

Contemporary Ecosophies and Ecorhythmology

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ABSTRACT

The present paper compares the author's original proposal called ecorhythmology with contemporary ecophilosophies. After briefly outlining the background and results of more than two decades of research, it examines the seminal theses of Object Oriented Ontology (Graham Harman), Action Network Theory (Bruno Latour) and the concept of *being ecological* (Timothy Morton) from an ecorhythmological perspective. Taking stock of interesting similarities and correspondences, this analysis also raises new questions, to which the author proposes different solutions. The paper presents two critiques of the reductionism of string theory and compares Harman's theory of metaphor with the concept of art based on gestural resonance. Further investigations connect Latour's redistribution of agency to the intersubjective relationship between the human and non-human, and relate hybridity to proximity. In the second part of the paper, Morton's different temporalities are juxtaposed with rhythmic dimensions, and finally, the article makes a difference between the casual, political and ethical approaches to the phenomenon of tuning. The stakes are always learning and relearning what kind of contact making can lead to greater peace in difficult human – non-human coexistence.

Keywords: temporalities, kinetic spaces, tuning, human – non-human coexistence, Graham Harman, Bruno Latour, Timothy Morton

Ecosophy is the chosen name of two earlier versions of ecophilosophy, initiated by the deep ecologist Arne Naess (1989) and the poststructuralist philosopher and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari (2000). Their proposals are quite different, but linked by the prominent role they give to practice: for Arne Naess, a normative practice based on ecological wisdom, and for Félix Guattari, a political movement. I have chosen to use the term “contemporary ecosophies” rather than the more general term “recent ecophilosophies”, in order to emphasise an approach from the perspective of practice-oriented physics that I have initiated.

Practice-oriented physics considers practice not in a normative or political sense, but as a practical orientation in time(s). Specifically, I have been investigating the rhythmic dimensions of the literary/artistic practice of reading and writing, i.e., the kinetic space of attention gestures tuned to a practical rhythm during the time of writing and reading (Berszán 2016). One of the important applications of paying attention in many different ways is learning and relearning our relationship with the non-human environment, in which artistic practices, including literary reading and writing, can be an effective ally. I call the exploration and cultivation of such contact making experiments ecorhythmology (Berszán 2018b, 2019a), and I have been developing it for the past 20 years not only in theoretical and applied studies, but also in a series of experimental *Land-rover Book* camps (Berszán 2012).

Among contemporary ecophilosophies, there are some that converge at several points with the research results of practice-oriented physics and ecorhythmology, showing that my research, which in the second half of the 1990s had to contend with the hegemony of discourse and then with the limitations of the contextualist paradigm, is finding important allies today. Fortunately, they both mutually reinforce each other and raise interesting further questions concerning their divergences. For a long time, representatives of the main schools of literary studies considered my proposals expressing dissatisfaction with the narrowness of the dominant paradigms, as having no stake. How can I not see, they asked, that nothing is outside of discourse? How can I not see that nothing is outside of cultural and/or political processes? How can I not see that nothing is outside of media history? How can I not see that nothing is outside of social history? Recently, I have finally found researchers who are not shocked at the thought that there is space, life and action outside our human reach. In this paper, I chose to consider these contemporary lines of research which I can debate without being diametrically opposed to them. On the contrary, even our arguments against each other have a common ground, so to speak. In what follows, I would like to present some of these common grounds and cause a little stir with a few questions and counter-arguments.

The three contemporary ecosophies selected in this paper are Object Oriented Ontology (OOO) initiated by Graham Harman (2017), Bruno Latour's philosophy known as Action Network Theory or ANT (Latour 1993, 2014), and Timothy Morton's conception of *being ecological* (Morton 2018). I want to show how ecorhythmology relates to and differs from these. As I indicated, my research in practice-oriented physics started in the second half of the 90s, and I only discovered these authors recently. My investigations so far are marked by the following books: *Kivezetés az irodalomelméletből* [Exiting Literary Theory] (2002), *Terepkönyv. Az írás és az olvasás rítusai – irodalmi tartamgyakorlatok* [Land-rover Book. Literary Rites of Reading and Writing] (2007), *Gyakorlástudás. Írások és mozgásterek*. [Practice Research. Writings and Kinetic Spaces] (2013), *Ritmikai dimenziók*.

Az irodalomtól a gyakorlásfizikáig [Rhythmic Dimension. From Literature to Practice-oriented Physics] (2018a). And some papers in English journals like *CLCWeb Comparative Literature and Culture*, *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae Philologica*, *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* or the *Hungarian Studies Yearbook*.

String theory, metaphor and gestural resonance

In Graham Harman's OOO, I am going to highlight two aspects that show interesting similarities with practice-oriented physics and ecorhythmology. The first one is a critique of the contemporary physical string theory regarding its reductionism, the second one is further reflection on Jose Ortega y Gasset's theory of metaphor.

Harman summarises the reductionism of string theory in four points, and rejecting its claim for the status of a "theory of everything", he gives the following subtitle to his own book: *A New Theory of Everything*. According to Harman, the four problematic theorems are: 1. everything that exists is necessarily physical; 2. everything that really exists is necessarily elementary and simple (see elementary particles); 3. everything that exists is necessarily real; and 4. everything that exists can be stated in a literal propositional language (Harman 2017, 25-35). Against these "intellectual toxins" (Harman 2017, 39) he offers counter-arguments and counter-examples, and proposes a developed version of Ortega's theory of metaphor. The first counter-argument suggests that a historical hyper-object such as the Dutch East India Company in the 18th and 19th centuries is not a physical being. The second counter-argument denies that emergent properties of complex objects can be derived from elementary entities: a married couple, for example, is more than its component persons separately. The third counter-argument states that Sherlock Holmes and literary fiction in general exists, but is not real. Finally, the fourth counter-argument lists examples in which explicit description is less than an implied one: a partially clothed body (see lingerie advertisements) is more erotic than nudist beaches; an explained joke is less than an implied punchline, and a metaphor cannot be exhausted by explicit phrases (Harman 2017, 25-35).

