Debating Ethical Issues Surrounding Environmental Art: On "Is Environmental Art an Aesthetic Affront to Nature?"*

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0. Introduction

Environmental Art has often been discussed in the context of recent Anglo-American Environmental Aesthetics. Even though environmental art has developed too many different varieties of forms of expression for a half-century to summarize them as an art movement, it is generally known as Land Art and Earthworks, large scale 'artwork used natural environment itself as its material', which emerged in the late 1960s in the USA.[1] Because the earliest examples of monumental Earthworks, such as *Double Negative* by Michael Heizer (1944-) in 1969-70, excavated using dynamite and bulldozers, they were often criticized for the lack of environmental sensibility, and this nature-manipulative image of Earthworks remains. However, since environmental art directly made in the natural environment situates between nature and art, and reflects the relationship between humans and nature and environmental thoughts in the background, it provides interesting themes for environmental aesthetics examining the natural environment.

Inspired by Peter Humphrey's essay, "The Ethics of Earthworks" in 1985, in the following year, Allen Carlson published a provocative article entitled "Is Environmental Art an Aesthetic Affront to Nature?". After that for environmental art drew renewed attention by virtue of its exhibitions and publications, the session 'Considering Environmental and Land Art', where Emily Brady presented "Aesthetic Regard for Nature in Environmental and Land Art" in response to Carlson's article, held at the American Society of Aesthetics Annual Meeting in 2006. Thus, among environmental aestheticians, active debates on ethical issues surrounding environmental art have been held.[2]

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[1] Environmental Art is not a defined term, but it is generally used to denote historically particular the short-term American movement from1968 to1974 called Earthworks. The term 'Land Art' includes works of a little longer, until about 1977, but still does not refer to a specific movement. After the1980s, eco art addressing environmental issues in practice appeared, and recently many artists explore the possibilities of the newer relationship to landscape and environment in their individual themes of works. Cf. Ben Tufnell, *Land Art,* 2007; Jeffrey Kastner, *Land & Environmental Art,* 2005; Linda Weintraub, *To Life! Eco Art in Pursuit of a Sustainable Planet,* 2012.

[2] Peter Humphrey, "The Ethics of the Earthworks", in *Environmental Ethics,* Vol.7, Spring, 1985, pp.5-21; Donald Crawford, "Nature and Art: Some Dialectical Relationship", in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,*

Although it is quite difficult to generalize environmental art, it can be defined as 'a various artistic activities to rearrange our responses to place, landscape, or nature by its subject concerning with natural environment'. As long as environmental art intervenes with nature artistically/artificially, as art and yet nature, its artistic value and its natural value can be called into question. Therefore, environmental art cannot avoid being judged from the point of view of environmental ethics.

This paper will examine the recent environmental aesthetics' debates about ethical issues surrounding environmental art, especially Carlson's "Is Environmental Art an Aesthetic Affront to Nature?" and the following debates. First, I will clarify that the appreciation of environmental art blurs boundaries between the appreciation of nature as nature and that of art as art. Then, examining Heizer's *Double Negative*, which is frequently criticized as a representative work of 'environmental art' in those debates in terms of the issues concerning the relationship between the work and the history of the land, I will reveal that environmental art expresses the very complicated contemporary natural environment where the dichotomy between nature and art or the natural and the artificial has already been annihilated. And then, by scrutinizing the environmental ethical arguments between instrumental value and intrinsic value of nature, anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, I will try to evaluate environmental art both aesthetically and ethically from the viewpoint of artistic and ethical values.

1. Environmental Art is an Affront to Nature.

As Michael Auping described in "Earth Art: A study in Ecological Politics" in 1983, 'insofar as earth art physically interacts with the landscape, it cannot be ecologically neutral',[3] increasing awareness of environmental issues, environmental art, especially the earliest Earthworks has been exposed to harsh ethical criticism by people with much concern to their ecological impact. In his essay, "The Ethics of Earthworks" in 1985, Peter Humphrey addressed the possibility of defending environmental art from the two fundamental approaches for environmental ethics, viewpoints of anthropocentric instrumental value and ecocentric intrinsic value. If the instrumental value approach is taken, then the use of the environment is good if its benefits outweigh its cost to people. According to this cost/benefit analysis, it is seemingly possible to justify the environmental art which improves the environment and contributes to enhancing people's environmental awareness. However, with the intrinsic value approach he adopted, which sees the natural environment as an end in itself and its use for human benefit as wrong, no earthworks would be permissible whatever the reason is for an infringement upon the rights of wilderness is. That is why environmental art which 'leaves a mark on the environment' can only

