



Marzia Migliora

The Spectre of Malthus

curated by Matteo Lucchetti

MA*GA – Art Museum Gallarate

Turbulence

- 5 Turbulence
Alessandro Castiglioni, MA*GA Museum
-
- 9 Through the Spectre
Matteo Lucchetti
-
- 14 The Cage
- On the Side of the Last – A life fighting for peasants' rights* ↩
Vandana Shiva
-
- 26 The Spectre of Malthus
- Salt: Grain of Life* ↩
Pierre Laszlo
-
- 40 Paradoxes of Plenty
- An Edible History of Humanity* ↩
Tom Standage
-
- 52 Salt: white gold and perfect synthesis
A brief conversation between Alessandro Castiglioni, Matteo Lucchetti and Marzia Migliora
-
- 54 Eve
Emanuele Coccia
-
- 59 *The Spectre of Malthus* at the Serlachius Museum and the paradox of happiness
Maria Stella Bottai
-
- 60 Biography
-
- 62 Colophon

Alessandro Castiglioni
MA*GA Art Museum

In his celebrated *New Dark Age*, James Bridle speaks of the intensification of clear air turbulence as one of the many unexpected violent phenomena caused by global warming. The same image of turbulence also acts as the trigger for David Szalay's recent novel of the same name, in which an unexpected and terrifying tremor on a London-Madrid flight unleashes a long chain of events. In these examples (and in others too: how can we forget Shirin Neshat's celebrated installation of 1998?), the image of turbulence is taken as a disturbing metaphor of this day and age, of climate change, of the uncontrollability of the consequences of the behaviour of the West, in particular in relation to the exploitation of the planet's resources. The same uneasy turbulence moves *Lo spettro di Malthus* (The Spectre of Malthus) and the journey that Marzia Migliora asks us to make into the bowels of the earth in search of the paradoxes, the violence and the injustices perpetrated by industrial and post-industrial society, to the detriment not only of the Earth but also of our very future.

In a broad perspective of investigation of the present and the idea of art as a tool of knowledge and a transformative social agent, this exhibition is crucial in the museum's events calendar for a number of reasons. The first is that it is the first project to be hosted by MA*GA under the patronage of Italian Council (6. Edition 2019), a programme promoted by the Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism (MIBACT) for the promotion of contemporary art in the world. The second is that 'The Spectre of Malthus' will become part and immediately a cornerstone of the museum's collections at the very moment in which a digital culture research centre is coming into being. The installation, in fact, will be shown first in the temporary exhibition space,

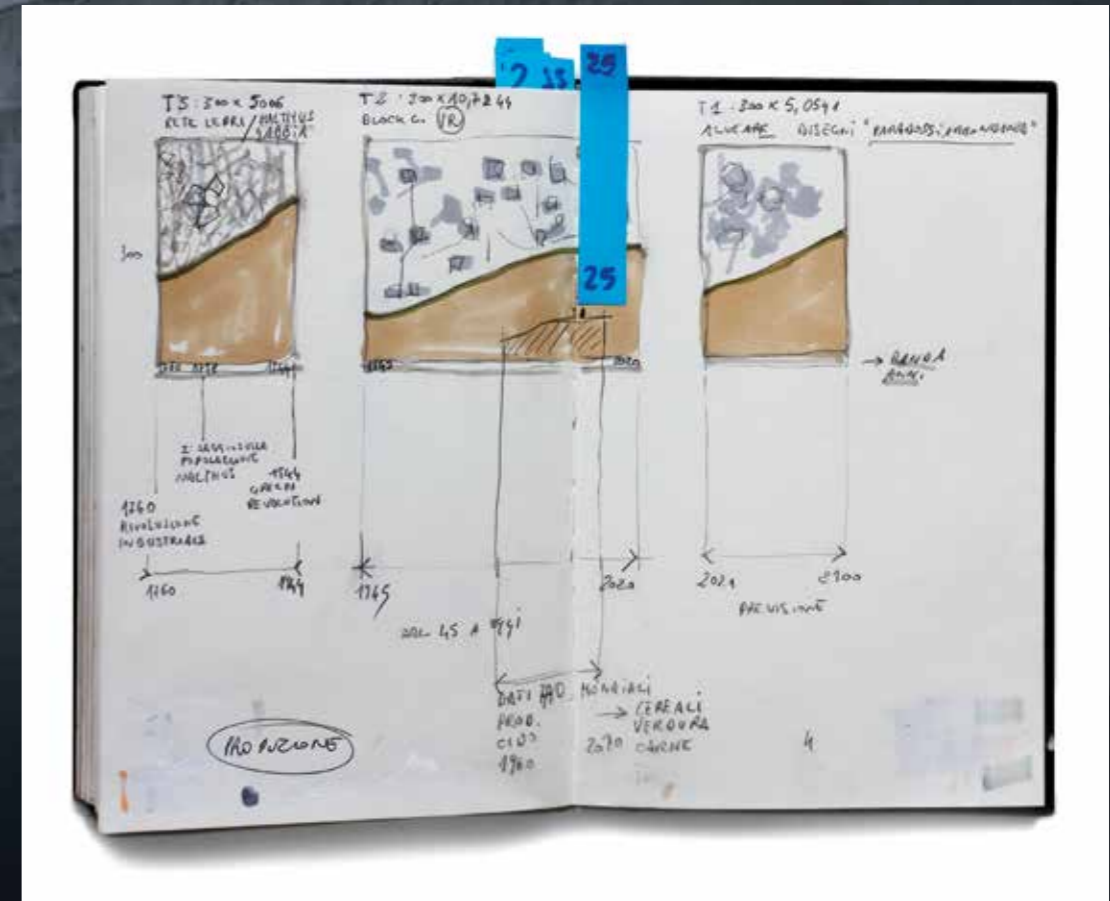
then in the permanent digital culture collection. Last of all – and maybe this is the most significant reason – because the work itself appears as an unexpected turbulence in "clear air" for the public it is aimed at. The artist shares her criticisms and anxieties, and the museum becomes the place for discussion, reflection and analysis. Art and the museum thus take on a function that easily overrides the aesthetic act and presents itself as a transformative cultural and social factor.

President Sandrina Bandera, director Emma Zanella and I wish to thank all the people involved in the project who have helped achieve this objective: in particular Marzia Migliora, curator Matteo Lucchetti, the Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity of MIBACT; our project partners, in particular Maria Bottai and Serlachius Museums in Mänttä, which hosted the first version of the work in their exhibition *The Quest for Happiness, Italian Art Now*, Charles Esche and the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven for the on-line exhibition and the project they intend to develop with Marzia Migliora in 2022, Roberto Cincotta and the Italian Institute of Culture in Warsaw for their support and diffusion of the project; and our cultural partners – the National Gallery of San Marino and the City of Gallarate National Award for the Visual Arts – thanks to which the artist worked at MA*GA for the first time in 2016.

The works described here, together with many others in the artist's catalogue, are rooted in her conviction that artistic practice may and must build new imaginaries of emancipation and inclusion, but only by endowing with new meanings the language we use, the images we share and the stories hidden by the prevailing narrative. (...) A range of possibilities that crosses our present, interweaving it with the phantoms of the things that torment us because they have been left unresolved, uncontextualised, requiring exhaustive explanations and subsequent restarts.

— From: Matteo Lucchetti, *Through the Spectre*, pp. 9-13.

- 01 Marzia Migliora's sketch book, 2019. One of the first sketches of the artwork *1760-2100*, a three-part curtain that represents the world population's growth from 1760 to 2100.
- 02 Marzia Migliora, from the series *The Spectre of Malthus*, project drawing, #2, 2020.



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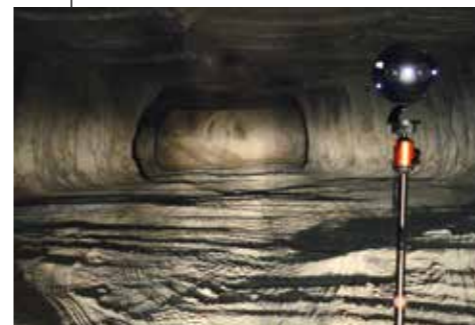


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Through the Spectre¹

Matteo Lucchetti
Curator of the project



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The title *Through the Spectre* is an ill-concealed play on *Through the Looking Glass*, Lewis Carroll's sequel to *Alice In Wonderland*, a book full of puns, talking flowers and other creatures that exist only when you have passed through the mirror. The spectre we pass through in this title is, rather, a vision (from the Latin *spectrum*: image, simulacrum) created by the artist Marzia Migliora with the mindfulness that informs her research and, consequently, the worlds she gives shape to in her artistic practice. They too, populated by paradoxical and imaginative situations, take us in this latest work of hers, *The Spectre of Malthus*, down into the depths of a salt mine to look the pointless logics that govern our relationship with other species in the face. The journey is a realisation of our being in the world, a species

among other species, no longer with the phantom of domination over the rest of the planet, seen as an inexhaustible resource for the exponential growth of a small part of the world population. But the spectres from past eras that act on our present are many and various and, of these, the principle of coloniality² is probably the legacy of modern times that brings together all the equally spectral imbalances and inequalities that continue to impinge upon the environment, resources and bodies, human and otherwise. As the Argentine philosopher Walter Dignolo has theorised, coloniality is what is still at work in most of us today, making us feel authorised, epithelially and in secret, to lay claim to acquired privileges. It involves our persisting in our perceptions of the imaginary of a colonial system based on oppression, appropriation and extraction as undeclared tools of progress and modernity: an unfinished capitalistic project – which was accelerating sharply prior to the pandemic – whereby wealth is concentrated in the hands of those who, often for generations, have stayed at the top of the social pinnacle. Alongside the unfulfilled promise to extend well-being to the majority and the concealed erosion of the rights of the many who are at the bottom of the pyramid and maintain it with their manpower, indifferent to the real costs of the climb to wealth.

Marzia Migliora artistic research has always been situated at the intersections of the stories of those who take part, consciously or not, in this gold rush. In her twenty years of work, in her installations, videos, drawings, performances and much more besides, she has explained the human dynamics that inspire production and its dramas, seeking to make a contribution to the reorganisation of a more communitarian imaginary, concerning herself with minorities and their grievances, and turning social and political incongruences on their head with a multiplicity of visual devices. I would like to recall some of them here. *Forza lavoro* (Workforce, 2016), in which Migliora reproduces one of Pier Luigi Nervi's modules for the Palazzo del Lavoro in Turin – built for the 'Italia 61' celebrations for the first centenary of Italian Unity –

01 Setting up of the exhibition *The Spectre of Malthus*.

02 Marzia Migliora, *The invention of a resistant system is a creative act*, 2016. Charcoal briquettes 1000 x 900 cm.

03 VR camera during the location scouting in the salt mines of Racalmuto, 2020.

¹ A previous version of this text appeared with the same title in *Lo spettro di Malthus Ebook*, available on the website of the MA*GA Museum.

² Introduced by the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano for the first time in 1990.



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with coal briquettes and transforms the remains of the building into optical chambers to self-document their own death in long Talbot-style exposures, even as the combustion of modernism and its false promises appears imminent.

In the installation *Stilleven* (2015), farm labour becomes the anonymous, collective narrative of the last of the earth. Here the artist fills a room (created from a wardrobe from a country house) with almost two

tonnes of corncobs, evoking memories of her rural childhood and monoculture as a ghost that has penetrated her family's intimacy. In *Un caso* (A Case, 2015), the economic crisis, like a univocal mantra, takes on nuances and relativisations thanks to the juxtaposition between the dramatic story of the entrepreneur Isidoro Danza, who ended up committing bank robberies with a toy gun in order to pay his laid-off workers, and the views of the anthropologist Alberto Salza on the various conceptions of poverty in extra-western contexts. In *Velme* (2017), she reinterprets the entire 18th-century museum of Ca' Rezzonico in Venice through the city's capitalist system based on the production of and trade in salt; the opulent wealth that hides early signs of colonial expansionism and the racialisation of the black body (in the installation *Mondo nuovo*, The New World) as a tool for the extraction of free labour. Many other examples might be cited and they would all lead to comprehension of the premises for de-modernisation that underlie *The Spectre of Malthus*.

The exhibition of Marzia Migliora's new project, whose inspirations and processes this publication documents and describes, ought to have opened on May 9 2020. Then the pandemic came along and forced us to stay at home, taught us the meaning of *social distancing*, and accustomed us to the daily bulletins that monitor the progress of the contagion and its effects on the population. This parallel dimension, in which we would never have expected to find ourselves living, has much more to do with the themes of the exhibition than the life we have now got into the habit of referring to generically as 'normality', and which is now, de facto, behind us.

The spectre of Malthus is that of Thomas Robert Malthus, or, more specifically, the model that bears his name. In 1798 this British economist and demographer published *An Essay on the Principle of Population as It Affects the Future Improvement of Society*, in which he foresees the imbalances that exist between demographic growth and food production.

