

MORE THAN A STORY: THE TWO-DIMENSIONAL AESTHETICS OF THE FOREST

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This article presents a general conception of aesthetic experience built on an analysis of the relationship between the narrative and the ambient dimensions of the aesthetic value of a natural environment, the forest. First of all, the two dimensions are presented with respect to the possibilities and problems raised by distinguishing between them. Next, the possibilities of their relationship are analysed and it is argued that they are strongly complementary. This complementarity becomes the core of the proposed conception of aesthetic experience, which can explain the difference between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic, and can also provide an answer to the question of the non-reductive differentiation between the aesthetic experience of nature and the experience of a work of art. The conclusion of the article is mainly concerned to eliminate one of the problems localized in presenting the ambient dimension (the ambience paradox), by means of Ricoeur's conception of the relationship between time and narrative.

Mehr als eine Geschichte: die zweidimensionale Ästhetik des Waldes
Dieser Artikel stellt ein allgemeines Konzept ästhetischer Erfahrung vor, das sich auf eine Analyse der Beziehung zwischen der narrativen und ambienten Dimension des ästhetischen Werts der natürlichen Umwelt, konkret des Waldes, stützt. Zunächst werden die beiden Dimensionen im Hinblick auf die Möglichkeiten und Probleme vorgestellt, die ihre Unterscheidung mit sich bringt. Dann werden die Möglichkeiten analysiert, die ihr Verhältnis bietet; vordergründig wird ihre starke Komplementarität hervorgehoben. Diese Komplementarität wird zugleich zum Kern der vorgestellten Konzeption ästhetischer Erfahrung, die nicht nur den Unterschied zwischen dem Ästhetischen und dem Nicht-Ästhetischen zu erklären vermag, sondern zugleich auch eine Antwort auf die Frage nach einer nichtreduktiven Unterscheidung zwischen einer ästhetischen Erfahrung der Natur und der Erfahrung mit Kunstwerken bietet. Abschließend versucht die Studie unter Rückgriff auf das Verhältnis von Zeit und Erzählung bei Paul Ricoeur, ein Problem – das Paradox des Ambientes – zu lösen, das sich bei der Vorstellung der ambienten Dimension ergeben hat.

I. INTRODUCTION

In this article we wish to present a general conception of aesthetic experience, which is based on the experience not of works of art, but of the natural environment, the forest in particular. Both in the introductory presentation of our aim and throughout the essay we shall proceed from the lower levels of generality towards higher levels.

Concrete experience and the description derived from it are a suitable starting point not only for a possible solution of most problems connected with the aesthetic dimension of a forest, a landscape, or other natural environment, but also, ultimately, aesthetic perception in general. For an example of this sort of description we turn to a classic of 'forest literature', the nineteenth-century

poet and transcendentalist, Henry David Thoreau and two of his descriptions of his experiences of life in the woods at his famous Walden.

The whistle of the locomotive penetrates my woods summer and winter, sounding like a scream of a hawk sailing over some farmer's yard, informing me that many restless city merchants are arriving within the circle of the town, or adventurous country traders from the other side.¹

Several pages before this passage, Thoreau recalls a rather different kind of experience:

Sometimes, in a summer morning, having taken my accustomed bath, I sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till noon, rapt in a reverie, amidst the pines and hickories and sumachs, in undisturbed solitude and stillness, while birds sang around or flitted noiseless through the house, until by the sun falling in at my west window, or the noise of some traveller's wagon on the distant highway, I was reminded of the lapse of time. I grew in those seasons like corn in the night, and they were far better than any work of the hands would have been. They were not time subtracted from my life, but so much over and above my usual allowance.²

Most of us can imagine or recall many similar, if not identical, situations, experiences, or events, but our choice of these two descriptions is aimed at a more subtle differentiation of the nature of the two described experiences. Both contain descriptions of the perception of the surrounding (forest) space; in both, time plays an important role. Both descriptions express the unifying or holistic character of the situation, its *quality*. Here, this unifying quality of the situation comes to the fore without completely overlapping with the audio, visual, or other perceptions, which it frames. One can, however, also note a certain difference: whereas in the first case the unifying quality joins together the individual perceptions into a network of metaphorical references ('whistle [...] penetrates my woods summer and winter, sounding like a scream of a hawk') and metonymic references ('whistle [...] informing me that many restless city merchants are arriving within the circle of the town'), in the second case the individual perceptions ('while birds sang around or flitted noiseless through the house') remain 'around' or 'flit noiseless through' in their particularity, so long as they are not again linked together by an association into a kind of coherent

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¹ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden. A Fully Annotated Edition*, ed. Jeffrey S. Cramer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 112.

² *Ibid.*, 108–9. As long as the temperature of the water in Walden Pond, at the edge of which Thoreau built his cabin, was warm enough, till about September, Thoreau used to bathe outside every morning (see *ibid.*, 108).

whole ('the sun falling in at my west window, or the noise of some traveller's wagon on the distant highway').

Because of this specific unifying quality, both situations include something more, something that speaks to our perception and distracts us from pursuing our usual activities. We could call that *something more* an aesthetic quality – without needing to call these experiences outright aesthetic.³ Here, time operates not only as a dimension that enables one to make a distinction between both experiences, but also as a strong aspect of the total quality of both situations, which separates them out from a practical orientation.

If we return to the difference between the two situations, then the most visible difference seems to be that in the first situation time flows in a certain direction, from the past to the future – in keeping with the necessary order, which we are a part of (whether we call it the arrow of time, the growth of entropy, being-towards-death or the cosmic order). Such experience expands our consciousness of contexts, lets us know that we are part of a far larger field or, rather, horizon of mutually linked human and natural events and processes; it situates us as beings with histories and therefore personal identities. By contrast, in the second case, time stops, at least for a certain period; it ceases to flow. Thoreau, in the described situations, has forgotten about the flow of time: 'I was reminded of the lapse of time'. But his life was not made shorter by this 'lost time'. On the contrary, through these perceived stoppings of time he has gained a certain time: 'They were not time subtracted from my life, but so much over and above my usual allowance.' Both experiences therefore imply a certain cognitive gain, which is connected, among other things, with time, and both refer to an experience that can be called aesthetic. (The presence of aesthetic or aesthetically valuable qualities signifies that at least a part of experience, if not the whole of it, was aesthetic.)⁴

³ We define 'aesthetic experience' at this point loosely, that is, as an experience that (i) comes to the fore or qualitatively separates off from the continuity of the usually practically aimed course of experience, or experience that is dominated by such a moment or phase; (ii) experience whose development and order are not controlled by any external aim, even though it could be used in such a way secondarily. We intend eventually to strip this definition of its negative character by investigating the relations between the narrative and ambient dimension of aesthetic value, which is realized within this kind of experience or on the basis of the possibilities of a relationship between the distinctions of narrative/ambient and aesthetic/non-aesthetic.

