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“NATURE” IN EXPERIENCE: BODY AND ENVIRONMENT¹

DEFINING AND EXPERIENCING NATURE

In environmental aesthetics nature is most often understood in terms of landscapes or individual representatives of various species. This means, on the one hand, that nature is discussed in terms of objects of some sort and, on the other, that nature is what we humans are not, whether it surrounds or encounters us.² But understanding nature either as a perceptible, recognisable and identifiable set of objects or as particular areas is less than satisfying if we want to distinguish nature from culture. In particular, the idea of pristine nature, or of nature as such, has become increasingly problematic during the 20th century. This is not only because each and every notion of nature is necessarily culturally mediated,³ but also because, more concretely, there are strictly speaking no pristine areas on earth today. Human influence, in the form of air- or water-born pollution and effects on the climate, reaches everywhere.

The practical difficulty of separating areas or items of pure or pristine nature from culturally transformed nature is also encountered when we want to reflect upon the aesthetic value of nature as it exists in most inhabited areas of the industrialised world. We soon realise that as a rule non-human nature and human culture appear together: nature as a ground of culture, culture as mediating and transforming nature. A radical interdependence of cultural patterns

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² The view that nature is, in one way or another, non-human, is not typical for aesthetics only. See Gernot Böhme, “Aporien unserer Beziehung zur Natur”, in *Natürlich Natur. Über Natur im Zeitalter ihrer technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), 9-25.

³ *Ibid.*, 37.

and natural conditions indeed characterises human life forms, and, *mutatis mutandis*, the life of other species as well.⁴ In principle this is always the case, but in comparison to what we tend to think of as less technologically advanced cultures, nature has today, in many human habitats and cultures, become either fairly imperceptible or present to humans mainly in negative ways: as polluted water, air, or other threats to our health.⁵

In this article, I want to discuss nature in a non-objectifying way, as an intimate and irreducible part of life. At issue here is how nature is experienced, rather than how it is defined or understood. This does not mean, of course, that there is no need to define nature for the purpose of this article; this I shall do later in this introductory section. Pointing then, in the second section, to the body as nature and, in the third, to natural aspects in built environments, I argue that nature is present already on the most basic level of experience, in and around the experiencer. Nature is here sensed rather than interpreted, present to us primarily as qualities and conditions, rather than as individual objects such as animals, plants, landscapes or places. But we are also present to nature in similar ways. In the fourth and last section, I briefly discuss the deeper challenge nature in aesthetic experience poses to us on the basis of this understanding of it.

By focusing on nature in experience, which in certain respects is close to Spinoza's *natura naturans*, or creative nature, I do not deny the relevance of other ways of understanding nature.⁶ Nevertheless, when the focus is on *natura naturata*, created nature, nature tends to be seen in terms of the non-human, so that plants, animals and eco-systems belong there with the one exception of *homo sapiens*. In questions of environmental philosophy, ethics and management, to regard humans and nature as adversaries, not neighbours, is unlikely to support a fruitful and sustainable approach to non-human nature and the

⁴ In so-called indigenous fishing or hunting cultures, what to us would be wilderness could be regarded as belonging to the community as its territory, while the community also belonged to the area. Thus a relatively pristine natural environment was part of culture, but culture also existed in and on nature, which, on the other hand, was not perceived, experienced or understood without the influence and mediation of culture.

⁵ This might give reason to suggest that environmental awareness begins with (an embodied) aesthetics; Gernot Böhme, *Atmosphäre. Essays zur neuen Ästhetik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), 14.

⁶ We probably need several definitions of nature, depending on the practical and discursive context. The insufficiency of any one definition for every conceivable context is not a linguistic or philosophical default; on the contrary, it indicates the complexity and richness of our situation and of reality, which transcends what any singular mode of description can convey.

environment as a whole. It seems that the latter approach can find support only in thinking which acknowledges conviviality and cohabitation. The juxtaposition also misrepresents and distorts the full reality of the human, animal self, and that is my main concern in this text.

The wish to avoid both an objectification of nature and a juxtaposition of humans and nature does not imply that every distinction is abandoned. Some philosophers want to say that everything that is, or belongs to, nature, and such a position certainly affords a useful perspective on humans and human agency. The problem is, however, that in particular if left without further specification, this broad definition can make nature a nearly vacuous term.⁷ In order to be able to critically discuss nature and the natural with regard to how we inhabit and interact with the environment, we need a concept of nature which is neither all-inclusive nor too narrow; ideally, a concept which enables us to make distinctions and observe the interactions of nature and culture in different contexts.

