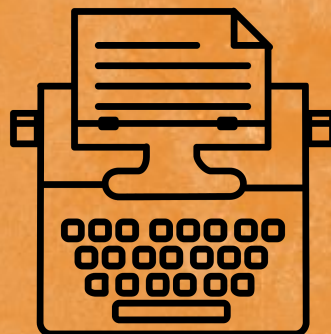


Title:

Author:

Occupy Climate Change (OCC!)

*Creative story
entry*



FORMAS



Welcome to Bologna, the City of Food

Daniele Mingardi

"The clothes are burned?"

"Oh, those are cheap pyjamas, service issue-wear 'em and throw 'em away, it costs less than cleaning."

'It costs less,' Shevek repeated meditatively. He said the words the way a palaeontologist looks at a fossil, the fossil that dates a whole stratum....

Ursula Le Guin, Dispossessed: an ambiguous utopia

CHAPTER 1

A Journey

It is difficult to organise anger when you have to dose your breath.

"Sustainability of words is important, consuming oxygen requires precious resources", the commander said as usual before departing. A thought perfectly matched to his ass wrapped in a perfectly thermoregulated eco-suit and resting on top of a comfortable ergonomic eco-seat, some annoyed listeners thought.

In the cabin carrying space labourers, silence was still respected, but certainly not in tune with the commander. Crammed in 30 in less than 40-m³, the corps had become a factory whose goal was to minimise the cost of oxygen. All this did not prevent the recreation of what expert social scientists would undoubtedly have described as an ecosystem rich in biodiversity: nervous thoughts combined with looks of varying degrees of fatigue, spacesuits laden with sweat and worn-out bodies, freeze-dried food perennially at risk of extinction, alternating streams of miasmas from painful space baths intertwined within the electronic and mechanical components of the cabin, inside which the toil of the workers forced to build it still seemed to rest. The only things missing, for no apparent reason, were windows through which one could become aware of the appearance of the departure planet one longed to leave and the arrival planet one never wanted to reach. Two physical and mental extremities in the midst of which, suspended in space, a spontaneous collective awareness condensed in a few days.

Triggered by that realisation, a whole series of enthusiastic gestures of solidarity were set in motion, whose shadow, however, reflected the real condition in which they were immersed. Those gestures were, in practice, only permitted in public in a cramped space, millions of kilometres away from their affections. On the earth's surface they would have turned into a calculation directly linked to the bank statement. Ever since the great crises of the 21st century, when a new economic-climate regime had been established in the hands of a body formed by a group of expert scientists (the Climate Change Control Centre, abbreviated CCC), the most perverse dream of environmental economists seemed to have been realized. Everything, from objects down to individual behavior, had been placed on a calculation grid that established their price, premium or penalty directly proportional to the amount of their estimated CO₂ equivalent. Sophisticated academic papers described the new system as a meritocratic and ecological big business, capable of orienting behaviour towards a new horizon of sustainability and finally pulling the world out of the abyss into which boring fossil capitalism had dragged it. It was therefore normal that mutual aid, extended outside the family group, was fined, while competition, necessary to transform the fruit of one's hard work into a salary suitable for the purchase of sustainable goods, was rewarded.

But not everyone agreed with this narrative. There was, even on that ship, someone stubbornly convinced that the arguments that justified the colonisation of space to solve climate change were the same ones that had given rise to wars, pandemics and environmental disasters in the last century.

For example, one labourer, since they had left, could not stop thinking about what many years earlier she had been forced to study in history books. One chapter of a book, entitled '*inter-planetary solidarity ecology strategy*', showed a graph illustrating how many planets would be needed if the whole world consumed as the Western countries did, accompanied, almost as if it were an incontrovertible logical consequence, by the brilliant idea of actually outsourcing the environmental costs of production to other planets. She also recalled how, when asked unconsciously about the difficulty of troubling the galaxy with respect to changing certain production and living patterns, she was threatened by her teacher with three weeks of public eco-utility work. Now that she had grown up, that unawareness had turned into conscious anger.

It is difficult to organise anger when you have to dose oxygen for a week. Yet, as she and other labourers made their way to the colony's new space greenhouse in the city of Bologna, she had the feeling that she was not the only one who wanted to dismantle the cage that would be recreated inside the plantation where they would spend the entire summer once they got off the ship.

