



Tó Face'

The edition

Go Face'

The edition

The project was born out of the image of the fishing net brought by the wave to the shoreline. **New Relation** thought of the marine waste as a revenant. At first in the depths of the water as if it had been pushed back, it becomes, once brought back by the wave, the reflection of our Western way of life. It leads us to face the result of our way of producing, and to question the traditional distinction between natural history and human history.

It is from this metaphor of the sea, from the idea of 'to face', from the image of the repressed that reappears, that New Relation has created the *Ghost Bag*.

Made from recycled materials, the bag itself is recyclable. For this purpose, New Relation has developed a new fabric consisting of fishing nets recovered from the sea (waste from intensive fishing tools), trapped in regenerated Econyl nylon.

For the duration of an exhibition we have extended this thought that surrounds and permeates the bag by staging it. It presents a device designed to psychoanalyze the bag as a conscious subject. The bag, in the center of the room, is placed on a couch and faces a chair. We hear fragments of interviews mixed with the recomposed sound of an ocean: these are the voices of researchers questioning a relationship with the off-centered environment.

The edition collects and unfolds the series of interviews heard in fragments at the exhibition.

The magazine takes up New Relation's artistic proposal to undertake analysis and research on the theme of the Anthropocene. Starting from the different anchorings of the exhibition, we have questioned researchers who have made these issues their speciality.

The common horizon of these exchanges is the need to take stock of the omnipresent trace of the human being on earth, and to think of new relationships and ways of being to what is said to be "natural". We believe that the words of researchers make it possible "to face" in a double sense: to face the reality of the anthropocene world, and to stand up to imagine new solutions.

To Face is thus presented as a series of interviews in a form close to discussion, mingling geography, epistemology, anthropology, language sciences and environmental psychology.



¹ Origin of the fishing nets recovered from the sea: CIV den Oever, The Netherlands

² The development of the bag was funded by Worth Partnership Project

Prélude

A paradigm shift

There is no longer a place on earth where one doesn't perceive the effects of human activity. This is how the Anthropocene is defined. The geographer **Michel Lussault** makes us aware of what such a paradigm shift in our way of living implies. With the world as a system, any action, even local, can have a global impact.

The implications of ecological thinking, even in the artistic field, are the mark of a civilisational change. The philosopher **Loïc Fel** makes us aware of the necessary repositioning of the artist, emblematic of a human endeavour in the process of becoming intimately integrated into the natural environment.

Dealing with waste, the revenant

The fishing net is this marine waste, sometimes visible, sometimes imperceptible, whose known consequences hide the real extent of the problems it causes. Our questions about this matter led us to meet **Géraldine Le Roux**, whose anthropological work with coastal native societies has enabled us to highlight the real impact of these plastic drifts.

Thinking about waste also leads to deconstructing certain promises. Recycling is not infinite. Renewable energies are not miracle solutions. With **Aurélia Gualdo**, whose thesis topic deals with the relationship between fashion and the environment, we focus on the limits of the ecological transition.

Doing with, reconnecting

Nature is a force, when it surpasses us, we may be tempted to turn it into an adversity. The current context and the desire to wage war show this very well. The definition of what we mean by the word "nature" varies as human history progresses. We are free to bend the term in a positive way. **Stéphanie Posthumus**, through her analysis of the treatment of nature in literature, reminds us of the importance of the role of imagination in the development of a new model of thought.

Reconnecting with nature is therefore a physical but above all a mental act. **Alix Cosquer**, researcher in environmental psychology, makes us attentive to the positive reactions of the human brain in a natural environment. Taking care of an environment also means considering the benefits it brings in return. It is a system of relationships, in which we are included and part of.



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Human habitat

Michel Lussault

Our mere presence involves an entire system. Far from being confined to the surface we physically occupy, the human habitat has expanded to the territories it indirectly occupies through its consumption. Michel Lussault, geographer at university of Lyon, insists on the social and political stakes of this spatial awareness.



/01

What aspect of this project has particularly caught your attention?

First of all, I find the fact of working with plastic interesting. Over the last twenty years or so, plastic has taken a very ambivalent role. Since plastic is what we are capable of creating and does not exist as such in the biophysical environment, it has been a symbol of progress for human societies for a long time, demonstrating its capacity to disrupt the order of material. If today it is used as a raw material for very numerous common objects, it is also the emblem of the by-product, and the waste of the consumer society. There is something very disturbing with plastic, which represents a peak in the technological achievement of human societies, and which at the same time is considered to be the ultimate waste.

The interest we have had in this subject also came from the idea that it reflected a certain production mode, what do you think about it?

Yes, this is what also draws the attention of certain scientists for whom plastic waste is emblematic of what they call “the metabolism of contemporary systems”. Plastic has become a reason to reflect on the contemporary world as a system of unalterable and uncontrollable flows of circulation. When human productions are transformed into “relief” - I prefer this word to waste, which refers to an ancient vision

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of the production and use of materials - they are no longer monitored but have a life of their own. It is an interesting material to reflect upon recycling, but also to challenge its limits, as it is so difficult to control.

The use of plastic is double-edged. As waste, it is both omnipresent and invisible, always there and uncontrollable. It is scattered everywhere in the networks and flows worldwide, crumbled into increasingly fine particles, circulating in air or water flows, finding its way into the digestive systems of fish and even human beings, in the form of micro-plastics or even micro-particles. It is the symbol of a contemporary world system, in which the smallest particle of substance can spread on a planetary scale, and always be found outside the place where it was originally produced and consumed. I therefore got caught up in your reflection of the waste as a revenant. It reinforces the idea that plastic waste is the rejection, almost in the Freudian sense of the term, of the contemporary system. It's something that everyone knows and is resisting.

How, starting from this observation of the omnipresence of plastic in spaces, can we consider the way we apprehend what is said to be "natural"?

You have to be careful with the concept of nature. It is certain that human activities, because of their intensity, have an impact on all the biophysical elements of the planetary system. The post-World War II period, and the unprecedented urban setting that characterizes it, may be a sign of this change.

There is no place on Earth where the consequences of human activity on biophysical systems are no longer visible. Yet such places, "uncharted lands", where anthropogenic effects were hypothetically non-existent, still existed at the beginning of the twentieth century.

This is no longer possible for the simple reason that, for 35 years now, we have sufficiently documented what is known as global change, of which the most spectacular aspect is climate change. The increased knowledge has given us the certainty that global change is so planetary - as its name suggests - that it affects the entire biophysical functioning of the Earth. Once again, there is not a single region of this planet where the effects of human activity cannot be observed. It is why thousands of researchers postulate the Anthropocene hypothesis. It is not a moral statement, it is simply the observation we have just made, which can be observed at all levels.

It therefore becomes difficult to consider nature as a reality external to human activity, which would be the setting that we would have to preserve, in which we could simply delicately put our feet covered with felt slippers in order not to spoil anything. In reality what we call nature is nothing more than what we make with biophysical elements, from our activities. And we do it simply because we live on the planet. This is where the question of habitat becomes central. Inhabiting is the very nature of human activity.

Is it in this way that you refer to nature as a "human artifact"?

Indeed, what we call nature is the name we give, historically, to the way a human society structures its biophysical environment. The underlying biophysical data does not significantly change: the major cycles of water, carbon, atmosphere are not very affected. But at each epoch, the way human habitation processes these biophysical data, refers to a specific environmental condition and is always different. We must understand that nature is a cultural, social, scientific, artistic and political invention of human societies, which will define the state of our relationship to the biophysical system. And this relationship is constantly evolving. The nature of 2020 has nothing to do with the nature of 1970, nor with the nature of 2010. We can even assume that the pandemic we are experiencing will profoundly change our perception of the biophysical system.

