édhéa

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ALONG ECOLOGICAL LINES –
CONTEMPORARY ART AND CLIMATE CRISIS
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COVER WRAP IMAGE
Marie Velardi – *Terre-Mer* (*Oostende*): pencil and watercolour on paper, 75 x 110 cm. © 2014, Marie Velardi.

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BARNABY DRABBLE

SPRING — 2019

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS – ALONG ECOLOGICAL LINES

Foreword

Climate change is a fact. Both mitigation and adaptation will keep humanity busy for many decades to come. In my view, these challenges are defining issues of the twenty-first century and call for concerted action across a wide range of fields of study and practice. My research focuses on the impacts of weather and climate on socio-economic systems and builds on the notion that it is options for action rather than mere understanding of the issues that matter most in dealing with climate change. Options about how we decarbonise our economy and how we adapt to a changing climate are embedded in scenarios about how we envisage our common future. While it is widely accepted by now that these scenarios can only be imagined by combining the efforts of both the natural and social sciences, the potential of the humanities and the arts is less often discussed within this frame. Yet they promise to be effective through the provision of novel perspectives, and the creation of alternative visions for a better future.

I was very fortunate to meet with Barnaby Drabble, whom I have known for many years, again in 2016, when I assumed the professorship for Weather and Climate Risks at ETH Zurich. Our conversations around the notions of risk and resilience and the need for alternative ways to frame the problem of climate change forged the idea of proactively exploring ways in which artists are working to expand the space from which options for action emerge. Barnaby's plan to travel across Europe by simple means 'along ecological lines' opened up the possibility to test this hypothesis. Along lines, not in the sense of delineations, but rather as an effort to connect activities across borders and cultures. Hence we agreed to collaborate on a symposium in Geneva and a small congress in Zurich to play back and build on his insights in conversations with many of the artists and specialists he met on his journey.

We were especially intrigued by the question of representation–from the scientific depiction of a changing climate by means of maps produced on the basis of the output of global circulation models, to the artistic rendering of innocently moving shorelines as drawn by Marie Velardi, to artistically informed protests during climate negotiations as captured by Oliver Ressler, to name only three complementary perspectives. Do such different representations support a broad call for action? Who do they suit the best? Do they support a fear-driven response, or provide the means to collectively strengthen our engagement and hope? Not that we found an answer to these questions; however, we felt compelled to capture

some of these thoughts in a publication that not only collects conversations, but also reminds us of the need for transdisciplinary dialogue between the sciences and the arts in order to open up creative spaces of possibility and to question traditions of knowledge and representational norms.

I wish this book the wide attention it deserves–and trust that you, the readers, will act as ambassadors not so much in carrying forward a specific idea or framing around ecological issues, but rather in engaging in conversations as rich as those I had the pleasure to participate in. We are in need of many different perspectives on climate change in order to successfully mitigate its effects and adapt to the challenges it presents, and the arts play an important role in providing these.

PROF. DR DAVID N. BRESCH
PROFESSOR FOR WEATHER AND CLIMATE RISKS
ETH ZURICH

Introduction

Along Ecological Lines

BARNABY DRABBLE

What does it mean that art is now being made in the context of a climate crisis that threatens our very existence on the planet? As our species begins to experience the consequences of its ecocidal practices and, with painful slowness, considers its response, what do artists do and how do they do it? Confronted with images of devastation, narratives of failure and practices of looking away, what can art show, tell or enact differently? As one way of life shows signs of coming catastrophically to an end, what role can art and artists have in the transition to what follows?

INTRODUCTION

I can't quite remember when I decided to cycle around Europe on a folding bicycle, talking to artists about climate change, but the idea emerged between 2010, when I first became familiar with the coming together of a global climate movement,[1] and 2015, when the COP21 climate change conference in Paris was met with the D12 protests and an unprecedented level of artistic activity. It seems likely that it was also influenced by my decision to move from Zurich to join a group setting up an eco-community in the forests of the north of Catalonia in 2013. This new context for my life and work raised many questions for me, and I found myself thinking about art differently, working with my students in new ways and reading and researching more broadly than ever before. I fell into a space where art, activism and the pursuit of another way to practise life started to look increasingly aligned. In John Jordan and Isabelle Frémeaux's film *Paths Through Utopias*,[2] a road movie set in a post-capitalist future, they drive through Europe visiting

individuals and collectives involved in the new forms of community that follow the collapse of civilisation as we know it. The trick in the film is that the squats, camps, homesteads and worker-run factories we encounter are no figment of the imagination but real projects, stranded this side of the inevitable changes to come, anomalies that may soon become the norm. Self-organised, de-grown, resilient and fiercely resistant, the film's protagonists, who play along with the playful premise in the interviews, appear prescient and visionary. When I first encountered the film I realised that I was drawn to it because of a certain familiarity with its subjects. I knew these people from the future, not exactly the ones depicted in their movie but others like them. At first I met them by accident, but after a while I sought them out and eventually they came to find me.[3]

▲
Rooh's bender, Landmatters Cooperative Permaculture Project, Devon, England. Film still from *Paths Through Utopias* by John Jordan and Isabelle Frémeaux, 109 mins (2011).

The community in Catalonia, and the practices we developed there, provided me with a space from which to launch sporadic road trips of my own and the impulse to interrogate the diversity of artistic responses to the burgeoning climate crisis. Over a period of two years my travels for this project took me to Barcelona, Madrid and Vienna, and via the school where I teach in Sierre to Geneva, Bucharest, Budapest, Zurich, Basel, Lüneburg, Barrow-in-Furness and Dundee. Although I do not yet fully belong to the no-flying club, I endeavoured to conduct these journeys on my little bicycle as far as my legs would carry me and otherwise by coach or

rail, with the bicycle travelling with me as luggage. I prepared myself carefully for these trips, envisaging the lines I was drawing across the geopolitical space of Europe, taking time to use the bicycle to experience the spaces in between the cities where most of my encounters took place, slowly traversing agricultural, post-industrial and suburban landscapes on my route. The interviews in this book, with the exception of those conducted by Yesomi Umolu and Andrea Phillips, were gathered along these lines around Europe, while the further essays and project descriptions elaborate practice and research I had the luck and privilege to come into contact with along the way.[4]

ENVIRONMENTALLY ENGAGED ART

What began as a series of chance encounters soon formalised itself as a decision to elaborate my long-standing interest and involvement in socially engaged art practices with an enquiry into how specific artists are working with ecological and environmental themes. This book offers readers a deeper insight into the practices of five of the artists whose work I became particularly interested in over the past three years: Ursula Biemann, Fernando García-Dory, David Haley, Oliver Ressler and Marie Velardi. Yet, as the essays by Maja and Reuben Fowkes, T.J. Demos, Laurence Schmidlin and Sacha Kagan attest, these are just a handful of the many artists working in this field, and by nature any discussion of this kind of work is by no means art-specific. As Naomi Klein explores in her book *This Changes Everything*, discussions about climate change and associated debates on ecosystem degradation and species extinction are no longer sensibly separable from that of a debate on the workings of global neoliberal capitalism:

'Our economic system and our planetary system are now at war. Or, more accurately, our economy is at war with many forms of life on earth, including human life. What the climate needs to avoid collapse is a contraction in humanity's use of resources; what our economic model demands to avoid collapse is unfettered expansion. Only one of these sets of rules can be changed, and it's not the laws of nature.'[5]

The geopolitical effects of neoliberal capitalism on human populations have long been the focus of socially engaged artists whose work focuses on social justice, community and democracy. In keeping with Klein's observation that the climate crisis is now the issue that unites all other activist and social justice issues, in the

first half of this decade I started to observe how artists who I had worked with on various projects, were gradually paying more attention to ecological and environmental issues in their work. This is not to say that their approach changed: that their work stopped examining social issues, or that they decided from one day to the next to 'green' their practice and become environmentally engaged – quite the opposite. What has started to happen is an expansion of the 'social' in social engagement to include the non-human, and this new framing of subjectivity changes both the art practices we observe and our understanding of the act of observing art itself. A task for me was to go back into the archives of the artists whose practice I found interesting and see then how clearly environmental concerns were evident in work that I would previously have interpreted differently.

Since I started working with fine art students on the master's at the édhéa in Sierre, in the Canton of Valais in the south of Switzerland, we have had a focus on art in the public sphere. It is perhaps unusual to map this term, which most frequently has urban connotations, onto a small town in this rugged, mountainous region. However, the human processes here of land use, migration, industry, agriculture and tourism, for example, though highly specific to the region, are immediately identifiable as global in nature. The students, who join the programme from around the world, bring with them their own diverse experiences of public space questions and the school in Sierre provides a kind of 'translocality' for research and production. One of my colleagues at the édhéa is the ethicist Eric Maeder.[6] He works with the students on environmental ethics, specifically on the history of human concepts of nature and the natural. With my own teaching in the area of social practice, we often noted that were exploring similar ground. It was with Eric that I first discussed turning my interest in this ecological turn into a period of research, and what followed was a series of lengthy conversations and exchanges on topics ranging from environmental justice and conservation to sustainable development and care ethics. From these discussions, two distinctly different questions crystallised: firstly, to what extent can we talk about the contemporary art world as in any way sustainable? And secondly, which kinds of art might be able to talk about an ethics of the non-human world?

DIVESTING ART AND ITS INSTITUTIONS

With its reliance on hyper-itinerancy, unethical sponsorship and speculative capital, the business of contemporary art, regardless of the practices it deals with, clearly contributes to climate change and ecological collapse rather than mitigating it. The art world has undergone a variety of changes over the last thirty years that together have compounded its negative environmental impact. The growth of the art market, art fairs, travelling exhibitions and biennales has resulted in an increased itinerancy of artists, their works and their publics. Artists need to travel more and further to be successful within such a system; their exhibitions become part of the experience economy encouraging weekend tourism and international travel, while their works are shipped ever longer distances to reach their equally itinerant publics. Over this time, in keeping with the growth in the number of museums and galleries showing contemporary art, we have seen an increase in sponsorship of art institutions by companies with poor environmental records interested in improving their public image, in incidences of what has been termed 'art washing'.[7] The list of sponsors involved in this activity includes big oil companies such as Chevron, ExxonMobil, BP and Shell, who seek to buy into the respectability of the major institutions they give money to.

Meanwhile, the overall art market has grown at a staggering rate, with reports estimating that the market grew on average 13% per year between 2000 and 2015.[8] This in part due to the growing importance of China as a market, but also due to an increased financialisation of the market in general, where fund managers approach contemporary artworks as assets to be indexed and traded rather than 'collected' in the old sense of the word. In the US, high-net-worth individuals (HNWI), those with over a million dollars to invest, hold around 10% of their wealth in art and antiquities. Artworks have always been bought and sold, and art institutions have always been supported by wealthy donors, but the last thirty years have seen contemporary art attract the sustained interest of the 'one per cent' and the corporate world.[9] It is common knowledge that currently 1% of the world's population own 50% of its wealth, and that the world's very rich, when they are not actively denying climate change, are noticeably inactive in supporting action on the issue, because this threatens their hyper-consumptive lifestyles and challenges the principles of growth that guarantee their ongoing wealth. It is precisely individuals like these who have become extremely important to the contemporary art market, which has become ostentatiously synonymous with luxury and speculation.

▲
Liberate Tate, *Human Cost*, Tate Britain, London (2011). Photograph – Immo Klink

However, the ethics of the art world are not uncontested, and although the term 'business as usual' resonates as markedly in the art world as it does in other sectors, calls for large institutions to reconsider their connection to destructive sponsors are now common. The high-profile activities of the activist art collective Liberate Tate serve as a good example of resistance and activism from within the art community. Liberate Tate's primary focus was to end the Tate gallery's funding by the oil company BP. Their activities included an open letter to the director, publications exposing the connections between Tate and ecologically damaging activity, and direct interventions into the Tate's exhibition spaces by performers faking oil spills and installing a wind turbine blade as a sculpture. In early 2016, BP and Tate announced their decision to cease their arrangement after 26 years[10] and £3.8 million pounds of sponsorship, a sum only made public after Tate lost a case at a freedom of information tribunal brought about by the activists. While both Tate and BP maintain that their decision was not influenced by the protests and the public concern they engendered, artists and activists celebrated the decision. When Liberate Tate chose to challenge the Tate as an example of one of the many arts organisations sponsored by oil and petrochemical

giants, they sought not only to make a very visible point that the arts have an ethical base that should be respected, but also to name artists as an active part of civil society, engaged in the far wider-reaching process of 'divestment'.

SUBVERTING ANTHROPOCENTRIC IMAGINARIES

Encountering the video essay *Deep Weather* by Ursula Biemann, I was struck by her juxtaposition of film shot in two distant but related places: the tar sands of Alberta and the flood-threatened deltas of Bangladesh. The footage of the former, captured from the air, shows the immense scale of what has become the world's largest industrial project, an unimaginable expanse of blackened earth, stripped of the boreal forests that once covered it. She leads the camera over the refineries and the tailing ponds, artificial lakes filled with the washout of the bitumen separation process, poisoned with heavy metals and hydrocarbons, and swathed in clouds of acrid smoke. In the latter she films thousands of Bangladeshi citizens as they fill and place a seemingly endless number of bags of sand, by hand, constructing a defensive wall against rising water levels, which threaten their livelihoods on the banks of the rivers and deltas. Biemann's camera, again, reveals to us the scale of the operation, the lines of bodies moving the white bags, stacking and throwing them into the water, to turn, walk back and begin again. The images are at once spectacular and matter of fact, in the way that the reality of human agency can sometimes seem stranger than fiction. The video, which seems far longer than its modest nine minutes, draws a causal line between two sites of human industry, one extractive, lucrative and toxic, and the other constructive, urgent and Sisyphean. Avoiding pathos, the work narrates these scenes as a story of water and oil, exploring the global exchanges, flows and circulation of non-human matter that occur parallel to and interdependent with human activity.

▲
Bangladeshi communities building flood defences.
Ursula Biemann, video still from *Deep Weather*, 9 mins. (2013).

This exploration of the human world and of environmental ethics through attention to the relations between human and non-human actants has been a trait of Biemann's recent works, and a central facet of the art and media project World of Matter.[11] Meetings taking place within this interdisciplinary grouping engendered Biemann's collaboration with the Brazilian architect and urbanist Paolo Tavares. Visiting Amazonia together in 2013, they conducted research into the case of the inhabitants of the Sarayaku territory, who successfully launched a legal defence of the forest against oil and mineral prospectors that laid the foundations for the multimedia installation and related publication entitled *Forest Law*.[12]

It is in *Forest Law* that we first encounter the figure of the indigenous scientist in Biemann's work[13]–a figure whose research focuses on the reintegration of the biological and the cultural. In the work of Fernando García-Dory, we encounter (often in person) similar figures, pastoralists whose practices of cultivation and animal husbandry date back centuries, and whose understanding of the relationship between the human and non-human differs from the now dominant industrial, extractive ones. *INLAND*, as he titles his ongoing collaborative project, takes the form of a 'para-institution'[14]–a cultural and economic entity whose varied fields of production test how the rural, long abandoned as a site of knowledge, can provide tools for dealing with the many facets of the current crisis. With a specific focus

on peasant culture in Europe, relating to García-Dory's biography growing up between Madrid and a remote rural community in the north of Spain, *INLAND* refuses a romantic or idealising point of view of the countryside. Although recognising that many of these practices are close to dying out, it counters the idea that their value has become purely nostalgic or touristic. Instead *INLAND* adopts, with a dose of irony, entrepreneurial agency, tethering these practices to the hyper-itinerant, globalised market in contemporary art objects and their makers. In doing so it poses critical questions about modernity and solidarity, reinserting the knowledge bases these practices represent into the spaces opened up by new technologies, post-democratic political conditions and the experience economy. *INLAND* avoids claiming morally higher ground for the indigenous knowledge and traditions it engages with, preferring to pitch their pragmatism (predicated on sustainable systems design and models of inter-species cooperation) against the disconnection and dysfunction that underlie contemporary consumerist ways of life.

As with García-Dory, David Haley's work begins with an interest in systems. Where *INLAND* creates spaces for modelling sustainable life practices in dialogue with the rural, Haley's working method, exemplified in his recent work *VIEWPOINT*, involves a process of meditative enquiry into the interrelatedness of natural things where the human, though present, is never primary. In this sense, the protagonists of *VIEWPOINT* are the rivers Cocker and Derwent that converge in the town of Cockermouth in Cumbria, which in recent years has seen devastating flooding. The conversations that Haley's work takes as a starting point are those he conducts with concerned residents on the one hand, and those between the stones that line the riverbeds–slate, limestone, yellow sandstone, black basalt and bluestone–on the other. Here, geological entities talk of millennia of change, of the presence of volcanoes, of a planet covered by sea, of millions of extinct species become sediment. Coming from a background in community arts, Haley's interest in ecology quickly brought him into contact with pioneers of 'environmental art' Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison, who he went on to work with on a number of projects. In keeping with their work, he also employs creative mapping processes and metaphor, both to provoke reflection on the ecology of the places he engages with and to ask broader questions about how we might take steps towards 'capable futures'.[15] Haley explores place as an arena of multiple intertwined temporalities, whether on the Kai Tak River in Hong Kong or in the catchment area of the rivers Cocker and Derwent. The long time-base of his practice of 'sitting and looking' leads to the co-creation of multivalent works, where he brings the residents and the elements together in acts

of reintegration, performing again, in new ways, the courting rituals that we have been dancing together for millennia.

There are parallels here with the in-the-field approach taken by curators Maja and Reuben Fowkes in their project *The River School*, where the natural and cultural histories of the Danube formed the starting point for study days, workshops and exhibitions involving artists, scientists and historians and, of course, the river itself. The sense that our abilities to understand and adequately respond to climate change are tied up in our cultural perceptions of time also forms the starting point for Marie Velardi's work. Her works on paper that make up the series *Terre-Mer* also relate to maps, as she begins by tracing pencil outlines of real or imagined coastlines, from satellite images or historical documents. The swathes of blue watercolour that marble the surface of the paper spread out from this fixed temporal point in a speculative representation of coastlines of the present, past and (near) future. As the sea rises due to the changing climate, land is lost, but in Velardi's representations the narrative force of this move from more to less is challenged in the foregrounding of a new temporal territory. These images of *Terre-Mer* are beyond the dialectics of sea and land or past and future; instead, as Laurence Schmidlin notes, they describe *'a sort of thicker present'*.[16] This thickness, in the blue in between, opens up a space of potential, an imaginary ebb and flow space of being present 'in' change, rather than subject 'to' it.

RED LINES

Looking back to the events that triggered this research, what made 2015 so important for environmentally engaged art has everything to do with Paris, and what makes now so important is how far we seem to have come since then. Artistic presence and engagement at COP21 were unprecedented, both in terms of the number of art-related events, exhibitions and discussions held in the city at that time, but also, and more importantly in my mind, in terms of the diversity of ways in which artists contributed to the civil society activities that sprang up around the UN-convened meeting of government representatives to discuss, once again, climate change.[17] As artists and art specialists, including Maja and Reuben Fowkes and Sacha Kagan, sat on panels at the 'conference of creative parties' organised by the arts organisations Cape Farewell and Coal, there were prominent works on view in the public space, such as Olafur Eliasson's *Ice Watch,*[18] installed on the Place du Panthéon, and Yann Toma's *Units of Artistic Energy* installation at the

Eiffel Tower. Christie's held an auction in Paris with funds raised going to climate change charities. The largest exhibition at the Sorbonne, entitled *Le Méridien Climatique,* showed work by, amongst others, Lucy and Jorge Orta, Taryn Simon and Tomás Saraceno, while smaller galleries and art centres took the opportunity to programme one-off environmentally themed exhibitions.

Artists were also involved in the protests that surrounded the COP. Jordan and Frémeaux's project *Climate Games,* for example, gave protesters training and tools to outwit the police and engage in creative acts of civil disobedience.[19] The focus on breaking the law to expose lawlessness also produced one of the most powerful images to emerge from the COP21. In a city that had been placed under a state of emergency due to terrorist attack, 15,000 protesters illegally formed a red line from the Arc de Triomphe to the financial district of the city, dressed in red and holding long strips of red fabric above their heads or laying them on the cobblestones. This action, organised by a coalition of scientists, activists and NGOs under the title *Red Lines Are Not For Crossing,* referred to the urgent need for governments to act on what its organisers termed *'minimal necessities for a liveable planet.'* The protest, which was echoed around the world in smaller demonstrations, involved drawing a figurative line, representing limits that could not be crossed without catastrophic consequences, bodies arranging themselves in a last line of defence against political intransigence.

▲
Red Lines activists contest the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris (2015). Photograph – Joel Lukhovi.

The *Red Lines* action, and the meetings leading up to it, are the focus of the first of four films in Oliver Ressler's ongoing series entitled *Everything's coming together while everything's falling apart*.[20] In these documentary essays, which weave footage with commentary, the artist follows the activities of the growing global climate movement. He documents the activists as they plan and undertake large-scale acts of non-violent civil disobedience against the perpetrators of climate crimes. These include protests like those in Paris but also blockades, occupations and acts of mass trespass on sites of fossil extraction and distribution, and airport development. For Ressler, in documenting these activities he is capturing the first stages of what he believes is the beginning of a 'climate revolution' – *'the moment'*, as he describes it, *'when popular resistance began to reconfigure the world.'* In relation to this, of all the voices that came out of Paris, including the familiar ones of politicians making promises they had no intention of keeping, the most caustically clear were those of the scientists and activists who reminded all present that this COP, like the twenty before it, was a 'fraud'[21] and that the process behind the talks was 'broken'.[22] Corporate interest, these voices told us, would persevere; the COP's unbinding agreements were essentially confetti thrown around at a 'save the world' party, where the real deals (the ones sustaining climate change) were being carved in stone, secretly, elsewhere. The *Red Lines* action in Paris spoke of defiance and of resistance, but also of fragility in the face of systemic violence.

When I write of the diversity of the artistic presence in Paris, I refer to the radical difference in approach and, for want of a better word, message that works addressing climate change can adopt and deliver. In Paris, some of the artists approached the topic in a descriptive way, with photographic exhibitions seeking to image the problems and raise awareness in the viewer, while others created dialogical spaces where the issues could be discussed in other ways – by inviting indigenous knowledges to the table, for example. Some work sought to elicit emotional reactions, ominously depicting how time was running out, or optimistically pointing to the potential of human energy for change. Some presented artistic-technological structures imagining future solutions to the crisis, while others explored philosophical spaces of humility and acceptance of our Anthropocene realities. Some focused on our individual consumerist habits and gave us tools for how to live more sustainably, while others chose to call out the hypocrisy of the COP itself, name the enemy and bring people out onto the streets to oppose it.

THE BRINK

Who announces the end? The anthropos? Or the police and the bureaucrats? Who tells us how to feel it, or think it, or obey it? We prefer not to be told – trying to inhabit a suicidal system assumes a sad defeat from the outset; it is an approach lacking in both numeracy and imagination.[23]

Artists have never met again at a COP as they did in 2015; further UN climate conferences came and went, but who could now openly dispute the inefficacy of these meetings to really address the underlying causes of climate change? None of the ensuing meetings have had the sense of urgency and importance that countries felt in Paris, not because the crisis has abated, but because the conference has lost much of its credibility. The much-talked-about 'moment to act' now lies in the past and the red lines drawn in Paris have been repeatedly crossed, to growing public concern, but with little or no response from the politicians who claim to represent them.[24] Meanwhile climate change has been put into context as only one of an intricately connected collection of human-extinction-hastening processes that require our urgent attention, and as such now battles in the ratings with mass species extinction, biodiversity loss, ocean acidification and ecosystem degradation. The tone has become dark, with scientists and journalists now fleshing out the ugly reality of where, they increasingly believe, we are headed.[25] Four and a half years on from COP21 it is clear that the promises of 2015 are not being honoured and the long-term strategies necessary for the change we need to survive are not being put in place. The IPCC has calculated that continuing on this course will result in a global rise in temperature of 3.2 degrees Celsius by the end of the century. At such temperatures and with such a high level of ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss, the Earth will be all but uninhabitable by human beings.

The fight against this eventuality is growing quickly. The fledgling climate movement I first came into contact with at the beginning of this decade is now a global phenomenon and civil society campaigning and acts of civil disobedience are raising public awareness on an unseen scale. Ten months after Greta Thunberg's decision to skip school and sit with a sign outside the Swedish Parliament, in March and May 2019 1.4 million young people marched in climate strikes in more than 1,400 cities around the world. In April 2019, assuming the title Extinction Rebellion, thousands were involved in week-long occupations of key sites around London. In an open letter signed by one hundred academics in support of this movement,

they argued that *'The "social contract" has been broken, and it is therefore not only our right, but our moral duty* [...] *to bypass the government's inaction and flagrant dereliction of duty, and to rebel to defend life itself.'*[26] Although there is cause for scepticism about whether a political response is possible without a full-scale overhaul of the capitalist project, these radical actions and others like them are having an effect on politics. Shortly after the first climate strikes and occupations, the Labour Party in the UK called for a declaration of an environment and climate emergency. Green parties saw a surge of support in the European Elections in 2019, essentially making them kingmakers in the fragmented European Parliament, promising support only for those who will help them to *'deliver on ... three key principles: climate action, civil liberties and social justice.'*[27] In the United States, the Democrats are talking about a Green New Deal, an idea politically unvoiceable just a couple of years ago.

In the period of a lifetime, we humans have brought ourselves to the brink: the edge of what we know we can ever possibly reverse. In the period of another, scientists now overwhelmingly predict, what we have come to understand as human civilisation will collapse and give way to unprecedented global levels of starvation, destruction, migration, disease and war.[28] So where we are now, the brink, is a liminal space and a hiatus before the nearly inevitable tumble down to the bottom. At this precarious point, those of us living in the wealthy consumerist parts of the world today can use our technological tools to see everything and every-when. A myriad of possible past and future futures so intricately entwined with one another lie in a tangle in front of us, and if we take the time we can follow these threads and imagine where they lead. Art, both in its making and in its viewing, opens up spaces of difference, including the different worlds we might choose to live in. At the brink, art can provide a space in which we pause to explore unpredictability, complexity, multiplicity, processuality and improvisation. Ironically, of course, we find ourselves here with no time left, but at the same time *'a feeling of history happening all at once.'*[29]

Inhabiting the Anthropocene, then, is as profound as it is exhausting. The view from the brink fills us with guilt and dread. We see death everywhere: dead animals, trees, soil, seas and inevitably dead us, probably dead all of us. Yet if we can avoid the path of anxiety and helplessness, the brink is also where we get a glimpse of a new 'us', an urgent sense of the once-distanced planetary collective we now belong to, made up of the human and non-human. The brink is where our entanglement in all earthly matter, process and being becomes unavoidably

clear and if we choose not to look away in the face of such calamitous change, we cannot help but feel intensely connected, awake and engaged. This is the 'engagement' in today's environmentally engaged art.

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1 / The name given to a coalition of diverse organisations involved in the civil society campaign addressing climate change, from 350.org and Avaaz to Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion.

2 / *Paths Through Utopias,* John Jordan, Isabelle Frémeaux, Kypros Kyprianou. La Découverte/editions ZONES (2011).

3 / My first meeting with François Schneider from the degrowth collective Can Decreix was one such chance encounter. I was in Cerbère with students working on quite different issues when our paths crossed and he kindly invited us to join him, on his small patch of land above the town. Similarly, it was a purely functional part of our life in Catalonia, the wish to source local organic supplies to supplement what we could grow ourselves, that led to our membership of the Catalan Integral Cooperative (CIC). It was only later, in conversation with members of a neighbouring community, that I made the link to the work of Enric Duran, whose concept of 'fiscal disobedience' and inspiring activism I was familiar with from quite other circles. On a day foraging for mushrooms in the forests of north-west La Garrotxa, we ran into the anarchist communitarian Didac Costa, one of the founding members of the hacker community Calafou, who showed us around the land he had obtained for a new community of plants, animals and eventually humans.

4 / I had many conversations and conducted many interviews on my travels, but sadly cannot publish them all here. I have, however, tried in the Acknowledgements to credit those who so generously took the time to meet.

5 / Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism versus the Climate* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), p. 21.

6 / See Eric Maeder, *Mapping Ecologies: A Short Introduction,* in chapter seven of this book.

7 / The term is introduced and discussed in detail in Mel Evans, *Artwash: Big Oil and the Arts* (London: Pluto Press, 2015).

8 / CITI report *The Global Art Market: Perspectives on Current Drivers and Future Trends,* 2015 – https://issuu.com/widewalls6/docs/a17f8_337b321569f6ce (accessed May 2019).

9 / Chin-tao Wu, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention Since the 1980s* (London: Verso, 2002).

10 / Nadia Khomami, 'BP to end Tate sponsorship after 26 years' in *The Guardian* (11 March 2016) – https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/mar/11/bp-to-end-tate-sponsorship-climate-protests (accessed 10 June 2019).

11 / World of Matter – https://www.worldofmatter.net (accessed May 2019).

12 / See the interview with Ursula Biemann, case study and testimonials in chapter five of this book.

13 / Indigenous scientists also appear as protagonists in Biemann's later works, *Subatlantic* (2015) and *Acoustic Ocean* (2018).

14 / See the interview with Fernando García-Dory and his conversation with Andrea Phillips in chapter two of this book.

15 / See the interview with David Haley in chapter six of this book.

16 / Translated here from the French *'une sorte de présent épaissi'.* See Laurence Schmidlin, 'Marie Velardi: The Art of Prediction', in chapter four of this book.

17 / See Barnaby Drabble, 'Contemporary Art at the Tipping Point' in *Seismopolite – Journal of Art and Politics,* Issue 14 (Oslo, 2016).

18 / For a discussion of this work see Maja and Reuben Fowkes, *Facing the Unprotectable: Emergency Democracy for Post-Glacial Landscapes* in chapter one of this book.

19 / For an in-depth discussion of this project see T.J. Demos, *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today* (London: Sternberg Press, 2017), pp.103–108.

20 / See the interview with Oliver Ressler and the case study on this film series in chapter three of this book.

21 / The much-reported opinion of the former NASA scientist James Hansen.

22 / D12 protest organisers in their *Red Lines* proposal (originally available at – http://www.parisclimatejustice.org – now no longer online).

23 / Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (eds), *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), p.20.

24 / *The U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (*IPCC*) *Special Report on Global Warming* and the *G20 Transition to a Low Carbon Economy, Brown to Green Report,* both published in 2018, show that only a handful of the signatories of the 2015 agreement on global warming are on target to meet the limit of two degrees; that at current rates global temperatures will rise above 1.5 degrees as early as 2030; and that far from CO_2 output being reduced, global emission rates have risen annually since 2015 and continue to rise each year. The G20 countries, which currently produce 80% of the world's emissions, still meet 82% of their energy needs by burning fossil fuels and in 2016 the same countries provided subsidies of $147 billion to oil, gas and coal companies.

25 / For example, in Jem Bendell, 'Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy' (IFLAS Occasional Paper 2, University of Cumbria, 2018), and David Wallace-Wells, 'The Uninhabitable Earth' in *New York Magazine* (July 2017).

26 / Extinction Rebellion – www.xrblog.org (accessed May 2019).

27 / Ska Keller, cited in John Henley, 'Greens surge as parties make strongest ever showing across Europe' in *The Guardian* (26 May 2019) – https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/may/26/greens-surge-as-parties-make-strongest-ever-showing-across-europe (accessed May 2019).

28 / Jem Bendell, 'Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy' (IFLAS Occasional Paper 2, University of Cumbria, 2018), p.11.

29 / David Wallace-Wells, 'The Uninhabitable Earth' in *New York Magazine* (July 2017).

Thaw

(Chapter One)

Interview with Maja and Reuben Fowkes

BARNABY DRABBLE

September 2016:

BARNABY DRABBLE — Maja and Reuben, thanks for agreeing to the interview and arranging for us to meet here at the Translocal Institute in Budapest. A few years ago, you organised a project called *The River School*. Can you tell me how and why that project emerged?

MAJA FOWKES — There is always a prehistory to our projects, and *The River School* was one such case. *The River School* came out of a series of symposiums we started organising at the Central European University in 2006 entitled *Sustainability and Contemporary Art*. For many years, we looked at the general questions around art and sustainability and ecology, focusing on specific, theoretical issues. Then we realised that we wanted to turn our attention to something that is actually out there, which is part of the natural world: to get out and deal with something very concrete. This is how we decided to do a project on the River Danube. It started slowly. The currents were very uneven, but they took us along. The whole project developed in that way.

REUBEN FOWKES — It wasn't a project that started with a complex master plan, or with different elements that had to be carried out. It sort of evolved as it went along, responding to the changing conditions and things that we found out and the way our interest developed over the course of the project.

