is now used by various companies). The unity of the work of art does not lie in any intentional meaning, e.g. what the painter perceived or what he imagined when he painted (the unity of a perceived or imagined object). It consists in the internal rhythmic unity of all

the elements of the painting, which corresponds to the rhythmic unity of all the painter's senses. It is the rhythm of the materials and colors used, the rhythmic exchange and tension of cold and warm colors, the thickness and density of the colors or the force with which the painter uses the brush, or the mutual tensions of the motifs:

The site [painted by Cézanne] owes its unity to the integration of several environments, corresponding to the traditional primordial "elements": air, earth, water, vegetation (the forest; *hylé*, the name of matter). These are identified in the painting by distinct masses or patches of color, whose oppositions of value, tone and texture constitute, in painting, oppositions that can also be called "elemental". Simultaneously with these contrasts, each pictorial element has resurgences or relays (insistent or furtive) within the others; and these exchanges maintain unity. The same principles of opposition and exchange govern the configuration and placement of the motifs (Maldiney 1985, 19).

But once again: none of this is accidental. The selection of colors, for example, is not backed up by the arbitrariness of the painter's ephemeral ideas, it is an expression of his unique encounter with what he is painting – the rhythm of the work is the rhythm of the painter's sensation, "a colored flow or a succession of colored touches...are events constituting encounters" (Maldiney 2001, 106). This is why the mountain Sainte-Victoire is necessarily different in each of Cézanne's paintings: Each of the painter's encounters with it is a different event composed of countless smaller events, which are Cézanne's sensory impressions.⁹

II. What is an Event?

Here we return to the term "event," which is the main focus of this special issue of *Filozofia*. The rhythm of a work of art is the possibility of capturing the event of a unique encounter (between Cézanne and the mountain, for example),

⁹ In this text, for the sake of clarity, I confine myself to the visual arts, but what I will argue here is also true to a large extent of poetry, fiction or the "movement arts," that is, of dance. A beautiful analysis of dance can be found again in Straus (2000, 277), who uses it to show the interconnectedness of sensation and movement: in dance, movement (its rhythm) immediately follows the music (the sensations of its rhythm); the child dances around or hops to the rhythm of the polka even before learning the conventional steps to be taken in it. Since the paper deals with the connection between art and ecology, let us add here that there is also what is called environmental dance seeking a response to ecological issues. See, e.g., the website of the "Environmental dance" project: <https://environmental-dance.com/>

the encounter with everything that is there for the first time, with all its heterogeneous and unrepeatable elements, i.e. the whole singular giving of the mountain and its surroundings in Cézanne's sensory experience, in their unique configuration (form, *Gestaltung*). As already mentioned, the rhythm following the painter's sensation is not linked to the faculty of his consciousness, to his subjectivity or even inter-subjectivity that is already constituted, ready-made, and representing the world to itself; as has been indicated above, in sensation there is initially neither self nor world with the mountain, but simply the "there is" (*il y a*) itself, an event of the giving of the world inseparable from the giving to an anonymous someone or, more precisely, to Cézanne's senses (Maldiney 2010, 452). In other words, each sensation (and art captures a cluster or a compound thereof) brings about a slightly different world and a newly awakened subjectivity; subjectivity is nothing but the "place" of this Opening (*Ouvert*), of the new event of being, it is the site of Heidegger's understanding / openness to being, but which in Maldiney, following the footsteps of Straus or Merleau-Ponty, is linked to subjective corporeality, to the space of the living body moving in its environment. It is the rhythm of this living body that is expressed in the painting:

But something appears to me in the Open as I am *the there* of its opening. There must be a *there* for *there* to be...nonsense or sense; being or non-being. It is the place of clearing.... The motoric tensions of our living body in a state of tense immobility, which articulate the space of presence of our "I can," are in resonance with the rhythmic articulations that determine the space of the work (Maldiney 1985, 210 – 212).

What Maldiney is saying here is that every perception of the visible mountain and its surroundings is preceded by the givenness of the very material of the perceptual world, which, together with its perceiver, has yet to be born – both in the form of the reaction of an intentional perceiving self (called Cézanne, for example, with all his empirical identities or ideas) to the world around it, and on the canvas through the painter's sketch, through the outline that somehow visibly expresses the infinity originally felt, the painter's immersion in the sensuous world. The painter's main task is to free such infinity from its captivity in the perceived outline through the colors and their rhythm. Cézanne himself describes the infinity as "unclear sensations that we bring with us when we are born" (Cézanne 1937, 227, quoted in Maldiney 1985, 24). The first moment of the painting is the condensation of these sensations not in the painter's consciousness, but in his flesh (*chair*), which is then followed

by the second moment: the systole is followed by the diastole, the “expansive invasion of color,” the diastole of the image and the visible world (Maldiney 1973, 184 – 185).

