

Thinking from Materials in Andy Goldsworthy's Environmental Artworks

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Abstract

By adopting posthuman ecology as its methodological framework, the author of this paper examines how British environmental artist Andy Goldsworthy's conceptualization of nature can radically undermine the nature/culture dichotomy. To do this, the author will survey the first and the second waves of environmental art movement, also known as Representational and Performative Environmental Art, in order to situate Goldsworthy's small-scale works within the latter. Then, by embracing Tim Ingold's idea of "thinking through making" within materialist ecology, the author puts forward that Goldsworthy's environmental art can resist the old-age hylomorphic model by using intuitiveness and improvisation as its strategy. In doing so, Goldsworthy eschews from turning nature into a representation that is to be manipulated by human subjectivity from afar, precisely by thinking from natural materials rather than about them, thus inviting us to conceive all human and nonhuman organisms as an intricate conglomerate of "leaky things" in an endless flux of ecological becoming.

Keywords: Ingold, materiality, environmental art, nonhuman, Goldsworthy, hylomorphism.

Introduction

The nature/culture relationship has undeniably been a controversial topic among environmental artists, cultural theorists, anthropologists, and more recently sociologists. As Bruno Latour has propounded, over the past three centuries numerous scholars have attempted to give a cohesive and unified definition of nature vis-à-vis culture, thus trying to transform Gaia into a single organism, whereas nature has continuously been modified through the ecological mutations of the material world.¹ Like all material beings, humans have also been transmuting the environment and, in turn, being transmuted with it, thereby challenging the age-old dichotomy between active culture and passive nature, which for eons supposed a clear-cut distinction between the two. By discussing Andy Goldsworthy's environmental methods of working with the material world, this paper examines the extent to which his way of engagement with nature innately rejects the nature/culture dichotomy. To do this, it will first survey the first wave of environmental art movement from 1800 until 1960, which later came to be known as Representational Environmental Art. Artists during this period attempted to draw

public attention to the importance of representing environmental elements in their works, by questioning the static and inert view of nature that had been embodied by artists prior to the nineteenth century. That is how they paved the way for the second wave of environmental art, which is also known as Performative Environmental Art. To shed light on the underlying causes that led to the rapid expansion of Performative Environmental Art, this paper will next elaborate on the sociocultural issues that gave rise to the global popularity of this movement since the 1960s until the present time. Subsequently, by introducing Andy Goldsworthy's artistic oeuvre and focusing on two of his small-scale environmental artworks, this text lays bare the shift that has occurred in the historical understanding of the nature/culture relationship within environmental art milieu. Goldsworthy's unique practice of working in/with nature can reveal the move from the traditional view of nature as passive and neutral to dynamic and fluid, or as anthropologist Tim Ingold calls it: the shift from "stopped-up" objects to "leaky things". Finally, by embracing Ingold's discussion on how to "think from material" rather than about them, this paper will argue how the conceptualization of nature, as presented by Andy Goldsworthy, can

¹ Bruno Latour. *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climate Regime* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2017).

diminish the traditional nature/culture dichotomy by considering the ecology of material as its theoretical underpinning. In the following, I begin my discussion by providing a historical overview of major shifts in understanding the concept of landscape prior to the nineteenth century.

From Landscape to Performative Environmental Art

Landscape has always been a predominant subject matter in the arts, whether it was an attempt to depict a realistic view of nature, or an abstract imitation thereof. The traditional view of landscape, which mainly refers to the conception of this notion before the nineteenth century, sought to depict human's gaze over the landscape as an external object in the world. For this view, landscape was a "way of seeing", suggesting that it could only be defined and assessed according to human's visual perception, i.e., the human eyes.² But this view of landscape, as being simply established by human's vision, has been rejected by numerous critics over time. The landscape, Ingold holds in *The Perception of the Environment*, "is not a picture in the imagination, surveyed by the mind's eye; nor, however, is it an alien and formless substrate awaiting the imposition of human order."³ For Ingold, neither the "culturalistic" nor the "naturalistic" conceptualization of landscape have been appropriate views for the representation of nature in the arts. Because the culturalistic view puts forward that "every landscape is a particular cognitive or symbolic ordering of space", which suggests that landscape is inevitably a direct consequence of human's cultural activity, thus inferior to it. And the naturalistic view suggests that landscape is "a neutral, external backdrop of human activities", which suggest that landscape is passive to cultural products, namely visual arts.⁴ In other words, for the traditional view of landscape, it is either viewed as an inferior outsider or a passive by product of human cultural activities. To overcome this deadlock, the

term landscape has been replaced in several fields by a new term, that is, the environment.

