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L'ECOLOGIA COME PRATICA ESTETICA. EMOZIONI E RELAZIONALITÀ NELL'ECOLOGIA PROFONDA DI ARNE NÆSS

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ABSTRACT

Il presente articolo indaga il ruolo centrale dell'esperienza estetica, delle emozioni e della relazionalità nella filosofia dell'Ecologia Profonda di Arne Næss. Mettendo in discussione il tradizionale dualismo tra ragione ed emozione, il testo sostiene che la consapevolezza ecologica e l'impegno etico scaturiscono da una modalità estetica ed incarnata di relazione con il mondo. Attingendo a intuizioni fenomenologiche e alla teoria della Gestalt, mostra come il percepire l'ambiente come un tutto interconnesso trasformi il senso di sé del soggetto e favorisca un legame gioioso e affettivo con la natura. Per Næss, riconnettersi con queste relazioni fondamentali implica una profonda comprensione del fatto che le nostre stesse identità sono intimamente plasmate dai contesti ecologici in cui viviamo. L'aria fresca che respiriamo, il cibo che ci nutre e la varietà di ambienti che abitiamo contribuiscono ognuno a proprio modo all'esistenza di ciò che siamo come individui.

Questa visione risuona potentemente con il concetto stoico di *oikeiosis*, che sottolinea l'importanza di familiarizzare ed entrare in sintonia emotiva con il mondo che ci circonda, coltivando un senso di appartenenza al suo interno. In tale quadro teorico, ricco e complesso, le emozioni svolgono un ruolo cruciale. Centrale in questa prospettiva è il concetto di *hilaritas* – il gioioso riconoscimento di appartenere alla più ampia comunità ecologica che fonda la responsabilità ecologista e sostiene l'azione ambientale. Collocando l'ecosofia di Næss entro una più ampia genealogia filosofica che include Spinoza e le teorie contemporanee sulle atmosfere e sugli affetti, l'articolo propone un'estetica ecologica intesa al contempo come pratica di relazionalità etica e come gioia incarnata. Tale approccio offre nuove prospettive su come la sensibilità estetica possa catalizzare un più profondo impegno ambientale nell'Antropocene.

Parole chiave: Arne Næss, ecologia, *Deep Ecology*, relazionalità ambientale, *hilaritas*.

ECOLOGY AS AESTHETIC PRACTICE EMOTIONS AND RELATIONALITY IN ARNE NÆSS'S DEEP ECOLOGY

This article explores the pivotal role of aesthetic experience, emotions, and relationality in Arne Næss's philosophy of Deep Ecology. Challenging the traditional dualism between reason and emotion, the paper argues that ecological awareness and ethical commitment emerge from an embodied, aesthetic mode of engagement with the world. Drawing on phenomenological insights and Gestalt theory, it highlights how perceiving the environment as an inter-



connected whole transforms the subject's sense of self and fosters a joyful, affective connection with nature. For Næss, reconnecting with these essential relationships involves a deep understanding that our very identities are intricately shaped by the ecological contexts in which we dwell. The fresh air we breathe, the nourishing food we consume, and the diverse environments we inhabit each contribute to the essence of who we are as individuals. This vision resonates powerfully with the Stoic concept of *oikeiosis*, which emphasises the importance of growing familiar with and emotionally attuned to the world around us, fostering a sense of belonging within it. Within this rich framework, emotions play a crucial role. Central to this argument is the concept of *hilaritas* – the joyous recognition of belonging to the broader ecological community, which grounds ecological responsibility and sustained environmental action. By situating Næss's ecosophy within a wider philosophical lineage that includes Spinoza and contemporary theories of atmosphere and affect, the article proposes an ecological aesthetics that is simultaneously a practice of ethical relationality and embodied joy. This approach offers new perspectives on how aesthetic sensibility can catalyse deeper environmental engagement in the Anthropocene.

Keywords: Arne Næss, ecology, *Deep Ecology*, Environmental Relationality, *hilaritas*.

1. SENSING THE ROOTS: AESTHETICS OF EARTHLY BELONGING

On 23 April 2015, the Botanical Garden in Palermo hosted a powerful performance by the Guatemalan artist Regina José Galindo¹, who is widely recognized as a leading figure in contemporary Latin American art. The performance, titled *Raíces*² [*Roots*] aimed to highlight the deep disconnection between humanity and Nature, transforming this theme into a visceral expression of the current environmental crisis, which is not merely observed but actively participated in by humans³. At its core, it reflects a profound crisis of *perception* concerning how we perceive *ourselves* and of *our relationship with the world around us*. As a result, it represents not only a challenge of understanding but also an *aesthetic crisis* that strikes at the heart of our physical existence, emotional capacities, and sensory experiences of reality.

In a courageous display of vulnerability, Galindo fully immersed herself completely naked in the earth, becoming one with the ground and she spent many hours grasping the roots of a centuries-old *Ficus macrophylla*, a tree that serves as a symbol of the Botanical Garden.

This highly emotional performance was more than a solitary act; it evolved into inviting others to join in a communal exploration of *identity* and *connection*. Galindo enlisted volunteers from various ethnic groups representing the multicultural fabric of the Sicilian city, encouraging them to dig into the ground in pursuit of the roots of plants native to their countries. In this interactive process, their arms became “human roots”, symbolising a deeper fusion with Nature that called for a re-examination of the “roots of our identity”. Galindo's performance translates into an *ontological engagement* that invites participants and spectators to reflect on their *intrinsic connection to the natural world*: it serves as a poignant reminder of

¹ Regina José Galindo was born in 1974 in Guatemala City, where she currently works. Winner of numerous art prizes in Latin America, in 2005, she was awarded the Golden Lion at the 51st Venice Biennale as the best young artist (under 35); in 2011, she received the Prince Claus Award in the Netherlands and, in the same year, she was proclaimed grand prize winner at the 29th Ljubljana Biennale. She has received numerous artist residency grants, and her works can be found in prestigious collections such as the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Miami Art Museum and the Castello di Rivoli in Turin. For a more in-depth look at the Latin American artist's works, see R.J. Galindo, *Estoy viva*, edited by D. Sileo, E. Viola, Skira, Geneva-Milan 2014.

² The performance *Raíces* was curated by G. Ingraio, P. Nicita and D. Sileo. For more information on the performance, see the following pages: www.arte.it/calendario-arte/palermo/mostra-regina-jos%C3%A9-galindo-ra%C3%ACces-estoy-viva-14715; www.exibart.com/sicilia/fino-al-28-vi-2015-regina-jose-galindo-raices-e-esoy-viva-orto-botanico-e-cantieri-culturali-alla-zisa-pad-iglione-zac-palermo/

³ N. Perullo, *Estetica senza (s)oggetti. Per una nuova ecologia del percepire*, DeriveApprodi, Roma 2022, p. 9. It should be noted that the author of the present paper has personally translated all quotations into languages different from English.

the need to return to the *humus*, a term that is etymologically linked to *homo*, and emphasizes the radical interdependence between humanity and the Earth, a relationship that cannot be ignored in our pursuit of a sustainable future. In this reflective space, Galindo reinterprets the Heideggerian concept of *in der Welt sein* [being-in-the-world], translating it into *in der Natur sein* [being-in-Nature] and suggesting that our relationship with Nature is not superficial or fleeting: it is an essential and fundamental aspect of our existence that necessitates profound awareness and action. The German philosopher Gernot Böhme (1937-1992) articulates this necessity, stating:

The fundamental question of every philosophy of nature “What is nature?” is motivated today by the so-called environmental problem, i.e., human beings have once again realised that they are inevitably Nature and must live in and with Nature. The question “What is Nature?” is therefore posed by philosophy in a transcendental way, i.e. from the point of view of the human being’s relationship to Nature. In the context of the tasks posed by the environmental problem, it is up to philosophy to subject the relationship of the human being with Nature to a thorough revision. In this way, it becomes clear that the destructive relationship with external Nature, contained in the natural sciences, modern technology and the industrial form of the economy, has its counterpart in the relationship with our own Nature, i.e. the Nature that we are, the human body⁴.

