

**Stephanie Schuster\***

## **Aesthetic Deep Time Experiences of Temporal Sublime Nature**

### Abstract

Deep time, encompassing the expansive temporal scale of Earth's and the universe's history, bears the potential of alienation due to its immensity. However, this estrangement can be mitigated through aesthetic appreciation of the temporal sublime in nature, as found in geological landscapes, ancient forests, and the starry sky. This paper aims to elucidate aesthetic deep time experiences and their significance. It posits that aesthetic resonance with the awe-inspiring atmosphere of ancient and enduring natural environments fosters an elevating yet humble feeling of belonging and being at home in the vast temporal continuum of the natural world. Central to such aesthetic experiences is a felt integration of world time and life time.

### Keywords

Environmental Aesthetics, Deep Time, Temporal Sublimity, Aesthetic Resonance, Atmosphere

### **Introduction**

Imagine standing on the verge of a steep canyon, walking through a thick ancient forest, or gazing at the vast and sparkling starry sky; imagine perceiving, in the impressive appearance and the light of your general knowledge, the ultimately unfathomable antiquity and continuance of the world—its deep time. Imagine being overwhelmed by the perception of the sublime scene and, at the same time, developing a profoundly fulfilling yet humble

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\* University of Basel  
Email: [stephanie.schuster@unibas.ch](mailto:stephanie.schuster@unibas.ch)

sense of belonging. I call such and similar experiences in sublime natural environments, in which the world's vast temporal scale is encountered, aesthetic deep time experiences.

The central claim of this paper is that aesthetic deep time experiences (*deep time experiences*, hereafter) contribute to a feeling of being at home in the natural world and its temporal depth. I argue that it is through aesthetic resonance with the awe-inspiring atmosphere of ancient and enduring natural environments that the observer attains an elevating yet humble feeling of belonging and being at home. Central to deep time experiences is a felt integration of world time and life time.

I will defend my claim by clarifying concepts such as deep time, aesthetic resonance, and temporal sublimity and drawing on two case studies examining a particular example of deep time experiences (Szécsényi 2021; Rolston 1998). To develop my argument, I build essentially on Angelika Krebs' landscape aesthetics (Krebs 2018, 2014), which gives a solid account of the experience of natural environments as the bearer of expressive qualities, i.e., atmospheres.

My paper attempts to explain deep time experiences and by this means contribute to aesthetic arguments about nature conservation.<sup>1</sup> For reasons of acquaintance, I approach deep time experiences from a contemporary Western perspective, relating them to the Western history of science and aesthetic concepts. Yet, this perspective neither implies any claims to superiority nor, in principle, precludes cross-cultural relevance.

## 1. Deep Time

Our lifeworld experience of time involves at least three core elements: the awareness of the present, the perception of change, i.e., time flow, and an asymmetry between the past and the future. While we have immediate sensual access to the present and, thus, immediate experiences of it, the past is encountered through personal and collective memory and, beyond that, through inferences and imagination based on evidence and traces. Through vivid memory or imagination, at best stimulated through sensual objects such as relics or ruins, the past can be encountered and revived in a subject's mind so vividly that it is appropriate to speak of experiences of the past or

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<sup>1</sup> Other reasons for nature conservation concern human basic needs and the well-being of animals. See Krebs (1999) for a critical taxonomy of major nature conservation arguments and Krebs (2018) for the location of the aesthetic argument within this wider realm.

being in touch with it (Korsmeyer 2019). While we cannot encounter traces from the future, we can approach it through our imagination, based on expectations and predictions, and stimulated through enduring sensual objects. In this extended sense, the future can be experienced too.

Some cultural and natural traces of the past point to relatively recent preceding moments or periods. Others show evidence of events and eras of ancient times. Among them, some natural entities bear witness to the immense timescale of the world. Deep time refers to this scientifically established immense timescale. Its discovery goes back to research findings of natural scientists in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries when Earth's vast geologic history was realized.<sup>2</sup> The metaphorical term "deep time" thus relates to geologic time or cosmic time. It was coined by John McPhee (1981) to express this enormous amount of time that challenges the human imagination. It is used nowadays to include the world's deep past and future.

