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## Human Nature and Aesthetic Ecosystem Services: Nature in the Service of Humankind and Humankind in the Service of Nature

Yrjö Sepänmaa

### Abstract

The term "ecosystem services" refers to the material and spiritual benefits and goods that we receive from nature, or, in a broad sense, from all kinds of environment. The various forms of such benefits have begun to be called services. Nature serves people by producing the material and spiritual (intangible, non-material) prerequisites for life. This is also the foundation of our aesthetic well-being. Does humankind reciprocally serve nature, or only itself through nature, with the intention of exploiting it? We see when nature suffers or flourishes, and we also observe our own effect on its state. As much as our well-being is dependent on nature's services, nature's well-being is dependent on us and our culture.

### Key Words

anthropomorphism, aesthetic civility, aesthetic welfare, aesthetic well-being, aesthetic wisdom, dignity, ecosophia, ecosystem services, human nature, humanism, novel ecosystem, welfare state

### 1. Introduction

Using the term "services" brings back the anthropomorphism passed over by natural sciences, which refers to a similarity to humankind, to its point of view and language. I direct most of my attention to this way of speaking and thinking that personifies nature. Does using language that combines humankind and nature bring genuine fellowship and closeness, and even love? Does the language of service therefore promote understanding of our environmental relationship and a rapprochement or does it lead back to a mystifying concept of nature and the establishment of a mutual system of values involving a servant and the one served, benefiting one over the other? Or perhaps a new age of humankind is arising or has already arisen, the Anthropocene, in which matters and words combine: ecology and philosophy become *ecosophia*, and aesthetics and ethics become *aethics*?

The environment is seen as a nature body resembling the human body, a living organism, a large ecosystem. The widest is the Earth as a whole, Gaia, Mother Earth. In the scenery we see faces, the back of a lake, the mouth of a river, the neck of the rapids, the bosom and lap of the ground. Nature is also, like people, thought to express emotions: a storm rages, the ground cries for water, plants and animals suffer from dryness or wither from lack of nutrients.

Humanity is experienced and understood as part of nature but simultaneously as conscious of itself, its identity. Even as a part of nature, it is also always something else. What, then, is the relationship between the human body and incarnated nature like? There are three models. The first is encounter; we see the scenery face to face. The second is the functional relationship depicted by the current talk of ecosystem services or benefits. The third is leaving an imprint: our imprint on the environment, the environment's imprint on us.

To this, I will divide my thoughts into three main parts: (1) the encounter between a human and the environment, a basic case of which is a person admiring a view from a vantage point; (2) symbiotic cooperation, that is, mutual serving; and (3) imprints, making and reading them. I strive to point out the way of seeing that is embedded in language, directing us towards thinking of nature and its parts as a person, with a human form.

## 2. Encounter

There are two parties: humanity and nature. Proof of their separate identity is simply that nature, in its different forms, existed before humanity and will continue to exist after it. Humanity, on the other hand, cannot exist without nature. In the end, humans are merely visitors in the life of the Earth.

The first form of an encounter is a look and greeting. ("Hello, Forest." " Hello, Mountain.", opening words of a poem by Aleksis Kivi). Looking is active. We look at nature; nature looks back at us. When we speak of looking at each other, we are shaping the environment to be like a human. The nature looking back to at us has an eye (lake, spring); the scenery has an expression (happy, gentle, melancholic). We are in the scenery, physically and spiritually. The scenery touches and moves us; on its face we read our internal world, our emotional states; the scenery smiles, as in Ingmar Bergman's film *Smiles of a Summer Night* (*Sommarnattens leende*), 1955.

For many in Finland, national scenery brings to mind those pictures of Koli Mountains, where a traveller gazes upon Lake Pielinen from the highest point, the peak of the Ukko-Koli. Here lies the basic situation of our encounter with scenery: face to face, eye to eye with the landscape. The scenery is personified. A *you-me*-arrangement and relationship is born.

