

Jan Defrančeski (Croatia)

University Centre for Integrative Bioethics, University of Zagreb

jan1161996@gmail.com

ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETICS AND LAND ART

Abstract

In this paper, the author reflects on the relationship between environmental aesthetics and land art. By considering their historical development, the author first addresses the terminology problem which prompted him to understand land art as a hypernym – i.e. a term that semantically encompasses other art practices (e.g. “Earth art”, “Earthworks”, “Site art”, “Arte Povera”, “Environment(al) art”, and “Ecological art”). Moreover, by considering certain features of land art (e.g. integration, interruption, involvement, implementation, and imagining), the author proposes a thesis according to which land art represents not only a contemporary art movement but also a new form of the aesthetic experience of nature. In the further development of this thesis, the author focuses on two aesthetic principles of land art – *participation* and *entropy* – which in the history of aesthetic theory have been almost non-existent, pushed to the margins, or completely neglected. Finally, by finding solid theoretical foundations for this thesis in Ronald W. Hepburn’s ground-breaking essay “Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty” (1984), as well as some land art projects (e.g. Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970), the author emphasises the strong theoretical connection between environmental aesthetics and land art.

Keywords: Ronald W. Hepburn, Robert Smithson, aesthetics, environmental aesthetics, land art

Art's development should be dialectical and not metaphysical.

– Robert Smithson, 1972

Introduction

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a new art movement – nowadays often referred to as “Land art” – took the American and European art world by surprise. Around the same time, Ronald W. Hepburn, a renowned British philosopher, published his landmark essay “Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty” (first published in 1966 and reprinted in Hepburn in 1984), which laid theoretical foundations for a new sub-field of philosophical aesthetics – the so-called “environmental aesthetics”.

In this paper, we will reflect on the connection between environmental aesthetics and land art, focusing on their historical origin, development, and current state of affairs. In that sense, we will try to offer answers to the following questions: (I) what constitutes the historical context of the emergence of land art; (II) is there a certain theoretical connection between the emergence of environmental aesthetics and land art; and (III) what are the basic features and aesthetic principles of land art?

However, before analysing the relationship between environmental aesthetics and land art, the terminology to be used should first be clarified. Namely, the term “Land art” is quite problematic due to its ambiguity. In academic discussions, there is no consensus on what this term actually means. Certain scholars use the term “Land art” in a rather broad sense, referring to similar art practices (e.g. “Environmental art”), while others use it to refer to a strictly defined art movement. For example, in Jeffrey Kastner and Brian Wallis’ book *Land and Environmental Art* (2015), one can read about various land art projects, such as Michael Heizer’s *Double Negative*, 1969–1970; Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*, 1970; Nancy Holt’s *Sun Tunnels*, 1973–1976; Walter De Maria’s *The Lightning Field*, 1977; and Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s *Running Fence*, 1972–1976, which are, on the other hand, in Gilles A. Tiberghien’s book discussed under the title *Land art* (1995). The question is whether “Land art” and “Environmental art” are one and the same. In order to try to answer this question, several art dictionaries were consulted. However, surprisingly, it was discovered that the lexical unit “Land art” is defined in a rather difficult way. That is precisely why a closer look into the terminology problem will be taken.

Terminology problem

Based on a comparative analysis of several art dictionaries, it was concluded that the term “Land art” is defined in a rather problematic way because it is often associated with some of the following terms: (I) “Earth art”; (II) “Earthworks”; (III) “Site art”; (IV) “Arte Povera”; (V) “Environment(al) art”; and (VI) “Ecological art”. For example, according to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms*, the term “Land art” stands for:

“A form of art practised since about 1967 by a group of American artists (including Walter de Maria, Carl Andre, and Robert Smithson) in remote parts of the world, such as the Sahara, the Mojave Desert, or the dried-up Lake Mirage in California. Protesting against what they perceived as the utilitarianism of much contemporary art, they used the land itself as their raw material, digging trenches in it, drawing lines by spreading lime on the earth, or making mounds of rocks” (Clarke, 2010: 141).

So far, so good. However, in *A Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art*, the term “Land art” is defined under the lexical entry “Land art (Earth art, Earthworks)” as:

“A type of art that uses as its raw materials, earth, rocks, soil, and so on. The three terms above are not usually clearly differentiated, although ‘Earthworks’ generally refers to very large works. This type of art emerged as a movement in the late 1960s and has links with several other movements that flourished at that time: *Minimal art in that the shapes created are often extremely simple; *Arte Povera in the use of ‘worthless’ materials; *Happenings and *Performance art because the work created was often impermanent; and *Conceptual art because the more ambitious earthwork schemes frequently exist only as projects” (Chilvers and Graves-Smith, 2009: 1079).

