

Aldo Leopold's Land Aesthetic: Cosmologies and Axiology

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Abstract

In *A Sand County Almanac*, forester and ecologist Aldo Leopold laid the foundation for a land ethic that is inseparable from an aesthetic. This article draws on John Baird Callicott's exegesis of Leopold to clarify what is new about this aesthetic of the land as opposed to the aesthetic of the picturesque that Westerners inherited from the 17th century. It takes the opportunity to apply Callicott's argument to the case of Brittany. It continues with a discussion of Leopold's aesthetic itself. After noting that this aesthetic may seem very elitist, it moderates by pointing out that the change of view advocated by Leopold is potentially accessible to all, even if it remains rare because of social conditioning. It ends by showing that the importance given by Leopold to conceptual schemes as much as to sensory experience is coherent with what glossology tells us about the way representation works. It concludes by emphasizing the axiological dimension of Leopold's aesthetics and ethics, which are based on what Leopold called a voluntary limitation.

Romain Gary's 1956 Goncourt Prize-winning novel, *The Roots of Heaven*, has been said to be the first "ecological" novel, as the writer himself recalled in 1980, in a short preface to the French edition. He made his own the words he had attributed, in the novel, to the game inspector Laurençot. One of the characters, the governor of Fort Lamy, who had lost his only son in the Resistance, maintained that the fight for mankind, against forced labor, totalitarian prisons, genocide, had to come before the protection of elephants. Laurençot refused to prioritize: "the elephants are part of that fight. Men are dying to preserve a certain splendor of life. Call it freedom, or dignity... They are dying to preserve a certain natural beauty" (Gary, 1958, p. 79). For Romain Gary, the hero of his novel, Morel, was indeed a pioneer of ecological struggles. But he added that the obstacles were the same in 1980 as at the time of the novel's publication: "we continue to dispose of peoples just as easily in the name of the right of peoples to dispose of themselves" while "the 'ecological' awareness itself comes up against [...] the inhumanity of the human" (Gary, 2020, p. 9).

Romain Gary was in a way responding in advance to those who, like Marcel Gauchet and Luc Ferry, at the turn of the 1990s, would like to see, under the protection of nature, the hatred of man (Gauchet, 1990; Ferry, 1992)¹. He was closer to Lévi-Strauss, who, as we will see, proposed as early as 1962 to base wisdom and collective action on the reintegration of man into the whole of living things. He was also closer to the forester and ecologist Aldo Leopold, who in *A Sand County Almanac*, a book published in 1949, had laid the foundations of a land ethic inseparable from a land aesthetic². It is precisely this land aesthetic, as formulated by Leopold and then by his principal exegete, John Baird Callicott, that will be the subject of this article.

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1 See some discussion of this in Le Bot, 2009, as well as Kohler, 2012.

2 This is why Leopold was one of the targets of Luc Ferry's criticism.

Let us begin by recalling how Leopold himself summarized his ethics³. After inviting his readers to “quit thinking about decent land-use as solely an economic problem”, he invites them to examine “each question in terms of what is ethically and aesthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient”. The statement leads to a maxim: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise” (Leopold, 1970, p. 262).

But what is that beauty, of which Romain Gary already spoke? To try to understand it, we will follow closely Callicott's argumentation, which underlined the novelty of Leopold's land aesthetic, compared to the aesthetic criteria inherited from the 17th century⁴. Our first part summarizes what Callicott says about the aesthetics of the picturesque, as it developed in Western countries from the 17th century onward. Our second part presents Leopold's land aesthetic and what makes it new compared to the aesthetics of the picturesque, which remains dominant today. We take the opportunity to point out how Callicott's argument can be applied to what we observe in Brittany. Our third section intends to go beyond a simple summary of Callicott's argument, to discuss Leopold's aesthetic itself. The first three points of this discussion are more sociological. While many of Leopold's passages appear very elitist (3.1), this elitism must be tempered by the fact that Leopold himself asserts that the change in the way we appreciate nature he advocates is potentially accessible to all (3.2). But the conditioning that continues to operate, decades after the publication of the *Almanac*, means that this change of view is still rare (3.3). Our last point of discussion (3.4) shows that Leopold's emphasis on conceptual schemes as much as on sensory experience is consistent with what glossology tells us about how representation works. But above all, it underlines the properly axiological dimension of Leopold's aesthetics and ethics, based on what he called voluntary limitation.

1. An Aesthetic of the Picturesque

The celebration of natural beauty, Callicott observed, is now commonplace. For several decades, it has fueled books, magazines, films, photo exhibitions, television shows, websites and video-on-demand platforms. The recent success of Sylvain Tesson's book, *La panthère des neiges*⁵, as well as of the movie *The Velvet Queen*, directed by Marie Amiguet and Vincent Munier, brings a new example. “I seek out beauty. I pay homage to it. This is my way of defending it”, says Munier to Tesson in the book (Tesson, 2019, p. 104). But this appreciation is relatively recent in the Western world. Augustinian orthodoxy, as Augustin Berque observes, would for more than a thousand years “turn Christians away from admiring the spectacle of the world”, at the same time that in China a reflection on landscape painting was developing (Berque, 2000, p. 265). Callicott can thus contrast the rich tradition of landscape poetry and painting in China and Japan with the little that Homer, Sappho or Plato had to say on the subject. The reading of the Bible, whether Old or New Testament, confirms this

3 Readers unfamiliar with Aldo Leopold will find a brief biography on Wikipedia. In book form, the reference biography is Meine, 2010.

4 We will quote Callicott's article, “The Land Aesthetic” (Callicott, 1994). There are at least two previous versions (Callicott, 1983, and Callicott, 1987).

5 English translation, *The Art of Patience: Seeking the Snow Leopard in Tibet*, Simon and Schuster, 2021, 176 p.

poverty of the Western tradition, despite a few passages in the Psalms⁶. It was not until the 17th century that “landscape painting” appeared in Europe. Painters such as Claude Lorrain were to shape the gaze of the cultivated public.

“People saw landscape paintings in galleries, enjoyed an aesthetic experience, and so turned to the painter’s motifs for a similar gratification. Natural beauty thus shone in the West, but, like the Moon, by a borrowed light” (Callicott, 1994, p. 171).

