

# **Revolution in Dialogue** **Conversations on transformative** **environmental activism**



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### intention behind this text

“Wherever you look, everyone speaks about transformation and about sustainability. It’s obviously a topic.”

Hearing this statement from the director of an international bank’s foundation sponsoring a talk on environmental policy made me wonder about the point we are at. On the one hand, numbers and prognoses on the state of the planet’s resources, air and water quality and ecosystems, are bland. On the other hand, a great awareness has apparently taken hold of organizations and individuals. “Sustainability”, “green strategies” or actions for a better future: a company with international outlook, political marketing and placement will argue that there are factors other than economic indicators that guide their decisionmaking.

What becomes clear quickly is that environmental concerns, be they about climate change, pollution, waste or resources and its consequences, are connected to greater systems: an economic system based on consumption, on more-than-we-need, on profitmaking for its own sake. But also a social system based on exploitation, on colonisation, on unequal power relations.

We live in a world of paradoxes: we write narratives and justifications of our life decisions in connection to individual and communal discourses, yet the reality of dominant belief systems that is the background for global economic, dominant practice embeds us in such a complex system that we cannot escape. Are we caught in a system that acts through us, forbids any behaviour leading to change and turns it around to make it add to the strength of its own working? Are there levers that satisfy the urge of individuals to *do something*?

This is a highly subjective text. I’m writing from the perspective of a privileged, well-educated young person living in a wealthy western country. Climate change and environmental destruction do not actually affect my daily life. These dialogues reflect the situatedness of conversations about any political and activist endeavour, but they cannot, even if reflection is attempted, include the issues that I haven’t been aware of.

All my thanks go to the people I’ve spoken to, that have lent their arguments and have let me step across the next argumentative fence. That have stopped and thereby fuelled my thought processes. These are not entirely my thoughts - they don’t belong to anyone.

## DIALOGUE 1. Activist versus scepticist.

They killed another polar bear.

Who?

One of these environmental activism groups, figuratively. It was presented dead on the street, the whole weight of global climate change melting icecaps and dirty snow on its back. No one really cared to stop and look. It was the most typical example of those pathetic actions you could imagine. As if it helped anyone to cry about polar bears.

Why don't they think of something better in environmental protest?

Because we are lame, green treehuggers who would like to turn the world back into stone age, when we didn't have progress. Who's interested in political rallies for environmental problems? The ones that are, are silenced, and the ones that could be heard, are fat, saturated and sitting on their privilege.

Of course. You could say the same about all kinds of political interest. Most people are depoliticized, disappointed, only interested in issues they feel the direct impact of. And domestic politics encourages that thinking. Why should anyone think about the faraway problems of climate change, melting glaciers, oil fields and coal mines - they have their own worries and that's usually enough to think about. As long as the urgency is not communicated in some other way, there seems to be no alternative to the current ways of life.



**SYSTEM  
CHANGE ! NOT  
CLIMATE  
CHANGE**

That's why it's so important to have action that is politically impactful. We need radical protests, not violent but radical movements. Small groups of concerned people, who are for some reason not blind to a problem, should use their power and organize.<sup>1</sup> Activism can be anything, awareness-raising probably in the first instance, but there is a difference in organizing the structures and building something for a longer term than standing around in a bear costume one day, forgetting about it in the next.

And a comparably small group of people can be sufficient to catalyze something - and to get others to join. Think of successful actions of civil obedience in the past: India's independence, South Africa ending Apartheid, Germany's exit from Nuclear Power.. maybe even the Soviet Union in part. It did not start off with a general public debating the issue, the dominance of political situations - as unfair as they may be - are always due to the large support, or inaction of the people.

**ES GEHT  
SCHON LANGE  
NICHT MEHR  
NUR UM  
EISBÄREN  
ENDE GELANDE**



But this is a different situation. What are you even talking about? What's the problem and the solution you have for it? Are we talking about climate change? About the privatization of water? About genetically modified crops? There is not *one* issue and *one* environmental movement concerned with it. I struggle to believe that we can actually achieve anything with public impact if we continue to hold up the signs of a global movement for the protection of the environment. Most of us in the Global North don't see a direct effect not at all - there's just no reason to believe in making that one issue visible enough to become a political problem.<sup>2</sup>

You're right, and wrong at the same time. Of course, different movements, different groups cover a diverse spectrum of environmental issues. And you cannot think of them all as one: firstly, there are differences in the motivation of activists. Different action, feelings of urgency and strategies result from the way that people are motivated to do something. The direct action of people affected by the pollution of their livelihoods is motivated differently than the actions towards divestment that is predominantly supported by students and other well-educated wealthy people in Western countries<sup>3</sup>. Secondly, each of those has strategies to match their motivation, to best summon their power and resist the existing structures. That also means differences in the definitions of impact, judgement of viable or not viable actions as well as understandings of legitimacy. And you can distinguish the scope of impact desired, local, global, particular or general.<sup>4</sup>

So we are putting all our energy into a loosely connected field of ineffective single players?

These movements do all have something in common: they are the ones creating awareness by defining the problems, by setting frames of what is important, of what requires public and political attention.<sup>5</sup> Without the first radical activists, problems would not gain social relevance at all: in the first instance it might only be the group of environmentally affiliated who recognize the urgency of a matter.<sup>6</sup> But when we take action and, say, block the smooth running of that coal power plant, our action will become visible. And people all over the world are taking actions, uniting in civil disobedience to point out the futility of fossil fuel and our addiction to it.