In the above-cited definition, “Land art”, “Earth art”, and “Earthworks” are not only connected but understood as one and the same. Here is “Land art” also associated with other art movements, for instance: (I) “Minimal art”; (II) “Arte Povera”; and (III) “Conceptual art”, but these are, once again, not one and the same. In addition, “Land art” is often confusingly linked with other art terms, such as (I) “Earth art”; (II) “Ecological art”; and (III) “Environmental art” (see Clarke, 2010). All of this leads to great academic confusion when it comes to the term “Land art”. Therefore, this paper will first try to clarify the terminology in order to remove the confusion that accompanies the latter term.

Earth art & Arte Povera

In *The Penguin Concise Dictionary of Art History*, the term “Earth art” is defined under the lexical entry “Earth art and Site art”. It is said that:

“Earth art is related to MINIMALISM by its insistence on working with materials, not just ideas (as opposed to CONCEPTUALISM). Because only films or photographs of an earthwork are usually collected or exhibited, it defies art world commerce. All of these site-specific works move into and change the natural world in an “invasive” way that bears no relation to conventional landscape architecture” (Frazier, 2000: 215).

On the other hand, in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists*, the term “Land art” is defined under the lexical entry “Earthwork (or Land Art)”. It is noted that “Earthwork” represents “type of art in which instead of using the land as a site providing the environment for a work of art, the land itself is fashioned into the art work” (Chilvers, 1990: 143).

Bearing in mind the above-cited definitions, it seems that the term “Land art” can sometimes be used as a synonym for “Earth art”. However, there is already some confusion here. By taking one step further, the term “Arte Povera” (Italian for “poor” or “impoverished art”) could also be taken into account. According to *The Penguin Concise Dictionary of Art History*, the Italian art historian, critic, and curator Germano Celant once wrote:

“Arte Povera expresses an approach to art which is basically anti-commercial, precarious, banal and anti-formal, concerned mainly with the physical qualities of the medium and the mutability of the materials. Its importance lies in the artists’ engagement with actual materials and with total reality and their attempt to interpret that reality in a way which, although hard to understand, is subtle, cerebral, elusive, private, intense” (Frazier, 2000: 35–36).

The problem is that almost the same can be said about “Land art” and “Earthworks”. Namely, all three art practices – Land art, Earth art (or Earthworks), and Arte Povera – refer to similar contemporary art movements, which are not only practically connected, but also share certain aesthetic values. For instance, in addition to sharing anti-formal and anti-commercial features, all three art practices use earth and other natural materials in creating works of art. It is also interesting that the influence of conceptual art and minimalism is visible in all three of them. However, then again, they still differ from each other in one important respect: the term “Earth art” refers to the pioneering land art projects

(see Smithson, 1996), while the term “Arte Povera” refers to a specific Italian art movement, which is closely related to the land art movement in general (see Celant, 2011). The matter becomes even more complicated when considering the difference between “Ecological” and “Environment(al) art”. What do the art dictionaries have to say about this distinction?

Ecological vs environment(al) art

Well, according to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms*, the term “Environment art” can be understood as:

“A type of art which began to establish itself in the 1960s, in which the artist creates a three-dimensional space to enclose the spectator and involve him in a whole range of sensory experiences – visual, auditory, kinetic, tactile, and sometimes even olfactory. The spectator was encouraged to become a participant in the ‘game’ or happening. Exponents of Environment art included Allen Kaprow, Ed Kienholz, and Claes Oldenburg” (Clarke, 2010: 92).

However, in the same dictionary, the term “Earth art” is defined under the lexical entry “Earth art (Environmental art)” as:

“A broad-based, international movement of the 1960s and 1970s, embracing artists such as Alan Sonfist, Nancy Holt, and Richard Long, which rejected the commercialisation of art and supported the emerging ecological movement. Earth art took many different forms, including the landscaping of urban sites, massive earth sculptures in the desert, and the recording of journeys through the landscape” (Clarke, 2010: 83).

Since there is some ambiguity here as well, it seems necessary to clarify their distinctions further. It can be said that the term “Environment art” refers to those works of art created through the artistic use of unconventional materials and/or are part of a certain natural environment. The same roughly applies to “Environmental art”, but with one important difference: those works of art usually have a specific environmental message or idea behind their creation. Therefore, environmental art is often associated with environmental ethics (see Carlson, 1986; Bannon, 2011; Nannicelli, 2018). However, environmental ethics is even more associated with “Ecological art”, i.e., the art concerned with the overall well-being of the environment. Based on this brief comparative analysis, it seems necessary to ask: What exactly is “Land art”?

What (exactly) is “Land Art”?