As Ingold bluntly asks elsewhere: "is weather a part of the landscape or is it not?"⁵ Although the traditional definition of landscape would include lands, trees, and skies, the term environment incorporates weather as its integral part as well. Indeed, when we use the term environment instead of the landscape, several shifts take place. First, by using the term environment we include a wider range of phenomena such as air, rain, clouds, moist, and sky. Second, in using the term environment, "the duality of nature-culture is at a local level", suggests meteorologist John Thornes.⁶ This means, by replacing environment with landscape the common superiority of human over nature loses its relevance, since the environment can also be an active force upon culture, whereas the landscape is resulted from human's cultural activities. To put it differently, the term landscape denotes a static and unchanging physical world that awaits human's apprehension, whereas the term environment signifies a dynamic and processual world, which simultaneously can affect humans and be affected by them. Thanks to the passage from landscape to environment, notes scholar Malcom Andrews, humans are not anymore some alienated outsiders to nature, but "we are all insiders now", therefore, "as a phase to the cultural life of the West, landscape may already be over."⁷ This paradigm shift from landscape to environment culminated in comprehensive studies of nature in visual arts in the early nineteenth century until the middle of the twentieth century: the era regarded as the Representational Environmental Art period.⁸

Between 1800 and 1960, the overall attitude of the artists towards nature faced a major change. For instance, John Constable started intensive examinations of nature by using diverse scientific apparatuses. His collection of paintings of skies between 1820 and 1822, notes Thornes, "was a combination of artistic experimentation and maturity, together with scientific desire to understand dynamic meteorological processes."⁹ For Representational Environmental artists, the

² John E. Thornes, "A Rough Guide to Environmental Art," *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, vol. 33 (2008): 395.

³ Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), 191.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁵ Tim Ingold, "The Eye of the Storm: Visual Perception and the Weather," *Visual studies*, vol. 20, no. 2 (2005): 100

⁶ Thornes, "A Rough Guide", 394.

⁷ Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art: Oxford History of Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 22.

⁸ Thornes, "A Rough Guide", 395.

⁹ Thornes, "A Rough Guide", 395.

auditory, the tactile, and the sense of time in representation of nature came to the fore, since they would not want to consider nature to be a passive outsider awaiting to be captured through depiction thereof. If there had been one prominent movement in environmental art that conspicuously rejected the idea of landscape by concentrating on the significance of time, it would be the impressionist movement in the nineteenth century. For them, the landscape stopped being “just a visual field” and instead became a “complex sensation of light, color, smell, sound, and tactile experience”; that is, it became an environment.¹⁰ Moreover, the impressionists clearly refused to illustrate the preceding static notion of nature by attempting to draw attention to perpetual material changes within nature. Rejecting the traditional conception of landscape, Monet contentiously said: “a landscape does not exist in its own right, since its appearance changes at every moment.”¹¹ For representational environmental artists, like Monet, nature ceased to be the passive object outside of human perception waiting to be turned into a deadpan sight. Nevertheless, still the ultimate aim of representational environmental artists was to *depict* what would occur between them and nature, and not to actively and physically *engage* with the process of art making in nature.

Due to the prevalence of photography in the beginning of the twentieth century, capturing instantaneity in nature had already become obsolete. For depicting the continuous changes in environment, which was the ultimate goal of impressionists, had been already achieved by the technological advancement of photography.¹² Besides, during the twentieth century *action* and *performance* attained a higher priority to the mere representation of nature. The culmination of these changes has led to the emergence of an artistic movement, later to be known as Performative Environmental Art.¹³ This movement resulted from several interrelated sociocultural reasons in the 1960s, which contributed to the popularity of the movement until the present time. Elaborating on the initial motives that led to the popularity of Performative Environmental Art in 1960s, cultural geographer John Wylie notes:

“this movement outdoors signalled both a conscious rejection of the commercialism of the mainstream art world and a dawning awareness of environmental stresses and vulnerabilities. And these beliefs and values further chimed with the emerging radical world view of sixties counter-culture.”¹⁴

The 1960s counter-culture primarily originated from an overall pessimism towards the notion of progress, which had been habitually embraced by individuals in the West. It was first advanced in the USA and the United Kingdom, but later became a ubiquitous global position upon culture at large. Although the 20th century's artistic milieu was not dominated by landscape art due to the fear of “world wars, increasing industrialization and materialism, the threat of global destruction and of irreparable damage to the ecology”, there was a conspicuous return to nature as the only source of inspiration left after the world wars.¹⁵ In addition to the public awareness about the industrialization and the commercialization of art in 1960s, artists embraced Performative Environmental Art because they wanted to be released from the theoretical discussions that were oversaturating abstract expressionism and minimalism.¹⁶ In other words, artists embraced this movement because, by incorporating performance art into environmental art, they could *act* against the plastic aesthetic and the widespread commercialization of the art market.