A deep time awareness bears the potential of alienation by vastly exceeding human history and challenging the human imagination. Yet, it does not necessarily involve an estranged human existence. At least three mutually inspiring ways can be distinguished of tempering the potential of alienation: firstly, the acquisition of scientific knowledge that supports our intellectual orientation in the vast dimension of deep time and gives reason to acknowledge that we are part of an ancient and enduring process (Bjornerud 2018); secondly, artistic involvement that explores our possible relationships with deep time (Talasek 2014); and thirdly, aesthetic experiences of the temporal sublime in nature that invites us to encounter deep time and to be in touch with it based on sensual perception of ancient and enduring natural environments, such as canyons and mountains as well as volcanic, glacial and karst landscapes, cliffs and gorges, ancient forests and the starry sky.

## **2. Aesthetic Experience and Resonance**

To explain deep time experiences and how they contribute to feeling at home in the vast temporal continuum of the natural world, an understanding of aesthetic experience is necessary. This understanding begins with pointing out its distinctive characteristics. I do not aim to lay out a complete theory but merely explicate my starting point. Three characteristics of aesthetic experience are central: the appreciation of the sensual qualities of an

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<sup>2</sup> See Albritton (1980) for changing conceptions of Earth's antiquity in the Western world after the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

object for its own sake, a free play of our cognitive and affective powers, and aesthetic resonance.<sup>3</sup>

Aesthetic experiences are anchored in sensual perception. That is, they start from the perception of the sensual qualities of an object and stay related to these sensual qualities. Think of the steepness of a canyon, an ancient forest's thickness, or the starry sky's vastness and sparkle. Or of an energetic melody, a smooth piece of furniture, a bright flower, a melodious poem. In aesthetic experiences, we take pleasure in the perception of these objects because of their sensual qualities. As distinct from other experiences of perception, in aesthetic experiences, we do not instrumentalize an object for a distinct purpose, nor do we perceive it as a means to an end, but we find value in the pleasure of engaging with its sensual qualities and dwell on them, considering the "aesthetic object" for its own sake.

Though aesthetic experiences are rooted in and related to sensual perception, the content of aesthetic experiences amounts to more than mere sensual pleasure. We dwell on an aesthetic object because based on its sensual qualities and, additionally, further knowledge about it (such as age or origin), it excites various imaginations, thoughts, and feelings (emotions and moods) related to our life experiences and values. We usually experience aesthetic objects as inspiring, meaningful, and symbolically rich, which is why they, in the act of engaging with them for their own sake, bring our powers of imagination and understanding as well as our affective powers into free play.<sup>4</sup> One could say that aesthetic objects challenge us to find meaning in them, "to make critical comparisons, and to examine our own lives and emotions in the light of what we find" (Scruton 2009, 197). In aesthetic experiences, we thus "open up and grow both rationally and emotionally" (Krebs 2018, 255).

Departing from more intellectual conceptions of aesthetic experience, I stress its affective quality. Yet, what does it mean that aesthetic experiences not only involve the flow-like pleasure that is typical for all intrinsic activities, but that aesthetic objects furthermore excite various feelings?

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<sup>3</sup> Three important sources for my understanding of aesthetic experience are Scruton's (2011, 2009) aesthetics, Brady's (2003) 'integrated aesthetic' and Krebs' (2018) 'aesthetic resonance'. They all substantially draw on and reinterpret ideas from Kant's (2000) aesthetic judgment.

<sup>4</sup> The idea of a free play of our powers of cognition goes back to Kant's (2000) aesthetic judgment. Yet, the inclusion of a free play of our affective powers clearly departs from Kant. For further aesthetic theories that stress the affective dimension, see Levinson (2006) and Dewey (1934).

