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Nicola Perullo

Interaction is between; correspondence in-between
-T. Ingold

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Abstract

In this paper I present a philosophical approach stemming from the general framework of ecological aesthetics, specifically defined here as a perceptual attitude that entails intimacy, engagement, participation, and care. In order to develop this approach, I lean on some authors that I find sympathetic to my view; particularly important are John Dewey, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Arnold Berleant and Tim Ingold. Following Ingold, I propose a reevaluation of what he calls “feet” to highlight the active and mobile nature of perception and a consideration for an ontology of living beings as a fluid meshwork composed by lines. I then propose to call ‘haptic perception’ an inter- and trans-sensorial perceptual approach, according to which the world we constantly move along is objectless, a meshwork continuously made of fluid interwoven lines. To understand this, we need to nurture an aesthetic approach free from the logic of the paradigm consisting of subject/object and of a sheer distinction between ontology and epistemology in favor of a radical relationalism.

Key Words

Arnold Berleant; John Dewey; ecological aesthetics; haptic perception; Tim Ingold; meshwork; Maurice Merleau-Ponty; relationalism

1. Introduction: in praise of a radical relationalism

Recent aesthetics has dealt with ecology and environment in different ways, and there have been various attempts for an “aesthetics of the environment” and for “ecological aesthetics.”[1] In this paper I propose a different approach to this issue stemming from the idea that, in general, aesthetics, as a philosophy of perception and of experience, should be always ecological.[2] By that, I take a more radical position aimed at showing that aesthetics should be not so much a philosophy *of* perception and *of* experience but a philosophy *with* experience. However, as it is not a very popular position, before putting all my cards on the table I need to clarify some preliminary points and to situate my proposal within a specific scenario.

I use the term ‘ecology’ stemming from James J. Gibson, as in the expression “ecology of perception,” that is, the continuous perceptual relationship and attunement with the environment. Ecology, in other words, is the way in which we inhabit and cope *with* the environment but, as I will show in the text, environment not as a container or a space we occupy but rather as the world we inhabit as we make it. By ecological aesthetics, then, I intend an aesthetics that goes beyond the sharp distinction between subject and object in favor of a radically relational model of knowledge. In order to make ecological perception effective, we need to overcome the subject/object paradigm of knowledge that is aligned with the traditional model of modern Western aesthetics. The ecological and relational aesthetics thus supports the idea that knowledge is not transmitted but is made as an ongoing process that involves perceivers and the perceived. In this framework, as discussed below, perception is action, and making knowledge means participating with an active and always emerging movement that involves what we normally think of as different entities or beings.[3] The radical relationalism at stake here implies that beings are not fixed individuals, as they are not in relation; rather they are relations.

Ecological aesthetics supports, then, the reshaping of the notions of subjectivity and identity according to a non-individualistic approach. Participation and implication are conditions of perception and knowledge; this can bring us to the idea of knowledge

through movement instead of through cogitation that I will develop later. One consequence of this is that ecological aesthetics goes beyond the strict distinction between knowledge and being. According to the proposed framework, in fact, as knowledge is not knowing *about* things but *with* them, epistemology and ontology cannot be radically separated. This is a paramount point for my proposal, because it disrupts the main paradigm of disinterestedness for “true” appreciation and enjoyment. As we know, disinterestedness is one of the keystones of modern Western aesthetics, in particular the Kantian; following a different line, the Deweyan one, I believe that an alternative is possible.[4] Disinterestedness usually goes in parallel with distance, considered the necessary ingredient for critical observation, judgment, and pure aesthetic appreciation. However, I believe that critical observation, and contemplation, do not need distance. On the contrary, as I will show, they always entail participation and implication. What makes the difference is (just) the explicit awareness of it: where an attuned perception is aware of its ecological texture and can explicitly practice a shift from critical distance to critical intimacy, an unaware one cannot.[5] Stemming from this awareness, ecological aesthetics, as it is not object-oriented but process-oriented, does not practice as much the judgment of objects but instead takes care in savoring processes and experiencing.[6]

Ecological perception, furthermore, does not straightforwardly separate thought from feeling; rather, a thinking/feeling always emerges, and this is what we call perception. As it is ecological, that is, immersed in an experience and situated in space and time, perception is always local and not universal, and site-specific and not general. According to this paradigm, this is also true, of course, for aesthetic perception, as it concerns experiences of a particular kind. Finally, ecological aesthetics is an everyday aesthetics and it promotes an art of everyday life that corresponds to a perceptual engagement that I propose to call perceptual wisdom. The notion of wisdom moves toward the attitude of being attuned with the world and expresses the willingness to practice an empathetic participation with others based on care and attention. Thus ecological aesthetics, is not an aesthetics of choice and intention but of care and attention. I propose to name this perceptual way to deal with the world ‘haptic perception,’ in opposition to the optical and retinoic framework on which the main currents of traditional modern and Western aesthetics, based on distance and dominance of visual perception, are founded. The haptic does not only refer to the sense of touch; it is inter- and trans-sensorial, and the opposite is true for the optic. These two adjectives, then, indicate a way to perceive, a potential for all the senses and their unity to feel/think with the world.

As it is already clear from my introduction, among other prominent sources of reference and inspiration, like John Dewey and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, my position is close and sympathetic to Arnold Berleant’s thinking and his idea of aesthetics as a practice of constant engagement.[7] In this text, I also turn to Tim Ingold’s work, which I find useful for helping me to find new terminology for an attempt to write *with* ecological aesthetics and not (only) about ecological aesthetics. It is a “knowing from inside” approach, always unattainable in its pure expression, of course, because we need to conceptualize, but somehow showable through examples, stories, and ways to arrange the set of argumentations.