In the early 1970s, other important factors also had noteworthy contributions to the historical context in which Performative Environmental Art was arisen from: Global warming and Green Politics. Global warming informed everyone about the gradual debilitating effects of industrialization on the environment, thereby sought artists' support to rescue the environment by their active political engagement. Also, Green Politics movement began to take shape in order to create an ecologically sustainable society in Europe that was rooted in environmentalism, social justice, and grassroots democracy. Eventually, due to aforementioned concerns, the 1960s became the decade in which “artists adopted a more physical, sensual, performative, and sculptural approach to

¹⁰ Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art*, 192.

¹¹ John House, *Monet: Nature into Air* (London: Yale University Press, 1986), 33.

¹² Thornes, “A Rough Guide”, 397.

¹³ Thornes, “A Rough Guide”, 398.

¹⁴ John Wylie, *Landscape* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 141.

¹⁵ H. Langdon, “Landscape Painting,” in *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. J. Turner (London: Macmillan, 1996), 720.

¹⁶ G.A. Tiberghien, *Land Art* (London: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996).

landscape.”¹⁷ That is why the principal attention was not a meticulous or an instantaneous representation of nature anymore, but rather an active engagement *with* nature. Today this notion of engagement with nature, rather than merely representing it, has become one of the main tenets of environmental art, and has been put into practice in the movement that is described by several different terms, such as: Land art, ecological art, process art, eco-art, earth art, total art, or Performative Environmental Art.

Performative Environmental Art was first introduced in October 1968 at the Dawn Gallery in New York in a group exhibition called *Earth Works*. The term *Earth Works* was coined by Robert Smithson, who also wrote an essay called “The Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects”, wherein he created a critical framework for the movement. Most of the artists in this gallery were in their late twenties, and were political activists who pursued the environmental liberation. The early aim of Performative Environmental Art was drawing awareness to the fragility of nature. Prior to this movement, Andrews notes, nature “used to be that robust ‘other’” and after the pervasiveness of this movement it became “a fragile, anorexic dependant, to be protected and ‘managed’”.¹⁸ This shift from considering nature as the “robust other” to the “fragile” and “anorexic dependant” was simultaneously acknowledged in America and Europe. The most renowned artists in Europe who largely guided the development of Performative Environmental Art (or commonly known as land art) were Constantin Brancusi, recognized as the patriarch of modern sculpture, and Joseph Beuys. Beuys’ notion of Social Sculpture, which resulted in planting 7000 Oak trees between 1982 and 1987 in Kassel, Germany, aimed to signify the underlying political, cultural, and social potentials of art. Describing the democratic functions of art, Beuys famously said: “art is now the only *evolutionary-revolutionary* power. Only art is capable of dismantling the repressive effects of a senile social system that continues to totter along the death line.”¹⁹ As an acclaimed performative environmental artist, Beuys aimed to reveal the “evolutionary-revolutionary power” of art by using natural elements such as trees and stones, in his large-scale works. However, alongside with

Brancusi and Beuys there were many other artists who paved the way for modern European land art, who mostly resided and worked in the United Kingdom.

The contemporary British Land Art is connected with schools such as St Martin, Slade, Chelsea, RCA and associated with artists such as Long, Fulton, Drury, Nash, and Goldsworthy. The influences of American Land Art were, needless to say, only one aspect of British Land Art and another is the British landscape itself and its concomitant notion of romanticism. British land artists, such as Drury and Nash, have aimed to elicit the pastoral, the sublime, and the Arcadian side of nature, the same way British Romantic Painters and poets (like Turner and Blake) did. British Land Art has maintained the properties of American and other European land artists, but it has also incorporated the rich history of British poetry and painting into its corpus.²⁰ An exemplary of embracing such approach is Andy Goldsworthy, whose small-scale works stand as an instance in which Performative Environmental Art proclaims the decline of the nature/culture opposition after 1960s.

Andy Goldsworthy: A Performative Environmental Artist

Andy Goldsworthy is a land artist, sculptor, and photographer, born in Cheshire, England, in July 1956. As a performative land artist, his works are mainly concerned with the notion of decay, growth, and entropy in nature. While he continually attempts to elicit the dynamic forces of nature in his artworks, he eschews from halting the circular flow of the natural environment. During his early childhood, he worked in a farm on a part time basis. This physical engagement with nature has become a crucial theme in his works, since for him an artwork is primarily a physical activity, and not just an imposition of mental endeavours on his surrounding natural environment. As he states: “my art is a way of learning in which instincts guide best. It is also very physical – I need the shock of touch, the resistance of place, materials and weather, the earth as my source”.²¹ For Goldsworthy, similar to many other land artists, a sculpture is not something to look at, but rather something to be

¹⁷ Thornes, “A Rough Guide,” 404

¹⁸ Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art*, 24.