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For one thing, it means that aesthetic objects, as was just mentioned, excite various affective states in our attempt to find meaning in them. As will be pointed out later, in the case of deep time experiences they might include feelings such as insignificance, elevation, wonder, and enchantment. In addition, it also means that closely attending to aesthetic objects typically includes the perception of their expressive qualities and sympathetic attention to them. In aesthetic experiences of a steep canyon, a thick ancient forest, or a vast and sparkling starry sky, we are not only invited to various affective states, but to share a sense of the sublime (that is, as will be elucidated in the following section, to experience awe). Being touched by an energetic melody, we feel energized ourselves. This relational act of sympathetic attention can be called emotional “resonance” and to highlight the aesthetic context in which these feelings are experienced, “aesthetic resonance.” In moments of particularly intense aesthetic resonance, we can potentially experience a vital unity with the aesthetic object and become aware of ourselves as part of a larger whole, yet not understood as an actual dissolution of subject and object, but rather as an experience of perfect coordination.<sup>5</sup>

Anyone can have aesthetic experiences and any kind of thing can be an aesthetic object, be they art, everyday objects, or natural entities. However, due to their particular sensual qualities, some objects invite and reward this kind of intrinsic engagement more than others. We usually attribute aesthetic value to them or judge them as beautiful, sublime, or the like. Our reasoning praxis indicates that aesthetic judgments are neither subjective nor arbitrary but claim intersubjective validity. After all, they are rooted, as was mentioned, in our life experiences and values.

### **3. The Temporal Sublime**

The sublime pertains to aesthetic objects that are primarily characterized by their manifestation or expression of immense magnitude or tremendous power and evoke a profound aesthetic response: a sense of the sublime or

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<sup>5</sup> Krebs (2018) introduces the concept of aesthetic resonance, but remarks that the physical metaphor of resonance can be misleading in three ways: 1. physical resonance is a causal phenomenon, while aesthetic resonance is intentional sympathy; 2. physical resonance is instantaneous, while aesthetic resonance requires active attention; 3. physical resonance is bilateral, while aesthetic resonance is not a mutual concept; the aesthetic object does not respond to us in a literal sense. Here lies also a crucial difference to social acts of emotional resonance, when persons do respond to each other in a literal sense.

awe (Clewis 2021).<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the subject only experiences the sublime in a position of safety. Typical sublime objects are natural entities such as mountain ranges, canyons, waterfalls, storms, the starry sky, plains, and deserts, but also artifacts such as cathedrals or bridges. Though commonly applied to monumental objects, the sublime extends to immaterial items such as moral character traits and scientific ideas. Emily Brady explains the sublimity of abstract ideas and objects “by their possession of qualities already linked to the material sublime—qualities, such as greatness, immensity and loftiness, which expand the imagination—or through their associations with objects or actions that are typically considered sublime” (Brady 2013, 35). A particular sublime quality that falls into this category is high age. Aesthetically engaging with a very old object, we encounter the temporal sublime.

Theoretically, our knowledge about the high age of an object, be it an artifact or of natural origin, is sufficient to evoke a sense of the temporal sublime. Yet, two material qualities strongly support the aesthetic response: a prominent individual form and spatial magnitude. These qualities catch our attention and support our imaginative powers (Wordsworth 1810). Paradigmatic examples are the remarkable ruins of antiquity, such as the majestic Egyptian pyramids, and natural entities, such as steep canyons and distinctly shaped mountains. The temporal sublime is, thus, typically evoked through a combination of the tangible properties of an object and its more abstract temporal property with which we are usually familiar through general scientific or historical knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

Like aesthetic objects generally, sublime objects bring our cognitive and affective powers into play. However, due to their characteristic qualities, this play is not entirely free, and the aesthetic experience is particularly demanding because sublime objects overwhelm our senses and capacities of imagination and understanding, thereby eliciting a comparative reflection that potentially inhibits the aesthetic experience.

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<sup>6</sup> Though my understanding of aesthetic experience is inspired by Kant’s (2000) aesthetic judgment, I do not follow his aesthetic dualism which regards the experience of the sublime as essentially different from the experience of beauty. I rather discern gradual differences, such as Schopenhauer (1969).