This inquiry can be characterized as radical in its implications, revealing the indispensable role aesthetics plays in our journey toward *re-establishing a connection with our naturally experienced world*. An *ecological aesthetics*⁵ arises that understands the discipline we are discussing in its original meaning of “a non-specialized philosophy”⁶ and of a “science of sensitive knowledge” that engages both our physical and emotional dimensions, linking back to the foundational ideas of the discipline as articulated by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten⁷. It is essential to recognize that the Greek verb *aisthanomai* – from which the Latin diction

⁴ G. Böhme, *Für eine ökologische Naturästhetik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am M. 1989, p. 8.

⁵ On the concept of “ecological Aesthetics” see N. Perullo, *N. Perullo, Estetica ecologica. Percepire saggio, vivere corrispondente*, Mimesis, Milan-Udine, 2020 and T. Toadvine, *Ecological Aesthetics*, in L. Embree, H.R. Sepp (eds.), *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics*, Springer, Berlin 2010, pp. 85-91. To understand the distinction between ecological and environmental Aesthetics see the following encyclopedia entries: A. Carlson, *Environmental Aesthetics*, in B. Gaut, D. Lopes (eds.), *Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, Routledge, London 2001, pp. 423-436; Id., *Environmental Aesthetics*, in E.N. Zalta (ed.), *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, 2020 (www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/environmental-aesthetics/); P. D’Angelo, *Estetica ambientale*, in “Enciclopedia Treccani XXI Secolo”, 2010 (www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/estetica-ambientale_%28XXI-Secolo%29/); S. Feloj, *Environmental Aesthetics*, in “International Lexicon of Aesthetics”, 2018 (www.lexicon.mimesisjournals.com/international_lexicon_of_aesthetics_item_detail.php?item_id=38); J.A. Fisher, *Environmental Aesthetics*, in J. Levinson (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2003, pp. 667-678. Cf. also the following collections of texts: J.L. Nasar (ed.), *Environmental Aesthetics: Theory, Research, and Applications*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1988; B. Sadler, A. Carlson (eds.), *Environmental Aesthetics: Essays in Interpretation*, University of Victoria Press, Victoria (CA-BC) 1982. More generally on the relationship between aesthetics, environment and ecology see E. Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment*, in V. Pratt, J. Howarth, E. Brady (eds.), *Environment and Philosophy*, Routledge, London-New York 2000, p. 142-163; P. D’Angelo, *Estetica della natura. bellezza naturale, paesaggio, arte ambientale*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2001; L. Fel L, *L'esthétique verte. De la représentation à la présentation de la nature*, Champ Vallon, Seyssel 2008; G.L. Iannilli (eds.), *Aesthetic Environments: Contemporary Italian Perspectives*, Aesthetica Preprint, n. 114, 2020; S. Kemal, I. Gaskell (eds.), *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1993; V. Maggiore, S. Tedesco, *Ecoestetica. Scritti sull'estetica della Natura*, Meltemi, Milano 2023 and M. Seel, *Eine Ästhetik der Natur*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am M. 1991.

⁶ The proposal of aesthetics, understood as a “non-special philosophy” connected to sensibility and perception, has been at the centre of an stimulating debate in Europe. See for example: G. Böhme, *Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Ästhetik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am M. 1995; E. Garroni, *L'estetica, filosofia non speciale*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1995; T. Griffiero, *Atmosferologia. Estetica degli spazi emozionali*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2010; W. Welsch, *Cambio di rotta*, ed. by L. Amoroso, Aesthetica edizioni, Sesto San Giovanni (Mi) 2023.

⁷ We refer to A.G. Baumgarten, *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus*, Halle, 1735; transl. by P. Pimpinella and S. Tedesco, *Riflessioni sulla poesia, Aesthetica edizioni*, Palermo 1999, p. 71 in which the opening of an aesthetic discipline is invoked for the first time. Cf. also the definition of Aesthetics given by the eponymous father of the discipline in *Aesthetica* (1750): «Aesthetics (theory of the liberal arts, inferior gnoseology, art of thinking beautifully, art of the analogy of reason) is the science of sensible knowledge» (Id., *Aesthetica*, Frankfurt a.d. Oder, 1750; transl. by F. Caparrotta, A. Li Vigni, S. Tedesco, *L'Estetica*, Aesthetica edizioni, Palermo 2000, p. 26). In his endeavour to give substance to his meditations, Baumgarten

Aesthetica derives – is expressed in a *medium diathesis* or mediative state: it does not conform to the binary nature of active *versus* passive; instead, it represents a fluid relationship that transcends the typical divisions of “I” and “you” or “subject” and “object”. Rather, it is a form of *feeling* that encapsulates a dynamic process between the external world and our internal sensitivity, challenging traditional distinctions between *sensation* and *perception*⁸.

To clarify this distinction, let us consider a pertinent example. When someone says, “I feel cold”, they are expressing a sensation related to bodily experience; this personal feeling reflects a physiological response to external stimuli (such as a drop in temperature) and typically contrasts with perceiving a physical object. When we say we perceive the book we are holding, we emphasize our cognitive ability to identify and understand that object as something that exist outside of ourselves, that is as something distinct from our internal sensations. This difference suggests that sensation belongs entirely to the realm of private experience or to the intimate side of subjectivity, while perception connects us to the public, shared reality of the external world and to the sphere of objectivity⁹. However, this framework falters when considering sensory modalities beyond vision. For instance, in Italian, the verb *sentire* (*to feel*) – etymologically related to the English word “sensation” – encompasses a broader spectrum, used to express the experience of hearing waves, smelling a rose, or tasting the texture of fruit¹⁰. It reflects a holistic view of sensory experience and engagement with the world, where different modalities can intertwine and influence each other. This idea is linked to the Latin verb *sentire*, which echoes the Greek verb *paschein* meaning “to feel with your whole self”. Böhme further articulates that

ecologically motivated Aesthetics could be called a general theory of perception. However, it would be necessary [...] to reintegrate emotional components into the concept of perception, that is, affective participation in what is perceived [...]. Suppose perception constitutes the sensory sensation of being in one's surroundings. In that case, the perceiver is not merely noticing what is happening in his surroundings from an almost otherworldly position but is somewhat affected by the state of his surroundings [...]. He feels, in short, in his own body, the environment in which he finds himself¹¹.