The overall perspective on nature in this article is anthropocentric. Such human perspectivism is inevitable, since my topic is nature in experience, but I also believe, more generally, that anthropocentrism is unavoidable for a human being. Nature, here, basically refers to processes, things and aspects of these that "are not 'made' but grow by themselves into whatever they become".⁸ But it is important to remember that this is *in comparison* to the perspective of human agency and culture; as Holmes Rolston puts it, "[n]ature is what is *not* constructed by the human mind".⁹ Nature, then, is what is not intentionally produced by humans, but experienced as given without the interference of human constructions.¹⁰ In perceptual experience, nature primarily announces

⁷ The broad view is defended by, for example, Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1992), 6-10. Also Holmes Rolston III thinks that nature, or the biosphere, is all-encompassing, but this does not lead him to collapse the distinction between the world of humans and nature, which he describes as plural; *Conserving Natural Value* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1994).

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 150. It might be useful to note that in discussions about environmental preservation and restoration this concept of nature and naturalness is insufficient since, as Robert Elliot argues, it offers no counterargument to the replaceability of natural areas; *Faking Nature: The ethics of environmental restoration* (London: Routledge, 1997), 108-111.

⁹ Holmes Rolston, III, "Nature for Real: Is Nature a Social Construct?", in *The Philosophy of the Environment*, ed. T.D.J. Chappell (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1997), 38-64: 42.

¹⁰ One can still agree with Elliot that intentionality *per se* does not distinguish humans from other animals: many mammals act intentionally. What distinguishes us is rather, according to him, that our impact on the environment is mediated through complex and sophisticated structures of culture, science, and technology; *op. cit.*, 122-123.

itself as processes and qualities rather than as areas (wilderness) or elements (plants, animals, rocks).¹¹ Further, nature is part of environmental experience not only around, but already in us. Embodied and situated, we not only act according to our wills, but are also influenced and acted upon by nature, from within and without.

The main reason for developing an understanding of nature along these lines is aesthetic and existential in character and related to questions about the quality of life. For many reasons, some of which I hope to illuminate in the following, it would be important to do justice to the relatively uncultured and unconscious sides of environmental aesthetic experience, whether it takes place in a natural environment or in a city. What we encounter of nature in experience and perception is both of value and of its own kind, and it cannot be substituted for by intentional action or products of human culture. Nature can enrich and expand where we are, how we are, and therefore also who we are. More generally, the argument about nature in experience might cast light upon the relations between mind and body, sensuous experience and understanding.

THE BODY AS NATURE

It is insufficient to understand the feeling, perceiving and acting body as an object, as the natural sciences tend to do. That the body as an object, which we could have before us, is not the same as the lived body, is a central teaching of philosophers who have reflected on embodiment as a basic condition of human existence, such as Edmund Husserl in his late work, Maurice Merleau-Ponty throughout his *oeuvre*, or, to mention but two contemporary philosophers, Gernot Böhme and Alphonso Lingis.¹² As Merleau-Ponty puts it, the body "is our ground, not what is before us, but what carries us".¹³

¹¹ Thus I deal with "wildness" rather than "wilderness"; cf. Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild* (New York: North Point Press, 1998/1990), 5-16; also Rolston 1997, 49. Aware of the difficulties of drawing a precise line between natural and cultural environments, I use the term natural environment to refer to areas where the influence of the human species is not marked or dominant. For a similar use of the term, see Dudley Knowles, "Figures in a Landscape", in *Virtue and Taste. Essays on Politics, Ethics and Aesthetics: In Memory of Flint Schier*, eds. Dudley Knowles and John Skorupski (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993), 34-51: 36.

¹² In addition to works already mentioned, the following are, in particular, relevant: Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1997/1970); Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992/1945), *Le visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991/1964), *La Nature. Notes. Cours du Collège de France*, Établi et annoté par Dominique Séglaard (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995); Gernot Böhme, *Für eine ökologische Naturästhetik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), *Anmutungen. Über das Atmosphärische*

It is easy to see an affinity between the role of this body in human existence and the role often given to nature in relation to human culture. In this section, I shall sketch a phenomenological understanding of the body, drawing on the aforementioned philosophers and focusing on the natural, or given, aspects of embodied existence. I start with aspects more closely related to the mere sensed and material givenness of the body as our ground, and proceed towards natural aspects of embodied meaning, behaviour and practices. Thus while the key words - affectivity and anonymity, implacement, *Befindlichkeit* and sedimentation - all highlight what in experience is felt as given, they also indicate that what is natural or taken-for-granted is neither purely natural, nor indeed *simply* constructed.¹⁴

In Merleau-Ponty's parlance, the lived body (*le corps vécu*) exists towards the world (*au monde*). The body receptively and actively turns towards the world, which is also lived (*a world*), and yet transcends the interpretations that any particular subject or culture can give to it.¹⁵ This means, among other things, that both body and world have dimensions which are not easily accommodated in the cultural side of life if we understand culture as importantly structured through articulation, language, knowledge, practices, identities, and more or less defined meanings. Particularly in the affective dimension of environmental experience, receptivity and a certain disinterestedness - that we do not force the environment to adjust to our own cognitive or practical interests - are important.¹⁶

Describing the body as a sexual being, in chapter five of the first part of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty points out that in the affective

(Ostfeldern: edition tertium, 1998); Alphonso Lingis, *The Imperative* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1998). Note that to criticize a scientific or, as would be more correct to say, a scientific worldview, does not imply that one turns-away from the natural sciences. Merleau-Ponty is a notable example of a philosopher incessantly in dialogue with the natural sciences, investigating and (re)interpreting their findings.

