

ENVIRONMENTAL THERAPY THROUGH ART PRACTICES: MEMORY, AGENCY, AND THE CARE OF WOUNDED PLACES

Nuvola Ravera

Albertina Academy of Turin

New Media and Critical-Curatorial Practices of Contemporary Creation program

nuvola.ravera@gmail.com

ENVIRONMENTAL THERAPY

ARTISTIC PRACTICES

SITUATED AND SPECULATIVE CARE

WOUNDED PLACES

AFFECTIVE ECOLOGIES

This paper explores the concept of *Environmental therapy* through a dialogue between philosophical perspectives, artistic practices, and speculative approaches to care. Expanding beyond the human subject, *Environmental therapy* considers the environment itself as an active participant in processes of transformation, bearing memory, trauma, and agency. Drawing from new materialist theories, hauntology, and affect studies (Barad, Ingold, Bennett, Haraway, Gordon), the research examines how artistic interventions engage with wounded landscapes, abandoned sites, and repressed histories, addressing their psychic residues and perceptual imprints. Through a selection of contemporary art case studies, including the *Don't Follow the*

Wind exhibition in Fukushima's exclusion zone, olfactory and atmospheric projects (Tolaas, Assaël), and choreographic explorations by La Tierce or El Conde de Torreñiel, the paper investigates artistic methodologies that activate latent memories and generate reciprocal processes of care between humans and environments. Finally, the paper critically examines the ethical challenges of such approaches, questioning the risks of romanticization, anthropomorphism, and extractive aesthetics. By framing environmental therapy as a hybrid and relational practice, this study suggests that artistic and performative interventions might foster new ways of sensing, remembering, and co-inhabiting fragile ecologies.

INTRODUCTION

This essay departs from the observation that certain artistic practices—particularly those engaging with wounded places, atmospheric traces, and latent memories—can give form to new modes of care. What if therapy were not a clinical act, but a speculative and performative gesture extended toward the environment itself? The notion of *environmental therapy* explored here emerges from this question. Rather than proposing a healing protocol, it suggests a relational posture of attentiveness, where artists become interlocutors in ecosystems marked by trauma, repression, or abandonment.

Drawing from philosophical perspectives and contemporary artistic practices, the environment is approached not as a passive backdrop or resource, but as a complex subject-endowed with memory, agency, and perceptual intensity. In this sense, *environmental therapy* can be situated within a lineage of thought on care and self-transformation, from ancient philosophical exercises to Foucault's *Care of the self*, through James Hillman's *Anima Mundi*, and into new materialist and feminist theories of affect, performativity, and multispecies entanglement (Barad, Ingold, Bennett, Haraway, Gordon). These frameworks offer a hybrid ground to understand how art—beyond representation—might activate subtle processes of reciprocal sensing, atmospheric listening, and co-presence with damaged environments.

This work examines artistic projects engaging with psychic residues, perceptual imprints, and environmental traumas. Many contemporary artists and collectives conduct long-term research in relation to *wounded places* (Till, 2008)—locations affected by severe pollution, urban stress, historical trauma, repressive institutions, abandonment, and decay. These sites are not just physical locations but carriers of memory, shaping collective transformation. Through selected case studies—including the *Don't Follow the Wind* exhibition inside Fukushima's exclusion zone, the creation

of atmospheric environments that make the invisible perceptible (S. Tolaas, M. Assaël), the possibility of generating demiurgic works, performances in dialectic with specific spaces (collective La Tierce, collective El Conde de Torrefiel), and collaborative projects that engage institutions as suffering subjects (D. Garcia, D. Mangano)—this research will explore how artistic devices can activate latent memories, give form to invisible forces, and potentially foster a reciprocal process of care between humans and their environments.

Finally, the essay will briefly address the ethical challenges and the risk of romanticization. If we speak of places as subjects, of landscapes, cities, and wounded areas, we must continually ask: *who cares for whom, and to what end?* Furthermore, there is the risk of projecting human needs onto nature (or vice versa) in a way that oversimplifies or idealizes complex socio-ecological issues. The conclusion reflects on the ethics of care and the caution needed to ensure environmental therapy remains a responsible practice, avoiding naïve idealism.

In sum, the aim is to articulate a rigorous yet imaginative interpretation of *environmental therapy*, where philosophical insight and artistic practices intertwine—an analysis enlivened by poetic reflection, engaging both material and atmospheric dimensions of ecosystemic experience.

