

By Neli Dobрева, École des Arts de la Sorbonne, University Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne

This special issue of *Nordicum-Mediterraneum* contains select papers from the research seminar *Environmental Aesthetics and Citizenship* (<https://estenci.wordpress.com/>), coordinated by Neli Dobрева, Oleg Bresky, Mogens Chrom Jacobsen and Oliver Kauffmann at the École des Arts de la Sorbonne, University Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, in partnership with the research circles *Patterns of Dysfunction in Contemporary Democracies. Impact on Human Rights and Governance*, coordinated by Mogens Chrom Jacobsen, and *Appearances of the Political*, coordinated by Carsten Friberg—all of them within the Nordic Summer University (NSU). This project was supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers of the Nordic Countries in cooperation with Foreningerne Nordens Forbund (FNF), the University of Aarhus (Department for Philosophy of Education and General Education) and the European Humanities University / The J. Althusius Institute.

The Seminar *Environmental Aesthetics and Citizenship* took place in Paris, France, at the École des Arts de la Sorbonne, University Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, during two semesters of the academic year 2018-2019. The guest editor Neli Dobрева would like to express her gratitude to the Dean of the École des Arts de la Sorbonne, Marie-Noëlle Semet-Havias, for her support and willingness, which allowed the Project to succeed.

The debate started at the NSU Summer Session in 2018 at Faro Island in Sweden, when all the NSU circles first got in contact with each other and began working together. One of the first considerations was how to collaborate between circles, exploring the ways in which human-rights militancy and, more generally, the protection of human rights are affected by the international human rights system and the way this regime enters State relations and, on the other side, the ways in which we could connect the sensory or sensitive (*le sensible*) experience, such as the aesthetic one, through the ongoing global debates about: the environment, ecology, humanity and non-humanity, post-humanity and trans-humanity, citizenship and environmental migration through the lens of representations, Anthropocene-centered discourses on degrowth, the ethics of de-extinction, the education on citizenship and urban participative democracy, the politics of care and common good, etc. Of course, all these questions were so inspiring and the debates so rich, that we opted for an interdisciplinary experimental seminar: *Environmental Aesthetics and Citizenship*.

Three main authors, one artist, and their recent works inspired us to start the discussion and to launch the Seminar. Fortunately for us, they did us the honor of participating and giving a talk, and thus brought their own contribution to the Project. Here, I would like to express all my gratitude to Nathalie Blanc, who is the French pioneer in eco-criticism, an artist, researcher and geographer, specialized in the realm of Urban Nature, environmental

aesthetics, and environmental mobilization and activism. As a founding member of the French internet portal of the *Environmental Humanities*, she was also the French delegate (2011-2015) of the European Research Network COST “Investigating cultural sustainability”^[1] as well as a privileged researcher of the European program “How Matter Matters” (2016-2019). Her book with Barbara Benish, (2016) *Form, Art, and Environment: Engaging in sustainability* (London, Routledge), was naturally the inspiration for the title of the Seminar as well as the direction that we decided to follow, questioning the place of art in the discourse of political ecology and the politics of care through the ecological vulnerability in the context of the everyday needs of urban “survival”, including the politics of sustainable food, urban farms and urban soils within the Project “SOLS FICTIONS”, dedicated to the urban soils of the Anthropocene.

