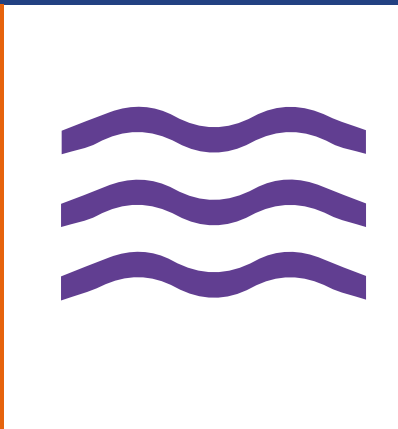


# KLAXON 12



## Reconfiguring Ecological Imaginaries

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# RECONFIGURING ECOLOGICAL IMAGINARIES

Pascal Le Brun-Cordier & Benoit Vreux

Global warming has been greatly disrupting human life on Earth and risks making it non-viable in the medium term. As yet, however, no major action has been taken in order to slow down its advance: the threat seems unreal. A great number of researchers have pointed out the existence of a multitude of “cognitive biases” that hinder us, both individually and collectively, from behaving rationally in the face of this unprecedented challenge. We are particularly hampered by our global conceptions of the world, by our “cosmology” at the centre of which is the idea of a “nature” external to humankind, and of which it should, according to Descartes, become “*master and possessor*” — an ontological posture amplified to the extreme by voracious and limitless capitalism.

Over recent decades, numerous thinkers have begun to deconstruct this idea of nature, to remind us of its relativity (such as the anthropologist Philippe Descola, observer of animist societies in Amazonia), or to criticize its exactitude in a largely hybrid world (as underlined by Bruno Latour's philosophy of science). In the field of artistic creation, an “*Anthropocene art*” (according to the formula devised by the art critic and art historian Paul Ardenne<sup>1</sup>) has emerged over recent years, an ecological and ethical art, heir to the environmental art of the 1960s and 1970s. For Lauranne Germond, art historian and exhibition curator, this ecological art essentially assumes three forms: “*the witnessing and sharing of knowledge; political and symbolic action; and resilience practices.*”<sup>2</sup>

In this twelfth edition of *Klaxon*, our objective is to highlight a fourth form that is specific to these artistic practices: the creation and deployment of new imaginaries of ecology. The works herein presented invite us to go beyond our traditional conceptions of “nature,” leading us to re-think other forms of relationships with living things, to foresee other forms of cohabitation with animals or plants, to cultivate new sensitivities with regard to the world around us — notably because these sensitivities explore new avenues, sensations, and understanding in which non-humans are something more than elements in a natural world in need of protection. Rather, they are imbued with singular qualities which require no form of justification.

As always, the works *Klaxon* presents relate predominantly to the performing arts in public space. Performing arts that invite us to transform our representations, our images, our imaginaries not only of the living, but also of public space itself, understood in its socio-spatial definition as well as in its political meaning.

Here, we will focus attention on the definition of the imaginary postulated by the science fiction writer Alain Damasio: “*The imaginary is neither a smokescreen nor a pipe dream. Quite the contrary: it is what bridges the action, the architecture of a state of mind; it is what gives it its vanishing point and its perspective. It is as vital as tactics, logistics, projects and drive. It serves as a continuity and link between these two concrete poles of combat.*”<sup>3</sup>

This architonic function of the imaginary strikes us as particularly strategic in the strange context in which we find ourselves today: more so than scientific arguments or political

***“The imaginary is neither a smokescreen nor a pipe dream. Quite the contrary: it is what bridges the action, the architecture of a state of mind.”***

**Alain Damasio**

<sup>1</sup> Paul Ardenne, *Un art écologique. Création plasticienne et anthropocène*, Éditions Le bord de l'eau, Lormont, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> « Restaurer avec l'aide des artistes notre lien intime au vivant », in *Courants Verts*, Éditions Le bord de l'eau, 2020, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> Alain Damasio, post-script to *La recomposition des mondes*, by Alessandro Pignocchi, Éditions du Seuil, p. 101.

discourse, it is probably these new ecological imaginaries that will help us both to circumvent some of the cognitive biases that have rendered us inactive and to consider other ways of thinking, behaving, living. Provided, however, that these imaginaries “empower” us; that is to say that these imaginaries are woven with ideas, sensations, perceptions “that tear us away from our habits, restore power to our mutilated desires; [that these imaginaries be] universes that trigger the desire to live differently by taking on this world of ours head-on.”<sup>4</sup>

Klaxon’s twelfth issue comprises three sections: Retrospective, Perspectives, and Foresight.



*La Recomposition des mondes*, Alessandro Pignocchi, Éditions du Seuil, 2019

## RETROSPECTIVE

The first section opens with a gallery of “milestone” creations: we invited artists and cultural professionals – all members of the In Situ European platform for artistic creation in public space – to speak of living artwork(s) in public space that have marked them in recent years, works that have led them to view the living world differently. The diversity of responses we received depicts a highly diverse landscape of forms and dramaturgies, whose common point is the impact these projects have on all those women and men who attend dozens of shows and performances in public space each year.

The second article focuses on one of these creations that was often cited during our survey: *Ce qui m'est dû* by the French street-theatre company La Débordante. Originally created in 2014, the year before United Nations Climate Change Conference, the “conference of parties” organised in Paris, this uppercut spectacle immediately met with a huge success amongst the French-speaking network of street arts. At a time that ecological awareness was beginning to crystallise, this piece translated in both a subtle and impactful way the broad spectrum of emotions that the show’s creators were navigating: “denial, helplessness, anger, depression, finally, before acceptance, so many prerequisites for the electroshock of taking action” as summarised by the journalist Julie Bordenave, who also collected eye-witness accounts from many audience members.

We devote our third article to Oerol, an annual festival organised since 1982 on the island of Terschelling off the Dutch coast. Here, “humankind is no longer at the centre of the artistic imagination,” explains Evelyne Coussens, a journalist who regularly attends Oerol: more than a stage or a theatrical setting, it is the island itself, the surrounding sea, the landscape that constitute the subject-matter for creations and experiences offered to participants. In this article and the works therein presented, we come to understand how this festival took on the task of reconfiguring our imaginaries.

<sup>4</sup> Alain Damasio, “For the lockdown, I dream of a carnival of lunatics, who topple our chintzy kings,” from an interview that appeared in *Reporterre*, 28 April 2020:

[bit.ly/2xZdas5](https://bit.ly/2xZdas5)

## PERSPECTIVES

The second section – Perspectives – opens with a fascinating conversation between Estelle Zhong Mengual, art historian specialising in “art in common,” and the artist Thierry Boutonnier, a former agricultural worker whose works, both collective and participative, involve living humans and non-humans. As Estelle Zhong Mengual points out: “*a rarity in the artistic sphere, Thierry Boutonnier intermingles sensorial experience with rigorous biological knowledge: for him, a living entity is never a formal motif, symbol, or metaphor for anything other than itself; it is an otherness with its own potential that requires that we know it in fine detail in order that we can truly enter into a relationship with it.*”

To conceive of something alive as an otherness we should get to know and to recognise its singularities and its rights: this is one of the challenges of the work of the artist and activist Maria Lucia Cruz Correia. The astounding devices she imagines (laboratory, clinic, school, institute, trials, and so on) mobilise us not as remote spectators, but rather as living human beings involved in the ongoing ecological crisis. Correia’s poetic and political work, notably *Voice of Nature: The Trial & Kinstitute*, which explores the imminent entry of living non-humans into the arena of the law courts, is presented and analysed by Nina Vurdelja, a PhD student in theatrical studies at the University of Tampere, Finland.

The Perspective section culminates with a contribution by the researcher and writer Marielle Macé, author of *Nos Cabanes*<sup>5</sup>, a short and lively essay devoted “*to the huts of practices, of thoughts, of poems*” forged in creative resistance to the ongoing ecological catastrophe. Macé’s contribution to this edition of *Klaxon* evokes one of those huts of ideas and of struggle. It unfolds in Brussels, where the writer and researcher was present in September 2019 in order to follow the Belgian capital’s water paths, water that cannot be tamed, channelled, buried, drained off. Revolving around the concept of a “*noue*” – a grassy ditch collecting runoff water –, Macé reminds us just to what extent language itself is also a field badly in need of defence, a space in which we can reconfigure our imaginaries, reinvent forms of companionship with our fellow non-human entities, and transform our way of living the present.

## FORESIGHT

This edition’s closing article is a prospective opening where our readers will encounter extremely punky and dynamic chickadees, illustrated by a former cognitive science researcher who has become a comic-book author: Alessandro Pignocchi. His astounding graphic novels draw the contours and colours of a western world that has been converted to animism. If those sensitive forms chosen by Pignocchi in order to share his convictions have proven successful, it is primarily because they leave real space for the viewer’s imagination. As Alain Damasio notes, “*comics are an outdoor art (...), an art where the air flows most fully in those spaces between frames (...). Where the cognitive wind discovers a lot of space in the inter-panels, to instill, in turn, its own images, its vision.*”

Good luck to you readers. We hope you will find this issue of *Klaxon* inspiring.

### PLBC & BV

<sup>5</sup> Marielle Macé, *Nos Cabanes*, Verdier, 2019.

# EIGHT LANDMARK CREATIONS THAT MAKE US SEE THE LIVING DIFFERENTLY

Pascal Le Brun-Cordier, Élisabeth Simonet,  
Jean-Sébastien Steil & Marine Thévenet

**“Has an artistic project succeeded in permanently transforming your representations of the living? Let us know about it!” This is how we challenged professionals in the sphere of creation in public space, members of the European network *In Situ*. Klaxon now has the pleasure of presenting you with eight of their answers: a visual Requiem, lines that overwhelm us, living stones, a chlorophyllious micro-society, a heterotopic centaur, a river treated as a legal entity, birds revealed in their all their individuality, a polar sundial... All of these works demonstrate and make the case for the transformative power of art, of its ability not only to touch us, but also to reconfigure our ecological imaginaries.**

## DRIES VERHOEVEN, FARE THEE WELL! (2012) BIDDING GOODBYE TO THAT WHICH IS DISAPPEARING



*Fare Thee well!*, Dries Verhoeven © Saris & Den Engelsman

The title *Fare Thee Well!*, translated into modern English as “have a safe trip!” expresses the very meaning and principle of this prophetic work. This visionary proposition is based on an optical process that engineers a switch in viewpoint; it’s designed in such a way that visitors can access the hidden reality of disasters already underway (environmental, political, and societal), in the here and now.

The device is simple: a row of long-range telescopes is placed at the top of a building that overlooks an urban landscape, somewhat similar to the coin-operated binoculars found on elevated sites above a touristic city. The visitor puts on a headset through which plays the melancholic air of “Ah! Spietato” from Handel’s



*Amadigi di Gaula* (HMW 11). On looking through this fixed telescope, visitors can see a LED news-ticker on the horizon two kilometres away, on which scrolls a series of slow-moving texts with the cold regularity of a news channel's never-ending strip. A litany of ongoing disappearances is listed with a tone of distanced irony: "goodbye capitalism," "goodbye God," "don't cry because it's all over..." The cityscape appears to be upside down in the telescope lens. Only the strip with the text remains the right way round, inviting visitors to flip their vision in order to access a lucid consciousness, beyond deceptive appearances.

This installation, which Dries Verhoeven describes as a "visual requiem," composes a farewell message to things that though still part of our daily landscape will no longer be around in ten, twenty, or fifty years. What is promised is not apocalypse, but rather the end of our familiar world, one whose existence we would like to prolong, and in which we would like to continue to believe in a little longer: "one more minute, mister executioner." The artist, however, does not grant us this one minute of one-eyed innocence, but instead places before our eyes the evidence we refuse to believe. We've

got to prepare to bid farewell to a world in the throes of disappearing.

### JEAN-SÉBASTIEN STEIL

Director of FAI AR, higher art education in public space (Marseille).

For more information:

[bit.ly/3cvBH7b](https://bit.ly/3cvBH7b)

[bit.ly/2ASn2pe](https://bit.ly/2ASn2pe)

[bit.ly/3bxF9go](https://bit.ly/3bxF9go)



*Fare Thee well!*, Dries Verhoeven © Andrejs Strokina

# MICHAEL PINSKY, *PLUNGE* (2012) HERALDING THE IMMINENT CATASTROPHE

An imaginary line. A symbolic line. A vision of the future. An observation of present-day society. *Plunge* is an in-situ installation piece by Michael Pinsky in which blue LED light-rings are wrapped around monumental columns in central London, whereby each circle indicates the level of the rising sea will have reached in a 1000 years on account of climate change. Together, these isolated rings on the columns create a constellation of points, a mental projection of a water surface that will submerge the city. Besides the elegance of the blue neon floating on the columns, this imaginary line is probably this installation's strongest

element, forcing passers-by not only to project themselves into a more global spatial context, on the scale of London itself, but also a temporal one, on the scale of a millennium.

It is not so much the reference to statistics drawn from a dystopian scenario that is challenging about this work, but rather the arduous process needed for its implementation, notably to convince London's authorities to install an artistic work that could be seen by so many Londoners and tourists that dealt directly with a future climate disaster. By encouraging collective awareness about the magnitude of the ongoing

ecocide, Pinsky points the finger at the disengagement of today's political class regarding these issues.

## MARINE THÉVENET

*International Relations, Tombées de la Nuit (Rennes)*

For more information  
*Plunge*, by Michael Pinsky, commissioned by Artsadmin and LIFT – Imagine 2020

[bit.ly/360EliZ](https://bit.ly/360EliZ)

[bit.ly/3fTMQR9](https://bit.ly/3fTMQR9)



*Plunge*, Michael Pinsky © RR



# NICK STEUR, *A PIECE OF 2* (2016) BLURRING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN INANIMATE AND ANIMATE

What a curious idea to watch a man balancing huge blocks of stone for several hours! And yet... There is something mystical about the link created by the Dutch artist Nick Steur with his huge blocks of stone. Indeed, we are not faced with a man and stones in front of our eyes, but rather with two partners in a unique, vibrant, and beautiful choreography. And the magic of this choreography is that it blurs the divide between what we all-too-often

quickly classify as living or inert. In *A Piece of 2*, the crucial thing is not so much to capture the fleeting moment when man succeeds in balancing the rocks, but rather to question our relationship to time itself and slowness. From these hours of manipulation, pauses, and silence, emerges a dust-covered man marked by time and effort. For once, it might well be the case that the rock shaped and sculpted the man, not the other way around.

And this reversal of positions invites us to reposition ourselves as part of a whole and not its centre. A welcome contemplation to rethink our relationship to our environment.

## ÉLISABETH SIMONET

Coordination Officer for the European network *IN SITU*

Pour en savoir plus:

[bit.ly/3czKlfn](https://bit.ly/3czKlfn)



*A Piece of 2*, Nick Steur © RR

## LE PHUN, *LES GÎMES* (2000)

### IMAGINE A HAPPY HYBRIDISATION WITH THE LIVING



*Les Gûmes*, Le Phun © Jordi Bover



*Les Pheuillus*, Le Phun © Kepa Etchandy

*Les-Gûmes* (Vege-tables)? “A human society secretly rooted in public parks and gardens. The characters who populate this society have chosen to deeply immerse themselves into the vegetal kingdom; they are beings in full mutation, half-human, half-vegetal. During pollination, they train visitors to discover their metamorphosis and reveal their poetic and chlorophyllious world.” This is how Le Phun, one of France’s historical street-arts companies, presents this installation-spectacle of spellbinding strangeness, at once funny and sensual, stemming from the fertile imagination of its leader, Phéaille. The cast of characters we come across during the stroll in their respective biotopes are called Li-liane, Gran-pûr, Romain Dubois, Artichade, Bamavet, Toumeflûr, and Rosie-mauve<sup>6</sup>. They all call out to us, we the “numans,” in a bucolic and subtle language where words are grafted in such a way as to provoke small poetic and discreetly political electro-shocks – for in this spectacle the critique of our predatory societies is made obliquely, through implicate remarks. What *Les-Gûmes* implants in our imaginations, with lightness and depth, is the possibility of a happy hybridisation with all that lives.<sup>7</sup>

#### PLBC

For more information:

[bit.ly/3644YDB](https://bit.ly/3644YDB)

<sup>6</sup> Translator's note: all these names are puns on the names of plants and vegetables.

<sup>7</sup> Two other Phun creations that shake up our representations of the living can be cited here: *La Vengeance des Semis*, a vast installation-show which, overnight, brings to the fore an agro-poetic micro-society in the heart of the city and thus displaces boundaries between urbanity and rurality, and *Les Pheuillus*, a nomadic people of anthropomorphic plant sculptures filled with dead leaves that migrate throughout our landscapes and our imaginations, who delicately blur the boundaries that separate the dead and the living, the improbably distant from the here and now.



# THE CENTAUR (SINCE 1989) BECOMING ONE WITH THE ANIMAL



Image extracted from *Europe*, short film (2009) by the Théâtre du Centaure.

*“The centaur is an admission of our incompleteness. Moreover, it is a cry of alliance: whenever you observe a centaur, what you see is a relationship. I will only be whole by being you: the centaur is a promise. I dream of a gallop for my human half, I dream of a word for my animal half: the centaur aspires for the impossible, with all its strength mustered; it questions the human animal, shifting the boundaries of the self toward the boundaries of the other: the centaur is an intersection. The centaur is one of those dreams that we can only realise in dreams: we have made a utopia of a fabulous being, as well as our daily space, and a collection of poems telling us of our relationship with*

*the world, and the relationship of the world to its own dreams, its need for the other and its quest for elsewhere. It is inside everyone that the centaur surges up, where secrets have their savagery, where the unconscious its strangeness, where the future is surveyed with many. We preferred this body which does not exist over a body which only half exists”.* In their Manifesto, Camille and Manolo, who co-founded the Théâtre du Centaure in 1989, sum up the quintessence of their artistic project: to attempt a fantastic fusion between animal and human. The specificity of this chimerical project is that it most often unfolds in the heart of urban public spaces or

on the skyline of vast landscapes. This immersion of the dream in reality powerfully enhances its capacity to disturb our imaginaries of the living. Moreover, this is precisely what makes it a heterotopia, a concept forged by Michel Foucault to which Camille and Manolo refer, this “*real physical place where a utopia is realised, a concrete space that hosts the imaginary like a child’s hut, a space that is both mythical and real.*”

## PLBC

For more information:

[bit.ly/2Z8gDjs](https://bit.ly/2Z8gDjs)

# CAMILLE DE TOLEDO AND THE POLAU, PARLEMENT DE LOIRE (2019-2020)

## INTRODUCING THE BIOCRATIC AGE

Following in the footsteps New Zealand and India, who offered the status of “legal standing” for inanimate objects (the Whanganui and the Ganges rivers, respectively) during 2017 in order to respond to ecological challenges, will the French administrative region Centre-Val de Loire be the first European region to establish a “parliament of humans and non-humans?” This is the challenge that has been taken up by several regional partners under the leadership of the POLAU-pole arts & urbanisme in conjunction with the author and lawyer Camille de Toledo. Their objective is to establish the first parliament for a non-human entity—in this case the Loire river—where the fauna, flora, and the river’s various tangible and intangible components would be represented. With a view to establishing this Parliament of the Loire, hearings commenced in October 2019 in the presence of the philosopher Bruno Latour, the researcher

and director Frédérique Aït-Touati, the landscape architect Bruno Marmioli, and the archaeologist Virginie Serna.