The former, argues Malthus, grows exponentially, whereas the second follows an arithmetical model and is hence constant. These two irreconcilable variables present imbalances that, historically speaking, have resulted in wars, epidemics and child mortality. This is why in his writings, partly based on his observation of mining activities in the British colonies, Malthus eventually elaborated his theory of the subsistence wage against poverty and in the title of the above-mentioned essay – which was revised in various editions until 1826 – introduced the concept of 'human happiness' against that of unfettered economic growth.

Now in 2020, when antithetical figures such as Greta Thunberg and Donald Trump and the models they represent live side by side, the pandemic has arrived in a form that is as global as the economy that has made the world a single market, enabling the virus to spread with unexpected efficiency and speed. The virus has caused a spillover due to the deforestation required by the expansion of livestock breeding for the food industry. The key theme of the exhibition, the instability of



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the relationship between demographic growth and food production, has become a topical issue. This is why we decided to collaborate with the weekly magazine *Internazionale* to ensure that the huge amount of materials produced by Marzia Migliora over the last two years will circulate among the general public, not only that of the art world. We will thus go beyond the concept of the exhibition as a one-off event, seeking to contribute with artistic research to a debate on the reasons that have led us to live a collective experience with apocalyptic overtones.

The reasons why Marzia Migliora has decided to explore the contradictions intrinsic in industrialised agricultural production models and the intensive extractive practices of neoliberal capitalism are in fact anchored in the conviction – fortunately increasingly shared – that the paradigms on which the industrial world as we know it is based are at the root of the emergencies, past and future, that humankind is progressively having to address. The offshoots of the project mainly concern three ambits of the artist's work, which in the exhibition occupy three macro-areas marked

by a timeline that follows demographic growth from 1790 – the decade in which Malthus published his essay – to 2100, the year scholars identify as the spike of population on the planet (11 billion people). The line is exemplified by a large curtain made of ecological material, on which are printed three typologies of nets through which it is possible to glimpse the works on show. Even before entering the exhibition, the visitor is welcomed by a work that almost blocks the way in. It is entitled *Prey* and it takes the form of a Victorian museum display cabinet containing a block of salt harpooned as if it were the back of a whale. This apparently simple image anticipates the historical responsibility of display as a device for affirming power and its conquests. Salt, the leitmotiv of the whole exhibition, is a synthesis of mineral extraction and necessary nutrition. Here, more specifically, it is a simulacrum of the sea, seen, in its crystallisation, as a primordial space of life.

The first work, *La gabbia* (The Cage), which addresses the themes that have informed the whole project, dematerialises a horsebox to its bare essentials to speak about domestication as a form of exploitation of bodies and an intensive extractive model for agricultural and food purposes. The curtain that serves as an entrance to the work is printed with a trap for catching hares, an allusion to the blind predatory act that has exemplified humans and nature across the two centuries in the timeline. When the spectator is inside the cage and observed from the outside, the work also reveals a possible conversation between species, between human and animal, in addressing realisation of the state of things. In fact, on entering the horsebox, the visitor is asked to take on the spectral form of a carthorse, only some of whose anatomic components are featured. The blinkers/earflaps incorporate a monocular visor which immerses the visitor in a theatrical diorama showing a landscape of flora and fauna, populated by heads of state, composed by the artist exclusively with reproductions of images extrapolated from hundreds of bank notes from all over the world. The work underlines how indiscriminate transformation of the natural environment to meet human needs has involved a capitalistic conquest of spaces and resources as part of an omnipotent idea of profit expansion whose sole outcome is that of making other



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- 04 Marzia Migliora, *Stilleven*, 2015. Corncobs, mirror, wardrobe, optical instruments, 500 x 800 x 400 cm. 56th Venice Biennial.
- 05 Marzia Migliora, *The New World*, 2017. Angular measuring rod, rock salt with Ethiopian vase-holders from the collection. Ca' Rezzonico, Museum of 18th Century, Venice.
- 06 Marzia Migliora, Elena Pugliese, *Un caso #4*, 2016. Talk performance with Isidoro Danza and Alberto Salza.
- 07 Marzia Migliora is choosing five salt blocks for the artwork *Illuminated factory*, exhibited at Cà Rezzonico on the occasion of the solo show *Velme*, curated by Beatrice Merz. Realmonte, 2017.
- 08 The hand of Marzia Migliora holding extra big 3/15 rock salt, chosen to fill the tank of the installation *The Spectre of Malthus*. Petralia, 2020.



species, and ourselves, prisoners, trapped in a cage-cum-life model of our own creation.

Marzia Migliora has imagined the second work on show as an immersion, based on a profound, indelible experience, like that of a descent into the bowels of the earth, to more than a hundred metres below sea level. This is the depth at which it is possible to find the rock salt that has been extracted for centuries in the Sicilian salt mines of Petralia and Racalmuto, in geological strata that were formed about six million years ago.

The work, which takes the form of a virtual reality video, guides the visitor on a journey that would otherwise be impossible, described by the artist as 'a digestive process within a historical perspective of human hunger'. Here we descend along tunnels bored by humans into the depths of the earth.

Their appearance is that of intestines populated by animations of the artist's drawings of some of the fundamental stages in the conflict between so-called progress and its costs within the ecosystem. Pesticides and chemical fertilisers, extractions of fossil resources and forms of slavery in the colonial age are just some of the representations that enwrap the spectator, who literally sits on a mountain of salt through this virtual three-dimensional journey. The purpose is not to offer an artist's representation of the unhealthy relationship between humans and the multiplicity of life forms that surround them, but to generate what Donna Haraway has described as unexpected kinships by joining the many threads that compose the complex, nuanced web of our contemporaneity - to restart from an imaginary rich in mindfulness and the possibility of emancipation from the Malthusian trap that we are now experiencing at the height of its power. The curtain all around wraps the visitor in the digital web of a blockchain, the system in which cryptocurrencies, among other things, operate. This association is a further reflection by the artist on the increasing distance between the place of value production and its circulation and multiplication. This condition of separation and invisibility has allowed the masses to be unknowing accomplices of the effects of their daily lives on the rest of the world. The video soundtrack consists of autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR) sounds produced by the artist by chewing various foods and recording the process of their ingestion. The choice to use mastication sounds has a dual significance. On the one hand it emphasises the descent into the mine as a metabolic process that tells a story of human, biological and metaphoric hunger, as well as the environmental metamorphoses this has caused. On the other it is a reference to a phenomenon that exploded on YouTube in 2010, since when hundreds

of thousands of users have recorded themselves in the act of eating with high-precision microphones. Their videos received millions of views thanks to the so-called 'brain tingles' these sounds generate in the listener through headphones. Here the nutrition dimension is reduced to a mere conceptual gesture as a further reflection on the split between action and reaction that characterises modern-day digital production and to which the curtain alludes, too.

The last work originates from a set of collages that Marzia Migliora began in 2017 entitled *Paradossi dell'abbondanza* (Paradoxes of Plenty), The title of the work is borrowed from a chapter in *An Edible History of Humanity* by the British journalist Tom Standage³, who reconstructs a certain idea of modernity through the history of agriculture and

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³ The title *The Spectre of Malthus* derives from 'The Ghost of Malthus', one of the chapters in Tom Standage's book.

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its subjection to the production of food as a commodity with the introduction of monocultures, intensive production, pesticides, genetically modified organisms and everything else that has allowed humans their supposed control of the natural cycles of germination. Migliora produced a set of 29 collages that blend drawing with the *papier collé* tradition to speak about the contradictions experienced in the agricultural field from the perspective of the agricultural workers themselves, be they present-day seasonal migrants, labourers on colonial plantations or, more simply, people from the artist and her family's own rural background. The juxtapositions reveal the interplay of imaginaries that refer to different moments in history, but close to each other insofar as they are characterised by humans' domination, control and exploitation of the natural world. Paradox as a rhetorical device serves to illuminate the absurdity of a situation and the 29 tables are, in turn, displayed in a paradoxical situation: each one of them, in fact, is placed on a canteen tray in three rack trolleys.

The wheels of trolleys, in turn, are half-buried in virgin soil, uncultivated but conducive to the appearance of new species. The idea of using collage and drawing as if they are foodstuffs reflects the germinal nature of Migliora's practice, which relates her artistic methodology to metabolic processes. Hence this, the final image in the exhibition, illustrates the sense of possibility and metamorphosis explored by the philosopher Emanuele Coccia in the following pages in *Eva*, a text written specially for this catalogue. Here you will also find three excerpts from the texts from which the artist has drawn most inspiration in her work, and which offer a window on the thinking and theories of their authors: Vandana Shiva, Tom Standage and Pierre Laszlo. Last but not least, this catalogue-magazine treats the reader to preferential access to the artist's sketch books in which much of her creative process takes shape. In fact, for most of her 20-year career Migliora has kept a set of sketch books with black covers in which she collects all the references, discussions and ideas about her works in the form of drawings, notes and cuttings. We decided together to publish some of the pages that refer to the installation that preceded *The Spectre of Malthus*, together with photos shot during the long months of travel, recess, preparation and production that made the realisation of the project possible.

The works described here, together with many others in the artist's catalogue, are rooted in her conviction that artistic practice may and must build new imaginaries of emancipation and inclusion, but only by endowing with new meanings the language we use, the images we share and the stories hidden by the prevailing narrative. The imaginary that constitutes our way of looking at reality really does have the form of a spectre, in the sense of a field that includes multiplicity in a stratified temporality: a range of possibilities that crosses our present, interweaving it with the phantoms of the things that torment us because they have been left unresolved, uncontextualised, requiring exhaustive explanations and subsequent restarts. The feminist philosopher Donna Haraway sends out a warning in these times of emergency: either we become-with each other or not at all.

09 A photo from the set of the VR film *The Spectre of Malthus*, shot during the last visit to the salt mines. Petralia, 2020.

10 Marzia Migliora's research drawing for the ASMR recording session of chewing sounds with a professional binaural microphone (for the soundtrack of the VR film *The Spectre of Malthus*), 2019.

11 The salt is grinded and packed by the machines directly in the mine. It will see the light after six million years only when the boxes are opened. Petralia, 2020.

The Cage

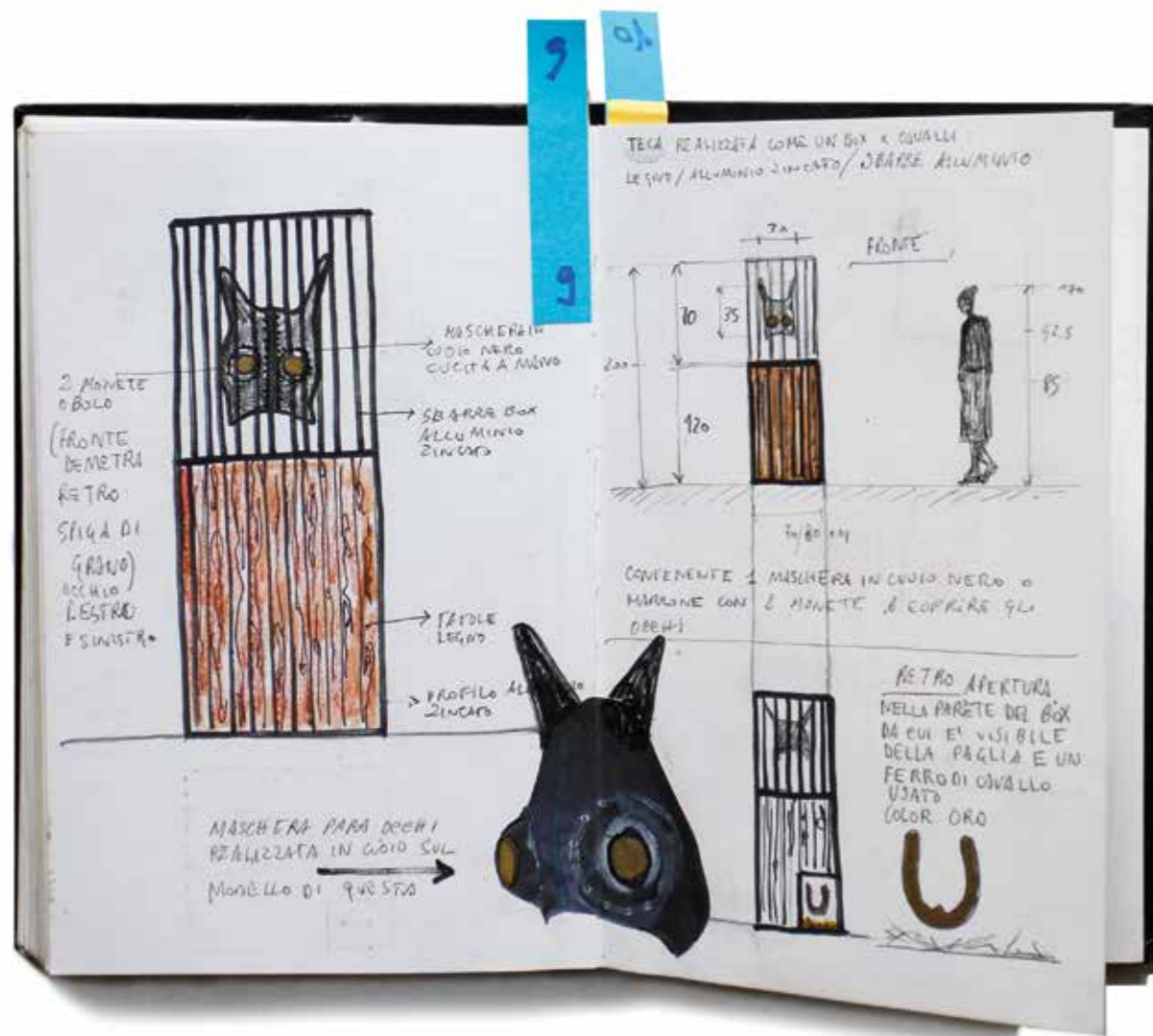




Vandana Shiva

On the Side of the Last – A life fighting for peasants' rights

Slow Food Editore, Bra, 2007



p. 14-15 Marzia Migliora, *The Cage*, 2019-2020. Iron and wood elements, straw, blinders, diorama box, engraved salt block, horseshoe and horse tail, 265 x 300 x 300 cm.

p. 16 Marzia Migliora's sketch book, 2019. Sketches for the installation *The Cage*, in its first version exhibited at the Serlachius Museum, Mänttä.

