rethink the challenge

developing sensitivity to change
being together in action

ALLIANZ FOUNDATION

>STREFA: WOLNO- -SŁOWA<

CANTIERI METICCI

reimagining MOBILITIES

PANICOCENE

REFRAMING CLIMATE CHANGE-INDUCED MOBILITIES

LIST OF CONTENT

Re-think the Challenge -
research by artistic participation

The climate crisis is not just a recent phenomenon;
it is a specific model of development based on values such as progress,
evolution and advancement - says Pierluigi Musaro in a series of talks
on climate migration entitled It's going to get warmer. The planet gives
us a chance to question the current system by developing mindfulness,
imagination, cooperation, and interspecies solidarity, by redefining concepts
that have been shaped by years of a capitalist and privileged point of view.

Rethink The Challenge is an artistic and research process where, through
participatory performative actions, artistic work with communities and
seminar meetings, we look at possible responses to the climate crisis that
would support cooperation, solidarity and mutual aid in caring for the planet
and all living beings. We wonder how community-based artistic processes
can respond to the challenges of today's world and whether they can create
real alternatives to the dominant system and power relations. Rethink The
Challenge is about asking questions, seeking answers in action, shaping
sensitivity and solidarity, and developing concrete tools that help us survive
times of crisis. It is also, and perhaps above all, training in imagining
a different world, different from the leading solutions and models, exercising
the courage to speak out about injustice and question established paths
of development and social patterns. Finally, it is giving space to creative
freedom, freedom of expression and speech, freedom of exploration.

We invited artists from different cultural backgrounds and fields to co-create the workshop processes. They prepared participatory creative activities for intergenerational groups of participants. We explored the topic of climate migration, drawing on texts by researchers and experts on the subject, as well as content created by people who describe the functioning of living beings other than humans.

In the artistic processes, we looked at, among others, the concepts of courage, freedom, imagination, justice of movement, and inter-generational solidarity. In seminar discussions, we discussed various responses of societies to environmental crises throughout history, the role of the arts and cross-sectoral cooperation in shaping the narrative of the climate crisis, and the legal response to attempts to redefine the rules of movement in the face of environmental change.

During the two editions of the festival, through meetings, workshops, seminars and performances, we looked at how movement is an integral part of our existence and how its restriction deprives people, plants and animals of their dignity and makes survival impossible.

The publication draws on key reflections that emerged during this two-year process in the work of Strefa WolnoSłowa, Cantieri Meticci and Reimagining Mobilities, and attempts to describe the two main workshop and performance processes in Warsaw and Bologna.

BandaBalena – All Breaths, the Breath. Mythopoeia, Conflict Pedagogy, and Ecological Care. Marginality and Climate Vulnerability

by **Pietro Floridia**

The more individuals find themselves at the margins—socially, economically, or geographically—the more dispropor-tionately they suffer the consequences of climate change. This dynamic is widely documented: those who are most vulnerable, despite contributing the least to the climate crisis, bear its heaviest burdens. Yet a disturbing paradox emerges: those most exposed to the effects of global warming often have the least access to information, cultural tools, and mental bandwidth to engage with the issue, being preoccupied with the urgencies of everyday survival.

This asymmetry produces a twofold divide: one in the distribution of harm, and another in the ability to recognize and articulate this harm as part of a shared destiny. Marginalized people—and their children—are thus excluded not only from decision-making processes but also from the symbolic and narrative spaces through which the climate crisis becomes shared meaning, common language, and collective story.

The Questions

From this awareness, as artists and cultural practitioners, we raise a set of fundamental questions—not only to guide our work, but to open a shared space for dialogue. These questions are not ours alone; they resonate across other disciplines, practices, and contexts.
The core questions we ask include: What are the key social and territorial contexts where it is most urgent and fruitful to "sow" imaginaries and discourses around climate change today?

How can we engage people who live outside of cultural circuits and who often perceive environmental issues as distant, abstract, or even alien to their lived experience?
What narrative forms can render climate issues relevant—felt as "one's own" —for individuals whose daily lives are marked by material urgency, precarity, and concrete struggles?
What processes can generate a shared field in which diverse subjects and positions may converge, dialogue, and confront the climate crisis together?

How can aesthetic work function not merely as a "vehicle" for informative content, but as a transformative practice capable of altering perceptions, emotions, and imaginaries?
What are the risks of paternalism or oversimplification when working with marginalized communities on complex topics such as climate change, and how can these be avoided through responsible artistic practice?
How can we concretely hold together the pedagogical, aesthetic, and political dimensions of such work in an integrated and coherent way?

Tool no. 1: The Formula – Assemblyage as Convergence of Heterogeneous Actors

We begin by outlining the theoretical and operational wager that lies at the heart of our approach: to bring together radically diverse individuals around a strong, polysemic symbol, enabling them to co-construct a founding mythical narrative and an oikos—a symbolic and material habitat—capable of generating shared interest and connecting the theme at hand with domains that are already meaningful to each participant.

To grasp the scope of this formula, we must first clarify the context: the Whale Land project took shape on the extreme periphery of Bologna, involving a radically heterogeneous community—dozens of children from marginalized neighborhoods (Ukrainian, Eritrean, Arab, and Italian backgrounds), professional and non-professional actors, set designers, visual artists, students, activists, women and men aged six to sixty.

They were invited to collectively build the story of a stran-ded whale, transforming that image into a shared symbol and poetic device.
The practices developed took multiple forms: collective writing and dramaturgical improvisation, scenographic construction of the whale as a large totemic object, choral theatrical performance, and the creation of original texts and rap songs for the final show.

The operative model that guided this process was what we call assemblyage—a neologism blending assembly (as in collective gathering and democratic participation) with assemblage (as in the aesthetic and philosophical notion of heterogeneous composition). Assemblyage names our core methodological principle: the intentional convergence of people as diverse as possible—in terms of cultural background, age, economic status, education—around a shared creative endeavor.

As Adolph Lingis suggests in *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (1994), the most radically inclusive communities are those that are not based on pre-existing identity markers that define who belongs and who does not. Instead, in such communities, no one is excluded because no one enters on the basis of similarity or prior membership: participation comes before belonging.

Moreover, issues like the climate crisis affect us all, but in unequal ways and through profoundly different experiences. This is precisely why it is essential to create a shared space where each person can contribute what they do not have in common with others: theoretical insight, lived experience, the anger of those who suffer directly, the stories and memories of those who have faced similar phenomena in other geographies—especially through migration.

In this framework, the diversity of perspectives is not an obstacle but a vital resource for composing a collective narrative in which the symbol—the stranded whale—acts as a magnet and a common field, capable of holding us together without flattening us into sameness. The power of this process lies precisely in giving value to the friction between divergent viewpoints, turning the encounter of distant life experiences into a productive dynamic. Thus, within the same narrative space, a young man from Gambia can speak of his village swallowed by the desert while a man from Romagna recalls his house submerged by a flood. These stories, though different in origin and geography, gather around a shared symbol and become traces of a common vulnerability—plural expressions of a planetary condition: that of precarious inhabitants of a wounded world.

Understanding how such diverse people are drawn to engage with climate issues means creating works that can speak to multiple publics—not just the already-informed or culturally equipped. A company of heterogeneities also allows us to activate multiple forms of knowledge, beyond discursive logos: knowledges rooted in the body, in materials, in lived experience, in meta-phors and fairy tales—dimensions especially intuitive for children.
This produces a plural epistemological model that does not hierarchize knowledge but welcomes its heterogeneity.

Finally, heterogeneity itself becomes both exercise and training for cohabiting the "common home" that is Earth—a rehearsal space for learning how to live together in multiplicity and disagreement, which is the necessary condition for any shared future.

Tool no. 2: Children’s Protagonism

photo: Julia Szabłowska

Among the most meaningful and radical dynamics we have encountered in our work, the convergence of adults and children has proven decisive. But what does it actually mean to confront a topic like climate change together—adults and children? What does it entail to co-create a story, a perfor-mative narrative, or even a material object such as a stage set? What are the deeper implications of such a practice?

We ask these questions because, in retrospect, we can affirm that it was precisely this intergenerational coexistence that triggered the most profound and unexpected effects on our artistic and theoretical journey. After thirty years of practice, this was the first time I chose to form a mixed group of around thirty children aged 7 to 13, teenagers, and about twenty adults.

This choice was strongly influenced by the impact of reading Günther Anders, and in particular his short story Die beweinte Zukunft (1961), “*The Mourned Future*,” in which Anders imagines a modern-day Noah who, faced with the indifference of his fellow citizens to the impending catastrophe of the flood, stages a public mourning ritual in advance: he dresses in black and weeps for the children who will die, even before the waters overwhelm them. This act captures the core disproportion that defines our contemporary age: an unprecedented level of technical power paired with a psychological and imaginative incapacity to fully grasp or feel the catastrophe that we ourselves are causing.

The anticipatory mourning for the death of the children reveals, for me, what is at stake in the climate crisis: not merely a technical transition, but the concrete threat of the extinction of the future itself—the end of the children. This is what Jacques Derrida evokes in Spectres de Marx (1993), when he speaks of the à-venir, the "to-come," as a radical openness that ethically calls upon us precisely in its indeterminacy and fragility, demanding that we take responsibility for those who are yet to come (Derrida, 1993).

This led to a methodological and ethical decision: to place children not on the margins but at the very center of the theatrical dispositif—not as passive recipients, but as co-authors, as subjects who actively participate in the construction of narrative and scene

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Sarah Pour

Tool no. 3: The Mythopoietic Function – From Storytelling to Foundational Myth

Having children as co-authors means embracing the mythic dimension of storytelling—not as ornamentation, but as a profound mode of inquiry. Working with children naturally brings forth a mythopoietic modality, because children—due to cognitive, emotional, and symbolic reasons—inhabit with ease that space where reality and imagination intertwine without rigid hierarchies, where everyday details coexist with ultimate questions without contradiction.

Yet this "mythicity" should not be understood as a regression to naive or primitive forms: it is a precious resource that lifts the narrative to a foundational plane, because myth acts as a device that does not merely represent what happens, but opens the question of what matters—of what grounds the very possibility of living together on Earth.

As Claude Lévi-Strauss and Hans Blumenberg have shown, myth does not aim to explain the world rationally. For Lévi-Strauss, myth is rather a language that symbolically organizes the fundamental oppositions that traverse human experience—life and death, nature and culture—offering the community a narrative structure through which to engage with what is irreducibly contradictory (Lévi-Strauss, 1955/1963). For Blumenberg, myth represents a tool for rendering the world's unavailability more inhabitable, giving form to what remains contingent, obscure, and threatening in human existence (Blumenberg, 1979/1985).

In this sense, spending over two years collectively constructing a contemporary myth becomes an attempt to found a community of heterogeneities—not because such a myth offers ultimate or immutable truths, but because it allows participants to articulate together the deep, original experiences that connect them. The stories we built with the children thus bring to the stage fundamental questions: our relationship with the world, the horizon of meaning, the values by which to live. Not decorative details, but a radical exposure to the essential knots of our shared condition.

This is exemplified in the mythic narrative we created together: the story of the stranded black whale, secretly cared for by children, which brings into play the overall sense of existence and the future—individual, collective, and planetary.

photo: Julia Szabłowska

Interwoven Mythic Motifs:
The Whale as a Crossroads of Archetypes

The story of the stranded black whale is not just a narrative—it is a weave of universal mythic motifs, functioning as archetypal structures capable of holding together both the personal experiences of the participants and the global challenges of our time: climate crisis, colonialism, thecommodification of the sacred, the vanishing of futures.

The choice to work with myth is not decorative but foundational: mythopoeia functions here as a narrative principle that transforms the story into a collective performative act. Each participant can project their own emotions, biographies, and visions onto these structures, becoming part of something larger.

Five key mythic motifs structure the narrative:

1. The Foundational Myth:
The Whale as Magnetic Symbol

In a village of the Global South, a beached whale becomes the symbolic center of a new alliance. Its enormous, suffering, yet living body acts as a magnetic symbol, able to attract heterogeneous actors—particularly children and migrants—around a common struggle. Initially passive spectators, they choose to care for the whale in secret, withdrawing it from logics of exploitation and resisting both their parents and the tourists, who embody a utilitarian view of the world.

It is in the powerful polysemy of the whale that this alliance is forged—not based on pre-existing identities, but on the shared commitment to a radical gesture toward the living. The symbol unites without erasing difference: it establishes a common field where diverse experiences converge, and care becomes a political act. The whale does not represent; it founds. It becomes a bottom-up origin myth, establishing a new shared **imaginary**.

2. The Edenic Myth: Childhood and Enchantment

At the origin lies a paradisiacal vision: the children discover the whale and begin to care for it in a hidden bay. This act reveals the original enchantment of childhood toward nature—a rela-tionship that is direct, affective, non-instrumental. The whale becomes a totem-animal, a living bridge to an unspoiled world.

Here, what Hartmut Rosa calls resonance is activated: an affective and responsive relation with the living, one that resists the logic of technical availability (Rosa, 2019). But this harmony is betrayed. Adults discover the whale, perceive its economic potential, and colonize its body by turning it into a water-themed amusement park. The sacred becomes merchandise; the affective bond becomes spectacle.

A fracture is thus enacted: resonance fades, and nature stops responding. The bleeding whale becomes the emblem of irreversible disenchantment and the collapse into extractivism and touristic consumption.

At the most tragic moment, the agonizing breath of the whale becomes the sonic center of the scene. That gasp becomes a global symbol: the lungs of burning forests, the suffocated bodies of migrants, animals choking on plastic, the victims of racism and war.

In this vision, Gregory Bateson and Achille Mbembe converge: on the one hand, the need to recognize "the patterns that connect" (Bateson, 1979); on the other, the affirmation of breathing as a universal right and common planetary good—a foundational principle for inhabiting the Earth (Mbembe, 2021). Echoing Cortázar's All *Fires the Fire*, we arrive at: "All breaths, the breath"—a sensory connection between the breath of one and the condition of all.

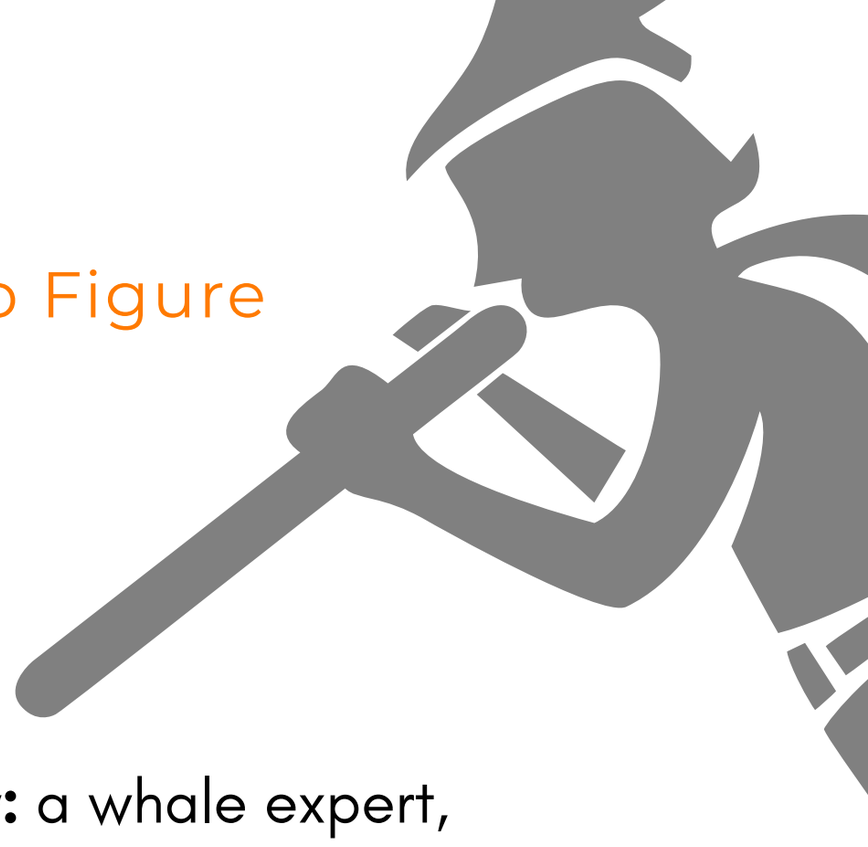
During the performance, the choir of Ukrainian children gave voice to this planetary cry, culminating in the refrain:

All breaths, the breath.
We are breaths among other breaths.
We are one single breathworld.

The narrative becomes poetic and political action—aesthetic resistance against the necro-politics of the present.

photo: Julia Szabłowska

4. The Trickster/Pied Piper Myth: The Arab Figure



The Arab is the most ambivalent figure in the story: a whale expert, precarious immigrant, mediator between children and adults.
Two archetypes intertwine in him: the Trickster, a liminal figure who dissolves boundaries, and the Pied Piper, who enchants and leads others into disappearance.

As Trickster, the Arab resembles Hermes, Loki, Eshù—he traverses the established order, reveals its fractures, and introduces instability and possibility. As Pied Piper, he does not lead the children to integration, but to desertion—taking them away from the adult world. He is a threshold figure, an agent of exit.

But his role is not only symbolic. The Arab is also a political figure, an emblem of the contemporary migrant condition: precarious, exploited, blackmailed—yet bearer of situated knowledge and a radical vision.