This new taste for landscape was contemporary with the scientific revolution by which “nature was objectified, separated, and distanced from the subjective observer” (ibid.). Philippe Descola has insisted on the technical dimension of this objectification, which involved in particular the invention, in the first half of the fifteenth century, of linear perspective (Descola, 2013, p. 59 ff; Panofsky, 1991)⁷. But he also emphasizes, more generally, the way in which technical innovations were to become inextricably mixed with new scientific orientations and territorial conquests, leading to the “great divide”, that is, the establishment of a naturalist and dualist cosmology that separated man from nature, or, to use Descartes’ words, the *res cogitans* from the *res extensa* (Descola, ibid.).

Within the framework of this great divide, the new Western landscape aesthetic was to be an aesthetic of the “picturesque”, that is to say, of that which is worthy of being painted⁸. In the English-speaking world, the canons of this aesthetic were laid down by William Gilpin in his *Three Essays on Picturesque Beauty* (1792) and by Uvedale Price in his *Essay on the Picturesque* (1794). First present in painting, poetry, literature, architecture and even music, this aesthetic of the picturesque will give rise to “two new popular activities: aesthetic travel (or rustic tourism) and the aesthetic management of nature, revealingly called then as now ‘landscape gardening’ (in England) or ‘landscape architecture’ (in the United States)” (Callicott, 1994, p. 172). In France, the first protection of a landscape, that of the forest of Fontainebleau, by imperial decree of August 13, 1861, is the result of a struggle initiated from the late 1830s by artists gathered around the painter Théodore Rousseau⁹. The law of April 21, 1906, known as the Beauquier law, was passed to protect picturesque sites within the framework of a contractual agreement. This law created departmental site commissions, now known as departmental commissions for nature, landscapes and sites. In Brittany,

6 Relative poverty, however. In the second half of the ninth century, for example, the monk Gurdisten, author of a Life of Saint Guénolé, underlines the beauty of the site on which the founders of Landévennec Abbey, in Brittany, chose to settle (Simon, Cochou and Le Huerou 2015, p. 131). A few centuries earlier, Augustine’s famous passage in the *Confessions* (X, 8, 15), about men who “go forth to marvel at the heights of mountains and the huge waves of the sea, the broad flow of the rivers, the vastness of the ocean, the orbits of the stars, and yet [...] neglect to marvel at themselves”, proved a *contrario* that this admiration existed (Berque, 2000, p. 265 and Albert C. Outler’s translation of the *Confessions*). Peter Brown adds that for a period of his life at least, during his retreat at Cassiacum, Augustine was “open, as seldom later, to the natural beauties around him” (Brown, 1969, p. 117). Even earlier, Socrates, who declares that the countryside (τὰ χωρία) and the trees have nothing to teach him, unlike the men of the city (τὸ ἄστυ), nevertheless appreciates the little corner of the countryside to which Phaedrus has led him (Plato, Phaedrus, 230b-230d).

7 On the reciprocal relationship between technique and history in the invention of perspective, see also Ghitalla, 1996.

8 But the word, from the Italian *pittresco*, has come to designate in a weakened sense what is “pleasing or striking in appearance; scenic; pretty, charming, quaint, unspoilt...” (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

9 See, for instance, Audier, 2017, pp. 436 ff.

the municipal council of the island of Bréhat took advantage of this new law to request the protection of the island, considering, in the terms of its deliberation of May 19, 1907, that “the numerous foreigners who come to Bréhat during the bathing season and whose number increases every year find the island so picturesque and so beautiful that they express the desire to have it classified” (quoted by Koupaliantz, 2018)¹⁰. The picturesque was still at the heart of the law of May 2, 1930, which aimed to “reorganize the protection of natural monuments and sites of an artistic, historical, scientific, legendary or picturesque nature” by providing two levels of protection, registration and classification. In the field of tourism, this aesthetic of the picturesque has led to the identification of “viewpoints”, those places which, as Catherine Bertho observed, “only have meaning and existence for the tourist and from which the landscape unfolds as a pure spectacle, most often empty of men” (Bertho, 1980, p. 61)¹¹.

In Brittany, since the 19th century, tourist writings have relayed to the general public a scholarly literature to build a regional stereotype, which ended up being adopted by the Bretons themselves as a celebration of their region (Bertho, 1980). In the absence of high mountains, it was mainly the coastline and inland escarpments, including the Monts d'Arrée, that were erected as picturesque landscapes, which they still largely remain today. As Edgar Morin observed in Plozévet in 1965, the new Breton *petite bourgeoisie*, who adopted a suburban lifestyle based on the ownership of a house and a car, had “taken to driving around the region like tourists on Sundays”, exploring “a large picturesque area reachable by car, staked out by the Pointe du Raz, the Ile de Sein, Douarnenez, and the Eckmühl lighthouse” (Morin, 1970, p. 62-63). This picturesque landscape, that of the Pointe du Raz, but also of the needles of Port-Coton on Belle-Île or of the Mont Saint-Michel in Brasparts, to take only two other examples, has become a “postcard landscape” or, increasingly, one of digital photographs, Instagram and selfies. Contemporary visitors, including local ones, don't always realize it, but their gaze and the framing of their snapshot, which is supposed to “immortalize” the moment, is dependent on the gaze of a whole series of predecessors, more or less illustrious: the painter Claude Monet on Belle-Île, of course, but also postcard publishers, the Vermot almanac (Horizons de France collection) or the Post Office calendar.

“Western appreciation of natural beauty”, Callicott writes to sum up his point, “is recent and derivative from art. The prevailing natural aesthetic, therefore, is not autonomous: It does not flow naturally from nature itself; it is not directly oriented to nature on nature's own terms; nor is it well informed by the ecological and evolutionary revolutions in natural history. It is superficial and narcissistic¹². In a

10 At the time, Bréhat's elected representatives probably had no idea that this classification decision would contribute to an even greater number of visitors, culminating in the current summer overtourism. Again relying on a very recent law, the Climate Resilience Law of August 23, 2021, the municipal council of the following October 5 voted unanimously to create a joint working commission against “tourist hyperfrequentation” (*La Presse d'Armor*, October 8, 2021).

11 Places that are often specially equipped: coin-operated telescopes and toposcopes.

12 This is borne out by the popularity of selfies, which were unheard of in 1994 when Callicott's article was published, even though people haven't waited for the smartphone and the 21st century to have their portrait taken against a landscape background. But it shall also be pointed out that the Western tradition is not monolithic: as Estelle Zhong Mengual has shown in a recent book, some painters and naturalists, since the 19th century, have minimized narcissism and have populated their paintings with other living beings (Zhong Mengual, 2021). Callicott, for his part, remarked, in a first version of his article, that the term narcissism could seem intemperate. But he chose it in honor of Benedetto Croce, who did not

word, it is trivial" (Callicott, 1994, p. 173).

