

## ECOLOGICAL ART AND ITS MAIN THESIS

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**Abstract:** The article deals with the topic of ecological art, the thesis of which is the necessity to protect the planet from climate and ecological disaster. The question the author poses in the study is: why, despite the great significance of the problem and its place in public (at least Western) debate, eco-art seems to occupy a rather mediocre place?

The difficulty of ecological art is, among others, that it must convince its recipients that the future fate of the world is, after all, their own, although the effects of the creeping ecological disaster which takes place in our time will be felt only by future generations.

One of the important reasons for the disproportion between the importance of the issue, which is the threat of ecological disaster, the huge financial resources and political efforts undertaken to reduce the devastation, as well as the fairly marginal position of eco-art is a certain paradox (the author refers to it as Nietzschean paradox) – eco-art, on the one hand, shifts the focus from human subject matter to the environment, in which man is only one of the actors, on the other hand, like every type of art, it must remain human. For only the special position of homo sapiens can justify denying and inhibiting man's aspirations in the name of their "leadership" and species chauvinism.

**Keywords:** ecological art, ecoventions, ecological activism, deep ecology, anthropocene.

### 1. Ego- and eco-consciousness

In 1947, the Doomsday Clock hung on the wall of the editorial office issuing *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. In its annual editions, the newsletter informs its readers of the time that has been left for humanity to reach the zero point – the moment when it will cease to exist. Initially, the basic parameter that was taken into account when moving the hands of the clock was the amount of nuclear waste littering the Earth (the scientists who created the clock had previously worked on the atomic bomb in the Manhattan Project). Today, the Bulletin's Science and Security Board also takes into account other factors, such as the impact of new technologies (enabling for example genetic engineering, or introducing information chaos) and climate change (primarily global warming) (cf. Mecklin, 2019).

The awareness of the human destructive impact on the natural environment clearly increased in the 1960s when publications such as *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carlson, *Population Bomb* by Paul R. Erhlich or *The Limits to Growth* report prepared by a group of scientists gathered around D. H. Meadows, started to emerge. Their authors write about environmental pollution, caused by, among other things, the use of pesticides – which Carlson calls “elixirs of death” (cf. Carlson, 1962), overpopulation (cf. Erhlich, 1968) and the depletion of natural resources (cf. Meadows et al., 1972). These publications lead to the increase in the sense of danger of an environmental disaster caused by human arrogance towards nature. It is also clearly visible in the example of many literary and film visions of the apocalypse, which have been enjoying unchanging popularity since then (cf. Borowski, and Sugiera, 2016).

In the second half of the twentieth century, various pro-ecological movements arose. One of the most radical and influential (cf. Keller, 2008) was the so-called deep ecology, associated with the New Age movement. Arne Næss – the founder of the movement – blamed humanity and its anthropocentric ideology for the dramatic situation it ended up in (cf. Næss, 1973). Therefore, the deep ecology (which is what, according to Næss, distinguishes it from all other shallow pro-ecological attitudes) intends to make a radical anti-anthropocentric turn, introducing the principle of biocentric egalitarianism. According to this principle: “The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent worth). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes” (Næss, 1986, p. 14). Biocentrism imposes the obligation to care for every single being without differentiating their value, which, inter alia, became the reason for criticism. First of all, the uselessness of the principle of egalitarianism was mentioned – in reality it is impossible to live without harming any other beings. Environmental ethics allows, for instance, situations in which, considering solely the number of existing lives, one life is worth more than many (for instance a life of a representative of an endangered species). Providing that every life is worth the same, there is no reason to eat vegetables or fruit rather than animals (cf. Keller, 2008). However, the criticism of deep ecology, although it referred to its basic principle<sup>1</sup>, did not question the destructive impact of man on the natural environment.

