



Sostenibilart

Ambassadors of Sustainability



Edizioni
Ca' Foscari

Sostenibilart

La prospettiva rovesciata Obratnaja perspektiva

Collana diretta da
Silvia Burini

4



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Ca' Foscari

La prospettiva rovesciata | Obratnaja perspektiva

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CSAR

Centro Studi sulle Arti della Russia

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia

Dipartimento di Filosofia e Beni Culturali

Malcanton Marcorà, Dorsoduro 3484/D

30123 Venezia

csar@unive.it



Sostenibilart

Elena Gubanova and Ivan Govorkov, *Redshift*, site-specific installation.
Column Hall of the San Sebastiano campus, Ca' Foscari University, Venice, 2011.
Installation view. © Elena Gubanova and Ivan Govorkov. Photo © Elena Gubanova



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CYLAND MediaArtLab and the Centre for Studies in
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Curators

Silvia Burini, Giuseppe Barbieri, Anna Frants, Elena
Gubanova, Natalia Kolodzei

Editors

Lydia Griaznova (CYLAND MediaArtLab)
Maria Redaelli (CSAR)

Texts and images collection

Elizaveta Goleva

Copy editors

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Translators

Simon Patterson, Irina Barskova (English)
Maria Redaelli (Italian)

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Kolodzei Foundation



Thanks to

Sara Chiesa, Linda Trentin, Giuseppe Salandra,
Nicola Tetro

Sostenibilart

Ambassadors of Sustainability

edited by

Lydia Griaznova, Maria Redaelli

Venezia

Edizioni Ca' Foscari - Venice University Press

2022

Sostenibilart. Ambassadors of Sustainability

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Edizioni Ca' Foscari

Fondazione Università Ca' Foscari

Dorsoduro 3246, 30123 Venezia

<http://edizionicafoscari.unive.it> | ecf@unive.it

1st edition December 2022

ISBN 978-88-6969-676-3 [ebook]

Sostenibilart. Ambassadors of Sustainability / edited by Lydia Griaznova, Maria Redaelli —
1. ed. — Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2019. — 118 pp.; 22 cm. — (La prospettiva rovesciata
| Obratnaja perspektiva; 4).

e-ISSN 2784-8590

URL <https://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/en/edizioni/collane/la-prospettiva-rovesciata-obratnaja-perspektiva/>

URL <http://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/it/edizioni/libri/978-88-6969-676-3/>

DOI <http://doi.org/10.30687/978-88-6969-676-3>



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Ambassadors of Sustainability

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On My Way, exhibition view. Exhibition in parallel with the 56th Venice Biennale, Ca' Foscari University, Venice, 2015. © CYLAND Media Art Lab

To Feel, to Understand, to Act Sustainability on Display

Maria Redaelli

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia

Abstract This essay describes the exhibition project Sostenibilart promoted by CYLAND MediaArtLab and the Centre for Studies in Russian Art (CSAR). Starting from an analysis of what is normally described with the term 'sustainability', we will examine how this concept is developed by the artists identified as ambassadors of sustainability. Their reflection on the theme is also expressed through the answers to three questions posed by the Author that allow a transversal reading of the project. The text will therefore consider the ideas that emerged in this interrelated exchange. Finally, we will consider participation in contemporary art to verify the significance of the contribution of the artists-ambassadors of sustainability to stimulate in the public a reflection – and eventually action – on the issues.

Keywords Sustainability. Climate Change. Social Inequality. SDGs. CYLAND. Relational Art. Contemporary Art and Participation.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Technologies Shaping the World: CYLAND's Perspective. 3 Sustainability on Display. – 4 Three Questions for a Cross Reading of the Project. – 5. Conclusion.

The clock ticks, global danger looms.
(Noam Chomsky, *Verso il precipizio*, 2018)

True planetary awareness is the creeping realization
not that 'We Are the World', but that we aren't.
(Timothy Morton, *HYPEROBJECTS. Philosophy
and Ecology after the End of the World*, 2013)

1 Introduction

The project that we present in this volume aims to introduce to the public the reflection of the selected artists on the issues of environmental, climatic, and social sustainability. It is hoped that, thanks to their sensitivity to the topic discussed and through their works, readers (and possible viewers, whenever the project becomes an exhibition) will be induced in turn to think concretely about the dangers deriving from abusing the planet's resources (as we said both human and natural). The hope is that where journalistic information does not move consciences, artistic reflection may have an effect.