¹³ Merleau-Ponty, *La Nature*, 20.

¹⁴ It would be worthwhile to discuss degrees and criteria of naturalness, but this falls outside the scope of the present text. That nature is always nature in relation to something else is indicated by the quotation marks in my title. However, in order not to falsely suggest that nature is more constructed than other concepts, I do not use them in the text.

¹⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, 17-179; also *Le visible et l'invisible*, 17-204. In the later work, Merleau-Ponty uses flesh as a key term rather than body, attempting to rethink the questions he addressed earlier from an ontological standpoint; cf. 219-220; also Claude Lefort's "Postface" to *Le visible et l'invisible*, 337-360: 347-354. To my mind, these two major works serve slightly different purposes; for example, the discourse of flesh does not quite do justice to the personal, embodied dimensions of perception.

¹⁶ Cf. Lingis, *The Imperative*, 13-22; also Böhme, *Anmutungen*, 70.

dimension, experience is characterised by a high degree of anonymity.¹⁷ This does not mean, however, that affectively intense experience is alienating. On the contrary, anonymity is in this context a positive rather than a negative term. It is relevant to recall, for example, aesthetic experiences of music, visual arts, or poetry, or architectural spaces that arrest us. In these, anonymity and affective openness come hand in hand: as I leave my social identity (my label and name) behind, I open myself to an understanding of sense which is intersubjectively constituted, shared and accessible to other sensuous and sentient beings.¹⁸ Anonymity is related to being with the body and to giving in or, momentarily, giving up one's ego and the construction of a self of conscious, reflected identity; thus it is not irrelevant that anonymity literally means namelessness.¹⁹ However, although we here give in to the body, this is not an act of regression but an opening up to a dimension which, as Merleau-Ponty says, is always with us, "constantly present as an atmosphere", "as an odour or as a sound".²⁰

In order better to grasp the character of the anonymity of feeling, it is useful to contrast positive with negative anonymity. In everyday discourse, we tend to use the term anonymity to refer to a state of inhibited, not increased, access and contact, a state of blankness and muteness. Thus an anonymous space is a space that does not speak to us, and likewise to be treated anonymously by a bank accountant is to feel that one's individuality and uniqueness are denied. It is important to note, however, that in such experiences a whole dimension of one's being is at stake, not just the specific content of who one is. When treated anonymously we feel cut off and turned off from the situation because our sensitivity and expressivity, that is, our possibilities to fully exist,

¹⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, 180-202. Like Freud, Merleau-Ponty has a broad understanding of sexuality and even uses sexual and affective as interchangeable terms. This is problematic in some respects, but there is no need to go into these problems here.

¹⁸ On the intersubjectivity of feeling, see Lingis, *The Imperative*, 125-128; on the intercorporeal character of embodied existence, Gail Weiss, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (London: Routledge, 1999), or, in *The Body and the Self*, eds. José Luis Bermúdez, Anthony Marcel and Naomi Eilan (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1998/1995), John Campbell, "The Body Image and Consciousness" (29-42), Andrew N. Meltzoff and M. Keith Moore, "Infants' Understanding of People and Things: From Body Imitation to Folk Psychology" (43-69), George Butterworth, "An Ecological Perspective on the Origins of Self" (87-105).

In order to indicate that what cannot be named is not meaningless, I discuss a distinction between meaning and sense in *The Human Habitat: Aesthetic and Axiological Perspectives* (Lahti: International Institute of Applied Aesthetics, 1998), 99-102.

¹⁹ Also Böhme, *Für eine ökologische Naturästhetik*, 188, points out that human beings cannot be understood in terms of identity only.

²⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, 196.

respond and act, are denied. We are treated as things rather than persons, hardly even as sentient beings.

While negative anonymity denies our capacities and refuses to deal with us, positive and receptive anonymity affirms us as sensuous and sentient beings, whoever we are. It can now be seen that the anonymity of the affective dimension is basically of one kind. In this respect, an environment can turn towards or away from us, affirm and enrich, or deny and impoverish human existence. Common to both positive and negative anonymity is, however, that both transgress the limits and limitations of socially defined identity and cancel the desire to know and classify the world.

A second point about the body as our ground is that it situates us. The body is a condition of our sense of place and of reality; it is because we are embodied that we trust the world to exist in what Merleau-Ponty calls perceptual faith.²¹ To have a body is to be tangibly situated in a material and felt environment, "implaced", as Edward S. Casey says.²² We can be more or less aware of our implacement and attend more or less to our situation, due to various reasons, such as our present activities and personal relationship to the place, our mood, or the atmosphere of the situation. But first, the body situates us in the world similarly to how objects are in the world: I am here as tangibly as a chair or a table, although this is not the only way in which I am here.²³ Nevertheless, it is only through the material presence of my body that I am here at all, which means that the body is not only lived, but also an object and place.²⁴ We shape our body and act upon it as upon an object. We also act through the body and think in the body, and we inhabit the body as we inhabit language or the world.²⁵ The various prepositions - upon, through, in, with - indicate how complicated and many-sided our situation is.

²¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, 48-49; also 17-19, 57; cf., on our confidence in or certitude of the world, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, 343, 361-362. On the importance of embodiedness for our sense of reality, see also Crispin Sartwell, *Obscenity, Anarchy, Reality* (New York: SUNY Press, 1996); or Alphonso Lingis, *Sensation: Intelligibility in Sensibility* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996).

²² Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Towards a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1993), 3-21, also note 9, 315; on the relation of body and environment, see also Arnold Berleant, *Living in the Landscape: Toward an Aesthetics of Environment* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 97-111.

²³ The distinction between being for-itself and in-itself does not, then, separate two exclusive categories of beings: we are for-ourselves but also in-ourselves.

²⁴ The ambiguity of the body means that it is not either subject or object, Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, 230-232; cf. Böhme, *Natürlich Natur*, 121.

²⁵ Merleau-Ponty uses "inhabitation" metaphorically in various contexts, e.g., *Phénoménologie de la perception*, 162, 207, 333 (note 1), 369. *La prose du monde* (Paris: Gallimard,

In one sense it is true, as Casey says, that "place is where the body is".²⁶ In one sense there is no place, other than the body, where we could be. But in addition one must note that the where of our being, grounded in the body, is not confined to but rather departs from it. With Merleau-Ponty, vision migrates into the world, and perception is in the world rather than in the body.²⁷ We inhabit the world, bodily, through perception, activities and language. To thus inhabit is to find meaning and make sense; not, however, by oneself, but with the environment. This potentiality of meaning and sense wherever we turn motivates, together with the unfinished character of the perception of concrete things, the use of the term "flesh" to designate both world and-body.²⁸ A description of a grapefruit by Alphonso Lingis illustrates this:²⁹

When we see a *grapefruit*, this identity is not something conceived at once like a concept; it is not an invariant found in all the various aspects; it is not a law or a principle like triangularity found in all triangles. We see it by looking, by looking at the way this compartmented cross-section of shiny pale yellow-green involves - makes visible - a certain sense of pulpiness, a certain juiciness, even a certain clear and homogeneous taste. ... The yellow-green is the yellow-green it is because it is condensed in this pulp, makes visible this contained liquidity, emanates this clear and tangy savor. ... what a grapefruit really is and means is something that we understand in touching, smelling, chewing, savoring, without ever ending at something like a definitive key to it.

A perceived thing is real in being explorable ...²⁹

The interaction of the perceiving and sensing body and the environment, which appears in many ways and from many varying angles, is possible only because the body is situated. But the reverse is also true when we speak of a living and lived body: perception is a condition of the body's mode of implacement. The idea of *Befindlichkeit*, developed by Martin Heidegger and Gernot Böhme, indicates how these two sides are related. Since Böhme puts a greater emphasis on perception, whereas Heidegger deals with *Befindlichkeit* more as a basic ontological condition of human existence, I shall in the following draw mainly upon Böhme.³⁰

1995/1969) conveys a sense of both *being and living in language*; inhabitation is likewise a central figure of thought in *Le visible et l'invisible*.

²⁶ Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, 103.

²⁷ Merleau-Ponty *Le visible et l'invisible*, 17-74, 172-204; also *Phénoménologie de la perception*, 423-468.

²⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, 172-204, also 302-304, 307-310, 312-314, 323-324, 327-328.

²⁹ Lingis, *The Imperative*, 55.

³⁰ See, in particular, Böhme's recent work: *Anmutungen, Natürlich Natur* (e.g., 84) and *Atmosphäre* (e.g., 96). Heidegger discusses *Befindlichkeit* in *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen:

Generally, *Befindlichkeit* refers to our presence to an environment, in particular to its atmosphere or affective quality, which is the way it first appears to us. As in German, in Swedish the double meaning of *befinna sig* is evident and everyday; the verb can be used to ask "how are you today" (*hur befinner du dig idag?*), but also, as on a mobile phone, "where are you now" (*var befinner du dig nu?*). In fact, there is a similar semantic and ontological doubleness of the verb "to be", but *Befindlichkeit* has advantages over "being" in that it foregrounds emplacement and feeling, which tend to become hidden by the everyday and abstract character of "to be".