Vol.42, No.1, pp.49-58; Allen Carlson, "Is Environmental Art an Aesthetic Affront to Nature?", in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy,* Vol.16, No.4, 1986, pp.635-650.; Emily Brady, "Aesthetic Regard for Nature in Environmental and Land Art", in *Ethics, Place and Environment,* Vol.10, No.3, 2007 (This special issue of the journal includes eight other philosophical papers mostly presented at the session 'Considering Environmental and Land Art' held at the American Society of Aesthetics Annual Meeting in Milwaukee in 2006), pp.287-300.

[3] Michael Auping, "Earth Art: A Study in Ecological Politics", in Alan Sonfist (ed.) *Art in the Land, A Critical Anthology of Environmental Art,* 1983, p.94.

be condemned as unethical after all. His argument is so simple that just because it is art does not mean that it is permissible to use the means otherwise ethically prohibited.[4]

There is also an aesthetic objection against environmental art. In 1983, Donald Crawford pointed out unusual attitudes of environmentalists addressing *Valley Curtain* (1970-72), *Running Fence* (1972-76), *Surrounded Islands* (1983) by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, in "Nature and Art: Some Dialectical Relationship". The objections against the projects, such as Christo's works from the environmentalists, usually take legal recourse by challenging the environmental impact of the construction. However, in fact, 'one cannot help but think that these critics believe Christo is engaged in an *aesthetic* affront to nature that goes deeper than the scientific assessment of environmental implications. This raises the question of whether they are destructive of the natural setting within the aesthetic context'.[5] Because 'Christo's artifacts forcibly assert their artifactuality over against nature, by their size, their engineering complexity and their synthetic components',[6] 'incursions on relatively pristine natural setting'[7] were made. 'This raises the question of whether they are destructive of the natural setting within the aesthetic context'.[8]

Following this essay, Carlson claims, in his paper "Is Environmental Art an Aesthetic Affront to Nature?". In 1986, as 'intimate relationships between art and nature', environmental art is regarded 'as simple one-sided aesthetic impositions upon nature' and an aesthetic affront to nature. As Crawford distinguishes a work's 'aesthetic affront to Nature' from its 'environmental implications', Carlson defines that 'the affront is generated by the aesthetic qualities of an object, rather than by, for example, its social, moral, ecological, or other such qualities'.[9] He describes that the affront is not only concerned with the appearance of the work of art; these environmental works constitute something like aesthetic indignities to nature, in part because of the way nature becomes incorporated into, becomes a part of art in such works. According to him, even if nature itself cannot recognize the affront as a man can do, it is affronted.

> A distinctive feature of environmental art is that a part of nature itself is a part of the aesthetic object - the environmental site is an aspect of the work. (…) The environmental site this changed from being a part of nature to being a part of an artwork and with this change the aesthetic qualities of nature are altered. Heizer, for example, says: 'The work is not put in a place, it is that place'.[10] And Smithson spoke of his sites as being

[4] Cf. Peter Humphrey, *ibid*. However, Humphrey's examples for this argument include works of not environmental art or not even works of art, and besides unlikely fictional works by actual artists (and they will never imagine!), his argument is quite sloppy and distorted.

[5] Donald Crawford, *op.cit.*, p.56.

[6] *Ibid*., p.56.

[7] *Ibid*., p.56-57.

[8] *Ibid*.

[9] Allen Carlson, "Is Environmental Art an Aesthetic Affront to Nature?", in *Aesthetic and the Environment, the Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture,* 2000, p.151.

[10] Cited by Carlson, from Michael Heizer, Dennis Oppenheim and Robert Smithson, "Discussions with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson", in *Avalanche*, 1970 vol.1, pp.48-70; reprinted in Holt, ed., *The Writings of Robert Smithson: Essays with Illustrations*, 1979, p.171.