Deleuze and Guattari develop Maldiney’s interpretation and speak of the first moment as the painter’s “becoming-mountain” (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1987, chapter 10). According to them, in the matter of a work of art, that is, in the matter of the canvas, the oil paint or the clay of the sculpture, there is expressed a block of sensations (of what they call percepts and affects) that go beyond the subjective experiences of the artist – similarly to Maldiney, these are not mere perceptions and affections associated with the subjective states of the artist correlating with the states of the perceived objects (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 164). In other words, in the first moment of the systole, it is as if the artist dissolved into the felt landscape, and in the second moment it is as if he were painting a non-human landscape, one without the presence of a human being (meaning, of course, without the perceiving, intentional, representing subject – but not without human flesh) (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 169). Thus, the artist’s body has become a mere “thermometer of a becoming” (Deleuze – Guattari 1994, 169), i.e., an asubjective medium capturing the becoming of sensation. So, the question now is whether there is any nature here – and in what sense is such art ecological.

III. Where is Nature Here?

Cézanne captures the “really seen” (Maldiney 1985, 22), the most real dynamic reality of sensation that our perception overlays. This is what Richir, following Maldiney, describes as the pre-intentional process of phenomenalization, i.e. the appearing of so-called phenomenological concretenesses (*concrétudes phénoménologiques*), which are constituted by a schematized human affectivity (corresponding to Maldiney’s sensation) (cf., e.g., Richir 2018, 15 – 16). Having effectuated Richir’s hyperbolic *epoché*, instead of identities (I perceive a book on my table), I find a phenomenological concreteness of colors, forms, lines, their relationships, etc., which are, in an always singular way, growing together (*en concrescence*), synthesized by passive syntheses, i.e. by what escapes intentional consciousness. The rhythm of a work of art captures such an event, such a compound of sensations unpredictably growing together, understood by Maldiney as the transition between Nothing or non-being and being, the transformation of Nothing into something (Maldiney 2010, 456 – 457; 1973, 175, 190, 192). More precisely, Maldiney writes that the hyletic data, the content of

sensation, come from Nothing: "Hyletic data come from nothing, a spontaneous genesis. It is only afterwards that we give them meaning and foundation in an objective world as qualities or states of affairs" (Maldiney 2010, 453). However, this nothing, for him, is not a designation of something that cannot be spoken of, or of something that does not exist, but, similarly to Heidegger, a designation of the last horizon – of a dynamic or "evential" (having the nature of events) being. The work of art then depicts phenomena, that which shows itself, and their relation to the Nothing (which is the core of being) whose space of presentation is the Open (*Ouvert*) (cf. Escoubas 2006, 78). For Maldiney, this Nothing is the last, inaccessible horizon of being, into which we lean out as *ek-sistents*. *Ek-sistence* does not mean to be in the world, but to be in relationship with this Nothing which Maldiney describes as the ground (*fond*) of nature.

Thus, nature is not some biological interior of living beings including humans, nor is it the perceived nature of physics. "Nature is the virgin world, the absent man that Cézanne wanted to paint" (Maldiney 1973, 185). Nature in the sense of *physis*, that which moves in and of itself, is what takes place *between* humans and the world (or between organisms and their environments) – nature's becoming is the rhythm of their mutual exchanges (Maldiney 1991, 101), the rhythm by which the Nothing of nature is made present and then captured in the work of art. The ground of all perceived nature we are trying to protect is its first unpredictable emergence in sensation. What corresponds to this ground on the canvas of Cézanne? In Maldiney's words:

In the radiant emergence of Cézanne's *Sainte-Victoire*, what we call the ground can be either the aerial and the marginal space of the foreground, where the curve of the ridge and the élan of the massif appear in a single rhythm, or the base, itself invisible, but whose presence the visible mountain attests to, in that its victorious élan is only perceptible in the very genesis of the form in its effort to be, which is that of a pulling out. This pulling out inherent in the outcome reveals the ground as without-ground (*Un-grund*) at the moment noted by Cézanne when the red earth emerges from an abyss (Maldiney 1973, 189).

That is why Maldiney says that "the act of birth of painting is identically that of nature" (Maldiney 1973, 184). Nature is the invisible abyss from which arises the mass of the visible mountain. This abyss, which appears in fact as nothing from the realm of the visible, is the background both of the artist's world and of his work of art (cf. Maldiney 1973, 251). It remains present on the canvas through its empty spaces. It is these blanks that drive the drawing and leave it

as if unfinished, open, always beginning again: “The black traces are at the service of the whites, ordered to the power of the non-trace, in which their line perpetually originates” (Maldiney 1991, 231; cf. Sucharek 2020, 85).

Nature is here understood as the world in its phenomenological sense, i.e. the context of our lives which retains its transcendence. This is why phenomenology is suitable for attempts to overcome the anthropocentric perception of nature. Phenomenology is not subjectivism, it is a thinking through the correlation between subjectivity and the world, which are two autonomous entities, i.e. mutually irreducible, which in the case of the world manifests itself through its emergence from the abyss of nature.¹⁰ If the work of art can capture human sensation, then it can also make perceptible this depth of nature, which Deleuze and Guattari describe as “the imperceptible forces that populate the world, affect us, and make us become,” or as “a powerful nonorganic life” that constitutes the basis of all that is (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 182). If we look at this description from the point of view of the early Deleuze, we might describe the infinity in which man merges with nature as the ontological virtual power (*puissance*) that moves everything, both subjects and objects; their encounter in sensation is nothing but a new actualization of this virtual (but fully real, the most real) life – it is an ever-different repetition, Deleuze’s famous difference and repetition.