We know the scenery by our head, intellectually; we feel it mentally with our heart; we sense it with our touch and other senses. *Nature on one's heart* – this is how Reino Kalliola (1909–1982), a famous Finnish naturalist and nature-writer, entitled his collection of writings (1978). *Think with the senses, feel with the mind* – this was the motto of the Venice Biennial 2007. The connections between feeling, knowledge, recognition, and emotion were indicated in the *Feel / touch / know / sense the landscape* exhibition in Finland in *Jyväskylä Art Museum* and in the book based on it (2012).

Traditionally, we have spoken of the book of nature. According to this, nature in itself is a large book that we read in order to learn and be inspired. The researcher is a reader of imprints, who compiles a picture of the past from ruins, pieces that have survived, and memories. Our survival in the struggle of life is a proof of, at the very least, satisfactory natural literacy.

The cultural environment is human's writing on nature and on earlier layers of culture. It is human's own addition to nature. All agriculture and forestry and any kind of building shapes and transforms nature, creates the language and writing of culture on top of it. That's why we need cultural literacy, too.

The service idea humanizes the non-human. The personification of nature and the entire environment acts as an aid to thinking but it also confuses. In the background, a mythical image of nature acts, though to modern people mainly as an allegory and metaphor. Personification has become literally illustrative. This manner of

speaking, which the actual natural sciences carefully avoid, is still common in essay-like nature writing and lyric nature poetry, which emphasize the interaction between humankind and nature. The operations of nature are explained in human terms of intentions and goals, predictions and rejections. Nature is seen as an understanding companion, conversational company, to which we are connected by an emotional bond. Arnold Berleant describes this kind of engagement as follows:

The conception of environment as ecological affirms its meaning as a human meaning, its meaning as experienced. As experienced, environment does not stand apart but is always related to humans, to the human world of interest, activity, and use. That is the human meaning of ecology. [1]

It is not only organic nature and its individual members that are seen as a partner; it can equally well be a machine, building or an intellectualized home region, native land, and common world. [2] Natural and cultural sites that are regarded as significant to an individual or group have begun to be "adopted," which means a commitment to taking care of them. In cases of displays and performances, some have gone even further, involving "marriage" to Lake Kallavesi in Finland (two "ecosexual" artists, Elizabeth Stephens & Annie Sprinkle), to the Eiffel Tower in France (Erika Eiffel) and to the Berlin Wall in Germany (Eija-Riitta Berliner Mauer).

Thus, surprisingly, the natural and cultural sciences, which are the foundation of ecosystem thinking, have had to leave space for metaphorical thinking that sounds mythical. When language takes control, nature becomes, in talking, the image of the human body and like humankind, which reinforces an emotional relationship and empathy. For example, one can feel sorrow for uncultivated fields being taken over by forest or for deserted villages, while at the same time knowing that the residents who have left may be happier elsewhere. Detaching from where one grew up may perhaps be interpreted as taking an initiative and being energetic, as being ready to leave to find a better life. The fields that have been left behind, covered in spring by dandelions and in mid-summer by cow parsley, are certainly visually beautiful, but in the eyes of someone who values farming, they are melancholy images of work that has lost value and been wasted.

### **3. Cooperation**

We can place ourselves above nature, we can place ourselves under it, but we can also be alongside it. Just as there is good and bad behavior between people, both exist between humans and nature. Good behavior includes taking another into consideration, respect, dignity, appreciation, and defending not only one's own rights but also those of the other. There are differences in how cultures regard the environment. Culture itself is value neutral. There are environmentally friendly cultures but also those that destroy the environment. Arne Naess, a Norwegian eco-philosopher, visualizes us hundreds of years in the future, where we look back to the present and see the Earth we have culturalized as ourselves, as our image. [3]

In order to survive, humans have had to shape their surroundings. The cultural environment is an image of its handler. It looks like him or her, but not so much in the sense of external similarity as with regard to attitudes and ways of thinking. It is this spiritual likeness,

catching the personality that portraiture strives towards as well.

The fight for well-being has now, in part, turned out to be nature's loss. Wrong methods have led to the pollution of the air and impoverishment and poisoning of the ground. Thus, nature needs nurture, it suffers, it loses its endurance and is even dying. A friend in danger is taken care of; we help him, and, in turn, he expresses gratitude to the helper.