'redefined in terms of Art'[11].[12]

According to Carlson, every change where the aesthetic qualities of nature are altered involves an aesthetic affront. If the natural environment is redefined in terms of art, as Smithson said, the change that the aesthetic qualities of nature altered into the aesthetic qualities of art constitutes an aesthetic affront of nature.

> Perhaps 'defile' is too strong a word to characterize most environmental art. Nonetheless, the general way in which environmental artists alter nature's aesthetic qualities by turning nature into art does seem to support its being an affront to nature. This is illustrated by Heizer's works such as *Displaced-Replaced Mass* (1969) in which a fifty-two-ton granite boulder is 'messed with' by placing it in an excavated depression. It is also evident in works such as Christo's *Surrounded Islands* described earlier and *Valley Curtain* (1971-72), 200,000 square feet of bright orange nylon polyamide spanning a Colorado valley, or Oppenheim's *Branded Hillside* (1969), a 'branding' of the land executed by killing the vegetation with hot tar. In such cases nature is 'redefined in terms of art' at a cost to its aesthetic qualities such that to speak of an affront, if not a 'denigration,' is quite appropriate.[13]

Carlson's claim that 'environmental art constitutes an aesthetic affront to nature' postulates the idea of the correct appreciation of nature which sees nature as nature. For environmental art directly created in the natural environment is between nature and art, there is a kind of torsion in its appreciation between the appreciation of nature as nature and the appreciation of art as art, and blurs their boundaries. Wherever should be the correct appreciation of environmental art?

I will address this issue, exemplifying Michael Heizer's *Double Negative* in the following section.

2. Appreciation of Nature as Nature, Appreciation of Art as Art, or Appreciation of Nature as Art, Appreciation of Art as Nature

A monumental work of environmental art created from 1969 to 1970, *Double Negative*, in the Mormon Mesa, Nevada, consists of two artificial cuts in the mesa surface facing each other, excavated the thirty-foot wide cuts to a depth of fifty feet, a total length of 1,500 feet by dynamite and bulldozers, and the displacement of 244,000 tons of rhyolite and sandstone. Its vast and magnificent scale appeals to spectators even by the photographic image. The work itself created in the remote desert far away from the city (but also not so far from the underground nuclear test site) has become a new artificial landscape and a new art form. It also expresses an opposition

[11] Cited by Carlson, Robert Smithson, quoted in Lawrence Alloway, "Robert Smithson's Development", in *Artforum*, vol.11*,* 1972, pp.52-61; Sonfist, *op.cit*., p.131.

[12] Allen Carlson, *op.cit.*, p.155.

[13] *Ibid*.

against environmental destruction and enhances environmental awareness in some way, as one which refuses to be transported to anywhere or to be possessed by anybody. At least, while it opened up an entirely new art form, it might reveal an attitude with melancholic conflict towards the natural environment dominated by a kind of eschatological view that the fragile earth was doomed to be collapsed at the time. Be that as it may, as long as it scarred landscape and manipulated nature, criticism of environmental destruction is inevitable.

Carlson suggests *Double Negative*'s similarity of appearance of actual disruption to 'the eyesore'[14] that 'is reminiscent of the result of mining operations, in particular the highway cuts and skyline notches produced by Appalachian coal mining'[15]. Nevertheless, at the same time, he claims, 'the aesthetic qualities an object has are only those it appears to have when it appropriately appreciated and moreover that such appreciation must involve appreciation of that object as the kind of thing it is. Consequently, if two different objects are different kinds of things, they can have very different aesthetic qualities even if they are identical in appearance'.[16] He recognizes the need to appreciate an environmental work of art as art.

It reveals Carlson's cognitivism in his aesthetics, his view that appropriate aesthetic appreciation should be informed by appropriate knowledge about the object to be appreciated. This means that there is an appreciation of nature as nature and also an appreciation of art as art.