Divestment has worked before, and it is happening again, now that more and more institutions are realizing their leverage for opposing dirty energy production. National states, insurances and public institutions, universities and communes. And it is truly a global movement - opposing fossil fuel production, the hypocritical actions and progressives led by governments and big corporations. What unites them is the feeling that it should be the individuals, not the privileged few sitting on corporate boards, who make the decisions. Instead of Big Green, the seemingly transformative initiatives led by global companies, foundations and governmental institutions and often supported with the money earned exactly in that destructive system, we demand real action, real changes, not top-down decisionmaking.<sup>7</sup>



You also asked another question, one about the thematic differences. I'd like to say that despite all the differences, there's much more that we all have in common. Movements come together, build global alliances or action networks where some issues or approaches are shared. And we all share the understanding of a need for a transition: the present way of us mistreating natural resources, extractivism, of the carbon economy has consequences so far-reaching that we cannot calculate them. But it is absolutely necessary, inevitable to do something about it.



That's right, it really appears to be one of the things that are unquestionably accepted by everyone. The present system is not working and we need to change it. But is that really something new on a larger scale than societal progress has been in the past? What's so special about this environmental system change?

## **DIALOGUE 2. Political beauty and other difficulties.**

Why does political action mean blocking something and pointing out the problems? Can activism only be successful in critiquing - as in the radical left movement that sees its legitimacy for violent protest in the violence of the situation? Wouldn't real alternatives be better?

Everyone has to be aware of the complex situations: it's not about making noise and disrupting something. The entanglement of power hierarchies in relation with the economy, providing jobs and - of course - exploiting resources seems to be the omnipotent solution to humanity's desires<sup>8</sup>. The absurdity of that runs so deep that I don't have the least doubt it will lead to fully turnaround everything.

In the end, members of society know that we will have to address issues of sustainability. I cannot really feel worried about the scientific prediction of climate change risks. There are things that need to be addressed more urgently at the moment, compared to which environmental issues are a matter of the privileged few. When the time comes of course we will adapt, and eventually the sustainable solutions will be the best ones. I'd rather enjoy my life without constantly being told to renounce the good things - or I might not live at all.

And it's easy for someone in privileged positions to demand action - people depend on their jobs, also in carbon-intensive industry. It's not a simple choice to quit and start anew if that is what you've done all your life and little else is available in structurally weak areas. It's the whole system that needs to change, anyway.

## **REDLINES ARE NOT FOR CROSSING** **#redlines #d12**

Honestly, I'm sick of hearing those comparisons to historical events when some obvious injustice was countered with sabotage and successfully put sand in the wheels of politics. The tiny successes that follow public unrest over additional airport runways or factory relocations that then heighten inequality if they end up in less lucky places. There are issues that just cannot be addressed by writing our politicians polite letters raising a certain question and demanding attention. Or having polar bears die on shopping streets. There is little political beauty in these symbolic projects.<sup>9</sup> We should rather celebrate aggressive environmentalism: we need to think up utopias, to bravely addresses problems instead of



looking away. We can sit on our hands waiting for the absolutely excruciating situation to arrive and then say we weren't in charge. Politicians step down, conferences are left without results, rules and agreements are not kept. That's an unbearable situation that we have to respond to in the same manner as political failures: it's against all forms of human dignity what is happening currently with refugees at European borders. And it's against all forms of justice, global, intergenerational and social, to not act on climate change. We need to get that message out. Why are people not more enraged that nothing is happening?