To achieve this goal, I will follow an unconventional route: I will walk along my path *with* terms such as feet, lines, weather, and labyrinth. They are not usual in the aesthetic debate but, I believe, they can contribute to a broadening of perspective.[8] I hope that these terms help to create an appealing scenario for an ecological aesthetics, that is, an aesthetics of corresponding with beings and things. The term ‘correspondence’ is paramount; by this, I do not mean the *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, or the correspondence of form with matter. On the contrary, following Ingold, I mean it in the sense of postal correspondence, as in an exchange of letters. To cor-respond means to respond *with*: questions and answers, actions and passions; a way of living attentively and perceiving what we encounter along the paths of life.

2. Feet and lines: how to live with the world-environment

James Gibson has pointed out the deep ecological dimension of perception. As we are always immersed in an environment, perception emerges and develops in and through it. We just need to be aware of it and draw the consequences. However, how do we achieve this awareness? Is a *theory* of perception sufficient? I want to address an issue about the idea of interaction. What is at stake in the supposed interaction between perception and environment? In many theorists of ecological aesthetics, the environment is still something severed and, in principle, different from the beings that inhabit and perceive it. It is a kind of container. The concept of affordance proposed by Gibson is a very useful trigger for thinking about the relationship between perceptual organisms and the environment as affordances open up a world of unfolding possibilities, information and invitations that continuously build upon one another. Nevertheless, even for Gibson the idea of environment remains somehow rigid, cluttered with objects of all sorts, a *space occupied*. [9] I think this is because of the idea of interaction, in which the perceivers and the perceived environment are, in principle, still clearly distinguishable, although inextricably related. According to this model, then,

relation is *inter*-action, presupposing that discrete, individual entities *exist before* and are independent of their relationship. Berleant highlights this difficulty, suggesting that we should move from a consistent ecological thought, and I agree with the point. We need to move away from “one of the last survivors of the mind-body dualism,” in favor of a radical approach to ecological knowledge according to which we are not *in*, rather *with* the world.[10]

Let us take a closer look at the walls and the roof of the building I need to establish here. If knowledge is relational and participatory, hence ecological, then ecological knowledge *is* perceptual. If perception is action, however, how we act and perceive is then not just a matter of unavoidable necessity, it asks for an *ethos*, a modality of perception stressed as aesthetic engagement by Berleant and Yuriko Saito, no doubt following Dewey. To put it succinctly, perception, as it is relational and actively engaged, is never pure and objective; rather, it is oriented, directional, and selective. Once we accept it, we can simply forget the obsession with the objective knowledge based on the presumed distance between the knower and the known and move towards a different approach. Once one removes the dichotomy between the environment and the subject, one can nurture an ecological perception as a proper *modus vivendi* based on intimacy, participation, and caring. I believe we can interpret engagement as a similar term, sharing the same scenario.

We need, then, an education of attention that leads us to a different quality of perception, not detached and objects-focused but, rather, interwoven and sympathetic with the processes.[11] If we are always immersed in the processes, and if we inhabit the world we contribute to make through a constant flux of “making-of- experiences,” a *theory* of ecology and, consequently, a theory of ecological aesthetics is then not sufficient. The change I propose is that theory cannot have the last word in aesthetics, and the ecological aesthetics that I propose is a way to indicate it. Aesthetics as a theory *about* something—whatever, the arts, the body, senses —shows its limits because ecological perception is experiential; it needs to be practiced and lived, in the occurrences of every experience.

How can we be engaged in an ecological perception? Through a constant exercise of opening-up, of exposure to the currents of life. First, it is necessary to marvel at life *per se*, at life that revives every time, as Merleau- Ponty noted (“*La nature était au premier jour*”) and, of course, also Plato and Aristotle (“Wonder is the only beginning of philosophy,” says Socrates). However, this exercise does not mean mere, passive retreating into observation. On the contrary, it has to do with imagination, which stems from the ongoing process of exchange, in Dewey’s words, of doing/undergoing, letting emerge the perceptual texture of the past and the future, of memory and creation. To anticipate what follows, the education to the perceptual engagement described above is not a pedagogy. Rather, it concerns a sort of exposure to the currents of the experience. This exposition means being open, attentive, and receptive to correspond to the encounters that emerge along the life-process.[12] I also need to clarify one important point. One could ask why it should be needed, this exercise of exposition, as an ongoing process of attention to what is *already there* – the life-processes, the currents of experience. The problem is that a “lazy” perception covers what is already there, in the background of our experience, making its appearance as it were fixed, stable, and objectified. In order to re-activate and reawaken the fluidity of the world, we need to shift from our comfort-zone to a new perceptual attitude.

We perceive as we live. If action is perception, being alive is to act and to move, even if one is not physically moving because perception is movement. I find very fruitful following the idea, from Paul Klee to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to Ingold, that living beings are lines in motion along a path, *locomoting perceptions*, entanglements of threads and lines, clumps of knots that continuously modify and alter one another. As living beings, we always move *along* the world’s crust (“the sentient being rides the crest of the world’s becoming”), creating it with every step. According to what I stated earlier, we do not move *in* an already given environment, rather we move along it, making and participating in its ceaseless becoming.[13] The environment as a world-environment, more generally as a context, is never completely stable; it is “made,” woven, and continuously storied. Because of this entanglement there are no sentient subjects on the one side and sensed objects on the other. The world itself feels and perceives; we *are* and in every instant *produce* (from the Latin *pro-ducere*, “leading forward”) the world that senses *with* us in turn. This is a good way to understand the deep meaning of being animate and animism. In effect, there are not subjects or material bodies infused with an inner soul or vital essence but beings that move and encounter, bringing each other life. Thus, life is always in the gerund as a non-finite verb form.