is confronted with the daunting task of finding «a ratio even in the *aesthetica* (the things of sensibility, understood in the broadest sense)» (L. Amoroso, *Ratio & aesthetica. La nascita dell'estetica e la filosofia moderna*, Ets, Pisa 2000, p. 41). This task of subjecting to rational analysis, even what seems extraneous to reason, is complex. He can only carve out a theoretical space for such a discipline by undertaking a profound restructuring of rationalism, or in other words, by proposing a redefinition of the entire Cartesian system of knowledge. Indeed, the father of aesthetics intends to vindicate the legitimacy of the territory of sensibility (the territory of *clear and confused* knowledge) by juxtaposing logic – i.e., the science of intellectual content (the territory of *clear and distinct* knowledge) – with a “sister” discipline that analyses the first moment of knowledge, namely the sensible experience, starting from the broader problem of man's being and his relations with the world. Using a term derived from ancient Greek, Baumgarten calls *Aesthetica* the new branch of thought he instituted, the aim of which is not to understand how the errors of the senses can be curbed and corrected but rather to understand in what terms one can speak of sensitive knowledge, how it develops in the human being and what its characteristics are. Perullo points out that this *scientia cognitionis sensitivae* «arises from considering the insufficiency of purely intellectual knowledge, clear and distinct, placing itself alongside it, but this only confirms this separation. [...] From this point of view, Aesthetics already has within itself both its limit and its resource» (N. Perullo, *Estetica ecologica*, cit., p. 23). For a comprehensive reconstruction of Baumgarten's thought based on the entire corpus of his aesthetic works, cf.: AA.VV., *Baumgarten e gli orizzonti dell'estetica*, Aesthetica Preprint, Palermo 1998; H. Reiss, *The rise of aesthetics: Baumgarten's radical innovation and Kant's response*, in “Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies”, no. 20, 1997/1, pp. 53-61; S. Tedesco, *Studi sull'estetica dell'illuminismo tedesco*, Edizioni della Fondazione Nazionale “Vito Fazio Allmayer”, Palermo 1998 and, above all, Id. *L'estetica di Baumgarten*, Aesthetica Preprint Supplementa, Palermo 2000.

⁸ N. Perullo, *Estetica senza (s)oggetti*, cit., p. 18.

⁹ Cfr. A. Pinotti, *Sensazione*, in AA.VV., *Enciclopedia filosofica Bompiani*, vol. 4- Rae-Z, Milano 2006, p. 10464.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ G. Böhme, *Für eine ökologische Naturästhetik*, cit., p. 10.

This vision finds a vivid expression in Galindo's performance. She enacts what Böhme theorizes: an embodied perception of the environment as a condition of existence, in which the human being physically senses the state of the natural world. Her gesture of immersing herself in the earth performs a somatic act of *oikeiosis*, a process of becoming familiar with and emotionally attuned to one's surroundings, revealing the deep relationality between Self and Nature¹². Through this embodied experience, she challenges the illusion of separation between identity and environment, between the individual and the ecological web to which they belong. This approach invites an exploration of how our sensitivities, grounded in physical experience, can ignite a vital dialogue about our ecological relationships, challenging us to cultivate a more profound connection with Nature and reintegrate ourselves into the rhythm of the natural world. Through this process, we can begin to restore our sense of belonging and responsibility within the ecosystems that sustain us.

Considering this clarification, one can understand why, in this sense, feeling offers not a subjectivistic but a radically *relational, systemic, and dynamic* perspective, which is structurally open to the other¹³. Therefore, the aesthetic perception of the environment is not purely visual but *somatic*: as Arnold Berleant points out, it is the body that *energises space* because «the physical senses play an active role, not as passive channels for *receiving external stimuli*, but as an *integrated sensorium*» that requires «a direct engagement of the conscious body as part of an environmental complex»¹⁴. Hence, in this experiential *nexus* the whole body is involved, not only the mere senses of sight and hearing (senses traditionally considered “noble” by philosophical reflection) but also smell, taste and the entire haptic sensory system, which includes both tactile and subcutaneous perception, aimed at grasping the texture of surfaces, temperature, humidity, pressure, etc. That is, we can combine sounds, images, tactile impressions, smells and even the kinaesthetic sense of movement into a single aesthetic experience, feeling a *total immersion in the object*¹⁵.

¹² As the Stoic theory of *oikeiosis* shows, human ethical development begins with self-care and extends outward in concentric circles to encompass the family, the community, and ultimately the cosmos (cf. R. Radice, *Oikeiosis. Ricerche sul fondamento del pensiero stoico e sulla sua genesi*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano, 2000; D. Sedley, *The Stoic Doctrine of Oikeiosis*, in A.A. Long (ed.), *Problems in Stoicism*, Athlone Press, London 1971, pp. 121-152). Contemporary authors have recently revived this model to support ecological thought and emotional interconnection with the non-human world (see, for example, K. Alladkan, *Stoicism, a Philosophical Basis for Ecology?*, in “Open Access Library Journal”, n. 8, 2021; M. Fabjański, G. Carrus, *The ancients knew it already: how Stoic philosophy explains the link between mindfulness, emotion regulation and pro-environmental behaviours*, in “PsyEcology”, vol. 14, 2023/1, pp. 103-120)

¹³ Cfr. N. Perullo, *Estetica ecologica*, cit., p. 14.

¹⁴ A. Berleant, *Aesthetics beyond the arts: new and recent essays*, Ashgate, Farnham 2012. See also Id., *Aesthetic perception in environmental design*, in J.L. Nasar (ed.), *Environmental Aesthetics. Theory, Research, and Application*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1988, pp. 84-97. In enjoying the natural environment, an *extended perception* is involved, i.e. a perception that encompasses different aspects and calls on the viewer to recognize himself as part of the experienced object. We are immersed in the object of our enjoyment and, for this reason, emotionally connected with it. On the centrality of the concept of *immersiveness* in such an aesthetic consideration see: V. Maggiore, *L'estetica nell'età dell'Antropocene: i molteplici volti della riflessione estetica contemporanea sulla natura*, in V. Maggiore, S. Tedesco, *Ecoestetica*, cit., p. 20 ss; S. Iovino, *Filosofie dell'ambiente. Natura, etica, società*, Carocci, Roma 2004, p. 134.

¹⁵ The problem of the absence of delimitation affects both the perceived object and the percipient subject: not only the natural object cannot be separated from his context, but not even the subject can rise to the role of detached spectator: we are “enveloped” by the natural entities, forced to bring all our sensory organs into play simultaneously. As Mikel Dufrenne points out, in front of the natural spectacle, we are involved in the game, integrated into the natural becoming of the world (see M. Dufrenne, *L'expérience esthétique de la nature*, in “Revue Internationale de Philosophie”, vol. 9, n. 31, 1955; transl. by V. Maggiore, *L'esperienza estetica della natura*, in V. Maggiore, S. Tedesco (eds.), *Ecoestetica*, cit., p. 69. For example, let's walk along a small path that leads into the forest. We are at the same time spectators and actors (we do not observe the forest “from the outside”, but we are “inside it”) and, alongside this mutual involvement of spectator and object, we find a reflexive effect whereby the spectator experiences himself vividly. It is an effect that, as Ronald Hepburn emphasises, is not foreign to artistic practices (for example, it is cleverly exploited by those involved in architecture). Nevertheless, it is both more intensely realised and more pervasive in natural experience because we are part of nature [see R.W. Hepburn, *Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty*, in B. Williams, A. Montefiore (eds.), *British Analytical Philosophy*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1966].

In this framework, Aesthetics is not a detached contemplation but an *embodied, relational, and affective practice* that reconnects us with our bodily roots and our radical dependence on the Earth. This performative and affective dimension of ecological experience calls for a rethinking of the traditional oppositions that have long shaped our understanding of aesthetics and subjectivity. In the following sections, I will explore how Arne Næss's Deep Ecology deepens this insight by revaluing the emotional dimension (Paragraph 2), redefining personal identity through Gestalt ontology (Paragraph 3), and finally proposing an aesthetic of joy grounded in Spinoza's concept of *hilaritas* (Paragraph 4). These stages will allow us to understand how an ecological aesthetic emerges not from fear or detachment, but from a joyful sense of belonging and resonance with the living world.