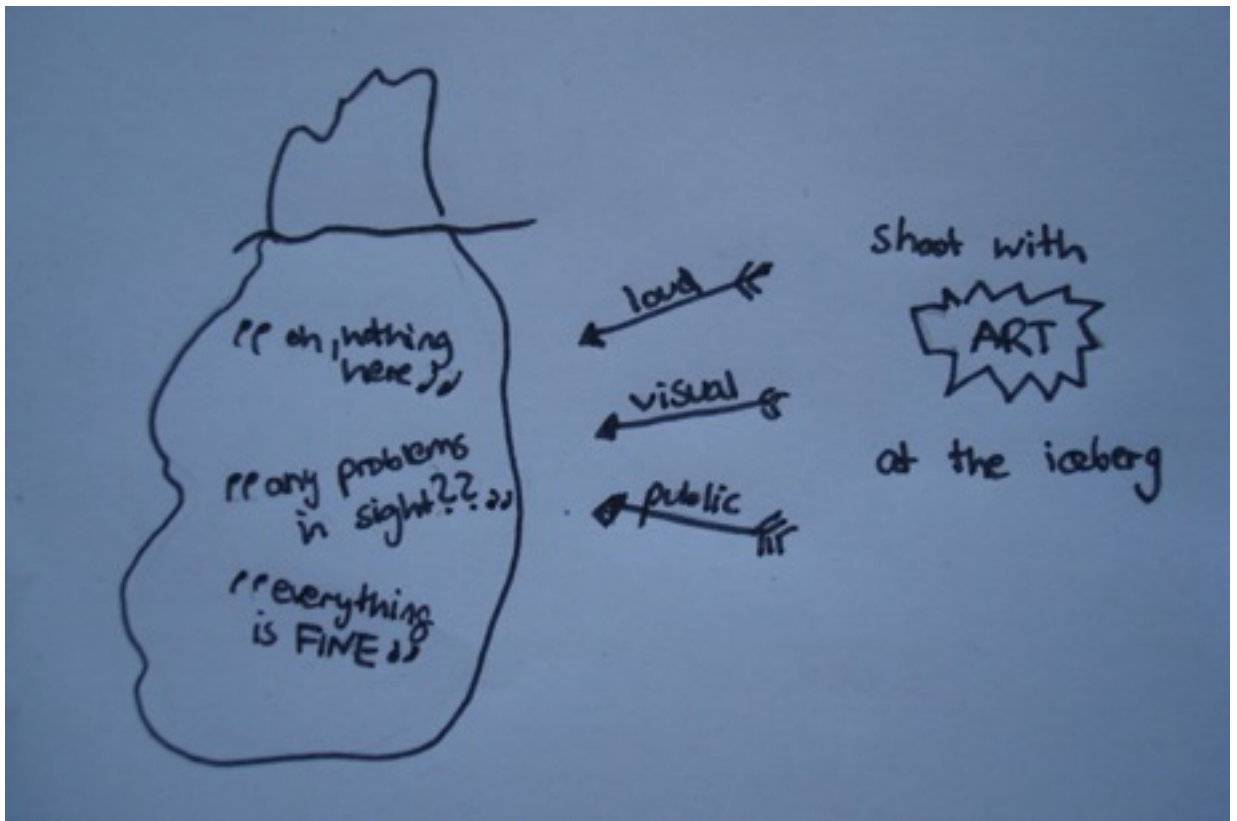


And how would you imagine to get attention for your political beauty? What does aggressive environmentalism look like?

Spilling the world with political beauty doesn't mean folding hundreds of paper boats for drowning refugees. And it is also no help if polar bears are now dying on shopping streets. What we need are real actions that show where we could be going or point out the problems that are running much deeper than usually recognized. Activists can put their fingers in the wound of inaction. From official admission of mistakes that have been made in treating the environment to a change of strategy. There's nothing better than imagining utopia and using the force of modern media to get the message out: if you would like a fossil fuel company to come out of the shadow, and decide to step back from harmful practices, let them announce that in a press conference.<sup>10</sup> The toxicity of thoughts start with the belief that everyone is just acting the way they need to, predetermined through rules of economics and the overarching self-interest.<sup>11</sup> We should stop defending



businesses with our understanding for their economic rationality, when we actually know of the consequences that are going to hit us.



Oh yeah, you joke, let's go skiing before it's too late. Who knows, maybe my children won't know that there used to be glaciers in the Alps. Haha.

It's not like we aren't susceptible to environmental problems. It's unfair to say no one cares. But we will act when we feel the need to, not because some fearmongers tell us to. But accusatory and moralising everything we do - essentially the base of our current society, its safe structures and wealth - is not exactly encouraging.<sup>12</sup>

Changes in outlook towards the world often concur with artistical expressions about those<sup>13</sup> - what if art was seen more as a catalysator and rapid alert system? What seems to radical for politics can be legitimised in artistic expression, subverting the established order<sup>14</sup>. And that way, with games and with humour we can go the first steps towards different thought processes. What represents the norm today will not longer be accepted without questioning tomorrow. That's why utopian visions are not far away in the future but rather to be built now. Yes, a little over the top, with an urgency that you wouldn't expect, but with perfect necessity. We are nature defending itself.<sup>15</sup>

### **DIALOGUE 3. Visit by a New World resident.**

You're trying to change people's lifestyles, trying to tell them to live frugally and go back to their roots. Discover your relationship with nature, don't buy so much stuff that you don't need, even if it makes you happy. What are people supposed to enjoy at all?



Think about it this way: it comes down to what we consume, which products we buy and how we use them. In fact, the power of individuals acting together to influence what works on economic scales is infinite. Why do we always think of the economy as a huge unchangeable abstraction although it is modelled on our desires and actions? We can change the way production and consumption works, if we are united enough. All that needs is sufficient information and awareness of the issues at hand: we should begin with education to help everyone understand the consequences of their actions, how they are involved in reproducing global systems, injustices and destruction. Because the current international political system does not seem capable of implementing anything conducive to change, the right address are individuals who are making the right decisions because they have understood and know it is better.

Reality is proving you wrong, dear friend. The gap between what we know and what we do is enormous: there are so many things that we don't do despite knowing it would be better. Work with discipline, eat and exercise - and that's only for our own good. In the case of a distant environment, or future generation that is affected, even worse.

There are many questions on the compatibility of wealth, economic growth and long-term sustainable practices that will not be answered by rationality: the rationality of economic systems maybe lends itself to thinking about green growth and profit-increasing sustainable businesses.

## **LOVE WILL SAVE THIS PLACE**

But that is at the heart of the problem in the end - how are we going to transform the focus on this kind of rationality through the action of a few idealistic souls?