The term environmental therapy is used here critically—not as a clinical or psychological protocol, but to suggest a speculative and performative posture of reciprocal care. Rooted in etymological and philosophical traditions of care, this concept challenges biomedical models that often disregard ecosystems, more-than-human agencies, and multi-species interdependence.

The seed for the hypothesis of *environmental therapy* through artistic and performative practices was planted within a personal art-research project developed in Venice in 2017, titled “Big Babol”. Here, the concept of the psyche of places was explored—common to various cultures under different names. Venice and its lagoon were considered in this project as a living organism.

Fig. 1 Nuvola Ravera, *Big Babol*.
2017- 2023.
Edible gelatin sculptures
made from Venetian lagoon
water. The installation
explores the psyche of place
through olfactory, sculptural,
and performative elements. It
enacts a speculative dialogue
with the wounded lagoon,
embodying environmental
therapy as relational sensing.
Rebaudengo, Fondazione
Sandretto Torino.



The project developed both in the studio and in direct engagement with the lagoon's territory, thanks to a collaboration with Gestalt psychotherapist L.C. This exchange pushed the boundaries of the traditional therapeutic setting, moving outside the studio to conduct *en plein air sessions*, treating landscapes and ecosystems as active subjects-hypothetical patients with suppressed figures to be unearthed (Figure 1).

Through 'three-way dialogues' –between the city, the therapist, and the artist– the work took shape as a multi-elemental narrative that extracted fragments of discourse,

atmospheres, and anatomies from the city. This process involved deep listening to intercept flows, air currents, tidal breaths, and overheard conversations, alongside material sampling: collecting water to transform into edible sculptures, creating casts of the city's anatomical parts, and making negative rubbings of surfaces using charcoal derived from the briccole (Venetian wooden poles). From this initial project—based on a presumed dialogue with a non-human patient, inherently unverifiable and fallible—emerged an interest in questioning the environment as part of a reciprocal care process¹. By contaminating soft and hard sciences through the lens of artistic devices, this research seeks to establish a relational inquiry with invisible fragments of the world as interlocutors, considering their historical and environmental wounds.

This combined approach ensures that artistic gestures are not merely described, but interpreted through a dialogical framework. The case studies were selected for their ability to activate gestures of care toward specific places. Here, the term *environmental therapy* is not used in a clinical or technical sense, but as a speculative and performative construct—emerging at the intersection of ecology, care, and artistic agency. Rather than proposing an actual therapeutic protocol, it serves as a conceptual device to imagine reciprocal processes of transformation. While the findings are not statistically generalizable, these examples show how art can catalyze transformative relationships between human and non-human subjects.

This methodological framework, while not without limitations—among them those of autoethnography: the artist-researcher is both observer and directly involved, which can generate perceptual and interpretative biases, as well as the impossibility of quantitatively measuring any actual ‘healing’—offers a lens to explore the transformative role of artistic practice and its ethical-political dimension. In the following sections, we will explore specific artistic case studies and their role in activating environmental memory

and care, followed by a critical discussion on ethical challenges and the implications of this approach.

PHILOSOPHICAL GROUNDING: CARE OF THE SELF, WORLD, AND MORE-THAN-HUMAN

Although this essay primarily engages with fragments of Western philosophical traditions, it is important to acknowledge Eastern and Indigenous perspectives on human-non-human care. For instance, Taoist and Buddhist teachings from the 4th century BCE emphasize living in harmony with the world² and many Indigenous cultures –from the Amazon to the Ande– perceive nature as a living, ensouled entity (Berkes, 2008). Despite emerging in different cultural contexts, these insights converge with certain ancient Western impulses: the idea that care of the self is not conceived in isolation but extends to an attentive engagement with the surrounding world.

Michel Foucault's *Le souci de soi* (1984) reintroduced care of the self as a transformative practice, not merely an individual attitude but a 'technology of the self' shaping subjectivity. For classical thinkers –from Socrates to the Stoics– self-care was a lifelong training of the soul, shaping one's way of inhabiting the world and relating to others. This care had both an individual and collective dimension, extending to one's way of inhabiting the world and relating to others. In this sense, self-care was inseparable from care for the community and the surrounding environment, as personal transformation always implied an interaction with the social and political context—a way to resist mechanisms of subjugation and create new ways of living based on awareness and ethical autonomy.