Blanc’s shared experience within her participation in the European research program *How Matter Matters* (2016-2019) and her political ecology discourse led us to another eminent author who is pursuing a twenty-year polemical work strongly engaged within the philosophical ontology and axiology related to the philosophy of technology and the *production of sense* in a time of *crisis*. We mean the philosopher, researcher, Professor in Epistemology and Gilbert Simondon specialist, Jean-Hugues Barthélémy, who had just published his new work (2018) *La Société de l’invention. Pour une architectonique philosophique de l’âge écologique* (Paris, Éditions Matériologiques). Revisiting the idea of the “crisis of sense” within a very particular philosophical language, dismissed by some of his critics as too fractious, he proceeds to connect it to the “ecological crisis”, thus establishing the bases of a future system that should be radically anti-dogmatic for the individuation of the ultimate *sense*. For him, in this system, Simondon’s ontological genetics, or genesis “*génésique*”, is finally re-founded. That becomes possible by including and redesigning Simondon’s “philosophy of ontological information”, linking it to the “philosophy of economic production” and the “philosophy of axiological education”, each of which precedes their reconfiguration outside ethics and, especially, the “ethics of low” in its totality. Introducing an idea of a *philosophy of the paradox*, Jean-Hugues Barthélémy opened for us the question of how one should connect these three principles (“philosophy of ontological information”, “philosophy of economic production”, “philosophy of axiological education”) to the ongoing debate of the ontological link between human and non-human in terms of sensory experience, i.e. the aesthetic one, and how we could revisit the individuation of *sense* overwhelming the modern paradigm of the separation between nature and culture by introducing the question of “axiological education”.

Rethinking *Toward the Materiality of Aesthetic Experience* (Peter De Bolla, 2002), we discovered Jean-Michel Durafour’s book (2018) *Cinéma et cristaux. Traité d’éconologie*

(Paris, Éditions Mimésis). A philosopher and Professor of Aesthetics and Films Studies, Jean-Michel Durafour's work opened up our discussion to the consideration of *living beings* and *non-organic forms of life*. His innovative ontological conception of *iconology*, as thinking of images as material beings, includes a comprehensive aesthetic theory of images as artworks, popular culture, scientific imageries and ethnology. Thus we could revisit the "artist's gesture" explored by Jean-Marie Shaeffer (*Adieu à l'esthétique*, 2016), and the materiality of the aesthetic experience as a 'one-dimensional' iconology inducing a 'one-dimensional' ontology. Durafour is thus exhuming Aby Warburg's idea about images as "expressions of equal dignity" and subjects of a 'flat' iconology as well as a 'flat' ontology going back to Duns Scotus' idea of "being as unequivocal". What is particular here is the empirical use of the field of cinema as primary material exploring the hypothesis that through material experiences (e.g., the context of viewing experience, the framework, the digital apparatus, the experimental and animated film), we could go beyond the mere cinematographic domination of images. This hypothesis should be probably confirmed by a clause on "general iconology". And that is the point that provokes the central interest of Durafour's work, already developing since his previous writings: the "general iconology" is distinct from any allusion to Alain Roger's *Court traité du paysage* (1997) and is within the linguistic (nominal) intersection of iconology and ecology, hence diverging from the growing (nominal) use of 'ecology' and 'economy'. Furthermore, that 'clause' becomes the main pivot in relation to Barthélémy's "eco-logical age" and Blanc's pragmatic approach to the aesthetic (environmental) objects. Consistently, Durafour claims a "crystalographic Aesthetics of film". Nevertheless, *Le traité d'éconologie* includes the relationship to biological theories, as well as ecology, ontology and anthropology lingering within the images. Questioning images takes place at the very particular intersection between art and science (i.e. physics, natural history, genetics) in relation to film. Thus, his 'iconology' reposes on metaphysical, ontological and biological principles as a specific discourse about images.

Durafour's suggestion of new anthropological, ontological and ecological practices applied to images disrupts and involves the possibility of an 'alter-iconology". Consequently, the 'econology' is an 'iconology', which reposes on a *relationniste* type of ontology: the world is not composed by inert or living entities, but these entities are the product of their relationships with each other. The chief example is "loneliness" as a modality of being-in-relation with: without the experience of the other, one should not be able to understand that he or she is alone. It is in that tradition of 'relationnisme' that Durafour rethinks here the 'econology' based on the history of the philosophy and contemporary ecology. From there comes his redefinition of the iconology as a specific idea of the image, which is the relational composition of the image itself and its iconographic environment (*milieu*): artistic

