

[Between Sense and Sensibility: Art and Society's Metamorphosis] Introduction

Art has been the focus of the social sciences on multiple occasions. It has mostly been studied as a “social fact”, a functionally differentiated sphere of social action, a field of production and of organization of knowledge practices, of power, and of the market. In other words, sociology has looked at art as an object or a product of the social world. Less frequently sociologists have questioned what role art plays in the transformation of society, and what forms of understanding and conceptualisation of social reality are elaborated by artists. However various art forms influence our lives, not only shaping aesthetical models, but also generating relational structures, which foster reflections beyond the artistic domain. The artist's creative effort is actually aimed at fostering both emotive and rational reactions, which induce psychological, political, and social evaluations in the people who are exposed to her/his art. Moreover, all art forms are intrinsically linked to the concept of innovation, of exploration of the new and of continuous re-invention of the past. We could thus affirm that there is a circular inextricable link between various art forms and various societal transformations. Furthermore, the public dimension of art pushes the artist's itself at the centre of hermeneutic circle among her/his creative intentions, the symbolic meanings of the opus and the added value of the interpretations by spectators.

Often the arts have fostered and supported revolutionary and innovative tensions also in the political dimension of social relations. Similarly, music and other art forms have often taken on the role of mediator in the communication between different cultures, contributing to the dismantling of stereotypes of the foreigner and ‘the other’. The production of music, public art practices, and other artistic forms and orientations are significant objects for research on contemporary societal transformations, precisely because they are laboratories of meanings and forms of action, which are not necessarily new, but which have been disregarded for some time.

Amongst these, the interpretation of the public as a gravitational centre of communities, and the inclusion of members of the community in the activation of the audience of art work appear sociologically relevant for their participative character, a “mild mobilisation”, not necessarily consumerist, but politically participative, producing community empowerment and in close contact with the fundamental reasons for living in close contact with the values of social ties. In this perspective, not only art overcomes the classic distinction between art and society, but it also offers spaces, situations, and forms to experiment encounters, interactions, relations which are not instrumental, but gratuitous. These practices are minimal, daily, interactional, private acts, we could say, but aggregated around an art installation, an object of more or less complexity, they become forms of participation, social practices, laboratories of that dimension of the common good as an indivisible reality. Furthermore, Art can help everyone to sense the dimension of the common/public as an indivisible reality and responsibility. This fact was ignored for a long time in the contemporary social experience producing more and public problems requiring a cooperative approach: the environmental and climate crises, the expansion of military crises, the crises connected to migrant masses, the lack of a clear political project by governments, the increase of public fear of the future.

A common characteristic of the essays in the monographic section is the attention paid to the artistic phenomenon's relations with the processes of social, political, economic transformation which can invest society in its totality, but also specific local societies, triggering participative, inclusive, integrative dynamics that carry out a social function for the community.

More specifically, the contributions, often by young researchers, converge around two themes. The first focuses on the ongoing change that, due to its multiple implications, requires going beyond the *mainstream* sociological theories of art. To summarise, this change can be identified both in the specifically sociological interest for social reality that numerous artists

develop in their creative work, and in the development of trends in sociological theory that, on the one hand, radically rethink agency, questioning the classical premise of intentionality and elaborating post-semiotic sociologies of distributed agency; and approaches which, on the other hand, frame the relationship of art and society identifying in *artification* the process of social creation of art.

The transition from the idea of society as a totality to a processual conception, of which the artist and her/his creative process are part, marks the development of an innovative interest for social research methods on the part of artists. Förster has synthesised this transition talking of ethnographic trend in art and Jameson has indicated in *cognitive mapping* a set of tools for artistic work which are appropriate to debate that process of fluidification of the social in which the spatial dimension of social phenomena prevails on their collocation in diachronic perspective. This transition has relevant consequences on the conditions of the artistic social critique and on forms of authorship. An aspect of the latter are forms of participative art, which, like in a prism, reflect the various categorizations elaborated by recent sociologies of participation (Bontempi). Other more radical contemporary sociological approaches abandon the concept of social and move from a rethinking of agency categories in terms of network and distribution, thus questioning the identification of action and intentionality typical of *mainstream* sociology. The success of concepts such as *socio-technical agencements*, performativity and *economization*, delineates a research field in which both artistic practices and social research converge. In this research field we can collocate the contribution by Bazzani that demonstrates how from the idea of social performance of a stable or rational identity collocated in the backstage of an interaction, we move to an idea of performativity of theory and of art form. The category of distributed agency allows the author to trace numerous analogies between social analysis and artistic work, highlighting, finally, how in perspectives opened by the concept of *economization*, proposed by Caliskan and Callon, «conceptualisations of the economy made by precedent economic theories are not abandoned, but are accepted as knots in the net of diffused agency, weakening their normative and prescriptive character in favour of their performative dimension». Along theoretical trajectories which are different from those just outlined, urban sociology today outlines innovative theoretical tools which allow understanding of the common elements of urban transformations and those of artistic production. Focusing on forms of *street art* Colacicco, in her essay, demonstrates how «urban art emerges from cultural spaces where it is preserved and occupies social places and non-places in which it presents itself as artification, manipulation of the artistic elements, closed relation between artistic object and social actions where it is produced. The art work itself becomes witness to social change, becomes an operator of the transformation, an analytic spy through which one can enquire into the practices of acculturation and social recognition of urban contexts». The theoretical approach along which the author develops her analysis are the studies on *artification* developed by the French sociologists Nathalie Heinich e Roberta Shapiro.