This movement occurs along paths, and these paths are the lines we trace while living. It is like the flow of a river. We tend to forget that it flows according to an intrinsitive trajectory, focusing instead too much on the riverbanks (the solidifications, the embankments, the “produced” objects), ignoring the fact that, without the flowing of water, there would be no banks. How can we remember and feel again this flow? We need help not from those notable parts of the body that have always played a role in

the sensitive re-evaluation of thought, like hands and the mouth; it is better to address the attention to the disregarded ones. Feet can help us.[14] In conventional thought, thinking with the feet, like thinking with the belly, is just an insult to someone's intelligence. In fact, many hierarchical oppositions of scientific and philosophical modernity depend on the subordination of the feet and, more generally, on the hierarchy between the upper and lower parts of the body. In this model, intelligence lies in the head. Contemplation and cognition need stillness and seats; hence, eyes ready to see and read in addition to hands free and ready to write. Conversely, locomotion has to do with walking, hence with feet. Feet neither see nor read nor write. When human nature is discussed in relation to the achievement of an upright posture, the focus is mostly on hands and, just barely, on feet that are effectively not only the support by means of which we touch the earth but also by which we move.[15]

Closed within footwear that acts to soften the impact with the soil, the earth, and its materials, feet have progressively lost their prehensile function. Thus, reduced to a mere means of locomotion, they disappear from the cognitive, intellectual, cultural, and social horizon. Feet become the means of transportation from place to place, sliding along the neutral ground thanks to footwear. The more shoes become a necessary feature of civilization, the more we lose the perception of the friction with the soil and the earth.[16] On the contrary, the naked and prehensile hand becomes the closest ally of the mind for the conceptual world. The hand *comprehends* ("to comprehend" comes from the Latin *cum prehendere*, and means, "to grasp"), the hand manipulates, resulting in manufacture and drawing. The link between hand and brain, connected to upright posture and to gazing at the sky and the horizon, results in the entire hierarchy of the perceptible and the distinction between distal and proximal senses.[17] The reevaluation of feet, then, is not about proposing a philosophy of walking so much as a strategy to restore a perceptual engagement, an attention to the basics of the movement on the earth as a condition of life, and hence, of thought itself. As exemplary gestures, to think, to read, and to write while walking can help to practice an ecological aesthetics, not as abstract knowledge about the environment and the world, but as lived experience, *habitus*, a way of life.

3. The meshwork: a weather-world

Moving is tracing a line along the world. As we normally move with feet, the reevaluation of pedestrian movement is a strategy for increasing the perceptive engagement towards an ecological aesthetics based not on the paradigm of *transport* from one point to another but on the one of *wayfaring*. [18] Lines are threads of wayfaring in which their continuous process of tracing—not *transporting*—themselves corresponds to the bundles of knots that we can call *meshwork*. Meshwork, another term taken from Ingold, indicates a fabric woven by an entanglement of lines of life, lines of growth and movement, in contrast with the traditional notion of network as a grid made from an inter-connection of points. The world is not a network of inter-connected points but a meshwork of lines entangled *ab origine*. The meshwork is the world we inhabit and we live with; hence, the world is a fluid entanglement. An ecological aesthetics should assume the meshwork paradigm because it allows the theoretical surmounting of the subject/object paradigm, then of the individual subjectivity, and, more important, it permits to practice the weakening of its powers through a systemic and unifying perceptual experience.[19]

Thinking of life as a meshwork means perceiving it as bundles of lines and as tracks of knots and twists. Walking is drawing, is moving along planes that intersect one another producing other lines, traces, threads, and further planes. This depiction of life and beings is not metaphorical but real, and it is possible to educate our sentient being to such a fluid and ecological perception. This education is a continuous attunement to feel/think attentively at the ever-emerging life of the interstitial spaces along the lines. Animate life is a flow that continuously emerges, develops, and transforms itself amongst masses, spirals, tangles, lines of crossing and flowing, not *on* the surface of the world but *with* it. This ongoing process *is* the world and we can *correspond* to it, moving along and dancing with it.

What about ontology here? What is at stake here is a kind of fluid ontology, made of tangles and constant constitution, interstices, evolution, and decay. There are no isolated objects or individual beings, only substances. They fluctuate between the earth and the sky through the mixture of air, intertwining, intermingling, and transforming one another. Thus, ecological perception is objectless; there are *no objects* in the environment but fluid substances, always in process even when they look still and firm. Also in visual contemplation, perception is movement. Seeing an object is seeing *with* the object that is, seeing a process because we see the voluminousness and the weightiness of it, for example.[20] Understanding this point well is crucial because it permits us to avoid the objections of subjectivism often directed to the aesthetic engagement and the ecological thought.[21] Once there are no objects, even the subject fades. There are only relations, in which the frictions of the beings encountered along the experience play, of course, a role. This friction between perceivers and perceived opens and develops a field of forces that correspond to each other, and there are many different ways for such correspondences to occur: agreement,

disagreement, appreciation, disgust, wonder, indifference, complaint, pleasure, anger, pain, enjoyment, curiosity, excitement, boredom, happiness, sadness, and so on.