BARNABY — The participants in the original symposium, would these have been art students?

MAJA — The symposiums were always interdisciplinary, working in collaboration with the Environmental Science and Policy department at the Central European University. From the beginning, we were bringing together scientists, artists and activists in this setting. And we wanted to continue that way with *The River School*.

▲
River School, Danube Delta (2014).

The starting point for *The River School* was that we wanted to focus on the River Danube from its Eastern European side, once it leaves Austria and Germany in the West and enters into Slovakia, Hungary, and flows down to Romania. We wanted to focus on that part of the river for many reasons: some of them are more related to colonial histories of the river, others derive from our interest in the environmental history of that part of the Danube.

REUBEN — It had this dual aspect. Focusing on the eastern side of the river and also looking at the life of the river, its agency and its materiality as part of the physical universe, something more than just its place in human stories and human history, as a metaphor and so on.

In the course of our research, it became clear very quickly that although there are many books about the Danube river, and many art projects, most of them have actually ignored the river as an ecological fact and looked exclusively at its human history, its cultural and political importance. If you look in the index of these books, you will find no entry for nature or environmental ecology. We wanted to bring in the ecological side of the Danube, which has been strangely missing from many cultural and historical accounts to date.

What we soon found out was that actually these two issues were connected. The issue of a colonial relation to the Lower Danube, viewing it as this exotic other, and the issue of a certain attitude to this part of the river as a natural force. Somehow there was a link between this cultural view and the intensive exploitation of the Lower Danube, typically seeing it as a resource for energy, fishing or so on and a force to be controlled.

▲
Like a Bird: Avian Ecologies in Contemporary Art exhibition, Trafo Gallery, installation view (2014). Photograph – Miklos Suranyi.

BARNABY — What did the school produce?

MAJA — There were several aspects of *The River School*. There was a travelling exhibition that focused specifically on birds. We wanted to look at how the river is shared with other species and not only fish. When you go to the Danube Delta and get immersed into it, you really understand how the river is important for all species, and especially for migrating birds, and how all is interconnected. So that was one aspect of the exhibition which was held at Trafó Gallery, Budapest and then it went to tranzit.org in Bucharest.

REUBEN — It was a two-year project, so it was possible to do various events at various times. During the exhibition, for example, there were different events on several issues: a workshop, study days and a symposium. There was an introductory event at the Whitechapel Gallery in London about the methodology of artists and their response to the ecological crisis and the way their lifestyles and their practices are interconnected.

Throughout the project, we looked at different aspects and we also included the social engagements. We invited some activists to speak, who were dealing with ways to overcome people's alienation from the river, the fact that people ignore the river, even though it flows through their cities. To address this, the Valyo group from Budapest devised various activities, like walks by the river with artist installations, yoga classes, group meetings on the river, a bar which was like a beach and so on. These were various techniques for resensitising people towards the presence of the river in the city.

Then there was Slovak novelist Michal Hvorecký's project on the Danube cruise ships, *Death on the Danube*. He looked at these huge holiday boats on the Danube as sites of the exploitation of workers, which create an experience where people who go on river cruises are also completely cut off from the river. They sit on the boats, being entertained, and are taken by bus to the various touristy events in cities. So what's the meaning of these Danube cruises?

It was really important for us to bring together environmental historians and the environmental humanities in this project through the symposiums. We had environmental historians speaking about how the Danube has changed over the last 300 years from its source to the Black Sea. They pointed out that we shouldn't just see the river as a victim of human interventions and human domination, but instead they stressed the agency of the river and the times it escaped human control.

MAJA — It was interesting to hear about the latest theories of thinking about the river from the point of view of the river itself, to take a fluvio-centric perspective. It was important to note that these ideas were coming from a scientist rather than the artist. Another scientist talked about nuclear energy and the Danube, because nuclear energy is a huge issue in Hungary. There are plans for further development of nuclear power and there's no public discussion about it. The deal that they signed is a state secret for another forty years.

▲
River School, Bucharest Delta (2014).

REUBEN — The British writer Nick Thorpe, in his book *The Danube*, looked at the river in an unusual way, choosing to travel upstream from the Black Sea to the Black Forest and thereby countering the historical narrative developed around journeys from the Black Forest to the Black Sea. He described his journey upstream as a descent into a dark and exotic world: a journey from civilisation in the South East towards the barbarism of Western capitalism in Germany.

MAJA — But there were many different approaches and we also concentrated on some artistic examples, including artists who were active in around '89 in opposing the large-scale Gabčíkovo dam project between Austria, Hungary and Slovakia, which involved civil disobedience.

REUBEN — It was the beginning of the civic movements in Eastern Europe that played a role in the bringing down of communism in Hungary and Slovakia.

MAJA — And it was very much connected to environmental activism at the time, which was interesting from our point of view. We had artists, such as Ilona Németh and József R. Juhász, who were active in the '80s and the '90s, and a younger artist, Axel Braun, revisiting it all again and asking additional questions. We brought all these practitioners with their focus on the river and shared together all these different views and dimensions, working towards an understanding of how people can talk to each other coming from these different disciplines. This was really rewarding.

REUBEN — It was important that we chose not to just to sit in the classroom or the museum and talk about the river but actually to get out there. We had floating workshops and excursions, and also visited the Danube Delta with artists Ursula Biemann and Vlad Basalici. We were interested in what it does to the conversation when you have the company of frogs, or when you can actually see and touch what you're talking about? This is a very specific way to talk about ecology.

BARNABY — Let's talk about Translocal; when did you decide to set up an institute?

REUBEN — In 2005, and we were thinking about what to call our activities. We wanted to have a website and we came up to this idea of Translocal, because it seemed to describe the way we were living and working at the time. We were interested in this idea of being intensely present in a plurality of localities while also adopting a perspective that goes beyond any particular local or national frame.

MAJA — Three years ago, we decided to actually open a space in Budapest as a platform for our work between contemporary art and academia. We developed Translocal as a research centre, which would enable us to do this and at the same time be small and adaptable to collaborations.

We decided to stay with the same name again, but for different reasons, because there are so many spaces in Europe which are over-conditioned by the local or national, and we wanted to have this openness preserved as a position of criticality and mobility. You cannot be closed into one geopolitical space.

Translocal is focused on research, supporting our own research and at the same time enabling others. This was the idea behind sharing our research resources, which are small but developing, by establishing an archive and a library and hosting events. The focus comes from our two long-term interests. One is Eastern European art history and the other is art and ecology. Through the Translocal Institute, we work to bring the two together.

▲
Translocal Institute, Budapest, Experimental Reading Room (2016).

BARNABY — You talk about the autonomy of this space, but also about collaborating with the Central European University in Budapest. What is the relationship between your institute and the University?

MAJA — We have been working with CEU since the first symposium in 2006 and have recently established the Environmental Arts and Humanities Initiative, consisting of taught courses and the programming of relevant events.

REUBEN — In recent years, we've also worked with several local arts universities, including the Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest and especially with their curatorial department and the art theory department. For two years we've had a group of MA students who've come every week or every other week for a whole semester to take part in our seminar on art and ecology and on the Anthropocene as part of the structure of their education. We also work with the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, which in some way is seen as the rival of the Academy of Fine Arts. From our independent position we had the opportunity to work with both of them.

MAJA — All the seminars were open to people who wanted to come and join. This was the agreement we had with the University, that this would be an open class.

REUBEN — We tend to build a core relationship with each institution for each semester but we also have an open call, and there were several people who joined the group because they were interested in the subject. I feel that they got the most out of it, participating more actively because they had a particular interest and attending even though there was no obligation. This dynamic also created something different for the students.

MAJA — So, overall we prefer to see our work with academic institutions as distinct cases of collaboration, because to our knowledge there are very few institutions where employees have the full freedom to be as critical as they may want to be, without restraints. For us, Translocal is about escaping restraints, about opening up to those who we really want to have a conversation with, about trying to spread ideas in the art world, amongst activists and across specialisations. Translocal is a resource and we try to open this up as much as possible.

REUBEN — Exactly, and with this in mind it's no surprise that one of the main spaces here is the library, where we are at the moment. It's a physical space full of books, but the catalogue is also online. People can come across the books, check whether we have it, make an appointment and come and read it here. Or they can use the catalogue as a guide to what literature is out there.

MAJA — We have received grants for developing the library, which we used to create an edited collection focused on our two main fields of interest.

REUBEN — When we decided to found a physical space for Translocal we decided very quickly that we didn't want to have a gallery or exhibition space.

MAJA — Coming from curatorial practice, we know what it takes to run a gallery and programme regular exhibitions. And that's why we decided we wanted the site to focus on the research aspect of our practice, while our curatorial practice entails collaboration with galleries and museums.

▲
Translocal Institute, Budapest, Library (2018).

BARNABY — As your work has a strong focus on art and ecology, how do you work in regard to the environmental impacts of your space and your projects?

MAJA — That's a hard question and we don't have a final answer. We have been asking ourselves this for a long time and we decided to limit our mobility and live frugally while remaining flexible. We tend to go to only one large exhibition in which we are not directly involved per year, a biennial or documenta, for example. We don't do globetrotting, but if there is a meaningful reason for travelling, we travel. We like to travel by train and have organised conferences where all the speakers came by train. But here we are also flexible, we don't go often on intercontinental flights but fly occasionally within Europe when we see it as absolutely necessary.

We did try to calculate our environmental footprint. And we even tried to make a project out of it, thinking about the artwork in terms of its life cycle and in terms of the environmental footprint. But we concluded that artworks resist any kind of numbers and statistics. In assessing the environmental impact of an artwork you could maybe calculate the tons of CO_2 used in its making and showing, but what of its intellectual or experiential impact on people, how do we count awareness, change in habits and thought processes?

REUBEN — An exhibition can have a positive impact, making the public think about other things, consider their values, maybe not to be so materialistic, not to consume so much in the rest of their life; how would you put that into the equation, all these unknowns?

So, in relation to your question about environmental impact of our work we choose to continually deal with it, be aware of it, have it as an issue and discuss it with others.

MAJA — There are sectors of the art world that completely ignore their environmental impact, and the biggest problem in our opinion is the global art market.

REUBEN — When thinking or talking about sustainability we have to look at which sector of the contemporary art world you're talking about and how does that artwork or space fit into other systems, especially economic systems, systems of speculation, systems of inequality. It is not sufficient to just measure CO_2, the social aspect cannot be ignored when you're thinking about ecology.

MAJA — We're interested in the idea of curatorial sustainability, as a counter to the art market and its continual focus on production, mobility and visibility. In terms of the ethics of our work, we believe that we work only with ethical artists, including artists who are even more adaptable than ourselves, who grow their own food, live outside of the big cities and produce wonderful art. They're still part of the art world, but they like to make long-term connections like we do and we work with these artists again and again.

REUBEN — Yes, we work against the suggestion that, as curators, we should be constantly trying to come up with a new idea. Instead we work with an issue over the longer term, often with the same network of trusted people.

MAJA — In our work we feel a sense of solidarity. We have the connection with people who are discovering and exploring something similar around the world. Once you meet these people, artists, curators, art historians, you have this common sense of building something together. This is the idealistic side.

REUBEN — On the less idealistic side, the dominant mechanism of the art world is un-sustainability. It is a mechanism that is not producing the right results because certain values are getting pushed to the top, which are not really worthwhile or

interesting, and other values are being ignored because the system is not recognising their necessity. There is a problem with the mechanism of the art world.

BARNABY — Various writers on art and ecology have suggested that in such a challenging time in regard to environmental issues every artistic practice must necessarily take a stance on sustainability. How far away from this are we?

MAJA — Things are changing. I think that today it's very hard for artists to justify unlimited resources and unlimited budgets that can be applied to whatever they dream up.

REUBEN — Audiences are changing too; sometimes we see something and we can't appreciate any aspect of it because we're so overwhelmed by how unsustainable and wasteful it is. The sense of urgency does change things. I think that whereas before art history could think about environmental art as a certain niche interest within the broader field of contemporary art, as the evidence of catastrophic climate change grows, it becomes harder to separate the environmental aspect of art from other aspects. Just like the way you can't separate the social context of an artwork from its ecological significance.

BARNABY — It's clear that you are taking a stance with your work. How would you describe Translocal's contribution to this change in practice?

MAJA — We are researchers, and we are interested in the idea of environmental urgency and its history. We're talking about urgency now but in '89 people here really understood urgency, in '68 people understood urgency and in the 1940s people understood urgency. As early as 1905, Francé and Simons' book, *Germs of Mind in Plants,* was a publication about the pollution of the environment and about the urgent need to do something about it. Clearly, it's not always the most optimistic position to see that, despite all this urgency, so little has been done, but on the other hand you understand the situation better.

REUBEN — Part of our work is about developing an understanding of how climate change is connected to all kinds of other issues around ecology. This whole discourse around the Anthropocene, which is also related to the discussion on climate change but broadens its register in different ways, leads us to investigate

the complex connections we can draw between the different aspects of the human relationship to the natural environment and the planet.

MAJA — The other objective is to bring the artistic discussion into the more general climate talks discussion, to actually inform scientific approaches. We would like to see the arts and humanities' contribution to the discussion about the environment accepted and taken seriously. It is time to acknowledge that what artists have produced in this field, as knowledge, is equal in importance to what scientists are telling us about climate change. Indeed, there is a connection between the two and a necessity to work together.

Currently, there is a danger that scientists would prefer to see the artists as illustrators. Whereas we think that it's not a question of illustration, but of a different kind of production.

Some artistic practices are activist-oriented and their work can create a huge impact in the locality they're working with. On the other hand, there are artists who are working through drawings. We believe that their practice has the potential to speak as much about important issues as the activist practices. If an artist has an exhibition which shows the depth of their engagement with the issues and presents their vision of the situation, they can also be effective in making people think about climate change, about their way of life or about the problems around sustainability.

REUBEN — We believe that what artists can do around ecology and climate change is not just about illustrating the theories or the problems that other people put out there, but also contributing to how those discussions are formed. Behind this is an acceptance that the kind of knowledge we need to produce in the Anthropocene is somehow negotiated between the sciences, the arts and the humanities. It no longer serves us to have them separated. We can't just rely on scientists anymore to give us all the answers about the planet because they haven't done a very good job of it up till now. There's definitely been something missing. So one of the challenges is to bring these streams of knowledge back together, because part of our alienation from the natural world is related to this historic bifurcation of science from the arts and humanities.

MAJA — In the first symposium we organised in 2006, we had this moment of revelation where during a talk by an environmentalist from the Department of Environmental Science and Policy, a student asked, *'Who's going to save the world? Is it education? Is it the arts? Who's going to save the world?'* The environmentalist said that if we were to get rid of the hundred largest multinational companies it would solve nearly all the world's problems. There was a shocked reaction. You wouldn't expect this from a scientist.

Facing the Unprotectable: Emergency Democracy for Post-Glacial Landscapes

MAJA AND REUBEN FOWKES

The politics of climate change is moving as fast as its science. A heightened sense of uncertainty arises from the alarming realisation that the threshold of irreversible global warming might have already been passed. The gathering speed of polar ice sheet melt and the global retreat of permafrost, as well as the ever more frequent occurrence of previously rare extreme weather events, with droughts, floods and gale-force winds sweeping indiscriminately across continents, are disconcerting manifestations of climate disruption that are a unifying experience for the living generation on the planet. It is increasingly evident that the hard-won recognition of the interconnectedness of species extinction, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, acidification of oceans and atmospheric pollution with anthropogenic climate breakdown also leads to the drawing of political conclusions. Resolutely, it is no longer possible to consider ecological crisis apart from political crisis.

The failure of late liberal governance to sincerely address the causes of climate chaos has been diagnosed as inseparable from the mounting dysfunctionality of the system, observable across its interlinked economic, sociocultural and democratic structures. A process of social stratification based on growing inequalities in the distribution of wealth is destructive of social cohesion and a barrier to effective decision-making on a national and global level. The consolidation of oligarchic power as a result of this polarisation means that, as political scientist Kevin MacKay contends, beneath the democratic façade *'societal decision-making remains captive to the interests of a predatory elite.'*[1] In addition to direct political interference, he

also outlines a wider pattern of oligarchic rule in which *'deception is propagated through corporate media, popular will is undermined, science is manipulated, and our culture is unable to respond effectively to its many crises.'*[2] Recent post-democratic reconfigurations of the political arena are also driven by geopolitical struggles over depleting natural resources and competing attempts to manage and profit from the effects of climate change.[3]

An emerging radical response demands the taking back of political and economic power from elites, while insisting that governments act for public good, not for private profit, and reacting adequately to the magnitude of the challenges posed by climate breakdown. Burgeoning new movements for social and environmental justice seek to initiate a renewal of democratic politics to overcome the paralysis of representative institutions, encapsulated also in the call for the constituting of *'regional, national and international assemblies based upon more robust forms of participatory democracy.'*[4] Disenchantment with the political establishment notably spills over into impatience with the complicity of the large NGOs of the mainstream climate movement, who *'continue to ask politely for gradual policy tweaks'* when it is clear that *'this approach has failed.'*[5] What is required, as the transnational platform Extinction Rebellion declares, is a *'massive emergency mobilization and a just transition'* to a post-carbon economy.[6]

Contemporary artists are active participants in the articulation of such radical ecological and political objectives in the face of an intensifying climate crisis. In particular, artistic practices directed towards magnifying awareness about developments on the frontline of climate change, namely the disappearance of ice caps and thawing of the permafrost, are in the focus of this contribution. It considers the variety of ways in which artists are approaching the predicaments of post-glacial landscapes, such as by visualising the retreat of ice from mountain tops, activating artistic, scientific and wider social circles, and bringing non-human entities into the conversation. Also at issue is how far such practices explore the potential of reinvigorated forms of democratic processes to bring about an ecological reorientation of the global social and political order.

Olafur Eliasson and Minik Rosing, *Ice Watch* (2014). 12 blocks of glacial ice. Installation view, City Hall Square, Copenhagen. Photograph – Anders Sune Berg. © 2014 Olafur Eliasson.

Olafur Eliasson's *Ice Watch* could conceivably be regarded as an explicit climate change artwork, based on the fact that since it was first realised for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Fifth Assessment Report in Copenhagen in 2014, it has been repeated on two further occasions to coincide with climate change summits at COP21 in Paris in 2015 and COP24 in Katowice in 2018. This public art project entailed the installing of twelve large blocks of Arctic ice in the formation of a clock as a tangible reminder that time is running out on efforts to find a solution to global warming. While compelling in its symbolism and sensory effect in imparting to audiences in Western capitals the enormity of the melting of primeval icecaps in distant seas, the work is illuminatingly problematic on a number of levels, as its cautious media presentation betrays.

The most recent edition of *Ice Watch* took place not at the site of the climate summit in Poland, but in front of London's Tate Modern. The accompanying statement conspicuously supplied the weight of each ice block when installed,

along with the information that *'the estimated energy cost for bringing one of these blocks to London is equal to one person flying from London to the Arctic and back to witness the ice melting.'*[7] The implication of this claim is that the carbon footprint of the transport to realise the work is environmentally justified, because with the same amount of emissions many more people could experience the melting of the ice first-hand than if they had to travel to the Arctic. Although this might be a starting point for a discussion about the need to find alternatives for international tourism, nobody is actually arguing that large numbers of people need to travel to see climate change effects in situ, not least because its disastrous effects are now tangible across the world. The question of how to justify taking glacial ice out of its natural environment to create a spectacle of its disappearance was raised already with the work's first and arguably most authentic iteration in 2014. The artist's response at the time did not dwell on the carbon footprint of the refrigeration of the ice during its transport from the Arctic, but, rather, evaded responsibility with the disclaimer that the *'icebergs transported to Copenhagen were fished out of the fjord, that is, they had already calved off the ice cap and had been irreversibly lost to the sea.'*[8]

Noticeably absent from the description of the work on the Tate Modern website was any call to action, apart from referring to the artist's hope that by experiencing *Ice Watch* more people will *'understand the reality of climate change.'*[9] The literalism of a clock ticking down to disaster, which is how the spatial arrangement of the ice blocks was presented in Copenhagen and in Paris, is exchanged here for the less urgent and reassuringly cyclical metaphor of *'the form of an ancient stone circle.'*[10] The acquiescent stance of *Ice Watch* echoes the complacency of an established political order that is unruffled by the multiple crises of the age of climate disorder. And yet traditional democratic mechanisms have consistently failed to compel politicians to reach binding global agreements to combat climate chaos. The roots of this tragic political failure can be traced at least as far back as the Rio Summit of 1992 when, as Naomi Klein convincingly argues, the impact of globalisation on carbon emissions was deliberately excluded from the discussion, as *'climate negotiators formally declared their subservience to the trading system from the start.'*[11] The repeat of *Ice Watch* mirrors the restaging ad infinitum of COP summits that regularly announce new measures with no prospect of enforcement.

Dramatic changes to the cryosphere, the cold zone of the planet where water is frozen into ice or snow, are accelerating at an unprecedented rate with global warming, evident in the fact that seventeen of the hottest years ever registered have occurred in the new millennium. *'The distress signals from our overheated planet are all around us'*, warns Dahr Jamail in *The End of Ice*, with glaciers *'vanishing before our eyes, having shrunk to the lowest levels ever recorded.'*[12] The catastrophe is compounded by the fact that as the disturbingly impermanent permafrost melts, it releases vast quantities of carbon originating in vegetation that absorbed it from the air centuries ago but froze before it could decompose. Much of this organic material is being released back into the atmosphere as frozen regions thaw, constituting one of the unpredictable feedback loops that threaten to nudge the climate towards the tipping point faster than is anticipated in most climate change summit scenarios.

Intimations of anthropogenic impacts on climatic conditions can also be found in the work of artists active at the onset of the Industrial Revolution. The dosage of sunlight breaking through polluted air was the compelling prism through which painters captured the nineteenth-century city. More recently climatologists, in their attempt to estimate the concentration of pollutants in the atmosphere at the time, have also turned to the analysis of historical paintings in search of visual confirmation of scientific observations. For instance, by examining Claude Monet's series of depictions of Charing Cross Bridge they have established a direct correlation between the distance at which buildings are visible in his paintings and measurements of visibility published in the *London Fog Inquiry* of 1901.[13]

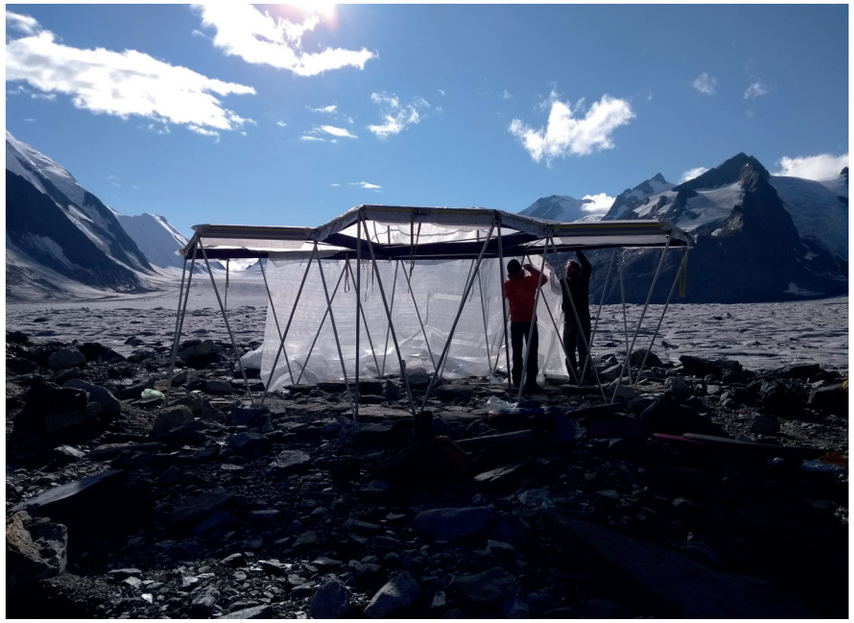
A different kind of evidence was on the agenda of British artist Emma Stibbon when in 2018 she followed in the footsteps of J.M.W. Turner's visit to the largest glacier in France, the Mer de Glace in the Chamonix Valley, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a route that had already been retraced in 1854 by artist and critic John Ruskin. While the older artist, Turner, had first depicted the sublime presence of the Alpine 'sea of ice' in pencil and chalk drawings, Ruskin turned to the daguerreotype to capture the same jagged frozen scenery. For her visit to the site, Stibbon also used early photographic technology – returning, however, not with images of the magnificent glacial landscape that had awed Turner and Ruskin, but with bleak photos of a moraine-strewn terrain. The shocking retreat of the glacier from the position it occupied in the valley a century and a half ago is stark evidence of the dramatic effects of climate breakdown on the highest and coldest places on the Earth.

▲
Plateauresidue (Aljaž Celarc and Eva Pavlič Seifert), video still from *Ex Topia* (2017).

In their work *Ex Topia* (2017), Slovenian duo Plateauresidue (Aljaž Celarc and Eva Pavlič Seifert) addressed the vulnerable state of the Triglav Glacier in Slovenia, which has shrunk in size from 36 hectares to just one hectare over the course of seventy years. They invited a group of participants to gather on the mountaintop and undertake a series of actions designed to awaken their receptivity to the vanishing glacier. The film records eight individuals going through a sequence of listening to a short intervention about ecological interconnectedness and human responsibility in a yurt-like camouflage tent before putting on a ghillie suit to amplify their sense of merging with the environment and setting off to immerse themselves in the post-glacial landscape.[14] Sharing her experience, one interviewee reminisced about an attempt by the local authorities in the 1980s to protect the glacier by banning the construction of ski lifts and restricting skiing on its surface. Whereas thirty years ago there was enough ice to consider turning it into a ski run, today, as the informant put it, *'you need a microscope to find it.'*[15] Testifying to the momentousness of the effects of climate change, she poignantly surmised that due to the immense scale of natural and human forces at work, *'some things cannot be protected.'*[16] This aptly identifies the absurdity of attempts at localised conservation in the face of global effects of climate disruption and emphasises what a profound challenge it poses for the present generation of terrestrials.

The proponents of the *'good Anthropocene'*, who contend that we should not view today's human-dominated geological era as *'a crisis, but as the beginning of a new epoch ripe with human-directed opportunity,'*[17] would opt for a technological fix to the problem of melting ice. Such a strategy has been tried by Swiss villagers living near the Rhône Glacier to protect a historic ice grotto endangered by the warming climate, who have begun to cover the glacier with white blankets every summer in an attempt to slow its rapid retreat.[18] More speculative proposals that seek to cover glaciers with artificial snow or use giant pumps to refreeze Arctic ice are indicative of the technocratic faith in the ingenuity of geoengineering, understood as *'deliberate, large-scale intervention in the climate system designed to counter global warming or offset some of its effects.'*[19] As author Clive Hamilton points out, *'there is something increasingly desperate about placing more faith in technological cleverness,'* when it is precisely the *'unrelenting desire to command the natural world'* that brought industrial civilisation to this impasse in the first place.[20]

This is notably not the path taken by Plateauresidue, who instead created a conducive setting in which participants could gain embodied experience and sensuous knowledge about the state of the glacier, with the expectation that they would pass these insights on to others. In other words, their focus lay in devising participatory strategies to break through the inertia of climate indifference, a collective passivity that is as much of an obstacle to confronting the intractable challenges posed by global warming as more aggressive forms of climate denial and the fostering of chimeric hopes in the prospects of purely technological solutions. While high-tech, top-down methods are favoured by technocratic elites whose interests lie in resisting systemic change to the social and economic order of global capitalism, contemporary artists are co-producers with social movements of alternative platforms for participatory, democratic responses based on more profound societal transformation inclusive of environmental justice. Such initiatives tend to align with explorations of natural solutions to climate disaster, such as rewilding, restoration and *'re-establishing forests, peatlands, mangroves, salt marshes, natural seabeds and other ecosystems.'*[21]



▲
MATZA ALETSCH, Campground, Aletsch glacier, Swiss Alps (2018).

Placing confidence in the '*capacity of a community to come together and to invent the tools of its own emancipation*' was the underlying presumption of Swiss artist Séverin Guelpa's initiative *Matza.*[22] It borrowed its name from a local Alpine tradition that centred on a tree trunk carried around villages in the Upper Valais region to serve as a catalyst for channelling common concerns, agreement upon which was expressed by hammering a nail into the felled tree as a sign of support. The artist salvages this custom from past centuries and enacts a rudimentary form of plebiscitary democracy for contemporary purposes, proposing it as a reinvigorated instrument for the self-determination and empowerment of local communities at a time when mainstream politics is in crisis. To those ends, in his 2014 *Matza Manifesto,* Guelpa outlined the affirmative value of '*the ability of individuals to join forces and pool their strengths and skills,*' to engender '*forms of collective intelligence*' that are '*capable of strengthening citizenship, democracy and self-management by encouraging different ways of collectively reclaiming collective territory.*'[23] These principles were explored in a series of artistic meetings held in locations of environmental and social sensitivity that face specific political and

ecological dilemmas, including the Mojave Desert in the United States, the Kerkennah Islands of Tunisia and the Aletsch Glacier in Switzerland.

The Aletsch Glacier shares the predicament of other permafrost landscapes across the world in that they are amongst the most immediate and dramatic casualties of global warming. *Matza* excursions organised annually by Guelpa, which involve spending days and nights on what remains of the glacial wilderness, were designed to bring a select group of artists and architects into close proximity with the melting ice sheet and provoke direct responses in the form of artworks created in situ using improvised materials. These were accessible to audiences through a testing hike with mountain guides and an exhibition of photographic documentation of the ephemeral works that transmit the inevitable sense of ecological precarity engendered by intimate encounters with endangered frozen landscapes.

▲
Oto Hudec, video still from *Concert for Adishi Glacier,* 8 mins/50 secs (2017).
Courtesy Oto Hudec and Gandy Gallery.

In contrast to these collaborative and participatory artistic initiatives, Slovak artist Oto Hudec's engagement with the glacial landscape appeared more solitary, since the only protagonists in his venture were the artist and the glacier. As the title of the work indicates, *Concert for Adishi Glacier* (2017) was a recital performed one-on-one to the ice in which the intensifying sounds of the artist's guitar and mouth organ attune with the disconcerting gush of meltwater. The film footage, shot from

a discreet distance, does not intrude into the space between the Georgian glacier and the performer, whose back remains turned to the camera to preserve the intimacy of sonic exchange with the non-human entity towering above. Plants growing in the Caucasus mountain sunshine in soil laid bare by the retreating ice are both reassuring signs of the resilience of natural processes and disturbing indicators of the melting of the permafrost.

The realisation that a rise in average temperatures of two degrees or above will *'trigger a variety of world-altering events, including the disappearance of most remaining glaciers'*[24] raises the question of whether the notion of the Sixth Extinction should be expanded to include not just threats to biodiversity through species loss but also the disappearance of natural entities. In that sense, Hudec's impassioned performance, rather than being a requiem for the loss of species alone, seeks to transmit an empathic gesture that recognises the entangled fates of humans, animals, plants and other living organisms, as well as the physical forces and natural phenomena of the Earth. At stake here could also be a reconfiguration of the notion of care, which, in contrast to the promotion by late liberal governance of self-oriented, consumerist and moralising versions of caring, advocates its extension to more-than-human worlds. Theorist María Puig de la Bellacasa suggests, therefore, that we reimagine care as *'an obligation that traverses the nature/culture bifurcation in keeping with the expansive ethos of "human-decentred cosmologies."'*[25]

The conjoining of hopes for ecological and political renewal resides in the cosmopolitical proposition that constituencies other than traditional Western political subjects must be brought into discussions about the future of the planet. To take into account more-than-human interests and voices in reimagined forms of democratic assembly may require the development of novel approaches to representation, but would be an incontrovertible sign of the necessary shift away from pernicious anthropocentrism towards a pluriversal, ecocentric position. That glaciers should also be specifically included in an expansion of legal and constitutional norms was signalled by the recent extension of legal personhood to Himalayan glaciers by an Indian court. This followed shortly on from the pioneering establishment of environmental protection for Patagonian glaciers by the Argentinian Congress in 2010, the first such law enacted anywhere in the world, by recognising them as *'goods of public character'*.[26] The true political gravity of such legal gestures lies in the fact that in order to provide meaningful protection of the rights of vulnerable glaciers, a radical transformation of the global economic and political order is required that may yet avert catastrophic climate disaster.

1 / Quoted on the author's website – http://www.radicaltransformation.ca/chapters-2 (accessed 10 May 2019). See also Kevin MacKay, *Radical Transformation: Oligarchy, Collapse, and the Crisis of Civilization* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2017).