According to Fritjof Capra – one of the leading authors of deep ecology and the New Age movement – it was the speech by Descartes which led to the recognition of man as the master of nature which resulted in the discrimination of species (named by Richard Ryder, in analogy to racism or sexism, speciesism) (cf. Ryder, 2000). Capra, in the typical manner for many researchers writing at the end of the 20th century, points to the philosophy of Descartes as the source of basic errors and disasters of modern times<sup>2</sup>. It was Descartes, as Capra claims (Capra,

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<sup>1</sup> In 1984, Næss and Georg Sessions created an eight-point deep ecology programme. The principle of biocentric egalitarianism comes first in it (cf. Næss, 1986, p. 14).

<sup>2</sup> Descartes is considered by modern researchers to be notorious. After reading various texts, he could be considered as the one guilty of all “the misfortunes” of modern times. Allegedly, he was supposed to achieve it by

1975; Capra, 1982), who, by separating *res cogitas* and *res extensa*, and recognising nature as an inanimate mechanism that can be managed and disposed of, initiates the birth of modern ego-consciousness. He confesses “My firm belief is that life is a unified whole, that we don’t have biological life, and social life, and mental life or psychological life, and spiritual life. I think this is all part of the whole process of life, which has evolved on this planet for the last 3.5 billion years” (Capra in Pisani, 2007, p. 13). “Species who disregard the basic principles of ecology will not survive in this interconnected world. This is why we need to live sustainably” (Capra in Pisani, 2007, p. 17). According to Capra, every element of environment/nature is as important as the other. Together, they create an excellent system, a kind of *perpetuum mobile*, whose symbiotic existence was interrupted by the human egotistic impulses. Therefore, the priority of the 21st century is to create a sustainable society that is the one whose all elements will be subordinated to the further development of the biosphere. It is possible only by changing the way of thinking about the natural environment and its dynamics<sup>3</sup>. In other words, it is only possible by replacing the ego- with eco-consciousness.

In *The Turning Point*, Capra writes: “When the concept of the human spirit is understood as the mode of consciousness in which the individual feels connected to the cosmos as a whole, it becomes clear that ecological awareness is truly spiritual. Indeed, the idea of the individual being linked to the cosmos is expressed in the Latin root of the word religion, *religare* (>to bind strongly<) as well as in the Sanskrit *yoga*, which means union” (Capra, 1982, p. 412). According to Linda Weintraub: “Eco-consciousness involves acknowledging the correspondence between artmaking and ecosystems whereby every action is a cause that ripples as an effect that then becomes another cause. An ecology bandwagon seems to be warming up. Whether it leads civilisation triumphantly through the new millennium is yet to be determined but one thing seems clear – educators need to prepare students for the long march ahead and help them lead the way” (Weintraub, 2006, p. 81). In both of these cases the birth of ecological consciousness is associated with the end of anthropocene<sup>4</sup> – the age of human dominance. With the end, which for the good of humanity, paradoxically, should, according to some (cf. Haraway, 2015, p. 160), come as soon as possible. “Artists – says Weintraub straightforwardly – are primed to lead this revolution. As such, eco art resembles a crusade” (Weintraub, 2014b, p. 2).

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recognising that the world is composed of two substances – *res cogitas* and *res extensa*. Reading Descartes’ writings proves that the issue is not so simple (cf. W. Marzęda, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> According to Capra, this goal is to be achieved with the help of new world leaders operating in various areas of social life (politics, economy, education, science, art and others). They are supposed to, based on ecological thinking, show solutions to various contemporary problems (economic, financial, energy or nutritional). This role seems to be accepted by many artistic activists who contribute to the ecoproject Capra is writing about (Capra, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> The term anthropocene was initially used in 2000 by Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer (cf. Crutzen, and Stoermer, 2000). Many terms to describe the era of human domination, in which man led to an ecological disaster (for example capitalocene, plastocene, technocene, or chthulucene) were coined. As Ewa Bińczyk notes, the dispute over the proper one has become, apart from the discussion regarding the beginning of the era, one of the two initiating the debate on anthropocene (cf. Bińczyk, 2018). Adopting the term anthropocene indicates man as the one who was at fault and who is responsible for the ecological disaster (cf. Latour, 2017; cf. Bińczyk, 2018).