¹⁹ Beuys statement in Caroline Tisdall, *Art into Society, Society into Art* (London: ICA, 1974), 48. (Emphasis in original).

²⁰ William Malpas, *The Art of Andy Goldsworthy: Complete works* (Eastbourne: Gardners Books, 2007), 103.

²¹ Cited in Christopher Tilley et al., “Art and the Re-Presentation of the Past,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, (2000), vol. 6, 43.

walked over or cycled through. Describing his way of making natural sculptures, he says “it is the fluidity of working that gives sculptures a sense of movement and energy”.²² In fact, for many performative land artists *movement* plays a pivotal role, since it is the physical working with materials that helps them produce a sense of fluidity in their art. This dynamism is best reflected in Goldsworthy's small-scale works, which usually last for a few days, minutes, or even seconds, as they are exposed to natural erosion, corrosion, or complete destruction, caused by entropy that is always towards maximization in nature.²³

Goldsworthy's works can be divided into two categories: large-scale and small-scale. This paper only focuses on his small-scale works, particularly on his works with leaves and icicles. Not only because his small-scale works are more frequently documented and thus are easier to access, but also because these works can lucidly display the diminishing of the traditional dichotomy between nature and culture, the polarity that had been lingering throughout the history of art until the emergence of Performative Environmental Art in 1960s. Goldsworthy's small-scale works can achieve this primarily through their intuitiveness and the indefatigable emphasis they put on the notion of constant change. For instance, his icicles and leaves are principally made by *re-juxtaposition* and *rearrangement* of these materials in natural environment. The only tools used in these works are his hands and sometimes a knife. For instance, *Icicle Star* (1987), is made through the juxtaposition of several fragmented icicles into the shape of a glowing star (Figure 1, see List of Figures). *Iris Blades* (1987) is an example of his works with leaves, resulted from a meticulous rearrangement of several Iris leaves in a pond. As Malpas notes, in Goldsworthy's small-scale works “there is no distance between subject and representation”, because he “uses the thing-in-itself, by itself.”²⁴ That is to say, in contrast with the traditional method of representing nature in landscape art — as we have seen in representational environmental artists like Constable — Goldsworthy uses the very element of nature itself to create and evoke his artistic message. What should be taken into account

about his works with icicles and leaves is that they are never planned before he goes out into nature to create them. Also, the fact that they cannot last without being documented as photographs, as they mostly vanish in a few minutes or hours. In effect, most of his small-scale works must be photographed and documented to be preserved due to their ephemeral and transitory existence. However, documentation and preservation in his large-scale works are not as necessary since they remain in nature until, due to gradual erosion and inevitable decay, they become a part of it.

The role of photographic documentation is irrefutably crucial in Goldsworthy's small-scale works; in fact, there would not have been any residue of his small-scale works without their photographs. While in the large-scale works photography can function as an invitation to visit the sculpture, in the small-scale works it becomes the only way of preserving and transferring the artwork to the spectator. This means, while in the large-scale works photographs have an indexical function, in small scale works they have a documentary function: they enable him retain the work in time and space. Goldsworthy describes the role of photography as the way in which he talks about his natural sculptures.²⁵ But, according to him, his photographs are not considered to be the original output of his art, as he disagrees with photographs being apt substitutes for the experience of the real work: “if the photograph were to become so real that it overpowered and replaced the work outside, then it would have no real purpose or meaning in my art”.²⁶ Although his physical works in nature are considered to be, as Malpas suggests, “the thing-in-itself, by itself”, the photographs of his works “are plainly *not* the object in itself, but a *representation*, a simulation, an equivalent of it.”²⁷

The important point about his photographs is that they refer to the original work that is placed in the natural environment, and in so doing, they solely function either as an invitation to visit the works (large-scale), or as a representation of the works (small-scale). To be clear, his photographs never substitute the real experience of being with the works in the material world, as they only refer to the original works and

²² Stated in Thomas Riedelsheimer, *Rivers and Tides: Andy Goldsworthy Working with Time*, Roxie Releasing, Germany, 2001, DVD.

²³ B. Tufnell, *Land Art* (London: Tate, 2006), 81.

²⁴ William Malpas, *The Art of Andy Goldsworthy*, 184.

²⁵ Riedelsheimer, *Rivers and Tides*, 2001.

²⁶ Quoted in Malpas, *The Art of Andy Goldsworthy*, 186.

