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Art as a Companion in a Changing Climate[*]

by
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Abstract: Recently, literature and the arts have been called upon to help address climate change, biodiversity loss, and other global environmental problems. Armies of artists, art scholars, philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, and communication theorists, among others, have proposed that literature and the arts could significantly contribute to fostering pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors. Nevertheless, the scholarly discourse around art and climate change is often filled with unfounded optimism and vague proposals. Views of the value of art should not be accepted uncritically, as artworks might also distort our understanding of environmental crises and the measures required for sustainability transformations. In this article, I will first explore some common views on the potential contributions of art to pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors, highlighting the weak parts in these proposals. In the latter part, I will examine the potentially positive aspects of the role of art in addressing the climate crisis.

Keywords: art, climate change, impact, attitudes, values

Abstract: Recentemente, la letteratura e le arti sono state chiamate in causa per contribuire ad affrontare il cambiamento climatico, la perdita di biodiversità e altri problemi ambientali su scala globale. Schiere di artisti, studiosi d'arte, filosofi, psicologi, sociologi e teorici della comunicazione, tra gli altri, hanno proposto che la letteratura e le arti possano aiutare in modo significativo a promuovere atteggiamenti e comportamenti favorevoli all'ambiente. Tuttavia, il discorso accademico sull'arte e il cambiamento climatico è spesso pervaso da un ottimismo infondato e da proposte vaghe. Le teorie relative al valore dell'arte non devono essere accettate acriticamente, poiché le opere d'arte hanno anche il potere di distorcere la nostra comprensione della crisi ecologica e delle misure necessarie per la sostenibilità ambientale. In questo articolo, esplorerò innanzitutto alcune opinioni comuni sul potenziale contributo dell'arte agli atteggiamenti e comportamenti pro-ambientali, mettendo in luce gli aspetti più deboli

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di queste proposte. Nella seconda parte, esaminerò invece le potenzialità dell'arte nell'affrontare la crisi climatica.

Keywords: arte, cambiamento climatico, impatto, atteggiamenti, valori

1. *Introduction*

In the public discourse on climate change, an often-repeated saying is that we have the knowledge and the tools to combat climate change, and that now we need to change our societies and cultures[1]. This is quite simplistic, of course. The truth is, however, that our understanding of the societal and cultural impacts of climate change lags behind its natural scientific study: we know, by and large, how *climate change* will physically affect the planet, but much less attention has been given to the societal *climate crisis* in research and media. Another common thought in the climate change discourse is that factual knowledge alone does not motivate change, and that appeals to emotions and imagination are needed to influence people's thought and behavior[2]. After all, climate scientists have said what they know;

[1] These calls for action often draw on scientific reports. For instance, in its 2022 report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) maintains that «the transitions needed for climate resilient development would need to be supported by radical shifts in governance, knowledge development, technology application, finance and economics, and social norms» (H.-O. Pörtner *et al*. (eds.), *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability*. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2022, p. 2580). Respectively, the 2021 joint report by the IPCC and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) asserts that «[a] sustainable global future for people and nature remains possible but requires rapid, radical and transformative societal change including adopting a way of thinking that integrates (rather than keeps separate) the technical, governance (including participation), financial and societal aspects of the solutions to be implemented» (H.-O. Pörtner *et al*., *Scientific Outcome of the IPBES-IPCC Co-Sponsored Workshop on Biodiversity and Climate Change*, IPBES Secretariat, Bonn 2021, p. 11).

[2] See e.g. A. Leiserowitz, *Climate Change Risk Perception and Policy Preferences: The Role of Affect, Imagery, and Values,* «Climatic Change» 77 (2006), pp. 45-72, on pp. 47-48; S. C. Moser, *More Bad News: The Risk of Neglecting Emotional Responses to Climate Change Information*, in S. C. Moser-L. Dilling (eds.), *Creating a Climate for Change: Communicating Climate Change and Facilitating Social Change*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, pp. 64-80; S. Roeser, *Risk Communication, Public Engagement, and Climate Change: A Role for Emotions*, «Risk Analysis» 23/6 (2012), pp.

they have said it very clearly, and quite a few times; they have issued warnings and emphasized the urgency of the problem; and they have argued that the more we postpone our actions, the more adaptation and mitigation will cost us. But their arguments have made little change.

In recent decades, literature and the arts have offered their helping hands in response to global climate change, biodiversity loss, and other environmental problems. Furthermore, armies of art scholars, philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, and communication theorists have proposed that literature and the arts could significantly impact on our environmental attitudes and behaviour. Overall, the task of examining the experiential dimension of environmental change – what it will be like to live in a radically different world – has been delegated to artists. And sure enough, artworks that explore environmental themes may help us to rethink our values and the culture that produces them; enhance our understanding and imagination; refine our emotions; and encourage us to seek alternative ways of living and relating to non-human worlds. Yet, there is a problematic, unfounded optimism common in discussions about art and climate change. Little attention has been given to the possibility that artworks, while well-intended, might also distort our understanding of the complexities of environmental crises and sustainability transformations, for example. Correspondingly, views on the transformative value of art too often ignore the complexity and ambiguity of artworks, portraying art merely as a dramatic form of climate communication.

In this article, I will critically explore the potential of art to impact on our environmental attitudes and behaviour. I will propose that art has distinctive value in addressing the climate crisis, but too much weight should not be placed on its narrowly understood instrumental benefits[3]. There are two sections in this article. In the first part, I will discuss common problems in views on the potential impact of art on

1033-1040; B. S. Morris *et al*., *Stories vs. Facts: Triggering Emotion and Action-Taking on Climate Change*, «Climatic Change» 154 (2019), pp. 19-36. See also T. A. Myers *et al*., *A Public Health Frame Arouses Hopeful Emotions about Climate Change*, «Climatic Change» 113 (2012), pp. 1105-1112.

[3] It ought to be emphasized, however, that it is not my intention to criticize artistic speech or artistic research; rather, my contribution is best understood as a caution for philosophers and other theorists. As several philosophers of art have demonstrated, artworks may also furnish us with an illusion of understanding, an aspect that ought to be taken seriously in the study of ecological or climate art.

people's thoughts and behaviours. In the second part, I will examine how art could help us face the climate crisis, offering modest views on its transformative potential.