A transformations as the one we are in is not comparable to turning a few switches and planning what we'll do after it has occurred. It would be so fundamental that it is really hard to imagine. Which is why criticizing the status quo is by far not enough - we can inspire with concrete utopias instead of threatening with catastrophe. Moralistic arguments might work up to a point but they will not in this case of sustained change. The real solutions are not found in frugality and deprivation, think of it the other way: currently we accept to live with noise, pollution and stress, we favour the possession of happy-making objects instead of having actually enjoyable lives. We prefer to get immediate gratification while considering a change as obnoxious intrusion.

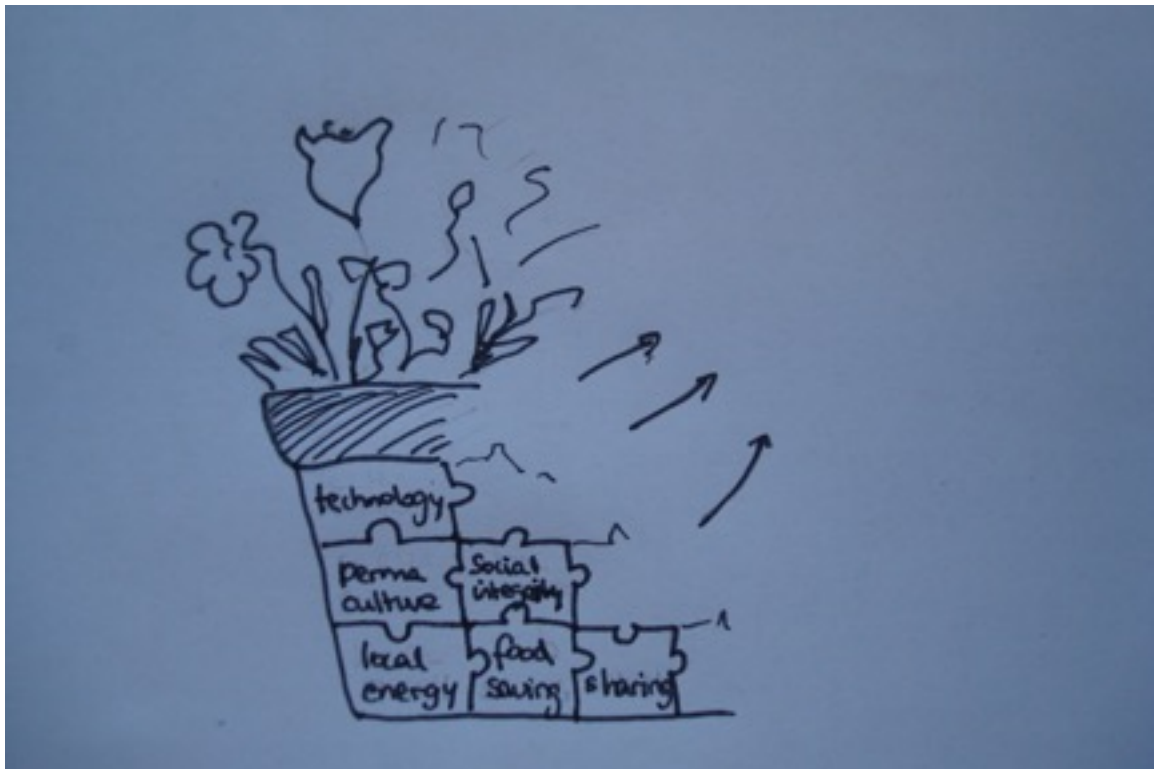
It may be difficult to hear, but we do need to size down. All technical solutions, all fancy innovation will not help enough if we do not stop overboarding consumption, in favour of global and intergenerational justice. And I don't see how this is going to happen if not through leadership and cosmopolitan politics that recognizes the problems. It's not the individuals - they will never change until they are forced to.

This enormous transformation will not take place without initiatives leading the way, showing what it could be like. Sometimes it's only temporary, but even the climate camps<sup>16</sup> give a glimpse into the future: trying to live a new order, new organizational structures, more intentional interaction with the environment that surrounds us, including its people. Another example are localist initiatives: more than 1000 places in the world have pledged to invest into a better future lifestyle. They are already building utopia in the small.<sup>17</sup>



All such initiatives are obviously built on money, on structures, on social system and fundamentally fossil fuel wealth. How can this be more than fighting against the symptoms of a greater problem?

I believe we can live in activism, not so much through making other people aware of problems and criticizing, but through enacting what works, and works better than conventional practices. And it's the knowledge of practices that we often lack.<sup>18</sup> What if more people learned about permaculture? So much more productive land can be used than in mono-agriculture fed by industrial fertilizers, with all the nasty side effects and potential to exploitation<sup>19</sup> While it may seem like a drop of water on a hot stone to speak about food waste, the dimensions of produce lost is immense. While we are speaking about a rising energy demand, a considerable part of that is wasted unnecessarily - when lights are kept on for days, when energy is simply not used productively<sup>20</sup>. And it doesn't need to be strange to call on something like that; it isn't bothering to think about small things.



Sustainability is not something to be learned in a book. But in fact, simply through living and practice it is becoming an obvious alternative - one that is actually adept in complexity to a modern world. But we should not fear complexity if we can participate in it as a decentral system. Rather than watching passively and believing in technocratic solutions, the plans of big corporations, of legislation, transformation will occur through radical change in everyone's lives, successful on its own and supported by external structures in the long run. It will not be odd to live the alternatives, they won't require different ways of planning, they will simply grow.