Similarly, philosopher Pierre Hadot, in *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (1995), described philosophy as a *therapy of the passions*, and the *spiritual exercises* of Hellenistic and Roman philosophical schools as ways of life aimed at healing and guiding the soul. If caring for oneself involves attention, discipline, and

Fig. 2 Chim↑Pom, Kenji Kubota, Eva & Franco Mattes, Jason Waite, *Don't Follow the Wind*, 2015-ongoing. View of the Fukushima exclusion zone, inaccessible site of the long-term exhibition. The landscape, contaminated by radiation, becomes both condition and co-author of the work.



compassion, could caring for the environment be understood in a similar way? Environmental therapy may rest on an ethos of care that merges self and world—an ‘ecological care of the self’ in which tending to the world becomes an integral part of tending to ourselves.

Hillman builds upon these ideas by extending psychoanalysis beyond its clinical framework and transforming it into a metaphorical and speculative tool for reawakening buried philosophical narratives, forgotten myths, and lost divinities. Hillman's *Anima Mundi* resacralizes the world, resisting modernity's disenchantment. His critique stems from the premise that contemporary society suffers not only from a loss of soul within individuals but from a *loss of soul in the*

Fig. 3 Eva and Franco Mattes, Fukushima Texture Pack, 2015. Installation view from Don't Follow the Wind. The work reflects on digital materiality and invisible contamination, engaging environmental trauma through latency and absence. Courtesy of the artists.



world itself. In *The Thought of the Heart and the Soul of the World* (1992), he asserts that ignoring the aesthetic and emotional presence of the environment constitutes a pathology of modern life. Our daily indifference—failing to notice a poorly repainted building, the birdsong at dusk, or the neglected architecture of a neighborhood—reflects a *sensory anesthesia* and a neglect of the *Anima Mundi*, which was once central to premodern cosmologies.

For Hillman, the world is a psychic organism endowed with memory, desire, and suffering, capable of communicating through its material manifestations, from landscapes to urban structures. He suggests that therapy must extend beyond the psychotherapist's studio: healing processes should involve the "*care of the soul in the world*", awakening our active presence in places and recognizing that the world itself has a psyche.

If the world has a soul, then it may also have a voice and agency. Feminist and posthumanist theorists have expanded on this idea of more-than-human agency through multispecies and materialist perspectives. Donna Haraway, with her evocative and biologically rooted language, invites us to rethink care as a tentacular, multispecies responsibility, where humans, corals, pigeons, and lichens co-exist in fragile yet

generative entanglements. In *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, she urges us to “stay with the trouble” rather than seek escapist salvation, embracing an art of *living on a damaged planet*. For Haraway, art is not a tool to fix nature, but a practice of worlding—of weaving new alliances and co-creating modes of survival between human and non-human partners. She proposes a speculative and relational approach where artistic and scientific practices intertwine, generating possible forms of collective regeneration and response to environmental devastation.

Similarly, new materialist thinkers such as Karen Barad and Jane Bennett emphasize that matter and environments are not inert substrates but active participants. Barad's agential realism (Barad, 2007) introduces the concept of intra-action, meaning that entities (people, objects, environments) co-constitute one another through their relationships—the world is constantly performing in interaction with us. Bennett (Bennett, 2010) likewise speaks of the vitality of matter, highlighting how even seemingly inanimate elements—such as metal or plastic—carry a certain agency, capable of influencing human bodies and decisions. In this perspective, the environment is performative: it acts, affects, and even remembers through its material configurations.

The notion of environmental memory resonates with Avery Gordon's concept of *haunting*. In *Ghostly Matters* (1997), Gordon describes haunting as an “*animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence makes itself known*”—often attaching to places where past traumas persist as an uncanny presence. Haunting suggests that environments can “*remember*” through their atmospheres and structures. Importantly, Gordon does not see *haunting* as an isolated, purely negative experience. Instead, it is a productive force that signals the breakdown of repression and the potential for transformative political action. When the ghost of an injustice appears—be it through the silence in a marginalized urban space or the palpable absence in a record of historical events—it compels both individuals and communities to engage in a process of

Fig. 4 Don't Follow the Wind,
Maintenance trip with flag
designed by Naohiro Ukawa,
Fukushima exclusion zone,
Japan, 2015.