## 2. Ecological art

Ruth Wallen defines: “[e]cological art is grounded in an ecological ethic and systems theory, addressing the web of interrelationships between the physical, biological, cultural, political work in remote and historical aspects of ecosystems” (Wallen, 2012, p. 235). The beginnings of ecological art took place in the 1960s, at the time when publications about the disastrous state of the Earth began to appear. The art can be treated as a sign of the awakening of ecological awareness. The term itself was originally used to describe the artistic practices of the time (cf. Kagan, 2014, p. 1). At the time the works of Hans Haacke, Alan Sonfist, Joseph Beuys, Helen and Newton Harrison<sup>5</sup> began to appear, followed by many others that raise the issues of environmental pollution, global warming, hunger, overpopulation, ecological colonisation or mass extinction of species. These artists not only define the subject matter of ecological art but also its course of action.

Since the 1960s, ecological art has been enjoying growing interest among artists. In one of the interviews, Weintraub talks about his research on eco-art: “What did I discover? Not dozens, but hundreds of artists, distributed around the globe, who were not merely addressing environmental concerns, but altering their art practices in order to accommodate these concerns. When I reached out to them, I heard over and over again that they felt they were working in an isolated way. They were not aware that they were forging a new art movement” (Weintraub, and Woods, 2018).

Pointing out the thesis of eco-art is not problematic, although the subject matter of these works relates to various issues – all of them proclaim the need to protect the planet from climate and ecological disaster. It is more difficult to define more closely how this kind of artistic activity differs from others. Weintraub undertakes it by writing: “Eco artists [...] are visionaries inventing new means of art-making that are capable of addressing the Earth’s mounting vulnerabilities and crises. Careful preparation optimizes opportunities to enjoy a pleasurable and enriching experience” (Weintraub, 2014a, p. 2). It also indicates the rich combinations of resources available to eco-artists and defines the basic eco-art concepts such as visualise, intervene, activate, dramatize, metaphorise. According to Weintraub: “Eco artists are at liberty to summon imagination, vision, wit, humour, exaggeration, ridicule, glorification, and every other expressive means that artistic license allows. Artistic expression even sanctions dispensing verifiable observations and factual data in the manner of journalists and scientists” (Weintraub, 2014a, p. 3).

It is more difficult to answer the question – and this is the basic problem of eco-art – why, despite the great significance of the problem and its place in public debate (at least Western), does eco-art seem to occupy a rather mediocre place? In other words, there is a visible

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<sup>5</sup> In one of the interviews, Helen Harrison says openly that reading Carlson’s *Silent Spring* inspired her to create art which deals with ecology (cf. Harrison, H., and Harrison, N., and Stephens, E., and Sprinkle, A., 2010).

disproportion between the importance of the topic, which is the threat of ecological disasters, huge financial resources and political efforts undertaken to slow down devastation, and the rather marginal position of eco-art. Why does eco-art take disproportionately little space in public space and debate? The answer requires taking a few issues into account.

### 3. Nietzschean paradox

Regardless of whether we traditionally blame Descartes or some other plague for the obvious conviction, held until recently, that the position of man is eminent, the obvious fact remains that at least since cave painting human matters and fascinations have constituted the basic subject matter and reference point for craftsmen and artists. Abandoning human subject matter must also lead to a change in attitude to the human recipient. So far, none of the currents – from nineteenth-century naturalism to abstractionism, have been liberated from the human perspective. All currents proclaiming the end of the human era have fallen into what may be called “Nietzschean paradox”. Nietzsche wrote in one of his most famous tirades: “Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of that universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented knowing. That was the most arrogant and mendacious minute of »world history«, but, nevertheless, it was only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts had to die” (Nietzsche, 1979, p. 79). And trying to point out human futility and the deceitfulness of the so-called intellect, he engaged more and more into human affairs. In other words, Nietzschean paradox can be expressed briefly: overcoming, abandoning what is human and cannot cease to be a human, all too human thing.