In *Decolonial Ecology*, Malcolm Ferdinand (2022) forcefully shows that ecological and colonial exploitation are inseparable, born from a shared matrix. One cannot fight for the environment without fighting against racism and colonialism, nor decolonize without caring for the living. The Arab embodies this inter-sectional vision, one that reads the entanglement of extractivism, marginalization, and ecological wound.

When betrayed by the mayor and local elites, the Arab consciously assumes the role of the Trickster-Pied Piper.
He incites the children to desert—not as flight, but as foundation. He leads them away from a world that no longer offers future, listening, or possibility.

His ambiguity also echoes the thought of Louisa Yousfi, who defends an "opaque resistance," a difference that cannot be assimilated. He resonates too with Savinio's idea that children are "tragic beings," bearers of a divine spark that condemns them to rebellion. The Arab awakens that spark—he urges them to reject an order they no longer recognize, and to disappear in order to found something else.

5. The Myth of Exodus and Metamorphosis: Founding Elsewhere, Listening to the Vanished

The final moment is a radical exodus: the children disappear, merging with the whale, becoming its vital organs. They do not die, but transform into something no longer visible or controllable. It is a symbolic departure from a dead world—a desertion that seeks not to overthrow power, but to found another community elsewhere.

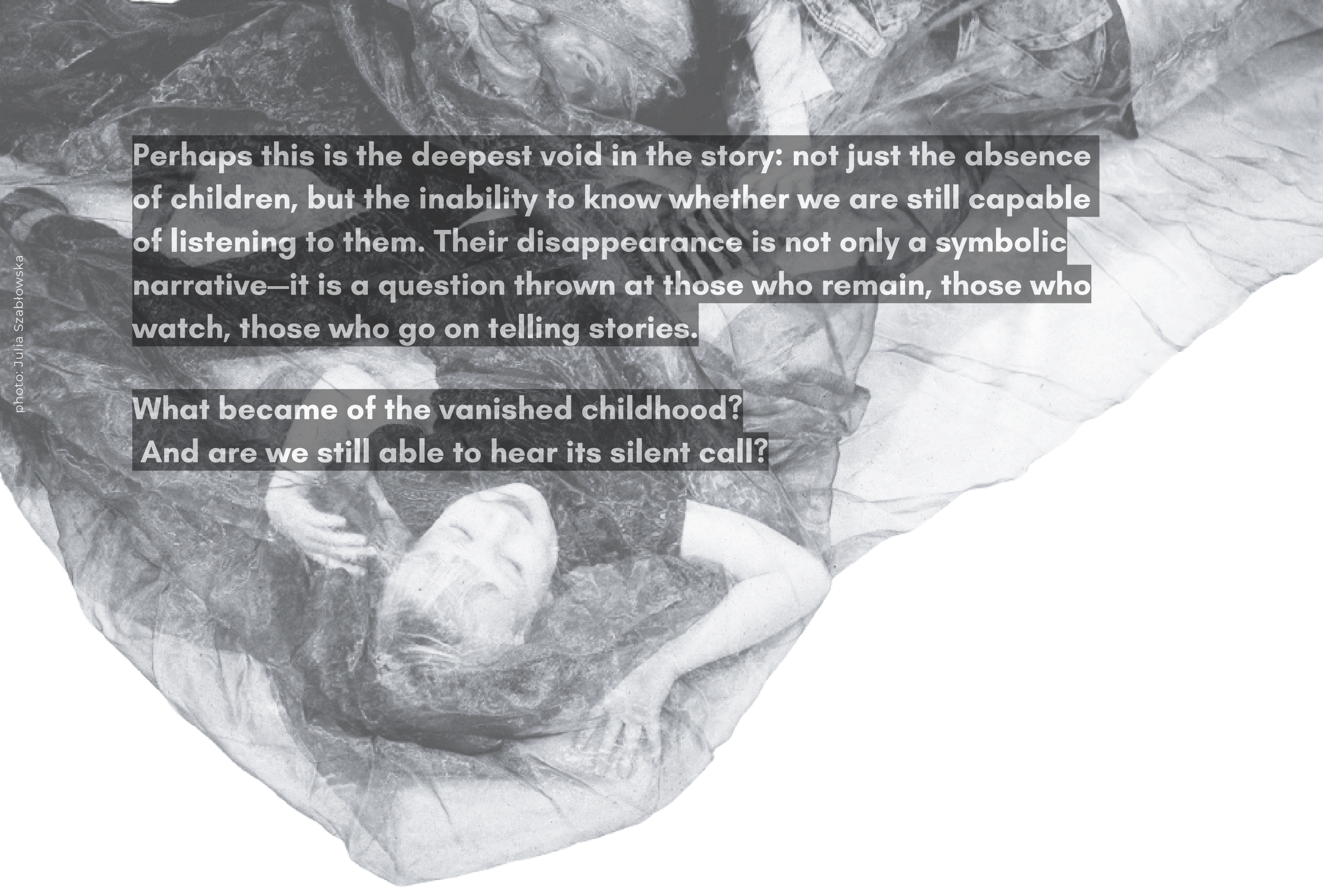
Two theoretical lineages echo here. On one hand, Michael Walzer's *Exodus and Revolution* (1985), where the biblical exodus is not mere escape, but a crossing of the desert to construct a new order based on alternative values. On the other, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt (2000), for whom exodus is a constitutive gesture—a political act of withdrawal that invents new forms of living together. It is at once political and ecological: a radical metamorphosis, where human and non-human intertwine in a vital pact of coexistence.

Their disappearance is not an end—it is a beginning. A new way of inhabiting elsewhere: beyond the gaze, beyond order, beyond a world that wanted them as mute spectators or commodities-in-training.

But if this exodus is foundation, for those who remain, it is also loss. No one knows where they went. They do not return. They leave no farewells.
No explanations.

And so, the world left behind discovers itself orphaned of childhood.

And so, the world left behind discovers itself orphaned of childhood.



The Stratification of Mythic Narrative: A Story for Children and Adults

As we have seen, the mythic narrative is, by its very nature, stratified: it never reduces itself to a single level of inter-pretation and offers itself to each person according to the depth and degree to which they choose to engage. Its strength lies precisely in this multiplicity: in its capacity to be simul-taneously received as an immediate story—populated by characters, adventures, and emotions—and as a symbolic, philosophical, and political inquiry.

This stratification makes it suitable for both children and adults, albeit in different ways. For children, the story immediately functions as an engaging adventure: there is a whale, a secret refuge, alliances and trials, a community of protagonists with whom they can identify. For adults, the same story opens up as a complex dispositif, scattered with symbols, archetypes, dilemmas, and cultural references, inviting a deeper immersion into human condition and its shadows.

Not by chance do we evoke Pinocchio as an exemplary model of such stratification—not only for the episode of the sea monster (often rendered as a "dogfish" or "whale") which already functions as a powerful archetype of the monstrous belly and transformative trial—but for the entire architecture of the work, as taught to us by Giorgio Manganelli and, more recently and even more radically, by Giorgio Agamben.

Manganelli, in *Pinocchio: un libro parallelo* (1977), shows how Collodi wrote far more than a moralistic tale for children: Pinocchio is an initiatory journey, a descent into the underworld of existence, in which the puppet must undergo death, hunger, deceit, and disillusionment before even accessing the condition of being human. The strength of the work—according to Manganelli—lies precisely in this duality: a brilliant, humorous, light-hearted story for children; an abyssal, disturbing, and anguished one for those who approach it with an adult gaze.

> Agamben, in both Infancy and History (1978/1993) and his recent *Pinocchio: The Story of a Puppet* (2023), deepens this notion of stratification. For him, Pinocchio is a figure of infancy as a reservoir of radical potential—not innocence or spontaneity, but a space not yet subjected to norms, where being is still able not to conform. In his latest work, Agamben suggests that Pinocchio represents the in-fans—the one who cannot yet speak and who, precisely for that reason, "resists" the normalizing speech of adults.
> **The journey of Pinocchio becomes the parabola of a being that cannot be fully integrated, who traverses error, metamorphosis, and trial without ever cancelling out his original opacity.**

From this perspective, Pinocchio's immersion into the belly of the sea monster is read by Agamben as a threshold-crossing: the moment in which infancy and history touch and separate, when pure potential must confront the imposed forms of the adult world. Yet what matters is not the arrival, but the lingering of Pinocchio in this in-between zone—where human and non-human, childhood and history, play and trauma mingle without ever fully merging.

This helps us understand why a story like that of the stranded whale can and must function for children, and why its symbolic depth does not make it "less suitable" but, on the contrary, more universal and powerful. Children are fully capable of dwelling within a narrative that contains mystery, enigma, grief, and metamorphosis—provided all this takes shape in the form of a story. Myth, due to its layered and archetypal structure, is the oldest and most natural form through which communities of children and adults have always shared the essential questions: life and death, separation and return, transformation and exodus.

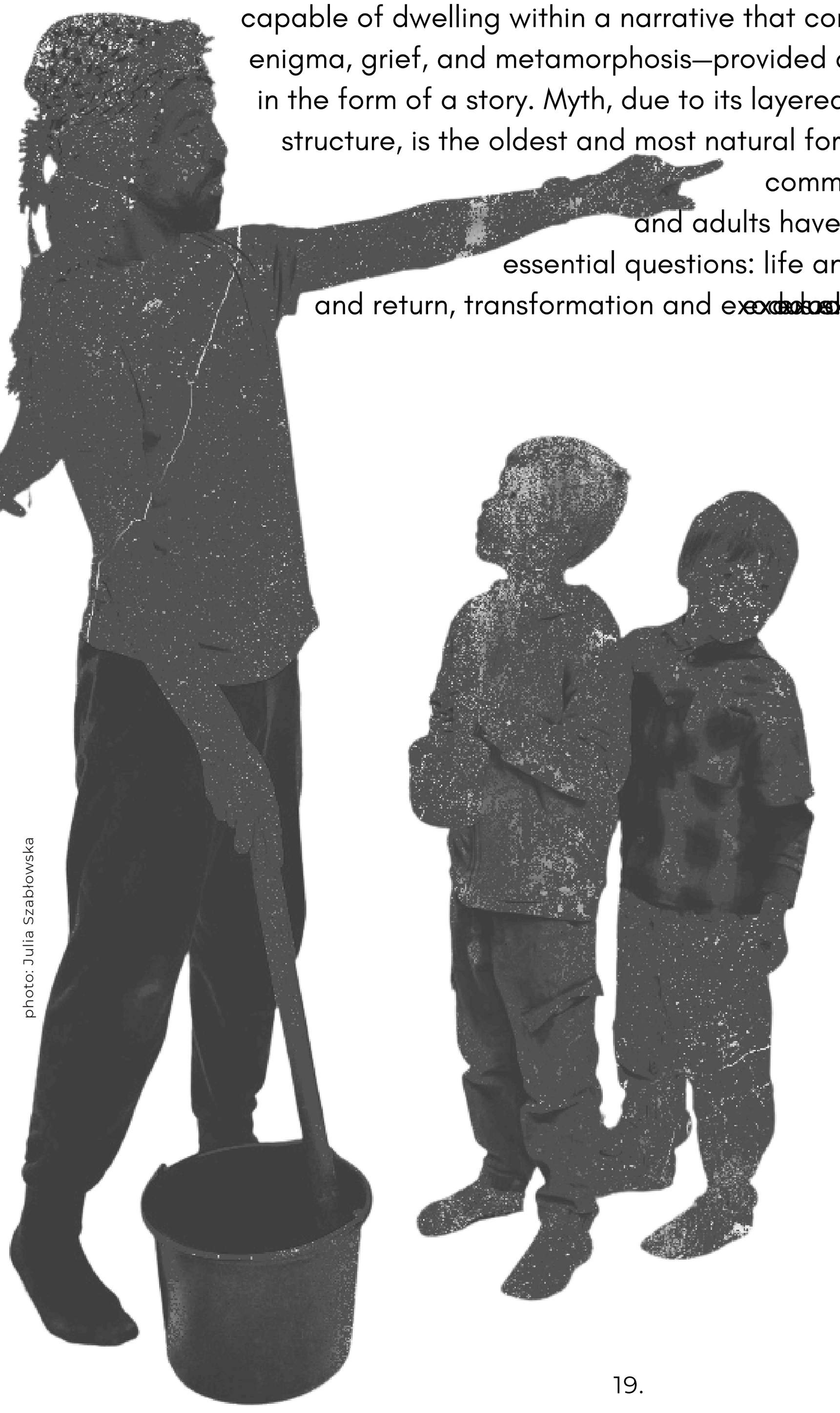


photo: Julia Szabłowska

Ultimately, the story of the whale and the children is not a story "for children," but a story that embraces children and adults together, offering each a way in: narrative immediacy for the youngest, symbolic depth for the oldest. This is the true value of mythopoeia: to create a common ground where different generations can dwell on the same questions—climate change, care, and loss—holding together lightness and depth, simplicity and layering, immediacy and radical inquiry, without one level excluding or diminishing the other.

Mythopoeia can thus become a bridge between generations that today often appear increasingly distant and mutually unintelligible.

Tool no. 4: The Symbol as a Shared Field — Articulating Differences and Performing Conflict

Our practice begins from a simple yet radical principle: the more solid the element that holds us together—a symbol, a ritual space—the more free and generative the differences that can be articulated within it. But this solidity is not one of pacification; on the contrary, the symbol is a shared field where conflict can emerge, be played out, traversed, and transformed.

photo: Julia Szabłowska

In this sense, theatre becomes a ritualized arena—not to cancel conflict, butto train us in living it critically. Here, the insights of Chantal Mouffe and Jacques Rancière converge. For Mouffe (2000), conflict is the very condition of democracy and must be transformed from destructive antagonism into constructive agonism. For Rancière (2004), conflict is the moment in which the voiceless enter the scene, contesting the invisible hierarchies of society and redefining the distribution of the sensible.

The whale thus becomes a pedagogical device that not only gathers diverse perspectives, but supports their confrontation and coexistence in tension. Around it, profoundly divergent—and even conflicting—interpretations have emerged. This very plurality reveals the whale's strength as a symbolic arena.

For some adult performers, the whale became a Leviathan, a political monster, a figure of authoritarian power and of the anthropological mutation that Pier Paolo Pasolini had foreseen as a drift into consumerism and spectacle. In this reading, the mayor in the story emerges as a populist leader, spokesperson for the whale's very body—a Leviathan that ends up swallowing the children, last opponents to a politics enslaved by profit. Here, the symbol does not unify but polarizes: it allows the staging of contemporary political conflict between populism and minority dissent.

For Eritrean adolescents, the black stranded whale evoked the return of colonial repressions: through their migratory experience, submerged memories of the Italian empire resurface. In their rap lyrics, the belly of the whale becomes a living archive—a place where the unburied dead, migrants lost at sea, and the wreckage of past and present violence converge. Here, the symbol becomes a space of resistance and remembrance, a tool for articulating a historical and geopolitical conflict: that between the legacies of colonialism and the persistent blindness of Eurocentrism.

> For younger children, the whale was instead a wounded baby animal, a gigantic and fragile being toward whom they could exercise immediate, peer-like care—an embodied relationship with nature that escapes both commodification and technocratic control. In this case, the symbol allows the children to articulate their conflict with the adult world: the tension between spontaneous care and the instrumentalization of life.

These divergent readings are not merely subjective or arbitrary interpretations: they are forms of critical participation in the symbol, each bearing memory, tension, and a real conflict with the present.

This is why, in the story, an alliance emerges between children and migrants: both suffer the same logic of exclusion and exploitation. As Malcom Ferdinand (2022) argues, ecology and decolonization are not separate issues: the same gesture of appropriation and exploitation targets resources, colonized territories, and racialized and marginalized bodies—revealing deep connections between colonialism, extractive capitalism, and the climate crisis.

Mythopoietic theatre, then, does not merely produce poetic images, but a concrete pedagogy of conflict, in which we learn that no identity is fixed once and for all, that every symbol can be overturned, and that no voice should be excluded from the play of differences.

In this layered interpretative space lies the core work of the company: to construct a symbolic arena that does not aim to resolve conflict, but trains us to live within it—building responsible relationships and conscious positions. It is a space of "inter-esse," as Hannah Arendt (1958) defines it: **a being-in-between people and perspectives, a proximity that does not dissolve tension, but renders it generative.**

Around the whale-symbol, we have thus built a small pantheon: figures, archetypes, and characters oscillating between history and myth, reportage and dream. And it is precisely in this oscillation that theatrical practice builds a shared imaginary—a space to collectively face the climate crisis and its historical and symbolic roots, from divergent yet convergent positions grounded in care.

photo: Julia Szabłowska

Tool no. 5: Material Construction and Oikopoiesis

Starting from the symbolic center—the whale—the material and imaginative interactions it generates become fundamental. We have already discussed the idea of "rewriting" the whale: that is, filling this common symbol with individual and collective stories, narratives that each participant can deposit into this narrative crucible, this "assemblage-text" that becomes a cross-roads of correspondences—at times capable of evoking the feeling of being "siblings," allies in a common struggle, while still maintaining divergent visions.

Alongside the mythopoietic dimension, an equally crucial layer emerges: the material and collective construction of the whale and the scenic objects, made entirely out of discarded materials. This practical and manual process is, for us, **oikopoietic**—from the Greek **oikos** (home, environment) and **poiesis** (to make)—because it does not simply shape the scenic space, but rather institutes a shared environment where relationships, symbols, and bodies intertwine.