Befindlichkeit points to both where and how we find ourselves, to where and how we are. The trick of the term is in how it allows us to see how, when we attentively savour an environment, we attend to how it feels to us and we do this by attending to our bodily state.³¹ Freezing cold or exposure are examples of descriptions that reciprocally refer to a quality of the environment and the state of our being as situated, implaced perceivers. Note especially that even when we intend to describe only environmental qualities, our understanding of these is based on embodied experience. If not itself a basic scale, the body certainly communicates the meaning of any scale, of temperature, weight, size, intensity. This is even more so in the affective dimension, where there is a mutual influence between how we feel and how the environment feels, which is not to say that these are identical. "Perception which aims for things also sinks into things", says Lingis, and this giving, even giving up of oneself - when "our look is not continually *interested*"³² - is a noteworthy aspect of the perception of *how things are*. To illustrate:

Walking in the mountains or by the sea, our gaze retains hardly any forms or information and dissolves into the blue rhythms of the mountains against the pale sky, into the haze over the sea, feeling the pleasure of their substance buoying it up and away. On a Greyhound bus, our

Neomarius, 1953/1927), 134-142 (par. 29 and 30). The term has been translated as "state of mind", but, as commentators have pointed out, this is misleading since it suggests a private and mental state. Hubert L. Dreyfus suggests "affectedness" instead; *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division 1* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1994/1991), 168-175; cf. Stephen Mulhall, *Heidegger and Being and Time* (London: Routledge, 1996), 76-81, 84, 148. It seems that the neutral and abstract "state" would in fact be preferable to "state of mind".

³¹ In recent discussions of proprioception, especially following the ecological account first proposed by J.J. Gibson, it has been pointed out that the information provided by the proprioceptive systems can be about the environment or about the body's relation to an environment; see José Luis Bermúdez, Anthony Marcel and Naomi Eilan, "Self-Consciousness and the Body: An Interdisciplinary Introduction", *The Body and the Self*, 1-28: 13.

³² Lingis, *The Imperative*, 69, 70.

sensibility sinks into enduring the desolation of the plains; on the subway, our sensibility, with a kind of spiteful complacency, gives itself over to feeling the grubby squalor of mass transportation. The perception of things, the apprehension of their content and the circumscription of their forms, is not an appropriation of them, but an expropriation of our forces into them, and ends in enjoyment.³³

But there might be reason to stress the reciprocal influence between person and environment more strongly than the above suggests. *Befindlichkeit* implies that how the environment appears to us depends partly on our own mood, although our mood is in turn not unaffected by the environment.³⁴ There are certainly differences between how individuals experience a particular space, due to personal background, degree of involvement, and present situation. Sometimes we turn away from an environment, while in another mood we might be intensely engaged in the same kind of situation. To feel the atmosphere of a space, we must receptively turn towards it and attune ourselves to it. This does not mean that we become somber in a somber place, only that it helps to recall and be open to what it means to be somber, how it feels. In the passivity of savouring affective qualities we are receptively aloof, not asleep. It is suggestive that mood can designate both personal states and moods of spaces. Also, if the latter is sometimes described in terms of a *genius loci*, as a quasi-soul or interiority, the mood of a person is, conversely, something one is in.³⁵

Regardless of the terms we want to use, *Befindlichkeit* suggests that we are directed towards qualities, towards finding out *how* things are around and in us. Our senses co-operate and interact, the body is one perceptual system. Colours, sounds and smells are relevant, but as characteristics of this situation and of these things, not as separate sensory qualities. This is so because perception is informed by and relies on what we have learnt through experience, in the world, with others. Perception is sedimented, it has a history which is incorporated in its objects and practices³⁶. We understand the facial expression, gait, gesture, or tone of voice of another person in a way which feels natural to us, although we have learnt their meaning by living and communicating with

³³ Ibid., 70.

³⁴ Cf. Böhme, *Anmutungen*, 21.

³⁵ In Finnish, the word *tila* can mean either space (room), or state of mind. "*Anmutungen ... sind Quasi-Subjekte*", says Böhme, *Anmutungen*, 8. One might note that Mikel Dufrenne, taking up an idea from Gabriel Marcel, described the aesthetic object as a quasi-subject; see *Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1953), 197, 255-256, 291-292, 306, 365, 408-409, 476, 487-488.

³⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, 173-179, 275-280, 399-401; cf. Galen A. Johnson, *Earth and Sky, History and Philosophy: Island Images Inspired by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989).

others, in a culture. But to have learnt in a culture is not to have learnt from culture alone. To have learnt the meaning of behaviour is to have learnt how it feels to jump happily, stiffen with anger, or whisper tenderly, in addition to having learnt about the proper reaction and interpretation of such behaviour when it is encountered in others. In many ways, culture does not exist or evolve independently from natural conditions. Likewise, it is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine a culture where grief is expressed in exuberant behaviour, anger in gracefulness, gratitude in shouting.

Still there is no denying that the nature of the perceiving and acting body is always to some extent second nature, acquired rather than simply given. For a human, the ability to walk on two legs apparently does not come by itself, but is learnt in a social context, and even things that happen to us in our body without our willing are not of merely natural causation. Although illness, sexual arousal, and emotional reactions such as crying or giggling may be unwished-for by the subject, they are culturally informed and related to habits, expectations and values. Thus already on a very basic level, and not just as a consciously formed, transformed, and designed appearance, the body is a foremost example of the intertwining of nature and culture in human life.

