

Ecological 'art' and the transformation of the world

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If the modernist artwork was autonomous in the sense of being subject only to the aesthetic laws of its own distinctive being, ecological artworks cannot be understood as 'autonomous', but – in accordance with ecological art's apparent 'respect' for, or attitude of 'letting-be' (Heidegger) towards the world – rather in terms of a complex interplay of heteronomy and autonomy. This claim is substantiated in the present paper through a scrutiny of the work of two ecological artists, namely Andy Goldsworthy and Bradley McCallum, and with considerable dependence on the groundbreaking work of Suzi Gablik. It is argued that ecological art marks a radical departure from traditional, modern(-ist) art, in so far as it engages society or nature as collaborator or partner, transforming it in the process, and Derrida's notion of two types of hospitality is used to articulate the paradoxical dynamic at work in art of this kind.

Key words: Modern, ecological, aesthetic, autonomy, heteronomy, collaboration.

Indien die modernistiese kunswerk outonoom was in die sin dat dit slegs onderworpe was aan die estetiese wette van die spesifieke sinswyse daarvan, kan ekologiese kunswerke nie as 'outonoom' verstaan word nie, maar – in ooreenstemming met ekologiese kuns se klaarblyklike 'respek' vir, of houding van *Gelassenheit* (Heidegger) teenoor die wêreld – eerder aan die hand van 'n komplekse wisselspel van outonomie en heteronomie. Hierdie bewering word in die huidige artikel gestaaf deur die werk van twee ekologiese kunstenaars, Andy Goldsworthy en Bradley McCallum, onder die loep te neem, met behulp van die baanbrekerswerk van Suzi Gablik. Daar word geargumenteer dat ekologiese kuns radikaal van tradisionele, moderne kuns verskil, vir sover dit met die samelewing of die natuur saamewerk as vennoot en dit in die proses omvorm. Laastens word Derrida se gedagte van twee tipes gasvryheid benut om die paradoksale dinamiek onderliggend aan hierdie soort kuns aan die lig te bring.

Sleutelwoorde: Modern, ekologies, esteties, outonoom, heteronoom, samewerking.

Carbon and other pollutants are emitted into the air in such massive quantities that large areas of forest landscapes are dying from the effects of acid rain. Millions of tons of toxic waste are being poured into our lakes, rivers and oceans, contaminating drinking water and killing off aquatic life. Slash-and-burn forest clearing and forest fires are depleting the forests worldwide. Recognizing this crisis, as an artist I can no longer consider making art that is void of moral consciousness, art that carries no responsibility, art without spiritual content, or art that ignores the state of the world in which it exists (Othello Anderson).

Two wanderers in a forest pause for a few minutes to take in the beauty of the wooded landscape. They sit down on the trunk of a tree that was uprooted by a storm. Suddenly one leans forward, scrutinizing a row of pebbles on the ground, and points out to her companion the startling fact that there is a crack running through the whole series. How surprising, unlikely even! One cracked pebble is quite 'natural', but a whole row of them? When they share this discovery with a friend of theirs at a later stage, the friend listens with amazement, which gradually turns into amusement. When the wanderers notice this, they are bemused, in turn, and naturally inquire after the source of their friend's entertainment. In response, she leads them to her study, where she takes a book from a shelf, pages through it for a while, and then presents it to them with a look of triumph on her face. To their utter astonishment it is a photograph of the pebble-series with the unlikely crack running through it! The caption adjacent to the photograph informs them that it is a composition by the artist / sculptor / photographer / environmentalist, Andy Goldsworthy, deliberately placed in an undisturbed natural environment so as to prevent it from looking contrived (see Beyst 2002: 2). This is an instance (just one) of what is known as ecological art.