In the fluid world we inhabit and live along, then, the environment is not a space occupied but a *weather-world*.^[22] According to Ingold, the weather corresponds to the plethora of all the different materials of the world, all fluidified with the medium of air.^[23] As we are the weather-world we live with, the differences between humans, things, and places are not categorial differences of essence; rather they are positional and functional ones. Their forms are temporary crystallizations within fields of forces, a plexus of continuous growth, development and the decay of encounters and relationships. Fixed identities do not exist—there is no hypostasis of “other” and “I,” of “subject” and “object.” Identities are just stories, storied, multiplies. “We”—a transient position—“are”—a crystallization in the flux of the meshwork—immersed in the atmospheric reality that is continuously reshaped by our movement and breath. “This” “is” *time*, time as the weather: “Immersion in the weather-world is a condition for – and not a consequence of – pure existence as temperate, and therefore sentient, beings.”^[24] The weather-world has a correlation with the correspondent picture of humanity. As the world is weathered, humanity *is* not, rather becomes, in the sense that it is not a given, a fixed datum, but an endless task to constantly achieve. Ingold, recalling themes and suggestions from Raimondo Lullo, Ortega y Gasset and Henri-Louis Bergson, proposes to think of humanity in the form of a gerund: human being means human becoming.^[25]

The paradigm of subject/object matches the picture of relationship as the creation of a network. Here, the world is a totality of discrete and separate units that can connect one to the other but, in principle, they can remain at distance and indifferent, without participation or engagement. On the contrary, the meshwork as intertwining of lines expresses the paradigm for aesthetic engagement, systemic thought, intimacy, and caring. Once ecological perception reveals a fluid world without objects and fixed entities, the awareness of interdependence and interpenetration between perceivers and perceived takes a different route, shifting from *inter-subjectivity* to *in-between*. Correspondence, in the sense here proposed, is a good term for describing this shift: while inter-subjectivity *is between* beings, *correspondence*, instead, is *in-between*. It is also a matter of language, and an ecological aesthetics should take care of this, trying to avoid as much as possible the “I” form and also the use of nouns. The *in-between* is expressed using the middle voice *mid-*, the midstream as a “form” of becoming. Precisely *here* (*here* that is impossible to grasp, being always already *there*) knowledge occurs, moving (*wayfaring*) through continuous lines that perforate one another without interruption. I know because I move, inhabiting and implicating in the process that I contribute to produce with the beings encountered and interwoven with me. Classification may be sometimes useful but it is fictitious and abstract, while reality is never stable and always processual. The strategic gesture to express this unity of unavoidable crystallization and action is the attempt to use verbal and adverbial forms and to write consequently, attempting a narrative and blurred style in order to indicate what is lost in the classification. To be aware of this is practicing the ecological perception. Ecological aesthetics is the description of this awareness in terms that try to be theoretical and performative at the same time.

4. Haptic and optic

I can now draw a distinction between two different perceptual approaches that summarizes my whole proposal: the haptic perception and the optic perception. The term ‘haptic’ has a long history but, despite being marginal and hidden at times, it has been recently rediscovered both in its strict and its broad sense by psychologists, designers, technicians, and philosophers.^[26] In its broader sense, haptic perception does not refer only to the sense of touch, nor does optic perception refer only to sight. Optic *versus* haptic is a metaphor that indicates two different kinds of attitude. An optical approach perceives objects understood as outcomes, as the crystallization of processes in temporary islands of stasis. Conversely, the haptic approach perceives through the objects, that is their movements and entanglements. In my view, haptic perception shift from objects to processes, as the “objectiveness” of the object is always in movement, full of potential, kinaesthetic, and tactile in itself.^[27] This is why ‘haptic’ replaced ‘touch’ in the philosophical jargon. The tactility of the haptic is not the grasping of the hand, and it is not just physical. Haptic feeling/thinking is the exposure to the flow of the processes we walk along. Haptic perception becomes and develops along the ongoing friction made by our intertwining with other lines. Lines create the weather-world that we are, that is new entanglements between solid, material, aerial, and bright elements. Perceiving haptically means to sense how we are with the substances, while riding and moving along their crests. When Merleau-Ponty writes about the painter’s sight, he refers precisely to this experience; to see the sky means to see *with* the sky, to merge with its light and presence in a relationship of reciprocal affection. In this creative movement of emergence, “things become things,” as Merleau-Ponty put it, and “the world becomes world.”^[28] The haptic approach engages with materials in the process. It is a kind of longitudinal, vertical perception, moving along

the interstices of the life of things. Conversely, the optic approach engages with the solidity of objects and their temporary immobility.

The haptic and the optic lead to two different kinds of perception. If the latter has to do with a comfort zone that solidifies the processes of life into stability and boundaries, the former feels at ease with the flux, the *métissage* and implication. As I clarified earlier, however, the optic perception covers processes that happen anyway. Furthermore, I would not deny that, on certain occasions and for given functions, we need solidification: islands of presence, positions and functions on which we anchor fluid, transient forms and identities. On the other hand, ecological aesthetics, in my view, is not the reverse of the traditional hierarchies. Why propose a haptic approach to life, then? The reason is strategic. In a world dominated by an obsession with stable objects, objectivity, numbers, commodity, and measurement, it is important to develop and nurture an alternative approach in order to reveal the impermanence of things and to be aware of it. Even the most firm and solid things are transitory, as humans are. They arise, develop, grow, and decay. In order to be intimate with the world, observing it from inside, it is good to see the materials of life as processual, and a haptic approach helps to do this. When one perceives the processes, the reality of materials emerges ("matter" comes from the Latin word *mater*, the generative mother that I have known through touching and that I touched, by blending surfaces and substances, myself, in turn, as a blended substance), anticipating the "given" as a *product* and touching the making in the process (life-in-the-making). One plunges into the flow, perceives the processes that incessantly make objects. According to this approach, there is no inside and outside. Lines do not have insides and outsides; they move and get knotty.