The comparative analysis of several art dictionaries has shown that the term “Land art” cannot be so easily defined. Apart from dictionaries, the latter problem is also present in a large number of research papers. Thus, many art historians, aestheticians, and philosophers have used different terms to refer to the same work of art. For some, Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970) is “Earth art”, for others “Land art”, although Smithson himself referred to his art as “Earthwork” (see Smithson, 1996). Besides the major problem of referring to the same work of art with different art terms, there is a much bigger problem – the problem of defining “Land art” as such. Given the previously highlighted definitions of land art, the question arises: what (exactly) is “Land art”? Before we offer our own answer(s) to the latter question, it should be noted that there is no doubt that “Land art” is indeed connected with the terms: (I) “Earth art”; (II) “Earthworks”; (III) “Site art”; (IV) “Arte Povera”; (V) “Environment(al) art”; and (VI) “Ecological art”, but not, as the dictionaries suggested, in a synonymous way. Hence, “Land art” should be understood as a hyperonym. By doing so, we can solve the problem of its ambiguous definition and thus overcome the confusion that accompanies the latter term. In that sense, “Land art” becomes an “umbrella term” for: (I) “Earth art” / “Earthworks”; (II) “Arte Povera”; (III) “Environment(al) art”; and (IV) “Ecological art”. However, what does that actually mean? It *de facto* means that there are different types of land art practices. To be more precise, it means: (I) that certain land art relates to the American and/or European pioneering projects (e.g. “Earth art” or “Earthworks”), or specifically Italian pioneering projects (e.g. “Arte Povera”); (II) that certain land art emphasises the environment as an essential part of the artwork (e.g. “Environment” and “Environmental”); and (III) that certain land art cares about the overall well-being of the environment. Such an understanding of “Land art” can be visually represented by the following diagram.



Diagram 1. “Land art” as a hyperonym.

After considering the terminology problem in more detail, we should look more closely into the features that make land art a contemporary art movement.

Land art as a contemporary art movement

According to Jeffry Kastner's and Brian Wallis' book *Land and Environmental Art* (2015), there are at least five basic features by which we can classify specific works of art that are commonly referred to as "Land art" or "Environmental art". In order to get closer to what "Land art" actually is, this paper will offer a brief overview of those features, as well as give several artwork examples to which these features refer. The mentioned fetures are (I) integration, (II) interruption, (III) involvement, (IV) implementation, and (V) imagining.

Integration

The feature of integration implies an artistic manipulation of the landscape as a material in its own right. Such an artistic endeavour often consists of adding, removing and/or displacing local natural materials (e.g. earth, soil, gravel, stone, wood, ice, snow, crops, and vegetation) with the aim of creating a form of minimalist and site-specific sculpture. The feature of integration can be easily recognised in the following land art projects: Dennis Oppenheim, *Negative Board*, 1968; Walter De Maria, *Desert Cross*, 1969; Michael Heizer, *Double Negative*, 1969–1970; Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970; and Andy Goldsworthy, *Torn Hole*, 1986. In that sense, it is justified to say that:

"Their work draws out the relationship between the existing characteristics of a site and evidence of human intervention. Often monumental in scale, they stimulate the spatial expanses in which they are located. These works introduce the foundational expression of the Land Art phenomenon. The performative, process-based nature of Land Art's formal strategies developed throughout the 1960s are based on mark-making, cutting, agglomeration or relocation. Late practitioners inflect these methods with lyrical, and/or political intent" (Kastner and Wallis, 2015: 45).

Interruption

The feature of interruption refers to the artistic implementation of non-local, non-indigenous, and man-made materials in the environment (e.g. asphalt,

rocks, rope, metal, and cloth) with the aim of creating a work of art that often compliments, challenges, and expands on the large scale of the environment itself. The feature of interruption also implies the use of manufactured substances and structures, the use of machines and technology, to harness, set in motion, or frame natural elements (e.g. coastlines, deserts, forests, snow, and forked lightning).

“The artists place an increasing emphasis on the transgressive qualities of the activity, questioning the definition of what is ‘natural’. They both participate in and critique the kind of terrestrial exploitation frequently carried out in the name of industrial and urban development. They also interrupt the landscape by bringing its dirt and organic randomness into the acculturated white cube of the gallery” (Kastner and Wallis, 2015: 72).

The feature of interruption is clearly visible in the following land art projects: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Wrapped Coast*, 1969; Robert Smithson, *Partially Buried Woodshed*, 1970; Nancy Holt, *Sun Tunnels*, 1973–1976; Richard Long, *Stone Circle*, 1976; and Walter De Maria, *The Lightning Field*, 1977.

Involvement

The feature of involvement relates to the artist’s individual relationship with the natural world (e.g. land). This relationship is deeply rooted in the primordial bond between humans and nature, as well as human participation in various ecosystems, environments, and landscapes. In order to achieve involvement in their works, artists often use their bodies to make a peculiar performative relationship with an organic environment. In that sense, involvement can be achieved with the use of the human body, performance, gesture, and ritual (e.g. using the human body as a canvas, rolling in mud, leaving a mark by walking, and diving to make underwater structures). Artists engage in such activities to map the landscape, document their journeys across the land, and question the boundaries between humans, art, and nature.

“Drawing on Conceptual Art’s strategies, some use words to substitute a picture of the land with its evocation as physical experience. In contrast to the boundlessness suggested by early earthworks, the landscape may be revealed as a zone of invasion or exclusion, divided by invisible yet complex networks of political and ethnic boundaries” (Kastner and Wallis, 2015: 114).

