

Invoking the Real: from the Specular to the Ontopoetic

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ABSTRACT

Ecophilosophy falls within the anti-dualist tradition of speculative naturalism. The failure of ecophilosophy to change the dualist mind-set of either the academy or society at large may be due less to its ecological content than to the sheer fact of its discursiveness per se. Discourse or theory, it is argued, is essentially specular in nature; it originates in a subject-object bifurcation that takes place within the inner *theatre* of the intellect. As the creator of an ideal representation or mirror of an “external” world, the subject experiences itself phenomenologically as an active party in relation to that world which, qua construct, is experienced phenomenologically as an inert and passive object. It is theory itself then, from this point of view, that entraps us in dualism. Theory, no matter how non-dualist its message, is accordingly unlikely to release us from the grasp of dualism. A modality which calls reality out of the plane of representation into active engagement with us is proposed as a more effective antidote to dualism. Such a modality, invocational in intent and figured as *ontopoetics*, is here explored, particularly as it pertains to art.

To revive the tradition of speculative naturalism - a tradition of metaphysics which, though realist, affirms the integrality of mind to matter - and to rescue this tradition from its historical marginalization, is a project crucial to legitimizing an important contemporary discourse, that of ecological philosophy, and affording this discourse the influence it so urgently warrants.¹ Ecophilosophy, revolving as it does around the rejection of dualism and an attempt to restore some kind of mentality – meaning, purpose, agency, will, intentionality – to nature, may be placed within the speculative naturalist tradition.² Dualism is a key organizing principle not only for modern Western

¹ For a definitive account of the tradition of speculative naturalism, see Arran Gare, “Speculative Naturalism: a Manifesto”, *Cosmos and History: Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 10, 2 (2014): 300-323

² The major schools of ecophilosophy, such as deep ecology, ecofeminism, the land ethic and bioregionalism, all attribute to the natural world fundamental qualities such as meaning, purpose or agency that render the world morally considerable in its own right. Within the wider field of environmental philosophy there are of course other approaches to environmental management that

thought generally but for modern philosophy itself, dividing philosophy into opposing schools defined by an exclusive ontological commitment to either matter or mind. Hence ecophilosophy, like speculative naturalism, falls outside those schools. Although ecophilosophy originated within the analytical stream of philosophy - a generally realist school framed by the reductive materialism of science - it could not be contained by that tradition.³ And although an ecological perspective is now starting to permeate the opposing philosophical camp, that of deconstruction and post-structuralism - a school with its roots in the German idealist and phenomenological tradition - it does not fit comfortably with the tendency of that tradition to privilege human experience and discourse over realism.⁴ Falling between the two major divisions of modern philosophy, ecophilosophy then is academically marginalized. Ecophilosophers cannot ameliorate this marginalization by either retreating from their anti-dualist stance, since they attribute to dualism the alienation of our civilization from the natural world, or from their commitment to realism, since their call to protect the natural world from human co-optation makes sense only if that world is real. Ecophilosophy is accordingly stuck between these two contemporary camps, and for this reason the project of recuperating a third, realist but anti-dualist tradition - speculative naturalism - to provide historical context and legitimacy for ecophilosophy is important.

Having acknowledged the importance of recuperating an historical context for ecophilosophy however, I do also wish to register a certain doubt in connection with this project. This is a doubt about whether it is possible for us really to escape dualism - and in consequence overcome our alienation from reality - by theory alone. Or perhaps even by theory at all.

This doubt is born of the bitter experience of having observed over decades the failure of environmental discourse generally to change behaviour. While the failure of ecological philosophy may indeed be partly explained by its marginalization within the larger discipline of philosophy, ecophilosophy is only one small part of environmental discourse. An unceasing flow of analysis of environmental dysfunction from a wide variety of disciplinary perspectives has been emanating from the academy since the 1970's; morally informed visions as to how to reconcile human society to the biosphere have likewise long been rolling off the presses. The literature promoting an ecological outlook is vast. Nor has this literature by any means been entirely ignored - it has found respectable niches both in the academy and the wider culture. But this has not meant that it has ultimately availed. It has failed to motivate either the public or their governments to act in any way remotely commensurate with the demands of the global ecological crisis, a crisis which is in consequence accelerating and intensifying at a shocking rate.

remain within both the metaphysical parameters of classical science and the moral parameters of anthropocentrism.