images, scientific theories or imageries, philosophical doctrines, literary works, cultural products, etc. We are interested in images, says Durafour, and that is because they are “beings-in-between” (*inter-esse*). From the idea of *relationisme*, follows that the concept of perception should be enlarged to the existing whole. He is using the precept from N.A.Whitehead of the “perception without cognition”: thus Durafour includes non-organic forms of life in the understanding of a singular ‘*prehension*’. We could recall here Jacques Lacan’s “sardine can” (*Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, 1973) that is gazing at us, while the *Real* is challenged by its entirety. Accordingly, images could exist without being perceived by the particularity of conscious human cognition. The question that then appears concerns the production of the images themselves (*en soi*) and without the correlation image-observer. Thus, we should think that the relationships that images are entertaining within their iconic environment should not be reduced to the relation between them and the humans, nor to other relationships familiar to humans. Hence Durafour, inspired by E. Kohn (*How Forests Think: Towards an Anthropology Beyond the Human*, 2013), suggests rethinking an iconology beyond the human perspective of it. This point also maintains and encourages us to think about the object without the limitations of mere human access, as opposed to the dominant post-Kantian tendency. Furthermore, Durafour continues his reflection by discussing the relationship between *relationnisme*, *correlationnisme* and *anticorrelationnisme*, following his thesis on ‘*econology*’. In that we gleaned three main theses about it as a science about the living relationship between images. Including that: a) images in general are non-organic forms of life; b) images maintain between each other and within their iconic environment mutual and co-evolutional relationships such as “expressions-in-between” (*entr’expression*) and material ones such as “perception-in-between” (*d’entre-perception*); c) iconology is a science about these relationships.

Following this inspiring scholarship, our attention was attracted to Pauline Julier’s recent artistic presentation. In her work *Naturalis Historia* (2017) (<https://ccsparis.com/event/pauline-julier>), a movie and a moving-images art dispositive (apparatus), the artist Pauline Julier is asking: what is “real Nature”? Inspired by the works of Professor Wang and his team on a coalmine in China, where an unexpected tropical forest appeared under the geological strata engulfed by a volcano, Julier is realizing a very personal artistic but also documentary work that is underlining multiple challenges for the environmental humanities. Recalling the eminent work of Pliny the Elder and his *Naturalis Historia*, Julier invites us to make an inventory of the World, as he did, combining art and science, archeology and ecology. The discovery of that forest—the oldest one before human and even animal life emerged—is also a clarion call for witnesses to archive and document a piece of *Naturalis Historia*, which is expected to mobilize our contemporary imaginaries.

Thus analyzing Julier's work, we could see that it includes the main problematic approached by Nathalie Blanc, Jean-Hugue Barthélémy and Jean-Michel Durafour. Expressing a special form of *art and science work*, in the context of the everyday—the *care* of the everyday, *life forms* and life styles— Julier is developing something original that we could call an *environmental aesthetics*. With this in mind, we considered her artistic practices as proposing aesthetic and ethical-moral objects acting as ways of seeing new-old *life forms*.

Keeping in mind the above-mentioned arguments, the contributions from this special edition of *Nordicum-Mediterraneum* emerging directly from our Seminar revolve around the issues of environmental challenges, educational campaigns, political and environmental sustainability, non-political, apolitical and supra-political aspects of human life, human rights, democracy (including citizenship), transhumanism, post-humanism, political *ecology*, gender studies, atmosphere, identity, atmosphere, pathic aesthetics, ecology, environment [*Umwelt*], environmentalism and ecological aesthetics.