Faced with the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s ecological and climatic challenges – and ever since the thinking on the subject exemplified by the law professor Christopher Stone in the early 1970s in the United States in order to defend the Redwoods in the Yosemite National Park against various development projects – several legislative decisions have recently used a mechanism of legal representation to grant a legal “personality” to nature’s elements: lately, residents of the city of Toledo, on the banks of Lake Erie, have been called upon to decide whether the lake upon which they depend can defend itself in court against polluting industries. The project leaders for a Loire Parliament propose to work through this legal mechanism that amounts to granting the status of “legal

subject” to elements in nature. This constitutes a real collective tale in the Anthropocene age in order to modify how we govern the living; to use the project’s initiators terms, it is a proposal to “*shift from the democratic age to the biocratic age.*”

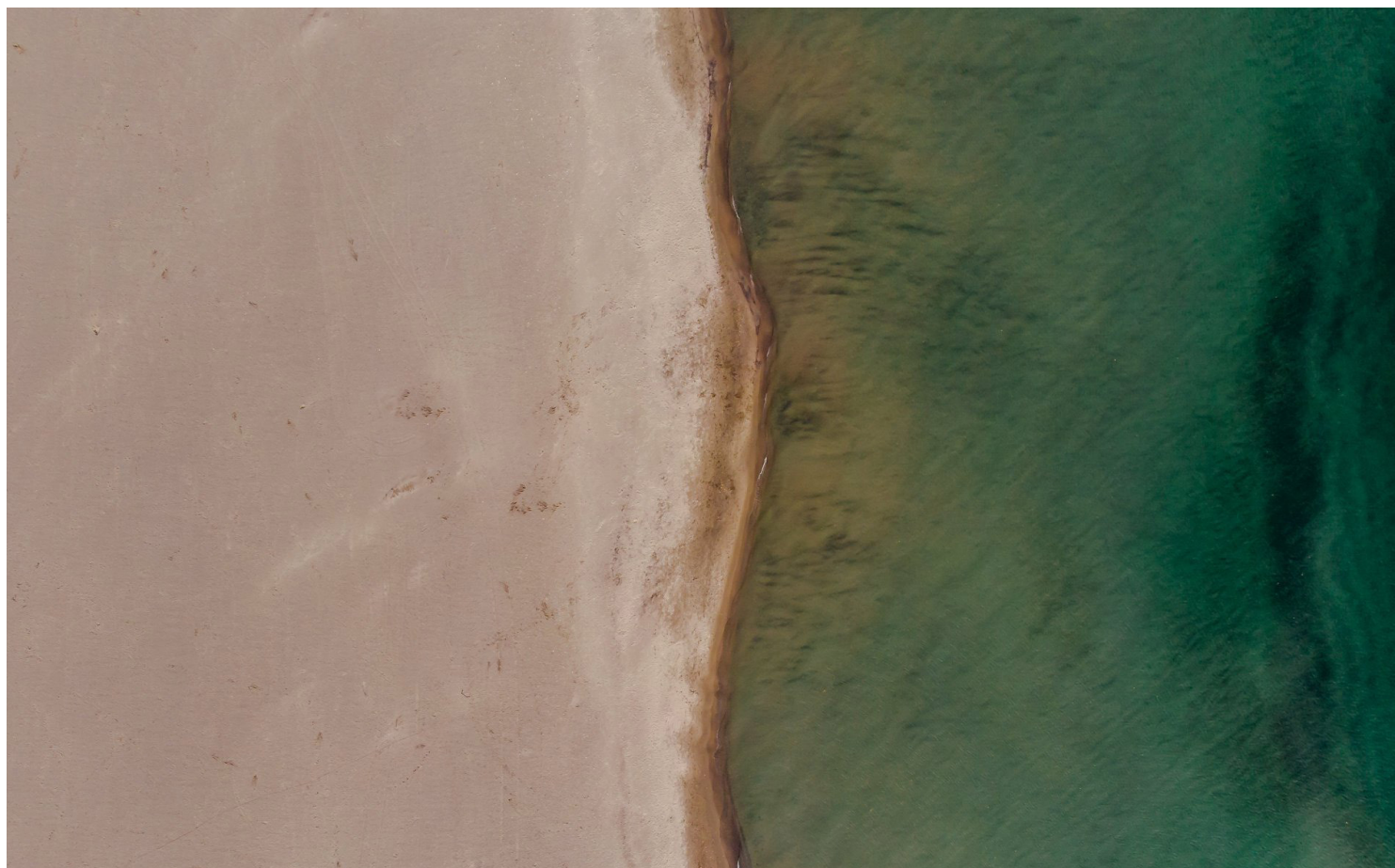
The conclusions of the Loire Parliament project will be transmitted to the French National Assembly, the Senate, the Government and the Regions concerned at the end of 2020.

Extract from “Towards a Legal Personality of the Loire, toward a Parliament of the River”, published on 3 October 2019 on Médiapart:

[bit.ly/35ZZ1aM](https://bit.ly/35ZZ1aM)

For more information:

[bit.ly/3dbv8qM](https://bit.ly/3dbv8qM)



# THE BIRD SINGERS (SINCE 2011) SEEING AND HEARING BIRDS INDIVIDUALLY



Les Chanteurs d'Oiseaux © RR

Johnny Rasse and Jean Boucault are bird singers: they put their talent for imitating bird-songs and bird-cries, as well as their vast ornithological knowledge developed since their childhood in the Somme, at the service of an artistic and cultural project that is regularly enriched through contact with numerous musicians. In early 2011, when I met the both of them in the middle of Montpellier's Méric Park, I underwent a very singular, troubling, and ultimately deeply transformative experience. By listening to them whistling to the finches in the trees, to the blue tits, the thrushes, the grey herons, and the kingfishers, and especially by hearing these birds answer them and react

to their songs, I began to see these birds not as an abstract generality, but rather as a multiplicity of singular living beings, residents of the park in the same way that humans are. Having become an attentive observer of the birds' displays, their territorial strategies, their accents, I began to distinguish them as individuals: the scope of my attention has changed permanently, as has no doubt that of the spectators that these Bird Singers have encountered during this ZAT – Temporary Art Zone.

Subsequently, my understanding of birds was further refined by reading the texts of the philosopher Vinciane Despret for whom birds have a lot to

teach us, notably that it is viable to create territory by developing strategies other than hierarchy or domination. The birds' territories are indeed shared and not thought of in terms of property, but rather of usage, as in the old practice of the commons. As for birdsong, it would be "like a fabric of reality": "the singing bird vibrates its own body along with that which surrounds it, as though the bird had extended its body into space."<sup>8</sup>

## PLBC

For more information:

[bit.ly/3cvF65X](https://bit.ly/3cvF65X)

<sup>8</sup> Vinciane Despret, "The birds sing their presence in the world, they have something to teach us," *Libération*, 14 February 2020.

Online: [bit.ly/2T9n4Ph](https://bit.ly/2T9n4Ph)



# OLAFUR ELIASSON, *ICE WATCH* (2015) DEPICTING THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY WITH A POLAR SUNDIAL



*Ice Watch*, Olafur Eliasson, Paris, 2015 © Martin Argyroglo

In 2015, on the night of December 2 to 3, the Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson installed twelve blocks of ice from an endangered iceberg off the coast of Greenland at the Place du Panthéon in Paris. This installation-performance *Ice Watch* is presented as a “polar sundial” that symbolises the slow and continuous

melting of polar ice on account of climatic disturbances. The hundred tonnes of displaced ice represents the amount of melting that occurs every hundredth of a second throughout the planet. In Paris, the blocks melted within a few days; the installation coincided with the Climate Change Conference 21. Simple and eloquent,

Eliasson’s installation aroused media interest from across the entire world.

Its carbon footprint, however, has also been the subject of some debate: in order to reach Paris, the blocks of ice had to be transported more than 3500 kilometres in refrigerated containers, initially by boat and later by truck, a trip that generated around thirty tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. When recreating this installation-performance in London in 2018, one of Eliasson’s collaborators spoke on his behalf: “Research has demonstrated that the general public are more convinced whenever they experience something directly rather than discovering it in an abstract way, through data or even on films or through photographs. The estimated carbon footprint generated by having a block of ice in London for *Ice Watch* is roughly equivalent to that of transporting one person from London to the Arctic, there and back, to witness first-hand the effects of climate change. For example, the carbon footprint of the Tate Modern installation is roughly equivalent to a round-trip flight for a class of twenty-four schoolchildren to Greenland in order to observe the melting ice-caps. By comparison, *Ice Watch* will reach a much greater number of people by dint of the on-site installation in London, not to mention all those who will see it via media outlets and on the Internet.” Does the end justify the means? Is non-ethical ecological art a viable proposition? Even if *Ice Watch*’s coherence is uncertain and its carbon footprint is heavy, Eliasson’s installation nevertheless remains the most well-known artistic action in public space dealing with the climate emergency.

## PLBC

For more information:

[bit.ly/2zJgY1m](https://bit.ly/2zJgY1m)

# CE QUI M'EST DÛ

## AN UPPERCUT PERFORMANCE ON CLIMATE DISASTER

Julie Bordenave

**Chalon dans la Rue Festival, July 2014, a minor earthquake was about to shake Europe's second street art festival. Amidst the French performing artists' strike<sup>9</sup>, Héloïse Desfarges and Antoine Raimondi put a stop to their mobilisation in order to introduce their new production at the festival: *Ce qui m'est dû* (What is Due to Me), a relentless and galvanising performance in public space on the theme of global warming, whose shock waves resonate still to this very day.**

The two artists – one from the dance world, the other from the circus world – had already collaborated in *La débordante compagnie*, founded by Héloïse in 2007. Following a production that focussed on societal injunctions for men (*Mâle*, 2012), or again on the imperceptible occupying of public spaces on the margins of the revolts in the French suburbs during 2005 (*Dispersion*, 2012), this time round the public got to see a more intimate performance. The duo traced the trajectory of Héloïse the young artist, the emergence of her political thinking, her entry into resistance and environmental activism. She recalls: “*I felt anger inside me. In order to identify it, I wrote a few lines about my trajectory. They depicted the world in which I found myself, one which I couldn't understand. From that, the idea emerged that we could draw a thread through these ecological questions that were beginning to overwhelm us.*”

Created in 2014, *Ce qui m'est dû* [bit.ly/2NmN9Hm](http://bit.ly/2NmN9Hm) takes us through the successive shifts in awareness that led

the young woman toward a professional retraining, after a first life in the Parisian universe of advertising communication. Right from the outset, the performance introduces narrative technique and delivers the keys to interpreting it: Antoine incarnates Héloïse through words; the dancer expresses herself through her medium, the body. On the pavement, these two unique presences, a layer of sound, interspersed by a few chosen musical pieces that pierce the silence. The scenography comprises a simple chair, which, in turn, becomes a weapon or a tribune's desk. As with pebbles that gradually weigh our conscience down, the information gleaned accumulates more or less fortuitously – reading a crumpled newspaper in the subway about the appalling working conditions in jeans' factories; the inability to determine the origins of a manufactured object... Amidst the vacuity of a languid life



*Ce qui m'est dû*, Festival Jeunes Pousses, 2014 © Alexis Nys – Sileks

endowed with luxuries and flashes of a raw and cruel external reality, Héloïse's anger rises. Against those around her, her job, her way of life. All in suppressed poetic power, the text, limpidly sober, accrues the reasons for dissatisfaction, for incomprehension, for the absurdity that was erupting under the suppressed rage. The dramaturgy plays upon the breaks in rhythms and tones.

<sup>9</sup> Translator's note: The author refers to a strike by the *intermittents du spectacle* in 2014 on account of proposed austerity cuts. *Intermittence du spectacle* is a French government scheme that allows performing artists, who can prove a certain amount of paid work per year, to receive unemployment benefit payments during periods when they are not working.



## AN UPPERCUT PERFORMANCE

Echoing those absurdities experienced on a daily basis – “I need to work a lot to afford a vacation. I need a vacation because I work a lot” – her body expresses restraint, impediment, subjugation, suffocation. Liberated, finally at twenty-three, as the young woman makes the decision to live from her art, namely dance, which she feverishly invested since childhood. Through her experience of alternating small jobs and periods without work, she learns how to step back; moreover she learns to live better with less all while recapitalising her energy to shrink the gap between theory and practice. The performance’s dramaturgical pivot was the synopsis of a conference by Jean-Marc Jancovici<sup>10</sup>, whose path Antoine and Héloïse had already crossed back in 2007. With an implacable factual lucidity, the engineer lays bare the supporting statistics at hand, the observation of the demise of fossil fuels, and the proclaimed disappearance of our civilisation.



*Ce qui m'est dû*, Festival Jeunes Pousses, 2014 © Alexis Nys – Sileks

Antoine can narrate so much information in a theatrical incision lasting seven minutes, a quarter-way into the show. A terrifying and dazzling surge leaves Héloïse on the ground, decaying into a long, silent cry of terror in which pain, stupor, and helplessness intermingle. The performance’s second half evokes survival: ways to mobilise and daily resolutions are listed, the duo inviting us to invent resistance, in a striking refusal of resignation, before ending with a resounding revolutionary

closure. Passionately tender, tenacious and determined, the dazzling tango that wraps up the performance literally sweeps the audience off their feet, who, in turn, spontaneously begin a few dance steps, often in tears. Another way of taking up arms, both physically and symbolically, by dint of a galvanising and essential enthusiasm.

**10** French engineer, consultant and lecturer, energy and climate specialist.



*Ce qui m'est dû*, Festival Jeunes Pousses, 2014 © Alexis Nys – Sileks





*Ce qui m'est dû*, Paris, 2015 © Alexis Nys – Sileks

## UNIFYING IMPULSE

A “*unifying impulse*” seeks to boost the duo. The creation of *Ce qui m'est dû* started from a desperate observation, coupled with a deep loneliness on being faced with the impossibility of communicating with those close to them about these themes that were still on the margins back then. “*Family, friends, nobody could give a toss! They often let us know that it wasn't suitable material for a performance: too complex, too technical, too anxiety-inducing. Whenever we broached the subject we ended up getting told off; it was probably too close to the bone. At that time, turning it into a performance was the only way we could find to get to talk about it. Not by direct questioning, but rather by rebound,*” analyses Antoine. Far from didactic proselytism, the artists perform the testimony and count on empathy. Disconcerting with sincerity, Héloïse implicitly enumerates the

**“Far from didactic proselytism, the artists perform their testimony and count on empathy.”**

denial, the impotence, the anger, and finally the depression before the acceptance, as many prerequisites as necessary for the electroshock of passing into action.

Banking on an emotional response enables them to broaden their audience. “*I probably wouldn't have gone to see such a conference spontaneously, and I'd have missed out on a major theoretical contribution about the end of resources in the world,*” admits Mathieu, a former graphic designer who was at that time retraining to become a baker, and who saw the performance all of thirteen times!

## SHOCK WAVE

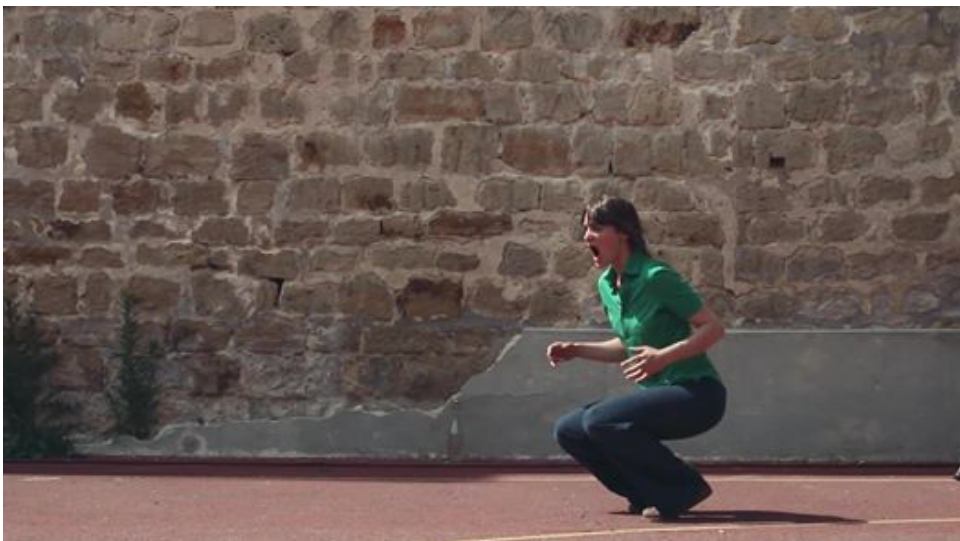
From the earliest performances, the shock wave spread. Over the six

performances at the Chalon festival, the number of spectators swelled, boosted by word-of-mouth... And commissions followed at a festival in an insurrectional atmosphere. “*Be-*

*tween the disturbances and the strikers' general assemblies, the atmosphere was very intense, and the show only amplified that. We signed*

*thirty or forty bookings at the back of the truck during that week!*” recalls Antoine. The rough patches that were part and parcel of producing the first dates for an outdoor show helped to determine the right tone. During a performance where they had no electricity supply, the definitive performing craft was to emerge: directly addressing the audience, without a microphone, using a frontal approach. “*Such situations render us very combative, which corresponds well with the piece. Street performances possess this raw aspect. Something else happens in the theatre, we are more emotional there,*” notes Héloïse.

Being fully involved with the body also contributes to the singularity of how the message is received. During rehearsals, dance and text interlink intuitively. Héloïse sought to shun purely illustrative gestures: “*For me, it was crucial that the eye of the spectator be free to establish the link. That the dance can be appreciated as such, that it does not stimulate the same area of the brain as the text.*” This was a winning strategy, recalls Mathieu: “*The fact that dance segments were included enabled me to feel a physical emotion, embodied in the flesh. We see bodies that suffer, run, gasp, sweat, exhale... In its musical choices as in its temporality, the sudden emergence of sound is very powerful. Especially for*



*Ce qui m'est dû*, The cry © RR



the dance at the end...<sup>11</sup> As often as not the public are in tears, often spectators invade the stage so as to dance.” Lou, for her part, praises the duo’s elegance in “approaching such a pressing and serious matter through the dance’s emotional beauty. Through her body, Héloïse succeeds in expressing the fact that climate change is a matter of survival.”

## EVOLVING PERFORMANCE

Each year, they further supplement their performance with current events: the successive failures of COP 22, 23, 24..., the Bataclan terrorist attacks, quotes from Naomi Klein... “It has become somewhat like our logbook, in which we write the developments every year, for history evolves,” comments Héloïse. The public’s reaction has evolved as well. Over six years, mass awareness has had an impact, and the consciousness that has become planetary has enabled us to initiate discussions differently. “Five years ago, people cried a lot in our arms, stupefied, just as if they were slapped in the face. For the past two years, discussions have focused more on how to organise; we’ve come across a lot of people who have changed profession... We’ve gone from being powerless on an individual level to a collective impulse

that is gradually reborn from the ashes; this can be seen with the social movements as well,” explains Héloïse.

The many spontaneous reactions from spectators follow this pattern. Antoine and Héloïse started exchanging correspondences with some others, as with Fred: “One aspect that moves me is the engaging fragility. We’re tiny faced with Molech, but yet hold our own in front of him; we want to achieve our greatest goal, we embody hope. Our hearts remain open – unlike that harshly gloom-laden militant stance. In terms of balance, your

**“Our goal is not to zero in on powerlessness, but rather to grasp through physicality, to arouse the urge to stand up at the end.”**

**Antoine Raimondi**

performance has a fractal quality: it’s the very alchemy of dance, a continuous suppleness, a light density, something full and suspended. As a spectator, it feels inclusive and it remains vibrant.”

From 2014 on, the performance continued living a life of its own: around fifty dates per year, in public spaces or in theatres. Following the proposal by Gérard Boucard, director of the Quai des Arts in Pornichet (Loire-Atlantique, France), the piece was adapted for the French sign language in 2019: a genuine re-creation for three performers, undertaken with the actors Olivier Calcada on stage and Emmanuelle Laborit in the wings.

What a revelation for Héloïse: “We liked the physicality of this language, it translates things directly. In particular, it is fascinating to watch how Olivier visually presents the conference. It renders it very vibrant; it becomes a new object.” The information is shared with another audience. “The world of the deaf was far from these concerns. They are often cast aside, much information from the universe of those who can hear never reaches them. As for the translation, we were astounded to discover that we had to be highly inventive; some signs did not even exist,” adds Antoine.

With their new production *Perikopto* – derived from the Greek *peri* (around) and *kopto* (to knock down) –, La Débordante compagnie keeps forging ahead with an emo-

tional militancy. This fiction for four actors analyses Macron’s political excesses, between crude capitalism and neoliberal reforms. And just as in *Ce qui m’est dû*, it is a matter of chronicling our times with as much acuity as possible, declares Antoine: “In any case, what we understand and we sense of our times. Our objective goal is not to zero in on powerlessness, but rather to grasp yet once again through physicality, to arouse the urge to stand up at the end.”

**JB**

**11** *Against the Law*, Sallie Ford & the Sound Outside.

## Julie Bordenave



A journalist who specialises in popular or alternative arts (street arts, rock, comics...), Julie Bordenave specifically examines creative processes in public spaces. Using Marseille as her starting point, Bordenave is now observing natural or cultural ecosystems, sharpening her regard on the Mediterranean cultural landscape as well as on the festival biotope; two contexts that are conducive to delivering moments of grace but that also interesting devices for seduction, camouflage, and predation. Bordenave also contributes her writing talents to specialised media, theatre companies, cultural institutions, and thematic books.