It is not merely a matter of building a neutral container, but of co-creating the very space in which the story happens and takes shelter—in both the narrative space and the real space of the performance.

This collective practice values non-verbal forms of expression, which are essential in intercultural and intergenerational contexts: it allows emotions and memories to emerge through manual engagement, and enables the sharing of stories and experiences in ways that elude rational argumentation.

Material Construction as Relational Construction

As Tim Ingold has noted, to build means to weave one's own life lines into those of materials, which themselves carry history and vitality (Ingold, 2013). The concrete acts of cutting, gluing, assembling allow participants to pour fragments of their subjectivity into matter, matter that bears traces of use and residues of previous worlds.

This is why the choice of poor and discarded materials is never incidental: it makes the whale an object-symbol already stratified with memory and remnants, immediately linking it to marginal lives and to the economies of waste. **The process of redeeming discarded matter parallels the symbolic and social redemption of people on the margins: abandoned and recovered materials become a direct metaphor for those who have been excluded or rendered invisible.**

In the very gesture of repair and co-construction, participants were able to recognize themselves as part of something greater. Here, what Ingold calls a “shared lifeline” is enacted: each subjectivity intertwines its material and imaginative trajectory with those of others.

The whale—as totemic animal—was not an abstract sculpture, but the tangible result of a patient collective labor, a fragile and layered object into which everyone could deposit a piece of themselves. This amplified the sense of care and protection: handling the whale they had built allowed participants to feel it as their own, to transform the symbol into an embodied experience, not merely a representation.

In this gesture lies a fundamental pedagogical function: oikopoiesis, the shared construction of an oikos—a home, an environment, a living space—is a way to educate toward shared responsibility for the world we inhabit. Oikos is also eco, as in ecology and economy: rebuilding the whale also meant prefiguring another common environment, one that is not given but must be continually recreated and maintained.

As Gregory Bateson (1979) suggested, true learning does not consist in transmitting content, but in a perceptual and relational training that teaches us to recognize the "patterns that connect." Our workshop thus proposed a space of multiple resonances, in which every manual gesture was also a symbolic exercise and a prefiguration of a different way of inhabiting the world.

To build the whale from discarded materials was, then, to build the very world we wish to live in: a fragile, relational, interdependent world. The oikos is never a neutral backdrop—it is the outcome of a shared responsibility, of a continuous collective work of reconstruction and maintenance. To care for a whale made of cardboard and salvaged metal is, in a small but significant way, an act of resistance against the climatic and cultural vampirism of our time.

photo: Julia Szabłowska

Conclusion: The Playful Community as a Potential Environment and Becoming-Child

The tools deployed through Bandabalena were not mere methodologies, but radical dispositifs: a layered symbol that functioned as a magnet for heterogeneity and a shared field where generational, cultural, and linguistic differences could manifest, confront each other, and articulate themselves without either exploding into conflict or dissolving into uniformity.

Around that symbol — the whale — people of vastly different backgrounds were able to write, build, narrate, draw, and perform, generating a small-scale cosmos in which they could reflect upon themselves, critique each other, and search for a shared meaning that could accommodate both passionate identification and ironic detachment. This process gave rise to what Deleuze and Guattari would describe as an assemblage — a complex, shifting montage of gestures, stories, presences, and materials that formed a collective organism in perpetual becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

This has been our practical definition of being-in-play: a two-year experience that oscillated between immersion and distance, passion and critique. By the end of it, we found ourselves — adults and children, migrants and locals — able to envision a new common course, aware that the journey itself had already transformed each of us.

What we built was not simply a theatre company, but a community in play: a space where coexistence became a critical and creative practice. Here, play was not escapism, but a radical mode of engagement — a space for the invention and fabrication of stories, symbols, and mythic environments, and a concrete opportunity for deep transformation.

For the adults involved, the experience embodied what Deleuze and Guattari termed becoming-child: not a nostalgic return to childhood, but a process of disarming rigid postures and reactivating potentials that adulthood tends to repress — mobile, relational, vulnerable, and creative forces (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Each participant responded in their own way: as a salutary crisis, as imaginative regeneration, as an ethical injunction not to betray the authenticity promised by childhood, or as a gesture of care and rebellion against the domesticating structures of adult society.

This becoming-child was not a goal to be attained, but a transversal passage, an opening of possibility — a sign that a community in play can serve as a transformative environment where myth and narrative are not merely stories to be told, but dispositifs for building shared imaginaries, traversing conflicts and differences, and engaging in mutual education in complexity.

Ultimately, **Bandabalena** constituted a laboratory of heterogeneous coexistence, a gymnasium for learning how to oscillate between immersion and critical distance, an environment where the symbol — never fixed or closed — became what Hannah Arendt (1958) would call inter-esse: the **"in-between"** space that connects people and perspectives.

At the end of this journey, what remains is perhaps the most valuable thing of all: the shared capacity to ask ourselves what new direction we want to take, strengthened by an experience that has brought together children and adults, migrants and locals, in a real exercise of **care, responsibility, plurality, and critical imagination.**

photo: Julia Szabłowska

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PLANT MANIFESTO, or the search for tools to build a better world through art

by **Alicja Borkowska**

photo: Agata Kubis

What are we talking about when we talk about so-called climate migration? How do we shape narratives about the mobility of people and other living creatures? Justice in movement begins with the question: do we have the ability to decide about our own movements? Why do we give some creatures the right to survive, caring about the mobility of endangered species, while denying this freedom to others by fortifying borders?

The

manifesto is changing; it is a kind of call to action, a constantly evolving utopia and dream of a just world. It is being developed within temporary workshop communities by people from different cultural backgrounds who share a common longing for a just distribution of goods and freedom of movement regardless of nationality or skin colour. The Plant Manifesto has had three editions so far, to which we invited workshop groups consisting of people from different cultural backgrounds, of different ages and with different socio-economic backgrounds. Each workshop process ended with an event open to the public, which engaged them in joint reflection on the topics raised during the workshops. The Plant Manifesto was created to initiate conversations, build communities around socially important topics, and shape sensitivity.

The Plant Manifesto is a workshop process and a performance created each time with a different multicultural, intergenerational and diverse group of performers. The workshop process consists of 10-12 meetings, during which participants have the opportunity to engage in creative work inspired by Stefano Mancuso's text *"The Nation of Plants"*. The Italian botanist's book becomes a starting point for discussion and artistic reflection on the similarities and differences in the functioning of the plant and human worlds. Taking up the titles of the individual chapters of the performance, edited by the Strefa WolnoSłowa team, we reflect together on the condition of our planet and the concept of power and its distribution in societies. We talk about interpersonal and interspecies relationships, and together we consider how the disruption of the chain of interdependencies in nature contributes to environmental change, upsetting the balance of nature, and how this affects us. We talk a lot about how everything affects us because everything is connected. We consider how to care for the world and the creatures living around us so that every being has access to clean water, soil and air in a way that ensures its availability for future generations. **Finally, we look at migration as a process of movement that affects all living beings and whose restriction is not only a limitation of human freedom, but a denial of the very essence of life.**

"Marcuso is the poet-philosopher of the movement, determined to win for plants the recognition they deserve." —Michael Pollan, *The New Yorker*

Each workshop meeting is devoted to a different point of the Manifesto, and we use various creative tools for reflection. We work through movement practices, performative tasks, and collective and individual writing. We use methods of verbal, movement and theatrical improvisation. We also invite people specialising in exploring the functioning of the plant world to collaborate with us, with whom we discuss specific mechanisms and phenomena that can be a source of inspiration and a starting point for us. During the workshop meetings, we create a script, dramaturgy and choreography for the performance based on formats prepared by us in advance. We move between specific chapters of the performance and within the proposed movement and text forms, enriching them with the ideas and creativity of the group members.

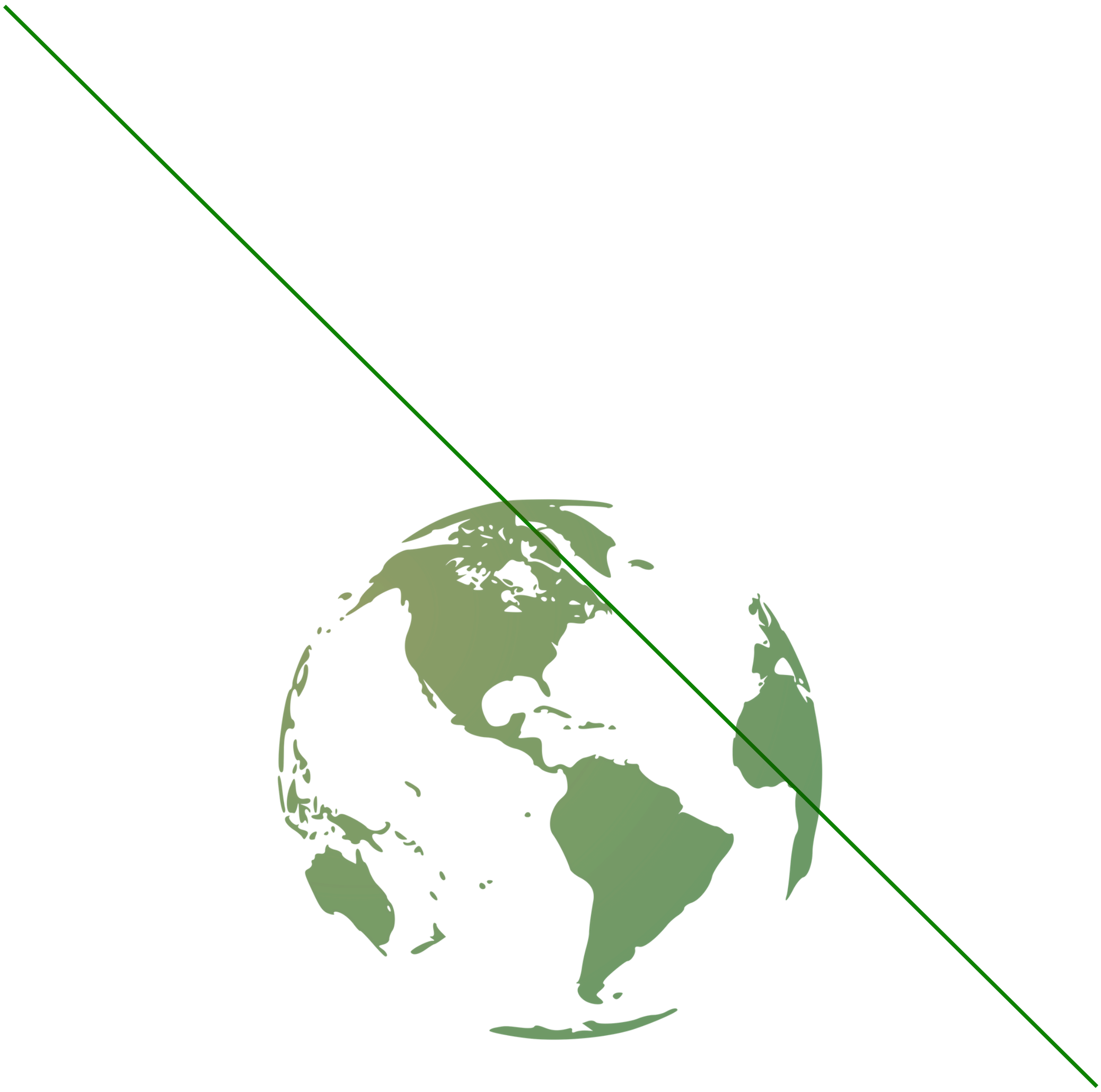
The first workshop meetings are devoted to building the group through improvisation, conversations, theatre and movement games. We try to get to know each other both through stories and directly in stage action. Due to the fact that we invite both people with artistic experience and those without, we try to gradually introduce exercises and tasks related to presence in space, body awareness, individual and group creative work.

At one of the first meetings, we discuss the subsequent chapters of "T*he Nation of Plants"* together - what do the subsequent points mean to us? What is most important to us in each of them? What kinds of associations and images come to mind? What socio-political events do we think relate to the points? What personal experiences related to the Manifesto can we share?

At the beginning of the process, each participant creates texts describing themselves through situations they have found themselves in, through important life experiences or images. These texts are both documentary and poetic, and in later stages, together with excerpts from "*The Nation of Plants*", they become the starting point for creating individual scenes of the performance.

The next workshops focus on specific points of the Manifesto. We organised our work on the Plant Manifesto around six edited chapters and excerpts from Nation of Plants:

1. The Earth is our common home.
Every living being has the right to exercise power.



We all live in a “bubble”. **We humans are alive just like plants, insects, fish, birds and microorganisms**; there is no place on Earth where there are not myriad different forms of existence. Our bubble is deeply immersed in a reality full of life, and we are convinced that this is the standard state of the entire universe. We cannot imagine ourselves as the only ones, the lucky ones. And yet we really could be the heroes of an extremely fortunate coincidence. Our planet is a single bubble in the universe created by living beings. In other words, it is the only bubble of its kind.

We treat the Earth as if it were ours. We have divided its surface into countries and granted dominion over it to certain groups of people, who in turn have entrusted power to a handful of individuals. They are the ones who wield real power.

(Stefano Mancuso *The Nation of Plants)*

2. The Plant Nation does not recognise hierarchical authority and supports decentralised plant democracies.

Observing young twigs, those shoots full of vitality that emerge from hidden buds, usually located at the base of the tree crown, one can see that each of them contains the general characteristics of the entire tree. **Everywhere you look, from the roots to the crown, you can see that plants are built on a pattern of distributed functions.** This structure allows the organism to develop freely and become stronger and more resilient. By using only distributed management models and acting as a decentralised and modular organisation, the plant nation has freed itself forever from the problems of fragility, bureaucracy, excessive distance, ossification and inefficiency typical of hierarchical or centrally managed organisations.

(Stefano Mancuso *The Nation of Plants)*

3. The Plant Nation recognises and guarantees the inalienable rights of natural communities as relationship-based communities.

The Great Leap Forward. China, 1950s and 1960s. After seizing power, Mao is convinced that certain scourges afflicting the Chinese people must be dealt with quickly and decisively. The country is severely ravaged by infectious diseases: plague, cholera, smallpox, tuberculosis, polio, malaria.

The spread of disease vectors must be limited. Mosquitoes carrying malaria, rats responsible for the plague, flies – all must be eliminated. Let's not forget the sparrows that eat our fruit and rice! One sparrow eats 4.5 kg of grain per year. By killing every million sparrows, we can therefore gain food for 60,000 people!

Millions of posters were printed showing ways to fight sparrows, which were to be merciless. The government urged people to scare sparrows away with any kind of noise so that they could not sit down and rest, but had to fly until they dropped exhausted.

Pots, pans, gongs, shotguns, trumpets, horns, plates, drums – every possible source of noise was used. To increase the competition, announcements were made about which schools, groups of workers and government agencies had achieved the highest number of sparrow kills.

The consequences were soon apparent. Sparrows do not feed only on grain; their main food source is insects. Without sparrows, the number of locusts grew. Huge swarms of insects destroyed most of the crops. Three years of terrible famine followed. It is considered to be the cause of the deaths of a huge number of people, estimated at 20-40 million victims.

(Stefano Mancuso *The Nation of Plants)*

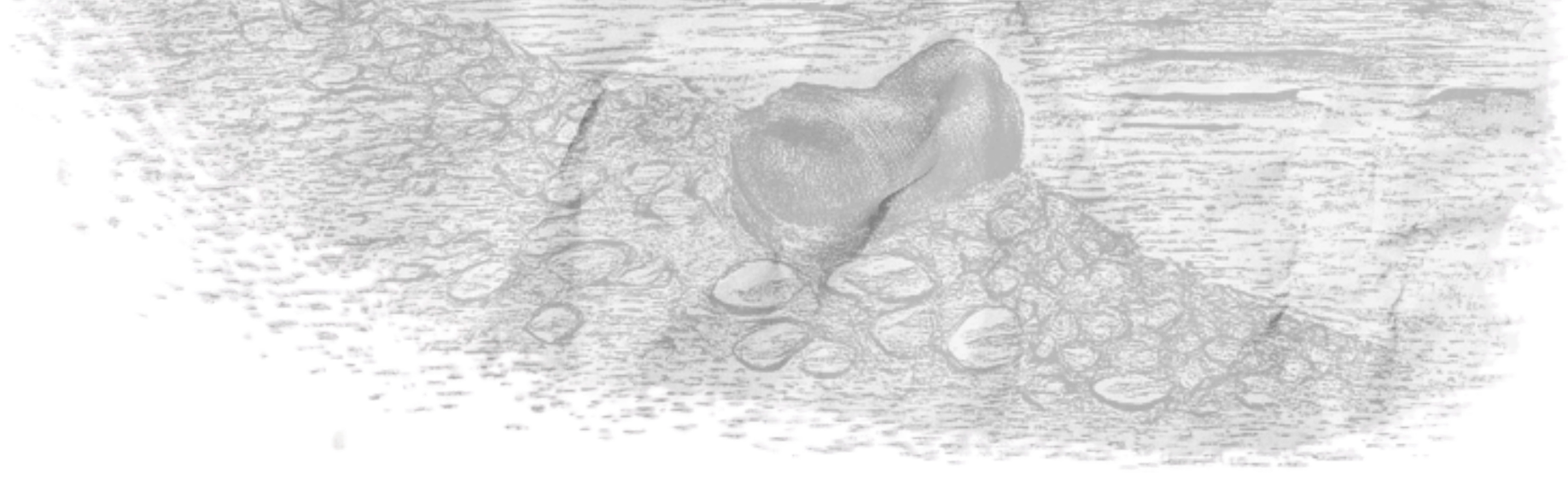
4. The Plant Nation guarantees everyone the right to access clean water, soil and air

Our world is becoming barren, desertified, unbearable. This is not the kind of heat that you rest from because night is coming. This is the heat bursting from the gates of hell for over 200 million people, and that's just an estimate, by 2050. They are fleeing Bangladesh, fleeing the Pacific islands, fleeing villages for cities, and then further, if they can. They are fleeing the Sahel drought, north to Libya, across the sea and further, if they can, to Europe.

From Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, they are fleeing drought, storms and an unbearable existence. They head north to Mexico and then further, beyond the wall, if they can, to the United States. Droughts, hurricanes and increasingly warmer seas are turning into a salty wasteland. The rising sea level is taking away your home and all your possessions. Violent rainstorms mean that water does not soak into the ground for weeks.

Trails. The Balkan, Sahel, Caribbean, nameless. This one – our trail, through the forest and the wilderness. They flee from Belarus and through Belarus. They flee, even though you don't want them, you are afraid, you are busy marking out zones. They flee, they are not tools or weapons. They are human beings, so they escape.

They escape from both Sudans, they escape from Ethiopia and Eritrea, if they can. They escape from Bangladesh, the Philippines and Vietnam. They escape from Tuvalu, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands. From Guatemala, Honduras and the Caribbean islands. If they can. They flee from Paraguay and Bolivia. They flee if they can, they flee. They flee from Kakhovka and Kherson, they flee from the flooded south of Ukraine. The dam has been destroyed, a raging torrent is sweeping away everything in its path. **People are fleeing, animals are fleeing – wild and domestic, if they can.** Knee-deep, neck-deep in water.



They are fleeing Palestine. The land is scorched by iron and fire, cities, schools and hospitals are destroyed, concrete containers for non-humans are crushed. **They are fleeing Gaza**, and we have brought all this upon them – with words, decisions and averted gaze. They flee after fleeing, once again, they flee to camps, where more bombs are already falling on them. And they will continue to flee, because hunger and the land is no longer suitable for cultivation, because water is controlled and rationed, because the air is no longer breathable.

They are fleeing because the rivers are drying up. They will flee from the Rhine and the Loire, they will flee from the mountain resorts in the Alps, because there will be no ice, no snow, no water.They will flee from the Vistula, once again, as they have done so many times before.

They will flee from Poland. From a desert Poland, a Poland without rivers, an underwater Poland. They will flee if they can. Will they be welcomed, or will flimsy fences be built to keep them out? Will they be shot at, only for arguments to ensue about whether it was allowed?

(Pavlo Luhovyi)

5. The Plant Nation does not recognise borders. Every living being has the right to move and choose where to live.

Article 14 of the Declaration of Human Rights states: 'Everyone has the right to seek and enjoy asylum in other countries in the event of persecution.'

This is not enough. It is not enough to have the right to migrate in response to persecution. It should be possible to migrate at any time, including when remaining in a place means depriving oneself of the chance to survive. Animals migrate, plants migrate. No living organism can have its ability to spread restricted. Migration is a natural survival strategy, and blocking it is a restriction of human dignity. Movement is also much more than that. It is the essence of life.

(Stefano Mancuso *The Nation of Plants*)

6. The Plant Nation respects the rights of both living beings today and those that will live in the future.

Plants, like any other natural system, follow the simple principle of developing as long as possible, in accordance with the amount of resources available. In other words, when resources run out, development is limited. The unhealthy idea that it will be possible to grow indefinitely in an environment with limited resources is a human invention. Other living beings live according to realistic patterns of behaviour. When nutrients or water become scarce, they can significantly change their structure to adapt to new conditions. The first response to change is to reduce body size. The flexibility of plants is incomparable to anything else. Plants reduce their size, become thinner or smaller, curl up, twist, rise, flatten, change shape, stop growing – they do whatever is necessary to maintain the best possible balance in an environment with limited resources.

The Earth's resources, as you have probably heard thousands of times, are limited. This is inevitable – a planet of a certain size cannot provide infinite supplies. If a resource is finite, it cannot continue to be used as if it were inexhaustible. **Sooner or later, it will run out, and no inventions or technologies will bring it back.**

(Stefano Mancuso *The Nation of Plants*)

Imagine

the house where your father, grandfather and great-grandfather lived.

The garden where your grandmother planted orange trees.

The land where your oldest ancestor walked.

The world he saw before his eyes has long since changed.

Your home is no longer yours.

Strangers live there,

and you have been banished from there for an eternal exodus.

So you wander the world

looking for a new place

that you will never find .

Never. Nowhere.

Everywhere you set foot,

you will only be an intruder.

You will forever remain someone else, someone from the past.

Your sun will set,

darkness will envelop you.

You will wake up in darkness.

You will live in darkness.

(Emil Al-Kawaldeh)

Depending on the group we work with, our **Manifesto** touches on slightly different socio-political topics, focusing on issues that are closest to the hearts of those involved in the process. We draw on the biographies and direct experiences of people in the group, as well as on social and political events in our everyday lives. Depending on the interests of the group, the Manifesto becomes more documentary or more poetic, always striving for universality and to inspire discussion, conversation and further exploration of the themes raised in the performance, both among those participating in the workshops and the creation of the performance, and during the performance itself.

Natalia Lis: The Plant Manifesto is a performance that is both a space for dialogue and an invitation to connect with species other than humans. It is an encounter open to all social, ethnic and religious groups. Cooperation and learning from plants.
In my opinion, this is a very important space, especially considering the current situation in which we find ourselves as humanity. Projects like this are catalysts for change, they spark curiosity and invite us to look at issues such as ecology and migration from a different, much more open perspective. Let's hope for more collective and interspecies activities like this!

Luxuan Wang: I was pleasantly surprised that the performance was the result of the work of all the participants. Alicja [Borkowska] and Łukasz [Wójcicki] created a cool atmosphere where everyone could feel comfortable, which I think is the most important thing for a group of non-professional actors. The final performance also turned out to be an interesting opportunity; I learned what it means to be present on stage, and that seemed like an extraordinary discovery of myself.

Mohammadreza Rezazadeh: Manifest Roślin is an encounter that brings us closer to the image of people who function with us every day, whom we pass by every day and who we are. People who, despite all the difficulties, try to express their emotions and needs. They want to enjoy this ability, but others, us, lack the openness to their happiness. We take on the role of Plants and see how much we can learn from these creatures.

Emil Al-Kawaldeh: Participating in the Plant Manifesto was one of the most interesting experiences of my life and my first opportunity to test my skills in theatre. During the workshops, I had the opportunity to work with an extremely creative and diverse group in every respect. Our different backgrounds, life experiences, emotional baggage and worldviews resulted in a joint theatre performance in which each of us had the opportunity to express ourselves in an unconventional way. In responding to difficult social issues, we managed to create an artistic reflection of our lives.

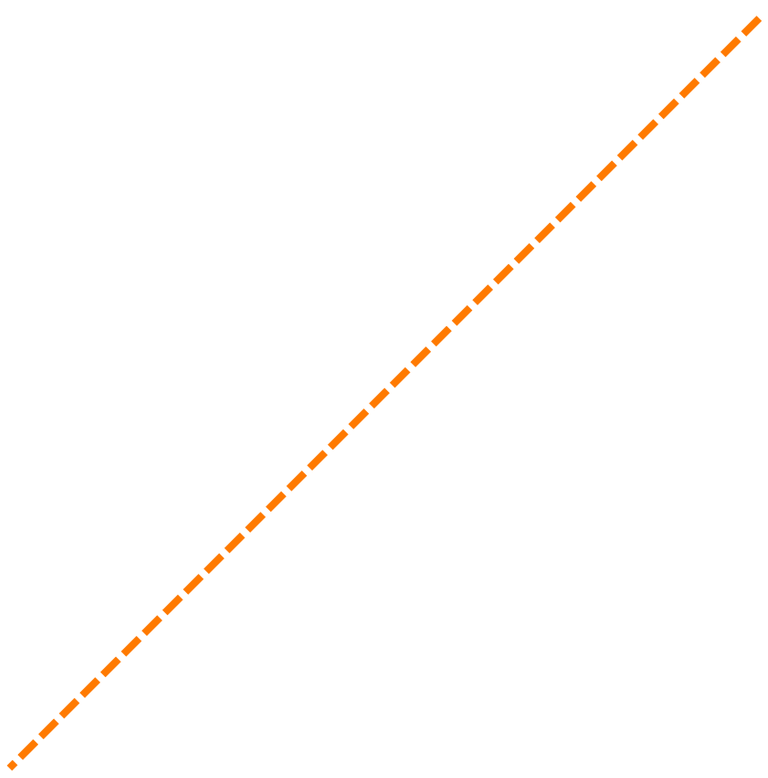
Magdalena Walusiak: Plant Manifesto has become one of my most intimate experiences on stage. I am surprised by this – I have been performing solo poetry performances for several years, sometimes in duets with improvising instrumentalists, and close contact with the audience is not unusual for me. But during Manifest, I sit down with the audience at one table and talk about something I agree with and consider important, looking everyone in the eyes, feeling very intensely the focus and emotions of others. I remember the faces of the people I saw for the first time during Manifest. These are powerful, personal encounters. At the same time, it's also good to feel part of a team, to act as one multifunctional organism. To become an important element of the stage ecosystem.

Climate crossroads:
The unnatural history of environmental crises

by **Przemysław Wielgosz**

The environmental crises have plagued humanity for a long time. People have also been trying to counteract them for a long time. Climate disturbances, long-lasting droughts and recurring storms have always been destructive, but the scale of the damage they caused depended on how societies responded to them. Some of these responses exacerbated the crises, while others mitigated them. We face a similar choice as we stand on the brink of a climate catastrophe.

It was 6:30 a.m. on Sunday morning, 13 July 1788, when the area around Tours was turned into a living hell. The local peasants were tending to their animals as usual when they suddenly felt as if night had returned. Along with the darkness, a gust of wind swept through the villages in the Loire Valley. However, this was no ordinary summer storm. A powerful gust hit the buildings, people and trees. Masses of air mixed with water and hail literally swept animals from their pastures, knocked people over, tore roofs off buildings and broke trees. The destructive hurricane moved rapidly from the south-west to the north-east. At 8 a.m., the wave reached Rambouillet, 50 km south-west of Paris, and half an hour later wreaked havoc in Pontoise, 70 km further north. It reached as far as the Austrian border in Flanders. The losses were enormous. French historian Alain Corbin, who describes the cataclysm in his book entitled *The Storm and the Breeze*, a history of how wind has been experienced, quotes a report by Henri Alexandre Tessier of the Royal Academy of Sciences, according to whom anything in the path of the moving air masses was 'crushed into the ground, chopped up, ruined'. Those who survived the storm in 1788 told Tessier that no one could remember anything like it.



The palaces and castles of the aristocracy suffered the most damage. Or perhaps it was simply that the damage to the mighty structures towering over the surrounding areas in which they were built was particularly striking. In the king's castle at Rambouillet alone, the wind broke 11,749 windows. Damaged roofs, torn turret spires, torn doors, fences and shutters made an impression. Buildings symbolising the power, durability and eternity of the ruling order proved surprisingly fragile in the face of an enemy as ephemeral and difficult to imagine as a rushing wave of air. To paraphrase Marx's famous phrase from *The Communist Manifesto*, one could say that the material symbols of the immutability of absolutism literally melted into thin air. The sight of ruined residences must have been etched in the memory of the peasants who were called upon en masse by their tenants to clear the area and repair the damage. **This could not be unseen.** And it was not just about the images fixed in their memory, but also about the conclusions drawn from them.

The hurricane of the Great Fear

Exactly one year after the apocalyptic hurricane, in July and August 1789, another storm swept through France. Once again, castles and palaces fell victim to it. Often, they had barely been repaired after the previous one. This time, however, it was not nature that was behind it, but rebellious peasants. But was nature really not involved? It so happens that the movement later called the Great Terror took its most dramatic form in the areas that had experienced the storm described by Tessier. This connection was already noticed during the peasant attacks on the castles. It was revisited many times later. So, could it be that the wind of 13 July 1788 brought the storm of revolution? Did the sight of crumbling castles inspire the peasants to believe in their own strength? In the possibility of overthrowing the aristocracy and ending serfdom? **Did the war waged on the palaces by the hurricane inspire the serfs to complete its work and secure freedom and peace for the peasant huts?**

Whatever the case, the participants and victims of the **Great Revolution** believed that weather anomalies were catalysts for social change. But the opposite is also true. People living at that time debated the impact of humans on the climate. It seems that today's climate discourse is not unique in history. This is the thesis put forward by two climate historians, Jean-Baptiste Fressoz and Fabien Locher, who in their book Le Revoltes du ciel remind us that one of the sins of absolutism, condemned even before the Bastille was stormed, was environmental degradation. As early as the first half of the 18th century, historian Jean-Baptiste Dubos, an enthusiast of John Locke's materialistic empiricism and an author who strongly influenced Montesquieu's thinking, believed that the deterioration of natural and climatic conditions should be attributed to the general decline of civilisation.

Between 1788 and 1794, appalling weather conditions, grain shortages, epidemics and rising timber prices inspired revolutionaries to denounce the environmental consequences of despotism and feudalism. The old regime was considered not only unjust but also ‘unnatural’. As Fressoz and Locher emphasise:

The revolutionary discourse contrasted the feudal regime, which blocked waterways, multiplied swamps, allowed plants to rot and condemned the population to degeneration, with a republic that condensed, drained, cultivated, warmed and made the climate beneficial.

At the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, many studies were written on the need for reforms to put an end to the deteriorating ecological situation. Their goal was a directly declared anthropogenic correction of the climate left behind by the indolent Bourbons.

The climate policy of the bourgeois revolution

Many intellectuals envisioned change. The most ambitious was presented by Eusèbe de Salverte, a doctor and revolutionary, member of the French parliament, politically associated with an association of ideologues (also known as the school of ideologues). In his 1806 work *Des rapports de la médecine avec la politique*, he presented the medical benefits of the Napoleonic Empire. Among the most important, he mentioned the creation of conditions for the transmigration of human populations to the most favourable climate zones. Salverte was also enthusiastic about the possibility of hybridisation between populations, which would lead to the formation of a racial optimum, and the fact that large public programmes could improve the ‘physical constitution of the climate’ and the people living in it. Interestingly, Salvetre's ideas are a complete reversal of today's fears of migration and the influx of people of ‘other races’ into Europe, who would replace its indigenous population. Of course, the French thinker uses racial categories, but he values them positively. Where the current right-wing imagination sees a threat, the French thinker of the early 19th century saw opportunities and possibilities for improving the situation.

In addition to reports and recommendations, the republic and then the empire also took concrete measures to repair the environment degraded by the ancien regime. These measures mainly concerned forests.
T**he revolution expropriated the clergy and emigrants, initiated the division of communal land and its sale, which benefited the bourgeoisie and the wealthy peasantry.** The royal offices of Maîtrises des Eaux et Forêts were abolished without their republican counterparts being established. The forests privatised in this way were removed from any form of regulation. The consequences of the reforms may seem familiar – chaotic logging and timber sales reached such proportions that by 1800, the press and some scholars blamed peasant axes for causing drought, and in 1820, the interior minister of the restored monarchy commissioned a study on the climatic effects of deforestation.

In France at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, it was clear that the environmental crisis was caused by the social system and the authorities. Anthropogenic sources made it a symptom of a crisis of power and society. This meant that, according to Enlightenment intellectuals and political activists, the right response to the environmental crisis lay in social reforms. This pattern fits both the storm of July 1788 and the climate degradation that had been growing for decades of absolutism. However, it says nothing about the specific actions that should be taken. On the contrary, a comparison of social reactions to both crises shows how different, and even contradictory, they can be.

The hurricane undermined feudalism, while one of the effects of the Great Famine, the opening of royal forests, triggered a process of chaotic logging and privatisation, paving the way for the formal transformation of forest habitats into commercial resources and tree plantations. The environmental crisis of absolutism thus gave rise to two responses – one paved the way for democratisation, the other for capitalism. A certain pattern can be seen here, one that is also evident in other eras and places affected by a combi-nation of environmental breakdown and social disorder. Examples include the 17th-century 'Little Ice Age' and the Dust Bowl of the American Midwest in the 1930s. The most important lesson to be learned from these risky comparisons is that it is not the force of nature, but the nature of the social response to its manifestations that determines the scale of the crisis's destructive effects. As in the days of the French Revolution, some actions can exacerbate it, while others can seriously mitigate it. From this perspective, the environmental crisis is always a political issue. The envi-ronment ceases to be a passive backdrop to the history of societies and becomes the environment of history, a force that shapes it and is at the same time subject to its influence. In other words, unlike the scholars of the Enlightenment, it is not a question of returning to natural history and reducing the history of societies to it, but rather of writing an unnatural history of the environmental crisis. And to draw conclusions – political ones, of course.