2. Leopold's land aesthetic

It is in Aldo Leopold's land aesthetic that Callicott will look for a way out of this trivial appreciation¹³. This land aesthetic, he wrote, "provides a seminal autonomous natural aesthetic theory that may help to awaken our response to the potential of these aesthetically neglected communities" (Callicott, 1994, p. 174). These neglected communities, he pointed out, constitute what some English-speaking authors call non-landscapes because they are deemed neither spectacular nor picturesque. Callicott provides a non-exhaustive list: "swamps and bogs, dunes, scrub, prairie, bottoms, flats, deserts, and so on" (ibid. p. 173). In doing so, however, he neglects to mention that things can vary from one region to another, or from one era to another. French art and literature of the colonial period, for example, made the desert, and especially the Sahara, just as picturesque in its own way as mountain landscapes¹⁴. And the case of Brittany, with the Monts d'Arrée, shows that landscapes of moors, peat bogs and swamps can also be elevated to the rank of picturesque. Hicham-Stéphane Afeissa rightly observes that Callicott "underestimates the richness of the folkloric, mythological, religious, and literary tradition that has developed over centuries around the swamps" (Afeissa, 2016, p. 228). In doing so, he aims for something less trivial than the stereotypical version of the picturesque. But what is important for our purposes is to remember that the novelty of Leopold's land aesthetics lies not in the promotion of previously neglected biomes or habitats, but in a different way of appreciating those habitats and biomes.

Unlike the aesthetic of the picturesque, the "autonomous natural aesthetic" does not privilege any particular point of view or perspective:

"One is in the landscape, i.e., in the natural environment, as the mobile center of a three-dimensional, multi-sensuous, experiential continuum. The appreciation of an environment's natural beauty could involve the ears (the sound of rain, insects, birds, or silence itself), the surface of the skin (the warmth of the sun, the chill of the wind, the texture of grass, rock, sand, etc.), the nose and tongue (the fragrance of flowers, the odor of decay, the taste of sap and waters) – as well as the eyes. Most of all it could involve the mind, the faculty of cognition" (Callicott, 1994, p. 174).

This cognition is informed by ecological science and evolutionary theory. This is what leads Callicott to speak of autonomous natural aesthetics: natural in the sense that it is inspired by ecology and evolutionary biology, and autonomous in the sense that it is no longer derived from art, although Leopold also defines it by analogy with music (Callicott, 1994, p. 181). "When Daniel Boone first entered into the forests and prairies of 'the dark and bloody ground'", Leopold writes, "he reduced to his possession of the pure essence of 'outdoor America'" (Leopold, 1970, p. 291)¹⁵.

recognize the possibility of a natural beauty: "finally, there is no natural beauty to which an artist would not make some correction", and added: "Man in front of natural beauty is exactly the mythical Narcissus at the source" (Croce, 1908, pp. 114-115 - my translation from the Italian).

13 Like the word narcissism, the adjective trivial may seem excessive, but it is well suited to the most stereotyped versions of the picturesque aesthetic.

14 See, for instance, Goual, 2012.

15 Leopold was probably referring to the words of Daniel Boone (1734-1820) about the territory called "dark and bloody ground" by the pioneers, reported in Frank. H. Norton, *The Days of Daniel Boone*. A

“Daniel Boone’s reaction”, he continues, “depended not only on the quality of what he saw, but on the quality of the mental eye with which he saw it. Ecological science has wrought a change in the mental eye. It has disclosed origins and functions for what to Boone were only attributes. [...] The incredible intricacies of the plant and animal community – the intrinsic beauty of the organism called America, then in the full bloom of her maidenhood – were as invisible and incomprehensible to Daniel Boone as they are today to Babbitt¹⁶” (Leopold, 1970, p. 291).

It could not be said more clearly that there is no view without “categories of the understanding” – Callicott emphasizes the influence of Kant on Leopold – but also that these “categories of understanding” are neither eternal nor universal: at the time Leopold wrote, Durkheim and the Durkheimians had already insisted on their social dimension (Durkheim, 1915). In the above-mentioned case, if Boone could only see attributes where Leopold’s contemporary ecologists could see origins and functions, it is because the evolutionary theory on the one hand, and the ecological science on the other, had in the meantime modified the view. “Evolution lends to perception a certain depth, ‘that incredible sweep of millennia’, while ecology provides its breadth: wild things do not exist in isolation from one another” (Callicott, 1994, p. 175, quoting Leopold, 1970, p. 103). From the perspective of this land aesthetic, informed by evolutionary theory and ecological science, native species, even unspectacular ones, are more valuable than introduced species, especially when they tend to become invasive and trivialize environments, taking the place of rarer native species. In North America, the native status of the spring draba is debated¹⁷. But Leopold pays tribute to this small flower, which most people run over without seeing it, for its job done “quickly and well” in early spring (Leopold, 1970, p. 28). He does the same for “the little sandwort that throws a white-lace cap over the poorest hill-tops just before the lupines splash them with blue” as well as for “the little *Linaria*, so small, so slender, and so blue that you don’t even see it until it is directly underfoot” (Leopold, 1970, p. 109-110). In contrast, he feels nothing but contempt for the downy chess (*Bromus tectorum*), a Poaceae that came from Europe but has become naturalized in North America, where it has taken the place of native species due to overgrazing¹⁸. And his contempt extends to

Romance of “the Dark and Bloody Ground” (New York: The New York Publishing Company, 1883), p. 146.

16 Character of the novel of the same name by Sinclair Lewis (1922). “The word *Babbitt*”, explains the Merriam-Webster dictionary, “quickly became a byname for one who adheres to a conformist, materialistic, unimaginative way of life”.

17 *Draba verna* or *Erophila verna*, spring draba, is a small Brassicaceae with white flowers. It is generally postulated that it was introduced to the New World by European settlers.