Malcolm Budd also claims that the aesthetic appreciation of nature should be the appreciation of 'nature as nature.' For instance, the colour of a flower or snowfield shining in the rays of the setting sun etc., if we contemplate it in abstraction from whatever kind it is seen to be and focus on its shape, textures, and colouring, it is not understood as the aesthetic appreciation of nature 'as nature'.[17] Furthermore, 'given that a work of art is an artefact- it requires that it does not essentially involve perceiving or imagining nature as a work of art'. Hence, he claims that as the appreciation of nature as looking like a beautiful picture of nature-nature as picturesque- if an observer adopts toward nature an attitude appropriate to a work of art, regarding it as if it were such a work, is different from the aesthetic appreciation of nature as nature.[18]

Do we ever appreciate nature or art (or artefact) by strictly classifying and distinguishing between them? Furthermore, can we ever appreciate it in such a manner? First of all, the concept of 'nature' includes extremely various and complex meanings. The nature-artefact dichotomy is not simple; between polar contraries of 'pure nature' and 'pure artefact', there are contradictories of 'nature' and 'artefact' with a fuzzy boundary between them, artificial nature (nature intervened by a human) and artefacts made by nature with different degrees are prevalent in our world.[19] Actually, it is not an exaggeration to say that nature not as artificial, untouched nature without

[14] *Ibid.*, p.154.
[15] *Ibid.*
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] Cf. Malcolm Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature,* 2006, p.2.
[18] Cf. *ibid*., p.5.
[19] 'Die Tatsche, daß der Unterschied zwischen Natur und Kultur oder zwischen artifizieller und naturhafter Gegebenheit in der heutigen Welt eine durch und durch graduelle Unterscheidung ist, ändert daran nichts'. Martin Seel, "Ästhetische und moralische Anerkennung der Natur", in Angelika Krebs (Hg.), *Naturethik*, Frankfurt am Mein, 1997, p.315.

any intervention of human agency exists no more.[20]

Nevertheless, Carlson says the following about the place called desert where *Double Negative* was made:

> The desert, for example, has a subtle, quiet beauty of its own, and altering that beauty can be as great an aesthetic affront to nature as altering the aesthetic qualities of conventionally scenic landscapes. In fact I suggest that none of virgin nature is comparable to the work of a third rate hack -the virgin nature by and large has positive aesthetic qualities.[21]

Although Carlson throws harsh criticism against *Double Negative* as 'the work of a third rate hack', as Jason Simus rightly points out in "Environmental Art and Ecological Citizenship," there are no affronts of nature itself, but the 'idea' of nature is being aesthetically affronted. That is the idea of nature as primordially innocent wilderness, the old ecological paradigm. The desert is regarded as having positive aesthetic qualities as wilderness, and like common criticism against earthworks, it is seen as virgin land raped by the brutality traditionally having been symbolized as machismo. Simus explains the following:

> Heizer's piece surely offends the idea of nature as paradigmatically pristine. But the idea of nature as primordially innocent or paradigmatically pristine may no longer be an accurate characterization of the natural world. Contemporary ecology now tells us that natural systems are better characterized as being in a dynamic state of flux, where disturbances are the norm and humans play an integral role in ecosystem structure and function. Nature, or our idea of nature, then, is anything but primordially innocent and paradigmatically pristine according to current science. In this view, environmental artworks are not aesthetic affronts to nature, and this can be illustrated by drawing an analogy with avant-garde art. Carlson explains that in the same way Marcel Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.* is an aesthetic affront to art, some environmental artworks are aesthetic affronts to nature. Note, however, that Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.* is only considered an

[20] Budd, who emphasize nature as nature is also quite cautious about wilderness. 'Although it would be mistaken to think of nature as that part of the world that has been unchanged or not significantly affected by human agency, much of terrestrial nature has not remained in its natural condition but has been subjected to human interference. Wild animals have been domesticated, new strains of plant developed by selective breeding, species native to one area have been transplanted to other parts of the world, rivers have been dammed, land reclaimed from the sea, hillsides terraced, seas polluted, forests felled, and so on indefinitely... In any case, much of our natural environment displays, for better or worse, the influence of humanity, having been shaped, to a greater or lesser extent, and in a variety of ways, by human purposes, so that little of the world's landscape is in a natural condition. If some segment of the natural environment has been affected by humanity it can still be appreciated aesthetically as nature, but appreciation of it by one who is aware of its non-pristine character is liable to be appreciation of it as *nature affected by humanity.* Accordingly, our aesthetic experience of the natural world is often *mixed*- a mixture of the aesthetic appreciation of nature as nature with an additional element, of a variable character, based on human design or purpose or activity.' Malcolm Budd, ibid., p.7. In this argument, see in Takako Itoh, "Historicization of Nature and Narrative of Environmental Art (3) (Shizen no Rekishisei to Kankyo-Geijutu no Monogatarisei(3))", in *GEIBUN008, Bulletin for Faculty of Art and Design, University of Toyama,* vol.8, 2013.