The climate policy of the bourgeois revolution

In the 17th century, a new literary genre was gaining popularity in China. These were short inscriptions in the form of poems, handwritten, most often as graffiti on the walls of houses. They were called tibishi. Their authors were often educated women, who were not uncommon in a society where book print runs reached 2 million copies. These texts were a kind of farewell, as their authors subsequently committed suicide. Many of them had previously been victims of rape and the loss of loved ones at the hands of soldiers. Tibishi were also written by men on a massive scale. The suicide epidemic was triggered by the disasters accompanying the so-called dynastic transition, i.e. the collapse of the nearly 280-year-old Ming Empire, the conquest of China by the Manchu armies and the seizure of the throne in Beijing by the new Qing dynasty (which its supporters called Da ye – the Great Enterprise). Only one of the chronicles of the time contains the story of over 1,000 people of both sexes who served the Ming dynasty or were simply emotionally attached to the world of the old empire and took their own lives in the face of the collapse of their country.

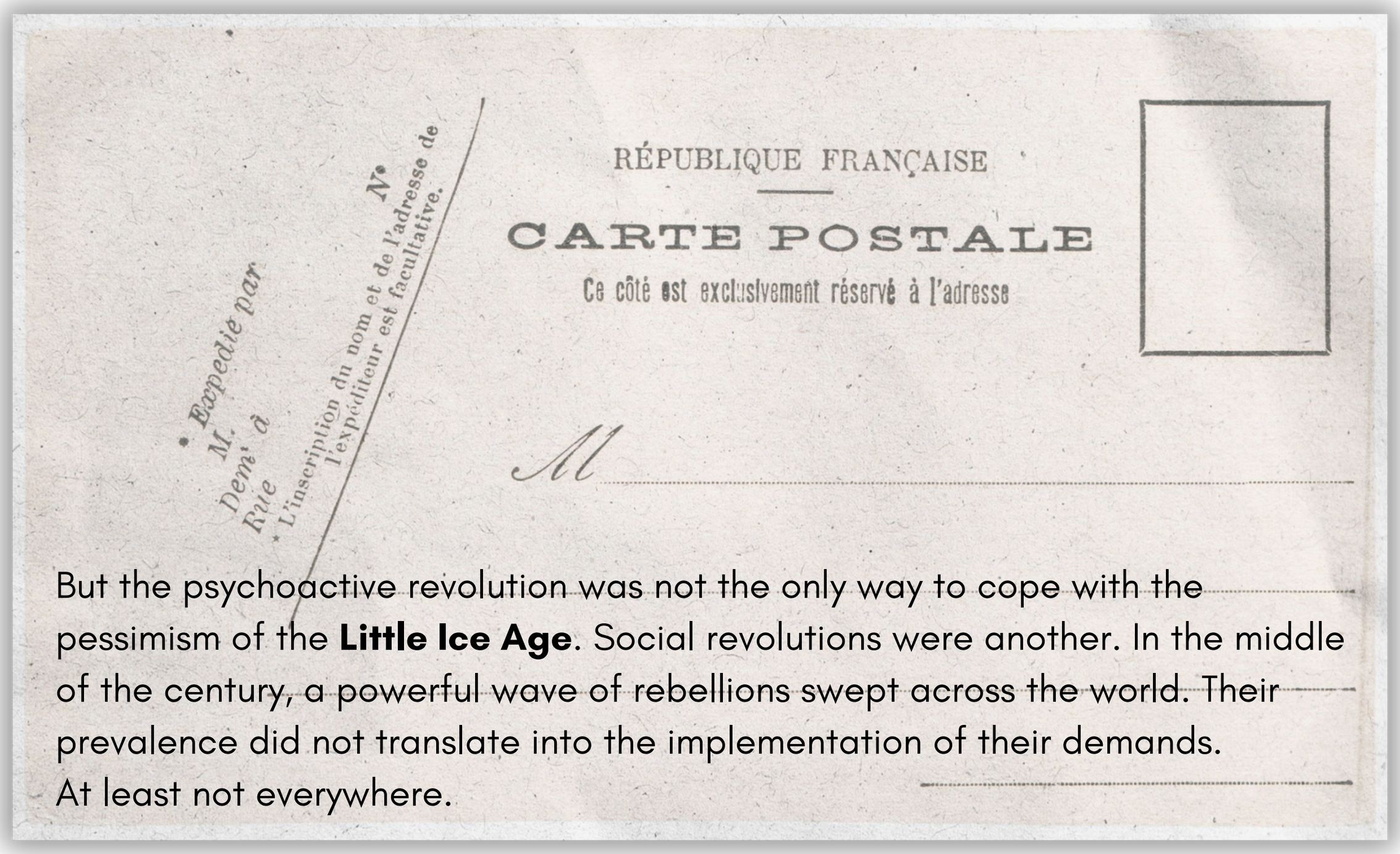
The letters of Chinese suicides expressed radical pessimism, a sense of the end and collapse of the world, and a fatalistic belief in the inevitability of universal destruction. The mood in 17th-century China was not very different from that in Europe at the same time. Suicidal tendencies resembled today's climate pessimism. Some accounts of this depressive atmosphere read as if they were written today. The difference is that while today the belief in the approaching end of human civilisation, the sensele-ssness of having children and any kind of planning stems from an awareness of the scale of anthropogenic climate change, the first symptoms of which we are only beginning to notice, 400 years ago people were primarily dealing with the effects of an unprecedented catastrophe that had already occurred.

A mini ice age within a few decades ruined the lives of societies on all continents. Cooling, total weather chaos - with bitter frosts in summer, prolonged droughts in winter and devastating storms at all times of the year - devastated crops and agriculture-dependent economies for decades. **The consequences were famine and epidemics, as well as growing competition for rapidly dwindling resources.** In his book *The Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century*, British historian Geoffrey Parker argues that climate had a decisive influence on what modern scholars call the crisis of the seventeenth century. The huge increase in violence accompanying political transformations and the wars they triggered, which took on unprecedented proportions, compounded and reinforced the effects of natural and health disasters. One third of the world's population died as a result of famine, drought, epidemics, wars and revolutions, making the 17th century a unique disaster in the entire recorded history of mankind. Parker's detailed estimates show that the scale of losses was similar everywhere - from the Chinese Empire to Spain, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Mughal India, the European colonies in the Americas, the African kingdom of Kongo and the Mali Empire.

Mass suicides were sometimes the result of trauma resulting from all these things: experiences of violence, poverty, the breakdown of social and family ties, cultural regression, hunger, loss of hope and freedom, as well as mass sexual violence. To an even greater extent, the root causes of numerous suicides were a profound sense of decline and an epidemic of depression, known at the time as melancholia. This was exacerbated by a permanent lack of sunlight caused by weather anomalies. Depression did not kill as quickly and on such a massive scale as smallpox, the plague or famine, but it effectively robbed people of the strength to face other threats. Its scale was enormous. An English parish priest living in the countryside named Richard Napier, whose writings are cited by Parker, comforted 40,000 people in need between 1597 and 1634, 2,000 of whom were 'distressed' and 150 had suicidal thoughts. Twice as many women as men sought psychological support.

Depression in the 17th century united people from different sides of the political divide. Both the leader of the English Revolution, Lord Oliver Cromwell, and the daughter of King Elizabeth, who was beheaded by the revolutionaries, suffered from it. As Oxford scholar Robert Burton wrote in his equally extensive and popular Anatomy of Melancholy, '*in our unhappy times (...) no one is free from the vices of melancholy.*' Burton himself suffered from a particularly severe form of the condition and ultimately ended his life by hanging himself in his study in Oxford.

The spread of melancholy in Europe led to desperate attempts to find an antidote not only in spiritual advice, which led to a veritable epidemic of psychoactive substances imported from other continents. American tobacco, African chocolate, opium and tea from Asia had a much stronger effect on European organisms at that time than they do today. The local population was just discovering them. They immediately found in them a means of improving their well-being and surviving an extremely difficult period.



But the psychoactive revolution was not the only way to cope with the pessimism of the **Little Ice Age**. Social revolutions were another. In the middle of the century, a powerful wave of rebellions swept across the world. Their prevalence did not translate into the implementation of their demands. At least not everywhere.

Climate capitalism?

In Europe, revolts were drowned in blood, peasants were herded back to the manor fields, and the rebellious were sent overseas as contract slaves. The political arena during the crisis was dominated by the reaction of the elites. They treated the climate cataclysm as a good opportunity to implement a kind of shock doctrine. From the socio-climatic turmoil in Europe emerged a more hierarchical and authoritarian world, even more based on violence, enslavement and exploitation. According to Parker, the most representative emblem of this was the fiscal-military state. It provided the foundation on which absolute monarchies, corporate colonial empires and, in the 19th century, the first nation states were formed. All these political organisms were united by a standing army, universal conscription, an extensive bureaucracy responsible for collecting taxes to finance the apparatus of power and violence, and, finally, growing sovereign debts resulting from the inability to cover military and (corporate) economy subordinated to the logic of unlimited capital accumulation. **The fiscal-military state became the natural environment of early capitalism.**
The European response to the environmental crisis of the 17th century included the strengthening and concentration of power structures, the concentration of wealth and land ownership (enclosure) and, finally, a revolution in diligence – an increase in the burden of work resulting from a radical deterioration in the situation of the working classes, the expropriation of peasants and the expansion of various forms of enslavement throughout the North Atlantic basin. While 1.5 million enslaved Africans were transported across the Atlantic between the end of the 15th and the end of the 17th century, thanks to new political and economic power structures adhering to the logic of unlimited accumulation, which developed in response to a minor ice age, it was only in the 18th century that European colonies in the Americas were enriched by another 4-6 million enslaved people. But slavery did not only affect the inhabitants of Africa. In England alone, around 1700, as many as four-fifths of manual workers were servants 'belonging' to their masters. This process in our part of the world was accompanied by the intensification of serfdom and the gradual elimination of stateless areas (e.g. in the Ukrainian Zaporizhia, Sloboda districts and the Hetmanate). It was from these transformations that capitalism as we know it emerged.

The outcome of the crisis in China was completely different. Although the empire experienced equally devastating effects of climate destabilisation, the response that emerged from the chaos of popular uprisings and bloody wars during the six-decade dynastic transition between the Ming and Qing (Manchu) dynasties was nothing like what happened in Europe. Although the armies of both warring dynasties were much larger than the largest forces operating on the fields of the European Thirty Years' War, the social consequences of their actions appeared to be milder. At least in political terms. This is not to say that the costs of maintaining them were lower, or that the atrocities they committed or the human losses resulting from the wars were any less significant, because these were proportionally the same in the Middle Kingdom as in Europe. The key factor was the different social power structure in China. The stereotypical view of Chinese society inherited from 19th-century colonialism suggests that, due to the dominance of a bureaucracy based on Confucian culture, it has always been incapable of initiative. In reality, it was in China that a powerful tradition of popular resistance existed. The plebeian culture of the Ming dynasty expressed a decidedly egalitarian vision of the world. The popularity of the legendary figure of the Equalising Rebel King of Fujian, as well as government-banned novels, most notably The Romance of the Three Kingdoms and Tales from the River Bank, symbolised this attachment to egalitarian ideals. On the south-western fringes of the empire, entire regions functioned outside the control of Beijing – and any other centre of centralised political power.

The Chinese statelessness described by American anthropologist James C. Scott as Zomia could be compared to the Cossacks in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at the time, cities of escaped slaves in South America, or Caribbean pirate republics, were it not for the fact that they were incomparably larger geographically, inhabited by millions rather than thousands, and enjoyed political and economic stability for centuries. But even the Chinese peasants within the empire were so organised and prone to revolt that the authorities had to reckon with them. And more so than with the aristocracy. Beijing often preferred – or simply had to – ally itself with the peasants against the nobility, while in Europe class alliances took on a completely opposite character. Therefore, while the alliance between the throne and large landowners brought absolutism and mercantilism to our continent, in China the alliance between the emperor and the peasants resulted in a system called minszeng, which obliged the imperial authorities to provide numerous benefits to the peasant population and to satisfy certain needs of the general population. As all this took place in the shadow of devastating droughts, cooling, famine and epidemics, the specificity of this model is best seen in relation to the management of the effects of these phenomena. **The pre-colonial welfare state in China – and its counterpart in India – took the form of a system of protection against the effects of drought and flooding.** This was achieved through extensive granaries, transport canal systems, the administration that ran them, and the rules that governed them.

There was another important aspect of the Asian transformation which, according to Parker, blocked the march of the more developed economies of China and India towards modernisation, identified by the British historian with Western-style capitalism, and which, from today's perspective, may be an inspiring example of the possibility of a different, more sustainable development. While the economic formation emerging in Europe developed increasingly capital- and energy-intensive processes of accumulation, both Asian centres were dominated by a model based on labour intensity and public redistribution of resources.

The free market of dust

The Little Ice Age provoked two completely different responses from the societies affected. The European response boiled down to managing the effects of the cooling in the interests of the upper classes and new power structures, while the Asian response was based on adaptation to mitigate the impact of the crisis on the lower classes at the expense of part of the elite. Almost half a millennium later, a similar alternative marked a crisis on a much smaller scale. It occurred in the north-western United States, history named it the Dust Bowl, and John Steinbeck ensured its permanent place in world literature with his novel The Grapes of Wrath. Although both the novel and the event itself have been somewhat forgotten, the story of the dust storms that ravaged the Great Plains in the 1930s can be very inspiring. This is the conclusion reached by Timothy Egan in his book The Dirty Years: A History of the Dust Storms of the Great Plains. The same conclusion can be drawn from the first part of Christopher Nolan's film 'Interstellar', which literally copied its image of a climate disaster from the future from the realities of the Dust Bowl, only extending the range of the dust storms to the entire globe. However, while Nolan's characters seek salvation in space, during the real dust storms of 90 years ago, it was not interstellar flight technology and the use of black holes that saved the day, but a change in economic policy. Moreover, as Egan points out, the causes of the Dust Bowl can easily be linked to the economy. Before the wind lifted hundreds of thousands of tonnes of dust, covering farms, towns, roads and entire swathes of farmland in Oklahoma, Kansas, Texas and Colorado, all these states experienced a real financial bonanza. They owed this to the Russian Revolution of 1917, or rather to the tragic consequences of the civil war in the former Tsarist empire. It cut off the West from Russian wheat supplies and drove up its price, which was exploited by farmers in the Great Plains. In a short time, a dollar bonanza fell on the entire region. Soaring profits from grain sales and cheap loans financed the expansion of farms, bringing prosperity and urban glitz to towns that had been sleepy until recently. Admittedly, the layer of fertile soil on the prairie was thin, but in the short term it proved to be exceptionally productive. Even the return of Russian supplies after the lifting of the Soviet blockade in the mid-1920s did not hinder the boom. **Farmers from the Plains simply ploughed more prairie.**

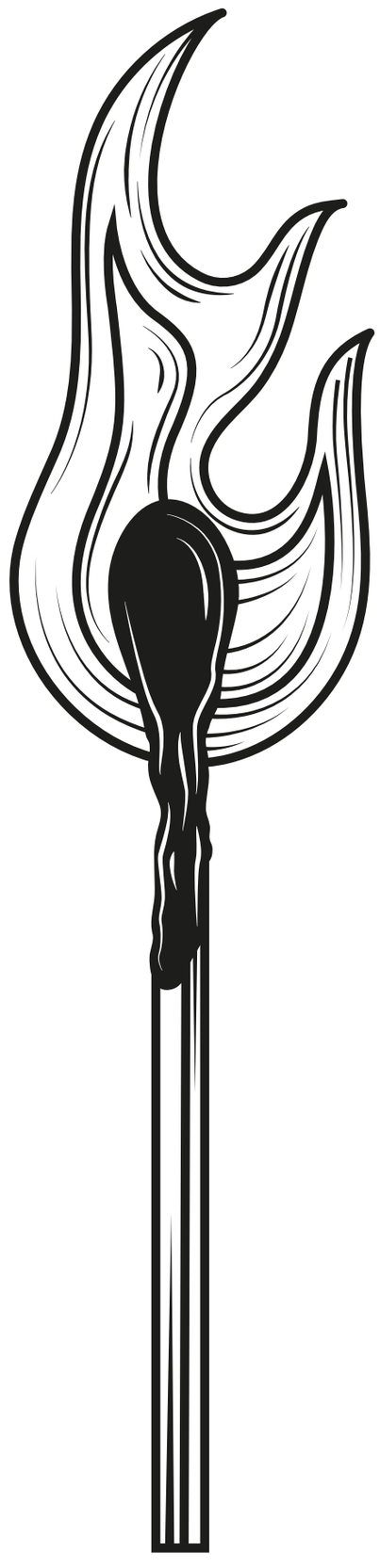
The grain boom on the Great Plains perfectly illustrates what agriculture is when left to the free market. It led to the concentration of land in the hands of the strongest players and to an increase in the area under cultivation and the amount of grain produced as a universal answer to all profitability problems. When, in just a decade, the land was completely exhausted, there was no trace left of the fertile layer, profits fell, and the vast fields turned into a desert; whatever had been spared by the ploughs was simply ploughed up. **The result of this consistent degradation of the land was dust storms. The beginning of the environmental crisis in the Midwest coincided with the crash of the New York Stock Exchange.** And this was not just a coincidence. The reaction of farmers and local authorities to successive dust storms destroying crops, burying houses and attacking the respiratory tract of their inhabitants was analogous to the actions of President Herbert Hoover, who was in office at the time. It could be summed up as ‘more of the same’. But just as financial belt-tightening only deepened the stock market crisis, contributing to its spread throughout the economy and the world, so increasing crops to make up for losses only increased those losses. As a result, the grain bubble on the plains burst, ostentatious wealth vanished with the dust, and farmers were left with unpayable debts.