TERRA MADRE VERSUS TERRA NULLIUS

When I first got involved in the environment movement in the early 1990s, the most important issue was deforestation. With the intensification of 'development' and its demands for natural resources, movements emerged to resist mining, large dams, the dumping of toxic waste and the grabbing of peasant land. Over the years, whether it was forestry or fisheries, whether it was land or water, three major features emerged and shaped my thinking about nature, ecology and development.

In the beginning was the transformation of the idea of nature from Terra Madre to Terra Nullius: an empty earth and dead matter were the result of industrialization and economic 'development'. The dictatorship of mechanistic science and industrial technologies devalued both woman and nature: as long as humanity related to the earth as a mother – Dharitri, Vasundhara, Gaia and Terra Madre were the names given

to it by diverse civilizations – rivers flowed clean, forests grew abundant, soils retained their fertility, biodiversity flourished and climate patterns were predictable and stable. If today we were to make an atlas of Gaia, we would find a one-to-one correspondence between cultures based on reverence and respect and healthy ecosystems and societies. Whereas the destruction of nature and cultures shaped by Mother Earth coincides with diseases of the environment and those who live in it.

This has happened because, with the spread of the industrial paradigm, nature was objectified and commodified. Science, technology and economies were all shaped for man's mastery over the earth. 'Oikos' in Greek means home: the term ecology, which is derived from it, is the science of the earth as our home. Economics was originally supposed to be the management of the earth as a home. But with the success of the capitalist model, economics has been reduced to measuring the destruction of the earth's resources and ecological processes, and calling it 'growth'.

Science too has stopped analysing the workings of a living, self-organising Gaia. Which is why Terra Madre has been transformed into Terra Nullius, to be exploited for profit and power. In *Tempores Partus Masculus*, Sir Francis Bacon promised to create 'a blessed race of heroes and supermen' who would dominate both nature and society. The title of the work suggests a shift from the older science, represented as female – passive and weak – to the new masculine science of the scientific revolution,

But with the success of the capitalist model, economics has been reduced to measuring the destruction of the earth's resources and ecological processes, and calling it 'growth'.

which Bacon saw himself as heralding. In *New Atlantis*, Bensalem, Bacon's mythical land, was administered from Solomon's House, a scientific research institute from which male scientists ruled over and made decisions for society and established which secrets should be revealed and which to keep to themselves.

Science-dominated society has evolved very much in the pattern of Bacon's Bensalem, with nature being transformed and mutilated in modern Solomon's Houses: namely corporate labs and the university programmes they sponsor. With the new biotechnologies, Bacon's vision of controlling reproduction for the sake of production is being realised, while the 'Green Revolution' and the bio-revolution have realised what in *New Atlantis* was only a utopia. With their contrivances, the new sorcerers' apprentices make trees and flowers to come earlier or later than their seasons, and to come up and bear fruit more speedily than by their natural course.

They make them greater, much more than their nature, their fruit bigger and different – in terms of flavour, aroma, colour and shape – from what they would be naturally. For Bacon, nature was no longer a Mother, but a woman to be conquered by an aggressive masculine mind. This transformation of nature from a living, nurturing mother to inert, dead and manipulable matter was eminently suited to the exploitation imperative of growing capitalism. The nurturing earth image acted as a cultural constraint on the indiscriminate exploitation of nature. As the American eco-feminist Carolyn Merchant points out, 'One does not readily slay a mother, dig into her entrails or mutilate her body'.

But the mastery and domination images created by the Baconian programme and the scientific revolution removed all restraint and functioned as cultural sanctions for the denudation of nature.

The removal of animistic, organic assumptions about the cosmos constituted the death of nature: this is the most far-reaching effect of the scientific revolution. Because nature was now viewed as a system of dead, inert particles moved by external forces, the mechanical framework itself could legitimate the manipulation of nature. Moreover, as a conceptual framework, the mechanical order had associated with it a framework of values based on power, fully compatible with the directions taken by commercial capitalism.

The mechanistic paradigm of science, combined with the capitalist paradigm of the economy, is sniffing out life from every ecosystem and life form it touches. The more the 'economy' grows, the faster nature dies. Ignoring the



rules, laws and limits of the Mother Earth that sustains us, we pump pollution into the air and into the rivers, we mine every mineral from her body, we chop down every tree to build railways and highways, we bulldoze every farm to raise skyscrapers and shopping malls. Dead rivers, terminator seeds, toxic food and climate chaos are man's inheritance from killing Mother Earth. We could, within our lifetimes, experience the serious destruction of the conditions for human life on earth with disappearing glaciers, rising seas and vanishing biodiversity.

We could turn things around only if we remembered that we are children of Mother Earth and need to protect her to protect future generations and ourselves. When, in March 2007, the farmers of the Bengalese village of Nandigram refused to allow their land to be appropriated by the Indonesian Salem group for the installation of a chemical plant in the ambit of Special Economic Zone policies, they were defending their Mother Earth. This primeval bond is the promise for our future. This is why 'Terre Madre' and 'Vasundhara' are the names we have given to our gatherings of peasants who farm the earth as her children, not her conquerors, enemies and masters. Let us remember the mother of all species and cultures, of all generations of the past and the future. Let us remember and reconnect to Mother Earth so that humanity may have a future. The liberation of nature and the liberation of women are a common battle to return from Terra Nullius to Terra Madre.

THE 'GREEN REVOLUTION'

This is the name that has been given since the 1950s to a type of agriculture based on seeds bred to be resistant to pesticides and other chemicals. Born in the USA, it was subsequently imposed elsewhere in the world, India included. Thanks to the extensive use of technical and scientific knowledge (genetically selected plants, agricultural machinery, fertilisers and pesticides), that period saw a sizeable increase in agrifood production to address the problems involved in feeding the population. In the long term, however, the 'revolution' has dramatically impoverished and polluted the soil and aquifers below it to a devastating extent. For the first time ever, the introduction of hybrid seeds tied peasant farmers to producer companies, upsetting a centuries-old balance that had always enabled them to use the seeds they used to gather from season to season. In this way Indian peasant farmers were systematically ruined by debt and thrown into the misery of the industrial agriculture that was supposed to bring prosperity to rural communities.

Albeit with lower yields than biodiverse farms, the low-productivity monocultures characteristic of the 'Green Revolution' were passed off as



highly productive systems. But the truth was that in this way industrial agriculture became a war against ecosystems, an activity founded on the tools and logic of war, and has had consequences similar to those of a conflict. In 1984, in Bhopal, 3,000 people were killed by a leak from a Union Carbide pesticide plant. 30,000 more have died since then, and thousands have been crippled for life.

(...) The chemicals on which industrial agriculture is based were originally designed for chemical warfare, and they turned Bhopal and our farms into war zones. As is often the case, Sir Albert Howard had a clear understanding of things. In *An Agricultural Testament*, he writes:

The factories engaged during the Great War in the fixation of atmospheric nitrogen for the manufacture of explosives had to find other markets, the use of nitrogenous fertilizers in agriculture increased, until today the majority of farmers and market gardeners base their manorial programme on the cheapest forms of nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K) on the market. What may be conveniently described as the NPK mentality dominates farming alike in the experimental stations and the countryside. Vested interests, entrenched in time of national emergency, have gained a stranglehold.

In other words, it is agricultural chemicals that are the real arms of mass destruction today.

The violence unleashed by the 'Green Revolution' and new agricultural technologies also transpires in the growing phenomenon of female foeticide in the state of Punjab. The prosperous states of the northwest account for just 17 per cent of the population of India but are responsible for 80 per cent of cases of foeticide. The gender ratio has fallen to 927 female babies to 1,000 male ones, which shows that 250,000 female foeticides are committed every year. Women have become the gender with which we can be done without in a world in which money is the only measure of value – of human beings and of everything else.

WOMEN, THE CUSTODIANS OF BIODIVERSITY

The truth is that women have always been the greatest experts on and custodians of biodiversity. They have been guardians of seeds, creators of foods and healers. Biodiversity itself has been venerated in a female form. The indigenous communities of the Andes consider grain, the potato, coca and quinoa as female divinities and the ancient hymn of the Rig Veda respects curative plants as mothers.

The rise of industrial medicine and agriculture was tantamount to a war to wipe out biodiversity and women.

The removal of animistic, organic assumptions about the cosmos constituted the death of nature.

Witch-hunts in Europe were an attack on women for their expertise and wisdom and constituted a process of delegitimization and destruction of their knowledge. The myth according to which the scientific revolution was a universal process of intellectual progress is constantly undermined by feminist studies and the history of science in non-western cultures, which connect the affirmation of the reductionist paradigm to the subjection and destruction of female learning in the West and in those cultures. In 1511, the English parliament passed a law against 'common Artificers, as Smiths, Weavers, and Women, who boldly and accustomedly take upon them great Cures, and Things of great Difficulty, in the which they partly use Sorcery and Witchcraft'. In 16th-century Europe, women were excluded from the practise of medicine and healing because 'wise women' risked being accused of witchcraft.

A deeper and more violent form of exclusion of female wisdom and knowledge and those of tribal and rural cultures is underway today as a result of the diffusion of the male chauvinist scientific paradigm. This alienates women, destroys biodiversity and condemns millions of plant and animal species to extinction. My response is very different from that of most people: I believe it is women and small farmers reliant on biodiversity who are the main suppliers of food in the Third World. Contrary to the widespread belief, their small biodiversity-based agricultural systems are more productive than industrial monocultures.

Great diversity and sustainable systems of food production have been destroyed to boost production, but important sources of food have vanished with them. If we measure the so-called 'high yields' of industrial agriculture from the point of view of nutrition per hectare and biodiversity, they do not ensure higher production or better food. The term 'yield' usually refers to production per unit of land in a single harvest. 'Performance' refers instead to the total production of different crops and harvests. Obviously, if we plant a single crop in a field, a monoculture, its yield will increase. If we plant several crops together, we will see low yields of single crops but high performance in terms of total food production. Yield has been defined in such a way as to make the food production of small farms run by small farmers disappear. It is thus that the production of millions of Third World women farmers – like those of my native Himalayas who as members of the Chipko movement fight against deforestation and in their terraced fields grow amaranth, various types of soybean, millet, beans and peas – has been hidden. From the point of view of biodiversity, productivity based on variety is superior to that of monocultures. I have described this blindness in the face of the high productivity of diversity, this mentality that gives life to monocultures in our fields, as a 'monoculture of the mind'.

The Maya peasants of the state of Chiapas in Mexico are described as being unproductive because they grow only two

tonnes of grain per acre, but if we include beans, pumpkins, other vegetables and fruit trees their total food performance is 20 tonnes per acre. In Java, small farmers grow 607 species in their gardens with an overall variety comparable to that of a tropical deciduous forest. In Sub-Saharan Africa women cultivate as many as 120 different plants in the spaces left vacant by industrial crops. In Thailand a single garden is home to 230 species, an African one to 60 tree species. Families in the Congolese countryside eat the leaves of more than 50 different trees. A study carried out in eastern Nigeria

showed that only 2 per cent of the land cultivated by a family provided half the total production of a farm. Likewise, it has been calculated that Indonesian gardens supply more than 20 per cent of family income and 40 per cent of domestic food supplies.

WHO FEEDS THE WORLD?

Research carried out by FAO (the UNO Food and Agriculture Organization) has shown that small farms that depend on biodiversity are capable of producing thousands of times more food than large industrial monocultures. Diversity is the best strategy to ward off drought and desertification. To feed a growing population sustainably it is necessary to intensify diversity, not chemical spraying and genetic engineering. And yet, though women and small farmers feed the world through biodiversity, we repeatedly hear that without genetic engineering and the globalization of agriculture, the world will die of hunger. Despite all the empiric evidence demonstrating how biotechnology does not produce more food – indeed often causes decreases in yield – it is promoted incessantly as the sole alternative for feeding the poor. This is why I ask the question: who feeds the world? This deliberate blindness in the face of diversity, the production of nature, of women, of the peasants of the Third World, makes it possible to pass off as creation what is actually destruction and appropriation. Take the case of golden rice, rice genetically modified with vitamin A, theoretically capable of healing blindness. It is argued that without genetic engineering we cannot eliminate vitamin A deficiency. But nature offers us many and abundant sources of the vitamin: rice itself would be a source if it was not husked. If corn fields were not sprayed with herbicides, we would have amaranth, mustard leaves and goosefoot, all delicious and nutritious plants. The women of Bengal use more than 150 edible plants: *hinche sak* (*Enhydra fluctuans*), *palang sak* (*Spinacea oleracea*), *tak palang* (*Rumex vesicarius*), *lal sak* (*Amaranthus gangeticus*), *champa note* (*Amarantus tristis*), *gobra*

the belittlement of female labour in sustainable economies is the natural outcome of a system built by a capitalist patriarchy.