CHAPTER 2

The city of food

The true value of sustainability

They were called ecomanagers. They were easily recognisable by their grass-green ties and the forced charm they tried to exude at every important occasion. They stepped off the ship free of the severe and debilitating soreness accumulated by the labourers during the week. Their cabins, equipped with the best amenities, were specially built to remove the stress of their valuable and meritorious work. Merit and comfort, however, did not seem to have charged their actions with vitality. They led the workers with the same coldness that seemed to convey the huge transparent dome towards which they were headed. On the huge sign that indicated the entrance, there was an illuminated sign with green access, surrounded by stylised drawings of fruit trees and strictly organic vegetables:

Welcome to Bologna, the City of Food

A city to taste

They entered, crossing the threshold of what appeared to be a giant amusement park. Every major city usually had its own colony where it outsourced environmental production costs, owned by the most deserving private entity in the area. The Bologna colony, initially built for luxury sustainable extra-terrestrial tourism, had been inaugurated 20 years earlier, in 2181, by Exploitaly, a century-old company promoting a resilient gastronomic business model, capable of withstanding every social and environmental revolution. For many years, Exploitaly had also specialised in industrial agricultural production, and thanks to its contributions in the development of state-of-the-art hydroponic greenhouses, built to solve the problem of the depletion of the earth's soil, Bologna had become one of Europe's leading cities for agrifood production. For what was called the theory of ecological dependence, each city had its own area of specialisation, thus eliminating any model of food sovereignty, contrary to any maximisation of sustainable production. That year, on the occasion of the centenary of the birth of the CCC, Bologna finally inaugurated a new model of spatial agrifood production, becoming to all intents and purposes part of the great industrial district of the solar system. The greenhouses, in order to optimise costs, were located exactly underground in the space dedicated to tourism: a square kilometre of hydroponic and aeroponic crops meandered beneath themed gardens and kiosks, luxurious restaurants equipped with every delicacy, statues in the shape of delicacies, solar-powered cottages with extroverted fruit-shaped swimming pools, artificial beaches and quads for adventurous excursions around the planet.

Images of this immense landscape crossed the corneas of the labourers, overturning the sense they had hitherto given to their dilapidated A++ energy class homes, where they were used to live. Effectively, the spatial division according to levels of merit on earth had been strongly accentuated through walls and buildings, so that the perception of the undeserving in relation to the rich was severely clouded. It was easier to swallow the idea that poor conditions were a necessary sacrifice for the protection of greenery and ecosystems.

Perhaps it was also to prevent them from thinking too much about this detail that they were immediately escorted to the entrance of the lift leading to the greenhouses, located inside a cottage of what appeared to be a small farm. Outside, there was an artificial pond, a small vegetable garden that had just been sown, holograms of farm animals and screens showing bucolic countryside landscapes with cheerful farmers busy at work. On that day, the space had been specially decorated for the inauguration of the greenhouse: hundreds of elegant guests stood in front of a small stage reserved for the presentation of the project by engineers, economists and sociologists. Countless banquets sampling agricultural products, prepared by the colony's best chefs, surrounded the whole thing, causing loud protest signals to resound in the stomachs of the labourers, probably also audible to those outside the building. Promptly an Exploitaly eco-manager drowned out these noises, starting her speech for the celebration of this important day:

"It was 19 July 2101 when, at the G3 in Genoa, the far-sighted decision was taken to found the Climate Change Control Centre, a centre of real scientific experts capable of taking the reins of our world into their own hands. We all know how difficult the last decades of the 21st century have been: wars fought for democracy, uprisings by groups with contempt for the freedom that the West has always wanted to defend, epidemics caused by the bad habits and ignorance of the poor, but above all sudden climate changes whose effects we could not foresee. As if all this were not enough, groups of phantom ecologists tried to oppose progress, opposing the wonderful works that our brilliant engineers were planning to save our beloved planet. So it was that governments took the courage to stop the barbarities of the present to propose a project that would allow the natural evolution of the human species. They thus created a society where what matters is not politics, but ecological meritocracy. A world where sustainability must be earned, where each of us is an advocate of our own merit, where each of us is responsible for our own failures and faults.

It is commitment and competition in hard work that determine a healthy environment. The data speak for themselves. Since all prices are related to CO_2 , since all our actions show how much we pollute, we have finally shown the real causes of environmental degradation. They are the underdeveloped countries, the poor, the outcasts, the slackers, too busy complaining about their own misery rather than rolling up their sleeves and earning their own sustainability. We do not discriminate; the statistics are objective and impartial. But we are not here to talk about failure, degradation and waste.

We are here to celebrate the centenary of the CCC and its wonderful achievements for society! It is because of its teachings that we have not lost heart, and we have made up for the mistakes made by worthless people. We certainly do not want the world to collapse because of them. But neither do we want to reduce these people to slavery, because although we know how much more sustainable that would be, we truly believe in freedom, even when its burden is hard to bear. It is for all these reasons that we inaugurate this space plantation today, which is a fundamental step towards making our planet green again. We all know how Bologna has become a reference model for world gastronomic culture. A model based on the use of innovative technologies that do not give up true peasant flavours. A model based on ecologically just labour, providing a chance for redemption for undeserving workers. But above all, a model based on the total sustainability of a production that, thanks to the location of its plantations and farms, manages to provide enough food for Bologna and many other cities without emitting CO_2 into the earth's atmosphere. Let us therefore celebrate the city's successes of the most progressive in Italy, despite the fact that filthy rioters are currently trying to ruin everything by squatting and sabotaging..."