Alongside nursing language, service language has appeared. We speak of *ecosystem services*. We speak of how nature offers us recreational, well-being, health, food supply and material services. Respectively, we must nurse, take care of, and protect nature so that it would feel well and could fulfil its service tasks. This is a mutual dependency. We search for those customs of working together this kind of language refers to.

Docent Ossi Naukkarinen, an aesthetician at the *Aalto University, School of Arts, Design and Architecture* in Finland, has returned to the source of the term *tact* (or *discretion*) and sees the ideal cooperation of humanity and nature as finding the same rhythm.<sup>[4]</sup> It is, however, nature that provides the starting rhythm. Sculptor and Professor Laila Pullinen (1933 – 2015) says of her material, stone:

I feel that I let the spirit of the material out when I find the language that it speaks. Stone, for instance, has the kind of magic that it cannot be chiseled against the grain. You first need to find in which direction it wants to be cracked. In walking around and sculpting and polishing the piece, I find the correct angle in which it will be responsive to my hand. The stone advises the sculptor through its own being.<sup>[5]</sup>

### 3.1 As servants of each other

The whole of human life is based on goods and services provided by nature. Some are produced directly by nature in a state of nature, but nowadays an ever increasing number are produced by the cultural and built environment. Cultural services, like education and teaching, art, leisure activities and recreation, are built on an essential natural foundation but distance themselves from it and develop into their own species. On the one hand, all kinds of shaping of the environment impoverish but, on the other hand, increase the richness and diversity of the environment.

Nature serves humankind but humankind also serves nature, interactively. At its best, this is mutual caring, while at its worst, it is the subjugation, forcing and suffocation of one by the other. Besides functioning interaction and mutual dependence, one also finds a reluctant service relation, a refusing of the role of servant and even outright opposition. To win the struggle for existence, humankind has had to fight stubborn nature and tame its wildness: frosts, drought and wetness, barrenness, predators, and insect pests. Nature has had to be conquered, not only with rationality but also by violence and cunning. A love-hate relationship has unavoidably remained.

The services obtained from nature are either material (food, raw-materials) or intangible. Typical non-material services are recreational services, among which aesthetic services must also be counted. Of these, beautiful landscapes and impressive natural phenomena, such as rainbows and the aurora borealis, which produce sensory experiences, are a surface aesthetic. Deep aesthetic services,

in a conceptual sense, are the harmony and dynamism of a system, an unbroken life cycle. Understanding the behavior of an ecosystem produces intellectual pleasure, while admiration or even surprise at the functionality of a multi-dimensional system tempts one to think of a higher intelligence hidden behind it, which then appears in common parlance.

Humankind, for its part, serves nature not only by protecting it but also by developing and refining it, producing something that nature itself is not able to do. This creates a cultural diversity in the environment, not as an intrinsic value but for our own benefit. Our goals are varied. The aesthetic motive of our actions is the preservation, promotion, and creation of beauty, the means being the practices of applied environmental aesthetics and the ethics that support it. The neologistic term *aethics* is sometimes used to refer to a combination of aesthetics and ethics.[\[6\]](#)

### 3.2 Side by side

We are a part of nature but, as we manipulate nature, we are always distancing ourselves from it and keeping a critical distance from it. Parallel to and in place of nature's system, we develop our own systems, a built and designed parallel nature. By its activity, humankind serves the ecosystem, which responds by producing well-being for it. In a friendly relationship, nature gives thanks for protection, environmental care, building protection. All of these are activities that take the environment into consideration and honor it. Otherwise nature is insubordinate or, if dominated, it disintegrates.

An increasingly large part of the environment is designed or made by humankind to suit its purposes. The urban environment is the most processed; not only its buildings and streets but also the gardens, parks, and city woods. Our responsibility extends both to urban nature and to the buildings and other artefacts. Cultural ecology and evolution become alternatives to and replacements for natural process. They all overlap, mix, and merge into one. Humankind has an increasingly important influence. Its footprints reach back to natural ecology, often as a form of disturbance but also in acts of repair.