18 Leopold speaks of bunchgrass and wheatgrass, which Anna Gibson translates into French as “melanthius” and “chiendent officinal”. This translation seems doubtful. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), bunch-grass can refer in particular to *Festuca scabrella* or more generally to “any of various grasses, chiefly of western North America, characterized by growing in clumps”. In other words, the term designates a group of clumping Poaceae. The translation by melanthius may have been dictated by another entry in the same dictionary: “bunch flower, a liliaceous plant of North America, *Melanthium virginicum*”. As for wheat-grass, the OED says: “(a) name for various species of the genus *Triticum*, esp. couch-grass, *T. repens*; (b) a creeping perennial grass of the genus *Agropyron*”. The translation by couch grass (*Elymus repens*, synonyms *Agropyron repens* or *Elytria repens*) may be inspired by this second definition. But *Elymus repens* is a Poaceae native to Europe, naturalized and invasive in North America, as is *Bromus tectorum*. The translation into Russian (by I. G. Gourova, Moscow, Mir, 1980) speaks in the first case of спороболус (plants of the genus *Sporobolus*) and пырей (plants of the genus *Elytria*, that of couch grass). *Sporobolus indicus* is indeed a cespitose Poaceae (bunchgrass) of American origin.

the motorist who admires the hills without being aware of this substitution: “it does not occur to him that hills, too, cover ruined complexions with ecological face powder” (Leopold, 1970, p. 165). The same could be said on this side of the Atlantic for Asteraceae such as South-African ragwort (*Senecio inaequidens*), despite its bright yellow flowers, or the various species of horseweed (*Conyza canadensis*, *Conyza sumatrensis*, and *Conyza floribunda*) that invade vacant lots, roadsides, railroads, fields, highways, or sidewalks¹⁹. On the other hand, ecology will allow to fully appreciate the presence of the marsh gentian (*Gentiana pneumonanthe*) in mesophile to wet heaths, but also, more modestly, the presence of the common speedwell (*Veronica officinalis*), a species of dry soils, next to the hemlock water-dropwort (*Oenanthe crocata*), a species of humid environment, at the edge of an old wall whose opposite side retains water.

In the end, beauty, according to Leopold, is the result of harmony and unity, “not unlike that of a good symphony or tragedy” (Callicott, 1994, p. 178). It is musical, rather than pictorial, metaphors that Leopold employs to speak of the “vast pulsing harmony” of hills and rivers (Leopold, 1970, p. 158). But the connections and relationships in question, Callicott points out, “are not directly sensed in the aesthetic moment: they are *known* and *projected*, in this case by me. It is this conceptual act that completes the sensory experience and causes it to be distinctly aesthetic” (Callicott, 1994, p. 178). This may also explain why Callicott, at least in the first version of this article, that of 1983, wanted to pay tribute to Benedetto Croce, who, not recognizing the possibility of a natural beauty per se, wrote, as we have already seen: “finally, there is no natural beauty to which an artist would not make some correction”.

3. Discussion

So far, we’ve largely confined ourselves to summarizing Callicott’s attempt to synthesize Leopold’s land aesthetic, and to applying them to the Breton case. We would now like to go beyond this simple summary by discussing a few points.

3.1. *An elitist conservatism?*

Many passages in Leopold may seem elitist, even aristocratic. There are the very few who, like him, are able to appreciate the “sky dance” of the woodcock on a spring evening or the morning chorus of birds before sunrise. And there are all the others, such as the modern owners of the neighboring farms, who “sight for entertainment, but harbor the illusion that it is to be sought in theaters. They live on the land, but not by the land” (Leopold, 1970, p. 36). The world for them “has shrunk to those mean dimensions known to county clerks” (Leopold, 1970, p. 47). They impose on the aesthetes their “honks, horns, shouts, and whistles [...] and finally, at evening, the drone of an untended radio” (Leopold, 1970, p. 66). These farmers are largely unaware of the wild flora, in which they probably only see weeds (Leopold, 1970, p. 126). The road crew, meanwhile, drive the mowing machine, depleting the vegetation, while the motorists passes by on the highway. “Mechanized man, oblivious of floras, is proud of his progress in cleaning up the landscape on which, willy-nilly, he must live out his days” (Leopold, 1970, p. 50). There is what everyone can hear and what is not “audible to all” (Leopold, 1970, p. 158). There are the “luckless ones”, condemned to hunt in an

19 The issue of so-called “invasive” plants is too complex to be discussed here. For an in-depth discussion in the context of the Armorican massif (France), we refer to Magnanon et. al.

ordinary way, in ordinary places, at ordinary times, and the others, the happy few, who do enjoy grouse hunting, in Adams County, at the time "when the tamaracks are smoky gold" (Leopold, 1970, p. 58). Above all, there is "the maze of new roads that inevitably follow governmental conservation", and hence the invasion of tourists. Gone is the solitude, which "is so far recognized as valuable only by ornithologists and cranes" (Leopold, 1970, p. 107). There used to be an "aristocracy of space based upon transport. [...] Henry Ford's revolution has of course abolished all this. Today the plane has given even the sky to Tom, Dick, and Harry" (Leopold, 1970, p. 131). "And there flashes through your mind the sad premonition of what will happen when the road is built, and this riotous reception committee first greets the tourist-with-a-gun" (Leopold, 1970, p. 148). Leopold had well understood that mass tourism destroys what it comes to see: "to cherish we must see and fondle, and when enough have seen and fondled, there is no wilderness left to cherish" (Leopold, 1970, p. 108). Many others, after him, would say the same thing. This is the case of Lévi-Strauss:

"Campers, camp in Parana! Or rather – don't! Keep your greasy papers, your empty beer-bottles, and your discarded tins for Europe's last-remaining sites. There is the place for your tents. But, once beyond the pioneer zone, and until the day, now all too imminent, when they will be ruined once and for all – leave the torrents to foam undisturbed down terraces cut into hillsides violet with basalt. Keep your hands off the volcanic mosses, so sharp and cool to the touch; tread no farther when you come to the first of the uninhabited prairies, and to the great steamy conifer-forest" (Lévi-Strauss, 1961, p. 133).

"A beach", he writes further, "was once a place where the sea yielded up the results of commotions many thousands of years in the making, admitting us, in this way, to an astonishing museum in which Nature always ranked herself with the avant-garde; today that same beach is trodden by great crowds and serves merely as a depository for their rubbish" (Lévi-Strauss, 1961, p. 333). It is also the case of the novelist Hugo Verlomme, writing about these men who dreamed "of horizons that they were not conscious to assassinate" (Verlomme, 1989, p. 233). This is not peculiar to tourists. "Man always kills the thing he loves", Leopold writes, "and so we the pioneers have killed our wilderness" (Leopold, 1970, p. 157-158). But tourism increases the danger. "Parks are made to bring the music to the many, but by the time many are attuned to hear it there is little left but noise" (Leopold, 1970, p. 159). The so-called "outdoor recreation" became an issue

"in the days of the elder Roosevelt, when the railroads which had banished the countryside from the city began to carry city-dwellers, *en masse*, to the countryside. It began to be noticed that the greater the exodus, the smaller the per-capita ration of peace, solitude, wildlife, and scenery, and the longer the migration to reach them. The automobile has spread this once mild and local predicament to the outermost limits of good roads – it has made scarce in the hinterlands something once abundant on the back forty" (Leopold, 1970, p. 280).