[21] Allen Carlson, *ibid.*, p.157.

> aesthetic affront under a theory of art that takes the classic beauty of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* as its paradigm example. Just as Duchamp's works force us to question our assumptions about art, many environmental artworks force us to question our assumptions about nature. And just as beauty is no longer the paradigm of artistic achievement, neither is primordial innocence the paradigm characteristic of the natural world.[22]

According to contemporary ecology, ecosystems are regarded as 'dynamic systems controlled by heterogeneity and variability',[23] and nature is understood as varying over time, subject to disturbances. However, there is a big difference between natural disturbance as a process and human disturbance as an intervention by human agency. Whereas the appropriate disturbances that happened with some frequencies are required to sustain healthy ecosystems, human interventions sometimes can utterly transform ecosystems. 'Many animals and plants in their long-established habitats often cannot persevere or survive against human intervensions. In that case, a few newly-arrived invasive species introduced from outside, become stronger and outcompete native species and bring about simple ecosystems which are completely altered from the more complex ones they used to be.'[24] Therefore, there are now many endangered species on the planet, even though many are not originally rare, but were commonly seen animals and plants in everyday surroundings. Especially in terms of biodiversity among various ecosystems, their changes are irreversible and once a species is lost, can never be reproduced.[25] When a loss of biodiversity happens, 'maintaining the status quo' or 'exclusion of human intervention' once aimed at maintaining Nature Reserves cannot be adequate to sustain the healthy status of the ecosystems anymore. Proper human interventions are instead required in ecosystems to maintain or restore ecosystems and biodiversity.

Perhaps for contemporary 'nature with historicity',[26] it is difficult to distinguish between artificial/cultural nature and also nature and artefact cannot be regarded as a simple dichotomy, so that both can only explore the possibilities of a sustainable coexistence. When you consider the natural environment addressed in environmental art, it is unreasonable to appreciate it as pristine nature, and also, it is quite difficult to appreciate it only as art and avoid looking at the natural environment.

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[22] Jason B. Simus, "Environmental Art and Ecological Citizenship", in Martin Drenthen and Jozef Keulartz (eds.), *Environmental Aesthetics. Crossing Divides and Breaking Ground*, 2014, pp.104-105.

[23] See Izumi Washitani, *Seitaikei wo Yomigaeraseru (To Restore the Ecosystems)*, 2001, p.141.

[24] *Ibid.*, p.118.

[25] 'Using knowledge of conservation ecology, to facilitate the functional restoration in order to achieve a more appropriate function is the only viable way to strengthen the health of ecosystems'. Izumi Washitani, *ibid.*, p.141. The appropriate intervention of humans enables to restore the intrinsic value of nature.

[26] About contemporary nature with historicity, see in Takako Itoh, *ibid.*

3. On Intrinsic Value of Nature: Is It Always Given Priority over Intrinsic Value of Art?

In the argument in environmental ethics, the value of nature is often considered making a distinction between instrumental and intrinsic value and applying the former to anthropocentristic and the latter to physiocentristic attitude towards nature. Just like arguments about the opposition: nature versus artefact, it involves a too simple reduction to anthropocentrism = instrumental value of nature and physiocentrism = intrinsic value of nature. Persistent and seemingly justifiable claims such as criticism against anthropocentrism and advocacy of physiocentrism are misunderstandings derived from a confused argument, the simplistic identification of 'anthropocentrism' with 'instrumental value of nature'.[27]