2 / Ibid.

3 / See also Maja and Reuben Fowkes, 'Feeling the Curve of the Earth: Deviant Democracies and Ecological Uncertainties', in *Mutating Ecologies in Contemporary Art,* edited by Christian Alonso (Barcelona: University of Barcelona, 2019).

4 / See Extinction Rebellion's 'Declaration of International Non-Violent Rebellion Against the World's Governments for Criminal Inaction on the Ecological Crisis' (April 2019) – https://rebellion.earth (accessed 10 May 2019).

5 / Ibid.

6 / Ibid.

7 / 'Olafur Eliasson and Minik Rosing Ice Watch: 11–20 December 2018', description on the Tate Modern website – https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/olafur-eliasson-and-minik-rosing-ice-watch (accessed 9 May 2019).

8 / Quoted in Katherine Brooks, 'Artist Melts 100 Tons Of Arctic Ice To Remind You That Climate Change Is Real', *Huffington Post* (29 October 2014) – https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/10/29/artist-melts-100-tons-of-_n_6063550.html? (accessed 9 May 2019).

9 / Ibid.

10 / Ibid.

11 / Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism versus the Climate* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), p. 77.

12 / Dahr Jamail, *The End of Ice: Bearing Witness and Finding Meaning in the Path of Climate Disruption* (New York: The New Press, 2019), extract published in *The Guardian* (8 January 2019) – https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/jan/08/when-the-ice-melts-the-catastrophe-of-vanishing-glaciers (accessed 9 May 2019).

13 / See also John Thornes, 'Cultural climatology and the representation of sky, atmosphere, weather and climate in selected art works of Constable, Monet and Eliasson', *Geoforum* vol. 39 no.2 (March 2008), p.570–580

14 / *Ex Topia,* film installation. Single Channel projection, 37 mins – http://www.plateauresidue.com/ex-topia (accessed 10 May 2019).

15 / Ibid.

16 / Ibid.

17 / Erle Ellis, 'The Planet of No Return: Human Resilience on an Artificial Earth', *Breakthrough Journal no.2* (autumn 2011), p.44. Also available at – https://thebreakthrough.org/journal/issue-2/the-planet-of-no-return (accessed 9 May 2019).

18 / See, for example, Rafi Letzter, 'Every Year, the Swiss Cover Their Melting Glaciers in White Blankets', *Live Science* (7 March 2018) – https://www.livescience.com/61951-swiss-glacier-blanket.html (accessed 9 May 2019).

19 / Clive Hamilton, *Earthmasters: The Dawn of Climate Engineering* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p.1.

20 / Ibid., p.199.

21 / 'A natural solution to the climate disaster', collective letter to the Editor, *The Guardian* (3 April 2019) – https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/apr/03/a-natural-solution-to-the-climate-disaster (accessed 9 May 2019).

22 / *Matza Manifesto* – https://matza.net/matza-manifesto (accessed 9 May 2019).

23 / Ibid.

24 / Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p.113.

25 / María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds* (Chicago/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), p.218.

26 / Jorge Daniel Taillant, *Glaciers: The Politics of Ice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.311.

Cultivate

(Chapter Two)

INLAND

FERNANDO GARCÍA-DORY

INLAND is an arts collective, dedicated to agricultural, social and cultural production, and a collaborative agency. It confronts various problems of a system that is collapsing at its environmental, cultural and financial levels–affecting both the planet and the individual–by formulating critical tools and applying them through experimental practice. It builds on the premise that the rural offers a physical and cultural space for the generation of diverse ways of life that differ from the hegemonic model. These other livelihoods are aware of their partial insertion in all established networks of exchange and aim to generate enough creative mass to question those power dynamics, as well as the current relationship between centre and peripheries.

INLAND is based on a sort of three-word manifesto: art–agriculture–territory. It speaks from the silenced other realities resisting erasure. It proposes collective encouragement for the reclamation of the means of livelihood. As a cultural artefact it uses all representational tools at hand to expand–beyond the contexts it intervenes in–what is produced in the instant and immediacy of the everyday. It is in constant contradiction between the tactics of camouflage adopted by its antagonistic work–which mimics conventional art forms and institutionalised habits–and the open exposure of its dissent and the alternatives that it promises and tests.

As a para-institution, *INLAND* is working together, against and beyond existing institutions. It is structured around different axes and lines of work–from training to commercialisation–that feed back on each other and become a self-sustained model that adapts and replicates.

INLAND's value lies in the applicability of its method. It promotes cells in specific rural locations–some of which remain undisclosed–while operating at a supranational level, setting up agencies in different countries to affect agrarian and cultural policy frameworks in Europe.

2010 — PRESENT DAY

Interview with Fernando García-Dory

BARNABY DRABBLE

September 2016:

BARNABY DRABBLE — Hello, Fernando – thanks for agreeing to this interview. I want to focus on your project *Campo Adentro,* which in English is called *INLAND*. Maybe you can just quickly describe the project to me. Give me some idea of when you started and what activities are involved?

FERNANDO GARCÍA-DORY — Well, thank you for your interest in my work. If we focus on *INLAND,* I would begin by saying it's a project about an organisation. It was started in 2010, and revolves around the process of creating a structure, an entity, that is both a social movement and a start-up company.

The project exists consciously in between these contradictory statements. In doing so it is mirroring the current existence of the artist today, in which we are, on the one hand, aiming to transform our world and making claims that we can see things, understand them and even change them. On the other hand, we are very much embedded in the whole frame of established relations within the contemporary art system, which is actually part of the broader industry, of entertainment, accumulation of cultural capital and monetarisation of creativity under the label of the cognitariat.

BARNABY — What position does the project take within those conditions that you've just described?

FERNANDO — I think that exists within these two spaces at the same time. To start with the first, the social movement is a space that welcomes various peer practitioners, including artists and rural agents who want to collaborate and to work together in an experimental encounter between the rural, the concept of territory and contemporary art. In this sense we believe that art as a practice can be challenged by a new context, frame of reference and commissioner, which we can call the rural.

I think of rural communities as indigenous cultures, or what is left of them. In different ways, depending on the circumstances, I am interested in how artists can make something pertinent and valid within this set of relations that is not just about people or culture, but actually about an ecosystem that has emerged from cultivation. An ecosystem that relies as much on the human species as the human species relies on it. The objective of this social movement is to create a platform for collaboration where we can confront the artist with the rural, but also the rural with art, recalling embodied forms of practice that allow a specific understanding of how we live within the world. How we transform and cultivate and care is rarely articulated or expressed, because many of the cultural forms of rural communities have been suppressed, neglected, dismissed, or frozen in the form of folk. My hope is that by creating this potential alliance between cultural producers and rural food producers and land stewards, we can find a common purpose and aesthetics that could drive the transition of our societies towards sustainability, which we perceive as a need.

On the other hand, it's a start-up company in the sense that it aims to successfully occupy a space in the art world that functions with many of the elements of the capitalist system. We are critical about the circumstances we are working with, but as a start-up we are driven by the notions of product-oriented constant promotion, hyper-availability, hyper-mobility, self-exploitation, profit, escalation and expansion. All these ideas of the global player are there, and we want to place them up front as a way of being both ironic and bold.

▲
Interdisciplinary workshops as part of *INLAND's New Curriculum,* Cantabria, Spain (2018).

BARNABY — With *INLAND,* you are not dealing with wilderness, but with agricultural land, or the countryside, as it is referred to in English.

FERNANDO — Yes, the full project started in 2010 because of a geographical circumstance. I grew up between a remote rural location in the mountains of Spain and the metropolis of Madrid. From early on in my work as an artist, I was guided by the feeling that there was a gap in contemporary cultural conversations about what the rural could bring or offer to a conversation that seemed exclusively urban.

I felt that this omission was impoverishing culture in general and at the same time this gap pointed to the relative invisibility of the disappearance of peasant cultures. There was so little said or done about the progressive erasure and displacement of the possibilities of these forms of life. I believe that that's due to very specific political and economic interests as part of a broader historical process. I foreground the rural in my practice because I believe it's the site in which human communities interact most consciously with the biosphere. By this I mean, rural traditions most frequently see our species interacting with the biosphere in a way that is focused on the survival of both.

At this moment, there's growing environmental concern about how our model of development is literally built on planetary destruction. We are realising that our current relationship to our biosphere appears to be driven by suicidal instinct. For me, however, I don't believe that the counterbalance to that is to be found in a romantic projection of the idea of untouched nature, a pristine wilderness that should be free from human agency. Here I refer to ideas connected with a certain set of ecosophical preferences, which I associate with deep ecology.

To deal with this, I prefer to look at social ecology as an ideological reference. Social ecology for me involves the organisation of citizens in local forms of government, along the lines of what is called libertarian municipalism. With *INLAND* I look to forms of economy and cultural production that are related to this. In this sense, I look at how peasant and indigenous people approach organisation, in the form of commons and in the form of exchange markets. Biocentrism is dangerous; I try to think that the way forward is to understand that we are on this planet, and we cannot just avoid that fact. It's better to find a way in which we care for it and cultivate it.

BARNABY — You've introduced the goals of and the philosophy behind *INLAND*. Can you describe what you actually do as an artist to manifest these questions and encourage these encounters between artists and people still living and working in rural areas with indigenous knowledge?

FERNANDO — Sure, *INLAND* works as a platform for collaboration and is developing a series of lines of action – ways of doing, if you like. It's a system that we also refer to as a para-institution in the sense that it mimics institutional power and parasites it, creating frictions that render hierarchies visible, while being self-sustained and self-replicating.

I like to use as a reference the model of Hezbollah – that is, an organisation that effectively runs a state within a state, with a healthcare system, an education system, a construction system, etc. If we can put the contentious ideological questions aside, this model is inspiring. Our para-institution, *INLAND*, is working on knowledge production. We have study groups and we develop seminars, for example, with galleries and art centres in London and in Madrid, as well as organising discussions at a local level. We transmit the knowledge we gather in the form of publications, produced by our own publishing service, and we are also offering training programmes based on this knowledge, which grounds the ideas in practice.

For example, we have a Shepherd School that was started in 2004 in the Spanish mountains to teach young people about a particular way of life, where the syllabus is composed of the technical and the experiential knowledge of the pastoralists. We also run the New Curriculum, where we are taking a village we are recovering as a sort of living laboratory, where students from different disciplines, from universities all around Europe, come together to exchange ideas, learning new skills, while applying their knowledge to the place.

BARNABY — You're working with different communities worldwide, but within Spain you have a specific site?

FERNANDO — That's right. *INLAND* is working in both cultural production and agricultural production. Our agricultural work includes farming and traditional crafts, while our cultural work involves producing commissioned projects, running the publishing house and making exhibitions. Both of these forms of work connect, and they coexist in three or four locations at the moment. One of these is the village we are recovering in the mountains of Northern Spain; here we're producing cheese, and we are also using the summer common pastures. We are now introducing other components in the agricultural system to have a more diverse production according to the area, like apples, small fruits and berries.

Secondly, we have a space in Madrid, in a building that has been given to us, which we call the Center for Approaching the Countryside. It's a building that has a residency space for artisans and agricultural practitioners; we offer this as a place where they can stay if they need to do things in the city. This might give us the opportunity to combine a talk about their work on agriculture with a visit to lobby the central government. We also have a canteen, a shop, a printing workshop and an archive in that house.

Thirdly, we have a space in Majorca. Focusing mostly on crafts, hosting different workshops and looking at rural traditions in the Tramuntana mountains. This space is considering how these practices can be resilient in the face of flows of people and capital, and how they can continue to produce by themselves.

Finally, we are also working on empty allotments in Madrid, one near an arts centre, where we have a greenhouse classroom and stage various activities, and another on the outskirts of the city. The allotments are about working with the neighbourhood on places to encounter the rural in the city.

These are the main sites of our work but we also operate globally. Recently we have carried out projects in Istanbul, Chengdu, São Paulo and Buenos Aires. These are spaces where *INLAND* is asked to produce, to present or to appear within the logic of the global flow of contemporary art. We agree to take part, while knowing very well how it works. If *INLAND* was a cultural production collective doing these events alone, it would struggle to achieve its aims of producing a change in the way in which the art system usually works. But we use these invitations to propose another form of relation to production, distribution and consumption, and we feel this is effective because it teams up with localised long-term work of the communities-of-practice we promote in the spaces described above.

We are trying to run both lines of work in parallel and also to balance the economies from both sides. At the moment, around 30% of the economy comes from land-related activities, and 70% from our cultural-based activities.

BARNABY — When you mention income from land-related activities, what does this entail?

FERNANDO — At the moment we make and sell cheese. Currently we have fifty goats and four cows, so we produce between 450 and 600 kilos of cheese a year, although the summer was quite cold in the north of Spain and the animals gave less milk than expected, so we'll have less cheese this year. The cheeses are available in Madrid through our art network and we sell it too in the local context where it is produced. The prices are very different but we like to sell it locally, as a wink to the art system.

We now have the idea to move towards a system of an internal currency, which we are calling the Cheesecoin and developing together with artist Hito Steyerl. For example, we aim to offer a monthly basket that will include our products, the cheese and other things, plus works from artists who come to stay in the village. You subscribe and get a certain number of Cheesecoins with which you can pay for those products. You can also get Cheesecoins by working on the rebuilding of the village.

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Interdisciplinary workshops as part of *INLAND's New Curriculum,* Cantabria, Spain (2018).

BARNABY — You keep referring to yourself as 'we' in these situations, and this clearly means that you are collaborating with a number of different people. Is this a fixed collaboration? Would you consider yourself to be the most important person in the collective? How does this 'we' function?

FERNANDO — Well, this is a crucial question for the project. From the beginning I wanted the project to be about an organisation, so it was important that we explore collective forms of agency. As a result, *INLAND* is in a state of constant negotiation, with ongoing discussion of how we find our models of governance, take decisions, dedicate our time and energy and gain satisfaction from our work. I started the project myself so it is inevitable that there is a certain influence on how the collective works. One of these questions is how horizontal you can be as an organisation when you have so many people coming through the project. For example, we have welcomed more than 200 students in the Shepherd School and more than 100 people in the study groups. So the project works as a testing ground and form of transition from a single-author form of creation to a shared agency, in a process of de-individualisation.

Despite the numbers, there was, however, a distillation of individuals who felt close enough to each other to commit themselves to setting up the legal entities behind *INLAND:* a nonprofit association and a cooperative. There are nine members at present, and over the three years of being legally constituted, there have been some changes in that core group. That depends on the level of commitment, the level of satisfaction with what *INLAND* can offer.

I can explain a little bit more of how *INLAND* is organised internally: basically, it is what we call a 'village-centric meritocracy'. The people who put more time into it and live in the village take more decisions, including about budgets, and the people from the second circle can profit from the different opportunities that *INLAND* has offered but are less involved in decision-making. Participants of both circles are paid certain percentages along the lines of time and engagement, with some part of this reserved to invest in the land and buildings.

INLAND doesn't work as a company to pay salaries, but rather it distributes wealth and welfare. If you join *INLAND* and you decide to live in the village, you have everything covered there. If you decide to live in the city, we have the building to host you. You can also circulate between the city and the countryside and this is part of the idea. Essentially it is a system promoting a transition, a possibility for cultural practitioners to start to work collectively in relation to the land.

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Interdisciplinary workshops as part of *INLAND's New Curriculum,* Cantabria, Spain (2018).

BARNABY — You've already said that your goal is social change. *INLAND* focuses on issues of our relationship to land, and thereby environmental issues. How do you attempt to effect change through the activities of *INLAND*.

FERNANDO — Well, first, I wouldn't separate social change from ecological change, because for me the social always relates to ecological cycles. It is hard to be specific about how my work tackles the question of climate change, for example, because I don't like to look at the question partially. I never felt that one problem was more or less serious or relevant than another. For me, the alienation of the human being within capitalism is as destructive as the way we are depleting resources in the planet, warming the atmosphere and extinguishing biodiversity, and this relationship is causal.

Ideas dating back to the Enlightenment promote an understanding of the human species as separate from the rest, with the capacity of analysing, dissecting and reorganising natural resources for our own profit. The idea of growth that underlies our modern view of economy is imagined without taking limits into account. And these assumptions, together with the techno-scientific capacities that we have developed, place us now at a crossroads with uncertain futures.

But climate change is only one consequence of this specific socio-ecological relation. There are many others, and I think that even if it seems too complex and too broad to try to tackle those all at once, we need to do so. In my work, I don't feel I can talk about one single consequence such as climate change without mentioning soil erosion, loss of biodiversity, social inequality or pollution. This crisis is multidimensional, so I don't focus specifically on one aspect in my work.

BARNABY — It seems that the project carries a certain optimism. The way you described it as a start-up gives me a sense of a beginning of something, while as a social movement there is the call to build or rebuild something. How do you frame that within the way you present *INLAND?* Is the project inspirational and visionary or is it more a project of informing us about loss?

FERNANDO — It is all these things, because it cannot be self-congratulatory and there can be no optimistic acceptance of the facts. I think the project has to show the possibility of a way forward, while observing the limits and the difficulties we find on that path; as I stated at the beginning of the interview, *INLAND* is about the contradictions we exist in. The Shepherd School project is called the *Kingdom*

of Utopia, in the sense that it is a space that tries to work as a scale model. Scale models could potentially become something bigger, but they can also just be toys.

Often, with *INLAND,* we play with the idea of a movement that has become a cult. Observing the often suffocating evolution of what was once an ideal, a vanguard or a revolutionary movement, we are always thinking about how history has dealt with those claiming to have a way forward. So many have ended up somehow stalled, wrapped up in their own flags.

▲
A member of the *INLAND* collective, German biologist Martha Baba, tends sheep on the outskirts of Madrid.

BARNABY — You've talked a little bit about these two main areas of activity brought together by *INLAND,* that of the artist and that of the people working in rural areas. Who do you consider to be the audience for your work?

FERNANDO — Well, we talk and act in many contexts and engage many audiences, From precarious cultural workers in the cities, the art world in general or rural communities in different places. I'm working with a global alliance of indigenous pastoralists or nomads, and European shepherds, for example. In the French Pyrenees, running one of the shepherds' meetings, participants were quick to

understand that it's possible to make art and make cheese at the same time. When I explained why we think art might be important in rural areas, they understood it and were quick to see their activities and mine coming together in the making of cultural proposals.

In addition to these connections, we work with six universities in different programmes with students studying landscaping, renewal, the arts and eco-design, for example. I got to know these programmes because they were interested in themes I am working with. For example, people from landscape engineering were including arts in their teaching, while fine arts teachers were working on an ecological focus for art production. This relation to students from different disciplines developed through the years. Together we ended up making a committee for artistic, scientific and vernacular knowledges.

BARNABY — When you talk about these cultural forms which are existent in these communities and related to these rural practices, can you name what these are?

FERNANDO — There are the ones that we can still see today, often perceived as echoes from the past, and there are the ones that can be reinvented. Rural communities are rich in cultural forms because for generations they have been accumulating good practices, and eliminating bad ones in a process of trial and error. Examples might be how they go about preserving seeds or how they work with particular breeds of livestock. These forms are in danger of being lost, because in Europe we have moved from 60% of the population working in the countryside in the 1950s to 2.5% today.

BARNABY — So, these cultural forms you're talking about are not, for example, traditions of songs or handcrafts, but more agricultural heritage?

FERNANDO — Yes, but in addition you have popular art, celebrations and rituals, which are tied up with music, costumes, crafts and ornaments. This is not to say that all aspects of rural culture are desirable. These spaces have a history of exclusion, patriarchy and rigid morals, sometimes influenced by coercive powers such as the Church, etc. Our task is to see which cultural elements make sense in the process of making something better, seen from where we are now.

BARNABY — In the projects in Majorca, you mentioned you were looking at craft. Does that have some relation also to production of ornamental objects, pottery and other things?

FERNANDO — Yes, but the aspects of rural culture we're also looking at are linked to cultivating the land itself – for example, drystone walling. We are considering that young people could learn this as a sustainable way of working with the landscape. Also growing or gathering fibres for basket-weaving, and wood and food crafts related to the olive.

BARNABY — I know you're very itinerant. You have talked about projects in China and Brazil. How do you balance your carbon production with an environmentally engaged practice?

FERNANDO — I work by organising my calendar. I have stayed in the village from May to mid-September for the last few years. In those months, I mostly travel around seven kilometres every two days, going to the post office. Then, I do projects that involve travelling and these take place mostly over the winter, when there is less to do in the village. I usually take two months a year for projects elsewhere in the world that may require long-haul travel. But I detest flying. I prefer to travel by train and where possible I do. For example, we are sitting in Basel, where I am giving a workshop, and I travelled here overland from Spain, by train and shared cars.

It is difficult and sad that sometimes the people who commission my work say, *'Well you're asking me for 300 euros for a train, and we have flight for eight euros.'* Now, unlike others, I'm happy to devote time, but it's frequently a question of how far the commissioner is willing to pay. Ten hours by train is a pleasure for me, productive time, but two hours by plane is terrible.

BARNABY — When we first met, we were in involved in a discussion in Stockholm about art as a life practice. It visited the idea that an artistic practice could also be a way of living. I think also the vision of you working and living between the village and the city provides us with a clear example of this approach and yet, interesting as your practices are, of course, there are contradictions. It seems to me that there are different tensions within the way you're designing your practice. What do these tensions point to in terms of how we can operate critically?

FERNANDO — I think it is about applying the transition we believe has to work for our planetary system to our everyday life and to our own professional possibilities and capacities. This is a practice. For me, struggling with these contradictions and still managing to stay several months a year in a place far from the global art circuit and from the metropolis is an attempt to see how that could work for our whole system. It is clear that this place is culturally rich, offering more than enough to satisfy my needs and interests.

That tension we're facing is one of how we put our energy and creativity into averting destructive tendencies as far as possible without ceasing to create; it's about creating a practice that is enriching, economically feasible and sustainable. As the saying goes, you don't change something by confronting it, but by making something that renders it obsolete. This is what I'm trying to do.

A Conversation as a Map*

FERNANDO GARCÍA-DORY WITH ANDREA PHILLIPS

ANDREA PHILLIPS — In the text you sent me that reflects on governance in and as a consequence of *INLAND*, you refer to a range of historical practices and thinkers – from the American anti-authoritarian ecologist Murray Bookchin to the British social reform movement the Fabians – as somehow precursors to forms of governance that you are both practising and observing/learning from. What is interesting about these sources is at once obvious, given they have nothing to do with art in the main, and more complicated, for they are rooted in understanding long-term epistemological and ontological change within systems.

FERNANDO GARCÍA-DORY — Yes, in fact this interest in non-art-based political references comes from my early understanding that in order to create the conditions of a 'good life' (a vision coming from Sumak Kawsay, an indigenous principle of a harmony of the human species with the planet), and art within it, we would need to transform the whole paradigm of growth inherited from the techno-scientific industrial capitalist logic that was expanded in the age of empires. That paradigm is cultural, is a *Weltanschauung,* but it also involves economic and political arrangements. Ecology and economy come together, the science and knowledge of how to organise the *oikos,* the house. Therefore, the cultural conversation would require at this moment a practical projection, and our contributions as artists might have to be useful in that sense.

Beyond the notion of the artist as one who sits and dreams and writes poems or makes artefacts for contemplation, while others organise the world, there is the need to reposition that 'elevated' activity within other production and circulation conditions different from the current art system. As an example of this double existence of the artist's condition, Courbet was in charge of the Cultural Assembly during the Paris Commune and others also started their own micro-systems, educational as with the Bauhaus or manufacturing as with William Morris.

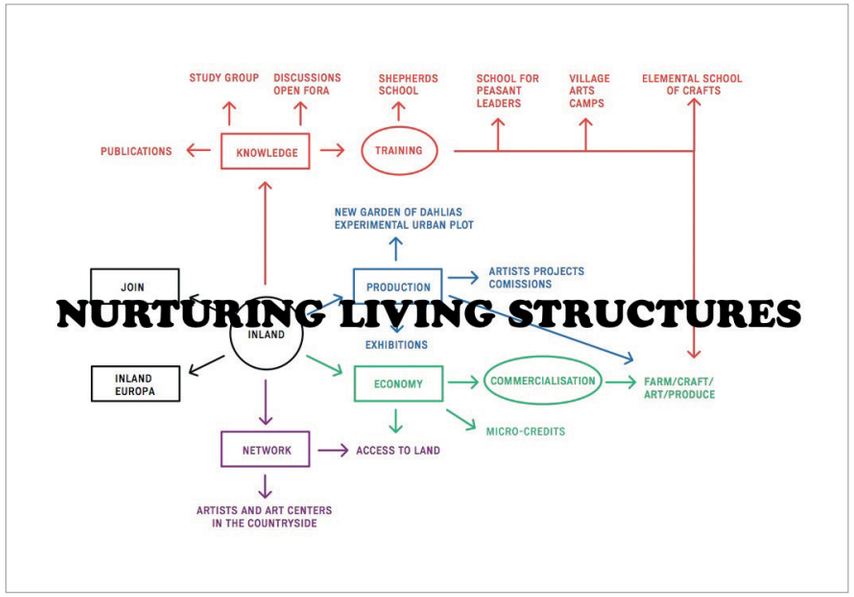
It is also true that often avant-gardes just ended up writing manifestos. I think it is interesting to see how ideas can be embodied in functional forms, social structures: what are the limitations, how far can that impulse take shape and what can we learn on the way?[1] It is also a way for me to reflect on the backlash of utopian and critical thinking, and be able to perhaps foresee what could come in the future.

ANDREA — What do you mean by the backlash of utopian and critical thinking? Are you referring to the market-oriented art world in which consumers are not necessarily interested in complex ideas, or a broader concern for a social devaluation of rigorous argument (that can be seen in the rise of centrist parties across Europe, for example, in party politics)? It is interesting that the Fabian Society, to whom you refer, founded in 1884, initiated the British Labour Party and was interested not only in what we might understand as conventional modes of political organisation but through this argued for universal healthcare and a minimum wage. They also had a profound influence on many decolonising states in the wake of formal British colonialism. How can art play a part in this differently attuned mode of political change?

FERNANDO — Those utopian formulations of modernity led in some cases to suffocating impositions and consequently to that postmodern retreat and false neutrality in the form of political disengagement. The scale of the required change, given the ambition and also the status quo, demanded integrated and vertical highly technocratic solutions, the best-known example being in the Soviet Union. Again, the coordination and cooperation of smaller units that avoid confrontation can eventually allow a heterogeneity of solutions, of trials and attempts. Art can playfully set the cultural conditions to sustain, as substrate, those cases, or free zones in cultural, and yet also economic, terms. Is the last bound up with what is left of the sacred?

ANDREA — I understand the sacred here as a historically and geographically shaped form of living together within ecologies of customs. But linked to this you also seem to be talking about two things: firstly, scale (what is often termed the micro-political but also could be understood as the shared allotment or the village school); secondly, protected zones of experimentation. This may be understood as *INLAND's* techné.

FERNANDO — If as artists we take the responsibility of manufacturing and fixing ideas in reality, we already take the chance to improve on the imperfection. In this way, ideas can really exist, and be not just 'representation' but presentation. Ultimately, when I think that the only realm of existence of art is representation, then it might be worth proposing scale models, representation of social forms that could exist at another scale. *INLAND* could be seen as a scale model of a state, or, beyond that term, of a social structure, productive also in economic and cultural terms.



▲
INLAND (2010–present day), *Nurturing Living Structures*, diagram.

The materialisation of this idea of systems of other institutions (a school, a market, a government body) could work as a reinforced catalytic system, as we can observe in biochemical processes, by which we create the structures that sustain them. And also, give a point of origin to new hybrid and unexpected forms. For example, the idea of collective art production in relation with materiality other than the digital could form other cultural expressions we can't yet foresee.

ANDREA — Do you mention the digital since many of the communities you work with in *INLAND* do not have a primary use-value for its mechanisms?

FERNANDO — I think the digital as a realm of representation and sphere of communication is a powerful tool that is challenging the state of evolution of the human species. Constant connectivity and virtual worlds mean as well that we are less present. People feel unrest about that, but all the social media work is being fuelled by the need for interaction and acceptance of our species. So we live in times of tension, of contradiction. In the parts of the planet where the digital is more extended, many people look for ways and techniques for reconnecting with their bodies, and all sorts of awareness–attention schools, such as the 'mindfulness' wave. Usually these are consumption options and aspects of lifestyles.

Sensible people, artists, are more and more in need of recovering a material realm of existence. Hackers bring their specialised knowledge on programming and different technologies back to its primary use-value by working with the farmers or rural communities with specialised knowledge of another kind (inter-species, eco-systemic growth cycles in a common and practical sense). In this exchange lies a symbiotic relation: both expand their experience of the world and sense of satisfaction. This was the idea behind my proposal in 2004 to create a P2P seed exchange system through a self-programmed and self-managed virtual seed bank connecting seed savers in different locations. Today we see initiatives such as Unmonastery or Open Source Ecology that are actually dealing with the notion of de-scaling in the face of collapse.

Now, probably more than ever, we need these micro-systems that allow other forms to exist, so they can be seen as other possibilities beyond the hegemonic model. Think of Beuys creating the International Free University or a Green Party: they opened up the idea of how a university could work, or how a state could function or dictate policies.

We don't have to reinvent the wheel for that. We can take ideas from the past and observe what is almost gone, as with the peasant cultures in Europe, and what is very marginal yet survives, as with indigenous worldviews. We can then consider–from the perspective of our contemporary challenges–what they offer today, how they connect also with new developments, how they would be reinterpreted in light of the new material conditions of existence and information flows and technologies. This is basically what agro-ecology is doing: combining adequate technologies for fungi reproduction and symbiotic bioengineering of soil and knowledge of, for example, Andean cultures. Or maybe, the current interest in crafted foods in contemporary lifestyles, and other forms of living and being, by cultivating those practices.

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Interdisciplinary workshops as part of *INLAND's New Curriculum,* Cantabria, Spain (2018).

ANDREA — The symbiotic relation between such lifestyle choices and contemporary forms of flexible and inventive capitalism is, however, hard to avoid. It would seem to me that the difference between *INLAND* and less sustainable 'eco-art' projects is precisely this form of realism: how to convert the lifestyle choices of those that can afford to make them into pragmatic rural relations. The Shepherd's School is an example of this. Yet it is a high-risk ideology–you have talked about creating multinational chains, for example. In this way you are decoupling the rural from the local. You also raise the possibility of marketing artistic proposals (and their promulgation) on a national and potentially transnational scale (going back to your reference to Beuys). This raises questions for the ways in which contemporary arts institutions are currently run, and the way in which they could act as mediators in a chain of ecological production.

FERNANDO — Ultimately, socially engaged art, or radical relational art, or critical public art, or environmental collaborative artworks, or even social sculpture, if we can label the cultural phenomenon these days as such, appear to me as a medium, not as an end. A longer conversation would be needed to define these cultural constructions. Are all the terms mentioned referring to the same practice? It seems also a field of quick change, in mutation, and not monolithic, but with shades. Is it a 'movement' as conceptualism was? Is it a genre? Is it a trend as media art?

Socially engaged art is subject to all the institutionalised art constraints you mention, all those parameters and validation mechanisms. And it is especially affected by them, an elephant in a glass house.[2] Socially engaged art appears to have a broader ambition to substitute the very integrated formal or conceptual art forms that claim to have no sociopolitical role (the now historical *l'art pour l'art* sector, with a huge set of economic interests). Maybe this field of socially engaged art is just a new set of parameters to define what would be pertinent to call art today, which criteria (redefining the notions of who creates, what for, how it manifests...).

ANDREA — ...Except that the huge set of economic interests that you mention has already found ways to financialise socially engaged art in extremely profitable ways...

FERNANDO — For me, these projects in this field focus on the possibility of creating the conditions for other production. But its promises will exhaust themselves unless they take the form of a vehicle. The para-institution, for example, is not a genre or a final form; it is more a stage in a process of transformation. The goal is to be able to create the conditions of a quotidian experience for a transformative art–an art that breathes and has a sense of those specific contexts' practice, not just of representation. A system of local bounds and reality, not of global dispersion and figuration. So for me, the creation of a para-institution allows for a superior, or more fit for surviving, form of art in a toxic environment such as the institutionalised art world sometimes appears to be. I am invited, for example, to a biennale, to work for a context I hardly know, with many constrictions in terms of time for engagement, resources, scope, presentation... aspects in which the artist has almost no control, and even the curator, or even the biennale structure does not, because they also respond to a broader and more complex cluster of interests and institutions: government, sponsors, media, etc. In those conditions one is probably condemned to bring some spectacular appearance of some sort, in order to secure a segment of the attention economy of a visual media dynamic that is fast, ruthless, predatory, voracious. Then the artist is supposed to plug out to the next project. What is the coherence and continuity in such a succession of ephemeral art explosions? For a secular studio artist it would be a body of work, an oeuvre. For a more realistic and contemporary form of artist (closer to the notion of cultural producer, self-manager), a career.

