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Introduction: Exploring Nature's Texture

Sigurd Bergmann and Forrest Clingerman

Abstract

Humans are meaning-making animals. This introduction explains how this insight can serve as a starting point for explorations into the connections between art, nature, and spirituality.

Keywords

environmental aesthetics – nature – theology – ethics

From the *Either-or* to the *And*

Now that we are on the threshold of the Anthropocene epoch, how should humans envision and understand their place in the world? Do humans possess the necessary cultural tools to imagine new possibilities and relationships with the natural environment at a time when our material surroundings (the very system that supports us physically and spiritually) is under siege? To answer questions like these requires more than scientific explanation. Resolution will come from knowledge formation that takes seriously the moral, philosophical, and aesthetic perspectives human beings implicitly rely on to engage with the world. The answers, in other words, will come through the human community opening itself to an interdisciplinary – and even spiritual – exploration.

In that vein, this book addresses the imaginative possibilities of addressing the breakdown of the human relationship with the environment through the visual arts. Bringing together contributions from artists, theologians, anthropologists and philosophers, it investigates the arts as an important contemporary bridge between culture and nature, as well as between the human and more-than-human world. This bridge is nearly elemental, insofar as the visual arts highlight the perceptual and affective dimensions of our knowledge of the world. Visual art furthermore cultivates society's capacity to connect letters and sciences with the complex layers of the public square: with social

movements, political constellations, economic power holders, other cultural actors such as media, and the like. In the context of the emerging environmental humanities, the arts act as the strong substantial force of what Wassily Kandinsky called the connecting 'and' in his famous 1927 essay of that name (1973). For Kandinsky, connecting is the task of the arts, with the aim of overcoming our current social time of 'either-or.'

Underlying the work of the present book is a simple but important claim: humans are 'meaning-making animals.' Within a biological framework, humans organize and interpret experience, and through this process human reflection transcends biology. The human encounter with the world might be described as an attempt to intertwine the many facets of existence in a meaningful way. As the vibrant field of environmental aesthetics has shown, this intertwining is not simply a passive operation. We are creative beings as well: we construct and create works of meaning that re-imagine and re-interpret our sense of the world. To encounter the world, therefore, is a profoundly aesthetic experience, at least when we take the term 'aesthetic' in an embodied way that acknowledges the word's rootedness in perception.

But unlike what early modern philosophers of aesthetics suggested, our perceptual encounters cannot not reside solely in disinterested observation. Rather, environmental artists, philosophers and theologians see how closely connected sensing and acting are. Indeed, Arnold Berleant's call for an "aesthetics of engagement" (1992) in relation to the environment is a forceful reminder of how the active human perception of the world – the activity of aesthetic engagement – provides the much-needed groundwork for how we act and react to our physical, intellectual, and spiritual location. Insofar as perception is not mere reception, but equally an active engagement and possible transformation, we seek an aesth/ethics. Specifically, the essays collected here point toward an aesth/ethics of nature and culture that constitutes an intertwining of both theory and practice; it seeks a union of reflection and action in the space of being.

Certainly the connection of thinking and acting happens in all spheres of existence. But there is something unique about the realm of human artistic creation. The authors here argue that an interconnecting aesth/ethics is nowhere more apparent than in the human creation of artworks. Artworks are not mere decoration, but endeavors to interrogate the meaning of being human. Artworks distill and intensify the aesthetic engagement with the world; they also challenge our preconceptions. Acknowledging the intertwining of nature and culture that exists in the work of art thus raises other questions: How might the work of art facilitate our interpretation of the meaning of environments? When humans seek meaning, how do the arts provide a reflexive way of perceiving the meaning of the world? Can artworks offer a way to transcend

the power of other forms of human artifacts – especially technological ones – found in-between humans and environments? The authors in this collection of essays reflect on these questions in order to show the interconnection between the human urge to create meaning and the natural world that serves as our surroundings.

Another way to explain this is to say that the present authors have gathered together to *explore nature's texture* in and through the cultural work of the arts. The notion of texture emphasizes not the alleged deep and unseen part of a natural phenomenon or artwork, but instead invites us to gaze on the surface. Talking about nature's texture forces us to stay in touch with the material appearance of life, rather than speculating about its inherent qualities. Indeed, placing nature's texture into conversation with the unseen air and the atmospheric – areas more frequently discussed in environmental humanities – is one of the more thought-provoking questions that results from this collection. Experiencing nature's texture is in that way regarded as an essential skill of "being alive" through "perceiving the environment" (the titles of two of Tim Ingold's influential works).