The title *Sostenibilart* is created by the union of art and the Italian word for sustainability (i.e., *sostenibilità*). The English word maintains the Latin root *sustinere*. This allows us to think about the broader meaning of the term, which is not purely that of sustain, of support, but has rich and varied facets. These are: to stand up to, to withstand, to endure and to have the necessary endurance, to submit to, even to hold up and to hold back. This immediately identifies a problem of approach with respect to just using the term sustain/support, which assumes a hierarchy in which a subject ('active' if we wish) acts on an object ('passive' element). On the other hand, by employing the other meanings mentioned, the role of subject and object is re-established on the same level to create a system.

In fact, it is easy to talk about sustainability, but what does it really mean to be sustainable? In his analysis of environmental art, Demos warns us about the rhetorical use of the word sustainability, declaring the danger about the 'greenwashing' effect of artistically exhibiting themes related to ecology with the risk of not having a true impact on the public (Demos 2009, 18). Sustainability could then be defined as 'being in balance', not leaving one's trace – which does not mean leaving one's mark, but rather, not imposing one's weight on others, not depriving someone of their resources only for one's own well-being, whether it is environmental resources or human resources. Indeed, we must think of a sustainable ecosystem in which economic, social, and environmental conditions are in equal relation. This is the aim of the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) of the UN Agenda for 2030: joint action by countries to ensure "peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future".¹ The program is marked by seventeen objectives that concern world hunger and poverty, the right to education and the guarantee of a non-violent childhood, the right to gender equality and the right to adequate health, the defence of nature and the prevention of disasters caused by human intervention in it, better infrastructure and scientific and technological progress.² The project, therefore, as we said, in line with

¹ <https://sdgs.un.org/goal>.

² <https://sdgs.un.org/topics>.

the SDGs, intends to make these problems tangible by offering their visualisation.³ We would like to analyse this concept through the lens of the words of the philosopher Citton, which are a criticism of being subjected to media images⁴ - a risk of mass communication that the project also tries to evade: “Le seul fait de regarder ensemble les mêmes choses au même moment produit des effets de valorisation commune” (Citton 2015, 51).

Indeed, the individual artistic experience can be transformed into collective emotion, as Lévy writes about such emotions that:

by making them autonomous from a space-time contingency, or at least (for contemporary arts) by giving them a collective reach, art makes us partakers of a way of feeling, of a quality of subjective experience. Virtualization, in general, is a fight against fragility, pain, attrition. (Lévy 1997, 70)⁵

We could then argue that to see is to feel, to feel is to understand, and to understand is to act. And this is also a system in balance.

2 Technologies Shaping the World: CYLAND’s Perspective

It is no coincidence that this exhibition project was created by CYLAND MediaArtLab. The multimedia art laboratory was created in 2007 by a group of artists on the initiative of Anna Frants and Marina Koldobskaya. Simultaneously, the annual CYFEST (Cyber festival) was also created, and, since 2013, it has been exported almost all over the world. In fact, in the fifteen years of its existence, the festival has been presented in Italy, Germany, Finland, the United States, Canada, Japan, Brazil and Ar-

gentina. The formula of the festival matches the global trend of exhibiting projects of this type, as it allows for the participation of international artists thanks to a specific thematic call. Every CYFEST is a reflection on global relevant themes and how these influence contemporary art practices.⁶ To quote a few, let’s first go back to the festival held in 2011 - at that time the official name was Cyberfest - where there was not a theme to explore but rather a pivotal question accompanied by the evocative

³ The idea is part of the historical concept of *art engagé*/engaged art, therefore of art and politics, and in this sense of ‘artivism’ (merged form of art and activism), a phenomenon that has been emerging in contemporary art since the late 90s. In Italy a recent volume dealing with this topic is that of Vincenzo Trione (2022).

⁴ This discourse clearly also falls within the concept of media ecology which involves the analysis of media conceived as an environment in which man is influenced by it and in which human culture develops. Since there is no way to deepen here, please refer to a reference bibliography (cf. McLuhan 1994; Postman 2000; Strate 2004; Scolari 2013; Linley 2016; Mattoni 2017).

⁵ Where for virtual the author means possible ways of living, possible ways of being, therefore opposed not to ‘reality’ but to ‘actuality’ (Lévy 1997, 2-5). All translations from Italian to English are by the Author.