Is everything untouched by humankind ecologically healthy? Nature's own disturbances, extreme phenomena, and direct environmental catastrophes mean, for example, the uncontrolled increase of some species, earthquakes and tsunamis, drought or excessive rain, even ice ages. The state of the environment is dynamic, self-correcting to a certain amount, and adaptable, not static.

Nature's own ecology can be compared with a positive all-is-well aesthetic, a cultural ecology with a critical aesthetic, because one thing or another can always be found that needs to be improved and developed. The aim is the mutual well-being of humankind and nature. This is thus a matter of the mutuality of interests. Humankind is self-evidently dependent on nature, even if not as greatly and directly as previously. What about the other way around? Is nature dependent on humankind? At least cultural nature, the agricultural and urban environment, can thank human activity for its existence, appearance, and character. There is a symbiosis between the parties, an interactive relationship, an interdependence.

Humankind is a party to ecosystems in which its effect is increasingly central. It brings with it new types of well-being, cultural, social, and economic, that do not belong to wild nature. We can speak of novel

ecosystems and their beauty.[7] This is a matter specifically of the functional, operational beauty of systems.

### *3.3 Aesthetic welfare services*

Welfare can be examined from the point of view of both humankind and nature. One expression of this kind of thinking is precisely speaking about the well-being of nature and the environment. Our conception of what is best for nature is often a narrow mirror image of our own well-being. We think that we know from the model of our own experience what is best for plants, animals, and even inanimate nature.

Aesthetic welfare, which Monroe C. Beardsley examined in his congress lecture in Uppsala, Sweden in 1968,[8] refers not only to the taking care of the preconditions of our needs involving beauty but also to the pleasure arising from the fulfilment of these needs. A welfare state sets foundations and standards for the well-being of its citizens. It arranges and ensures the material, institutional, and social preconditions for happiness and a good life. These include work and income, safety and education, the possibility to practice physical and intellectual culture, and leisure pursuits and recreation. Society cannot ensure realization and subjective satisfaction, which, possible or not, remain the responsibility of each person.

Freely following Beardsley's line of thought, the environment has aesthetic wealth or capital from which each person can only take a part for his or her own use. Use presupposes not only sensory sensitivity but also conceptual competence and skill, which can be taught and learned, thus permitting one to realize one's own possibilities. Prerequisites are given by aesthetic education and culture. Nature itself, the whole environment, guides by its reactions through trial and error. The experience of welfare thus cannot be ensured or proven from outside. However, such preconditions as a beautiful and stimulating environment and cultural offerings and leisure-activity possibilities can and should be ensured. The framework of welfare – clean air, silence and peace, communications, town and country planning with all that is involved – are primarily the responsibility of society. The realization of the welfare of the individual on this basis requires each person's own action, knowledge, skill, and sensitivity.

Beauty is, on the one hand, the source of our well-being and, on the other hand, its result. The aestheticity of the environment is a means, too, something that maintains and produces human well-being. The health effects, both physical and mental, are particularly important instrumental values, whereas actual aesthetic well-being, like art, is a value in itself. The aesthetic environment has many kinds of instrumental values but they are, however, secondary to intrinsic ones.

Environmental design and product development that take nature's well-being into account create cultural well-being. Renewable natural resources and the recycling of these resources are preconditions for the sustainability of a system. Through its solutions, design can support sustainable development. The extension of the useful life of things and products by repair and maintenance is one way to save natural resources. Programmatic "trash design" leaves a product's previous stage visible and, by its roughness, reminds us of the process's continuity, that at the end of one life cycle another starts. This is also represented by ecological nature care in which signs of deliberate planning are left. That which seems abandoned can

actually be intended.<sup>[9]</sup> Forest fire is nature's renewing ecological act and, as such, is aesthetically acceptable.<sup>[10]</sup>

#### 4. Imprint

There are material and spiritual imprints visible in matter that remain in one's mind and memory. An imprint is left when traveling; it is created when working, thinking, and speaking. It is fading or lasting, external or internal. An imprint extends from a brush to a violent blow that leaves a scar or disability. Everything leaves an imprint, vanishing or healing, or a memory. The human face is a mirror of personality and of a way of living. The face of scenery is the image of its maker, designer.