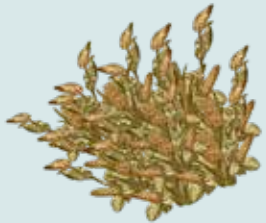
note (*Amaranthus lividus*), *ghenti note* (*Amarantus tennifolius*), *banspata note* (*Amaranthus lanceolatus*), *ban note* (*Amaranthus viridis*), *sada note* (*Amaranthus blitum*), *kanta note* (*Arnaranthus spinosus*), *bethua sale* (*Chenopodium album*), *brahmi sak* (*Bacopa monrieri*), *sushin sak* (*Marulea quadrifolio*), to name just a few. But the creation myth presents biotechnologists as the creators of vitamin A, thus denying the multiplicity of bounties of nature and female knowledge on how to use them to feed their children and their families.



The most effective way of destroying nature, local economies and small self-sufficient producers is to make their production invisible. As in the case of women whose families and communities regard them as 'unproductive' and 'economically inactive', the belittlement of female labour in sustainable economies is the natural outcome of a system built by a capitalist patriarchy. This is how globalisation destroys local economies, yet this ruination is looked on as development. Women themselves are depreciated in the same way: given that they carry out most of their work in rural and indigenous communities in collaboration with nature, and often at odds with dominant development, oriented towards the market and commercial policies, and that labour capable of meeting needs and ensuring subsistence is generally undervalued, their livelihoods and systems of sustenance are nurtured less.

The invisibility of sustainable, regenerative production is especially conspicuous in the ambit of food. Whereas the patriarchal division of labour has assigned women the task of feeding families and communities, patriarchal conceptions of science and technology have made the work of women as suppliers of food disappear. Women do play this role but the possibility of 'feeding the world' is no longer associated with them and seems to depend exclusively on global agribusiness and the biotech multinationals.

But the industrialisation and genetic manipulation of food and the globalisation of trade in agriculture are recipes for creating hunger, not for feeding the poor.



- 01 Marzia Migliora, *The Cage*, 2019-2020. Detail: view from the inside of the blinders containing a diorama box, lenses, 5 collages on glass, led light.
- 02 Marzia Migliora, *The Cage*, 2019-2020. Detail: collage made with elements taken from paper money in a theatrical diorama box, lenses, 5 collages on glass, led light.
- 03, 04 Marzia Migliora, *The Cage*, 2019-2020. Iron and wood elements, straw, blinders, diorama box, engraved salt block, horseshoe and horse tail, 265 x 300 x 300 cm.





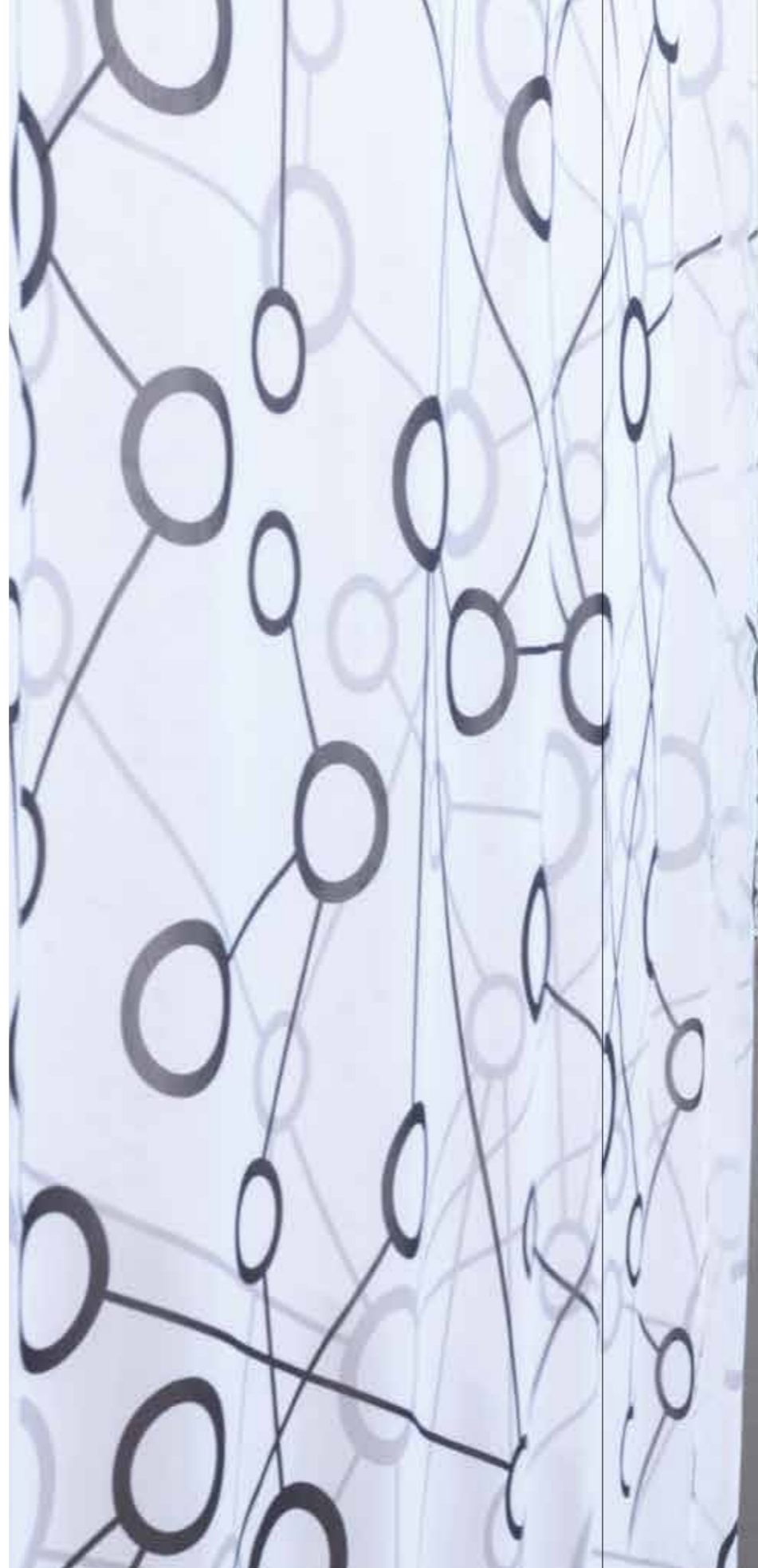
02



03



The Spectre of Malthus



Pierre Laszlo

Salt: Grain of Life

Columbia University Press,
New York, 2001

- p. 26-27 Marzia Migliora, *1760-2100 (#blockchain and #honeycomb)*, 2020. Graphic printed on eco chiffon sheets, supporting structure, 300 x 2320 cm.
Marzia Migliora, *The Spectre of Malthus*, 2020. Virtual reality video installation, ASMR sound, color, animation, 4'30", Oculus virtual reality device, salt, stool, tank, ø 250 cm.
- p. 28 Marzia Migliora's sketch book, 2020. A detail of a collage with a sculpture holding coins in its mouth and eyes. To the side, a sketch for the installation *The Spectre of Malthus*.

According to anthropologist Mary Douglas, consumer goods are a form of communication, since they give rise to barter or exchange. Until the time of Gutenberg, they were the chief means of communication between human groups. Forms of communication in their turn dictate social structure:

The meanings conveyed along the goods channel are part and parcel of the meanings in the kinship and mythology channels, and all three are part of the general concern to control information.¹

And goods are the guarantors of social relations, which they help to establish. Salt is exemplary in this regard. Several centuries before our era, sheep tracks used to transhumance already coincided with the paths used for salt distribution that went from the Mediterranean coast to inland mountain zones (...).

ABUSE OF POWER

A brief history of the Republic of Venice teaches how a contingent fact, the refuge of its inhabitants in an insalubrious, marshy area, was turned by them into an asset. The asset became a domination when the marshland was developed into a salt production center. The domination in turn became an empire when Venice realized that it could emancipate itself from its local production operations by seizing competing producers nearby and overseas.

The republic graduated from salt imperialism – which in the meantime had expanded to include numerous commodities issuing from the eastern Mediterranean and the countries of the Orient to monopoly. This monopoly prevailed not only over large parts of the Mediterranean but also at the very heart of the republic: various influences of the Venetian salt monopoly on the very organization of the city-state are evident. These range from large-scale public works (beginning with the containment of the local rivers whose flooding was a serious threat to the saltworks) to a strong and coercive political regime and a city design based on districts divided into regular blocks, modeled on the topography of salt flats, with their grids of geometrical design.

But Venice, in spite of its hegemonic will, was obliged to battle other rival imperial powers – whether the Genovese (in production and trade) or the Dutch (in trade alone) – themselves also tempted to monopolize the delivery of salt.

Modernity thus roots one of its origins in salt. Salt production and trade provided the model for a colonial type of economic development, in which an essential good is monopolized by a country then in a position to fix its price, by force if need be.

Moreover, the trade in salt has exerted a lasting influence on ways of thinking (in passing, note that it is one of the historical roots of anti-Semitism).

The Dutch Revolt, which took place in the Netherlands at the end of the sixteenth century, illustrates salt's relationship to the colonial type of subjugation and, conversely, to the struggle for independence from an occupying force. It entwined a religious war, a struggle for national independence, and a social revolt. The blockade by the Dutch of the Iberian salt production centers caused the bankruptcy of Philip II's Spain, in spite of its importation of gold – which disappeared with the speed of the fairy variety from the Americas. The Netherlands' war of independence demonstrated the rise in the strength of its naval force, thereafter the leading navy in the world.

And what was happening in France during the same period under the ancient regime? The French people were suffering from the gabelle, a salt tax all the more unjust for penalizing the poor and that, further, discriminated between provinces in the kingdom. Made heavier by Richelieu, who relied on the revenue to finance the king's military expeditions, this tax became synonymous with royal power. Little by little over the course of centuries, the king arrogated the salt tax for himself. It rendered costly a product that was of the highest necessity, one that was abundant to boot. Ways of thinking retain a trace of this: one still speaks today of an "addition salée" [Literally, "a salted bill", a bill or check that is too high or padded. – Trans.]. In addition to everything else that was irrational about the salt tax – Vauban, a military architect and a visionary statesman, courageously denounced it – the brutal repression of the trade in contraband salt did not succeed in eradicating it.

The question then comes up: isn't every tax, because of its salty origin, stained with an intrinsic violence? Furthermore, the farming-out of taxes still endures. Tax farms still compare, even in their abuses, to those of the farmers-general [Fermiers généraux was the name for the wealthy and powerful private tax collectors in France before the Revolution. – Trans.] under the ancien régime. They persist today, for example, in the form of fees levied by corporations for water or highway use.

Other relics attest to the suffering endured by saltworkers over the course of history, whether in the mines or in the evaporation chambers of the saltworks. To visit today the Wieliczka mine or the utopian city of Chaux, designed by the ingenious architect Claude-Nicholas Ledoux but unfortunately never completed, is to witness a cold brutality.



The domination in the collective psyche of salts rarity and high cost is also reflected in sayings and proverbs from the most diverse cultures, from Ireland to Japan.

THE SEEDS OF MODERN TIMES

Following the withdrawal of populations to higher ground and the disrepair of the roads – or the deliberate damaging of them to make them unpassable, after the barbarian and Saracen invasions – commercial Europe expanded – but limited itself as well – along the coasts alone; such coastal expansion endured for several centuries (until the end of the Mongol invasions, toward the middle of the thirteenth century). Several cities along this coastal chain made good use of their location in their bid for power between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries²: Venice, whose zone of influence was primarily the Adriatic Sea, its east and west coasts, and the eastern Mediterranean (including the Greek archipelago)³; Genoa, its great rival, which dominated the eastern Mediterranean⁴; the Netherlands, which exercised its domination over the Atlantic traffic⁵; and, finally, the Hanseatic League, which beginning in the twelfth century united mercantile cities such as Hamburg, Lübeck, and Kiel, operating in the North Sea and the Baltic.