However, the arguments of 'intrinsic value of nature' are quite persuasive, and indeed they have acted as a kind of barometer for bringing our attention to human duties and responsibilities for nature, and concerning the conservation of nature, setting ethical behaviour criteria of humans and society based on rights of nature beyond environmental ethics centred human interests or wellbeing. As with that, the first concept of 'nature' in the argument of appreciation of nature as nature is vague; that of the intrinsic value of nature is still unclear. This is well known in arguments in environmental ethics. In the usual arguments confusing intrinsic value as non-instrumental value with objective or absolute intrinsic value, any natural environment becomes the inviolable quasi-wilderness so that no artificial intervention can be allowed and art has to be excluded as a natural consequence. Indeed, as with a nuclear power plant built on a coastline, the behaviour of making artificial cuts by dynamite and bulldozers on the mesa in the desert area of the American West should be held liable for breach of duties with respect to intrinsic value of nature from the standpoint of recognizing the rights of nature. However, that natural environment should have its own rights does not automatically mean that it should have any rights one can think of. But then, the intrinsic value of nature is often discussed as the value beyond utilities for a human being in parallel with the intrinsic value of art. Nevertheless, in the discussion on the value of the environmental artwork, obviously, the intrinsic value of nature has priority over that of art, as it were, automatically.

Humphrey claims, even if environmental art can emphasize the intrinsic value of nature, 'one cannot justify bulldozed earthworks simply by saying that they reharmonize people with nature. According to the intrinsic value approach, it does not make sense to save the environment by

[27] We as a human being, can think about nature only from the human point of view, and aesthetics examines aesthetic experience of nature, for its epistemic character, has no way other than perceiving nature for us, because it speaks about what human beings can perceive as nature physically- sensorily. Moreover, nature is not a valuer. As long as aesthetics is the study on the judgement of value, 'values come into the world with human beings who evaluate'. Because of the structure of cognition, we cannot give away the human point of view, and this shows that also in terms of ethics only human standards can be the standard for ourselves. However, this does not mean that human beings are in the centre of all beings, or everything can be understood for human beings or to be prepared for them. Avoiding to let human criteria be the measure of all things as anthropocentrism, but also avoiding the anthropomorphism into which often physiocentrism fell, based on 'extensionalist physiocentrism', we can consider not only direct responsibility for humans and animals, but also responsibility for plants and minerals, and other natural things and artificial objects. See Angelika Kreps, *Ethics of Nature* 1999. The outlines of these arguments and their criticisms are precisely described in this excellent book.

destroying parts of it, unless the nondestructive approaches do not work.'[28] Or according to Carlson, as long as environmental art intervenes artificially in the natural environment, even if it makes people much more aware of the intrinsic value of nature, it is dismissed as an aesthetic affront to nature whenever the natural environment is seen as art.[29]

While on the other hand, Brady appraises some art forms in which the artistic relationship to nature is more intimate and the intrinsic value of nature is emphasized, as showing aesthetic regard for nature in environmental art. In her discussion, she pointed out the problems with the position of Carlson's positive aesthetics, which regards nature unconditionally as being beautiful, in her distinctive manner. According to her, Carlson concludes that even the artworks highlight nature's quality, it may be seen as causing an aesthetic affront of another kind, 'the affront implicit in the idea that for the aesthetic interest and merit of nature to be recognized it must first be considered works of art.'[30] In addition, he makes the further claim that because such works 'do little if anything to alter nature's aesthetic qualities…there are adequate grounds for considering these natural pieces not to be work of art.'[31] That is, then these works of environmental art are seen as nature.

Positive aesthetics, which argues that pristine or wild nature is always beautiful or wild nature as it is always 'aesthetically good' or the approach from the intrinsic value of nature, at least keeps environmental art out.[32] Brady correctly points out that 'the problem is that the thesis places the aesthetic value of wild environments over cultural ones simply in virtue of natural value. Wild nature is just always more beautiful than humanly modified nature, and only the latter can ever have negative aesthetic value.'[33] Although Humphrey also realizes that 'natural and artistic aesthetic qualities are not interchangeable,[34] he attends to nature exclusively and eliminates art when he questions ethical issues.

