

## Ethnographic Findings from a Mediterranean Landscape: Waste in Anthropocenic 'Representations'

Text & Photos by Silvia Lelli, University of Firenze, Italy - September 2017 - [silvia.elli@unifi.it](mailto:silvia.elli@unifi.it)



**Mots-clés:** Waste, Landscape&Environment, Anthropocene, Art&Anthropology  
**Néologismes:** *natucultural, artethnographic, Fourth Landscape.*

### AN ARTETHNOGRAPHIC RE-SEARCH

Waste, trash, garbage, etc. are material-and-intellectual cultural objects, as a wide literature nowadays explains. Many analyses of our waste reveal a lot about our uses and values, namely, about our 'social-culture' in the anthropological sense. The core of my contribution regards *objects* and *insights* derived from my attempt to clean up a few small Mediterranean<sup>1</sup> beaches from waste - different kinds of debris, rotten objects, plastics, polymers, non-biodegradable materials - deposited there by the marine currents.

So, my approach derives from a not rally organized local practice that from the smallest Mediterranean beaches reveals a global connection with the Plastic Oceanic Garbage Vortexes. Developing since a few years such physical and intellectual re-search, I realized that I was part of an unexpected 'teamwork' complexly constituted by *natural* agents - the sea flow, matter corrosion, and other physical phenomena - and *cultural* ones: collecting waste stuff, once produced, used and dismissed by human beings.

I was surprised by their massive presence in an environment defined 'natural' and 'beautiful', I was struck by their quantity and strangeness. So far I was, as many others,

---

<sup>1</sup> The research-activity, I carry out with AntropoLogiche Association, takes place since a few years in Elba, a Tyrrhenian island in the Tuscan Archipelago National Park - Livorno province, Italy - the largest marine park in Europe. A coastline considered among the most polluted all over the world (Speciale TG1, 2017; <http://www.tenews.it/giornale/2011/01/05/l-allarme-c-e-troppa-plastica-nei-mari-dell-elba-35474/>), and at the same time as one of the cleanest (<http://www.arpat.toscana.it/temi-ambientali/acqua/balneazione/classificazione-delle-acque-di-balneazione>; <http://sira.arpat.toscana.it/sira/balneazione/balneazione.php?comune=portoferraio>).

deceived by the touristic industry apparatus that 'cleans' the beaches for the summer season, hiding trash from the visitors' eyes. But exploring isolated, not-equipped coastlines, I discovered their not really 'natural' conditions. I was at the same time attracted and repelled by these weird objects: their new-rotten aspect, ugliness entwined with beauty, poetic formations mashed up with filth, vegetal and animal life coexisting with rusty scraps and corroded plastics in improbable 'still life' compositions, bizarre shapes and colors worked out by natural forces, their 'wrong' placement (Douglas 1966), the intertwining of unnatural (chemical-industrial stuff, polymers of any kind) and natural elements (wood, stones, salt, water, sun, temperature...). In short, these objects show an entanglement of materials that we usually do not see, indicating that the ideas of fixity, stability, inertia... that we attribute to material things - and the same stances of 'attributing' and of conceiving 'things' - are incorrect: the matter they are made-of exhibits their complex historical and physical processuality.

Further questioning on why these things attracted me, I realized that I was interested in them not only for their appearance, but also because they revealed hidden realities about the local-global (*glocal*) situation of the planet: even if collected on a tiny territory, they are the same kind of materials that compose the immense Garbage Vortexes floating in the Oceans. So I started noticing their material-and-symbolic importance, and I decided not to throw them in the trash - where probably they came from<sup>2</sup>: it would be just a way to get rid of them, and hide them over again. Waste is a 'matter' that our society tries to hide (Humes 2013) but, as Joshua O. Reno (2016) remarks, it always get back to us, in a way or in another.

They became relevant *ethnographic findings*, 'objects' embodying and showing a not-so-evident evidence, small *naturalcultural* assemblages-installations from an Anthropocenic fieldwork/landscape. As 'Anthropocenic finds', I decided to exhibit them in order to provide new knowledge about the actual environmental situation, through a new interdisciplinary cultural tool, in a scientific-artistic-ethnographical perspective, as 'micro Anthropocenic Landscapes' (Lelli 2017). Since environmentalist descriptions appear to be distant, or catastrophic - then not easily accepted - and scientific treaties and data are difficult to understand or to believe, nor enough *touching* for a broad not specialized public, I propose an innovative approach to the waste issue, combining a scientific knowledge, in form of a material evidence, with different kinds of knowledge that engage art, agency, language, cognition, emotions, participation, in search of new approaches that could be helpful in an

---

<sup>2</sup> Recycling for most of them is impossible, due to their advanced disintegration. Moreover we know that recycling is not a solution: it implies a large use of energy and pollution, and it circularly encourages and legitimates the use of plastic supplies.

Anthropocenic Era - or idea. Scientifically confirmed or not as an 'Epoch', nonetheless the idea of living on a planet modified by our not-so-aware doing, stimulates such research.