In my oral and written debates with theoretical physicists Zoltán Néda and Albert-László Barabási, I resisted the physical reduction of events, too. The physical model of self-organising systems, I argued, does not reveal the event of the pilgrimage in Mecca (this was the subject of Zoltán Néda's sociophysical lecture) in its entirety, but creates its time projection into a very narrow physical space (the kinetic space of bodies with mass and extension). For the physicist, it makes no difference whether pilgrims whirling around the Kaaba stone practice their belief or tell each other mother-in-law jokes. An event taking place in several dimensions is reduced to an event described in fewer dimensions or in a different rhythmic dimension, i.e., it is a distorted time projection

(Berszán 2016, 5-6). Network theory also pretends that everything must happen in the network space, whereas the variety of kinetic spaces is much wider than networks. Things, which in Harman's philosophy can only be accessed in their appearance, while their ontological reality is inexhaustible, cannot be reduced to points and edges, as the network models and formulas of Albert-László Barabási suggest (Berszán 2016, 2-3). What distinguishes practice-oriented physics and ecorhythmology from the position of OOO and, in this respect, moves it closer to string theory, is the introduction of the complementary rhythmic dimensions (Berszán 2016, 2019: Practical Rhythm). Hence, the inner secret of the thing is not so much posited as the inaccessibility of the Kantian thing as being in-itself, but as happenings and motions in the kinetic spaces of things and living creatures.

Harman's reflection on Ortega's theory of metaphor resonates with the ecorhythmology of artistic attention practices. According to Harman, philosophy is closer to aesthetics and the arts than to the sciences (Harman 2017, 59). He does not claim that works of art reveal the mystery of life and being, but that the particular kind of pleasure we call aesthetic experience arises from an encounter with the inaccessible Kantian thing in-itself. Harman reminds us that philosophy is not wisdom in gold bars, but the *love* of wisdom, and this is the source of its vivid metaphors.

As an ecorhythmologist, I could relate to this by trying to attune precisely the attentive gestures of aesthetic appreciation in art, for instance while writing or reading literature, and letting those gestures attune me. The indecision between the two kinds of tuning we call aesthetic encounter. Ortega takes the example of the metaphor from López Pico: "the cypress is like the ghost of a dead flame" (Harman 2017, 72). Compared to the translation of the thing as appearance to sensual data or the literal knowledge of the cypress, the metaphor encounters the real thing as being in-itself. But in the experience of the metaphor, the cypress is not the real object involved in the aesthetic experience, but the author or the receiver who experiences the metaphor by becoming a compound thing made of the qualities of cypress and flame, just as an actor becomes the other person acted out in Stanislavsky's methodology (Harman 2017, 83). According to the theatricality of metaphor, the objective image that I have access to is only a shadow of the thing in-itself, but it does trigger a subjective reaction out of me, and it triggers it out of me as a thing in-itself. Consequently, I am the only real object on the scene carrying the sensual qualities of the metaphor. Aesthetic experience encounters the thing in-itself but, in Harman's view, it never confronts the other object, but (only) the reader himself/herself. To this extent, the Kantian ruse remains valid: after all, he says, it is not the roiling ocean that is sublime, but a sensual appearance of my idea of infinity in it (Kant 2002, 129-130). This time I am the only accessible being in-itself who takes the stage: I play the cypress.

In practice-oriented physics and in ecorhythmology, the relationship between the cypress and the reader is one of attunement to the shared rhythm of a happening, i.e., a resonance with the cypress's gestures (this time, all impulsive gestures are taken into account including the cypress turning green). In writing and reading the metaphor, I am in a shared kinetic space with the other: something intense is happening with us, in which the other participates as much as I do. I agree with Harman that, in addition to teaching sciences, it is also necessary to teach arts in order to encourage learners to discover a certain kind of getting in touch with things, other than using or knowing them. However, our description of what happens in this relationship shows differences. Harman's theatricality and the gestural resonance outlined by me only partially overlap. It needs and deserves further investigation to find out how they converge and how they diverge. For Harman, theatricality brings about an ontological turn (becoming something), for me, practice is an orientation in kinetic spaces, or a passage between them (attunement to events with different rhythms).

According to the OOO, the relationship between the participants in the metaphor is not reciprocal: one of them (the cypress) takes on the role of the grammatically understood subject, the other (the flame) the grammatically understood object (Harman 2017, 86). This theatrical orientation, however, completely forgets the *ghost*, even though it is also a participant in the metaphor: *the cypress is the ghost of a dead flame*. Ecorhythmology is not oriented according to the acting performance and the role to be played, but follows the rhythm of a game participants initiate in each other's company. I do not play or act out the cypress in the metaphor, but play along with the cypress, the flame and the ghost. What is created is not a common, complex object, but a common kinetic space I share with the cypress, the flame and the ghost, so that the metaphor is happening with and to us, and it is not performed by me alone. Those beings evoked here contribute to their evocation. In the metaphor, I am attuned to their impulses and I am placed in their midst or company. The result is not so much a compound object made up of cypress, dead flame, ghost and me, but a gestural resonance between us in which this metaphor takes place. This is how I understand participants' commitment in a lived metaphor.