2. *Problems*

The cognitive value of art – its ability to enhance our understanding of ourselves, others, and reality – is not only one of the oldest topics in philosophical aesthetics but also a subject of intense research in philosophy. Many contemporary discussions about the role of art in fostering sustainable attitudes echo views common in the philosophy of art, yet they often either ignore or remain unaware of critical viewpoints raised by skeptics; nonetheless, there *are* problems with "aesthetic cognition" and ideas about learning from art[4]. In general, the scholarly industry surrounding "climate art" or "art and the Anthropocene" is overwhelming, and this article may provide only a narrow picture of the topic; moreover, I will approach these diverse and nuanced theories as abstractions.

In typical proposals regarding the cognitive and affective value of art in the climate crisis, it is suggested that art could concretize climate change which may seem overly abstract for laypeople; that artworks might engage and encourage people to imagine possible sustainable futures, making these futures thinkable, discussable, and resonant in our lives; and that artworks could provide us with opportunities to explore the values and beliefs embedded in our culture, resulting in changes in our value systems[5]. These are all important aspects, and

[4] See e.g. J. Mikkonen, *The Cognitive Value of Philosophical Fiction*, Bloomsbury, London 2013, ch. 2; Id., *Philosophy, Literature and Understanding: On Reading and Cognition*, Bloomsbury, London 2021, ch. 4.

[5] Respectively, see J. E. Thornes, *A Rough Guide to Environmental Art*, «Annual Review of Environment and Resources» 33 (2008), pp. 391-411; K. Yusoff-J. Gabrys, *Climate Change and the Imagination*, «WIREs Climate Change» 2/4 (2011), pp. 516-534; J. Gabrys-K. Yusoff, *Arts, Sciences and Climate Change: Practices and Politics at the Threshold*, «Science as Culture» 21/1 (2012), pp. 1-24; R. Levitas, *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society*, Springer, New York 2013; H. Davis-E. Turpin (eds.), *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, Open Humanities Press, London 2015; A. E. Lesen-A. Rogan-M. J. Blum, *Science Communication through Art: Objectives, Challenges, and Outcomes*, «Trends in Ecology and Evolution» 31/9 (2016), pp. 657-660; L. J. Roosen-C. A. Klöckner-J. K. Swim, *Visual Art as a Way to Communicate Climate Change: A Psychological Perspective*

works of art certainly may successfully serve these purposes. There are, however, recurring problems with these kinds of views. They relate to i) the unification of environmental problems; ii) the limits of narrative form; iii) the subjectivity of individual responses and the problematic link between emotion, thought, and behaviour; iv) didacticism and instrumentalism; and v) the focus on the individual.

2.1 *Unification*

The environmental scholar and writer Ville Lähde has insightfully explicated central difficulties in public discourse on environmental problems – difficulties that he argues are also, or especially, present

on Climate Change-Related Art, «World Art» 8/1 (2018), pp. 85-110; M. Milkoreit, *The Promise of Climate Fiction: Imagination, Storytelling, and the Politics of the Future*, in P. Wapner-H. Elver (eds.), *Reimagining Climate Change*, Routledge, London 2016, pp. 171-191; H. Hawkins-A. Kanngieser, *Artful Climate Change Communication: Overcoming Abstractions, Insensibilities, and Distances*, «WIREs Climate Change» 8/5 (2017), pp. 1-12; S. Veland *et al*., *Narrative Matters for Sustainability: The Transformative Role of Storytelling in Realizing 1.5°C Futures*, «Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability» 31 (2018), pp. 41-47; M. Burke-D. Ockwell-L. Whitmarsh, *Participatory Arts and Affective Engagement with Climate Change: The Missing Link in Achieving Climate Compatible Behaviour Change?*, «Global Environmental Change» 49 (2018), pp. 95-105; R. Tyszczuk-J. Smith, *Culture and Climate Change Scenarios: The Role and Potential of the Arts and Humanities in Responding to the '1.5 Degrees Target'*, «Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability» 31 (2018), pp. 56-64; D. Galafassi, *"Raising the Temperature": The Arts in a Warming Planet*, «Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability» 31 (2018), pp. 71-79; D. Galafassi, *Restoring Our Senses, Restoring the Earth. Fostering Imaginative Capacities through the Arts for Envisioning Climate Transformations*, «Elementa: Science of the Anthropocene» 6 (2018), pp. 1-14; J. Bentz-K. O'Brien, *ART FOR CHANGE: Transformative Learning and Youth Empowerment in a Changing Climate*, «Elementa: Science of the Anthropocene» 7 (2019), art. 52, https://doi.org/10.1525/elementa.390; W. Welsch, *Art Addressing the Anthropocene*, «Contemporary Aesthetics» 18 (2020), https://contempaesthetics.org/2020/02/18/art-addressing-the-anthropocene/ [21.06.25]; M. Michałowska, *Artists in the Face of Threats of Climate Change*, «Oceanologia» 62/4, Part B (2020), pp. 565-575; J. Bentz, *Learning about Climate Change in, with and through Art*, «Climatic Change» 162 (2020), pp. 1595-1612; T. J. Demos, *Beyond the World's End: Arts of Living at the Crossing*, Duke University Press, Durham 2020; N. Rogers, *Law, Fiction, and Activism in a Time of Climate Change*, Routledge, New York 2020; M. Oziewicz *et al*. (eds.), *Fantasy and Myth in the Anthropocene: Imagining Futures and Dreaming Hope in Literature and Media,* Bloomsbury, London 2022; M. Benenti-L. Giombini, *Climate Change, Philosophy, and Fiction*, in G. Pellegrino-M. Di Paola (eds.), *Handbook of Philosophy of Climate Change*, Springer, Cham 2023, pp. 502-523.

in artistic invocations of global environmental crises. To begin with, this "ritualistic" speech, as Lähde calls it, is prone to the tendency of conceptual totalizations. The talk about "*the* environmental crisis" – or "nature," "culture," "society," or "humanity" – fades out differences between geographical areas, ecosystems, and people, along with differences in responsibility for the problems, the impacts of the problems, and possibilities for action. As Lähde sees it, such speech also creates a false sense of familiarity, as if we already know the problems: "*the* this" and "*the* that." Further, this kind of language easily becomes a substitute for knowledge and prevents us from understanding the complexities of the world. Assumptions of a unified crisis also imply that there are unified causes and solutions. Nevertheless, as Lähde has forcefully demonstrated in his writings over several decades, environmental problems are legion, and they have both commonalities and differences. They range from small to large, local to global, and short-term to long-term problems that are intertwined in various ways. There are long-term problems, such as climate change, in which the accumulated concentration of greenhouse gases alters the climate system for centuries, even if emissions were stopped today; there are local problems, such as a factory's chemical discharges into a water system, which could potentially be stopped quite quickly; and then there are problems, such as "biodiversity loss," which are actually a mosaic of problems[6]. Moreover, environmental problems have socio-political and cultural particularities, and they vary across different contexts. In climate policy, for instance, it is not sufficient to focus solely on emissions, but issues of justice, baseline conditions, wealth disparities, and so on must also be taken into account. For this reason, we need contextual understanding and solutions that fit the local situation[7]. After all, "we" are not in the same boat; in fact, we are not even in the same storm.