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<sup>1</sup> As the writer Astra Taylor points out, Mark Rudd, who became a student activist in the 1970s, distinguishes between activism as an empty, mainly discrediting term, and organization, as long-term structure building that can create transformative movements. (Taylor, 2016)

<sup>2</sup> See Giddens (2011): one of the main questions of dealing with climate change is about how to assign urgency, make the topic a political issue by giving it a certain frame.

<sup>3</sup> The Fossil Free campaign, advanced by a young alliance called [350.org](http://350.org), is based on the idea of divestment: by withdrawing investments from fossil fuel companies, institutions can put into action their knowledge that in order to limit climate change to a temperature increase of 2°C, the industry cannot extract everything available. By stopping the funding, at least public organizations (universities, insurances, governments) should not contribute to such contradictory behaviour.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed typology of environmental activism groups, see Park (2013).

<sup>5</sup> Framing is seen as one of the important functions of movements, and one answer to the question of how politicization of environmental issues are possible (Viehöver 2011).

<sup>6</sup> "The environmental movement plays a crucial role here in framing climate change as a political, economic, and social issue, and in offering solutions to the problem." (Doyle 2009, 104)

<sup>7</sup> Naomi Klein (2014, 230ff) describes "mainstream greens" and "Big Green": the nowadays omnivalent intention to become sustainably, as integrated into business logics in terms of ecological, economical, social aspects is often strangely connected to system-conservative actors, based on the money earned in these particular systems and aiming for breakthrough technological or scientific solutions that will allow economic systems to persist without principle change.

<sup>8</sup> Oil as a convertible resource: base ingredient for materials, food production and energy.

<sup>9</sup> Political beauty is a description for the missing moral aesthetics in politics, as described by Ruch (2015). He is co-founder of the Centre for Political Beauty, that has done projects on refugees and European politics in the past, with the moral imperative of political failures against humanity as during the Holocaust and coined the term 'Aggressive Humanism' for their actions.

<sup>10</sup> The artist collective 'The Yes Men' has famously created irritation by publically appearing as representatives of the companies they were critiquing, revealing the secretive and dishonest communication strategies and often eliciting direct action and responses by the management. Targets of their activism included Monsanto, General Electric and the U.S. chamber of commerce.

<sup>11</sup> Phillip Ruch, philosopher and founding member of the Centre for Political Beauty uses the concept of toxic beliefs that are grounded in our own dependency on scientific explanations of ourselves. In striving for scientific perceptions of humans and their feelings, we are heading towards a determinacy that is harmfully paralysing individuals. What it needs is the hope, the optimism and the will to fight injustices against humanity. A parallel can easily be drawn to the

<sup>12</sup> Cf. the experience of a fossil free activist who concluded from the fun and adventurous atmosphere at the climate camps that "perhaps we need new terms for a movement that puts winning ahead of moralising" (Fremeaux/Jordan are the founders of the art activist collective The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination which co-organized the Climate Games at COP21).

<sup>13</sup> cf. Weiss (1978, 341) in Bogerts (2015)

<sup>14</sup> "Activism as art and activist art are two different things. Activist art is any recognized and accepted form that happens to carry political/polemical content, while activism as art might not look like art and might not involve any pre-existing forms." (O'Donnell 2006)

<sup>15</sup> The COP 21 climate convention in Paris was accompanied by thousands of people participating in the Climate Games, "the world's largest Disobedient Action Adventure Game". Teams took part to reveal greenwashing, to draw red lines and to show how gambling with the climate could also look like, real-time, real-world.

<sup>16</sup> Climate Camps take place parallel to many fossil free and degrowth initiatives around the world; they are places in which new non-hierarchical structures, a different way of treating nature and living together are tried to enact. See e.g. [klimacamp-im-rheinland.de](http://klimacamp-im-rheinland.de)

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<sup>17</sup> For more information on the transition town initiative: [transitionnetwork.org](http://transitionnetwork.org)

<sup>18</sup> cf. Welzer (2015): "Tatsächlich scheint sich in den vergangenen Jahrzehnten vor allem die Art verändert zu haben, in der man über Umwelt- und Klimaprobleme spricht, nicht aber die Praxis des global weiterwachsenden Ressourcenverbrauchs und der jährlich steigenden Emissionsmengen. Die Grenzen der Aufklärung liegen also in der Praxis" (8f).

<sup>19</sup> See the film 'Inhabit' for examples on successful permaculture projects, eliciting the need for a revised, indeed more scientific and smarter agricultural system than the prevalent monocultural practices today.

<sup>20</sup> A report found that energy demand could be cut in half simply by using energy more productively (MGI 2007).