Expanding Democratic Citizenship: Education Through Bildung. Klafki Confronting the 21st Century

Our first contribution, by Asger Sørensen, explores the issues related to including in the contemporary democratic education template a theory of *Bildung* inspired by Wolfgang Klafki (*Studien zur Bildungstheorie und Didaktik*, 1963): the cultural *Bildung* as problem-solving in addition to political democracy for educational outreach. It is important to stress that the work of Klafki did not have an influence beyond the borders of the German-speaking world, with the exception of Denmark, where his work received an enthusiastic reception. Sørensen shows us how important it is to maintain an axiology for citizens' education, at all social and political levels. Participative and direct democracies are highlighted in a way to show how a collective aesthetic experience could contribute to the common good. The *Bildung* theory appears to be very appealing for the contemporary world, especially when thinking about climate migration and the ethical debate about de-extinction. It also seems to be a useful template for questions of gender and religious discrimination including the problematic of human rights through citizen education and *Bildung*. Moving beyond Rawls, Durkheim, Habermas et alia, Sørensen ultimately claims that only by emphasizing the metaphysical value of every individual human being can democracy, *Bildung* and citizenship education hope to cross cultural boundaries and divides, so as to establish an attractive and legitimate background culture of mutual trust.

Remarks on Science, Epistemology and Education in Bruno Latour's Down to Earth

Olivier Kaufman is interrogating issues of "soil" and citizenship in Bruno Latour's recent

works, namely: From which epistemic stance can “soil” be seen, and how, precisely, is the ensuing description carried out? Criticizing Latour’s scientific-epistemological stances of ‘Galileism’, Kaufman suggests that there are other models that we could follow, especially in order to look more closely at the differences between the thesis of Latour on a ‘view from nowhere’, which is “misguided and wrong in the details” for Kaufman, and the alternative stance toward the ‘Terrestrial’ that Latour is arguing for. The ability to form conceptions towards a view from nowhere is constitutive for being able to think. Kaufman recalls Thomas Nagel’s book *The View from Nowhere* (1986), where Nagel has argued in detail for this epistemological ‘fate’ of human beings – a kind of ‘double vision’, since we can transcend our subjective selves – although not fully so. For Kaufman that is an essential part of our pursuits of truth – that we are able to attempt putting ourselves to the side, including being able to acknowledge another subject’s point of view. At the same time, Kaufman considers a missing element in Latour’s attitude towards education, encouraging us to revisit the discarded ‘old forms of subjectivities’, i.e. attitudes, myths and rituals, as we develop new templates offering a survival perspective for our human future.

Ecology of Sense(-making), Political Eco-logy and Non-ethical Refounding of Law

In his contribution, Jean-Hugues Barthélémy shows his concern about “health of *both nature and culture*” and thus the necessity for the deconstruction of the duality of nature/culture. In that sense he gives an example concerning “Transhumanism and many other new ways of thought” that “are still – implicitly but undoubtedly – under the paradigm of the duality nature/culture, since their position needs in the last instance a discontinuity between nature and culture”. Barthélémy underlines a paradox between the evolutionary theory of transhumanism (as its goal is to build an immortal post-human) and the naturalist claim about language and consciousness: “The only way to keep an evolutionary framework while considering human self-construction is to admit the finitude of human being as historicity or self-construction which prolongs evolution and reveals the fact that biological life itself has no essence [...], the very strange fact is that naturalists do not even consider the non-human animal when they assert that ‘consciousness’ is reducible to its physico-chemical substratum : in their minds, the ‘problem of consciousness’ is a problem which concerns human beings only.” For Barthélémy, the transhumanist position is ideological, taking advantage of speculative techno-capitalism so as to dream of a post-human era instead of worrying about the future of the planet. On the contrary, Barthélémy defends the so-called current geological age ‘Anthropocene’, which at least, through its ultimate and dramatic consequences, reveals the indirect index of the *crisis of sense(-making)*, which results from the misunderstanding of human finitude – that is to say: human non-originary (or being-derived) and therefore human mortality. Inspired by Husserl and Heidegger, but moving

beyond their thought, and debating implicitly as always with Simondon and Bachelard, Barthélémy is developing his own theory on *sense(-making)* as noematic, three-dimensional and over-representational of the *ob-jects* of thought. Accordingly, “such an *archi-reflexive semantics*, which provides an unprecedented modality of the self-‘knowledge’ that philosophy must be, can be considered as a *fundamental ecology of sense(-making)* - and of its crisis -, because *sense(-making)* is the “milieu of all milieux” *which make sense within it*”, Barthélémy says.