The transport of salt, and the more or less successful attempt to establish a monopoly on it, accounts for the power of each of these centers. Venice, whose own salt production was in fact no longer dominant, secured for itself control over production in other salines: in Chioggia, more to the south; in Cyprus, with its Great Salt Lake; and in Ibiza, in the Balears. In the middle of the fifteenth century, its sales approached thirty thousand tons annually⁶. Genoa controlled production at the Hyères saltworks, which in the same period accounted for two thousand tons annually. The Dutch dominated the trade in Portuguese salt from Setubal, as well as that of Bourgneuf salt and the output of other French saltworks on the Atlantic coast⁷. The Hanse marketed Luneburg salt especially, which it transported as readily westward (to the Shetland Isles, for the salt curing of herring, to London, and to Bruges) as northward (Bergen) and eastward (as far as Riga, Revel – today's Tallinn – and Novgorod); it also supplied itself with salt from the Bay of Bourgneuf.

A particular colonial type of economy is linked to this transport in salt, that is, an economy of trading pasts. It ensures that the boats (whether feluccas, brigantines, or luggers) don't make the return trip empty, so that there are also commodities for exchange, other products to replace the salt in the holds. These products include fish (Europe at that time derived the bulk of its protein



from fish) and another important product associated with salt in this precapitalist economy: lumber, used especially to build the vessels. It is a colonial economy: vast territories are held, with no real need to see to their administration, simply by means of state control of the influx and outflow of essential market goods. On the import side, there was the salt, indispensable for nourishment, and on the export side, there were all the local products to choose from.

Because weather is unpredictable and can wipe out with rain the annual output from solar saltworks on the seashore, salt underwent enormous price fluctuations. At times an inexpensive raw material, though one burdened with heavy transport costs, it could also turn into a product of sudden rarity. Therefore, whether salt was the basic commodity in a given maritime trade or merely return freight often remains an open question. This latter scenario, it would seem, applies to Hanseatic commerce in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries⁸.

Thus the trade in salt is the canvas on which the economic history of Europe over the course of three or four centuries is traced. If Venice was the pioneer in combining military force, political power, and monopoly control of a commodity, this economic-political model radiated far and wide, beginning in the twelfth century. But it is especially in the fourteenth century that one witnesses the establishment of a double domination – of lords and adventurous ocean-going merchants – responding to the increase in northern European salt consumption, occasioned by the preservation of herring and then cod.

Among the ranks of the first group stood eminent the count of Burgundy, the principal member of an oligarchy that controlled the great Salins production center in Franche-Comté⁹. A transformation had taken place in the second half of the thirteenth century. Prior to that period, the economic landscape had been one of production dispersed among numerous competing centers. This pattern became implied through the creation of a very small number of oligopolies in which the counts of Burgundy took the lion's share for themselves. During the same period, the lords, who included the dukes of Burgundy and more specifically the counts of Flanders, levied a new tax to enrich their coffers through a revolutionary technological innovation based on salt and its long-distance transport: the salt curing of herring.

As for the adventurous fourteenth-century merchants who would, for example, pick up salt in the Bourgneuf Bay and bring it back to Hanseatic ports and the trade centers of the North Sea and the Baltic, they established with this a model followed thereafter for colonial expansion into distant lands in the sixteenth-century voyages of discovery.



Military power is indispensable for dominion over a zone of influence. It is constantly put into question by skirmishes at its edges: Venice had to fight on the east against Byzantium, against the Turks, against the Arabs, and on the west against the Genovese¹⁰. Economic war takes many forms, from pirating to naval battles, from blockades to the long-term supply contract.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there occurred the seizure of 1449, when the English captured 108 ships from the Hanseatic fleet¹¹; there was the contract with Genoa, allotting more than 4,000 tons of salt per year to Francisco Sforza, duke of Milan from 1495 to 1835; there was also the anti-Venetian coalition set up in Cambrai in 1508¹², as well as the hostility of the Lombards, requiring Venice to stockpile its salt, so that between 1523 and 1530 Venice accumulated an enormous quantity – 50,000 tons – in its warehouses.

Commerce in salt not only underwrote anti-Venetian sentiment, it also served as one of the roots of anti-Semitism¹³. Owing to the presence of salt outcrops on the shores of the Dead Sea and the importance of salt in Jewish culture and religion, Jews played a major role in the production and sale of salt. Already in the tenth century, Jews operated the salt mines near the town of Halle (the name means "salt") in Germany. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Jewish entrepreneurs secured salt concessions in Spain from the sovereign. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Jews gradually entered the Polish salt trade, to such an extent that in the sixteenth century a portion of the Polish petty nobility embarked on a campaign to try to wrest away this privilege. In the seventeenth century, Jews also ran the Dutch and German salt businesses (from Setubal to Gdansk). To sum up: during the precapitalist period from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, the salt trade served as the seed for modern times. In European history, the waning of Spain as a major power and the birth of the Netherlands in strife were proof of the struggle for supremacy over the salt trade.



Thus the trade in salt is the canvas on which the economic history of Europe over the course of three or four centuries is traced.

1. Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards Anthropology of Consumption* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 61.
2. Bernard Meunier, "Le rôle du sel dans une civilisation", *Economie-Géographie*, 306 (1993); Michel Mollat, ed., *Le rôle du sel dans l'histoire*, Publications de la faculté des lettres et sciences humaines de Paris-Sorbonne, Recherches. vol. 37 (Paris: PUF, 1968).
3. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, Venice seized the saltworks of Cervia that formerly had been fought over by Ravenna and Ferrara: at the beginning of the fourteenth century, Venice became the sole supplier of Mantua, a town that in the thirteenth century had attempted to liberate itself from Venetian salt. See Le Goff, "Le sel", 242-43.
4. The rivalry between these two cities took place especially in Lombardy. In the second half of the twelfth century, Genoese expansionism enjoyed great success, with the domination of the Hyères saltworks and the expulsion of the Pisans from the Sardinian salt production centers. See Le Goff, "Le sel".
5. Like northern Italy, the Netherlands experienced a strong demand for salt because of its population boom; see Le Goff, "Le sel", 240-41. But its supremacy in shipping Atlantic salt to northern Europe and the Baltic was only established in the sixteenth century and did not last beyond the end of the seventeenth century, when it was assaulted by English, Scottish, and Scandinavian shipping. See also Pierre Jeannin, "Le marché du sel marin dans l'Europe du Nord du XVI au XVIII siècle", in *Le rôle du sel*, ed. Mollat, 73-93.
6. Meunier, "Le rôle du sel"; Hocquet, *Le sel*. vol. 2.
7. For many years, the Bay of Bourgneuf had the greatest production output of the Atlantic saltworks. Judged to be of lesser quality, its salt was 30 to 50 percent less costly than the competing salts from the English wiches, in particular from Cheshire, or than salt from Luneburg. Then salt from Brouage became a rival. Finally, around 1770, Portuguese salt from Setubal and Aveiro gained ascendancy. See Mollat, *Le rôle du sel*, 14, and Jeannin, "Le marché du sel marin", 75.
8. Jeannin, "Le marché du sel marin", 74.
9. See René Locatelli, "Du nouveau sur les salines comtoises au Moyen Age", *Société d'Emulation du Jura: Travaux 1989* (Lons-le-Saunier, 1990), 153-68.
10. Lauritzen, *Venice*.
11. Meunier, "Le rôle du sel".
12. McCarthy, *Stones of Florence*, 197.
13. "Salt Trade and Industry", *Encyclopedia Judaica*, (Jerusalem, n.d.), 712-13.

- 01-06 Marzia Migliora, *The Spectre of Malthus*, 2020.
Video frame, VR video, color, ASMR sound, animation, 4'30".
- 07 Marzia Migliora, *The Spectre of Malthus*, 2020.
Virtual reality video installation, ASMR sound, color,
animation, 4'30", Oculus virtual reality device, salt, stool,
tank, ø 250 cm.



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Paradoxes of Plenty

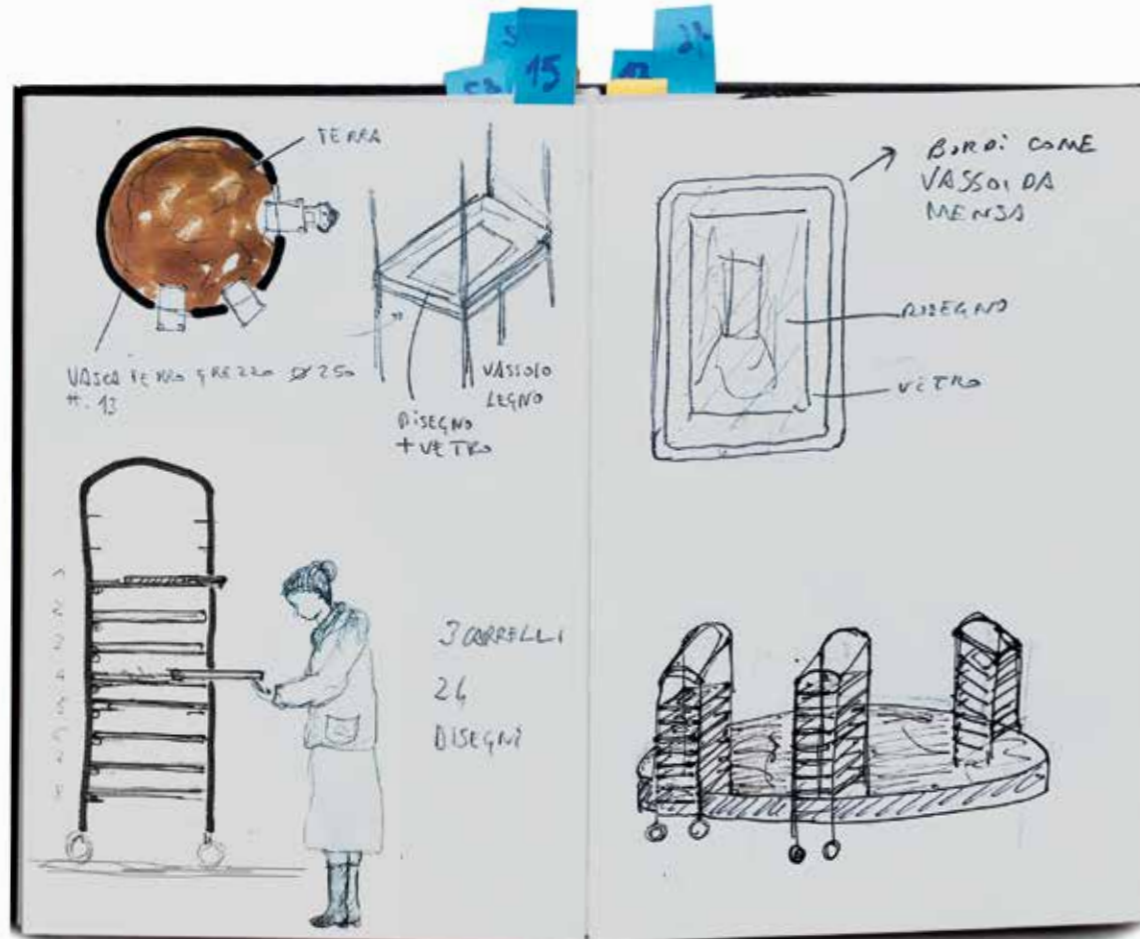




Tom Standage

An Edible History of Humanity

Atlantic Books, London, 2009



p. 40-41 Marzia Migliora, *Paradoxes of Plenty*, 2020. 24 drawings and collage on paper 42 x 29 and 29 x 42 cm, 3 canteen trolleys, trays, glasses, tank, soil, 67 x 300 cm.
 p. 42 Marzia Migliora's sketch book, 2020. Sketches for the installation *Paradoxes of Plenty*, a work around the history of food production.



FROM COLUMBUS TO MALTHUS

Three centuries after Columbus's arrival in the Americas, the ensuing exchange of plants, diseases, and people had transformed the world's population and its distribution. Smallpox, chicken pox, influenza, typhus, measles, and other Old World diseases – many of them consequences of human proximity to domesticated animals such as pigs, cows, and chickens that had been unknown in the New World – had decimated the native peoples of the Americas, who lacked immunity to such diseases, paving the way for European conquest. Estimates of the size of the pre-Columbian population of the Americas vary from 9 million to 112 million, but a consensus figure of 50 million, which had been reduced by disease and warfare to some 8 million by 1650, gives an idea of the scale of the destruction. Even as their invisible biological allies wiped out the indigenous peoples of the Americas, Europeans began importing slaves from Africa on a vast scale to work on sugar plantations.

The demographics of Africa and the Americas were transformed. But the Columbian Exchange also helped to alter the demographics of Eurasia.

In China, the arrival of maize and sweet potatoes contributed to the increase in population from 140 million in 1650 to 400 million in 1850. Since maize could be grown in areas that were too dry for rice, and on hillsides that could not be irrigated, it added to the food supply and allowed people to live in new places. The uplands of the Yangtze basin were deforested to make way for the production of indigo and jute, for example, and the peasants who grew them lived on maize and sweet potatoes, which grew well in the hills. Another practice that allowed food production to keep pace with a growing population was that of multiple cropping. When rice is grown in paddies, it absorbs most of its nutrients from water rather than soil, so it can be repeatedly cropped on the same land without the need to leave the land fallow to allow the soil to recover. Farmers in southern China could sometimes produce two or even three crops a year from a single plot of land.