2. FEELING THE WORLD: NÆSS'S CRITIQUE OF THE DUALISM BETWEEN EMOTION AND REASON

Continuing our reflection on aesthetics as an embodied and relational experience, Arne Næss's ideas highlight the essential role of emotions in our relationship with nature. Contrary to the common belief that emotions obstruct rationality and clarity, Næss views them as a significant form of "wisdom" emerging from a deep, lived connection with the natural world.

Because of its etymological depth and openness to exploring our embodied and metabolic relationship with the environment, Aesthetics can play a crucial role in today's ecological debates: it can foster the emergence of what (not by chance) is called *green sensibility*, an environmental feeling founded on the intimate recognition of our being participants within Nature and not opposed to it¹⁶. This presupposition constitutes the foundation of the theoretical framework elaborated by Arne Næss¹⁷.

In this paragraph, we will explore the fundamental role of emotions in the natural experience according to Arne Næss, highlighting how his philosophy transcends the traditional separation between reason and feeling to build a more authentic and profound relationship with nature. To trace the path we will take in

¹⁶ It should be emphasised that such a role was already recognised for Aesthetics in the New European Bauhaus promoted by the President of the European Council Ursula von der Leyen: a creative and interdisciplinary initiative that aims to connect the European Green Deal to lived spaces and everyday experiences, creating a bridge between the scientific/technological world and the artistic/cultural world to jointly address complex social problems, with a view to cooperation and co-construction of knowledge. See in this regard the speech *Building the world we want to live in: a union of vitality in a world of fragility* delivered by U. von der Leyen to the States of the Union on 16 September 2020, available online at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ov/SPEECH_20_1655

¹⁷ Arne Næss (1912-2009) was born the youngest of four children in the suburbs of Oslo, in a house with a garden that blends into the wilderness: it is to this place that he owes his earliest memories of being immersed in Nature, a relationship with the natural dimension that, from childhood onwards, takes on a mythopoeic and highly personal value, particularly with the mountains. He studied philosophy, mathematics, and astronomy at the University of Oslo, the Sorbonne in Paris, and the University of Vienna, where he participated in the homonymous philosophical circle. Returning to Norway at the age of twenty-seven, he became the first full professor of philosophy at the University of Oslo, a position he held until 1954, inevitably influencing the way philosophical themes were received in the Scandinavian countries (cf. J. Hartnack, *Scandinavian philosophy*, in P. Edwards (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, vol. 7, Macmillan, New York 1967, p. 301). «The importance of the work of Arne Dekke Eide Næss [...] has perhaps not yet been fully recognised, particularly within philosophical academic circles. Næss's name appears inextricably linked to ecology, rather than philosophy, even though he devoted much of his research to issues ranging from epistemology [...] to metaphysics, philosophy of language, psychology and ethics» (L. Valera, *Il pensiero di Arne Næss*, in A. Næss, *Introduction to Ecology*, ETS, Pisa 2015, p. 8). Indeed, Næss is known in Italy for his ecological activism and his name is mainly linked to his fame as a well-known mountaineer. In this, Italian thought stands in contrast to a growing interest in this author worldwide: the Scandinavian philosopher has lectured at the world's most prestigious universities, he was one of the founders in 1958 of the prestigious journal "Inquiry", and the collection of some of his writings, entitled *The Selected Works of Arne Næss*, consists of approximately 3000 pages and is divided into ten volumes. See in this regard: A. Næss, *The Selected works of Arne Næss*, ed. by H. Glasser, A. Drengson Springer, Dordrecht 2005.

the second part of this argument, it is worth noting that we are not interested in understanding how Næss arrived at the construction of his thought nor in outlining the fundamental characteristics of the Deep Ecology movement of which he was a promoter¹⁸, but rather in elucidating the central role that emotional experience plays in the *spontaneous encounter* with Nature. To guide the reader, we recall that Næss called his philosophy *Ecosophy T*. Etymologically, the word “ecosophy” is composed of the Greek terms *oikos* and *sophia* (*home* and *wisdom*). Here *-sophia* indicates the ability to get to the bottom of things: it does not necessarily have scientific claims, unlike words composed of *-logos*, but for Næss all forms of wisdom should have direct relevance to our actions. As with “ecology,” the prefix *eco-* carries a meaning extending beyond the immediate sense of home, family, and community. As the philosopher highlights, the more appropriate translation would be “Earth home”¹⁹. Therefore, Ecosophy is a philosophical view that draws inspiration from the conditions of life in the ecosphere.

We should remember that Næss was a great admirer of the mountains. At the end of 1938, he built a small cabin at the foot of the imposing cliffs of Mount Hallingskarvet, calling it *Tvergastein* (“crossed stones” in Norwegian). It was an isolated hut that could be reached in three hours on foot from the railway station of the nearest village. Thus, the “T” in the term *Ecosophy T* stands for *Tvergastein*, the place where the philosopher composed most of his original writings and that he considered “home” or, in other words, a place to be emotionally attached to. We can therefore assert that such a philosophical reflection could only have originated «in places where human endeavor blends perfectly with the landscape, and nature is perceived in all its disruptive majesty»²⁰. The idea that nature is constantly present to the human being – in all its visible or latent forms – accompanied Næss throughout his life, becoming especially prominent in his later speculative phase.

In the book titled *Life's Philosophy. Reason & Feeling in a Deeper World*, Næss starts from the evidence of the “artificial gap”²¹ that exists in Western society between reason (regarded as an aseptic epistemological tool, indispensable in scientific and political practice) and emotion. Emotions are often described as “warm”, “uncontrollable” and “shortsighted” because, according to common sense, they do not allow us to tackle with lucidity complex problems, such as environmental ones.

As the philosopher points out in the incipit of a well-known article entitled *The World of Concrete Content*: «In environmental debate there is a constant complaint against those who fight to “save” a natural being (a river, a wood, a sea, a kind of animal or plant, a landscape) that they mainly express feelings and subjective likes and dislikes. They are said to lack a sense of objectivity, and ultimately to lack adequate reference to reality as it is in fact and not just as they feel it»²².

¹⁸ Cf. for a more in-depth analysis of the intertwining of the Scandinavian philosopher's biography and the origins of his theoretical thinking the chapter entitled *L'esperienza qualitative della natura: l'ecologia profonda di Arne Naess*, in V. Maggiore, *Sentire la natura. Un nuovo spazio per l'estetica nell'età dell'Antropocene*, Plumelia Edizioni, Bagheria (PA) 2025, pp. 293-354. See also the text that marked the beginning of his ecological interests: A. Næss, *The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement. A Summary*, in “Inquiry”, n. 16, 1973, pp. 95-100; it. tr. *Il movimento ecologico: ecologia superficiale ed ecologia profonda. Una sintesi*, in M. Tallacchini (ed. by), *Etiche della terra. Antologia di filosofia dell'ambiente*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano, 1998, pp. 143-149.

¹⁹ A. Næss, *Ecosofia. Ecologia, società e stili di vita*, transl. by E. Recchia, RED, Como 1994, pp. 41-42.

²⁰ L. Valera, *Il pensiero di Arne Naess*, in A. Næss, *Introduzione all'ecologia*, ETS, Pisa 2015, p. 11. On the importance of this place for the formulating of Næss's theories see also: A. Næss., *Esempio di un luogo: Tvergastein*, in Id., *Noi siamo l'aria che respiriamo. Saggi di ecologia profonda*, Piano B edizioni, Prato 2021, pp. 29-66.

²¹ A. Næss, *Life's philosophy: reason and feeling in a deeper world*, eng. tr. by R. Huntford, University of Georgia Press, Athens 2008, p. 12.

²² A. Næss, *The World of Concrete Contents*, in Id., *The Selected works of Arne Naess*, cit., p. 449. Cf. also D. Rothenberg, *No World but in Things: The Poetry of Naess's Concrete Contents*, in “Inquiry”, n. 39, pp. 255-272.