⁴ The presence of aesthetic qualities can of course remain only a defamiliarizing feature, not the dominant one, of non-aesthetically oriented experience (for example, cognitive or practical). In such a case, this kind of experience does not detach itself from the non-aesthetically oriented course of experience, which continues to be dominantly controlled by another, external aim. The very presence of 'something more', which goes beyond a utilitarian, manipulative approach to the surrounding environment but creates the possibility for these qualities to become the nucleus of a new or different experience, which we defined earlier (see note 3).

We shall now consider the possibilities of comprehending these indicated differences and similarities. We shall begin by differentiating the *narrative* and *ambient* dimensions of the aesthetic experience of the natural environment, as the contemporary American philosopher Cheryl Foster does, and we shall try to suggest answers to the questions that this distinction raises in combination with our two examples. On the one hand both descriptions evoke a special kind of unification, which we usually call aesthetic. There is no reason to continue in the described perceptual activity other than the activity itself. It is not followed except *for its own sake*. On the other hand the first experience Thoreau describes here is important because it puts him into the ordered network of occurring events, whereas the other experience temporarily excludes him from this network.

The clarification of the means by which we articulate the aesthetic value of the natural environment leads, according to Foster, to a certain *cleft*. Its emergence is the result of, among other things, the fact that our aesthetic evaluation of nature necessarily includes a dimension that resists direct, clear discursive expression.⁵ This dimension of experience (and the values realized within it), which, we believe, Thoreau pithily pointed to in his second description, Foster calls *ambient*. She sets it in opposition to the *narrative* dimension of aesthetic value, which, by contrast, comes to the fore in a description of the first experience. Both dimensions are, according to her, necessary, that is, they cannot be reduced into one nor is one of them alone sufficient to capture the aesthetic experience of nature. Nonetheless, within the contemporary philosophical discourse the narrative dimension was, and is, privileged, which, if that is the case, must therefore lead to limiting the explanatory force (that is, the scope and precision) of theories that do that.⁶ The closing or bridging over of this cleft consequently relates not only to a certain 'nearly forgotten' field of the investigated fact; it is not a mere addition, but a revision of the assumptions of each one-sided, narrative-based, theory.⁷

⁵ Cheryl Foster, 'The Narrative and the Ambient in Environmental Aesthetics', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56 (1998): 127.

⁶ Recall the analogical resistance of aesthetic experience in general, which has accompanied aesthetics at least since Immanuel Kant. The tradition of the negative definition of aesthetic judgement – for example, 'that is beautiful which pleases universally without a concept' – indicates at least the presence of a dimension that is difficult to grasp in a direct way. Although annoying for some theorists, this irreducible character of aesthetic experience appears in many forms in the history of aesthetics – including the failure of semiotics and structuralism, which are based on linguistic models, in thematizing the image. See, for example, Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgement*, transl. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 102–4, § 9.

⁷ The first possible reason for the marginalization of the ambient dimension is, according to Foster, that the ambient dimension of experience is linked with the philosophical tradition that conceives subjectivity (of the subjective point of view) or, at least, the relationship between the subject and the object, as the starting point for the

We are mainly concerned with what is meant by the ambient and narrative dimensions of experience of the natural environment or landscape in contrast to each other, the possibilities of their mutual relations, and how they relate (or can relate), together and apart, to an aesthetic value whose realization is the essence of aesthetic experience.

In exploring these questions and possible answers to them we shall proceed as follows. In the second part of the essay we explain what is meant by the narrative dimension of aesthetic value of the natural environment, and point out problems that the recognition of the role of this dimension raises in the pertinent kind of experience, chiefly concerning the question of distinguishing between the aesthetic and non-aesthetic within this experience, and the question of the nonreductive distinction of the natural aesthetic experience and experience of works of art. In the third part we shall try to 'localize' the neglected ambient dimension and, on the basis of problems raised by it, we shall point out the paradox that is linked to its presence, at the level of theory as well as experience itself. In the fourth part, on the basis of Foster's analysis of the relationship between both dimensions, and then by means of Ronald W. Hepburn's implicit conception of narrativity and ambience, we shall propose the kind of conception of the aesthetic field, which will be based on the postulation of the relation of the two dimensions and also provides one of the means of differentiating the aesthetic experience of nature from the experience of art. The conclusion will then be devoted mainly to dispelling the paradox of ambience, by employing Ricoeur's conception of the relation between time and narrative. It is in Ricoeur that we shall find the methodological means to transcend the level of the established narrative syntheses, which for a long time remained the focus of the mainstream of contemporary narratology. Ricoeur's return to the roots of narrativity as such and to their relation to the experience of time, which Foster explicitly ignores,⁸ enables one, we believe, to deepen one's insight based on the previous analysis of the two dimensions.

Though we have chosen a special kind of natural environment – the forest – as our initial example, our arguments relate to the problem of the aesthetic value of the natural environment (in comparison with aesthetic values realized

exploration and establishment of a wide variety of forms of value. (See, for example, Foster, 'The Narrative and the Ambient', 128). The epistemological background of the investigated relationship between the narrative and the ambient dimensions in environmental aesthetics is appositely formulated by Foster as a dilemma that a certain part of the Western philosophical tradition is undoubtedly facing – namely, whether to include amongst the relevant facts 'the individual's perceptual acquaintance with and respect for the natural environment, and support the validity of such knowledge in our account of aesthetic value' (ibid., 127).

⁸ See ibid., 132.

in our experience of art) in general. We have chosen the example of the forest primarily because its 'ambience' is, we believe, more obvious than that of the other usual kinds of environment. If we find ourselves in a thick forest, it surrounds us more completely and intensively (from all sides) than other basic kinds of natural environment. We shall also, for the moment, ignore some otherwise important distinctions, for example, between the landscape, forest, or natural environment. In their possible extension, our arguments should be applied across the breadth of the aesthetic field.