The exhibited 'Anthropocenic objects' are a material evidence that deserves to be scientifically treated, but their astonishing, stimulating 'appeal' deserves attention as well, since it is the medium, a connection, that offers to our perception their - and our - stories. Their appearance- 'appeal', arouses interest about their existence, and questions on 'what exactly they are', on how to deal with the processes of their production, and the many connected problems.

So, I will not analyze here the practices related to waste that in the area are limited to a not well working separate collection - not accepted/not understood by local people and not respected by tourists - nor I will go into the many difficulties in the subsequent recycling processing, made more difficult by the fact that we are on a little island.

I will rather explore waste from the very specific point of view of our understanding of its materiality, of the cognitive tool we use to understand it, believing that a reassessment of our knowledge about waste-objects, and objects in general, far from having an immediate practical feedback, could nevertheless convey a broader attention on the waste issue. The hybridity of such material raises epistemological and theoretical questions about the paradigms of the disciplines (science, ecology, and politics) that deal with the understanding of the environmental situation, and of the education about it. So the exhibit offers a participative transdisciplinary framework, encouraging different insights on the issue.

Conjugating scientific and anthropological discourse, I keep together different kinds of knowledge evoked by the observation of these objects, concretely caring for their co-presence. The scientificity-reliability of this cultural operation consists in making explicit the process itself. Specifically, I strictly limited my artistic intervention on them, since their 'simple' existence is a scientific, objective datum that I do not want to lose. So, 1) my artistic intervention is minimal in order to preserve their status of material evidence of the planet's situation; 2) I do not treat them with chemicals.

Regarding this latter point, I give the smallest as possible contribution to environmental pollution, especially while assembling artworks whose role is to testify against industrial and chemical contamination. *Committed* art cannot *commit* pollution itself, while pretending to condemn it - it is clearly an unsustainable contradiction, yet widely practiced. So these objects are non-further-polluting materials, exhibited within an intentional, firm activist frame.

Regarding the former point - the status of *ethnographic finds* - I do not manipulate them: the consequence would be the loss of their scientific evidence, and of the 'realistic'

impact they convey. So, I carried out a minimal 'artisticization' of them, through very simple actions: collecting, juxtaposing and exposing them, maintaining together some material elements of the original site where I found them, letting them to perform the contrasting assemblage 'nature-culture-chemical industry' they evoked in me. Basically, my artistic intervention is constituted by the unique means of their exhibition. I entered an already ongoing flux of activity, just making these objects more visible and, through them, making more visible some related hidden realities about waste and beyond. So, they are not conceptual products of a human driven idea, but *natucultural* products, stuff I find 'ready made', out there. I take part in a complex collaborative *natural+human (natucultural)* material process, in a way similar to the artifacts' *morphogenetic* process described by Tim Ingold, a way that "soften any distinction we might draw between organism and artifact" (Ingold 2013: 22), different from the *hylomorphic* model, highly conceptualized, abstracted and alienated from the matter-flow, where "the life proper to the matter (...) is hidden or rendered unrecognizable (...), which reduces matter to inert substance." (ibidem: 31).

## NEW KNOWLEDGE FROM & FOR THE ANTHROPOCENE

A reconjunction of many scientific sectors is crucial for studying the new symbiotic forms of life emerging from the floating waste - as the "Plastisphere", a heterogeneous microbial communities living on/by ic marine debris - for studying their impact on both them and the bacterial communities, for understanding if they really 'digest' plastics, "Whether or not that material then passes up the food chain (...). To understand if it's a good thing or not, we have to understand the entire system" (Zettler et al. 2013; see also Goldstein et al. 2012; Galgani et al. 2013)<sup>3</sup>.

Yet, a wider transdisciplinary survey and reconjunction of other forms of knowledge and possibilities of understanding these new materials, in conjunction with scientific knowledge, is necessary. The *artethnographical* exposition is a wide instrument, whose result is the construction of a new tingling counter-aesthetics, a material poetry that combines the contrasting contradictions and ambiguities of these objects: truly, a *garbage-aesthetics* that offers new visual scientific data, new material and political visions of 'old stuff', evoking the conflicting states that the waste issue arouses, with the advantage of exciting the curiosity about it.

---

<sup>3</sup> See also the wide literature produced by IFREMER-Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer, <http://wwz.ifremer.fr/>

As attested by other innovative projects based on the interdisciplinary combination of art and science (Blanc & Benish 2016, Hengge & Grosser 2014), the dissemination of scientific knowledge via new emotional artistic languages is not only facilitated, but also produces new knowledge, deepening the awareness of many aspects our behaviors, evaluations, decisions, and, as we will see, also in terms of a new scientific understanding of the living systems. Specifically, such *artethnographic* experience provides - to us and to the audience - new insights regarding our old presuppositions, and helps in reassembling some theoretically secluded, simplistic, dualistic categories, like *rationality* and *sensation, emotion* and *understanding, science* and *sociology, economics* and *ecology*. A process that offers empowering cognitive-linguistic tools for facing the new situations.