In an approach like this, there is no substitution because no participant in the metaphor can be replaced. It is precisely because of their irreplaceability that we encounter their uniqueness which makes them cognitively and non-cognitively inexhaustible. To be in each other's company does not mean that we know everything about the other, however the act of getting in touch is as real as the collision of two rocks. One real rock does not collide with the sensual image of the other, as Harman suggests (2017, 163), because in this case it is undecidable which of the two is real, or rather it can only be said that they are sensual for each other and therefore for themselves as well, and their reality remains only hypothetical. The fact that in the collision

the two parties do not encounter each other in their totality does not mean that the collision between the real rocks is not real, or that only an indirect encounter takes place. I accept that this is not the only way of encounter, but it is real, and it is also direct, in the sense that everything by which they are given for each other in this encounter belongs to them, as much as they belong to their reality. For my part, I find the ontological separation of reality and appearance, or the ontological leap between the two problematic, since appearance is no less real than the unfathomable thing in-itself or its relations. I agree that every realistic encounter with the unknowable other makes him or her both familiar and unfamiliar: what or whom I meet is known to me as one who can be close to me in other ways too: further encounters are seemingly probable.

Similarly, the difference between the time projection of an event and its following in its own rhythmic dimension is not ontological, but rather “ethical” – not as an opposition between false belief and true knowledge, but as different practical orientations in different attempts of contact making. Such encounters are always real, but it does matter what is the occurrence with which a practical or resonant relationship is established. The Harmanian paradigm (whose unarticulated presuppositions as real qualities constitute the scientific thing as a sensual object) is equated here to the real kinetic space of time projection, whose events never coincide with the event followed in its own rhythmic dimension. Such a shared kinetic space does not mean knowing the truth about the other, it is a much closer encounter. In my view, this indispensable condition makes possible what Ortega and Harman both assume: a confrontation with the unknowable other. Otherwise, we miss the other because we mistake it for something else, we encounter in a different kinetic space.

So-called *correlationism* strips the object of all ontological depth conceiving it as a *correlatee* to its *correlators*, such as perception, interpretation, realisation or execution. According to its radical postmodern version, the supposed background of an object constructed in the process of its grasping is also a product of the same process. The OOO rightly objects that correlationism erases the object correlated to my perceptual or any access apparatus as non-existent by tracing it back to the operation of my access apparatus (Harman 2017, 55-56). And Harman similarly criticises the reduction of things to their effects or actions in Latour’s theory of agency (Harman 2017, 49). According to the ecorhythmological view, I can pay attention not only to the way I access the other’s activity, and not only to the effects of these actions, but also to their occurrence or rhythm. Such a relationship draws me into the company of the other, where I do not collect data, do not construct anything, and do not measure the output performance related to a network of agencies, but resonate with the proximity of the other.

Agency, hybrids and the proximity to the other

For me, there are two Bruno Latours: one with whom I am a good friend, and one to whom I am just a debating partner. I will first introduce my friend by means of two quotes. “One of the main puzzles of Western history is not that ‘there are people who still believe in animism,’ but the rather naive belief that many still have in a deanimated world of mere stuff; just at the moment when they themselves multiply the agencies with which they are more deeply entangled every day. The more we move in geostory, the more this belief seems difficult to understand.” (Latour 2014, 7) Let me ask him to explain how he understands this: “It is not that we should try to puff some spiritual dimension into its [the Earth’s] stern and solid stuff – as so many Romantic thinkers and nature philosophers had tried to do – but rather that we should abstain from deanimating the agencies that we encounter in each step. Geo-physiology as well as geo-morphology, geo-physics, geo-graphy, geo-politics should not eliminate any of the sources of agency.” (Latour 2014, 14)

Latour proposes that we take stock of what does what, and it will become clear that the division that places the capable subject, society, culture and human history on one side and the incapacitated objects on the other is untenable. Just look at what sunshine and rain in springtime do to trees, grass and flowers. Notice what hoar-frost or snow does to the trees. What the wind does to the clouds and the sea. The earthquake to the city, the air and drinking water to humans, gravity to our planet, the tilt of the Earth’s axis of rotation (relative to its orbit) to the seasons, the mole to the earth, wild boars to corn fields, wolves to flocks, woodpeckers to pine trunks, or how a dog, horse, dolphin or octopus is happy with another dog, horse, dolphin or human companion...

I think I am a close collaborator of Latour when I write studies on what a pond (in Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden*), a small wolf (in Jack London’s novel *White Fang*), or “some tuft of dandelion seed” (in Wordsworth’s poem), does to a person writing and reading literature (Berszán 2018b; 2019b). Further on, there are the trees of Ágnes Nagy Nemes (Berszán 2017), the estuary of the River Severn in South Wales in Philip Gross’s poem collection (Berszán 2019c), young Marcel learning to listen to noises on a sad evening in Proust’s *Search of Lost Time* (Berszán 2022), or Ádám Bodor’s “sinistra zone”, in which there is room for more than just humans (Berszán 2015). What became apparent about these non-human creatures was that they were co-authors, as skillful attention-grabbers as art itself. They are an excellent and indispensable companion in our exploration of all that could never happen to us were it not for lakes, little wolves, tufts wandering on smooth water, estuaries, trees, sounds, mountains. While trying to find out what colour a lake is, we are engaged not only in a particular form of Romantic transcendentalism, but also amazing experiments, as those

two or three pages dedicated to this can convince us in David Thoreau's *Walden* (Thoreau 1971, 175-177).