Career etymologically comes from 'to run', also road and vehicle. It obviously refers to race and involves mobility and speed, and competition. And of course, competition is associated with success and defeat and individual choices for that aim. In all this set of institutionalised forms, how can an art that is supposed to promote collaboration, a process of awareness more than an object, direct exchange more than represented outcome, and many other contradictory aspects, survive and have other forms of continuity?

The para-institution allows me to differentiate the intention from the author. It goes beyond the individual. It can be an agency that can be an umbrella for other art forms to appear–without having to submit to the established institution of art–with a power balance in which the artist and the creation will always be interdependent. For example, for the 2015 Istanbul Biennial I proposed an installation called *INLAND Turkey Extension Agency*. It tactically used the event constrictions by discussing both the sustained durational impulse of *INLAND* and its vision

(propaganda) as well as connecting with four case studies on current relations with territories and models of development in Turkey. The visitors could speak to women from a Kurdish crafts cooperative that *INLAND* connected with, other new co-ops, and also with hackers such as Ben Vickers to exchange ideas about a possible internal credit card system. They could also travel from the past, present and future of the cultural position of the rural in Turkey, through the utopian garden city and village republic plans of Ataturk, to the resistance peasant communities are posing to mega-infrastructures. It echoed existing situations shaped as case studies (often unknown to national and foreign audiences) that could be connected to what *INLAND* has been doing in Spain for example. So there was a dialogue between the 'external visitor' and the 'local case', with visitors being invited to take action and artists to look at these cases as possible frames of work. *INLAND* then operates as a replicable system, hopefully offering some inspiration. The room was also transformed: new colours and materials made it more warm, using cheap street market bags as cushions, pink and blue carbon accounting paper used by co-ops, printed with iconic images from farming manuals and also logos and brands of the movements, and a modular eatery-cum-classroom and self-built furniture. The Ayran bar with free hot drinks invited people to take time to look at and discuss things.

ANDREA — So, I understand this network of co-ops and knowledge exchanges as well as forms of solidarity between producers in Turkey and those involved in *INLAND*. But what about the biennial itself? I understand that you use it to help with your work infrastructurally in situ and to garner publicity, but is this not a missed opportunity? Or rather, should you not also challenge the infrastructure of the biennial itself, which has no commitment to the co-ops? How could the network or alliance between the institution (here, the biennial) and its 'para' (here, you and the co-ops) become a mode of sharing skills of imagination and organisation? Another way of putting this question is to ask: who has the right/access to autopoiesis? As the author, you do. The biennial curator does too. But how about those in the co-ops as well as the many minor cultural workers on short-term contracts who produce the biennial?

FERNANDO — If I understand your question, your point refers to how the evolving nature of the para-institution (that is created from and to benefit the art producer, adapted to the existing reality of an art system that places the producer often in

a vulnerable and subordinated position yet bridging other possible forms of creation and reproduction, valid for a post-art-system collapse) can also serve as reference and exchange with the institution (academy, museum, gallery, etc.). I think it can when the institution is ready for its deconstruction or unlearning. The access to autopoiesis is for those who commit to explore.

The critical issue is the flow regime between these communicating vessels, in terms of the balance between them, and also how the institution can perform in two ways: efficient and 'authorised' (in the sense of legitimated by a well-careered individual or art system authority) and also collective, open, adaptable, and nurturing for the ones that take part in it. If too much attention is placed on the enactment within the evental economy of the art world, the para-institution can become just a skin or shell, an empty representation or appearance of an institution, not a functional para-institution. The established institution – the gallery, the museum – is interested in this form, as a sort of cannibalistic, parasitic approach: you absorb the qualities of that innovative art understanding while you deactivate and keep it powerless, dependent, eventually disposable. That is, until the next innovative art proposal appears, as a quality to be acquired, only in its appearance.

Therefore we see multiplying examples of schools, universities, museums (note that they usually focus on educational institutions, as it is a form of immaterial economy), etc., in the titles for artworks (wishing to acquire a para-institutional status) that are actually not rooted or aiming to survive the scope of the show.

Sometimes, but not so often, the artworks are interested in economic institutions (I recall the *Time/Bank* e-flux ran for documenta 13, or the corporate-like forms of SUPERFLEX). When an artist amasses enough cultural and material capital, it becomes an institution itself (like Olafur Eliasson's studio with 100 staff members, as well as a canteen and research institute and corporate spin-offs such as Little Sun).

ANDREA — Precisely. I recognise that it is a difficult task to deinstitutionalise ourselves, or, in my terms, to take on institutions and change them internally. As you know, this means taking on the challenge of the less exciting, less glamorous work of budgeting, fundraising, dealing with equal opportunities, making sure that staffing is based on equality, looking at gender and racial relations within the institution, etc. I see in the work of some artists, including yourself, a recognition of this work as the site of politics (as did, incidentally, the Fabians!). But the tricky negotiation

is, I guess, proposing what might be called the 'Robin Hood' methodology: stealing from documenta (cultural and deferred economic value creation) in order to keep working on embedding new pastoralism.

FERNANDO — But in its full dimension, the para-institution can also help to change those dynamics by resetting the collaboration standards. For example, I moved from being a one-year invited artist to produce something for Casco, to introduce within that institution's general programme a long-term activity strand, that actually allows, in terms of time resources, decision-making capacities, the possibility of really extending *INLAND* in that context. These are similar to the biological realm's fascinating forms of encounter in between parasitism and symbiosis. Behaviour-altering parasites ultimately could transform the host, improving its capacities. Take, for example, the legumes affected by soil bacteria rhizobia, by which the plant acquires new capacities to synthesise and absorb nitrogen and therefore grow more and become stronger.

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Interdisciplinary workshops as part of *INLAND's New Curriculum,* Cantabria, Spain (2018).

ANDREA — I understand the biological parasitical model more clearly in terms of slow change. Perhaps the real problem is the art world's demand for consistent remodelling and novelty. I admire institutions such as Casco in Utrecht, The Showroom in London, and Tensta Konsthall in Stockholm for their attempt to commit to slower and longer-term institutional ethics within the parameters of their funding agreements (which are based on the production of novelty). I agree that this is a necessity. How do the financial aspects of *INLAND* (the products that are for sale) contribute to and affect such slowness? How can you make sure *INLAND* is sustained, or will it wear out? How much is it reliant on the character Fernando García-Dory?

FERNANDO — That is a crucial question as usually collectives don't begin with individual initiative but with affinity among like-minded people. The whole of the *INLAND* project is defined as a 'platform for collaboration'. I looked towards working and sharing practices with other artists, in a time when individual careerism is a basic subject at art schools. The people who take part in *INLAND* come and go, as the platform cannot offer continuous material support. The challenge is to extend agency to the group and how that is built on shared visions and commitments. As for the choice of agricultural production, it does relate directly with that affect and pace necessary for raising animals and for cultivation. Even cheese requires five months for ripening.

There could also be an opposite effect: would this 'monster' finally demand more attention and intense speedy work? Would it be better to just have a quiet silent retreat? But then, how could it be collective, pedagogical, and transmissible and replicable all around? I want to believe that this search for balance requires as well the right proportion of production, collective labour, creativity, and economic and cultural recognition of the endeavour. Taking part in a project elsewhere once a year can also be an important factor in stabilising the group. I am thinking now of Grizedale Arts. Let's say we all benefit from and experience the thermo-industrial society and the uncountable slaves it provides us with, available as much as a source of energy with such a high calorific and work conversion still is in place–that is, the extraction and use without hesitation of fossil fuels that allowed combustion engines to multiply power and mobility in machines of all sort. What comes after that we can't see entirely, but it could be part of the use and function of the game we are playing around with, the game of a para-institution, and hopefully developing skills with those attempts: skills that

are necessary to start to build social resilience and 'togetherness' within ourselves and other species and matters, once the complex sociopolitical structures of this era crumble under their own weight. After all, maybe the early cave painters of hunting scenes were just figuring out how to assure reproduction of the group for another day.

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* / This is an edited excerpt from a conversation originally published in *INLAND Volume*, Dutch Art Institute and Casco – Office for Art, Design and Theory, Utrecht, Holland (2016).

1 / The Situationist International's support of leisure has become a major factor in advanced capitalist society. Canjuers adds *'While modern capitalism constantly develops new needs in order to increase consumption, people's dissatisfaction remains the same as ever. Their lives no longer have any meaning beyond a rush to consume, and this consumption is used to justify the increasingly radical frustration of any creative activity or genuine human initiative – to the point that people no longer even see this lack of meaning as important.'* Free time is equated with passive consumption, and therefore inaction, laziness à la Bartleby, would be the only possible escape. But what about a proactive, productive, fulfilling occupation? As Guy Debord stated in his 'theses on cultural revolution' in 1958, *'There can be no freely spent time until we possess the modern tools for the construction of everyday life. The use of such tools will mark the leap from a utopian revolutionary art to an experimental revolutionary art.'* Translation from the French by Ken Knabb.

2 / In 2015 the international curator group Chamber of Public Secrets mailed a quite bold invitation to a panel discussion stating that *'Working at the intersection of art and activism can be difficult and problematic at best, patronizing, unethical and opportunistic at worst. When it comes to work in a foreign context, this quagmire becomes even more apparent.'*

Struggle
(Chapter Three)

Everything's coming together while everything's falling apart

OLIVER RESSLER

The title *Everything's coming together while everything's falling apart* refers to a situation in which all the technology needed to end the age of fossil fuel already exists, and where the question of whether the present ecological, social and economic crisis will be overcome is primarily a question of political power.

The story of this ongoing film project may turn out to be a story of the beginning of the climate revolution, the moment when popular resistance began to reconfigure the world. The project follows the climate movement in its struggles to dismantle an economic system heavily dependent on fossil fuels. It records key events for the climate movement, bringing together many situations, contexts, voices and experiences. There is one film for each event.

In the first film, *COP21* (2016), activists contest the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris, a city then under a 'state of emergency' (effectively made permanent by recent French legislation). Like the twenty failed annual climate conferences before it, COP21 in Paris in 2015 proved the incapacity of governments to commit themselves to any binding agreement that would curtail global warming through a definite strategy for the end of fossil fuel use. The resulting Climate Agreement avoids anything that would harm the economic interests of corporations. The governments now pretending that 'non-binding agreements' can hold back climate change are the same ones whose 'binding free trade pacts' make dead letter of local environmental and climate legislation.

The film on the *Ende Gelände* ('End of the Road') action (2016) shifts the focus to a massive civil disobedience mobilisation at the Lusatia lignite coal fields (near Berlin); 4,000 activists entered an open-cast mine, blocking the loading station and the rail connection to a coal-fired power plant. The blockades disrupted the coal supply and forced the Swedish proprietor Vattenfall to shut the power station down. The action was part of an international global escalation against the fossil fuel industry, calling on the world to '*Break Free from Fossil Fuels*' and putting that imperative directly into practice.

The film *The ZAD* (2017) focuses on Europe's largest autonomous territory, located close to Nantes in France. The ZAD ('zone to defend') emerged from the struggle against plans to build a new airport. In 2012 the French state's attempt to evict the zone was fiercely resisted by more than 40,000 people. The state returned in the spring of 2018 with 2,500 armed police in a brutal eviction siege lasting eight days. But the people of the ZAD stood defiantly, as they do to this day. Up to 250 people in 60 collectives have been living permanently at the ZAD, occupying the wetlands, fields and forests. The zone is a successful example of the way resistance and the creation of alternatives need to happen at the same time. While people take back control of their lives with self-organised bakeries, workshops, a brewery, medicinal herb gardens, a rap studio, a weekly newspaper and a library, they hinder the construction of an unnecessary, ecologically disastrous airport project. The film is built around a group discussion with activists living at the ZAD.

The most recent film, *Code Rood* (2018), highlights a civil disobedience action in the port of Amsterdam in June 2017. The blockade of Europe's second-largest coal port draws a red line against this important fossil-capitalist infrastructure facility. The largest single source of the coal shipments is Colombia, where coal is extracted under ecologically and socially devastating conditions.

Everything's coming together while everything's falling apart was first presented as a two-channel video installation as part of Oliver Ressler's solo exhibition *Property is Theft* at MNAC – the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest. The project was later expanded to a four-channel video installation and will be ongoing, with further episodes to be added as the struggle against a fossil-fuel-dependent economy continues.

2016 — PRESENT DAY

Interview with Oliver Ressler

BARNABY DRABBLE

January 2017:

BARNABY DRABBLE—Hello, Oliver, thanks for agreeing to this interview. I want to start by asking you about the series of films entitled *Everything's coming together while everything's falling apart* which you're making at the moment about environmental activism.

OLIVER RESSLER—The material for the first film, *Everything's coming together while everything's falling apart: COP21*, was gathered in Paris in December 2015. The COP is the name given to the annual climate change conference under the umbrella of the United Nations and in Paris it was already in the twenty-first year and it's considered, even in hindsight, to have been one of the most important ones. This was because the majority of the states present managed to reach an agreement to limit the increase of the average temperature to two degrees Celsius in relation to pre-industrial levels.

The problem with this agreement they came up with is that it was non-binding while, on the contrary, agreements like those set up to establish free trade, for example, are all binding agreements. This already shows how much importance the states who come to such meetings really put on global warming, because of course the agreements that were made in the framework of the World Trade Organization effectively contradict the steps necessary to limit or reduce global warming.

▲
Oliver Ressler, video still from *Everything's coming together while everything's falling apart: COP21*, 17 mins (2016).

BARNABY — Talk to me about why you decided to go to COP21 – what was your intention in making this short film?

OLIVER — It was already quite clear at the beginning of my research that the COP21 would be accompanied by an important mobilisation. Many of my works are related to demonstrations and to mobilisations. I'm not a big believer in governmental processes and I am concerned by the failure of the negotiations under the umbrella of the United Nations in relation to global warming. I think change will happen when the pressure from the people on the streets from social movements increases and I had the impression that Paris would be important from this aspect.

BARNABY — You wanted to focus on the protesters who gathered in large numbers, outside the convention.

OLIVER — Yes, but shortly before the meeting a terror attack took place in Paris and the state removed the right to demonstrate in Paris, choosing to restrict civil liberties in the name of security. So, for the protesters who gathered, everything became a bit different to what was originally planned. But 10,000 demonstrators showed up and ignored this ban on demonstrations and the imposition of a state of emergency.

I recorded some of the protests themselves and I recorded some of the meetings and public events organised to prepare for the demonstrations. I use some of this material in the film. In a departure from my earlier films, in this new series of films I use a strong voice-over, which more or less leads the viewer through the films and builds the narrative. The original texts I wrote myself in collaboration with the writer Matthew Hyland.

BARNABY — Can you talk more about your collaboration with Matthew Hyland?

OLIVER — When I started to work like this a couple of years ago, I was interested in finding someone who would improve the quality of my English. But when I started to collaborate with Matthew Hyland I think it pushed me a bit further, because here was a person who was really interested in the content and was able to work with me to make beautiful, almost poetic texts to accompany the film material. I was very happy to have someone who really took this so seriously.

Usually I start with something like a draft version and then there's a longer process of discussion and a back and forth of emails until we come up with a version which is suitable for the voice-over.

BARNABY — In both of these recent films, *COP21* and *Ende Gelände*, which we will talk about in a moment, you used the same narrator, a female voice with an African American accent. Why did you choose this particular voice for these films?

OLIVER — I have to tell you that even though the material for these first two films was recorded half a year apart I worked on the editing of the two films more or less at the same time. When I worked on the second film, *Ende Gelände,* I had the feeling that I needed a voice that had a particular tone. At first I was hoping for an old voice with a lot of depth, I was looking for a person who had a very rough voice and probably a smoker. Going down into an open-pit coal mine immediately affects your voice, your breath, as the coal dust is very aggressive to humans. I wanted this to be reflected in the narrator's voice.

I tested a couple of speakers for the production and Renée Gadsden was the closest to this tone, of those English speakers based in Vienna I was able to access. Renée is a wonderful political writer and an activist. I liked her voice a lot, also because it is not a typical voice for film narration, so I invited her to lend her voice to this film.

▲
Oliver Ressler, video still from *Everything's coming together while everything's falling apart: Ende Gelände/End of the Road*, 12 mins (2016).

BARNABY — The second question was again about this poetics. In earlier films the texts, either in the form of subtitle or in the form of voice-over, were factual and descriptive. Beginning with *Leave It in the Ground* in 2013, the first considerable film you made addressing questions of climate change and extractivism, the device changes and you start to explore a much more fictionalised account and a more poetic range of vocabulary. Why are you interested in having a more poetic voice in these recent films?

OLIVER — When I started to work on *Leave It in the Ground* I was originally planning to produce a film based on the activists in Lofoten in Norway who are trying to protect the region from oil drilling. My aim was to construct a film based on the interviews I was planning to collect. But as I started to record interviews with a couple of people I realised that I expected a more radical approach in their resistance. I was disappointed with the material and I finally decided not to use the interviews directly in the film. But the situation remained very interesting so I used some of the information I obtained through these interviews and decided, for the first time in my life, to write a narration text. As I progressed I really became excited about it and the film I produced was very different to what I did before. By writing myself I made a film that presents something very specific.

I continued producing films based on interviews or based on recorded assemblies or different situations where four, or five, or six people meet together and discuss with each other. Now it appears that there are two or maybe even three different methods I use, they coexist at the same time and leave me with broader possibilities of how to get to a film.

BARNABY — We can only come back to the COP21, where you lend a part of the film to the activists themselves describing what they are planning, responding to the changes which took place on us on account of the terrorist attacks. It seems also that you're interested in other speakers in these films. Talk a little bit about how you decided on the subject matter in the editing process for the *COP21* film.

▲
Oliver Ressler, video still from *Everything's coming together while everything's falling apart: COP21*, 17 mins (2016).

OLIVER — Yes, this new series of films is actually the first one where I combined the narration I co-wrote and the material I recorded from activists. In this case I was lucky to attend one of the large events where activists were preparing for a demonstration called *Red Lines*, and the artists John Jordan and Isabelle Frémeaux were present. I recorded all kinds of different materials while in Paris, including the eventual protests, and I realised when I was editing the material that the shots from the preparation meetings nicely contextualised later material on the streets. In the end, the things that were a bit more abstract I wrote about, and the ones

that were closer to the activities visible in the images I accompanied with footage from the activists.

BARNABY — This relatively unplanned approach, where you film first and then find out what you have in the editing process, is that something which was also the case for other films?

OLIVER — Yes, this is something important, an unplanned presence with a camera that I have been using for many years in my artistic work. Even though the work might look quite structured and organised, very often the base of it is material I collect, where I never really know where I will end. In one of these cases, for example, I ended up being 'kettled' by the police for hours during a demonstration and my accidental involvement in this occurrence became the source material for the film *This is What Democracy Looks Like!*

BARNABY — Can you describe a little bit the second film *Ende Gelände,* which you filmed in a lignite mine in Germany?

OLIVER — Generally, Germany is considered one of the countries most committed to an ecological transition and reducing carbon emissions. But if we look at the details of how the electricity is being produced then we see that there's still a very high percentage of lignite or coal being burned and it's almost 40% of the electricity produced in Germany.

Ende Gelände focuses on a mass mobilisation of a couple of thousand activists and follows them as they plan and carry out an act of civil disobedience in which they occupy one of Germany's largest lignite mines in the Lausitz (near Berlin). They chose to temporarily close down the coal pits connected to a power plant that is one of the largest sources of carbon emissions in the entire European Union.

I had heard of a similar action previously and decided to record this direct action for a film. Back home, I wrote a narration text and collaborated again with Matthew Hyland. The final voice-over provides some of the basic information about the action and the site, while also trying to link it to some more far-reaching information related to global warming.

BARNABY — You described these two films as two of a series. Have you got plans to make further films that deal with acts of civil disobedience or campaigns addressing climate crimes?

OLIVER — Yes, I will definitely continue with this series but haven't yet decided what I will focus on. In any case, it will focus on different kinds of mobilisation or activities of civil disobedience against fossil infrastructure. Very often you get very late notice of something interesting taking place, maybe only two weeks from now. I am always hoping that my schedule allows me to be spontaneous enough to participate in these actions, when the opportunity arises. Currently, for this series I am looking for visually different material to describe different categories of civil disobedience.

I would also be interested, for example, to commit one of these films to divestment, but so far I have not found an angle on how to do such a thing visually. I definitely do not want to end up with a film where two or three people solely explain how divestment works. So increasingly this series is led by the question of how to explore these activities visually.

▲
Oliver Ressler, video still from *Everything's coming together while everything's falling apart: Ende Gelände/End of the Road,* 12 mins (2016).

BARNABY — The title of this series of films, *Everything's coming together while everything's falling apart,* suggests not only the growth in manifestation and mobilisation of resistance but also perhaps a more depressing aspect of recognising the speed at which things are falling apart. The narrative voice often picks up on this paradoxical situation. What do you want to communicate through this?

OLIVER — Well, it's now 2017 and in a recent publication from the Copernicus Climate Change Service, an EU-funded institute looking into the increase of the temperature due to global warming, researchers show us that we are very close to going over the 1.5 degree rise above pre-industrial level. Keeping emissions below this figure was the published aim of the majority of nations meeting at COP21 in Paris.

Within just one year and two months, the temperature has increased considerably. The speed at which the temperature is increasing has of course to do with what scientists have been explaining to us for the last thirty or forty years: that if certain tipping points are reached then the speed of the warming will increase dramatically. The Copernicus Climate Change Service report suggests that we're already in the middle of this. News of this kind appears very depressing.

Yet I still have the impression that never in the history of humanity has there been so much mobilisation and so much awareness in relation to the climate crisis. So I tend to be optimistic that there is a chance to manage this, and here I do not mean manage it in the way the managers of today's global economy and the so-called 'leaders' of our world try to manage it, through just leaving it to corporations.

This problem has to be managed in a way that also includes a redistribution of wealth and that recognises the climate debts the Global North has to the Global South. I still have a feeling that it is not too late. If we can pull together the energy of millions of people globally and mobilise this, we can still avoid the most damaging results of catastrophic warming. But we really need to hurry up!

BARNABY — Given this urgency to mobilise, I wanted to talk with you about the question of the audience for your work and the way your works are distributed. How do you distribute your work and who do you hope sees it?

OLIVER — I hope to produce work that is able to talk to different people, so I produce the works not only for exhibitions but also make them available for

presentations in cinemas or in film festivals. Importantly I also make them available to activists, political organisations and groups. Now, this cycle of films is very new and I'm submitting them to a couple of different film festivals at present. This hinders me from making them available for free on the Internet, but films that are already a bit older are mostly accessible for free on Vimeo and on my website.

BARNABY — You mentioned making them available to activist groups. Do activist groups regularly request to use the film? Availability is one thing – what about demand? Is there a demand for these films?

OLIVER — In general, I have the experience that in the films where the activists are very central there's a lot of demand. These films are inspiring but also tactical so they are often presented in the meetings or events organised by activists. For example, the films I did about Venezuela were presented hundreds of times in events organised by activists.

In this new series, the films are a bit more complicated because there's also this narrative voice and the use of poetic text, which is not so accessible to those looking for more classic activist video. This changes the distribution pattern and demand. Interestingly, these two films were also worked on in a period of time when I was invited to present on conferences dealing with visualisations of global warming, resistance, decarbonisation and degrowth strategies. I'm still in touch with people who participated in these conferences and many of the activists in these conferences are also researchers from different backgrounds. I was usually the only artist in these conferences and I know that some of these participants are interested in showing the films in their communities and networks.

As an artist and as a filmmaker I depend on the visibility that film festivals, museums and other institutions bring my work, I cannot simply avoid these things and still expect people to take an interest in the films on my website. The money I earn with these films comes indirectly through invitations to talk, exhibit or teach somewhere, while the presentation of a film in a festival or in a museum may have a small fee but is more important for raising awareness that the film is there.

So, for a general public it takes usually two years before I make the films available for everyone online. If activists approach me and ask to screen the work, I usually make them accessible for free.

BARNABY — You've worked with video now really for twenty years or more but I know that you are trained as an artist and never received a filmmaker's education. Why do you work with film and video? What is it that you feel is possible with this medium in relation to the kind of political and social questions you are dealing with?

OLIVER — I actually started as a painter and already while I was studying I was trying to work politically, although from my point of view nowadays, I obviously failed. The first works I made that I can take seriously today were installations made for exhibitions and works on billboards and posters in public space. These are two formats I'm still working with today. Around 1995 I started with installations that combined printed materials, photographic works and text works with videos. This started something and I began to think about how great it would be to produce a film that would not depend on additional material and could exist outside of the exhibition context in cinemas, film festivals or film screenings. I made my first film in the year 2000, and I think you were the first to screen *Rote Zora* in London at that time or a year later.

BARNABY — I remember the film very well.

OLIVER — That was at a time when the Internet existed but not as a platform for presenting videos because connection speeds were much too slow. Nowadays, of course, the Internet is also a central channel for access to my films.

BARNABY — A lot has changed since 2000. We screened *Rote Zora* in the Lux cinema in Hoxton Square. The technological changes are clear but of course the reception of film by your average person has changed massively also. There's so much more film in our lives, video is omnipresent, both in private and public space. How does this change the way you are thinking about your work?

▲
Oliver Ressler, video still from *Everything's coming together while everything's falling apart: The ZAD,* 36 mins (2017).

OLIVER — If you went to a demonstration twenty years ago and you took a video camera, you would be one of the few people who were filming there. Nowadays if you go to a demonstration sometimes you have the impression that maybe every second person is filming, at least with a mobile phone. Twenty years ago you had to ask people for consent to use their image in a film, while from my more recent experience of the Occupy Wall Street demonstrations in New York, people would now consider the request strange, because it's become normal that everyone is filming.

BARNABY — The police are filming as well.

OLIVER — Yes, and they use this material against the movements. At one time this production of film was very important, so that we could present material from a demonstration in order to show a different perspective than the one that was presented on the news. However, my work has moved on. I think this aspect is being done by so many people nowadays that it would be a bit meaningless to still do this as an artist.

BARNABY — You talked in a very heartfelt way about how you feel that now is the time to mobilise massively. Is there an aspect of your films that is recruitment for the movements?

OLIVER — I love when my works are being used by activists or political organisations to recruit other activists, a younger generation of activists, to participate in blockades, in mobilisations, in demonstrations. But it's always hard to know, when you work on a film, if it has the capacity to be used for something like this or not. I know for sure that some of the films I made in the past have been used to recruit and to mobilise people to become more active and participate in social movements.

▲
Oliver Ressler, video still from *Everything's coming together while everything's falling apart: Code Rood,* 12 mins (2016).

BARNABY — The poetic aspect of the film seems to also create not only a wish to connect through, let's say, factual or descriptive terms but also to connect emotionally to your audience. What are you trying to do with this?

OLIVER — I think that this theme of global warming is of such importance that there's a need to address people on a very personal level because it really affects everyone. All of us, and certainly our children and future generations, will be hugely affected by these decisions we make now or which we don't make now. I use this poetic voice, which has a certain tone, which shows involvement, which shows feelings, which

shows emotions, as an attempt to see if it's possible to address people on another level, beyond just informing them of the facts. It's also a test for me. I cannot say if it is really working. But it is interesting for me to try out different ways of producing film, with different approaches to the audience and different voices.

BARNABY — I read repeatedly that environmentally engaged artistic practices are guided by a wish to raise awareness. Is awareness raising really what this work is about or should we explore other claims for these artistic practices?

OLIVER — Yes. I think with awareness alone, it will not be possible to achieve this much-needed change of our political and economic system. I think what is also required is perspectives on which direction we should head in. I think my works contain arguments for activities beyond simple awareness of the problem.

Practically, there are lots of things to be done. Firstly, we need to create a situation where there is political will to genuinely address the climate crisis. Once we create this political will, I think it can just be done step by step. There are things that are so easily done that it's painful to observe the politicians' inactivity. For example, in Europe there are billions of euros every year spent to support extraction, subsidies for fossil fuel projects given directly by the state. To abandon these and move the funds towards establishing an alternative renewable energy system would not require any investment, it would only require political will.

Just as it would to put really high taxes on flights, on petroleum and especially on those corporations that produce the petroleum and become incredibly rich in the process. It is a question of social justice, really, that this money should not be allowed to stay in the pockets of these destructive companies. There is an argument that not only their current income but also past income from their activities should be expropriated in order to subsidise this much-needed transition. This wouldn't hurt anyone besides a few CEOs and shareholders, and we could even leave them one mansion and then they can go to hell in it. The rest of it is needed for the transition.

Today, representative democracy represents the needs of capital and not of the people. This has to be changed as a first step, to cut the links between members of parliaments and corporations in general. Political will in democracy means that people are allowed to make decisions on the things that affect them the most, and politicians then make decisions that represent these concerns. Examples of such decisions might be whether or not your nation should go to war in Iraq or Afghanistan,

or yes, if there should be a law against fossil fuel corporations being subsidised with billions of euros every year.

BARNABY — We talked a little bit about where you finance your work from – the necessity to compromise or to recognise there's no such thing as clean money – but let's talk about the production itself and the question of how much of our own carbon footprints and things like that. Do you consider your production to be as sustainable as it could be?

OLIVER — The way I move around in the world and work together with different people and different social movements and present my work is far from being sustainable. My carbon emissions are, of course, much beyond what should be considered a healthy level of living on this planet. I'm very aware of it. I'm very unhappy with it.

There are activist-artists like John Jordan who are very radical in this aspect, that they make a decision not to enter a plane anymore. I thought about this, and I decided against it because I think that the work I'm doing has some positive effects in the world.

We, as mankind, if this doesn't sound too pathetic, will only overcome this ecological crisis through overcoming the capitalist system.

I think that this cannot happen without the human bodies that will move, and that will blockade, and that will demonstrate, and that will occupy. It is these bodies that will push through this much-needed transition towards a new system. I don't think that we can achieve social change through clicking on Facebook, through 'like' or 'dislike'. It is not that easy, unfortunately.

It will require us being physically there and forcing people to pay attention that thousands, tens of thousands, and millions of people are against extractive industries, are against racist and xenophobic politicians, are against a system of representative democracy that does not take care of the people who go and vote.

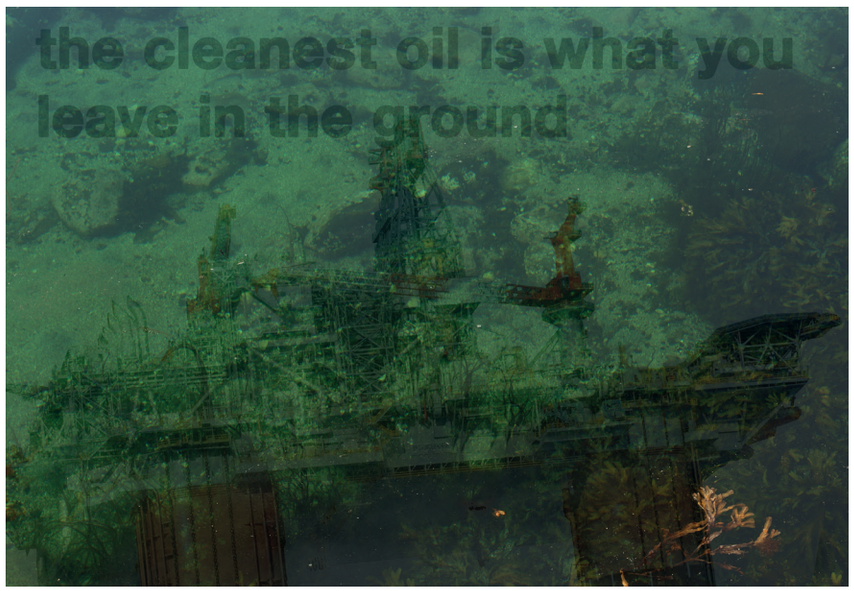
I think it is time to bring our bodies towards the front lines where decisions are being made: decisions about our future life. This also means the sites where the extraction takes place. As this happens, my artistic practice will continue to focus on these forms of resistance.