The flag marks the
contaminated site and
sustains a dialogue of presence
and absence, making the
environment itself the
exhibition's gatekeeper.
Courtesy of the artists.



collective remembrance and, ultimately, redress. In this way, the ghost becomes a mediator, urging us to re-examine established power structures and to envision alternative futures that incorporate the voices of those who have been systematically silenced. Gordon's work enriches our understanding of therapy, showing that encountering the ghostly means not curing a static wound but about initiating an ongoing dialogue—a call to continually 'do something' in the face of persistent historical and material violence. This theoretical insight establishes the central premise of *environmental therapy*: that care of the self and care of the environment are not separate pursuits, but two interwoven facets of a holistic practice of healing and critical transformation³ (Guattari, 2000).

SENSING THE AGENCY, WOUNDS AND MEMORY

To consider the environment as an active subject means recognizing that landscapes and places are not static backdrops but dynamic entities, endowed with histories, capacities, and even their own wounds. Environmental therapy demands that places be treated not as mere settings for human action, but as protagonists—or at least as partners.

This implies acknowledging both environmental memory—the idea that environments ‘remember’ through physical imprints and the persistence of past events—and environmental trauma, meaning that sites can be ‘wounded’ by destructive events and carry that trauma into the future.

One way to understand environmental memory is by examining the sensory and material traces that remain. A striking example is olfaction: our sense of smell is neurologically linked to memory and emotion more directly than sight or hearing. The artist and scent researcher Sissel Tolaas has observed that *“smells are constantly used, consciously or unconsciously, as a means of communication between plants, animals, and humans. It is more strongly connected to memory than any other sense and is the most effective trigger of recollections and emotions”* (Tolaas, 2023). In her research, Tolaas collects volatile molecules from urban environments—ranging from the scent of an archaeological site to traces of pollution, the aromas of domestic kitchens, or human bodily odors—then reconstructs them in immersive installations. Scents act as invisible mnemonic archives of places⁴ (Figures 5-7), unlocking memories and atmospheres that often escape visual perception. In Tolaas’s work, the environment asserts its presence through scent; the city ‘speaks’ through its olfactory landscape, transmitting histories of industrial activity, cultural practices, or even collective anxieties. These olfactory projects demonstrate the agency of the environment in a visceral way: a single gust of wind can transport someone to a moment decades past or alert them to imminent danger. The environment communicates and influences us at a subconscious level, inducing memory and emotional response much like a skilled therapist might uncover a repressed recollection.

Beyond sensory traces, environments retain memory in tangible forms: ruins, residues, and scars. A damaged river, for instance, ‘remembers’ the culverting, diversions, and industrial spills that have poisoned its waters. An old building preserves the trace of past damage—blackened walls from a long-extinguished fire or bullet holes left by a conflict. Art-



Fig. 5 A thick layer of smog lies over the city of Puebla.

A thick layer of smog over the city of Puebla to evokes the invisibility of environmental stressors and atmospheric toxicity—central themes in olfactory Sissel Tolaas art practices. Courtesy Jose Castanares / AFP/Getty Images.

ists and theorists often act as interpreters of these signs. Feminist geographer Karen E. Till, in her article *Artistic and Activist Memory-Work: Approaching Place-Based Practice* (2008), speaks of ‘wounded places’—sites marked by violence or loss—and argues that artistic and activist practices in these places can help communities recognize and transform how that memory is experienced.

Engaging with a *wounded landscape*—a site of detention, a former war zone, a neighborhood forcibly evicted, or an area struck by ecological disaster—requires attentiveness to what the environment itself expresses in its present state. Does an unsettling silence exist where activity and sounds once reigned? Do certain areas resist regrowth, as if the soil itself were mourning? While ecosystems do not experience pain in a human sense, they undergo disruptions, and they may collapse or recover. A forest might ‘grieve’ deforestation, as its biodiversity and network of relations suffer severe damage. When people later walk through that deforested area,

they often describe it as devastated, empty, or sad—human terms that project an emotional understanding onto an environmental reality. This tendency to emotionally characterize damaged environments highlights both the power and the risk of anthropomorphism. On the one hand, imagining an environment's perspective—a river that weeps, or a mountain that remembers—can be a useful exercise in empathy. It encourages us to extend ethical consideration and approach that place with humility and care. As mentioned earlier, many Indigenous cultures around the world have long treated landscapes as living and sentient entities, deserving of rituals of respect and healing when harmed.