How amazing things are revealed if we really pay attention to what happens to a little wolf when it first ventures out of the den where it was born: among other things, we plunge into a wall – see Jack London's *White Fang*, chapter four on The Wall of the World (London 1906, 84-100). A generalised physics of Brownian motion offers an unheard-of study of attention (26 years before Brownian motion was discovered) – see the 4th of Wordsworth's *Poems on the Naming of Places* cycle (Brett-Jones 1991, 215). If you are interested in the secret occurrences of human thought, it is worth reading Philip Gross' poetic experiments in liquid matter – megatons of fresh and saltwater, or the mudflow of the tide – from the *Betweenland* series of the T. S. Eliot Prize-winning volume *The Watertable* (Gross 2009). If you are interested in the unfathomable actions of trees, it is worth reading the lines of Ágnes Nemes Nagy on the gestural resonance between hoar-frost and trees (Nemes Nagy 2003, 5). It is worth exploring the astonishingly subtle spaces of attention in Proust's tangled sentences and Ádám Bodor's attempts to become a local in the *zone* he describes (Bodor 2011). And, of course, one can also read my studies, which explore the rhythmic dimensions of practical orientation in all these temporalities. My research on sophisticated and intense attentional gestures of artistic practices can contribute to the re-learning of our relations with the human and non-human environment, sometimes in experimental *Land-rover Book* camps, sometimes on the mediatised battlegrounds of school and university education, sometimes in the attention laboratories of everyday practices.

When we deal with literature, we are playing with and risking our lives, just like when climbing the ice wall in the Fogaras Mountains. Otherwise, it's not worth it. Otherwise, we cannot convince others, especially young people, that it is worthwhile to be involved in literature and the arts. And we cannot convince ourselves either. What the other does is not merely an effect. Concerning agency, it is not only causality that counts, but also intersubjectivity. We do not only divide subjectivity (previously denied to things and attributed to humans alone) with non-living, non-sentient, non-conscious creatures through the redistribution of agency, but also share the company of each other.

Let us see now the other Bruno Latour with whom I am arguing. He is a hybrid. Or at least that is what he claims about himself and me and the world (Latour 1993, 1-3), while I keep protesting. There is no doubt that my body is made up of chemicals that have not always been part of my body and will not always remain part of my body. There is also no doubt that without associated bacteria, I would not be able to digest, and without air, water and food, I would quickly die. So, I have, and must have, a lot of non-self in me, not only in material or symbiotic association, but also in terms of my unconscious realms or acquired knowledge, including ideas of the friend Latour and doctrines of the discussion partner Latour. But in the same existence in which this

indivisibility is valid, so are individual things, beings, phenomena or thoughts. If there are no individual thoughts in this study, it can hardly be accepted as a research contribution to what has been discovered so far. Just as, by the same token, it should also include the thoughts of other professionals. How, then, are we to reconcile ourselves with this deceptive ambiguity? What we already know is that chronic human self-isolation, or the illusion of it, is leading to a global environmental crisis. But we also know that without individual creatures, without individual events, there is no diversity.

The proposed solution by ANT is linked to the Merleau-Ponty or Simondon line, which seeks to resolve the contradiction in the evolutionary history of a “metamorphic” or “metastable” system by referring to the “laws” of ontological, phenomenological or network processes and operations (Merleau-Ponty 1968; Simondon 2020). For me, there are two problems with this attempt: first, it narrows down the irreducible events of interconnection to a single paradigm (the hybrid model or the network model); secondly, it does little to address our responsibility, for example, to the failed, unsustainable or unilaterally self-constitutive ways of interconnection. Because either our mistakes are the result of the inescapable and irresistible laws of hybridity (and then we fight against them in vain, even within ourselves), or else the solution seems to reveal another world where there are and can be no such “sins”. Yet they exist in our world. As Timothy Morton would say, global warming in the Anthropocene is not the fault of octopus species, but of humans (Morton 2018,16). And if we are responsible, then we cannot say that it just happened, we cannot help it. Inasmuch as it is possible to make wrong decisions or act wrongly in metastable states, we cannot say that awareness of the metastable system is sufficient for change. Our practical orientation must also be changed.

Furthermore, it may be narrow-sighted to speak only about the feasibility of the proposed solutions, such as the management of nature, which would be made possible by the technological control of Earth systems (Earth engineering). Maybe it is still worthwhile to leave the management of the planet to the unpredictable and unknowable cosmic, geological or biological systems. Latour argues that the human intervention that causes problems should be remedied by even greater intervention, and that it is foolish, for example, to protect national parks from human technology; it is necessary to accept that the entire surface of the planet is (or should become) cultivated land (Latour 2011). In his opinion even the most strictly protected reserves should have restaurants, post offices and bus stops. I am not so sure about that, I think it is good to have areas without these human constructions.

And I also agree with Graham Harman that, while research into hybrids is important, we must reject the assumption that all entities are hybrids of nature and culture, as Latour suggests (Harman 2017, 57-58). It is better to speak – as Harman does – of *compounds*, where hybrids are only one group. After all, it is also possible to link only natural elements

(e.g., the hydrogen and oxygen atoms in a water molecule) or only cultural elements (as the Greek and Judaic components of the European cultural tradition). It is not only the necessarily hybrid encounters of culture and nature that can constitute or provoke relations, translation, mediation or an ontology, but also the Levinasian proximity that makes the ethical relation between Me and You ultimate by acknowledging the radical otherness of the other (Levinas 1979).