STRUGGLE (CHAPTER THREE)

Denaturalising the Economy: Oliver Ressler's Political Ecology*

T.J. DEMOS

Oliver Ressler's recent film *Leave It in the Ground* (2013) begins with shots of the pristine ecosystem of the Lofoten archipelago in Norway's Arctic Circle, its sparkling waters shown meeting the coastal grasses before the low-lying mountains that rise majestically in the background. Commissioned by invitation from the Lofoten International Art Festival in 2013, the film includes a voice-over that describes a conversation between a 'fisherman' and an 'oil producer', a dialogue of diametrically opposed interests that both offers a glimpse of the current ecologico-political conflict as it bears on this remote Far North region, and extends outwards to manifold global environmental crises today. Joining the artist's long-standing commitment to making artistic projects that explore the social, political, environmental and economic conditions of life under advanced neoliberal capitalism, the piece poses a fundamental question that implicates us all: whether we – a 'we' that transcends this local Norwegian community and suggests a global English-speaking civil society frustrated with the failed attempts by our governments to address climate change – should drill for oil in the Arctic at a time of increasingly limited hydrocarbon reserves, thereby expanding industrial fossil fuel extraction and advancing further the contemporary death drive towards impending ecological catastrophe; or whether we should 'leave it in the ground', transitioning towards a post-carbon future guided by the principles of ecological sustainability, democratic participation and social equality.



▲
Oliver Ressler, *Leave It in the Ground* (*The Cleanest Oil*), LED lightbox, 84.1 x 59.4 cm (2014).

As such, this recent piece is exemplary of Ressler's artistic practice, which, over the course of numerous films, light-boxes and text-based works over some twenty years, has explored and challenged the central claims of mainstream corporate and governmental discourse on climate change, ecological policy and biotechnology, and invited viewers to consider the larger philosophical stakes of such claims. Going back to such pieces as *100 Years of Greenhouse Effect* (1996), a text-panel installation for the Salzburg Kunstverein, Ressler has confronted in particular the flawed economic basis of conventional approaches to ecological crisis, as, for instance, outlined in the technocratic agenda of the 1996 *Future-Capable Germany* report compiled by the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy. As well, with *Focus on Companies* (2000), an installation of image-and-text panels, he targeted corporations like Novartis, Schering, Bio-Rad Laboratories and Roche, drawing attention to the negative sociopolitical effects of genetic engineering science.

Critically complimenting this frontal attack on corporate environmental agendas are Ressler's pieces that document and amplify the climate justice activism of social movements insisting on alternative approaches to sustainability and

democratic governance, such as *For a Completely Different Climate* (2008), a three-channel slide installation with sound that reported on the Climate Camp protests against the construction of a new coal-fired power station in Kingsnorth, England. As the projection rotates through a series of documentary still images of the temporary encampment in the south-eastern region of the country, shown ringed with imposing police checkpoints and surveillance stations, viewers are shown non-violent activists gathered to challenge the hypocrisy of British environmental policy under the Gordon Brown 'New Labour' administration. Still more ambitiously, the piece articulates the failure of post-Kyoto climate protocols on behalf of global governance owing to the latter's paradoxical unswerving commitment to capitalism's growth economy, doing so by including interspersed titles woven into the slide show that reiterate protesters' critical analysis of British and indeed international policies on environmental matters (even while the work nevertheless asserts its singularity as a project distinct from the aesthetico-political sensibilities of Climate Camp).[1] Amidst the political chanting and drumming heard on the piece's soundtrack, the voices of participants explain their position:

We do not focus on one issue but have a systemic critique of the problem. The problem is with the growth paradigm. The Kyoto Protocol established an emissions trading system that has had no discernible impact on emissions reductions. Since the Kyoto Protocol was signed, the global carbon emissions have exceeded the worst-case scenario of the IPCC [*Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*]. *Emissions trading has had no discernable impact on actual carbon emissions, but it has created a market. By 2020, the global market for carbon emissions is projected to be worth 2,000 billion dollars.*

Building on that project's critical insights into the financial priorities of current environmental policies shared by governments worldwide – the problem of the growth paradigm – *Leave It in the Ground* spells out the stakes of the current crisis in more detail. The film offers a narration delivered in the authoritative tones of a British-accented newscaster, as if we're watching a BBC documentary relaying a story about climate change. Yet, as indicated in its title, stemming from the common anti-fossil-fuel slogan of contemporary environmentalists (seen, for instance, written across the back of one activist appearing in *For a Completely Different Climate*), the content of this account is strikingly unlike anything that would typically appear on that or similar mainstream media platforms. While such

news services may report on climate change, they typically do so without considering any approaches to the manifold problems that would not begin by repeating the automatically assumed commitment to the free-market principles based on 'sustainable development'. As the film's speaker sarcastically intones, '*After all, one must learn that climate protection is a very relative thing: it must be compatible with economic growth.*'[2]

That, of course, is the standard assumption of green capitalism, which, as many critics (including members of Climate Camp) have pointed out, offers a largely cosmetic retooling of industrial production without substantially reducing the ruinous accumulation of greenhouse gases, or the pollution of air, land, and water supplies (e.g. Al Gore's already outdated 2006 documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, is exemplary in this regard, as it suggests that trading emissions credits and developing clean and efficient technologies can save us from global warming, with no need to alter the capitalist system in structural ways).[3] Broadly speaking, green capitalism proposes to overcome the 'limits to growth' approach of the first post-WWII wave of environmentalism (as articulated in the eponymous 1972 UN-commissioned report), which was soon seen to represent an unacceptable demand on capitalist globalisation, wherein growth represented the answer to poverty alleviation and the modernisation necessary for recently decolonised countries in the Global South, and was taken as a fundamental definition of 'freedom' for developed countries in the North.[4] Neoliberal globalisation, however, quickly overcame the 'limits' approach by reconciling growth with environmentalist considerations via the compromise discourse of 'sustainable development'–what Ressler refers to in his work of 2000 as *Sustainable Propaganda*. That discourse enabled corporations, and by extension an increasingly fossil-fuel-addicted society, to continue global development without any fundamental system change in production or consumption models beyond the inclusion of superficial greenwashing design modifications and a mystifying rhetoric of green publicity. However, as critics–including Ressler, in pieces such as *For a Completely Different Climate* and *Leave It in the Ground*–have shown, this turn towards green capitalism has utterly failed to curtail greenhouse gas pollution, which is all the more astounding when one realises that the scientific knowledge of anthropogenic climate change is now more than a century old (first studied by Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius in the late nineteenth century, as Ressler's *100 Years of Greenhouse Effect* points out).

▲
Oliver Ressler, *For a Completely Different Climate,* 3-channel slide installation with sound (2008).

Despite such critiques, the continued irrational devotion to the economy above all else has become naturalised as unquestioned common sense within governmental reports, corporate mass media and UN-instigated climate meetings. As such, it defines the current reigning ideology of our era, according to which the market is seen as part of human nature.[5] Indeed, as Fredric Jameson has observed–in what has become a frequently cited saying on the Left–'*it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism.*'[6] Ressler's confronting of this very predicament points to the ambition of his project, which is precisely to imagine a world beyond capitalism and beyond its naturalisation of finance, an ambition that he has long investigated through the political-aesthetic intertwinements of his artistic practice, including his many documentary accounts of anti-capitalist and environmentalist social movements such as Climate Camp. As Ressler observes, to realise something like '*a completely different climate*'–where 'climate' references an ecology of politics as much as Earth's natural systems–climate change would need to *'be confronted through a radical transformation of society that would effectively challenge the existing distribution of wealth and power relationships that are guaranteed by the military.*'[7] Which leads to the following formulation: *'the main task today is to combine the discussion of climate change with the discussion of a need for a change of the economic and political system.*'[8] This is a succinct formulation of the key ingredients of current political ecology, which can only begin by overcoming what might be termed contemporary *economysticism,* according to which the world and all elements of life are envisioned through a financial lens, as if nature is in some sense economic, and the economy a part of the natural order.[9]

In this sense, Ressler's work is significant for raising a set of critical questions that few others are asking today. Among them is a critical enquiry into the nature of value and the value of nature, which anthropogenic climate change forces us to ask, even while the dominant corporate media discourse is generally set on

suppressing it altogether: that is, whether we as a civilisation would agree with the fisherman or the oil producer, as represented in *Leave It in the Ground*. Do we support the intrinsic value of nature as an ecologically integral site of biodiversity and interconnected life systems, seeing the Norwegian archipelago as a spawning ground of fish that forms part of a complex and interdependent ecosystem? Or do we agree with the oil producer who views the archipelago as a source of wealth accumulation, because *'people can live with less fish, but not without oil.'* And so, with a quasi-religious fanaticism that enables a person to see money as more important than food, he explains *'We will extract millions of barrels of petroleum. It will make us rich, much richer. We are living in uncertain times. The economy is in crisis. What oil will give us is certainty.'*

If we go for the latter madness, what about the spectres of environmental devastation that haunt this commitment to oil, the drilling of which would bring as well the 'certainty' of the destruction of the seabed through the release of toxic and radioactive materials, as drilling effluent mixes with some of the cleanest water in the world? What about the negative effects of noise pollution and oil rig traffic on local animal life, as well as the carbon emissions that would further impact climate chance, endangering the viability of Earth's biosphere? What certainty does the oil producer offer us beyond what Ressler's voice-over reminds us is the certainty of continuing down the road towards irreversible civilisational collapse?[10] The imagery of the film is striking in this regard, as, over the course of its eighteen minutes, it mixes diverse geographies into a cauldron of geopolitical-environmental conflict – shots of ocean fish in the coast of Norway lay atop scenes of BP's Deepwater Horizon oil rig disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, and images of calamitous flooding flow together with footage of UN climate summits. The resulting geo-aesthetics of montage allegorises the interconnectedness of ecological systems, where politics and industry appear in cause-and-effect relations with natural environments, even as the inability to govern nature in a sustainable way at present brings disastrous results to the very sites of political and corporate power and decision-making.

The *inability* of our current system to imagine any form of environmental value that is not founded on an economic calculus – as in recently developed 'natural capital' economics, and the latest corporate approaches to 'ecosystem services' that 'natural resources' are seen to provide – is perhaps one of the greatest threats to life as we know it, and an outcome of what *Leave It in the Ground* terms *'fossil fuel fundamentalism.'* In this regard, Ressler joins a growing chorus of social activists in speculating what an alternative model of value might be, calling to mind David

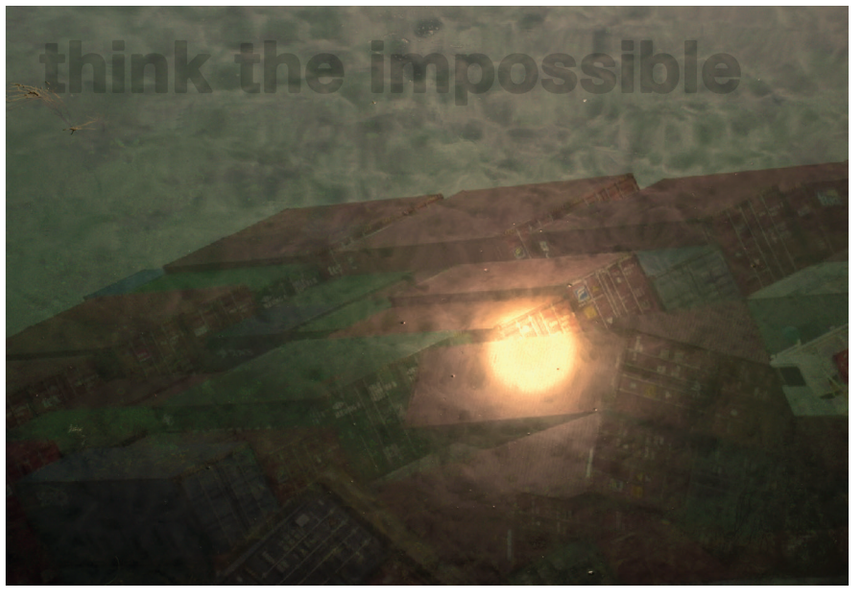
Graeber's social anthropology, where value, far from defining narrowly conceived financial wealth, figures as *'a set of practices, beliefs, and desires that bring universes into being, a place where the world is continually reconstructed, and where human beings undertake the project of mutual re-creation.'*[11] According to Graeber's post-economistic definition, the way in which we define value, and, importantly, how we practise that definition, makes certain forms of life possible, and others not – for instance, an ecologically sustainable world, or one headed for *'a militarised geography of social breakdown on a global scale,'* as Ressler's film warns (and which it dramatises in the accompanying images of trains transporting military tanks superimposed over pine forests and seascapes, as war capitalism dominates nature).

Moreover, as *Leave It in the Ground* makes clear, climate change disaster is not some distant future dystopia, but already impacts our present. As the film's narrator observes:

'The United Nations has estimated that all but one of its emergency appeals for humanitarian aid in 2007 were climate related. Already now climate change adversely affects 300 million people per year, killing 300,000 of them. An estimated 50 million people have already been displaced by the effects of climate change, and the numbers will escalate in years to come. A study from Columbia University's Center for International Earth Science Information Network projects 700 million climate refugees will be on the move by 2050.'

These figures call to mind related catastrophic events of recent years, such as the superstorms Hurricane Sandy, which struck New York City in 2012, and Typhoon Haiyan, which hit the Philippines in 2013, as well as the uncontrollable wildfires in the drought-afflicted West of the US in 2014, and the destructive and unpredictable heavy downpours in places such as Kenya in recent years. All figure as current examples of the negative effects of climate change brought to mind by Ressler's film's repertoire of appropriated imagery. As his film notes:

'Weather joins the chaos, un-free market chaos, with unprecedented temperatures and unprecedented rains. Climate refugees, displaced farmers, subject to victim-blame, have no choice but to make for the city.'



▲
Oliver Ressler, *Leave It in the Ground* (*Think the Impossible*), LED lightbox, 84.1 x 59.4 cm (2014).

Towards the end of the film, something striking happens to Ressler's narration. The speaker is in the midst of citing negative statistics and terrible future scenarios, wherein climate change figures as a threat multiplier, leading to geopolitical conflict over increasingly scarce resources, agricultural lands and clean water supplies. At this point he starts to yield to whispered threats and emotional outbursts, which interrupt his otherwise scientifically supported but unbearable discourse. In these moments, the exemplar of white male authority, and token of the governmental-media elite, appears to lose control and yield to irrational behaviour. It's as if the necropolitical and ecocidal ramifications of military neoliberalism cannot help but affect its stable, self-assured reportage.

With these and the above passages in mind, we can appreciate the multifaceted modelling of political speech that Ressler's films gather together, which works in tandem with his visual montage. Considering *Leave It in the Ground* in particular, the film performs the disturbance of conventional corporate news and nature programmes, giving rise to a linguistic struggle between discourse and conflict, between language as the performance of normativity that naturalises politics, and language as a counter-discourse of disruption that erupts into babble.

This babble suggests not only the overwhelming severity of the ecological crisis we face and its ultimate inability to be translated fully into conceptual intelligibility via mass media sound bites, but also the meaningless verbiage of so much media spectacle that ignores that crisis altogether in favour of the endless production of un-newsworthy non-events. Although the narrator's subject-position might be initially mistaken for the authoritative rhetoric of corporate media, it instead proposes a vehicle of radical content marked by multiply determined valences that invites from viewers a considered retort as much as collective politicisation and solidarity. This invitation towards solidarity connects to Ressler's documentary reporting on grassroots social movements, as in *For a Completely Different Climate*, calling attention to collective struggles against the continuation of the government–corporate–military complex that has defined late capitalist modernity. As such, the films together enable the formation of critical speech acts by literally enacting the vocalisation of words otherwise consigned to noise in our increasingly privatised public sphere, words that are seldom heard in media forums generally merged with corporate interests. In this regard, these films practise what Ressler (writing with Gregory Sholette) has termed *'unspeaking the grammar of finance'*–in other words, unlearning the semiotics of money that has suffused seemingly all aspects of our collective life worlds, including the everyday language of ecological matters.[12]

By animating languages of value alternative to neoliberalism's economism, Ressler's work brings other universes into being, reconstructing the world and our relation to it. Going beyond the various proposals of green capitalism, including its dubious models of ecologically sensitive design, its megalomaniacal geoengineering projects, its myopic techno-fixes, *Leave It in the Ground* centres attention on the economy: *'Demystifying the economy; decarbonising the economy; democratising the economy; decapitalising the economy'*–this is the solution of Ressler's political ecology.

▲
Oliver Ressler, *For a Completely Different Climate*, 3-channel slide installation with sound (2008).

While admittedly part of a minoritarian discourse waged against neoliberalism's nearly global hegemony,[13] Ressler's project nonetheless forms part of a growing multitude of forces intent on rethinking approaches to climate change from outside capitalist assumptions, including forces emanating from the Global South as much as the North. These include indigenous enviro-political formations (such as the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth that met in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in 2010, Canada's Idle No More movement, the Kari-Oca II declaration of indigenous people in Rio, Brazil, 2012, and the ongoing Zapatistas' revolution in Chiapas, Mexico); eco-socialist activists and policy analysts such as Chris Williams, Richard Smith and John Bellamy Foster,[14] Green Party and World Social Forum politics posed against the elites of the World Economic Forum and conservative governments worldwide; transition town, degrowth communities of localist eco-practitioners; experimental artists operating at a critical distance from the commercial art world; Earth jurisprudence environmental lawyers such as Polly Higgins and Cormac Cullinan; alter-globalisation Occupy-affiliated social movements; and eco-feminists, small-scale farmers and radical gardeners struggling against the corporate 'biopiracy' of native species and the neo-colonisation of GM seeds, and for pro-Earth democracy.[15] While such a list represents a complex intersection of internally diverse groups and individuals, the varied elements share a commitment to comprehending ecological sustainability in ways newly delinked from the financial priorities of economic growth and unlimited development. In this vein, such a transversal network of political formations recalls Ressler's multi-video and publication project *Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies* of 2003–2007, which explores a similar array of creative social movements thinking outside the neoliberal box (including libertarian municipalism and participatory economics, and new socialisms and utopian feminism, seen against the backdrop of historical and contemporary social movements, from workers' self-management practice in Yugoslavia during the 1960s and 1970s, to Zapatista collective governance).

Faced with the reality of catastrophic climate change, and equipped with a range of proposals for demystifying, decarbonising, democratising and decapitalising the economy, the hysterical narrator of *Leave It in the Ground* at one point angrily yells out *'Do not expect your politicians to make these decisions on your behalf!'* Among the film's crucial lessons is that *'after years of recycling, carbon offsetting and light bulb changing, it is obvious: individual action just doesn't do the job when it comes to climate crisis.'* Despite whatever significance it may represent as a form of

individual contribution to a different world, so-called ethical consumerism is also a further crass manoeuvre of green capitalism: to distract us from the necessity of forming social movements to bring about transformative, systemic change.[16] Ressler's narrator articulates what his films demonstrate and help realise: *'only collective action will do.'*

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* / This essay was originally published in *Oliver Ressler: Cartographies of Protest,* (Vienna: Verlag für Moderne Kunst, 2015).

1 / On the complexity of Ressler's past work in relation to activist forms, see Yates McKee, 'Reactivating Productivism', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Protest* 1:2, August 2003.

2 / My (admittedly non-scientific) survey of BBC reporting on climate change and global warming yielded the following observations: the news platform commonly reports on climate change by simply amplifying what Conservative government officials say about climate change (exemplary of what Glen Greenwald calls 'stenographic journalism' completely void of independence and criticality); reported 'solutions' to climate change threats generally come from within the framework of neoliberal capitalism, free market and growth-economy assumptions; articles frequently excitedly portray geoengineering techno-fixes as modes of adaptation (implicitly accepting a future of climate change); and there is never any mention of anti- or non-capitalist initiatives, such as degrowth and de-globalisation proposals from eco-socialist or other unconventional sources. See, for instance, 'How Broadcast News Covered Climate Change In The Last Five Years', 16 January 2014 – https://www.mediamatters.org/research/2014/01/16/study-how-broadcast-news-covered-climate-change/197612 (accessed 10 May 2019).

3 / For a devastating critique of such an approach, see Richard Smith, 'Green Capitalism: The God That Failed', *Truthout,* 9 January 2014 – http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/21060-green-capitalism-the-god-that-failed (accessed 10 May 2019).

4 / See Donella H. Meadows, et al. *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (London: Earth Island, 1972).

5 / The notion that *'the market is in human nature'* is a proposition that Fredric Jameson once said *'cannot be allowed to stand unchallenged',* arguing that the contestation of this ideology – the idea that the market is our second nature, a given, a biological fact – is *'the most crucial terrain of ideological struggle in our time.'* While it has been more than twenty years since he wrote these words, the situation has only become more pronounced, and its stakes all the greater. See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 263.

6 / Fredric Jameson, 'Future City', New Left Review, 21, May – June 2003.

7 / See – http://www.ressler.at/for_a_completely_different_climate (accessed 10 May 2019).

8 / See 'Approaches Against the Fossil Fuel Fundamentalism: An interview with Oliver Ressler by Dorian Batycka, with an intervention by Mike Watson', 5 July 2013, accompanying Ressler's participation in the Maldives Pavilion of the Venice Biennale in 2013 – http://maldivespavilion.com/blog/interview-leave-it-in-the-ground-by-oliver-ressler (accessed 10 May 2019).

9 / For a wider consideration of this term, see my guest-edited special issue of *Third Text* (January 2013) on the subject of 'Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology'. On contemporary economysticism, see Philippe Pignarre and Isabelle Stengers, *Capitalist Sorcery: Breaking the Spell,* trans. Andrew Goffey (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

10 / Such language may sound alarmist, but in fact it is employed guardedly by scientific bodies. See, most recently, Nafeez Ahmed, 'NASA-funded study: industrial civilisation headed for "irreversible collapse"?', *The Guardian,* 14 March 2014 – https://www.theguardian.com/environment/earth-insight/2014/mar/14/nasa-civilisation-irreversible-collapse-study-scientists (accessed 10 May 2019). For a broader picture of one potential dystopian future, see Christian Parenti, *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence* (New York: Nation Books, 2011).

11 / See David Graeber, 'It is Value that Brings Universes into Being', *HUA: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3/2, 2013, pp. 219–243.

12 / See the introductory essay by Gregory Sholette and Oliver Ressler, 'Unspeaking the Grammar of Finance', *It's the Political Economy, Stupid: The Global Financial Crisis in Art and Theory,* ed. Gregory Sholette and Oliver Ressler (London: Pluto Press, 2013), pp. 8–13.

13 / On the history and theory of neoliberalism – which represents the integrated system of free-market deregulation, privatisation, and the defunding of social welfare and public institutions that defines advanced global capitalism – see David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

14 / See in particular, Chris Williams, *Ecology and Socialism: Solutions to Capitalist Ecological Crisis* (London: Haymarket, 2010).

15 / Ressler compiles his own related list in the Maldives Pavilion interview:

'*There are several examples for anti-capitalist struggles and practices with articulated focuses on ecological issues that already go back many years, and I believe there is no way to call them opportunistic: the self-government of the Zapatistas in the Lacondonian forests in Chiapas, the Guardia Indígena of the Nasa in the South of Colombia against the timber and mining industry, the transnational activities of the peasant organization Via Campesina, Murray Bookchin's attempts to initiate ecological and self-managed communities in the U.S., the aforementioned climate camp movement in the UK, Germany and elsewhere, to name just a few. All these are clearly anti-capitalist and ecologically oriented at the same time, not because of opportunism, but because of an understanding that a serious implementation of ecological principles will have to shred the free-market ideology that has dominated the global economy for more than three decades, as a serious response to climate change requires the breaking of every rule in the free-market playbook'.*

16 / For an excellent starting point for the proposed platform for such a social movement, see Naomi Klein, 'Capitalism vs. the Climate', *The Nation,* 9 November, 2011 – http://www.thenation.com/article/164497/capitalism-vs-climate (accessed 10 May 2019):

'*We will need to rebuild the public sphere, reverse privatizations, re-localize large parts of economies, scale back overconsumption, bring back long-term planning, heavily regulate and tax corporations, maybe even nationalize some of them, cut military spending and recognize our debts to the global South*'.

Tidal

(Chapter Four)

Terre-Mer

MARIE VELARDI

The *Terre-Mer* project focuses on the relationship between land and sea, and starts with the shift of the coastline over time. Both research and artistic project, *Terre-Mer* questions notions of temporality, becoming, displacement, habitat, geography, territory, risk and chance, by sensitive and artistic means.

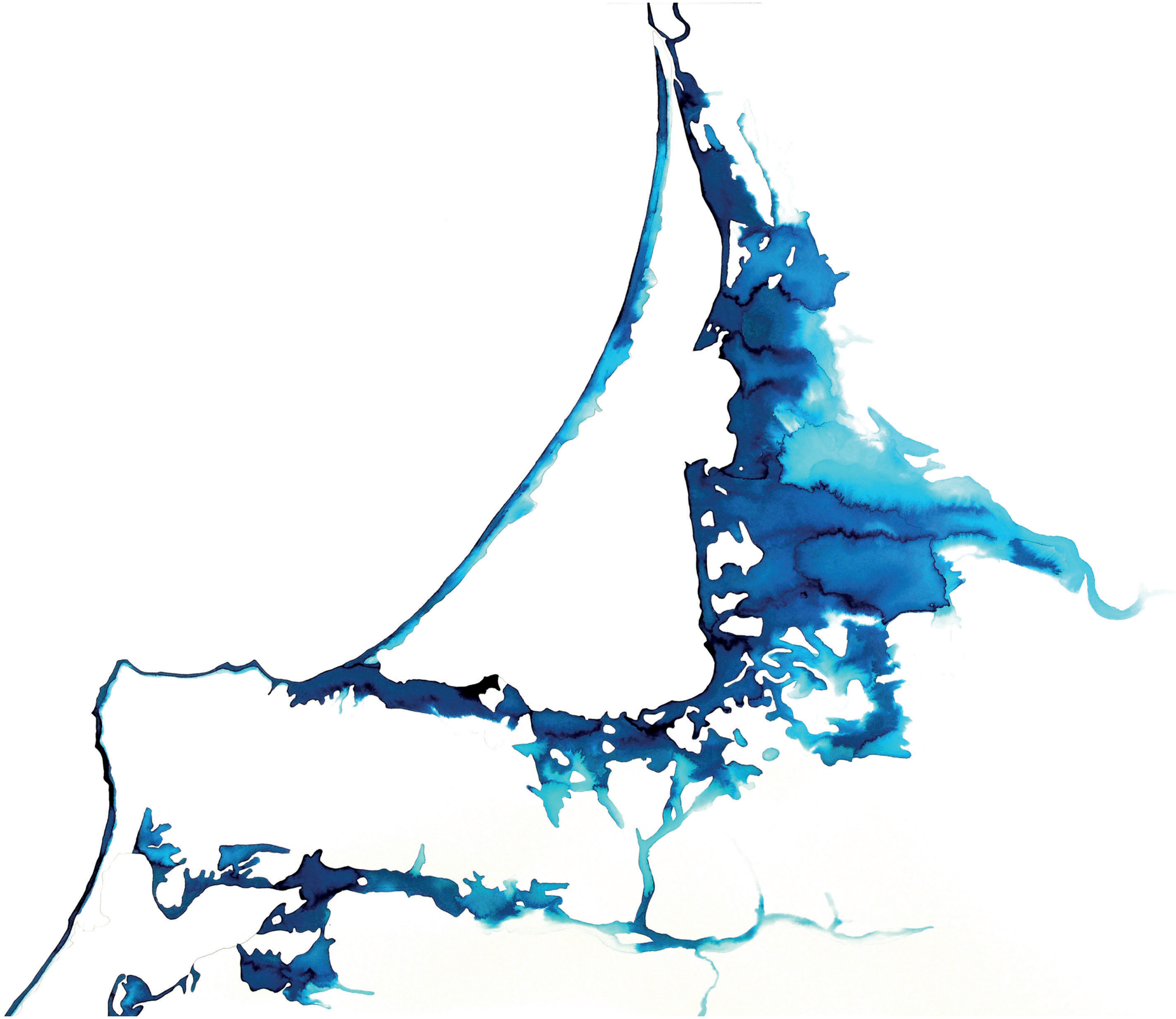
Terre-Mer (*Land-Sea*). I invented this name to evoke areas that are both land and sea, regions that are either under the sea or on land, depending on the period to which we pay attention. These are in-between areas, areas of relationship between land and sea.

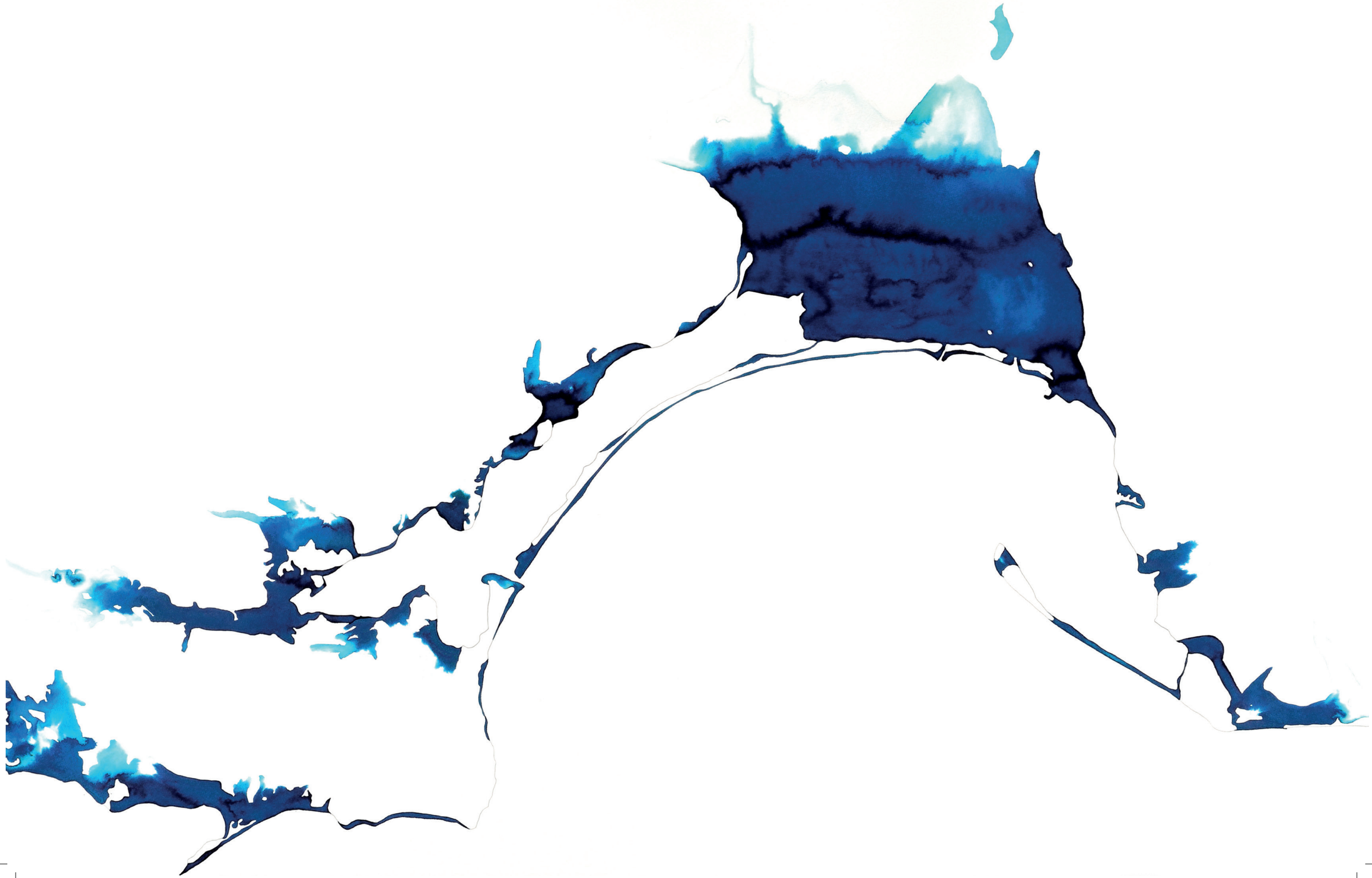
Through this project, it is important to represent the 'shifting' relations between land and sea. These movements disturb the clear distinction, like that of the line separating the mainland from the sea in the representation of the territory in cartography. But in my opinion, it is also about questioning the habitat, and the lifestyles related to these uncertain territories: what should be done in the Sea-Sea areas? Must we live there, develop them for humans, build technological means so that we can continue to live there and 'defend' ourselves against the sea, or do we have to return them to the sea? How to live on Terre-Mer? This project tries to deepen and share these questions, through my artistic practice.

Coastline: the coastline is a curve/line representing the intersection of land and sea. This boundary between land and sea is in constant displacement, through the erosion of the coasts and the changing level of the sea. Currently, with the warming of atmospheric temperatures, the average sea level is rising. Part of the project focuses on the representation of moving territories. How to represent a long-term view of the coastline, with its travels, present, past and future?