²⁷ Malpas, *The Art of Andy Goldsworthy*, 184 (Emphasis in original).

not substituting for them. Goldsworthy's photograph, hence, reinforce the fact that his small-scale works are in essence unfinished: both as photographic representations and as material conglomerates in the world. They are incomplete in their representation since his photographs "require the spectators to create the rest of the artwork by using their imagination". They are also incomplete in their physical existence since his works never reach the stage of completeness; that is, they are always in the process of *being* completed. As Malpas notes: "his artworks leave some part of the sculpture incomplete, and the viewer can supply the rest from their memories of the real world."²⁸ The notion of incompleteness in Goldsworthy's works, at both levels of making and documentation, is essentially to indicate the idea of growth, time, change, and flow in nature, each of which intrinsically opposes any mode of closure and cessation. In other words, Goldsworthy's works denote life and process; they signify the very fact that both the representation of his works (the photographs) and the original works (the sculptures) are dynamic. For example, the *Icicle Star* is situated at the boundary of being an icicle or a melted sculpture, because at the very moment when it is being made it already has begun to erode, collapse, decay, and melt away.

Therefore, in contrast with the traditional view of nature as being a static and neutral object, Goldsworthy's art works demonstrate the unfinished and the dynamic side of nature. His works refuse to accept the inert and passive conception of nature as an object that is there to be manipulated by human visual perception and via diverse cultural means, as was a common practice before the emergence of Performative Environmental Art. This is because his understanding of the work of art is something unremittingly in process: both when it is being made and after it has been made. Accordingly, the traditional view of landscape, which would corroborate completed artworks, does not play a role in Goldsworthy's oeuvre. As he concisely puts it: "the origin of the stone is in the volcano, when it is alive", that is, when it is yet formless and incomplete, when it is fully dynamic and in swirl.²⁹

Indeed, it is only through working with natural materials that his art works come into being: precisely through the very process in which

they are shaped. In the following, I will elaborate on the way in which the craft of Goldsworthy, as introduced above, can radically shatter the nature/culture distinction by considering the same ecological life for human and non-human bodies. Not only can the decline of the nature/culture dichotomy fulfil the primary aim of the early performative environmental artists (those such as Beuys who wanted to save the endangered nature by his active engagement), but it can also shed light on the fact that ecological materials are what *both* natural and cultural bodies are made of, and in turn, receive their vulnerability from.

Rejecting Hylomorphism by "thinking through making"

As I have so far discussed, Goldsworthy's performative environmental artworks are always unfinished and dynamic. For him, it's during the making of a sculpture that it comes into being, or it becomes alive, not when the sculpture is so called "done". At this point, I will further discuss how a dynamic view of natural sculptures can subvert the hitherto dominant model with which artworks were made, i.e., active culture and passive nature. To do so, I will explore how Goldsworthy's artworks can destabilize the age-old hylomorphic model, which is habitually employed across a large spectrum of art fields.

According to Ingold, hylomorphism is the "doctrine that making involves the imposition of preconceived form on matter."³⁰ The term hylomorphism is composed of two Greek words, *hyle*, which means matter, and *morphē*, which means form. It was first coined by Aristotle to describe the state of being: a being that is comprised of *hyle* and *morphē*. The hylomorphic model can be exemplified by an artisan who makes sculptures by using mould and clay in order to create new forms out of nature. In this view, there is always a pre-made structure (a mould) that imposes the intended construction upon materials, thereby determining the shape, size, scale, and the form of the final work. For example, for a brick maker, the shape of the brick is always predetermined by the mould that is used to make the bricks. In this way, the clay that is utilized in this process is considered to be passive and neutral, for it is always human's idea,

²⁸ Malpas, *The Art of Andy Goldsworthy*, 184.

²⁹ Riedelsheimer, *Rivers and Tides*, 2001.

³⁰ Tim Ingold, "Toward an Ecology of Materials," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 41 (2012), 439.

or the mould, that determines the form of the clay. As philosopher Gilbert Simondon has argued, the hylomorphic model corresponds to “the man who stands outside the works and sees what goes in and what goes out but nothing of what happens in between.”³¹ The hylomorphic model corresponds to the traditional view of landscape that was earlier discussed in this paper: the view which would consider nature to be only a neutral background of human activities. That is, the hylomorphic model takes for granted that it is only human's preconceived ideas that can play active roles in any constructive activities, and by doing so, it undermines the dynamic role that nature plays in human activities, or in a broad sense, over culture. In Ingold's terms, in the hylomorphic view “theory leads and practice follows”, and not vice versa.³² In other words, in the hylomorphic model it is always culture furnishing nature, form furnishing the matter, or *morphē* imposing itself upon *hyle*.