The feature of involvement is dominant in the following land art project: Kazuo Shiraga, *Challenging Mud*, 1955; Richard Long, *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967; Peter Hutchinson, *Underwater Dam*, 1969; Charles Simonds, *Landscape – Body – Dwelling*, 1971; and Christian Philipp Müller, *Illegal Border Crossing between Austria and the Principality of Liechtenstein*, 1993.

Implementation

The feature of implementation refers to an artistic investigation of natural environments as ecosystems and depositories of various socio-political realities. On the one hand, this feature is often accompanied by the perception that nature represents a blank canvas or an infinitely exploitable resource. However, on the other hand, within this feature, one can also recognise the tendency to view nature as a dynamic and interactive ecosystem. This is precisely why the feature of implementation often involves addressing social, political, and environmental issues (e.g. global pollution, climate change, social alienation, exploitation, and destruction). Particularly, certain land art pieces “present responses that combine incisive critique with practical and redemptive strategies which can be effected by the individual” (Kastner and Wallis, 2015: 136).

The feature of implementation can be easily recognised in the following land art projects: Alan Sonfist, *Time Landscape*, 1965–1978; Hans Haacke, *Ten Turtles Set Free*, 1970; Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance – Outside and Inside*, 1973; Agnes Denes, *Wheatfield – A Confrontation*, 1982; and Joseph Beuys, *7000 Oaks*, 1982.

Imagining

The feature of imagining implies the artistic interpretation of nature. Namely, some land artists do not take the land as physical matter but rather as a metaphor or signifier. “They understand it as a concept, as an optical construction or linguistic elaboration that may take the form of a diagram, a sentence or a photograph” (Kastner and Wallis, 2015: 174).

In that sense, the feature of imagining often relates to a rich symbolism and narrative, which hint at various historical, cultural, and social phenomena (e.g. the emergence of civilisation, historical narrative, and morality). The feature of imagining can be differentiated in the following land art projects: Jan Dibbets, *Perspective Corrections (Square with Two Diagonals)*, 1968; Ian Hamilton Finlay,

Woodwind Song, 1968; John Baldessari, *The California Map Project. Part 1: California*, 1969; Alighiero Boetti, *The Thousand Longest Rivers in the World*, 1979; and Lothar Baumgarten, *Theatrum Botanicum*, 1993–1994.

Although land art can be understood as a contemporary art movement, in its essence, it represents something much bigger than that. Namely, at its core, land art represents a new form of the aesthetic experience of nature.

Land Art as a New Form of Aesthetic Experience of Nature

Besides the five basic features that make land art a contemporary art movement, one can recognise two aesthetic principles – *participation* and *entropy* – which in the history of aesthetic theory have been almost non-existent, pushed to the margins or completely neglected. This becomes quite clear if we consider some of the classics (see Hegel, 1993; Schelling, 1989; Hartmann, 2014; Adorno, 1998; Croce, 1992), as well as certain handbooks, manuals, and textbooks of aesthetics theory (see Levinson, 2005; Taliaferro, 2012; Nanay, 2019; Euron, 2019; Nadal and Vartanian, 2022). Nevertheless, one should be careful here. This is not to say that *participation* and *entropy* have never been the subject of aesthetic debates. For instance, when contemplating aesthetic qualities in nature, Hepburn writes about *involvement* and *restlessness* (see Hepburn, 1984: 13–15), which are closely related to the principles of *participation* and *entropy*.

Also, the thesis that land art reflects a new form of the aesthetic experience of nature can only be put forward in relation to Immanuel Kant, who laid the philosophical foundations for the aesthetics of nature in general but also for the discipline that is today called “environmental aesthetics”. On that note, let us remember, Kant in his *Critique of Judgement*, argued that “fine art is art, so far as it has at the same time the appearance of being nature” (Kant, 2007: 135).

However, it is time to revisit *participation* and *entropy*. As is usually the case in aesthetic theory, these categories primarily concern the *form* and *matter* of works of art. Participation, for example, concerns the form of a work of art insofar as it erases the formal boundaries between the subject (i.e. observer) and the object (i.e. work of art). For that matter, in the aesthetic experience of art (i.e. observation of a work of art), the subject of aesthetic experience can *participate* in the object of aesthetic experience, but not as an artist creating a work of art, but as an observer who explores and changes the form of a work of art by their very participation in it. On the other hand, entropy primarily concerns the matter of a work of art in terms of the artistic use of unconventional and natural

materials that often fall victim to the ravages of time. Therefore, the following section will more closely consider the form and matter of land art with regard to participation and entropy.

Form and Participation

The pioneering land art projects, such as Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970), suggest that participation is one of the fundamental values of their artistic achievement (see Smithson, 1996: 143–153). Besides the pioneering projects, it seems that the same can be said about land art of the later generations, such as Marinus Boezem's *The Green Cathedral* (1987) and Alberto Burri's *Cretto di Burri* (1984–1989, finished 2015). In both cases, participation manifests itself as an interaction between the subject and the object of the aesthetic experience. However, the land art of newer generations provides a greater interaction between the observer and the observed. Such interaction often encourages one to re-think the observer's moral actions and conduct. This is probably one of the reasons why land art today is often brought into connection with ethics, especially environmental ethics (see Carlson, 1986; Boetzkes, 2010; Bannon, 2011; Nannicelli, 2018; Morton, 2009, 2021).