II. THE NARRATIVE DIMENSION OF THE AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

According to Foster, most models that today control the description or interpretation of aesthetic values of nature emphasize the narrative dimension. By narrative dimension we mean the frame of reference, which gives preference to the relation between the visible and otherwise perceivable natural surface and, on the other hand, invisible, intangible events and processes, which are concealed behind it, or have preceded the framework or in some unfathomable way work together 'behind it'.⁹ Foster writes:

The narrative dimension tethers perceptual features of the natural environment to diverse frameworks of conceptual information and locates aesthetic value in the capacity of the perceiver to make appreciative judgements about nature's features within the context of, or with reference to, the framework through which they are viewed. One example of the narrative dimension of aesthetic value at work can be seen in the tendency of aesthetic theorists and nature writers to allude to the mythological or social history linked to the surface they are surveying.¹⁰

Whether it is a matter of a common-sense framework (that is, everyday practice, established by daily life), a mythological framework, or various versions of a scientific frame of reference (a primarily natural-science frame of reference), all make the environment readable, interpretable, and understandable in relation to the framework used. They enable the use of information (categorizations, conceptualizations) to create a whole landscape as a coherent, meaningful space (or spacetime) with a pattern or structure, like Thoreau's sound, which *informs* him 'that many restless city merchants are arriving within the circle of the town'.¹¹ The narrative dimension of aesthetic value 'inscribes' into the natural environment the dimension of human history, the social frame in Erving

⁹ Ibid., 128.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Goffman's sense,¹² and expands the possibilities of our aesthetic appreciation of this quality, which resonates, as Foster notes, with the time of society or the time of nature or both. This time can be contemplated as embodied in remains and ruins, which stand out from the environment. It is no coincidence of course that Foster talks about a narrative dimension, not a separate narrative, because it is obvious that the pertinent frame of reference of the narrative dimension is created by a large number of smaller intersecting stories, as is the history of humankind and individual personal histories. No story, whether past, contemporary, or future, arises out of nothing, as Ricoeur notes; each story emerges on the basis of its own pre-history, that is, against the background of mutually intersecting and entangled narratives, creating the true potential of all stories that we tell or which are ever to be told.¹³

In relation to the *scientific* sort of frame of reference, this approach, emphasizing the domination of the narrative dimension, is well documented by Holmes Rolston III's claim, mentioned by Foster:

Without science, there is no sense of deep time, nor of geological or evolutionary history, and little appreciation of ecology. Science cultivates the habit of looking closely, as well as of looking for long periods of time. One is more likely to experience the landscape at multiple scales of both space and time.¹⁴

In an article devoted to aesthetic experience of the woods Rolston points to the inadequacy of the aesthetic perception of the forest if we approach the forest

¹² See, for example, Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1974).

¹³ Paul Ricoeur, 'Life: A Story in Search of a Narrator', in *A Ricoeur Reader*, ed. Mario J. Valdés (New York: Harvester, 1991), 432–5. We may take one more step with regard to the distinction between the ambient and the narrative, and expand the reservoir of potentialities of stories by adding an area so far unstructured by the narrative, that is, a certain background of all possible stories, which is in the end the living world. We should not of course give ourselves over to the 'third dogma of empiricism' (see Donald Davidson, 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme', in idem, *Inquiry into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, 183–99), in other words, to the idea of a clear or even existing frontier between a scheme (language) and non-conceptualized reality. The narratively 'unprocessed' reality does not necessarily mean non-conceptualized reality. It is also fair to say that not every synthesis, every perception, and conception is a narrative one. See the distinctions made between the two kinds of natural aesthetic object in Ronald W. Hepburn, 'Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty', in *British Analytical Philosophy*, ed. Bernard Williams and Alan Montefiore (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 292–4. See also Part IV of the present article.

¹⁴ Foster, 'The Narrative and the Ambient', 129. Holmes Rolston III, 'Does Aesthetic Appreciation of Landscape Need to be Science-Based?', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 35 (1995): 376.

'as though it were found art'.¹⁵ The reason for this inadequacy is clear: this sort of aesthetic understanding is not aesthetic understanding of the forest environment *as a forest environment*.¹⁶ The way to greater adequacy is obvious, according to Rolston:

One has to appreciate what is not evident, and here science helps. Marvelous things are going on in dead wood, or underground, or in the dark, or microscopically, or slowly, over time; these processes are not scenic, but an appreciation of them can be aesthetic.¹⁷

There is no doubt that a thorough knowledge of the pertinent kind of forest can lead the informed perceiver to a more complex aesthetic experience than experienced by an uninformed perceiver.¹⁸ But a problem arises here: the knowledge of processes, which are not 'scenic', *can* lead to aesthetic appreciation, but *need not necessarily* do so. The one fundamental distinction, which is also a prerequisite of *each* adequate conception of an aesthetic appreciation of nature, actually remains unexplained – namely, how can one distinguish an aesthetic understanding of a forest landscape from the usual or scientific understanding? In other words, how can one satisfy the other requirement of each model of aesthetic appreciation of nature, which resides in one's ability to explain the difference between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic spheres?

Allen Carlson, one of the main thinkers in environmental aesthetics, formulates the view stressing the dominance of the narrative dimension even more cogently:

science [that is, the story provided by science, natural or otherwise] is the paradigm of that which reveals objects for what they are and with the properties they have. Thus, science not only presents itself as the source of objective truth, it brands alternative accounts as subjective falsehood and therefore, in accord with objective appreciation, as irrelevant to aesthetic appreciation.¹⁹

According to Carlson's distinction between 'design appreciation' and 'order appreciation',²⁰ where the first process of appreciation traces human intention

¹⁵ Holmes Rolston III, 'Aesthetic Experience in Forests', *The Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism* 56 (1998): 160.

¹⁶ See Malcolm Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature: Essays on the Aesthetics of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1.

¹⁷ Rolston, 'Aesthetic Experience in Forests', 160.

¹⁸ It is even probable that experience of this kind and the realized values in it cannot be expected from contact with any kind of human art.

¹⁹ See, for example, Allen Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art, and Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 119. Foster refers to the same passage from an earlier version of Carlson's essay. See Foster, 'The Narrative and the Ambient', 129.