At least two imprints are created at one time, one from planning to the building site, the other to the place where the raw material is taken from. The aesthetic connects to the ethical. What are the rights and responsibilities of a human? Does nature offer the materials or are they just taken from it? What does sustainable development mean? Who or what develops? Is concern for the environment a general concern, lamenting and picturing the end of the world, or everyday caretaking for the partner, the environment?

One can see furthest to the past when looking up at the starry sky, in principle all the way to the Big Bang. In his work, *The World without Us* (2007), Alan Weisman has made a thought experiment starting from humankind suddenly vanishing from the earth. He shows how the human imprints would vanish in hours, days, years, and centuries, thousands and millions of years. The last to vanish would be radio signals moving in space.

The first footprint of astronaut Neil Armstrong is still present as a concrete dent on the surface of the moon. Are it and other marks left from his moonwalk a cultural heritage to be preserved? This question is posed by Professor Eugene C. Hargrove, an environmental philosopher.<sup>[11]</sup> The symbolic meaning included in the imprint is what makes it a heritage, a human sign for the first time outside its own habitat on another celestial body. It recalls everything that made this possible and what it represents. The footprint is not merely that of a certain person but, more abstractly, that of humankind, as this is referred to in the first official words of Neil Armstrong, the person stepping on the moon on 21, July 1969: "This is one small step for a man, a giant leap for mankind."

Humans leave an imprint as a species and as humankind, but everyone also leaves an imprint as an individual and a social agent. The most memorable are significant scientific and artistic acts, actions in leading positions in government, business life, or politics. Writing a biography necessitates tying the imprints together, perceiving one's career, one's life path. The course of events is reconstructed from details; the past is built from pieces.

The user's imprint is left as objects, clothes, and dwellings. The imprint of a hand and of fingers is a very visible sign for identification but, at the same time, it also points to the skill and style of its originator. We can imitate, walk in someone's footsteps, but this does not call for the same kind of creative ability and is, as such, more like dexterity and skillfulness.

The scenery is the image of its creators, and the culture our common imprint. Imprints have value properties: beauty and ugliness, good and bad, skill and incompetence, meticulousness and indifference.

What is beautifully made between humans is a model for what is beautifully made between human and nature. A beautiful act enhances well-being and enjoyment. A valuable life is a life lived honorably, one that has left a positive imprint. A human has found balance with himself but also with nature.

#### 4.1 From eco-culture to eco-civilization and wisdom

An environmental culture is a system of relationships between humans and the environment at any one time. As such, it is value-neutral. Cultures are environmentally positive, negative, or value-neutral. A civilized environmental relationship, environmental civility, is value-positive. It signifies good behavior towards the environment, responsibility and care, respect and esteem, while preserving the dignity of the other. Environmental wisdom or ecosophy is a positive attitude based on this kind of knowledge and feeling. Wisdom is to receive services from nature without overexploitation, preserving and developing nature's ability to serve. The question is not, however, only of thinking about benefits but rather of accepting the other as itself, for its uniqueness.

Cultural diversity is an addition which humankind has brought, parallel to natural diversity. Both represent wealth being offered. A humanistic point of view emphasizes the positive actions and possibilities of humankind. Humans increase the richness of nature, though they may also reduce it. Animals and plants are bred and their numbers regulated, at the same time artificial structures and environments are developed, which nature does not produce alone and from itself: road networks, data communications connections, entire communities and societies. Humanity's aesthetic possibilities tied to moral duties are eloquently expressed by Frederick Ferré, a constructive postmodernist as a philosopher: "The meaning of life is to be both a maker of beauty and a destroyer of beauty in order to make more beauty. That really is the rhythm of the universe."<sup>[12]</sup>

The Dutch aesthetician Jos de Mul declared when speaking of environmental matters: "Not going back, but going forward to nature."<sup>[13]</sup> According to him, nostalgic *return-to-nature*-type Utopias, sought from the past, will not succeed. Instead we must look to the future. We can promote the implementation and development of ecosystem services. This is a task for active, applied environmental aesthetics. The Italian Pagano's idea of cultural evolution is linked to this. To generalize, there are two directions: a return to a simpler, more natural life that merges with nature and, on the other hand, a going forward to one suited to humankind without knowing precisely what kind. Alongside nature-centred ecosystem thinking, an increasingly culture-centred ecosystem thinking based on humankind has visibly developed. The humanistic outlook trusts humankind's possibilities and its responsibility for its environment, and regards itself as a refiner but also as a guard and preserver.