But what, then, is 'ecological' art compared to previous conceptions of art as a distinctive human cultural practice, with which certain distinctive artefacts – called works of art – are inseparably connected? It is not difficult to gather from the preceding little fiction concerning a (at a certain time factually existing) 'work' by an ecological artist, Andy Goldsworthy, that – in Goldsworthy's case, at least – it involves nature and 'natural' materials, that it retains the 'creative' moment traditionally associated with art, even if in the case of the pebbles such

creativity is ‘minimal’ and only goes as far as selecting and ordering or organizing them in a certain sequence of the artist’s choice. The reason for this is, again in Goldsworthy’s case, that his art is predicated on minimal disturbance of, or interference with, nature (Beyst 2002: 1-3). For that reason, most of his ecological creations do not involve any manufacturing or processing machine tools of any kind (although there are some instances of ‘permanent sculptures’, such as his *Three Cairns*, where such tools have been used by him; see Andy Goldsworthy/Wikipedia 2007: 1; see also regarding his recent work: Brunton 2007). They are the result of the artist simply rearranging materials and/or objects found in nature in a specific way, minimally interfering with the environment where the artwork is situated or placed. Understandably, therefore, many of his works – such as those comprising arrangements or structures of stone, thorns, flowers, leaves, twigs, mud or snow – are ephemeral, and his photographs of these fleeting ‘works’ capture them at what he considers to be the ‘peak’ of the cycle or process of growth and decay of which they form a part (Goldsworthy/Wikipedia 2007: 1).

It is important to note that, in his artistic practice, Goldsworthy constitutes nature not as an object, but – as Heidegger would say, ‘letting’ her natural processes of growth and decay, warming and freezing, ‘be’ without harnessing them to ends that would alienate them from themselves as they are in nature – as a partner or collaborator. Small wonder that one of the books (by himself) with beautiful reproductions of (his and others’) photographs of some of these ephemeral ‘works’ – for example sculptures consisting of packed snow, or of icicles – is aptly titled: *Andy Goldsworthy – A collaboration with nature* (1990). This, I would suggest, seems to comprise the distinctive difference between traditional art, conceived as artworks or ‘art objects’ created by independent, autonomous individuals, and ecological art. Instead of imposing aesthetic forms on nature in the shape of different materials, ecological art witnesses to a participatory relationship between artist and society or nature considered as ecological totalities (of which the artist therefore forms a part). In Heideggerian terms (Heidegger 1966: 53-54, 61) one might say that ecological art truly *lets* the world – society as well as nature – *be* a world. I shall return to the significance of this.

From these remarks about Goldsworthy’s work one may already gauge a crucial difference from traditional art conceived of in ‘aesthetic’ terms. Not that ecological art does not display ‘aesthetic’ features, if by that is meant that such works are beautiful, pleasing, and so on, but it differs decisively from traditional art in so far as it does not present itself ‘framed’ by some conventional, aestheticizing device to indicate its ontological distinctiveness and ‘uselessness’ compared to ordinary, pragmatic objects of use. The function of a frame is precisely to demarcate the aesthetic space of the artwork from the historical, pragmatic space of the quotidian, so that Schopenhauer (1969: 185) could say:

...art...plucks the object of its contemplation from the stream of the world’s course, and holds it isolated before it. ...it stops the wheel of time; for it the relations vanish; its object is only the essential...

By way of considering a modernist painting (*Newburyport*) by Frank Stella, Karsten Harries (1997: 16-17; see also Harries 1968) elaborates on the work of art as an aesthetic object. Among other things he points out that it presents itself as a ‘*self-sufficient whole*’, that it ‘demands aesthetic distance’, and that it enables the viewer to have a ‘*plenitude of aesthetic experience*’ because, being without pragmatic usefulness, it suspends our engagement in the affairs of the world (the point made by Schopenhauer, above). One could add to this that the art galleries and museums where such traditional works of art are routinely exhibited, add to the distance, if not alienation, between art and the world by the fact that they are in a sense ‘contextless’ – or perhaps ‘de-contextualizing’ – places, a characteristic that is consonant with the ‘aestheticism’ of modernist art, according to which the aesthetic space of the artwork functions autonomously as a realm divorced from the workaday world. Ironically therefore, the very ‘strengths’ of

modernist art are also its ‘weaknesses’ which enable one to make sense of the emergence of, among other novel kinds of artistic practice, ecological art. It is precisely against the backdrop of these characteristic features of the (modern) work of art, I would like to argue, that the novelty of ecological art like that of Andy Goldsworthy (as well as that of Bradley McCallum, whose work I shall discuss below) stands out unmistakably.