In the context of the connection between the subject and the object of the aesthetic experience, i.e., the connection between humans and nature, Ronald W. Hepburn noted:

“We have not only a mutual involvement of spectator and object, but also a reflexive effect by which the spectator experiences himself in an unusual and vivid way; and this difference is not merely noted, but dwelt upon aesthetically. The effect is not unknown to art, especially architecture. But it is both more intensely realised and pervasive in nature-experience – for we are in nature and a part of nature we do not stand over against it as over against a painting on a wall” (Hepburn, 1984: 13).

In the same context, but now referring to his own aesthetic experience of nature, he added:

“But I am both actor and spectator, ingredient in the landscape and lingering upon the sensations of being thus ingredient, rejoicing in their multifariousness, playing actively with nature, and letting nature, as it were, play with me and my sense of myself” (Hepburn, 1984: 13).

Among others, a similar description of the principle of participation can also be found in Timothy Morton's book *All Art is Ecological* (2021). In discussing his own aesthetic experience of a particular work of art, Morton vividly pointed out:

“I am experiencing unknown effects on me coming from something that I am caught up with in such a way that I can't tell who 'started it' – am I just imposing my concepts of beauty on to any old thing, or is this thing totally overpowering me?” (Morton, 2001: 95)

Matter and Entropy

Things are significantly different in the case of the artistic use of matter and entropy. Although there are several definitions, entropy can properly be understood here as the change-effect of land art's form and matter caused by the level of exposure to natural elements (e.g. rain, snow, drought, flood, and wind). Namely, the artistic use of natural materials, as well as the natural environment in which the work of art is located, together lead to various aesthetic changes that mostly concern the art's matter but which can consequently affect its form as well.

This is perhaps most evident in Smithson's works of art (i.e. “Earthworks”), as well as his written papers. In addition to his famous essay “Entropy and the New Monuments” (Smithson, 1996: 10–23), Smithson wrote extensively about entropy in most of his papers, implicitly or explicitly. For example, in the essay titled “A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects”, Smithson wrote: “In the technological mind, rust evokes fear of disuse, inactivity, entropy, and ruin. Why steel is valued over rust is a technological value, not an artistic one” (Smithson, 1996: 106).



Photograph 1. An aerial photograph of Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970). Taken from the Holt/Smithson Foundation website. URL: <https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org/spiral-jetty>.

This 1,500 ft. (457.2 m) long and 15 ft. (4.6 m) wide earthwork sculpture was constructed in April 1970 on the north-eastern shore of the Great Salt Lake near Rozel Point in Utah entirely of mud, precipitated salt crystals, rocks, and water. Besides the fact that it is possible to walk on *Spiral Jetty*, observe the reflection of its salt crystals in the sunlight, and touch or even move the stones that make up its foundations, this earthwork sculpture is particularly interesting because of its entropy.

Because of the visible changes in its matter caused by exposure to natural elements, the aesthetic experience of *Spiral Jetty* changes over time. For example, it is clearly visible that: (I) due to the increased number of bacteria and algae in the lake caused by a rise or fall in temperature, the water around *Spiral Jetty* can change in colour; (II) due to the increased amount of salt in the lake, *Spiral Jetty* can be completely covered with salt crystals; (III) due to the increased rainfall, *Spiral Jetty* can be completely submerged; (IV) due to the increased temperature, the water around *Spiral Jetty* can sometimes dry up completely; (V) due to the harsh weather and climate conditions, the shape of the *Spiral Jetty* is constantly changing. Moreover, all of this, of course, significantly affects the overall aesthetic experience of this masterpiece.

However, why is entropy so important to Smithson and other (land art) artists? In Smithson's case – and what is also true for others – entropy as an artistic value is connected with “art's development” (see Smithson, 1996: 155). On the connection between entropy and art's development, Smithson wrote in more detail in his essay “Cultural Confinement”. At one point in the essay, he noted:

“Art's development should be dialectical and not metaphysical. I am speaking of a dialectics that seeks a world outside of cultural confinement. Also, I am not interested in art works that suggest “process” within the metaphysical limits of the neutral room. There is no freedom in that kind of behavioral game playing. The artist acting like a B. F. Skinner rat doing his “tough” little tricks is something to be avoided. Confined process is no process at all. It would be better to disclose the confinement rather than make illusions of freedom. I am for an art that takes into account the direct effect of the elements as they exist from day to day apart from representation” (Smithson, 1996: 155).

In that sense, entropy becomes an essential part of art's development but also of aesthetic theory as well. Namely, entropy, in a certain sense, gives “life” to land art. Unlike traditional art practices, land art is not hermetically sealed in a museum, it is part of a certain environment and ecosystem, and due to the exposure to natural elements – it changes, develops, collapses, and disintegrates over time.