Let me turn to some examples. I perceive a wooden chair as an object and as a produced function when I sit on it. However, if I sand it down or saw through it, I return to the concrete life and to the process of the material overshadowed by the object-chair. While I operate on the material, the qualities of the object-chair retreat and the processual and knobby substance beyond the object emerges. Also, in the field of food we can recognize an optic taste and a haptic taste. Let us take wine. The optical approach to taste, based on objectifying and referential sensory analysis that builds ontological maps (what flavors, fragrances, what aromas, there would be *in* wine), emerged massively in the second half of the twentieth century, aiming to consider wine as a dissectible object (colors, odors, tastes). The haptic taste, instead, perceives the wine as a whole, without fragmenting it in discrete pieces or blocks. Wine is neither a commodity nor an object; it is a living substance. Thanks to this approach, the experience of drinking becomes, in my view, and in a Deweyan stream, fully (ecological) aesthetic. The haptic engagement suggests caressing wine and letting the wine caress us, blending its substances with ours and recalling the materials with which it is made. An ongoing *correspondence* allows a perception of wine before its solidification as an object, before its analysis as a mere commodity. I drink and feel the rock, the earth, the sky, the air and the water, the sun and the clouds, and the leaf of the plant and the ripe grapes. I feel the fermentation of grapes, the alcoholic warmth, and the winegrower's work. I feel the style and the personality that emerged during the relationships that occurred before my encounters with the others, prolonging the entanglement of lines and thus, ultimately, *living*. This wine is never only *this*: it is I who encounter wine within a flux where the things of the world flow. When one says: today I like this wine more than the last time, it is not saying that "the wine" – that particular one – has changed; it is rather saying that the entanglement, the encounter, has changed, and that *I* also have changed with it. The enigma of the ongoing creation of life, of nature always like the first day, and of our resulting astonishment, lies in this little torsion of meaning, in the difference of this nuance.[29]

5. From judgment to exposition and labyrinth

Haptic perception has to do with memory but, as it is always a process in the making, it opens up to creativity and imagination, calling for a different approach to rules and precision. The sense of touch involves the question of precision, as observed by many philosophers, such as Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy, among others. What is precision? When Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten invented aesthetics as a discipline, he wanted to build a shelter for small perceptions, for non-measurable qualities, for the *je ne sais quoi*, for passions and feelings. Aesthetics, according to Gottfried Leibniz, was the science of sensitivity as clear and confused knowledge. The haptic approach takes on board the challenge advanced by such confusion, its irreducibility to distinction and analysis. Instead, optical perception, not only the one of logic and rational science but also the one of aesthetics directed at objects, demands clarity and distinction. Thus, aesthetics immediately suffers its influence, betraying itself and thus becoming inaccessible, as much because of reason as of imagination, when giving itself up to the unattainable precision to which it aspires, distancing its gaze from the participated flow within the processes. Wanting to achieve scientific legitimacy as the knowledge *of*, aesthetics ends up losing its specific character of knowledge *with*: situated, singular, and always engaged with the process it describes. Detachment is not possible. Detached aesthetics is an illusion of perspective.[30] We do not need to set up sense-

oriented aesthetics against rational aesthetics, because life as a *meshwork* precedes any hypostasis and classification, mind/body, reason/emotion, inside/outside, and so on. Rather, the point seems to be the abandonment of the project of the modern and monotheistic aesthetics of object, product, and evaluation criteria, in favor of a pluralistic and polytheistic one. I stated at the beginning of the paper that contemplation does not entail distance and detachment but asks for intimacy and connivance, and it is indicated in Buddhist philosophy so well.[31] Haptic perception attunes itself to the pragmatics of experience as such, and the absence of systems and definitive theories is not a lack, but a resource. The following thought from the *Blue Cliff Record*, a classic of Zen Buddhism, reverberates with correspondences with this perspective:

When the feelings of judgements of intellectual consciousness are ended, only then can you see through. And when you see through, then as of old sky is sky, earth is earth, mountains are mountains, rivers are rivers.[32]

Once we have become aware and skillful in attending to haptic experience, our need for judgments stops in favor of savoring different experiences and encounters and exposing ourselves to the unexpected and the miracle of every instant. In an inhabited world, differently than in an occupied space, we are nomadic perceivers without boundaries or directions, based on attention rather than intention, on improvisations rather than projected designs.

Ecological aesthetics is a continuous exercise of awareness about the correspondence of all the living beings and an education about living inhabiting a world of lines. This education supports and empowers care and attention, instead of choice and intention, because the former cope with the situation and contexts, without guiding principles, given rules and prefixed goals, as is the case for the latter. Care, awareness, and compassion (from the Latin word *compassio*, “feeling together”) are strategically more important than choice, culture, and competence (from the Latin *cumpetere*, hence competition). Ecological aesthetics leads, then, to the ancient, noble (and neglected in modern philosophy) concept of wisdom. Wisdom expresses not smartness but intuitive intelligence; not necessarily culture but nurture; not analytical skills but *savoir-faire*; not necessarily specific competence but the ability to orient oneself along the experience; not necessarily verbal skills but tacit expressivity.[33] Wisdom corresponds to an art of caring and attention to the processes that we attend, feeling together with them, participating and observing as we move along. If, on the one hand, smart intelligence, culture, and cultivation came out of critical distance, intention-oriented design, control, and judgment, on the other hand, wisdom corresponds to critical intimacy, attention-oriented living, exposure, and savoring.