Without entering here in the debate on *if, how* and *what* kinds of knowledge art-fruition and art-making can or cannot generate, I adopt a general concept of 'knowledge', intending that we always gain something meaningful from interactions with artworks - and with 'simple objects/things'.

As cognitive linguistics (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, Lakoff 2010) and cognitive sciences affirm (e.g., Libby & Eibach 2013), the vision and naming of new aspects of 'things' expands our views and categories, useful tools for understanding what we have done up to now, and possibly correct our mistakes. We wrongly imagined the future (Jedlowski 2017) carrying on misleading ideas - and behaviors - of 'progress' and 'growth' (Latouche 2004, 2012), neither controlling the increasingly accelerated changes (Eriksen 2016), nor understanding the connections between waste and neoliberal globalization (Eriksen & Schober 2017). A reassessment of our 'knowledge construction system' is definitely due.

Facing such a complex task, collecting garbage is not enough; but in continuity with it, I consider its exposition a cultural-political counter-action, aiming to a realistic performative construction of new knowledge. This 'ethnographic artisticization' is a new material practice for the redefinition of these obsolete objects, through the process of their revitalization, giving to these rotten objects the opportunity of participating again in the social life (Kopytoff 1986, Thompson 1979) assuming new roles as a scientific evidence, as well as stimulating art pieces. In interaction with the public, a performative agency emerges, enacting material-symbolic processes that add new perception and challenge the mainstream stereotypes of our consumerist reductive views - ones that had declared their inutility and 'social death', obtaining their silence and invisibility. The *waste-aesthetics* hits, and the contribution of the exhibit, beyond the close observation of the material scientific data, is the possibility to think of- *get in touch* with- the material outcomes of the capitalistic-consumerist behavior.

Stereotyped behaviors as 'use an object-throw it away-buy a new one' and so on, are evoked and challenged, *moving* from the idea of 'dead stuff to throw away and hide' to, e.g., ideas of 'bizarre living things that convey new information', or 'material complex agglomerations to be analyzed', or 'which further processes these materials will go through?', and more.

Similar agentive inputs, deriving from the direct interaction between human and nonhuman beings, are possibly more stimulating than ones obtained by the common practice of avoiding/hiding the garbage and pollution troubles. Agentive-interactive inputs are more effective, in virtue of the continuity, proximity and interaction maintained with a contextual, material processual reality - a necessary condition advocated by any anthropological-ethnographical community, and by other 'new knowledge' frameworks.

Configuring these effects in performative and agency terms, and searching for a reassessment of new reliable understanding of the living systems, I propose to deepen the grounded-reasoning about these objects, testing a possible framing of this cultural activity across the *Posthumanist Performativity* and *Agential Realism* accounts elaborated by the philosopher Karen Barad (1996, 2003, 2007), across other partially related views, as *New Materialism*, focusing on Tim Ingold's anthropological discussions (2007, 2012, 2013), within the more general background of the *Systemic Unifying Vision* developed by the scientists Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi (2014).

## NEW DYNAMIC OBJECTNESS

These practical-theoretical frameworks reveal new characteristics of objects in general that challenge our granted categorizations of 'objects' and 'objectness' as still and steady stuff, deconstructing their reified meaning on a scientific base. To analyze 'the concrete matter' of objects is a very basic, micro-scale investigation, but it gives a measure of the limitedness of our mainstream knowledge paradigm.

The exposed objects embody the complexity of the processes of their formation, created by the interactions of *nature* and *culture* (Bateson 1979), at once regarded as *good* and *bad* (Douglas 1966), *durable* and *deteriorated*, made of *alive*- yet considered *inert matter* (Ingold 2007, 2013), judged *inactive objects* vs. *active subjects* (Barad 2003, 2007), they materialize the coexistence of *space* and *time*, synthesize *past* and *future* (Jedlowsky 2017).

So they offer visibility to many invisible connections: among different physical micro-macro areas, different materials and issues of the planet's life, and many symbolic categories, being not only concrete testimonies of the global situation, but also 'things good to think'. Of

difficult definition, these waste-objects show the artificiality and inadequacy of human categorization: precisely, of the traditional paradigm-attitude that we *still* use to construct the physical-and-cognitive predicament we live in. According with Tim Ingold's suggestions, derived from a scientific observation of the *concrete matter* of which objects are made of<sup>4</sup>, we find that

things are active (...) because of ways in which they are caught up in these currents of the lifeworld. The properties of materials, then, (...) are processual and relational. To describe these properties means telling their stories. (Ingold 2007: 1).

Property is a condensed story. To describe the properties of materials is to tell the stories of what happens to them as they flow, mix and mutate. (Ingold 2007: 14).

The exposed waste-artifacts show - more clearly than ordinary objects - the dynamicity of their stories-properties; watching them, we concretely see complex agglomerations, dynamic interactions, transformations and incongruities merging in their matter, neither separate nor ordered in discreet sectors or oppositions... not exactly the characteristics we usually attribute to *material objects*. They indeed embody - and exhibit - properties of 'objectness' we did not know before.