The reason is that if we treat the *homo sapiens* species as a biologically indistinct element of nature (cf. Latour, 2005; Haraway, 2015, p. 159) then we must also treat its activities, along with heavy industry and pollution, as a characteristically human way of shaping their ecological niche, which is the whole planet. From this point of view, nothing can speak in favour of saving the planet. If we take this perspective into consideration, the destruction of life on Earth or its radical transformation will only be one of the elements in the history of Life. Nothing but an indication of the special role that our species played on Earth first as a destroyer and today increasingly as a nature’s protector, can justify anti-destruction and pro-ecological activities. Otherwise, we are confronted with problems similar to those of New Age ecology. The author will generally refer to this situation as a Nietzschean paradox. Only the special position of *homo sapiens* can justify denying and inhibiting man’s aspirations in the name of their “leadership” and species-specific chauvinism.

Returning to the topic of ecological art, a question arises: can art ignore human affairs without falling into a buffoonery of announcing its own death? The basic problem of eco-art, which artists have to deal with while preparing their works, is that on the one hand, this kind of art transfers the emphasis from the eternal human subject matter to the environment, in which man is only one of the actors, on the other hand, every kind of art, also ecological, just like in Nietzschean paradox, is always human. One of the strategies for moving away from human subject matter, which has been present since the very beginning of ecological art, is to present the functioning mechanisms of selected elements of the ecosphere. In *Grass Grows* (1966), on a cone-shaped soil, Haacke plants grass, which in time becomes a green, living form, where only traces of visitors' presence can be seen for example footprints (cf. Jones, 2011). Whereas, in *Rhine Water Purification Plant* (1972) in the Museum Haus Lange in Krefeld, a small sewage treatment plant is constructed – canisters with filters in which dirty water flows through little pipes. When water is purified, it flows into a fish pond, then irrigates the museum gardens. This work was created in response to a specific situation. “In 1972, the City of Krefeld poured about 11 billion gallons of untreated wastewater into the Rhine – Haacke says in one of the interviews. As part of a large triptych in my installation, I listed all contributors to this mess, including the number of gallons of their respective contribution. The largest polluter was a factory situated right on the Rhine that was part of the giant Bayer group of corporations” (Haacke, 2016).

Helen and Newton Harrison draw attention to the concept of the ecosystem in their first works. *Making Earth* – their early eco-political work (1970) was created as a result of realizing that there is no such thing as the most endangered species on Earth. It is the Earth – the entire ecosystem is under threat. Hence, using sand, clay, leaves, manure, water and an ordinary shovel they begin to produce it. “After all – they say – anyone, anyone at all for any reason can interrupt or destroy or force the simplification of the ecosystem in the soil. It only takes a shovel. [...] the one of us making topsoil, the other planting in it. We did this before understanding collaboration was wanting to happen. This making and planting became, in a larger sense, a metaphor for the idea of regenerating the earth worldwide. Implicit was a second question. »Would it be enough, if all the topsoil was regenerated worldwide? « Clearly it wouldn't be enough. Regenerating topsoil might simply be an invitation for further exploitation. Something was missing” (Harrison, H., and Harrison, N., 2010). “We propose nothing less than assisting ecosystem regeneration on a planet-wide basis” (Harrison, H., and Harrison, N., 2010, p. 44)

The assisted regeneration can take many forms. It may, as in the case of *Full Farm* (1974), an educational project of plant growing and worm breeding, which included, among others, an orchard (*Portable Orchard*) and potato cultivation (*Potato Farm*), show the process that is necessary to produce food. It may also take the form of a research on the life of lagoons conducted in cooperation with scientists as in the seven-part series *The Lagoon Cycle* (1974-1978) – a work which consists of more than 50 elements (a mural, photos, texts) and it makes you realize that the means to survive is to “reorient consciousness around a different database”

(Harrison, H., Harrison, N., 1974-1978). It may also show results which our seemingly harmless, aesthetic choices can sometimes have on a given ecosystem. In *The Barrier Island Drama – The Mangrove and The Pine* (1982) – one of the first works dealing with the topic of ecological colonisation, the changes which took place in Florida due to the pine brought there from Australia, were documented. The tree was imported in order to embellish the landscape. When it grew, like a weed, it led to the destruction of unique mangrove swamps (cf. Harrison, H., and Harrison, N., 1982).