IV. Conclusion: In What Sense Is Art Ecological?

The article has addressed the question of how art can be ecological by way of explaining Maldiney’s thesis that art is the truth of sensation (*sentir*). Art is profoundly ecological because it can capture the specific rhythm of sensation, which is the rhythm of the event of the encounter between the artist’s living body and the world. In the event of sensation arriving unforeseeably from the

¹⁰ For Maldiney, nature is an autonomous pole of phenomenological correlation, i.e. irreducible to its relation to subjectivity. In this respect, he not only takes up what Levinas says about the relation to the Other (both subjectivity and the Other are autonomous, see Levinas 1979, 61, 62, etc.), but also extends it to the relation to the world in general: the world is also characterized by Levinasian transcendence and thus autonomy or absolute separation (cf. Maldiney 1991, 315). A similar line of reasoning is taken by T. Toadvine who in one of his articles (2014) opposes speculative realism and object-oriented ontology and tries to show that the past of the universe preceding subjectivity can only be investigated phenomenologically. More precisely, he speaks of an immemorial elemental past that is linked to the materiality of the body of subjectivity and the bodies it encounters, to their own organic, biological rhythms. He also explicitly connects this notion of the past with the notion of nature: “We do not need science to first encounter such a time, as it constantly haunts us; it is one of the ways that our subjectivity is caught up in the cosmic pulse of nature” (Toadvine 2014, 277).

depth of nature, both are born anew together, which corresponds to the artist's condensed unclear sensations, in which the painter literally becomes what he paints, and to their release on the canvas with the help of colors. Thus, Maldiney's aesthetics merges with ecology, which literally means the "logos of the dwelling (*oikos*)."¹¹ Maldiney writes:

Aesthetics is also an ethics. *Ethos* in Greek means not only a way of being but also a dwelling place. Art provides man with a dwelling place, i.e. a space in which we take place, a time in which we are present – and from which, by making our presence felt in everything, we communicate with things, beings and ourselves *in a world*, which is called inhabiting (Maldiney 1973, 148).

Maldiney's ecology would then be a philosophical "science" of our being in the midst of the sensible being of nature as *physis* – it would be a science of our real experience of nature, not of our representation of nature through the prism of perception, scientific knowledge, or various ideologies and prejudices. Not surprisingly, it is precisely this conception of nature that many branches of environmental ethics (e.g. Naess' deep ecology as opposed to the shallow one) want to reveal, and among them eco-phenomenology, which – similarly to art in Maldiney – aims to carry out a radical *epoché* and describe nature purely on the basis of human lived experience. Moreover – again similarly to art in Maldiney and to eco art – it wants to describe not only the relationship between humans and nature but also to uncover its value independent of humans, i.e. nature as an event, and thus contribute to a better understanding of the ecological crisis (cf., e.g., Toadvine 2017, 174).¹¹ Both the phenomenology of art and eco-phenomenology are most deeply concerned with our lived experience of nature, in which its true value or, more precisely, the source of all values, spontaneously emerges, that is, nature not as the counterpart of human culture, but as an admirable and transcendent spontaneity of which we are a part, nature as *physis*.

It is this conception of nature that seems to be the basis of all our discussions of environmental issues, not only in the field of environmental ethics, but in society in general. From there it is only a short step towards any political or institutional impact, such as the new legal status of nature or even the formulation of its rights. The need for engagement grows wherever people feel a reality that nothing matches in a world of perceptual, universal, objectively shareable meanings dominated by the ideologies of consumerism and profit.

¹¹ In this ethical or environmentalist aspect, eco-phenomenology differs from all phenomenological investigations into nature found in many authors, starting with Husserl.

According to Deleuze (2000, 171 – 172; 2006, 234 – 236), modern humans are characterized by their inability to overcome such ideologies and realize their new existential possibilities appearing to them in their diverse encounters with the world. It is as if humans were separated from the world and from themselves and unable to think and act on the basis of how they experience it. In addition to frustration and other psychological consequences, this contributes to the destruction of nature. However, philosophy or art are revolutionary forces capable of changing this: they sketch for us new forms of human society, they capture the deepest human affects in which we are no longer ourselves, in which we literally dissolve into the felt nature, and which are then precisely the basis for our ability to change. Such is the range both of eco-art and eco-phenomenology: from lived experience, via discussion, to engagement or activism.¹² The warming world needs all of this.

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¹² G. Hess (2018) characterizes eco-phenomenology in a similar vein – as an exploration of lived experience, which forms the basis for both critical discussions of various strands of environmental ethics and various types of environmental political activism.

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Petr Prášek
Department of Contemporary Continental Philosophy
Institute of Philosophy
Czech Academy of Sciences
Jilská 10
110 00 Prague
Czech Republic
e-mail: petrprasek@email.cz
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7094-562X>