³ For a handy round-up of the development of ecophilosophy, and environmental philosophy generally, within the analytical tradition, see Andrew Brennan, "Environmental Ethics", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, National Endowment for the Humanities, 2008, <plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-environmental>. (accessed on 15 September 2014).

⁴ A key ecological theorist in the deconstructive tradition is Timothy Morton. Other theorists attempting to recuperate realism within the deconstructive tradition and, in some instances, combine it with an ecological perspective, include the so-called "new materialists".

My question here is *why*. Why this desolating failure of ecological literature? To answer this question fully would no doubt require many volumes of multi-disciplinary investigation. In the short space available to me here I only want to focus on a single, but very fundamental, reason for the failure of ecological discourse – across the humanities and sciences - to motivate us to reorient ourselves to reality and align, in true non-dualist style, to Earth. This reason lies in the nature of discourse itself. That is to say, the failure of ecological discourse may be not so much a function of its content – its *ecological* content, or, in the case of ecophilosophy, its explicitly anti-dualist content - as of its discursiveness per se. Specifically, it may be a fault of the *representational* nature of discourse. Ecological discourse, like theoretical discourse generally - whether scientific or philosophical - is basically representational in tenor: it offers a view of the world that, being a *view*, is indeed essentially *specular* in nature. Through the lens of such discourse we *look* at the world and imagine it as spread out passively for our epistemic gaze. We examine it, survey it, map it, reflect upon it in an effort to work out how its parts and aspects fit together. We construct an abstract simulacrum of reality that *re*-presents, through the lens of theory, the manifold that initially presents itself to us more immediately, though still passively, through visual perception. Throughout this process, the subject remains the active party, constructing an abstract simulacrum in the inner theatre of its intellect; the world, as that abstract construct, remains utterly passive, inert, two dimensional. In other words, the reliance of discourse on vision, whether understood literally, as perception, or figuratively, as the kind of *view* established by intellectual inquiry, results in a one-way relationship with reality. Whether the view offered is a reductive, mechanistic one or the new, relational, ecological one explored for decades by ecological philosophers and more recently by “new materialists”, makes little difference, ultimately, in light of this unilateralism. As a one-way relation, such a specular approach to the world leaves us stranded in a hidden solipsism, a subliminal subject-object impasse, that no amount of representational re-vision can alleviate. Stranded in such solipsism, we are not *moved* by the world: as a specular object existing on the wrong side of the subject-object divide, the world necessarily leaves our emotions untouched. Unless we are moved by the world however, we will not be mobilized to act in its defence. The specular character of theory itself then is ultimately conducive to subtle, even unconscious, indifference to the world’s fate, regardless of whether that theory is ecological or non-ecological, dualist or non-dualist, in its representations.⁵

I am suggesting that subject-object dualism is reinscribed by the very act of theorizing, regardless of the content of the theory in question. Subject-object dualism cannot, accordingly, be rectified by theory. To theorize is subtly, internally, to re-enact the subject-object divide.

It would follow from this diagnosis of our current failure of motivation that we will only be moved to act decisively in defence of the world when that world rises up from the passive plane of representation and actively joins us in the making of meaning. In other words, only when our relationship with reality becomes two-way, a subject-subject transaction, a call and response, can we possibly escape the deep human

⁵ For an in-depth analysis of the specular nature of theory and the roots of subject-object dualism in this specular orientation, see Freya Mathews, “Why has the West Failed to Embrace Panpsychism?” in *Mind That Abides: Panpsychism in the New Millennium*, ed. David Skrbina (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2009), 341-260

solipsism of our epistemic condition and become genuinely engaged with reality. To embark upon this new relation would be to enter into a new epistemic geometry, leaving behind the old two-dimensionality of our sciences, literature, philosophy and traditional arts, in favour of the three dimensionality of communicative encounter, of reciprocal presence, presence that *answers back* when our questions send out tentacles of attention in search of it. In this new relationship, it would no longer be so much a matter of our making sense of the world, in the time-honoured manner of epistemology, as of the world imprinting us with meanings of its own that then afford the defining pathways for our agency.