In such cases, the art becomes utilitarian – it is used for educational purposes or actions directed at a specific purpose. *Operation Paydirt* by Mel Chin (an action carried out from 2006 until today), together with its complimentary projects *Fundred Dollar Bill Project* and *Safehouse*, can be used as a flagship example, which are aimed at preventing children from lead poisoning. *Fundred Dollar Bill Project* is supposed to educate and activate the community and at the same time bring funds making it possible to accomplish the main task. The project involves children who draw their own versions of \$100 banknotes, which are then sold and converted into real money supporting the project (cf. Chin, 2006). *Safehouse*, built in the hurricane destroyed district of New Orleans, serves as a safe place where you can draw and store children's drawings (the front wall of the house looks like a large rotary combination lock) (cf. Chin, 2018, 2010).

Cecylia Malik also has specific goals in mind. The socio-artistic action (as the author herself defines it) *Modraszek Kolektyw* (*Modraszek Collectivity*, 2011)<sup>6</sup> prevented the development of Zakrzówek – a picturesque place with a small lake in Kraków, where the protected butterfly species, Modraszek, lives. *Warkocze Białki* (*Białka Plaits*, 2013) was to prevent the devastation of Białka by its regulation and showed the problem of river regulation in general. This issue was also raised by the *Siostry rzeki* action (*Sisters of the River*, 2018), where female participants wearing self-made second-hand swimming costumes, each with a plaque bearing a name of a selected Polish river, which looked like road signs informing which river we were crossing, protested against the construction of the E40 river highway. The highway has already been identified as one of the largest ecological disasters threatening Poland.

Ecological art is also utilitarian in the sense that it mixes – for example in the so-called living sculptures – with gardening and crafts, which have not belonged to the field of artistic activities in the traditional sense (since the Renaissance). It is visible in the photographs of Tim Flach, who anthropomorphises animals in his portraits. His exhibitions, where you can see, among others, portrait photographs of representatives of endangered species (Polar Bears, Lemur Leaf Frog, Philippine Eagle and many others) combine fine workmanship with typically anthropomorphic elements. Animals are photographed in positions in which people tend to sit or with almost human grimaces on – in this case the word seems suitable – faces. Hens dancing

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<sup>6</sup> Modraszek Kolektyw was created in cooperation with Justyna Koeke, Rozalia Malik, Monika Drożyńska, Karolina Kłos, Kamil Goerlich, Mateusz Torbus, joined by other artists and activists (cf. Malik, 2011)

like ballerinas. Surprised faces of bats and even a profile of a gaping mouth of an alligator resembling a singer rather than a hunting predator (cf. Flach, 2012).

In other words, incorporating art into human context seems inevitable regardless of whether it is about institutions or human subject matter. Therefore, the main problem in the discussion about anthropocene finds its expression in eco-art: can you avoid or overcome what is human in typical human performances?

#### 4. Cassandraic art and creeping disaster

When Cassandra foretold the fall of the Trojans and called for the burning of the great wooden horse the Achaeans had left on the river bank, she was in a highly convenient situation. Her predictions concerned directly the people she addressed. Ecological art is derived of that convenience due to the scale of the problem and the fact that it does not say anything directly about the recipients' life. In all likelihood, the conclusion of the climate disaster will not take place in their lifetime. It is likely that this disaster will be neither violent nor spectacular. So, how is eco-art supposed to meet the traditional requirement that art should concern a recipient (*de te fabula narrata!*). Oedipus with gouged eyes or Van Gogh's rustic shoes reveal the horizon of an individual being – they always relate to a recipient in some way – they are about him or her. (cf. Heidegger, 1992) However, can eco-art's thesis directly concern a recipient, since tragedy is a problem of scale and not of an individual being?