© Olivier Pisella

Klaxon 12 - RECONFIGURING ECOLOGICAL IMAGINARIES



# THE OEROL FESTIVAL: HUMANKIND IS NO LONGER AT THE CENTRE OF THE ARTISTIC IMAGINATION

Evelyne Coussens

**The Oerol Festival takes place annually on the island of Terschelling off the coast of the Netherlands. For ten days each June, this island is transformed into a natural stage that welcomes theatre, dance, installations, and concerts. In the Terschelling-Frisian dialect, “oerol” means “everywhere.” The festival borrows its name from an ancient local tradition, whereby cattle were allowed to roam freely around the island each spring for a short period. Similarly, the festival unfolds throughout the island, rendering this singular landscape the very meaning of its curatorial project. In her contribution, Evelyne Coussens, a journalist specialising in the performing arts and a regular visitor to the festival, analyses how the Oerol Festival has been engaging in reconfiguring our ecological imaginaries.**

Does the imagination precede reality, or is it the other way round? It's difficult to answer this question conclusively, but if we suppose that the former is true, then a world awaits us in which humankind's position in the twenty-first century will differ radically from that of its predecessors. Judging from the practices of artists who are pushing the cult of the unique, artistic genius aside in favour of a more horizontal practice and imagination, the role of humankind will be rather more modest. Connection, exchange and mutual respect are central to these new works – not only between people, but also between humankind and the ecosystem as a whole.



Monument for a transforming landscape, Vesta Kroese, Oerol Festival, 2009-2011 © Wilco Admiraal

The concept of “ecosystem” is for few arts festivals as tangible and real as it is for the Oerol Festival, which has been held annually on the Frisian island of Terschelling since 1982. That year, Joop Mulder, the owner of the café “de Stoep” in Midsland, invited several artists from Amsterdam for an island version of the metropolitan “Festival of Fools”, a subversive theatre and performance event that brought together the Amsterdam arts scene. The concept caught on and every year the festival drew more and more artists who soon no longer limited themselves to the streets around “de Stoep”, but scattered all over the island – oerol is a Frisian term for everywhere, all over – in order to measure themselves against the raw beauty of the sea, the woods and dunes. The Oerol Festival was born.

## A CHANGE OF MENTALITY

“Hey, don’t pick the flowers.” I feel caught out. After arriving on Terschelling, as I cycled with my luggage on my back in the direction of my holiday cottage, I’m suddenly tempted to get off my bike and compose a bouquet of wildflowers: white, purple, green and red, the colours of the island flag. On the main road from West-Terschelling to Oosterend, somewhere at the level of Midsland, the bicycle traffic is heavy: hundreds of Oerol-goers are making their way from or

to their umpteenth performance of the day. As two women cycle by without slowing down, they rebuke me firmly: don’t pick the flowers. What I intended to make mine belongs to nature. This is the Oerol Festival, where even the public helps to watch over the integrity of the island.

From the very beginning, the island has been an indissoluble part of the arts festival, but rather in a pragmatic sense. Nature itself was scarcely an interlocutor. The artists mainly saw the landscape as a wonderful setting, a playground that allowed them to break out of the theatre auditorium but otherwise remained rather passive. This was the 1980s and especially the 1990s – the “fat years” in the Low Countries. The economy was booming and artists could count on structural subsidies as the end of the century grew near. In Flanders the “Flemish Wave” was exploding, a generation of artists who each built up a highly individual artistic narrative with a structure of their own.

As expected, the “use” of the island soon came up against its limits, represented by the Staatsbosbeheer, the National Forestry Agency that manages Dutch nature reserves. As the festival grew in popularity with the audience developing in tandem, the artists were increasingly confronted with what they were authorised to do, or not, in the landscape. Artistic freedom and ecological conscience seemed to face

**“It’s no longer about creating on the island, but with it.”**

each other like rivals. It is only at the end of the century, when the capitalistic bubble began to fissure on a global scale and when the Jeremiahs of climate change finally found an audience, that people slowly grew aware that nature should not just serve as a setting, but should be a source of inspiration and an interlocutor.

## NEGOTIATING WITH NATURE

Kees Lesuis joined Oerol in 2006 and became the festival’s artistic director in 2008, at the precise moment when that awareness was beginning to take shape. Lesuis: *“The cultural cutbacks at the start of the century forced us to reflect on what our ongoing purpose was in society. Had we not been engaged in navel-gazing for far too long already? That question led to a generation of artists who wanted to be of much broader relevance. Less focused on their own selves and more on the community and the importance of shared narratives. Oerol has developed a strong bond with this generation.”*

The awareness spread that it wasn’t a question of creating on the island, but with the island. For this to happen,



Monument for a transforming landscape, Vesta Kroese, Oerol Festival, 2009-2011 © Wilco Admiraal





Monument for a transforming landscape, Vesta Kroese, Oerol Festival, 2009-2011 © Wilco Admiraal

however, the possibilities had to be mapped out. Oerol called on an independent ecologist to identify the vulnerable areas and the more accessible ones. That document became a bible for the festival. Lesuis: “In some areas, a lot is possible, but in others, things are only possible on a very small scale. There are places, like the bird-nesting area in Oosterend, where we don’t even go looking – they’re completely protected. It’s made-to-measure, because nature is dynamic, and so we must be too.”

The turn from an anthropocentric mindset to a broader ecological one occurred not only at the organisational level, however, in the practical negotiation with nature.

More important yet was the conversation with the artists, the choice of projects, and the interaction with the public. The idea of the island as a partner led Lewis and the team of programmers to primarily invite artists who subscribe to this idea and implement it in their own practice. Lesuis: “The starting point is always the question: why would you want to work here, what do you want to bring to the island, what do you expect from it? And that means that not every artist can

*just come here, no. As a festival, Oerol is closely connected with the place where it takes place; Terschelling is an island with an extremely vulnerable nature reserve where the consequences of climate change are directly noticeable. That is why the festival makes room for artists and theatre-makers who address pressing ecological issues with all the means available to the arts. Makers who delve into the paradoxes of human thought and action and who rely on the imagination as a thinking space and as a workplace for a liveable future.”*

**“The starting point is always the question: why would you want to work here, what do you want to bring to the island, what do you expect from it?”**

the vanishing of this landscape with various actions: architectural sculptures were made from the wood, the trees were turned into benches, and in 2010 Kroese organised a performative walk along the edge of the felled area, where only a few surviving trees trace the circumference of the wood. The walk is a work of memory, of sorts: all that remains of the actual forest are traces in the imagination.

In 2018, *We Have Never Been Modern* premiered at Oerol, developed by Lotte van den Berg and Daan 't Sas.<sup>12</sup> [bit.ly/30TGrk7](https://bit.ly/30TGrk7)

The artists placed a glass cube on the flats. Every day, a visitor sat in the cube and let the incoming tide wash over them. A fragile human being in a fragile glass construction, delivered up to the force of the sea – it doesn’t get more humble than that. And yet it was not the humbleness of paralysis, because for van den Berg the awareness of smallness doesn’t lead to defeatism. Driving humankind away from

**Kees Lesuis**

## NATURE IMAGINED

One of the first important projects to give shape to this new awareness was *Monument for a Transforming Landscape*, a project by artist Vesta Kroese that returned to Terschelling three years in a row (2009-11). [bit.ly/2XP8Nul](https://bit.ly/2XP8Nul) During this time, eight hectares of wood were felled in the Arjensdune. The artist documented

<sup>12</sup> After the book of the same name by Bruno Latour, published in English translation by Harvard University Press, 1993 (the original French edition dates from 1991).





*We Have Never Been Modern*, Lotte van den Berg & Daan 't Sas, Oerol Festival, 2018 © Wilco Admiraal



*We Have Never Been Modern*, Lotte van den Berg & Daan 't Sas, Oerol Festival, 2018 © RR

the centre of the *Weltanschauung* doesn't mean that we have to deprive humankind of all acting power. In fact, the ecological disaster that is advancing on us proves precisely that we do have a lot of power, including in a negative sense.

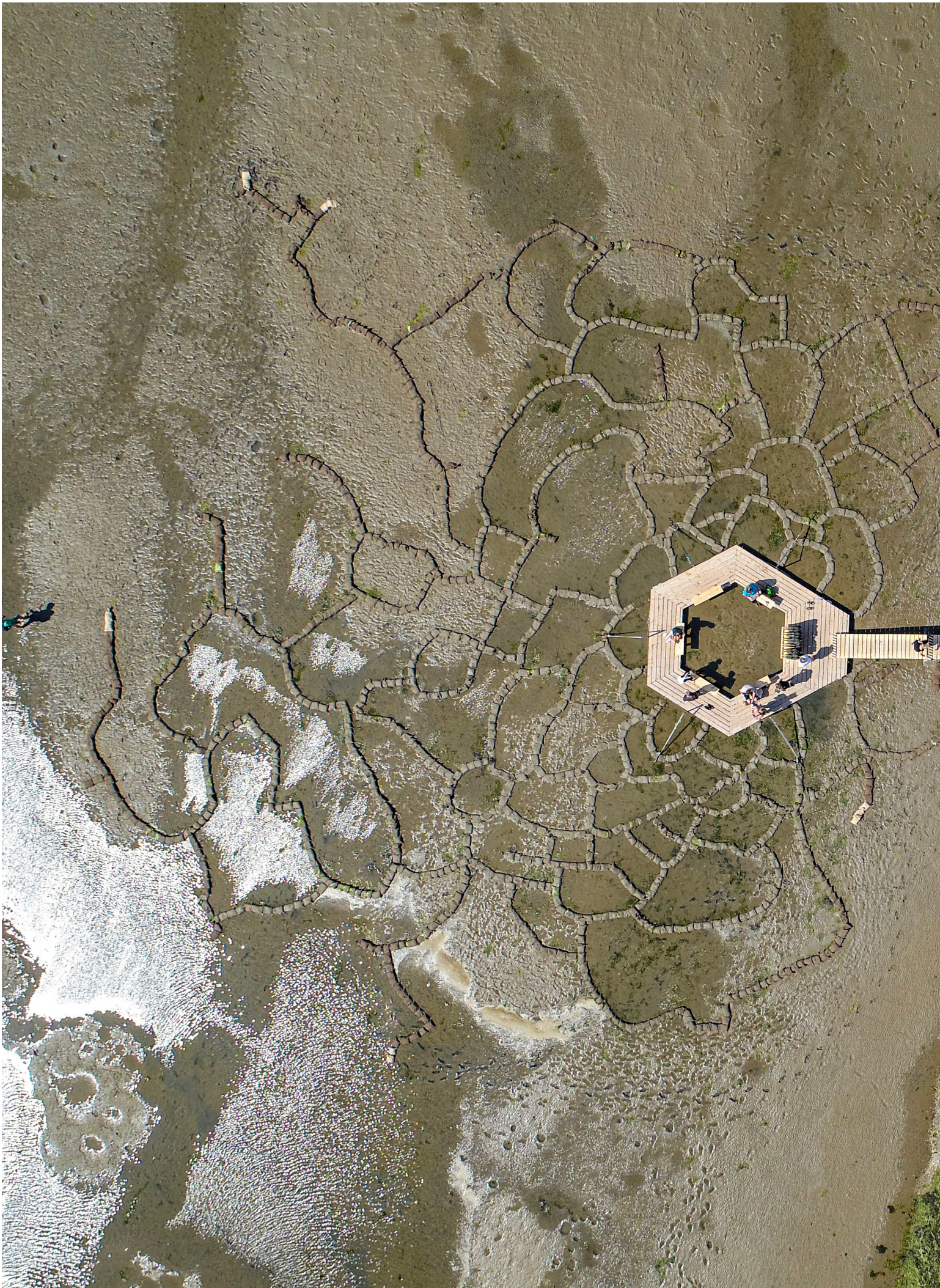
The great thing about *We Have Never Been Modern* is that the project also unintentionally confirmed the "clash" between humankind and nature, because after a few days the cube appeared to let in water and the artists therefore had to deal with the fact that the sea had forced its way into their "idea" uninvited. Instead of "restraining" the water by plugging the leak, van den Berg and Daan 't Sas decided to let the cube fill up slowly and to shorten the length of time the visitors stayed in the box. That self-evident thinking *with* the context, *with* nature instead of against it: that is what the farewell to the Anthropocene means on Oerol.





*We Have Never Been Modern*, Lotte van den Berg & Daan 't Sas, Oerol Festival, 2018 © RR













*Nieuw Antropoceens Peil*, Marc van Vliet, Oerol Festival, 2018 © Marc van Vliet

## INTERACTIVE PUBLIC

The number of projects on Oerol that actively involve the public is striking: instead of “a most individual expression of a most individual emotion”,<sup>13</sup> a fair number of artists pride themselves on the imagination of a more broadly supported “we”.

Emke Idema even created that “we” literally: her performances consist of interactive party games in which the public itself has to act and is made responsible for its choices. In 2019 Idema experimented with *FOREST*, a game in which the trees even possess an awareness and can therefore decide themselves to put a stop to the production of oxygen. This put the players in thorny situations, from

which they had to rescue themselves—sometimes at the expense of the public interest. The performance not only represented the issue of ecological responsibility in terms of content, but also made it tangible by turning passive spectators into active players.

<sup>13</sup> A famous quote from the Dutch poet Willem Kloos, 1890.

RETROSPECTIVE

# LAND ZONDER DIJK

At the border between land and water, bioconstructors have created a living environment outside the dikes: a salt marsh. These organisms have the particularity of reacting to environmental conditions and, in turn, strongly influencing them. *Land Zonder Dijk* (literally: “land without dikes”) is an experience where visitors, in the manner of bioconstructors, build their own living environment: a gigantic model of self-organisation. Researchers will observe it the following year to see what has developed. The role of bioconstructors in coastal ecosystems is the subject of research by Tjisse van der Heide. Thanks to his expertise, Studio Buiten Werking has designed an interactive game to make visible the hidden beauty of this ingenious ecosystem.

[bit.ly/34ZfHP5](https://bit.ly/34ZfHP5)





Nieuw Antropoceens Peil, Marc van Vliet, Oerol Festival, 2018 © Moon Saris



Nieuw Antropoceens Peil, Marc van Vliet, Oerol Festival, 2018 © Marc van Vliet



## LINES TO SCIENCE AND POLITICS

The representation of the ecological awareness has grown more polyphonic over the years: besides the voices of the artists, the spectators have also taken on a role – and not only them. Since the turn of the millennium, science has also become an important partner for the festival. A fair number of artistic projects pride themselves on close collaborations with scientific institutes. During the festival they often receive a spot within De Expeditie, a programme of multidisciplinary art trails that wind their way through the landscape. Research is central in De Expeditie, and that is where the dialogue with the island is at its sharpest.

The installations or on-site performances often try to formulate an answer to a “question” raised by science. In 2018, for instance, the artist Marc van Vliet visualised the *New Level of the Anthropocene* [bit.ly/3bsjZB0](http://bit.ly/3bsjZB0): a string of stakes stretching in a line across the island and which, cutting across polders, dunes and constructions, announced the expected water level of the marked sites in a hundred years’ time – in most cases, a terrifying height of four metres. Whereas the theatre and performance shows often act on an aesthetic level around ecology, De Expeditie creates space for the “harder” work with a more activist or political streak.

**“The festival itself is a fine example of an ecological system: organisers, artists, public and island are constantly working with and on each other, and this at an organisational, practical, aesthetic and political level.”**

For the festival, that remains a quest. Lesuis: “We’ve had many in-house discussions about that boundary between art and activism: how far do we want to go, is this our mission?” He mentions *Tools for Action* [bit.ly/2VqP8Pz](http://bit.ly/2VqP8Pz), a platform involving artists and activists that will “practise” at Oerol 2020 together with the public in positive protest. Although these hybrid projects do make use of the means and imagination of the arts, they unmistakably spread a political message. Louis is all for it: “Oerol needs to stand in the midst of society. It can’t be a noncommittal utopia that sends you home unchanged after ten days.”

Besides the obvious practical policies regarding recycling and sustainable energy, for which the artists are also being called to account, the challenge consists above all in entering the minds of the festival goers and making them aware of the “status” of their host. That can sometimes occur in very practical terms: while waiting for the start of a performance, I myself once saw signs that told me that rare mosses were growing beneath my feet and invited me to sit elsewhere. But the most important tool to raise awareness among a wide public are the artistic projects themselves of course.

It is especially for the public that has grown with the festival since the 1980s that the evolution towards a more committed ecological point of view is not all that natural. It is claimed, for instance,

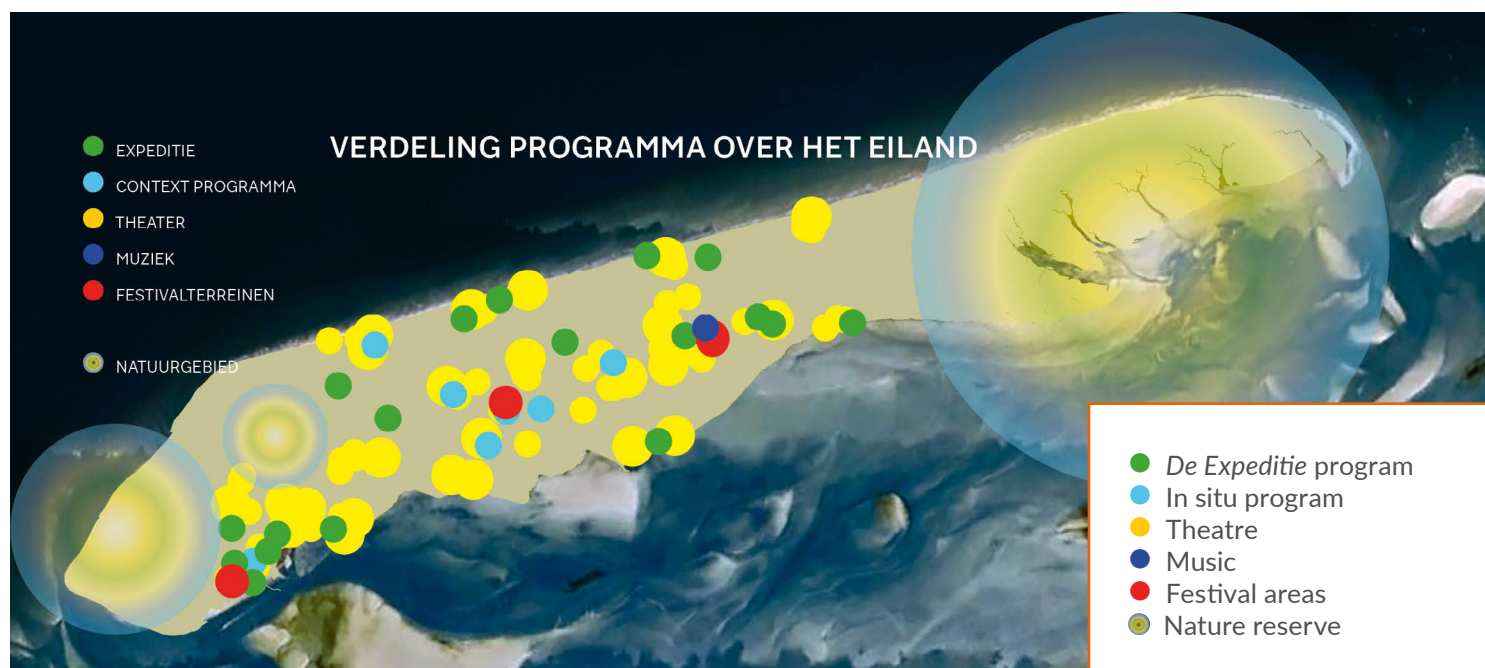
that the programme has grown too heavy, too moralistic. Lesuis retorts: “We’re still not a dogmatic festival. The programme comprises different layers and the more traditional performing arts also certainly still have a place. But we have made our choice in terms of contents. Part of the public may choose to opt out for that reason, but I’m convinced that we are also drawing a new public thanks to it.”

## MAKING THE PUBLIC RESPONSIBLE

Louis has touched a sore point: the history but also the name of the Oerol Festival as a “fun” festival, a festival that drew a very wide audience that came not only for the theatre, music and performances, but also to eat, drink and party. That party reputation jars with the growing self-awareness that Oerol must assume a role in making the public socially and ecologically aware. Not only the artists, but the spectators too have increasingly been called to account in recent years.

## CURATORIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The public that does return consists of people who are looking for a more



layered experience, in both time and space. From a curatorial perspective, “sustainability” is a key concept. With some artists (such as Idema, van den Berg, etc.), longer projects evolve over several years. The artists become familiar faces to a loyal public that grows in time with them. But in spatial terms too, there is the idea that a single place can take on several meanings. Lesuis: “This year we are developing a special festival area in the ‘pick-your-own’ garden at Oosterend where we are going to stage issues about food supplies in the future, but also theatre and classical music. The

**“Oerol needs to stand in the midst of society. It can’t be a noncommittal utopia that sends you home unchanged after ten days.”**

*performances are never isolated – they stand with one another. The festival goer who comes to Oerol makes a journey through all the layers of the festival. It is that connection of experiences that has a nourishing effect.”*

In this sense, the festival itself is a fine example of an ecological system: organisers, artists, public and island are constantly working with and on

each other, and this at an organisational, practical, aesthetic and political level. No single stakeholder predominates – humankind’s dominant trace, the godlike artist who intervenes in the landscape, has definitely been abandoned. During ten days in June, the Anthropocene is dead and buried on Terschelling. And now, on to the rest of the world.

**Kees Lesuis**

**EC**

For more information: [bit.ly/2XTvEVF](https://bit.ly/2XTvEVF)

## THE OEROL FESTIVAL

Since 2006, Metropolis has been a member of IN SITU, the European platform for artistic creation in public space:

[bit.ly/3cF7XEn](https://bit.ly/3cF7XEn)

## Evelyne Coussens



Evelyne Coussens (b. 1980) studied classics at Ghent University and theatre studies at the University of Antwerp. She works for *publiq* and writes as a freelance cultural journalist for the newspaper *De Morgen* and for various Flemish and Dutch cultural media (*rekto:verso*, *Etcetera*, *Ons Erfdeel*, *Theatermaker*, *Theaterkrant*, *De Revisor*, etc.). She is a member of the broad editorial boards of *Etcetera* and *rekto:verso*, and sits on various evaluation committees. As a visiting lecturer she teaches the theory and practice of art criticism at various Flemish university colleges and universities.

© Johan Martens



# THIERRY BOUTONNIER, ARTIST ROOTED IN THE LIVING WORLD IN CONVERSATION WITH ESTELLE ZHONG MENGUAL

**Thierry Boutonnier is an artist who has not forgotten he is living amidst the living. For more than a decade, he has been working with boxwood, earthworms, Damascus roses and human beings. These multi-specific, collective, and participatory works intertwine humans and their fellow living creatures wherever they live. Each project forges a common time and a sense of working together between humans and non-humans: a rarity in the artistic sphere, Boutonnier intermingles sensorial experience with rigorous biological knowledge: for him, a living entity is never a formal motif, symbol, or metaphor for anything other than itself; it is an otherness with its own potential that requires we know it in fine detail in order to truly enter into a relationship with it. Boutonnier's works are invitations to draw our non-human cohabitants onto the radar of our daily attention. The following is a conversation between a human being rooted in the living world and an art historian, Estelle Zhong Mengual, specialist in “art in common,” on location at Vive les Groues, in Greater Paris.<sup>14</sup>**



“Prenez racines!”, Collective work, Urban nursery, Thierry Boutonnier, Mermoz-Lyon, since 2009, MJC Laënnec-Mermoz © Thierry Boutonnier

<sup>14</sup> Vive les Groues is a brown-waste land project covering 9000m<sup>2</sup> at Nanterre, in close proximity to the high-rise towers of Paris' business hub La Défense. Launched by the Yes We Camp association, it is part of a pre-figuratory approach for the future neighbourhood of Les Groues. “Through the collaborative organisation of the brownland-site and the planting of a horticultural nursery, the challenge is to create an ecosystem with diverse and committed stakeholders, to unify around shared intentions, and to facilitate the birth of a neighbourhood identity. The spaces are open to the general public: everybody is invited to participate in the site's dynamic, by partaking in projects on site, by proposing programs, or simply by availing of the brownland-site on sunny days.”

[bit.ly/2X83HbO](https://bit.ly/2X83HbO)





Thierry Boutonnier on site at *Vive les Groues* for this interview, February 2020  
© Hannah Demerseman



Malik, "*Prenez racines!*", Collective work, Urban nursery, Thierry Boutonnier, Mermoz-Lyon, since 2009, MJC Laënnec-Mermoz © Thierry Boutonnier

**Estelle Zhong Mengual:** When did you start working with trees?

**Thierry Boutonnier:** First of all, a plane tree and an oak tree housed my earliest tree-huts. Reading *Tintin and the Mysterious Island* during a summer-storm in a rebuilt barrel in a plane tree is a key first moment. I subsequently introduced a multi-centennial box-tree in the *Sempervirens* project (2009-2011). Then there was "*Prenez racines!*" ("Take Root!") [bit.ly/2WX2H9b](http://bit.ly/2WX2H9b), an artistic experiment in the form of an urban nursery, whose realisation was to span six years, between 2009 and 2015. The project evolved within the framework of the "urban contract of social cohesion" (CUCS) that underpinned four years of reconstruction work to the East entrance of Metropolitan Lyon. The initial request was that artists-in-residence would come to support local residents during the neighbourhood's urban transformation, within the framework of the Lyon's urban policy. It was envisaged that this companionship would be temporary in nature.

**Estelle:** Yet, within this highly constrained framework, "*Prenez racines!*" still succeeded in creating something entirely different.

**Thierry:** Yes, thanks also to the MJC Laënnec Mermoz in Lyon<sup>15</sup>, who supported this approach, it is a collective work – and not an individual creation – between local residents, the trees, and myself, which forms part of the redeveloped neighbourhoods, not on an ad-hoc basis, but rather on a sustainable footing. Local residents cultivated trees in their neighbourhood that was then under reconstruction. These trees were sponsored by local residents, and later definitively transplanted to the district of Mermoz. They nurtured the spectrum of plants for the tree-planting scheme for public spaces – something that had not been envisaged at all. The trees served as a liaison; they helped us to renegotiate the works' time-frame thanks to the collectives they initiated.

**15** Translator's note: the youth and culture centres, whose title is generally abbreviated as MJC, are associative structures. Their objective is to empower young people as well as to advocate their autonomy. They have the capacity to set young people in motion and to develop new and innovative initiatives. They want to link youth and culture from a perspective of popular education.



**Estelle:** Is this the work that caught the attention of the Société du Grand Paris<sup>16</sup>, and which ultimately led you to continue working with trees in the Appel d'Air project? [bit.ly/34xy0dT](http://bit.ly/34xy0dT)

**Thierry:** Yes, in 2016, as part of the launching of new train stations in the Greater Paris metropolitan area, the Société du Grand Paris suggested that I reflect over a project that could be a continuation of this urban nursery we created with “Prenez racines!” It was about a process-based work to raise awareness about the construction sites’ time-scale. Pauline Marchetti and Jacques Ferrier, the architects responsible for these Grand Paris stations, created a charter for what they call “the sensual station.” The charter states that the forecourt of each railway station must host a remarkable tree, which, when noticed, would beckon people to enter the metro entrance. Akin to Hector Guimard’s pedestal tables<sup>17</sup>, but instead we have a living tree that grows and not bronze poured into casts to

create organic shapes. This demonstrates the shift in paradigm and representation that a living entity can have in urban planning. We no longer represent the living through bronze, the living takes its place. Within this continuity, my initial proposal was

**“There is a shift in paradigm and representation that a living entity can have in urban planning. We no longer represent the living through bronze, the living takes its place.”**

**Thierry Boutonnier**

that local residents cultivate these trees in their own homes once reconstruction work got underway, and to recreate a similar fostering system to the one used in “Prenez racines!”. It was at this point that I started working with the landscaper Sylvain Gaufillier and the association COAL<sup>18</sup>.

**Estelle:** Were those trees, which were destined to be subsequently planted in the stations’ paved entrance area, first cultivated by neighbourhood residents in their living rooms, before their very eyes, rather than in a nursery as is habitually the case?

**Thierry:** That was our initial idea (Sylvain kept an eye on how the trees were developing). It might have been in their living room, or at the foot of their building, or in their shared gardens. What interested me was not to restrict the concept of an urban nursery to require a large area. That’s why I envisaged the project as being somewhat mobile all while being rooted directly in the ground as close as possible to the stations that were under construction.

**Estelle:** What led you to transform the project’s design afterward?

**16** Organisation responsible for constructing a 200km metro network and sixty-eight stations within the Greater Paris metropolis.

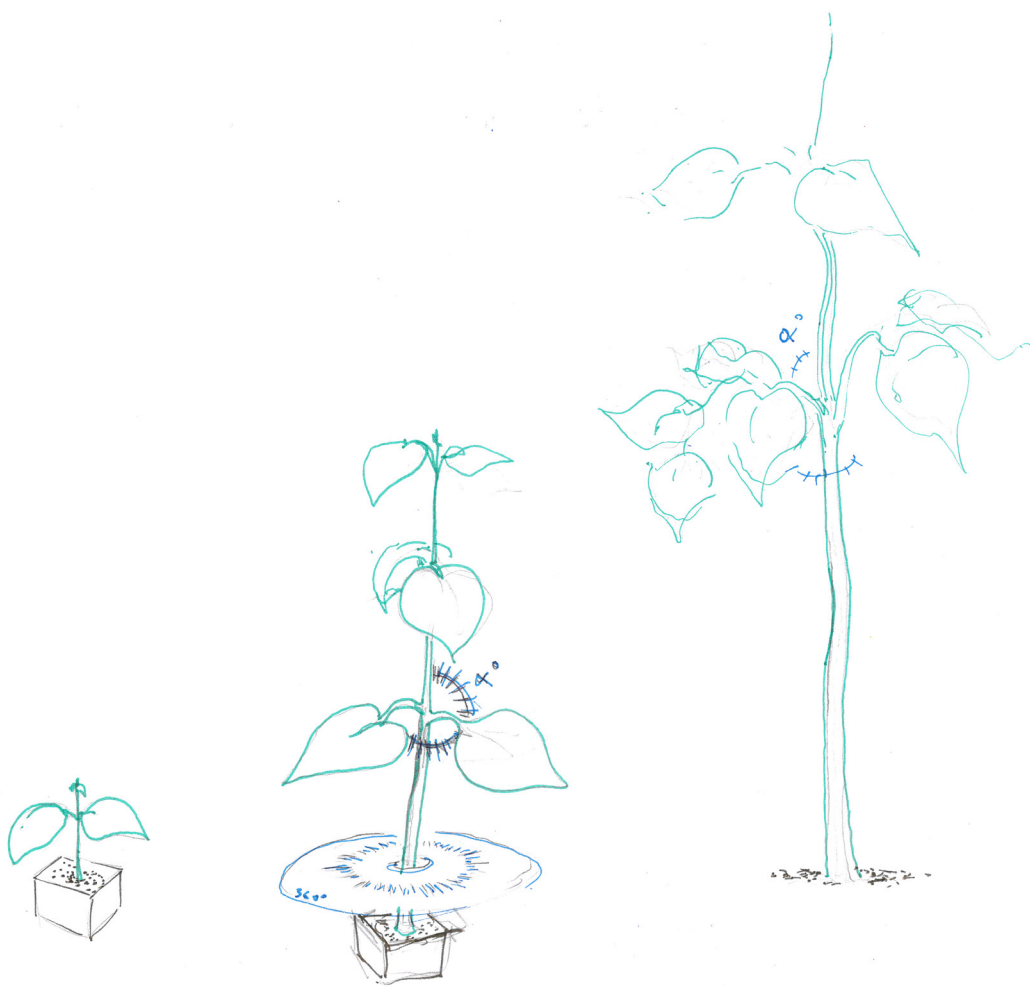
**17** A series of highly-publicised ornate kiosks and canopies designed by the architect and one of Art Nouveau’s pioneer Hector Guimard for the Paris Métro entrances circa 1900.

**18** An association created in France in 2008 by a group of professionals drawn from contemporary art, ecology, and research whose objective is to champion the emergence of a culture of ecology.

[bit.ly/3eJf6Ft](http://bit.ly/3eJf6Ft)



Transplanting trees, Appel d'Air, Collective work, Urban nursery, Thierry Boutonnier, Grand Paris, since 2016, in duo with Pauline Marchetti & Jacques Ferrier, in cooperation with Coal & Sylvain Gaufillier & YWC © Sylvain Gouraud – SGP



Sketch of *Paulownia Tomentosa*, Appel d'Air, Thierry Boutonnier © Thierry Boutonnier

**Thierry:** For one, this social network of a tree was posing problems in terms of coordination: between the train stations, the *associations* of shared gardens in tandem with local residents, but primarily the problem was in selecting residents. Who was to choose the residents to accommodate *Paulownia Tomentosa*, the Fox-glove Tree, the tree species chosen for the stations' forecourt?

What should we do for all those who had nowhere to live, for those not considered as residents, those who are excluded? What's more, there were problems related to the tree's biology. As a tree, the *Paulownia Tomentosa* is a rapid grower (this is partly why it was chosen). I had underestimated the plant's capacity for growth. I was taken aback at its annual rapid growth of between 1.5 and 2 meters; when it's growing under the residents' care, it's terribly invasive (*laughs*)!

**Estelle:** Does that explain why you found yourself in Nanterre so as to solve that problem, in *Vive les Groues*, where we're meeting today?

**Thierry:** Yes, on account of the plant's innate force and the need to have cultivation phasing in open ground, we decided to propose another growing pattern in 2017 whereby we temporarily

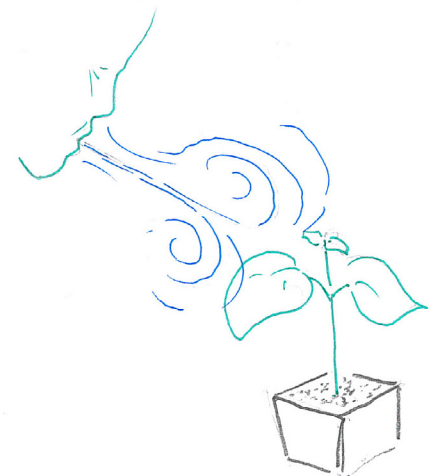
**“Appel d'Air has mastered the tree in an utterly different fashion; it is as though the project has undermined from the inside the place, function, and substantial role given to it in this urban development plan.”**

*Estelle Zhong Mengual*

planted the trees in a pre-determined site within the Greater Parisian region. The sixty-eight trees for the sixty-eight stations were to be planted in an urban nursery; people could visit this site, and this site has become *Vive les Groues*. This innovative nursery planting setting was possible thanks to the collective in charge of *Vive Les Groues*, namely Yes We Camp [bit.ly/2K2loB6](http://bit.ly/2K2loB6) who accommodated the trees: in parallel, they had submitted the idea of an urban nursery project as part of a tender for a project for a temporary occupation at La Défense in Paris. That is what made us re-locate the *Appel d'Air* project to this site.

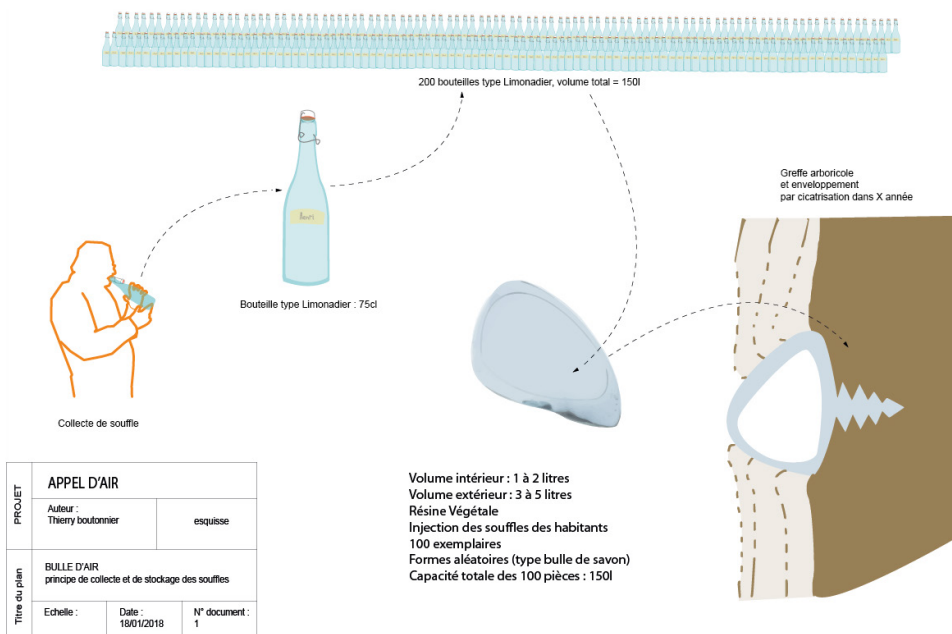
**Estelle:** In the *Appel d'Air* project, you are again working at an intersection where you have to confront multiple constraints: those imposed by *Paulownia Tomentosa*, the tree itself and its specific traits, and those imposed by the remit issued by the Société du Grand Paris...

**Thierry:** Yes, their specifications' constraints, as in the case of *Paulownia Tomentosa*, are major: the tree must have a particular shape, a



Breath, Appel d'Air, Sketch, Thierry Boutonnier © Thierry Boutonnier





Appel d'Air, Thierry Boutonnier, principe of collecting and storing breaths © Thierry Boutonnier

particular height and girth, a particular tree pit for tree-planting and so forth.

**Estelle:** You were talking about a possible paradigm shift of living things in urban planning, where living things are no longer merely represented, but rather presented. And yet, what strikes me is that in the development plan the *Paulownia Tomentosa* nevertheless remains considered as a decorative element: an element considered for its set formal properties, so that it can replace a more traditional signatory system, in similar fashion to how the design of a public bench is considered in terms of the uses it is supposed to fulfill. Now, for me, *Appel d'Air* has mustered the tree in an utterly different fashion; it is as though the project has undermined from the inside the place, function, and substantial role given to the *Paulownia Tomentosa* in this urban development plan, as well as its way of looking at it.

**Thierry:** *Appel d'Air* is a new pivotal point in my work, which happens specifically in relation to what is found under the ground, to everything we don't see, and which underlies the sustainability of trees' coexistence in densely anthropised environments. With Sylvain, we had to plant the trees, for instance, at Les Groues in open ground that came from Champigny-sur-Marne, earth that originated in one of the stations in Greater Paris, for the soil at Les Groues was too contaminated. We come to understand how that part of a tree that is underground and invisible, and yet vital for its survival and its long-term anchoring, that this underground part is of the utmost importance. If we want to benefit from this relationship with

trees, we've then got to ask ourselves this question, for they cannot survive without us asking it and without us asking it of ourselves.

**Estelle:** To pose questions about the soil is to consider the tree not as an aesthetic form, but rather as a form of life, and thus to ask the question: what does a tree require?

**Thierry:** A tree, and notably its invisible dimension, its root system underground, is interlinked with a support system, with solidarity, biomass, with physical as well as biological issues. Whenever the engineer Adolphe Alphand considered planting hybrid plane trees during Baron Haussman's renovations of the Parisian boulevards, he completely integrated the idea of planting them in open ground, of using planting frames, with fertigation.<sup>19</sup> At that juncture, it was clear that all such efforts were taken to ensure that the tree live as long as possible. Nowadays, savings in construction and other so-called cost-killers primarily focus on cost factors concerning the form of what we want to have at the point of delivery, and thereafter whatever may happen will happen. The interplay involving stakeholders and the tree's root system over-determines what will be visible *afterward*. This invisible part forms the living element; not thinking about it entails limiting a tree's lifespan, its ability to adapt; it makes it very isolated.

**Estelle:** Working with trees as part of an urban development project also implies working on our representations of what a tree is, and seeking to integrate a tree's standpoint.

**Thierry:** Yes, in the urban arboreal ecosystem, trees have been cultivated: they are farmed trees. That means they are already the result of cultural representations; they have been selected and are the fruit of domestic work. For me, the idea of an urban nursery presented the opportunity to render public all these modern tree-growing farming methods and to demonstrate how over time our representations intermingle the reality of living entities. To test these representations through direct practice. In this respect, *Yes We Camp* and *Appel d'Air* converge: they both constitute a ground for experimenting with and being attentive to living entities. It's not a question of turning a tree into a guinea pig; it's not a question of running experiments in which the living being before our eyes is already deemed inanimate, but rather to work on a joint project with living beings with whom we cohabit. It is a work in which mutual dependency with these beings exists.

**Estelle:** You have a unique way of approaching trees: the *Paulownia Tomentosa* emerges in your works under the guise of a cohabitant. This is a highly specific form of a living entity, very unusual, in that if one didn't know the living being well, one might have the impression that a tree does not inhabit its ground, that it's just there.