We come across feet, again, as a means of attuning and improving our haptic perception. Pedestrian motion is effective for a ground-based awareness of the ongoing processes of experience, and, undoubtedly, nothing could be further from naïve naturalism and the idea of experience as being authentic and self-evident. What we need to do is to continue along a long path of attention and discipline at the end of which lies a shift of perception. Walking offers an alternative model of education that, rather than instilling knowledge into the minds of novices, leads them out into the world.[34]

Walking as thinking, as exercising thought by making— it does not mean instilling knowledge, but educating to learn as a practice of exposure along the way. We can propose another distinction between two different modes of moving, to make the point clear: the maze and the labyrinth. While the maze presents a series of choices related to the traveler’s intentions, in the labyrinth holding to the trails calls for an ongoing attention.[35] Children often go through streets without any intentions or fixed positions; they just move by curiosity and, sometimes, wonder, and this is the haptic approach to the world. Moving through the maze means inhabiting the axiomatic paradigm of intentions and choices. I know where I want to go and, gradually, I decide which path to take and where to turn, depending on predetermined intentions. In the *maze*, intentions lead the way as the model in which design and prefixed ideas command, according to an agency where *doing* and intentions predetermines *undergoing*, exposition, and passions. In contrast, walking the labyrinth means letting the attention simply carry us. In the labyrinth, *doing* and *undergoing* reciprocally recall one another but the latter determines the former. The flow of the current transports us, though we do move with margins of freedom. Life is not subservient to action but action is subservient to life; action is without the prevalence of the I-agency.[36]

Following the haptic approach, then, aesthetic education looks like a “poor pedagogy,” to use an expression by Dutch philosopher Jan Masschelein, because it does not address specific goals or content and it amounts, instead, to an endless experience of learning by experience. It is learning to learn; it is not about adopting acquired instruction but carrying on an engaged life, composed with all the tasks emerging in the practice of correspondence.

From intention to attention, from instruction to education. Caring of the world, conniving with its processes, is to cor-respond with it. Corresponding is to observe from within in an intimately critical way. The haptic perception proposed by ecological aesthetics reveals itself, then, also as an art of community and commonality in which individual agency is always within a more comprehensive flow. Here lies the political dimension of such ecological aesthetics. Once one accepts to practice perceptual wisdom, the very idea of independence fades and the sovereignty of individual freedom, pivotal in the logic of late capitalism, is put into question. When the logic of choices and personal wishes often appears to be driven and induced by marketing, the logic of care and of interdependence comes up as a concrete alternative that may open a different political space that originates from the everyday ethical practice of correspondence and relationship.

6. Conclusion: making soup as a way to wisdom

In recent years, I directed my research with an increasing resolve to reject any possibility of philosophy as thinking *of* or thinking *about* or, that is, the mere thematization of fields in order to comprehend by means of concepts. I try to propose a philosophy where I do not teach *something*, but I teach how to learn and where I, myself, learn to learn, again and again. For biographical and contingent reasons, I came to explore this possibility through the substance of food. Nonetheless, it would be wrong to understand this field as a *theme* studied from a philosophical perspective because they have rather been encounters to *experience*. In some of my recent works, wine is a substance/medium with which I realize encounters: "I drink for reweaving or creating a new fabric, for highlighting to myself the hidden connections between the disentangled things of the world."^[37] I could say that this is the shift from a philosophy *of* wine to a philosophy *with* wine or from *being expert* to *being alive*. Criticizing the expertise does not mean to refuse it all and to praise ignorance; instead, it is a move to dislocate the issue of aesthetic appreciation in a different field, that is, the field of making- knowledge by experience. Expertise is oriented to the past (*expertus*); experience (*experiri*) to the step forward.

Nowadays, more philosophers are addressing food issues, and from different perspectives; too often, however, they treat it as an object to dissect and analyze. In my view, instead, food or wine are interesting precisely because of their exemplarity in terms of ecological perception: "Where is 'outside' in this case? Is it the landscape that surrounds me where I stand? Is it the world outside my window? The walls of my room and house? The clothes I wear? The air I breathe? The food I eat? Yet the food metabolizes to become my body."^[38] Food are substances we take in on a daily basis, permitting a practice of an ongoing exercise of presence in the world, to be realized as a never-ending perceptual sharpening, that is *rhythming* unceasing correspondences. *A presence in the world*: an objectless but processual world, full of knots of lines. Here is an example of suggested attention and care stemming from a haptic attitude:

Next time you are making soup, pay attention to the way your stirring gesture with the spoon both induces and responds to viscosities and currents of the mixed ingredients in the pan. What is odd is that studies of the material culture of kitchens have generally concentrated on pots and pans, and spoons, to the virtual exclusion of the soup. The focus, in short, has been on objects rather than materials. Yet on second thoughts, this is not a division between what we find in the kitchen: objects here; materials there. It is rather a difference of perspective. Householders might think of pots and pans as objects, at least until they start to cook, but for the dealer in scrap metal, they are lumps of material.^[39]

Ecological aesthetics, as a constant exercise to sharpen the perceptual awareness to the meshwork that corresponds to the world, thus joins Western philosophy with Eastern thought. I shall end my paper with another reference that shows a convergence with Taoism's and Buddhism's non-theorizing and non-systematizing thought.