Throughout this book, nature's texture is encountered in different ways. While texture in the sciences refers to different qualities of the surface of material and geological phenomena, textures in the arts are qualities that lead the eye to what happens visually on the canvas, textile, or other medium. The texture of an artwork represents the elementary sphere wherein meaning can arise. Necessarily, it allows the unseen to take place and shape, and bodily it allows senses, the sight and the touch, to start to interact. Talking about nature's texture in this context overcomes the reduction of simply seeing (and interpreting) nature and expands human bodily-being-in-touch with life and its carrying forces. Several of the artistic processes that are presented here allow for such a synesthetic mode of approaching the environment. Touching, seeing and interpreting nature, as well as experiencing the atmosphere and our weather lands in flux, will hopefully in this way also be encouraged through this volume. Exploring nature's texture through ethics, the arts and faith can then turn into a rich tool to manifest what Goethe had in mind by claiming that "only in the world she becomes aware of herself." Only within nature and the world the human can become aware of herself.

The Context of Exploring Nature's Texture

A focus on embodied perception recognizes the ways that context and perspective informs reflection and engagement. It is only fitting, then, to acknowledge the context from which these essays emerged. The work of this collection

originated in a seminar workshop held at the Ernst Haeckel Haus in Jena, Germany, in the Spring of 2014. The director of the Ernst Haeckel Haus and distinguished theoretical biologist, Olaf Breidbach, was pivotal in hosting this event (tragically at the time of the seminar itself Breidbach was battling a severe illness, and he has since passed away). This project was unique in drawing together well-established scholars and artists to show the ways that the arts foster distinctively human capacities of imagination, empathy, and creativity. Throughout this project, the collaborators have seen how the visual arts exercise our abilities to see the world in new and hopeful ways. The workshop in Jena in 2014 made it also possible to continue and deepen an earlier initiated cooperation of artists, biologists, scholars of religion and philosophers in the same thematic field with a certain focus on landscape. This earlier event took place on the island of Hiddensee in the German part of the southeastern part of the Baltic Sea in May 2010, and its results have been published in 2013.

While this volume directly emerged from workshops in Hiddensee and Jena, it also has roots in larger interdisciplinary conversations around the environment. Especially since the 1970s, environmental challenges have led to a process of several relatively interconnected, valuable responses in previously autonomous disciplines: the environmental sciences and climatology, social science research on the environment, and the increasing synergy of disciplines in the so-called *environmental humanities*. This mobilization in the sciences and humanities has gone hand-in-hand with the emergence and development of environmentalism in the sphere of social movements, which again has had an impact on society and culture, especially including politics – from local to global – as well as the economy. An important insight comes out of these discussions: “spaces-in-between” are of specific interest as “nature” always takes place between people, and between humans and other beings. This “in-betweenness” exists because we are caught in the tensions between multiple levels of relationality. “[T]hese tensions become productive only when our political encounter with nature finds a unity amidst the differences in our interpretations of space” (Clingerman 2015: 135). Therefore it should not be surprising that the artists and scholars in this volume explore the complexity of the spatial in-betweenness with and within nature.¹

Undoubtedly, the invention of the notion of *environmental humanities*, to which also this volume intends to contribute, has done much good in starting to heal the asymmetry between the faculties in the global academy.

1 For a discussion of how the ecological turn and the spatial turn are interconnected see the special issue of *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* (Vol. 20, No. 3, 2016) on the theme of “Spatial turns in religion and the environment,” edited by Sigurd Bergmann.

Interdisciplinary collaboration centered in the humanities is significant for facilitating a more holistic reflection on human inclusion in the environment. Since the theoretical and methodological limits of earlier models of (environmental) science still represent a hindrance for in-depth and integrated cooperation in some ways, one can almost intuit the beginning of a new, alternative mode of scholarly exploration of the world. For example, due to their global success climatologists have begun to confront the limits of empirical analysis and computer-based simulations – discovering, in effect, that human beings are not as easy to predict and include in simulations as initially hypothesized. Facing a question, such as how much suffering a human can take and how he or she might respond, leads scientists intellectual tools of the environmental humanities. The study of religion plays a unique role in this: religious belief systems are veterans in dealing with suffering and uncertainty. Religious traditions provide values, as well as skills of empathy and compassion, for the path to a new sustainable and ecojust world.