So, synthesizing Ingold's discussion, and according to George Lakoff's cognitive linguistics, if such redefinition would be transferred into daily language-knowledge, also the derivatives 'objective', 'objectivity', 'objectivism', etc. would acquire very different meanings, conveying ideas of 'dynamic, unpredictable, mimetic, changing, *alive*', questioning and renovating the entire Objectivist Paradigm, Objectivist Metaphysics and Objectivist Cognition (Lakoff 1987: 157-218).

New frameworks let us perceive how 'old' our traditional categories are, and how 'new' are these objects. Consequently to such redefinition of meaning, transforming the old cognitive linguistic opposition *passive object (nonhuman)* vs. *active subject (human)* may have the pragmatic effect of not being caught totally unprepared facing the so called 'natural' disasters. A speech-act (Austin 1962) that attributes the responsibility to 'nature' only, paradoxically forgetting the human centrality that we usually assume. Anthropocentrism produced the Anthropocene – idea or fact – so it is more difficult now to elude our co-responsibility in such occurrences. As Donna Haraway suggests, it is a question of “response

---

<sup>4</sup> Ingold's discussion regards any material, but on these particular objects his observations are even more evident.

ability”, and of positioning ourselves “*with* the world” and not generically ‘in’ or ‘for’ it (Haraway 2008).

Actually, the earliest scientific-philosophical treatises (Bateson 1972; Maturana & Varela 1972; Barad 1996; Capra 1997, 2002) already observed that human categorizations have fuzzy borders, that their complex overlaps and dynamicity must be taken into account in order to understand the reality, etc. Nonetheless, new possible categorizations difficultly enter the ordinary language. Mainstream thinking *still* relies upon reductive paradigms, hiding the scientific evidence that everything is made of connections and relations and that ‘matter’ is lively and relational. We are alive just because we are made of, and surrounded by, alive matter: “Like all other creatures, human beings do not exist on the ‘other side’ of materiality but swim in an ocean of materials.” (Ingold 2007: 7). An issue that reminds us to the waste predicament: to think waste as ‘alive matter’ in a unified category with human beings would perform a co-responsibility and possible ‘response abilities’, making us more aware of the planetary damage of consumerism.

But this is exactly the kind of knowledge that the economic consumerist apparati are afraid of, promoting politics that hide not only waste, but also new reliable languages and paradigms.

### **AGENCY, MATTER and HUMAN/NONHUMAN INTRA-ACTING**

The ‘material language’ of the waste objects tells the stories of their *lively objectiveness* produced in *naturalcultural* processes. This ‘synthetic’ neologism recomposes the theoretical and cognitive-linguistic caesura that artificially separates the two constructed ‘fields’ of *nature* vs. *culture*, hiding the material outcomes of their concrete interactions. I recently found out that Karen Barad since 2007 used the neologisms “*naturalcultural*” and “*socialnatural*” for analogous purposes, exposing her Agential Realist framework: “This framework provides a Posthumanist Performative account of technoscientific and other naturalcultural practices.” (Barad 2007: 32). The term “Posthumanist” underlines “the crucial recognition that nonhumans play an important role in naturalcultural practices, including everyday social practices, scientific practices, and practices that do not include humans” (ibidem). So, Posthumanist Agential Realism, including “practice within theory (Barad 1996: 182) and underlining “the necessity of an ethics of knowing” (ibidem: 183), appears an appropriate framework for analyzing the Anthropocene and its products, as waste.



Barad states that "matter is not a fixed essence; rather, matter is substance in its intra-active becoming - not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency." (Barad 2003: 828). Nonhuman objects and materials are not inert, but *agentive becoming*: a scientific fact that our mainstream cognitive anthropocentric paradigm do not contemplate, defining agency as an *attribute*, and *attributing* it to humans only. Barad theorizes these crucial interactions, observing different *agencies* at work in *intra-activities*:

Agency is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has. Agency cannot be designated as an attribute of subjects or objects (as they do not preexist as such). Agency is a matter of making iterative changes to particular practices through the dynamics of intra-activity. (...)

What about the possibility of nonhuman forms of agency? From a Humanist perspective, the question of nonhuman agency may seem a bit queer, since agency is generally associated with issues of subjectivities and intentionality. However, if agency is understood as an enactment and not something someone has, than it seems not only appropriate but important to consider agency as distributed over non human as well as human forms. This is perhaps more evident in considering fields such as science, where the subject matter is often "nonhuman". (Barad 2007: 214).

Summarizing her *Performative Metaphysics*: "the universe is agential intra-activity in its becoming. (...) This dynamism is agency." (Barad 2003: 818, author's emphasis). Barad's statements are based on a detailed analysis of Niels Bohr's Philosophy of Science<sup>5</sup>. In their account, as well as in Ingold's, the borders between *culture/nature*, *subjects/objects* (supposedly corresponding to *humans/nonhumans*, *agents/nonagents*) are put it in check: such distinctions "do not preexist" the human linguistic categorization, rather, the different roles of *subjects* and *objects* are performed from time to time in *linguistic material* relational intra-actions.