In a well-known text by Eihei Dōgen—a Japanese monk of the thirteenth century, founder of the Sōtō school of Zen Buddhism dedicated to cooking and translated as *Instruction for the Cook*, the culinary practice in a monastery represents a way of achieving enlightenment. Every day, the cook (*tenzo*) chooses rice, vegetables, and other ingredients, and he must protect and be frugal with them, as if they were his own eyes.^[40] The *tenzo* keeps a feeling/thinking that corresponds, in our terms, to the intimate and careful attitude we have called haptic. Here, gestures are both means and ends. An intimate care flourishes by considering every passage both as paramount to the process of making and as valuable in itself. In Buddhism, there is no difference between ordinary and artistic gestures because art consists, primarily, in an ongoing self-improvement from which the work realized results, even a simple dish with rice and vegetables. In another passage, Dōgen specifies that the ordinary can undergo two different attitudes: one of negligence and carelessness, the other of attention and sensitivity. The latter redeems the value of the ordinary:

When you prepare food, never view the ingredients from some commonly held perspective nor think about them only with your emotions. Maintain an attitude that tries to build great temples from ordinary greens, that expounds the *buddhadharma* through the most trivial activity. [...] When making a soup with ordinary greens, do not be carried away by feelings of dislike toward them nor regard them lightly; neither jump for joy simply because you have been given ingredients of superior quality to make a special dish.[41]

I began this paper proposing the philosophical relevance of feet, and I followed the idea according to which we are lines composing a meshwork. I believe that this understanding is paramount for developing a feeling/thinking approach based on the "knowledge *with*" paradigm, proposing then to call this approach haptic perception. I think that the haptic approach is a consistent way to practice any kind of processual and situated philosophy, that is, being aware that consciousness *is* not but rather *occurs*, and that the mind is not individual but an extended flux, connected with the world it makes.[42] This is the ecological mind, but an ecological mind means ecological perception because mind is the ongoing mixture of feeling and thought. Thus, ecological aesthetics, in my view, is the crossroad of such theoretical background, with one additional feature, given the status of the discipline. Aesthetics performs its task as a practice of nurture, convinced that in order to perceive wisely, theory never has the last word. To understand, feel, think, appreciate, and enjoy, one has to *live with* the world, not to dissect and analyze it.

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Endnotes

I thank the anonymous reviewers for their useful comments and suggestions.

[1] See, for example: Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992). Arnold Berleant, "Some Questions for Ecological Aesthetics," *Environmental Philosophy*, Spring 2016, 123-135. Jusuck Koh, "An Ecological Aesthetics," *Landscape Journal*, Vol. 7, n. 2 (Fall 1988), pp. 177-191. Nathaniel Stern, *Ecological Aesthetics* (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2018). Lars Hanning, *Ökologische Ästhetik* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007). Heike Strelow and Vera David, *Ökologische Ästhetik* (Basel: Birkhäuser GmbH, 2004).

[2] In the wake of Baumgarten's reevaluation, for a recent re-proposal focused on the shift from judgement to savoring, even if from a different perspective, see Bence Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[3] My reference here is Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge: Bradford Books, 2004) and *Out of Our Heads. Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009).

[4] See, for example, Arnold Berleant, "Beyond Disinterestedness," *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 34, 3 (July 1994), 242-254.

[5] See Adrian Miles, *et al.*, "From Critical Distance to Critical Intimacy: Interactive Documentary and Relational Media," in *Critical Distance in Documentary Media*, Gerda Cammaer, *et al.* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 301-319.

[6] See Yuriko Saito, "The Ethical Dimensions of Aesthetics Engagement," *Espes*, 6, 2 (2017), pp. 19-29.

[7] See Arnold Berleant, "What is Aesthetic Engagement?," *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 11 (2013).

[8] Ingold suggested this vocabulary but other prominent philosophers have also talked about lines, such as Deleuze and Guattari, and even about feet; Michel Serres once spoke about "thinking with feet."

[9] See Tim Ingold, *Being Alive. Essays on movement, knowledge and description* (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 12.

[10] See Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment*, p. 3.

[11] I utilize here the notion of "connivance" in the sense proposed by François Jullien. According to him, "connivance" is different from knowledge as it indicates better the intertwining and the intimacy of perceiver and perceived. See François Jullien, *Living Off Landscape or The Unthought-of in Reason* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).

[12] *The correspondence of lines* is the title of a chapter in Ingold's book *The Life of Lines* (2015). This book, together with *Being Alive* (2011) and *Making* (2013), constitutes a sort of integral and coherent trilogy, partially anticipated by *Lines: A Brief History* (2007), which inquiries into the same themes and questions from different perspectives and with diverse emphases and tones.

[13] Tim Ingold, *The life of lines* (London & New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 84.

[14] Michel Serres, "Je pense avec les pieds," *Philosophie Magazine* (26/05/2016, web source).

[15] I need to point out that locomotion must be understood, firstly, in reference to the ontological nature of perception. Of course, a disabled or paralyzed person whose body movement is severely limited or even non-existent makes a case for this model but perceptual movement can, in such occurrences, grow and be directed in different ways (as an aphasic grows different modalities of language).

[16] See Ingold, *Being Alive*, pp. 33-50.

[17] See Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste. Food and Philosophy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999).