<sup>7</sup> As can be inferred from my understanding of aesthetic experience in section 2, detailed scientific knowledge is neither necessary for, nor the content of aesthetic experience. For a summary of the knowledge-debate in environmental aesthetics, see Brady and Prior (2020). My position mostly resembles Brady’s (2003) ‘integrated aesthetic’.

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There are, more precisely, two potential tensions in the encounter of sublime objects that threaten the unity and the directedness of the aesthetic experience. For one thing, realizing the observer's smallness in relation to the magnificent vastness of the aesthetic object—in our case, its high age—cannot only evoke admiration and the like, but also a feeling of insignificance. Alternatively, the overwhelming sensual impressions can inspire the observer to direct their attention to sublime qualities deemed essential to humans, such as consciousness, moral vocation, or reason. While the latter response overcomes the mixed feelings of admiration and insignificance that threaten the experience's unity, it shifts away from the integrated both other- and self-directedness of the aesthetic experience to mere self-directedness.

How can the unity of the sublime experience be established and the other-directedness be kept? I suggest it happens through a successful synthesis of the sensual impressions, imaginations, thoughts, and feelings. As Brady, who furthermore stresses the transformative power of the sublime experience, remarks regarding the natural sublime: encountering it, we see ourselves differently, “as deeply struck by it all, but also handling it, synthesizing it, and gaining some new sense of how we fit into a picture much larger than us” (Brady 2013, 199). Such a synthesis is demanding and requires engagement, yet it is an integral part of the experience of the sublime. It means incorporating divergent reactions to the aesthetic object: on the one hand, the reflection on one's smallness or ephemerality and the humble realization of a higher complex of forces and meaning, and on the other hand, the elevating feeling of participating in the magnitude and strength of the aesthetic object through sympathetic attention and the realization that it is possible to carry the object in our consciousness and to reflect on it rationally despite being overwhelmed by the sensual impressions and the challenges of the imagination. By permitting a ‘both...and’, integration of other- and self-directedness is retained, and eventually, a successful synthesis evokes a coherent affective response, that is, a shared sense of the sublime. In other words, it is an experience of awe.<sup>8</sup> In experiencing awe, we aesthetically resonate with the sublime object as a whole. Metaphorically speaking, we answer it.

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<sup>8</sup> As Clewis (2021) has convincingly argued, the affective state of sublimity is a species of awe, aesthetic awe. Yet, departing from him, I do not define awe as an affective mix with inner tension. While the philosophical literature on awe is rather sparse, my understanding is inspired by Bollnow's (1942) detailed consideration. It stresses the coherence of awe, even though the German term ‘Ehrfurcht’ suggests a mix of positive and negative feelings.

Based on this framework, let us narrow the focus more closely on deep time experiences. As became apparent, the terms “temporal sublimity” and “deep time” are strongly related. Deep time refers to the vastness of geologic and cosmic time. So does the temporal sublime, though the term, as it is used, includes any high age that challenges the observer. Additionally, the temporal sublime includes the notion of a temporal quality that can be the object of an aesthetic experience. Thus, I classify deep time experiences as a case of temporal sublime experiences of natural environments.

In the light of what has been outlined so far, imagine, again, standing on the verge of a steep canyon, walking through a thick ancient forest, or gazing at the vast and sparkling starry sky; imagine, again, perceiving, in the impressive appearance and the light of your general knowledge, the ultimately unfathomable antiquity and continuance of the world. Imagine being overwhelmed by the encounter of the world’s sublime temporal scale as it is manifest in the steep and shapely canyon, the thick and mighty ancient forest, or the vast and sparkling starry sky, yet, in attending to the environment around you for its own sake, you engage in a play of imaginations, thoughts, and feelings. The imaginations might include vivid images of the encountered place as it was in the deep past, as it has developed, and as it might be in the future. The thoughts might include reflections on the relationship of world time with your life time, the mystery of existence, eternity, and the interconnectedness of all beings across space and time. The feelings might include insignificance, elevation, wonder, and enchantment. All in all, you develop a humble sense of the vast temporal dimension of nature’s complex forces, yet realize—through the sensual experience of an enviroing ancient presence, as will be further elaborated in the following sections—that it is a complex in which you partake; and, based on your deepest values and life experiences that include respect for something larger than yourself, respect for the deep origins of life and gratitude for the mystery of existence, you experience awe.