Beardsley, whom I referred to above, notes that there is competition rather than opposition and conflict between values. In practical situations, goals that are, as such, regarded as being good must be placed in order of importance, prioritized, and, in that case, the environment's aesthetic values may have to make way for health, economic, and security viewpoints. What means could be used so that aesthetics – in a broad sense, beauty values – would have a better chance in this competition? The first condition is to show their concrete importance to our everyday life, its material and immaterial goods and services. The aim is not the supremacy or absolutism of aesthetic values but to give them a reasonable share in the totality of

values and in the life model that arises as a result of many kinds of compromise.

Unlike material, aesthetic ecosystem services are generally public. As public goods, they are freely available without charge to be enjoyed by all. By concentrating on intangible, intellectual goods instead of material things, nature would be saved. A landscape is not worn down by looking at it but peripheral activities, like moving around tourist sites, nearly always lead to wear and, in the worst cases, can destroy valued sites.

#### *4.2 Environmental aesthetic civility and guides to the good life*

Environmental civility and wisdom are about how to live in harmony and peace with the environment. A balanced environmental relationship and a life derived from it can well be seen as similar to good human relationships and polite behavior. It recognizes nature's rights but also human rights. Losses, as such, cannot be compensated by money or in other forms, but perhaps something valuable, in another sense, may be gained instead. The natural environments and earlier cultural environments are exchanged for something that is regarded as more valuable. A civilized environmental relationship means good manners: generosity, uprightness, respectfulness, taking the other party into consideration, caring, empathy. Civility is knowledge, skill, and competence, a respectful attitude. Wisdom is more than that; it requires sympathy and understanding, civility of the heart, seeing totalities, and recognizing the common good.[\[14\]](#)

One intermediary between the environment and humanity is investigative and model-giving art. Environmental eco-art is of two kinds, that which is ecologically made and that which promotes ecological values by its example or its declaration or warning. Large environmental art and building projects have aroused criticism because of their detriments, even when they have had a positive effect in raising ecological consciousness. The best known and most discussed are surely Christo's massive packaging and covering projects. They have been implemented mainly for documentation; permanent changes in the landscape were not intended.

Finally, I refer to two examples of confrontational or documentary environmental art realized in Finland, such as the Finn Ilkka Halso's *Museum of Nature* series of photographs[\[15\]](#) and the Latvian Kristaps Gelzis' environmental artwork *Eco Yard 2000: 100 m<sup>2</sup> fenced-off land safe from urbanisation*.[\[16\]](#)

*Museum of Nature* by Halso is a series of photographic manipulations. The natural objects and sites are placed on display like museum pieces, surrounded by massive constructions. Their scale extends from a covered river, rapids, and part of a cornfield to individual trees. In an imaginary culture in the near future, a world dominated by technology preserves the nature it has conquered as reserves and sample pieces. The place of the past is in the form of a natural and cultural heritage in a museum cabinet. As Christo packaged, Halso framed and encased.

*Eco Yard 2000* by Gelzis is (was) a work of environmental art in which a wire-net steel fence enclosed an area of 100 square meters of wasteland that had survived in the middle of the city of Helsinki. Opposed to each other were nature and culture, perhaps also the countryside and the city, permanence and development. The work, which should have lasted for 5 years, from the start of 1995 to 2000,

lasted, although forgotten, until the end of 2014, almost 20 years. Now, however, it has lost its battle and is destroyed; it has vanished, leaving no trace, the only memory traces are photos and written documents. The urban environment has conquered wasteland-nature. The struggle has ended in the loss and destruction predicted in the work's name. The area is being metamorphosed into a built park lined by office-buildings and dwellings.