Soon, hundreds of thousands of people left their ruined farms, fleeing the suffocating dust and drought to California. However, only extreme poverty and hostility from the local population awaited the first climate refugees of the 20th century. In 1934, a wave of dust rising from the Plains covered the east coast of the United States. Egan writes that dust covered the windows of the Senate on Friday, 19 April, just as a meeting was beginning at which Hugh Bennett, the new head of the newly established Soil Erosion Service (SES), was to convince sceptical senators of the need for government intervention in the Great Plains. When the sky over Washington completely darkened, Bennett reportedly said, 'They've blown Oklahoma in here.' There could have been no better argument for the new occupant of the White House. Franklin Delano Roosevelt had been in office for a year, having come to power on a platform of breaking with Hoover's orthodox liberalism, and was the first US president in history to initiate public agricultural policy. A system of subsidies, government purchases and guarantees, as well as the introduction of social insurance, saved not only millions of people in the Midwest, but also what remained of their environment. This did not happen overnight. **The Dust Bowl culminated in 1937, when 134 dust storms were recorded, some lasting several days.** Nevertheless, the halting of prairie exploitation and large-scale public works to reclaim it contributed to the mitigation and eventual cessation of the storms. And although the American steppe never regained its original form, the soil conservation areas established by the SES prevented subsequent prolonged droughts in 1974-76 and 2000-2003 from turning into a repeat of the Dust Bowl.

Another great crossroads

In fact, the history of the Dust Bowl contains some important themes from the Little Ice Age and the revolutionary debate on environmental degradation during the Bourbon era. It shares with the latter an awareness of the social causes of the environmental crisis. The former is that, on a micro scale in terms of space and time, and in a mitigated form, it tells us that societies affected by the destructive forces of nature always have a choice. This message is very relevant today. After all, we are facing a depressing atmosphere of climate pessimism. It quite effectively undermines our belief in the meaning of action in the face of global warming. Even the names of radical environmental organisations – Extinction Rebellion or Last Generation – often express an underlying disbelief in the effectiveness of their activism. However, if we cannot imagine stopping or even mitigating the coming Armageddon, then perhaps it is worth looking to the past. If only to see that nothing has ever been predetermined. And, while we are at it, to realise that facing the environmental crisis is not about fighting the forces of nature.

Our future will not be decided by miraculous technology or geo-engineering that will stretch a protective umbrella over the earth, but by the balance of social forces. Because it is this balance that will ultimately decide who will fit under the umbrella and who will be excluded. Today, as in the past, the struggle will be between people, or more specifically between groups of power and interest, social classes and followers of competing ideologies, and finally between all of them and the necessity of satisfying inalienable needs. The egalitarian rebels of the 17th century fought against the nascent capitalist state and the new class of owners, the French revolutionaries faced the contradictions of their own politics, and Roosevelt's social democrats broke the resistance of the liberals. The alternative has always been political. Roosevelt's SES instead of Hoover's business as usual and the Qing's minsheng instead of European military-fiscal capitalism show that there was no such thing as environmental determinism in the past. But they also convince us that we are not doomed to it in the future. Perhaps the most interesting lesson to be learned from reading Parker, Fressoz, Locher and Egan is the conviction that even in extreme situations, another world is possible. **It's just that we can always end up worse off.**



Alicja Borkowska

IT WILL GET WARMER

Conversations about migration in the era of climate catastrophe.

1.

If we think of humans as animals, because that is what we are, why do we treat migrating humans differently than migrating animals? -

conversation with **Sonia Shakh**

How did you become interested in the topic of migration?

It was 2015, I had just finished writing a book about pandemics, which was due to be published in 2016. I was looking for new projects. It was during the so-called migration crisis in the Mediterranean, when people from Syria, Afghanistan and all over Africa were travelling along this route. These stories were all over the headlines. I had just written a book about pandemics and epidemics. I thought that new populations moving to new areas, mass movements of people, could lead to the outbreak of epidemics. **I began to wonder what connection mass migration might have with public health.** I managed to get a grant and a reporting assignment to go to Greece to report on the impact of the arrival of new migrants on public health. I went there and visited refugee camps, detention centres and ad hoc aid centres where people were stranded. I quickly realised that people on the move are actually healthier than the host populations they arrive in. The main reason for their health problems was not that they were migrants, but the way they were treated by the host communities. In other words, it was not a migration crisis, but a hospitality crisis. I observed the reception of these people primarily from a public health perspective, but also from other perspectives. At that time, there were plenty of vacant flats in Greece, a huge number of abandoned houses and empty buildings. There were opportunities to take in all these people. The real problem was not migration itself, but the lack of willingness to accept these people into the community.

I realised then that my instinctive reaction was to think that a mass move-ment of people, migration on such a scale, must mean crisis. After all, I kept seeing such statements in newspaper headlines. I began to wonder whether we were actually paying attention to whether there was absorption capacity in the places where migrants were arriving. Does relocation only save the lives of migrants? Do we examine how it can contribute to increa-sing the resilience of the societies these people are leaving? These are issues that are worth considering in order to decide whether this migratory flow is a crisis or not. But of course, none of these reflections appear in the public debate. We just assume it's a crisis. I asked myself why I instinctively decided that just because people are moving, it must be disastrous in some way. These reflections started a journey that turned into a book.

One of the things that immediately struck me was how natural scientists accepted the fact that species migrate to new places. I looked at butterflies, for example, and various species threatened with extinction. **Droughts and urbanisation mean that they cannot move freely.** They are trapped, and this is a huge problem that threatens biodiversity. So biologists got together and started planning corridors and bridges, and finding different ways to make it easier for different species to move to new places. They knew that only by allowing all creatures to move to places where they can survive would we be able to preserve biodiversity in the f u t u r e.

So you can see the contrast between scientists saying, '*Species must be able to move to new places, we must ensure that they can*,' and people looking at other people who are moving and reacting, '*Oh my God, let's build a wall, let's put up a ladder, let's not let them in*.' How self-destructive can this be? If we think of humans as animals, because that is what we are, why do we treat migrating humans differently from migrating animals? This is where my book *The Next Great Migration* came from. From reflecting on why we draw invisible lines on land and say, '*No, you can't move beyond them. You need documents, you need all kinds of official permits to move beyond those lines*.' When we look at other species, we can see that they may not want newcomers either, but it happens anyway, right? And ultimately, we're grateful for that, because movement is a strategy that has allowed us and other species to survive on this planet. I started looking at how people have moved throughout history and how we've built a mythology around a sedentary lifestyle. I began to explore where the idea came from that we all belong to specific places and parts of the planet. I trace this idea back to Linnaeus's 17th-century taxonomy. Linnaeus was religious and therefore claimed that animals are in their place, which is perfect because God put them there. Therefore, we cannot question this. They have always been there and always will be. To think otherwise would be to say that **God is not perfect**, **which is blasphemy.** From this belief that individual creatures belong to specific places on Earth came the idea of cla-ssifying them all according to where they are found. Japanese maple. Canadian goose. We associate a place and an animal as if they were one thing because we assume that a particular species has never moved. In this way, Linnaeus' taxonomy becomes part of our voca-bulary. We teach this to our children, we make little maps of the world with animals drawn in different parts of it. We put these maps on the walls of nurseries. And we don't even say that this is India. We say: oh, here is a peacock. This is India. We say: *here is a bear. That's North America. That's a kangaroo, that's Australia*. It's one and the same. This is indoctrinating children with the idea that everything has a specific place and that this place is permanent. In all biological sciences, Linnaeus' taxonomy is fundamental to this day. This also translates into human taxonomy. The whole idea of race also comes from Linnaeus, who divided humans into biological subspecies based on where they lived. People in the world must be biologically distinct because they do not come from one place. They live in different places and must have always been there. They are completely isolated from each other. In the United States, the entire society was built according to the idea of racial hierarchy, which is embedded in the concept of immobility, in the way we think about other people and other populations. **They belong here, we belong there.** I think that all of this, even for someone like me, has contri-buted to the knee-jerk reaction that when people move around, they cause a crisis.

I am the daughter of immigrants. I think I have incorporated this idea of being an anomaly, of being somehow out of place, into my own life. I never thought of myself as American, I'm not just American, never, I'm American from India, I'm American from South Asia. I call myself many other things to emphasise that I'm not a real American. Because **I really belong somewhere else.** It's as if the act of migrating long distances somehow disrupts the balance of nature, a certain order. Through this act, I have become a unique creature that doesn't really fit in the place where I live. I think this way of thinking has always been deeply rooted in my sense of self-worth.

80% of wild species are currently moving to new places. They are moving to higher latitudes, to higher altitudes, in response to climate change. We know that more people are moving now than at any time since World War II. Palaeogenetics tells us that this is not a modern phenomenon. It is something that humans have been doing since our evolution. Since we left Africa. In Africa, we did not lack food, water or nice places to live. It is a perfect place to live. But we left anyway. Why? We left Africa, then populated all the continents, and still did not stay in one place, but continued to move. There were other hominid species inhabiting other continents. So it wasn't like we moved to a place that was empty. No, there were other species there, other people, Neanderthals. But we went there anyway. We had to live with other species. And it didn't end well for them. We took control of them. But we still kept moving. And that's what paleogenetics tells us. We didn't just leave Africa and go to Europe. We went back to Africa, then we went to Asia, then we went back to Africa, then we went to North America, then we went back. The history of our species is a complex and dynamic history of constant movement, which is simply a deep part of who we are.

This is how we have survived on a planet that has always been changing. We can see this in other species that are more vulnerable to climate change. But also within a species — for example, populations living in a forest, if they live on the edge of the forest, are more vulnerable to change. They are more vulnerable to dispersal, migration and further movement. Marine species that live in deep parts of the sea, which do not change as often, will disperse and migrate less than those that live closer to the surface. There are many examples of this in nature - if you are exposed to change, you are more likely to move. One of the things I write about in the book is the migration rate. **The idea is that if your environment is not stable throughout the lifetime of your offspring, you are more likely to say, 'Let's move somewhere else.'**

That doesn't mean migration isn't destructive. It is destructive. Any change is destructive. But it's still something we do as an investment in our future, and we've always done it because it's an adaptive thing. That's what biology tells us about migration. Why do all these species migrate? Moving to a new place is very dangerous, you don't know how to live, what to eat, you don't know what's toxic. You don't know what will make you sick, you have no friends. It's a very difficult thing to do. Evolution shouldn't favour it, but it does, it always has. We should think deeply about the fact that we are in an era of enormous change, in which everyone must potentially move to new places. Do we see this as a problem? Or do we want to see it as a solution to a problem?

Yes, change is destructive. It happens too fast. We are not ready for it.
All of these statements are true. Absolutely. But the fact that people are able to move to a new place and start a new life is our strength. It is what allows us to survive. Having children disrupts life so much. But we don't question why people do it. It's an investment we make, even if it's burdensome, expensive and can make us unhappy for a few years. But we do it anyway.
And we don't ask people, 'What's your reason for having children?' But we ask migrants, 'Tell me the reason you moved.' One reason? Migration is very complex, it's complex human behaviour. It's deeply ingrained in us.

Your observation suggests that it is modern biological knowledge that helps us understand migration and treat it not as a problem, but as a challenge, as something we have to deal with because it is natural.

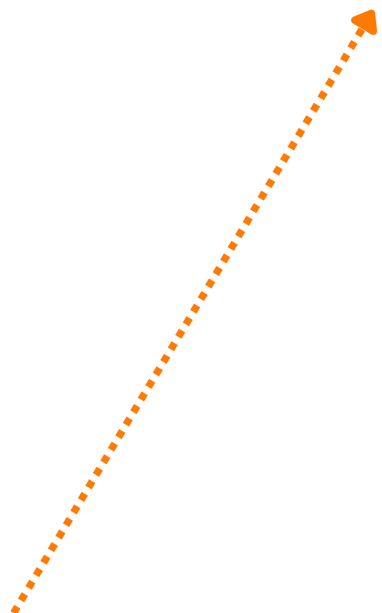
The belief that all creatures are immobile, which has been part of biology since Linnaeus, has hampered much scientific research on animal migration. Our knowledge of animal movement was limited by our imagination. For a long time, we didn't know much. Only recently have scientists been able to take a broader view, thanks to GPS technology that can be placed in a small solar-powered device on a bird, deer or wolf. This type of device can tell us the exact location of an animal. Every project that deals with this kind of wildlife tracking discovers that animals move further, faster and in more complex ways than anyone ever imagined. This is new knowledge that is only just beginning to permeate other fields of science. I think it's changing the way scientists think about animal habitats and how to set the boundaries of reserves. Take rhinos or giraffes, for example. Their ranges are much larger than we ever thought. We thought we could put them in small, compact groups, but no, they move much further. This knowledge is really important. And I think it's starting to spread to other areas. **We're starting to understand more about other animals, how they move and how they can move, and what help they might need from us to move to new places.** One of the biggest obstacles are cities and motorways – these are barriers that make it difficult for wild animals to move around, so we should take special care of these spaces to take animal migration into account.

Another issue that has persisted since Linnaeus' taxonomy, in my opinion, is the idea that if animals move to new places, they are invaders. This is the idea of invasive species, which is rooted in nativism. Our feelings towards human migrants are nativist. I think we make the same argument about invasive species as we do about human migrants – yes, in some places migration can be destructive, especially on small islands where there is not much capacity to absorb new arrivals. New species can be quite destructive and sometimes displace species that are already there.

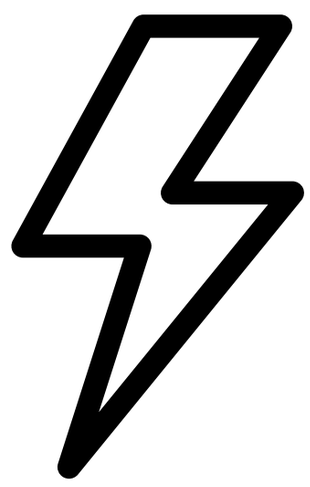
But in most places on the continents, newcomers simply increase biodiversity. I don't want to minimise the destructive effects, they do exist. But overall, we should be happy that species can move to new places. The benefits of species moving to new places far outweigh the costs associated with the spread of a few so-called invasive species. Only 10% of species that move to new places are able to survive. For 90% of them, it is too difficult and they cannot find a good place. Only 10% survive, and of that 10%, only 10% actually become a nuisance to other species that are already there.
So we are talking about 1%. The remaining 99% increase biodiversity.
I think you can draw a direct comparison with what happens with humans – **99% of migrants will contribute to increasing the resilience of society, economic growth and innovation.** Migrants have mobile capital, they are not usually rich, but they are not the poorest of the poor either, because they are very rich in resourcefulness, knowledge and skills, social ties and other things that can be taken with them to a new place. So if you think selfishly, you should welcome newcomers with open arms, because they have the skills that actually help grow your economy and bring innovation.

This can also be seen at the biological level. Where do innovations come from? From evolution. When a species or individual moves to a new place, a new habitat, it has to adapt to it, learn new ways of surviving, feeding, its immune system has to change, its body has to change, it has to adapt to the new climate. Adaptation to the new place takes place. And when some members of the community move to a new place, they transfer these adaptations to another place, where they become innovations. Just as the source of creativity and innovation is that we transfer things we have developed elsewhere and apply them in a new area, a new sector.
This is the source of innovation and creativity. From a biological point of view, this can be observed in genetics. You need a few individuals from a certain population that become homogeneous, and then you need a few of those individuals to move to a new place and introduce them into a different population.

This is biological diversity that allows us to survive. If every-one has the same genes, everyone has the same culture, then a threat comes and wipes out the entire species because everyone has the same weaknesses. Diversity matters because of our resilience – both in a political and biological sense.



If this is so logical, and movement is essential for our survival, why are we so prone to panic and feelings of threat created by politicians and the media?



I think there are two issues to raise here. First, you're right, there is a lot of panic around migration, but I would question whether we panic about all migration. I think 90%, maybe even more, of migration happens and we don't notice it. We accept it. We don't think about it. It doesn't bother us. Nobody questions it. So it's only a small fraction of migration that bothers us so much. We generally accept migration. However, there is a problem with the small percentage of migration that everyone fears. It has to do with who the people arriving are. It's not about where they come from, or that there are too many of them. It's not about numbers, it's not about scale. **It's about who they are.** I'm talking primarily about the American context, but I think this is also true in Europe. Ukrainians have to come here. That's fine, everyone is fine with that. But Mexicans? Absolutely not. Definitely not. So I would say that it's not about migration itself.

We have a very strong tendency to favour our own group over other groups. It's a human tendency. Group cohesion is probably very useful for us. But how do we form groups? On what basis? Individuals are diverse. Which small things do you pick out and consider to be a common feature of a group? We all have brown eyes. We all have one freckle here. We all have white skin. On what basis are we going to decide what we have in common? I think it's simply based on what catches our attention. This can be observed in social psychology studies – researchers gather a group of students and tell them that everyone wearing white T-shirts belongs to one group and everyone wearing blue T-shirts belongs to another group.