On the other hand, projecting human emotions onto the non-human carries the risk of oversimplification. Pursuing this hypothesis of *environmental therapy* requires caution: perhaps it is less about claiming that the forest literally feels sadness and more about translating its signals, emanations and emissions to recognize an analogy between *wounding and healing*. A wounded environment may not experience pain as the human psyche codes, but it manifests dysfunction or imbalance that requires attention. In turn, the human communities connected to that environment experience suffering (grief, displacement, anger), so the trauma is, in a sense, shared across the boundary between human and non-human.

Another key aspect of considering the environment as a subject is agency – the ability to act and influence outcomes. Timothy Morton's concept of *hyperobjects* (2013) is particularly relevant in understanding wounded environments. Large-scale phenomena such as climate change or nuclear radiation are beyond human perception yet shape our material and emotional landscapes in ways that demand new forms of care and artistic intervention. The new materialist theories we previously mentioned, such as J. Bennett, draw inspiration among others, from Spinoza, who argued that “*all things are animate, though to varying degrees*”. These perspectives emphasize that agency is distributed; what we label as “inanimate” can still initiate events. Take

Fig. 6 Sissel Tolaas, *Talking nose* 2001. Still from the video, in which participants interpret olfactory samples from urban environments. Tolaas explores the mnemonic and affective dimension of smell. All images courtesy of the artist.



technological disasters, for example: the agency of uranium atoms splitting and releasing radiation was central to the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011. In the aftermath, the exclusion zone was shaped by the agency of radioactive isotopes, which rendered the land uninhabitable. The Fukushima environment itself became an active agent, 'deciding' (through radiation levels) that humans could not return for decades.

Among the selected case studies, *Don't Follow the Wind* stands out as a long-term exhibition inhabiting a contaminated site (Fukushima's exclusion zone), yet conceived as a performative space shaped by the environment itself. This exhibition, curated by the Tokyo-based collective ChimPom, Kenji Kubota, Eva and Franco Mattes, and Jason Waite, is installed within the Fukushima exclusion zone. Though officially 'open' since 2015, the exhibition remains inaccessible until radiation subsides.

In a sense, the curators have organized an exhibition where the environment itself is the 'guardian': for now, the works exist in an empty land, slowly deteriorating in toxic silence, seen only by a handful of workers engaged in cleanup operations or through video documentation. We might say that the persistent radiation co-creates the artistic statement—a powerful reflection on authorship, human



Fig. 7 Sissel Tolaas, *AirREborn BelowAbove*, 1994-2022
Interactive installation using wind sensors and olfactory emissions to create a responsive atmosphere. *AirREborn* suggests an immersive form of environmental communication. Image: ICA Philadelphia. Photo by Constance Mensh.

absence, and time. The project makes the invisibility of radioactivity and the forced absence of human life its central theme, making the environment an active participant in defining the conditions of reception.

Projects like *Don't Follow the Wind* blur the distinction between the environment as a passive stage and human artists as sole creators. The exclusion zone itself becomes a 'collaborator' in the exhibition. Such practices reinforce a key principle of environmental therapy: allowing the agency of a place to speak and guide the process. Instead of imposing a solution, the human practitioner (artist, therapist, community member) listens and works in resonance with the environment's dynamics.

The project does not seek to 'fix' the disaster—something only time and large-scale remediation efforts could achieve— but rather to mark it, render it visible, and keep the catastrophe present in the collective imagination. In

this conception, the work begins by standing in the site of crisis and listening to it, trusting that expressive acts (as secular rituals) may transcend language and communicate more deeply. These dynamics are visually (Figures 2-4), where the absence of human spectators, the contaminated site, and the decay of matter underscore the work's temporal and spatial inaccessibility.

Considering the environment as an active subject requires interpreting memory as something inscribed into landscapes, understanding trauma as a fracture within the living fabric of ecosystems and communities, and recognizing that agency is distributed across networks of life and matter. Environmental therapy, in this sense, does not merely seek to restore places to a previous state, but to acknowledge their wounds, listen to their signals, and engage in a process of mutual recognition and care.