To accept that our ultimate task is not so much to understand the world as to engage with it in the making of meaning is a hard call for us, since understanding the world, attempting to make sense of it, is a defining vocation of modern civilization. This is the great legacy that ancient Greece, wellspring of theory - or, in Greek, *theoria* - and hence of *philosophia*, bequeathed to the West. (It should be noted that the Greek word, *theoria*, means a looking at or thing looked at, and is related to *theoros*, spectator and *thea*, spectacle. Hence the idea of theory as constructed in a kind of inner theatre.) What we tend to overlook in this connection is the existence of an alternative way of orienting ourselves to reality which does not rest first and foremost on representation, in the sense of *theoria*, but rather on a process of adaptive accommodation, of heightened acuity and responsiveness to environmental cues. By way of this orientation, which is native to ancient China rather than ancient Greece, and which I have elsewhere described as *strategic* as opposed to theoretic, we find our home in the world not by constructing a representation of things in the inner theatre of our intellect. Rather, we find our home by heightening our sensitivity to the energetic patterns at play in our environs and by adapting our agency to them. By orienting ourselves agentically to our environs in this way we remain immersed in those environs, rather than separating ourselves out, as authorial subject, from the world as inwardly or cognitively projected object. In other words, the *strategic* self remains free of the primordial subject-object dualism that the mental act of theorizing instates.

It is clear that throughout its history, Western culture has consistently maintained a basically theoretic, discursive, representational and hence profoundly dualist orientation to reality. With the exception of liturgy, in an ecclesiastical context, and music, which by its very nature is resistant to the representational imperative, this has been the basic tenor of the cultural expressions of the West – its arts, literature and knowledges, culminating, of course, in the arch-form of *theoria* and hence of dualism, science. There has consequently been an irremediable tendency in the West to see the world as mere matter and ourselves as the exclusive repository of mind. The question of mind – its exceptionalism - what it is and who has it – has consequently haunted the Western intellect. Attempts to correct the dualist perspective, via theoretic ascriptions of mind to matter – in the many forays into speculative naturalism that have punctuated the history of Western thought⁶ – have been unavailing, since the theoretic act itself re-inscribes and confirms the primordial dualism.

From the strategic perspective, by contrast, the question of mind barely arises, since the primordial bifurcation which accompanies the act of theorizing - of self into world-constructing subject and world into its constructed object - has not occurred. The agent

⁶ Gare, "Speculative Naturalism".

responds to surrounding energetic ebbs and flows as appropriate, offering communicative responses to communicative cues and more strictly functional responses to more strictly physical impacts. The line between communicative and non-communicative is not hard and fast, and the question of the precise distribution of mind in the agent's environs is not relevant. If the energy patterns in which the agent finds itself immersed at any moment seem to bespeak intelligence, sentience, intentionality or conativity, then there is no reason for the agent not to respond in kind, appropriately, without requiring prior metaphysical decisions.

If the broad outlines of this argument are accepted then, it seems that, in order to escape the deep though hidden solipsism that paralyses our capacity to act in defence of our world, we need to start shifting from our present overly representational orientation to a more strategic orientation. The strategic orientation is cultivated, of course, not through discourse but through practices. In ancient China, Daoist arts— such as martial arts and calligraphy – were the practices whereby the *sage* honed his capacity for acuity, accommodation and adaptiveness. (The *sage* of ancient China was the archetypal exponent of the strategic approach, in contrast to the *philosopher* of ancient Greece, who was the archetypal exponent of the theoretic approach.⁷) But any activity that requires close attention and adaptiveness to shifting patterns in a localized field of agency may count as strategic practice – the kind of activity at which traditional Indigenous societies in particular tend to excel.

In the context of a strategic orientation, where no hard and fast line exists between mind and matter, or between meaning and mere causality, apparently meaningful configurations within our environment will be taken at face value as meaningful, at least until they prove to be otherwise. If there is no reason in principle why meaning should not constellate in our environment, there is no reason why we should not experiment with practices of address, call and response, invocation to precipitate the formation of such meaningful configurations. There is no guarantee that these practices will succeed, but no *prima facie* reason to expect them to fail either. Such practices may be conducted at many levels – we may devise communicative cues for particular animals or birds, rivers, mountains or other special places, or for the cosmos at large. If our invitations are taken up, and communicative exchange ensues, the power of this experience will pull us into profound emotional connection with the animal, bird, river or place in question. And should the world itself, or reality at large, come to our party and make meaning with us, we will never be the same again! This experience is so astonishing, so bewitching, so primordial and so enlarging of the self that the world will immediately take pride of place amongst our most intimate attachments. There will be no more question, thereafter, of indifference to the world's fate.