Seeing, Wondering, and Connecting

This volume contains nine chapters, placed in such a way as to elicit links across the authors' reflections, as well as with awareness to the unique conversation that emerges in the volume between artists and scholars. In fact, the theme of *connections* is pivotal: connections about the relationship between aesthetics, nature, culture, and the work of art. But before we can fully engage the connections made, it is important to show how rooted our experience of art and nature is in perception (in the case of visual arts, this is particularly the sensation of sight). We also must acknowledge the affective and reflective dimensions of wonder. In the case of both nature and art, wonder is a nearly liminal state, found between thinking and sensing, interpreting and encountering. Through the themes of seeing, wondering, and connecting, the chapters raise different discussions surrounding the experience of art and nature, as well as the entanglements between them. Themes and motifs raised by the authors include such things as empathy, imagination, ethics, science and technology, wildness versus cultivation, and our interpretation of both art and nature.

The first two chapters orient the reader to provide the reader with an venue to explore human perception and seeing. In Chapter 2, theologian *Sigurd Bergmann* reformulates one of the book's central questions – “how might the work of art facilitate our interpretation of the meaning of environments?” – into something more spatially focused: What does art do to me as the space and spirit where I am? For Bergmann, space is understood as an essential

all-embracing quality of life. To better grasp this, a phenomenological understanding of atmospheres assists to overcome dichotomist modes of perceiving, thinking and acting. Time is in such a view not homologous to space but rather integrated in an overarching way; art is regarded as a skill of encountering the future by compressing the past.

Following Marcuse's understanding of the critical function of art, art appears as a place of a manifested utopia where the future and past encounter each other, a place that transfigures "the space where I am". Theologically regarded the production of art, and the reception of artifacts as a place-within-nature reveals the skill of humans to fabricate meaning and to experiment creatively with modes of existence which are able to manifest authentic utopia based on reminiscence. Reflecting about the Triune Spirit as a liberator of nature, the Spirit appears as a "being-of-the-one-in-or-with-the-other."

What is true for theology might also become true for environmental arts: Not propositional knowing but prepositional knowing is at core. Art works might then be regarded as products from human skills to manifest how the one lives within and for the other and how past and future encounter each other. Environmental art, departing from the intrinsic value of nature and sometimes also from a neo-animistic understanding of its spiritual life, rather advocates empathy and respect than commodification and utilitarian usage. Can art, in comparison with technology, assist in placing the artifact at the nexus between the material reproduction of our daily life, our relationship to nature, our social relations and our world view and belief, and serve as a critical and constructive mediator? Can its erotic beauty and its capacity for neo-animating produce a countervailing power that resists and overcomes commodification and alienation? After an analysis of Aboriginal Art in Australia, which inspires such a view about the continuum of time in space, the chapter ends with a reflection about weather. The connection weather and religion is depicted historically and J.M.W. Turner's paintings are studied as inventions of "weather" in the modern sense. Being alive now means to be exposed to a continuous flow of change and not to command any certainties. Weather teaches us to accept to be at the mercy. Turner and his color paintings therefore offer an outstanding place where one can become aware of being within the world, and to discover and accept the world with all its power of change within oneself.

Artist *Karolina Sobecka* complements the theoretical and aesth/ethical meditations of Bergmann by calling for an atmospheric turn in design, environmental aesthetics and cultural theory in Chapter 3. She focuses on the air and its non-visibility that prevents it from capturing our imaginations. According to her, the unseen has to be invoked conceptually, and this requires distance. However, the imperceptibility of the air is in part due to the fact that it

is everywhere: if it disappeared, we would notice its lack instantly. So what are some strategies to bring the atmosphere into focus, to wrestle a bit of tangibility out of the vastness, invisibility and complexity of this abstraction? What could be some experiments on the materiality of the air that would help us shape its imaginary? The author's reflections are anchored in her art work, for example, the performative pieces that she has called "CloudServices," as well as a recent workshop with artists, scientists and geoenigneers on the descriptions of experiments on the atmosphere. At the hands of Sobecka, the notion of atmosphere overcomes dichotomies between nature and culture, and the transition to an atmospheric worldview follows what might be described as modernity's shift from a solid to a fluid worldview. Sobecka explores the atmospheric turn in different artistic experiments which are inspiringly described in detail in the chapter, and she interconnects them to different philosophical elaborations, revealing the exciting potentials of an atmospheric turn. Her chapter concludes with a thought provoking inspiration of a new way of approaching change: "As we're experiencing the atmospheric turn, internalizing uncertainty and change as inherent aspects of our reality, we can start discerning not only what change means, what continuity and curvature mean, but also start to understand nuance about how various rates of changes of different entities interact and synchronize, start building our ways of seeing differently premised on uncertainty and variability."