From that modality follows the articulation of multidimensional *sense(-making)*, engendering a *philosophy of ontological information*, a *philosophy of economic production* and a *philosophy of axiological education*. Claiming that the “Law is not the system of compatibility between the ‘free-wills’ of ‘moral persons’, but the system of compatibility between the *needs* of all the human *and non-human* subjects that might suffer from not satisfying their needs”, Barthélémy introduces the idea that “the political *eco-logy* which should permit us to go beyond the debate between the post-Rousseau ‘political philosophies’ of the ‘social contract’ and the post-Marxist ‘political economies’ of ‘suspicion’. In this new theoretical context, freedom and justice are needs because needs are what ensures health - against suffering - and not just survival”. Claiming that axiological problems are educational problems and denouncing how Western thought confuses health and happiness, Barthélémy moves to the question of ‘re-founding’ the Law: “further thinking about a new and non-ethical notion of *responsibility* is now possible: my being-in-debt towards the universal ecosystem means that my semantic non-originary translates itself into a responsibility within the political-economic problematic - exactly as it translated itself into a non-substantiality of beings within the epistemological-ontological problematic, and into a contingency of our being and values within the pedagogical-axiological problematic”. Thus, if the Law re-founded in a non-ethical way is not breaking the relationship to Nature where that clause does not exist, but “the entirely refunded Law has for vocation to become what will allow the planetary ecosystem’s balance to be maintained beyond the anthropocenic ruin of the forces which have founded it so far as equilibrium”, Barthélémy argues. In that way, the duality human/ non-human would be deconstructed and thus we could recover an equilibrium within the *sense(-making)* and the environmental, so as to finish with the *eco-political* crisis of *sense(-making)*.

The Human Rights of Privileged Victims. A Marxist Satire on Shouting Matches

The thought-provoking discussion of Barthélémy’s proposition about the “Law re-founded in a non-ethical way” continues within the contribution of Giorgio Baruchello. Stressing the fixed social inequalities - in terms of gender, religion, social status and the imposed *status quo* - and seeing human rights overwhelmed by the over-privileged 1%, Baruchello adopts a

very pragmatic approach, one could say almost an anthropological one, replacing the old semantics of the “*classe bourgeoise*” with current terms such as “the corporate elite”, “the job creators”, or just “the rich”. Highlighting the old principle of *divide et impera*, Baruchello shows how this old-as-the-World principle is still in operation, especially in times of crisis, observing: “When religion cannot do a good enough a job, viable alternatives exist: race, nationality; region-, party- or even football-based affiliation can be often as effective”. In these terms he faces the great ongoing debate on disparities between men and women. The gender discourse is an example of how popular attention is diverted from far more important questions and what is pointed out is that such a debate is subverting the middle class as well as the academic environment. The question should be: is that a false direction to take in hand the problematic proposed within the *refunding of the Law in a non-ethical way* that “has for vocation to become what will allow the planetary ecosystem’s balance to be maintained beyond the anthropocenic ruin of the forces which have founded it so far as equilibrium”, as Barthélémy claims? According to Baruchello: “Men and women spend endless time and effort squabbling about the so-called ‘male privilege’ and an alleged set of attendant disparities, rather than combining their efforts in order to pursue better wages, better working conditions, sensible monetary and fiscal policies by State authorities, true economic security and autonomy, a life-saving stop to the all-embracing profit-motive that is destroying the planet, as well as emancipatory self-ownership and democratic self-stewardship”. It seems that the same considerations concern the economic apparatus (*dispositif* in terms of Foucault), the decision-making societies from all levels up to the European commission’s technocrats. In comparison, the female representatives are more and more duped into participating in commonly understood patriarchal structures, and even though some of them enjoy careers and prestige, they are still subverted by the same regime of domination. The working place is also an environment, an urban one, and also the one that has to be the *habitus* and the *habiter* in everyday life.