After these dark, even dystopian vistas, what of optimistic, visionary utopias that became real? They too exist, or existed: the garden city Tapiola in Espoo on the outskirts of Helsinki, which was then compacted, contrary to its original idea; and Oscar Niemayer's Brasilia, the capital, which expands without control as differently named satellite towns. Beardsley, an esteemed and devoted professional aesthetician, stated of the original, aestheticized Brasilia, governed by aesthetic values only, that "enormous and desperate social needs were left unmet, and a government ruined itself, in the effort to realize a (perhaps) magnificent aesthetic dream."<sup>[17]</sup> The fate of utopias seems to be lost because of their unyielding self-sufficiency.

Shadowed by threats, the second phase of ecosystem services is in front of us. In fact, it is already around us, our cyborg-like connection to the environment, imposed by a technological culture that increasingly takes the form of artificial nature and virtual reality. New culture should not, however, destroy the old but move in step with it. A human, humane nature, in which we play a constructive and not a destructive role, could still be created. Plural *natures* could arise with which it is possible to construct endlessly varied systems of relationships, that is, cultures, including the characteristically aesthetic ones like the capital, Brasilia.

##### **5. Conclusion: nature as human, human as nature**

The candidates for the *Ars Fennica Award* in late winter 2014 emphasized the mythical relationship between human and nature. Riitta Ikonen, one of the artists in the *Contemporary Art Museum Kiasma* exhibition, photographs still lives of people, including herself, in clothes and accessories provided by plain nature. Subjects pose for the camera in their plant clothes. They can also be seen in another way: nature's spirit or god has, in a way familiar from folklore and religions, taken human form, become a human.<sup>[18]</sup>

A human mythologizes herself, empathizes with Nature, places herself in it, adopts the role Nature has given her, puts on Nature's costume, identifies herself with Nature's mythological character. At the same time, such a human is clearly a character in a play.

Just as the human presents herself as nature, so do the nature spirits of folklore and even higher gods take the form of a human. The encounter occurs at the same level. Even then, a certain distance remains. The dresser clearly knows she has dressed in the form of a character and shows this to the viewer. The idea has been to separate nature and character, but they still intertwine or mix.

In conclusion, sometimes *human nature* has a balanced singular meaning (*human+nature, humannature*); sometimes it is bipartite and holds a tension between human and nature (human: nature); sometimes it foreshadows a clash, human contra nature (*human vs. nature*).

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### Endnotes

I would like to thank my reviewer for constructive comments and remarks.

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[1] Arnold Berleant, "An Ecological Understanding of Environment and Ideas for an Ecological Aesthetics," Chapter 2 in Xiangzhan Cheng, Arnold Berleant, Paul H. Gobster, Xinhao Wang, *Ecological Aesthetics and Ecological Assessment and Planning* (Zhengzhou, China: Henan People's Press, 2013), pp. 54-72, ref. on p. 70.

[2] On biological and cultural ecology, see Piergiacomo Pagano, "Eco-Evo-Centrism: a new environmental philosophical approach," *EAI. Energia, Ambiente e Innovazione*, 2-3 (2014), pp. 93-99, ref. on p. 97.

[3] Sarah Nardi, "Return to Paradise. We will not attain true, meaningful sustainability until we stop treating the earth as a resource," *Adbusters* # 83: A New Aesthetic.

[https://www.adbusters.org/magazine/83/arne\\_naess.html](https://www.adbusters.org/magazine/83/arne_naess.html)

[4] Ossi Naukkarinen, "Everyday Aesthetic Practices, Ethics and Tact," *Aisthesis. Pratiche, linguaggi e saperi dell'estetico*, 7, 1 (2014), pp. 23-44. (Original version published in Finnish 2011.)

<http://www.fupress.net/index.php/aisthesis/article/view/14609/13656>

[5] Quoted by Juha-Heikki Tihinen in his essay "Arcs and Curves – on the significant form in Laila Pullinen's art," in *Arcus Lucis. Laila Pullinen. Valon kaari. Ljusbåge. Arc of Light*. (Rauma, Finland: Teresia and Rafael Lönnström Foundation, 2013), pp. 29-36, ref. on p. 32.