I have elsewhere termed the kind of practice that calls reality into active presence and invites it to collaborate with us in the making of meaning, *ontopoetics*.⁸ Ontopoetics is *poetic* inasmuch as the “language” a communicative world speaks is necessarily a concretised and particularized one, a code of meaning conveyed through the symbolic resonance of *things*. It is in such language then that our address needs to be couched, since it is in such language that the world is able to respond: it is able to *speak things*.

⁷ Francois Jullien, “Did philosophers have to become fixated on truth?”, *Critical Inquiry* 28, 4 (2002): 547-571.

⁸ Freya Mathews, “The Poetic Structure of Being: an Invitation to Ontopoetics”, *Australian Humanities Review* 43 (2007).

Ontopoetics is *ontic* inasmuch as the term signals that not only we, but reality itself, can indeed speak, that it is invested irreducibly with meanings of its own, or can be called into such meaning through invocation. Ontopoetics is performative, and its basic currency is ritual, with all the embodied narrative and aesthetics that normally make up ritual performances, such as song, dance, story-telling, ornamentation and atmospherics. However, many other forms of activity, such as walking and pilgrimage, can be adapted to ritual purposes, and serve as instances of onto poetic address.⁹ Ontopoetics succeeds when reality responds to the call with conjunctions of synchronistic circumstances clearly referenced to the caller's intent.

As a cultural orientation, onto poetics is correlative with strategic praxis: we might expect to find onto poetics flowering in societies in which the strategic orientation is evident in everyday transactions with reality. This is certainly the case with hunter-gatherer societies, which are the pre-eminent exemplars of the strategic orientation, adjusting themselves agentially and responsively and supremely immersively to the particularities of their ever-changing environments. And in such Indigenous societies, particularly here in Australia, onto poetics rather than "art" in the passive, representational, modern sense tends to be the principal cultural modality: cultural expression is always in dialogue with *country*. But in any society, even industrial ones, basic transactions with reality, such as those involved in manufacture, agriculture and architecture, can in principle be re-cast in the strategic mode by attuning them to patterns of conativity at play in their environments. Many intimations of such redesign of industrial societies are already available, in the shape of design-with-nature or biomimicry philosophies.¹⁰ All praxis, redesigned to function in synergy with reality, could in principle be treated as an occasion for shared meaning-making. In this event, the poetic, which we in the modern West relegate to the specialized enclave of "the arts", would become a natural accompaniment of everyday life, embroidering our material practices with highlights of meaning in the companionable course of a never-ending conversation with reality.

In face of the present political realities of Western societies, the prospect of modern praxis undergoing such a wholesale strategic realignment with reality seems unfortunately remote. Although "art" should in no way be hived off from the core practices that make up "the economy", as if "production" – our livelihood – could be separated from the basic activity of meaning-making, art under its present marginalized aspect is perhaps, vestigial as it is, the sole remaining memorial to onto poetics in modern societies. As such it may provide a starting point for a return to onto poetics as the root of culture. Without retreating from the commitment ultimately to infuse all practice – industrial, agricultural and architectural – with invocational significance, let us consider how artists operating within the broad parameters of modern constructions of art might begin to re-imagine what they do in accordance with an onto poetic

⁹ Freya Mathews, "Come with Old Khayyam and Leave the Wise to Talk," *O-Zone* 1, Punctum Press, 2014, <http://o-zone-journal.org/issue-1-short-essay-cluster>.

¹⁰ See, for example, Janine Benyus, *Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired by Nature* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002) (first published by William Morrow, 1997) and William McDonough and Michael Braungart, *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things* (New York: North Point Press, 2002), both discussed at length in Freya Mathews, "Towards a Deeper Philosophy of Biomimicry", *Organization and Environment*, 24, 4 (2011): 364-387

perspective. In re-imagining art as onto-poetics, we might uncover, in microcosm, the outlines of a re-imagined civilization.