The hylomorphic understanding is similar to the understanding of gold for a chemist, because a chemist always determines what is gold by its chemical properties that are already predetermined. In the same way, in the hylomorphic model an artisan determines the shape of his/her artworks by a set of predetermined moulds, preconceived ideas, or forms. For a chemist, Ingold notes, “gold is one of the elements in the periodic table,” whereas for an alchemist “gold was [the] yellowing and gleaming, and anything that yellowed and gleamed, and that would also shine ever brighter under water and could be hammered into thin leaf, would count as gold.”³³ With regard to this comparison, we can consider Goldsworthy's works, such as *Icicle Star*, as conducting alchemy with natural materials, since for him, similar to an alchemist, there are no fixed and encoded attributes for natural materials. In that, for Goldsworthy there are no preconceived ideas when he starts making his small-scale works; rather, he initiates making his artistic forms *while* working with the materials, such as leaves and icicles. Consequently, instead of imposing a decided form on matter (as it is defined in hylomorphism) he simultaneously works and creates his artistic forms; that is, the intuitiveness of working with natural materials allows him to

evade hylomorphism. This strategy is what Ingold simply, yet eloquently, calls: “Thinking through Making”.

According to Ingold, “in thinking through making nothing is ever finished”, that is precisely why it can become an alternative way of thinking to the hylomorphic model. This conceptual framework suggests that the process of thinking proceeds only concurrently with the process of making. This means, in “thinking through making” forms and ideas go hand in hand, rather than preceding one another. That is why Ingold contends that creating something new does not pertain to innovation by means of imposing some fixed ideas, but it rather lies in improvisation.³⁴ In contrast to hylomorphism, in improvisation there is no particular prerogative for neither theory nor practice; instead, they both must necessarily operate together and at the same time. Given Ingold's contention, it can be said that Goldsworthy's natural sculptures resist the hylomorphic model in that they are never planned or thought before, for they are chiefly based on *intuitiveness* and *improvisation* in the material world.

Thinking from Materials: Participating in the World of Becoming

Goldsworthy attempts to understand materials not by what they are, but by what they do. Rather than objectifying natural materials by the imposition of defined ideas, he attempts to understand them by engaging in the process of working with them. Instead of conceiving materials as objects distant to human subjectivity, he participates with materials by performing his art *through* them. As we have seen in the history of Performative Environmental Art, nature ought not to be perceived as a static or a neutral element. On the contrary, it is considered to be comprised of an infinite number of dynamic and fluctuating constituents. Thus, the only way to engage with natural materials, without objectifying them as backdrops to human subjectivity, is to think *from* them rather than *about* them. As Ingold puts it “as the dancer thinks from the body, so the artisan thinks from materials.”³⁵

³¹ Quoted in Ingold, “Toward an Ecology”, 433.

³² Tim Ingold, “Ingold, Thinking through Making,” YouTube, posted by Institute for Northern Culture, accessed July 13, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ygne72-4zyo>

³³ Ingold, “Toward an Ecology”, 434.

³⁴ Stated in Ingold, “Ingold, Thinking through Making”.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Andy Goldsworthy's *Iris Blades* and *Icicle Star* epitomize how thinking from materials can be accomplished. By sheer re-juxtaposition and rearrangement of leaves and icicles in these works, Goldsworthy has succeeded to induce a new form from natural materials without submitting to the hylomorphic model, a form which is inherently fluid and volatile. For him "it is the fluidity of working that gives sculpture a sense of movement and energy".³⁶ Undeniably, the logic of fluid sculpture plays an indispensable role in his art works. That is why he deems the origin of stone to be found as runny lavas on a volcano, when it is mutable par excellence.³⁷ For lavas make visible the fact that matter is constantly shaping and reshaping into new forms, thereby resisting the notion of completeness, even when it coagulates into volcanic stones. In other words, for Goldsworthy natural materials are in the process of constant *becoming*, and as a result, they should never be conceived as finished *per se*. As Ingold submits, "in the phenomenal world, every material is a becoming."³⁸ Every material, like Goldsworthy's *Icicle Star*, is constantly, yet gradually, propelled towards an upcoming change, not matter how small that is. The *Icicle Star* immediately starts to melt while it is being made, and even at the very moment when it reaches its fleeting fulness, it is already changing form and substance, becoming something else. Referring to this work, Goldsworthy says: "the very thing that brings the work to life, is the thing that will cause its death."³⁹ The very material constituent of *Icicle Star*: water.