⁶ Here’s the complete list of CYFEST and their themes to expose what has been said in the text: CYFEST-14 (2021-22) *Ferment*; CYFEST-13 (2021) *Cosmos and Chaos*; CYFEST-12 (2018-20) *ID. ART:TECH Exhibition*; CYFEST-11 (2017-18) *Weather Forecast: Digital Cloudiness*; CYFEST-10 (2016-17) *Frame of Reference*; CYFEST-9 (2015-16) *Patterns of the Mind*; CYFEST-8 (2014) *The Other Home(s)*; CYFEST-7 (2013) *Capital of Nowhere*; CYFEST-6 (2012) *At Heaven’s Door*; Cyberfest 2011, slogan: *Show us your Tongue!*; Cyberfest 2010, festival motto: *House Bugs*. Please note that Cyberfest 2007, Cyberfest 2008, Cyberfest 2009, were not strictly thematic and thus did not have a subtitle. See: <http://cyland.org/lab/program-list/cylandfest/>.

slogan *Show us your Tongue!*: is the art created thanks to new technologies a new artistic language or is it a mere parody of 'traditional art'? Let's consider then CYFEST-9 (2015-16) with the title *Patterns of the Mind* where artists were called to explore the problem of neo-tribalism, or digital tribalism. The speed of computerised communication and rapid dissemination of messages, allows for the creation of groups (tribes) of people geographically distant, but having the same interests. This phenomenon includes artists too, of course. For the CYFEST-11 (2017-2018), the theme was *Weather Forecast: Digital Cloudiness*, encouraging to reflect not about climate but about the digital clouds, thus trying to understand the ambivalence between the 'real' world and the digital one. The artists proposed works that showed how perception of reality changes with digital technologies, how they shape our social interactions considering also that information and even the most intimate thing we have, our memories, are stored in metaphorical clouds, travelling in a parallel world where they live without us, and they even survive us. Finally, let's consider the last CYFEST presented at Ca' Foscari in 2019, whose title was *ID. Art:Tech Exhibition* (CYFEST-12). On this occasion, we were facing the problem of identities and self-identity when interacting with digital technologies. Screens and alphanumeric codes deconstruct and multiply images and self-representations thus creating many and parallel living selves.

We should consider that a dynamic and free space such as the one spurring from the festival (which is an almost 'ephemeral' event) imposes itself in a decisive way parallel to the artistic and cultural museum tradition. Proposing an independent festival allows you to experiment and let yourself experience. The target audience is also obvi-

ously different: through festivals, it is possible to reach a younger audience that is already receptive not only to new technologies but also to the most urgent issues at a global level. It therefore seems important to us in this context to remember that CYLAND's activity is not limited to exhibition events but is widely dedicated to educational programs. The seminars, lectures and workshops organised by CYLAND always present different approaches thanks to the participation of international artists and curators, and this also occurs in the exhibitions. In this we therefore find the will to implement existing synergies and create new ones, between professions and heterogeneous professions (physicists, engineers, programmers, artists, curators, art historians). Due to this type of approach, since 2011, CYLAND weaves a close bond with the Ca' Foscari University of Venice where almost annually thematic exhibitions are presented or the CYFEST is proposed.⁷ Offering exhibitions and free of costs events in educational contexts is suitable for the purpose of encouraging research, and above all, stimulating the curiosity of the young public where their future takes shape.

Returning to the synergy between different professional figures created by the laboratory, it is essential to point out that some works are made in the context of the laboratory work: these are called *Made in CYLAND* (there is an archive available online and a series of video interviews on YouTube⁸) where the same artists talk about their works⁸). In this case, these works turn out to be an effective transposition of theoretical reflections in the field by creating a forge of practical elaborations of current issues in the context of the international debate. We find some of these works also within the project: *Blops Per Minute*, *Time Density*, *Trembling Creatures*, *Artists Union*. *Still Life*.

⁷ In the pages of this volume, we also find the images of the projects presented by CYLAND at Ca' Foscari, to retrace the consolidated history of the link between the laboratory and the Venetian university. We also find an image of the last edition of the CYFEST presented recently in Yerevan (CYFEST-14: *Ferment*, 10-25 October 2022).

⁸ https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLxfD4yyMvYbUeCPmkFJNp_KETxm7Nu75Z.