This description and invitation to the imagination is not meant as a fixed script for deep time experiences but tries to capture typical aspects based on examples (Szécsényi 2021, Rolston 1998). It also does not want to suggest that the aesthetic resonance—the feeling of awe, which takes more or less time to engage in, dependent on the current state of mind and former experiences—is the final point of the experience. The play of the powers of imagination and understanding and the affective powers typically continue, sometimes even long after being in the particular environment. However, the feeling of awe, which encapsulates a sense of the sublime, represents



the apex of this aesthetic experience. But what does sharing a sense of the sublime mean exactly? The ensuing section will elucidate that the experience of sublime awe is not merely a subjective response evoked within the observer. Instead, through a successful synthesis, one encounters an awe-inspiring atmosphere inherent to the sublime. This atmosphere, distinctly expressed in the surrounding environment, invites aesthetic resonance, which, ultimately, leads to a feeling of participation.

#### **4. Aesthetic Resonance with the Awe-Inspiring Atmosphere of Temporal Sublime Natural Environments**

Since the environing ancient presence of temporal sublime nature and the encounter of an atmosphere are crucial for understanding the feeling of participation in deep time experiences, I will approach these aspects by pointing out particular characteristics of aesthetic experiences in natural environments.

Initially, it is crucial to define “nature” within the context of this discussion. Here, nature refers to those elements of the world not crafted by human hands. Unlike human-made artifacts, this encompasses entities that arise, evolve, and cease independently. Notably, the distinction between nature and artifacts should be seen as a spectrum, akin to the gradation between light and dark, rather than as a binary, which is more akin to the absolute states of life and death (Deplazes-Zemp 2022; Krebs 2018). Most of what we call the natural environment lies between the extremes of pure nature and pure artifact. Nonetheless, in the aesthetic appreciation of natural environments such as canyons, ancient forests, or the starry sky—even if the latter is experienced downtown—we encounter, at least to a great extent, something non-human made.

Besides aesthetically encountering something non-human made, aesthetic experiences of natural environments share at least three further characteristics (Brady and Prior 2020). Firstly, they are particularly immersive. They differ from the object-centered experience of a sculpture or a single tree, which implies a clear boundary of the aesthetic object. If we aesthetically experience a natural environment, we do not only look at or listen to something, but we perceive a setting from within; we experience ourselves as observers and participants. Secondly, aesthetic experiences of natural environments include manifold and diverse sensual impressions, not only visual and acoustic ones, but also olfactory and tactile qualities, and may even extend to include the impressions of temperature. While it remains disputed

whether the senses of smell and touch are aesthetic or belong to the sphere of the pleasant, temperature perception usually does not count as aesthetic experience, which is based on intentional acts and not a matter of causal reaction or mere sensual pleasure.<sup>9</sup> However, in aesthetic experiences of natural environments, the diversity of aesthetic and non-aesthetic perceptions is part of an experienced whole, which adds to its immersive character. The third characteristic concerns the perception of ongoing dynamic changes due to daytimes, seasons, weather phenomena, and processes of growth and decay.<sup>10</sup> These changes evoke the impression of natural environments as enduring and living, while the encounter of other living species further intensifies the impression of liveliness.

As was pointed out, it is in particular through the sensual experience of an enviroing ancient presence that we realize to partake in the vast temporal dimension of nature's complex forces in deep time experiences. As it becomes evident now, this is due to the immersive character of aesthetic experiences of natural environments and the impression of natural environments as living and enduring.