We can therefore understand why nature has become an artistic and aesthetic motif. It is already an invention, something that needs to be stabilized. Nowadays every artistic creation is engaged in practices to give this nature a certain aspect, a certain shape, a certain appearance. Paradoxically, one of the characteristics of Anthropocene nature in 2020 is that it cannot be considered without plastic. Today, a natural landscape is a landscape in which the waste of human activity is visible.

Aren't the natural spaces created in this globally urbanized world simply a reserve

for survival? We are almost forced to save green spaces in order to limit the damage...

Humans have always been dealing with biophysical features. The sentence of Descartes saying that men are "masters and possessors of nature"¹, characterizes the modernity and its desire to differ from biophysics, to be in a position of absolute control of what is called nature. In reality we never can. That is what this pandemic has shown us. The only thing in our power is to grasp the biophysical reality and understand how these realities can enter our home, how we can accommodate them. Take a look at how the climate crisis is forcing us to deal with certain elements of the atmospheric system, for example. What do we do about the heat? What do we do about the extreme variation in weather? What do we do about the air? What do we do about the trees? Trees are once again turning into major subjects in contemporary thinking. We are beginning to think about a necessary re-wildening of certain parts of the world. The philosopher of environment Virginie Maris², for example, advocates for the rediscovery of the wild, or more precisely the possibility of recreating spaces in which the wild regains the upper hand. Feral reserves where humans have no access. It would have seemed absurd 50 years ago. We had the impression at this time that preserving species was like managing them with human presence.

What exactly do you mean by the idea of habitation? We understand in your speech that it does not only refer to the area physically occupied by an individual.

First, we must look back at the very etymology of the word. The concept of habitat was born in the 17th century in the field of natural sciences, and at that time it characterized the natural environment of a species. As far as the human species is concerned, habitat cannot be reduced to housing. Your habitat is not only limited to your home, your neighborhood, or even the spaces you use every day. It refers to all the places used to satisfy our needs as residents. Even in a period of lockdown, even in the case of compulsory house arrest, our living areas are not totally merged with those of our home. Nowadays, for example, communication platforms have expanded the human habitat. Geography has clearly shown that digital spaces are real spaces. The human habitat has become more complex. Let's take a very simple example: when you eat, if you consume a meat protein that has been obtained from an animal fed on soy, it means that your habitat involves a small fraction of intensive soy exploitation in the Amazon rainforest. And then it gets absolutely dizzying. For every person in the world today, given what globalization is all about, their habitat becomes a kind of spatial foam that is expanded and extended to the whole world.

Can we say that our way of living and thinking about habitat therefore also depends on our ideological choices?

Of course. We are not trying to blame anyone, but on the contrary we must become aware of this individual responsibility and turn it into something political. Let's take an example in your type of object consumption: depending on whether or not you

use plastic objects, depending on whether they are new or recycled, you will have a completely different configuration of your habitat. It is therefore the act of inhabiting in itself which is, to use Bruno Latour's notion, "cosmopolitan"³: in fact, it has a role to play in a certain conception of the relationship we have with the planetary biophysical system.

The spatial consciousness of which you speak then becomes an awareness of interdependencies...

It becomes an ecological consciousness in the almost strict sense of the term, that is to say, an awareness of an interdependence between all the entities that share this planet. I insist on the fact that the concept of nature has often led us to think that what was non-human was external to us. If we take this concept of habitat literally, we realize that everything is constantly interconnected, assembled, arranged. Our habitat is a permanent accommodation between humans, between humans and other, non-human and non-living entities, because we also have relationships with the non-living. We are constantly in touch with materials, which are not simply materials of use, but substantial materials, that we encounter in our homes on a daily basis and have to deal with. This is how we live with plastic. We live with plastic, we even cohabit with plastic, so we might as well objectify the relationship we have with it.

When you underline the dependence between humans and the ecosystem that surrounds

them, do you acknowledge some kind of vulnerability?

If there is any credit to be given to the pandemic we are going through, it is that it has pushed us to confront our individual, social, and species vulnerability. This vulnerability is the same as for all other living species, the living is vulnerable by definition. The characteristic of the living is that it is only fleeting, therefore it is its mortality that defines it. This vulnerability is therefore first and foremost that of all living beings. Then, there is a vulnerability of the non-living which is of another type: it is not linked to mortality but to the human ability to disrupt the organization of the non-living, that they have thanks to their technical power. The exploitation of lithium, through the evaporation of water contained in fossil aquifers in the Atacama Desert is a good example. The mineral which was soluble becomes rushed and integrated into a complex industrial chain threatened by exhaustion. This question of the depletion of mineral resources shows that we are pressuring the non-living, that the non-living is vulnerable and we must pay attention to it. This vulnerability is truly universal, and this is what is interesting to take into account.

Is this need to take into account the vulnerability of different entities also an issue for a care policy?

My reflection is indeed based on the theory of care, as suggested by the scholars Joan Tronto⁴ and Carol Gilligan⁵, among others, which I have transposed

to the notion of space. For me, we have two things to do, both referring to the two possible meanings of the verb "to care" in English. I think you cannot take care if you are not careful, and then you cannot be careful if you don't take care. It's a kind of virtuous scheme that is set up and established. But first of all we have to pay attention to the ways we live together, nothing can be done if we are not initially careful about the way we live and cohabit. And this includes the reflection we previously had on our individual homes. We have to try to become aware that they extend beyond the places we visit on a daily basis, to all the spaces that are used to meet our needs. This investigative requirement is absolutely essential. It is a kind of pre-political effort. Without this diagnostic work, we cannot exist without being attentive to those who need to be taken care of, both human and non-human. The two go hand in hand. Caring is based on the idea that the human habitat is vulnerable and fragile, that non-humans are vulnerable and fragile, and that we need to find ways of living that are ways of caring for each other collectively.

We then see how care and attention can mutually benefit each other. This is completely in line with the years we have just lived since the current face of capitalism is characterized by inattention. Capitalism must always, without any consideration, draw more and more resources from the environment. It is an extractive system. We live in a total lack of care since the logic of power prevails over everything, and this in every sense of the word since we are also in a system that maximizes social inequalities. Social inequality stems moreover

from this formula: I don't care, I don't have to take care of those who are weaker than me. This notion of care strikes me as a very important political concept today in order to consider the future.

The expertise of local actors can surely help to get a more focused "attention" when a global scale is more suitable to the indifference you are referring to. What do you think about this?

In the world as it is today, all scales are constantly merging. What is local is global, what is global is local. It is very difficult to separate the world into different scales. Your plastic waste, for example, is micro-local because it is extremely tiny, but it is also part of a local scale, which is the production scale, and on another global scale, which is the distribution and use scale. The global, the local and the zonal are constantly intertwined. I often talk about the permanent collusion of scales. Everything is permanently intertwined, mixed. I am local, but at the same time I am always global and reciprocally. This is what is characteristic of the contemporary era and has to be thought of through the intermediary of the habitat, as I was saying earlier. I can no longer be satisfied with just stating that what is happening in the world does not concern me since I am just a local individual. I am a local individual, but I am also a fully globalized individual.

With the ecological challenges ahead, many people will be forced to relocate. Does this redefine what it means to inhabit?