3 Sustainability on display

Returning to the main theme of the exhibition project, we can say that it is an effort to try and answer the questions:

How are we to cope these changes creatively?⁹ [...] Could the experience of individual isolation and uncertainty itself be used to provoke a transformation to some form of community, united in shared experienc-

es and the need to survive and thrive? (Haley 2003, 143, 145)

With this purpose, we will now propose below an overview of the works based on some common denominators that distinguish the research of the artists presented in the volume in alphabetical order.

3.1 Instability

The uncertain era in which we live, characterised by continuous changes, is echoed in the reflection on the instability and fear of the future by the group Where Dogs Run. Their interactive installation *The Phobia of Tomorrow* marks the hand of the visitor with the date of the following day, thus concretising exactly the anxiety for tomorrow, like a sort of *memento mori*. Instability is the word that distinguishes – and gives the title (i.e., *Instability Mode*) to – Alexander Ponomarev’s project, which aims at mirroring emergency signal launched by an entity on the verge of decline (taking inspiration from his experience as a sailor and the morse codes of distress call when you must abandon the ship). In insecurity and unpredictability, we try to

find something to hold on to, on which we can rely. Anna Frants’ work *Artist Union. Still life* is based on this assumption, that is, on the law of large numbers: as much as there is a random variable, a certain degree of probability of an event can still be determined. We can also find variability in the fermentative sound installation *BPM - Blops Per Minute* by Oleg Malenok, Vasili Bakanov, Alexey Grachev, Andrew Strokov, Alexander Bochkov, where man no longer exists, but only the relationship between technology and nature. In fact, the drum is played by the fermentation process of the beer that takes place inside the ampoules connected to the electric instrument. The ‘random’ is therefore the rhythm that will be created.

3.2 Fragility

Along with instability goes the question of fragility. Although the historical moment we are experiencing may not be the minute before mass extinction,¹⁰ it is true that the great changes we are facing determine serious dis-

appearances: of natural resources, animal and plant species, but also linguistic differences and folklore. It is on these assumptions that the research of Valentina Tamborra is based. With her photographs she tries to draw

⁹ The author refers to “the accelerating increase of the human species, the accelerating decrease of other species, and the accelerating effects of climate change” (Haley 2003, 143).

¹⁰ Let’s take up the concept of countdown introduced by Chomsky, also mentioned in the epigraph where the philosopher sees the end of the world as midnight on a clock that marks the final time of the planet: after the Second World War the lancets have moved to seven minutes from midnight and continue to run rapidly towards the fatal hour since then (Chomsky 2018).

attention to this problem. This reportage photograph, however, not only documents and records a certain situation, but also gives great dignity to the subjects represented like those we see from the series *ÁhkÁt - Terra Madre*. The fragility and at the same time the resilience of the peoples of the Arctic is also explored by Anna Tolkacheva and Sergey Katran. Like Tamborra, Tolkacheva attempts to record, to catalogue, all the elements that distinguish these peoples and reworks them in interactive *Nomadic Poetry* that allows us to see their places and know their words and traditions. It is an attempt

3.3 Interferences

The most eye-catching thing about environmental issues is that we have lost control of the landscape, which has changed and continues to change very quickly because of man. Here Maria Cristina Finucci with the installation *Wasteland Memoire* builds traces of her Garbage Patch State, the state of plastic she founded symbolically starting from the news of the huge barges of garbage that assemble and live in the oceans. This space is literally invaded by piles of plastic that make the emergency tangible, such that it seems that the space is even asking for help. Chakaia Booker, instead, more than working with garbage in public spaces, gives new life to the elements of waste, creating prints with them to create new environ-

3.4 Interiority

The reflection on change and sustainability concerns clearly also human inner reality. Anna Frants with *Trembling Creatures* shows us some beings in perpetual motion, just like us in our everyday routines, unlike the static rocks of the Arctic. Movement is also at the center of Elena Gubanova and Ivan Govorkov's installation, but it focuses on time, on the lancets running by - or us running by the lancets. In their installation *Time Density*, time acceler-

to make immortal in memory what is fading before our eyes. Katran instead realises what he calls 'social sculpture' (starting from the definition of Joseph Beuys), and his work *Northern Corpus* reports on the real threat to the linguistic and folklore traditions of the Nenets people due to global warming and the consequent disappearance of the tundra. Speaking of fragility and resistance we must cite Tuula Närhinen's project *Drop Tracer* which, starting from the assumption of the delicacy of the ecosystem, demonstrates how many small drops together are able to make it resilient.