Alternative temporalities, rhythmic dimensions and attunement

Timothy Morton and I have independently obtained very similar results: what I call “kinetic spaces” are close to what he calls “possibility spaces”; what I call “gesture resonance” is close to what he calls “tuning”; and my term “rhythmic dimensions” also refers to a variety of temporalities, which are equally important to him. Morton conceives of possibility space as a genre, an attitude or a way of accessing data objects, and, broadly, as an “executive” interpretation or a set of constraints (Morton 2018, XIV). Such is the case, for example, with *data dumping*, the most common way of communicating ecological information today, which induces guilt, does not tolerate contradiction, offers itself for acceptance as facts out of the sky (i.e., not constructed reality), and paralyses ecological action by reinforcing our powerlessness. This is why Morton warns that we can “live ecological knowledge” in other ways, in other genres, i.e., in other possibility spaces.

I would add that not all of these correspond to ideological tendencies. Morton also seems to accept this, but he most often associates possibility spaces with ideological critique. He asks what movement or movements can be made in the possibility space of information dumping concerning global warming, but he is also aware of the limitations of our hitherto valid mode of accessing something when it no longer goes unnoticed but comes as a surprise (e.g., winter is removed from the succession of seasons and consequently the familiar climate ceases to be taken for granted). A special form of surprise is when we encounter other ways, by which I also mean the others’ way of accessing things. It turns out that other creatures also experience the things we experience, but mostly in very different ways than we do (for a fly, my wristwatch is a landing strip). “Natural is habitual”, Morton concludes (Morton 2018, XXXII), which could be translated into Hungarian as: *ki mint él, úgy ítél* [one judges as one lives or: he/she who lives as he/she lives, judges as he/she judges]. This is precisely why, in my understanding, different kinetic spaces are not only shaped by prescriptive norms and ideological constraints, but also by the rhythm (or temporality) of a practice. So, it is not so much the (ideological) critical reflection that offers solution here – or at least it is not enough in itself because it is also within the kinetic space of a critical practice –, but rather the passage between

different kinetic spaces helps as demanding practical orientation in different temporalities.

Practical orientation is not equal to ideological effect, because it is not only a matter of transmitting information, not even a matter of interpretative contexts and patterns to be followed, but also the rhythmic dimensions of gestures. A possibility space both offers possibilities and sets limits, something Morton fails to emphasise. However, he would certainly agree that one can only move from one “possibility space” to another, which is exactly what I propose, when I understand them as kinetic spaces. One of the current possibility spaces is the cult of science as the worship of factoids constructed from some data, which prescribe a certain attitude and identify data with the thing itself. But according to Morton – here again a staunch supporter of the OOO –, data are only certain ways of approaching things, and never refer to things directly, but through the patterns that scientists recognize in them (Morton 2018, 74). The invention of such patterns, Morton suggests, seems to be similar to the aesthetic appreciation of works of art (Morton 2018, XXVII).

David Hume (1973) and Immanuel Kant (2003) had already warned of the variability and contingency of data. But it should also be stressed that data collection (in any broad sense) is only one way of connecting. Love is not mere data collection. The proximity of the other is not a mere given. Turning toward or tuning in to him/her/it depends not only on the selection of data, but also on gestural resonances. Morton also reserves the term “tuning” for this. The otherness of the other becomes apparent when I meet him/her/it in other kinetic spaces than the ones I have been used to. I mean kinetic spaces that the encounter with the other makes me discover, and in which the other teaches me to find my way. All things can do something, and to all things can happen something in many kinetic spaces. This discovery moves us out of our familiar kinetic spaces, without foregoing practical contact for the sake of some reflexive “background”. For Morton, art becomes reflexive, it begins to speak about itself from a meta-position, because it discovers that we are locked into our own interpretations (Morton 2018, XXXV). The problem with reflection, however, is that jumping to meta levels always alienates me from what I have come into contact with. Reflection not only adds something to what it reflects on, but it takes much away from it. When I reflect on my poetry reading, it takes me out of the rhythm of reading the poem. I don’t think self-reflection alone solves the problem of discovering the inexhaustibility of the other. I do agree, however, that because ecological facts are also about us (about how we are and what we do), it is difficult to see them from the outside; to inquire about how we act or see is one of the hardest tasks to do. Instead of self-reflection, this is why we need to ask the other for help, and to learn ways of making contact that move us out of our frequently practiced but problematic kinetic spaces that provoke crisis. Such experiments always call for attunement and re-tuning.

Morton also considers the aesthetic encounter as a model for what environmental ethics and environmental politics seek to achieve between the human and non-human (Morton 2018, 2). We agree that thinking is not the only, nor the most excellent way of access (as there is none). And we interpret the book of Ecclesiastes in the same way: when reading that there is a time for everything under the sun (Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8), one may understand this to mean that everything has a different time, so there are many temporalities involved.¹ Morton is also right saying that when I tune in to something, it has already tuned in to me, i.e. it has started to move my attention in some way. Particularly in the perception of beauty, it is undecided where the effect starts. The English phrase “I like her/that” translates into Hungarian as “ő/az tetszik nekem” (she/it pleases me, she/it makes me like her/that).