I should mention that, although the other innovative art-practices alluded to above will not be considered here, one should acknowledge – as a helpful critic has reminded me – that ecological art has had recognizable precursors, such as ‘Process Art’ and ‘Earthworks’ (themselves part of a broad movement of ‘conceptual art’ which originated in the 1960s, and which can be traced back to the immense influence of the work of Marcel Duchamp; see Smith 1981: 258-259; Beardsley 1998). For example, the impermanence or ephemerality of many instances of ecological art – discussed below – archived through photographs only, is characteristic of these forms of art as well.

That the way was prepared, theoretically, for ‘ecological art’ is evident in Marilyn French’s (1986: 542-544;) elaboration on the contemporary (properly, one might say, *post*-modern), emergent conception of nature as an almost incomprehensibly complex, open, interconnected totality of interrelationships. This is the case not only in ecosystems, but even at the level of subatomic ‘probabilities of interconnections’ which – significantly, as far as ecological artistic practice goes, as will be shown in what follows – include the observer. One finds a similar tendency in what Havel (1996: 213) refers to as the *Gaia* Hypothesis – the conception of the earth as a gigantic organism, instead of a neutral planetary surface that merely ‘contains’ a wide variety of organisms:

This theory brings together proof that the dense network of mutual interactions between the organic and inorganic portions of the Earth’s surface form a single system, a kind of mega-organism, a living planet – Gaia – named after an ancient goddess who is recognizable as an archetype of the Earth Mother in perhaps all religions. According to the Gaia Hypothesis we are parts of a greater whole. Our destiny is not dependent merely on what we do for ourselves but also on what we do for Gaia as a whole. If we endanger her, she will dispense with us in the interests of a higher value – that is, life itself.

It is striking that in both these cases one encounters an emphasis on the interconnectedness of things – on the erroneousness of isolating anything in the world from anything (or everything) else – in this way reminding one of the earlier contention that, judging by Goldsworthy’s example, ecological art appears to emphasize a participatory relationship between artist and nature (or society). Nor should this be surprising, if one considers that an ecology may be thought of as ‘a *whole defined by internal relations*’ (Kovel 2002: 17).

The theme of interconnectedness and participation in totalities that surpass the individual as an isolated, atomistic entity, is elaborated in the work of an important theorist, Suzi Gablik, who situates the significance of ecological art in the context of the (overcoming of the) concept of the modern ‘self’. Gablik’s essay, ‘Toward an ecological self’ (1993: 301-309; first published in 1985, and incorporated in the last chapter of Gablik 1998), is an early indication of the direction of ecological thinking generally, and its meaning for art in particular. Her reference to ‘an ecological self’ is important: for Gablik, as for a variety of thinkers she cites, the end of modernity marks the transition from the so-called Cartesian self – characterized by putative autonomy, self-transparency, a certain isolation and self-containment – to a relational self, constituted by its insertedness into a web of social and natural relations with a variety of ‘others’. She links this paradigmatically modern ‘dominator-system’ with an individualistic, consumer-capitalist economic system typified by the aggressively competitive pursuit of individual affluence at the cost of economic concern for others, and argues that the conception of art that is consonant with this, has been one of art as a ‘private’ pursuit. It may come as a shock to some, that she

even aligns the artist, Christo, well-known for his ‘landscape art’ or ‘environmental projects’ (the construction of which has often involved thousands of people), with the modern project in light of his remark (in a 1990 interview), that his work ‘...is a huge individualistic gesture’, and that, given the supreme importance of ‘independence’ to him, the ‘work of art is a scream of freedom’ (quoted in Gablik 1993: 302).

Against the backdrop of this ethos of individualistic self-assertion, Gablik (1993: 303-305) focuses her discussion on the work of a (then) young artist (and graduate art student), Bradley McCallum, whose evolving artistic practice – as opposed to art in the sense of separate artworks – exemplifies the contours of an emergent new ecological paradigm for art as well as of the self. Already in his undergraduate years, McCallum changed his sculptural practice from making large welded steel objects to a collaborative artistic practice involving a homeless community in whose needs he wished to provide as a sculptor. This may strike one as being odd – how could *sculpture* in any way satisfy needs on the part of homeless individuals, and what could possibly motivate a sculptor to change his or her practice in this apparently incongruous direction? Gablik (1993: 303) explains:

Brad wanted to do this *as art*, that is, capitalizing on the same skills he used in making sculpture. He was not searching for independence, autonomy, or freedom so much as for the social need he sensed that art was meant to fulfill. His art soon became pragmatic, goal-directed, purposive, and charged with ethical sensitivity – all things that run counter to the teachings of aesthetic autonomy. He began to care less for originality than for results.