[6] The term *aethics* appears in Geof Huth's – a visual poet – blog, published January 19, 2011.

[http://www.goodreads.com/author\\_blog\\_posts/90199-aethics](http://www.goodreads.com/author_blog_posts/90199-aethics)

[7] See Emma Marris, Joseph Mascaro, Erle C. Ellis, "Perspective: Is Everything a Novel Ecosystem? If so, do We Need the Concept?", in *Novel Ecosystems: Intervening in the New Ecological World Order*, ed. by Richard J. Hobbs, Eric S. Higgs, and Carol M. Hall (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2013), Chapter 41, pp. 345-349, ref. on p. 348.

[8] Monroe C. Beardsley, "Aesthetic welfare," *Proceedings of the Sixth International Congress of Aesthetics, Uppsala 1968*, ed. by Rudolf Walter Zeitler (*Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Figura Nova, Series X*), Uppsala, 1972, pp. 89-96, ref. on p. 89. Also published in *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 4, 4 (October 1970, Special Issue: The Environment and the Aesthetic Quality of Life), pp. 9-20; an enlarged version, "Aesthetic Welfare, Aesthetic Justice, and Educational Policy" in *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 7, 4 (October 1973, Special Issue: The Arts Cultural Services, and Career Education), pp. 49-61.

[9] Paul H. Gobster, referring to Joan Nassauer, in his "Aldo Leopold's Ecological Esthetic. Integrating Esthetic and Biodiversity Values," *Journal of Forestry*, February 1995, pp. 6-10.

[10] Zsuzsi I. Kovacs, Carri J. LeRoy, Dylan G. Fischer, Sandra Lubarsky and William Burke, "How do Aesthetics Affect our Ecology?," *Journal of Ecological Anthropology* 10 (2006), pp. 61-65, ref. on p. 63.

[11] Eugene C. Hargrove, "The Preservation of the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies in the Solar System," a paper presented at the Seventh International Conference on Environmental Aesthetics, *Celestial Aesthetics: The Aesthetics of Sky, Space and Heaven* at the Valamo Monastery, Heinävesi, Finland, March 27, 2009. (Published in Finnish 2012.) See Hargrove's article "The Preservation of Non-Biological Environments in the Solar System" [www.lpi.usra.edu/meetings/nlsc2008/pdf/2162.pdf](http://www.lpi.usra.edu/meetings/nlsc2008/pdf/2162.pdf)

[12] Quotation from "The Paula Gordon Show: Life and Living." <http://www.paulagordon.com/shows/ferre2/>

[13] Jos de Mul, "Earth Garden. Not going back, but going forward to nature," a lecture given at *International Conference Environmental Aesthetics & Beautiful China*, Wuhan, University of Wuhan, May 21, 2015.

[14] On environmental aesthetic civility, see Yrjö Sepänmaa, "Environmental Civility: Culture, Education, Enlightenment, and Wisdom," *Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art* 6 (2013), pp. 139-145.

[15] *Ilkka Halso, Museum of Nature*. Text: Pessi Rautio (Helsinki: Galerie Anhava, 2005). [Exhibition Catalogue.] See pictures at *Ilkka Halso esittää/presents* <http://ilkka.halso.net> and <http://inhabitat.com>

[16] "Eco Yard 2000" was part of the international exhibition of contemporary art, *Ars 95 Helsinki* (February 11 – May 28, 1995) organized by the *Museum of Contemporary Art, Finnish National Gallery*. The work slowly deteriorated, but was allowed to stay on its site for almost 20 years until the end of the year 2014, when its traces were removed from the new park construction area.

[17] Beardsley, *op. cit.*, p. 89 (see Note 7).

[18] Riitta Ikonen (with an essay by Leevi Haapala), in *Ars Fennica 2014 7.2./20.4.2014*, edited by Kirsti Karvonen (Helsinki: Henna and Pertti Niemistö Art Foundation, 2014), pp. 23-28. *Ars Fennica* e-book: [www.arsfennica.fi/2014/ArsFennica\\_2014.pdf](http://www.arsfennica.fi/2014/ArsFennica_2014.pdf)