The next three chapters form a tryptich on a sense of wonder, which is elemental in human encounters with religion, nature, and art. Indeed, the topic of wonder pervades the origins of this volume, insofar as Ernst Haeckel's work was paradigmatic for a transdisciplinary and imaginative view of the world. Visiting the impressive Ernst Haeckel House in Jena, one cannot only dive into the laboratory, library and working rooms of the influential biologist and inventor of modern "ecology" in the house that Haeckel himself built as his living and working space, but one will also find strongly expressive and colorful paintings on the walls. Beside his career as a scientist Haeckel had also developed his arts of painting where mythology and biology are intertwined in quite a peculiar artistic mode (Breidbach 2006).

In Chapter 4, theologian *Whitney A. Bauman* develops a deeper reading of Haeckel's work in the context of spirituality, nature, and art. Bauman departs from a central quote in Haeckel's writings which misleadingly has led to an understanding of the ecologist as some type of precursor to contemporary mystical environmentalists: "The whole marvelous panorama of life that spreads over the surface of our globe is, in the last analysis, transformed sunlight." (Haeckel 1900: 139). However, nothing could be further from the truth, at least based upon his own self-understanding. Haeckel was arguing for a

monistic, materialistic understanding of the world against what he perceived as the dogma of theology and the wrong-headedness of German idealism in philosophy. He thought the emerging scientific method – relying on sensory observations and experimentation – would provide the new framework for understanding everything, including all things human. What we see as ‘wonder’ in his art works and in his writings were to him attempts at explaining this monistic, evolutionary ‘scientific’ view of the world. Of course, such a reading to him was ‘wonder-filled’ in the sense that wonder is that which continuously keeps the observer focused on the new and unknown. Haeckel was, like Alexander von Humboldt before him, engaged in bringing together what were at the time disparate sciences: geology, evolution, zoology, embryology, physics and cosmology, and his newly coined ‘ecology’, in the construction of a new, naturalistic worldview that brought all of these things together into a single explanatory story. He argued that the guiding principles for such a story would be the old Greek trinity of: goodness, beauty, and truth. Many of the connections he made between various plant and animal organisms, and between the various sciences, were depicted in a number of his paintings and sketches. The most well-known of these can be found in his *Kunstformen der Natur*. He sought in these drawings to sketch out the similarities in forms across many very different and very diverse species and in doing so challenged the dominant theological aesthetics of the Christian west at the time. Bauman’s chapter analyzes some of Haeckel’s sketches and paintings and the way that he challenged three primary aesthetic categories through them: that between biotic and abiotic things in the world, that between plant and animal life, and that between humans and the rest of the animal world. It was from within these curious borders and crossings that Haeckel wondered most about constructing a naturalistic worldview that would fundamentally shift how we understood humans within the rest of the evolving planetary community.

Art without an Object but with Impact (Kunst ohne Werk aber mit Wirkung) is the title of a project realized by the Swiss artist *George Steinmann* together with Bauart Architects Ltd Bern for the ARA Region Bern Ltd. Steinmann’s contribution shows his workings of the artist by reproducing his artist’s talk from the originating workshop. The talk published here provides a reflection by the artist on meaning of this work, especially how it can be understood in connection with other areas of research and inquiry. This transdisciplinary process for the new headquarters of Switzerland’s leading wastewater treatment facility (each day 90 million liters of wastewater is cleaned by the wastewater treatment system before it is returned to the river Aare) began in July 2008 and ended in December 2011. The project, presented in this chapter, is based on two Interventions. In ‘Intervention A’, water from three curative mineral springs of

the Engadin valley in Eastern Switzerland (well-known in medieval times and described by Paracelsus) has been added to all water-based material and elements used for the construction of the building. Although the effect of this step remains immaterial and invisible, the mineral water itself and its energy are in the building as 'information', which penetrates the material and creates a resonating space. In 'Intervention B', a Water Advisory Board (*Wasserbeirat*) has been convened to discuss the various problems pertaining to water. Key topics given by the artist were 'Gender and Water', 'The Aesthetics of Water', 'Human Rights and Water Sanitation', 'Potential Agricultural Water Pollutants', 'Water Strategies in Switzerland', and 'Global Water Initiatives', among others. Resulting from the roundtables, a 'Forum for Water' (*Wasserforum*) was established in the new building. The close cooperation of all participants, including the construction workers, as part of the artist's strategy, neutralizes the traditionally decorative role of the artist and leads to a critical examination of the artist's role in building-site art projects in general. By combining sociopolitical, aesthetic, natural scientific, and communicative elements, Steinmann has realized a transdisciplinary contribution to the field of art as research.