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## Illustrations

### Part X

Cover page: Banksy. Accessed via banksy.co.uk

pp.2,3,5: ende-gelände.org

p.4,8,11: own illustration

p.6,7: climategames.net

p.9: transitionnetwork.org

p.10: permacultureprinciples.com

### Part Y

Cover page: Albert Janzen. marker on whiteboard (author's own)

p.3: own illustration



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- <sup>1</sup> One such concept is well captured in the Global Marshall Plan which, borrowing the historical idea of rebuilding a global balance through empowerment European countries, aims to promote the fair, ecologically and socially responsible development and lead towards a sustainable world economy that leaves behind hierarchies between developed and developing countries, the Global North and South (cf. Radermacher 2004).
- <sup>2</sup> Environmental governance is a term used to describe the attempts of ruling and steering processes by both state and non-state actors. The environmental crisis has been described as a crisis of governance in the wake of an understanding that society does have power to shape and influence its environment (cf. Evans 2012).
- <sup>3</sup> The concept of circular economy is based on six principles to regenerate, share, optimise, loop, virtualise and exchange resources. Instead of linear production and consumption structures, the aim is to close cycles and thus reduce negative impact of economic activities (cf. Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2015).
- <sup>4</sup> A celebrated example of circular economy practices is Redisa, a South African tyre recycling organization that was designed by a government-owned nonprofit and aims to engage local communities in the recycling processes, providing several thousand jobs and recycling otherwise unused material.
- <sup>5</sup> For an example of an organization acting towards achieving environmental transformation, see the European Climate Foundation.
- <sup>6</sup> Such utilitarian thinking can also be found in the Effective Altruism movement, in which it is argued that single people will probably be able to have greater impact through targeted donation than working in an already positively impactful environment (cf. Giving What We Can).
- <sup>7</sup> "Die hohe Problemanzahl ist jedoch selbst ein Diskurseffekt, setzt also die Politisierung des Klimas bereits voraus" (Viehöver 2011, 676).
- <sup>8</sup> For a critique of the anthropocene narrative as diagnostically problematic and discouraging action see Malm/Hornborg (2014).
- <sup>9</sup> Cf. Lange (2011).
- <sup>10</sup> "People are often provided with this new sense of collective identity and ownership when campaigners offer a clear and unified regime alternative in constructing new ways of living" (DeJina/Diesendorf 2016, 126). See also Viehöver's argument that climate stories carry the source to change and transformation of knowledge orders. (Viehöver 2011, 681).
- <sup>11</sup> See Hellmann (1998, 20ff) for an overview over movement theory and the framing approach.
- <sup>12</sup> Giddens (2011) uses the metaphor of us all being SUV-drivers knowingly.
- <sup>13</sup> One account of the (morally wrong) absurdity that we live in a globally unjust society, is given by Peter Singer and the story of the child in the pond: if we were asked to rescue a drowning child in the pond in front of our house, we wouldn't hesitate to sacrifice our expensive clothes. But if that child lived in an African country and died due to a preventable disease, we would not care (cf. Singer 2009, 3f).
- <sup>14</sup> As Ulrich Beck writes to "criticize what one can call the technocratic national (and transnational) domestication of climate change, the post-political consensus around 'green economy', technological innovations, etc." (2015, 82)
- <sup>15</sup> Cf. Beck (2015, 80). The term 'metamorphosis' is his.

## DIALOGUE 2. The transformative power of theory - a monologue

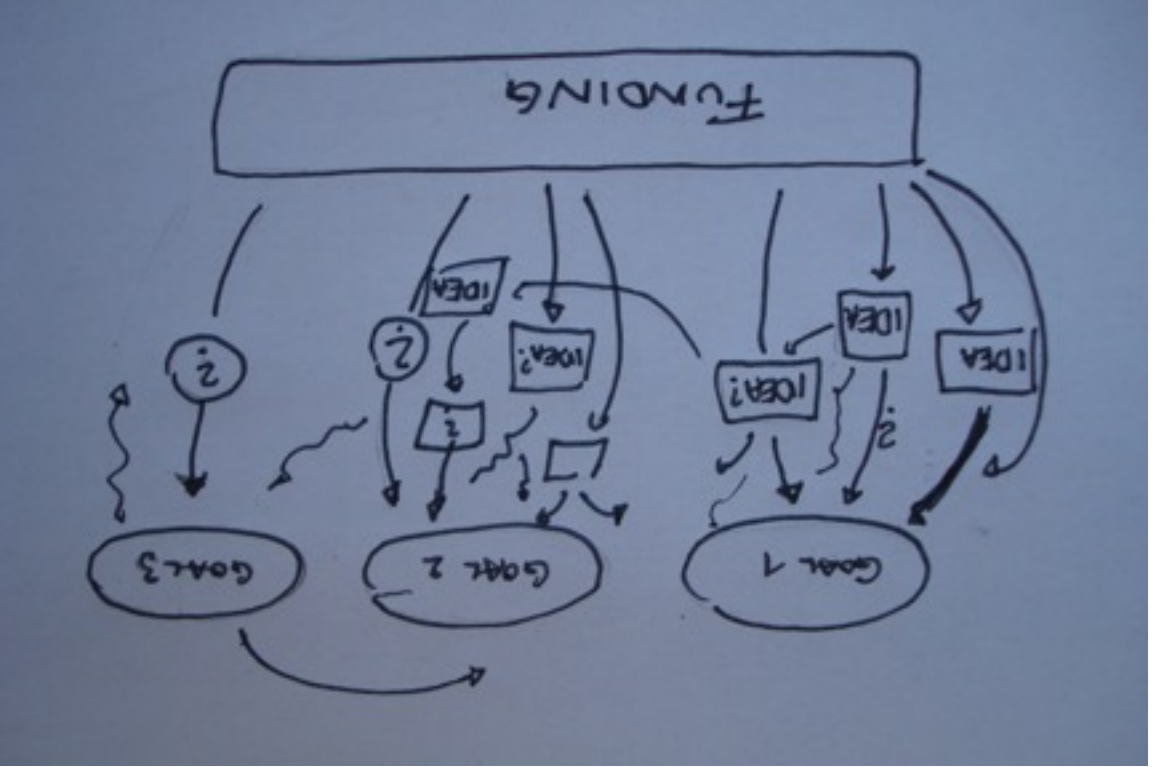
How transformative and radical are ideas - can you change the way that people think and through that influence the way they live? The power of discourses is being made visible in that we are now able to think of the relationship between humans and nature as something adaptable, that we have the power of impacting. A first step has been the realization that societies do have an impact on their environment and that this relationship has become unbalanced and flawed.<sup>7</sup> While the acknowledgment of material effects of human action on the environment is not enough for a complete characterization,<sup>8</sup> it leaves open the question of how much power we do have to change by understanding. How can we target the practices, interests and power relations with our knowledge in mind?<sup>9</sup>