There is much insight in Lähde's remarks. Indeed, a recurring prob-

[6] V. Lähde, *The Polycrisis*, «Aeon» 17.08.23, https://aeon.co/essays/the-case-for-polycrisis-as-a-keyword-of-our-interconnected-times [21.06.25]; V. Lähde, *Life Matters Everywhere. The Notion of Biodiversity in the Dasgupta Review*, «BIOS blog» 07.02.22, https://bios.fi/en/life-matters-everywhere-the-notion-of-biodiversity-in-the-dasgupta-review_eng/ [21.06.25].

[7] V. Lähde, *What is in an Environmental Crisis*?, A keynote lecture in the Aesthetics in the Age of Environmental Crises conference in Lahti, Finland, 5 June 2021. Recording available from the author by request. V. Lähde, *The Appeal of Environmental Master Metrics*, «SATS» 23/1 (2022), pp. 5-15.

lem in environmental art, the discourse surrounding it, and the humanistic treatment of environmental problems more broadly is the tendency to reduce complex and diverse environmental issues to a unified problem with a single root cause, assumed to be solvable in a wholesale fashion. For instance, *the* problem might be framed as "the distorted Western human–nature relationship," with "ecological empathy" offered as *the* solution. While environmental art has value in drawing our attention to pressing issues, it may also offer a narrow, even distorted, view of them, presenting simple solutions to complex problems.

2.2 *The Limits of Narrative Form*

One obstacle to representing the climate crisis in narrative form is that, as just noted, the issues at stake involve vast and complex phenomena which, by their nature, resist storification. As such, the core difficulty lies in *representing* the climate crisis – although this also extends to theory, specifically regarding what kind of value may be attributed to narrative representations of the climate crisis in narrative arts. Several "story-pessimist" narrative theorists have argued that the climate crisis exemplifies a phenomenon that is simply unnarratable: one cannot narrate climate change[8]. As the literary scholar Juha Raipola puts it,

> In order to narrate the progress of the ongoing environmental crisis, one would need to be able to point out such individual anthropomorphic actors as the Greenhouse Effect, Carbon Dioxide, Fossil Fuels, Livestock, Deforestation, Waste, Human Species, Ecological Footprint, Natural Processes, Ecosystems, Petroleum Industry, or Global Capitalism, all of which then supposedly contribute in different ways to the permanent changes in global weather patterns. With such a multiplicity of active participants – which vary depending on the choices made by the storyteller – narratives have a tendency to become perplexingly complex, and even then, they cannot account for the true complexity of the ongoing material processes[9].

[8] See e.g. M. Mäkelä, *Climate Uncertainty, Social Media Certainty: A Story-Critical Approach to Climate Change Storytelling on Social Media*, «Frontiers of Narrative Studies» 9/2 (2023), pp. 232-253. Here, see also Amitav Ghosh's pioneering work *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, Penguin Books, London 2016.
[9] J. Raipola, *Unnarratable Matter* in S. Karkulehto-A.K. Koistinen-E. Varis, *Reconfiguring Human, Nonhuman and Posthuman in Literature and Culture*, Routledge, New York 2019,

Or, as another literary scholar, Hannes Bergthaller writes,

> Climate change names a process which takes place at scales vastly exceeding those of everyday experience, which is spatially and temporally diffuse, and whose reality can be grasped only by way of complex mathematical models incorporating knowledge from a wide array of scientific disciplines. [...] The mechanisms which give rise to the changes climate scientists observe can be modelled mathematically, but to cast them in the form of a narrative is necessarily to misrepresent them. Narratives present events in terms of a bounded, temporal sequence of goal-oriented actions linked by a linear causal chain. The order of a complex system, by contrast, emerges from a very large number of concurrent interactions at a small scale that are linked by multiple feedback loops[10].

Roughly speaking, narrative arts represent human (or anthropomorphic) experience, whereas the climate change – or here, the societal climate crisis – is too complex and extensive to be meaningfully explored in narrative form. The climate crisis resists customary frames of storytelling and the human perspective due to its vast scale; it spans physical, societal, and political dimensions, along with the intricate interconnections between them. In narrating the climate crisis, oversimplification is (nearly) inevitable, which may ultimately distort the audience's understanding of the issues[11]. This problem might best be

p. 272.

[10] H. Bergthaller, *Climate Change and Un-Narratability*, «Metaphora: Journal for Literary Studies and Media Theory», 2 (2017), art. 5, on pp. 2 and 9, https://metaphorajournal.univie.ac.at/climate-change/volume2_bergthaller.pdf [21.06.25].

[11] There are, however, more positive views of climate narratives, some of which focus on new, non-linear, and experiential forms of storytelling, for instance. See e.g. A. Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in the Time of Climate Change*, University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville 2015; A. Johns-Putra, *Climate Change in Literature and Literary Studies: From Cli-Fi, Climate Change Theater and Ecopoetry to Ecocriticism and Climate Change Criticism*, «Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change» 7/2 (2016), pp. 266-282; E. A. Kaplan, *Climate Trauma: Foreseeing the Future in Dystopian Film and Fiction*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick 2015; S. Streeby, *Imagining the Future of Climate Change: World-Making Through Science Fiction and Activism*, California University Press, Berkeley, CA 2018; G. Andersen, *Climate Fiction and Cultural Analysis: A New Perspective on Life in the Anthropocene*, Routledge, New York 2019; K. Baysal, *Apocalyptic Visions in the Anthropocene and the Rise of Climate Fiction*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne 2021; M. Caracciolo, *Contemporary Fiction and Climate Uncertainty: Narrating Unstable*

understood as a reminder of the need for humility; after all, the "story pessimists" raise an important point that warrants careful consideration, particularly if we regard the role of art as one of illustrating the climate crisis or concretizing climate change. In other kinds of approaches – which I will discuss in the latter part of this article – the limits of narrative form do not pose a comparable problem.