Næss is highly clear in emphasising that the gap between the rational and emotional components (historically established by the Galilean scientific revolution due to the devaluation of the qualitative) is based on a mistaken understanding of the concepts themselves of “reason” and “emotion”. Drawing on the reflections conducted by Spinoza (an author dear to the Norwegian philosopher) in his *Ethica more geometrico demonstrata*²³, Næss states that «the conventional translation of *ratio* is unfortunately “reason”. But what we call reason today is enormously different from what the philosophers of the seventeenth century called *ratio*. When we are confronted with a vital choice of action, *ratio* indicates which choice is in accord with human nature or essence»²⁴. And if, conversely, we concede, following Næss, that «emotions are not objects, things that we own» but that «they emerge from an encounter between ourselves-and-the-world»²⁵, then *ratio* can be interpreted as that *inner voice* that, in critical situations, urges us to act towards what we believe is most in accord with our Nature or, better, with the Nature that *we are*. Emotions, in this view, are not interior states but modes of tune with the world, arising from our embeddedness in the ecological web.

Næss focuses his reflection on sensitivity and corporality, conceiving the experience of nature – even scientific nature – as primarily an *aesthetic experience*: according to the philosopher, it is always a *spontaneous experience* «of something real»²⁶, something that we experience in the *first person* and that implies the recovery of the qualitative dimension in our relationship with nature. «It is not the case that we merely have emotions, any more than we have relationships», says Næss²⁷. «We are emotions and relationships because, in a broad sense, those thoughts, emotions, and relationships with which we identify are, in other words, a part of ourselves»²⁸. A perspective, sketched with lyrical accents²⁹, that goes beyond the traditional dualism between subject and object, advocating a unique form of *relationalism*.

«There is not a subject and an object», writes Næss. «There is an existence that you do not adequately describe when you say, “There is Arne Naess and there are these flowers”. Many would take it as a kind of poetry, but I think it is a description of the world, a description of what there is, what genuinely exists»³⁰. It is a theoretical position that prompts us to return to the roots of the terms at play – to evoke the image of radical immersion recalled by Galindo – particularly the origins of the term *ecology*.

Let us recall that the term *ecology* – nowadays used during the current environmental crisis – made its first appearance well before the rise of ecological awareness: it was used for the first time in the second volume of the *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen*³¹, a voluminous biological essay written in 1866 by the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919)³². In this context, ecology is defined as the science of the

²³ B. Spinoza, *Ethics: Proved in Geometrical Order*, ed. by M.J. Kisner, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2018.

²⁴ A. Næss, *Life's philosophy*, cit., p. 10.

²⁵ *Ivi*, p. 15. Here Næss specifies: «I use hyphens as a reminder that a sharp distinction cannot be drawn between ourselves and the world» (*ibidem*).

²⁶ Id., *Author's Preface on My Papers and Selections*, in *The Selected works of Arne Naess*, cit., vol. VIII, p. lxxvi; it. tr. by A. D'Attoli, *Prefazione a SWAN VIII – X*, in F. Nasi, L. Valera (eds.), *Arne Naess*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2023, p. 61. Cf. L. Valera, *From “spontaneous experience” to the Cosmos: Arne Naess's Phenomenology*, in “PROBLEMOS”, n. 93, 2018, pp. 142-153.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ As Rothenberg points out, «here is a philosopher with a love-hate relationship with precision, a suspicion of rhetoric, and a deep respect for poetry – maybe not poetic language, but poetic action» (D. Rothenberg, *It is painful to think? Conversations with Arne Naess*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1993, p. 190), which attempts to restore the depth that experience deserves by extolling the human capacity to experience the qualities of Nature directly.

³⁰ C. Diehm, “Here I Stand”. *An Interview with Arne Naess*, in “Environmental Philosophy”, n. 1, 2004, p. 9.

³¹ E. Haeckel, *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen. Allgemeine Grundzüge der organischen Formen-Wissenschaft, Mechanisch begründet durch die von Charles Darwin reformirte Descendenz-Theorie*, G. Reiner, Berlin 1866.

³² For information on Haeckel's life, works and thought, please refer to his autobiographical writing *Ernst Haeckel. Eine autobiographische Skizze*, in Id., *Ernst Haeckel. Gemeinverständliche Werke*, hrsg. von H. Schmidt, Leipzig und Berlin, Alfred

relationships that connect an organism to its surroundings or, in other words, as the science of those relationships that allow a given entity to *feel part* of its surroundings, to *perceive to be part of the world*, to “feel at home” in an environmental context³³. Haeckel defines ecology as the science of the relationships between organisms and their environment [*Umwelt*], laying the foundations for a systemic understanding of life.

This definition marks a crucial moment in the conceptual genealogy of ecological thinking. Yet, what Næss inherits from Haeckel is not simply a scientific paradigm but a *philosophical impulse*, a recognition that identity arises through relation: where Haeckel's ecology remains a science *about* interconnections, Næss transforms it into a philosophy *within* interconnection. For Haeckel, the environment is seen as a separate “sphere” external to the organism, which is described primarily in terms of its effects; in contrast, Næss dissolves this distinction, encouraging us to view the environment as a fundamental aspect of the Self. He extends Haeckel's vision by reinterpreting ecology not as a detached science but as an existential and affective condition: the experience of *being part of*, rather than merely *related to*, the world. Ecology thus becomes not only the study of the world but a way of inhabiting it, of sensing and responding to its textures, rhythms, and forms from within.

«Ecology is *the study* [...] *of the world* that leads us *into the world*, therefore [...] it is the study (and discourse) *with the world*»³⁴, where the term world – repeated here several times – is to be understood as «*what happens insofar as we co-inhabit it, being immersed in it and, at the same time, incessantly contributing to its realisation*. The world is this making, this continuous production where everything is interwoven: we, *homo sapiens sapiens*, are part of this interweaving which we do not dominate but which we describe and, at the same time, co-transform»³⁵. The vision that Næss promotes is strongly related to Haeckel's definition, although in his thought «the reference to ecology no longer applies only to scientific discourse but invests the very vision of reality»³⁶. Næss invites us to rediscover this emotional bond, an internal relationship based on an intrinsic consonance with Nature that leads us to affirm that not only are we part of a network of vital relationships «but these relationships intrinsically constitute our identity. We are the air we breathe, the food we eat, the environment we inhabit; we are nodes in the web of interconnections of life»³⁷.

3. THE WORLD AS GESTALT: AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND THE ECOLOGY OF FORM

The vision of the natural world articulated by Deep Ecology calls for a profound rethinking of the principle of individuation and a comprehensive redefinition of personal identity. For this reason, Arne Næss intro-

Kröner Verlag und Carl Henschel Verlag, 1924, vol. I, pp. IX-XXXII. Cf. also W. Bölsche, *Ernst Haeckel. Ein Lebensbild*, Hermann Seemann Nachfolger, Berlin – Leipzig 1900; eng. tr. by J. McCabe, *Haeckel. His life and works*, George W. Jacobs and Co., Philadelphia 1906; M. Di Gregorio, *From Here to Eternity. Ernst Haeckel and Scientific Faith*, Vandenhoeck Ruprecht, Göttingen 2005; E. Krauß, *Ernst Haeckel. Biographien hervorragender Naturwissenschaftler*, BSB B. G. Teubner, Leipzig 1984; Ead., *Haeckel e l'Italia. La vita come scienza e come storia*, Cisst, Brugine 1993; R.J. Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life. Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 2008 and G. Uschmann (ed. by), *Ernst Haeckel. Forscher, Künstler, Mensch*, Urania Verlag, Leipzig – Jena – Berlin 1961.