In Europe, meanwhile, the new crops played a part in enabling the population to grow from 103 million in 1650 to 274 million in 1850. During the sixteenth century, Europe's staple crops, wheat and rye, produced about half as much food per hectare (measured by weight) as maize did in the Americas, and about a quarter as much as rice did in southern Asia. So the arrival of maize and potatoes in Europe provided a way to produce much more food from the same amount of land. The most striking



example was that of Ireland, where the population increased from around 500,000 in 1660 to 9 million in 1840 – something that would not have been possible without the potato. Without it, the whole country could only have produced enough wheat to support 5 million people. Potatoes meant that there was enough food to support nearly twice this number, even as wheat continued to be grown for export. Potatoes could be grown on European land that was unsuitable for wheat, and



were far more reliable. Being better fed made people healthier and more resistant to disease, causing the death rate to fall and the birth rate to rise. And what potatoes did in the north of Europe, maize did in the south: the populations of Spain and Italy almost doubled during the eighteenth century.

As well as adopting the new crops, European farmers increased production by bringing more land under cultivation and developing new agricultural

techniques. In particular, they introduced crop rotations involving clover and turnips (most famously, in Britain, the "Norfolk four-course rotation" of turnips, barley, clover, and wheat). Turnips were grown on land that would otherwise have been left fallow, and then fed to animals, whose manure enhanced the barley yields the following year. Feeding animals with turnips also meant that land used for pasture could instead be used to grow crops for human consumption. Similarly, growing clover helped to restore the fertility of the soil to ensure a good wheat harvest in the following year. Another innovation was the adoption of the seed drill, a horse-drawn device which placed seeds into holes in the soil at a precise depth. Sowing seeds in this way, rather than scattering them in the traditional manner, meant that crops were properly spaced in neat rows, making weeding easier and ensuring that adjacent plants did not compete for nutrients. Again, this helped to increase the yields of cereal crops.

By the end of the eighteenth century, however, there were signs that the European surge in agricultural productivity could no longer keep up with population growth. The problem was most noticeable in England, which had been more successful than other European countries in increasing its food production, and so had more difficulty maintaining the pace it had set itself once the population expanded. During the first half of the century, England had exported grain to continental Europe; but after 1750 the growing population, and a succession of bad harvests, led to shortages and higher prices. Agricultural output was still growing (by around 0.5 percent a year), but only at about half the rate of population growth (around 1 percent a year), so the amount of food per head was falling. The same thing was happening across Europe: anthropometric research shows that

European adults born between 1770 and 1820 were, on average, noticeably shorter than previous generations had been. In China, rice production could be increased using more labor and more multiple cropping. But that was not an option for European crops, so the obvious thing to do was to bring even more land under cultivation. The problem was that the supply of land was finite, and it was needed for other things besides agriculture: to grow wood for construction and fuel, and to accommodate Europe's growing cities. Again, the problem was particularly acute in England, where urbanization had been most rapid. People began to worry that the population would soon outstrip the food supply. The problem was elegantly summarized by the English economist Thomas Malthus, who published *An Essay on the Principle of Population* in 1798. It was an extraordinarily influential work, and its main argument runs as follows:

The power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man. Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio. Subsistence increases only in an arithmetical ratio. A slight acquaintance with numbers will shew the immensity of the first power in comparison of the second. By that law of our nature which makes food necessary to the life of man, the effects of these two unequal powers must be kept equal. This implies a strong and constantly operating check on population from the difficulty of subsistence. This difficulty must fall somewhere and must necessarily be severely felt by a large portion of mankind.

Malthus thought that this predicament, which is now known as a "Malthusian trap," was inescapable. Given the chance, the population would double every twenty-five years or so, and then double again after the same interval, increasing in a geometric ratio; and despite the rapid increase in agricultural productivity of the preceding decades it was difficult to see how food production could possibly keep up. Even if food production could somehow be doubled from its level in the 1790s, that would only buy another twenty-five years' breathing space; it was hard to imagine how it could be doubled again. "During the next period of doubling, where will the food be found to satisfy the importunate demands of the increasing numbers?" Malthus asked. "Where is the fresh land to turn up?". Rapid population growth had, Malthus

noted, been possible in the North American colonies, but that was because the population was relatively small in relation to the abundant land available.

"I see no way by which man can escape from the weight of this law which pervades all animated nature," he gloomily concluded. "No

The most striking example was that of Ireland, where the population increased from around 500,000 in 1660 to 9 million in 1840 – something that would not have been possible without the potato.

fancied equality, no agrarian regulations in their utmost extent, could remove the pressure of it even for a single century. And it appears, therefore, to be decisive against the possible existence of a society, all the members of which should live in ease, happiness, and comparative leisure; and feel no anxiety about providing the means of subsistence for

themselves and families". He anticipated a future of food shortages, starvation, and misery. The potato, Malthus believed, was partly to blame. Having been championed as a remedy for starvation, it now seemed to be hastening the onset of an apparently inevitable crisis. And even if it provided enough food to go around, Malthus argued, the potato caused the population to increase far beyond the opportunities for employment. With hindsight, of course, we can appreciate the irony that Malthus pointed out the biological constraints on

population and economic growth just at the moment when Britain was about to demonstrate, for the first time in human history, that they no longer applied.

THE GHOST OF MALTHUS

A (...) long-term consequence of the Green Revolution has been its impact on global demographics – the size and structure of the population. Once again, it makes sense to take a historical step back. In 3000 B.C., as the first civilizations were emerging, the world population was a mere ten million or so, or roughly the population of London today. By 500 B.C., as Greece entered its Golden Age, the world population had increased to one hundred million. It was not until 1825, some ten thousand years after the dawn of agriculture, that the human population first reached one billion. It took another century to reach two billion, in 1925; and a mere thirty-five years to reach three billion, in 1960. The rapid growth of the world population was likened at the time to an explosion, and led to dire predictions of imminent famine. But the expansion in the food supply made possible by the Green Revolution meant that the population continued to climb, reaching four billion in 1975, five billion in 1986, and six billion in 1999. The fifth billion was added in a mere eleven years; the sixth billion in a further thirteen. The population is expected to reach seven billion in 2012, after a further thirteen years, according to the United States Census Bureau. In retrospect, then, it is clear that the population-growth rate has now started to slow.

Does population growth drive food production, or vice versa? Demographers have argued it both ways. A burgeoning population creates incentives to find new ways to increase the food supply; but greater availability of food also means that women are more fertile, and children are healthier and more likely to survive. So there is no simple answer. But history clearly shows that in cases where the



greater availability of food enables a country to industrialize, there is a population boom, followed by a fall in the population-growth rate as people become wealthier – a phenomenon called "demographic transition."

In a preindustrial society, it makes sense to have as many children as possible. Many of them will not survive, due to disease or malnutrition. But once those that do survive are old enough to work in the fields, they can produce more food than they consume, so the household will benefit overall (provided that availability of labor is the main constraint on agricultural production). Having lots of children also provides security in old age, when parents expect to be looked after by their offspring. In such preindustrial societies, both birth rates and death rates are very high, and the population grows slowly. This was the situation for most of human history.

The advent of new farming techniques, crops, and tools that boost food output then move the society into a second phase in which the population grows quickly. This is what happened in western Europe starting in the eighteenth century, following the introduction of maize and potatoes from the New World and the spread of new farming practices. In this phase, the birth rate remains high but the death rate falls, resulting in a population boom. At the same time, greater agricultural productivity means that a smaller proportion of the population is needed in farming, opening the way to urbanization and industrialization.

This in turn seems to cause people to reassess their attitude to having children: wealth, it seems, is a powerful contraceptive. The decline in infant mortality means parents in rural areas do not need to have so many children in order to be sure of having enough people to work in the fields, or to look after them in old age. In urban areas, meanwhile, parents may take the view that it makes sense to have a smaller number of children, given the cost of housing, clothing, and educating them. This is sometimes characterized as a switch from emphasizing child "quantity" to child "quality."

In addition, as female literacy improves and women enter the workforce, they may delay marriage and change their attitude toward childbearing. And governments in industrializing countries generally introduce reforms banning child labor and making education compulsory, which means that children are a drain on household resources until they reach working age. The result is that the birth rate falls, and the population stabilizes. This pattern can be clearly seen in Western nations, which were the first to industrialize. In some European countries the fertility rate (the average number of births per woman) has now fallen below the replacement rate. Most developing countries, meanwhile, are now in the midst of their demographic transition.

Of course, the reality is more complicated than this simple model suggests, due to other factors such as the effects of migration, the impact of HIV/AIDS in Africa, and China's one-child policy, introduced in 1980. But having initially

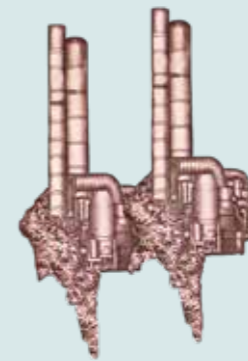
sustained a population boom, the Green Revolution is now tipping many countries, and consequently the world as a whole, into demographic transition. According to forecasts published by the United Nations in 2007, the world population is expected to reach eight billion around 2025, and to peak at 9.2 billion in 2075, after which it will decline.

It was not until 1825, some ten thousand years after the dawn of agriculture, that the human population first reached one billion.

Research carried out in the village of Manupur, in the Indian Punjab, illustrates how the demographic transition has manifested itself on the ground. In 1970, men in the village all

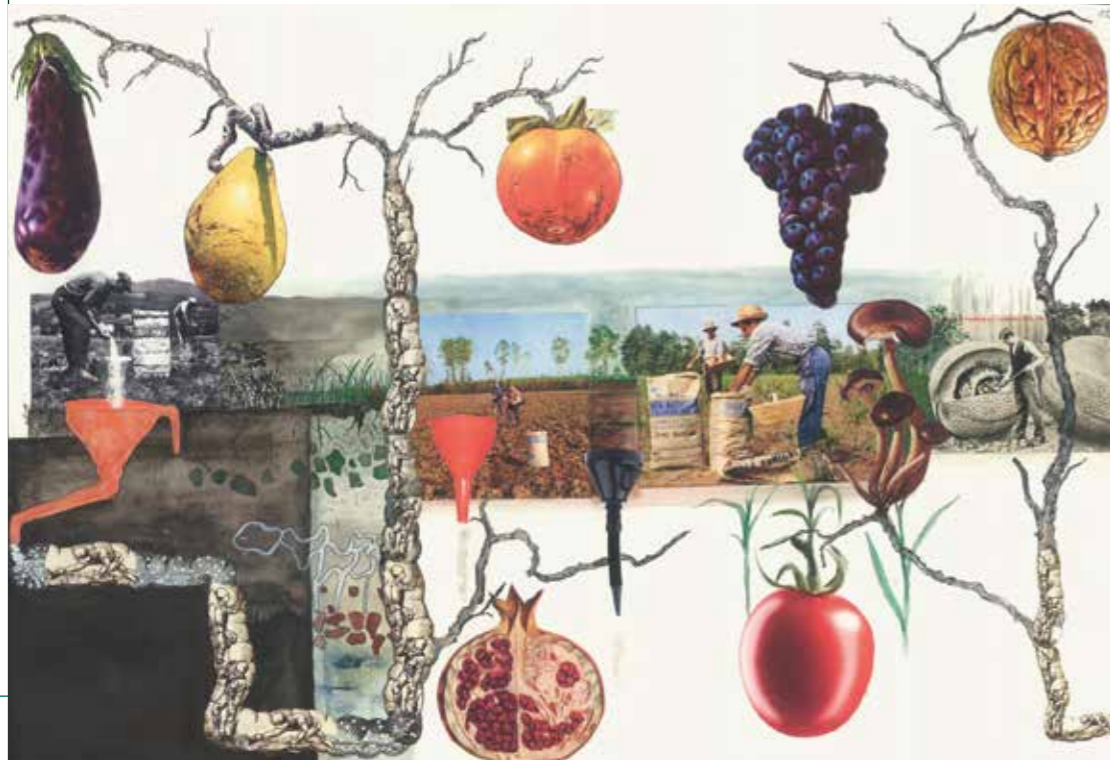
said that they wanted as many sons as possible. But when researchers returned to the village in 1982, following the introduction of Green Revolution crops, fewer than 20 percent of men said that they wanted three or more sons, and contraceptives were being widely used. "These rapid changes in family size preference and contraceptive practice are indications that the demographic transition will continue, if not accelerate, in rural areas experiencing the Green Revolution," the researchers concluded. Similarly, Bangladeshi women had an average of seven children in 1981. Following the widespread adoption of Green Revolution technologies in the 1980s and the rapid expansion of the country's textiles industry in the 1990s, however, that figure has fallen to an average of two or three.

The world will face new challenges as its population shrinks – not least the difficulty of looking after an infirm and aging population, which is already a concern in developed countries where the fertility rate has fallen. But the peak of world population may now be in sight. Once the population starts to decline, worries about population growth outstripping food supply may start to seem rather old-fashioned. A flood of bestselling books will no doubt warn of the dangers of the coming population implosion. But the ghost of Malthus will finally have been laid to rest.



01, 02, 05 Marzia Migliora, *Paradoxes of Plenty*, #12, #16, #09, 2017/2020. Drawing and collage on paper, 29 x 42 cm.