2.3 *Subjective Responses*

In the scholarly literature on the epistemic, moral, and political value of art, one regularly encounters conditional expressions, such as "may improve" and "can help." Of course, an artwork may have certain kinds of effects on some reader, viewer, or listener – but for whom and under what conditions? The truth is that we gain insight and inspiration from various sources all the time, and a lot can be learnt from gardening, walking, or football, for instance[12]. Nevertheless, if we are to account for, say, the cognitive value of art as art, we should pay attention to what is special about it: not the features it shares with other discourses or practices, but what makes it distinctive. If this distinctiveness is about a certain kind of engagement with the work or a response to it, for example, we ought to show that this engagement or response is typical among the audience, or that it is rewarding, and hence we should approach the work in the way proposed. Commonly, the distinctive value of art is seen in a certain kind of emotional engagement or imaginative experience. A regular line of thought is that aesthetic cognition characteristically operates on emotions. In the context of our topic, the idea is that climate art, for instance, could influence our thought and behavior through emotional impact. Put in crude terms, with dystopian art, the relevant motivating emotion is fear, and with utopias hope.

At this point, it is illuminating to examine a well-known case of using emotions in climate communication, namely, the journalist

Futures, Bloomsbury, New York 2022; J. Thieme, *Anthropocene Realism: Fiction in the Age of Climate Change*, Bloomsbury, New York 2023.

[12] See e.g. D. O'Brien (ed.), *Gardening – Philosophy for Everyone: Cultivating Wisdom*, Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken, NJ 2010; F. Gros, *Marcher, une philosophie*, Carnets Nord, Paris 2009 (Engl. transl. by John Howe, *A Philosophy of Walking* , Verso, London 2014); R. Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, Verso, London 2001; S. Borge, *The Philosophy of Football*, Routledge, London 2019; S. Mumford, *Football: The Philosophy Behind the Game*, Polity, Cambridge 2019.

David Wallace-Wells's *New York Magazine* article *The Uninhabitable Earth* (2017) and the discussion that followed it[13]. Wallace-Wells's article portrayed a worst-case scenario of global warming, presenting a doom-laden picture of the future. The author maintained that even with active intervention, the effects of climate change will have catastrophic impacts on life on Earth. The article was followed by a scientific controversy about its predictions, along with an extensive psychological debate on whether fear motivates action. In the psychological debate on emotion-based communication, people took sides, some defending the pessimistic approach and others preferring optimism and hope. What was common to both camps was that they greatly simplified the emotion they championed.

Yet, emotions are complex, even messy. Commenting on the psychological debate, the behavioral scientist Daniel Chapman and his colleagues remark that emotions cannot be clearly distinguished at neurological, physiological, or behavioral levels. For instance, the emotions we refer to as "grief" and "fear" in everyday discourse are extremely complex and connected to various kinds of meanings in our lifeworld[14]. Besides, as Chapman and his colleagues see it,

> Emotional responses to messages about societal risks are influenced by the beliefs, worldviews, and existing emotions each individual brings to the table. These moderating effects are very likely be amplified in the case of climate change due to a unique combination of extreme public polarization and features of the issue itself known to affect engagement, such as abstractness and long time horizons[15].

Not only do individuals' emotional reactions to messages in informative discourse vary, but the motivational force of emotions also admits individual differences. Whether an affective response to a message leads to any behavioral changes is a complicated matter. As Chapman and his colleagues nicely point out, emotions are not "switches" that can

[13] D. Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth*, «New York Magazine» 10.07.2017, https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/07/climate-change-earth-too-hot-for-humans.html [21.06.25]. The article was later revised and extended into a book *The Uninhabitable Earth*, Random House, New York 2019.
[14] D. A. Chapman-B. Lickel-E. M. Markowitz, *Reassessing Emotion in Climate Change Communication*, «Nature Climate Change» 7 (2017), pp. 850-852.
[15] D. A. Chapman-B. Lickel-E. M. Markowitz, *art. cit.*, p. 851.

be flipped for a desired effect. Moreover, one cannot assume that the short-term affective impact of a given message will lead to any relevant behavioral responses – or that the emotional response will persist[16].

Fear, for instance, does not affect every person in the same way; one may start to act, while another becomes depressed. Fear is good for drawing attention to an issue but bad for motivating action. As for its potential behavioural impact, it typically leads to egoistic actions, such as self-preservation[17]. Overall, the connections between positive or negative climate emotions and pro-environmental behaviour are complex, and the impact of emotion on one's behaviour depends on factors such as socioeconomic position, capacities, and possibilities. Anger, for instance, may be productive when one has the power and means to act[18].

If dystopian narratives dominated in recent years, *hope* now seems to be a trend in art and environmental campaigns[19]. Of course, single-minded optimism is no cure either[20]. The risks associated with climate change are enormous, and they are real. There is no reason

[16] *Ibidem*. See also R. A. Howell, *Investigating the Long-Term Impacts of Climate Change Communications on Individuals' Attitudes and Behavior*, «Environment and Behavior» 46/1 (2014), pp. 70-101.

[17] See e.g. S. O'Neill-S. Nicholson-Cole, *"Fear Won't Do It". Promoting Positive Engagement with Climate Change Through Visual and Iconic Representations*, «Science Communication» 30/3 (2009), pp. 355-379. For an overview of the use of fear appeals in climate communication, see J. Reser-G. Bradley, *Fear Appeals in Climate Change Communication*, «Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Climate Science» 26.09.2017.

[18] L. N. Kovács *et al*., *Acting as We Feel: Which Emotional Responses to the Climate Crisis Motivate Climate Action*, «Journal of Environmental Psychology» 96 (2024), 102327. For complexities in emotion-based climate communication, see T. A. Myers-C. Roser-Renouf-E. Maibach, *Emotional Responses to Climate Change Information and Their Effects on Policy Support*, «Frontiers in Climate» 5 (2023), 1135450. For psychological challenges in climate communication, see E. Markowitz-A. Shariff, *Climate Change and Moral Judgement*, «Nature Climate Change» 2 (2012), pp. 243-247.