However the potential of utopian storytelling should not be underestimated. In providing a meaningful story, theories of degrowth, alternative economies and socio-ecological transition give people voices and narratives to live by.<sup>10</sup> Movements are built on frames that make it possible to legitimize their own activism and contribute to an effective resistance.<sup>11</sup>

A lot of work is done on why we are inactive despite our knowledge, why we do not change our behaviour and demand change, if we are aware of the problems of the current system. And solutions can be found, in blaming the system, moral dilemmata, human psychology.<sup>12</sup> It's maybe a moral puzzle of why we do not change in light of what we know about consequences of our action.<sup>13</sup> Or we can ask about how the global interrelations paralyse actors, and how strangely international political consensus is overridden by pre-cosmopolitan structures.<sup>14</sup>

What it comes down to is that the complexity of the issue at hand does not lend itself to thorough analysis, forging a plan and executing it meticulously. With the discrepancy of national policy making and the transnationalization of side effects and risk of climate change, we ought to think of the transformation rather as metamorphosis than a switch change. What we can hope for are consequences of our practices to become common goods: realizations that emerge to frame our thinking, open up for recognition of interrelations and productive social movement.<sup>15</sup>

It is key is to act strategically from the point we know well. While we do not understand fully the causal chains that will lead to a goal, we might know several of the levers that are essential to the processes. And to target engrained systematics, we should try and pull as many levers as possible at the same time. This is not something to be achieved on a grassroots level - although this could be part of it. What could kick-off real change towards a fossil-free environment for example is action on government level, advisory work with regulatory bodies combined with funding of legal structures, of NGOs, of research on alternatives, of financial impact consulting.<sup>5</sup> It's not the one or the other - and why shouldn't we use the dirty money collected in the businesses that are so successful today that they have to somehow prove it through corporate responsibility?<sup>6</sup> We're undermining their system, let it change them if they won't!



environmental destruction, are not addressed at all by that one recycling initiative. How could activism be designed that targets that whole mess? And is there still a place for individual responsibility, if the system is so powerful that it paralyzes rather than enticing behavioural changes? Why would we support a corrupt working order in any way?

## DIALOGUE 1. The innovative low-carbon economy and finally institutionalizing

Can I trust your rhetorics? Is the discourse generated through discussions and the inclusion of terms related to environment, future generations and sustainable behaviour sufficient to sleep soundly? How activist are the front-runners of a green transformation really?

The key to system-level change lies in supply-driven adaptation of the economic system. Greening the economy through the establishment of sustainable business, through supporting entrepreneurship that risks going forward with new technologies and eventually takes over the established working order - that is how disruptive change happens. What the presently successful should do is support those ventures, note the necessity for plans that provide a counterbalance and chances to implement new ideas.<sup>1</sup>

I agree that the words are currently on your side. And environmental governance, the celebrated international policy structures that produce meaningless deals, do not prevent them.<sup>2</sup> But how much of that is rather greenwashing than honest intention? Maybe that empty talk can have hidden effects if narratives matter more than scientific results, yet until those empty pledges have been filled with meaning, victims of the global systems will suffer even more: it hits the poorest, it correlates with social injustices, and the official stance of companies who are advancing that is not helpful for attacking them. It's hypocrisy at its best.

Granted! Demands for climate justice are not heard enough, and we have to work on establishing systems that protect the weak from power inequalities. And these are not exclusive if we design them the right way. Circular Economy<sup>3</sup> can provide concepts that are implemented in a non-profit way, that lend themselves to decentralization and thus empower local communities. And with expert knowledge structures can be planned to be efficient, not conducive to corruption or fraud; the chance lies in using top technologies and concentrated knowledge on management systems to imagine a differently structured economic system.<sup>4</sup>

The exceptionalities of such cases is quite obvious. Some new green businesses can certainly be built, and the increase in fairly and ecologically produced fashion or food is something nice to be observed in rich Western societies. But the underlying complexities of an incompatible growth paradigm and planetary boundaries, of globally unequal burdens of climate change and

## intention behind this text

There seems to be, across most economic and political spheres, a feeling of a need for change. No longer are demands for transformation the idea of a crazy minority. Corporate responsibility and sustainability efforts are on their side, so are mission statements of local and global corporations, everywhere.

This urge for transformation is accompanied by a growing consciousness of the complexity of problems. Can answers to such interconnected networks of questions be designed, can we understand the underlying correlations? And can solutions be implemented on a large enough scale?