Of course, this completely changes the definition of inhabiting, especially since no one can objectively answer your question, which is basically, "how can we deal with it?". This is, I think, what can explain why a certain number of political and social-economic actors remain in a kind of denial of action concerning global change. It is not that they refuse to diagnose global change, contrary to what is often believed, but it is simply, and understandably so, that they are unable to imagine the future. To be able to reinvent the habitation of the planet on the scale of 7.5 billion, and soon 10 billion people in 2050, is a job that no one can undertake today. It is a job that is overwhelming.

Therefore, I am not saying what to do, because I cannot predict what is to come next. But what I do know for sure is that we have to start by diagnosing this habitation crisis that we are talking about. And this also means that, given the size of the challenges we face, the only resource we have is a collective political experiment on new ways of living in this world. This is why I almost always end, and I am not going to derogate from this rule today, with a call for collective experimentation on habitat: we need to experiment with new ways of inhabiting and considering our system of relationships and encounters with non-humans.



¹ René Descartes, *le Discours de la méthode* (1637)

² Virginie Maris, *La part sauvage du monde. Penser la nature dans l'anthropocène*, Paris, Le Seuil, 2018.

³ Bruno Latour, *Quel cosmos ? Quelle cosmopolitiques* » in Jacques Lolive et Olivier Soubeyran (sous la direction de) *L'émergence des cosmopolitiques- Colloque de Cerisy*, Collection Recherches, La Découverte, Paris, 2007 pp. 69-84.

⁴ Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries. A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, Londres-New York, Routledge, 1993.

⁵ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, Harvard University Press, 1982.

Aesthetics and ecological sciences

Loïc Fel

Loïc Fel is the author of the epistemology thesis entitled *Green aesthetics*. Together with him, we evoke the artist and his positioning in an ecological context. The aim is to understand how the recollection of data of ecological sciences influence our aesthetic perception of the world.



/02

Why study the ecological transition with an interest in aesthetics?

The Enlightenment has changed our “Weltanschauung”, in other words, our vision of the world. The way we conceive the world and our relationship to it has been transformed thanks to the construction of Western rationality, which is separate from any theology. A change in civilization such as this one is characterized by a change in both the constitution of knowledge (science, pure reason¹), ethical judgement (practical reason²), but also in aesthetic perception (the faculty of judgment³). This was the case during the Renaissance, then at the beginning of the industrial revolution, and is also the case today with ecology and the systemic approach. It has been established that this change has been radical for sciences for about a century, for ethics since the 1960s, but for aesthetics the work still has to be done. By proving this third change, we are giving ecology a civilizational scope. The idea is to consider this aesthetic research as proof of something bigger.

It is thus this last paradigm shift, concerning the faculty of judgment, that is at stake in the ecological movement that you call Esthétique Verte (Green Aesthetics)?

Exactly. What is going to be special and really striking for both architects and artists, is that until now everything that used to define an artistic movement,

or the taste of an era was or could be defined by formal elements and language. Artistic movements were always defined by formal features, representation modes. Now, when we take a look at those who claim to be part of the ecological movement, we can hear a large diversity of formal languages. Therefore, being part of the ecological movement cannot be defined based on this criterion. Affiliation to the movement is going to be defined based on the way one relates to nature. A work or an architecture can be called ecological, not because of its shape but because it maintains a particular and chosen interaction with the world, with its environment. The same way that an ecological garden is defined as such not because it is designed in a certain way - like English or French gardens - but because it has a caring connection with nature and biodiversity. Finally, formal criteria have been replaced by a functional one. I believe this change makes things far more effective and concrete. Whether it is the architect, the artist, or the gardener, everyone becomes an intermediary towards a direct relationship with nature and the way it behaves, rather than being a demiurge who creates something *ex nihilo*. It is a matter of presenting, not representing. And this is a really radical change.

We imagine that this new aesthetic has been influenced by the contribution of recent scientific knowledge in the field of ecology...

Not only. It is deeper than that in so far as it is a change of rationality that has taken place. The scientific knowledge of ecology, as well as the ethics and aesthetics that come from it are all due to the same

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phenomenon: a change in the way we see the world. I believe that the origin of this movement is Alexander von Humboldt's⁴ phytogeography of plants⁵ who, in his work, dealt with questions of morality, science and social sciences. He is the last thinker to have produced a work that has gathered and organized all the knowledge of his time into one system. What he has introduced as a change could be summed up by saying “what if instead of analyzing phenomena or things one after the other, separately, we focused more on the relationships between them?”. It thus affects the object under study, and therefore the way of interpreting the world. Ecology, unlike biology, does not study a living being, but the relationships between living beings and their environment. It's a shift that changes everything.

Doesn't this idea reduce creative practice to a search for utility?

It is the relationship that matters. The artist's intermediation is also a relationship and can be of value or not. We can still carry on having a formal judgment. Everything that already exists is there, but in a more global way. If I sum up the work of the last 20 years on the reflection on aesthetics in relation to ecology, one could say that it is an enrichment of the aesthetic relationship that is at stake: instead of being on one level, it is on four.

Could you describe these four levels for us?

The first one consists in the satisfaction taken from the formal perception of things. If I look at a forest drawn by an artist, it is the arrangement of shapes

and colors that I am going to find beautiful and in harmony with the taste of an era, for example. The second level is the “objective perception” in the context of the aesthetic relationship, theorized by the Canadian philosopher Allen Carlson⁶. I will find an elephant beautiful because it matches what an elephant is supposed to look like, basically because it is healthy and of normal size and build. This is precisely where scientific knowledge interferes with the aesthetic judgment. A polluted environment will be perceived as unpleasant, and a primary forest teeming with life as beautiful. Then the third level concerns the relationship between human interaction and the history of an object: its symbolic and collective value. For example, this forest could be sacred to a particular community, or be the historical site of a specific event, such as the place of the first meeting between Westerners and this community, or the last habitat of a species in danger of extinction, as it is unfortunately too often the case. This “patrimonial” dimension permeates my aesthetic experience with a certain aura. Finally, the last and fourth level of the aesthetic relationship that I'm trying to define, corresponds to the level of intimate and personal symbolism. This is the level of the personal experience that I can have with an object, a place, or a living being.

All these different layers of the aesthetic experience are mutually enriching. Green aesthetics seek to keep those together rather than make one of these criteria exclusive. To use the example of the bag, first, I will find it beautiful by its shape and its colors.

The second level corresponds to its function: it is a bag and moreover it is recycled. It has a relevant story to tell me from the point of view of the relationship with nature. The third level corresponds to the symbolism of the fishing net and the consumption model that I share with every human being. And the last level, more intimate, could be, for example, that I discovered this bag when someone gave it to me, so I also have an emotional connection to the object.

What place would you give to the sensitive experience in the aesthetics that you defend? Can one still be delighted by a landscape in the romantic sense of the word?

It is integrated and built on it. The same as when faced with a poem or a work of art. If I discover it without precise knowledge, without having the detailed lexicological analysis of the poem, I can still get an overall impression and enjoy it. It is always feared that analysis, knowledge, objectification, might diminish the emotion. Yet art history has taught us that the more we know about a painter's history, the more we know how to decode his pictorial brushstrokes, symbolic elements, the more our emotional experience is deepened. It is the same with nature. The intuitive oceanic feeling of belonging to something bigger, as when one faces a great panorama and experiences the sublime, is reinforced by the ecological knowledge since it makes it objective and real.