However, gender roles could also have some positive aspects in the contemporary debate, especially when it concerns Western women who are winners in that case. But socially, this debate replaces the problematic of the ‘working class’ and especially what has been going on in Europe for decades: for Baruchello, “Europe’s working class has emigrated to China under the banner of ‘globalization’”. As a result, the egalitarian principle could not satisfy centuries-old traditions of non-emancipation. And that is a concern for both men and women, according to Baruchello. The question of human rights is completely displaced and still very alien from the one concerning the duality human/non-human through the *refunded Law* and its vocation to allow the planetary ecosystem’s balance to be maintained beyond the anthropocenic ruin of the forces which have founded it so far as equilibrium, in terms of Barthélémy’s claim. Yet, one could think about some possible issues as a contrapuntal

presence within that very pessimist landscape of the contemporary Western world. Supposing, for example, that the Law is not refunded according to a non-ethical template, so that human rights could still be evolved as a counter-power against the 1%. That would be the point that is underlined in the contribution of Carsten Friberg.

Identity and Aesthetics. Atmosphere as an approach to the appearance of the concrete person

Carsten Friberg approaches the question of human rights by conceptualizing 'sensitivity aesthetics'. For him, sensitivity (*le sensible*) relates to the forming of both identity and perception. (Here we could recall Durafour's position on 'perception' that we already discussed.) Friberg illustrates his assumption following the Baroque writer Baltasar Gracián's reflections in *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia* (1647). The appearance and the perception of what we call identity are very often displaced from the very idea of it. Therefore aesthetics could be approached as a matter of sensorial perception that supplements the reduction of complexity in a conceptual identification. Assuming that the human being evolved in relation to its environment - cultural, social and natural - Friberg claims that: "We embody social relations as well as perception and sensorial relations to ourselves and the environment the way we have learned to". To enforce his assertion, he introduces the concepts of 'atmosphere' having in mind the works of Gernot Böhme and the 'pathic aesthetics' of Tonino Griffero. But the way he emphasizes the sensitive (*sensible*) dimension of identity leads us to pay attention to "how the consequences of strong ideas of identity prove not only to be insensitive and prejudiced but can result in the neglect and dehumanization of individuals". Here is the question of citizenship as related to identity: What makes me human, individual, having rights and belonging to *this* or *that* identity? Who am I? And what makes me an individual having rights, i.e. defending my rights of being, having a legal protection issued from belonging to a national, juridical community? Is that a passport, a 'soil', a community, etc., that makes me capable of affirming my identity? In that sense we are still far from establishing the pretended sensitivity (*le sensible*) as criterion of identity. Nevertheless, we should assume that there is that emotional, sensitive side of the question of identity that is subversive, on the one hand, of my environmental life-long education and belonging to a milieu, and, on the other hand, of my own subjective experience, which could be also a choice of who I am and who I want to be. That could be an allusion to Pierre Bourdieu's thesis on class reproduction and of the initial ignorance of the milieu to which "I" belong. As Friberg says, it is about how environment matters, because we are guided and influenced by cultural artifacts, specifically aesthetic artifacts, judgment of taste, education and absorption of sensitivity as such.

The intervention of the so-called new technologies does not simplify the problem: should "I",