Before further analyzing the aspect of ancient presence, which is linked with the experience of the liveliness of natural environments, in the final section, another question must be addressed. How do we encounter the manifold immersive elements of a natural environment surrounding us as a whole? In other words, how can we aesthetically resonate with an environment as a whole? As Krebs argues regarding Georg Simmel's landscape philosophy, the unifying principle is atmosphere (*Stimmung*), an affective quality that integrates a larger whole (Krebs 2018, 2014; Simmel 2007). That atmosphere is the unifying principle of natural environments, is reflected in descriptions of such environments as peaceful or melancholic. These statements also indicate that atmosphere is an affective quality tantamount to mood, thus, a state that affectively integrates an experiencing subject.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See Kant (2000) for differences of the pleasant and the aesthetic and Brady (2003) on a discussion of the aesthetics of smell.

<sup>10</sup> The third characteristic of aesthetic experiences of natural environments reveals their particular temporal properties. For examples of aesthetic experiences of natural environments that focus on other temporal properties than deep age (such as cyclicity or time flow), see Schuster (2021).

<sup>11</sup> See Krebs (2017) for an approach to moods (also 'Stimmung' in German) as affective states with an integrating and, furthermore, holistic character.

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In the case of built environments, such as marketplaces, cathedrals, or cityscapes, which share the immersive aesthetic characteristic of natural environments, we can say that the architect intended to create a particular atmosphere (Zumthor 2006). But how are atmospheres infused into natural environments? How can they have an affective quality? Following Krebs, I contend that the experiencing subject infuses atmospheres into natural environments. Yet, the atmospheres are not just an arbitrary ascription. Instead, we find expression in natural environments based on their characteristics that we perceive through the lens of human life, thus, our life experiences and values. In other words, we find expression in natural environments in our continual attempt to make sense of the world around us.<sup>12</sup> In the case of aesthetic experiences of ancient natural environments—through a successful synthesis of the manifold and immersive sensual impressions, imaginations, thoughts, and feelings—we typically encounter a sublime, that is, an awe-inspiring atmosphere, inviting aesthetic resonance.

To aesthetically resonate with an atmosphere is an intentional act, though it might sometimes feel like experiencing emotional contagion. However, we can perceive an atmosphere without resonating with it. As was said above, in moments of dynamic aesthetic relation with intensive sympathetic attention, we experience a vital unity with an aesthetic object. In aesthetic resonance with the atmosphere of environments, this sense of unity typically includes a feeling of participation, a feeling of belonging and being at home. While the feeling relates to the human world in the case of built environments such as beautiful architecture, it relates to the natural world in the case of natural environments. Though the feeling of being at home in nature must not be confused with absolute security, it deeply connects us with the natural world. Thus, natural environments that have enough integrity to invite aesthetic resonance contribute, in general, to healing a feeling of alienation and rift with the natural world (Krebs 2018, 2014).

Aesthetic resonance with an idyllic landscape is less demanding than deep sympathetic movement with the awe-inspiring atmosphere of a sublime natural environment. Yet, it is possible to fully devote oneself to a humble realization of a higher complex of forces and meaning, as, for example, in encounters of deep time when we succeed in aesthetically resonating with the awe-inspiring atmosphere of the ancient natural environment.<sup>13</sup> In invit-

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<sup>12</sup> This section can only provide a condensed version of Krebs' landscape aesthetics. See Krebs (2018; 2014) for her elaborated approach.

<sup>13</sup> I depart slightly from Krebs' landscape aesthetics by suggesting that aesthetic resonance is fully achieved not only in beautiful, but also in sublime nature. Krebs (2018)

ing a feeling of belonging and being at home in the world's temporal depth, temporal sublime nature contributes to the mentioned healing of a feeling of alienation and rift with the natural world. The concluding next section will further address this particular experience of temporal participation.