In the aesthetic experience we encounter something/someone non-aggressively, non-violently. What I like is not liked for a specific purpose, so according to Morton, I am in solidarity with what I appreciate as beauty, regardless of whether that something is human, has consciousness, is sentient, or is a living being. That is how he thinks democracy can be extended to include the non-human (Morton 2018, 74). I think it is more likely that such experiences extend to include democracy. Because in the aesthetic encounter I discover the invisibility, the intangibility of things, including the intangibility of myself. Ecological consciousness is the discovery that there is a great variety of temporalities; which is, in fact, a profound recognition of a multiplicity of beings that are not me, with whom I live. And it is because of this multiplicity of temporalities that there is a high stake in the practical orientation concerning different times.

In the experience of the beautiful, it is undecidable who is logically and chronologically attuned to the other first: me to what is beautiful or it to me (Morton 2018, 74). I am really encountering an *other* (I am not the only real object here): “the encounter with Ice Watch is in a way a dialogue with ice blocks, not a one-way human conversation in a mirror that happens to be made of ice.” (Morton 2018, 72). What Harman captures as theatricality (the theatricality of the lived metaphor) is, for Morton, “a mind meld between me and something that isn’t me” (Morton 2018, 74). The company of the other cannot be a performance that replaces the other, nor is it something that dissolves the singularity of the self and the other. From Morton’s description we can retain the attunement, from Harman’s proposal the experiencing or living of the metaphor as commitment, but in an ecorhythmological approach there is no theatrical acting out, no fusion, but resonance. Fusion as blending dissolves the participants, the common rhythm always connects them to one another. And insofar as the actor’s work is more than a performative construction, it has something in common with the resonance-connection of encountering the other, too.

1 I mentioned this for the first time in my doctoral dissertation in 1998 (Berszán 2002, 84-86).

Morton emphasises the “givenness of data, of what is given” (Morton 2018, 74) in the beautiful, and Harman also speaks of the encounter with the inaccessible. How can I encounter the inaccessible? By revealing the mysteriousness of something that I have hitherto regarded as graspable, as a closed object; by realising its openness, its intangibility. This is what captures me in beauty, and this is what I capture in beauty, I would say, but it is no longer a question of capturing, of acquiring, but of encountering. In Hungarian ‘*találkozás*’ (encounter) etymologically refers to one trying to find and fit the other and the other trying to find and fit one. The other is not subordinated to one’s actions, nor vice versa, but what they do, what happens in the encounter, is attuned to a common rhythm that they experiment with together.

In the experience of the beautiful, Morton says, I myself also become an ungraspable other, the other who experiences, and who is not usually seen by experience: “I’m experiencing the texture of cognitive or emotional or whatever phenomena”, “I magically see the unseeable aspects of a thing, including the thing called Tim Morton. I grasp the ungraspability of a thing.” (Morton 2018, 76) I would rather say I am meeting the self I can only be in the company of another. If there were no trees, I would never know who I could be in the company of trees. Morton relates the experience of beauty to the unforeseeable future, to futurity itself as the coming of an unforeseeable “not yet”. I am talking rather about coming close to the radically different in what happens with us as fellow participants. Morton says time flows from things: “Different objects, different futuralities.” (Morton 2028, 76) I research different temporalities as additional rhythmic dimensions of happenings. Time flows out of things because what happens to them also sets us in particular rhythmic dimensions. Without them we would not discover these dimensions of happenings, for example, what happens to trees in the wind, the way they move, the music of the foliage; or what happens when they bloom, or when the hoar-frost precipitates on their branches. Without trees, these would be rhythmic dimensions that are forever locked away, but thanks to the proximity of trees, when we are in their company, our attention learns to resonate with these events. Through our attunement with the trees, these subtle rhythms/temporalities become a shared kinetic space. This is my understanding of the line: “art emits time, which tells you something about how everything emits time.” (Morton 2018, 79)

I would add to what Morton says about the inevitability of our ecological existence: the recognition that multiple temporalities require a demanding practical orientation in time. Art acquires and helps us acquire proficiency in and between events with different rhythms through practical experiments. We should not speak of mere cognition or awareness, but of practical learning or learning by practice, the result of which is the expansion of the range of our kinetic spaces: proficiency in multiple rhythmic dimensions. I consider it untenable to call interpretation the way we access something, or the way we make

contact with it. This is as much a mistake or confusion as confusing a data-object with the object itself. For it is not only the data-object that we access, but also the way we come into proximity with the fellow-object, and the way the object comes into proximity with us, that is real. Such proximity is not a mere recording of data, but an exposure in which we are receptive to the otherness of the other and at the same time devoted to the other. If this is what Harman's theatricality means, then there is only a difference of terminology between us; if not, then I take proximity to be valid instead of theatricality. In the "realisation" or "execution" of things, things also intervene, and it matters how and to what extent they intervene or participate. For my part, this is where I would distinguish between kitsch and artistic approaches. Kitsch is when the things we depict have little or no say in our (depictive) practice, because we are aligned with other things (e.g., markets, ideologies). When connected, like in art (or love), we learn to align with who we are in proximity to.

Causality versus urge, politics versus ethics

Morton stresses that art is not just decorative, but causal: it always does something to me that I encounter in it. Since I cannot have direct and complete knowledge of any one thing, I can only tune in to it, more or less intimately. But in the meantime, it is already attuned to me what I am attuned to. It is a dynamic relationship, like the animal magnetism postulated by Mesmer (Morton 2018, 93). I describe this reciprocity as a highly refined and extremely intense attentional and gestural resonance, which cannot be traced back to the mapping of the data object. In reading Ágnes Nemes Nagy's poem *Között* [Between] (Nemes Nagy 2003, 59-60) and her essay *Böleánytelenül* [Buffalo-less] (Nemes Nagy 2018, 135-145), I say almost verbatim what Morton says: "the shaman follows the movements and habits of the prey, bringing them into her or his body, allowing his or her body to resonate with nonhuman capacities and qualities" (Morton 2018, 90). Doesn't it sound like Berszán?