What results, and what were his means for attaining these? By befriending some homeless people, McCallum was able to ascertain what needs on their part could be met through his intervention as a sculptor. Homeless people use shopping carts to transport their meagre belongings, and – in a similar fashion to Krzysztof Wodiczko’s creation of *Homeless Vehicles* (Gablik 1993: 303; see also Snyman 1995; Olivier 2006), of which he was aware – McCallum set out to construct his own prototypes (as improvements on the impractical shopping carts), but with an important difference. As Gablik points out (p. 303), Wodiczko’s prototypes still functioned as (admittedly highly unusual works of) ‘art’, while McCallum was more interested in developing ‘a living artistic practice’ out of his ‘helping’ relationship with his homeless friends.

This relationship assumed the form of collaborative communication between the artist and the homeless individuals who received the prototypes from him for testing, resulting in the modification and improvement of the trolleys as pragmatic ‘sculptures’ – for example with the addition of an awning to provide shade for a skin cancer sufferer – before being given to the person as his or her own. To understand the sense in which Brad’s artistic practice could be understood as ecological art, the following observation by Gablik (1993: 304) is important:

In order to accommodate the different needs of each person, Brad had to develop a certain trust and fluidity; to be open to interpenetration and blending, he had to develop a more transparent and permeable ego structure that would be receptive to an intertwining of self and other.

At the Yale Graduate School of Art in New Haven, McCallum continued his experimental shaping of a sculptural practice, in collaboration with a homeless woman, whose needs he gauged, again, by communicating with her as he had done before with other homeless people (Gablik 1993: 304-305). It turned out that she did not feel the need for a cart, but instead desired a park bench with an awning, which Brad subsequently provided by constructing an aluminium backrest with a cover and bolting it to a park bench. Because she was not quite satisfied with it, he kept changing it in the spirit of collaborative work – as he insisted (Gablik 1993: 304) – until she was content. (See photograph in Gablik 1998, opposite p. 89, for one of McCallum’s New Haven ‘park bench shelters’ as ‘collaborations in process’.) For Brad, it was the collaborative process, with its requirements of trust and mutual capacity for listening, that mattered, and not

his own intended final product as autonomously created work of art. (The fact that Brad thought of his work as a ‘collaborative’ process involving homeless people is significant – recall what was observed at the outset in this article about Goldsworthy’s ecological artistic practice, of which he conceived as a ‘collaboration’ with nature.) Clearly, Gablik attaches great (ecological) significance to this work (1993: 305-306):

So why do I like this work so much? First of all, because it is not counterphobically tough. Nor does it aestheticize homelessness. Rather, it breaks the trance of economic thinking and legitimates another kind of motivation. It offers our society a different image of itself that is not based on the conspicuous consumption of valuable goods or the inevitability of self-interest. The quality of the response is crucial – it moves away from alienation and the mode of the helpless, isolated individual submissive to things as they are, which tends to shape all our interactions. To use ecologist Bill Devall’s wonderful phrase, the work is ‘simple in means, rich in ends’. In a consumption-oriented culture, the most important thing is to buy and own objects; the more things that can be bought and sold the better. The intense involvement with things, with consumption and one’s own standard of living, seems to go hand-in-hand with a lack of involvement in social problems and relationships. ‘The mechanical division between self and world,’ writes Wendell Berry, ‘involves an emotional dynamics that has disordered the heart of both the society as a whole and of every person in the society.’