**Thierry:** A tree continues to be called a "subject" in arboriculture; it is not an object, but rather a subject with a quality, an essence, and as a subject, it both inhabits and is inhabited. We are becoming increasingly aware that it plays a part in a support network, especially in its root system, which means that a tree is not isolated. An isolated tree is in itself fragile. The botanist Francis Hallé describes how a tree is a subject inhabited by duplicative phenomena; it has a biological function that hugely differs from that of humans and animals. A tree is a collective being, each vertex, each germinal bud has the generative power of that self-same tree and enables its duplication. So, whenever we have a tree trunk with its canopy and its branch-system, we say "*here we have a tree.*" If we do not manipulate the shape of a tree, it will develop suckers and the tree can break out, branches can grow in all directions; it has a plasticity that renders it adaptable to its environment. It lives differently according to random factors in its environment.

<sup>19</sup> Irrigation with nutrients at the base of the tree that requires grating, drains, and sometimes small tubes coming from the sewerage system.





Distillation, *Eau de rose*, Collective work, Rose garden and vintage rose water from the locality, Thierry Boutonnier, Lyon, since 2014  
© Blandine Soulage Rocca

**Estelle:** A tree is constantly inventing ways to build its life.

**Thierry:** I would prefer to say that the tree builds its *lives*, and strives to give itself the full potential of having as many lives as possible, but all the while integrating chaos and randomness into its development. What interests me is that the living being seeks an equilibrium between time and space, it seeks the balance between randomness and redundancy, between tension and compression. This is one way of presenting the living, as advanced by the outstanding biologist Olivier Hamant who has been seeking out what underpins organic forms. A tree can help us think, to represent ourselves in a trajectory and a continuum of living, where we accept error, failure, the

possibility of dying and accidents as being intrinsic to growth and to a life. In the aftermath of Joseph Beuys, I have been searching for ways to build upon this innate force of plants.

**Estelle:** You are currently pursuing this quest through another project, in parallel to *Appel d'Air*: could you tell us more about *Recherche Forêt*?

**Thierry:** As part of the current redevelopment project in the Groues and Hanriot neighbourhood, footpaths and building-entrances will undergo renovation, trees are to be felled, and brownfield-sites reinvested. With *Recherche Forêt*, and this is what we are planning to do this afternoon, the idea is to collect plants that

were planted some fifty years ago, with mysterious intentions as far as we understand, that were domesticated, and which now have become feralised<sup>20</sup>. Not alone do they possess a visual quality, but also and primarily a biological and vibrant quality, that of interdependence, for they have become acclimatised to their surroundings. At their crowns they have acquired knowledge of their environment, knowledge that is meant to be

<sup>20</sup> Feralisation is a pedogenetic process (involving physical, chemical and biological processes, which, in interacting with each other, result in the formation, the transformation, or the differentiation of soils). It is characterised by a very high deterioration of minerals and a high concentration of iron and aluminium. Over time, this process forms laterite, a red rock rich in iron.



Thierry Boutonnier and Estelle Zhong Mengual on site at *Vive les Groues* for this interview, February 2020 © Hannah Demerseman



archived, to be collected, and ultimately transplanted in order to afford themselves a viable future.

**Estelle:** You speak of a tree as a carrier of knowledge, of knowing its environment. In a way, that's also what it means to inhabit a space; it's really knowing about where one lives. These trees in Nanterre have grown by taking into account the nature of this site and its potential. A tree's knowledge not only involves knowing the information encoded in its seed, it also has to do with its biographical trajectory during its life as an individual; its life-story. That means that a tree is not just anyone, it's not interchangeable.

**Thierry:** A tree's scope of knowledge is underestimated and terribly complex. In this interplay of space and time, quantum coherences are involved in photosynthesis or in producing scents; taking stock of these coherences requires one having recourse to everything that is chrono-environment as in archaeology. Whenever we work alongside archaeologists, we discover how a tree carries and conveys knowledge and is linked with its environment; this enables us to envisage another viable future for that field. We are surrounded by trees and they constitute an archive of a world, an archive that is complicated to reconstruct.

**Estelle:** What will happen to these plants from Nanterre once they've been stockpiled?

**Thierry:** In urban areas, we witness an unfurling of a continuum of living entities that is hybrid in nature: it was once highly domesticated and is getting wild. With *Recherche Forêt*, in tandem with the Boomforest association, Yes We Camp, and Les Petites Voisines, we are conserving these

**“A tree continues to be called a 'subject' in arboriculture; it is not an object, but rather a subject with a quality, an essence, and as a subject, it both inhabits and is inhabited. We are becoming increasingly aware that it plays a part in a support network, especially in its root system, which means that a tree is not isolated. A tree is a collective being.”**

**Thierry Boutonnier**

sites' memories in a certain way in order to give them a future in one of the Parisian urban forests that has been cultivated by Boomforest. These plants extracted from the brownland sites (laurels, rose trees, cherry trees, oaks, quince, fig trees, and so on), these plants will be replanted by using the Miyawaki technique; it enables us to cultivate extremely dense forests (three plants per square meter), non-porous to human extractions: humans cultivate the edges, but strictly speaking they cannot enter the forest. The primary purpose of these islets of urban forest is to remove carbon from the atmosphere.

**Estelle:** How do you position yourself in relation to this use of trees for carbon offsetting?

**Thierry:** My objective, if there be one, is certainly not to compensate for our

madness and stupidity, but to think about how we've inflicted on trees that they amass everything that we ourselves cannot absorb, on those very beings who have asked for nothing but who yet help us to survive, with whom we share our everyday and who, in a hospitable way, offer us colours and scents. To reconnect, to think in a living continuum where intentionality varies and which questions us about our responsibility nowadays. For me, it's not a matter of compensating for the carbon, but rather in “thinking with” the trees.

**Estelle:** I've the impression that in all your projects, your object it is not so much the living entity itself, but rather the relationship or relationships that can be activated or invented between human and non-human inhabitants.

**Thierry:** Let's say that the tree-planting for *Appel d'Air* in non-professional nurseries was a way of reaching out to residents and users, and of developing an interdependent link between these trees and their neighbours from day to day. The more this link between trees and human and non-human inhabitants exists, the more they can cohabit on a sustainable basis. I'm also interested in earthworms, birds, and mushrooms that can be part of these trees; the idea is to be able to experience these beings on a sensorial level. It is one thing to experience your greenhouse plant next to the computer; it's quite another to experience a tree in an urban nursery—to experience a physical relationship with a tree that overwhelms us, and because it overwhelms us, it elevates us. What we are proposing is that our fellow creatures participate in direct actions, depending on the season. Through such experiences as transplantation, dressing the tree, adapted watering, we consciously renew

**“My objective is to reconnect, to think in a living continuum where intentionality varies and which questions us about our responsibility nowadays.”**

**Thierry Boutonnier**



*Production Objectives*, action details, Thierry Boutonnier, Les Bessous, 2005, MJC Laënnec-Mermoz © Alexis Vallée-Charrest



those links of mutual dependence that are part of reality, in particular breathing. We breathe in oxygen while a tree generates oxygen, and thus it is our best ally. Yet, our daily priority actions are usually more focused on short-term interests; ultimately we care very little about these trees that surround us and that help us to breathe. In our existence everything is present; everything is potentially in-the-making so that we continue to be here. We strive, however, in our representations to take into consideration that something is missing and we try to fill this deficiency with various and varied irrepressible needs.

**“Developing through art a presence and an experience of all that lives that will enable us to re-complexify the idea of living.”**

**Estelle:** What exactly can art do in this shift in the regimen of attentiveness and significance with regard to living entities?

**Thierry:** The idea that art might help “reconfigure the imaginaries of the living” makes no sense to me. For me, it’s not about reconfiguring, or prefiguring; we’ve got to drop all those schema. Rather, it is about developing through art a presence and an experience of all that lives that will enable us to re-complexify the idea of living. The challenge is not to be in the picture, but rather to live life with this attentiveness and to make ourselves available. It has to do with hospitality, the unexpected, randomness, and redundancy. It is a question of seeking out this balance between time and space so that

we can co-evolve and have as much possible space in which to adjust in order that this co-evolution takes place in a vibrant manner, and certainly not with a fixed approach, where production objectives and short-term profitability are favoured. To live is to take into consideration what is already here in our midst, to live means to live with – not for something, not against something.

**Estelle:** To what extent have trees changed your work as an artist over recent years?

**Thierry:** In my academic training at the Beaux-Arts in Lyon, there was this antagonism between nature and culture that I had not yet understood and overcome. I was still in this post-situationist critique of time-commodity and exploitation. My parents are dairy farmers, my brother took over the farm, and I myself worked as a farm-labourer in order to finance my studies. I had not yet fully grasped the potential of having grown up surrounded by corn. The fact that I had grown up in a farm setting afforded me a slightly more systemic vision, and thus a vision of the living continuum where multiple time-frames and futures co-existed within a single presence. In 2009, I somehow fulfilled my affiliation with Joseph Beuys and

his 7000 Oak Trees project<sup>21</sup> when I said to myself: “why not try to re-work this question of participative tree-planting, to assume it as a trajectory where there is an artistic gesture to transmit, an artistic arboreal gesture that means something.” “Prenez racines!”, this performative utterance that sounds like an injunction, landed me for five to six years in an urban nursery, working in conjunction with local residents. A collective comprising local residents was born from which a shared orchard emerged. I could see just how structuring this organic potential was in terms

of consolidating a collective dynamic. I experienced it and I saw it with young people, such as Adil who was barely seven, eight years old at the time we started to work. He is now seventeen: this question of transmission revolving around vegetation, to grow together, this changes a lot. We take the time to understand an otherness that does not speak, an otherness that is highly complex and differs from us. It ushers us into spheres we had not previously envisaged. We take the time to do things together with trees, in a continuum of life, with those who have been as well as those who are not yet there, and to render this environment hospitable, with them, together.

**Interview conducted by Estelle Zhong Mengual in February 2020, transcribed by Hannah Demerseman**

21 [bit.ly/34EUJoE](https://bit.ly/34EUJoE)

## Estelle Zhong Mengual



Estelle Zhong Mengual (born in 1989 in Paris) is an art historian. A former student of the École Normale Supérieure de Lyon, she holds a doctorate in art history from Sciences Po Paris. She co-edited *Reclaiming Art – Reshaping Democracy* (Les Presses du Réel, 2017) and is co-author of *Esthétique de la rencontre* (Seuil, 2018). In parallel with her research on art in common (*L’art en commun – Réinventer les formes du collectif en contexte démocratique*, with a preface by Bruno Latour, Les Presses du Réel, 2019), she is interested in how we can broaden our forms of collective to embrace all living entities in the context of the ongoing ecological crisis. She is particularly focused on the constitution of an environmental history of art.



# MARIA LUCIA CRUZ CORREIA: CULTIVATING UTOPIAN ECOLOGIES IN THE COURT

Nina Vurdelja

***Maria Lucia Cruz Correia, an artist and activist based in Belgium, positions the climatic and environmental emergency at the core of her work. All across her installations, performances, actions, floating sculptures, this unique voice makes the question of the imaginaries of ecology ring out all the more loudly. Ever since S.O.S Mobile Field Hospital (2010), her works have been exploring the relationships between humans and non-humans, questioning the concepts of nature, organism, ecosystem, and environmental crime. The artistic devices she imagines (laboratory, clinic, school, institute, trials, and so on) mobilise us not as spectators, but rather as living human beings fully immersed in the ongoing ecological crisis, thus shaping fresh possibilities with regard to the forms that our relationships could take with non-humans, with “nature”, with life. Here, Nina Vurdelja draws the portrait of this committed artist, and more specifically analyses her latest project: Voice of Nature: The Trial & K institute.***

We're collectively and unarguably witnessing a global ecologic crisis and heated-up environmental debate being a political urgency of the last decade. Among the growing number of resonant perspectives, a distinguished voice belongs to a Portuguese-Belgian artist and activist Maria Lucia Cruz Correia. Her practice has been disruptive and caring, uncompromising and utopian at the same time, while nurturing a genuine collectivism, solidarity and compassion in facing challenges of the contemporary climate struggle.

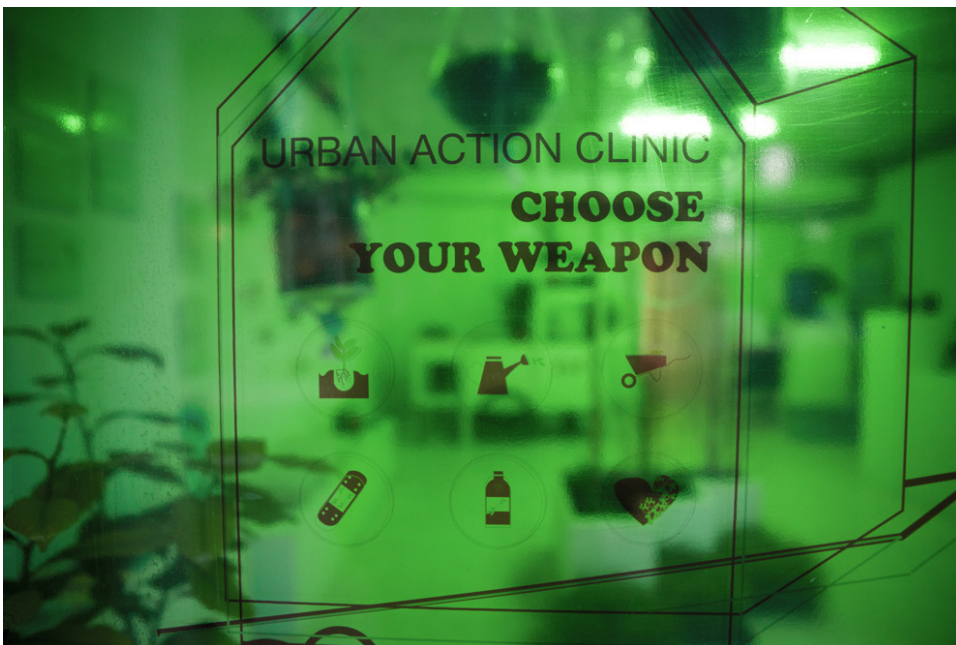


Urban Action Clinic, Maria Lucia Cruz Correia, 2015 © Joey Van Kerckhoven  
Klaxon 12 - RECONFIGURING ECOLOGICAL IMAGINARIES





Urban Action Clinic, Maria Lucia Cruz Correia, 2015 © Joey Van Kerckhoven



Urban Action Clinic, Maria Lucia Cruz Correia, 2015 © Joey Van Kerckhoven

The artistic manifesto of Maria Lucia Cruz Correia has over time obtained a unique precision and sharpness in penetrating a membrane of the Western society and embracing a more universal attitude of global interdependence and coexistence. In 2017, she received the Roel Verliers prize for *Voice of Nature: The Trial*, and has been recently short-listed for the prestigious Coal prize.

The first steps in her artistic formation were charged with a curious engagement and a critical examination of ecology and economy of collective and individual body, with the special interest in artistic and activist potential of a wounded social organism, as seen in *From Nature to Nature* (2012) [bit.ly/2LIIODI](http://bit.ly/2LIIODI) and revisited in her later work. What follows (2013-2016) is a series of projects as a resident artist at Cultural center Vooruit in Ghent, where

she has been building temporary spaces for recruitment of environmental commons as more sustainable and ecologically aware communal living. With *Urban Action Clinic* [bit.ly/2LuLePP](http://bit.ly/2LuLePP) and *Common Dreams* [bit.ly/2YZwnFI](http://bit.ly/2YZwnFI) [bit.ly/3dBD7go](http://bit.ly/3dBD7go) in particular, she constructs an intimate relationship of trust in one-to-one performance talks or simple activities with visitors, allowing collective and individual climate grief, anxiety, and hope to be transformed into DIY action plans and toolkits for micro resistance. Furthermore, in project *One place and 1440 seconds* [bit.ly/3buyt2y](http://bit.ly/3buyt2y), human-nonhuman encounter in forms of a contemplative exchange and silent protest, is displaced in a remote, harmed natural site where singular and collective body, sensual and rational agency, listening and activism become equal through resilience.

Although her artistic work has been supported with an extensive theoretical and ideological underpinning, Maria Lucia Cruz Correia has avoided suggesting any ready-made solutions or commodified knowledge on the environmental issues. Instead, she has been practicing what the performance scholar Christel Stalpaert names “a diplomacy of dissensus”<sup>22</sup>. Stalpaert defines the term combining Ranciere's writings on dissensus and art in public space with Latour's view on political ecology as a diplomatic practice rejecting the idea of an ideal order of nature that the world should preserve<sup>23</sup>. Applied to Maria Lucia Cruz Correia's work, it suggests the absence of any explicit pedagogy or a single, strictly defined outcome of environmental art and activism, but instead, makes space for numerous inequalities to be addressed and different interests to be met within the seemingly univocal common sense on ecological issues.

**“Maria Lucia Cruz Correia has been practicing 'a diplomacy of dissensus': she addresses numerous inequalities and meets different interests with a seemingly uni-vocal common sense on ecological issues.”**

In that respect, ecological thinking of Maria Lucia Cruz Correia largely addresses the problematics of ontological divide between nature and culture, from the perspective of the fundamental human and other-than-human interconnectivity and unseparatedness, or kinship of the complex ecological community. Accordingly, her work claims speculative post-anthropocentrism embracing the notions of multiplicity (Deleuze and Guattari) and aesthetics of ambiguity deeply embedded in the concept of nature.

<sup>22</sup> Christel Stalpaert, “Maria Lucia Cruz Correia's Urban Action Clinic Garden (2015): A Political Ecology with Diplomats of Dissensus and Composite Bodies Engaged in Intra-Action”, *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Politics*, edited by Peter Eckersall and Helena Grehan, Routledge, 2019, pp. 108-125.

<sup>23</sup> Christel Stalpaert, “The performer as philosopher and diplomat of dissensus: thinking and drinking tea with Benjamin Verdonck in Bara/Ke (2000)”, *Performance Philosophy*, vol. 1, 2015, pp.226-238.