In short, like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, Leopold has little sympathy for the "many-too-many"²⁰. But he does not stop there. The entire chapter of the *Almanac* entitled "Conservation Aesthetic" aims at finding a solution: no longer building roads, but promoting perception, "the only truly creative part of recreational engineering"

20 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, The Preachers of Death. Nietzsche, however, does not appear in the index to Curt Meine's biography of Leopold.

(Leopold, 1970, p. 290). His elitism, if there is such a thing²¹, is more axiological than sociological. If some things are not accessible to everyone, it is because they require a learning effort and a certain asceticism. One must learn to be silent in order to observe and listen. Leopold's cultural emphasis on wilderness and his apparent elitism, as his biographer Curt Meine reminds us, is not an expression of misanthropy, but of "intellectual humility and humanity's continual 'search for a durable scale of values'" (Meine 2022, p. 171, quoting Leopold, 1970, p. 279). His land ethic, he adds, is an outgrowth of his consideration for people, of his "innate sense that all people have qualities... that must be understood and respected" (Meine, 2022, p. 177). It is not a substitute for the Golden Rule and for the ethics that guide human relations. It adds to them by encompassing them (Leopold, 1970, p. 237-239). It can be compared to what Claude Lévi-Strauss said in May 1976, before a special commission on liberties of the French National Assembly, about the interest of basing freedoms not on the definition of man as a moral being, but on his definition as a living being. It follows from such a definition that "these recognized rights of humanity as a species will encounter their natural limits in the rights of other species" (Lévi-Strauss, 1976, p. 282). In any case, it was contradictory, he continued, citing article 56 of a bill for the adoption of a declaration of liberties, tabled by the Communist group, "to demand in one and the same sentence 'the protection of the flora and fauna, the conservation of the countryside, free access to sites' and 'the elimination of noise pollution, environmental pollution, and every other degradation of the structure of life'. Free access to sites is in itself a form of pollution, and not the most innocuous" (Lévi-Strauss, 1976, p. 282). Like Leopold, Lévi-Strauss saw that the "democratic" demand for access to sites tended to reduce "the per-capita ration of peace, solitude, wildlife, and scenery" (Leopold, 1970, p. 280).

But the assimilation of that access to a form of pollution was part of an axiological perspective that Lévi-Strauss had developed as early as 1962, in a speech in Geneva on Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Relying on Rousseau to defend "a conception of mankind which places life before men", Lévi-Strauss asked if "the myth of the exclusive dignity of human nature" – one of the expressions of the great divide mentioned above – had not "subjected nature itself to a first mutilation, one from which other mutilations were inevitably to ensue" (Lévi-Strauss, 1962, p. 37 and 41). The ethical conclusion he drew from this was set out most clearly in 1971 in *Race and Culture*, a text commissioned by UNESCO to inaugurate the International Year for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination²²:

"For some twenty-five years, he [the anthropologist] has become increasingly aware that these problems [those "posed by the struggle against racial prejudices"] reflect, on a human scale, a far vaster problem, whose solution is even more urgent – that is, the problem of the relationship between man and other living species – and that it is useless to try and solve this problem on the lower level if we do not tackle it on a higher scale. Also, the respect we want man to feel for his fellow man is but one specific case of the general respect that he ought to feel for all forms of life" (Lévi-Strauss, 1971, p. 22-23).

21 Leopold himself did not completely exclude that his choice of planting pine trees, while the neighbors were planting birch trees, was a little snobbish (Leopold, 1970, p. 74).

22 United Nations General Assembly, 24th session, resolution 2544, December 11, 1969.

It was still necessary to understand, as Lévi-Strauss wrote in 1952 in another text written at the request of UNESCO, that “there are in human societies forces which work simultaneously in opposite directions: those leaning toward the preservation, and even the accentuation of particularities, and those working toward convergence and affinity” (Lévi-Strauss, 1952b, p. 326)²³. The ethical call to base human respect for one another on a more general respect for all living beings could not but be part of this dialectic of the particular and the universal²⁴. Ethical requirements, while primarily axiologically based, also contribute to social particularization. What appears as Leopold's elitism, his refusal of “organized promiscuities” (Leopold, 1970, p. 218), can thus be understood within the framework of the dialectic of the particular and the universal. In *A Sand County Almanac*, he was already posing in his own way the question, both ethical and political, formulated a few years later by Lévi-Strauss: “whether human societies are not defined (with regard to their mutual relationships) by a certain *optimum* diversity beyond which they could not go, but below which they should not go either without endangering themselves” (Lévi-Strauss, 1952b, p. 327)²⁵.

3.2. Promoting perception through education

Leopold's answer to this question, as applied to the problem of the “outdoor recreation”, was, as we have already seen, based on the promotion of perception (Leopold, 1970, p. 290). Leopold understood that the impoverishment of what is now called biodiversity, at least in the most anthropized sectors, is linked to ignorance and indifference. The alternative was then: “either insure the continued blindness of the populace, or examine the question whether we cannot have both progress and plants” (Leopold, 1970, p. 51). The second solution did not seem impossible to him:

“The shrinkage of the flora is due to a combination of clean-farming, woodlot grazing, and good roads. Each of these necessary changes of course requires a larger reduction in the acreage available for wild plants, but none of them requires, or benefits by, the erasure of species from whole farms, townships, or counties. There are idle spots on every farm, and every highway is bordered by an idle strip as long as it is; keep cow, plow, and mower out of these idle spots, and the full native flora, plus dozens of interesting stowaways from foreign parts, could be part of the normal environment of every citizen” (Leopold, 1970, p. 51).

Leopold was anticipating what is called “differentiated management” of public green spaces. In France, a definition was adopted as early as 1994 by professionals at a symposium in Strasbourg: in the context of such management, “each space, and therefore each element of the heritage (land and plants), must benefit from appropriate

23 The first translation, by the UNESCO, was: “forces working in contrary directions operate simultaneously in human societies, some being conducive to the preservation and even the accentuation of particularism, while others tend to promote convergence and affinity” (Lévi-Strauss, 1952a, p. 9).