In order to re-imagine art in this way, however, let us first backtrack and note that in the West art has, by and large, historically shared the *specular* orientation of other cultural modes: art has, in its own distinctive ways, sought to *represent* reality, even though its representations have been filtered through a subjective lens. In other words, artists have tended to ask themselves, how does the world – including my own self - appear to *me*, rather than forging representations stripped of subjective significance, as science does. Although this is understood as marking a move away from objectification, by implicating the subject and its feelings in representations of reality, at a deeper level such an approach is still entrapped in subject-object dualism. Reality at large is not itself consulted about its self-meanings. The artist still seeks, unilaterally, to “make sense of it”, to ascribe meaning to it. In other words, art has historically and even recently remained broadly within the representational modality rather than opening up to the addressive mode, the mode that calls reality into active, revelatory presence, inviting it to collaborate in the making of meaning.

I would like to identify three steps towards the liberation of art from its entrapment in the dualism of the representational modality. The first is to lift it out of art galleries and return it to the landscape, to the scene of poetic revelation. The modern art gallery is a purposely decontextualized, sterilized environment, in many ways reminiscent of a hospital, clinically purged of tropes that could enable the world to speak – the bush that could burn, the olive branch that could signify, the butterfly that could tellingly alight, the seas that could part, the dove that could fall, the rainbow that could suddenly shine forth. Art originated in the landscape, as rock art, and that is where, to my mind, it properly belongs, in the lap of the speaking world.

Since the environmental art movement that began in the 1970’s has often been *in situ*, inscribed in the landscape itself, a genre-specific exodus from the art gallery has already begun. And traditional environmental art is also sometimes implicitly addressive, inviting natural elements or local life forms to make their mark on the work, helping to shape its final form, as with Andy Goldsworthy’s arrangements of leaves and stones, for instance. A more recent and particularly exquisite example of this approach, emanating from poetry rather than visual art though blending with art in the process, is the physical placement of poems in rural settings by British poet, David Morley. Haikus are carved into wooden posts along a path, for example, where they are designed to be read as part of the rhythm and immersive pleasure of walking but also intended to be over-scripted by natural agencies, where these over-scriptings may eventually in effect re-author the poems.¹¹

However, a further step towards the conversion of art back into onto-poetics would involve restoring to art its ceremonial or ritual context. Art in its original form – whether at Lascaux, the Chauvet Cave or the Burrup Peninsula, for instance – is regarded by many prehistorians to have served totemic, shamanic or other religious or sorcerous purposes. It is widely agreed that the function of rock art is likely to have been at least in part invocational. Addressed to unseen presences, such as animal totems or Dreaming

¹¹ For examples of David Morley’s work, see his personal website, www.davidmorley.org.uk/id17.html. (accessed 15 September 2014).

Ancestors, its aim may have been to open up to and engage the inner, spirit or Dreaming dimension of reality.¹² In a gesture of reconnection with these prehistoric origins, we might today revive invocational contexts, framing our art within mythic narratives fitted to our own time and place and in accordance with our own understandings of reality. Such narratives, couched in the poetic idiom we share with the world, would allow for revelatory response. Art could thereby continue to serve as a tool for the discovery of meanings lying beyond the human.

In prehistoric and ancient times, invocational practices were often accompanied by sacrifice. The thinking behind sacrifice was surely that, if one wished reality to respond to one's overtures, one would have to approach it with offerings. By making an offering believed to align with the interests of the invoked presences, one hoped to attract their attention, gain their cooperation while also demonstrating one's own good will and sensitivity to protocol. The idea of sacrifice may have become repugnant to modern sensibilities but there are other ways in which the artist today can signal her sensitivity to the world's ends, to its current existential circumstances. In our own era, dubbed the Anthropocene, what reality surely needs, here on Earth, is succour for its struggling species. Humanity is displacing millions of species, robbing them of rightful habitat and starving them of their biological entitlements. We have arrogated to ourselves the ecological affordances crafted *by* the larger community of life *for* that larger community. An appropriate offering then, in the current context of environmental emergency, would surely be to build ecological affordances into our art works. Such offerings would count as a *third* step towards reconfiguring art as onto-poetics.