or my identity, correspond to a 'fingerprint'? Does identification of a body, even though it is 'mine', express a state of mind, character, or sensitivity? Accordingly, for Friberg: "The relationship between aesthetics and identity should be apparent when recognizing the relationship to the forming of senses, feelings, and body". From this stems the axiological role of aesthetics, as related to the values of a community, its appearances and shared experiences such as social roles, nationalities, gender choices and storytelling within it. So the "I" as a free subject is surrounded by all these spheres, milieus and environments in his everyday being. Carsten Friberg relates his problematic to Böhme's understanding of "atmosphere as a fundamental concept of aesthetics". Within that concept, perception, experience, the body, individuals, objects and the environment are merged inside the affective and sensitive (*le sensible*) experience of the environment. The concept of atmosphere, in this sense, means that perception is a kind of diplopia experience that should not determine the phenomenology of seeing, perceiving and feeling: it is the extension of the aura of all these elements as "atmosphere of a place" or "perceiving atmospherically". However, it is important to underline, and Friberg stresses it, that this specific experience which Böhme reveals, of ecology as an organic environment, is not merely including nature into the aesthetic experience, as a bodily or corporeal one, hence alluding slightly to A.G. Baumgarten's conception of aesthetics, but to this "organic environment" [*Umwelt*] extending to the non-organic forms of life. Thus, the concept of atmosphere reveals an aesthetic experience without necessarily including nature, but rather its very Kantian sense of disinterestedness. In spite of this, it is somehow anthropocentric and caring for the human sensitivity to aesthetic judgments integrating "the human being as a sensorial and bodily being affected by its surroundings". And this is the pivotal point of Friberg's presentation that changes our fundamental relationship to the world: aesthetics without nature and recovering identity through environmental aesthetic experience perceived atmospherically.

Environmentalism Without Nature ? Steven Vogel's post-natural environmental philosophy

Adopting an opposing position in his contribution, Sune Frølund analyses the thesis of Steven Vogel's "postnatural" environmental philosophy as expressed in *Against Nature. The Concept of Nature in Critical Theory* (1996). Although criticizing it and pointing out its ambiguities, Sune Frølund argues for an overwhelming ambivalent attitude to nature that prevails in his writings, influenced by the Critical Theory tradition and integrated by Vogel's pragmatic constructivist epistemology. This novel approach grapples with Böhme's analysis, which we just saw in the contribution of Carsten Friberg, where the question of 'pathic experience' was underlined. What Frølund is exploring here is the way in which we could succeed in bypassing the specific attitude to nature coming from philosophers such as

Lukács, Adorno, Horkheimer, Habermas, and Marcuse. However, the idea of *post-natural environmental philosophy* is also much closer to Bruno Latour and Jacques Derrida, concerning the former's separation between nature and culture qua ideological and political construction and the latter's postmodern theory in general. Frølund exposes Vogel's arguments against the misleading place given to nature by Lukács, who claims, "Nature is a social category" and, at the same time, rejects Engel's "dialectics of nature". The question that follows, and Frølund is stressing it, is "how is it possible to think of an 'environment without nature'?" Contesting the philosophers from the school of Critical Theory, but also using their arguments, Frølund insists that what Vogel claims, "helps us see that the overcoming of this alienation consists in realizing that nothing in the material reality, not even nature, exists un-mediated by human construction and labor", which includes the position of Lukács ("Reality is not, it becomes") and the Marxist concept of "alienation".

Hence another question appears, following Bill McKibben: "What if we drop the very idea of Nature?" And that question is the very recognition of the way humans succeeded in leaving their mark everywhere within Nature as a trace of their activities. From this recognition results, as Frølund underlines, Vogel's concept of 'environmentalism', which should replace the separation between nature and culture and allow the organization of human existence around its own actions in everyday life: "The world is not something we find ourselves in; it is something we have helped to make. But at the same time it is something that helps to make us: we are who we are because of the environment that we inhabit. The environment is socially constructed; society is environmentally constructed". Recalling the importance of the concept of "labor" through Kant, Hegel and the Marxist use of it, Frølund underlines Vogel's attempt to represent a *new type of materialism* in which the idea of practice is taken seriously as physical labor or as *material practice*. Accordingly, we should accept that everywhere within our "sub-lunar terrestrial world" there are residues from an "anthropogenic impact". Vogel's argument for that is: "if cognition is a practice there is no cognition of anything beyond practice, i.e. no cognition of anything unaffected, unconstructed or unbuilt like nature is assumed to be" - and that is his incontestable pragmatic constructivist epistemology. However, it is evident that, as humans, we need to have a coherent environmental theory and for that we need to reconsider the concept of "nature". For that we need, in turn, to denote a former existence of a pre-anthropogenic, unconstructed world. And furthermore, we need to show that nature was before and will be after the human action on it. Frølund stresses that point, too: "only if environmentalism were able to acknowledge that there is nature before and after anthropogenic impacts, it is possible to determine which of our actions has or will change nature to a degree that threatens our survival". To save his "materialism", Vogel affirms that even an artifact has a 'nature of its own' and may "exceed [its] relation to human construction". At the same time,