²⁰ See, for example, Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment*, 102–25.

in works of art, whereas the second process follows the original traces of ordering in aesthetically important objects of nature,

it is no surprise that humanistic stories and the human sciences are relevant to the appreciation of artifacts, while natural sciences are relevant to the appreciation of nature. What else should following the lead of the object indicate?²¹

Everything that deviates from, goes beyond, or disturbs the order, brought by stories from the natural sciences into our appreciation of nature, is, from the point of view of Carlson's object-oriented approach, condemned to languish under the term 'subjective falsehood'. That Carlson squeezes out any natural particularity or process that, in the frame of current experience, remain outside the pertinent interpretational synthesis, is demonstrated by Carlson's question: *What else* should we be led by in such situations, apart from an already existing story presented by science about this kind of natural environment?²²

Whether one is talking about the usual supply of convictions and collective memory or the sophisticated 'stories' of scientific theories, one would agree with Foster that if these stories become the basis of aesthetic judgement, it is a matter of the *narrative dimension of aesthetic value* or the 'recognition of the natural environment as an index of processes hidden from the eye but intelligible to the mind'.²³ In all such cases

we filter the perceptual properties of nature's surface through a frame of reference that functions as narrative in character, one that contextualizes the objects before us as players in a partially invisible drama.²⁴

The narrative dimension is, as we have seen in Thoreau's description and Foster's remarks, one of the fundamental dimensions, therefore, of the aesthetic value of the natural environment. But this knowledge raises two questions. If we concentrate only on the narrative dimension of the aesthetic value of the natural environment, we shall in our search for an adequate model of appreciation of nature eventually be forced to choose between particular, often oblique, even colliding frames of interpretation. Even if, despite the impossibility of

²¹ *Ibid.*, 119.

²² As with Foster, what is chiefly under discussion here is 'mainstream' research. In the natural sciences and in philosophy one of course encounters many nonreductive approaches to this question. It has to be admitted that the emphasis on the nonexistence of a perspective other than one bound to a narrative is, as we shall see, also supported in its own way by problems connected to the search for discursively demonstrable evidence in support of the possibility of a perspective outside this narratively woven network of meanings.

²³ Foster, 'The Narrative and the Ambient', 131.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

completely abandoning the adopted methods of the narrative and conceptual structuring of natural environments, we established one of them as adequate, we could not avoid the requirement to distinguish the aesthetic from the non-aesthetic applications of the chosen frame, that is to say, the distinction between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic. A related question will then be how to distinguish natural aesthetic phenomena from the second fundamental area with which we traditionally link the dominance of the aesthetic function, that is, from the world of works of art. After presenting the second central dimension of aesthetic value we shall try, on the basis of their relationship, to offer a definition of the aesthetic field, which dispenses with giving preference to one frame of reference (for example, the scientific) over another, equally functional narrative means of understanding the natural environment. We shall thereby prepare the way to answering the second of these questions.

III. THE AMBIENT DIMENSION OF THE AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Though the notion of the narrative dimension of aesthetic value is an indisputably functional and effective instrument for understanding our, and not only our, relationship with the natural environment, if one were to concentrate solely on this dimension it could in consequence obscure or suppress the different yet continuously present viewpoint, which Foster calls the ambient dimension of aesthetic value. If it obscures it completely, one can then, at the level of metacritical aesthetic theory, according to Foster, talk about an 'indexical fallacy'.²⁵ In other words, if we are in the thrall of this fallacy, everything that we perceive in nature and the landscape is reduced to indexes, referring to invisible chains of facts.

The ambient dimension of the aesthetic value of the natural environment emerges, according to Foster, not as an alternative to, or substitute for, the narrative dimension, but *simultaneously* with it. It surrounds the narrative ways we use to attribute aesthetic value to the natural environment. This surrounding then evokes 'atmosphere' as one of the meanings of the term 'ambient'. Although it seems obvious that if the narrative dimension gains the upper hand, then the ambient dimension retreats, Foster still tries to see them in a symbiotic relationship.²⁷ What consequences the distinguishing of the meaning of both these dimensions has, or can have, in their mutual relationship remains, however, unanswered. Because the term 'symbiotic', in our opinion, excessively reduces the tension between the two dimensions, we prefer the term *complementary*

²⁵ See, for example, *ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

to name the relationship between the two dimensions, because neither of the dimensions can be considered without the other; each of them is comprehensible only as the antithesis of the defining features of the other.

How do we become aware of the presence of the ambient dimension? The ability to imagine the unseen and the ability to experience the sensuous presence of already interpreted, narratively unified nature are evidence of the fundamental incompleteness of the application of narrative contextual frames. The idea of the unseen takes part directly in the current aesthetic experience of the seen. As Foster writes: 'Via imagination we bring what is not-present to the senses into sensuous relevance'.²⁸ This view was formulated much earlier in an article about the forest by José Ortega y Gasset, in the following way:

I have now around me as many as two dozen grave oaks and graceful ashes. Is this a forest? Certainly not. What I see here is some trees of the forest. *The real forest is composed of the trees which I do not see.* The forest is invisible nature – hence the halo of mystery its name preserves in all languages.²⁹

The ambient share of the unseen in the current perception of the forest, or this currently sensuously experienced idea of the unseen, is not the same as the indexical *seen–unseen* relation of the narrative dimension. The sensuous presence – the effect of narratively unified nature – upsets the continuing narrative synthesis by the influence of the emerging aesthetic quality, just as the referential function of the sign is weakened if it becomes an aesthetic sign.

If we are led instead by the other side of the whole complex process of the narrative synthesis of perceptual natural entities, we can experience through this imaginative-sensuous ability the presence of the initial or original otherness of nature.³⁰ Foster points out that this existential level of the aesthetic value of nature has been underestimated and neglected. The attempt to comprehend and make equal this neglected or even rejected ambient dimension of nature remains, however, without a definitive result. The central problem crystallizes here, which in this connection we shall call the *paradox of the ambient dimension of aesthetic value* or, in short, the *ambience paradox*. How can one comprehend discursively something that by its nature resists discursive comprehension or ceases, through this kind of comprehension, to be itself? Or, to put it differently,

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Quixote* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 59. (Emphasis added.)

³⁰ Foster, 'The Narrative and the Ambient', 132. Foster does not go on to answer the question of the extent to which this kind of aesthetic experience or that dimension of it leads to the deterioration or transformation of the established frameworks.

how can one objectivize the horizon, so that it does not cease to be a horizon? Or, to put it differently yet again, as Francis Sparshott has expressed it, how can one make a figure out of the background so that it does not cease to be a background?³¹

Let us, in addition, imagine a situation in which different values oppose each other in practice, and the arguments put forth in their favour are based on the very narratives we have been discussing, by means of which these values become obvious. The ambient dimension of the aesthetic value in Foster's sense cannot in practice be based on most of the established standards, frames, and so forth,³² because that dimension would then cease to be itself; it would become an element of the narrative dimension:

In the ambient dimension, the environment as an index of conceptual frameworks recedes and we encounter nature as an enveloping other, a place where *the experience of one's self* drifts drastically away from the factual everyday. [...] The usual habit of cognitive separation into categories dissipates in the face of an open encounter with that which presents itself, at least on the surface, as radically other from us. In foregoing epistemological control, we refrain, if only for a while, from boxing everything into neat cognitive packages.³³