You show that this enrichment of the aesthetic experience also involves taking into account

the alterity of nature and its own rationality. Could you explain this idea in more detail?

We are given the opportunity to be biocentric. Up until now, our aesthetic relationship has proven to be purely anthropocentric: things were considered on a human scale. We only saw them through the prism of our own senses. The experience that a fly or a kiwi bird gets from its environment is different from ours. Scientific progress now enables us to apprehend it and to enrich this perception. We had to admit that our vocabulary or our perception is linked to our reality, and that the environment can actually be interpreted by other species. I would like to stress that it is necessary to take this alterity into account for the good management of the territorial life, the preservation of species and the environment.

This reminds us of the work of the gardener Gilles Clément, who thinks his gardens in motion by taking into account the physical reality of the evolution of plants.

This is a good example of the evolution of aesthetic taste. Gilles Clément defends the choice of species that are going to be sowed depending on the characteristics of the soil, the climate... The goal being to have to do as little maintenance as possible. The plants are left to resow from one year to the next, to move gradually. No drawing is respected, contrary to the French garden model. It is much more economical for local authorities to manage this type of garden: it does not require any inputs or mowing for maintenance. And it is also, above all, beneficial to biodiversity.

Over the years, the general public has developed a taste for the countryside, for local and seasonal flowers, for a less designed and more bushy garden, which was not easy to reach at first! It is an example in the evolution of aesthetic practice and taste through the practical implementation of scientific knowledge and its impact on an artistic practice: the art of the garden - if we consider it to be an artistic practice.

Artists claiming to be part of this movement integrate more and more natural materials. Even to the point of erasing their own traces?

They might also not create a visible work of art, or use tangible materials since their material is the relationship. It is for this reason that many visual artists who have become involved in this artistic scene claim to have been inspired by Beuys' work⁷. The artist would even go so far as to define the notion of "social sculpture" as the subject of his work. The artistic object could be totally immaterial and purely relational. It is no coincidence that he was also the founder of the Green Party in Germany. I think the idea that the gesture creates the work is even more accurate in the environmental movement. It can just be a look, there is not necessarily a transformation of the object, but just a relationship that changes.

Does this type of artistic practice, focused on the relationship, influence our collective conception of what is "natural"?

I believe there are two levels, the perceptual level on the one hand, and the narrative level on the

other. While the philosopher's job is to enunciate concepts, the scientist's job is to enunciate knowledge. Meanwhile, the artists suggest percepts. They try to reveal something that we did not yet know how to see or to make perceptible. For example, the issue of the rise of the oceans is an extremely subtle phenomenon to document, invisible to the naked eye, but which can be revealed through the intermediation of an artist. Regarding this subject, Marie Velardi's work *Terre-mer*⁸, which is composed of a mapping of the foreshore (the area covered at high tide and cleared at low tide) is conceived as a real act of mediation. It reveals things that escape our instantaneous experience. Then the second level, even more significant in my opinion, is the narrative level. Every time we have agreed to provide the necessary efforts to change our society, we have first built the story of a positive future, a future where things work out well. However, when it comes to ecological issues, there are a majority of stories about the collapse or the feeling that we will inevitably suffer a lot of deprivation. Very few of these speeches herald a future where the efforts undertaken would converge towards a better tomorrow, where, in a way, the ecological challenge would be successfully solved. Yet this is the ideal that should be followed in order to create a positive and optimistic future that feels appealing to the broader public. And that is precisely where the artist intervenes.

¹ *Pure Reason* was theorized by Kant in 1781. This publication seeks to establish the conditions of human knowledge. The subject receives phenomena through the filter of their sensitivity and the categories that make up their reasoning. It is thus from them and their representations that the knowledge, which is no longer contained in an object that can be known intrinsically, is thought.

² *Practical Reason* derives from Pure Reason in so far as it constructs ethics on reason alone, independently of God's will. The aim is to establish an ethics that is supposed to be unconditional.

³ Finally, the *Critique of the Faculty of Judging* focuses on the field of aesthetics. Once again Kant reverses traditional ways of thinking. Beauty is not a quality to be found in the work, it is not to be sought in the object contemplated, but it is constructed by a subject judging the way in which it is affected by it.

⁴ Editor's note: Alexander von Humboldt was an explorer, naturalist and geographer, born in 1769 in Berlin and died in 1859 in the same city. He is considered as one of the pioneers of ecology. Among other things he showed the influence of human activities on ecological disruption. He observed a direct relationship between the deforestation in Venezuela and the drying up of Lake Valencia.

⁵ Study on the distribution of plants on Earth.

⁶ *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture*, Psychology Press, 2002

⁷ Joseph Beuys, an artist from the beginning of the 20th century (1921-1986), whose work consists largely of happenings and performances.

⁸ Marie Velardi relies on scientific research in ecology to build *Terre-mer* (2014-2019), an artistic project deployed in several mediums (watercolors, texts, drawings, videos), questioning the variations of the coastline, the line separating maritime zones from land, on a geographical map.



"Ghost net"

Géraldine Le Roux

Géraldine Le Roux, lecturer in Anthropology at the University of Western Brittany, author of *Un art des ghost nets, Approche anthropologique et esthétique des filets fantômes*, tells us about the fishing net, a particular type of predator, which continues to haunt the marine environment even after it was removed from its ship.

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Why are there so many fishing discards found on coastlines around the world?

First of all, it is essential to deconstruct the popular belief that fishermen are the polluters of the seas. It is a rather prevalent image that cannot be proven in terms of risk and waste management. The reasons we find lost nets are plural, but most of the time they are accidental. Nets and trawls¹ can be lost due to the poor-quality materials used to make them. Under the weight of the quantity of fish caught, a net made of an overly weak material, such as bad polymers or a too-low concentration of this synthetic material, can break easily. Another reason for the ghost nets phenomenon - very well captured in Anita Conti's² *Les Racleurs d'océan* - is simply the fact that the bottom trawl can "hook" (i.e. cling to a rock or a coral) due to an unfortunate mistake or bad weather. It then gets stuck and breaks off. On another scale, the net-mending also produces marine wastes, although much smaller in size than nets and trawls of several kilometers in length and weighing up to several tons. When a fisherman "mends" a net (repairs his net on the docks) some threads are systematically lost, and rarely cleaned up. A more or less microscopic flow of waste then slides from the dock to the sea. However, these accidental losses could be avoided, which is why a certain number of structures accompanying the fishermen are currently considering the installation of gutters. But the net-mending is also

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done while fishing, on the open sea, on a boat caught in the wind and waves. This is a job where you have to react quickly, and which can turn out to be dangerous. As a result, falling threads are not a priority. In addition to these situations explaining the accidental loss of fishing nets, the fact that some gears are deliberately offloaded must also be taken into account. Facing the risk of being controlled by Customs or other official services, the fisherman at risk of being caught fishing illegally may choose to untie their net or trawl. Finally, because some port infrastructures require a fee for what is brought ashore, some fishermen prefer to throw away their used fishing gear in the open sea. In the Pacific, where I work as an anthropologist, it is common to see both awls (pieces of trawls) and huge gillnets stranded on the coasts, even those of very isolated islands.

An Anglo-Saxon expression calls these nets lost at sea "ghost nets". What is the idea behind this expression?