The project brings together a series of artistic works representing different areas of the sea and land, such as the drawings of *Terre-Mer*, in pencil and water-colour, and letters from *Terre-Mer*, texts written in fictitious form, from meetings and interviews with inhabitants of *Terre-Mer* areas, researchers from scientific disciplines – geographers, architects, geomorphologists – and researchers in the human sciences – philosophers, historians and anthropologists.

2014 — 2017





Terre-Mer: Series

1 Marie Velardi, *Nida,* pencil and watercolour on paper, 75 x 110 cm (2014). Courtesy of the artist, p.136–137.

2 Marie Velardi, *Gdansk,* pencil and watercolour on paper, 75 x 110 cm (2014). Courtesy of the artist, p.138–139.

3 Marie Velardi, *Aberdeen, Forvie, Inverness, Nigg Bay,* pencil and watercolour on paper, 75 x 110 cm (2014). Courtesy of the artist, p.140–141.

4 Marie Velardi, *Sulina,* pencil and watercolour on paper, 75 x 110 cm (2014). Courtesy of the artist, p.142–143.

Terre-Mer: Letter
Translated section from the on-going text *Lettre de Terre-Mer* (11th–21st century).

We have reclaimed land from the sea.

Little by little, we have drained the marshes on our coastlines and shores.

First we transformed these marshes into beds for cockles and oysters.

As time went on we dried them up entirely to form meadows where our cows and sheep could graze.

We built our houses there, closer and closer to the sea, for the fishing, and then we built our holiday homes and our rest homes.

We waited for our old age and settled there peacefully. Then our families chose to stay there, to live there.

We raised dykes to protect ourselves from storms and floods, higher and higher, until we could see neither sea nor horizon.

We moved the coastline and old islands found themselves in the middle of our fields.

Then the sea came back. And keeps coming back.

We will live to the rhythm of the moon. By observing the tide cycle, high and low.

We will no longer buy land. Our homes will be mobile, and floating if necessary.

We will choose where and when to move them, according to the movements of the waters, letting the sea and the rivers find their place.

The ancient beds of the rivers and shores of the sea will be traced on our maps, which will remind us of the contours of the old and future islands.

We will commemorate the missing, the storms and floods of the past, as well as those to come.

We will create the School of Hazards, where we will learn to read the sea, the rivers, the forests, the changing winds and the movements of the sand dunes.

We will break down the dykes to see the horizon.

We will return these lands to the sea.

She will come back.

Marie Velardi: The Art of Prediction*

LAURENCE SCHMIDLIN

The hypothesis is the only fact of the future. Similar to the literary and cinematographic fiction that she uses in her work *Futurs Antérieurs, XXIe Siècle* (2006/2015), Marie Velardi speculates on the conditions of our future, calling on them to imagine tomorrow's memory. Employing a medium of speculation par excellence, drawing–particularly watercolour–enables her to introduce the unknown. As the colour is diluted, it yields partially uncontrollable shades, just as water and pigment react unpredictably in contact with the paper. Randomness adds even more possibility. That which is beyond control has formal potential. These qualities refer to our ability to anticipate an event without being able to accurately predict how it will present itself to us in reality. In the series of drawings *Terre-Mer* (2014–2019), the artist allows this area of encounter between water and ink to come alive, like the continuous flow of the sea that submerges territory and withdraws from it before invading it again. The gradation of blue in this area results from the superposition of different temporalities: the past, the present and a plausible future, all fixed in the same drawing.

EMBRACING THE COASTLINE

The coastline, the point of contact between land and sea, is in a constant process of redesign. It forms a landscape that is never quite the same from one moment to the next. There are several reasons for this. Wave action gradually erodes the

coast, while carrying away and returning soil and sand to reconstitute it every time a little differently. Sea levels are now rising every year due to warmer atmospheric temperatures. And then, there are also weather disasters. The series *Terre-Mer*, a term coined by Marie Velardi herself, represents this elusive space of convergence of the aquatic and terrestrial elements, specifically the current coastline and its movements between the past and the future, assuming a rise in water levels of a few metres. The artist gives a unique temporal register to landscapes in constant metamorphosis.

This project, which includes some thirty drawings, follows the video *Aléa* (2014), filmed together with Indonesian anthropologist Rhino Ariefiansyah. Four years after the floods and deaths caused by Cyclone Xynthia, the video work documents the impact of the disaster on the inhabitants of the French coast, some of whom were forced to move for security reasons, while the others refused to leave. What are their memories of the territory? How has the past joined the future in this moment of cataclysm? Following these questions, Marie Velardi began to enquire into situations that would lead to similar responses, situations where people have had to find compromises to live with the environment they believe they own. The coastline offered a specific example of such a shifting territory.

Velardi's drawings are not immediately understandable, as they represent neither land nor sea, which instead reside in the white parts of the paper. The element that crosses the page is not a real aquatic area. It is the result of the coexistence of three temporalities, suggesting the migration of the coastline over time, a time that the artist describes as 'expanded', a kind of thicker present. Like the watercolour series *Aquifers* (2013) and *Renewal Time* (2013), which simultaneously showed the actual state of groundwater and its renewal, which can take a huge amount of time, the scale is temporal and not spatial. As is often the case in her work, Marie Velardi proposes to move away from a linear representation of time. The past is no longer only the place of memory, but also an active time, always current, and the future is an era. The coastline, pencil-drawn from satellite images, is diluted with blue watercolour; the darkest hue indicates the approach of the sea and the most blurred the retreat of the land. Between the first *Terre-Mer* (*L'île d'Elle*), an island back in Gallo-Roman times and now a hill surrounded by land, and the last *Terre-Mer* (*Avalon*), a mythical island whose possible location the artist sought on ancient maps and which could be located near Glastonbury, we observe this natural phenomenon from Venice to Mumbai, via Nigg Bay in Scotland.

IN SEARCH OF LONG TIME

To be devastated, to build, to protect, to adapt, to renounce, to dry, to rebuild, to plant, to fear, to honour. How can you live on the waterfront, knowing the danger that lies ahead? In *Lettre de Terre-Mer*, Marie Velardi gives voice to the population – past, present and possibly future – of these places in between and creates a story of the relationship to the Earth that gives and takes. It tells, with a certain mysticism, the story of fear and hope, fatalism and resistance, and it reviews different ways of renewing our relationship with nature. When Xynthia descended on human constructions, the dykes that were supposed to protect the population from the water did not break. They prevented the sea from returning from where it came, turning against those who had built them. Solutions that are more in harmony with the environment, such as mangroves and sea marshes, make it possible to create buffer zones. Thus, *Terre-Mer* becomes a character, almost a divinity, to whom we might, for instance, address the question of whether the construction of such a channel suits him.

This letter does not offer a linear narrative. The tenses of the verbs are intertwined, allowing the reader to travel through time and events. Fictional elements alternate with documentary elements, drawn from Marie Velardi's interviews with the inhabitants of coastal sites and researchers from different scientific disciplines, which she uses to open up possibilities. Furthermore, the text is always unfinished. It is in a process of being constantly supplemented by new passages. Literary matter is organic, expanding over time. Like its subject, it is a thought in construction, never definitive, but always prospective. Velardi summarises her approach as an attempt to *'think what happens to us and create from what comes.'* It seeks to contribute to the territories she studies, by sharing their past and future memories, thereby giving meaning to the events we face.

✻ / This is a slightly revised version of a text originally published in *Kunst-Bulletin,* no. 5, June 2019. Translated from the French.

Witness

(Chapter Five)

Forest Law

URSULA BIEMANN

Forest Law is a collaborative multimedia art installation from the Swiss artist Ursula Biemann, produced in collaboration with the Brazilian architect Paulo Tavares. The installation is made up of a synchronised two-channel video projection (38 minutes) and a photo-text assemblage shown on tables and/or walls depending on the exhibition space.

The project, which also includes the bilingual artist book *Forest Law/Selva Jurídica*,[1] draws from research carried out by the pair in the oil-and-mining frontier in the Ecuadorian Amazon – one of the most biodiverse and mineral-rich regions on Earth, currently under pressure from the dramatic expansion of large-scale extraction activities.

At the heart of *Forest Law* is a series of landmark legal cases that bring the forest to court and plead for the rights of nature. One particularly paradigmatic trial has recently been won by the indigenous people of Sarayaku, based on their cosmology of the living forest.

Forest Law has been realised in a close reading of Michel Serres' *The Natural Contract*,[2] and the project emerged from dialogues – between Biemann and Tavares, between the camera and the forest, and, most importantly, between them and the many people whom they encountered while travelling through Amazonia in November 2013.

Taken together, the collection of personal testimonies and factual evidence presented in the installation and publication expose the multiple dimensions of the tropical forest as a physical, legal and cosmological entity.

The project was commissioned by the Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University.

2014

1 / Ursula Biemann and Paulo Tavares, eds, *Forest Law/Selva Jurídica* (Michigan: Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum, Michigan State University, 2014).

2 / Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

Interview with Ursula Biemann*

Yesomi Umolu

July 2014:

YESOMI UMOLU — I would like to start by asking you to introduce the project *Forest Law*, a collaboration with the Brazilian architect Paulo Tavares. Can you begin by explaining how you came to make it?

URSULA BIEMANN — The project was the result of a commission by the Broad Art Museum, Michigan State University, called The Land Grant commission program, for artists whose work deals with food, agricultural and environmental issues. At the time I had an ongoing conversation with Paulo Tavares about Michel Serres and his book *The Natural Contract*. This connection came about because both of us are involved in World of Matter, a collaborative project where a group of around ten researchers and practitioners from different disciplines contribute ideas around global ecologies of resource exploitation and circulation.

Due to the timeline of the commission, it was essential that we begin with an existing body of research that we could build on. Paulo is one of those intellectuals who has long engaged in visual communication through video, map-making and exhibition practices. Given this, and his substantial research on the region, I contacted him to see if he would be willing to travel with me to the Amazon and contribute his research to the project, and from that point it became a collaboration.

YESOMI — Why did the case of nature rights in the Amazon emerge as a topic to explore within this commission?

URSULA — Nature rights is a pivotal point in the complex nexus of competitive land use for food and bioenergy, and the environmental and climatic consequences this has for the planet. Plus, under the fertile soil of the Amazon, there is a concentration of mineral and hydrocarbon deposits attracting big transnational companies. Their interest clashes with the rights of indigenous nations who collectively own these territories. The ultimate victim in these fierce struggles for land, water and geological wealth is nature – it's the Earth herself, with her atmosphere and biosphere. Presently, nature doesn't appear in law other than in the form of property rights. While we have parcelled off the land into small cells that can be owned and exploited, entire Earth systems are legally invisible. This is a fatal lacuna in the world legal structures. In this context, the recently adopted rights of nature in the Constitution of Ecuador are an important move towards closing this breach. To speak about nature rights challenges the very foundations of the modern humanist definition of nature.

▲
Ursula Biemann, video still from *Forest Law.* 2-channel video installation, 38 mins (2014).

YESOMI — Can you tell me about your encounters and conversations with people while on this research trip to Ecuador? And how did you finally settle on the key

individuals whose interviews form a central portion of the video? Who are they, and why are they important voices in the region?

URSULA — We were concentrating on forest-related legal cases in Ecuador, a country that stands out as a global epicentre for this kind of environmental activism. A new conflict unfolding in the south of Ecuador was of particular interest to us, so we looked for a strong representative of the Shuar nation, whom we found in the person of Domingo Ankwash, a leading activist. The Shuar are not exactly known for their friendliness towards strangers, which made me wonder if any of them would be willing to speak with us, let alone before the camera. An unfortunate incident, whereby a young Shuar got killed by the military, prompted the Shuar leaders to call in a press conference on the day we arrived by bus in this rainforest area. The public event was the perfect opportunity for us to approach and meet many important community speakers, who, under these particular circumstances, were open to being interviewed. One of the leading figures we met there was Franco Viteri, who had come from Sarayaku specifically to attend the press meeting. Sarayaku was the second area of key interest to us, but it was difficult to access.

The village council decides on each and every visitor who can enter the territory. Making this personal contact with Franco paved the way for us to fly to Sarayaku and interview him, as well as Sarayaku leader José Gualinga, whose testimony turned out to be crucial to the video and the book. From the capital, Quito, in the Andean Sierra, we also reached out to Nina Pacari, a Kitchwa lawyer and former constitutional judge. Nina had been seminal in conceptualising and implementing the plurinational state within Ecuadorian borders, pushing for the recognition of indigenous peoples as nations with their own rights, rather than defining them as minorities within the state. We also had the chance to interview a botanist, David Neill, who has made it his life's work to record and name vast numbers of unknown species in the Cordillera del Cóndor. This encounter was particularly pertinent in the sense that the Cóndor, where the copper mines are currently being opened in Shuar territories, is one of the most biodiverse areas in the world. Geologist Pablo Dunque added another layer of expertise, explaining how this unique biodiversity and mineral concentration was formed by a clash of tectonic plates. Even if we can only include short interview passages in the video and the book, the knowledge that emerged from all these encounters made me appreciate the depth of the issues at hand.

▲
Ursula Biemann, video still from *Forest Law.* 2-channel video installation, 38 mins (2014).

YESOMI — Can you speak about the process of collaboration with Paulo and some of the key questions that emerged from your conversations around this project?

URSULA — While most of my video projects are conceived as my artistic productions, I have frequently engaged in collaborations with other artists and cultural producers to generate a larger context for my research. *World of Matter* would be an example of such a collective project that involved artists, research architects, photojournalists and art historians. Earlier projects were *The Maghreb Connection* (2006) and *B-Zone* (2005). The extended exchange with others around a particular set of political and theoretical issues during the time of development and production of my video works has proven incredibly fertile. The collective outcome of an exhibition that has built up through extensive dialogues is so much more impactful.

In the case of *Forest Law*, the collaboration simply started off as a common field trip. But since the contents of the video and the documents were so entangled with Paulo's research, our work continued to embrace increasing levels of collaboration – it grew organically, so to speak. We share a long history of postcolonial critique through our work, as well as an interest in, how shall I say, non-academic research practices that are equally inspired by theoretical, activist and artistic/literary forms of writing knowledge. A question that emerged was what happens when you

take elements of indigenous cosmology, which is usually discussed in academia in the anthropological context, and bring it into the global future-generating legal frameworks, moving from a cultural analysis of a highly localised and allegedly 'primitive' or pre-modern imagination to the planetary scale of binding juridical structures? This dramatic change in perspective creates a speculative moment, which harbours great creative potential for shifting the attention of viewers from one way of looking at an issue to a radically different one. Art and other creative writing and visual practices have the ability to activate this sort of shift. While I, as an artist, clearly have more freedom to create logical gaps and narrative fiction, the negotiations in this collaboration moved along the lines of how much of this narrative freedom is admissible in the research university setting. A hybrid format like the *Forest Law* installation and book establishes an interesting terrain to negotiate such fundamental questions of practice, engendered by an equally hybrid form of collaboration.

YESOMI — Can you describe the relationship between the video and the documents table in the installation? How did you settle on these two components? I am particularly interested in the interplay between personal testimonies and 'factual' evidence that is present between the video and the table. Can you talk a little more about this?

URSULA — I think that the combination of these two formats in the exhibition space precisely reflects the type of dynamic I just mentioned. The two media – large-scale video projection and a documents table – speak to each other in a non-hierarchical way. The testimonies given in the screened video interviews resonate with the public hearing video documents displayed on the table, which we conceived as a 'forum' in the sense that the table functions as a device that gathers visual and archival evidence around which political conflicts and negotiations unfold. Forensic evidence – produced in the form of maps, photographs and material samples – supports the case put forth by the interviewees, yet the video refers to this forensic aspect not via direct critical comments, but through the voiceless performance of an activist dressed in a white protective suit, handling the toxic muds and fluids in the actual contamination sites. These diverse methods find simultaneous expression in the installation, blurring somehow the factual and fictional boundaries, but not enough to question the earnestness of the research.

▲
Ursula Biemann and Paulo Tavares, *Forest Law* exhibition installation view, BAK (Basis voor Actuele Kunst), Utrecht, the Netherlands (2015).

There is something shockingly timely about *The Natural Contract*, which Michel Serres published in 1990. In this little book he pleads for the inauguration of a natural contract, i.e. a binding pact between humans and the Earth, to complement the exclusively social contracts upon which our legal system rests. Twenty-four years ago, at the threshold of a rapidly globalising capitalist world, he anticipated the magnitude of physical transformations our planet would undergo given this fierce and inequitable worldwide battle for wealth and resources, in which the Earth itself would be the biggest loser of all. He goes to the roots of reason and judgement in philosophy in search of explanations for this age-old chasm between science and law that is driving these ill-fated developments.

This alone would be reason enough to make Serres's project a primary reference for *Forest Law*. But I think what is so deeply inspiring for me about his writing is that he exposes these profound conceptual and historical considerations through a dazzling trajectory involving sites and plots ranging from Greek philosophy to his own experience as maritime navigator. And he does so in a language that never shies away from the mythic, the speculative, the political and the poetic, and that always remains a little enigmatic. As he speaks for a new bond between

humans and the Earth, he dismantles countless academic confines that have been decisive in preventing this bond. His writing is practice.

YESOMI — Similarly, you and Paulo have spoken about your approach to the project being very influenced by anthropologist Eduardo Kohn's writing on the 'living forest'. Why were you drawn to his work?

URSULA — We came across his writing after our return from the field trip last November. *How Forests Think* had just come out last summer, a very recent discovery. In this book, Kohn places human anthropology in a larger semiotic context of thinking selves, which includes all beings and their form-giving lives, i.e. all semiosis, but also other beings, such as spirits of ancestors and the masters of the forest, the protectors of the ecosystems, with whom the shamans communicate. The amazing thing is that he develops these beautiful theories at a Kitchwa village located about 50 kilometres from where we did our fieldwork in the Amazon. In widening the semiotic concept, Kohn succeeds in going beyond an anthropology of the human, connecting Donna Haraway with Viveiro de Castro. This thorough and delightfully creative theory is helpful for *Forest Law* in that it offers a scientific proposal for some of the less tangible arguments that indigenous leaders brought before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights against the intrusion of oil companies in their territories. José Gualinga speaks about the living forest as the forest of beings, a place where the micro- and macro-organisms communicate with each other and with the community. It's very easy to dismiss these cosmological visions as pre-modern or simply mythic; the real task is to begin to seriously incorporate them into our thinking, which has been dominated by exclusionary rational formats to the detriment of the planet and its life systems. Kohn's interpretation of the thinking forest is an extraordinary contribution.

YESOMI — *Forest Law* is a particularly timely project that responds to events that are currently unfolding in the Amazon, and also parallel cases across the globe. Given this context, what contribution do you hope the project will make to these discussions?

URSULA — In its detailed and well-documented approach to these cases, I hope that *Forest Law* can be a paradigmatic piece that many people from diverse fields of study and activism can plug into. Its main purpose is not so much the

presentation of a mass of new facts that support a particular argument, but lies in creating a new place in the imagination about these entangled circumstances that affect the small forest community of Sarayaku as much as life on the planet as a whole. This mad shift of scale is what makes these narratives so deeply relevant for anyone engaging with the piece. In the age of the Anthropocene we begin to understand that we are connected with the Amazon through the global hydrosphere, through the currents of air, particles, precipitation and radiation. By tying this planetary perspective to social and political histories and movements on the ground, a political ecology emerges that makes itself known through public debates, writing and image-making. This is the type of terrain to which I imagine this project contributes.

YESOMI — How do you see *Forest Law* functioning beyond the museum spaces in which it is shown? I am particularly interested in how it may become a useful advocacy tool and resource. Is this something you intend for this project?

URSULA — Art can impress itself on the imaginary and the intuitive thinking and perception of viewers with a magnitude that factual information will never achieve. And since the museum is the designated place where signifying practices are being negotiated, *Forest Law* is well positioned at the Broad Art Museum, as both a museum and university context. But *Forest Law* is clearly not a hermeneutic project; it draws on live testimonies of people whose livelihood, whose very existence, is at stake. So there is an inherent urge to publicise the material beyond the art context to reach indigenous and international activist communities who will use it for advocacy. If the project emerges from a combination of theoretical reflections, aesthetic considerations and political activism in the field, it will flow back into these same channels at the moment of distribution. That's why *Forest Law* takes all these different formats and why the book and video are bilingual; it is vital that the outcome can reach those people and organisations who have made it happen. This is a minor contribution, maybe – it's a long history we are talking about. But art and social and ecological activism also have a long history, attached to and intrinsically related to these struggles, as the project demonstrates. So this is an intervention in a regime of visibility, which is also a regime of power. Does art contribute to it? What is its resonance? Is it consequential? *Forest Law* dwells on this frontier space. I also hope that beyond our upcoming exhibition in Bogotá the project will circulate to other Latin American destinations. It will help raise

international awareness of the underlying mechanisms of these forest cases in which Western histories, as well as current economic strategies, are deeply implicated. It's by no means some kind of remote issue unfolding at the edge of the rainforest. It hits us smack at the heart of civilisation; as the video text reads, *'When the forest is gone, world civilization will have come to an end/Muerto el bosque, la civilización del planeta habrá llegado a su fin.'* In that sense, *Forest Law* can also be seen as advocating the rights of nature on a global scale, in the same way human rights had to be fought for.

▲ Ursula Biemann, video still from *Forest Law.* 2-channel video installation, 38 mins (2014).

YESOMI — Your projects are often celebrated for their ability to connect micro and macro conditions, frequently linking localised struggles with broader global issues. How do you see *Forest Law* connecting to spheres outside of Ecuador?

URSULA — If by 'macro conditions' you mean the theoretical stratum that makes its appearance in my videos, I would certainly agree that establishing this connection has been important to me throughout. But I would also say that this level of reflection is not only a larger contextualisation of particular circumstances within a global scheme. *Forest Law* obviously resonates with a long and violent history of displacing, expropriating, and exterminating native populations in the United States, Canada and so many other countries across the world. But there is

another dimension that interests me in my video works that refers to things that cannot be filmed. In addition to documenting political issues, these videos speak about how we can imagine reality to be constituted–in other words, they manifest an underlying ontological enquiry. This whole question of how things materialise is tremendously important if one aspires to have any sort of effect in the world. While in earlier works I have used human geography as a space-producing principle, this video unfolds a landscape that is populated by all kinds of sentient beings who inhabit different dimensions of reality; it delves into cosmopolitical considerations.

The living forest of interrelated beings highlights a multiple form of existence, which cannot be constructed through a material historical narrative only; nor does it emerge merely through spatial practices and their many materialising expressions. Hence, neither a historical nor a geographic organisation can adequately render this lived multidimensionality that phases in and out of human perception. Rather, this complex forest ecology is a form of present and future-generating existence, a place where long evolutionary chains meet the future legal system for Earth. As the precariousness of conditions necessary for human existence on this planet is being rapidly exposed, the future perfect becomes the vital conjugation of thinking, even if grammar tutors dissuade you from using it. We turn into archaeologists of the future, who must piece together *'what will have been thought.' Forest Law* posits itself in this conditional future that is shaped by the decisions we are making now. The forest is somehow used in the video as an indicator for how much time humans have left before their civilisation comes to an end. From this speculative point, the narration looks back at the time around 2014 when major shifts were made regarding the Rights of Nature, and it ends with the words, *'If we have a future, we will have decided to look after all sentient beings.'* In the age of the Anthropocene we are asked to think in much larger temporalities. The usual short-term, consumptive way of thinking that our economy thrives on is utterly insufficient for grasping the current human condition. What is needed are more inclusive models of imagination that simultaneously pay attention to very tiny and very large non-local entities, like insects and global warming, or minute gold deposits and automated world financial markets.

The entire discussion of local–global relations has just been a warm-up for what is currently required. We have been focusing too much on short-term history and on medium-range scale, in which humans are invariably centre stage. I believe that *Forest Law* speaks to this shift in thinking.

Postscript 2019

URSULA — The rights of nature movement in Ecuador, which is a major subject of *Forest Law* (2014), strives towards universal law through the many on-the-ground struggles by indigenous nations (including the Sarayaku, who are featured in our piece), NGOs, and juridical bodies that are being created in civic initiatives. It goes beyond the global to address the cosmopolitical, planetary dimension. Artists can contribute to this process by experimenting with a wide range of narrative and aesthetic forms when exploring the changes in the composition of the Earth.

Art tends to address the collective imaginary that shapes our attitudes and potential actions; that is important. In addition, I have also become involved in actively collaborating on the foundation of an indigenous university in the south of Colombia. I was introduced to the idea during my recent field excursion to Nariño and Putumayo in the Amazon in 2018, where I had extended meetings with indigenous tribal leaders. Ultimately, I became convinced that in this context it makes more sense to co-create an institution that will help facilitate indigenous sciences in the years to come than to create another video about the pressures on indigenous territories and their vital forests.

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* / This is an edited version of an interview conducted by the curator Yesomi Umolu and first published in the catalogue produced for the exhibition of *The Land Grant: Forest Law* at the Broad Art Museum, Michigan State University in 2014.

Testimonies from indigenous witnesses in Forest Law

JOSÉ GUALINGA

Sarayaku has always defended its territory, its environment and its life. There is much interest in exploiting its resources–timber, minerals and oil. So we have decided to say *'No!'* to all extraction projects in Sarayaku. We want to remain free, we want to stay clear of contamination. These are protected territories because they sustain us. In 1996, without consulting the people of Sarayaku, CGC, an Argentinian oil and gas company, obtained a licence to drill in the territory. In 2002, CGC intruded unauthorised, violating all decisions issued by Texalupan authorities, the council of the elders and the assembly. This spawned resistance, and Sarayaku declared a state of emergency. We mobilised. Sarayaku established the peace-and-life camps along its boundaries and protected the boundaries, mobilising the people within the forest. Nevertheless, the company announced publicly that it would respect only two kilometres of Sarayaku's territory–i.e. the central part only, nothing more–not understanding that Sarayaku has 140,000 hectares and constitutes property collectively owned by the Sarayaku people. The company advanced with its workers and militarised the mountains and the river with private security, the police and armed forces in order to hinder the people of Sarayaku from mobilising themselves.

WITNESS (CHAPTER FIVE)

▲
Ursula Biemann, video still from *Forest Law* – José Gualinga.
2-channel video installation, 38 mins (2014).

In 2003 we managed to expel the oil company. But the Ecuadorian judiciary continued to threaten, defame and persecute our leaders and people to the point that leaders received death threats. That's why we appealed to the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights.

The living forest is the forest of beings. The forest is where the micro- and macro-organisms interconnect with us, with our people and families. It's also a space of recreation, where we enjoy ourselves, where we replenish the energies for our emotional and physical life. It's a space for transmitting our knowledge through the Yachaks (the wise ones) and the elders to our children; it's an area of education. And it's also where we enter into communion with other beings who transmit their energies to us so we can continue to live. That's the living forest. It was important throughout the process to make the Court of Justice understand how enmeshed the people of Sarayaku are with the mountains, the lagoons, the trees; with the Amasanga, the Sacharuna, the Yashingu; and with all the natural spaces that include invisible beings, the protectors regulating the ecosystem. These beings have more fundamental rights than any of us because they are the ones who protect. We wanted the court to understand the importance of the territory of Sarayaku, and to understand that if the territory disappears, the indigenous people disappear with it.

NINA PACARI

From a Western logic you can conceive of a natural contract. For the *cosmovisión* of the indigenous people, this isn't necessary because in holistic thinking, by violating the individual rights of a person you violate the rights of nature. Oil exploitation is an example. But in the debates, the environmentalists said it was important that nature be defined as a subject with rights. So we said, let's meet in the middle. Thus the outcome is a norm with intercultural character, a new concept that can be a paradigm for the conservation of nature. In the case of Ecuador, with the new constitution and the reforms that have been pushed ahead since the nineties, we say that a person or individual is a subject with rights; people or collective identities like First Nations are subjects with rights; and nature too is a subject with rights.

▲
Ursula Biemann, video still from *Forest Law* – Nina Pacari.
2-channel video installation, 38 mins (2014).

DOMINGO ANKWASH

I am Shuar. Our history derives from a history of invasion of the indigenous people in Latin America. Our territory was vast; it reached from the north to the south of Amazonia. Now it is divided into provinces: Zamora, Morona Santiago, Pastaza, Napos, Sucumbius, Orellana. All this was our territory. Seven nationalities lived there, each with its distinct culture and language, and when the republics were formed, they divided us into two countries: Peru and Ecuador. In Peru we have our Shuar brothers who speak our language. The republics have divided us. Our territory has been degraded; we don't have a territory anymore. Mining and oil extraction come together. In the war of '41 (between Ecuador and Peru) the transnational corporations entered, Shell and Texaco. They came to work in the north, and here in the mines in the south, too. There is a story that says that in this zone the miners were exterminated by the Shuar, so they went to exploit oil in the north instead. This history of oil exploitation is bitter for us. And now in the mining boom, this government, which is extractivist in the truest sense, calls in the transnational corporations. We know for sure that the Chinese, Canadians, Arabs, Koreans and Japanese are here. What do they negotiate? Our Amazonian territory. They negotiate our forest, our habitat.

▲
Ursula Biemann, video still from *Forest Law*–Domingo Ankwash.
2-channel video installation, 38 mins (2014).

All large-scale mining destroys the habitat of humans, plants, forests, animals, insects, and the entire biodiversity. What will happen when the mines start to open? For large-scale mining, they will need territory and water. They will have to tap rivers and valleys, and start to destroy and contaminate. That's why we are fighting. They are already in the Cordillera del Cóndor, they have already started their activity. Now they will start to open, beginning with the excavations of 1,000 metres or more, 3,000 metres wide. That's just the first pit they will open. What will they do in twenty, thirty, or forty years? That's what we ask ourselves.

I said, *'Let's move and organise ourselves.'* We are not armed, but one day the stones will fly because we cannot die for dying's sake, we are living beings. Extinguish us–I prefer that they extinguish us, that no single Shuar remains, and that they do as they please with our territory. But as long as there is a living Shuar, they will get these reactions. And now they are afraid of our little fishing rifle, while they have machine guns, helicopters, bulletproof vests, military helmets, etc. I have the right to defend my people. I have the right to speak for my people, who are mute. If they have to shoot us down for telling the truth, shoot us down; we are not afraid. The Shuar invented poison and the lance. And now they tell us to cut the point of the lance, they are afraid of the lance itself. How far do these powerful capitalists reach? My people say that we are the enemies of the government. The state declared war on the Shuar people.

Convergence
(Chapter Six)

VIEWPOINT

DAVID HALEY

a dialogue with rivers, people and their catchment
at the confluence of the River Cocker and Derwent

lakes to sea to lakes
a catchment, a confluence
and a dialogue

Over millennia geology, climate and biodiversity have shaped many rivers. Over millennia, the many rivers have shaped the geology, climate and biodiversity. Over millennia humans have shaped and been shaped by this ecosystem.

Within this ecosystem, shaped by the confluence of the rivers Derwent and Cocker, a physical form emerged. This pointed landform occurs at the mouth of the River Cocker, which gave its name to the town that evolved. From here people view the two rivers. This promontory is their 'viewpoint' and this project aims to give voice to that mouth.

Learning from the floods of 2009 and 2015, it seems that the people of Cockermouth found great camaraderie from their plight and worked hard to support each other. However, it also seems that they were ill-prepared to foresee and cope with what may, now, be seen as the inevitable recurrence of intense rainfall. While much is being done by local people, civic authorities and government agencies to physically reduce vulnerability to flooding impacts, climate change psychology is beginning to understand the long-term traumatic effects of such events on a psychosocial basis.

The transformative challenges presented by this situation run deep and wide, calling for an integrated interdisciplinary approach. Heritage provides a lens to see the shape of things over time. Ecology provides the pattern that connects those things over time. Art may provide the process to transform those things to culture over time. Turning the face of disaster to the face of opportunity this arts project aims to reveal the heritage and ecology of Cockermouth, enhance the culture of the people as many dynamic futures, and thereby increase their adaptation for resilience.

VIEWPOINT brings a wealth of community arts practice and many years of climate change research to listen to, engage with and empower the people of Cockermouth to creatively determine their capable futures. The main aim is to determine the form and composition of Cockermouth's riparian heritage, and consider how this may inform its community future(s). Through meetings, workshops and events it will develop a local lexicon, create new metaphors and share myths to form an eco-heritage narrative. As a dynamic dialogue, these streams of consciousness will emerge as a poetic form, a fable to be carved in stone, written on walls, published in print and online, and performed.