Let me quote once more a fragment of the Weintraub's eco-art definition: "Careful preparation optimises opportunities to enjoy a pleasurable and enriching experience". This is perhaps eco-artists' most important task – how to prepare an artefact or an artistic performance in order to optimise the "pleasurable and enriching experience". The situation is similar to the one illustrated in the famous poem by Miłosz – the whole problem is that, as the poet says, "There will be no other end of the world" (Miłosz, 1983, p. 77). What is happening around – dripping tap water, chimney smoke and a rustling plastic bag – is the end of the world.

Artistic transformation of human everyday life in modern civilisation into a chip from a mosaic forming a picture of a disaster, is a challenge and an important problem of today's eco-art. Since the Sophocles' times artists have developed mechanisms which were intended to convince a recipient that a work of art ultimately refers to his or her life, that it is about him or her (catharsis, stories of saving the soul in the Middle Ages, a metaphysical feeling in Pure Art). Meanwhile, ecological art cannot benefit from those centuries-old achievements. The reason being that it says nothing about its recipients' fate. The effects of the creeping disaster which takes place in our time will be felt only by future generations. The difficulty of ecological art is that it must convince its recipients that the future fate of the world is, after all, their fate.

Various attempts to deal with this difficulty can be presented. One of the latest, widely available ideas is a temporary exhibition (09 October 2018-08 September 2019) of the works by an American artist J. Henry Fair at the Berlin Naturkunde Museum entitled *ArteFakte*. It shows industrial facilities in Germany and the USA photographed from an aircraft in such a way that a recipient often has no chance of guessing what is presented. The structures, however, are colourful and form amazing patterns. Only by looking at the signature and the reverse – large-format photos are displayed on portable screens – one can learn a bit more about the presented pollution and how to fight it, and even the names of politicians and scientists who struggle with the presented problem in the EU. So, there is a roof of a paper mill in the USA, a sewage spill to the Rhine or industrial areas on the banks of the Mississippi (cf. Fair, 2018, 2019). Fair creates the effect of surprise by choosing details of panoramic images (obverse), which are certainly “opportunities to enjoy a pleasurable and enriching experience”.

Another – classic example – are Haacke’s ecological works, which are created by means of natural materials: water, earth, in cooperation with plants and animals. In *Condensation Cube* (1965) we can see how water enclosed in a Plexiglas cube reacts to the presence of the viewer – under the influence of their heat it changes its physical properties, evaporates and condenses creating patterns on transparent sheets. As Melissa Sue Ragain noted “Work that explored the small-scale, often invisible aspects of the natural environment offers a more appropriate starting place for generating a critical language for ecological art” (Ragain, 2012, p. 33).

Another method of solving the above-mentioned problem by departing from the traditionally developed ways of presentation in art is a happening or activism. The works-performances of the previously mentioned Mel Chin or Cecylia Malik may be a good example here. For instance, two Beuys’ works of art from 1971 were the answer to a specific ecological threat. The first was to prevent the planned drainage of swamps in the Ostend area – during the performance the artist soaked in the endangered swamps (*Action in the swamps*), the second was to prevent forest clearance in Dusseldorf (*Overcome the dictatorship of the parties for once and for all*). He carried this action out together with some students, with whom he painted white marks on the endangered trees. His most famous ecological work-performance – *7000 Oaks* (1982-1987), began at Documenta 7 in Kassel and continued even after his death. 7000 trees planted during the action still affect the air quality in the city.

Beuys was not only one of the first people to practice art in the form of ecological activism, but he also actively participated in German politics – he founded DSP (German student party in 1967, one of their goals was defined as “cleansing the earth, water and air”), the Organisation for Direct Democracy through Referendum (its aim was, inter alia, to ensure greater protection for the animal and plant world and their multiplication), moreover, he was also a Green Party’s candidate for Bundestag. All these groups chose environmental protection as their course of action, to a greater or lesser extent (cf. Kaczmarek, 2001).