There is a kind of oscillation or hesitation between the human and the non-human. From the moment we perceive our differences not as rigid divisions but rather as ghostly similarities, like the shaman in the hunting dance, it turns out that we are closer to the animals than we think or would like. It was while I was tracking wild animals without a gun, as my father taught me, that I had the startling realisation that there was no essential difference between a wild boar and me: we see with our eyes, walk on our feet, we have the same internal organs, we fear, struggle, experiment with possibilities... According to Morton, ecological relations are formed when the difference between the non-sentient, non-conscious, non-personal other and the subject previously reserved for humans becomes radically undecidable or wobbly (Morton 2018, 122-123). I would add: while writing and reading literature, let's

say, I enter into an intersubjective relationship with the non-human: a lake, a small wolf, trees, a landscape, like Greg Foster with an octopus in the documentary entitled *My Octopus Teacher* (Ehrlich–Reed 2020). This way I not only learn something about the other, but something happens to us in a shared kinetic space. It is always a very intense experience when I get really close to the other: be it another human, be it a bear, be it God. I get to “know” something about each of these cases – not just recordable information, but I will know something about their closeness that I could never have known if we had not been in a shared kinetic space.

If we remove the hesitation and clearly categorise ourselves and the other into separate categories, Morton argues, it is nothing but violence. “If I decide you’re just a machine, I can manipulate you exactly as I want. If I decide you’re a person, and person means ‘not a machine,’ then I can decide that other things are just machines by contrast, and manipulate them.” (Morton 2018, 110) It does not mean that in ecocriticism we mix everything up. The intersubjective relationship with things is not an unformed mass; if it were, then the relationship would not be a problem, neither causally, nor ethically or aesthetically. “But connection is a big problem.” (Morton 2018, 120) Morton and I agree on that, too. It is not all the same how we make contact or create a relationship: there is a difference between toleration and appreciation (e.g., liking as appreciation of something as beautiful).

Morton adopts the uncanny valley theory (Morton 2018, 121–122) which explain the reasons for our liking and disliking of robots: we dislike what is very different and at the same time eerily similar to us (see, for example, hybrid aliens in science fiction films) – this is what we find strange. Morton sees the key to the ethics and politics of tolerance, appreciation or acceptance of the strange other in ambiguity, in the undecidability of being different or similar. I, on the other hand, find it in the common kinetic spaces. With my child, with my students, with the bear, with God, it is our shared kinetic spaces that connect us, or the lack of them that divide us. If I am in a shared physical space with the bear and I shoot it from a distance, that’s not a shared kinetic space. If I share a house with my child, that is not a common kinetic space. Sitting in a common classroom with my students for 90 minutes is not a common kinetic space. If I routinely say the Lord’s Prayer, that is not a shared kinetic space with the Invoked One. We will only have a common kinetic space with the bear, with my students, with my child, and with God, if we are attuned to each other in a common rhythm in some kind of practice. It is enough if both the bear and I want to avoid openly attacking each other – the way we try to agree on this from a distance of about 20–25 steps. We have met several times like this, and the only chance I had was to have someone to negotiate with. Because not only do I meet a much larger and much stronger colossus than myself, but a highly intelligent and sensitive beast with an excellent affinity for making contact. I don’t know if Morton would agree, but

I find it a distinguished opportunity for ecocritical or ecophilosophical inquiry when I find myself in such intense joint attention exercises with students in class or in the *Land-Rover Book* camps; when we tame each other or swim miles together with my son and the lake (most recently in the Alps); when I befriend a bear, even if it is at a distance of about 20-25 steps; or when I befriend God in prayer. What ecorythmology means is that in all the experimental fields of shared kinetic spaces, we can learn and relearn ourselves and each other.

Instead of “causality of art”, which is irresistible regardless of me, I would rather use “urging”, which is also highly impulsive, however it not only triggers something but also demands resonance. Resonance is not forced: I can resonate with many things, and along with the impulse, at any given moment it depends on practical choices what I actually resonate with. Alongside (and sometimes instead of) the causal network of relationships in the ecosystem, I would rather speak of a dense forest of urges, in which the only inescapable imperative is the need to orient yourself. What rhythms tune oneself in to, depends on a practical *time sacrifice*, too. Even in a concentration camp, there are always choices, which is not to say that you can choose just anything. In attunement, one can only ever choose something that makes one want to choose it. But there is never just one urge that prevails, even in the most severe cases of imprisonment or coercion. Even when one is nailed to the cross, one may choose to accuse the Saviour crucified along with him or to admire his innocence. We know that there were those who chose the first option and there were those who chose the other. Just as Jesus had to choose whether to ask for a legion of angels from heaven to crush the execution squad, or to endure the shame and suffering; he had to choose whether to take vengeance on those who defied him, or to pray for them.

For ecorhythmology, art is not so much a thing-like work of art as some kind of intense artistic practice that urges us to follow its attentional stimuli. However, these impulses do not drive us violently: resonance is a constant attunement to urges rather than a helpless co-vibration with them. Our impression that we cannot escape from an extremely strong impulse already presupposes our attunement, even if it is impossible to decide which came first: the impulse or the attunement. Morton’s aesthetics exemplifies solidarity by the appreciation of the work of art, and while he exemplarily avoids the ultimate politicisation of art, he does not exclude the possibility of using art to reinforce deceptive aspirations, even in the Platonic sense, by assuming the all-encompassing causal power of the work of art. Yet, to urge and to influence by coercion or manipulation are not the same: the former seeks partners or the other’s company, whereas the latter looks for instrumentalized resources or *subjects*. Art does not attack, but provokes voluntary “solidarity” resonances.