24 “Humanity”, wrote also Lévi-Strauss, “is constantly struggling with two contradictory processes. One of these tends to promote unification, while the other aims at maintaining or reestablishing diversification” (Lévi-Strauss, 1952b, p. 361), or, in the first translation: “humanity is forever involved in two conflicting currents, the one tending towards unification, and the other towards the maintenance or restoration of diversity” (Lévi-Strauss, 1952a, p. 49). The anthropologist had already perfectly formulated what some of us have since reworked, following Jean Gagnepain, under the name of ethnico-political dialectic. See for instance Brackelaire, 1995, and Le Bot, 2013.

25 First translation: “optimum degree of diversity, which they cannot surpass but which they can also not fall short of without incurring risks” (Lévi-Strauss, 1952a, p. 9).

treatment with varying levels of services depending on the design of the space (park or garden), its cultural, social and biological function, its role in the urban fabric and the relationship that we wish to create with the plants” (Allain, 1997, p. 206). This can be done by accepting those corners of wasteland that are off-limits to lawnmowers, as Leopold advocated. Or, better, by promoting annual late mowing. Nearly thirty years after its adoption, however, the notion is sometimes overused and the corresponding practices can vary greatly. But the promotion of perception, advocated by Leopold, went far beyond the differentiated management of green spaces:

“Like all real treasures of the mind, perception can be split into infinitely small fractions without losing its quality. The weeds of a city lot convey the same lesson as the redwoods [...]. Perception, in short, cannot be purchased with either learned degrees or dollars; it grows at home as well as abroad, and he who has a little may use it to as good advantage as he who has much” (Leopold, 1970, p. 292).

Just as the young slave in the *Meno* (82a-85b), if asked the right questions, can come to the conclusion that double space is constructed from the diagonal, not through some reminiscence, contrary to what Plato has Socrates say, but through the exercise of his logical faculty, so Babbitt can theoretically access an understanding of the ecological relationships between beings and “a refined taste in natural objects” (Leopold, 1970, p. 194, also cited in Callicott, 1994, p. 174). Still, he must receive the right training for this, a training that, as Leopold observed, “does not necessarily originate in courses bearing ecological labels; it is quite as likely to be labeled geography, botany, agronomy, history, or economics” (Leopold, 1970, p. 262). But this ecological initiation, he added, remained rare and is still rare.

3.3. *An opposite conditioning*

For Babbitt and his Breton (and more broadly French) alter ego have been educated and conditioned differently. In *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold evokes, not without a certain nostalgia, a “yard-square relic of original Wisconsin [which] gives birth, each July, to a man-high stalk of compass plant or cutleaf Silphium²⁶ [...] perhaps the sole remnant [of this plant] in the western half of our county” (Leopold, 1970, p. 49). But on his last visit, in early August, he discovered that

“the fence had been removed by a road crew, and the Silphium cut. It is easy now to predict the future; for a few years my Silphium will try in vain to rise above the mowing machine, and then it will die. With it will die the prairie epoch” (Leopold, 1970, p. 49).

What would he say today? If the spontaneous flora of an urban housing estate potentially carries the same lessons as the redwoods, the conditioning of suburban civilization, of which Leopold had only known the beginnings, has done little to encourage housing estates dwellers to receive these lessons.

In his study of the American lawn, environmental historian Ted Steinberg, complementing work already carried a dozen years earlier by another historian, Virginia Scott Jenkins (1994), showed that the American obsession with the lawn only really took hold in the years following World War II, with the development of suburbs. “Turf became as ubiquitous as television [...]. The lawn became the outdoor expression of

26 *Silphium laciniatum*, native Asteraceae, emblematic of the Great Plains of North America.

fifties conformism” (Steinberg, 2007, p. 13). The rotary power mower was patented in the 1930s, but did not really become widespread, even in the United States, until after World War II, taking its place alongside the automobile in almost every garage (ibid., p. 26). A whole arsenal of machines, most often gasoline-powered, has since been added: aerators, sod cutters, dethatchers, backpack blowers, trimmers, edgers (ibid., p. 6). As a result, a majority of contemporary gardens and green spaces, both private and public, run on fossil fuels. It's polluting and noisy, very poor from an ecological point of view, but it's supposed to be neat, beautiful and healthy. The turfgrass industry has succeeded in imposing a lawn aesthetics that is far removed from Leopold's aesthetic. Until the middle of the 20th century, when members of the working classes were lucky enough to have a garden, it was rather to grow vegetables or even to raise a cow or two. The entry into the consumer society, largely encouraged by the advertising industry and popular magazines, which encouraged people to see the lawn as proof that its owner was a good neighbor, a good citizen and a good father, erased all that (Jenkins, 1994, p. 63). A pattern that was by no means spontaneous has become an integral part of the habitus of suburban humanity, in America as in Europe²⁷. Ecology as a science of the interactions between living beings and their environment has little place here. Green spaces tend to be reduced to surfaces to be mowed, just as there are surfaces to be asphalted or painted, the most elementary and trivial expression of Cartesian dualism: a thinking thing (or supposed to be), the “gardener”, pushes a mower on an extended thing, the lawn²⁸.

3.4. *Sensation and emotion*

After these socio-historical considerations, it remains for us to specify what, in Leopold's account of his aesthetics, belongs to the sensory and conceptual dimensions and what belongs to the emotional and ethical dimensions.

From the perspective of the theory of mediation, it is not surprising that Aldo Leopold's land aesthetic, “involves a subtle interplay between conceptual schemata and sensuous experience” (Callicott, 1994, p. 176). Regardless of the type of knowledge involved (that of evolutionary biology and ecology), the characteristic of all knowledge is that it passes through a grammatico-rhetorical dialectic whereby “the ‘world’, as we drink it through our senses, is first filtered, structured, and arranged by the conceptual framework or cognitive set we bring to it, prior not necessarily to all, but to any articulate, experience” (Callicott, 1994, p. 176). Thus, we can only agree with Callicott when he writes that “while an autonomous natural aesthetic must free itself from the prevailing visual bias and involve all sensory modalities, it is not enough to simply open the senses to natural stimuli and enjoy” (Callicott, 1994, p. 177). That's why we can't help but disagree with the idea that aesthetic appreciation of the living world consists in giving free rein, alongside scientific knowledge, to a sensitive experience that owes nothing to it. There is no such thing as the “cerebral” (or “mental universe”) on the one hand, and the sensible on the other. There is, once again, a dialectical relationship between perception, in all its dimensions – visual as well as auditory, olfactory, tactile and gustatory –, and conceptualization, which enable perception to be refined. Botanical

27 See also Paul Robbins' book, which, from a more Latourian perspective, shows how the lawn itself functions in turn as an actant that produces a certain type of person (Robbins, 2007). A “human type” (*Menschen-tum*), Max Weber might have said. In France, the bibliography on the subject is scarce. Pierre Lieutaghi's pioneering article doesn't seem to have sparked any vocations (Lieutaghi, 1983).