4. Desert Is Not Wilderness: Is It possible to Appreciate Environmental Art Properly?

Whereas large-scale earthworks made from 1969 to 70 are generally understood as a lack of environmental conservation awareness, recent research indicates that they were within the general environmentalism at that time.[35] Appreciation of art is 'emotionally and cognitively rich engagement with a cultural artifact, intentionally created by a designing intellect, informed by both art-historical traditions and art-critical practices, and deeply embedded in a complex, many-

[28] Peter Humphrey, *op.cit.*, p.20.
[29] cf. Allen Carlson, *op.cit*.
[30] *Ibid.*, p.161.
[31] *Ibid.*, pp.160-161.
[32] Kiyokazu Nishimura also points out the problems of arguments on environmental art of Carlson and Humphrey in his book. See Kiyokazu Nishimura, *Plastic no Ki de Nani ga Warui noka? (What Is Wrong with Plastic Trees?)*, 2011.
[33] Emily Brady, "Aesthetic Regard for Nature in Environmental and Land Art", p.294.
[34] Peter Humphrey, *op.cit.*, p.13.
[35] cf. Philipp Kaiser and Miwon Kwon, *Ends of Earth: Land Art to 1974,* 2012; Ben Tufnell, *Land Art,* 2006.

faceted art world',[36] as Carlson defined, so that the creation of art is inevitably situated within the historical development of art and culture and therefore art has to be appreciated correctly as art within its context.

Double Negative is a monumental work representing Earthworks that was one of many new genres in the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, Happenings, Performance, Installation, Conceptual Art, Video Art and so on, by their reimagining of what art could be, that can open up new possibilities for art and literally new horizons of art. As the site of the work was the land owned jointly by Heizer and his New York art dealer Virginia Dwan and isolated about 130 kilometres northeast of Las Vegas on a barren mesa outside the small town of Overton, special legal permission to create the work of art was not required. Indeed 'the National Environmental Policy Act came into force while this work was in process, on January 1, 1970, and the ensuing agency was not established (with the requirement for environmental impact statement in the future) until the following September, after the *Negative*'s completion'.[37] In fact, the art world did not raise questions about the artists' interventions in the landscape. Rather, like Philip Leider's review, it was favourably received. 'The [*Double Negative*] is huge, but its scale is not. It took its place in nature in the most modest and unassuming manner - the quiet participation of a man-made shade in a particular configuration of valley, ravine, mesa and sky. The piece is a new place in nature'[38]. The artist's large-scale manipulations of terrain were considered heroic as paralleled to the American pioneer spirit. 'Not only the art world, but mass media news and pictorial magazines were inspired by the image of New York artists going into wilderness to move sometimes thousands of tons of earth to create extraordinary sculptural spectacles that few would experience'. However, as Roderick Nash explains in the Introduction of *Wilderness and the American Mind,* wilderness is the concept made by civilization, and the Americans regarded the wilderness as 'a moral and physical wasteland fit only for conquest and transformation in the name of progress, civilization, and Christianity'. [39] For the colonialists, the native Americans living in the wilderness was 'savages', and they and their wild habitat, the 'frontier' have to be conquered and transformed. This idea has taken a firm hold in the tradition of frontier spirit and one of the crucial factors that formed the American national character. The desert area of the American West is exceptionally the place which includes such contradictions of its complex history. There, railways were laid, many facilities of US forces were built, the first experiment of the atomic bomb in New Mexico was executed in 1945, and Yucca Flat of the nuclear testing site in Nevada was constructed in 1950; these all occurred under the American myth of national identity formed in the wild western frontier.

The site of *Double Negative* is close to a reservoir by Hoover Dam, which is not so far from the Nevada Test Site and in the Pueblo Indian reservation. In the USA, exhausted by the

[36] Allen Carlson, "Environmental Aesthetics", in Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, 2001, p.425.

[37] Cf. Suzaan Boettger, "Earthworks' Contingencies", in Elaine A. King and Gail Levin, *Ethics and the Visual Arts,* 2006.

[38] Philip Leider, "How I Spent My Summer Vacation or, Art and Politics in Nevada, Berkeley, San Francisco and Utah", in *Artforum* 9, no.1 (September 1970), p.42.