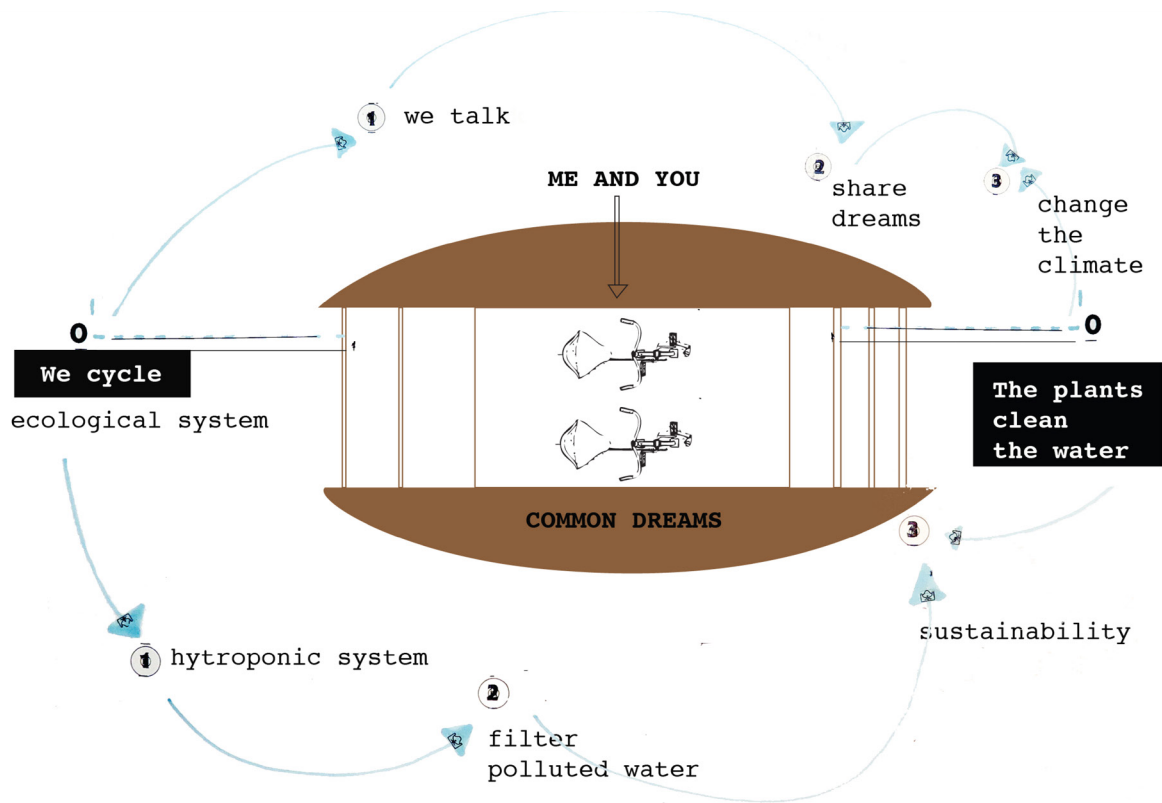






*From Nature to Nature performance, Maria Lucia Cruz Correia, 2012 © Nina Vurdelja*





Common Dreams: Floating Garden, Maria Lucia Cruz Correia, 2016 © Maria Lucia Cruz Correia

## COMMON DREAMS: FLOATING GARDEN

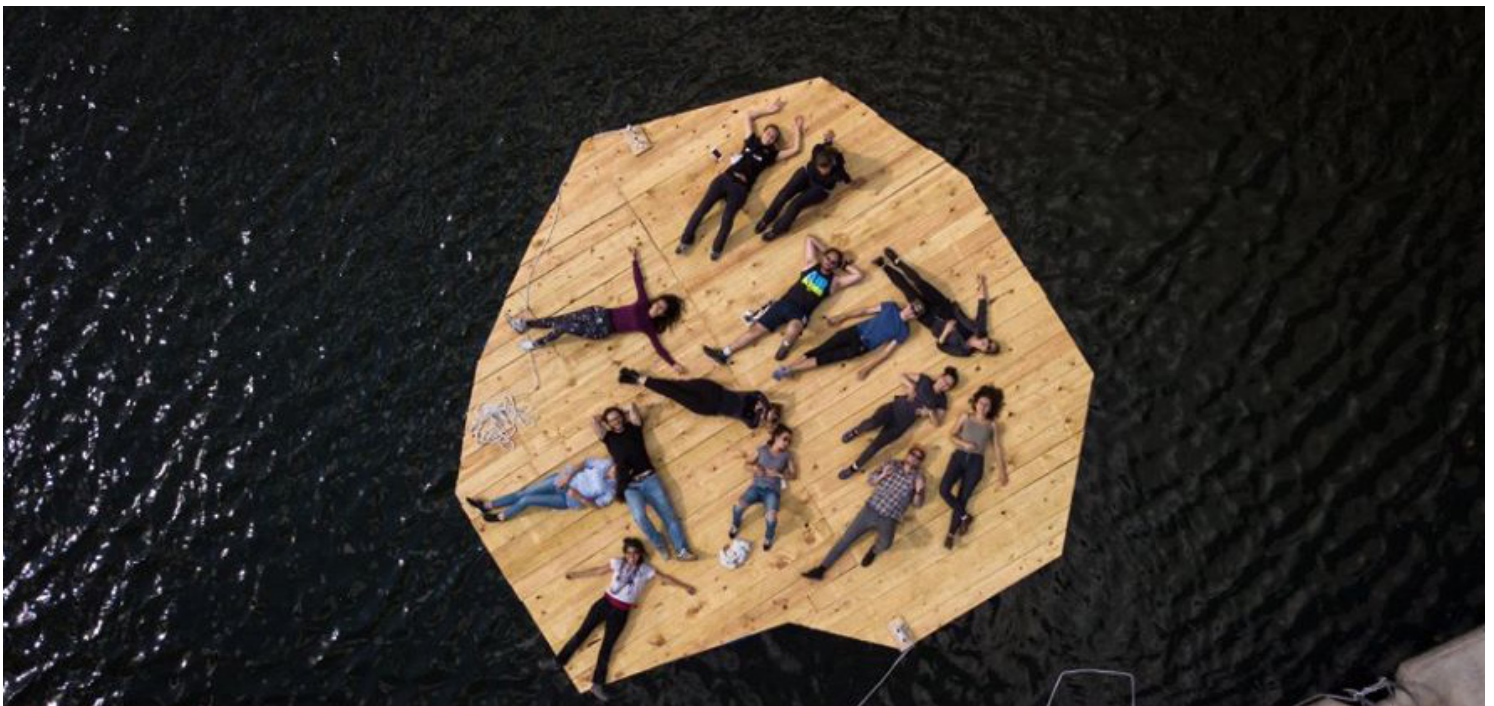
“Common Dreams is a floating sculpture, a place to reflect about climate change, to unveil questions about 'Home'. A survival experience, while pedaling together we dream about a future living scenario. The journey takes place on a pedal boat filled with water-filtering plants.”

[bit.ly/2YXqk3R](http://bit.ly/2YXqk3R)

## COMMON DREAMS: FLOTATION SCHOOL

“Common Dreams: Flotation School is an ongoing autonomous climate school, providing workshops on survival, sustainability, climate adaptation, climate grief and loss of landscapes.”

[bit.ly/2YZGSIL](http://bit.ly/2YZGSIL)



Common Dreams: Flotation School, Maria Lucia Cruz Correia, 2018 © Meds Urban Haven  
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*Voice of Nature: The Trial performance*, Maria Lucia Cruz Correia, 2019 © far Nyon

## VOICE OF NATURE: THE TRIAL

For several years Maria Lucia Cruz Correia has commenced an ongoing, long-term research on diffused post-anthropocentric narratives and possibilities for articulation of non-human voices in the environmental justice arena. Suspending her artistic and activist agency in service of urging poliphony of the endangered planet, she has gone through a durational

process of intimate de-colonisation of the self, entering a deep conversation between inner and outer nature, with living and nonliving others, reclaiming a hermetic, opaque and traditional wisdom and asking permission to defend nature in the court. It is through these “cosmic conferences”, as she calls them, that she became “*the Guardian of Nature*”. This concept of a deep personal transformation is at the core of the project *Voice of Nature: The Trial* [bit.ly/2Z0deml](https://bit.ly/2Z0deml), proposing a response for the challenge society faces in

attempts to represent legally non-humans. Employing the myriad of activist tools, and bringing together most diverse aspects of environmental grounding, including myth, magic, art, ritual, and expert knowledge through close collaborations with lawyers Hendrik Schoukens (BE), Juan Auz (EC) and restorative justice expert Brunilda Pali, Cruz Correia has been developing a model for the throughout transformation of the legal system. *Voice of Nature: The Trial* premiered in 2019 as part of the *Same, Same but Different*



*Voice of Nature: The Trial performance*, Maria Lucia Cruz Correia, 2019 © Mark Pozlep





*Voice of Nature: The Trial performance*, Maria Lucia Cruz Correia, 2019 © Mark Pozlep

festival, in the Appeals Court House in Ghent. The project has been produced as an international, interdisciplinary collaboration among the number of Belgian and international cultural venues and performing arts spaces: Vooruit (B), Kaaitheater (B), Bunker (SL), Workspacebrussels (B), Het TheaterFestival, t-theater & Circuit X (Roel Verniers Prijs 2017) and Imagine 2020.

The core team of authors gathered Maria Lucia Cruz Correia (concept and direction), Ingrid Vranken (dramaturgy), Caroline Daish (performance), Joao Bento (sound design), Vinny Jones (light design), and Mark Pozlep (video). Participatory, inclusive ground of the piece has been established already during the series of open rehearsals and artist-in-residency presentations, in order to assure transparency and dialogue throughout the process of environmental (un)learning and *making sense*.

*Voice of Nature: The Trial* performance is a mobile, hybrid architecture and therefore implemented on location. The scenography reinvents the traditional

setting of a courtroom into a mixed organism, a regenerative space constantly transforming over two hours of duration. Designed to symbolise the 4 elements: Fire, Air, Earth, Water, the theatrical space is reconstructed by presence of “*silenced objects*” (moss, stones, wood, dead animals) and matter (soil, water, oil), appropriated from nature into the courtroom. The extensive field research and devised approach have resulted in a hybrid performance

**“Suspending her artistic and activist activities in service of the endangered planet’s urgent poliphony, Maria Lucia Cruz Correia has gone through a lengthy process of intimate de-colonisation of the self.”**

format, combining elements of theatre, screening, ritual, plenum, and a trial. The staged text obtains qualities of cut-up and collage methods which reflect collective dramaturgy, calling at the same time for the abandonment of human-centred rational logic and representational rigidity. Documentary material collected in Ecuador and the US, alongside a wide range of contemporary law suits, maps the thematic ground of environmental crime, further elaborated through eclectic array of

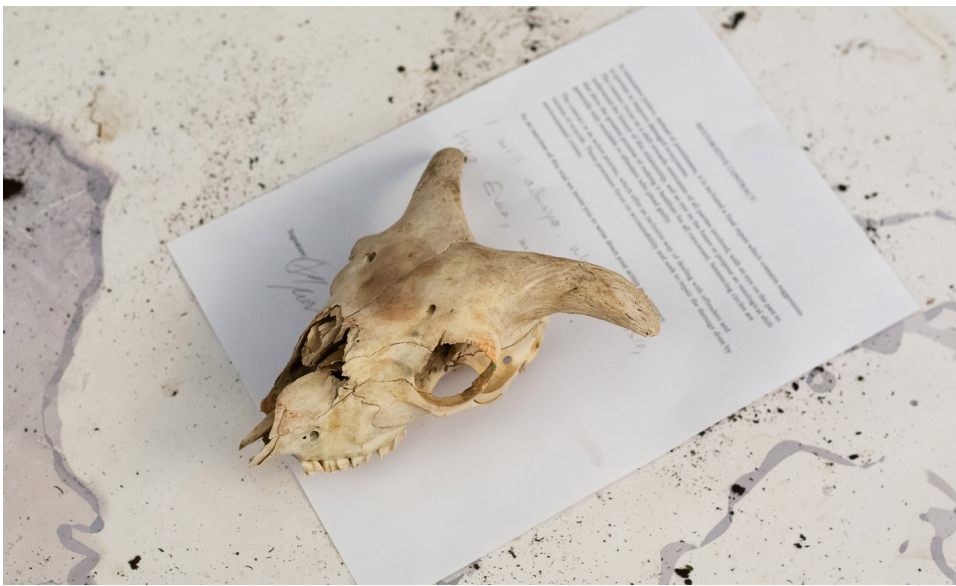
rituals, animism dialogues, and poetic gestures of reconciliation between human and non-human nature. The piece interweaves together methodologies from the juridical system into theatrical context by presenting evidence, agency, silent victims, accomplices, accused ones and the ones in power. They tackle environmental trauma as an outcome of colonialism, extractivism, consumerism and separation with nature<sup>24</sup>.

The audience consists of most diverse social groups, all seated amongst other humans and non-humans in a circular form – an egalitarian assembly. Throughout the piece, participants are invited

to move in space, interact, and to share personal experience of climate crime, responsibility and trauma; they are encouraged to engage with historical figures of perpetrators and victims, transforming them into agents of possible regenerative, restorative legal processes. This change happens on multiple levels of reflection and

<sup>24</sup> *Voice of Nature: The Trial*, project brochure.





Voice of Nature: The Trial performance, Maria Lucia Cruz Correia, 2019 © Nada Zgank



Voice of Nature: The Trial performance, Maria Lucia Cruz Correia, 2019 © Nada Zgank

sharing, as follows: listing own petrol-related habits, a sensuous encounter with polluted soil, symbolic visualisation of the global ecocide, witnessing stories of environmental crime, silent conversations with non-human others, personal pro-climate commitments, and eventually, drawing up a collective restorative justice contact. This step-by-step process of personal and collective transformation is seen as a first stage towards a durational reorganisation of legal institutions and cultivation of non-anthropocentric paradigm in courts. It reveals that the mission of institutionalisation of ecocide necessarily entails an intense embodiment of the regenerative practices and healing processes, with the ultimate goal of *making kin with nature*, (Haraway) as an empathic, aware and equal companionship of humans and other-than-humans. On these foundations

*Voice of Nature: Kinstitute* [bit.ly/2ACL0oh](https://bit.ly/2ACL0oh), Cruz Correia's latest and most complex project so far, has been set.

## TRIAL AS PERFORMANCE FORM

The origins of trial as a performance form can be traced back to ancient Greek drama, with the *Oresteia* by Aeschylus from 458 BC introducing the concept of the courtroom into theatre. However, with the contemporary documentary theatre of the last two decades, trial constellations on and off the stage have been drastically reinvented.

The Swiss director Milo Rau, the founder of *International Institute of*

*Political Murder*<sup>25</sup>, has significantly expanded the form and the transformative potential of documentary trial performance. With several trial-based pieces ranging from *Hate Radio* (2011)<sup>26</sup>, *Moscow Trials* (2015)<sup>27</sup> or *Congo Tribunal* (2017)<sup>28</sup>, he explores the controversies of public imagination of crime and verdict, seeking for possible interventions in individual and collective experience of responsibility, blame, guilt, fear, punishment, etc. His pioneering oeuvre has been addressing the wrongs of recent political history, stripping the absurdity, corruption and anti-humanism of the contemporary legal systems.

The appropriation of legislative structures into theatre can also be found at the core of *New World Summit*<sup>29</sup>, an artistic and political organisation initiated by the Dutch theatre maker Jonas Staal. The project develops legislative frameworks with and for stateless states, autonomist groups, and blacklisted political organisations. The series of performances and interventions explores and hacks the notions of political (under) representation, creating utopian parliaments, governments and embassies in spaces occupied by non-egalitarian, one-dimensional and heavily exclusive infrastructures. Setting in action these political ephemerality serves a purpose of debating alternative geopolitical historiographies and rights of all kinds of unrecognised and systematically silenced *others*.

Along the similar logic, theatrical adaptation of a trial has been present in a number of projects by the German performance collective Rimini Protokoll. This can be seen as a part of their long-lasting commitment to adapt most diverse public spaces into pavilions for reimagination and reconstitution of the collective urban living. The critical mapping of a relational space of a courtroom is found already in *Zeugen, Ein Strafkammerspiel* (2004)<sup>30</sup> (specifically, working around the voyageur poetics of witnessing) and re-appears

<sup>25</sup> [bit.ly/3fHA4Fn](https://bit.ly/3fHA4Fn)

<sup>26</sup> [bit.ly/3cukmvs](https://bit.ly/3cukmvs)

<sup>27</sup> [bit.ly/2zxXYCQ](https://bit.ly/2zxXYCQ)

<sup>28</sup> [bit.ly/3dJrh3Q](https://bit.ly/3dJrh3Q)

<sup>29</sup> [bit.ly/2BleK8S](https://bit.ly/2BleK8S)

<sup>30</sup> [bit.ly/3fK85VO](https://bit.ly/3fK85VO)



in several later projects, including recent *Utopolis* 2019.<sup>31</sup> Featuring interactivity and an innovative use of technology, collective flaneur body visits prominent locations in the city, posing questions: “How do we administer justice and how do we enact a law? How do we organise knowledge and how do we prepare coming generations for the future? What do we believe in? How do we want to live together?”

## KINSTITUTE AS AN UTOPIAN SERVICE FOR CITIZENS

*Voice of Nature: KInstitute* sets a quest towards a radical reinterpretation of the legal apparatus in relation to climate justice and environmental crime, in a fluid form of the utopian public service for communities. The ultimate intention of *KInstitute* – a regeneration of multi-functional and multi-fictional landscapes – is made possible through a systematic change in how both humans and other-than-humans are represented within the ecological narratives. This implies, among the other tasks, engaging in multispecies political debate, while allocating political power where it has been lost

and providing legal and legislative means of channeling and amplifying unheard voices.

Furthermore, a service of utopian ecologies would necessarily entail testing and implementing new, innovative ways of togetherness, responsibility and compassion amongst and within species. It considers delicate gestures to embed unknown, unfamiliar and other in horizontal networks of solidarity in times of uncertainty. The role of an artist is to navigate discontinuities of the societal order and *dead ends* of the actual climate discourse; to unlock the

**“An artist's role is to unlock impossible forms of environmental learning.”**

*impossible forms* of environmental learning (feeling, sensing, letting go); to enable necessary transfers of knowledge, in order to empower individuals and communities for facing and acting upon the urgency of the burning climate agenda. At the same time, it is of the equal importance to ensure a shared sense of climate awareness and responsibility, especially in urban environments, where the feeling of displacement and natural estrangement is perhaps the strongest.

With *Voice of Nature: KInstitute*, and *The Trial* in particular, Maria Lucia Cruz Correia provides artistic guidance, mediation and call for action,

in the context of ecology as organisation of communal living.<sup>32</sup> Her most recent work aims to regenerate lost environmental connections and revisit the body and senses as common, the most accessible and equal ground for learning, creating and resisting in times of crisis. With an accent on participation, inclusion, distributed ability and agency, Cruz Correia employs sensuous knowledge to enable the relationship of mutual healing, assistance and growth. In *Voice of Nature: The Trial*, these human-non human consolidations are set in motion to provoke a profound take on representation, “speaking on behalf” of and guardianship, as parameters of new environmental justice in making.

Gradually, through expert collaborations, these platforms of utopian companionship obtain a possibility to become drafts for institutional reforms and durational, organised models of resistance, as well as plans for utilisation and organisation of public space in order to meet the wide spectrum of needs of its human and non-human dwellers.

31 [bit.ly/2YNimZt](https://bit.ly/2YNimZt)

32 [bit.ly/2YMkDnF](https://bit.ly/2YMkDnF)

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*We Are Sea Protecting Itself*, Maria Lucia Cruz Correia, 2016 © Miguel Proença

## WE ARE SEA PROTECTING ITSELF

“Saturday, June 11, 2016 in Odeceixe Beach. The action is a performance protest against fracking exploration in the region of Algarve. During the action-performance participants were writing letters to request the cancellation of contracts between government and ENI / GALP Consortium which has been entitled to use the ocean as a private Space National Maritime and conduct oil prospection at 46.5 kilometers from the beaches of Arrifana, Monte Clerigo, Amoreira, Odeceixe, Carrapateira and Amado.”

[bit.ly/3dHmf84](http://bit.ly/3dHmf84)

[bit.ly/2WrNQUV](http://bit.ly/2WrNQUV)



*B.O.T. Boxes of Transiency*, Maria Lucia Cruz Correia, 2009 © Buda

## B.O.T. BOXES OF TRANSCIENCY #2

“Taking responsibilities and action in the light of degradation of our planet is primarily and inherently an ethical quest. From individual creation to a social consciousness.”

[bit.ly/2WV5cJ5](http://bit.ly/2WV5cJ5)



# VOICE OF NATURE: KINSTITUTE

"*Kinstitute* questions the ontological kinship between nature and governments, institutions and corporations and whether there is a siblingship between institute as a political body and kinship as a social web untangling these organisational bodies.

The *Kinstitute* is an utopian public service which is acting as kin to other-than-humans communities. The collective is formed by artists, water, restorative justice experts, earth, activists, fire, environmental lawyers and air. We use tactics to counteract environmental crimes, ecocide and climate change, by striving a collective language between humans and other-than-humans, focused on inter-being, intersectionality and restoration.

Organisms can spread – or be transmitted – by several routes through direct transfer of performances, workshops, lectures, restorative contracts – or other germs from one another.

We are a restorative mobile unit – nomads – moving from place to place and operating on the bases of occupying existent habitats – forests, courtrooms, industry offices, farms, law offices, corporation offices, mountains, temporary tents, boats, vans."

[bit.ly/2WNwUHA](https://bit.ly/2WNwUHA)

## Nina Vurdelja



Nina Vurdelja is a doctoral researcher at Centre for Practice as Research in Theatre T7 at Tampere Universities. She graduated from Erasmus Mundus Masters in International Performance Research at the University of Helsinki and the University of Arts Belgrade (2014) and MA Cultural Studies at the University of Belgrade (2016). Her special interest resides in post-anthropocentric intermediality and ecophenomenology in performance. As a cultural worker and reviewer, Nina is dedicated to collective critical practices and speculative performance ecologies, as well as inclusive and non-hierarchical models of art mediation and audience development.



# DIVERTED GULLIES

Marielle Macé

**On 6 September 2019, a few dozen people gathered at Parc Duden in Brussels, for an outing proposed as part of the 4Days4Ideas event. We were to walk to a few critical points within the city where water cannot be tamed – channelled, buried, drained away – and at the same time to come together with some of the Belgian capital's defenders of water. The day, inspired and guided by Marielle Macé, culminated with a conference-poem where the writer and researcher invited us to follow her line of thought that she traces “from the gully to us”<sup>33</sup> the title given to the day. Several months later, she agreed to once again take to the waterways and revisit the words from that outing. Drawing its source from this rediscovered idea of “noue,” Macé here reminds us just to what extent language, too, is a field badly in need of defence, a space where we can reshape our imaginaries, reinvent forms of companionship with our fellow non-humans entities, and transform our way of living the present.**

I had to travel via Cairo Egypt to get from the Loire valley in France to Brussels; it took the help of others to set adrift and return to the present that word that inspired me while writing *Nos Cabanes* (Our Huts)<sup>34</sup> to reflect on ways to live in this devastated world, in particular ways to reconnect with water against a backdrop that was also marked by environmental and social degradation and struggle.