Goldsworthy's works therefore not only oppose the hylomorphic model by their intuitive character, but also draw our attention to a world of endless becoming. As Ingold writes rather cryptically: "everything may be something, but being something is always on the way of becoming something else."⁴⁰ It may seem hard to envisage the means whereby artists can produce art works in a dynamic world of becoming, in the word of perpetual alteration. It is because production habitually employs the hylomorphic model, the model which is heavily dependent on the imposition of ideas on matter. In the *Icicle*

Star, Goldsworthy has created a work through intuitive associations with materials in the natural environment, or as Ingold would put it, through the process of "correspondence". Production, Ingold holds, "is a process of correspondence, not the imposition of preconceived form on raw materials substance, but the drawing out or bringing forth of potential immanent in the world of becoming."⁴¹ Similarly, the *Iris Blades* has been made solely by means of corresponding natural materials (leaves) with each other. Only by adopting such method of production (correspondence) can Goldsworthy resist utilizing the hylomorphic model.

Additionally, through the very practice of crafting natural materials, Goldsworthy accumulates more knowledge of what each specific material is, and what it can do in combination with other materials. After the collapse of one of his sculptures, Goldsworthy says: "each time I got to know the stone a little bit more, they got higher each time, so it grew to my understanding of the stone."⁴² For him, it is crucial to work, to be physically entangled with the materials. That is, he views materials not merely as some static entities with fixed attributes, which can be studied through systematic and theoretical investigations. Instead, for him natural materials, or nonhuman organisms, both grow and are grown, the same way humans do. He considers all nonhuman organisms to be dynamic, alive, and in the process of becoming what they are. As Ingold proposes, "to understand materials is to be able to tell their histories—of what happens to them when treated in particular ways."⁴³ Only by the practice of corporeally engaging with natural materials one may understand their properties, instead of viewing and assessing them from the distance — as it was the case before the nineteenth-century environmental art.

Through his own physical involvement with nature, Goldsworthy aims to understand it without turning it into a static object that is to be remotely manipulated by humans. By incorporating the ideas of flow, growth, and decay in his works, he offers a dynamic view of nature that is entirely based on *movement* and *becoming*. Ingold, following Sheet-Johnstone,

³⁶ Stated in Riedelsheimer, *Rivers and Tides*, 2001.

³⁷ *Ibid.*,

³⁸ Ingold, "Toward an Ecology of Materials," 435.

³⁹ Stated in Riedelsheimer, *Rivers and Tides*, 2001.

⁴⁰ Tim Ingold, "Introduction", in *Redrawing Anthropology: Materials, Movements, Lines*, ed. T. Ingold (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 3.

⁴¹ Ingold, "Introduction," 6.

⁴² Stated in Riedelsheimer, *Rivers and Tides*, 2001.

⁴³ Ingold, "Toward an Ecology of Materials," 434.

points out that “the key to both self-knowledge and organic life is movement. It is not just bodies, as living organism, move. They are their movement.”⁴⁴ By emphasizing the notion of unfinished works, Goldsworthy accentuates the fact that his natural sculptures, same as other nonhuman organisms, are constituted of everlasting modulating components. That is why calling his artworks as complete is a radically mistaken attribution. For instance, to call Goldsworthy's sculptures completed, is to call alive human bodies completed, by disregarding the fact that they both grow and are grown. Leaves and icicles in *Iris Blades* and *Icicle Star* are exposed to change at every second of their lives, since their active ingredients are part of the perma-fluctuating material world. To put it simply, both *Iris Blades* and *Icicle star* have an ecological life, precisely the same way human bodies do.

From “stopped-up” Objects to “leaky things”

By considering the same ecological life for both humans and nonhumans, Goldsworthy undermines the traditional distinction between the two in his fluid sculptures. Ecologically speaking, all living bodies, either humans or nonhumans, are sustained by “taking in of materials” from their environments and “the discharge into them, in the process of respiration and metabolism”. Both human and nonhuman organisms sustain their lives through the process of absorption from and the discharge into their natural environments. They both continue to live in their environments “because of the interchange of materials across the ever-emergent surfaces by which they differentiate themselves from the surrounding medium.”⁴⁵ By underlining the notions of movement and change in nature, Goldsworthy wants to embody the same ecological processes that are at work in his sculptures and in human bodies. The fact that they both grow and decay, that they are both fluid and permeable. As Ingold puts it: “things exist and persist only because they leak”. The term “leaky things”, for Ingold, applies to both human and nonhuman organisms; in that, they are both in

constant intake from and discharge into their surroundings, they are both ecological, thus continually leaking into their circumambient space.