MAPPING THE UNSEEN: ARTISTIC PRACTICES FOR WOUNDED SITES AND INSTITUTIONS

If certain places carry a powerful historical and ecological legacy –psychic residues of what has happened, perceptual imprints that shape how they are perceived and felt– how can artistic practices address these aspects? And can we also consider cultural institutions themselves as places that bear a traumatic legacy? In recent decades, many artists –often in collaboration with other disciplines– have actively sought methods to unearth hidden narratives, acknowledge or even ‘cleanse’ toxic energies, and ritualize potential processes of healing or *remembrance*.

K. E.Till has theorized this kind of engagement as place-based memory-work–actions that reveal and confront a site's layers of memory, frequently in collaboration with those who remember it or have been affected by its history (Till 2008). Together with artists, researchers, and scholars, Karen E. Till founded the international, interdisciplinary collective *Map-*



Fig. 8 Micol Assaël, *ILIOKATAKI NIOMUMASTILOPSARODIMAK OPIOTITA* 2014.

Interactive installation exposing electromagnetic instability and environmental discomfort. The work activates healing through disquiet by revealing latent tensions in built space.

ping *Spectral Traces*⁵ (Mapping Spectral Traces, n.d.). Time and again, this group explores the soil as both dwelling and threshold, creating a living archive of collective memories in which the traces of traumatic events, injustices, and forced removals inscribed in both institutional spaces and historical sites persist, even when they are not immediately visible. *Mapping Spectral Traces* has operated in various countries and contexts shaped by conflict and urban transformation, such as the divided neighborhoods of Belfast, post-apartheid townships in Johannesburg, and former border sites in Berlin. In these locations, artists and local communities have collaborated to make submerged memories tangible through performances, site-specific installations, and alternative cartographies, subverting the rigidity of Cartesian maps to restore the emotional and historical complexity of space—turning each location into a palimpsest of hidden stories.



Another form of alternative cartography might be that of S. Tolaas (Stavanger-Norway 1959), who creates *smellsapes*. In the project *Talkin Nose* (2001), for instance, she reproduced the smell of Mexico City's smog in an olfactory map placed on the exhibition space walls using a scratch-and-sniff technique. She also presented a video showing participants' noses as they sniffed, and their mouths silently translating the invisible city. The projection was accompanied by an audio track, out of sync, with descriptions of scents such as sweet and old", 'rusty', 'pleasant, aromatic, light', 'fragrant, flowers and vanilla'. An exhibition atmosphere of this kind forces visitors to confront a reality that is often ignored, turning a passive sensory imprint (like the headache induced by polluted air) into a conscious experience. The point is not to distinguish between 'good' or 'bad' smells, but to reactivate an authentic, atmospheric, and emotional relationship with the environment—overcoming the perceptual anesthesia that frequently characterizes urban life.

Fig. 9 La Tierce, *D'après nature*, 2018. Somatic performance transforming the stage into a sensitive landscape. Minimal movement and perceptual attention invite embodied attunement to micro-signals of place.

A different yet complementary angle emerges in Micol Assaël's (Roma 1979) installations⁶ (Figure 8), where visitors find themselves confronting hostile microclimates, electromagnetic fields, and claustrophobic architectures. Rather than soothing the environment, M. Assaël's approach in projects such as *ILIOKATAKINIOMUMASTILOPSARODIMA-*



Fig. 10 La Tierce, 2025. Site-specific workshop exploring new ecologies of attention through body-space interaction. Inspired by Bruno Latour's concept of geopathy, the work engages affective landscapes as therapeutic terrains.

KOPIOTITA' (2014) (Curated by Andrea Lissoni in Hangar Bicocca, Milan) unsettles the public, revealing how underlying energies can distort our sense of security. If therapy sometimes demands confronting discomfort or 'unconscious material', Assaël's charged spaces become stimuli for the realization that the built environment is neither neutral nor passive. By exposing these latent and disturbing tensions, Assaël's work paradoxically opens up the possibility of 'healing through disquiet', highlighting how dependent we are on environmental forces we seldom question.

Following this idea of tuning into the intangible signals of places, other artists also engage wounded or "latent" environments as co-participants in a therapeutic dynamic. A similarly sensitive yet powerful strategy appears in the work of the French collective *La Tierce*⁸ (Bordeaux, 2013), whose choreographic research explores the relationship between body and object, perception and landscape. La Tierce's workshops foster micro-sensitivities: faint chemi-



Fig. 11 El Conde de Torrefiel, *La Plaza*, 2018.