So, language has a crucial role in these processes, and "a *performative* understanding of discursive practices challenges the representationalist believe in the power of words to represent pre-existing things." (ibidem: 802). Representationalism relies upon 'reflections' of the reality, while Agential Realism relies upon "*diffraction* as a physical phenomenon (...), a material-discursive phenomenon that makes the effects of different differences evident" (Barad 2007: 88). "Representationalism separates the world into the ontologically disjoint

---

<sup>5</sup> Niels Bohr, Nobel Prize in Physics in 1922, fundamentally contributed to the understanding of Atomic Structure and Quantum Theory.

domains of words and things, leaving itself with the dilemma of their linkage such that knowledge is possible." (Barad 2003: 811). So doing, it enacts a "*Thingification* - the turning of relations into 'things', 'entities', 'relata' - [that] infects much of the way we understand the world and our relationship to it." (ibidem: 812, author's emphasis).

Agential Realism, instead, focuses on the "intimate relationship between concepts and materiality" (ibidem: 820). So, another innovative proposal regards "material-discursive practices", which frame in a unified relational ontology the 'human-speaker' and the 'nonhuman-thing' we speak of. Such paritarian condition is unforeseen in Representationalism, which ranks us/humans as detached from- and superior to- the world we allegedly *could* represent:

(...) "Bohr's insight that concepts are not ideational but rather are actual physical arrangements is clearly an insistence on the materiality of meaning making (...). Hence, materiality and discursivity must be reworked in a way that acknowledges their mutual entailment." (ibidem: 819-20).

"On an agential realist account, discursive practices are not human-based activities but rather specific material (re)configurings of the world through which local determinations of boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted." (ibidem: 828).

Such insights about the materiality of meaning-making and the not-human base of the material discursive practices as "physical arrangements" that (re)configure the world, lead to the overlapping of ontology and epistemology, as two outcomes of the same intra-activity, named, in fact, "*Onto-epistem-ology*: the study of practices of knowing in being" (ibidem: 829).

But, "knowing in being", or 'the awareness that we are participating in what we are knowing', is a difficult task to practice: we are 'still' educated to 'stillness', still imagining ourselves as 'out-above the rest of the world', and still considering this position as a fix privilege, despite evidence. But "boundaries do not sit still" (ibidem: 817), and we are 'still-knowledge' producers, unprepared for the accelerate changes we inadvertently contribute to materialize. Such divulgated 'stillness' of classical-western scientific knowledge is a Representationalist stance that reduces the real complexity to limited human '*reflections*' (ibidem: 88) and presupposes the observer (*subject*) as external to- and dominating- the observed, isolated 'things' (*object*). So, 'classic science', according with its own paradigm, has troubles in explaining how we can understand something from a presumed external position,

and in reconnecting its separate 'discoveries', even when they are correct. We are using very blunt instruments to orientate in the Anthropocene, it's no wonder if we are submerged by rubbish.

After such survey, Posthumanist Agential Realism appears a useful tool for constructing a 'new scientific knowledge': "According to Agential Realism, *science is movement between meanings and matter, world and word, interrogating and redefining boundaries, a dance not behind or beyond, but in "the between", where knowledge and being meet.*" (Barad 1996: 185, author's emphasis).

### **SPACETIME, DIFFRACTIONS FROM A 'FOURTH LANDSCAPE'**

Another interesting conjunction regards "the making of *spacetime*", derived from physics, and reconfigured in the Agential Realist view:

This ongoing flow of agency through which "part" of the world makes itself differentially intelligible to another "part" of the world and through which local causal structures, boundaries, and properties are stabilized and destabilized does not take place in space and time but in the making of spacetime itself. The world is an ongoing open process of mattering through which "mattering" itself acquires meaning and form in the realization of different agential possibilities. Temporality and spatiality emerge in this processual historicity. Relations of exteriority, connectivity, and exclusion are reconfigured. The changing topologies of the world entail an ongoing reworking of the very nature of dynamics. (Barad 2003: 817-18).

The exposed waste-objects - 'Anthropocenic finds', are material "parts" or *diffractions* (ibidem: 88-89) of a *glocal* Anthropocenic Landscape: '*forms* that take place in the making of spacetime'. They embody *spacetime* in their matter, allowing a sort of visualization of 'the making of *spacetime*' itself: *time* is transforming the physical *spaces* of their *bodies* in a unique processual historicity. The same can be said for the sea shores/*spaces* where they come from, as well as for the Oceanic Plastic Vortexes, 'topologies' produced in *spacetime* through *natucultural* historical changes unseen before.

They condense *spacetime* contemporarily *embodying past, present, and future*: they reveal the things they were, show what they are now, and prefigure a future - an unsustainable future. So, according with Paolo Jedlowski's "Memorie del Futuro"(2017), they let us think of

the "past futures": the 'futures' we once (in the past) imagined, but did not materialized as we had imagined - most probably because they were imagined within the myth-paradigms of development and growth.