Anthropologist *Tim Ingold's* chapter also offers a self-reflection of the author, giving Ingold's personal reflection about the pendulum of an anthropologist who moves forth and back between science and art. Over a forty-year career in environmental anthropology, the author has found himself drifting inexorably from an engagement with science to an engagement with art. This was also a period during which science increasingly lost its ecological bearings, while the arts increasingly gained them. This chapter traces this journey in the author's own teaching and research, showing how the literary reference points changed, from foundational texts in human and animal ecology, now largely forgotten, through attempts to marry the social and the ecological inspired by the Marxian revival, to contemporary writing on post-humanism and the conditions of the Anthropocene. For Ingold this has been an Odyssey – a journey home – to the kind of science imbibed in childhood, as the son of a prominent mycologist. This was a science grounded in tacit wonder at the exquisite beauty of the natural world, and in silent gratitude for what we owe to this world for our existence. Today's science, however, has turned wonder and gratitude into commodities. They no longer guide its practices, but are rather invoked to advertise its results. The goals of science are modeling, prediction and control. Is that why, more and more, we turn to art to rediscover the humility that science has lost?

The next three chapters bring the theme of connections into more explicit relief. In the seventh chapter, collaborative environmental artists *Reiko Goto* and *Timothy Collins* take the reader to the Black Wood in Scotland, where they

have undertaken long-term explorations in the lens of environmental art. What does it mean to have an empathic relationship with a forest landscape? Can art contribute to this idea in any fundamental way? This chapter focuses on two years of creative work that focused on a woodland, in a small community of Rannoch in the southern Highlands of Scotland. In order to observe the place the artists took on three residencies beginning with the community and working within the forest itself. They also did a residency with the regional museum, and the archives of the Forestry Commission. They did a final round of work with Forest Research for a period of months. Methods included walking and talking in the forest, consideration of the records or the 'cultural ecology' which emerged in the archives and records and eventually considering what was missing, they began to think about the social ecologies with a social scientist, and began an ongoing discussion and mapping of Gaelic place names.

Their work in the Forest yielded a number of insights built around empathy, the understanding of the other. We understand the other through facial expression, tone of the voice and body gesture. Our body is like a container or substance that holds and transmits our thoughts and feelings. A person's state of mind can be described as a metaphor through body and mind relationship. These metaphors can take many forms, such as visual, mathematical, linguistic, and musical. As is seen by Goto and Collins, a place name is a metaphor that provides a possibility for empathy. This raises an important question for the authors: how are empathic interrelationships between people and land revealed in the cultural records that attend the Black Wood? The artists are interested in how a reading of history and its application in the present can reshape perception and normative value. To do this work, they tried to think about and experience the forest from different perspectives. Thinking about that place as a local community asset, as one of the largest most southern Caledonian forests to be managed; and as a historic landscape that was lived in, worked in and fought over for centuries. Looking at the broader landscape, the Gaelic place names reveal the passage of wildlife and farm animals along with impressions and ideas about land formation, colors and history. In this complex historical record of experience, we find ideas that support contemporary perception that is rich and useful as a broad context to be used as we think about future forests.

Philosopher *Arto Haapala* approaches Chapter 8 to show how gardens represent a connection between nature, aesthetics and human design. Environmental aesthetics has, according to him, been traditionally concerned with two spatial areas – natural environment and built environment. A paradigmatic case of the former is architecture, of the latter untouched wilderness. But there are interesting cases which fall somewhere in-between human

design and nature – gardens and parks are prime examples. Here the author studies aesthetic problems of small-scale managed nature, small gardens and parks which are typically parts of an individual property, a house or a housing estate. Haapala argues that there are two sets of principles that can be applied when appreciating gardens and parks aesthetically: those drawn from nature, and those drawn from built environment. Unlike many contemporary aestheticians, he argues that there is no uniform concept of the *aesthetic*. This can be shown, for example, by looking at the ways in which our aesthetic judgments of nature differ from judgments of artifacts, including works of art and architecture. The author argues against theorists such as Allen Carlson, Holmes Rolston and Marcia Eaton, who claim that the aesthetic appreciation of nature is somehow conditioned and ruled by concepts and categories from natural sciences. Different kinds of categories are relevant in understanding and appreciating artifacts, but not in nature appreciation. This dichotomy is reflected in our aesthetic judgments of gardens and parks. Often gardens are managed to the degree that they are completely artifactualized, natural objects are used as materials for various kinds of human-made things. But also wilderness can dominate gardens – at least to a certain degree.