Then they start asking the students questions about each other. And even though the division is completely arbitrary, people start to dehumanise the other side. All these people wearing blue T-shirts don't understand concepts the way we do. There are all these measures that make us immediately think of people in our own group as more human, smarter, more insightful, more generous. But the way we created the groups is completely arbitrary. We could create a group by dividing people into those who like vanilla ice cream and those who like chocolate ice cream. And people will immediately become suspicious of the other group. So it's really about what we draw people's attention to. This is very useful for right-wing populists. You can draw a nation's attention to migrants or not. It's a political choice. In the United States, all brown migrants gather at the border. They wait there because we don't give them any opportunities to move. This creates a kind of visual spectacle. Or we don't give them documents, so they are always marginalised. You could say that this makes them poorer, living on the streets, begging. **Through politics, we make them visible to us as a group.** And that means that they like chocolate and we like vanilla. This division may be completely arbitrary, but once we become aware of this distinction, we stigmatise a particular group. We know that when migrants arrive, if no barriers are created for them, they integrate into society almost immediately. Even their bodies begin to change, their health improves, and they begin to resemble the host population more and more. The second generation, their children, can no longer be distinguished from the host community, unless we create some kind of barrier for them. So the problem only arises when we become aware of the existence of immigrants and then start to worry about what politicians are telling us. But it is still only a small proportion of migrants who are treated in such an inhumane way. For me, it is simply a political choice, a really successful political strategy by populist leaders. You create a scapegoat, you create a group, everyone becomes aware of it, and then you can blame it for all the problems in society. You don't have to solve any real problems anymore, because you can just say it's their fault that there are no jobs, it's their fault that prices are too high. There are no flats, it's their fault. Is it that simple? Of course.

In light of climate-related migration, what do you think about asylum and migration laws in the US and Europe? Do you think the law should change in light of what is happening with the climate crisis?

We need policies that make climate migration safe, dignified and humane. Climate migration is illegal all over the world. Nowhere in the world is it legal to cross an international border for climate reasons. The idea that there must be one reason why people move is problematic in my view. But if that is our policy, if that is how we are going to make migration policy, then we need to make climate another reason why people can move. We know that if we think about migration as something we want in the long term because it contributes to our resilience, there are many ways we can maximise the benefits and minimise the costs. We can change the pace, direction and scale of migration. **People will have to move, but they don't all have to do it at once.** We can control this through policy. I think these are really important policy choices. People will move, whether we like it or not. If we build a wall, we will only make migration more dangerous, but it will continue. It is not a tap that can be turned on and off. It will continue. Either way, if we want to reap the benefits of migration, we should think about how to direct it. Not everyone has to come to one small place and settle there. We can create sister cities, build bridge-building initiatives, create programmes that allow people to go to places where it makes more sense for the whole society. Where there is greater absorption capacity, the pace of migration can be changed, spread out over time so that not everyone arrives at once.

These are things we can and should be doing on an ongoing basis. If we don't observe what is happening in the places where people are migrating from, then a disaster will happen and everyone will have to move at the same time. This is what happens, for example, in the case of hurricanes. We have no mechanisms for observing and relocating these people in advance. A big storm is coming and everyone has to flee at the same time. This is extremely burdensome for everyone involved. We are approaching the whole issue in the wrong way, using it as political football rather than a real problem that we want to manage.

Finally, I would like to ask you about cultural and artistic projects that you consider valuable in terms of shaping social awareness of climate and migration.

I wish I had a better answer for you, but nothing comes to mind at the moment, although I have certainly seen some beautiful works related to migration. I think the topic is difficult when it comes to human migration because, as I said, most human migration takes place and we have nothing against it precisely because it is invisible. Making it visible through politics makes us start to see it as a problem and a threat. Artists often try to humanise migrants by telling their stories. And I often wonder if it isn't better to simply ignore migrants, who become scapegoats precisely because they are put in the spotlight.

I think I am interested in works that look at the roots of migration in human history. The fact that people in Europe have not been white for thousands of years. We all came from Africa and have very diverse roots. We interbred in different parts of the world, we are all mongrels in a sense. It's really interesting. And I am most inspired by works that show that we are animals among other animals. Other animals move much further, faster and more dynamically, and we support these migrations. I think that if we manage to suppress the human ego a little, tame it a little, and look more broadly at nature and the role of migration, then I think we open our minds. I don't have any specific work in mind. But the general rule is that I like things related to other species more. Animals move around constantly, some of these movements are very inspiring, simply beautiful. The way they do it is amazing. We can feel admiration. And then admit that we too are animals, and **migration is something we have always done.**

Sonia Shakh *was born in 1969 in New York City to Indian immigrants. She graduated from Oberlin College with degrees in journalism, philosophy and neurobiology. She also lectures at other universities across the United States, including Columbia Earth Institute, MIT, Harvard, Brown, Georgetown and others. She is mainly interested in inequality between and within societies. Her articles appear in many magazines, not only scientific ones.*

2.

We need to think about other, better solutions –

an interview with **Elena Giacomelli**

‘Panicocene’ is a category that became the subject of your book. How did it come about?

Panicocene is a neologism I coined while working on a project as part of a Marie Curie research fellowship. It all stemmed from an analysis of the roles that different narratives play in contemporary society and how they influence the public imagination.

I believe that creating an atmosphere of panic is one of the leading narratives today, which is often overlooked in researchers' analyses. Ideas influence people, they can have positive or negative effects and influence how people vote, thereby influencing policy-making. In my research, I start from an analysis of media narratives on migration, which I have been involved in for a long time – I was a cultural mediator, I worked in refugee centres, and migration has always been my passion. For 30 years, I have been observing how migration is described by the media as a crisis (emergency), even though crises are temporary in nature – they should have a clear beginning and end. Migration in the media seems to be a continuous, permanent crisis. In my opinion, it is worth asking why there is a desire to maintain this narrative of a continuous crisis. On the other hand, we have climate change. **While migration is a crisis, a moral and political panic – invented, created – the climate crisis is a real crisis, a real threat.** I wonder what happens to these two categories when they meet in one narrative. I am therefore observing how the media narrative makes climate migration appear to be the sum of two crises. In reality, this is not the case. When we talk about climate migration, we should think about it beyond the framework we are used to when talking about migration and climate change. Of course, these are two elements of one phenomenon, but in order to analyse them, in my opinion, we need to look at them separately.

However, what is happening now in the public sphere is **moral panic**, a double crisis that is not explained by any scientific or academic analysis. When we look at migration analyses, we see that most climate-induced migration is internal. The public perception, however, is of billions of people moving north from the so-called global south. It is as if climate change only affects other countries – not us. In this way, the figure of the climate refugee is created as a result of the alienation of this category. Panicocene does not seek to replace other categories that describe our contemporary world, such as Anthropocene or Capitalocene. Panicocene is an accompanying category that seeks to shed light on the ideas and narratives, including those in the media, that influence people and their political choices.

You describe a certain analysis of today's media and political narratives. What kind of narrative do you think would be the most appropriate counterweight, so as not to scare people, but also to respect their fears?

When migration and climate change meet, climate issues disappear and all the fear focuses on migration. Climate is therefore used as another argument for securing borders.

The idea of an invasion – perceptible but not real – does not contribute to adaptation to climate change, but to sealing borders. I would like to know how to change these narratives; we have been talking about this for 30 years and no one has yet managed to do so. It is certainly important to talk about justice. To show that there are no illegal migrants, but there is unregulated migration. It is not people who are illegal, it is migration that is unregulated. It is worth looking at passport indices, at how the world is closed to some people and open to others. Many times in my research, I ask the question: what would a world without borders look like, while pointing out that for many people, including us, white people from the West, the world is already borderless. For example, I am now in the United States. Yes, I had to submit some documents to get here, but it wasn't a big deal for me. If I want to go to Senegal for research, I go. However, for some people with 'weaker' passports, even applying for a tourist visa is impossible. I would therefore always emphasise the issue of fairness in movement, pointing to the inequality of opportunities in movement between countries, which we owe to our colonial past. **For some, the world is closed, while for others it is already a world without borders.**

I would also draw attention to climate justice – the countries and people who have contributed least to the current climate change are those who are now suffering most from its effects. In my opinion, this is a good perspective if it goes hand in hand with the statement that climate change has no borders and affects us all, regardless of our origin. Interestingly, 90% of research on climate migration is conducted by scholars from the so-called global north, and the object of research is always the so-called global south. It is as if academics are also marginalising climate migrants. I am not saying that southern countries are not more affected by climate change, but I think it is important to recognise that we ourselves can also be, and are, **climate migrants.**

You conduct research both among communities in the ‘south’, e.g. in Senegal, but also among Europeans. Can you share your observations on how different people and groups talk about climate change and how they respond to this crisis?

In my previous study, I used a tool I called **Climate Diaries**. I asked people from Italy and Senegal to take photos that answered the question of what climate change means to them. People responded with photos, each accompanied by a short description. Climate change is difficult to grasp. We talk about a communication trap resulting from the fact that this phenomenon is so huge and spread out in time and space that it is difficult to grasp. We observed that climate change in Senegal is part of people's everyday lives, something that is present in their daily routine, causing the destruction of homes and memories. It therefore contributes not only to the destruction of possessions and material things, but also of memories. One fisherman told us about his school building being destroyed by coastal erosion. In Italy, on the other hand, climate change was seen as a threat to the future. Now, of course, people's answers would be different. If I asked the same question today to students in Bologna, who have just experienced flooding, their perceptions would certainly have changed. I am therefore referring to my research from two years ago, which has become obsolete due to the recent climate disasters in Europe.

In the study I am currently conducting on Panicocene, we ask people to share their imagined worlds. It is a kind of creative writing exercise on the topic of climate migration in the future (and the present). What is interesting about this study is, among other things, the fact that ideas about climate migration and their definitions are not yet fixed, but are still taking shape. Fortunately, they also go beyond the logic of victim and saviour, which has often appeared when we talk about migration. The category of victim is one that I would like to work with. Who is the victim in today's world of climate change? In the media and political narrative, we are the victims of climate migration that threatens us. But what if we reversed the perspective? **The victim is the environment.** The victim is the person affected by climate change. The victim is an island that is disappearing due to rising water levels. The definition of victim is therefore broad. However, being a victim of climate change does not take away agency – the ability to decide whether to leave your place of residence or stay. Talking about climate change is often accompanied by a belief that it is impossible to move. The idea of climate migration is therefore broad.

The tools you use in your research are artistic tools – photography, creative writing. How do you choose the methods you work with? Is the choice intuitive, or have you observed that some tools may be better suited to describing particular issues?

Amitav Ghosh says that the climate crisis is also a **crisis of imagination** ('The climate crisis is a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination'). We are unable to imagine or describe it; it is a crisis of narrative. I started working with visual tools because words can sometimes be deceiving. Climate change can have many meanings, and in translation, the meanings I wanted to emphasise can be lost. Working with images can be more intuitive, more empathetic than words. Recently, I have moved on to creative writing, trying to describe an idea that is not yet clear, not yet told. So I work between the intuitive and what is present in literature that describes the difficulty of finding tools for this narrative.

And what artistic attempts to describe the subject are close to you?

I don't know. There are many ways. What must be avoided are unambi-guous definitions, universal answers to questions about the relationship between migration and climate change.I don't know. There are many ways. What must be avoided are unambi-guous definitions, universal answers to questions about the relationship between migration and climate change. It would be more important for me to refer to specific images in order to connect the fragmented aspects of **climate change.** The artistic practices that appeal to me most are those that refer to a specific place and experience – to a specific community, not generalised ones, because such stories only add to the chaos.

What should be avoided when talking about climate migration?

Migration always has multiple causes. The West has a tendency to cate-gorise migration with a strong tendency to exclude. Refugees – yes, economic migrants – no, climate refugees – no, because they don't exist. The need to define migration precisely is a Western whim created to create categories of desirable and undesirable migrants. What should be avoided? **Avoid generalisations** and alarmism. Instead, go beyond your bubble and try to reach different groups with different tools. Try to influence people who are afraid. Fear is often irrational, not directly linked to a real threat, but caused by a **collective imagination** of invasion, initiated by the European right wing.

There is talk in the European Union about creating a new category of climate refugees. What do you think about this?

Every legal category is a product of its time. The **category of refugee** was created after World War II and arose from a very specific need – to find a legal solution for all Europeans who found themselves outside their countries because of the war. It was intended to enable them to find refuge in the countries where they ended up. When the refugee category was created in **Geneva in 1951**, it had a time and geographical limit. According to this definition, a refugee was a European (geographical limit) who fled seeking refuge before 1951. It was not until the 1967 protocols that people who fled after 1951 were also recognised as refugees. The geographical limit remained, however, with the signatories of the convention deciding whether to recognise only people from Europe or from all over the world as refugees. I refer to this because it is obviously important to find categories according to which we can ensure the safety of people crossing borders.

But we can think in terms of categories other than that of refugees. The category of refugee is individual protection. **Climate change, however, does not affect individuals, but entire regions.** This category may therefore not be sufficient. We definitely need to find tools to protect people crossing borders, but also to protect people moving within countries – let us remember that most people affected by climate change and forced to move migrate internally. One tool that could potentially protect such people is Loss and Damage, a category created during COP28. So far, the financial resources allocated are very small, so we need to look at how this instrument will be implemented. We therefore need to think in other categories as well. Of course, international protection due to climate change is good, but it should not preclude thinking about other, **better solutions**.

Elena Giacomelli, *visiting fellow at the Centre for Integrated Earth System Information (CIESIN) at Columbia Climate School, Marie Curie researcher at the University of Bologna, and leader of the global project "PANICOCENE. Reframing Climate Change-induced Mobilities," which aims to examine and analyse how media discourses and narratives can lead to stereotypes about climate change-induced migration. Her research focuses on mobility and migration, borders, climate change, and ethnography.*

3.

What are we missing?

a conversation with **Stefania Peka**

How do you look at climate migration, what do you focus on in your research?

I focused on research after about 10-12 years of working as a social worker. For years, I worked with asylum seekers and migrants, especially women, mainly from North Africa. Later, I started working as a consultant for public administration and the third sector, so I got involved in project design and development, and then, thanks to a scholarship, I joined the University of Bologna. I am currently starting my first year of doctoral studies.

The first project I worked on was **Climate of Change**. It involved developing and launching an online petition to be submitted to Coop, which was taking place in Saudi Arabia at the time. Our activities focused on understanding the perceptions of people living in areas most at risk from climate change. Together with Elena Giacomelli and Pierluigi Musaro, we created a method we called Climate Diaries. During our stay in Senegal, we created WhatsApp groups through which we asked questions and collected answers in the form of visual materials. I compiled the materials from this work and then set about disseminating both the results of the study and the methodology we used, so that the visual tools would become not only a research tool but also an analysis tool available to organisations that do not conduct research on a daily basis.

This was the first project I worked on with **Reimagining Mobilities**. RM is an informal collective of people working in the sociology department who look at the topic of mobility and try to find new tools and methods for talking about migration. My perspective is to try to imagine fair mobility, i.e. the freedom of movement of people based on their aspirations for a better life and not linked to systems, structures, borders or documents. The climate crisis is experienced differently depending on where you live. If there is a flood in the region where I live, I can easily move to another place, I am a little more protected than a migrant from another part of the world for the same reason. If the territory where I live, where I was born and grew up, is, for example, the coastal area of Senegal, which is completely pink from the water, I have to move, but where? What options and freedoms do I have in the current system? I do not consider it a good thing to introduce another category of rights – climate refugees. Because by doing so, we are only following a system that wants to divide people precisely, pigeonhole them into certain categories, when we know very well, we already know from asylum law, that these categories are then used for manipulation at the political level and exclude people from access to rights, rather than including them.

What is worth fighting for?

In my opinion, it is worth fighting for the recognition of humanity, the right to a healthy life, the right to live and breathe. These are fundamental human rights, just like **the right to freedom of movement**.

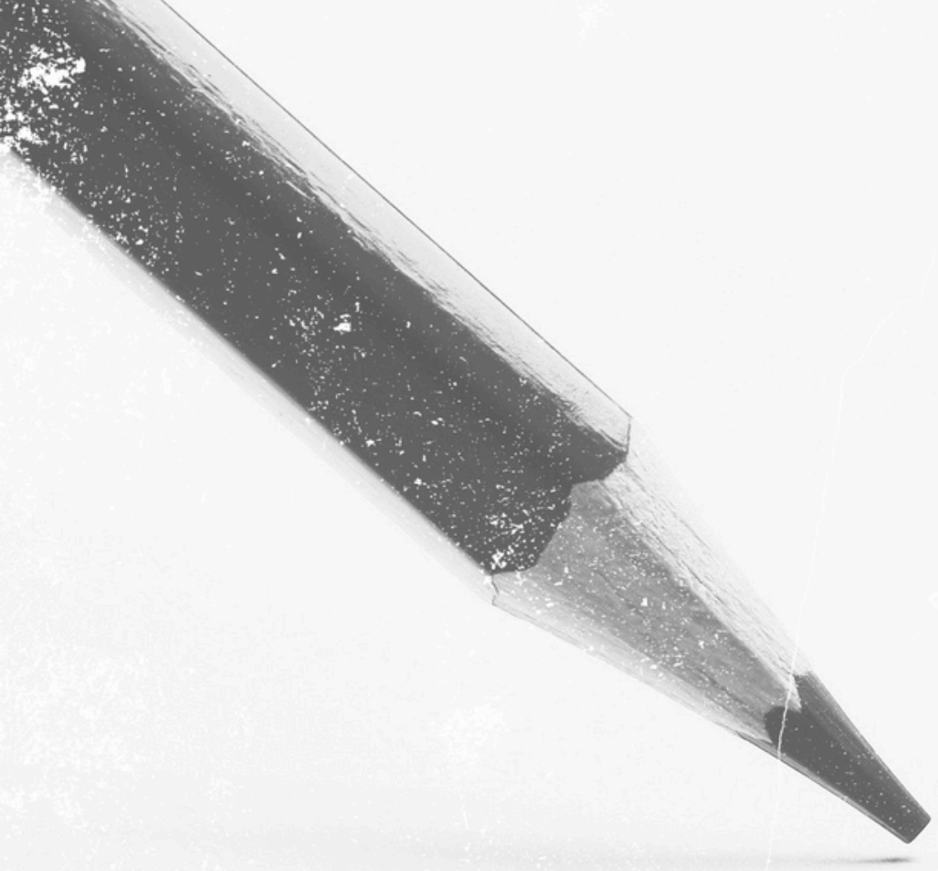
In Italy, politicians have managed to dismantle the Geneva Convention on asylum seekers by talking about the possibility of migration to the nearest 'safe' countries, so I suspect that even if a law on climate refugees were to be introduced, it would also be dismantled. I think it is crucial to realise that the climate crisis affects both people who live on the other side of the world and me. While I am aware of the privileges or lack thereof that significantly change the ways and means of dealing with this crisis, I still believe that this crisis can be an opportunity to better understand others who are in a difficult situation. It can be an opportunity to reach people who may not currently be sensitive to this issue. The fact that we are increasingly witnessing situations such as floods and other natural disasters in Europe may move us to accept people who are coming from other parts of the world because of the same threats.