The reference to Berry’s observation regarding the schism between self and world points to a wider context. To be more specific: what has emerged through scrutiny of Gablik’s discussion of what I would call McCallum’s socio-ecological artistic practice, is corroborated in a wider ecological framework through Gablik’s discussion of other artists – including Andy Goldsworthy, whose ecological art formed the point of departure of this article – in her book, *The reenchantment of art* (1998). Confirming my initial remarks about Goldsworthy as someone who practises a ‘letting-be’ of nature, she notes that, eschewing domination, his ‘gestures are delicate and unobtrusive’, seeking attunement with different seasons, forest- and landscapes, entering into a dialogue with each in a spirit of ‘cooperating with its subtle web of interrelated processes’ (Gablik 1998: 91). Just how different from traditional art- practices his artistic activity is, becomes evident from his own account of his *modus operandi* (Goldsworthy 1990: 2, 4):

Movement, change, light, growth and decay are the lifeblood of nature, the energies that I try to tap through my work. I need the shock of touch, the resistance of place, materials and weather, the earth as my source. I want to get under the surface. When I work with a leaf, rock, stick, it is not just that material in itself, it is an opening into the processes of life within and around it. When I leave it, these processes continue...At its most successful, my ‘touch’ looks into the heart of nature; most days I don’t even get close. These things are all part of a transient process that I cannot understand unless my touch is also transient – only in this way can the cycle remain unbroken and the process be complete.

What Goldsworthy’s practice resembles is the cycle of birth, growth, decay, death and resurrection associated with the cult of the god Dionysus in Greek antiquity (Shlain 1998: 136-148), which celebrated the periodic seasonal return of life in nature after her ostensible ‘death’ in Winter. His self-reflective words confirm that he thinks of himself as making art on nature’s terms, respecting natural rhythms and cycles, but not without bringing a certain human ‘work’ into nature’s bosom, not without a creative and innovative tactility that ‘alters’ nature’s immediate appearance without violating her integrity. Hence, one cannot speak here of *nature* being constituted as the artist at the cost of the human artist-agent; what occurs is a collaboration of reciprocity, a partnership of mutual contribution: Goldsworthy attunes himself to the exigencies of specific materials and the *genius loci* of the place where they are encountered; he ‘listens’ to what they say to him in the process of entering into a co-creative relationship with them. The musical metaphor of attunement is particularly apt for capturing the tenor of this paradigmatically ecological artistic practice – in this respect it is reminiscent of McCallum’s eco-social artistic practice, where a comparable attunement to the (communicated) needs of the homeless people was indispensable for what he created.

Communication, listening, letting-be, dialogue, sensitivity, respect, attunement, collaboration, non-subordinating partnership, reciprocity and mutuality are the hallmarks of the

emerging paradigm of ecological art today. To the answer, *why* these artists (and many others whom I have not even referred to here) have felt the irresistible need to change their practice from the ‘business as usual’ way of being an artist in contemporary society, the answer is not hard to find: the conventional way of being an artist – painting, sculpture, photography and practising other arts – are part of a cycle very different from the cycles of nature that someone like Goldsworthy acknowledges in his art, namely the artistic-economic cycle of producing, promoting, exhibiting, selling, self-promoting, and so on. This cycle fits into and reinforces the dominant mode of production in contemporary society, namely consumer capitalism, and it presupposes – as Gablik (1993: 302, 308; 1998: 2-3; 6-7; 77-78; 117-119; 146-149; 176-183) has shown at length – a conception of the artist as individualistic, competitive, autonomous, economically active and self-interested subject whose artistic production is predicated on the need to turn a profit from his or her art at all costs. The artist whose moving statement of intent – henceforth to create responsible, morally committed art – was used as an epigraph at the beginning of this article, Othello Anderson, alludes to the obscene by-products (such as toxic waste) of this economic system in his statement (Gablik 1998: 180-181). These are by-products which are highlighted in the work of another ecological artist-photographer, David Hanson (Gablik 1998: 77-81), who has made it his personal project to document, photographically, some of the most salient sites where hazardous materials such as nuclear waste are dumped – materials that he believes will be retrospectively regarded, from some future time, as the legacy of late 20th (and early 21st) century Western culture, negatively comparable to Chartres Cathedral, Stonehenge or the Egyptian pyramids.