After a brief overview of land art's development, its main features, and aesthetic principles, the paper will focus on environmental aesthetics in order to gain a better insight into their historical and theoretical connection.

The Dawn of Environmental Aesthetics

Environmental aesthetics, as a relatively new sub-field of philosophical aesthetics, arose in the last third of the 20th century (Carlson, 2019). It originated as a reaction to traditional aesthetics, especially aesthetics within the analytic tradition which was largely concerned with the philosophy of art. By pursuing the philosophical investigation of the aesthetic appreciation of natural environments, environmental aesthetics went beyond the analytical appreciation of art. In this sense, environmental aesthetics once again reopened the debate about the possibility of an aesthetics of nature, initially raised by Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* and debated throughout the 18th and 19th centuries by various German idealists and Romantics (see Hegel, 1993; Schelling, 1989; Schiller, 2016), as well as American transcendentalist (see Emerson, 2003; Thoreau, 2008).

To be more precise, Environmental aesthetics' development has been influenced by at least five historically interrelated factors: (I) the dominance of 18th-century landscape aesthetics and landscape art; (II) the neglect of 18th and 19th-century aesthetic debate on the aesthetic appreciation of natural environments; (III) the exclusive focus of 20th-century philosophical aesthetics on art; (IV) the 20th-century public concern for the (aesthetic) condition and well-being of natural environments; and (V) the emergence of 20th-century environmentalism and ecologism. That is why, for example, some research papers consider environmental aesthetics in connection with the emergence of environmental ethics. Also, the latter papers often explore the moral aspects of certain works of art (land art), which are, in one way or another, contacted to the emergence of environmental aesthetics (see Carlson, 1986; Bannon, 2011; Nannicelli, 2018). However, Ronald W. Hepburn's essay "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty" (1984) undoubtedly played the biggest role in the "dawn of environmental aesthetics". By re-introducing natural beauty into the academic debates, as Carlson pointed out:

"Hepburn demonstrated that there could be significant philosophical investigation of the aesthetic experience of the world beyond the artworld. He thereby not only generated renewed interest in the aesthetics of nature, he also laid foundations for environmental aesthetics in general as well as for the aesthetics of everyday life" (Carlson, 2019).

To this day, Hepburn's essay is commonly recognised as one of the most important theoretical landmarks for the 20th-century aesthetics of nature (Brook 2010, Saito 2010, Sepänmaa 2010, Carlson 2014).

Ronald W. Hepburn and Environmental Aesthetics

Hepburn's essay, as well as some pioneering Land art artistic achievements (e.g. Alan Sonfist, *Time Landscape*, 1965; Richard Long, *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967; Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970; Nancy Holt, *Sun Tunnels*, 1976), re-invigorated the academic debates about the aesthetic appreciation of natural environments. In his essay, Hepburn noted that while the 18th and 19th-century discussions of aesthetics (i.e. The German Romantics, I. Kant, J. G. Fichte, F. W. J. von Schelling, G. W. F. Hegel) explored ideas of the beautiful, the sublime and the picturesque in nature, thereafter the focus shifted rapidly towards a philosophy of art. Hepburn suggests that philosophical aesthetics had largely become understood as the "philosophy of art" (Hepburn, 1984: 9) and that it had avoided natural environments because there are particular

"features of aesthetic experience as understood within art which are not present in nature: namely the artist's intention, and the 'frame'. Therefore, in the field of traditional aesthetic theory the object or artefact is the appropriate focus of aesthetic appreciation. Natural beauty, by not providing us with neatly framed objects or artistic expressions, thus slipped out of the debate" (Clark, 2010: 352).

However, what were the reasons for the shift towards a philosophy of art? Parts of the answer lie in some general shifts in the aesthetic taste itself and not so much in aesthetical theories as such. In that sense, the first part of the answer concerns the connection between judgements of taste and theorising aesthetic experience. As Hepburn put it: "This is a legitimate procedure, since, despite the difference of logical level between them, judgements of taste and the theorising of aesthetics exert unmistakable influences upon one another" (Hepburn, 1984: 9).

The second part of the answer can be found in the decline of the "Wordsworthian vision of nature". Hepburn describes the decline of the romantic vision of nature in the following words:

"The vanishing of the sense that nature is man's 'educator', that its beauties communicate more or less specific morally ennobling messages, this is only one aspect of the general (and much anatomised) disappearance of a rationalist faith in nature's thorough-going intelligibility and its ultimate endorsement of human visions and aspirations. The characteristic image of contemporary man, as we all know, is that of a 'stranger', encompassed by a nature, which is indifferent, unmeaning and 'absurd'" (Hepburn, 1984: 10).

Hepburn locates the last, third part of the answer in the realm of science. That prompted him to write:

“The work of the sciences, too, has tended to increase bewilderment and loss of nerve over the aesthetic interpretation of nature. Microscope and telescope have added vastly to our perceptual data; the forms of the ordinary landscape, ordinarily interpreted, are shown up as only a selection from countless different scales” (Hepburn, 1984: 10).