In what other ways, apart from a defence of the theoretical relevance of the individual's perceptual acquaintance with, and respect for, the natural environment, can identification of the ambient dimension of the aesthetic value of nature be useful? Can it, for example, contribute to increasing respect for the natural environment, or for those aspects and areas of nature that fall into our blind spots? A positive answer to this question is blocked by the fact that the ambient dimension is by its nature antithetical to any arguments stemming from this very conceptual background formed by the pertinent competing or cooperating frames. Foster points to the potential of the experience of the ambient character, which could, provided that due attention is devoted to it, cultivate in us a consideration for what exceeds us or is different from us, 'different' in the very sense of exceeding the established conceptual and categorical frames. How can one argue, however, in favour of something that eludes direct

³¹ See, for example, Francis E. Sparshott, 'Figuring the Ground: Notes on Some Theoretical Problems of the Aesthetic Environment', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 6 (1972): 11–23.

³² The narrative concatenation of events, the comprehension of nascent configurations, is subject to habituation, automatization, and the acceptance of patterns of behaviour and even the influence of fictitious narratives and narrative genres; they conform, then, to culturally determined norms. In the ambient dimension *the natural frame*, in Goffman's sense, can work, transformed of course or rearranged in strata by an aesthetic attitude.

³³ Foster, 'The Narrative and the Ambient', 133. (Emphasis added.)

articulation? In other words, how, for example, can one argue in favour of natural states or objects, which at that time and place fall through the conservation and preservation nets that are usually constituted narratively (in the aforementioned sense) by the existing interpretational frames? We again run up against the problem that we called the 'paradox of the ambient dimension aesthetic value', whose lack of solution stands in the way of any other considerations of the possible use of the central distinction (narrative/ambient).

No matter what kind of environment we are concerned with, we shall be faced with the difficulties that Sparshott brought attention to. What relations do we actually have in mind when we talk about environment?³⁴ To Sparshott it seems somehow unsuitable to talk about *this or that* environment, as if environments could exist in themselves, neutrally awaiting our return after we leave them or move into another environment. 'Surely an environment is always *someone's* environment,' Sparshott asserts,³⁵ and if we substantialize this term into an entity regardless of the viewpoint of the one 'who is surrounded', there is a danger that even before we have tried to localize what it is that its aesthetic aspects or qualities reside in, we find ourselves in the sphere of pure fiction or, as Quine puts, we become victims of the 'myth of a museum'.³⁶ In other words, we identify a primarily narrative-based 'synthesis of the heterogeneous' (Ricoeur), in the sense of an environment 'with a certain story' – landscapes of our childhood, the residue of the ancient volcanic activity in the hills of north Bohemia and so forth, with the terrain itself and we separate it from our relationship with this environment and therefore also from the consciousness of the presence of pertinent acts of interpretation. The aesthetic objectivization of our relationship with an environment does not therefore end with the relevant aesthetic object, but continues on, beyond the frame of aesthetic experience. This is tantamount to the cancellation of the experience, or the petrification of a set narrative synthesis with a mere echo of the original aesthetic experience.

If we consider the point of view of the one 'who is surrounded' as the defining feature of each environment, and if we attempt to localize its narrative or ambient aesthetic aspects, the paradox of ambience becomes utterly obvious. For, whenever we focus on *any* aspect (and its corresponding qualities), that is, whenever we focus on something, the environment necessarily recedes into the background. As Sparshott remarks: 'Environmental values are background values. Our topic has to do not with works of art for looking at but with settings

³⁴ Sparshott, 'Figuring the Ground', 14.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ See, for example, Willard Van Orman Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 27.

that we hardly notice.³⁷ Is this not once again a red herring? Is it not absurd to search for aesthetic or any other aspects, qualities or features of something that necessarily ceases to be an environment – that is, ‘what-is-around’ or milieu, which is, in the true sense of the word, *ambient* – at the moment our view focuses on certain aspects, qualities, or features of the same thing? Is it even logically possible to focus on or depict the background? In Sparshott’s words, is ‘figuring the ground’ possible? To solve the paradox of ambience, we shall return with a summation in the conclusion of our article.

IV. AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

First, however, let us turn to two questions that we already raised in connection with the discussion of the narrative dimension of the aesthetic experience of the natural environment. First of all, what is the relationship between, on the one hand, the two dimensions, both separately and together, and, on the other hand, aesthetic experience as such, or its differentiation from non-aesthetic experience? Second, what opportunities would a possible solution to this question open for a non-reductive differentiation of aesthetic experience of nature and our experience of works of art? In other words, what is the relationship between, on the one hand, the axis differentiating narrative from ambient and, on the other, the axis differentiating aesthetic from non-aesthetic, and does grasping this relationship permit a profounder understanding of what makes the aesthetic experience of nature indispensable to experience within our contact with works of art?

Though we know, thanks to Foster, about the conceptual link between, on the one hand, the terms ‘narrative’ and ‘ambient’ and, on the other, the assumed symbiotic relationship between the dimensions, which those terms name, and, in addition, we also know about the dangers inherent in neglecting one or the other side of the problem – namely, the danger for the natural environment itself and also for the completeness and therefore adequacy or correctness of the theory about it – one basic matter remains unclear. What is the relationship between the distinctions narrative/ambient, on the one hand, and aesthetic values/non-aesthetic values on the other? If we assume the independence of these distinctions, we are left with four separate possibilities: the ambient dimension of the aesthetic experience of nature, the narrative dimension of the aesthetic experience of nature, the ambient dimension of the non-aesthetic experience of nature, and the narrative dimension of the non-aesthetic experience of nature. One can easily imagine non-aesthetic experiences of separated dimensions: for

³⁷ Sparshott, ‘Figuring the Ground’, 17.

example, the planner of a stretch of new motorway may notice the pertinent section of the land from the point of view of the existing situation, the narrative configuration, and its future transformations. Similarly, a sun-bather on a beach can experience physiological pleasure from the homeostasis of his or her organism in this ambient environment. We would, however, be hard pressed to call either of these experience *aesthetic*. But what is the relationship between these two extremes – the utter dominance of the narrative dimension and the utter dominance of the ambient dimension – and, on the other hand, the question of defining their relationship at the aesthetic level of experience?