³³ E. Haeckel, *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen*, cit. vol. II, p. 286. For a concise analysis of the emergence of the concept of ecology see L. Valera, *Ecologia ed ecologie*, in “Giornale di storia della medicina”, vol. 23, n. 3 – Medicina nei secoli. Arte e scienza, 2011, pp. 1015-1044.

³⁴ N. Perullo, *Estetica ecologica*, cit., p. 20.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ S. Iovino, *Filosofie dell'ambiente*, cit., p. 95.

³⁷ Cf. E. Cavazza, *Introduzione*, in A. Næss, *Siamo l'aria che respiriamo. Saggi di ecologia profonda*, Piano B edizioni, Prato 2021, p. 15.

duces the groundbreaking concept of *ecological Self*³⁸ to indicate an *enlarged identity*, which offers an ontological perspective rooted in Gestalt psychology³⁹. The Norwegian philosopher argues that, with a deep and all-encompassing maturity, we naturally begin to identify ourselves with all living beings, regardless of their beauty or ugliness, size, or sentience. This transformation reflects a fundamental shift in how we perceive our place in the world, emphasizing an *intrinsic unity* within the natural environment: by recognizing a rich tapestry of interconnected relationships, Deep Ecology advocates for a move away from a narrow, atomistic understanding of the self; instead, it encourages an expansive view that highlights the self's essential connections to the broader web of life. The unity described here is not simply a mental association or a deliberate organization of separate experiences that are connected only through the awareness of the observer. Rather, it manifests as a profound intuitive sense of connection, a rich and immediate understanding of the inherent unity that exists among various entities. This deep-seated feeling fosters the emergence of diverse forms [*Gestalten*], allowing for intricate relationships to take shape. Ultimately, this process contributes to the creation of a *total relational field* (the planet Earth in its organic and inorganic totality), a complex web of interactions that reflects the interconnectedness of all things.

This perspective fosters a greater appreciation for the complexities of nature and our role within it, advocating for an ethical responsibility towards all forms of existence; furthermore, it is a belief that can be described as a very particular form of Spinozism or a holistic perspective, but that Næss prefers to call it a *Gestalt Ontology* to emphasise its spontaneity⁴⁰.

Defining its perspective as a “Gestalt Ontology”, Naess is referring to Gestalt psychology, which focuses on an intriguing aspect of human perception: the tendency to create formal configurations. For example, when three points are arranged randomly on a blackboard, our minds instinctively perceive them as forming the shape of a triangle. This involuntary process is often summarised in the saying “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts”. While Næss embraces this idea, he contends that it doesn't fully explore the richness of the Gestalt concept. He emphasizes an important aspect he refers to as the “infusion of the character of the whole into each part”, which means that the significance of a part is deeply intertwined with the essence of the whole it belongs to.

To illustrate this, consider the moment the first notes of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* resonate through the air. These opening sounds do not just stand alone; they evoke a profound emotional atmosphere that reflects the symphony's entirety. In this instance, we can articulate that “the part is more than a part”, as the character of the entire melody informs and connotes our experience of those initial notes in a fascinating interplay of expectations and connections. As Næss asserts:

³⁸ C. Diehm, “*Here I Stand*”, cit., p. 12.

³⁹ *Gestaltpsychologie*, or *Gestalt psychology*, is a school of psychology that originated in Germany in the early 20th century (and continued its research in the United States, where some of its most illustrious representatives had moved following the rise of Nazi doctrine in Europe). Its leading exponents include Max Wertheimer (1880-1943), Kurt Koffka (1886-1941) and Wolfgang Köhler (1887-1967). The theories of this psychological school focus on understanding the processes involved in the perception of reality and how phenomena are experienced through the senses: for the proponents of this school of psychological thought, it is incorrect to divide human experience into its elementary components; on the contrary, it is always appropriate to consider the whole as a phenomenon of a higher order than the sum of its components. This concept, known as *epistemological molarism* or *emergentism*, is summarised in the motto “the whole is different from the sum of its parts”. It forms the basis of some of the laws of perception identified by Gestalt psychologists. By way of example, we cite the *law of good form* (which states that the perceived structure is always the simplest); that of *good continuity* (which holds that all visual elements are perceived as belonging to a coherent and continuous whole); that of *proximity* (which emphasises the fact that elements are grouped according to distance); or, again, that of *figure-ground* (according to which parts of a complex structure can be interpreted either as objects or as background).

⁴⁰ Cf. A. Næss, *Ecosophy and Gestalt Ontology*, in “The Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy”, n. 6, 1989/4, pp. 134-137; Id., *Reflections on Gestalt Ontology*, in “The Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy”, n. 21, 2005, pp. 119-128.

The slogan most commonly used to introduce *Gestalt* perception is: “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts”. But using the example of a known melody, the more characteristic feature is the influence of the whole upon each part. Whatever the part of the melody that is heard, the particular character of the whole influences the experience of the part. A “part” of a *Gestalt* is more than a part. That is, if we listen to a part of an unknown melody the experience is different from listening to that part when the melody is known⁴¹.

If we are familiar with the symphony, the impact of those few notes is vastly different than if we approached them with no prior knowledge. Our understanding is enhanced, shaped by our previous encounters with the complete composition, allowing us to fully appreciate the depth and complexity of each musical phrase.

In addition to these considerations, it is essential to recognize that the experience of listening to a piece of music (a rich tapestry woven from individual notes, harmonies, and intricate movements) hinges significantly on the specific context in which we engage with it. Whether we are immersed in the sounds of a symphony in a grand concert hall, surrounded by the warmth of fellow music lovers, or find solace in a solitary moment with our headphones on a bustling subway, each scenario shapes our emotional responses. The environment (the soft embrace of a quiet room, the vibrant energy of an outdoor festival, or the intimate charm of a cozy café) imbues the music with layers of meaning and feeling. These varied experiences give rise to distinct interpretations of the musical composition. The underlying intuition is that *Gestalt Ontology* is connected to the idea of a “complete” or “total view”⁴², based on the assumption that we cannot make any clear ontological split in the field of existence and that the part (each natural entity) is an expression of the whole (the Nature)⁴³.

This Gestalt vision is not merely psychological: it points to a deeper ontological claim. The self is not a bounded unit but a node within a dynamic relational field, where every element is shaped by and shapes its surroundings. The identity of any being (human, plant, rock) is not given in isolation, but emerges from the pattern of relations in which it participates. As Tim Ingold notes «life is not lived inside things, but along the lines of their relationships⁴⁴». In this *field ontology*, the ecological Self is not an abstract concept but a lived reality: a felt continuity with the flux of life, in which no part exists independently of the whole. Næss’s Gestalt ontology thus articulates an *experiential metaphysics*, grounded in the lived perception of form, rhythm, and mutual implication. To perceive the world ecologically is to feel this web of relational forces as constitutive of who we are.

At this point, Næss’s thought resonates with Gernot Böhme’s aesthetics of atmospheres. Both thinkers reject the idea of the subject as an isolated observer and instead conceive perception as a participation in a dynamic field of tensions and affordances. In the same spirit, Næss insists that we are not separate from the landscapes we perceive: we are always already situated within a perceptual field that shapes our sense of self. The world is not a background to our consciousness, but a co-presence that vibrates with meaning.

⁴¹ Id., *Reflections on Gestalt Ontology*, cit., p. 119.