A "ghost net", literally, suggests that the net continues to fish, to trap species, even though it is no longer attached to the ship. However, the impact of ghost nets on fishery resources has not been scientifically proven. On the other hand, there is proof of its danger to the fauna and flora, affecting many mammals and marine birds, as well as invertebrates, including protected species such as turtles, whales, dolphins, sharks, dugongs, and manatees. Regarding the research I conducted in Oceania, the term ghost also takes on another meaning. For many societies in Oceania, the ocean is not an empty or neutral space. It is occupied by

non-human entities. For Maori people in New Zealand, the sea is an area through which the dead are transiting. For Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia, the world created by ancestral spirits is at the same time what is on earth, what is in the atmosphere, the stars, the wind, the sea currents, and what is in the ocean. Sea and land are a continuum. The sea is inhabited by entities that have strong ties with many of these communities; ties that could quickly be summarized as totemic. Taking care of this environment, through certain protocols, certain rituals, means taking care of all these human and non-human beings who will take care of you in return. This is the main difference with a western approach, according to which the ocean was perceived for a long time as an abyssal space in which one can sink anything. The work of the historian of sensibilities, Alain Corbin³, has highlighted this representation of an empty territory in which everything that society no longer wants can be thrown into it, and disappear.

How do we come into contact with a non-neutral environment that is so full of symbolism?

First of all, it is important to know that each site belongs to a traditional owner who must be asked for prior authorisation. It is a very common act for members of indigenous communities to address the elements that make up the marine environment. For example, they gently place their hand to close the clamshells. This gesture is meant to protect humans from accidental injury, but also to avoid attacking the non-human entity.

The dialogue with the environment also involves reading the signs. A cloud, a bird's flight or other atmospheric phenomenon can, depending on the form they take, be interpreted as the acquiescence of ancestral beings.

How does one approach a non-neutral environment that is so symbolically rich?

First of all, it is important to know that each site belongs to a traditional owner from whom prior authorization must be obtained before entering it. It is very common for members of indigenous communities to address the elements that constitute the marine environment; for example, gently placing one's hand to close the clamshells. This gesture is meant to protect the human from accidental injury, but also to prevent any assault on the non-human entity. The dialogue with the environment also includes the reading of signs. A cloud, a bird's flight or other atmospheric phenomenon can be interpreted as the approval of ancestral beings, depending on the form they take.

Is plastic pollution visible on a daily basis for coastal populations?

In the northern Australian region where I am conducting my research, this marine pollution has been documented for a few decades now. From the 1990s onwards, local fishermen acknowledge having seen more and more of these ghost nets and note the increased presence of dead animals strangled by these synthetic thread residues. It is undeniable that people are observing the negative

impact that these nets have on the fauna, flora and possibly on human activities. Maritime or inter-island connection boats may be delayed due to a net caught in the engine or the propeller. However, the degradation of this macro-waste is far less visible and audible. This synthetic material, which is claimed to be permanent, actually deteriorates very quickly, especially once it is washed ashore. Depending on its quality, according to ultraviolet light, salinity, and hydrodynamics, macro-waste breaks down into micro-waste, into particles barely visible to the naked eye. I have experienced it myself. On a Polynesian atoll located in an area where industrial fishing is officially prohibited, I once found a blue rope; sensitive to color, I took it in my hands and as soon as I grasped it, it broke, leaving my palm blue, covered with synthetic dust. This means that this same dust can be found in the sand without us noticing it and possibly enter the food chain as well. A very large part of the plastic that lies in the oceans remains undetected by scientific evaluations. This is what they call "the great mystery". It is well-known that all marine organisms, from oysters to fish, ingest it. But we are unable to determine if the plastic elements remain partially in the marine organism or if they come out of them completely. While studies suggest that this may lead to behavioral changes in marine life, these conclusions remain uncertain. In summary, this is an invisible material with a potential high impact that is linked to the so-called POPs (Persistent Organic Pollutants). I would like to highlight that fishing gear has always been lost. The use of gillnets is a technology that has existed since the Neolithic period. But back then, when it was made out of natural fibers,



such as hemp or coconut fiber, it deteriorated naturally. For about forty years, fishing nets have been made with synthetic polymers, plastic residues that persist in the ocean over a very long period of time. The residues spread to different levels of the oceans and seas: emerging at the surface, floating along the water column, resting on the ocean floor, or washing up on the coast. Some will run on the surface of the water, and others, on the contrary will, sink, depending on their composition.

You mention the salvage of materials washed up by the sea as a practice that is part of certain traditions. So, recycling would therefore have an ancient history?

Indeed, the recovery of marine objects has nothing new. Historically, each society has its own interpretation of what the sea-wrack deposits. In Brittany, for example, there is what is called the "pinse" tradition, which consists in going to the coast to collect what the sea brings. This can be materials of natural origin such as driftwood or manufactured objects from shipwrecks.

The proliferation of plastic materials on beaches has not altered these traditional practices?

The ethnographic approach obviously brings us to wonder, among other things, whether picking up a natural material is equivalent to picking up a synthetic one. It is interesting to note persistence

and variation in the approach to what the sea brings and what they do with it. I can give you some Australian examples: the synthetic fiber is processed by some old basket makers as they do with natural fibers, by rolling the material on the thigh (a bit like for the Cuban cigar) or hanging the long fibers on the toes to braid them better. Likewise, some basketry forms and techniques have been borrowed to make objects from ghost nets. There is a continuity of techniques, forms, and gestures, but also great innovation, linked to the art world for which these objects are made; also, because the synthetic materials require certain adaptations. For the Indigenous artists with whom I work, it is important to reinterpret a tangible heritage, to perpetuate an intangible one, and to update them in light of the new challenges that societies and territories are facing.

¹ Pocket-shaped net whose opening is kept gaping, towed at sea by one or two boats.

² Anita Conti, *Raieurs d'océan* (1953), Paris, Payot, 2017.

³ Alain Corbin, *Le Territoire du vide, L'occident et le désir de rivage, 1750-1840*, Paris, Flammarion, 2018.

⁴ The sea leash refers to natural or man-made debris brought back to the coast by the waves.

Deconstructing and rebuilding ecological promises

Aurélia Gualdo

Aurelia Gualdo tells us about her thesis project on *The reparative dimension of the engagement processes of fashion designers*. We examine with her the difficulties that remain to be overcome in order to build a fashion ethic.

/04

You are currently working on a thesis about the links between ecology and fashion, what are your first thoughts?

I wonder how ephemeral objects become political objects, focusing on the modalities of the designer's engagement. It is interesting to note that most of them are neither involved in a political party nor even particularly politicized. This is what has pushed me to have a strong interest in cognitive processes. Commitment does not come alone; it is often preceded by an emotion. There is first a shock, personal or not, linked to the designer's experience which leads them to take heed of their environment. For example, the pictures of the collapse of the Rana Plaza in 2013 (which caused the deaths of more than 1,100 Bangladeshi workers who were working in this building for Western brands, ed. note), appeared as a wake-up call for many designers I have met. There is a strong restorative dimension at the ecological and social level as well as at the individual level: the designers, by committing themselves, do not only fix their environment but also themselves, their profession.

To what extent does this commitment through fashion imply an awareness of the environment, either natural, political, or economic?