[19] A paradigmatic example is Hannah Ritchie's non-fiction book *Not the End of the World: How We Can be the First Generation to Build a Sustainable Planet*, Vintage Publishing, London 2024.

[20] The writer Rebecca Solnit roughly sums up the problem: «Optimists think it will all be fine without our involvement; pessimists take the opposite position; both excuse themselves from acting» (R. Solnit, *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*, Haymarket Books, Chicago 2016 [2004], on p. xiv. Here, see also M. J. Hornsey-K. S. Fielding, *A Cautionary Note about Messages of Hope: Focusing on Progress in Reducing Carbon Emissions Weakens Mitigation Motivation*, «Global Environmental Change» 39 (2016), pp. 26-34).

to avoid difficult topics or emotions related to the climate crisis – quite the contrary. We must acknowledge that we stand to lose much and are heading into dangerous waters. However, the lesson to be learnt from studies on psychology and climate communication is that there is no one-size-fits-all solution for climate communication, as the same message can impact individuals in various ways. And since social engineering and an audience-focused approach are not advisable in climate communication, such "strategies" are even more questionable in art.

2.4 *Didacticism and Instrumentalism*

Yet another concern regarding climate art relates to the artworks' didactic tones, on the one hand, and the instrumentalism in the theories that explain the significance of art, on the other hand[21]. To begin with, works of art that have an explicit didactic aim and allow little room for different, perhaps mutually incompatible interpretations, typically fall short as art. Indeed, one of the pleasures of art interpretation is, as Peter Lamarque puts it, «to notice different ways that the content can be imaginatively construed»[22]. Ambiguity and open-endedness are commonly considered artistic virtues, and reading theses or messages from the thematic content of an artwork is always a matter of interpretation. Rather than providing answers to questions or solutions to problems, works of art are generally valued for, say, revealing unforeseen connections between things and aspects of the world or complicating commonplaces[23].

Of course, an author's political intention, for instance, is not in itself an aesthetic vice: it is one thing for an artwork (or rather, the author) to explore political, social, or philosophical themes and invite the audience to reflect on them from the viewpoint offered by the work, and quite another thing to push a univocal message or thesis about those matters. As for our topic, one could argue that an author's

[21] For the "return of didacticism" and a pedagogical trend in certain genres of fiction, see M. Lehtimäki, *Narrative Communication in Environmental Fiction: Cognitive and Rhetorical Approaches*, in S. Slovic-S. Rangarajan-V. Sarveswaran (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Ecocriticism and Environmental Communication*, Routledge, London 2019, pp. 84-97.
[22] P. Lamarque, *Literature and Truth*, in G. L. Hagberg-W. Jost (eds.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*, Wiley-Blackwell, Malden 2010, pp. 367-384, on p. 382.
[23] See e.g. Mikkonen, *Philosophy, Literature, and Understanding*, cit., pp. 76-80.

exhaustive climate-pedagogical intentions are usually at odds with a work's aesthetic value, and the more the author preaches, or pre-chews the food for us, the less room there is for interpretation and pleasure.

Moreover, while artworks do affect our emotions, thoughts, and behavior – whether or not their author intended them to – those effects seem highly complex and contingent. When thinking about our affective and imaginative engagement with environmentally themed artworks – with their complex, dramatic narratives, multiple viewpoints, potentially lifelike situations of ethical importance, and rich language, along with other medium-specific factors – one might expect even greater divergence in reception than with messages in informative discourse[24]. In addition, works of environmental art vary in many ways, and as Matthew Schneider-Mayerson, a researcher of climate fiction, aptly remarks, «evaluating 'climate fiction' on its readers is a hazardous enterprise, since this category includes a range of styles and genres»[25].

While we may learn various things from works of art, we ought

[24] On empirical research on the effects of reading climate fiction, see M. Schneider-Mayerson *et al*., *Environmental Literature as Persuasion: An Experimental Test of the Effects of Reading Climate Fiction*, «Environmental Communication» 17 (2020), pp. 35-50; M. Schneider-Mayerson-A. Weik von Mossner-W. P. Malecki, *Empirical Ecocriticism: Environmental Texts and Empirical Methods*, «ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment» 27/2 (2020), pp. 327-336; M. Schneider-Mayerson, *"Just as in the Book"? The Influence of Literature on Readers' Awareness of Climate Injustice and Perception of Climate Migrants*, «ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment» 27/2 (2020), pp. 337-364; T. Lahtinen-O. Löytty, *On the Limits of Empirical Ecocriticism: Empathy on Non-Human Species and the Slow Violence of Climate Crisis*, «Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism» 20.09.24, pp. 1-14. On the topic, see also M. Schneider-Mayerson *et al*. (eds.), *Empirical Ecocriticism: Environmental Narratives for Social Change*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2023.

[25] M. Schneider-Mayerson, *The Influence of Climate Fiction: An Empirical Survey of Readers*, «Environmental Humanities» 10/2 (2018), pp. 473-500, on p. 481. Schneider-Mayerson remarks that readers of "climate fiction" are typically already concerned about the environment, and that these works might have little value in converting conservatives (*art. cit.*, pp. 478-479; for "preaching to the converted," see also J. Landy, *How to Do Things with Fiction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, pp. 27-33). Another literary scholar, Sherif Ismail, suggests that for this reason, «climate change [...] needs to be engaged in more subtle ways, regardless of genre, to address larger segments of readers in the first place, starting, in this case, not from readers' presumed interest but from their possible lack of interest or willful avoidance» (S. H. Ismail, *On Why Less Is More in Climate Fiction*, «ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment» 31/2 (2024), pp. 248-267, on pp. 250-251).

not to be too quick to attribute these possibly subjective, variable, and instrumental gains to the works themselves[26]. What we "learn" from an artwork might radically differ from its author's intended purport, for instance. As the literary scholar Bo Pettersson aptly puts it, readers of a didactic piece «may be put off by its patronizing tone and perhaps "learn" the opposite of what was intended. They benefit in some sense, but this is not necessarily what the poet, according to Horace, intended»[27].