These reflections on "the making of spacetime" and of the "changing topologies" introduce my idea of 'Fourth Landscape', gratefully derived from Gilles Clément's "Third Landscape" (Clément 2004) and from Nadia Breda's suggestions (Lai & Breda 2011). Shifting from the category of 'environment' to one of 'landscape', I elicit the importance of these *spaces* where peculiar emotional and mental states, often called 'atmospheres', *take place*, emerging in human beings in interaction with the *natural* elements.

A 'landscape', differently from 'environment' or 'territory', is a space where matter and feelings nourish each other. As I say in Lelli (2017), I was impressed by how, standing on an ordinary-but-unfrequented seashore, I could feel in tight contact with the micro-beings living there, and at the same time in direct contact with the macro-context of the immense oceans and the plastic Vortex, physically connected by the seawater and by the trajectories of the floating migrant waste, physically perceiving to be myself a "part" - a *diffraction*- of the world. "Here, if you get closer and look in detail at the beautiful 'naturalistic postcard' perspectives, you see the waste, the material surplus rejected by our civilization, literally emerging from the sea in unimaginable proportions, brought there by the collective action of *natucultural* human and non-human agents." (ibidem).

In Clément's description, 'Third Landscapes' are places recognizable from some characteristics: the variety of interacting ecosystems, a relative stability/instability, anthropization or wilderness, they are symbolic or meaningless, vast or minute-yet without borders, not-exploited spaces, whether for human decision or not. Considered uncomfortable, difficult to reach or simply unknown, they are ignored and unfrequented by human beings, so biodiversity here can grow and flourish. They are confronting with the "planetary mishmash" (Clément 2004: 24).

Maybe Gilles Clément didn't know, but he was describing an 'almost Anthropogenic Landscape'. 'Almost', because as in other similar landscapes, the presence of vast amounts of waste - a material he does not mention - can no longer be ignored. So what I call 'Fourth Landscapes' share some characteristics with the 'Thirds', but are not made of 'natural matters only': micro and macro waste characterize the Anthropocene, and are neither short-temporary accidents of some place, nor of 'our' time, but structural, endemic matters of the planet's *spacetime*. Fourth Landscapes are not "protected *from* the human activity" - rather they are garbage repositories, they are not only "*natural biodiversity* reservoirs", their *future* will be

not only *biological*, and we are not aware of the consequences of anthropization *on* biodiversity. These distinctions made, many other characters are similar: a *Fourth Landscape* is a refuge for known and unknown vegetal and animal species - as ones that make a living on plastics -, a "territory of resistance" (ibidem: 7), a "place of possible invention, an active situation" (ibidem: 10). So *Fourth Landscapes* are 'mattering of the Anthropocene *spacetime*', and perform quite positive agencies in the construction of knowledge: interacting with human beings, they exhibit the micro-macro planetary situation, offer a material perception of the reality in becoming, and allow an unusual contact with ourselves within the surrounding reality. I will explore their potentialities as "territories of resistance" in a forthcoming publication, attempting just a few temporary conclusions here.

### NEW KNOWLEDGE IS A POLITICAL PRACTICE

Such interactive transdisciplinary excursus elicits the recognition that agency does not exist 'a priori' as an imagined quality of human or nonhuman beings/things, but it is a product of an interaction between them, precisely, between the 'material matters' they are made of. This implies that also nonhuman beings, things, objects and discursive practices are agents, and situates humans and nonhumans on a paritarian interactive level, intertwined and dependent one from the other.

These insights relocate human beings *among* the natural elements from which they often escape, dazed by Illuministic, colonialist, developmentalist power myths. If introduced in basic education - that is in intra-action with us - such insights are likely to produce effects. The new paritarian categorization of humans and nonhumans, could mitigate our anthropocentrism, the attitude that drove us to the predicaments of the Anthropocenic Era. The consequences of the divulgation of such knowledge would be a change of paradigm, a Copernican sociological revolution, a possible reorientation towards more realistic and collective ethics and politics.

But these new insights are not yet translated in ordinary language: politics hide waste, as well as new knowledge. So, searching for means to divulgate some new knowledge about the actual planet's situation, I carried out my practical-idea of the exposition, allowing people to interact directly with the ethnographic Anthropocenic findings. Their 'material language' is

not a 'representation of reality', rather a *diffraction*, since they are realities themselves<sup>6</sup>. As material artistic-discursive practices, through the not-codified, poetic language of art, they offer a possible access to new insights, from a not Representationist, not distant, nor imposed point of view.