<sup>33</sup> Translator's note: the original title: “*Des noues aux nous*”. The author is here playing with the French homophones *nous* (us/we) and *noues*, the plural of *noue* that has multiple meanings: valley-gutter, but also in metrological terms denotes a dip, a hollow, a gully. The author's intention is multi-layered, for *noues* also rhymes with the verb *nouer* meaning to tie together, or interlink.

<sup>34</sup> *Nos Cabanes*, book by Marielle Macé published in 2019



The water defenders in Brussels at the Wiels marsh, during 4Days4Ideas, Brussels, 2019  
© Youssef Meftah





Walk on Forest's slopes, during 4Days4Ideas, Brussels, 2019 © Youssef Meftah



The water defenders in Brussels at the Wiels marsh, during 4Days4Ideas, Brussels, 2019 © Youssef Meftah

The word in question is *noue*<sup>35</sup>. This word has always been familiar to me. In the region from where I hail from it is a highly common place name<sup>36</sup>; it refers to a particular state of water and to ways of dealing with water, particularly rainwater, which is so abundant around there. I come from the so-called old *bocage* in the region of Nantes<sup>37</sup>, at the extremity of the Loire, with its low tides, its moorlands struggling for survival. And *noue*, that word that carried me along lines of every sort, rivers, courses, ebbs and flows, links, cables, lifelines and lines of death. The *noues* and all that ensues, the *noues* and every other word it evokes, those that we at once hear: the desire to say *nous* (we), the desire to inter-connect. I took that word as an invitation to listen to natural elements deemed mute and, as one of those who can speak, to exercise our responsibility with respect to those elements.

**“The noues can teach us how to deal with water, to work together with it, with its innate intelligence, and even with its overflows.”**

A *noue* is a gently sloping grass-ditch, landscaped or natural (the ancient dead arm of a river would be a good illustration); a *noue* collects rainwater, it helps to control runoff and evaporation, to replenish groundwater underground, and thus to conserve land without having to deploy tubes or pipes. *Noue* is also a term employed by carpenters; the crossing between two planks that channel water and ensure that the roof is tightly sealed; a kind of “Z” (the Z of ZADs<sup>38</sup>, of sensitive zones, of the Zomia highlands).

<sup>35</sup> Translator's note: in French both the singular the plural of the noun *noue* are pronounced exactly as the first person plural pronoun for we/us *nous*.

<sup>36</sup> Translator's note: a place name derived from a topographical feature.

<sup>37</sup> Translator's note: A *bocage* refers to the French agricultural system of dividing pastureland into small hedged fields.

<sup>38</sup> Translator's note: ZAD — *Zone à défendre*, a French neologism used to refer to an occupation that is intended to physically blockade a development project. In France, such Zones are often meant to defend the local fauna and flora against destructive projects that would devastate those natural environments.





The water defenders in Brussels at the Wiels marsh, during 4Days4Ideas, Brussels, 2019 © Youssef Meftah

Hence, the *noues* can teach us how to deal with water, to work together with it, with its innate intelligence, and even with its overflows. These are lines where human thoughts and those of water meet, places where we enable water take the initiative, without excessive planning. If properly maintained, these small ditches protect villages from flooding, villages that have been continuously exposed to flooding ever since land-consolidation campaigns were implemented during the industrialisation of agriculture. As a child,

this industrialisation led me to believe that our landscapes had always been so bleak, spits of pale earth lined up under greenhouses and tarpaulins, as a result of which my family of market gardeners deprived themselves of the beauty of the surrounding countryside. Besides, we can link the intensity of the current ecological ravages with the destruction of a specific group within the working classes, namely the *paysans*, or peasant farmers; farm-owners, farmers, market gardeners, those who no longer even

wanted to call themselves peasants (peasants – this sacrificed word but which is being re-politicised today).

In this self-same region, right in the middle of the *Zone à défendre* of Notre-Dame-des-Landes<sup>39</sup>, a locality bears this name, and continues doing so despite the destruction and evictions that occurred during the spring of 2018: *La Noue*; and several others at a short distance (yet it remains the same word): *La grande Nohe*, *La petite Noue*, *La Noë verte*, and even *La Noue non plus*<sup>40</sup>. The fields of Notre-Dame-des-Landes, the Tarn and Tescou watersheds where the Sivens dam was planned, these zones are equally wetlands as they are large-scale “valley gutters” – ecological resources, but also veritable lakes of impatience, areas in which ideas about life

<sup>39</sup> Translator's note: Here, the author refers to the well-known Zone to Defend in the Loire-Atlantique department, close to Nantes, where over decades local residents have resisted the construction of a new airport in the rural commune of Notre-Dame-des-Landes. They were joined by a group of squatters. A large-scale counter-mobilisation started in the 2010s. Even after the French government abandoned the project, hundreds of people are still living on the site that has been transformed into an experimental social zone.

<sup>40</sup> Translator's note: The site was thus renamed by those living in the ZAD Zone; it plays on the homophone *nous non plus* (neither do we).



The start of the walk in Parc Durden's Jardin Essentiel, during 4Days4Ideas, Brussels, 2019 © Youssef Meftah





MARAI'S WIELS

NOUS SOMMES EN BELGIQUE,  
NOUS SOMMES À BRUXELLES  
C'EST N'EST PAS UN PLAN D'EAU.  
IL N'Y A PAS DE HÉRONS, IL N'Y A  
PAS DE DEMOISELLES, IL N'Y A PAS  
DE STERNES  
C'EST UNE INONDATION.  
IL Y A DES POISSONS DANS L'INONDATION <sup>41</sup>

The Wiels marsh, during 4Days4Ideas, Brussels, 2019 © Pierre Mercier – Ersatz

are formulated, about links, about another life yet to be imagined and championed, on the ground, the gestures and forms of daily life that need to be defended. Because over the course of the twentieth century two-thirds of the surface area of wetlands throughout France has disappeared, and the fragility of these ecosystems is directly linked to the social violence felt in so many localities across this land. It is in this punctuation of the ZAD by that word *noues*, a word that makes us instantly hear other words; it is in this irrigation of a combat zone by this name that sounds like a rallying-call, a collective yearning intimately experienced that the well-spring for my entire writing project of *Nos Cabanes* is found.

Hence, in my desecrated region, place names with “*noues*” are commonplace. Nevertheless, this way of doing things is almost entirely forgotten, in this tainted countryside where roads are just as much paved with asphalt as they are in towns and cities, as waterproofed, incapable of porosity, and where the risk

of flooding has multiplied accordingly. We no longer know how to deal with water; we have eliminated the sunken paths, the flood-banks and flood-meadows, places for a kind of concrete dialogue with water.

**“Some city residents rejected the idea that rainwater be considered as waste, to be at once discarded into the sewerage system. They were seeking alternative solutions, more collective and more inventive.”**

It’s a bygone practice. And yet a re-emerging practice. Because the science behind the use of gullies—given such a science exists even if there’s no cartographic code to identify them—has nowadays been transported to distant urban areas. It can be witnessed in the use of alternative hydraulics, whenever we try to manage water without deploying buried pipes and pipelines, whenever we try to undo the waterproofing of the surface, to provide possibilities for infiltration in order to refresh the atmosphere, to recreate urban rivers, porosities, and amidst all this to reconnect with water’s intelligence.

It was during my participation at a “Water Night” at the French Institute in Cairo that I was to become aware of an exemplary case of this collective re-opening of a conversation with water. A researcher in literature, Elvina Le Poul, who is researching for a PhD thesis on a literary anthropology of water, led me to discover an article by Dominique Nalpas in the second issue of the beautiful review *Aman Iwan*<sup>42</sup>, devoted to waters (with the dreamy title: *L'eau fait la pirogue* (Water makes the dugout canoe)

in a series of illuminating texts on the relationship that inhabitants of diverse localities such as Goa, Lake Nokoué in Benin, Valparaiso Bay, the Parisian basin, Brussels enjoy with water...) It was thus in Cairo, and thanks to Elvina Le Poul, that I became aware of several *noues* in

<sup>41</sup> Translator's note: “We are in Belgium. We are in Brussels. This is not a body of water. There are no herons, there are no damselflies, there are no terns. This is a flood. There are fish in this flood.”

<sup>42</sup> Dominique Nalpas, “Eau politique et agir poétique. Bruxelles, Belgique”, *Aman Iwan*, n°2, 2018.



Brussels (as well as in Lille and in Douai) and that I was somehow able to reconnect this ghostly name from my childhood landscapes with the present.

I will quickly tell this story that I place under a title (that I came across during another research project on not so distant a topic — birds) that I borrowed from the remarkable poet Dominique Meens, author of a poetry collection titled *La Noue Dérivée*<sup>43</sup>, even if it's not really about wetlands.

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The text published in *Aman Iwan* was by Dominique Nalpas, “founding member of the États généraux de l'eau in Brussels<sup>44</sup> and coordinator of the Brusseau project.” I was later to learn that he initially worked in the field of mental health, followed by a stint in humanitarian action and hosting refugees, and finally in the cultural domain. Nalpas’ text retraced the ups and down of the struggle involved in re-appropriating water throughout the city and humbly made audible a collective voice and intelligence.

It all started, according to Dominique Nalpas, at Place Flagey in Brussels. Some twenty years ago the Brussels Region had undertaken to construct a gigantic “storm basin,” a large flood control reservoir under this square, one of the city’s largest, in order to collect rainwater and to reduce the risk of flooding. In fact, flooding was a regular occurrence during the heavy summer rains, the low-lying terrains of the Brussels valley were submerged by “flash rivers” that penetrate underground cellars, ground floors, and the city’s tunnels. Eight years of

construction work had been scheduled to stem the anger of these waters driven from the city’s surface, and whose backflow created a rapid succession of difficulties. Some city residents, however, were against this solution; they distinctly refused to be pitted against each other (those living close to Place Flagey against those further down the valley). They rejected the idea that rainwater be considered as waste, to be at once discarded into the sewerage system. They were seeking alternative solutions, more collective and more inventive.

Local residents sought to deploy collaborative and dispersed intelligence techniques against this formidable storm basin — this large centralised cistern, this sort of trash that can be filled with clear water. Such techniques can manifest instantaneous solidarity or a desire for solidarity of a whole “watershed” and its understanding of water as a resource, in other words as a “common good.” The residents met up with urban planners; they sought to re-think the whole territory in its totality; they thought the whole thing through in conjunction with those living in the valley; they proposed to slow the waterflow by using architectural approaches, availing of plants to promote water evaporation, using the potential of soil infiltration by working to release “new urban rivers.” Throughout these processes, they reconnected with skills and a vocabulary, notably that of the “noues,” resolutely that of the *noues*.

So, I rediscovered this beautiful word *noues*; as in that ZAD of Notre-Dames-Landes, differently, but obviously in an inclusive sense. I rediscovered it not only in the actions of those living there but also in the texts that championed their cause (made available by États

généraux de l'eau in Brussels as well as by Brusseau on their website<sup>45</sup>). For it was not merely a grand series of gestures, but also of phrases that revealed themselves in this struggle around Place Flagey. Here, everything was withstood, even initiated, by the desire to name things differently, to state accurately what is already present (and thus to treat it fairly), and moreover to make something new happen, to imagine what lies ahead, to support and enhance it. To say, for example, that the marsh that emerged at the edge of the Wiels brewery site is indeed a marsh, an ecological system that ought to feature on maps of water bodies — and not merely a “planning accident,” as it is apparently referred to following the underground water table being pierced in order to construct new housing in this area. A marsh, one of those self-same marshes that gave their name to the entire city<sup>46</sup>: *Bruss*, *Bruoc* is the marshland, and Brussels the city of waters (the city must obviously reconnect to its waters, make space for them, and rebut a long history of keeping waters under control). To say that the Wiels Marsh is indeed a marsh (even though it does not feature on maps and its designation is currently the topic of a real mini-war on Google Earth). Or again: to

<sup>43</sup> Translator’s note: literally translated *The Diverted Gully*, 1989.

<sup>44</sup> Translator’s note: this refers specifically, in the collective imagination, to the Estates General held in France on the eve of the French Revolution.

<sup>45</sup> États généraux de l'eau à Bruxelles, research-action project: [bit.ly/2xYyrlP](https://bit.ly/2xYyrlP)

<sup>46</sup> Brussels derives its toponym from the Old Dutch name *Bruoc-sella*. *Bruoc* means marshlands, and *Sella/sel/zelle* denotes a home or a house, hence a home in/on the marshlands.



The water defenders in Brussels at the Wiels marsh, during 4Days4Ideas, Brussels, 2019 © Youssef Meftah  
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pit “storm basins” against “rain gardens,” to oppose “public order” with a “joint request.” To discover “new urban rivers” alongside “new human rivers”: lines of struggle, lives knotted together by water, interlinked through “catchment basin solidarity.” As a writer, part-philosopher and part-poet, I have learned much from these approaches, approaches that heal speech as well.

They are indeed sumptuous phrases that these actions trace in the landscape, sumptuous and truly active. Even if not quite heeded (for the struggle was pretty much lost at Place Flagey), these phrases and thoughts create trajectories, trajectories to follow; they trace paths, desires, thoughts that infiltrate, that flow and can percolate elsewhere.

Dominique Nalpas, through whom these actions came to life, stated that the storm basin crisis is a basin of rage<sup>47</sup>: “storm basin”, after all what a name for a basin that arouses rages we thought it would contain! He stated that the Place Flagey storm basin crisis was to signal “the entry of water into Brussels politics.” The entry of water into politics: something akin to the dream of hydraulic democracy, which culminated in these États généraux de l'eau, and which actually presupposes exchanges, words, imaginative efforts, technical multitudes rather than a single great engineering feat.

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Moreover, I heard a rallying cry to poetry’s responsibility in the significance that these gestures apportion to speech and to the words we need, and the possibility of tying my individual writing efforts to this collective endeavour. Hence, I pulled this thread, unwound the ball. Reading *Aman Iwan* led me to Feda Wardak, at that time artist-in-residence at the Ateliers Médicis in Clichy-Montfermeil. She features among the actors on the *Aman Iwan* research platform that undertook two years’ work at that intersection of

**“They are sumptuous phrases that these actions trace in the landscape, sumptuous and truly active.”**

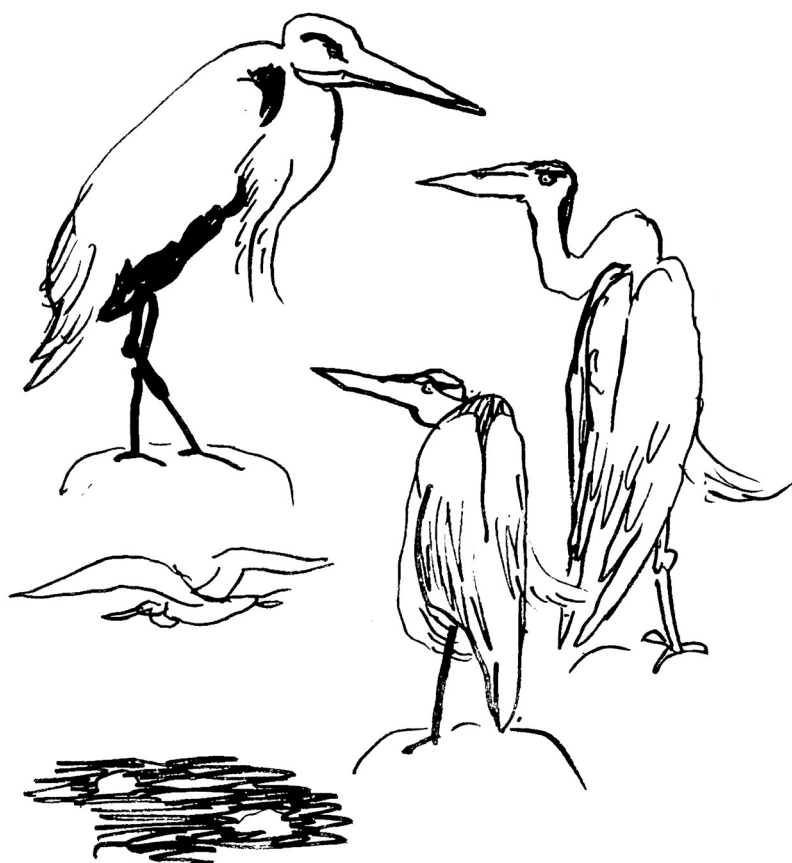
citizen action and artistic research, on water management models in certain communities worldwide (a fortunate coincidence, for the Ateliers Médicis had invited me: they were interested in what I was proposing at the Maison de la Poésie in Paris), and it was Wardak who ultimately led me to the États généraux de l'eau. Given I was invited at about the same time to conduct research at La Bellone, a theatre and dramaturgical research centre in Brussels, I proposed to link my intervention with these actions. Camille Louis, the philosopher and dramaturge, and

Emmanuelle Nizou organised work sessions with Dominique Nalpas (who had read *Nos Cabanes*, and who is deeply interested in poetry, together with Pierre Bernard, architect and actor from Brusseau. We envisioned at the core of the 4days4ideas<sup>48</sup> Festival in September 2019 – initiated by Mylène Lauzon at La Bellone – a day devoted to these re-appropriations of urban water, from the city to theatre, from research to poetry.

Our day began with a walk in the company of several actors from Brusseau (Dominique, Pierre, Fabienne, Geneviève, from the “Communauté Hydrologique de Forest Nord”). It was conceived as a line punctuated by stations, snippets of speech, or pearls on a necklace.

From the “Essential Garden” in Forest as far as the Wiels marsh, it was a question of learning about these actions carried out around water and about renewed attention to water in cities. This was a way of expressing what surges forth from our imaginaries and notably from our political imaginaries through these actions. It was a way of discussing the solidarity that sprouts around these actions – this “catchment basin solidarity” that testifies to just what extent water can effectively interlink people, even city residents. At once dependent and interdependent, people can also be inventive, capable of taking action and making propositions that flow and overflow elsewhere.

Hence, a trajectory and several stopping points, for it takes more than one single point to create a line, that is to say a stream of actions, thoughts, or words. And so it is a series of singular struggles, yet all associated with and interconnected by water we have experienced; by going down, following the water descent, as though tracing a kind of river ourselves. By behaving as water does, for water has only one consuming passion: to pass, to flow, to rush, to penetrate, to constantly go further, always further downstream. Our outing (Brusseau is well used to such) was enthusiastic and joy-full. We carried signs and shouted slogans: “Every hermetic surface is a wellspring (of problems)”; “The



The Wiels marsh, during 4Days4Ideas, Brussels, 2019 © Pierre Mercier – Ersatz

<sup>47</sup> Translator’s note: in the original, this is a linguistic pun: *bassin d’orage* (storm basin) and *bassin de rage* (basin of rage).

<sup>48</sup> [bit.ly/3fKJyzJ](https://bit.ly/3fKJyzJ)





Conference-poem by Marielle Macé at the Markten Cultural Centre, during 4Days4Ideas, Brussels, 2019 © Youssef Meftah



Conference-poem by Marielle Macé at the Markten Cultural Centre, during 4Days4Ideas, scenography by the Ersatz collective, Brussels, 2019 © Youssef Meftah

*Garden is indispensable,<sup>49</sup>; “The people of Forest downstream will swallow a mouthful”; “I say wiels to the marsh”...<sup>50</sup>*

Back in La Bellone, we shared a meal — akin to a small culinary procession of boats and ponds, prepared by “Les Gastrosophes”, an association of “agri-cultural and vagabond” cooks who primarily work with salvaged foodstuffs, for they, too, refuse to accept that a potential resource (water, foodstuffs from the earth) be too rapidly treated as waste.

I finally intervened with a conference-poem at the De Markten Cultural Centre, in order to re-enact my own efforts on-stage, to make heard and ring out a confluence of water lines and lines of thought... A spectacle conceived (at the initiative of La Bellone) in concert with Ersatz, a collective of scenographers, who had worked on the decor, the lighting and sound, starting (decidedly) with salvaging magnetic tape that morphed into watercourses that did not imitate nature. These tapes didn’t seek to imitate the meandering watercourses, but rather inter-mixed their geometries, their meshes, their own visual sediments, in which waste becomes a resource, and plastic is capable of becoming a stream.