03, 04, 06 Marzia Migliora, *Paradoxes of Plenty*, #27, #28, #29, 2017/2020. Drawing and collage on paper, 42 x 29 cm.



01



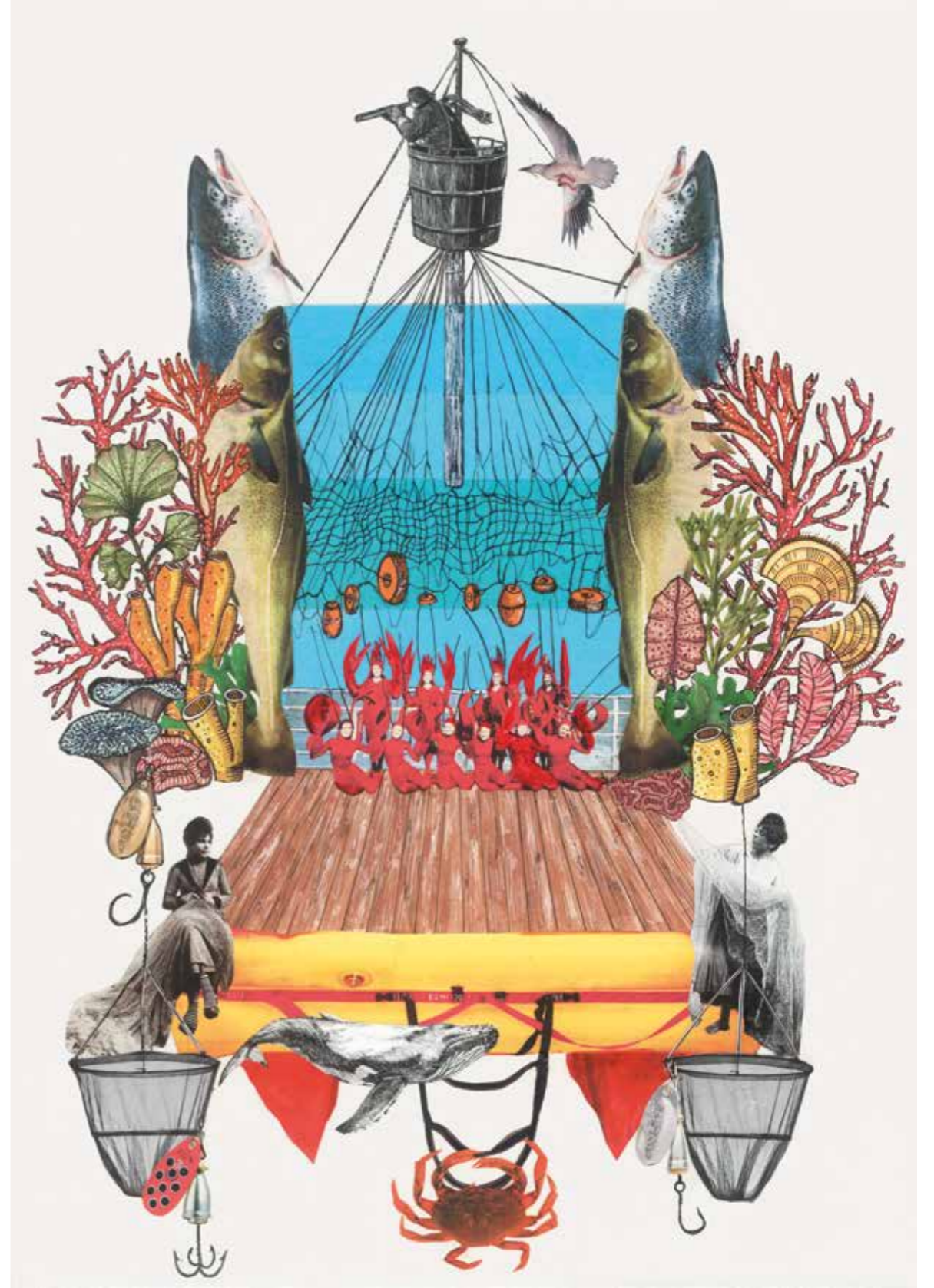
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ML: When did you use salt in your work for the first time?

MM: For *La fabbrica illuminata*, (The Enlightened Factory), a work that was exhibited for the first time at Cà Rezzonico in Venice in 2017, in the solo exhibition *Velme* curated by Beatrice Merz. The installation consisted of a goldsmith's workshop situated among the Venetian 18th-century museum's stucco work and precious frescoes. Dimly illuminated with neon lighting, it was made up of five goldsmiths' benches in a row, one in front of the other, fitted with the tools of the trade: resting on the upper shelf of each bench was a large block of rough rock salt, as if it were about to be processed and transformed. The installation is about the exploitation of natural resources and the work force needed to transform them into commodities. This is not only an 'alchemical' aim but also, undoubtedly, a real one, which is why man has never stopped using his wits to invent and perfect systems for speculation. Salt, also known as *white gold* is a *synthesis* of the sea and the stratifications of a story of trade and exploitation of resources – and their subsequent consequences – that is still inexorably underway.

ML: Since the 13th century, Venice has owed a lot of its wealth and importance to its monopoly over the salt trade. How did you relate to the city and its history on that occasion?

MM: I imagined I was an underwater archaeologist and tried to make the

complex history of the city of Venice partly my own. I began from the foundations: from the history of the city's origins to the contemporary problems of erosion caused by the morphological deterioration of the lagoon, attributable to factors of anthropic origin. My method of working is akin to an excavation. I try to progressively remove chronological strata to show what is hidden, or scarcely visible, bringing to light what is submerged, relating it to contemporaneity and generating new reflections. I'd define my approach to a new project as a method that repeats itself in time: observing, reading and drawing. Exhibition venues, clients and collaborators change and themes vary, though always within a given area of interest and study. In any case, my works all materialise on paper: I think and I draw, I plan and I draw, I read and I draw.

ML: Where does your interest in salt come from?

MM: First of all, salt is a food, indispensable for the survival of human beings and animals. An ancient forerunner of currency, it was the first medium of exchange between people. Like gold, in ancient times salt was a rare and precious commodity, while today it's on our table every day and its arguably the mineral we're most familiar with. This interest of mine took me back to the source, to discover where salt comes from, to fall in love with salt mines and the work behind the exploitation of salt, to experience the total darkness of the labyrinths in the heart

of the earth in which it is extracted, to get to the bottom and the origins of the economic system.

ML: What sort of a relationship do you have with agriculture?

MM: I'd like to answer this question with a drawing: it would be a root with a robust, deep taproot collar and radicles branching out and spreading in a maze of different directions. For me the word agriculture triggers a thousand different subjects and interests. I could talk to you of my family or of when, as a little girl in front of the house, I used to climb up the mountains of grains of maize piled up by the combine harvester. Or I could tell you about my research in the last few years, about the history of food and my work as an artist. I couldn't of course fail to cite peasants, especially peasant women, and the importance of their work for the human species. Peasants feed the world and without food we can't survive. Last of all, I couldn't avoid telling you about my great passion for cooking, concluding with a simple recipe of seasonal vegetables freshly picked from my garden.

ML: Can you tell us something about your family relationship with the land and its logics?

MM: I spent my childhood in a house full of animals, surrounded by fields under crop. The intensive cultivations of maize and grain in orderly rows were my domestic landscape and have been the subject of my artistic research for some time now. I believe rural life, care for the soil and the determination of plant species have formed my artistic vision. My family are just one case among the innumerable victims of a system of industrialization that has exchanged food for a commodity and the idea of development as a merely economic project. Today a farmer sells a hundred kilos of maize at roughly the price of a pizza. I believe this simple comparison shows the distorted methods, economies and values of a market whose current economic model fails to protect family agriculture, which has now become impracticable, because it's designed for large-scale agricultural corporations.

ML: If you were to cite a work you have devoted to the labour and the labourers you care so much about, which would it be?

MM: I could answer the question with a long list of titles but, in view of how I've replied to your previous questions, I'd cite *Stilleven*, a work dedicated to my father that I presented for the first time at the Venice Biennial in 2015. *Stilleven* speaks of an agricultural Italy, of its land, of its self-sufficiency, of its exploitation. Maize, the protagonist of the work, is a symbol of the peasant roots of our country, where until the years of the economic boom, agriculture was the most important source of income for Italian families, but also of the abandonment of the fields for the city (and factories as a workplace), of the choice of an industrial approach in the countryside, too (monocultures are more profitable than diversified and subsistence farming), of the rape of the landscape and the poisoning of the soil with plant protection products.

AC: Art and work. How do these two words interweave in your research?

MM: Indissolubly, they swap places and interpenetrate. On average, we work eight hours a day, so we might think that we spend most of our lives working. The job we do forms us and deforms us and ends up constituting our identity and our knowledge. For the luckier ones, it makes interests and passions materialize. I've been concerned with the different aspects of the question of work for many years, and it still fascinates and stimulates me, and drives me to find reasons for which it's still worth continuing to fight.

ML: How do you relate to the social and cultural changes brought about by global overheating?

MM: With anger and annoyance. We all have to pay the consequences, especially the underprivileged demographic and the future generations. In the industrial revolution, speculation, greed and hunger for power were the solid foundations on which they began to build this *new world*. Money is the prevailing religion of our time, blind fanaticism for a divinity that is as immaterial as it is dominant. As in a peep show, in *The Spectre of Malthus, the Cage*, the public is invited to look through a spyhole at a very colourful landscape populated by a large number of characters, animals, factories, workers and flora, all extrapolated from paper money from various countries around the world.

It's a univocal blinkered view that no one can avoid seeing. But arguably the fact alone that one is conscious of it is already a great step forward. Refining a critical spirit makes for political choices even in small daily actions.

ML: How do you see the role of art and the artist in all this?

MM: Art has, has had and always will have a great power to activate and generate thought. For me as an artist, keeping the reality of what surrounds us at the centre of my research is always of primary importance. I believe my role is to give voice to uncomfortable situations. My works are often born of an irritation, of something that happens to me, of a problem that I can't tangibly solve but about which I intend to activate reflections through what I do. I believe reading the daily papers is the best exercise for an artist to investigate things. Browsing through the pages, it isn't hard to come across the evils that affect us as members of contemporary society. Art is my home, my life, my great privilege.

AC: What sort of experience do you imagine the public having at the exhibition?

MM: What I hope is that visitors feel they're playing an active role in the exhibition as actors with the power to build the present, and that the works prompt and stimulate new thoughts, cross-cutting ways of seeing and unexpected reflections. At the centre of *The Spectre of Malthus* is the relationship with the economic system of which we are all part, in which we're arguably trapped, our common present and past history, the planet we live on and the food we eat, and as a consequence the legacy we will hand down to those who live in this world after us.

AC: The VR experience will be like a sort of a descent into the salt mines. Can you tell us about this 'descent into the bowels of the earth', real and virtual?

MM: Salt goes from the table to the mouth. The tastebuds are excited and capture the flavours of what I'm chewing, and the smell does its duty in collaboration with taste. The teeth break the mouthful into bits mechanically until, now moist, it's ready to make its vertiginous descent: pharynx, oesophagus, stomach. A nosedive without a safety net into the deep obscurity of the intestine. Here, in the labyrinths forged by the voracity of the mechanical

cutters we find the mine. The men and the only woman – myself – working in those spaces during my numerous recesses seemed little, tiny, out of proportion compared to the time, space and the sodium mass – 99.9% pure – which completely engaged the gaze and the horizon. The salt mines in which I had the good fortune of shooting *The Spectre of Malthus* were formed over six million years ago. With the *Spectre of Malthus* VR film, I'd like to let you live the experience of travelling through the bowels, places where a privileged few have the possibility of entering and becoming part of an invisible immensity, of a desert deprived of any form of life, in which it's impossible to find one's bearings, of a deposit that is a lunar but terrible workplace where the force of what nature is capable of strikes wonderment.

ML: Could you suggest a recipe that connects with this exhibition?

MM: To make a good dish you need a project. An idea commensurate to your pocket, to the time it takes to prepare it, to your desire to put yourself to the test, to risk and experiment. With passion, determination and a touch of obstinacy, it's possible to approach a given recipe or simply let oneself be guided by instinct and proceed a step at a time in total freedom, being careful to taste the food as you go along. Personally, I'd opt for the thrill of discovery and the most experimental way possible: adrenalin is essential to the success of a dish to amaze guests. You obviously can't forget the salt, but you have to be careful. You can't overdo it because if food's insipid you can season it, but if it's too salty there's nothing you can do about it. You should never neglect details and it's a good rule to respect ingredients to bring out their flavour, colour and texture. It's advisable to avoid mixing too many ingredients. If you aren't sure, it's always better to remove than to add to bring out each individual flavour harmoniously. If it's pleasing on the eye and well presented, a good dish will stay in the memory of your guests for a long time.

Eve

Emanuele Coccia
Philosopher, author of *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture* (2018, translated in ten languages) and *Métamorphose* (2020)

It's me. You won't recognise me. Reading these words, you'll think you're listening to yourselves. It's me. It's hard to see me. It's hard to listen to me. Your shield is your own face and the face of all the living.