2.5 *Focus on the Individual*

A significant concern in what I refer to as the focus on the individual is that much of the discourse surrounding art and climate change remains limited to art's potential impact on individual psychology and behaviour – perhaps unsurprisingly, given that aesthetics has traditionally centered on personal experience. Additionally, like general public discourse, research on art and climate change tends to reduce the individual citizen to a consumer, shifts responsibility onto individuals and communities, and pushes societal and political issues into the background. It focuses on what is in one's shopping basket while neglecting subsidies and taxation; it emphasizes personal choices while ignoring inherited conditions, existing infrastructures and path-dependencies, institutions, and the habits of societies –systemic factors that deserve far greater attention[28].

While art may certainly inspire changes in people's attitudes, political, societal, and economic obstacles can easily prevent behavioral change[29]. That said, many of us already act as "environmentally

[26] P. Lamarque, *Thought Theory and Literary Cognition*, in J. Daiber-E.-M. Konrad-T. Petraschka (eds.), *Understanding Fiction: Knowledge and Meaning in Literature*, Mentis, Münster 2012, pp. 67-80, on p. 79.
[27] B. Pettersson, *How Literary Worlds Are Shaped: A Comparative Poetics of Literary Imagination*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2016, p. 239.
[28] In *The New Climate War: The Fight to Take Back Our Planet* (PublicAffairs, New York 2021), climate scientist Michael E. Mann illustrates how fossil fuel companies delayed action on climate change and shifted the emphasis to individual responsibility – such as popularizing the concept of a *personal carbon footprint*. Framing climate change as an issue of individual choices proved to be a highly effective strategy for postponing sustainability transitions.
[29] For social and structural obstacles to individual behavioral change, see e.g. D. Ockwell-L. Whitmarsh-S. O'Neill, *Reorienting Climate Change Communication for Effective Mitigation: Forcing People to be Green or Fostering Grass-Roots Engagement?*,

friendly" or "ecologically" (sic) as we can – within the constraints of the systems we live in. Nonetheless, there are many challenges related to our perceptions of sustainability and our ability to live sustainably [30]. For instance, in her survey of environmental sociological research on "sustainable consumption," Emily Huddart Kennedy aptly remarks that, from a material standpoint, the common conception of a "sustainable lifestyle" in popular imagination is unlikely to be supported by the current and projected reserves of natural resources. Moreover, Kennedy notes that, from a symbolic perspective, the "sustainable lifestyle" is only accessible to relatively privileged individuals who can afford to purchase relatively expensive goods, while society does not recognize social value in genuinely low-impact lifestyles [31]. In a similar vein, Lähde points out that

> [T]he constant production of needs, systematic enticement to consume, and the creation of ever-new technical devices seem necessary and even essential significantly impact our living environments. Since consumption is also linked to social status and esteem, the idea of free consumer choice becomes highly questionable, or even psychologically naive. Breaking free from these forces requires social differentiation and a willingness to give up what is considered normal and desirable, which is never easy. It is wishful thinking to believe that such lifestyle changes could accumulate through individual choices quickly enough to become mainstream [32].

A further problem is that cultural changes are inherently slow, while

«Science Communication» 30/3 (2009), pp. 305-323.

[30] The internal and external factors that affect consumer choice, for instance, are numerous, and the vast body of research on the value–action gap suggests that while people's environmental concern has grown, this does not necessarily manifest in their behaviour, see e.g. B. Lane-S. Potter, *The Adoption of Cleaner Vehicles in the UK: Exploring the Consumer Attitude – Action Gap*, «Journal of Cleaner Production» 15/11-12 (2007), pp. 1085-1092; O. Essiz *et al*., *Exploring the Value-Action Gap in Green Consumption: Roles of Risk Aversion, Subjective Knowledge, and Gender Differences*, «Journal of Global Marketing» 36/1 (2022), pp. 67-92.

[31] E. H. Kennedy, *Sustainable Consumption*, in K. Legun *et al*. (eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Environmental Sociology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2020, pp. 221-235, on pp. 226-227.

[32] V. Lähde, *Arjen teoille on annettava yhteinen suunta*, in S. Laakso-R. Aro (eds.), *Planeetan kokoinen arki: askelia kestävämpään politiikkaan*, Gaudeamus, Helsinki 2022, pp. 82-99, on pp. 92-93.

the climate crisis demands urgent action. We must acknowledge that small, gradual transitions are insufficient; addressing the climate crisis requires rapid, radical changes in energy production, food systems, construction, heating and cooling, logistics, mobility, and beyond.

Of course, there are important psychological dimensions to living an ethical life. Engaging in concrete actions can help alleviate feelings of threat and enable one to remain functional – and moral integrity is undeniably important. Many practices that are now mainstream, such as vegetarianism in the Western world, originated as grassroots movements, and marginal ways of living "sustainable lifestyles" should be recognized and valued. However, within a broader context, systemic solutions are essential. This requires advocating for and demanding accountability from corporations, municipalities, and nation-states; furthermore, we must reconceive the individual as a politically active citizen.

Rather than giving us solutions, the arts may be more valuable by offering something else. I will now take a more constructive look at the role and value of art in sustainability transformations by comparing art to science, highlighting how art can complement or parallel scientific enterprises.

3. *Prospects*

3.1 *Imagination and Emotion*

In explaining the role of art in sustainability transformations, much emphasis has been placed on imagination. It is said that, in fighting the climate crisis, we need to employ our imagination, and that art may enhance our capacity to envision and encourage utopian thinking as a means of driving societal change. Nevertheless, we use imagination all the time in our daily lives, and it occurs everywhere. In general, imagination is a very complex mental phenomenon, manifesting in a variety of forms, from supposition to fantasy. Natural scientists use imagination in their research, but the scientific imagination, which builds on hypotheses and speculation, is more constrained and governed by truth.

The environmental scientist Donella Meadows famously spoke of a «failure of vision» and a «culture of cynicism» in scientific practice. In the interdisciplinary workshops which she ran in the 1980s, she

discovered that scientists – economists, agronomists, and ecologists, for instance – were reluctant to engage in a group exercise to envision a better world: to imagine what a world without hunger might be like. The participants, however, refused, commenting that the task was childish and silly. Among the comments were «Visions are fantasies, they don't change anything. Talking about them is waste of time», «I'm not sure what the world would be like without hunger, and I don't see why I need to know», and «Stop being unrealistic. There will always be hunger. We can decrease it, but we can never eliminate it». One participant said that he wanted to ignore painful emotions because the gap between vision and reality was too great for him to bear. Another said that she has a vision but «it would make [her] childish and vulnerable to say it out loud»[33].