In *Pensées*, Pascal says the following:

Habit is a second nature that destroys the first. But what is nature? Why is habit not natural? I am very much afraid that nature itself is only a first habit, just as habit is a second nature.³⁷

That "nature itself is only a first habit" might be taken to point to the fact that we inhabit nature wherever and however we live, both the nature in our bodies and the nature around us which we eat, drink, breathe and walk upon. To be a first habit, then, is also to be a first habitat. Pascal suggests that a sharp distinction between nature and second nature cannot be drawn. But this can mean that everything in human experience belongs to culture or is construed only provided that we admit nature and culture to be everywhere intertwined.³⁸ To claim that everything is culture forces us to add that everything is also nature. There is always nature in culture, a nature of otherness and resistance, of non-conformity to our thoughts.

It might be more nuanced to say that what is given in and with the body is not given by nature alone and, in addition, not given by a nature which is

³⁷ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, fragment 126, quoted in Anthony J. Cascardi, *The Subject of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 130.

³⁸ It might be possible to compare this view of nature and culture to Judith Butler's approach to sex and gender, discussed by Weiss, *Body Images*, 19-20, 140-141.

not-we, although it might go against our projects and desires. If human agency and culture are not the same thing, as I suggested in the very beginning, the least intended of our actions may also have more of nature than culture in them. But human nature cannot be reduced to second nature, if the latter means acculturated responses where the natural is reduced to the normal or taken for granted, to what makes the world manageable.

NATURE IN BUILT ENVIRONMENTS

Even when we are armed with sophisticated scientific knowledge or philosophical arguments, nature in its existential role does not withdraw from human experience. Storms may still surprise or frighten us, and the sun that warms us can be comforting. The presence of nature in environmental experience is particularly evident outdoors, but by no means confined to exterior spaces. In interior spaces there are often, in addition to our own animal bodies, natural elements such as changing natural light, draught, organic materials, worn surfaces, etc. For the sake of clarity, however, I shall refer in the following mainly to outdoor urban spaces, since in these both natural and cultural elements are so clearly present.

Any human habitat, also a city, is a human construction made with nature. It consists of topography, flora and fauna, parks, plants, birds, animals. In addition to these tangible natural objects, the weather and the seasons, with changing light, temperature, storms, rain or snow, are also in an important way parts of nature in the city. As much as its architecture or the behaviour of the inhabitants, these elements are crucial for the character of a city. One might think of the fog of London or of San Francisco, or, if one wants an example where human influence and natural processes come together, of the smog in these places.

In this section, I shall discuss aspects of our environment which are similar or analogous to the aspects I discussed in the section on the body as nature: affectivity and anonymity, implacement, and sedimentation. What first comes to the fore are, then, processes and activities that take place in the environment. Some of these are of human origin, but in addition there are seasonal and other natural cycles and processes. Secondly, I shall note the traces and marks left in and on the environment by natural processes and human activities. Together, and as a third point, processes and traces make the environment dense or opaque, that is, they confer a not easily analysable character upon the

environment, a character which resists cognitive grasp. In other words, what happens or has happened of itself or seems to do or have done so, and which therefore belongs to the nature of the environment according to the nature-in-experience perspective, also belongs more to the affective than to the cognitive dimension of existence. More generally, one could suggest that we tend to be affected by what we cannot grasp, and nature in experience importantly confronts us with such qualities. This suggestion is not presented as a final word or a sufficient perspective on affectivity, but I hope it illuminates our understanding of mood and atmosphere.

Let me turn, then, first to environmental processes and activities. What takes place in a city in terms of activities and processes is partly of natural and partly of human origin. But these are not separate: natural conditions constantly influence what humans can do and the way in which life is lived, projects undertaken, activities performed. On the other hand, human structures and behaviour similarly afford and constrict the possibilities of other species.

Elements such as light, temperature and vegetation and their constant changes are of crucial importance for how built spaces appear to us aesthetically and affectively, that is, for their character and atmosphere. Human behaviour, in particular the direct presence of human bodies in urban space, influences the atmosphere in a similar way. Footsteps or the sound of human voices - mumbling, rising, falling - mingle with the twittering of birds or the wind in trees. These can in fact be said to belong to a different soundscape, as compared to the sound of traffic or machines. A similar difference is found in light where, as compared to natural light, artificial light tends to be even and one-dimensional. Whereas living things animate, open and differentiate space, machines rather colonize or fill it up. One reason for this is certainly to be found in the rich nuances, the rhythmic and yet unpredictable changes of the natural elements which draw us in and are so interesting to follow. Many changes and rhythms are in fact present at once: linear, cyclic, daily, yearly, regular, irregular. For such reasons, the atmosphere of spaces is typically more enriched by natural than by artificial elements. When the atmosphere of a space is highly dependent on artificial means, the risk that it appears impoverished, mute, or alienating is bigger than if there is a rich presence of natural elements.