Physical project outputs will include temporary artworks on site and the emergence of something permanent, crafted locally. Texts will evolve from the process of engagement with the different communities, sectors and generations of people living in and visiting Cockermouth. With full participation of local people and project partners, the story will continue in *VIEWPOINT: STORYING*, a heritage tale-telling event, and *Rivers of Light*, a lantern parade to enhance the existing annual celebration. In addition to these core artworks, 'ecological arts-led, practice-based research' findings will be presented at international conferences and published in academic journals and books. The question is not *'what is the artwork?'* but *'how does the art work?'* And of course the real legacy of this project will be embodied by the people of Cockermouth.

As an overall outcome, the project hopes to contribute a means to resolve the relationship between the people of Cockermouth, their rivers and the catchment. The situation requires sensitivity to understand the complexities of environmental, social, cultural, psychological, spiritual and economic issues. No pretence is made to offer solutions, nor to further problematise the situation, but to creatively enable Cockermouth townsfolk to identify and form meaningful questions for 'capable futures' and thereby potentially increase their capacity for ecological resilience and adaptation to change. This is their future heritage. Their story will become an ongoing affirmation of community spirit and conviviality, grounded in the realities of the transformative challenges we all face.

2018 — PRESENT DAY

Interview with David Haley

BARNABY DRABBLE

December 2017:

BARNABY DRABBLE—Hi, David–thanks for agreeing to this interview. The first thing I want to ask is what you're working on at the moment?

DAVID HALEY—Sure, one of my current projects is a thing called *VIEWPOINT*. It's based in a small market town called Cockermouth, which is next to the Lake District in the North of Cumbria, North West England. I was invited there this time last year, initially to contribute to a Heritage Lottery funding bid. That was to basically look at enhancing a really specific place in this town at the confluence of the rivers Cocker and Derwent. Because of the confluence of these two rivers the town has suffered in recent years with dramatic flooding.

The Heritage Lottery bid proposal was to look at creative and artistic ways of understanding the heritage of this town and the culture of living in a town that floods. My particular interest, and why I was invited to take part in it in the first place, is because since 1992 my whole practice has focused on climate change and species extinction. In 1992 I was working for an arts company called Welfare State International in Ulverston in the South of Cumbria. The company was renowned for doing long-term residencies in city areas. We specialised in working in a socially engaged manner. Looking at the development of cultures as a way of helping communities to become self-determined.

1992 became really important to me because of the Rio Earth Summit, which was the first time the idea of climate change became a popular notion. I remember that you could send a postcard to the United Nations and they would post for free the Rio Summit book. This had the outlines of Agenda 21 and introduced the basic idea of sustainable development and how to apply it to make the world a better place and save us from climate change. 1992 was a kind of watershed for me, because my daughter was four at the time. As a human being, I just realised that, this was the most important thing to address in the world because it would affect my daughter's future.

Climate change at that time was basically perceived as a scientific phenomenon that would affect economics and be solved politically. There was no mention of culture, so the question was how does an artist approach this stuff. From then till now I'm still trying to work it out.

BARNABY — *VIEWPOINT* is a small, local project dealing with a flooding problem. Is it possible to go from those big ideas of the Rio Summit and climate change in general to two rivers coming together?

DAVID — For me, the question of climate change is absolutely paramount in relation to the flooding in Cockermouth. The effects the flooding has on the local economies and on the social psychology of the different communities within that little town is phenomenal. I tend to spend a lot of time talking with people, listening as much as I possibly can. I refer to this as deep listening because it was not just about listening, but listening and then enquiring as to what it is I'm listening to. What it is that people are saying and not saying, where it's coming from, going back to people time and again and their community groups.

▲
David Haley, *VIEWPOINT: FROST,* Confluence of the Rivers Derwent and Cocker.

BARNABY — What's your proposal for *VIEWPOINT*?

DAVID — Well, we've set up a programme of work and a series of sub-projects which, more than anything else, follow an interest in group processes. Hence, this constant dialogue with people the last six months. I visit at least two to three times a week. The thing about the small town is that it becomes a microcosm for much larger issues. As an artist I can look at the town from a sociological point of view, as a place that has obviously much wider connections, but nevertheless is a workable place, an identifiable place.

BARNABY — How big is Cockermouth? How many people live there?

DAVID — Eight thousand. Interestingly one of the café owners there described the main population as being townsfolk and farmers. The farming ranges between a little bit of arable, a lot of sheep farming, some cattle farming and then odd things like llamas. The townsfolk are professionals and retailers. Then we have another community, who the café owner referred to as hippies, the people who have escaped the large conurbations, most of whom have had higher education, most of whom

have come from the arts or from the professions and have decided that Cockermouth is a really nice place to live because it's rural.

There is then a fourth class which she refers to, which is where the main economy sits, not in tourism as such, but in the workers from the Sellafield nuclear power plant. Interestingly the borough council used all its new housing allocation to build in Cockermouth and the new builds are specifically aimed at the Sellafield workers – the prices are way beyond what farm labourers or young people could afford. This is an indication of how the local economy is based on the wages that Sellafield workers receive. So for instance, the Mercedes-Benz, BMW dealerships in the area are some of the busiest in the country, despite being in this rural place.

So there is this very distinct mix of people who, generally speaking, tolerate each other and get on with life, but actually they hate each other, until a flood comes. In recent times, in 2009 and 2015 they experienced two massive floods. The community camaraderie noted at these events was astonishing. However, one of the big questions for local people is '*How can you have two one-in-a-hundred-year floods in the space of six years?*'

BARNABY — So, in the process of responding to this commission, you started with what appears to be a piece of sociological research, into the residents, everything from their economic situations, which backgrounds they come from, to what kind of animals they are involved in if they are in agriculture. Why? What's the reason to find so much out there? Where does that lead you?

DAVID — Well, most of my work since 1992 deals with the culture of climate change and has been focused on futures thinking. Just for the record, I do not use the expression sustainable development anymore, but always refer to 'capable futures' as being a specific way of engaging and creating greater capacity to engage with the future that we need to understand.

BARNABY — What are capable futures?

DAVID — I got the idea of capable futures from an exhibition catalogue from 1985, which accompanied an exhibition by Eduardo Paolozzi called *Lost Magic Kingdom*, at the Museum of Mankind. In the catalogue, he wrote about the need for a new culture, *'in which way problems give way to capabilities.'* I very much liked this idea:

that problems actually point the way, rather than becoming a block which you need to navigate around, or an insurmountable wicked problem. So the idea of 'capable' you could now, maybe, substitute with the word 'resilient'. In my usage futures are plural because we have to consider multiple, diverse futures. The future is not a predetermined thing, whatever the politicians wish us to believe.

BARNABY — Traditionally we can understand socially engaged work as a process in which the artist becomes engaged in the community, and with their help prepares an intervention or production. The former being understood as the research and the latter the 'work'. Is this the case with you?

DAVID — No, I tend to work back to front, in that sense. I have worked on many projects where there is a specific end product required and the outcome, an exhibition or something, is actually a good moment to focus on process. But the product itself, to be absolutely honest, I'm not really interested in. I work across different art forms, from poetic texts (I am not a poet, I am an artist who uses poetic texts) to sculptural forms. When I was an art student I should have taken sculpture and not painting, but we all make our mistakes. I love sculpture. I love the physicality of it. I love what it can do. I like performance and I like dancing. I see these as just some of the tools that I can use.

BARNABY — Do you choreograph things ahead, or is this an improvised process?

DAVID — Both, but the trick is working them together, a bit of experience helps and, with age, I can now work those. You should not tell the funders this, but some of the time I haven't a clue what I am going to produce. Most of the time I am on a complete edge as to where the project's going. I get led down different paths and sometimes they are cul-de-sacs. I get taken up with different ideas that may go anywhere, as a learning process. Then there are things that start to emerge from the entire process that are correct in my way of working and thinking, that are correct to my values, that are hopefully correct to what I have agreed with the people, the commissioners and funders, and again, I mean that's always part of the process. I'm not a great one for doing the end evaluation. What I prefer is a constant evaluation. So I'm constantly in touch with all participants and players.

BARNABY — You talk about commissioners. In Cockermouth, where you've spoken to lots of people, are there expectations from the community?

DAVID — Yes. There is a really good steering group that is made up of the people from the local heritage group, civic trust, traders association, town council, borough council, developers, local people etc. Every time we meet they ask, *'What's the artwork?'* and without wanting to be a clever-clever artist I say, *'The question is not what is the artwork, but how does the art work?'*

Now, six months down the line in this particular project, I have become particularly interested in the way in which most people that I've talked to in Cockermouth are not aware of the river catchment that they live in and, as a result, simply do not know what causes their floods.

I had a very interesting exchange with the wife of a farmer one day. We were doing a project with children and they came as a family group talking about the rivers. I asked, *'What do you think about the rivers? What about living with the rivers in the future?'* She replied, *'They need to be stopped, dredged, get rid of all the gravel, and that will make the river deeper, and then they will take more water, and then the river will be fine.'* Then I said, *'That sounds extreme'*, and she replied, *'The last flood killed twenty of our sheep.'*

From the science that I have gathered over the time I have been working on this project I can see two, maybe three, main causes for the floods. The first is the historic channelling of the rivers. In pre-Roman times, the rivers would have been a delta system of many confluences. The whole thing would have been far messier. It's through the industrialisation of the landscape and the constraining of the river channels that the water flows a lot faster than it ever did.

The second factor is deforestation. The massive change of the landscape through a particular approach to sheep farming has denuded all the slopes of forest. Which again means we get far greater run-off when it rains. The River Cocker's tributaries come through some very narrow ravines where flash flooding takes place almost immediately but then dissipates quite quickly. But in constant raining situations the flash flooding multiplies to create serious damage.

▲
David Haley, *VIEWPOINT: DUSK,* Confluence of the Rivers Derwent and Cocker.

Now there is a big conundrum because the Lake District from where the water comes has now been given World Heritage status for its culture, but notably not for its ecology or for the environment. So, for tourism reasons, Beatrix Potter's romantic depictions of sheep farming and nature are what the UNESCO World Heritage Centre has decreed as being the right future for the Lake District. But it is this way of life that maintains an unviable form of farming in an environmentally destroyed landscape, which eventually leads to flooding in Cockermouth.

So, ironically, the farmer's wife who lost her sheep has been unwittingly maintaining the very reason that the floods take place. Dredging the river further means that water travels faster through the rivers and therefore generates further risk of flooding. People are living in this kind of paradox and for me going forward with my work, that paradox is the interesting bit.

BARNABY — You seem to suggest that the paradox of the farmer's wife and the lost sheep could be seen as equally evident on a global level.

DAVID — Totally – this, on a tiny scale, is the Sixth Extinction. The Sixth Extinction event compared with climate change gets very little press basically because it's perceived as not having any economic effects – we're just losing little creatures, but actually it is about the life of the biosphere. It is what and who we are, and how we are inextricably interdependent with the rest of life on the planet.

BARNABY — Your work is not only about connections between human beings, but also about connections to other species, and you have talked about the long history of human intervention in landscapes for agricultural, cultural, economic reasons to name a few. What brought you to this wish to make work about the connections between these traditionally separate systems?

DAVID — It's about ecology! One of the things I did in 1992, reading the book from the World Summit, was to note how it kept mentioning this word 'ecology'. Difficult to believe now but I didn't actually know what it meant at that time. So, I looked it up in the dictionary and discovered that it was the study of organisms, their relationship to each other, and their relationship to their environment. For me understanding ourselves as one such organism seemed important and to this day this is a way of understanding my practice or my art: it is in those relationships, it's the connection between.

In a film about Gregory Bateson, he talks about the evolution of the human hand. He said most physiologists who have studied the evolution of the hand are concerned with the way in which the joints work, the muscles and the tendons control different parts of the hand and the fingers. And he said, *'But what they miss is the space between … that's the ecology, that's the thing that actually makes it work.'* Space in between. That's where I try to make art.

I'm getting into that in the process of making some objects for this place in Cockermouth. It's not only about the people and the community, it's as much about the other things I can find there, the flora, the fauna, the water, the rivers, and what I have become really interested in is the rocks. In the riverbeds of the Derwent and the Cocker, the slate, limestone, some yellow sandstone, black-green basalt and stuff called bluestone, which is some of the hardest stone. It's completely unworkable, it's so hard. I find this very interesting, this kind of diversity of stones and rocks.

▲
David Haley, *VIEWPOINT: FLOOD,* Confluence of the Rivers Derwent and Cocker.

I'm currently looking at potentially a formation of large rocks big enough not to be moved when it floods. I don't want to generate a piece of work that's going to actually make the flooding worse by hampering trees and things that float down the river when it does flood. What I'm looking at is the arrangement of maybe twelve large lumps of rock of different types representing different rocks found in the catchment as a whole, so that it starts to connect people physically to the geomorphology of where they live. Why have we got some black basalt here? Very few people are aware that this volcanic rock exists in the area, just the other side of the Derwent.

BARNABY — You said earlier that you increasingly involve poetic texts in your work. When did you start working this way?

DAVID — The first work where I incorporated some poetic text was in fact a conference at Lancaster University in 2000, called *Between Nature,* where I was commissioned to do a piece of work entitled *Seeking an Unacceptable Profile: species nova (to see anew)*. The conference was one of the UK's first big meetings of artists who talked about their work as being ecological. Working for the commission I

noticed in my sketchbook that I had a particular way of writing notes. I started to find this quite interesting until I became more interested in the notes than the objects I was supposed to be producing. So I arranged the notes into different systems that became a kind of poetic text.

Some of these texts arise from talking to people in the different communities, I extract different expressions, different sayings, different ideas, different concepts, but then I work with them, and that if you like is the artifice, the way of moulding them into something.

BARNABY — There seems to be this process of letting go of things, of observing flows in your work.

DAVID — Yes. I have been looking again recently at a fabulous book that came out in the mid-1990s called *Sensitive Chaos* by Theodor Schwenk. It's a brilliant book which talks about the way in which water flows and the fact that all water flows adopt vortices, spiral forms, and all living beings have that form. If you take a cross-section through our bones you will see a spiral form, it's the natural form even with people that have straight hair still to have a curl in it.

I'm working in this place with a confluence of two rivers and when they come together they start to work with each other to create amazing vortices. I spend a lot of time sitting and looking and taking zillions of photographs. Sitting and looking and trying to understand and never quite understanding because when you try to catch it, it's always gone.

I mentioned how interested I am in dancing. Recently, I contacted an old friend who I know to be not just a morris dancer but also a traditional dance caller. I was interested in the way that the two waters spiral together as they meet and it reminded me of *do-si-do*, or *dos-à-dos* in French – 'back to back' – which is a kind of small form within most traditional dancing. Coming back to the rocks, I'm trying now to design a way in which visitors might engage with the place, reading text on the different surfaces of the rocks so that they move through the space dancing a *do-si-do*.

BARNABY — You described your work as ecological art. What does that really mean for an artist and how is ecological art different from other kinds or forms of art?

DAVID — Although what I do can be called ecological art, it's not defining these things as such that interests me. I don't like a lot of arts, if I'm being absolutely honest. I hate private views, I hate the business that's attached to a lot of art and I specifically see that the art world has a lot more to do with the values of neo-liberalism than culture or even heritage. While I don't knock any other artists' work, I see that people working as painters, sculptors, poets, dancers are all part of a big spectrum, and I too operate on that spectrum, here, or could be there, or there.

One thing I do like about ecological artists is that for every artist there is a different definition. There are people who like definitions for theory reasons, but for me, it's about the relationships between things and working with those. When I meet people who aren't necessarily informed about art practices they ask, *'What in the world are you doing?'* I say, *'I'm an ecological artist. I work with landscapes and things.'* They reply, *'Oh, you do landscape painting.'* But no. I work with the land, with the ecosystem that includes the landscape environment that includes all living beings, human and non-human, and just as much when I was a painter I would use some cadmium red and some cobalt blue, I now work with a farming practice, some rivers, forestry, industrial heritage and different elements on my palette.

BARNABY — The analogy to paint is interesting and leads me to think about layers. In your work you seem deliberately hesitant to become fixed on one particular thing of interest, or show one facet of what interests you; you adopt a multilayered approach.

DAVID — I don't mean to be pedantic, but my work isn't layered, it's ecological. It's systems based. I'm blessed with being dyslexic, which is probably why I'm fascinated by the meaning of words, because I question them a lot. I see the world, or understand the world, I should say, not as a linear thing, but rather as a place of things that are connected to other things, sometimes in a haphazard fashion, and sometimes in an organised fashion. My work starts during that complexity.

BARNABY — I also think that's an interesting distinction, particularly in regard to the sense of mapping. One might be tempted to think about your work in terms of drawing maps or composing cartographies.

DAVID — Well, again, I have been honoured and blessed with working with Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison. I've worked on at least three or four main UK projects with them.

The first question I apply to any and every project that I do comes from the Harrisons, which is, *'How big is here?'* It's like, one of those really dumb questions: *'What do you mean how big is here?'* At the moment I'm working in Cockermouth – *'Does that include both sides of the River Derwent?'* Well, yes. *'Does that include* these *communities and* these *communities?'* Yes. *'Does that include all the farmland that is around?'* Well, I guess it must do.

Eventually, it's actually clear that the whole catchment is Cockermouth and that Cockermouth is just one element within a catchment, so that's how big is here. Of course, you can go on to levels of understanding the individual, the household, the community, the street, the district, the town, the county, the country: *'This is in mainland Britain.'* And then you can start to talk globally about things. That's where climate change becomes a specific issue to that woman who lost her twenty sheep.

BARNABY — I wanted to talk a little bit about this question of values. Do you have a specific set of principles from which you conduct your work? How do you decide, for example, when a commission comes up, whether you want to work with that commissioning body? Are these important questions to you?

DAVID — Totally. I will not work with the nuclear industry or the arms industry. I appreciate that I live in society, I have a bank account, I have to drive a car, I do eat meat, I do lots of other things, I go shopping even. There are parts of the society that I live in. I'm not going to be a hermit. I try to live with the smallest harmful footprint that I can, as a person. Even breathing and being another human being on the planet is actually bad news in some respects.

BARNABY — Our personal behaviour is only a part of the picture. Huge changes are needed on a more structural, political level, and if no responsibility is taken, we can speculate that climate change will be catastrophic to the human species and all the other species.

▲
David Haley, *VIEWPOINT: SUMMER*, Confluence of the Rivers Derwent and Cocker.

DAVID — They're already being catastrophic. That's again the myth that it's something that's going to happen, maybe. It is happening now. No two ways about it. That these changes we see now will have an effect on all life is absolutely without question. We are just one of the species that happens to be living at this moment in the planet's history.

But, coming to a point where the ecology is in collapse and we are under stress, just as many other species are under stress, there is a huge amount of stuff we simply don't know. Having said all that, fear needn't stop us from living a good life. A life that is well-meaning. A life that creates as little impact as possible. It's also fun. One of the greatest antidotes to the whole situation is conviviality.

We are in the process of an enormous ecological collapse. When systems collapse they quite often flip into another system. We can see this from paleontological studies. There were dinosaurs, there are no longer dinosaurs. A few species managed to evolve out of that era into the present era. A few species from this era with a bit of luck will evolve into the next era. What and who they will be, how many of them there will be, I have no idea. I hope there are a few humans around. I hope they have a good time. The human species did survive through the last ice age, which was the last big extinction.

BARNABY — My interest is, in this stressed situation in which we find ourselves, how can we create the space in which we can slow down, heal ourselves and make better decisions?

DAVID — I propose engaging in one's life, with others, in a creative, convivial fashion. Resilience is entirely a creative form. There are two main definitions of resilience: one is engineered resilience, the other is ecological resilience. Engineered resilience is about how long can you sustain the present situation, the one that actually caused the problem that you're in, in the moment. It's about endurance. Whereas ecological resilience is more about how you might become the other side of collapse. How might you evolve into another state of being?

BARNABY — It's this flip you describe, this moment where something gives way to something else?

DAVID — I've talked about geological epochs. It's quite interesting to talk about the rocks at Cockermouth. It is that thing of how different epochs of the biosphere of the planet have existed for millions of years. Because of an event of some sort and sometimes events that also take millions of years to happen. In this particular case of climate change we are only talking about a short period, maybe a thousand years. This flip into another state of being means that, yes, whole oceans of life were lost. This is what we now call limestone. Whole oceans of life were again lost that we now call coal. Whole oceans of life have been lost that we now call sandstone.

BARNABY — What you're pointing to is the inevitability of change?

DAVID — Yes. The word art, as I understand it, comes from the Sanskrit word *Rta* that comes from the *Rig Veda*, the first writings of the Vedic philosophies. The word means the dynamic process by which the whole cosmos continues to be created virtuously. Now, that idea of the whole cosmos continuing to be created is actually what science talks about in terms of the Big Bang. That continual diversification and expansion of energy – in Hindu Vedic philosophies this is typified by Shiva Nataraja. It's Lord Shiva doing the dance of creation and destruction.

It's not the dance of creation and more creation, it's creation and destruction. It's the two things, and they come together constantly. He has a two-sided drum that beats to show that these two things constantly come. In Daoist thinking, you have the *Taijitu*, which is the *YinYang* symbol; and it's not *Yin* and *Yang*, it's *YinYang*. It's interesting that in European translations of the Chinese, we've got *Yin* and *Yang*, separating male and female, but it's not, it's *YinYang* – resolving the difference. They're not separate, they come together, always. It's that resolution of opposites and resolution of dialectics that I try to work with philosophically, artistically and as a living being.

VIEWPOINT

Facing the Cocker, carved onto the
six rocks from the centre to the point:

towards the sunset
to the sea and ocean's gyre
do-si-do-si-do

where we become one
a whirling revolution
one becomes many

gravity and heat
vision of many prospects
this climate of change

fluid perspectives
we flow in parallel time
past, present, future

water seeks to learn
the sum of our whole catchment
rivers draw themselves

'Cocker,' says Derwent,
'how is it that we live and
what is it we do?'

Facing the Derwent, carved onto the
six rocks from the centre to the brewery:

'Derwent,' says Cocker,
'resolve interdependence,
and we yield to time'

when rains fall tears flood
from homes to boats to refuge
ruins to friendship

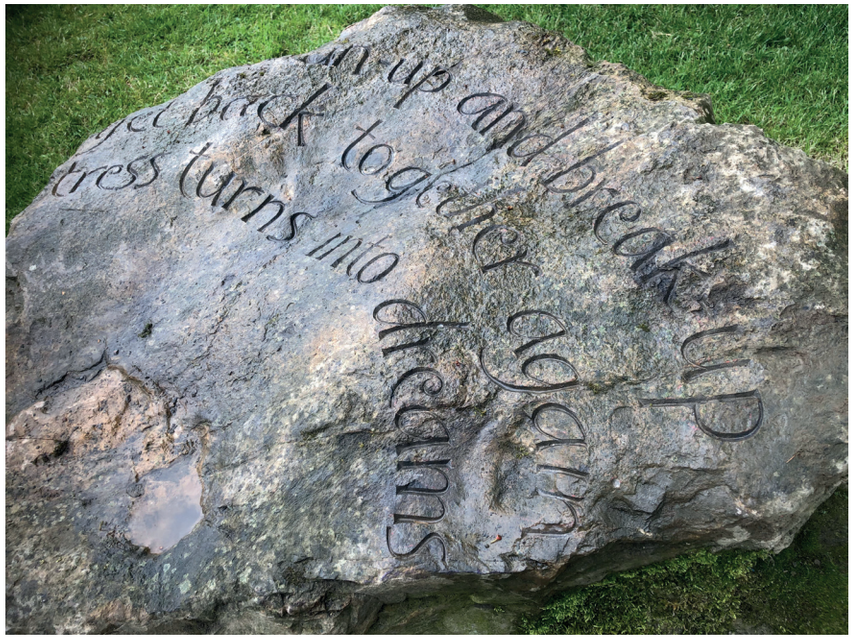
can't happen again
need to be doing something
despair shifts to hope

clean-up and break-up
get back together again
stress turns into dreams

strata of lives lived
we are the rocks and water
together flowing

learning to adapt
differences reconciled
giving way to grace

▲
David Haley, *VIEWPOINT,* Confluence of the Rivers Derwent and Cocker. Letter-carving by Pip Hall (2019).



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David Haley, *VIEWPOINT,* Confluence of the Rivers Derwent and Cocker. Letter-carving by Pip Hall (2019). Photograph – Pip Hall.

Becoming
(Chapter Seven)

Queer-convivialist life-art, complexity and sustainability research*

SACHA KAGAN

Many civil organisations and social movements across the planet are aiming to address the compounding contemporary threats to human civilisation and working towards a more sustainable human development. A common outline for the shared features of these efforts was drawn a few years ago by the *Manifeste Convivialiste* [1] (or *Convivialist Manifesto* in English), a text co-authored by several influential French-speaking left-, green- and centre-left-oriented intellectuals. The *Convivialist Manifesto* highlighted some fundamental commonalities, shared concerns, values and approaches across a diversity of movements, and suggested several sensible orientations. In the following pages I will engage in a commentary on this manifesto, as an opportunity to discuss the need for a queer-convivialist life-art and for an experience of complexity, as part of the transformative search process of sustainability.

Meanwhile, in academia, in several European and North American universities, a young (trans)discipline has emerged, which over the past decade has become increasingly visible under the name of sustainability science. This movement within academia also aims to address the compounding threats and to work for sustainable development. This still relatively new field and form of research has already developed several innovative features that have potential for social transformation, with a focus on solutions-oriented knowledge and action, rooted in an epistemology that does not shy away from a normative self-understanding or from developing an action-oriented research agenda. Sustainability science

borrows several participative and empowering features from the long tradition of participatory action research,[2] while not always clearly acknowledging it and while aiming only precisely to differentiate itself from it.

However, with its roots in natural sciences, quantitative social sciences and systems modelling on the one hand, and its solutions orientation, spurred by a strong sense of urgency (justified by the current planetary situation), on the other, sustainability science suffers from limitations to its transformative potential. A small number of researchers involved in this field have, in recent years, started to argue, not only that *'sustainability is the emergent property of a discussion about desired futures'*[3] but also that *'maybe the challenge of sustainability isn't to prove the world more real – rubbing people's noses in the parts per million and the hectares – but to prove the world more imaginary.'*[4] The limitations of sustainability science can and should be addressed by an 'artistic turn' towards an artful form of sustainability research.

Addressing compounding threats such as climate change involves the challenge of working wisely with intricate combinations of knowing and non-knowing, relative certainties and uncertainties, diverse capabilities and incapabilities, hard limits and open possibilities. It is a challenge to think creatively yet humbly, containing hubris and countering the unfortunate tendency to run for quick fixes – which Gregory Bateson deplored as a society's tendency to go for the shortcuts, instead of painstakingly identifying 'deeper' leverage points (as Donella Meadows has called them).[5] As research on climate change (and as the failure until now to mitigate climate change) shows, we need to become prepared for crises of probably a much greater extent than we have experienced so far. We will then need to get ready to develop the human creative response at levels, scales and speeds probably unknown before now.

The *Convivialist Manifesto* makes clear that the challenge of sustainability for the times to come is not about preserving and sustaining a 'good life' of the same type that affluent societies have been enjoying for a few decades. The implications of superficial understandings of the good life and sustainability may stabilise the status quo for a few more decades to come, for some parts of the world. But in the long run, for everyone (and for some sooner than for others), they will only worsen our lack of resilience.

Instead of preserving a good life, the search for sustainability should be interpreted as inviting us to experiment with other lives, to open up to futures-oriented questions, and to queer these other, potential (good?) lives, taking resilience as a moving horizon.

From a sustainability-oriented perspective, resilience points to the ability to survive and live well in the long term by transforming oneself in relationship with one's environments. It implies an ability to learn from, and absorb, disturbances, i.e. to be changed and reorganise, to some extent, while still keeping an ethical societal direction such as the one sketched out in the *Convivialist Manifesto* around principles of interdependence and care. Resilience works here as a capacity to evolve (or rather, in Edgar Morin's sense, to co-evolve and eco-evolve) through serious crises. It is not just resistance, and it is not just adaptation, but involves some elements of both, without losing sight of ethical goals for sustainability. Building up the capacity for resilience will become very relevant in the coming decades, when the trusted approaches that fuelled the development of modern societies will be severely tested. Under growing instability and uncertainty, resilience will also bring better responses than any single all-encompassing strategic blueprint for transformation to sustainability. Some of my colleagues have even dropped the term 'sustainability' in talking about this. For example, the many space scales and timescales involved in this civilisational challenge have brought the ecological artist David Haley to talk of a search for 'capable futures' instead of 'sustainability'.[6]

The understanding of resilience that I am stressing here points to the necessity to learn from the unexpected, i.e. serendipitous learning. Serendipity is not merely the meeting of an open-minded perception with unexpected events; it also implies sagacity: a wisdom that is grounded in sense perceptions and that allows keen discernment and sound judgement.[7] The required openness also means that one should be flexible, curious and alert enough to change one's goals and interests along the way (i.e. developing an agility when faced with options for change). Sagacity brings together sensorial perception, experiential learning over time (and over a lifetime), and acting in wisdom.

Serendipity and sagacity allow not merely an accumulation of capabilities and of knowledge, as a stock of fixed items that would pile up over time. Rather, the accumulated experience actualises itself in light of constantly changing factors. More important even than experience as the acquired stock of knowledge is experience as the training of the capacity to perceive and interpret the world in complex ways,

i.e. a phenomenological and hermeneutic learning process. This learning process requires artful qualities; otherwise the experiential process may become a numbing, anaesthetising one that over time reinforces path dependencies and tunnel visions rather than developing one's sagacity and serendipitous qualities.

When I look at the characteristics of resilient systems, what I see is the expression of life's inherent creativity. My contention is that, while sustainability requires both a build-up of resilience and an openness to transformative change (i.e. often radical change, going to the roots of issues and seeking deep leverage), building up the qualities of resilience in human societies calls forward a cultivation of multiple creative responses and capabilities – a radical embracing of Joseph Beuys' provocation: '*Everyone* [*be*(*come*)/*return to be*[*com*]*ing*] *an artist*'.[8]

Furthermore, the compounding threats discussed by sustainability researchers (and summed up in the *Convivialist Manifesto*) do not permit just any arbitrary form of creative development of human societies. They require a kind of cultural development that is especially sensible to qualitative complexity. My understanding of 'complexity' follows Edgar Morin's, in his six-volume work *La Méthode*.[9] Although difficult to sum up in a few words, Morin's complexity can be approached by considering his notion of 'macro-concepts': a macro-concept harbours the dynamic tension, both contradictory and complementary, between relationships of unity, complementarity, competition and antagonism. Across different levels of systems, we need to learn to appreciate both the contradictions between, and dynamic balancing of, different logics, and to acknowledge the great level of ambivalence, uncertainty and indeterminacy that all living beings have to cope with on this planet. Morin appealed, metaphorically, to our '*musical ears*' which allow us to '*perceive the competitions, symbioses, interferences, overlaps of themes in one same symphonic stream, where the brutal mind will only recognize one single theme surrounded by noise*'.[10]

One major quality of the *Convivialist Manifesto* lies precisely there: in its basic sensibility to qualitative complexity. In particular, the manifesto gives us some hints that 'convivial' is not equated with 'consensus-ist conformist' political correctness, and should not drift in that direction. However, the manifesto, in its encounter with a wide readership, walks on a thin hermeneutic line: if misread in a way that is insensible to complexity, this manifesto will fall into the trap of a new form of narrow green/leftist moralism. To consolidate this quality that I see in the manifesto, and to help prevent the misreading I just mentioned, I focus on the importance of developing an aesthetics of complexity – as a foundation stone for

a practice nourishing itself in the *Convivialist Manifesto* and bringing an artful quality to sustainability science.

One area in which the manifesto expresses very well its sensibility to complexity is in stressing the balance of cooperation and antagonism. This insight not only echoes Edgar Morin's understanding of complexity and philosophy but also Chantal Mouffe's work on the importance of antagonistic relationships (and her plea for 'agonistic' politics) as important dimensions of democratic practice, warning against a reduction of politics to mere consensus-based processes.

This is indeed the core meaning of the manifesto's call to '*cooperate* [*with*] *and oppose*' each other. This means to both turn away from the exclusive focus on market competition that is dominant (and dwarfing cooperation) in contemporary societies, and also prevent the very high risk of a consensus-ideology that would invariably end up as a 'soft totalitarianism' (to borrow a provocative expression that I first heard – associated with a critique of consensus and the media in late twentieth-century democracies – from the mouth of political scientist Slobodan Milacic). Instead of a rigid dogma of consensus, convivialism needs 'uniplural' (Morin) cultures of complexity.