We could say that it is not *us* who find these waste-anthropocenic objects, but *they* find us - and find us unprepared to manage such *natural* situation. In interaction with us, they recall our everyday use objects, but they are quite different, showing their transformation, 'in being': such insights 'touch', 'move', impress us. The term performance implies this concrete possibility, foreseeing the pragmatic effects deriving from a direct interaction. We are put in the condition to perceive, and think, the agentic role they-garbage play, for worse - altering ecosystems, pollution, animal killing, producing unknown plastic microparticles, etc. - and for better: floating garbage is also a warning, the emerging iceberg top of an entire, submerged rotten system. The delicate, not scaring language of art is more likely to let us accept a plight, instead of instigating denial and fugue in front of catastrophic data and reports. Their material dangerousness can be 'poetically felt' closer, and taken more seriously than its description. To hide problems is dangerous.

The Agential Realism paradigm is an alternative to the Classic Western Science and to Representationalism that, dropped from above, split 'semiotic' (epistemology) from 'material' reality (ontology), keeping us afar from it. This explain my choice for exposing real waste materials - and not their representations - posing them and people in the condition of interacting (again) and produce new agencies<sup>7</sup>, this time the objects performing as material messengers from an anthropocenic "territory of resistance". A physical interaction/intra-action between their materiality and ours can produce stronger agentic effects than assisting to 'second hand' representations:

Particular possibilities for acting exist at every moment, and these changing possibilities entail a responsibility to intervene in the world's becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering. (Barad 2003: 827).

The implications of an approach aiming to construct new knowledge are political. To keep people in "ignorance" is a political strategy carried on by "marketing-driven social media

---

<sup>6</sup> In Semiotics we would say that they are 'indexes', not symbols, nor icons (Lelli 2017). Similarly, Haraway designates objects as "material-semiotic actors" (Barad 2007: 181), and Bohr affirms that "The material and semiotic apparatuses form a non dualistic whole" (Barad 1996: 172).

<sup>7</sup> All along their 'social life' these objects performed their agencies in interaction with us, but in utilitarian roles.

networks" (Disruption Network Lab. 2016). The same can be said for the "construction of denial", as in the case of the "global warming" issue hidden behind the label of "climate change", illustrated by Kari Marie Norgaard (2011), so we "do not integrate this knowledge into everyday life", living in a fictional "double reality", constructing social "strategies of denial" (ibidem: 403-405) supposed to protect us from our fears. Even concerned people, in wealthy nations, elaborate denial strategies as justifications for their inaction. But "knowing or not-knowing is itself a political act" (ibidem: 409-410).

These micro, individual 'non-cultural' politics are connected to the macro-level political economy. Ignorance is a depoliticized tool for the immobilization and maintenance of a socially-and-environmentally destructive capitalist over-production, whose wealth, moreover, is unjustly distributed.

Thus, 'garbage' is a political concept, the consequence of a political economy *still* protecting the colonial paradigm of overproduction and overconsumption in rich countries. The difficulty, for us - 'the resistent' - consists in distinguishing 'new-age' sensationalist 'garbage information' - a blinking mass political product - from helpful grounded, well-founded reliable new knowledge. We are not educated to distinguish reliable information, nor to translate it in actions. Yet, new scientific actions are promoted (e.g., The Ocean Cleanup Technology), as well as interdisciplinary political-cultural actions (e.g., in Italy, University of Pisa, the POE - Politica-Ontologia-Ecologia Seminar, October 2017).

Similar evidence and connections challenge our entire mainstream knowledge-behavior paradigm, circularly legitimated and reproduced by the powers of the whole consumerist cultural-economic apparatus. It is the same paradigm that promotes itself, hiding the existing damage and maintaining the separations among 'different sectors' of life and knowledge. Once recomposed, no doubt survives about the global problems it creates. The material-artistic-waste exhibit is an attempt of constructing a new cognitive-political medium in order to render intelligible such complex intertwinement.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Austin J.L., 1962, *How To Do Things With Words*, Harvard University Press.
- Barad K., 1996, «Meeting the Universe Halfway: Realism and Social Constructivism without Contradiction», in L.H. Nelson & J. Nelson (eds), *Feminism, Science, and the Philosophy of Science*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 161-194.