[39] Roderick F. Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind,* p.xxii.

protracted Vietnam War, amid the Cold War era, nuclear war was a real possibility and popularized the image of Spaceship Earth enhanced by the Apollo 8 Earthrise photograph; there was a growing environmental awareness because of environmental hazards caused by pollution and pesticides. *Double Negative* implicates this negative American history and becoming a negative sculpture of sculpture - 'there is nothing there, yet it is still a sculpture'-[40] has been an extraordinary landmark of art, and still is today.

However, *Double Negative* must be held liable for any possible ecological damage by contemporary standards of environmental ethics, no matter how important it is. Rhyolite and sandstone were dynamited and then removed by bulldozers and pushed into the chasm between the cuts, which then contained a huge mound as if generated by an avalanche. Suzaan Boettger, a researcher of Earthworks, counters, 'it has not been shown that any Earthworks actually harmed the "biotic community"'.[41] In fact, within the art world, no one denounces Earthworks as having harmed the ecological environment.[42] Retrospective criticism could be possible, but she describes, 'their right to such aggressive acts no longer seems that it would be so easily given - at least not without prior research into the potential environmental impact. Another characteristic of a free society is the recognition that no one has the right to radically alter the public heritage of nature without substantial public benefit'[43]. Such large-scale Earthworks like *Double Negative* were rarely constructed after the early 1970s because the sharp economic recession underway constrained private and public funding. That was due to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries' (OPEC) dramatic increase in the world price of petroleum and the United States' phased withdrawal from Vietnam. The environmental concerns associated with human manipulation of the natural environment uncreased after that. By contrast, after more than a half-century since its construction, in *Double Negative,* its original sharp artificial edges of the cuts were weathered, deteriorated and became vague, and merged into natural and organic irregularities of surroundings. Instead, a new argument has been developed that the work needs additional alteration or reinforcement to restore and conserve it. Nevertheless, already in 1985, when the work was donated to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Heizer made a final decision to allow the work to decay.

Carlson condemned environmental art unilaterally in his essay, 'Is Environmental Art an Aesthetic Affront to Nature?', from the points of view of the environmentalist after 1985, through dealing with only the earliest Earthworks of the late 1960s under the name of environmental art, without fully considering or understanding its value as a work of art, and furthermore, under his illusion of wilderness. This kind of attitude would have to be described as provincial and intolerant anachronism. However, within the layered structure of growing awareness of environmentalism every day and evolving environmental art as contemporary art by reflecting ever-improving environmentalism, it is also a fact that it is complicated to evaluate the ethics of

[40] Julia Brown, Interview with Michael Heizer, in Julia Brown (ed.), Michael Heizer: *Sculpture in Reverse*, 1984, p.16.

[41] See Boettger, *ibid.*, p.223

[42] *Ibid*., p.223. Subsequently, Boettger refers to Humphrey's and Carlson's condemnations of environmental art, dismissing it as having no impact in the art world.

[43] *Ibid*., p.221.

environmental art accurately at a particular point in time.

Sheila Lintott asks the question of the Earthwork, whether it is worth the ecological and environmental costs incurred in its creation.[44] As already noted, current environmental aesthetics debate whether an environmental ethical flaw diminishes the aesthetic value as art. Let us not subordinate artistic value to natural value automatically as before or be forced to choose between autonomism and moralism. For the artistic value, in order to measure the excellence of an outstanding work of art, there are very complex interwoven mixtures of different elements and cannot be measured by a kind of ethical standard; good-bad. Then, consistently evaluating environmental art within the framework of art, and based on the premise that environmental art is not a moral expression of emotion, in order to suggest that there is still the possibility to weigh the environmental ethical value, I would like to conclude this paper with the following thought experiment. This is because I think this can finally be the starting point to consider the value of art as an equivalent to that of nature in environmental aesthetics.

If we could discover new technology to restore and regenerate the ecosystem completely in the preferred form, should we use it to destroy *Double Negative* and restore the original shape of the Mesa?

[44] cf. Sheila Lintott, "Is It Worth It?", in *Ethics, Place and Environment,* Vol.10, No.3, 2007, pp.263-277.