One of the guidelines for considering the relationship between the two dimensions is offered in the classic essay by Ronald W. Hepburn, 'Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty'. Even though Hepburn does not here explicitly discuss the ambient and the narrative dimensions of aesthetic experience, he points out two conceptions of the natural aesthetic object.³⁸ On the one hand one can experience aesthetic pleasure in the natural environment in its 'sheer plurality, in the stars of the night sky, in a birdsong without beginning, middle or end'.³⁹ On the other hand one can, in addition to this view of the individual 'uninterrupted natural objects', experience an orientation towards another kind of uniqueness, to a certain synthesis, a unification, a certain kind of unity with the natural environment, as Hepburn claims.⁴⁰ This is an orientation to something that will, by contrast, probably include a 'beginning, middle or end'. Hepburn's initial view not only fits well with the distinction between the two dimensions but it is also obvious which side of the distinction each conception of the aesthetic object belongs to. The unity that is characterized by its having a 'beginning, middle or end' has, since the days of Aristotle, been understood as a narrative unity, which confers a special kind of unification upon the perceived or imaginatively intended particularities.

What Hepburn then goes on to say is important for us – namely, one need not choose which of two obviously opposite kinds of aesthetic significance is right. On the contrary, Hepburn proposes that we look at the two opposites as inseparable, even though they are opposing phases of the same process. A certain indeterminateness or incompleteness, evoking the endeavour (*nisus*) to achieve the opposite pole of the unity is typical of natural aesthetic objects, in the sense of isolated particularities. Hepburn does not give preference to any of the usual kinds of unity – from our perspective we could say that he does

³⁸ Ronald W. Hepburn, 'Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty', in *British Analytical Philosophy*, ed. Bernard Williams and Alan Montefiore (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966): 292–4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 294.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

not give preference to any kind of narrative (or to non-narrative) frame of interpretation. He stresses chiefly the fact of this movement in the sense of a certain urge, which evokes in us the perception of an aesthetically important natural particularity. He subsequently describes ways to realize this endeavour. This realization can assume a wide variety of forms of the anthropomorphization of nature (or, as Hepburn calls it, 'humanization of nature'), where natural forms and scenes begin, for example, 'to express' human emotions – the forest becomes sinister, the sky sad, and so forth. We can further contemplate the natural scenery as the unified creation of Providence, perfect and organized in all its antitheses. Moreover, this spiritualization of nature is – at least from our perspective as contemplating people – also one of the forms of anthropomorphization. Similarly, one can be aesthetically fascinated by the majestic result of interconnected, mutually inseparable, geological and evolutionary processes, which is again a form of the anthropomorphization of the natural environment.

Among the examples of the means of unification, however, a special place is held by the situation in which it is not nature that is 'humanized' but the human spectator who is 'naturized'. If in such a case a certain equilibrium occurs, that is to say, a reciprocally balanced relationship arises between a human being and the natural environment (in other words, a certain kind of unification), it is because we ourselves become aliens with regard to our unproblematic everyday notions about ourselves and not 'through any assimilation of nature's form to pre-existent notions, images or perceptions'.⁴¹ Hepburn's orientation, from initially noting a dynamic perceptual whole, not united with background experiences, towards a process of perception stabilizing in insight into a culminated (unified) whole, need not have the character of the understanding of the special content of a particular aesthetic experience, which is unambiguously linked with a certain narrative. The orientation may instead be towards 'the background quality of emotions and attitudes, common to a great many individual experiences' itself.⁴² We would stress Hepburn's anticipation of the ambient dimension of many aesthetic experiences, and make it a constitutive element of the delimitation of the *aesthetic field in general*. In this connection, there arises the potential of the central narrative/ambient distinction in differentiating between the aesthetic experience of nature and the experience of works of art. The *at-one-ness* form of unity is, after all, as Hepburn argues, difficult to imagine in our experience of art. The absence of human intention in natural aesthetic phenomena creates a special modality of the presence of the ambient dimension, in whose framework,

⁴¹ Ibid., 297.

⁴² Ibid.

as Foster notes, we first encounter nature as the ‘enveloping other’, where ‘the experience of one’s self drifts drastically away from the factual everyday’.⁴³

We propose formulating the aesthetic experience of the natural environment as an experience in which we may find ourselves *simultaneously* on both sides of the boundary between what is (already) narratively arranged and that which comes from the outside, that which is the material of this arrangement, that which we are never able to grasp in its completeness just as, at a higher level of generality, we are unable to grasp the perceptual horizon or the horizon of all horizons – the world (in Husserl’s sense). When Foster writes about ‘the narrative or ambient dimension of aesthetic value’, one sometimes gets the impression that each of these dimensions denotes a certain ‘sort of experience’, capable of independent realization. We would again point out the strong complementarity of these two levels, which can reasonably be seen in a double sense. At the conceptual level it is difficult to imagine the one without the other, just as the concept of synthesis requires that which is synthesized. At the level of experience one can then talk about a sort of mode of it, in which none of the extremes of either of the two poles of distinction occurs, but, instead, the vivid presentation of the *simultaneity* of the two dimensions and therefore also the consciousness or direct experience of this complementarity occur. We could then locate the experience against the kinds that are formed by the strong dominance of one of the dimensions. With this experience, one not only balances more intensively on the boundary between the narrative and ambient dimensions than when one experiences a work of art but this experience also creates the possibility of the non-reductive distinction between the natural quality and the artistic aesthetic quality in the jointly defined aesthetic field.

To sum up what has been said so far, we would state that both dimensions are complementary in the strong sense of the word. We believe that this kind of complementarity of both dimensions is demonstrated, for example, by the losses of the aesthetic dimension when one of them is utterly dominant. In a one-

⁴³ Foster, ‘The Narrative and the Ambient’, 133. The aesthetic experience within the aesthetic attitude always implies of course a transition, the abandonment of a practical or everyday attitude, regardless of whether the object-field of the aesthetic relations has to do with a natural aesthetic object or a work of art. The natural aesthetic object, nevertheless, puts Goffman’s natural framework into play. By its randomness and non-intentionality that natural frameworks strengthens the possibility and power of the ambient dimension of experience. Experiencing oneself in an aesthetic experience is predominantly located in the framework of society, which is largely structured by the lines and points of intersection of the narrative (for which, see Ricoeur’s narrative identity, the self, in the conclusion of this article). It is therefore fair to say that the strong complementarity of the ambient and the narrative dimensions has its framework counterpart in the intersection of two of Goffman’s primary frameworks.

dimensional narrative experience the 'story' of the landscape takes control to such an extent that it loses *the aesthetic quality of its own environment* and, provided we remain in the frame of aesthetic experience at all, we are 'moved' by the story, not by the heterogeneous elements that are synthesized by the story. With the absolute dominance of the ambient dimension, the subjectivity of the perceiver would probably be suppressed, there would probably be an extreme loss of focus, and probably something like a mystic dissolving into Atman, in other words again *abandoning the framework of aesthetic experience*. The aesthetic field (experience, perception, consciousness, and so forth) therefore seems to be limited to the special relationship between these dimensions, where disturbing it leads to a stepping-out of the aesthetic field, or the transformation of the aesthetic experience into an experience of another kind.