Scientists aim to formulate precise research questions and seek solutions to problems through reasoning and experimentation. However, science does not, or cannot, provide the kinds of future visions we are interested in. For instance, climate models and scenarios offer predictions of global average *temperatures*. These projections are difficult to make and are often conservative and cautious for various reasons. This caution stems partly from the fact that skepticism is a core principle of scientific inquiry.

The historians of science and environmental scholars Keynyn Brysse, Naomi Oreskes, Jessica O'Reilly, and Michael Oppenheimer describe scientific caution by pointing to a phenomenon which they call «erring on the side of least drama». By this term, they mean «an inherent bias in favour of existing knowledge and presumptions, and the avoidance of conclusions that seem excessively dramatic»[34]. The authors illustrate this phenomenon by referring to what statisticians call Type 1 and Type 2 errors. A Type 1 error involves thinking an effect is real when it is not, that is, assuming something nonexistent. In contrast, a Type 2 error means missing effects that are actually present. As the authors put it, «Making a Type 1 error can be thought of as being naïve, credulous, or gullible; making a Type 2 error can

[33] D. Meadows, *Envisioning a Sustainable World* [A talk given at the Third Biennial Meeting of the International Society for Ecological Economics, 24-28 October 1994], in R. Costanza-I. Kubiszewski (eds.), *Creating a Sustainable and Desirable Future: Insights from 45 Global Thought Leaders*, World Scientific, Singapore 2014, pp. 9-14.
[34] K. Brysse *et al.*, *Climate Change Prediction: Erring on the Side of Least Drama?*, «Global Environmental Change» 23/1 (2013), pp. 327-337, p. 8.

be interpreted as being excessively skeptical or overly cautious»[35]. According to them, many scientists worry that overestimating a threat could harm their credibility, while underestimating it would likely have minimal, if any, effect on their reputation[36].

Neither have emotions place in scientific practice. Scientists set aside their emotions when designing their studies, analyzing data, and drawing conclusions. As Brysse and her colleagues see it, the virtues of scientists include objectivity, dispassion, restraint, moderation, level-headedness, discipline, and self-control. For the authors,

> the scientific values of rationality, dispassion, and self-restraint tend to lead scientists to demand greater levels of evidence in support of surprising, dramatic, or alarming conclusions – than in support of conclusions that are less surprising, less alarming, or more consistent with the scientific status quo[37].

According to Brysse and her colleagues, scientists often steer clear of dramatic findings, as such outcomes are linked to emotions, feelings, irrationality, and even femininity – traits traditionally seen as incompatible with the objectivity and rationality of science[38]. In addition to these psychological explanations, scientists are careful in their predictions about future climates because so much – namely, the amount of carbon dioxide emissions – depends on politics.

Moreover, Brysse and her colleagues see the desire to achieve consensus as problematic in scientific practice. They maintain that

> a strong focus on consensus as settled knowledge – one that either excludes important but unsettled or controversial science or obscures disagreement over what science should be considered – can be detrimental. If consensus reports include only that knowledge that can be agreed upon by all partici-

[35] *Ibidem*.
[36] K. Brysse *et al.*, *art. cit.*, on p. 9. For an example of scientific conservativism, see the commentary of IPBES (2019) report on the estimation of future plant animal species extinctions, A. Purvis, *How did IPBES Estimate "1 Million Species At Risk of Extinction" in #GlobalAssessment Report*, IPBES blog 22 May 2019. https://www.ipbes.net/news/how-did-ipbes-estimate-1-million-species-risk-extinction-globalassessment-report [21.06.25].
[37] K. Brysse *et al.*, *art. cit.*, pp. 1-2.
[38] M. Oppenheimer *et al.*, *Discerning Experts: The Practices of Scientific Assessment for Environmental Policy*, Chicago University Press, Chicago 2019, p. 165.

> pants – what we might consider "least common denominator" knowledge – then at best the stated conclusions may be weak, ambiguous, or watered down, and at worst they may be severely misleading [39].

However, in addressing the societal climate crisis, we also need visions, emotion, and dissenting voices. We need the kinds of visions that Meadows's scientific peers dismissed as "childish" – specifically, visions of non-catastrophic futures where life on Earth can persist, or even scenarios of planetary well-being. The practices we call art may not be the sole domain for envisioning sustainable futures, but ideally, they hold significant potential in this endeavor. Art provides us with a refuge from the constraints of biased "rationality" and "realism". The arts explore, in their distinctive manners, ways of being human and the structures of lifeworlds. They explore meanings of human life that are absent in climate scenarios.

In particular, art is valuable when we seek to understand something that is just beginning to take form. Art responds sensitively to changes, ideally assisting us in articulating and sharing these emerging meanings. The arts may offer us new words and new languages for describing novel phenomena and feelings, such as those called "climate emotions". What is extremely important is that art accepts, even celebrates, difficulty and perplexity. As Sacha Kagan states, art holds particular value concerning complex issues like global climate change due to its ability «to keep open the ambiguities, ambivalences, contradictions and creatively chaotic dimensions of reality, rather than levelling them into a coherent logical system or even a dialectic system» [40]. Even so, when theorizing about learning from art, we must remind ourselves of the complexity of the problems and their solutions, the diversity in audiences' responses, and the intricate and contingent route from emotions and imaginings to values, beliefs, and behaviours.

3.2 *Path to Wants and Desires*

Reason alone does not take us very far, for human decision-making

[39] M. Oppenheimer *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
[40] S. Kagan, *Artistic Research and Climate Science: Transdisciplinary Learning and Spaces of Possibilities*, «Journal of Science Communication» 14/1 (2015), C07, https://doi.org/10.22323/2.14010307.

also encompasses emotions and desires of mixed kinds. Not only are needs, wants, and desires largely unrelated to rational thought, but habit, comfort, and consensus are deeply embedded in our social structures. Interestingly, there are few established platforms for discussing what constitutes a good and meaningful life in the context of sustainability transformations, and conversations around these topics can feel uncomfortable even in sustainability forums. In contrast, art is permitted to be naïve in embracing utopian or hopeful ideas. As a result, art opens a space for us to explore significant questions about meaning and purpose[41].