The labourers' listening, now filled with endurance, was interrupted by the opening of the lift leading to the greenhouses. On the way, several metres long, the lights were switched off to save energy. They descended, shrouded in the same invisibility that would characterise their stay, in the same indifference with which their labours would be transformed into a calculation to be included in the value of the fruit and vegetables. The latter would soon reach the Earth, ready for consumption. The true price of their supposed sustainability, on the other hand, would not move for long months from the dungeons of another planet.

CHAPTER 3

Returning from the plantation

Breathing again

From the heights of the greenhouses, mechanical voices forced the labourers to constantly listen to the main theories and practices of ecological meritocracy. There was one that seemed particularly suited to their everyday life: 'the ecological body is not just a theory: it is an attitude, a posture, a discipline that only deserving people can aspire to achieve. The ecological body consumes very little, overcomes antiquated needs that anchored it to rigid biological patterns. It is a resilient body, immersed in an ever-changing flux, whose only rule is sustainability. However, do not think that the exercise required to achieve it makes it artificial: the ecological body is totally natural, because it is nature that demands its advent within the broader human evolution. Indeed, their bodies, in order to survive, had had to adapt to structural toxicity, reduced space for movement and nutrients, just as they did to the vegetables and fruit trees over which they were forced to stoop or climb every day. They were in every sense part of what used to be a plantation and then had become a factory, and at the same time, that very factory turned back into a plantation. It seemed to be a kind of homage to those past experiences that one tries to forget but always carries in one's heart. Work was carried out for 10 hours a day within orderly rows of plants, schematically grouped according to the functional requirements of the only permissible objective: growth. Their care had thus been reduced to a mechanical domestication based on fertilisation, so that even the labourers' gestures, trained by contamination, seemed mechanically domesticated. Their thoughts, however, were not. The repetitive movements of cutting, harvesting, spraying, were intertwined with the silences forced by the continuous effort, leaving interstices where observations, reflections, cues nested. Their concretisation, however, was made impossible by the little energy left at the end of the day, spent in the physical recovery needed to wake up the next day. Individual sleeping quarters and the lack of common spaces also made collective organisation virtually impossible.

Three months passed in this way, at the end of which the employment contract would automatically be terminated. This was common practice for jobs at the lower end of the ecological spectrum. Companies said that this allowed them the opportunity to redeem themselves socially without ever getting bored. For the majority of workers it meant, in fact, only preparing to plunge into a round of unbridled competition in order to secure any chance of survival. That round was to begin again the moment they set foot on the ship that would take them home.

"Sustainability of words is important, consuming oxygen requires precious resources", the commander said again before departing. Yet, this time all the labourers felt that on that ship they could breathe again. They discovered that the ideas matured on the plantations were like sharp boxes inside fragile biodegradable bags, whose boundaries imposed by a master are sooner or later torn apart. Their matured desire to get to know each other and think together enlarged the little physical space of the cabin, transforming it into a place of autonomy, where it was possible to break out of the silence imposed on them for months by the invisible hand of repression. Conspiring together then became the oxygen needed to inhale the awareness of the strength of a multitude of united individuals and exhale all the feelings that led them to see each other as rivals in the game of ecological meritocracy. This was not a simple quest for transition to a new fragile equilibrium, but a small revolution towards a new ecology of planetary relations.

Although they were not certain how this could be achieved, they were certain that from that moment on, their way of living together could not be dictated by a system that claims to be sustainable based on the amount of carbon dioxide emitted or its 'greenness'. In the greenhouses of the city of Bologna, surrounded by machines and calculators, they realised that data does not show the material processes needed to achieve certain results; surrounded by leaves and stems, they understood how sometimes green can only be a colour.*

**The ending of this dystopian voyage is unknown. It would be nice to think that, given their incredible power, the revolutionary desires of the labourers sabotaged the engines and command hierarchies in the spacecraft and then went out, and not being able to breathe in space arrived early, sowing revolts against everything that had turned the biosphere into a code for the accumulation of money. It would be just as nice to think that those desires, once they arrived, drew different lines from those that should have run through the goods produced on the plantations, forming archipelagos of spaces freed from a world in which merit is mistaken for social justice and ecology thought of as a science that determines ways of living and being far from history. But after all, we know that if imagination is needed to show that other worlds are possible, it is up to the people who live and attempt to realise those desires to dictate the words that make up the ending of their story.*