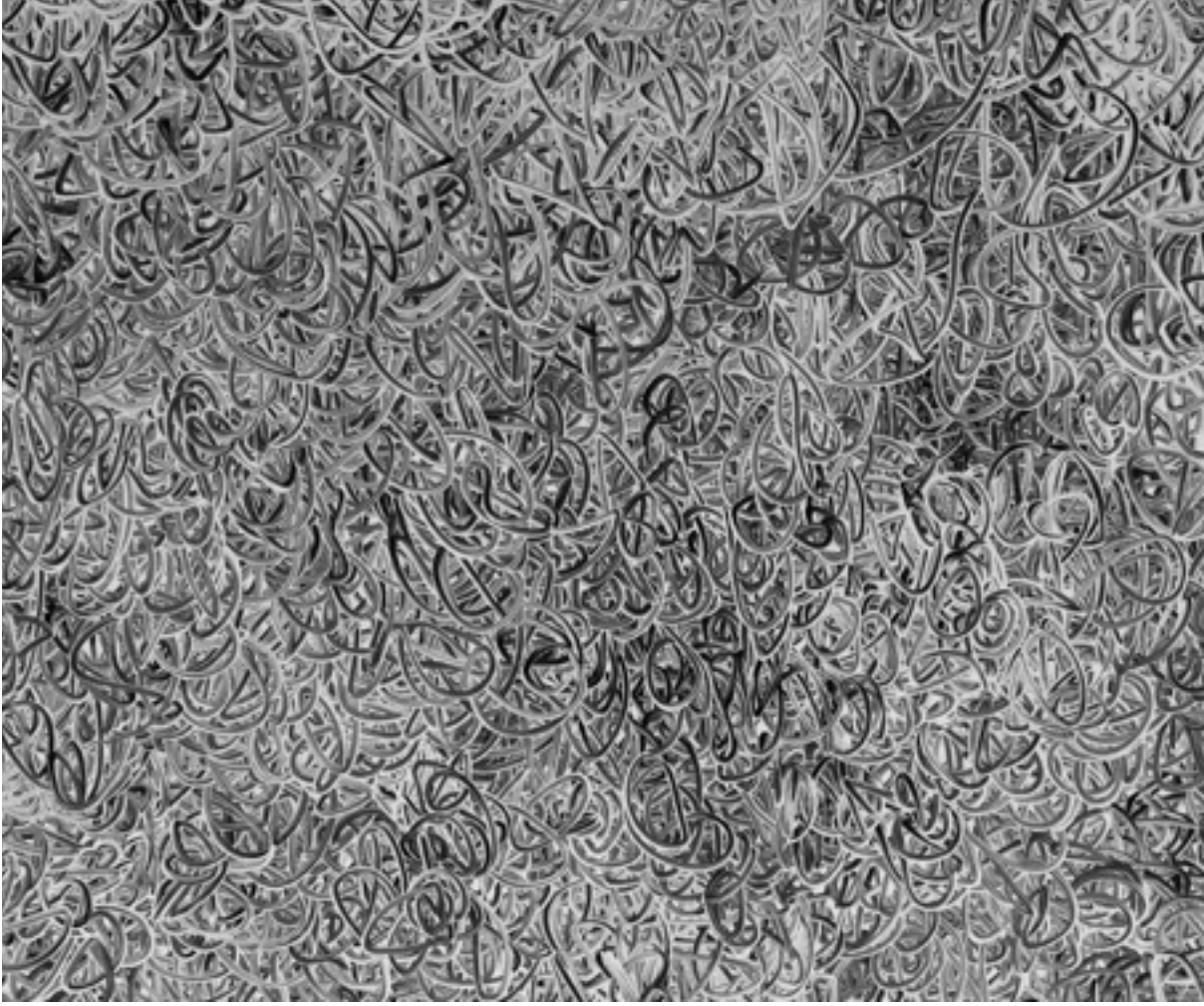
On a level of environmental governance, while little is achieved in terms of compulsory political regulation, there are a lot of ongoing projects that deal with topics related to the environment. This runs in stark contradiction with the facts, estimates and prognoses of environmental science. The measurements and calculations show that the effect of all of the world's lives and industry in our current system are not improving, or becoming less problematic, but indeed the apparent awareness and calls for transition don't seem to have a noticeable effect.

We live in a world of paradoxes: we write narratives and justifications of our life decisions in connection to individual and communal discourses, yet the reality of dominant belief systems that is the background for global economic, dominant practice embeds us in such a complex system that we cannot escape. Are we caught in a system that acts through us, forbids any behaviour leading to change and turns it around to make it add to the strength of its own working? Are there levers that satisfy the urge of individuals to do something?

This is a highly subjective text. I'm writing from the perspective of a privileged, well-educated young person living in a wealthy western country. Climate change and environmental destruction do not actually affect my daily life. These dialogues reflect the situatedness of conversations about any political and activist endeavour, but they cannot, even if reflection is attempted, include the issues that I haven't been aware of.

All my thanks go to the people I've spoken to, that have lent their arguments and have let me step across the next argumentative fence. That have stopped my thought processes and thereby fuelled them. These are not entirely my thoughts - they don't belong to anyone.

**Revolution in Dialogue  
Conversations on transformative  
environmental activism**



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