By exploring our being in the world, artworks could provide a pathway to our wants, desires, preconceptual experiences, and the complexities we call emotions, accessing areas that may be difficult to reach in our daily lives. This is significant because global climate change also challenges our cultural values. Many of us have been taught to pursue a good life through material wealth, prosperity, and progress, and now, we are being asked to disregard everything we learned at home, in school, and as members of society, and to forgo many pleasurable experiences, such as travel and consumption. Even though there is moral and philosophical merit in resignation – and it can be profoundly rewarding – it does not inspire the general public. A negative approach centered on renunciation does not motivate the masses. Instead, we need inspiration to encourage alternative actions.

3.3 A Companion in the Change

A common view in the climate change discourse holds that we must first change our values in order to address the climate crisis: that we must improve ourselves before we can improve the world. However, as stressed throughout this article, what we need are political, systemic solutions, here and now. We cannot afford to wait for a cultural change that may or may not occur. Ultimately, cultural change will follow from material transformations in society, driven by necessity[42]. The problem, of course, is social inertia. Our ways of being in the world change very slowly, and values, conceptions, habits, and

[41] This may, of course, fail; see e.g. C. Renowden *et al*., *Exploring Integrated ArtScience Experiences to Foster Nature Connectedness through Head, Heart and Hand*, «People and Nature» 4 (2022), pp. 519-533.
[42] I owe these points to Dr Lähde.

routines cannot be changed easily[43]. The belief in continuity and progress, for instance, runs deep in our collective consciousness and we are furnished with various self-protective defense mechanisms[44]. This is also socially organized and an aspect of cultural cognition[45].

The research unit BIOS, which studies environmental and resource factors in the Finnish society, approaches sustainability transformations in terms of *ecological reconstruction*. According to them,

> We are living in the ruins of a fossil-fuelled economy. To phase out fossil fuel use, the material structures and social practices of production, transport and housing must be reconstructed. This necessary transition is analogous to the post-war reconstruction, during which the physical infrastructure was rebuilt and foundations of the welfare society were laid[46].

I find the metaphor of reconstruction particularly insightful, especially regarding cultural transformations. After all, value change is a sustained epistemic, emotional, and practical process[47]. Unlearning – letting go of outdated beliefs and values – is slow, often painful or inconvenient, and requires openness and effort, along with something positive to fill the resulting vacuum. People need inspiration to bridge thought and action. Moreover, an intergenerational, sustainable culture is built collectively and requires a supportive environment. Art can be a great companion in that change. However, we must approach its "transformative potential" with caution, keeping in mind the threats examined in the first part of this article. Additionally, we

[43] R. J. Brulle-K. M. Norgaard, *Avoiding Cultural Trauma: Climate Change and Social Inertia*, «Environmental Politics» 28/5 (2019), pp. 886-908.
[44] See e.g. J. Dodds, *The Psychology of Climate Anxiety*, «BJPsych Bulletin» 45/4 (2021), pp. 222-226; M. C. Wullenkord-G. Reese, *Avoidance, Rationalization, and Denial: Defensive Self-Protection in the Face of Climate Change Negatively Predicts Pro-Environmental Behavior*, «Journal of Environmental Psychology» 77 (2021), 101683.
[45] E. Zerubavel, *The Elephant in the Room: Notes on the Social Organization of Denial*, in K. A. Cerulo (ed.), *Culture in Mind: Toward a Sociology of Culture and Cognition*, Routledge, New York 2002, pp. 21-27; E. Zerubavel, *The Elephant in the Room: Silence and Denial in Everyday Life*, Oxford University Press, New York 2006; K. M. Norgaard, *Living in Denial. Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 2011.
[46] BIOS, *Ecological Restoration*, 08.11.19, https://eco.bios.fi/ [17.10.24].
[47] E. Brady-A. Holland-K. Rawles, *Walking the Talk: Philosophy of Conservation on the Isle of Rum*, «Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology» 8/2-3 (2004), pp. 280-297, on p. 284.

need to move beyond the Romantic expectation that has shaped our thinking about art: the belief that individual artworks must radically transform us. At the very least, radical transformation should not be the standard for artistic cognition, as it is neither psychologically plausible nor sustainable[48]. Ultimately, the demands placed on the arts and artists to imagine sustainable futures have been excessive, perhaps in part because rational enterprises have faltered.

4. *Conclusion*

It is impossible to accurately forecast the complex societal and ecological crises of the future and living with uncertainties and images of threats is psychologically demanding; yet, we must still anticipate the future. Rather than radical transformations, I see great value in art in the current situation in aiding us in processing and tolerating complexity, enhancing our capacity to reflect on possible alternatives, teaching us to live with uncertainties that carry existential consequences, and cultivating hope. If we need a term for this attitude, it could be *critical hope*, as proposed by some (Vaclav Havel, Jonathan Lear), or *hopeful pessimism*, as advocated by others (van der Lugt)[49]. As the environmental scholar, educator, and advocate Ashlee Cunsolo nicely puts it, «While grief can be full of pain, it can also be full of resistance, of creativity, of collectivity, and of hope»[50]. The future may be dreadful, but we can act in ways that make it less dreadful and our

[48] It is unlikely that individual artworks would permanently alter our mental landscapes, proving us with ideas that guide our lives. Furthermore, if an individual artwork could radically change us in some positive way, could not another work have the opposite impact?

[49] The Czech statesman and author Václav Havel is often cited for his view of *radical* or *critical* hope. Havel says that «Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty *that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out*» (V. Havel, *The Kind of Hope I Often Think about*, in P. Wilson (ed.), *Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation with Karel Hvizdala*, Vintage Books, New York 1990, p. 181). See also J. Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2006; M. van der Lugt, *Look on the Dark Side*, «Aeon» 26.04.22, https://aeon.co/essays/in-these-dark-times-the-virtue-we-need-is-hopeful-pessimism [21.06.25].

[50] A. Cunsolo, *To Grieve or Not to Grieve?*, «NiCHE» 19.01.18, https://niche-canada.org/2018/01/19/to-grieve-or-not-to-grieve/ [21.06.25].

lives more meaningful. This matters not only to us but also to other forms of life.

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