As a personal aside, I might mention here that the idea of art as ecological affordance occurred to me when I became aware recently of improvised structures known as "insect walls" (or pollinator walls, bee towers or insect hotels), consisting of banks of cut materials – wood, bamboo, masonry and such like – often fashioned into little houses and drilled with holes and cavities according to strict specifications for particular species of insects, such as bees, wasps, beetles and ants.¹³ I found these walls, intended not as "art" but as garden features, so enchanting that I began to think about further possibilities - sculptures that would afford nest sites for birds, for instance. I happened to read in passing about some Henry Moore sculptures that were great favorites with birds. Further browsing turned up a sculpture garden in New York in which one particularly large steel sculpture was said to be irresistible to nesting birds¹⁴, while chipmunks preferred the mysterious inner spaces of a welded steel piece

¹² Different interpretations of the significance of prehistoric rock art have currency. They range from the sympathetic magic theory of the Abbe Henri Breuil, according to which hunters represented the animals they hunted in an effort to influence them, to the theory that cave art figured as part of shamanic or initiation rituals. See, for example, Jean Clottes and David Lewis-Williams, *The Shamans of Prehistory: Trance and Magic in the Painted Caves* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998). Across such differences of interpretation however, invocation plays a central role.

¹³ For photographs of such walls, see *Encouraging Native Bees with Insect Walls, Pith & Vigour*, 2014, www.studiogblog.com/shop-for-garden-products/shed-other-garden-buildings/encouraging-native-bees-with-insect-walls. (accessed on 15 September 2014).

¹⁴ For a photograph of the sculpture, by Louise Nevelson, see *PBase, Donald M Kendall Sculpture Gardens at Pepsico*, 11 November 2007, www.pbase.com/gonzalu/image/89267588 (accessed on 15 September 2014).

composed of automobile parts¹⁵, and carpenter bees enjoyed chewing a 45-foot western red cedar totem pole.¹⁶ It was gratifying that sculpture, at least, could offer ecological opportunities, but why, I wondered, were such affordances merely accidental? (Indeed, the uses made of the sculptures by other species in this particular park were regarded by the maintenance staff as “attacks”!¹⁷) Where were works that included affordances as intrinsic to their theme? I googled “birds nest sculpture” and similar phrases, and came up with innumerable examples of ornamental nest sculptures, large and small, but no examples of anything that was actually intended for the use of birds. At this point the specularly of our present approach to our world weighed on me – even at our most sympathetic, it seemed, we talk objectifyingly *about* the environment to one another, rather than addressively *to* the environment itself. But then I found an example of art as pure affordance: a work commissioned by the Cambridge City Council in the United Kingdom consisting of two hundred nest boxes in a thirty-three foot high red, yellow and orange sculpture, the shape and colour of which alluded to the African sun. The Cambridge Swift Tower, complete with speakers playing bird song, was designed to accommodate young swifts arriving in the United Kingdom from Africa. Swift populations are apparently rapidly declining in Britain because old buildings, their preferred nesting sites, are giving way to development.¹⁸

Here indeed was an “offering”! And here was an example of how “environmental art” (and art generally) could be revisioned – not merely as a fixture in the landscape, nor merely as a collaboration between the artist and the landscape – important as such collaboration is in the movement towards onto-poetics - but as an affordance, in which the artist makes an offering to the landscape and the offering itself is the basis for poetic collaboration, for the sharing of meaning. It was not clear whether the Swift Tower was conceived in a narrative context or installed in a ritual, invocational manner, in a communicative gesture not only towards homeless young swifts but towards a world deemed meaningful in its own right and potentially responsive. Probably not. But the addition of such a mythic, invocational context would bring the Swift Tower very close indeed to being an instance of art as onto-poetics.

I have suggested elsewhere that in the context of onto-poetics, the notion of artist, and even of philosopher, might be replaced, or at the very least complemented, by that of *animateur*, one who orchestrates conditions for poetic exchange across species and natural systems boundaries. An animateur is traditionally defined as “a practising artist, in any art form, who uses her/his skills, talents and personality to enable others to compose, design, devise, create, perform or engage with works of art of any kind”.¹⁹ In

¹⁵ For a photograph of the sculpture, by Judith Brown, see *Flickr*, 3 September 2011, www.flickr.com/photos/aneswede/6117401842. (accessed on 15 September 2014).