Do these considerations mean that Goldsworthy – or McCallum for that matter – no longer practices art in any recognizable form? And if *their* artistic practices seem light-years removed from the ‘paint, exhibit, sell and become famous’-careers of modern artists, what about artist Dominique Mazeaud, who regards her ritual acts of removing polluting junk from a river – something she has called ‘The great cleansing of the Rio Grande River’ (Gablik 1998: 119-123) – as art? Is that art? Only if we consider the world – society and nature – in terms that are quasi-analogous to the artwork in modern terms, that is, as a whole or totality that somehow has to be made whole (and beautiful?) again. Why quasi-analogous? Because, on the one hand, the modern artwork was considered ‘whole’ and unified in the sense that it was a ‘complete’, aesthetically ‘closed’ totality (as pointed out earlier); hence the frame which signified its hermetic isolation (and insulation) from social and natural reality – if anything were to be added or subtracted from it, it would no longer be the artwork it was. In the case of ecological art, on the other hand, the collaboration between the artist and others/partners – a dialogue which is indispensable for the artistic practice in question – is predicated on *care*, that is, on the desirability of either restoring to others their ‘wholeness’ in the sense of human or social dignity (socio-ecological art), or preserving the ‘wholeness’, integrity or inviolability of the other in the guise of nature (nature-ecological art).

But despite the ostensible similarity between the modern work of art and ecological artistic practice in terms of ‘wholeness’, there is a crucial difference: given its aesthetic distance from social reality, the wholeness pertaining to modern art is closed, while, in the absence of such aesthetic distance, ecological wholeness is open-ended in the same way that a dialogue is open-ended. To put it more accurately: the relations of meaning internal to a modern artwork are in a certain sense cemented into place for the viewer to discover – even if the latter brings to it novel cultural and personal horizons of expectation, these can only resonate with the artwork as ‘welded together’ by the artist. Different viewers experience the artwork differently not because it has changed or lost its unified wholeness, but because they are different from one another and therefore view the artwork through different experiential lenses. An ecological ‘artwork’, which comprises an inseparable component of the natural or social ecosystem, on the other

hand, is open in so far as it is not ‘welded together’ once and for all – it interacts with agents that enter into a relationship with it, not merely in the sense that viewers enter into a perceptual-cognitive relation with a modern painting (whose internal structural relations remain the same), but more decisively regarding social behaviour or natural-cyclical processes that could be either healthy or pathological. Unlike a modern work of art, a social or a natural ecosystem does not remain impervious to ‘outside’ agents that enter into its ambience – its ‘wholeness’ is fragile. The same holds for ephemeral ecological works of art, like Goldsworthy’s sculptures made of ice, or snow, and ‘frozen’ (for a second time) on film by him or his photographers. They are creatively inserted into nature by the artist, who selects, arranges, combines and constructs, but partly on nature’s terms in so far as all the materials are an integral part of the open-ended natural ecosystem. Hence the similarity between the modern artwork and the social or natural world into which ecological art gently, dialogically, inserts itself, has the character of a quasi-analogy.

Besides, to think of ecological art as exemplified in Goldsworthy’s work along the lines of a caring partnership with nature, resurrects the idea of his artistic practice as a form of what Heidegger calls *Gelassenheit* (letting-be), which requires some elaboration here to clarify this claim (Heidegger 1966: 53-54, 61; Megill 1985: 36, 179-180; Olivier 1990: 120-122). It is no accident that Goldsworthy’s way of doing art is not dependent on modern technology which, according to Heidegger (1977: 13-26), amounts to a global attempt to gain mastery over everything by reducing nature (as well as society) into mere ‘resources’, or what Heidegger calls a ‘standing-reserve’. Instead, Goldsworthy’s art ‘lets nature be nature’, lets leaves be leaves, pebbles be pebbles, snow and ice be snow and ice – not passively by merely passing it by, but *actively* by highlighting its beauty as an integral, if ephemeral moment in nature’s endless cyclical being. *Gelassenheit* or letting-be is here an active practice, an artistic intervention of the gentlest kind, which stands as a reminder to humankind – whose technological activities have left nature (the great ‘mother’, according to ancient beliefs; see Shlain 1998: 30-39; 144) damaged and scarred (see Kovel 2002; Olivier 2005) – that another, different, less harmful relation with the natural environment is possible, one that has the potential to transform human attitudes as well as, eventually, a damaged nature (and society) itself (see Olivier 1998, for an exploration of a different sense of transformation in and through art).