In Frederic Godard's *Sociologie de la mode*, this idea is explained very clearly. Following Marcel Mauss's

conclusion, he characterizes fashion as a *complete social fact*¹ since it involves phenomena that affect all the spheres of our society at the micro as well as the macro level. This is where the study of ethical fashion, on both the designer and the consumer side, is relevant. For the consumer, becoming aware of how everyday objects are made - such as a bag, for example - means becoming aware of its environment, at both political and economic levels, since it involves multiple aspects. The example of seeds is quite eloquent about this matter. While the food lobby is very active, very little is said about the seeds used to make cotton, which are also full of GMOs. We tend to forget that those fields are also cultivated to produce clothes. This is due, among other things, to a lack of education about the clothing industry among citizens. Until a few decades ago, our mothers learned at a very young age to sew, repair, and take care of their clothes. In the 1990s, globalization led to a significant loss of domestic skills. Today, this has resulted in the emphasis on 'ready-to-throw-away' items, with clothing of the fast fashion industry, from GMO fields when they are not petroleum-based, and manufactured under poor conditions, both on the human and environmental scale.

Many brands and large firms are incorporating environmental issues or actions into their strategies. How do you feel about these measures?

The problem is taken into account, but they still manage to deal with it without questioning themselves. There is a lot of attention paid to making the garment or accessories last longer by making them

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recyclable. Yet the real issue is not about how to recycle, but how to produce. How to reduce overproduction? What service savings need to be developed to make the garment last longer as a material good? These are the questions that should be asked. We must rethink the way we consume and own objects. Luxury finds its origin in this idea: buying a piece that lasts longer.

This reminds me of the distinction Hannah Arendt makes between the objects produced by *homo faber* and those of the *animal laborans* (in reference to Marx) in her book *The Human Condition*²: the former transforms raw materials into "objects-of-the-world", objects of use, while the latter produces consumer items. The object of use guarantees a durability in the use of the object, a memory, and the presence of humans on earth. It makes it possible to leave a trace, like a will anchored in the eternity's process, as opposed to 'ready-to-throw-away' clothes. The difference with these objects lies in their "rate of wear and tear": the ratio between the durability of objects of use and the coming and going of objects of consumption. The ideals of *homo faber* - permanence, stability, duration³ - are sacrificed by the abundance of the animal laborans of modern societies. In other words, an oversupply of consumer goods. But, trying to explain to fashion stakeholders and large corporations that the problem is not so much about how things are recycled but about overproduction, just does not work. According to them, moving in this direction would jeopardize their entire production system. We can nevertheless observe that there is a paradigm shift among the next generations. Since the beginning of my fieldwork⁴ in 2016,

I have come across many young creators who are deeply questioning the system. For example, young designers refuse internships and jobs with certain brands, considering that they are not environmentally and/or humanly sustainable, which would have been inconceivable a few years ago.

This echoes the H&M Group's recycling policies ...

Yes, basically, their speech is: "Too much waste in the world, give it to us, we will recycle it, and in exchange we will give you vouchers to buy even more clothes". But, on the other hand, a report was published by *Ethique-sur-l'étiquette*⁵ showing that some of the European subcontracting factories of the group employ women in abominable working conditions: they are given glucose capsules to prevent them from fainting. A so-called 'green policy' does not make a brand ethical.

How exactly can an ethical brand be defined?

This is a complicated issue. Ethics can be considered either in a pragmatic or in a moral way. In the first case, ethical principles will be applied in one area of activity and a CSR (social and environmental responsibility) unit would have to be established in all companies. In the case of the fashion industry, it would be a center that deals exclusively with ethical fashion. Is it the answer? I don't think so... I believe that ethics should not be used in a practical sense but understood in a moral one. It is more interesting to have a brand that is not 100% green but works in good

environments and respects its employees, rather than a brand that brags about being 100% green but then treats its employees badly. It's a question of coherence. This comes down to making a fundamental distinction between green capitalism and social sustainability. We can use the example of wind turbines. An environmentalist current, known as green-capitalism, would build wind turbines without thinking about their location. The consequence is that they would kill a migratory flow of birds, and thus a whole ecosystem. This is more about thinking about a renewable energy business than an ecological thinking. Ecology must take all ecosystems into account, not just one. In this same direction, it would be more necessary to speak about ecological and social fashion than ethical fashion. This should be the norm. We talk about ethical fashion, but we should just talk about fashion, saying that fashion must make a transition that aims at social ecology, not just an environmentalist transition. It depends on what designers do. From the moment you act and speak up, you get political. To bring back the question of emotion, the sensibility that people have as human beings must be used to act.

¹ Frédéric GODART, *Sociologie de la mode*, La Découverte, 2010

² Hannah ARENDT, *Conditions de l'homme moderne* (1958), Calmann-Lévy, Agora, Presse Pocket, 1988

³ *Ibid.*, cf p. 176

⁴ For her research, Aurélia Gualdo is carrying out her ethnography of fashion activists in Paris.

⁵ « H&M : Fair Living Wages Were Promised, Poverty Wages Are The Reality », enquête *Ethique sur l'étiquette*, Clean Clothes Campaign, septembre 2018





Literature and environmental thinking

Stéphanie Posthumus

What place should be given to imagination in the ecological transition? Stéphanie Posthumus, specialist in ecocriticism and professor of Comparative Literature in Quebec, discusses with us the importance of language in the construction of an imagination that would go beyond anthropocentrism.

/05

Can imagination be defined?

A distinction must already be made between imagination and imaginary. To me, the imaginary is collective, on a social scale. We're not talking about someone's imaginary but about the imaginary of a group. It can be a set of images, of representations that are flowing at a given moment. The imaginary is something rather amorphous. How can it be studied, if not in a particular text, in a film?

On the contrary, imagination is something very concrete. It is always embodied by someone; it is an intellectual, creative capacity. This someone can be either human or non-human. There is both the ability to imagine a world and the ability to relate to that world. This is what forces us to re-examine the idea of interiority, of consciousness, in other living beings. Besides the capacity to imagine, to identify oneself, there is what I call a "performance" of this imagination: it is expressed in relation to what is around us.

What term should we use to reflect upon our relationship with nature? You prefer the term "ecology" to "environment", can you comment on why?

I have used the works of Michel Serres and Isabelle Stengers a lot. Their philosophical and ecological reflections enable us to come up with another

vocabulary, to build a world that does not limit us to what the term "environmental" suggests. The latter is closely linked to the 1960s and the birth of the environmental activist movements. It is also linked to national park policies. This expression refers to a certain approach to nature: a desire to protect, to respect, which, however, can lead to a division between nature and humans in the same movement. I'd rather choose the term "ecological". Its etymological root is oikos, which translates as house, habitat. It embodies the idea that nature is always here, now. The term "environment" remains attached "what is around" to a certain extent. In this case, it still conveys the idea of a knot at the center, which in this case is the human being. If we want to get out of anthropocentrism, we must avoid this thinking subject, this something at the center, from which we start to reflect on the rest.

This also raises the question of linguistic communities. Does the language spoken, and the vocabulary used lead to different ecological situations?

It's when you speak another language that you realize that the same word, in this case the word "nature", doesn't mean the same thing according to the culture in which you exist. It is from a very concrete experience of different languages that we can reflect on this.

Then, within the same language, there can be great variations. I speak French, but does it determine the way I see what is in front of me and how

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I talk about it? This is the issue with the term imagination. At what level does it affect the way I see and talk about what is in front of me? Could we say, by example, that the ecological imaginaries of Quebec, Algeria, and France are similar enough because of their common language to make comparisons? I don't think so. The issue here in Quebec, arises mainly in comparison with the United States. It has often been said that Quebec writers are more oriented towards the United States than towards the rest of Canada. It is a way of developing an identity while rejecting what the rest of English-speaking Canada represents. I agree that culture and language filter the ecological imagery, but that does not entirely determine it.