Performance blending everyday gestures with choreographed presence. The urban square becomes a co-performer in revealing the affective climate of the city.

cal odors drifting by, silence in transitional urban spaces, or fleeting resonances of air currents. Through works such as their triptych on the body-object relationship and *D'après nature* (2018) –a piece that reconfigures the stage as a sensitive landscape to be traversed– La Tierce develops a practice of attunement that extends beyond traditional performance. Their work invites participants to engage in a state of heightened attention, moving through spaces not as passive spectators but as co-inhabitants of shifting environments. This embodied sensitivity is captured in figures 9-10, where performance and attention unfold as ecological attunement (Figures 9-10).

This exploration extends to their cycle of workshops on new practices of attention, which is freely inspired by Bruno Latour's concept of *geopathy*—an approach that rethinks the entanglement of bodies and environments in a state of mutual influence and affect. By investigating how movement, objects, and spatial configurations shape perception,



Fig. 12 El Conde de Torrefiel, *La Plaza*, 2018.

Another scene from *La Plaza*. The public space emerges as an active subject of emotional sedimentation, activated through repetition and collective presence.

La Tierce cultivates an embodied sensitivity that resonates with therapeutic approaches to place, memory, and ecological awareness. Their work suggests that to heal or care for a space is not to impose order upon it, but to learn how to move within its latent forces and vulnerabilities.

Lastly, El Conde de Torrefiel (Barcelona, 2010) offers a performative declination of environmental therapy in *La Plaza* (2018), transforming an ordinary urban square into an ephemeral stage for latent urban tensions. Passersby and volunteer performers become entwined in carefully choreographed scenes that highlight anxieties and emotional undercurrents of daily life. The environment—an apparently common square—reveals itself to be anything but neutral: it becomes an actor whose hidden narratives of conflict or complicity shape the performance. By activating this intangible dimension, *La Plaza* shows how a site can ‘participate’ in unveiling the psychic burdens of social spaces, prompting reflection and possibly new community bonds (Figures 11-12).

From the crises of the square embodied in El Conde de Torrefiel's work, we turn to caring for institutions and their dysfunctional, problematic postures through the artistic bodies of the following practitioners. Dora García (Valladolid 1965), with her project *The Inadequate* (2011) created for the Spanish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, transformed the entire pavilion into a living archive and performative space, bearing witness to issues of marginality and exclusion. The artist drew on the legacy of anti-psychiatry and radical mental-health reformers such as Franco Basaglia, whose work in 1960s-70s Italy led to the closure of asylums and proposed a new vision of community care. *The Inadequate* shifted therapeutic processes onto a public scale, turning the exhibition pavilion into a space of listening and restitution for excluded subjectivities—replacing the idea of an exhibition with that of an occupation, and making the pavilion a stage for open conversations, monologues, and daily workshops enlivened by marginalized or critical voices.

This approach enabled psychiatric patients, political dissidents, and outsiders to enter an institutional space typically reserved for official hegemonic culture. García thus staged a genuine therapeutic encounter with the institution itself: the artistic space became a safe zone for exploring experiences often stigmatized by society. The pavilion was not an asylum, yet it became a metaphor for one, allowing the 'ghosts' of psychiatric history to manifest in the context of contemporary art. García's work demonstrates how artistic practice can address the psychic residues of the institution: the trauma of exclusion and silence pervading psychiatric history was, at least temporarily, brought to light and made audible.

CONCLUSION

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN ENVIRONMENTAL THERAPY THROUGH ART

This study suggests that artistic practices can play a crucial role in fostering new modes of environmental care,

provided they remain critically aware of their ethical responsibilities. The notion of *environmental therapy*, particularly when adopted by artists, should be understood not as a healing protocol, but as a speculative and relational practice that engages wounded sites through presence, attention, and ethical partiality. As such, it raises significant ethical questions: Who has the right to intervene in a place's trauma? How can artistic projects avoid exploiting or aestheticizing suffering? And how can we speak of 'healing' landscapes without falling into a romanticism that overlooks material conditions? When external artists use sites of trauma as mere aesthetic backdrops without engaging the local communities, they risk reinforcing extractive dynamics rather than fostering genuine care (Tronto, 2013).

