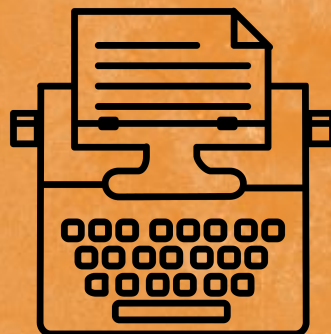


Title:

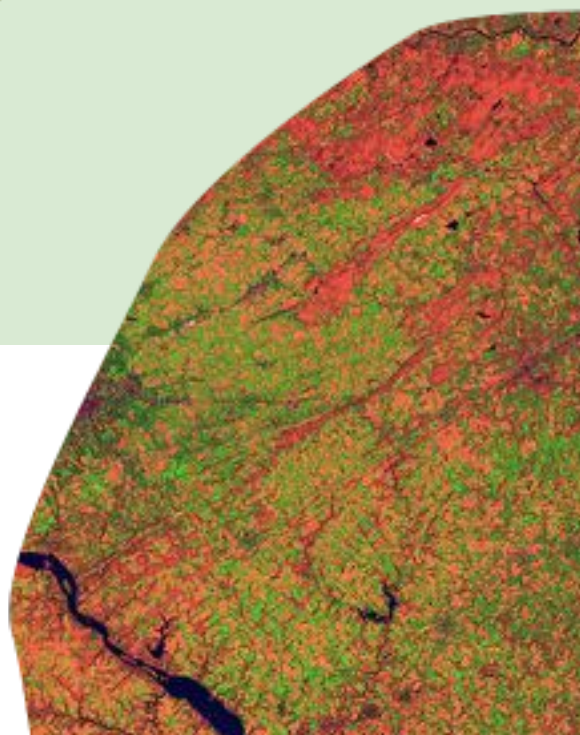
Author:

Occupy Climate Change (OCC!)

*Creative story
entry*



FORMAS



A valley with no more human animals

By Daniele Sormani

After two days it* left the lair. The storm had passed. Its signs were evident everywhere: the barren ground soaked, almost muddy; traces of hail on the ground; rivulets of water running down the hill. The damage was not extensive, on the contrary: the land was no longer suffering the effects of the torrential half-yearly rains, nor wasting the great resource they constituted.

The woods were bright green, the colours brought to life by the rain. They had reclaimed the mountainsides, tree by tree, tempering the searing heat that now reigned for so many months of the year.

The rivers had taken back what had been taken from them by force: so many decades of human neglect and maintenance, coupled with the exceptional weather events that had now occurred almost two centuries ago, had caused the rivers to destroy those human-made riverbanks that were too narrow for them. The course of the rivers had changed over the decades, partly renaturalised, but not completely. The Adige no longer flowed through the centre of the city. The Fersina no longer flowed straight down, instead sweeping across the plain into the areas where human animals had once slept. Now these dwellings had become the homes of other species: as the forest advanced, birds came to nest, taking advantage of the presence of the watercourse, fish wallowed in the water, preyed upon by some mammals and birds. Some animals used the ruins of human houses for their dens, while others kept their distance as if fearing the sudden return of their now-extinct owners.

After this quick reconnaissance, it* headed for some foods, preferably some nuts, or some of the little fruit that still managed to grow in August, rigorously in the shade of the mountain. It* took the way for what the human animals once called GITAV. As it* walked, it* looked around, saw the mountains reinvigorated by the forests that had taken over the slopes that human animals had once torn up with ski lifts, a kind of transport based on metal rope that connected large bare trees; it* saw other non-human animals adapted to that torrid climate grunting in the woods, fluttering in the treetops, living their lives, unaware and perhaps consciously ignoring how much the human one had been canceled, along all the other species that had not made it.

The absence of human animals had changed the balance of species: with their disappearance, the cows, pigs, and chickens that had been kept in cages for so many millennia had dwindled to the point of near extinction, partly due to their now genetic weakness and inability to forage for food. Over the decades, those that remained had re-acclimated themselves to the forests, grasslands, mountains and hills, and by now had integrated with the other herbivores. The goats were the first to regain their stolen freedom. In their place, the more hidden and less meek species had reclaimed their space. The woods were teeming with deer, chamois, and fawns; the riverbanks with beavers and marmots; the burrows of moles could be seen; not to mention the insects, reptiles, amphibians, and birds. Carnivores were beginning to return in large numbers after two centuries of slow repopulation.

They said that in the last decades the major effects of the Little Warm Age were easing, giving some respite to an exhausted Earth. But it* looked around, its eyes on the forests and non-human animals, and wondered who and what was exhausted: the Earth, or human rule over it?