V. CONCLUSION

The complementarity of the two dimensions and their experienced simultaneity as the core of the aesthetic experience is well manifested in the attitude towards the experience of time. The apparent stopping of time – returning to the two initial descriptions by Thoreau – is typical of the encroachment of the ambient dimension on the narratively united perception of the natural environment is. This stopping is, however, again interrupted by the renewed narrative interlinkage of the 'suddenly free' phenomena. This rhythm of interruption and resumption has – again only apparently – a paradoxical consequence. By this 'loss' Thoreau not only gained a certain time 'over and above [his] usual allowance', but also, in this process, grew 'like corn in the night'.

The descriptions of these experiences, we believe, bring to the surface the profound link between our experienced time, its narrative structuring, and a certain kind of knowledge contained in these processes. In conclusion we shall try to link together these three levels with the help of Ricoeur's conception of the relationship between time and the narrative, in which not only is this triple link explicitly explained but also a certain solution to the paradox of ambience implicitly emerges. We would first note that in his analyses of the relationship between time and narrative Ricoeur goes beyond the mainstream of contemporary narratology, and in his own way also considers the two spheres of experience, ambient and narrative.

In Ricoeur's conception, narrative is chiefly a synthesis of the heterogeneous. This kind of agreement, which Ricoeur terms 'narrative concordance',⁴⁴ cannot exist without discordance. As his example, Ricoeur cites tragedy, full of

⁴⁴ See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative I* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 3–90, Part I. *The Circle of Narrative and Temporality*.

complications, dreadful events, and fateful reversals, and it is precisely the synthesis of these heterogeneous incidents (similar to Alfred North Whitehead's 'contrast within identity of type') that is the essence of the aesthetic experience. With the restoration of concord through imaginative variations, which tragedy or fiction generally provide occasion for, there occurs a certain kind of mediation, which is different from *reference* (*mediation between man and the world*) and from *communication* (*mediation between man and man*). Our imaginative participation in the projected fictional universe of the work is the place of a special kind of mediation – namely, between man and himself, which Ricoeur calls *self-understanding*. The opening of the possibility of this kind of knowledge is conditioned by the fusion of the experiential horizon of the imaginatively intended work and the concrete experiential horizon of the reader's actions. By this mediation the reader can look at the world of the work from the perspective of his or her own experience and also at the world of his or her own actions from the perspective of the work. With the achievement of the synthesis or model configuration of the heterogeneous elements of the work, there simultaneously occurs a possibility of a real reconfiguration of heterogeneous element-events of one's own life story. Ricoeur therefore applies his analysis of *concordant discordance* or *discordant concordance* to us, to human life. He introduces the concept of *narrative identity*, which forms us, because

subjectivity is neither an incoherent succession of occurrences nor an immutable substance incapable of becoming. It is exactly the kind of identity which the narrative composition alone, by means of its dynamism, can create.⁴⁵

We would stress mainly that Ricoeur understands this specifically aesthetic mediation as a form of knowledge.

Each narrative synthesis means a concatenation of certain relations, a special interlinking of a nascent whole and its accumulating parts. Each narrative synthesis, however, if it is not a mechanical repetition of previous syntheses, is also a process within which there occurs a 'de-automatization' of a wide variety of conceptual, informational frameworks, precisely under the influence of the novelty of the nascent synthesis and, we would add, of a special rhythm. Let us recall, in this context, the two interlinking categories of temporality in our introduction. On the one hand, there is time flowing, hastening from one place to another, from the past to the future, the experience of time expanding our consciousness of contexts, letting us know that we are part of a much wider field or, rather, horizon of mutually interlinked human and natural events and processes,

⁴⁵ Ricoeur, 'Life', 434.

situating us as beings with histories, and therefore personal (narrative) identities. On the other hand, there is time, which for a while stops, ceases to flow. In his described situations, Thoreau forget about the flow of time, and in this connection we could say that he stopped carrying out those unifying acts of synthesis that give the moments its before, now, and after. But his 'lost time' did not make his life shorter. On the contrary, by way of these perceived stoppings of time he gained a certain time ('They were not time subtracted from my life, but so much over and above my usual allowance'.) We recall this 'so much over and above' of the state without a certain, clear, narrative grasp, in order to stress the cognitive nature of this experiential modality, in the sense of Ricoeur's 'surplus of meaning', which was made possible by opening up the space of the habitually bound reception of the environment. Although the exclusion of any concept or means of concatenation is, by definition, typical of this experiential modality, without this modality our picture of knowledge in general would be fundamentally incomplete. Ricoeur's emphasis on this more fundamental level, which he calls 'phronetic intelligence',⁴⁶ distinguishes him from contemporary mainstream narratology, which concentrates on established narrative schemes, rather than the prerequisites of its birth. This narrative intelligence, in the true sense of the word, continuously renews the identity that constitutes us, rather than applying identity to the heterogeneity of the particularities of our lives from the outside, that is to say, from the perspective of some ready-made concept, idea, or narrative pattern.

The two modalities of time, described by Thoreau, can reasonably be derived therefore from complex narrative time, as explained by Ricoeur.⁴⁷ The episodic dimension is chiefly a linear concatenation of events, a chronological nexus. In the configurational dimension the chains of episodes are transferred into semantic units, thanks to a reflective act, similar to the performance of the 'reflective judgement' in Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, as Ricoeur adds.⁴⁸ This reflective 'configuration' (and, in this sense, aesthetic configuration) is, with regard to the linear episodic dimension, metatemporal and it opens up the possibility of a more complex temporal structuring. If we bear in mind that in the narrative dimension of the experience of nature one experiences fragments of stories, lead-ups to a narrative, rather than a complete story of the kind one would encounter in a short story or novel, then it is not out of the question that the configurational dimension can be expanded and can, because of the limited possibility of extracting the whole from the fragments of the narrative

⁴⁶ Ibid., 428.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 425–37.