¹⁶ For an account of the Pepsico Sculpture Garden, see *Donald M. Kendall Sculpture Gardens*, Wikipedia, <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_M._Kendall_Sculpture_Gardens>. (accessed on 15 September 2014).

¹⁷ “Nature and pollution can threaten the artwork. In the spring, birds like to nest in a work by Nevelson, chipmunks prefer the mysterious inner spaces of Judith Brown’s “Caryatid”, a welded steel sculpture made of automobile parts. At one point, carpenter bees started chewing into Robert Davidson’s “Totems,” a 45-foot (14 m) Western red cedar sculpture. Removing bird guano is a constant task. The huge model statue of a bear was a favorite target for some.” *Ibid*.

¹⁸ *Action for Swifts*, <actionforswifts.blogspot.com.au/2011/03/cambridge-city-council-swift-tower.html>. (accessed on 15 September 2014).

¹⁹ Quoted in Mark K. Smith, “Animateurs, animation and fostering learning and change”, *the encyclopaedia of informal education*, 1999, 2009, www.infed.org/animate/b-animat.htm#cite.

other words, an animateur is one whose role is to awaken others to creative cultural life, through theatre or festival or other participatory arts. In particular, the animateur draws forth narrative tropes from the poetic depths of her community to help that community discover and give expression to its own deepest meanings, thereby bringing it into a process of self-actualization. The role of the traditional animateur can readily be extended to the environmental context, or at any rate to a context in which “environment” is understood in the psycho-active terms of onto-poetics: an onto-poetic animateur would, like animateurs generally, help communities to constellate and give expression to latent levels of their own self-narratives while at the same time invoking and drawing forth, through appropriate invocations accompanied by offerings, the poetic potentials of the larger life-system. The animateur would, in other words, find ways of engaging people in communicative exchange with local ecologies, with all the expanded possibilities for meaning and hence for expression that would flow from such two-way communication.

As a medial figure, the animateur serves to stretch the contemporary notion of art in two directions. On the one hand, she helps to open artistic creativity up to input from reality, from the poetic animating genius at the core of creation, thereby releasing such creativity from the possessive and hence commodifying grip of the individual artist. On the other hand, she again releases this creativity from the grip of the specialist-artist, but this time by lifting it out of the art enclave into the wider working community. Every occasion of engagement between society and its world – whether arising in the course of industry, architecture, agriculture, recreation, science or travel – is treated as an opportunity for shared meaning making, for the investment of everyday life with the gravity and grace of metaphysical significance. In a culture mediated by the animateur then, art in its present specialized sense would eventually dissolve into a wider, everyday tapestry of aesthetic, ethical and poetic expression inextricable from the nuts and bolts of economic praxis.

Theory would not of course be abandoned in such a culture. Whether in its philosophical or scientific guise, *theoria*, the province of specular reason, represents a human developmental milestone from which there is no turning back. But specular reason does not appoint ends or afford templates for meaning. Ends and templates for meaning would be discovered, in such a scenario, in consultation with reality, with specular reason being firmly placed in the service of such ends and templates. Ideally, the onto-poetic animateur would integrate scientific and ecophilosophical perspectives with her onto-poetic insights into local ecologies, thereby weaving the specular perspective back into a larger participatory orientation to reality.²⁰

In conclusion, onto-poetics offers one way in which we might invite the world to rise up from the passive plane of representation and actively join us in the making of meaning. Perhaps there are also other ways. My point here is just that it may only be through practices rather than texts that we can escape the grip of the mind-matter/subject-object dualism that has severed our affective connection with reality and, in the modern era, rendered the world an object of our infinite presumption. Philosophy, as the primordial vehicle of *theoria*, may seek to redress the wrong it has done the world; it may herald the need for practices such as onto-poetics to bring us back into communicative

²⁰ For a more detailed discussion of the role of science and philosophy in a contemporary onto-poetic scenario, see Mathews, “Come with Old Khayyam and Leave the Wise to Talk”.

exchange with reality. But simply by re-theorizing the world in non-dualist terms, in the manner of metaphysics, it cannot escape the deeper grip of dualism if, as I have suggested, dualism has its deepest roots in the activity of theorizing itself.