⁴² As Næss himself pointed out in a conversation with Diehm, the concept of *total view* follows the German term *Weltanschauung* and can, therefore, only be improperly translated into English as *world view*. As Næss states, «*Weltanschauung* is something different from “world-view”. A “view” can be totally rendered in language: “My view of the world is so-and-so”. But *Anschauung* has to do with what you feel and see, so the *Weltanschauung* has to do with the integration of this view with feelings; it is how you feel yourself and how you feel the world. And because it has to do with what’s immediate – how you feel the world and how you feel yourself – the *Weltanschauung* cannot be properly expressed in language» (C. Diehm, “*Here I Stand*”, cit., p. 6).

⁴³ Næss introduces the notion of the *ecological self* into the philosophical debate to indicate what broadly identifies the person. We recognise an intrinsic unity in nature, a network of constitutive relationships that pushes us away from an atomistic conception of the self towards a knowledge of the self as essentially related to other organic and inorganic entities.

⁴⁴ Cf. T. Ingold, *Corrispondenze*, transl. by N. Perullo, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano 2021.

A feeling of being part of Nature that, although never mentioned by the Norwegian thinker, powerfully evokes the Stoic concept of *oikeiosis*⁴⁵ the progressive internalization of the world as one's own⁴⁶. It is a spontaneous process – defined by the Norwegian philosopher as not rational but not irrational – through which the interests of another being are our interests, and which has obvious ontological repercussions. «That many people do not quite grasp where I stand», says Næss, «might stem from the fact that I feel that both I myself and life itself are a kind of current, not objects floating in a current. I do not step into the river, as the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Heraclitus saw it. I am the river».⁴⁷

This statement is in close accord with what Italian anthropologist Emanuela Borgnino has called *native ecologies*, such as the ecological approach that characterises the natives of the Hawaiian Islands. Expressions such as *He Hawaii au* (I am Hawaii) testify that for the Hawaiian culture «the human being is a constituent part of the archipelago called Hawaii and can claim to be, not to represent it, as an active element of a network of relations between the parts that make up the territory [...] it is not an evocative expression, but a concrete statement [...] that takes the name of *kuleana*, responsibility that implies having relations»⁴⁸.

Although Næss's reference to the phenomenological method is not very explicit in his writings and sometimes even apparently rejected⁴⁹, the Norwegian philosopher seems to radicalise the Heideggerian concept of *Mitsein* and translate it into a profound identification with what is only apparently other than me: a spontaneous process that has obvious repercussions on the ontological level, through which the interest or interests of another being are considered as our interest or interests. The author writes:

there is a level of existence such that you don't have that feeling about what you feel and what is. Being with those flowers and really concentrating, I find that a unity exists, that there is an *existing* unity – a unity that is not just in feeling but in *existing*. It is a unity of something I call “me” and a “flower,” but those terms are wrong to describe the situation⁵⁰.

Based on this realisation, those who want to adopt a genuinely ecological attitude must not only (and not so much) attempt to argue in favour of other species or defence of inorganic Nature in its entirety but also *correspond with it*. Tim Ingold points out that to correspond with bacteria, eagles, and bees, as well as minerals

⁴⁵ Cf. R. Radice, *Oikeiosis*, cit.

⁴⁶ The term *oikeiosis* comes from the Greek word *οἰκείωσις*, which translates to “familiarization,” “appropriation,” or “internalization”. This concept is central to Stoic identity and ethics, particularly in the writings of Posidonius, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius. It refers to a natural and progressive process through which an individual recognizes themselves as part of a larger order (the community, the city, humanity, and ultimately the entire cosmos). This understanding highlights a profound empathic and relational dimension wherein the self and others (both people and nature) are not seen as oppositional but as interconnected; thus, the idea of *oikeiosis* can be viewed as an ancient form of moral and ontological ecology, presaging many insights of contemporary environmental philosophy and echoing the thoughts of thinkers such as Arne Næss.

⁴⁷ A. Næss, *Life's philosophy*, cit., p. 3.

⁴⁸ E. Borgnino, *Écologie native*, Elèuthera, Milano 2022.

⁴⁹ If in *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, Næss says that phenomenology can help articulate a “non-utilitarian” consciousness of nature (A. Næss, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1989), in a conversation with Christian Diehm regarding a question about the usefulness of phenomenology, Næss replies: “All right, you're a phenomenologist. That might help, but it might not, because there are so many concepts there that it's difficult to concentrate on the things we're talking about; you verbalize too much and make things overly intricate. There is a tremendous complexity in philosophical phenomenology” (C. Diehm, “*Here I Stand*”, cit., p. 10). On the relationship between Næss and phenomenology, see: C.S. Brown, T. Toadvine, *Eco-Phenomenology Back to the Earth Itself*, SUNY, 2003; C. Diehm, *Deep Ecology and Phenomenology*, in “Environmental Philosophy”, 1(2), pp. 20-27; L. Valera, *From “spontaneous experience” to the Cosmos: Arne Naess's Phenomenology*, cit.; M.E. Zimmermann, *Rethinking the Heidegger-deep Ecology Relationship*, in “Environmental Philosophy”, 15(3), pp. 195-224.

⁵⁰ C. Diehm, “*Here I Stand*”, cit., p. 10.

and plants, is to coexist⁵¹. Coexistence is a communication that is upstream of knowledge, and that should not be trivially understood as living next to each other sharing the same space of existence, but rather as living together *with* other natural entities, *thanks* to other natural entities, *for* other natural entities, because our forms, functions and activities only acquire meaning in a constant interchange with everything that (positively or negatively) contributes to shaping our existence⁵².

In numerous passages of his texts, Næss seems almost to anticipate such reflections, emphasising that his perspective is far from a simple form of anthropomorphism. As he asserts in his dialogue with Diehm: «people say I am unduly anthropomorphic, “humanizing” the stone. But in another way, I am also “stoning” the human. The movement is mutual; it goes the other way also».⁵³

Ultimately, the ecological aesthetic experience that Arne Næss advocates is not an abstract intellectual contemplation but a *deeply embodied and sensorial mode of being-in-the-world*. It entails an emotional and bodily engagement that dissolves the traditional dichotomy between subject and object, allowing for a relational and transformative immersion in the more-than-human world. In line with Gernot Böhme’s call for an embodied aesthetics (which emphasizes the sensory, affective, and atmospheric dimensions of experience) and Galindo’s concept of performative immersion, Næss shows that genuinely ecological perception requires openness to affective resonance and bodily harmony. Such an integrated experience fosters a profound form of ecological wisdom and ethical responsibility, one rooted not merely in cognition but in lived, felt participation within the web of life.

4. *HILARITAS*: THE JOY OF RECOGNISING ONESELF AS PART OF THE WHOLE

The attempt to delineate the profound and two-way character of ecological correspondences allows us to articulate the various dimensions of emotional engagement with the environmental crisis. Thus, we promote an aesthetic experience that is no longer based on detached contemplation but on embodied, participatory resonance with the more-than-human world. One of the most original aspects of Næss’s ecological philosophy is that he promotes an aesthetic based on *joy* rather than awe, melancholy, or fear.

Næss’s primary reference in identifying such a conception of joy is, once again, Spinoza⁵⁴. The Norwegian philosopher began reading Spinoza at seventeen, «having received a copy of the Ethics in Latin as a gift from a Norwegian Supreme Court judge during a mountaineering trip»⁵⁵. He later offered a deeply ecological reading of the Dutch philosopher, convinced, as he writes in the essay *Spinoza and Ecology*, that «no other great philosopher has as much to offer on the path to clarification and articulation of essential ecological behaviour as Baruch Spinoza»⁵⁶.

⁵¹ Cf. T. Ingold, *Corrispondenze*, cit.