On a theoretical level, however, there are other distinctive reasons for the shift. In contemporary aesthetic theory that seeks to make itself increasingly rigorous, one such reason is that “if we are aiming at an entirely general account of aesthetic excellence, this account cannot make essential reference to experience of (or imitation of) nature; since there are arts like music which are devoid of any such reference” (Hepburn, 1984: 10).

That is why, argues Hepburn, the artefact is taken as the aesthetic object *par excellence*, as well as the “proper focus” of study. This is certainly supported by the fact that contemporary artists have turned from *imitation* and *representation* to the sheer *creation* of new objects. The second reason lies in the expression theory – to this day one of the most dominant aesthetic theories – which cannot properly cope with nature precisely because it is a *communication* theory:

“It must represent aesthetic experience of nature either as a communication from the Author of Nature, which it rarely does, or else (rather awkwardly) as the discovery that nature’s shapes and colours can with luck serve as expressive vehicles of human feeling, although never constructed for that end” (Hepburn, 1984: 11).

It is quite clear that works of art (art objects) have a number of general features not shared by objects in nature. For instance, all art objects have frames or pedestals; they all share a common feature of being set apart from their environment in a distinctive way (Hepburn, 1984: 13). On the other hand, objects in nature cannot be so clearly set apart because they are part of their environment, sometimes even in a symbiotic relationship with other living or non-living beings. Given that the subject of the aesthetic experience of nature (or objects in nature) is also part of an environment, landscape, ecosystem, and nature as such, it is difficult to speak of strict frame boundaries of natural objects, as well as frame boundaries of particular land art pieces. In that sense, art objects share features of *completeness* and *detachment*, while objects in nature have features of *framelessness* and *involvement*. Although the latter features of objects

in nature may be in some way a disadvantage aesthetically, they also bring some remarkable compensating advantages. As Hepburn points out:

“Whatever lies beyond the frame of an art-object cannot normally become part of the aesthetic experience relevant to it. A chance train-whistle cannot be integrated into the music of a string quartet; it merely interferes with its appreciation. But where there is no frame, and where nature is our aesthetic object, a sound or visible intrusion from beyond the original boundaries of our attention can challenge us to integrate it in our overall experience, to modify that experience so as to make room for it. This of course, need not occur; we may shut it out by effort of will, if it seems quite unassimilable” (Hepburn, 1984: 14).

On that note, it seems worth asking: is the shift towards a philosophy of art bad in itself, or does it represent a commendable advance in aesthetic theory as such? The answer to the latter question was also offered by Hepburn, who believed that the shift is

“bad, because aesthetics is steered off from examining an important and richly complex set of relevant data; and bad because when a set of human experiences is ignored in a theory relevant to them, they tend to be rendered less readily available as experiences. If we cannot find sensible-sounding language in which to describe them – language of a piece with the rest of our aesthetic talk, the experiences are felt, in an embarrassed way, as off-the-map; and, since off the map, seldom visited” (Hepburn, 1984: 11).

However, since its early stages, the scope of environmental aesthetics has significantly broadened. Today, apart from natural environments, the scope of environmental aesthetics includes human and human-influenced environments as well (see Carlson, 2019). Also, in contemporary environmental aesthetic theory, it is possible to distinguish two basic orientations.

Basic Orientations in Environmental Aesthetics

In the second half of the 20th century, shortly after the publication of Hepburn’s essay “Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty” (1984), it is possible to distinguish two basic orientations in environmental aesthetics. These two orientations certainly arose from initial reactions (i.e. theoretical positions) inspired by Hepburn’s thesis on the neglect of the aesthetics of nature. These theoretical positions were usually distinguished as belonging to one or the other

orientation, alternatively labelled “cognitive” and “non-cognitive” (Godlovitch, 1994; Eaton, 1998; Crawford, 2004), “conceptual” and “non-conceptual” (Moore, 1999), or “narrative” and “ambient” (Foster, 1998). As Carlson rightly pointed out:

“The distinction marks a division between those points of view that take knowledge and information to be essential to aesthetic appreciation of environments and those that take some other feature, such as engagement, emotion arousal, or imagination, to be paramount. The distinction thereby gives structure and organisation to the diverse points of view represented in the field. Moreover, it is in line with similar distinctions used in aesthetic theory concerning the appreciation of art, music, and literature” (Carlson, 2019).

Within the “cognitive”, “conceptual”, or “narrative” orientations in environmental aesthetics, one approach, sometimes labelled as the “natural environmental model” (Carlson, 1979) or “scientific cognitivism” (Parsons, 2002), stands out the most. This approach implies that:

- (I) knowledge and information about the nature of the object of appreciation are central to its aesthetic appreciation (Carlson, 2019);
- (II) the aesthetic experience of art should not serve as a model for an adequate account of nature appreciation (Carlson, 2019);
- (III) nature *can* and *should* be, as Saito puts it, appreciated “on its own terms” (Saito, 1998).