The road to GITAV meandered around the river, then broke off and climbed slightly, then steepened in the last part. In that part of the valley, the beating sun could not penetrate the vegetation, and in the undergrowth there were berries and greedy acorns; where there had once been vineyards, there were now firs and larches, while the fruit trees had remained and even multiplied, given the influx of animals that had gone in search of food and, without perhaps knowing it, had scattered seeds.

GITAV was one of its* favourite places to forage. Collective memory said it had been created by humans two centuries before. The human animal had dug it out with 'machines', non-living creatures he controlled at will, made of those strange inedible stones. It had hollowed out one side of the mountain east of Trent, destroying the homes of many non-human animals and even a few humans, sweeping away the trees and undergrowth.

It was said that the idea was to create a kind of path inside the mountain, through which they would pass another machine, different from the others, in which they would put food and other things that humans used. This never happened. They had started, yes, but then more or less left it at a third, caught off guard by the onset of the Little Warm Age. With its

arrival, heavy rains had destroyed the banks of the valley's rivers and flooded the entire plain. The mountains stripped of trees had failed to hold, and landslides had added to the chaos. The human animal had abandoned the valley after a few years of resistance, finding it too difficult a habitat in which to live. Many other species had come to the same conclusion, including chamois, goats, and bears, followed later by wolves.

Wherever we stopped, it was incredible to hear the discrepancy: first of all, silence. It was said that in the time of the human animal, the most prevalent noise was that of its machines and tools. Now, however, silence could be heard. But as soon as one's ears got used to it, one realised that it was not silence, but a very wide range of many different sounds, noises, and sounds. The sound of water from rivers and streams, the rustling of leaves, the breaking of twigs in the undergrowth as an animal passed by. And then the grunts, groans, moans, snorts, burps, cries, howls. A cacophony of sounds that together created an incredible harmony. And all this in the light of day, or rather to the ears of those who wanted to listen, who had previously been absorbed and dazed by a multitude of negative, dangerous, frightening, and intrusive auditory stimuli. Which was more or less the same way one remembered humans.

When humans fled, they left all their traces behind. Over time, we reclaimed their impermeable paths: mushrooms were the first to penetrate them with their spores, followed by perennial weeds and then, decades later, by scrubland.

The human dams, very different from those of the beavers, were destroyed by algae and rain, and the streams reclaimed their riverbeds. The quarries, on the other hand, remained as an eternal reminder of the wounds left by the human animal.

Back in GITAV, with their exodus, this path was left unfinished. According to the original plan, the water springs from the mountain would have been plugged once and for all. Over time, however, they had eroded the rock and entered this horizontal hole. The cave that was created was therefore full of water, and as the sun shone on it for many hours, a very strong humidity was created at the entrance, which was then diluted further inland. Plants grew in this habitat that could not grow outside because of the heat. In addition, most animals were afraid to enter the cave because of the high humidity. There was always an abundance of berries and wild fruits and great peace.

Had it not been for the sisterhood of the species, it* would probably have made its* lair there. It* would spend hours there eating, lying down and resting, never leaving. It* would arrive early in the morning, at first light, before the humidity could become too enveloping, and it* would not leave until the sky had turned orange, perhaps streaked with pink or violet. At that point, it* would roll in the grass, scratch itself* against the logs, smell all the essences that had changed since morning. It* runs, it* eats, it* urinates, it* grunts, it* growls. Then it* would slowly make its* way back to his den, to its* own kind, safe from predators.

In the silence of the cave it* had time to think, to let its* imagination run wild, to create futures, pasts, and presents. It* wondered what had become of the human animal. Had it become extinct like so many other species of animals and plants? Had it survived? Where did it live and how did it live?

When it had left the valley, the human animal had gone north, away from this increasingly tropical, increasingly dry and hot climate. At first, it was said, it had climbed higher, aided and abetted by the climate that made the Highlands more habitable, but soon it was gone, unable to live in so small a space and so impervious, used to having the world at its yoke.

Who knows what the North was like, what the climate was like, what the different species were like. Who knows what the North was like 200 years ago, or a few decades later, when the human animal went there in search of a future. Who knows what that future was like.

Who knows what the human animal was like two hundred years ago and now, if it still exists. It was said that it was a predator. The worst of all predators: they said it was predatory even towards its own kind, its peers, its equals. Who knows if it had changed. Who knows if it still lived on violence and pain, or if the collective pain had bent it, transformed it, mutated it. Who knows what interests the human animal had? Who knows if a human animal of today would be like a human animal of two hundred years ago and would want to turn its* cave into a path, or if it would want it to become its cave instead.

These thoughts and reflections were its* own; it* shared them with no one else. Leaving the cave and returning home, it* made no mention of them. Its* secret never revealed, its* treasure not shared.

Next day, same life.