[18] Paolo Maccagno, marathon runner and anthropologist, in *Lungo lento. Maratona e pratica del limite* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2015) provides an understanding of the marathon as a liminal experience in which the boundaries of subjectivity fuse with the surroundings and the rhythm of the earth's life.

[19] See Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi, *The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[20] See on this Brian Massumi, "The Thinking-Feeling of What Happens," *Inflexions*, 1.1 (May 2008), pp. 1-40.

[21] See Berleant, "What is Aesthetic Engagement?."

[22] The notion of atmosphere is here paramount to understanding the weather-world topic, because the latter is a consequence of the former. According to Ingold, atmosphere is the aerial and immersive space where meteorological and affective dimensions correspond. Although there are some similarities with the idea of atmosphere proposed by Gernot Böhme, for example, its *in-betweenness*, the latter conceives atmosphere as "sphere of presence of a something, its actuality in space" (Gernot Böhme, *Atmospheric Architectures. The Aesthetic of Felt Spaces* (London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 23), that is, emanations by means of which things, people, or the environment 'tinge' with their qualities the surrounding space and are perceivable.

[23] Ingold, *The life of lines*, pp. 69-72.

[24] *Ibid*, p. 78.

[25] *Ibid*, pp. 115-119.

[26] See Nicola Perullo, "Haptic Taste as a Task," *The Monist*, 101, 3 (2018), pp. 261-276. In addition to philosophy, haptics has been studied mainly by experimental psychology. The first theory about haptics as active touch has to be attributed to Ernst Weber, master of Fechner and author of *De Tactu* (1834) and *Die Lehre vom Tastsinn und Gemeingefühl* (1851). Later, further investigations on haptics have been carried out by David Katz, for example in his *Der Aufbau der Taswelt* (1925). See, for instance, David Prytherch, "Weber, Katz and Beyond: An Introduction to Psychological Studies of Touch and the Implications for an Understanding of Artists' Making and Thinking Processes," and Mairghread McLundie, "See me, touch me, feel me, hold me? A guide to haptics applications in the digital realm," both in *Research Issues in Art Design and Media* ("So what is haptics anyway?"), 2 (Spring 2002, web source), and, of course, James Jerome Gibson, "Observations on active touch," *Psychological Review*, 69 (1962), pp. 477-491, and his *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1966). Moreover, the Hungarian psychologist Géza Révész, in *Psychology and the Art of the Blind* (Harlow: Longmans, Green, 1950), examines the relationship between the haptic and art. Here, the connections between blindness and artistic creation are analyzed using the example of sculpture. Over the last decades, all these pioneering studies have delved into deeper, and been proved or verified by specific studies in different fields, such as applied psychology, cognitive sciences, and engineering. (For a review, see also Adam Gopnik, "Feel me. What the new science of

touch says about ourselves," *The New Yorker* (16/05/2016, web source)). Without going into detail, according to Derrida, for instance, a "pure" haptic, understood as the smooth, similar to the "body without organs," cannot exist. In any case, haptics is not coincident here with the smooth; rather, it is the ongoing and conscious relationship that, at the same time, is both carried out and undergone. (See Jacques Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005].) See also, Roberta L. Klatzky *et al.*, "Haptic identification of objects and their depictions," *Perception and Psychophysics*, 34, 2 (1993), pp. 170-78; Bernard Berenson and Emilio Cecchi (trans.), *I pittori italiani del Rinascimento* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1997), pp. 61-118; Giuliana Bruno, *Atlante delle emozioni. In viaggio tra arte, architettura e cinema* (Milan: Mondadori, 2006) and Giuliana Bruno, *Superfici. A proposito di estetica, materialità e media* (Monza: Johan & Levi, 2016).

[27] See Massumi, "The Thinking-Feeling of What Happens," p.16.

[28] Cited in Ingold, *The life of lines*, p. 84.

[29] See Nicola Perullo, *Epistenologia. Il vino e la creatività del tatto* (Milan: Mimesis, 2016), pp. 51-58.

[30] See Berleant, "Beyond Disinterestedness."

[31] Ingold, who repeatedly claimed the value of alchemy, shamanism and paganism, is also sympathetic to Taoist and Buddhist thought. See Ingold, *Making*, pp. 28-31.

[32] Thomas Cleary and J. C. Cleary (trans.), *The Blue Cliff Record*, (Boston & London: Shambhala, 2005), p. 62.

[33] On this theme, see also Nicola Perullo, *Taste as Experience. The Philosophy and Aesthetics of Food* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), particularly Chapter 4: "Wisdom of Taste, Taste of Wisdom" and Tim Ingold, "Of work and words: craft as a way of telling," *The British Museum* (2/11/2017).

[34] Tim Ingold, "The maze and the labyrinth: walking, imagining and the education of attention," in *Psychology and the conduct of everyday life*, eds. Ernst Schraube and Charlotte Højholt (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 99-110.

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] With a clear reference to Jean Luc Nancy, Ingold speaks of action without "agency," without the leading intention of the "I." See Ingold, *The life of lines*, pp. 143-146.

[37] Nicola Perullo, *Epistenologia. Il vino e la Creativita del tatto* (Milan: Mimesis, 2016), p. 28.

[38] Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment*, p. 3.

[39] Ingold, *Making*, pp. 18-19.

[40] Eihei Dōgen and Kosho Uchiyama, *From the Zen Kitchen to Enlightenment. Refining Your Life* (New York: Weatherhill, 1994).

[41] *Ibid.* p. 7.

[42] Noë, *Out of Our Heads*.

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