The natural processual aspect of built environments importantly appears in what seems unplanned, fragmented, run wild or ruined. Nature takes place in a city by wearing and tearing human constructions, but in a larger biotic perspective this wear and tear is part of the overall life of the city. Whether what

goes on is judged as ruination, running wild, or vitality is dependent on the perspective we take.³⁹ Plants grow, birds nest and animals inhabit the city: whether we see these in terms of decay or of life is dependent on whether we want these elements or not and on whether we want them in the particular places they occupy.

Regardless of our positive or negative judgement, it is a fact that nature leaves traces and marks on buildings and other constructions. This second aspect of how nature affects and makes itself present in a built environment is, then, only another side of the first, yet it has a different meaning and impact. Traces and marks refer to past events and give these an air of objectified, fixed reality. But note that the use of the collective term nature to refer to what basically are individual events is motivated by the fact that we typically do not know how a particular trace or mark came about. The latter appear as indices, unintended or unplanned signs caused by an event.

In addition, or rather parallel to the unplanned elements caused by non-human nature, there is a socially unplanned dimension. To perceive the trace of a passerby, for example through footsteps left in the snow, is not to perceive a sign that was meant to be deciphered. The marks were left, if not by mistake, then almost certainly without intention. Such marks and traces are of human origin and making, yet rarely aim towards form, articulation or significance. These traces include the way a pavement or street has sunk through long use, the way a door knob is worn by the touch of hands, or how litter lies in the street. Similar in character to the traces and marks left by other animals, these elements refer to a way of life that may feel natural to some, but is so only in the context of a particular culture.

Processes, activities, traces and marks differentiate and multiply the environment. Thereby they make it dense, rich, thick, not like a concrete wall, which is impenetrable and homogenous, but like a work of art which is dense or thick, not shallow, as an object of perception and imagination.⁴⁰ The perceptually dense object cannot be grasped by our strictly rational faculties, it does

³⁹ The dialectic between nature and culture is poignantly described by Georg Simmel in his short text on the ruin, "Die Ruine", in *Philosophische Kultur. Gesammelte Essays* (Potsdam: Gustav Kipenhauer Verlag, 1923). Recent monographs on this other side of construction include Robert Harbison, *The Built, the Unbuilt and the Unbuildable: In Pursuit of Architectural Meaning* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1994/1991) and Mohsen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow, *On Weathering: The Life of Buildings in Time* (Cambridge Mass.: The MIT Press, 1993).

⁴⁰ Cf. Lingis, *The Imperative*, 53. Perceptual density should not be confused with the syntactic and semantic density that serves cognition and is described by Nelson Goodman in *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969/1968).

not give itself to us like a concept, it is not transparent. It may be safe to say that in any environment, exterior or interior, where nature is allowed to take its course to some extent, we never see just one process, past or present, as we look around attentively. There are always other things to see in what was a moment ago only background, other levels, other scales. The spatial and temporal multiplicity, the many objects and processes, is thus one aspect of the density of an environment influenced by nature. But there is another aspect of density, which is more like the concrete wall, namely the reliability and resistance (which here are but the two sides of one feature) of an environment. An environment stays in place and holds us, is, like our body, our ground.

AFFECTED BY NATURE

Let me conclude by returning to nature and affectivity, a theme encountered through our body, in and around it. One might admit that as grasped and discussed by us, nature is inevitably mediated by culture - which is not to say that it is covered by the latter - and yet hold fast to the claim that nature in experience can appear precisely as the uncultured. When we experience natural phenomena we may experience a limit to our cognitive faculties where nothing is construed, because cognition halts.⁴¹

This brings us to the aesthetic relevance of nature in experience, a question related to how we find ourselves affected by nature. There seems to be two sides to this, and only one of them has so far been discussed. I have suggested that natural elements are often more important than artificial ones for how situations feel. Indeed, the nuances and the uniqueness, variety and surprise of natural and built environments alike often lie to a large extent in what nature has generated. The *how* of the situation or the environment, the way it is, is closely related to its natural elements. The other side of the aesthetic relevance of nature, which I have not discussed, is expressed in the suggestion that nature in experience excites an aesthetic and reflective response. This suggestion, which I call the aesthetic challenge of nature, is broader in scope and more demanding in various ways than the description of qualities generated by

⁴¹ Taken that one important point of the term nature is to refer to something we cannot grasp, the concept of nature need not be contrasted with any particular ideational content, only with the general idea of things that are made by humans and/or can be explained, defined, articulated. Compare the term earth as discussed by John Sallis, *Double Truth* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 39-55.

nature. Here, I can only indicate the direction in which the aesthetic challenge might be developed.