The challenge is to develop, in very concrete situations and contexts, a fine art of balancing competition, cooperation, antagonism and unity. This is, indeed, not just a set of recipes with tried-and-tested techniques. It means resorting both to the consensus-fostering approach of non-violent communication, and to the critical, deconstructive and dissensual artivistic approach advocated by Mouffe.[11] And it means resorting to the latter of course not merely towards others, i.e. some hegemonic evil forces 'out there' but also self-reflexively, as individuals, as societies and as a species. It requires qualities of ambiguity, ambivalence and the 'musical ear' praised by Morin, i.e. it craves artistic competences fostering the aesthetic experience of complexity. In short, the convivialist '*coopérer et s'opposer*' is less a science (in the narrow sense of the term) than it is an '*art de vivre ensemble*' – an art of living together.

This art is of course not a propagandistic, agit-prop kind of art. It is, rather, a continuous learning and research process with queer and discordian accents. It requires both the deconstructive and dissensual qualities found in the work of some contemporary artists, but also the reconstructive and reconnective qualities of ecological artists. One example of public art attempting an interesting balancing act of these qualities is the piece that Hans Haacke did for the Bundestag in Berlin: *Der Bevölkerung* (2000 – ongoing), a collection of soils from all German Länder

(federated states), which Haacke asked Members of Parliament to contribute (new MPs were asked to bring new soil, and some soil is removed when an MP's term expires). Haacke wrote the following in his statement for this piece:

'*In an extremely controlled building, the ecosystem of imported seeds in the Parliament's courtyard constitutes an enclave of unpredictable and free development. It is an unregulated place, exempt from the demands of planning everything. It is dedicated TO THE POPULATION.*'[12]

I advocate for this necessary art to have queer and discordian accents. The function of a queering artistic process is not to bring certainties, to win over your audience to your critical message, to necessarily 'make them understand' something that you already identified and thought up for yourself. It is not a Brechtian process of distanciation, elevating you into (the cold winds of) an intellectual enlightenment, and shutting down the ambiguities. The function of a queering artistic process is, on the contrary, to foster uncertainties that stimulate de-normalising and denaturalising aesthetic experiences and thought and embodiment processes. It is a process of distanciation and of 'freaky desires' – to paraphrase the parlance of artist and 'freaky theorist' Renate Lorenz,[13] keeping you in a (warm flux of) intellectual, emotional and corporeal confusion, keeping ambiguities and ambivalences thriving for longer. From such an experience there can arise more interesting queerings of 'good' lives, taking us to other desires, elsewhere than within the path dependencies of affluent consumerism.

We also require a queer vigilance, to balance the 'relocalisation and re-territorialisation' and the *'entre soi suffisamment solide'* – i.e. the strong enough between-ourselves/self-segregation proposed by the *Convivialist Manifesto* – with a constant reflexive work of de-normalisation and deterritorialisation of identities, without which the genesic potential of chaos (as discussed by Morin) would be choked off. The trick is to avoid an exaggerated parochialism and maintain the quality of what Ursula Heise called an 'eco-cosmopolitanism'.[14] We must clear out any potential confusion or misunderstanding: the *Convivialist Manifesto* should not be confused with some kind of communitarianism: the manifesto is clearly founded on principles of *'commune humanité … commune socialité* [*et*] *individuation*' i.e. Morin's three levels of human identity as individual – society – species, not reducing these to only one level. The further risk to avoid here, I would add, is ending up with an identitarian trinity of speciesism, communitarianism and

individualism. Here the 'queering apart' (or 'freaking out') of these tendencies is of utmost importance. More generally, a vigilant and chronic process of queering is necessary to ward off a rigidified moralism within any convivialist-identified and/or sustainability-oriented movement.

For example, from a queer-ecological perspective, the manifesto's negative take on the notion of *démesure*, i.e. excess, needs to be handled carefully, because excesses, inefficiencies of redundancies, and irrational exuberances are important qualities of all living systems, without which no resilience could be achieved. A wholly 'measured' convivialist order, forbidding *démesure*, would be as foolish an enterprise as the techno-dream of efficient smart cities. The manifesto's moral warning shot hits its target more relevantly, I would contend, when it warns against 'illimitation' and 'hubris' rather than when it rejects excess.

The manifesto fails to notice the importance of developing senses, sensibilities and sensitivities to our environments, as multiple and interrelated modes of corporeal learning and embodied knowing, opening us up to our complex enmeshment with environments, waking us from 'anaesthesia' as coined by Wolfgang Welsch in his *Ästhetisches Denken,*[15] and the associated psychic numbing. These aesthetics, i.e. these 'organs of perception' (as developed by Shelley Sacks and Hildegard Kurt in their artistic work and discussed in their writings)[16] will then open up the field of perceptions-experience-knowing into enhanced qualities of questions, regarding the moral question (as well as the political, ecological and economic questions) raised by the *Convivialist Manifesto*. To be fair, some of the points in the manifesto tangentially approach this insight, i.e. recognising humans as êtres de désir – beings driven by desire, and recognising the importance of the *'mobilisation des affects et des passions'* – the mobilisation of affects and passions. We need to mobilise aesthetic sensitivities to living complexity, with a convivialist-discordian eroticism.

This also means that, besides their tactical and strategic functions for mobilisation and protests, 'shame' and 'indignation' alone make up a poor, narrow and limited toolbox for cultural and social movements. Here, the manifesto's appeal to *'affects and passions'* is highly relevant, but it also needs to be further qualified. We need to stress and articulate artistic tactics of reflexivity that are futures- and ethics-oriented, while at the same time retaining qualities of ambivalence and, very importantly, tactics of humour. Only with an extended toolbox, not restrained by a constricted moralism, can the bottom – bottom (i.e. horizontal) 'creativity' shortly invoked in the manifesto start unfolding itself and stimulate qualities of resilience.

After Hans Dieleman,[17] I consider that resilience requires the flourishing of spaces where imagination, experimentation and challenging experiences open up futures-oriented questions and perspectives. These are both mental and physical spaces of conviviality, agonistic confrontation, and other, confusing and (individually as well as socially) creative shared experiences. These are spaces where social conventions are reflected, unfrozen and challenged, and where imaginative and experimental practices unfold. Researchers and activists alike need to engage more fully in a comparative translocal exploration of such spaces, of the functions of arts-based activities and processes therein, and of the roles of artists and other creative individuals and groups, in such spaces of possibility. We may also explore local places as 'Cthulhu-scenes'[18] – i.e. cities, suburbs, villages and other human settlements, both as naturecultural sceneries and as stages where diverse agents and 'actants' (in Latourian-speak), humans and also more-than-humans engage (on different levels) with the multiple scales and dimensions of the search process of sustainability.

A convivialist life-art should ground itself in aliveness as the experience of complexity. It should be a creative, reflexive, critical and also humorous activity. The *Convivialist Manifesto* should not be received as a stern treatise for sworn-in revolutionaries, but as an open and fundamentally democratic invitation. Seen artistically, this should be an invitation to reinvent, through practice, the art of living together. An art of interdependence and humility, borrowing a seriously healthy reflexive humour from the discordian tradition. Discordianism is a (pseudo-)religion invented in the late twentieth century that developed a half-serious, half-absurdist worship of chaos (around the mythological figure and symbols of Eris, the Greek goddess of chaos). Discordians popularised the idea that both order and disorder are illusions imposed on the universe by humans through their various religions and ideologies. Discordians deploy subversive humour to prevent ideas and beliefs from becoming dogmatic.

In the words of Donella Meadows:

'There is yet one leverage point that is even higher than changing a paradigm. That is to keep oneself unattached in the arena of paradigms, to stay flexible, to realize that NO paradigm is "true", that every one, including the one that sweetly shapes your own worldview, is a tremendously limited understanding of an immense and amazing universe that is far beyond human comprehension. It is to "get" at a gut level the paradigm

that there are paradigms, and to see that that itself is a paradigm, and to regard that whole realization as devastatingly funny. It is to let go into Not Knowing, into what the Buddhists call enlightenment.'[19]

A crucial quality of artful approaches is to maintain tensions, discomfort, irritations and challenging experiences while moving in between and across levels of reality, working with symbolic thinking, and asking questions that touch upon fundamental themes for humanity, without falling into the trap of a flatly holistic discourse. Existential questions must be kept infinitely open, and not be met with finite answers.

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* / This is an edited excerpt from Sacha Kagan's article 'Artful Sustainability: Queer-convivialist life-art and the artistic turn in sustainability research', first published in *Transdisciplinary Journal of Engineering and* Science (TJES) in 2017. The full text is available at – http://www.atlas-journal.org/index.php/term-2/2017-issue (accessed 10 May 2019).

1 / [Collective] (2013), *Manifeste Convivialiste: Déclaration d'interdépendance* (Lormont: Le bord de l'eau).

2 / Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury, eds, *The Sage Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice* (London: Sage, 2008).

3 / John Robinson, interviewed in Thaddeus R. Miller, *Constructing Sustainability: A Study of Emerging Scientific Research Trajectories* (Phoenix: Arizona State University, 2011), p.31.

4 / Robinson, paraphrasing David Maggs in Timothy Taylor, 'Canada's greenest prof. Vancouver might just be home to the greenest building in the world. Meet the geography professor who brought it to life', *Canadian Geographic*, 1 June 2012 (accessed 10 May 2019).

5 / Donella Meadows, *Leverage Points: Places to intervene in a system* (Hartland: The Sustainability Institute, 1999) – http://www.donellameadows.org/wp-content/userfiles/Leverage_Points.pdf (accessed 10 May 2019).

6 / David Haley, 'Capable Futures' talk, 2014. Manchester Metropolitan University – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zy-Cm6fpva8 (accessed 10 May 2019). See also David Haley, 'A Question of Values: Art, Ecology and the Natural Order of Things', *Elemental: an arts and ecology reader* (Liverpool: Gaia Project, 2016).

7 / For a discussion of this in more detail, see Sacha Kagan, *Toward Global (Environ)Mental Change: Transformative Art and Cultures of Sustainability* (Berlin: Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2012).

8 / English readers will be more familiar with the classical formulation of the Beuys quote in English: "Every human being is an artist", as for example in 'I Am Searching For Field Character' by Joseph Beuys, 1977, as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western Man – Joseph Beuys in America,* compiled by Carin Kuoni (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993). However, in German, Beuys was also using the expression "Jeder Mensch ein Künstler", which has a lot more ambiguity to it. With this specific formulation in German, Beuys appealed to the potential of artfulness in every human being and aimed for its (re-) emergence, but did not mean then that every person always 'is' an artist. My playful alternative translation into English aims to convey the greater qualitative complexity from the German expression.

9 / Edgar Morin, *La méthode.* [6 volumes], (Paris: Seuil, 2008).

10 / For a more thorough introduction to Morin's complexity in English language, see Sacha Kagan, *Art and Sustainability: connecting patterns for a culture of complexity* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2011), chapter 3.

11 / Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the world politically* (London: Verso Books, 2013).

12 / For more information, see – http://derbevoelkerung.de/en/ (accessed 10 May 2019). See also Hans Haacke, *Hans Haacke: Once Upon a Time...* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2013) pp.61–67.

13 / Renate Lorenz, *Queer Art: a Freak Theory* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2012).

14 / Ursula K. Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

15 / Wolfgang Welsch, *Ästhetisches Denken* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1990).

16 / Hildegard Kurt and Shelley Sacks, *Die rote Blume. Ästhetische Praxis in Zeiten des Wandels* (Klein Jasedow: thinkoya/Drachen Verlag, 2013).

17 / Hans Dieleman, 'Transdisciplinary Artful Doing in Spaces of Experimentation and Imagination', *Transdisciplinary Journal of Engineering and Science* (2012), chapter 3, pp.44–57.

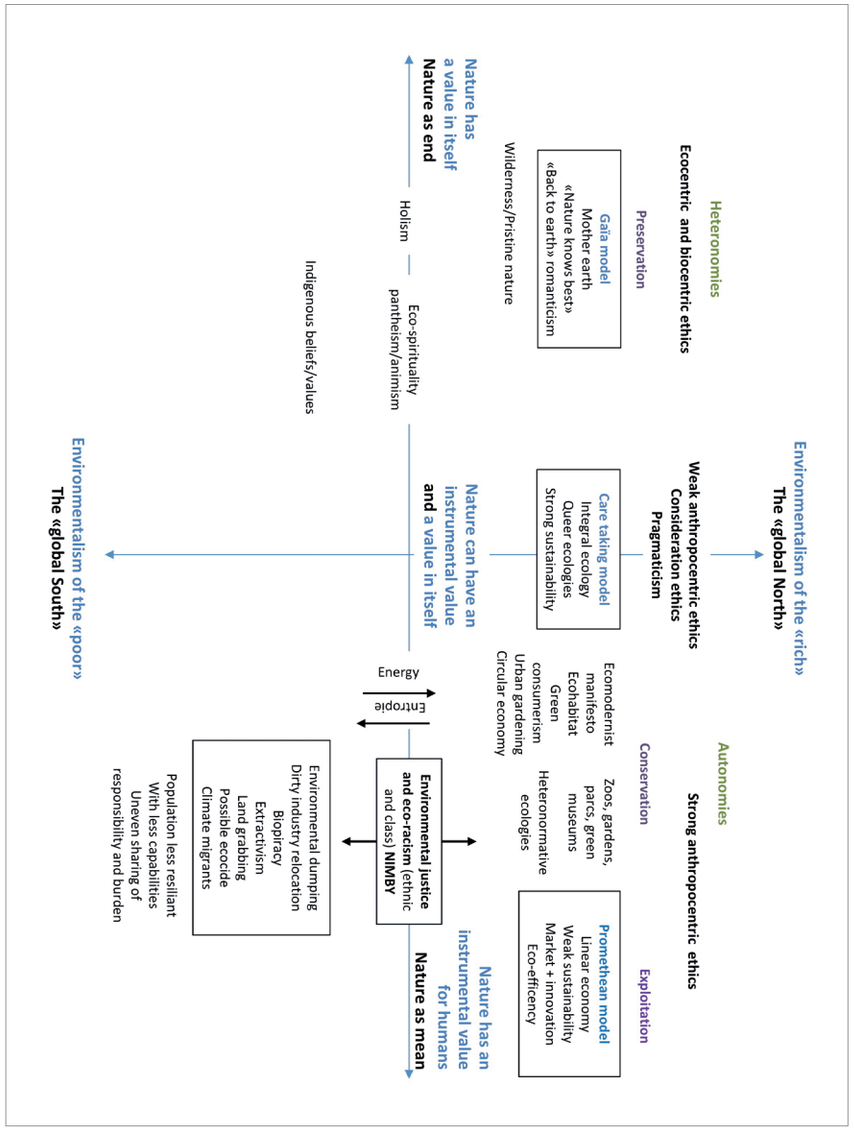
18 / Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

19 / Donella Meadows, *Leverage Points: Places to intervene in a system* (Hartland: The Sustainability Institute, 1999) – http://www.donellameadows.org/wp-content/userfiles/Leverage_Points.pdf (accessed 10 May 2019), p.19.

BECOMING (CHAPTER SEVEN)

Mapping Ecologies: A Short Introduction

ERIC MAEDER



▲
Eric Maeder, *Ecologies Mindmap* (2018)

In this diagram I have been trying to map for more than a decade the thought patterns of environmental ethics that I discover through my encounters and readings. It was initially inspired by the reading of a text by the French philosopher Catherine Larrère entitled 'What the Mountain Knows'[1] in reference to *A Sand County Almanac* by one of the pioneers of ecological thinking, Aldo Leopold. In a few pages Larrère traces the evolution of environmental ethics thinking in the Western world from the 1970s to the present day, and identifies three major positions: anthropocentrism, biocentrism and ecocentrism. Each of them responds in its own way to the ecological crisis. The central question of environmental ethics is to reflect on human/natural/value relationships and to ask questions such as these: when we say that we must protect nature, what exactly are we saying? That it must be protected because otherwise we will no longer have unpolluted spaces? And so, we protect it in our own interest. Or should it be protected because it would have value in itself? Biocentrism recognises an intrinsic value for each living entity (a tree, an animal, a human). Adopting this approach for a human being means to not *'arbitrarily dispose'* of any living entity and to provide *'proof that there are valid reasons to destroy intrinsic values.'* Ecocentrism recognises an intrinsic value in an ecosystem, and does not value individual elements (a tree, an animal) but values the whole they form, the *'biotic community.'*

What is important to ecocentrics is *'the interdependence of the elements and their common belonging to a whole,'* more than the elements taken one by one. Thus, the whole – the ecosystem – is more important than its parts – any living being. This approach can therefore be described as holistic (*holos*, everything), as opposed to the individualism of biocentrism (where each living entity has an individual value in itself). Finally, strong anthropocentrism differs from the two previous positions in that it does not recognise an intrinsic value to nature; it only recognises an intrinsic value to humans. It believes that only human beings have a value in themselves (humanism, human rights philosophy) and that only humans can make value judgements. This does not mean that nature has no value, but only that this value of nature is determined 'in relation' to the human. These three positions divide the diagram into left and right: eco- and biocentrism on the left, and anthropocentrism on the right.

Seeking to overcome these three somewhat frozen positions based on heavy metaphysics, another position, called weak or expanded anthropocentrism, tries to emerge. Among these thinkers, Catherine Larrère or Dominique Bourg believe that anthropocentrism is not necessarily destructive – that it is not inherently destructive of nature. The destruction of nature has never been a main objective of humanism. This position, also called pragmatist, proposes to adopt a pluralistic and relational vision in our relations with nature. As Catherine Larrère points out, '*Why do we need to limit ourselves to "intrinsic value" to define the value of a forest? There are plenty of reasons why you might find worth in a forest, plenty of ways to value it.*'

This position occupies the centre of the sketch and attempts to go beyond strong anthropocentrism and eco- and biocentrism.

Finally, in order not to keep these ecological questions in a speculative bubble, or rather in the northern hemisphere, and to show that these questions are part of a balance of power between the so-called Global North and Global South, I have included a vertical axis to this diagram and raised issues of environmental justice.

1 / Catherine Larrère, 'What the Mountain Knows: Roots of Environmental Philosophies', Books and Ideas. net – https://booksandideas.net/What-the-Mountain-Knows.html (accessed 10 May 2019).

Biographies

URSULA BIEMANN

Ursula Biemann is an artist, author and video essayist based in Zurich, Switzerland. Her artistic practice is strongly research oriented and involves fieldwork in remote locations where she investigates climate change and the ecologies of oil and water, as in the recent projects *Deep Weather* (2013), *Forest Law* (2014) and *Subatlantic* (2015). Her video installations have been exhibited worldwide in museums and at international art biennials in Liverpool, Sharjah, Shanghai, Seville, Istanbul, Montreal, Venice and São Paulo. She has had comprehensive solo exhibitions at Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Lentos Museum Linz and Helmhaus Zurich, and she is part of the collaborative *World of Matter* project. Biemann is author of *Mission Reports: Artistic Practice in the Field* (Bildmuseet Umeå/Arnolfini, 2008) and *Forest Law/Selva Jurídica* (Broad Art Museum, Michigan State University, 2014), and editor of *Geography and the Politics of Mobility* (Generali Foundation/Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2003), *Stuff It: The Video Essay in the Digital Age* (Edition Voldemeer/Springer, 2003), and *The Maghreb Connection: Movements of Life Across North Africa* (Actar, 2006). Biemann is Doctor honoris causa in Humanities at the Swedish University Umeå (2008). She received the 2009 Prix Meret Oppenheim, the Swiss Grand Award for Art, and the 2018 Prix Thun for Art and Ethics.

– https://www.worldofmatter.net
– https://www.geobodies.org

DAVID N. BRESCH

David N. Bresch is professor for Weather and Climate Risks and chair of the Institute for Environmental Decisions at ETH Zurich/MeteoSwiss. His research focuses on the impacts of weather and climate on socio-economic systems. Combining numerical modelling of weather and climate risks with the engagement of decision-makers and end-users, his research aims to explore ways to strengthen resilience based on a shared understanding of their weather and climate susceptibility. Such an integrated view along the chain of impacts also opens new perspectives to the treatment of uncertainty in decision-making.

– www.wcr.ethz.ch

T.J. DEMOS

T.J. Demos is professor in the Department of the History of Art and Visual Culture at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and founder and director of its Center for Creative Ecologies. He writes widely on the intersection of contemporary art, global politics and ecology and is the author of numerous books, including *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today* (Sternberg Press, 2017); *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology* (Sternberg Press, 2016); *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis* (Duke University Press, 2013), winner of the College Art Association's 2014 Frank Jewett Mather Award; and *Return to the Postcolony: Specters of Colonialism in Contemporary Art* (Sternberg Press, 2013). Demos co-curated *Rights of Nature: Art and Ecology in the Americas* at Nottingham Contemporary in January 2015, and organised *Specters: A Ciné-Politics of Haunting* at the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid in 2014. He is currently working on a Mellon-funded research project, art exhibition and book project dedicated to the questions *'what comes after the end of the world?'* and *'how can we cultivate futures of social justice within capitalist ruins?'*.

– https://creativeecologies.ucsc.edu

BARNABY DRABBLE

Barnaby Drabble is a writer, curator and researcher whose work focuses on contemporary art in relation to issues of public space, exhibition practice and histories, ecology and environmentalism, and artistic research. He is a senior lecturer and researcher at the édhéa, Valais School of Art in Sierre, where he conducts his research and leads the seminar Social Practice on the MAPS (Master of Arts in Public Spheres) programme. He has curated numerous independent and institutional projects including exhibitions, screenings, discursive events and events in the public space. He has co-edited two influential publications on curatorial issues, co-authored two books on artistic research, and regularly contributes to journals and publications. He is a managing editor of the *Journal for Artistic Research* and a member of its editorial board since 2010. His research project *Along Ecological Lines* (2016–2019), relates both to his long-term focus on social and political relevance of artistic practices and to his engagement in the environmental and social innovation taking place in intentional communities and eco-villages.

MAJA AND REUBEN FOWKES

Maja and Reuben Fowkes are founders of the Translocal Institute for Contemporary Art, an independent research platform focusing on the art history of Central Europe and contemporary ecological practices. They head the Post-socialist Art Centre (PACT) at the Institute of Advanced Studies, UCL, and co-direct the Getty-Foundation-supported research initiative Confrontations: Sessions in East European Art History. Recent and forthcoming publications include a co-authored book, *Central and Eastern European Art Since 1950* (Thames & Hudson, 2019); Maja Fowkes' *The Green Bloc: Neo-Avant-Garde and Ecology under Socialism* (Central European University Press, 2015); and a special issue of *Third Te*xt on 'Actually Existing Artworlds of Socialism' (Routledge, 2018). They have recently contributed chapters to *Art*

and Theory of Post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe: A Critical Anthology (Duke University Press, 2018); *Art in Hungary, 1956–1980: Doublespeak and Beyond* (Thames & Hudson, 2018); and *Extending the Dialogue* (Archive Books, 2018). Their curatorial projects include the *Anthropocene Experimental Reading Room* and the *Danube River School,* and they are also founding members of the Environmental Arts and Humanities Initiative at the Central European University, Budapest.

– http://translocal.org

FERNANDO GARCÍA-DORY

INLAND was initiated by Fernando García-Dory in 2009 and began as a cultural strategy in support of rural life over a period of three years (2010–2013), specifically made up of an international conference, an artistic production with twenty-two artists-in-residence in the same number of villages across Spain, and a programme of exhibitions and presentations. This was followed by a period of reflection and evaluation (2013–2015), launching study groups in the Netherlands and Spain, and a series of publications. It continues, extending its methodology across Europe, to question harmful European Union policies regarding the rural and culture. It is also recovering an abandoned village as the organisation's headquarters and 'community of practice'. *INLAND* publishes books, produces exhibitions and makes cheese. It also advises as a consultant for the European Commission on the use of art for rural development policies, facilitates shepherds' movement, and is promoting access to land in different locations for collective artistic and agricultural production. *INLAND* has exhibited at the Istanbul Biennial (2015), Casco Art Projects, the Netherlands (2015), PAV Torino, Italy (2015), and the Maebashi Museum, Japan (2016). In 2017 it was present at CCA Glasgow, MAMM Medellin, MALBA Argentina, BAU Bolzano and the FHU Puglia. In 2019 INLAND is working with the Serpentine Gallery in London, the Matadero in Madrid, and the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris.

– http://inland.org

DAVID HALEY

David Haley makes art with ecology, to enquire, learn and teach. He publishes, exhibits and works internationally with ecosystems and their inhabitants, using images, poetic texts, walking and sculptural installations to generate dialogues that question climate change, species extinction, urban development and transdisciplinarity for 'capable futures'. He is a visiting professor at Zhongyuan University of Technology; vice-chair of the CIWEM Art and Environment Network; mentor/advisor (founder) at the Future's Venture Foundation; a trustee of Chrysalis Arts Development and Barrow's Beautiful Places; and a member of the

ecoartnetwork, the UK Urban Ecology Forum and the Arts Steering Group, Ramsar Cultural Network. He was a senior research fellow and director of the Ecology in Practice Research Group, Manchester Metropolitan University. His current projects include *VIEWPOINT,* a work for Cockermouth, Cumbria. In collaboration with the National Oceanography Centre, Haley's current project *A Drop in the Ocean, a Trace of Life* considers the transatlantic journey of a waterborne bacterium to question the emergence of our next evolutionary epoch. He is guest producer/artist for Art Gene's *Extreme Views: Think Tank,* exhibiting *a dialogue with seagulls: the writing on the wall.* He is also consultant to SpaceXFarm, Manchester.

SACHA KAGAN

Sacha Kagan has been researching at the intersection of the arts, culture(s) and sustainability for more than a decade. He has been a research associate at the Institute of Sociology and Cultural Organization (ISCO), Leuphana University, Lüneburg (2005–2018); principal investigator at the research project *The City as Space of Possibility* (2015–2018); and chair of the Research Network Sociology of the Arts at the European Sociological Association (2015–2017). Kagan is the author of fifty-three publications, including the book *Art and Sustainability: Connecting Patterns for a Culture of Complexity* (transcript Verlag, 2011).

ERIC MAEDER

Eric Maeder holds a master's degree in philosophy and history from Geneva University, is a lecturer at the édhéa, Valais School of Art in Sierre , Sierre, and the Haute écoles de gestion de Genève and Fribourg, and is an independent consultant. Eric is an ethicist: he specialises in the ethics of art practices, environmental ethics, and organisational ethics. In his recent research project *L'art dans la nature. Nature dans l'art. Conceptions, expériences et pratiques in situ,* for the institute of Tourism HES-SO Valais, he has been examining philosophical and ethical representations of nature in artistic practices dealing with the public sphere. As an independent consultant, he helps organisations address a variety of ethical challenges in the workplace. He is also a member of several ethical committees.

ANDREA PHILLIPS

Andrea Phillips is BALTIC Professor and Director of the BxNU Research Institute, Northumbria University, and the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art. She lectures and writes about the economic and social construction of public value within contemporary art, the manipulation of forms of participation and the potential of forms of political, architectural and social reorganisation within artistic and curatorial culture. Recent publications include 'Educational Investment: A Context for CAMPUS' in (ed. Carolina Rito) *Nottingham Contemporary Journal*

(Nottingham Contemporary/e-flux, 2019); 'Social Dreaming: Learning about Curating at Iniva and Santiniketan' in (eds Choi, Rosenthal, Watson) *Practice International* (Iniva/Casco, 2019); 'The Imperative for Self-attainment: From Cradle to Grave' in (eds Choi, van der Heide) *Unlearning* (Casco, 2018); 'Forgetting the Public' in (eds Wilson, Bergendal et.al) *Public Enquiries: Park Lek and the Scandinavian Social Turn* (Black Dog, 2018); and 'in conversation with Keller Easterling' in (eds O'Neill, Steel, Wilson) *How do Institutions Think?* (MIT, 2017). Phillips' forthcoming book, *Contemporary Art and the Production of Inequality,* will bring together discussions on the politics of public administration and management with recent analyses of arts institutions, alongside debates on value (public and private) informed by research into the political functions of the art market and personal experience of organising, lobbying and governing contemporary arts institutions, arts education institutions, and working directly with artists.

OLIVER RESSLER

Oliver Ressler produces installations, projects in public space, and films on issues such as economics, democracy, migration, global warming, forms of resistance and social alternatives. He has completed thirty-one films, which have been screened in thousands of events of social movements, art institutions and film festivals. His solo exhibitions include those at Berkeley Art Museum, United States; Alexandria Contemporary Arts Forum, Egypt; Wyspa Institute of Art, Gdansk; Lentos Kunstmuseum, Linz; Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporaneo – CAAC, Seville; MNAC – National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest; and SALT Galata, Istanbul. Ressler has participated in more than 350 group exhibitions, including at Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid; Centre Pompidou, Paris; the biennials in Seville (2006), Moscow (2007), Taipei (2008), Lyon (2009), Venice (2013), Quebec (2014), Jeju (2017), Kyiv (2017) and at Documenta 14, Kassel, 2017 (exhibition organised by EMST). Ressler was the first prize winner of the Prix Thun for Art and Ethics Award in 2016. For the Taipei Biennial 2008, he curated an exhibition on the counter-globalisation movement, *A World Where Many Worlds Fit*. A travelling exhibition on the financial crisis, *It's the Political Economy, Stupid,* co-curated with Gregory Sholette, has been presented at nine venues since 2011.

– http://www.ressler.at

LAURENCE SCHMIDLIN

Laurence Schmidlin has been a curator of Contemporary Art at the Musée cantonal des beaux-arts in Lausanne, Switzerland, since 2017. She received her MA and her PhD in Art History from the University of Geneva. Pursuing a career as a museum professional, she is a former head of the Cabinet cantonal des estampes and deputy director of the Musée Jenisch Vevey (2013–2017), and she has interned and worked at many institutions, including

the Cabinet des estampes du Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva; the Swiss Institute, New York; the Frick Collection and Library, New York; MAMCO, Geneva; Fondation de l'Hermitage, Lausanne; Forde, Geneva; Musée des beaux-arts, Le Locle; and Fri-Art, Fribourg. In 2012, Schmidlin co-founded Rosa Brux, an art and research space in Brussels. She has specialised in the study of prints and of contemporary drawing, with a strong research interest in all forms of intermediality. Her PhD thesis is titled *The Drawingness of Drawing: La Spatialisation du dessin dans l'art américain des années 1960 et 1970* (2016). This study aims to shed light on the development of so-called tri-dimensional drawing in American art, both in theory and in practice. It is published by the Presses du réel, Dijon, France, in 2019.

YESOMI UMOLU

Yesomi Umolu is artistic director of the 2019 Chicago Architecture Biennial and director and curator, Logan Center Exhibitions at the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts at the University of Chicago. She directs a programme of international contemporary art in the Logan Center Gallery and contributes to a number of strategic committees that drive the development of contemporary art, architecture and urbanism on campus. In addition to her curatorial role, Umolu also holds the position of lecturer in the Humanities Division. Specialising in global contemporary art and spatial practices, Umolu recently curated *Cinthia Marcelle and Tiago Mata Machado: Divine Violence* (2017); *Kapwani Kiwanga: The sum and its parts* (2017); and *So-called Utopias* (2015) at the Logan Center Gallery. Prior to joining the Logan, Umolu held curatorial positions at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and the European biennial of contemporary art, Manifesta 8. Her other notable exhibitions include *Material Effects* (MSU Broad, 2015); *John Akomfrah: Imaginary Possessions* (MSU Broad, 2014); *The Land Grant: Forest Law* (MSU Broad, 2014); and *The Museum of Non Participation: The New Deal* (Walker Art Center, 2013). Umolu has been a visiting lecturer, critic and speaker at a number of international universities. She currently serves on the curatorial advisory board for the United States Pavilion at the 16th Venice Architecture Biennale, commissioned by the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the University of Chicago.

MARIE VELARDI

Marie Velardi is an artist whose work takes multiple forms – installations, videos, drawings, texts, printed images and sound – in which there is always a common element: the link to time, and in particular to the future. Her primary aim is to construct a memory of the future (a long-term perspective), which she understands as being of equal importance to a memory of the past. Her work has been exhibited in Switzerland, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, the USA, the UK, India and Thailand. In 2014–2015, she was one of three artists to represent Switzerland at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale of India. Her work has won numerous prizes. The

exhibition *Objectif Terre: Vivre l'Anthropocène* was awarded the Prix Expo 2016 by the Swiss Academy of Natural Sciences, with a specific mention by the jury for her scenography. She received the 2015 grant from the City of Geneva for the research and creation of her work series entitled *Terre-Mer*. Since 2017 she has been a teacher on the bachelor's programme at the Ecole de design et haute école d'art du Valais, Sierre, where she is currently co-director of the print studios, specialising in multiples and editions.

– http://marie.velardi.ch

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