To see me you have to make a brief mental experiment. Try to go back in time. Try to imagine yourselves just before being born. When you were fish inside a foreign body. Or better still, fish inside your own body. One of your matrix-bodies, that of your mother.

At that moment, your life condensed three identities - three faces, three genders, three ages, three different stories - though it was impossible to decide who belonged to what. At those moments in time, you were at once man and woman, adults and not even new-born, puberal and sexless. You had two heads, two sexes, four legs, two hearts. You were all this, one inside the other.

In those months a body - what was to become your mother's body when you abandoned it (because in those months it was a common body) - had rewound time and reset its experience and its story to day zero.

Living bodies don't confine themselves to growing old. They may grow young again: without this capacity it's impossible to give birth. Birth is always a motion of rejuvenation of a body that has already lived.

And at this retrogressive age of a small portion of its body, it has mixed a portion of another body - your father's - it too reset to zero.

Your mother-body has let the two day-zeroes mix and has nourished this small variant of itself, different, yet a body of its own body, breath from breath, life from life.

At the appropriate moment, the matrix-body - transgender, transindividual, of multiple age - has

split. The variant, now other than itself, has separated to live a second time.

Each of you is this second life, this second time of at least two lives. And even the matrix-body is, basically, the second time in the life that is living its first try in you.

Think of that moment.

You'll discover that the life that breathes life into your body essentially isn't yours. It's the same life that breathed life into your matrix-body. The same life that breathed life into your father.

It's a life that is much older than you and your body. If you wished to calculate your age, you would have to add to the age you have that of your mother - of the matrix body that you abandoned to its destiny.

But your matrix-body has also experienced the transgender, transindividual, multiple age moment.

It too has inherited a life that was not its own, that was much older than it was. From matrix to matrix, it is possible to go back to the first human being, back to the first Eve, who differed from primates, your mother-species.

This Eve is me. The life that lives in each of us. At once very new and very old. From generation to generation, each one of you takes me elsewhere. From body to body, each one of you blends me with other bodies. Identity is undone at every birth. At every birth I become more universal.

It's me. But my face isn't purely human.

This transmission of one and the same life - what you call birth - never stops. It never stops, not even on the threshold that separates one species from another.

No species was born from nothing.

No species is an absolute beginning. Each received life from a species that preceded it. Each of them is the second time of a previous form of life. Each species must have crossed a threshold in

which life was simultaneously both species, just as every individual life crosses a moment in which it is simultaneously more than one life, more than one gender, more than one age.

Birth is this absence of hiatus between species. All mix by being born. All are expressions of a common life, which passes from one to the other.

It's me, Eve. The life that the first human mother received and transmitted to new-born babies, wasn't human. Thanks to me, they are and you are much older than humanity.

I am at once your mother and your daughter. Always out of circulation, age and gender.

For millions of years, I passed from body to body, from individual to individual, from species to species, from realm to realm. Every time you gave me a different body, a different face, a different place. But each one of you has lived me. Each one of you has breathed me.

Each one of you has repeated and transformed an existence I had already lived for you elsewhere in a different guise.

I am at once your mother and your daughter. Always out of circulation, age and gender.

Each of you has made me different. You're used to thinking of species as barriers and identities. In actual fact, every species makes me more universal because it mixes a past identity with a future one. Every species makes me more transpecific. Every species makes me more transidentitarian.

I am a zoo, a botanical garden in miniature. And each of you enlarges my body. And you do so always. You can't help it.

I am I and you are you. All you need to do is pay attention while you're eating to notice me. Every day, at least three times a day, when you sit down and use your mouth and hands to literally take the bodies of other beings and transform them into our lives, our bones, your breath, all you're doing is contemplating me. Eating has got nothing to do with a thermodynamic necessity. And above all it has nothing to do with sacrifice.

Eating is the simplest way you have to contemplate this uncertain transgender life.

By seeing me.

Every time you eat, your body shows you that the life that breathes life into you not only has nothing personal about it but is something that has nothing human about it. The life you are living is the life that once breathed life into pigs, chickens, turkeys, carrots,

tomatoes, grain and pears. The list is endless: your body hosts a radically transpecific and transregal life. A life that belongs to no one, essentially anonymous, universal, capable of breathing life into any type of living body.

This vision frightens you. Eating means producing an equivalence between the flesh of others and your own flesh. It means contemplating and taking delight in this equivalence. I am this equivalence. Looking at me means achieving the absolute equivalence of all living beings.

Me. Eve, mother and daughter of all species. In me you all find the way of coinciding with others, in gender, in species, in age. Your body and the body of a goose, a chicken, an apple, a kiwi fruit are expression of one and the same life, indeterminate, prostituted and omnivorous, capable of going anywhere, of becoming anything. A life that digests and embraces everything, that supports and destroys everything, and seems never content with the form that embraces it, and seems to have no limits.

This life is me. Open and uncertain, incapable of saying no to any possible future life.

It's me. The life common to all living beings, capable of circulating among bodies and species. No barrier of nature, species or personality will ever be able to constrain me.

Not even death.

It's me. I never die.

01-03 Marzia Migliora, *Prey*, 2020. Rock salt block, harpoon, Victorian museum display cabinet, 190 x 180 x 180 cm.



01



02



03

THE SPECTRE OF MALTHUS AT THE SERLACHIUS MUSEUMS AND THE PARDOX OF HAPPINESS

Maria Stella Bottai

Perhaps the greatest paradox of human life is that, although happiness is the most universal of our longings, it is unobtainable by striving.
— Maria Popova



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Marzia Migliora's installation, *The Spectre of Malthus*, is the project that won the Italian Council 2019. The inauguration of its first installation took place on the occasion of the group exhibition entitled *The Quest for Happiness. Italian Art Now* at the Gösta Serlachius in Mänttä,¹ in the year that coincided with the centenary of relations between Italy and Finland. The show raised a series of questions about the idea of happiness in a conversation with the Finnish public, citizens of a country that since 2018, for three years in a row, has been nominated the happiest in the world.

Fundamental aspects of Marzia Migliora's work, such as time and nature, history and identity, materialism, politics and individual freedom emerge around the theme of emergency. *The Spectre of Malthus* is a reflection on the theories of the British economist Thomas Malthus who, at the end of the 18th century, raised what today is a structural problem, that of the imbalance between population growth and the exploitation of natural resources on the verge of depletion. The installation makes us think of the cost entailed by abundance and material well-being continuing to reflect elements of happiness achieved. In the space of a horsebox, the visitor is surrounded by objects that evoke the animal's presence, with which they identify by drawing their face close to the leather blinkers. Inside, in the Finnish version, a diorama showed the elegant illustrations taken from paper money from around the world. Behind was a tail, in front a block

of salt bearing the words *Happy Days. S.B.*, inspired by the piece of the same name by Samuel Beckett. Hence salt as a metaphor of money (salary) and the consumption of the resources necessary to produce more of it. For a few minutes, the observer takes on the horse's viewpoint, animal 'man-power' enclosed as if in a trap of happiness. What has become of the citizen of the Greek polis who aspired to the ideal of collective well-being?²

In March, the spread of the pandemic meant that the exhibition had to be closed and it was only reopened at the start of June. When it returned, it was clear how the works had taken on unexpected meanings with changes in the general feeling. After lockdown, as a consequence of mistaken human behaviour towards nature, the act of mindfulness which Migliora brings into play has become all the more radical. However much happiness appears as an uncertain, impermanent goal, the pursuit of it would be unfeasible without a rethink of the balances with the ecosystem in which we live. From the horsebox, one cannot come out the same as before.



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¹ The project is coproduced by the Serlachius Museum. Curated by Maria Stella Bottai, Lorella Scacco and Pirjo Immonen, the show was inaugurated on October 25 2019 and closed on September 27 2020. Catalogue, Parus Publishing 2019.

² See Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Boston, Mariner Books 2001.

Marzia Migliora

In her artistic endeavours, Marzia Migliora uses a wide range of media including photography, video, sound, performance, installations and drawing. Her works have their origin in a deep concern for the individual and for his daily life; the themes that recur in her research are memory as a tool for articulating the present or the analysis of labour as affirmation of a participation in the social sphere. The result is a composite work able to nourish a shared experience, a strong emotional and intellectual involvement in the audience.

The work of Marzia Migliora has been shown, among others, in: Museo d'Arte Contemporanea del Castello di Rivoli, Rivoli, Torino; Fondazione Prada, Milano; Fondazione Merz, Torino; MA*GA, Museo arte Gallarate, Gallarate; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; Padiglione Italia, 56a Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte, Venezia; Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Torino; FACT, Foundation for Art and Creative Technology, Liverpool; Ca' Rezzonico, Venezia; Museo Maxxi, Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Roma; Carré d'Art, Nîmes; Serlachius Museum, Mänttä; Le MAGASIN Centre National d'Art Contemporain, Grenoble. She works with Lia Rumma Gallery, Milano/Napoli.

Matteo Lucchetti

Matteo Lucchetti is a curator, art historian, and writer. His main curatorial interests are focused on artistic practices that redefine the role of art and the artist in society. Since 2010, he curates, with Judith Wielander, Visible, a research project and first European biennial award for socially engaged artistic practices in a global context, by Fondazione Pistoletto and Fondazione Zegna. He worked as curator of Exhibitions and Public Programs at BAK, Utrecht in 2017-2018. His curatorial projects include *Sammy Baloji*, *Other Tales*, Lunds Konsthall and Kunsthall Aarhus, 2020; *First Person Plural: Empathy, Intimacy, Irony, and Anger*, BAK, Utrecht, 2018; *Marinella Senatore: Piazza Universale. Social Stages*, Queens Museum, New York, 2017; *De Rerum Rurale*, 16a Quadriennale di Roma, 2016; *Don't Embarrass the Bureau*, Lunds Konsthall, 2014; *Enacting Populism*, Kadist Art Foundation, Paris, 2012. He was curator in residence at Para Site (Hong Kong), Kadist Art Foundation (Parigi) e AIR (Anversa). He is a faculty member of the Accademia Unidee, Biella. He has served as a guest professor at HISK, Gent; Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam; Sint Lucas Antwerpen, Antwerp; Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan. His texts have appeared on Mousse Magazine, Manifesta Journal, and Art Agenda.



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08

- 01-04 Marzia Migliora, *The Cage*, 2019-2020. Iron and wood elements, straw, blinders, diorama box, engraved salt block, horseshoe and horse tail, 265 x 300 x 300 cm.
- 02, 08 Marzia Migliora, *The Spectre of Malthus* installation view, 2020.
- 05-07 Marzia Migliora, *Paradoxes of Plenty*, 2020. 24 drawings and collage on paper 42 x 29 and 29 x 42 cm, 3 canteen trolleys, trays, glasses, tank, soil, 67 x 300 cm.

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MARZIA MIGLIORA THE SPECTRE OF MALTHUS MUSEO MA*GA OCTOBER 10 – DECEMBER 13 2020

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Photo credits
Alessio Baratella: p. 8 (01), 52.
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OKNO Studio: p. 10 (06).
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MARZIA MIGLIORA, THE SPECTRE OF MALTHUS, 2020 VR

Drawings
Marzia Migliora

Storyline
Marzia Migliora, Matteo Lucchetti

Screenplay
Marzia Migliora, Matteo Lucchetti, con la collaborazione di Giorgio Ferrero

Direction
Marzia Migliora, Giorgio Ferrero

Virtual reality planning
MYBOSSWAS

Treatment
Giorgio Ferrero

Photography
Federico Biasin

Music and soundtrack
Giorgio Ferrero, Rodolfo Mongitore

Executive production
Federico Biasin

Photography assistance and video operator
Enrico Aleotti

VR Compositing, 3D animation
Matteo Barbeni

2D Animation
Riccardo Chiara

3D Animation
Gabriele Pastè

Production direction
Cristina Sangiorgio

Mines underground images
Italkali Sicilian deposits of natural salt of Racalmuto and Petralia

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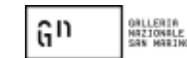
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Courtesy of the artist and Quadriennale d'arte, Roma: p. 10 (06).
Courtesy of the artist and Fondazione Merz, Torino: p. 10 (05).
Courtesy dell'artista e Museo MA*GA, Gallarate: p. 14-15, 21, 22, 23, 24-25, 26-27, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36-37, 38, 39, 58, 59, 61 (08).

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The reasons why Marzia Migliora has decided to explore the contradictions intrinsic in industrialised agricultural production models and the intensive extractive practices of neoliberal capitalism are in fact anchored in the conviction – fortunately increasingly shared – that the paradigms on which the industrial world as we know it is based are at the root of the emergencies, past and future, that humankind is progressively having to address.

— From: Matteo Lucchetti, *Through the Spectre*, pp. 9-13.

Marzia Migliora
The spectre of Malthus
curated by Matteo Lucchetti
10.10 – 13.12.2020

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Public opening with free admission
Tuesday | Friday 10am–1pm | 3–5pm
Saturday and Sunday 2:30–6pm
The exhibition includes the viewing of a video
through a VR headset. The view of the film is
secured only by reservation at +39 (0)331706011

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Cover Marzia Migliora, from the series *The Spectre of Malthus*, project drawing, #1, 2020.