Alexandra Dementieva with *Re-Lighting* also creates new environments, real landscapes giving new life to recycled elements, which is thanks to the use of recycled Led. In all these cases we see how these are environments in which the human presence is not contemplated; it is a sort of occupation by objects, a claim of territories and spaces taken away. For Francisco Infante-Arana and Nonna Goryunova, on the other hand, the *Artifacts* that they insert into the environment make us perceive the influence of man - even if we would almost perceive it as a supernatural presence -, which has the purpose of demonstrating just how human intervention modifies the environment within which it acts.

ates and slows down suddenly, casually, recalling that desperate race in search of happiness on the part of society.

But then we can also find some interior environments, interior landscapes, the representation of interior world in the work *Neurons Living and Dead* of Ludmila Belova. Starting from a reflection on Alzheimer's Disease, Belova reconstructs neurons to form new intimate scenarios against memory loss.

Finally, dealing with external perception and its reflection in individual sensitivity, we cite the media installation *Let them Talk* by Marina Alekseeva and Vladimir Rannev.

3.5 Fluidity

In these difficult times there are also those who imagine escape routes, or alternatives, to these relentless modification processes. For Ilya Kabakov the way to go is dematerialisation in the universe: indeed, the main character The Flying Komarov of his series of drawings *Ten Characters* gradually dissolves and fades into the atmosphere. Then, Pavel Ignatev, for example, for *Reverse Drift. Unpacking and Absorption* fills his sculptures (and the exhibition hall) with snails to demonstrate the increase in entropic flow and the survival of the biosphere. Culture and

The artists remind us how words have a significant weight and are able even to trigger a war.

the human being reabsorbed by nature. In a similar manner Victoria Ilyushkina, in her multichannel video installation *Cat Dreams*, shows us what it would be like to be cats, to be much closer to nature than men are. She does this also thanks to the acoustic part made by Thorsten Soltau, Max Kuiper, Vasili Stepanov. In these processes of hybridisation between human and animal sensitivities, Miriam Simun's answer to the problem is to imagine that man learns from cephalopods, acquiring their skills and sympathy in the video *Your Urge to Breathe Is a Lie*.

4 Three Questions for a Cross Reading of the Project

Alongside the presentation of the works that are part of the project, it is possible to find the answers to three questions that were submitted to the artists and that are related to the proposed theme. The idea is to offer a transversal reading through some key points of the problem at issue. These are: humankind is on the brink of extinction, will art save us? Can we think of a hierarchy in the system man-machine-nature? Can artists inspire social change? If so, how?

These are clearly somewhat provocative questions, which could affect the different strings depending on the receptiveness of each and which could in this way result in sincere and direct answers. Especially in touching on such controversial issues, such as the theme of mass extinction stemming from the indiscriminate use of the planet's resources, the relationship of man with the machine and the impact of scientific-technological progress, and finally the role of the artist within society. In the dedicated texts we find discordant opinions, we find commonal-

ities and we find recurring important terms. We are sure that this type of cross reading will help not only in understanding the proposed projects and the ambassadors of sustainability, highlighting the way in which everyone fulfils this mission - although they focus on different assumptions or give more value to some issues than others - but will also instil a greater curiosity about sustainability in the broad sense. We will try to summarise the answers collected, but we prefer to give clues without mentioning names so that it may arouse more curiosity in the reader, who will research them autonomously.

First, we must mention the fact that the work of this volume (as well as the project) began in a completely different world, as the group Where Dogs Run says, namely before the attack on Ukraine by Russia. Unfortunately, there has never been a period without conflicts in human history, but we must for sure point to this moment as decisive - in a negative way - for some of the artists we present.