With these actions, and in my individual approach, we are a far cry from a reverie about a return to what nature would be without us humans, or of turning an ideal form of nature into a sanctuary, where any form of human action would be a desecration. Conversely, it is constantly a matter of looking at political, anthropised landscapes, intermingling watercourses, human trajectories, industrial lines, agricultural furrows, canals grids and of interweaving all these phrases, taking notice of impure, degraded, and interdependent situations.

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*Nos Cabanes* sought to re-anchor poetic approaches amidst these eco-political questions, approaches by poets who know how to listen to things, by poets who have the audacity to hear things and to seek out a dialogue with them. For my part, in that book I yearned to be

<sup>49</sup> Translator’s note: this slogan plays on the name of the “Essential Garden,” which literally means the “garden of plants essences” but that can also be understood as the “indispensable garden.”

<sup>50</sup> This is a pun on *Je dis oui au marais* (I say yes to the swamp), for the Flemish word *Wiels* is pronounced *Oui-ls* (Yesss).



a kind of poet, a poet without verses, but yet who strives through phrases to champion ideas that are surging throughout the world, even across the territories. For to champion these ideas is not exactly to speak for the things of this world (land, animals, rivers); rather, it is to seek to know their modes of being, their personalities, their behaviours, their habits, their ideas, their thoughts, by treating them as subjects, quasi-subjects (as some lawyers are doing nowadays)... I strove to show through this short book that it was a question of animism, an animism in thought, in speech, in syntax, which we have not lost. The calm animism of a poem that sets up a scene in which to listen to that which might not speak, but yet makes sentences in this world. Hence, a calmly championed animism, through the subtle and infinite grammatical redistribution of the powers of action, of dependencies, and of links. It was a case of demonstrating that sentences mark the living with stripes, that they arise before our eyes, behind our backs. It was also a matter of retaining “the songs without scruples,” those who believe that they are able “to make everything speak

**“To champion these ideas is not exactly to speak for the things of this world (land, animals, rivers); rather, it is to seek to know their modes of being, their personalities, their behaviours, their habits, their ideas, their thoughts, by treating them as subjects.”**

for us” (I say this with Jean-Christophe Bailly, Chris Marker, and Ponge in mind, and all those whose voices and audacity I listened to in *Nos Cabanes*). We have to sense just how much our ecological responsibility is at stake in our speech; this requires that we assume our responsibility as those who speak. As I see it, this is what cries out for genuine attentiveness to speech in a world that is devastated everywhere.

I would therefore like to continue this work with words in Nantes, in Bordeaux (the FRAC has invited me), in Montreuil – Montreuil where bus number 122 stops at *La Noue-Clos français*; this particular *Noue* is a neglected, noisy, abused, abusive and mistreated suburb, but where residents get by as they can: they maintain links, they try things out, they petition, they themselves collect

garbage... or sometimes they give up, despite the social fabric provided by local associations and renovation efforts – they call it a day in the shadow of a ghost gallery, stuck in one of those neighbourhoods where France effectively pens them in.

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And it still requires a turn-of-nut: thanks to this work I realised that the word “noue” was already somewhat fetishised, twisted, and was about to be monopolised (just as with the pronoun *nous* (we/us)). In certain areas, urban programs promise landscaped gullies as a concession of sorts made to a vaguely ecological spirit: “not to worry, we will build gullies...”; In reality, these programs care little about fighting backflows or privatising resources, reopening the city, rendering it a truly porous space, porous to ebbs and fluxes, movements, links. Unquestionably, words, as with waterlogged soils, are also zones in need of defence.

MM

## Marielle Macé



Marielle Macé was born in 1973. Researcher and writer, she teaches literature at the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences in Paris (EHESS), and is one of the organisers of the review *Critique* and the review *Po&sie*. For the 2019-2020 season, she is an associate author at the Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers. Her books use poetry as an accomplice in understanding the forms of common life and render these forms the arena for our disputes and commitments. Her published works include: *Façons de lire, manières d'être* (Gallimard, 2011), *Styles. Critique de nos formes de vie* (Gallimard, 2016); and with the éditions Verdier *Sidérer, considérer – Migrants en France* (2017) and *Nos Cabanes* (2019) – which was to become the subject of a cycle at the Maison de la Poésie in Paris, and continued onstage, notably in Brussels and Avignon.



# ALESSANDRO PIGNOCCHI: REDESIGNING OUR WORLDS

Pascal Le Brun-Cordier

**A former researcher in the cognitive sciences and in the philosophy of art who has become a comic-strip author, Alessandro Pignocchi has been creating “graphic novels” in which punk chickadees, Jivaros explorers of our western society, Marcel Proust, Emmanuel Macron, and Donald Trump in full animist conversion, interact with each other. His water-colour images and his alternately surreal, caustic, funny and poetic stories, sketch worlds that are being reshaped.**

In his first album, *Anent: Nouvelles des Indiens jivaros*<sup>51</sup>, Pignocchi chronicles his adventures, discoveries, and disappointments in the Amazonian jungle, in the footsteps of the French anthropologist Philippe Descola who had lived there during the late 1970s with one group of the Jivaroan community. It was following this immersion that Descola published *Les Lances du crépuscule*<sup>52</sup>, a seminal book in which he presented the way of being within the world of these animist<sup>53</sup> communities.

In 2017, in volume 1 of *Petit traité d'écologie sauvage*<sup>54</sup>, Pignocchi imagines a world where animism has become the predominant mindset. In the album's opening pages, the French prime minister's car rolls over a hedgehog. The politician tells his chauffeur, “Turn around! We have to eat it in order to allow his wakan soul return to his protective spirit.” On the next page, he informs his chauffeur: “I'm sick and tired of moving

*around in cars and planes... I'm going to go to the meeting with Angela [Merkel] by bike... Call her and have her defer it for two months.”*

**“The Pignocchi style juxtaposes lightness (line, colour) with strangeness (story, settings). This is how he ushers us into another version of the world, that is possible and plausible.”**

His graphic meditations continue with *La Cosmologie du futur*<sup>55</sup>, an album from which we publish an extract in this edition of *Klaxon*. Here, we see a blue tit in dialogue with a long-tailed tit confronted with a blaze – namely, our world unquestionably in the grip of the flames of global warming. When the long-tailed tit suggests to his colleague “let's play at being hummingbirds” so as to extinguish the flames, we can savour the ironic allusion to the American Indian legend well-known to environmental activists that tells of a fire in the

middle of a vast forest where, “All the terrified animals, aghast, helplessly watched the disaster. Only the little hummingbird was active, fetching a few drops with its beak in order to squirt them onto the blaze. After some time, the armadillo, annoyed by this senseless agitation, said to it: ‘Hummingbird! Aren't you crazy? You're not going to quench the blaze with those drops of water!’ And the hummingbird replied, ‘I know that,

<sup>51</sup> Alessandro Pignocchi, *Anent. Nouvelles des Indiens jivaros*, Éditions Steinkis, 2016.

<sup>52</sup> Philippe Descola, *Les Lances du crépuscule*, Presses Pocket, 2006.

<sup>53</sup> A propensity to detect a presence amidst non-humans that on occasion enables us to communicate with them.

<sup>54</sup> Alessandro Pignocchi, *Petit traité d'écologie sauvage, tome 1*, Éditions Steinkis, 2017.

<sup>55</sup> Alessandro Pignocchi, *La Cosmologie du futur*, Éditions Steinkis, 2018.



but I'm doing my part.” In *La Cosmologie du futur*, the dialogue doesn't end in exactly the same way...

The irony also targets Pierre Rabhi<sup>56</sup>, the French writer and farmer, who has built his ecological movement around this parable of small gestures — while failing to specify that the hummingbird dies of exhaustion in the original legend. For Pignocchi, we have to go much further and to question the foundations of a predatory and destructive economic model.

Pignocchi stayed for several months in the ZAD (Zone to Defend) of Notre-Dame-des-Landes, a site of more than 1,500 hectares near Nantes, in the west of France, which, over decades, has become a place full of vibrancy in the fight against a large airport project deemed destructive of life, notably for the considerable flora and fauna that flourishes in the area. Beyond this local, victorious struggle (the French government eventually abandoned the airport project in 2018), for many, the ZAD of Notre-Dame-des-Landes is emblematic of an indispensable struggle against large-scale useless development projects, as well as the possibility to experiment with other lifestyles, far from the ruinous aberrations of dominant neoliberalism.

Following his stay in the ZAD, Pignocchi published *La recomposition des mondes* from which we present a particularly important extract<sup>57</sup>. Herein, he lays bare his conviction that the concept of nature

must be jettisoned — a conviction forged, yet again, through his contact with Philippe Descola who made it known that “no word, in any Amazonian language, comes even close to our western concept of nature.”<sup>58</sup> This reading of Descola powerfully impacted Pignocchi: “If we deconstruct the dichotomy between nature and culture, all the concepts that organise our relationship with the world collapse, one after the other: the idea of protection, the idea of aesthetic contemplation, progress, work...”<sup>59</sup>

Pignocchi's style juxtaposes lightness (line, colour) with strangeness (story, settings). This is how he ushers us into another version of the world, at once possible and plausible. For the reader, the journey takes place surreptitiously, following several cognitive short-circuits — chickadees that can talk? — and powerful narrative electroshocks such as at the opening of the *Petit traité d'écologie sauvage*. These strange graphic novels deploy a vast alternative imaginary in which the reader can settle in, wander around... As the writer Alain Damasio rightly notes, “more than a movie or a book, comics are an outdoor art. By that I mean: an art where the air flows most fully in those spaces between frames, between two successive images. Where the cognitive wind discovers a lot of space in those inter-panels, in which to instill, in turn, its own images, its vision. And whenever the images themselves, rather than wanting to be precise and realistic, become water-coloury and stealthily blur, fog up and evoke more than they actually reveal,

as in Pignocchi's works — then the imaginary construction of the ZAD becomes even more poetic and leaves even more... to be desired.”<sup>60</sup>

Unquestionably, Pignocchi's work has helped to reconfigure our imaginations of the living, in a way that is at once subtle and radical. If his contribution strikes us as being extremely precious, it is because, as Damasio says, “the imaginary is neither a smoke-screen nor a pipe dream. Quite the contrary, it is what bridges the action, the architecture of a state of mind; it is what gives its vanishing point and its perspective. It is as vital as tactics, logistics, projects, and drive. It serves as a continuity and link between these two concrete poles of combat.”<sup>61</sup>

## PLBC

**56** In 2007, the *Mouvement Colibris* (Hummingbird movement) was created by Pierre Rabhi and Cyril Dion in France.

**57** Alessandro Pignocchi, *La recomposition des mondes*, Éditions du Seuil, 2019.

**58** “There's no ecology without a struggle against the economic system”, from an interview with the review *Reporterre*, 28 October 2019: [bit.ly/2T3Vpzb](https://bit.ly/2T3Vpzb)

**59** Ibid

**60** Alain Damasio, afterword to *La recomposition des mondes*, p. 102.

**61** Alain Damasio, afterword to *La recomposition des mondes*, p. 101.

## Pascal Le Brun-Cordier



After having created and directed ZAT — Zones Artistiques Temporaires, an artistic event in public space in Montpellier, for five years, Pascal Le Brun-Cordier is currently undertaking studies and projects for cities or cultural structures, often in conjunction with architects and urban planners. He is currently the director of the Master in Cultural Projects in the Public Space at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, where he is an associate professor.



# COSMOLOGIE DU FUTUR

(EXTRACT)

Alessandro Pignocchi, Éditions Steinkis, 2018

## HUMMINGBIRDS



<sup>62</sup> Translator's note: A reference to an American Indian legend and the parable of the "small gestures" as popularised by Pierre Rabhi (see "Alessandro Pignocchi: Redesigning our Worlds").





You know, we realised with the wrens and the chaffinches that if we organised ourselves we can transport a huge fuel can together.









# LA RECOMPOSITION DES MONDES

(EXTRACT)

Alessandro Pignocchi, Éditions du Seuil, 2019



Our concept of "Nature," which, depending on the context, could encapsulate beings, phenomena, and the most disparate territories, is a relatively recent western conception.



The distinction between Nature and culture strikes us as obvious, for it neatly arranges the modern world and endows it with its direction.



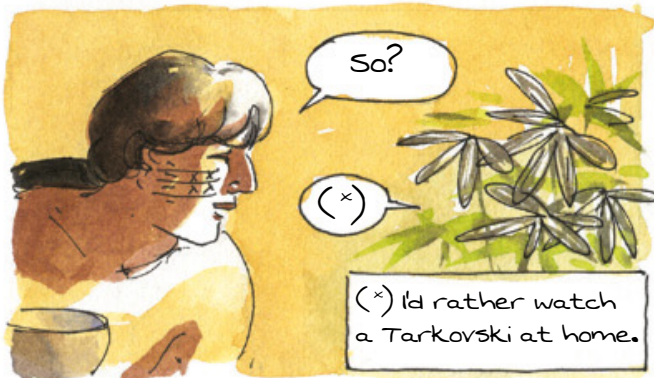


In Amazonia, for instance, plants and animals are spontaneously considered as individuals. The interactions that Native Indians cultivate with them resemble ordinary social relationships.



In fact, even in Amazonia, plants and animals rarely respond directly. Their specific physical attributes prevent them from talking the language of humans.

Whenever a member of a species (a manioc stem) has something important to say to a member of another species (a human), it appears to the human during a dream or a hallucinatory trance.



Whilst each species have comparable social practices, these are set in a world that is constructed according to the specificities of its body. So, if manioc beer is human's ceremonial drink, human blood is that of manioc.

We are far from a western take on nature, distant and disembodied, resource or sanctuary.

The discovery, thanks to research by various anthropologists, that nature is a western construct was a true eye-opener for me...

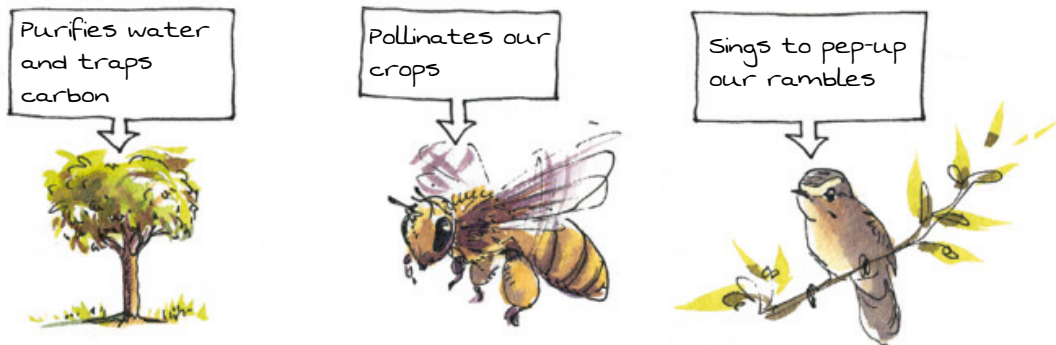




... and me, who always thought of myself as an out-and-out "nature" lover, and who envisaged its protection by means of national parks as being an objective to be met.



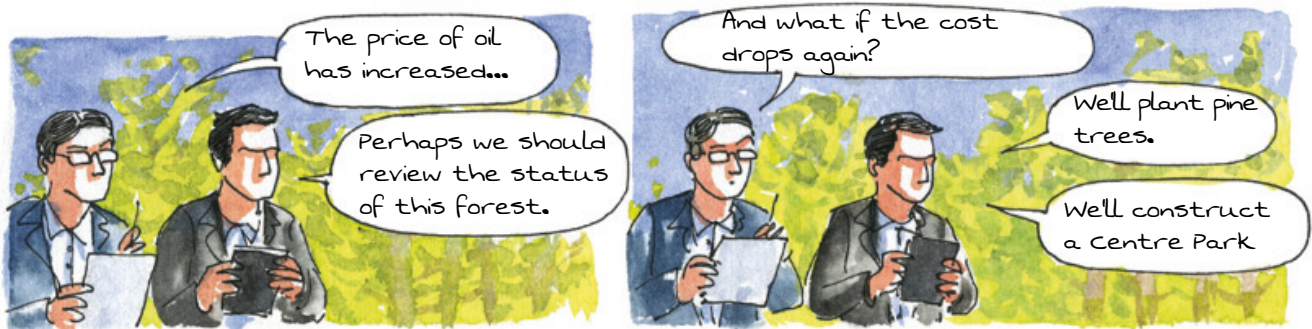
Through the prism of anthropology, the protection of nature appears as the indissociable extension of exploitation. In either case, plants, animals, and ecosystems are assigned functions that serve humans.



Let's be clear: it's not a matter of saying we don't need to protect.



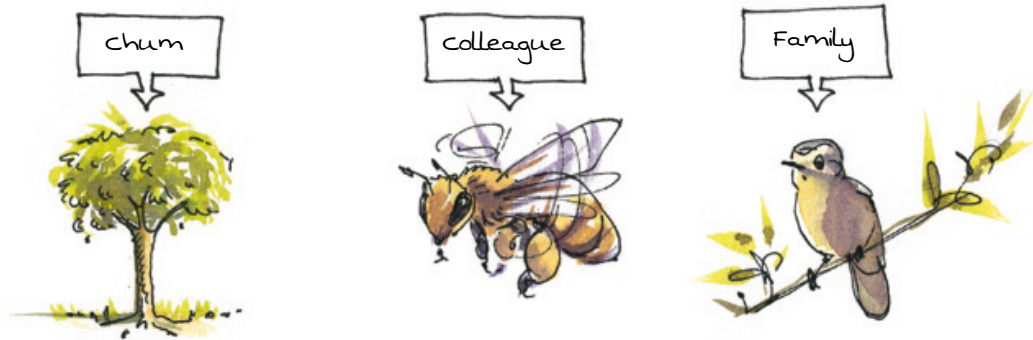
But this shift between protection and exploitation is skewed, for should we decide to protect, we can always change our minds. The opposite is more difficult.



So this dynamic inevitably tends toward destruction.



Above all, our concept of Nature favours this subject/object relationship (that zeros-in on usage) and blots out the rich subject/subject relationships (based upon empathic consideration of the other) that we could establish with non-humans.



It's high time we dump that concept and learn to conceive of the world without it.



I went to have a look at things in Amazonia, amongst the Jivaro Indians, to try to understand what a world in which plants and animals are considered as alter egos looks like.

But my experience wasn't entirely convincing.





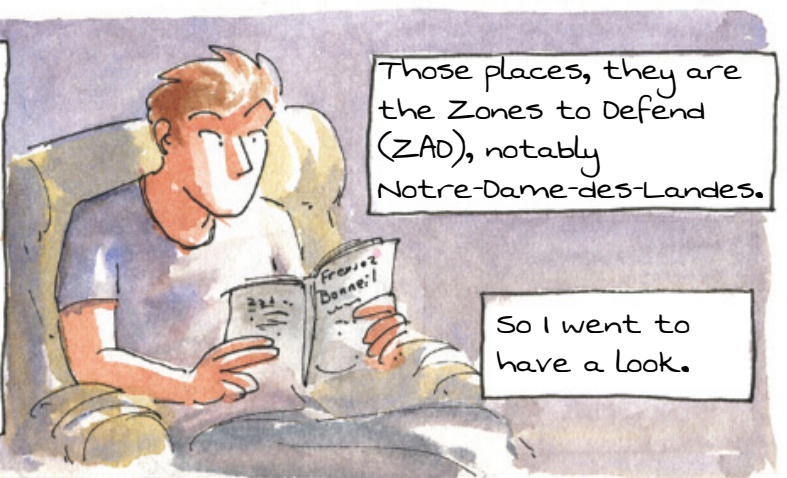


If you don't speak their language, you don't get their jokes or the meaning of those small gestures, two areas of daily life where the Amazonian way of thinking still persists.



Above all else, the Jivaros taught me that a people's cosmology, that means the way in which they construct the world, isn't for them a routine topic of conversation. I didn't, however, learn much about the Jivaroan cosmology itself.

And then more recently I came to learn in the writings of various thinkers that there are sites in France where this cosmological revolution is already unfolding, where people are already beginning to imagine worlds that are open to a subject to subject relationship with plants, animals, and the land itself.





So, what does that mean in practical terms? That they shag their dogs?



In real terms that means that in contrast to what happens everywhere else, social and environmental questions are not separated, much less pitted against one another in the ZAD.



These concepts in themselves are no longer really relevant.



That's not very concrete.



But yes! That means that they are people who are aware that they inhabit a common piece of ground...



... a piece of ground that they seek to share as best they can, between humans and non-humans.





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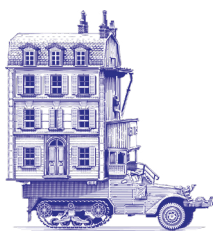
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More to come soon.

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