If there are so many different ecological imaginaries, can we consider a global response to the ecological crisis?

It is indeed a global, universal crisis, but that is not enough. It can lead to false universalism. Are we sharing a set of experiences, only because we are human beings? I do not believe that one day we will be able to reach a single unified global response. I am afraid that this will lead us to some kind of green totalitarianism.

To what extent will the way we call "nature" determine our action on it?

There has been a movement in ecocriticism for a long time that seeks to eliminate this word, saying that Nature, with a capital N, is understood

as something external to us, creating a form of dualism. I am referring to Timothy Morton¹ who insists on a form of ecology without nature, without even wanting to name it. According to me, this idea remains extremely problematic. If we recall the mythological tradition, for example, naming, personifying, still allows us to bring concepts to life. Therefore, Bruno Latour uses the term Gaïa² - a term from mythology - while others use terms from native languages to get away from this dualistic approach. Using other terms can help us re-imagine this relationship. It allows us to re-interpret a Western philosophy that has had a long history, in which nature is always situated as something different from culture. What if, for example, the virus SARS-CoV-2 was called something else? What if it was no longer seen as something foreign coming from nature? What if we named it as an integral part of our socio-economic and bodily systems? Which metaphors will help us best? The discourse of the war against the virus disturbs me. It's like saying that nature is trying to attack us. This is not trying to deal with it, it's trying to eradicate it.

It also raises the question of how we want to involve the reader. Are there narrative models that are more effective than others?

Indeed, this was the main point in *The Comedy of Survival*, by the American literary critic Joseph Meeker, the very first book on ecocriticism that was published in the 1970s³ - even though the term does not yet exist at the time. According to him it wasn't the tragic mode - in which

a hero tries to fight against something and loses in the end - that would help us to live ecologically, but comedy, in which a character is trying to cope, depending on society and people around him. And I think that ecocriticism continues to debate whether there is a mode that is more efficient. I think that the answer ultimately is no. I believe that for every literary genre there are dangers, as in science fiction for example, and the emphasis on an apocalypse. Yet when it is not apocalyptic or catastrophic, I think science fiction is a key genre for French ecological awareness. For example, we can take the work of Canadian author Margaret Atwood with her dystopian trilogy *MaddAddam*. It is the story of a pandemic created by a scientist, who wanted to eliminate the human species in order to create his own species. Atwood spends very little time talking about the disaster, the trilogy takes place afterwards. It shows that there is an after, and that this after is not just about survival. There are possibilities to create differently. In this world there are animals that are very intelligent, there are also lots of plants that have been genetically modified. It is not a return to a kind of pre-civilization either. The question is: how does one create "with" this kind of pivot or turning point. I think this can help us get away from the idea that, in the capitalist framework that governs the world, the only way to move on is a total catastrophe that will replace everything. On the contrary, the book shows a kind of continuity in relation to what we are already experiencing. Finally, literature can move and touch, but the main issue for me is: how does the reader encounter

otherness in the text, and how do they manage to dialogue with it? The problem with literature is that it remains a very individual activity. It is only when you share this experience, when you talk about it in a group, that it starts to circulate more widely. I think that there is not only one way for literature to affect or influence the reader. Rather, there is a process in which the reader is involved, that can convey new discussions. It is not a question of involving the reader to mobilize them, as in a slogan such as "we are all going to stop driving cars". Here the discourse becomes too quickly a praxis, the imagination is reduced to "here's what we have to do".

How is the link between imagination and political action made?

I think we must ask to what extent the imagination is already political. It is not as if you had imagination on one side and political action on the other. Assuming that imagination is political from the outset, the choice of literary texts I use to prepare a lecture, or an article already puts me into a form of political action. For example, I have noticed how I was constantly quoting male thinkers. Therefore, I now make the effort to break out of this literary canon in my lectures, to quote authors who are not widely read. Somehow this is a political action. At the same time, if I choose these literary texts, it is also because something struck me, something echoed in my mind. Thus, I think that there is always some interaction, some dialogue, some intertwining between imagination and the political dialogue. I think that they cannot be separated like that. Telling

my students how I got here, where I am and why I do what I do, already helps them to understand this link between imagination and political action. I always try to get back to my own situation. To use Margaret Atwood's trilogy as an example, she does not assert that we need to act against genetically modified organisms, but instead how we are going to have to deal with them. The student can then also think, in their present tense: "how do I want to deal with the world now? With what kinds of organisms do I want to debate, negotiate?".

I work with a group of scientists who often ask me about the link between imagination and political action. They work on climate change and transition and the role of trees. They always ask me what literary texts they should read, or how a story that will educate the general public could be written. In other words, they want to know how to instrumentalize the literary imagination to lead to a certain political action. I always answer that the imagination does not work in that way, it instead cultivates diversity, it leads to new forms of creativity that are already political. If they are forced to take a single political form from the outset, the work of the imagination is eliminated.



¹ Morton, Timothy. *Ecology without Nature*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007.

² Latour, Bruno. *Face à Gaïa: Huit conférences sur le nouveau régime climatique*. Paris: La Découverte, 2015.

³ Meeker, Joseph. *The Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and a Play Ethic*. New York: Scribner, 1974.



The unconscious relationship to nature

Alix Cosquer

"Biophilia" is the hypothesis that humans have an innate tendency for natural environments. Alix Cosquer, researcher in environmental psychology in Montpellier, shares with us the consequences of such a proposition.

/06

Environmental psychology and ecopsychology are two fields that are still not very formally established in France. How do they differ from each other?

This is a good question, but the answer is not that simple. My career path has more to do with environmental psychology, which is a research discipline. It is mainly based on social and cognitive psychology. Its field of study deals with the relationships between individuals and the environment. When I talk about the environment, it is to be understood in its broadest sense. It includes both the external environment - whether it is natural or urban, or highly artificial - and the social environment, in other words, what surrounds us as individuals, the people we interact with and, more broadly, the society that constitutes our system of references and values. As far as ecopsychology is concerned, it is not necessarily claimed as a research discipline. There is indeed a theoretical dimension, especially in the United States where ecopsychology is taught and studied in universities, but it mostly consists of a large number of practitioners. The core of the idea is to reconcile human individuals with the planet. Instead of trying to bring external solutions, through practices of environmental preservation for example, it intends to find internal answers by working on individuals and their psychological relationship, sometimes unconscious, to the living.

How do you get your results?

If the questions asked in environmental psychology and ecopsychology are quite similar, the answering methods are different. In environmental psychology, research is structured around targeted questions, such as children's relationship with nature, prevention of environmental risks, etc. In order to provide answers, one can observe, set up questionnaires, and, of course, work with individuals and the different actors in the field... Data collection protocols are very diverse. Then, depending on the results obtained, we can possibly suggest recommendations. Our observations can be used to contribute to society in one way or another. In ecopsychology it's quite different: there is a much more generalist approach. Part of it consists in research questions, but also an important part is based on the implementation of reconnection processes or rituals designed to rehabilitate the link between the human psyche and the environment. For example, Joanna Macy, who is one of the important figures in ecopsychology has developed *The Work that Reconnects*. Her work consists in assisting the individual, through several stages, in a reflection and a work of putting people in relation with their psyche and their environment.

Why use psychology to address environmental issues?

We interact with the world either as individuals, as a society, or as a species. Taking an interest in individuals is one of the possible approaches to study the relationship between humans and nature.