28 Allusion, of course, to the Cartesian dualism of the *res cogitans* (man) and the *res extensa* (nature).

practice teaches us this in a quasi-experimental way, for example, when we identify marsh St. John's-Wort (*Hypericum elodes*) by paying attention to the curry-like scent emanating from its crumpled flower, or when we identify rushes by trying to tear off a clump of it or feel the ridges on the stem with our fingernail²⁹.

But there's nothing specifically aesthetic about this interplay of conceptual schemes and sensory experiences. So we still need to determine what is properly aesthetic about Leopold's land aesthetic. The answer, of course, depends on how we define aesthetics. Jean Gagnepain adopted a definition that ruled out any talk of natural beauty:

“beauty [...] cannot constitute an autonomous value, since it is integrated, as an endocentric investment, into each of the performances whose rationality it manifests separately. Hence comes that there is no natural harmony; that beauty is not sensual, but indifferently conceptual, artificial or contractual; that it may, in the eyes of some, appear as a ‘rapture’, a ‘metamorphosis’ or an ‘anti-destiny’³⁰, simply because on the fourth plane the feeling it arouses wrenches us from brutal desire and confines to purity” (Gagnepain, 1991, p. 186).

This quotation calls for some comments and explanations. The terms aesthetic and beauty are used as synonyms, in a way actually rather usual. But the definition of aesthetics given by Gagnepain is very different from the usual definitions. According to the etymology of the word, aesthetics refers to sensation³¹. It was the case in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, where transcendental aesthetics, distinct from transcendental logic, is defined as “the science of all principles of *a priori* sensibility” (Kant, 1929, p. 66). But usual definitions of aesthetics have most often made it a science of the beauty, either in the sense of the study of the beauty, or in the sense of the research of what is beautiful³². This is why the *Trésor de la langue française informatisé* (TLFI) considers it abusive to use the word as a synonym for the adjective “beautiful” or the noun “beauty”. Aesthetics is interested in beauty, but is not beauty, just as sociology studies social life but is not social life. For Gagnepain, aesthetics is neither a science of the principles of the sensibility, as in Kant, nor a science of the beauty. It is only, in a much more restrictive way, one of the ways, on each of the planes of the mediation, to reinvest the structure in the conjuncture. While the two other aims are “practical” and “exocentric”, the aesthetic aim is endocentric. On the plane of the sign, there is aesthetic when the message is self-referenced. Gagnepain speaks in this case of poetic rhetoric. We find the same self-referencing on the plane of the tool. Gagnepain speaks here of plastic industry. And we find it too on the plane of the person, in the context of choral policy, as well as on the plane of the norm, in the context of heroic morality³³.

29 The fact that its clumps can be easily torn off is one of the criteria used to distinguish the annual toad rush (*Juncus bufonius*) from the perennial slender rush (*Juncus tenuis*), which is found in the same environments. In the same way, the common rush (*Juncus effusus*) and the compact rush (*Juncus conglomeratus*) colonize the same environments and are often confused. One of the criteria of distinction are the longitudinal ridges on the stem of the second.

30 It is probably an allusion to Malraux's sentence, “Art is an anti-destiny”, in conclusion of *The Voices of Silence* (1951).

31 Greek αἰσθάνομαι: to perceive by the senses (hearing, smell, sight...).

32 Science or metaphysics of beauty, such is the meaning given to the word aesthetics by Louis de Beausobre, to whom etymologists attribute the first use of the word in French (Beausobre, 1753, p. 163-164).

33 The aesthetic aim can be combined with each of the other two. On the plane of knowledge, such a combination of scientific and poetic aims can be observed in botanical nomenclature, which provides that

This makes Jean-Yves Urien say that aesthetics in Gagnepain has no relation to beauty (Urien, 2017, p. 253). The problem is that Gagnepain said the opposite on numerous occasions by identifying beauty with his definition of aesthetics. This was the case, as we have seen, in the above passage. We note however a kind of repentance, in this same passage, which can give reason to Jean-Yves Urien. Because after having identified aesthetics and beauty as endocentric aims, Gagnepain also evokes, on the fourth plane, the “feeling it [the beauty] arouses”, which “wrenches us from brutal desire and confines to purity”. It is not forcing his point to find there a double definition of beauty: an endocentric aim on the one hand, but also, in agreement with Freud, the sublimation of a desire. This second definition is that, more usual, of “axiological considerations of pleasure and sublimation” or that of “the axiological appreciation or judgment relative to the result” (Urien, 2017, pp. 255 and 257).

But it is even more complicated because, a little further, Gagnepain associates beauty to truth, ophelimity and justice: “truth, ophelimity, justice, even beauty, as we have shown, are not in themselves ends of the man” (Gagnepain, 1991, p. 191). It is a third definition, because the beauty is not here the sublimation of a desire but only a valorization. However the formulation (“even the beauty”) testifies to a hesitation. Because if truth can be defined as valorization of the message, ophelimity as valorization of the work and justice (or rather equity) as valorization of the social use, of what the beauty, in this third definition, could be the valorization if not of the suffrage? One struggles, however, to conceive what it could be and one wonders if the model here does not work in a vacuum, dragged along by its own logic to produce quite mythical statements. The demon of analogy, wrote Mallarmé. Relying on the testimonies of the experience of beauty, of which this article has given some examples, I would tend to retain a definition in terms of emotion and of regulation of this emotion, therefore of sublimation, which can concern as well the concept, as the art or the contract, not necessarily in an endocentric aim. Just as knowledge implies, within the framework of the grammatico-rhetorical dialectic, a multi-sensorial perception and its conceptualization, pleasure implies, within the framework of the ethico-moral dialectic, the emotions, also multi-sensorial, and their regulation. Emotion, more or less regulated, can of course relate to representations, but the grammatico-rhetorical process that produces these representations must be distinguished from the ethico-moral process that produces the regulated emotions. As Freud had already understood, the idea (*Vorstellung*) must be distinguished from “the instinctual energy (*Triebenergie*) linked to it” (Freud, 1986, p. 55).