The second theme around which the essays of the monographic section converge reveals a methodological connection between contemporary art and sociological research. Theatre, photography, video production are understood as artistic practices through which we can observe processes of social change. If the relation between theatre and sociology now spans several decades, the work of Augusto Boal and the wide typology of forms developed in connection with the Theatre of the Oppressed offers interesting tools for analysis of at least two themes. The first is the analysis of structures and of processes of interaction, linking itself rather well with an ethnomethodological approach. The second theme, as discussed by the essay by Pisciotta, assigns to some forms of theatre the function of research tool for biographies and lived experiences, as in the case of participative theatre used by Kaptani and Yuval-Davis in a sociological research on comparing the lived experience of migration.

D'Ambrosio focuses her analysis on the relations between photography technologies and the social meanings of photography in her artistic production, highlighting how - starting from Benjamin's critical work - the link between forms of socialisation and the reproduced image is continuously enriched with meanings and processes of legitimisation. Lastly, the use of photography as research tool of *visual sociology* links the photographic product to indicators used in social research, binding it to the methodological criteria of validity and reliability of the data and to a coherence and/or compatibility value that links the selected images to the network of research hypotheses.

Santanera's essay traces and discusses the features of the multiple relations between video production and urban life, in a heterogeneous and segmented city such as Douala, in Cameroon. The artists insert their film practice within their social context and produce *web series* with the objective of reflecting daily hardships through an interpretation which mobilises alternative behaviours, criticising the acquisitive ethos. The author observes that the videos have an overtly pedagogical aim accompanied by a fierce social critique, advancing alternative and practicable models of daily social life. In other words this

mode of production which allows viewers to experience a strong process of identification «represents an attempt to locate routine and regularities, what Förster calls *habitual agency*, to be contrasted to improvisation as practice of daily survival, typical of post-colonial metropolises».

The production of music and its multiple connections with consumerism are outlined by Luzi in a wide-ranging examination of sociological literature on music. Technology has radically modified the relation between the conditions of production and the conditions of consumption of music. If experimental research was already practiced at the very beginning of the twentieth century, digital technology has opened up creative spaces which were unimaginable and thus has changed the conditions of production and consumption. The interpretation of Luzi, aligned with Adorno's musical sociology, shows the similarities between forms of sociality linked to new musical genres and the disharmonic tendencies of the musical executions of songs which can be attributed to these genres. The evolution of musical composition models thus becomes a mirror both for problematizing of social life, and for the progressive technicalization of human experience. Music becomes thus simultaneously a mirror of social life and mechanism to manage social tension that music itself describes.

The essay which concludes the monographic section, that of Appignanesi and Paladini, tackles an unusual theme in research on art and society, which is however exceptionally interesting: the theme of art destruction as dimension of social change. In Luhmann's perspective, memory and identity are analysed as a dimension of the art medium in the form of "artefact". Social change can thus be examined by using art work as an indicator in the phases of variation, selection and re-establishment of the system. Thus «the parallel between social change and the cyclic nature of the process of semanticisation-desemanticisation-resemanticisation indicates how the destruction of art work is an analogous process to that of its construction». The analysis refers to the case study on the Cartoceto Bronzes, which appears particularly relevant here as it demonstrates a long sequence of resemanticisations dating from late antiquity.

Having received wide-ranging responses to the call of the monographic section, we have selected and distributed outside the monographic section some contributions which, though slightly diverging from the theme of the call, have however seemed worthy of being published. The section *Contributions* hosts contributions which are more directly linked to experiences of art production. The two essays by Justin Thompson and Leone Contini, two very active artists in the contemporary art scene - both in Italy and internationally - develop important analyses and reflections on the nature and meanings of the creative process and on the relation between artist and art work. These two contributions are preceded by an intervention by Ceravolo and Viacava that present the first results of a research-action project in which inmates of four prisons have had the opportunity to attend guided listening sessions of instrumental music. The aim of this first experimental phase of the project, called CO2 and promoted by the CPM Music Institute in Milan in cooperation with the Università di Pavia, is that of evaluating the utility and practicality of such an initiative in the framework of educational policies in prisons. The first results are encouraging and therefore a second experimental phase has been launched, this time involving twelve institutions and thus including a much larger number of detainees.

The section *Essays and Researches* also hosts, amongst others, two essays which, though not focused on contemporary art, frame the relation between sociology and aesthetics according to interesting perspectives. Ruggeri carries out a detailed investigation into the possibility of aesthetically interpreting Simmel's category of reciprocity (*Wechselwirkung*), both in the normative dimension of order, and in the re-composition of the constitutive ambivalence of social processes. Finally, Verderame outlines and discusses the concept of aesthetics in Simmel and Durkheim, attempting - with commendable results - an original application of this category to the Festival d'Europa 2015.