In the following chapter theologian *J. Sage Elwell* unfolds a rich meditation on the work of Hans Breder and Ana Mendieta, as well as an accompanying interview with Hans Breder. Ana Mendieta (1948–1985) was a Cuban-born painter, sculptor and performance artist. The earth and the feminine were dominant and consistent themes throughout her brief career and are presented most powerfully in her *Silueta Series*. Mendieta described the *Silueta Series* as ‘earth-body’ sculptures. For these pieces she created outlines of her own body and the female form generally in natural materials ranging from flowers and branches to fire. This chapter examines Mendieta’s exploration of earth and body in her *Silueta Series* and includes an interview with her former teacher, lover, and collaborator Hans Breder. The first section of the chapter presents a brief biographical sketch of Breder and Mendieta followed by an exploration of their independent and collaborative work together, attending in particular to the place of the body and/in nature in Mendieta’s *Silueta Series* and Breder’s body-mirror series. The second section interrogates their work in order to understand the dialectical aesth/ethics of the sacred/profane liminality where embodiment meets environment. This section explores the relationship between Breder and Mendieta’s differing, but parallel, aesthetic sensibilities and the concomitant ethical commitments they imply. The final portion of the chapter includes a 2016 interview with Hans Breder – one of the last before his death – wherein he reflects on Mendieta’s life and work.

Chapter 10 serves as a conclusion for the volume, implicitly showing why our seeing, wondering, and connecting are vital in the current circumstances. Theologian *Forrest Clingerman* concludes this volume with an examination into the aesthetic roots of environmental amnesia. In the context of hypermodernity – a world that is in the confusing space at the fuzzy border between such things as the secular, sacred, global, local, economic, scientific, and technological sphere of human existence – he asks whether we should dwell on the meaning of our surroundings. This suggests a tension: on the one hand, the human understanding of environments (both built and natural spaces) implicitly shows our need to connect who we are and where we exist. On the other hand, there also exists a tension between a seemingly basic immediacy of environmental experience and our mediating interpretation of environments, which creates a “crisis of meaning.” That is to say, we continue to acknowledge the need for a multivalent relationship with the environment, but simultaneously often fall into an understanding of actual environments that is utilitarian, flattened, and distorted. Returning to a theme found in Bergmann’s chapter, Clingerman suggests that we have lost a sense of “the space that I am,” and thus we have become unable to find adequate sense of how to dwell in places, landscapes, and environments. This chapter suggests that this crisis of meaning has aesthetic roots, and in turn, how the arts might serve as critique and antidote. To argue this point, Clingerman first explains how at least part of our current crisis of meaning is the result of our environmental amnesia, or the lack of understanding the temporal and spatial thickness of our surroundings. This amnesia is not merely a forgetfulness of how to encounter environments in general; it is equally a loss of home and place. Next, he shows how environmental amnesia is rooted in the breakdown of our aesth/ethics of place. There are aesthetic roots to our environmental amnesia, especially when we understand aesthetics as related to perceptual interactions. A local ethics is needed, but lest this ethics becomes mired too deeply in the past, so too imagination is a tool for understanding a place-focused ethics. Finally, the chapter concludes by drawing on sentiments found in the chapters by Goto and Collins, Steinmann, and Sobecka: the human experience of the arts – as perceptually penetrating our relationship with space and time – become an imaginative practice of combatting the effects of environmental crisis.

Throughout, the authors of this volume are attempting to break some longstanding boundaries in order to fully explore the artistic and material dimensions of nature’s texture. As a result, the individual chapters contribute to a larger transdisciplinary dialogue between the activity of artists and the meditations of philosophers and theologians. With this in mind, the editors hope that these studies and reflections offer a hopeful alternative to the overhumanized

future envisioned by some narratives of the Anthropocene. What is desired throughout these essays, in sum, is a recuperation of the bonds between culture and nature, art and science, spirit and matter.

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