I think we need to work on a more cultural approach rather than a systemic one. Due to the fact that the third sector works to provide direct assistance, it hardly hybridises with the outside world. So it is other factors that shape the overall **collective awareness**. I think that, first and foremost, we need to learn to communicate the levels of complexity that lie behind a person's migration and their stay in a new territory.

What tools do you consider appropriate for raising awareness about migration and climate issues? How do you choose the tools you work with?

Climate diaries were first used by us in our work with people whose main languages are not European languages. We worked with images because images allow you to tell a story and also have great power in showing me a place that I can see through someone else's eyes. Thanks to the Climate Diaries, we were able to observe through images what life is like for people who live elsewhere. How does an image work? It allows you to work without using words; it is the most direct form of communication, and I believe it is also a very powerful tool for people I call emotionally illiterate, in the sense of a whole group of people who may have the linguistic competence to speak different languages but are not in touch with their emotions. I start with individual work and then try to transform it into a collective experience. Each of us puts a story into the image, and thanks to the online tool that is our WhatsApp group, we bring together people who have never spoken to each other before, who have never shared anything before, but who have set to work to create something that, through images and words, captures the complexity of certain phenomena in a given part of the world.
An important theme for me in every project is how to move from individual action to collective action. **We all have our own ideas, but it is the collective that allows you to fight battles**.

In my opinion, another interesting tool is the use of existing works – using both images and short notes, creating collages that also allow you to combine the individual with the collective. An artist-researcher I met in Budapest conducted an artistic residency with Nigerian women living in England. These were Nigerian women who had emigrated for economic reasons and were therefore the group treated worst among migrant groups in England. The artist conducted meetings, workshops and circles with the group, which she recorded, and then created a looped soundtrack from the recordings, where you can distinguish individual words, but they do not form a coherent narrative, but rather a collective cry of people who are usually the 'subject' of academic research. I think it's a very beautiful artistic and research project.



COMMUNITY

I think an important thing that we rarely do is gather opinions from citizens to understand **why people think the way they do**. What is it that we, as human beings, do not understand about other people? We are definitely missing something if the most powerful country in the world is once again ruled by a person who promotes mass deportations, builds walls, denies climate change and, in the meantime, supports genocide on the other side of the world. Where does this drift towards denialism come from? It is really disturbing because it means that people are out of touch with reality and history. How can we reach them and open up a debate with those who think differently? In my opinion, the only way is to collect interviews and opinions in order to understand their thinking and initiate a joint conversation.

How do you think a feminist perspective can help change thinking about climate migration? What kind of thinking, but also what actions, what skills has feminism given you that are useful in your research, but also in your daily work on these issues?

The first issue, but one that is very difficult to apply, is the practice of self-awareness, the trivial fact of recognising dignity in the stories and words of anyone you encounter, and of cultivating care within yourself, in the broadest sense of the word. What feminism tries to do, and what I try to apply in my daily work, is the ability to question given categories, given social regimes. If we start to question aspects that govern our economy, such as mono-nuclear families, we will probably also be able to question other models, such as the models of closure of human bodies questioned by transfeminism. We don't question certain key concepts on a daily basis, do we? Feminism, **intersectional feminism**, has the ability to read all levels of discrimination that a person experiences, which stem from class, family background, socio-economic status and skin colour. Recognising that there is inter-sectionality in climate migration may also allow us to question the dynamics of domination. Because at its core, it is about recognising the mechanisms of power.

In relation to what you said about people's awareness of climate change and climate migration, if you think this thing is, I mean, has it changed since, I don't know, 5 years ago, 10 years ago with events like the recent floods?

I live in a bubble, so it's very difficult for me to say. But it's an interesting question. I would very much like that to be the case, but I don't know if the principle of 'war between the poor' applies here. People have lost all their possessions and their lives in recent natural disasters in Europe. If there is a threat affecting your immediate neighbourhood, your loved ones, you focus on helping in that situation. Does this also make you more sensitive and prompt you to help others fleeing similar threats in other parts of the world? There is certainly a chance, but what we will do with it remains unclear. It is very interesting how the security needs of my neighbourhood and my city connect with the global level. **How do we change in times of crisis?** How do we respond to threats and why are we most concerned about what is happening around us, which determines whether these events make us more inclined to separate ourselves further or to help others?

Stefania Peca *is a researcher at the University of Bologna, a member of the Reimagining Mobilities collective, and a consultant for third sector organisations and public administration in the field of migration and social integration. Since November 2023, she has been an assistant in the Effetto Farfalla project. Cambiamo le parole per cambiare il mondo on discrimination issues and in the Turismo delle Radici project. She is collaborating on a project on climate migration, Re-think the challenge, a series of seminars that will use creative tools such as creative writing to build collaboration between different target groups: activists, researchers and scientists, journalists. Feminist.*

4.
It is our lifestyle that drives climate change, and climate change drives displacement -

a conversation with **Mimi Sheller**

What is and what should mobility justice be in today's world?

I would like to start by referring to '*mobile ontology*' and the work of philosopher Thomas Nail. His latest book, published this year, is titled *Philosophy of Movement*. It summarises some of his earlier work and explains the idea of mobile ontology, in which mobility is the basis of everything.

Our world is a world of energy. So, rather than starting any social or political analysis of fair mobility from the 'sitting perspective' of the nation state, society, or even individuals, groups, or communities, we need to think of mobility as something that is at the root of everything. Too often, when people think about refugees, migrants, borders, or asylum seekers, they start from the premise that the nation-state should be the basis for these considerations. It is within its borders that decisions are made about who to let in and who to keep out.

In my book *Mobility Justice*, I argued that all mobile processes are continuous in nature, and that certain concepts have been developed or elaborated to control or channel these flows. The political state, a kind of centralised state power, emerged from this need. Populations also emerged from a kind of channelling of different mobilities. This is my way of turning the narrative around and thinking about what we take as the starting point for our considerations. There are connections and processes of continuity, disruption, and relations. The world is organised into areas that are, so to speak, temporary formations. And this is where the question of mobility justice comes in, because these areas are also areas of power. One can think of the nation state or the laws governing who is a citizen and who is not, who can enter and stay, and who can be deported. The area of movement is the political state, and citizens are produced within this area. Everything therefore depends on mutual movements.

Justice of movement is an overarching concept for thinking about how power affects the management and control of mobility or flows, and how patterns of unequal mobility and immobility or mobility and residence are shaped, creating inequalities in the circulation of people, resources and information. Thus, justice of movement is a term that describes thinking about power and inequalities in the distribution of mobility and immobility within this overarching system.

For me, justice of movement occurs at many different levels. You can start with our bodies and the mobility we have. In many societies and cultures, there are restrictions on certain forms of physical mobility, such as restrictions based on gender, sexuality, race, class, age or disability. So mobility justice starts with the question: do we have the ability to decide our own movements? Are they controlled by others? Then we can think on a broader scale: when we start to move in space, whether urban or rural, to what extent are we capable of mobility? How do systems of power regulate the circulation of different groups of people in urban space? And then we arrive at the question: what are the regulations governing mobility within and across borders in different territories? How do borders, walls, checkpoints, gates, passports, detention centres and all specially designed technologies control mobility? How do they all contribute to mobility and justice?

Finally, I would also consider the planetary scale of resource flows and energy circulation that drive fossil fuel consumption and global warming, as well as pollution, which also contributes to the movement of people. I am talking about the mobility of plants and animals, but also of rocks or water, rivers, anything that is part of the Earth's energy metabolism. Our planet, our solar system and our universe. We can also think of movement in a more subtle sense, not as movement from one point on Earth to another, but as a kind of flow. Leaves that are constantly trembling slightly, our bodies that are constantly breathing. These are also movements. When people take too much energy and do not respect the movement of plants, animals or other energy metabolisms on Earth, they destroy the conditions of our own existence.

In my opinion, when we talk about justice in mobility, we need to take all these perspectives and ways of thinking about methods of controlling mobility into account.

Let's talk about actions and collaborations that you think could somehow support this kind of thinking about mobility.

To talk about actions and collaborations for fair mobility, my starting point would be to consider what we mean by justice. There are many different forms of justice or our concepts of justice. In a sense, justice itself is mobile. The legal systems or everyday practices in which we create justice are fluid and mobile in themselves. The law itself is mobile. In theories of justice, a distinction is often made between different types of justice, including distributive justice, i.e. the fair distribution of risks and benefits, access to different types of goods. Many aspects of communicative justice concern the idea of equal access and fair distribution of public transport systems or cycle paths. We often draw attention to procedural justice, talking about who owns the decision-making processes.

We need significant community participation in the management of mobility systems. To this end, we need access to information, meaningful understanding, and informed consent based on different types of local knowledge. Procedural justice also requires what some call recognition. We must have participatory recognition in deliberations about justice. And this requires a certain respect for the contributions of different types of people or entities and respect for the autonomy of individuals. To this end, we must also address pre-existing power relations between participants in deliberations.

The idea of deliberative justice means that it must be rooted in egalitarian principles in which there are pluralistic opportunities for contribution. We could have deliberative and procedural participatory justice for humans that would lead us to a more just distribution, but how are non-humans represented? How are plants, animals or rivers represented? So to these different forms of justice, we should also add the idea of epistemic justice. There are, for example, different forms of non-Western or indigenous knowledge that may include a non-human perspective in their epistemic thinking.

All these elements speak of acting through deliberation and joint decision-making, which would inform our legal and political systems in the pursuit of greater justice in mobility. We might ask how people come together to actually create moments of deliberation and action for justice in mobility. This is something that often happens in various kinds of social movements or collectives that support others, care for others, or share resources. In my work, I often talk about care mobility, mindful mobility. I think of care mobility as spaces where people are present, listening and helping each other. These can be organisations helping migrants and refugees in individual countries and at borders. In the US, there are groups that leave water in the desert on the US-Mexican border to help people left there to fend for themselves by smugglers, known as coyotes. Leaving water, providing information, and offering various kinds of assistance to people at the border or in so-called sanctuary cities is really important in order to try to create greater opportunities for political claims for justice in the area of mobility.

You talk about direct aid and direct action, and I wonder what's your opinion on other types of action, such as those created within cultural or artistic projects? Do you think they can help shape the narrative around mobility?

I will start with some really interesting artistic works that have been created at borders, specifically at the US-Mexico border, which I just referred to. In the US, there are very strong calls, especially under President Trump, but also before him, for the construction of a wall to stop migration. In his first presidential campaign in 2016, Trump called not only for the construction of a wall, but also for mass deportations. The idea was that undocumented immigrants should be deported from the country en masse. In the first phase of the rise of this kind of political discourse, Electronic Disturbance Theater, a very interesting art group based in Southern California, created an artistic intervention, a conceptual work of art called Transborder Immigrant Tool. The object used in the project was to be a very basic flip phone, which would be handed out to migrants trying to cross from Mexico into the United States through the desert, where many people died. The phone would be equipped with a compass and would allow one-way communication, so it would not reveal the location of people on the move. The location would be masked, but people would have access to a compass that would show them where activists had left boxes of water. At the same time, the concept assumed that the phone would provide not only access to water, but also to poetry sent to the devices in text messages. In this way, the border would be rehumanised, as it would give people both the water they needed to survive and poetry, recognising their humanity and need for hope and inspiration. The project, along with access to water, would bring poetry to a place of danger and death.

The entire project was never implemented due to many difficulties related to the border policy at the time. However, the idea itself caused quite a stir in the media. The mainstream media was disturbed by the very concept. This was the goal of the Electronic Disturbance Theater - to disrupt the narrative, one-sided commentary, and mediatisation of the border. The project broke into the public sphere by questioning the entire effort put into building the wall. It drew attention to the deaths of people in the desert and exposed the cruelty and theatre of violence at the border.

John Craig Freeman created a work entitled Borderwall Las Fronteras. In this work, he used a publicly available map of the desert on the US-Mexico border, created by a migrant support group, which showed all the locations where a dead person had been found. The artist created an app that marked each location with a small skeleton, similar to those seen in Mexico during *Dia de los Muertos*. These small skeletons appeared as an overlay – when you held your phone up in the desert or looked at Google Earth, you could see small skeletons at each of the points where a dead person had been found. And there were thousands of them. A kind of border monument was created, a kind of public marker that could be accessed from anywhere in the world to visualise the scale of death that had taken place on our border. Also in Europe, in connection with the crossings of the Mediterranean Sea and the so-called migration crisis of 2015, many artists created public monuments aimed at initiating a public debate drawing attention to the number of deaths at the borders. Artists have tried to represent what is happening at borders in various ways. Another methodology is to create more participatory works of art, meeting migrants in a way that becomes a kind of artistic intervention – creating places of refuge, serving meals, building other forms of direct assistance.

What should we pay attention to in the public narrative on climate migration so that it contributes to promoting fair mobility?

I recently co-authored an article with Andreas Neef. In his work, Andreas pointed out that the dominant narrative or framework, especially around climate migration but also more generally around the future of migration, is that more and more people are now on the move and being displaced. Objectively speaking, the number of migrants in the world is steadily increasing and is expected to continue to grow. The topic of climate displacement is increasingly coming up in public debate — it is said that millions of people will be displaced due to climate change and that everyone will migrate to safer environments — especially to the north, as areas in the global south are becoming hotter, desertified, deforested, rivers have dried up and there are no more fish, and intense storms and other extreme phenomena are occurring.

The ubiquitous narrative now promotes fear and panic about impending climate displacement and how we will cope with it. This narrative is being used to fuel political movements that call for building walls and keeping people out of Fortress Europe, America or Australia. It is a very powerful political ideology because it makes people afraid of a 'flood' of migrants. That is why it is really important that we challenge this narrative and break its hold on our imagination, because it is neither an accurate nor a true description of what is happening.

One way I am trying to change the way we understand what is happening is by talking about our own relationship with the climate. Climate mobility is linked to our fossil fuel-based lifestyle. It is our lifestyle that drives climate change, and climate change drives displacement. So if displacement is happening in some places, then it is really us, and by us I mean the group I call the kinetic elite, who are the main cause. Change should not be about building walls. Change should be about changing our behaviour and changing the causes of climate instability. That would be the first issue.

The second issue related to climate mobility is that when people move, it is often not a one-way linear movement from the global south to the global north. First, a lot of displacement happens within countries. Most people who are displaced by drought, storms or fires remain in their country, only moving to another area that is not at risk. There is also a lot of migration from rural areas to cities because agriculture is under threat and declining. There is no reason to believe that there will be mass migration to Europe or the United States. The reason why this particular migration is taking place is because of the demand for labour in the US and Europe, linked to high levels of consumption. We must therefore talk first and foremost about our energy consumption, our use of fossil fuels, our demand for labour, because of the consumer economy in which we live. If we want to change the issue of migration, it should not be about whether we accept migrants or not. It should be a broader, what I call a cine-political conversation, a deli-beration. It should be a question of just change at the planetary level. We should look at how our energy consumption affects people's ability to stay and live where they want to stay and live.

What should we pay attention to in the public narrative on climate migration so that it contributes to promoting fair mobility?

After the recent elections in the US, but also after statements and actions by European governments, we see that policies promoting a more liberal and humanistic approach are being rejected by our societies. Ideas about building walls and mass deportations are winning. This is causing a lot of political tension. I am currently working with researchers from the KTH School of Law in Stockholm on reflections on legal mobility. We are not only talking about the law that shapes mobility, but also about the mobility of law and how justice itself is mobile. This takes us to a different level or ground of thinking. Nation states, national legislation and state borders emerged from the control and surveillance of mobility. The nation state should not be a formation that decides who is a citizen and who is not, who can be deported and who can be imprisoned, and consequently who gets to live and who gets to die. So what would a different territorialisation of law look like, or how could we create a different legal framework that would allow for justice? In the US, we have sanctuary cities that try to apply municipal law and promote community-based action, a kind of local justice in terms of mobility. Legal battles are being fought in different jurisdictions. Sometimes they contradict each other. I think the question should not be how to change the state's border policy as such, but how to change the type of legal jurisdiction in which freedom of movement is defined.

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