⁴⁸ Paul Ricoeur, 'The Human Experience of Time and Narrative', in *A Ricoeur Reader*, ed. Mario J. Valdés (New York: Harvester, 1991), 109.

concatenation, be filled in or substituted for precisely by the ambient dimension of experience.⁴⁹

We believe that at a certain phase of such a process we step beyond that *indexical fallacy*, or we break the apparently obvious link between signs of 'indexes of processes hidden from the eye but intelligible to the mind' and then the pertinent phenomena, at least temporarily and suddenly, begin to exist in their particularities, for themselves (as partial aesthetic objects, as aesthetic qualities, as self-referencing aesthetic signs), not as parts of more or less long stories. At such a moment we may reach that interdimensional boundary and both dimensions simultaneously – on the one hand, a dimension in which we always find ourselves, and which is ultimately always filtered through the habitually established narratives, and, on the other hand, the dimension that is our home, created by us and maintained by means of 'reading' the space that we inhabit.

If we admit of the possibility of such a process, a dimension *necessarily* opens up for us by relaxing that narrative bond, and thanks to that dimension one can realize the fact that there is a milieu here, and always was one, even if it was hitherto invisible or only vaguely prefigured. This *ambient* dimension, in the true sense of the word, makes its presence felt, though not 'just by itself', in other words independently of the possibilities of narrative grasp, but precisely by the multiplication of the possibilities of new narrative syntheses and new possible subjects of these syntheses, by way of the energy that drives the efforts to achieve a new creative grasp of the whole. That only confirms the aforementioned claim about the strong complementarity of the two dimensions in experience *in general* and about the special setting up of these dimensions in the aesthetic experience in particular. To sum this up in a single sentence: the field of meaning, created by experiencing the simultaneity of both dimensions, has an irreducible cognitive dimension, thanks to which we can understand ourselves and continuously – though only up to a point of course – renew this understanding.

⁴⁹ Reflexivity, as an inherent feature of the aesthetic experience (and not only of the aesthetic experience of nature), however, enables other, albeit largely analogical, conceptions of temporal modality, the 'vertical dimension' of time, which was introduced by Bachelard. See, for example, Gaston Bachelard, *The Dialectic of Duration* (Manchester: Clinamen, 2000). A reflection, according to Bachelard, introduces discontinuity into the flow of time, the linear continuity of time's arrow: 'This line running perpendicular to the temporal axis of life alone in fact gives consciousness of the present the means to flee and escape, to expand and deepen which have very often led to the present instant being likened to an eternity' (ibid., 105). Whether we call the modality of time, in which mostly the ambient dimension of the experience of nature is realized, an expanded configurational dimension with an attenuated episodic dimension, or whether we call it a vertical extension of time and temporal consciousness, nothing changes about its complementarity and the inherently aesthetic nature of the ambient and the narrative dimension of experience.

A possible objection to this kind of use of Ricoeur's theory argues that Ricoeur's conception relates at best to the relationship between the narrative and the ambient dimensions in the experience of a work of art (chiefly a literary one) but not to the experience of the natural environment, including a forest.

According to Ricoeur, the fusion of the imaginative horizon of a work and of the real horizon of actions characterizes our experience of a literary work. We would claim that the aesthetic experience of the natural environment is an analogous process. In this case, however, the fusion concerns the narratively constituted horizon of our current lives and the ever-present (though not always realized in the true sense of the word) *ambient* horizon of nature as the 'environment of environments'. The natural aesthetic object by its randomness and non-intentionality not only strengthens the possibility and force of the ambient dimension of experience, but is also in this respect irreducible to our experience of a product of human art. The possibility, anticipated by Hepburn, of 'naturizing' or 'becoming foreign to our everyday notion of ourselves', thus provides a special modality of self-understanding. Each received story, or even only a story fragment, necessarily influences our 'life story', in other words the narrative identity in the sense of configuration, 'extracted' continuously from the 'life story', and enables or initiates a new 'becoming' of subjectivity. The aesthetic 'regime' of experience, through reflexivity, strikingly increases the impact that the restructuring story has on narrative identity, because the stepping out of facticity or everyday life, of the natural attitude (or, if you like, the advent of aesthetic distance) frees the self from the thrall of the practical self, which includes stabilized categorizations (Foster's 'cognitive packages') and enables new 'becomings', a multiplicity of possible directions of becoming, including narrative continuations in the experience of nature and oneself.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Another relevant reference to a possible solution to the paradox of ambience could be the reference to the cognitive sciences and the latest research on attention, including the changing weight of the participation of the conscious Self and the dynamic triangle of the centre of attention, the periphery, and the Self, which at its peaks can again split into other triangular formations. The triangular model of attention, created within the contemporary cognitive sciences, and linking together the relevant parts of the brain (the cortical areas, the prefrontal cortex, and the thalamus), includes the presentation of the object in the focus of attention (known as the 'expression of attention') the control of attention, and the thalamic enhancement of the feedback and feedforward connections between the expression of attention and control. This model provides a plausible interpretation of divided attention, which occurs also in the aesthetic experience, such that the triangular relation splits in two during self-reflexion, in other words, dividing attention on the object in the primary focus of attention and on the emergence of a second triangle, whose object, the second expression of attention, is the perceiving subject itself. Also in the event of divided attention, the model postulates a unified complex cognitive act or, rather, process, although the objects of attention are not at the same level (the reflected Self is not

The dual temporality of the two dimensions of the aesthetic experience of nature, the complementarity, and, in this respect, synthesizing or 'fusional' complementarity of a 'close' figure, the narratively configured level of experience and the 'remote', ambient dimension of possible, though for the time being unrealized, narrative configurations appears 'between the lines', for example, and not surprisingly, also in the second stanza of a poem by William Wordsworth. And it is reasonable to consider this expression evidence of the presence and complementarity of the two dimensions of aesthetic experience. We dare to say that the following apostrophe is not limited only to the cuckoo. It can easily be expanded to the aesthetic experience of nature or, more particularly, the forest as its condensed, dense exemplification.⁵¹

While I am lying on the grass
Thy twofold shout I hear;
From hill to hill it seems to pass,
At once far off and near.

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qualitatively the same as the 'external' object of perception). The possibility of divided attention need not, however, stop at the self-reflexion of the perception of one single object of perception and it is reasonable to imagine that two objects, also qualitatively heterogeneous, can enter the foci of attention at the same time. The primary split of attention, the taking up of the aesthetic self-reflecting attitude, can initiate another division of attention to two qualitatively different levels or dimensions of experience, and the complex process of the aesthetic reception can thus, in the simultaneity of experience, also include the two dimensions of experience, which we have been observing.

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