- Barad K., 2003 «Posthumanist Performativity: toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter», in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 3, 28: 801–831.
- Barad K., 2007, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Duke University Press
- Bateson G., 1972, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind. Collected essays in anthropology, psychiatry, evolution, and epistemology*, University of Chicago Press.
- Bateson G., 1979, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*, Hampton Press (2003) (NJ)
- Blanc N., Benish B.L., 2016, *Form, Art and the Environment: Engaging in Sustainability, Studies in Culture and Sustainable Development*, Routledge, London
- Lai F., Breda N. (eds.), 2011, *Antropologia del "Terzo Paesaggio"*, CISU, Roma.
- Capra F., 1997, *The Web of Life: a New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems*, Anchor Books
- Capra F., 2002, *The Hidden Connections: A Science for Sustainable Living*, Harper Collins, New York.
- Capra F., Luisi Pierluigi, 2014, *The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision*, Cambridge University Press.
- Clément G., 2004 *Manifeste du Tiers paysage*, Édition Sujet/Objet, Montreuil (Seine-Saint-Denis).
- Disruption Network Lab., 2016, «IGNORANCE: The Power of Non-Knowledge», *Art & Evidence Conference Series, Berlin, Sep. 30-Oct.*, <http://www.disruptionlab.org/ignorance/>
- Douglas M., 1966, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, London, Routledge
- Eriksen T.H., 2016, *Overheating. An Anthropology of Accelerated Change*, Pluto Press, London
- Eriksen T.H., Schober E., 2017, "Waste and the superfluous: an introduction", in *Social Anthropology*, 25, 3: 282-287.
- Galgani F., Hanke G., Werner S., De Vrees L., 2013 «Marine litter within the European Marine Strategy Framework Directive», in *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, 70: 1055–1064.
- Goldstein M.C., Rosenberg M., Cheng L., 2012, «Increased oceanic microplastic debris enhances oviposition in an endemic pelagic insects», in *Biology Letters*, 8 (5): 817–20.
- Herrington Jessica, undated, "Can Knowledge Be Found In Works Of Art?" [http://runway.org.au/can-knowledge-found-works-art/#\\_edn1](http://runway.org.au/can-knowledge-found-works-art/#_edn1)
- Haraway, D.J., 2008., *When Species Meet*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis
- Hengge R., Grosser G., 2014 «Science & Theatre, ein Experiment an der Schnittstelle von Naturwissenschaft und Kunst», in Stock G., Parzinger H., Aue S. (eds.), *ArteFakte – Wissen ist Kunst / Kunst ist Wissen*, Transcript-Verlag, Bielefeld: 479-488.
- Kopytoff I., 1986 «The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process». In A. Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in cultural perspective* (pp. 64-91). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- IFREMER-Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer, <http://wwz.ifremer.fr>
- Ingold T., 2000 «Culture, nature, environment. Steps to an ecology of life», in *The Perception of the Environment. Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, Routledge, London-New York: 13-26.



- Ingold T., 2007 «Materials against materiality», in *Archaeological Dialogues* 14 (1) 1–16 Cambridge University Press
- Ingold T., 2012 «Toward an Ecology of Materials», in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 41: 1-459.
- Ingold T., 2013 *Making. Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, Routledge, New York-London.
- Jedlowski Paolo, 2017, *Memorie del futuro. Un percorso tra sociologia e studi culturali*, Carocci, Roma.
- Lakoff G., 1987 *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things. What Categories Reveal about the Mind*, Chicago University Press.
- Lakoff G., 2010 «Why it Matters How We Frame the Environment», in *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture*, 4, 1: 70-81.
- Lakoff G., Johnson M., 1999 *Philosophy in the Flesh: the Embodied Mind & its Challenge to Western Thought*, Basic Books, New York (2008).
- Latouche S., 2004, *Survivre au développement: de la décolonisation de l'imaginaire économique à la construction d'une société alternative*, Mille et une nuits
- Latouche S., 2012, *L'Âge des limites*, Fayard-Mille et une nuits
- Lelli S., 2017, «Fourth Landscape in the Anthropocene: artethnographic findings from a Mediterranean waterfront», in AAM - Archivio Antropologico Mediterraneo, *Managing Global and Social Water. Ethnography of Emerging Practices in the Anthropocene*, N. Breda & E. Bougleux eds.
- Libby L.K., Eibach R.P., 2013 «The Role of Visual Imagery in Social Cognition», in D. Carlston (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Social Cognition*, Oxford University Press, New York: 1-51.
- Maturana H.R., Varela F.J., 1972, *Autopoiesis and Cognition. The Realization of the Living*, D. Reidel Publ., Dordrecht-Boston-London.
- Mayer J.D., Salovey P., 1997 «What is Emotional Intelligence?», in P. Salovey, D.J. Sluyter (eds.) *Emotional Development and Emotional Intelligence*, Basic Book, New York: 3-31.
- Norgaard K.M., 2011 «Climate Denial: Emotion, Psychology, Culture, and Political Economy», in J.S. Dryzek, R.B. Norgaard, D. Schlosberg (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society*, Oxford University Press.
- Speciale TG1. *Mare da salvare*, 17/09/2017, <http://www.rai.it/dl/RaiTV/programmi/media/ContentItem-cdb131fa-bb64-410e-96e7-a0bd95a73e94-tg1.html>
- The Ocean Cleanup Technology, <https://www.theoceancleanup.com/>
- Thompson M., 1979, *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value*, Oxford University Press.
- Zettler E.R., Mincer T.J., Amaral-Zettler L.A., 2013 *Life in the "Plastisphere": Microbial Communities on Plastic Marine Debris*, American Chemical Society.

<http://www.tenews.it/giornale/2011/01/05/l-allarme-c-e-troppa-plastica-nei-mari-dell-elba-35474/>

<http://www.arpat.toscana.it/temi-ambientali/acqua/balneazione/classificazione-delle-acque-di-balneazione>

<http://sira.arpat.toscana.it/sira/balneazione/balneazione.php?comune=portoferraio>