In Leopold's view, in any case, the land aesthetic is not the satisfaction of some brutal desire or an exacerbated emotion. It is inseparable from ethics and always implies restraint. Giving up an easy gunshot after his dog forced a partridge into a tree was, he writes, his “first exercise in ethical codes” (Leopold, 1970, p. 129). The famous wolf-

the names of plant families are formed from the genitive singular of a genus name belonging to the family in question, in which the genitive ending is replaced by -aceae (or by -acées in French). The final rhyme indicates that the word designates a family: Caryophyllaceae, Chenopodiaceae, Polygonaceae, Rosaceae, Urticaceae, etc. Although the botanical nomenclature considers as valid terms consecrated by a long usage that differ from this model (International Code of Nomenclature for Algae, Fungi and Plants, known as the Shenzhen Code, 2018, article 18.5), they tend to be replaced by the new forms: Compositae, Cruciferae, Gramineae, Leguminosae and Umbelliferae become Asteraceae, Brassicaceae, Poaceae, Fabaceae and Apiaceae.

hunting scene, the one that invites to think “like a mountain”, ends with a retrospective admission of guilt (Leopold, 1970, p. 138-139)³⁴.

Leopold, who later became one of the world’s leading experts on game and wildlife resource management³⁵, understood that “managing game without resorting to predator-control calls for ethical restraint of a high order” (Leopold, 1970, p. 219). The whole chapter on the aesthetics of nature conservation, which aims to find an alternative to road building and the self-destructive invasion of nature by motorized tourists, as well as the following chapter on wildlife in American culture, focus on the search for a higher form of pleasure, not in the sense of a social hierarchy, but in the sense of a scarcity that is inseparable from, precisely, ethical restraint. Promoting perception, “building receptivity into the still unlovely human mind” (Leopold, 1970, p. 295), as this chapter advocates, doesn’t mean only developing knowledge. It also means renouncing the easiest pleasures – such as fishing for farmed trout purposely released into rivers or enjoying possession, invasion, appropriation – in order to seek another pleasure that involves a certain asceticism. It means showing voluntary limitation³⁶ by using with moderation the accessories that industry makes available to the hunter, the fisherman or the simple walker. It is at this price that it is possible to learn to “see one’s own garden” rather than to set out to conquer continents. The time one accepts to take to observe and develop one’s knowledge is a manifestation of this asceticism. It is the price to pay for access to a pleasure accompanied by wisdom (Leopold, 1970, p. 222). The smallest sidewalk curb can then take on the dimension of a world. Rather than scratching everything, down to the smallest seedling, confusing cleanliness with death, it becomes possible to rejoice, for example, in the presence of the birdeye pearlwort (*Sagina procumbens*), which from a distance resembles a moss and knows how to live in these hostile environments, trampled on all year round, exposed to drought and overheated in summer. In the context of a change of ontological point of view, a virtuous circle begins: attention, on an ethical level, invites to develop knowledge and knowledge invites to pay more attention. Pleasure and opportunities for admiration, as Leopold understood, are thus multiplied.

Conclusion

Observation and experience show that it is not necessary to know botany or ecology to be able to admire a landscape or to marvel at the sight of such or such a plant. Sight of course is not the only sense involved and one can appreciate the singing of the birds, the whisper of the wind in the needles of the pines or the sensation that it produces on the skin. Moreover, nothing prohibits, even if nothing obliges, to give

34 The event took place in September 1909 on the banks of the Black River in the Apache National Forest, Arizona. Leopold, a recent graduate of Yale Forest School, had just been assigned to the area as part of the Forest Service. He was 22 years old. His account in the *Almanac* dates from 1944. As such, it reflects the evolution of Leopold’s thinking in the 35 years since those days (Flader, 2012).

35 See his book *Game management*, New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1933.

³⁶ Самоограничение (*samoograničenie*) or моральное самоограничение (*moral’noe samoograničenie*), self-limitation or moral self-limitation, said Solzhenitsyn, who made it the foundation of freedom. See, for example, the dialogue between Nerzhin and Rubin in *The First Circle* (chap. 26): “Unlimited freedom?” asks Rubin. “No, a moral self-limitation”, replies Nerzhin.

thanks to God or to the gods and the testimonies, here again, are multiple³⁷. It is certain that aesthetics, in the sense understood by Leopold, cannot be reduced to an endocentric aim in the sense of Gagnepain. The pleasure of botany is obviously not limited to rhyming genus or family names. On the other hand, it can result from the elegance in the way of identifying a taxon with the help of keys, an elegance analogous to that of certain mathematical demonstrations, or, on the level of action, to that of certain climbs in mountaineering or rock climbing. But the endocentric aim is not excluded either. The choral aim, for example, on the plane of the person, consists, according to Gagnepain, in “celebrating purely and simply the fact of being together, whatever the reasons one has for gathering” (Gagnepain, 1991, p. 117). Why could it not include plants, animals, or even inanimate beings? For the fact of being together that is celebrated, on the one hand, rarely, if ever, extends to the whole of humanity. Whether it is a military parade, a mass or a rock concert, to take up Gagnepain's examples, it is always the celebration of a limited collective, which has implicitly given itself an identity and borders. On the other hand, insofar as the being, on this plan, is not separable from the having, and because the person, especially, can be lent to non-humans, nothing prohibits to think that the choral aim can include some of them in the collective that it celebrates. It is even what the ethnographic experience teaches. As Baptiste Morizot observes, one had to be a modern Westerner like Pascal, contemporary of the great divide and of the birth of a dualistic cosmology, to be frightened by the silence of infinite spaces. “The ethnography of the indigenous peoples who still live in cohabitants in their ecological community never evokes this anguish of the silence of the world and the cosmic solitude” (Morizot, 2021, p. 158-159). We are not alone, as Sylvain Tesson also discovered by accompanying Vincent Munier on the tracks of the snow leopard. Attention to other forms of life, including the most humble, can be another way of celebrating the fact of being together.

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37 “The cosmic sense of Creation where everything is originally beautiful, of that beauty of which Genesis speaks, bathes the culminating episodes of each of Solzhenitsyn's works”, observes Georges Nivat (2009, p. 179).

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