The issue of care and consent is central. In traditional therapy, the patient consents to treatment. In the case of places and communities, consent is more complex. As feminist care theories suggest (Kittay, 2010; Tronto, 2013), attention, responsibility, and reciprocity are fundamental to an ethical approach. Artists should collaborate respectfully with residents, witnesses, and local authorities. The most meaningful initiatives involve local voices from the outset, aiming to bring tangible benefits rather than merely producing an artwork. For instance, in *Don't Follow the Wind*, some Fukushima evacuees were consulted, and an unusable farm was offered by its owner, who wished to let his land speak on behalf of the displaced. Similarly, Dora García has worked closely with psychiatric survivors. This approach embodies an ethics of care based on attentiveness, accountability, and reciprocity (Tronto, 2013), framing artistic creation as a relationship rather than a unilateral imposition, as outlined in feminist philosophy.

Conversely, when an artist arrives from 'outside', uses an emotionally charged location as a backdrop, and then leaves without ongoing engagement, the act risks becoming extractive or even re-traumatizing for local populations. Therefore, a key principle of ethical environmental therapy is that it

must be conducted *with* and *for* the community, not merely on the community.

Furthermore, idealizing nature and healing can slip into eco-romanticism, sidestepping uncomfortable realities: representing nature as benevolent, pure, or easily recoverable ignores its harsh aspects. Speaking *of* and *for* an environment in terms of 'wounds' and 'healing' may imply an assurance of recovery that, in some cases, is unrealistic. Certain damages—such as species extinctions or radioactive contamination—are irreversible on a human timescale. Defining a polluted river as a wounded being can inspire empathy, but if the political causes and responsible entities behind the pollution are not addressed, the result risks being an empty elegy. To counter this, many artists incorporate real data and testimonies.

Another issue in certain artistic discourses is the mystification of Indigenous or premodern environmental care practices without genuine understanding—an appropriation that superficially romanticizes spiritual concepts such as 'Mother Earth' or 'sacred land'. R. Braidotti and D. Haraway advocate for a posthumanism that respects diverse epistemologies without reducing spirituality to a reassuring stereotype. While Indigenous ecological knowledge holds profound insights, it must be engaged with respectfully and specifically, rather than being exploited as an abstracted, symbolic reference. An ethical practice would involve direct collaboration with Indigenous communities when referencing their lands or traditions—or at the very least, properly acknowledging their philosophies. It is also crucial to distinguish between metaphor and materiality. Declaring that 'the forest suffers' is a powerful image, but it does not imply conscious will. *Environmental therapy* is not a total remedy; it is most effective when accompanied by environmental justice, activism, and long-term policies. Arts can spark dialogue and mobilize emotions, but it does not replace decontamination efforts even could guide political pressure. The goal should be to cultivate a sustained culture of care.

Artistic interventions should avoid eco-romanticism and instead foster dialogue across diverse life forms and perspectives. In this sense, Anna Tsing, in *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015), demonstrates how natural landscapes are entangled with complex histories and power structures. Art practices, then, can reveal these entanglements of power and vulnerability without reducing them to comforting narratives.

Ultimately, this approach demands ongoing responsibility: a single artistic initiative is insufficient if it is not accompanied by a long-term commitment. Only through sustained engagement can we transform artistic interventions into long-term acts of care, ensuring that the wounds of places are neither ignored nor aestheticized, but meaningfully addressed.

NOTES

1 The notion of *environmental therapy* was initially formulated in the author's thesis *Fake it until you make it—Retoriche dell'arte e della Cura*, as a critical response to the ideological overlap between clinical and exhibitionary spaces conceived as regimes of total visibility. There, environmental therapy marked a speculative departure from institutional structures, imagining care as a performative alliance among human and non-human actors within complex ecosystems. The present paper extends that conceptual trajectory into the field of place-based art practices and ecological memory.

2 Lao-Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*; Dhammapada.

3 As Félix Guattari outlines in *The Three Ecologies* (1989), therapy can be rethought as an ecosophic process that transcends clinical boundaries and connects environmental, social, and mental ecologies. This perspective informs the speculative and relational use of "environmental therapy" proposed in this paper.

4 See Figures 5-7 for examples of Tolaas' installations translating urban smellscape into sensorial archives.

5 <http://www.mappingspectraltraces.org/>

6 See Figure 8 for visual documentation of Assaël's interactive installations.

7 Curated by Andrea Lissoni in Hangar Bicocca, Milan.

8 The collective includes Sonia Garcia, Séverine Lefèvre, and Charles Pietri.

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