Frølund assures us that nature only “plays a kind of cautionary role” or “nominal” role in his theory, and that he only sanctions the word because it reminds “us of the limits of our abilities and the need to be careful and modest about our attempts to transform the world”. With that we could recognize the contradiction of a theory that maintains human cognition as material experience capable of overwhelming nature within its practice, but at the same time recognizing the need for a coherent acceptance of it. As a result, Frølund articulates the problem arising within this *new type of materialism* defended by Vogel: “What is Nature at all?”. Is it a question of constructivist cognition or the continuation of a fight between environmentalists about the idea of nature, as Latour (2017) suggests it as “*le Terrestre*” that more or less plays the role of the old concept?

The Nature-culture Continuum through Moving Images: From Vegetable Pompeii (Pauline Julier) to NATURALIS HISTORIÆ (Pliny the Elder)

Continuing the debate, and especially, restating the question “What is Nature?”, my contribution to the present collective work is a type of ‘field work’ (an art project of Pauline Julier), using images as “primary materials”, asking questions such as “what if before humans there was, and after there would be, Nature?”. The question that I am asking is: “is it possible to make an inventory of the World before humans disappear?” And if we should follow a new materialist practice still dreading the duality nature/ human society, how should we defend the complexity of the “anthropogenic impact”? Combining art and science, archeology and ecology, Pauline Julier invites us to rethink the discovery of a forest, maybe the oldest one ever, before human and even animal life emerged, as a witness, archive and document, in order to mobilize our contemporary imaginaries and eventually to act. I am arguing that this project, put in the context of the everyday, provokes our cognitive capacities for *care*, *life forms* and *life-styles* in respect to *environmental aesthetics*. With this in mind, I am considering her artistic practices as a materiality of the aesthetic experience dealing with *ethical-moral objects* in terms of Saito (2007). By considering the artist’s responsibility in the process of producing, I am exploring her artwork as a gesture, and the artistic action as a projection of society’s “forms of life” (Wittgenstein; Braidotti). Seen this way, the artist is an *author-producer* (Benjamin) of a “form of life”. That understanding of the artist is indebted to Dewey’s notion of “the experience of experience”, which recognizes that the aesthetic experience is not separate from the *life* experience. That should be considered as the will of the artist to repair the ethical connection to the environment, which is by itself the sharing of ethic and aesthetic experience (Nathalie Blanc; Jacques Rancière). In that sense the sharing of the sensitivity is repaired. This, in turn, opens the way towards an *environmental aesthetics*. Accordingly, Julier shows us that it is not scientific inventions that discovered Nature but, on the contrary, that is the Nature,

as a subject of our human devastating actions on it, which is contributing to our scientific research and understanding of it. And the way in which we dispose of objects brings us to some sacred significance: Nature existed before us humans, and will exist after our own self-provoked extinction. Another point we address is how the attempt to escape from that, as the transhuman and the posthuman conditions are trying to do, would be to approach images that Julier is showing through the scholarship of Jean-Michel Durafour and his concept of “econology”: images as “beings-in-between” creating a link between human and non-human nature. I demonstrate next how we, from our human position, should face and reconnect the inhuman part of images, i.e. Nature.

I am infinitely thankful to Giorgio Baruchello for inviting me as a guest editor for this special issue of Nordicum-Mediterraneum. I would also like to express my gratitude toward my colleague Mogens Chrom Jacobsen, who made the success of our Project possible, and Kelly Cogswell, who helped with the text.

^[1] I am using double quotation marks when it is a straight citation of a word or expression and single quotation marks to stress the importance of the concept.

Share this:

- [Share](#)