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This does not mean that things are separated, on the contrary, they must remain interrelated. Although we are individuals, we are social individuals above all. There is a strong permeability between the way we see ourselves as individuals, the way we think about ourselves and the environment we are surrounded by, whether social or natural. What I am most interested in, is to see how the individual interacts with these other levels. On the other hand, if we look at individuals outside of their social interactions, it is interesting to observe that our relations with the environment are not systematically explicit. We then join the field of ecopsychology where we deal with the psyche and the unconscious relation to nature.

Many of the so-called overly individualistic attitudes are blamed for being responsible for certain environmental issues...

I find that a lot of weight is put on individuals, even though it is the smallest level of consideration. Over the past few years, a lot of emphasis has been put on the individual as a possibility, an initiator, a factor of change. Environmental policies are now based on pro-individual incentives for behavioral change. Humans are expected to act responsibly in order to have more eco-responsible practices without necessarily questioning the social implication of their behaviors. It is a way of clearing society, of avoiding more complex and difficult to hear questions about the structural and social changes required to coherently address preservation issues. For example, at the individual level you can have positive environmental practices, recycle, promote

zero waste, compost... But if you live in rural areas and work in the city, you will still have to use your car, because there are no other possible alternatives. There is a structural framework that is very difficult to change because it involves questioning and improving the way in which, as a society, we interact with nature, and how, still as a society, we deal with the environment. This also comes down to political concerns.

The environmental psychology and ecopsychology approaches certainly share the presupposition that humans share a need for nature, both psychologically and physically...

This is not a new concept. It was developed in the 1980s by Edward O. Wilson on what he called the "biophilia" hypothesis, which postulates that as humans, we have an innate tendency - genetically inscribed - to seek contact with nature. For thousands and thousands of years humans have lived in direct contact with nature. During this time, they have developed genetic and neuronal dispositions that make them react efficiently to these environments. What was a not-so-obvious hypothesis to submit in Wilson's time is now supported by new techniques such as those of neuroscience. There is, among other things, work conducted on the cerebral activity of individuals immersed in natural settings. It has been shown that in these situations the different cerebral regions function better together, which would tend to prove that our brain works better in contact with a natural environment. Other studies on visual perception have shown that our brain

reacts better to stimuli from natural environments. These are the environments that are easiest to analyze for us humans.

This therefore contradicts our urban lifestyle ...

Yes, that's obvious. Changing lifestyles, such as increasing urbanization or the amount of time spent in front of screens, have further accelerated this distancing from the natural elements. But in the end, if the type of everyday environment can influence our relationship to living beings, it seems to me that it is our representations of nature - both collective and individual - that construct our life choices and define the place left to nature by humans. We are immersed in what Descola¹ calls a "naturalistic ontology": nature is thought of as external to us. We are able to admit that we share common physical and evolutionary characteristics with other living beings, a "continuity of physicalities". On the other hand, it is difficult to escape the idea of a psychic discontinuity between what is human and the rest of nature. To think of a different relationship with nature is also to try to go beyond this boundary in order to make it permeable and porous.

What can be done to reduce this gap?

Reversing this trend would involve for example an improvement in the frequency of visits to natural environments, by building more city parks closer to people and encouraging individuals to visit green spaces more regularly. These do not necessarily have to be protected natural areas; local natural areas can be enough, as long as we promote biodiversity

or well-being in these areas. Some countries have chosen to integrate these data into large-scale public policies. For example, in South Korea, the frequency of forests has been encouraged by the creation of dedicated forestry centers for sylvotherapy (treatment by getting in contact with trees, ed. note), providing guided and supervised sessions. More broadly, it represents a whole social system where the idea is to incorporate the relationship with forests from childhood to old age. This involves the construction of schools in the forest and the regular use of natural areas by people throughout their lives. What is based on observations in the health field is concretely put into action through social practices.

Doesn't this idea of getting your "shot" of nature lead to an artificial relationship with natural environments?

Are you afraid that green spaces in cities will reduce nature to a specific image in people's minds?

Indeed, to a rather utilitarian idea.

The utilitarian side of the practice can in fact be seen as a danger. The aim of walking in the forest is clearly to achieve human well-being. This highly anthropocentric aspect can raise questions... To what extent can this type of contact with nature contribute to transforming the representations and relationships of individuals with respect to nature? As far as I'm concerned, things are not as straightforward. When we go out in nature, the motivation is often individual: we go to relax, meet friends, do physical activity, enjoy the scenery,

etc. The contact with nature, however, gradually leads to a form of sensitivity to all living things. This is difficult to measure. This is a tenuous process and it will undoubtedly span over several years, or even several decades. In this regard, some studies have shown that exposure to natural environments during childhood has an influence on the way we then perceive the environment. This is also why the question of accompaniment, of the discourse that is produced at the same time as the experience of nature, is probably very important in the construction of the relationship to nature.

You quote the work of Richard Michel in your articles, who has shown that it is possible to reduce health inequalities by taking environmental issues into account. How do social and environmental inequalities fit together?

This is interesting because it is often a forgotten aspect when talking about the possible benefits of interacting with nature. The physical and psychological benefits are being discussed, but there are other dynamics, including the impact on inequalities, and more specifically social and environmental inequalities. It is important to know that there are inequalities in the relationship to the environment in urban areas. The most disadvantaged neighborhoods are also the neighborhoods with the least exposure to nature, since nature is often rarely close by. Nature is less diverse and exposure to certain types of pollutants is higher. These are part of the implications of environmental ecology in terms of public policies.

What about the survivalists, in which category would you put them?

In the second category. It is about anger, fear. The notion of collapse is similar to the notion of "the great turning" in the sense that we have to consider that the world as we practice it is changing. However, there is a positive dimension to this theory of the great turning: it is an opportunity to rethink our relationship to the world in order to move towards greater sustainability.

We may have a stereotypical impression of the well-being that nature can bring by forgetting the precise scientific basis on which these incentives are based. It now appears not just as a way of life...

Today we have the possibility to associate a certain number of disciplines around these topics. Well-being issues can be linked to medicine, neuroscience, psychology and ecology. What is particularly interesting is that the results of these studies converge. Results that could be observed empirically on the benefit of a walk in the woods become clearer when measurable physical indicators are found to support these hypotheses. This can also contribute to inviting interest in the dimensions of research and reflection in the field of ecopsychology and to open up the field of practice. Beyond the fact that nature is indeed necessary to all possible life, it is necessary to our daily life and to our humanity.

¹ Philippe Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture*, Paris, Gallimard, Folio Essais, 2015.

Editorial direction

Bringing together artists, researchers and other cultural actors, *Léonore Larrera* and *Alexandre Parodi* try to create moments of involvement where the fabrication of ideas can be born from the meeting of these different practices.

Through publications, exhibitions and conferences, they are interested in artistic and scientific works that embody the great contemporary movements and realities, on topics such as our relationship to the body, the sacred, digital tools and the natural.

To Face

New Relation

Developed by designer *Mattia Akkermans* and artist *Morgan Belenguer*, New Relation reflects on the creation of new systems of relations between humans and non-humans, living and non-living.

Their interests focus on the links of reciprocity and interdependence between these different entities, based on the observation of the growing and unprecedented hold of humans on Earth in the new planetary era of the Anthropocene.

In constant evolution, New Relation is conceived as a metamorphic entity.

www.newrelation.earth



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Go Face'