⁵² Cf. N. Perullo, *Estetica senza (s)oggetti*, cit., p. 11.

⁵³ C. Diehm, “Here I Stand”, cit., p. 15.

⁵⁴ See A. Næss, *Spinoza and Ecology*, in “Philosophia”, n. 7, 1997/1, pp. 8-9; Id., *Spinoza and Deep Ecology Movement*, in Id., *Ecology of wisdom. Writings by Arne Naess*, ed. by A. Drengson, B. Devall, Counterpoint, Berkeley, 2010, pp. 230-251. For a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between Næss and Spinoza see: E. de Jonge, *Spinoza and Deep Ecology. Challenging Traditional Approaches to Environmentalism*, Routledge, London-New York 2004.

⁵⁵ L. Valera, *Il pensiero di Arne Næss*, cit., p. 13.

⁵⁶ A. Næss, *Spinoza and Ecology*, cit., p. 8.

In his *Ethica more geometrico demonstrata*, Spinoza defines three forms of joy: *laetitia*, *titillatio*, and *hilaritas*. This distinction is considered crucial by Næss for clarifying which positive emotion best supports the feeling of being a part of Nature. *Laetitia* refers to a general increase in perfection, an uplifting sense of becoming more fully oneself. It is defined as «the passing of a person from a lesser to a greater perfection»⁵⁷ (as opposed to sadness, which is its counterpoint and leads to a decrease in the perfection of an entity).

Spinoza defines *Titillatio* (*delight*) in the Proposition 11 of the Third Part of *Ethics* as an «emotion of joy related to mind and body simultaneously»⁵⁸; however, as the Dutch philosopher specifies immediately after providing this definition, *delight* indicates a form of joy that concerns only a part of the organism, a subset of it. It derives from the sense of direct excitement, as Spinoza says, which is «attributed to a person when one part of him is more affected than the rest»⁵⁹. So, it is a localised, fleeting joy, that involves only part of the body or mind.

But *hilaritas* (*cheerfulness*) most profoundly resonates with Næss's ecosophical perspective. *Hilaritas* is defined as «joy which insofar as it is related to the body, consists in all the parts of the body being equally affected, i.e. it consists in the body's power of action being augmented or assisted, so that all its parts have the same proportion of motion and rest toward each other; and therefore by cheerfulness is always good and cannot be excessive»⁶⁰. Thus, cheerfulness is the joy that arises when each part of the organism recognizes itself as part of the whole because it involves a balanced and harmonious increase in the body's capacity for action. For Næss, this kind of joy arises when the human being feels fully present, attuned, and integrated within the larger whole of Nature. It is not the joy of excitement or amusement, but of serenity, deep concentration, and existential alignment. In this sense, joy becomes a mode of being rather than an emotional reaction: it is a form of *ontological clarity* because the human being comes to full self-realisation through the sphere of feeling, recognising his *ontological* connection with the whole.

In this conception, Næss's reading of Spinoza meets his *Gestalt Ontology*. Just as a musical motif cannot be understood apart from the melody that gives it form and meaning, the individual cannot be truly understood apart from the totality to which they belong. In this framework, Nature is not something external that we observe, admire, or protect; it is something that *expresses itself through us*. And we, in turn, discover our true selves – *our affective and emotional truth* – in the experience of that expression.

Hilaritas, then, is not only a philosophical category but an aesthetic-affective mode of ecological self-realisation. It is the joy we feel when we experience the world as a *home*, not in the sense of property or comfort, but as the living totality to which we belong. It is the quiet joy of recognising the wind on the skin not as foreign, but familiar; the scent of a pine forest that surrounds us; the sound of a bird call that makes us stop in our tracks, as if something deep within us had just been acknowledged. It is the joy of walking barefoot on the earth and feeling that the ground does not resist but receives us. It is the same joy we might feel after a long journey, when we finally return to the landscape that shaped us, to the relational web that sustains our being.

⁵⁷ B. Spinoza, *Ethics: Proved in Geometrical Order*, cit., p. 144.

⁵⁸ *Ivi*, p. 104.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*. See also the Proof of the Proposition 43 where Spinoza notes: «Delight is joy which insofar as it is related to the body, consists in one or some parts of it being more affected than others» (*ivi*, p. 191).

⁶⁰ *Ivi*, p. 191.

This joy, however, is not a private mood or fleeting sentiment (*Stimmung*), but a generative force: it empowers ecological commitment as praxis. In other words, it is the felt ground of ethical action, not its emotional decoration. *Hilaritas* becomes the affective condition for cultivating care, responsibility, and co-existence, not out of guilt or fear, but from the inner necessity of being attuned to the world that sustains us. To feel joyfully at home in the more-than-human world is to act in ways that preserve, support, and regenerate its integrity. As such, ecological awareness in Næss is not contemplative distance but aesthetic participation, and ecological ethics becomes an embodied consequence of joyful belonging.

This Spinozian and ecosophical insight can be seen as a form of “ontological activism”: one that does not merely perceive the world but lives in it differently. The aesthetic of joy does not suspend agency; instead, it animates it. In the space opened by *hilaritas*, the ecological Self can begin to act not against the world, but with it, for it, through it.

In this light, Næss makes joy – not guilt, anxiety, or even wonder – the motivational foundation of ecological awareness. Unlike reactive emotions rooted in fear, helplessness, or shame, *hilaritas* fosters an active ecological commitment grounded in a positive and affirmative sense of belonging. It is not a passive emotion, but a generative one: the affective condition for the flourishing of ecological responsibility. As such, it represents the ethical-aesthetic transformation of our being-in-the-world, in which action arises not from moral obligation but from joyfully felt participation.

5. CONCLUSION

The ecological aesthetic proposed by Arne Næss does not merely redefine our emotional relationship with Nature: it calls for a transformation in our mode of being-in-the-world. Throughout this inquiry, we have seen how perception, emotion, and form are not isolated faculties or internal states but expressions of a profound relationality that binds the self to the world in which it lives, moves, and feels. From Galindo’s concept of bodily immersion to the Naessian critique of the mind-emotion dualism, from the Gestalt perspective of the Self as part of an ecological whole to the Spinozian joy of *hilaritas*, a common thread emerges: the idea that aesthetics, understood in its most radical sense, is not about judging from a distance but about engaging affectively, perceptively, and ethically within the world.

This rethinking of aesthetics as a practice of embodied belonging opens the way for a more integrated ecological consciousness that does not separate between knowledge and experience, contemplation and action, or beauty and responsibility. It is a call to inhabit the Earth not as owners or spectators, but as participants in a shared and fragile web of existence. Here, aesthetic experience becomes ecological praxis: a mode of sensing and acting in the world that is grounded in resonance rather than domination, in connection rather than control.

Crucially, this praxis is not driven by fear or guilt – emotions often mobilized in environmental discourse – but by joy. The profound joy of recognising oneself in the more-than-human world and of feeling that our actions matter because they are part of a larger pattern of life. *Hilaritas* becomes the name for this ontological and affective resonance: a state in which we do not simply observe the Earth but participate in its unfolding, not merely defend it but are defended by it. We do not just defend it; we are also defended by it. This emotional connection forms the foundation for an ecological ethos that arises from our inner experiences rather than being imposed from outside.

Thus, the aesthetics of deep ecology is a philosophical and existential necessity in times of crisis. It teaches us that before establishing any ethics, before any policy or scientific framework, we must relearn how to feel the world – not as an object, but as a living, dynamic network of relationships in which we are always already immersed. Cultivating this feeling, this *aisthesis*, is perhaps the most crucial first step toward re-inhabiting the Earth with care, humility, and joy.

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