Goldsworthy fluid sculptures aim to substitute the passive-static image of nature by a dynamic-leaky one through considering the ecology of material as their common denominator. As Ingold proposes, the “shift of perspective from stopped-up objects to leaky things distinguishes the ecology of materials from mainstream studies of material culture”.⁴⁶ To put it differently, if “stopped-up” objects refer to the idea of nature for artists prior to the arrival of environmental art (the artist who would consider landscape as a “way of seeing”), the notion of “leaky things” refers to the perspective from which nature has been viewed from the 1800s onwards: a nature in relentless flux. Since 1800s, artists have acknowledged a nature that would instantaneously change: a dynamic nature that could affect culture and being affected by it. That is, they started to envisage nature to be constituted of “leaky things” rather than being a collection “stopped-up” objects. In *Icicle Star* and *Iris Blades*, Goldsworthy aspire to put us in relation to the constantly modulating materiality of the world, thus making us apperceive nature as a dynamic bundle of “leaky things”.

Same as the early representational environmental artists, Goldsworthy wants to signify what ties humans to nature by attempting to introduce nature through its ecological factors: clouds, rain, moisture, sunlight, etc. As Monet once said, “to me motif itself is an insignificant factor; what I want to reproduce is what lies between the motif and me.”⁴⁷ What Monet then had difficulty naming it later fell into the category of “externs” in the study of natural materials. Schiffer and Miller distinguish between *artifacts*, which are material modified by human activity (e.g. domesticated plants and animals), and *externs*, which include everything else, such as “sunlight and clouds, wild plants and animals, rocks and minerals”.⁴⁸ For Ingold, ecological anthropology and material culture can only be integrated if “the externs are brought back in, not just as a residue, but as the fundamental condition for life.”⁴⁹ Precisely the return of the

⁴⁴ Ibid., 437.

⁴⁵ Ingold, “Toward an Ecology of Materials,” 438.

⁴⁶ Ibid.,

⁴⁷ J. House, *Monet: Nature Into Art* (London: Yale University Press, 1986), 221.

⁴⁸ B. Schiffer & AR. Miller, *The Material Life of Human Beings: Artifacts, Behavior and Communication* (London: Routledge, 1999), 126.

⁴⁹ Ingold, “Toward an Ecology of Materials,” 431.

externs is what Goldsworthy seeks to accomplish in his artistic practice. By incorporating externs in his works, he lays bare that both humans and nonhumans are prone to the same ecological changes, such as erosion and decay. Therefore, ecologically speaking, for a Performative Environmental Artist like Goldsworthy, cultural bodies (i.e., humans) and natural bodies (e.g., icicle) are not distinct from each other, because they are vulnerable and exposed to the same ecological changes.

That is why Ingold proposes that “we should no longer speak of relations between people and things, because people are things too” as the bodily existence of both is determined by movement.⁵⁰ By considering movement as the basis of organic life, there is no radical difference between human bodies and natural materials. That is also why Goldsworthy’s emphasis on his natural sculptures is built on dynamic notions such as decay, erosion, growth, or change in general. For he wants to manifest that constant change is what unites all material bodies. He considers natural materials as continually modulating and fluctuating things in space, which he can only pursue by means of intuition. By using intuitiveness, thus, he enables himself to take part in the cycle of nature without altering its process, since for him natural materials are not determined by what they are, but rather by what they do. In other words, for Goldsworthy, the river is not dependent on water, but on the flow.

Conclusion

Through the history of environmental art from the nineteenth century onwards, there has been a tectonic change in the representation of nature from a passive outsider to an active insider, from being out there to being with us. Andy Goldsworthy’s art works can be seen as an example of how Performative Environmental Art movement has drawn global attention to this paradigm shift. His works, undoubtedly, respond to the initial aim of performative environmental artists, that is, preserving the fragile nature and raising environmental awareness by engaging *with* the natural environment. By using intuitiveness and improvisation as his methods, Goldsworthy subverts the hylomorphic model, and in turn resists objectification of nature and distancing from it. In other words, by considering the same ecological life for natural materials and human bodies, a life that is based on the dynamic notion of constant change, he aspires to undermine the traditional opposition between the static nature and the dynamic culture. For him, both natural materials and human bodies are alive, active, and teemed with endless mutability; they grow, decay, and more importantly, they become what they are through their movements. In short, by thinking *from* natural materials rather than *about* them, Andy Goldsworthy eschews from turning nature into a representation that is to be manipulated and utilized by human subjectivity from afar, and instead, he invites us to view nature as an intricate conglomerate of leaky things in an endless flux of ecological becoming, as we all are.

List of Figures

Figure 1. Andy Goldsworthy, *Icicle Star*, Scaur Water, Dumfriesshire, Scotland (1987).

Figure 2. Andy Goldsworthy, *Iris Blades*, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, West Bretton (1987).

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Biographical note

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