This is why I do not share Morton’s thesis that “every decision is a political one” (Morton 2018, 87). I would rather speak about practical

decisions. The difference is that a political decision is a gesture of power, even as a gesture of solidarity, because in political decisions we are always either for someone/something or against someone/something. A practical decision, in comparison, can be a gesture of many kinds, depending on the contact making it is tuned to: it can be retaliation or forgiveness, hatred or love, indifference or interest, isolation or openness, and everything in between or alternatives to these. It is important, both ethically and aesthetically, that the practical decision should not be only political, and that no other “neutral” space should be assumed which can include and relate all kinetic spaces. The actual relation between kinetic spaces is created by practical passage or re-tuning from one to the other. Morton’s examples of his thesis that politicises choice are: “Allowing a watch to be a landing strip for a fly. Allowing a plastic bag to be a bird murderer” (Morton 2018, 87). A practical choice may be not only allowing, but also obeying, for example, in a Levinasian exposure to the proximity of the other; or it may be navigation among the (not only political) urges that have an effect on me.

I would also extend Morton’s thesis that “Because of interdependence, when you take care of one entity or group of entities, another one (or more) is left out” (Morton 2018, 87). Time sacrifice also means that I can never be in two kinetic spaces at the same time: I can only get into one by getting out of all the others at that time. The irreducibility of temporalities with different rhythms does not allow for the simultaneous experiencing of events taking place in several kinetic spaces at the same time. I accept that “veering” among different possibilities also allows for hesitation, however I would not build the conception of tuning on this notion. Instead, I think of gestural resonance as a skill or flexibility that can tune in to many different rhythms, but once entering a rhythmic dimension there is no way to deviate (or veer) from the time direction of the happening, because that would mean dropout from its kinetic space. It is true that we have to learn to resonate, and consequently resonance can be more intense or less intense, but this has more to do with combatting practical distances than with imprecise, relative or statistical approaches to the truth.

I would not rule out precise attunement, which Morton exemplifies, on the one hand, with the fatal case of an opera singer’s voice completely resonating with the glass and causing it to shatter, and on the other, the smooth and controlled efficiency when everything is perfectly in tune (Morton 2018, 81, 131). Artistic practices achieve extremely sophisticated and extremely intense resonances, which can of course be shocking or distressing. I accept that reading literature is dangerous, because we are playing with and risking our lives, but otherwise it is not worth reading literature. If we never step outside our comfort zone, only shallow resonances are possible. Art is indeed a risky, precise experiment performed in order to gain skillfulness in the kinetic spaces of events and practices, but otherwise it could never reach the artistic threshold of intensity and rich temporality. The “timber” of objects as a solitary

quality or vibration/rhythmic pattern can only be discovered through precise attention exercises. But this does not exclude, nor does it make it impossible to avoid, what Morton fears: that “the dream of ‘ecological’ society as immense efficiency (the fantasy of perfect attunement) dampens the uneasy coexistence of lifeforms.” (Morton 2018, 101) The difficulty of coexistence also arises from what Derrida calls the ethical paradox, or our dwelling on Abraham’s Moriah, which I like to call the “decision sacrifice”: I can only fulfil my duty towards a particular other by sacrificing my duty to many more others on the altar of my choice, like Abraham who fulfilled his duty towards God by scarifying his duty to his son and his wife (Derrida 1995, 53-81).

Beyond this, it is also difficult to live in peace with another person or another way of life. Just as it is not easy to argue, in an ethically correct way, with an ecophilosopher very close to me either. It is best to be willing to learn from all my unveiled transgressions against him, whether I recognize and admit them myself or others help me to do so. The apostle Paul has set us a great task, even though, from Morton’s point of view, he is committed to a monotheistic religion based on settled agriculture, not at all ecological, and even responsible for global warming. His warning suggests that “If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all.” (*The Letter of Paul to the Romans* 12:18). I don’t think this is an anthropocentric principle; but rather an experiment involving our most obvious company, which can be extended indefinitely in all directions and at all scales as Saint Francis showed it. It can be extended at least as much as the Mortonian magical causality and strangeness of *charisma* indicating the power of things, from the force field of whale songs to the force field of art (Morton 2018, 105).

I do not wish to rule out uncertainty, Morton is right that it often serves us well, even in research. I hesitate only when an ecophilosopher wants to base an ethics of living in peace with other life forms on this principle. I accept that hesitation is necessary, but not sufficient. For me to succeed to some extent in living in peace with others in a difficult coexistence, it is also necessary that someone and/or something try their best to live in peace with me. To be able to not refuse, but tolerate, appreciate and embrace the uncanny similarities of the “uncanny valley”, as always, I need a charismatic urge that convinces, fascinates, disconcerts, does not let me rest, and which urges me, as soon as something or someone upsets the peace (whether it is me or another person), to start (re)learning my relationship with my most broadly understood environment, made up of everything in my proximity. My experience in ecorhythmology has convinced me that it is worth learning from everything and everyone who can teach me. And unlike Morton, I do not exclude God and the practice of monotheism from this. Without wishing to give a single answer to the question how such learning can lead to greater peace in difficult coexistence, one answer I am willing to give is: among other things, through the exploration and practice of artistic attention experiments, including literary writing and reading.

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