Beuys' ecological actions are one of the first ecoventions – “practical actions with ecological intent” (Spaid, 2017a, p. 35) as defined by Sue Spaid – the author of the term. The meaning of the term, which was coined in 1999<sup>7</sup> while preparing, together with Amy Lipton, the exhibition *Ecovention: Current Art to Transform Ecologies*, that took place in 2002 at the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, Ohio. Spaid introduces it in the following way: “The term ecovention (ecology + invention) was coined to describe an artist-initiated (the ‘I will’) project that employs an inventive strategy (the ‘I know’) to transform (the ‘I can’) a local ecology” (Spaid, 2003, p. 13). Ecovention is a type of artistic intervention which, first of all, is associated with a specific place, a specific environment. Therefore, they are local activities (cf. Spaid, 2002 p. 12). Secondly – they are participative in character, often created in cooperation with the local community, environmental organisations, scientists, politicians, and generally – with people interested in changing a given situation. This intention of protecting or restoring local ecology and collectivism make them stand out from other forms of ecological art. Thirdly, ecoventions aim to – in the longer term – change social or political procedures regarding ecology.

The exhibition was divided into five sections: “1) activism to publicize ecological issues/monitoring ecological problems, 2) valuing anew/living with brown-fields, 3) biodiversity/accommodating species/studying species depletion, 4) urban infrastructure/environmental justice, and 5) reclamation and restoration aesthetics” (Spaid, 2002, p. 16). The exhibition comprised the works of artists who are recognised today as classics of ecological art: Beuys, the Harrison couple, Alan Sonfist, Robert Smithson, George Steinmann, Agnes Denes and Mel Chin, and dozens of others whose works approached the problems of ecology in an ingenious way.

In 2017, Spaid, in cooperation with Roele Arkesteijnek, prepared another exhibition: *Ecovention Europe. Art to transform Ecologies, 1957-2017* (De Domijnen, Sittard, 4 September 2017-7 January 2018). This time she presented works created in Europe. Apart from the 5 sections which raised the same topics as in the first exhibition, three more groups were added: Food Security, Climate Change and Oikos. This time, despite being limited to works related to one continent, the number of presented works was significantly bigger than at the 2002 exhibition (cf. Spaid, 2017b). This indicates how much today's artists are involved in environmental protection.

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<sup>7</sup> The term itself was coined three years earlier (cf. Spaid, 2017a).

## 5. Summary

The problems of ecological art indicated here are primarily technical. And they do not have to prove insurmountable. Actually, eco-art is placed today among other activities for the benefit of the planet - ecological art is mainly utilitarian. Eco-art is utilitarian in the sense that its basic means of expression are used in the implementation of various ecological initiatives on equal terms with others, such as scientific research or social campaigns. The latest examples of eco-art's utility can be Fair's photographs. These are colourful, beautiful images – baits designed to encourage a recipient to see what is on their reverse. It may also be a small installation showing what the process of water purification looks like, an artefact which illustrates how the very presence of man affects the surrounding environment, tree planting action, collecting funds to counteract lead poisoning, an action aimed at changing the authorities' decisions regarding the development of a given area or river regulation. It may also be an educational action carried out in cooperation with various foundations and institutions, or pro-ecologically oriented government agencies. Commissioned by the Cultural Council of South Holland (1994), the Harrisons prepared a new project for *Green Heart* and the Randstad of Holland, an area of 800 km<sup>2</sup>, which was recognised as one of the most valuable green areas of North-West Europe (cf. Harrison, H., and Harrison, N., 1984). Another time, thanks to the British Government's funding, the work *Greenhouse Britain* (2007-2009) was created, which deals with global warming. One of the classic ecological art projects, planned at the request of the Art Park Foundation, involves the regeneration of 20 acres of devastated area which remained after the construction of the Niagara Power Plant. For two years, soil was imported and enriched, various plants such as berries and trees were planted. One of the project's elements included engaging local communities, municipal services, construction companies, farms and youth organisations. The latter dealt with the collection of seeds, which were then scattered throughout the area. What's more, the implementation of the project – as its authors emphasise – took a long time, but it was much cheaper than the commonly used methods of fast regeneration of devastated areas (cf. Harrison, H., and Harrison N., 1976-1978).

Regardless of the methods in which solutions to specific ecological problems are suggested and the effectiveness of ecoventions that are carried out at the macro scale, ecological art must find a way to overcome Nietzschean paradox in order not to be marginalised.

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