4.1 Going Extinct or Surviving?

The first question evidently highlights the climate crisis as well as the international tensions we are going through. As Morton points out, now the threat is already too developed and is part of the problem itself unfortunately:

The spooky thing is, we discover global warming precisely when it's already here. It is like realizing that for some time you had been conducting your business in the expanding sphere of a slow-motion nuclear bomb. You have a few seconds for amazement as the fantasy that you inhabited a neat, seamless little world melt away. All those apocalyptic narratives of doom about the 'end of the world' are, from this point of view, part of the problem, not part of the solution. By postponing doom into some hypothetical future, these narratives inoculate us against the very real object that has intruded into ecological, social, and psychic space. (Morton 2013)

However, we prefer to think that it is still not too late. Indeed, based on the answers collected, we can say that not everyone believes that we are on the brink of extinction, sometimes arguing that we will not become extinct but

transform. Some assert art is already saving the world. It's a common opinion anyway that if art cannot save us, art can for sure make us feel the urgency of the question. For this aspect we can relate to Raessens' thought:

The discourse around climate must mobilize and reinforce progressive and positive moral ideas; it must be persuasive, changing attitudes and behavior by using narratives, documentary information, and games; it must stimulate social learning by using the power of social networks; and it must stimulate a post-liberal and global form of citizenship. (Raessens 2019, 97)¹¹

Someone proposes that the planet will survive without us, in which case the problem will be what to do with all the art we have produced. We can testify a general confidence in people, in the hope that the world can be changed thanks to the union of art and souls.

Therefore, whatever the facet of the position on the subject by the artist-ambassador, the essential point is to be able to be part of her/his reflection, the fact that her/his vision is shared with the public.

4.2 Is There a Hierarchy?

The second question as anticipated in the introduction deliberately poses a terminological problem that concerns the use of the term hierarchy approached to the concept of system. In fact, many artists have responded that it is not possible to establish a hierarchy, as it is precisely a system in which the elements are interdependent and in balance. As Morton says, it's a "dialogue between equal

partners, a dialectical play between the organic and electronic" (Morton 2013).

It is certainly evident how man often feels above nature, what Passmore defines with the term "despotic man", who controls nature and thinks he can shape the world as he pleases with arrogance (Passmore 1991, 19-42).

Also interesting is the answer that many others give

¹¹ These different facets are also analysed and compared in another volume, see Shin 2016.

about the machine (and technology in general) as an integral part of man and nature.¹² Still, others hope that the machine will definitively surpass man, that dream of human disappearance also described by Baudrillard as follows:

Technique becomes [...] the art of disappearing. Its purpose would consist, more than in the transformation of the world, in an autonomous world, fully realized,

from which we could finally withdraw [...] we therefore dream of a world miraculously moved without our intervention, and autonomous beings who, far from escaping our will, as in the sorcerer's apprentice, would realize our desire to escape our will. (Baudrillard 1996, 45)¹³

A prevarication, that of the machine over man, that for Wiener, considered the father of cybernetics, was to be avoided as very dangerous (Wiener 1996, 36).

4.3 Acting for Change?

The third question was probably the most complex and the one that garnered the most discordant opinions. In fact, few believe that art can inspire change. Several artists believe that, rather, it can be the tangible demonstration of these changes.

In this context we would like to recall how Lévy identifies the role of the public and the social function of contemporary art:

Instead of spreading a message to receivers outside the creation process, invited to give meaning to the work only at a later time, the artist here tries to constitute an environment, a device of communication and production, a collective event that involves recipients, that transforms hermeneutics into actors, that puts interpretation in circuit with collective action [...] this, moreover, is one of the main social functions of art: to participate in the continuous invention of the language

and signs of a community. But the creator of language is always a collective. (Lévy 1996, 130)

In the era of fast and fake news (meaning the distortion and the rapid divulgation of information through the internet), art is the way to communicate with the audience on a deeper level.

The use of technology in art also results, for example, in an interaction where the audience becomes not only spectator, but actor too.

The new media and technologies by which we amplify and extend ourselves constitute huge collective surgery carried out on the social body with complete disregard for antiseptics. If the operations are needed, the inevitability of infecting the whole system during the operations has to be considered. For in operating on society with a new technology, it is not the incised

¹² Where by nature it is correct to understand both animals and plants that for intelligence and 'sensitivity' are certainly not to be excluded and separated in the idea of an equal natural system (Coccia 2018).