In passing, it is noteworthy that, in various ways, architects have shown an awareness of this imperative for some time. One manifestation of this is that ‘earth architecture’ today assumes many forms, including so-called ‘cob houses’, and the amount of information on the Internet alone, pertaining to all the varieties of ‘earth architecture’, is astonishing. John Beardsley (1998: 127) points out that, since the 1970s (mainly in the United States), art, including architecture, has increasingly been transforming public spaces in cities – something which testifies to ‘...the reintegration of the arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, and landscape design – severed from each other in the modern era – with the aim of creating the best possible public environment’. Needless to say, this movement away from the modern valorization of the museum as the appropriate setting for art, towards a genuinely ‘public art’ in the encompassing sense, is consonant with the spirit of ecological art as characterized here (mainly with reference to the art of Goldsworthy and McCallum).

Another way to grasp the distinctiveness of the way Goldsworthy does art, entails thinking of it in terms of the complex, paradoxical logic encountered in poststructuralist thought. The theme of hospitality in particular, as explored by Derrida, lends itself to being used here, with illuminating results (Derrida 2005: 66-67; Caputo 1997: 109-113). There are two concepts of hospitality, according to Derrida – one, unlimited, unconditional, excessive, generous to the point of self-effacement of the host(-ess) in favour of the guest, the stranger or foreigner;

the other, conditional, limited, a little bit 'hostile', self-assertive in the sense of limiting the privileges that the other or guest, stranger, is granted access to. These two concepts are not contradictory, but neither is either reducible to the other. They are irreducible. And, in their 'purity', each is impossible. This means that conditional hospitality, where the host or hostess asserts his or her power over the guest, would lose all semblance of hospitality if it were not tempered by its counterpart, unconditional hospitality, the striving towards imparts to the act of (conditional) hospitality its recognizable character. Hence, pure, conditional hospitality is impossible. But the same is true of unconditional hospitality: in the absence of a smidgen of reserve or suspicion towards the stranger, for instance in the event of offering the latter everything the host has to give 'without limits', would be self-destructive. Such hospitality is therefore equally impossible; it requires, in turn, the mitigating influence of limits imposed by conditional hospitality. Neither is reduced to the other; each remains distinct, but by allowing the logic of the one to be softened, or strengthened, by the logic of the other, the practice of hospitality first becomes possible.

What is its relevance for ecological art, especially in the case of Goldsworthy, whom I have presented as paradigmatic instance? Think of human beings as strangers, and nature as host. The history of Western culture has culminated, by all accounts, in the near-devastation of nature (Kovel 2002; Olivier 2005; Diamond 2005) through industrialization and technology, characterized by Heidegger (1977) as an 'assault' upon nature. In terms of Derrida's analysis of hospitality, this means that, historically, the strangers, or guests (human beings) have abused the excessive, unconditional hospitality of the host (nature) by imposing themselves on the host and ransacking the premises, abusing and decimating its bounty. Even traditional artists, while not actively abusing the host's hospitality, have practised their art in such a way that they have placed an aesthetic distance between themselves and the host through conventions like framing and representation, withdrawal into the mausoleum-like space of the museum, and so on. This may seem a harsh judgment of landscape artists like Constable, Turner, and especially Cézanne – after all, the sublimity and beauty of nature are undeniably celebrated in their work; this cannot be disputed. It is equally undeniable, however, that the very constitution of an aesthetic space in and through their work is part of the history and logic of modernity in so far as it attests to the distinctiveness of the aesthetic, as opposed to the cognitive-theoretical and ethical-political spheres of discourse. The advent and development of postmodernity have witnessed the transgression of the frame – for example in the art of Rauschenberg – and more subtly, its artistic deconstruction in the work of artists like Anselm Kiefer, the theoretical counterpart of which is encountered in that of the poststructuralists (see, for example Derrida 1987: 37-82). This may be seen respectively as a prelude to, and as being concomitant with the novel artistic practice of truly ecological artists.