If the discussion of affective qualities emphasized the reciprocity between subject and object, where moods and feelings can interchangeably be ascribed to both, the aesthetic challenge of nature indicates instead a shortcoming in the faculties of the subject and a break between experiencer and environment. But although this might remind us of Kant's description of the beautiful and the sublime,⁴² the analogy should not be taken too far. What I try to describe is not two different experiences, one of intimacy, another of the strange or alien, but two complementary aspects or sides of the aesthetic experience of nature where the challenge of the unfathomable directs us towards, not away from, finite and embodied existence.⁴³

In order to point out what makes environmental experience aesthetic, one might want to use terms such as engagement, intensity, attentiveness, or wonder.⁴⁴ These terms foreground the connection and interaction between experiencer and environment; experience, not judgement.⁴⁵ In the above discussion of implacement as *Befindlichkeit*, what is important is likewise the ongoing perceptual and sensuous interaction between subject and environment, which is not so much, or not just, a practical or cognitive appropriation or

⁴² Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1990/1790), see in particular 39-113 (par. 1-29).

⁴³ Compare Knowles' suggestion that the (mathematical) sublime can lead us into, not away from the landscape and nature; Knowles, "Figures in a Landscape", in particular 40-41, 45-49. The aesthetic challenge I describe is not about that which we do not know but might become more familiar with, cf. Arto Haapala, "Strangeness and Familiarity in the Urban Environment", in *The City as Cultural Metaphor: Studies in Urban Aesthetics*, ed. Arto Haapala, (Lahti: International Institute of Applied Aesthetics, 1998), 108-125: 113, 117-119; nor is it about the decomposition of the world described by Lingis, *The Imperative*, 78-79, cf. 43-44.

⁴⁴ On engagement, see Arnold Berleant, *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1991); on wonder, Ronald W. Hepburn, "*Wonder*" and *Other Essays: Eight Studies in Aesthetics and Neighbouring Fields* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1984), particularly "Wonder", 131-154. I discuss the characteristics of aesthetic environmental experience in *The Human Habitat*, 60-92.

⁴⁵ "Judgement" might be taken to suggest a verdict or statement, but aesthetic judgement need not be verbally expressible. Kant, for one, describes the judgement of taste in terms of the feeling of pleasure it gives rise to, and takes pains to point out that the judgement does not rely on concepts; Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 39-40, 55-58 (par. 1 and 9).

Böhme observes that philosophical aesthetics has, by and large, focused upon questions related to language and meaning, rather than experience; Böhme, *Atmosphäre*, 23. Similarly, in analytic environmental aesthetics the discussion of the relevance of knowledge for the aesthetic appreciation of nature has almost made it seem as if there are few other interesting topics. But if the focus is shifted from (correct) appreciation to a wider account of perceptual experience, where the interaction between perceiver and perceived as well as non-cognitive aspects of experience are acknowledged, other questions come into view.

identification of things and places but also, as Lingis puts it, "an expropriation of our forces into" the environment.⁴⁶ In wonder or expropriation, the aim towards rational control of the world is cancelled. Put metaphorically, we do not grasp, we touch and are touched.

To emphasize sensibility, sensitivity and perceptual interaction does not in itself constitute a bridge to reflectivity, and yet it seems that this connection is crucial for the place we finally give to nature and to our body. In order for nature in experience to have a deeper existential role, it must be able not just to stimulate our senses and add or subtract from our well-being, but also to challenge our thinking about ourselves and the world.

At this point, it is worth observing that with natural processes and qualities it is often the very naturalness of the phenomenon that calls for an aesthetic and reflective response. The mere might or vastness of a storm at sea or of the silent winter forest under a starry sky does not as such excite a deeper response. Wonder and reflection are called forth by the fact that these phenomena - an awkward word here - are given, nature, not made by us, and therefore outside our reign. The same reaction can be evoked by small things, for example by looking at the fragments of the world of ants that is visible to us in the anthill. Also in such a case one encounters an absolute limit in the world (as universe, or all there is) to human understanding and culture. Here is a world I cannot understand, not even if I possessed all the present and future scientific knowledge of ants, for I cannot become an ant.

The reason that I cannot become an ant is that I am a human being. To be a human being is to be in a body, a culture, a language, a way of life, all of which are shaped by oneself and shape what one thinks of as oneself. The body is material and alive, real and irreducible, sedimented and natural to us in what it is and in how it is. As embodied, we are open to situations, able to perceive, but also tangibly situated and ourselves exposed to the world. Exposure and vulnerability are at the core of sensuous enjoyment, whether aesthetic or of some other kind.⁴⁷ For this reason, it is simplifying to discuss the sensuous dimension separately from the full range of human existence. In aesthetic environmental experience, the body is not *merely* sensuous and sentient. It is our *locus* and home, ground, reality and hereness. In the situation where I am, nothing and no-one can replace my response, which involves a responsibility

⁴⁶ Cf. the passage quoted on page 118 above.

⁴⁷ On enjoyment, vulnerability and responsibility, see Emmanuel Lévinas, in particular *Totalité et Infini. Essai sur l'extériorité* (Kluwer Academic/Le Livre de Poche, 1991/1961) and *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (Kluwer Academic/Le Livre de Poche, 1996/1978).

both for what I am and for what the environment or object is. Here lies the need, even the necessity, of deeper aesthetic reflection.