### **Conclusion: A Felt Integration of World Time and Life Time**

In order to grasp the most particular temporal quality of deep time experiences, I will finally draw on two case studies of deep time experiences: Endre Szécsényi's (2021) reflections on the aesthetics of the night sky and Holmes Rolston's (1998) exploration of aesthetic experiences of ancient forests. Although they each focus on a specific environment, they share striking similarities concerning the phenomenology of deep time experiences. In particular, they highlight a central aspect of deep time experiences that still needs more focus: the experience of ancient presence, which is linked with the experience of the liveliness of natural environments.

In experiences of deep time, one is said to encounter the Earth's and the cosmos' ancient past. However, this past is not experienced as distant or detached; rather, it is perceived as a present reality, apprehended through a multisensory engagement with the world. As Rolston articulates, natural environments are historical museums, but unlike cultural museums or ruins, which preserve the past in a static form, these natural museums continuously embody what they have always been. They are enduring living environments that bridge the deep past with the present and potentially extend into the deep future. This duality of being both ancient and perpetually renewed in each moment underscores their unique temporal character. Their dynamism thus "couples with antiquity to demand an order of aesthetic interpretation that one is unlikely to find in the criticism of art and its artifacts" (Rolston 1998, 158).

Depending on the characteristics of a natural environment, special features shape deep time experiences. Encountering, for example, the night sky, we experience a particular ancient object and an extreme temporal scale: cosmic time. However, as Szécsényi points out, the ancient night sky is nonetheless experienced as connected to the present moment because of the peculiar sensual impressions around us, such as the enlightening of the terrestrial landscape, voices, and smells. Furthermore, though the night sky is, thus, part of the lively natural environment, it is remarkably slow to change and therefore connects us in spirit with humans from all places and times, as

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argues that in the latter, due to mixed affective responses, sympathetic movement is only partly achieved.

Szécsényi's remark leads to infer: "Since time immemorial every generation has had the opportunity to wonder at almost the same breath-taking sight of the starry sky, while everything else in our environments has changed and is incessantly changing" (Szécsényi 2021, 58). In ancient forests, as Rolston observes, a "miracle of the Earth" is encountered, namely that nature "decorates" its geomorphology with life. According to him, the trees of ancient forests evoke this ongoing "genesis and biological power" (Rolston 1998, 160). Whereas in volcanic landscapes, as the former Icelandic president Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson (2009) vividly puts it, deep time experiences typically include the feeling of witnessing the beginnings that holy scriptures attribute to higher powers.

Of peculiarity and partly different from deep time experiences, as I have approached and outlined them, are experiences of caves because the presence as manifested in the time of day, year, or weather is less perceptible underground. Thus, the observer sometimes feels like entering a somewhat detached temporal dimension, which, nonetheless, has its own value.<sup>14</sup>

Both Rolston and Szécsényi stress the aesthetic challenge presented by the magnitude of the overwhelming sense of deep time and the simultaneous awareness of humanity's and one's individual finitude. Yet, in encountering deep time not as an abstract number or theory but as manifested in the at once ancient, present, and enduring environment whose awe-inspiring atmosphere invites aesthetic resonance, alienation can give way to a feeling of integration. Or, as I put the claim: At the heart of deep time experiences lies a felt integration of world time and life time. While the former encompasses the vast dimensions of the world's past and future, the latter relates to the observer's comparably limited life time.

The felt integration of world time and life time is an experience that overrides the natural world's indifference towards us, even though we know that the world cannot sympathize with us. Our humble yet profound feeling of integration and belonging is real and, ultimately, consoling. To prevent an impoverished and alienated relationship to the depth of world time, we should, thus, treat our canyons, ancient forests, the starry sky, and all the other impressive manifestations of deep time with careful consideration, both regarding us and successive generations.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Another particular case of deep time experiences (that is beyond the scope of this paper) concerns the aesthetic encounter of living fossils. See, e.g., Leopold's (1987) vivid description of encountering sandhill cranes.

<sup>15</sup> See Brady (2021) and Capdevila-Werning and Lehtinen (2021) for approaches to intergenerational aesthetics.

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