By contrast with the modern, aesthetic celebration of nature, the ecological art of Goldsworthy (and Richard Long; see Long 1991) – in a manner analogous to Derrida's paradoxical poststructuralist negotiation of the tension between conditional and unconditional hospitality – practises a delicate interweaving of the conditional and the unconditional. By intervening in nature's processes and material history – making a fragile sculpture out of icicles, or snow, or leaves, or pebbles – he accepts the hospitality of the host(-ess), nature, without abusing it. At the same time he places nature in the position of having to temper its unconditional hospitality with the countervailing mode of conditional hospitality, instantiated by his own way of proceeding. How is this evident? Instead of availing himself of nature's bountiful treasures, her materials, by removing these and creating an artwork with the traditional 'durability' from them (that is, using, possibly misusing nature's unconditional hospitality), he tempers such a practice by invoking a concomitant conditional hospitality on her part: he uses the materials in question on condition that they are not removed, reduced to cultural artefacts once and

for all – instead they are gently harnessed into a configuration that is undeniably artistic, but equally undeniably still part of, and situated within, nature. His artworks are *both* cultural (the product of human intervention in nature) *and* natural (subject to the ongoing rhythms of natural cycles and processes). And he accomplishes this difficult task by acting in accordance with both an unconditional and a conditional hospitality on nature's part, the combination of which is indispensable for the preservation of nature's integrity. Few philosophical-theoretical approaches are as fruitful as Derridean poststructuralism in gaining an understanding of what is truly new in ecological art of this kind.

It may be objected that a remnant of traditional art, predicated on the 'durability' of the work of art, still remains in Goldsworthy's (and Richard Long's) artistic practice, namely the photographs that they take (or others take on their behalf) of their transient creations. This is indeed the case, but the tension between these photographs as documents or archives of the 'work' at the approximate moment of its equilibrium – see for instance, in addition to the obvious cases of photographic records of his snow and ice creations, the photographs of Goldsworthy's astonishing, 'impossibly' balancing rocks (in Goldsworthy 1990, see also Beardsley 1998: 51) – and the ephemeral, unstable work itself, comprises an aspect of the poststructuralist logic that one finds here: taken together, the photographic archive and the concrete, transitory creation comprise Goldsworthy's 'art' – it is *both* relatively 'durable' *and* subject to the ruin of natural time's becoming, according to which it is short-lived to a greater or lesser degree in the specific form that Goldsworthy, with nature's collaboration, has given to it. As it gradually loses that delicately constructed form, it is taken up in natural processes such as melting, erosion decomposition and so on – a truly Dionysian cycle of birth, 'growth', maturing, decay, death and rebirth (in a different guise). It is hard to imagine a more salutary and joyful reminder, in a time of technological *hubris*, of the inseparability of life and mortality.

In conclusion it may be noted that, in accordance with ecological art's apparent 'respect' for, or attitude of 'letting-be' towards the world, or nature, a complex interplay of heteronomy and autonomy may be discerned, something that is consonant with the mutual 'letting-be' of different beings that ineluctably share the same world-space. This, too, is very different from the 'autonomy' of the artwork as traditionally conceived. Considering the work of both McCallum and Goldsworthy, this interplay becomes apparent as follows. Instead of autonomy and distance as traditionally embodied in the work of art, constituted on the strength of its aesthetic difference, the intervention of the artist as evinced by the structural changes wrought in his (or her) 'creations' – the modified park benches (McCallum), the 'natural sculptures' and their photographic archives (Goldsworthy) – testifying to a certain autonomy, corresponds with a countervailing heteronomy in so far as the work is submitted to the demands or requirements of an other, a collaborator in the guise of the homeless or nature.

If one thinks of this in terms of artistic practice instead of the ecological work of art, this tension between autonomy and heteronomy becomes even more evident, given the degree to which artist and collaborating other enter into a relation of mutual give and take, where neither remains fully autonomous. The fact that ecological art lends itself to being understood in terms of a paradoxical co-presence or interlacing of autonomy and heteronomy, confirms its structural similarity to poststructuralist logic (see in this regard Hurst 2004). What this investigation has brought to light seems to me to suggest that ecological art may justifiably be regarded as having introduced something novel into artistic practices – a new receptivity and reciprocity – something which, even if it does not sit well with entrenched notions of art, holds out the promise of a transformation of the world (society as well as nature) in the place of its former alienation (in the sense specified above).

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