¹³ However, the opposite is also true, namely: "The culture of industrialized society, functional to machinism, is firm to the idealizations of classical physics: abstracting individual relationships of cause and effect from the infinite complexity of becoming, it has practically cut the bridges with biology. The technological man seems incapable of understanding life because his cultural patterns are shaped to understand the machine. The need to quantify, to draw on the mathematical intelligibility of phenomena, leads him to represent a passive, inert nature, subject to deterministic laws that he must only take possession of to build, transform, dominate" (Sacchetti 1997, 85).

area that is most affected. The area of impact and incision is numb. It is the entire system that is changed. The effect of radio is visual, the effect of photo is auditory. Each new impact shifts the ratio among all the senses. What we seek today is either a means of controlling these shifts in the sens-ratios of the psychic and social outlook, or a means of avoiding them altogether. To have a disease without its symptoms is to be immune. No society has ever known enough about its actions to have developed immunity to its new exten-

sions or technologies. (McLuhan 1994, 64)

Today we have begun to sense that art may be able to provide such immunity. Technical tools may seem 'cold' and distant from us, but they speak to us, and we nowadays speak their same language. We are accustomed to their language but we are kind of still not accustomed to their use in art. We should however not be surprised as they can create new universes, new spheres of meaning and being.

5 Conclusion

Bowie sang "Is there life on Mars", but we know there is no Planet B, so we cannot but ask ourselves: what future will there be on Earth? It is a question addressed to every single individual but what the ambassadors of sustainability do, as we have shown, is share with us their reflections, their scenarios. That is also what Bishop, starting from what Rancière defines as "partage du sensible", writes about this type of mutual exchange, asserting that this "opens the door for all art to be political, since the *sensible* can be *partagé*" (Bishop 2006, 27-8). The political aspect entails a call to act, to work concretely for the betterment of the planet. Still according to Bishop in fact:

The hope is that the newly-emancipated subjects of participation will find themselves able to determine their own social and political reality. An aesthetic of participation therefore derives legitimacy from a (desired) causal relationship between the experience of a work of art and individual/collective agency. (Bishop 2012, 12)

Although we may feel powerless in the face of major

changes, sustainability also means pushing humans to assume their responsibilities not as individuals but as a collective, because change requires a "new mentality" and the "promotion of a new art of living in society" (Guattari 2020, 39).

Our survival on earth is threatened not only by environmental degradation but also by the disintegration of the fabric of social solidarity and psychic ways of life that therefore need an overall reinvention. The refoundation of politics must therefore necessarily pass through the aesthetic and analytical dimensions connected to the three ecologies: of the environment, of the socius and of the psyche. (Guattari [1992] 2020, 39)

Undoubtedly the most important actions must be moved by politics, but certainly citizens can contribute to raising the threshold of attention on issues of ecological crisis and social injustice. This ties in with Bourriaud's concept of relational art,¹⁴

¹⁴ "Relational (art): A set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space". (Bourriaud [1998] 2002, 113)

Because art is made of the same material as the social exchanges, it has a special place in the collective production process. A work of art has a quality that sets it apart from other things produced by human activities. This quality is its (relative) social transparency. If a work of art is successful, it will invariably set its sights beyond its mere presence in space: it will be open to dialogue, discussion. (Bourriaud 2002, 41)

Art has the power to create new imaginaries, new worlds, but it also has the power to show us reality for how it is. It can bring to the public attention not only the problem of the present, but of the possible future too. When we see that, that future becomes tangible, and we cannot avoid reflecting about the problems we are living and creating. For Bourriaud then artworks have the chance and give us the chance of

learning to inhabit the world in a better way, instead of trying to construct it based on a preconceived idea of historical evolution. Otherwise put, the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist. (Bourriaud [1998] 2002, 13)

Developing a project, a volume, and a possible future exhibition dedicated mainly to the visualisation of the process of valorising actions aimed at improving the planet means not considering art and artworks as a separated form society, merely as individual aesthetic experience, but making them an actual integrating force for defending sustainability as the foundation of a healthy ecosystem.

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ID. ARTTECH EXHIBITION, exhibition view. As a part of CYFEST-12 and in parallel with the 58th Venice Biennale, Ca' Foscari University, Venice, 2019.
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The project *Sostenibilart* aims to raise awareness on a crucial issue, such as the sustainability of all our activities on the planet, and together to 'educate' concretely, through art, sustainability in a broad sense, inspiring and promoting actions.

The idea is powerful and understandable: to encourage, in the current international scene, artists of significant standing to become 'Ambassadors of Sustainability', contributing with their works to promote a greater and more active awareness of environmental respect, the non-dissipative use of the planetary resources, multiethnic and multigenerational sharing.



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