Namely, the “natural environmental model” or “scientific cognitivism”, for example, holds that:

“Just as serious, appropriate aesthetic appreciation of art requires knowledge of art history and art criticism, such aesthetic appreciation of nature requires knowledge of natural history – the knowledge provided by the natural sciences and especially sciences such as geology, biology, and ecology. The idea is that scientific knowledge about nature can reveal the actual aesthetic qualities of natural objects and environments in the way in which knowledge about art history and art criticism can for works of art” (Carlson, 2019).

Also, within this orientation, some authors are of the opinion that the appropriate way to aesthetically appreciate nature “on its own terms” is to appreciate nature as it is characterised by natural science (Carlson, 1979, 1986; Eaton, 1998; Parsons, 2002).

On the other hand, the leading “non-cognitive”, “non-conceptual”, or “ambient” approach, called the “aesthetics of engagement”, draws on phenomenology as well as on analytic aesthetics. This approach implies that:

(I) something other than a cognitive component, such as scientific knowledge, information or cultural tradition, is the central feature of the aesthetic appreciation of environments (Carlson, 2019);

(II) the appropriate aesthetical experience of natural environments involves the total immersion of the appreciator in the object of appreciation (Berleant, 1992, 1997, 2005, 2013);

(III) nature *can* and *should* be appreciated through multiple contextual dimensions and multi-sensory experiences of it (Carlson, 2019).

As opposed to the “natural environmental model” or “scientific cognitivism” for the “aesthetics of engagement”, one could say that:

“In doing so, it rejects many of the traditional ideas about aesthetic appreciation not only for nature but also for art. It argues that the theory of disinterestedness involves a mistaken analysis of the concept of the aesthetic and that this is most evident in the aesthetic experience of natural environments. According to the engagement approach, disinterested appreciation, with its isolating, distancing, and objectifying gaze, is out of place in the aesthetic experience of nature, for it wrongly abstracts both natural objects and appreciators from the environments in which they properly belong and in which appropriate appreciation is achieved” (Carlson, 2019).

The Connection between Environmental Aesthetics and Land Art

Based on this short analysis, we can emphasise three important points of the connection between environmental aesthetics and land art:

(I) Historically speaking, on a theoretical and practical level, environmental aesthetics and land art appeared around the same time – in the late 1960s and early 1970s – i.e., in the early stage of the environmental movement;

(II) Although they can be viewed separately as a contemporary art movement that encompasses various art practices and as a new sub-field of philosophical aesthetics, land art and environmental aesthetics complement each other. In that sense, due to its basic features, land art can be understood as a subject of environmental aesthetics research;

(III) And finally, environmental aesthetics and land art share a fundamental idea – the importance of aesthetic appreciation of nature.

Concluding Remarks

These three points suggest that there is a strong theoretical connection between environmental aesthetics and land art. However, these three points are certainly not the only things that could be said about their connection and therefore represent only certain guidelines for deeper and more comprehensive research. For example, it would be interesting to consider the relationship between environmental aesthetics and land art in relation to the environmental movement. Namely, as can be seen, land art has good theoretical foundations for communicating certain environmental messages and ideas due to its basic features. However, that task should be left aside for now because, expressed in Smithson's words, it remains to be seen what the dialectical development of art will bring us in the future.

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Jan Defrančeski (Hrvatska)

Sveučilišni centar za integrativnu bioetiku, Sveučilište u Zagrebu

jan1161996@gmail.com

ESTETIKA OKOLIŠA I *LAND ART*

Sažetak

Autor u ovom radu promišlja odnos estetike okoliša i land arta. Razmatrajući njihov povijesni razvoj, autor najprije ističe terminološki problem koji ga je potaknuo da land art shvati kao hiperonim – odnosno pojam koji značenjski obuhvaća druge umjetničke prakse (npr. »Earth art«, »Earthworks«, »Site art«, »Arte Povera«, »Environment(al) art« i »Ecological art«). Štoviše, razmatrajući određene značajke land arta (npr. integraciju, prekid, uključenost, implementaciju i imaginaciju), autor predlaže tezu prema kojoj land art ne predstavlja samo suvremeni umjetnički pokret nego i novu formu estetskog doživljaja prirode. Autor se u daljnjem razvoju ove teze fokusira na dva estetska principa land arta – *participaciju* i *entropiju* – koji su u povijesti estetičke teorije bili gotovo nepostojeći, potisnuti na marginu ili u potpunosti zanemareni. Konačno, pronalaženjem čvrstih teorijskih temelja za ovu tezu u znamenitom eseju Ronalda W. Hepburna »Suvremena estetika i zanemarivanje prirodne ljepote« (1984.), kao i nekim land art projektima (npr. Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970.), autor ističe snažnu teorijsku povezanost estetike okoliša i land arta.

Ključne riječi: Ronald W. Hepburn, Robert Smithson, estetika, estetika okoliša, land art