



FUTURE NARRATIVES FOR PLANET EARTH

MANIFESTO





INTRODUCTION

*"It makes a difference which questions we use to think about other questions
It makes a difference which stories we tell to tell other stories
It makes a difference which thoughts think thoughts
which descriptions describe descriptions
which ties tie ties
It makes a difference, which stories create worlds, which worlds create stories..."
(Donna Haraway, 2021)*

This **MANIFESTO** is the result of a Transeuropean partnership, where partners with theatrical, cultural and social backgrounds from seven European countries in a three-year artistic and creative and collective process challenge each other in the project **FUTURE NARRATIVES FOR PLANET EARTH**. The project is co-financed by the European Commission within the "Creative Europe" program and brings together performing artists, cultural workers, scientists and researchers in a joint process to explore and renew the interaction between, on the one hand, creativity and visionary artistic forms of expression and, on the other hand, societal issues such as climate change, green transition, sustainability, activism, artivism and socially engaged art (SEA).

Through theatre and performing arts, we focus on creating a holistic approach to the artistic representation of our main societal subjects such as the relationship between human and nature, social and climate sustainability and transformation of capitalist powerstructures, equality and diversity as well as resistance and struggle against both structural and behavioral discrimination. Or in other words: we want to pave the way for a socially engaged art in practice, thus using our Future Narratives partnership as a fruitful alliance of theatre houses and a unique and inspirational network of diverse European traditions.

THE PERFORMANCE LECTURE METHODOLOGY AS A STARTING POINT

Along the way, our primary working methodology has been the **Performance Lecture**, since this approach gives space for diversity and emphasis on the holistic perspective. Through the performance lecture methodology we combined the artistic embodiment, sensory perception and creative unfolding of artistic representations

of our societal subject with theoretical inputs and more traditional academic research methodologies. At the same time, the performance lecture methodology calls for a consequent sharing, co-creation and presentation format, based on an integration of art-based and theoretical knowledge-based communication through Visual Arts and Media, performing Arts and Theatre, Dance and Movement, Poetry and Creative Writing etc. Hereby, we created an artistic space where artistic creativity and diversity is strengthened through theoretical-conceptual knowledge, while the academic approach reaches new levels of understanding through the artistic and creative processes. In summary, the working methodology challenged our normative thinking patterns and even conforming notions around creative, on-the-spot processes and strict Aristotelian frameworks for the units of action, time and place.

FROM ACTIVISM TO ARTIVISM

Instead, we have jointly searched for new aesthetic models and non-linear mind-sets that form the core of an activist thinking based on theatre and performing arts in multivoices narratives and in a multimodal interaction with other forms of artistic expression.

In doing so, we have expanded the concept of political activism in the climate change and other societal forms of resistance to become a new concept of **Artivism**, where the political and transformative potential of art is emphasized and empowered.

In our explorative co-creation, we involved a wide range of theoretical contributions and conceptual considerations. In particular, we were inspired by the American scientist, philosopher, zoologist, biologist and feminist **Donna Haraway**. With her Cyborg Manifest, Haraway challenges all habitual thinking about our concepts of culture and nature. She introduces the term **naturecultures** to emphasize the intertwined and co-constitutive relationships between natural and cultural processes. From her radical perspective, there is no absolute difference

between humans and nature. We flow in and out of each other like tentacles in a criss-crossing network.

A NEW GAZE ON THEATRE AND PERFORMING ARTS THROUGH TENTACULAR THINKING

From this background, we have prepared our **FUTURE NARRATIVES FOR PLANET EARTH MANIFESTO**, as presented in the following sections. Our **MANIFESTO** concerns itself with the transformative forces that we as a co-creative partnership experienced when working with societal subjects aimed at recapturing the future as a space of new human-nature relations, possibilities through socially engaged art.

Thus, our **MANIFESTO** manifests itself in the intersection between theory and artistic practice in a universe that seeks to break down human supremacy over nature and climate as well as structural hierarchies, discrimination and lack of equality in the capitalist system we are still a part of. At the same time, it is a crossroad where traditional ways of thinking about the role of theatre as a mirror for lived life are put to the test through a dialogical, co-creative and non-hierarchical language with room for multivoiced and multimodal communication.

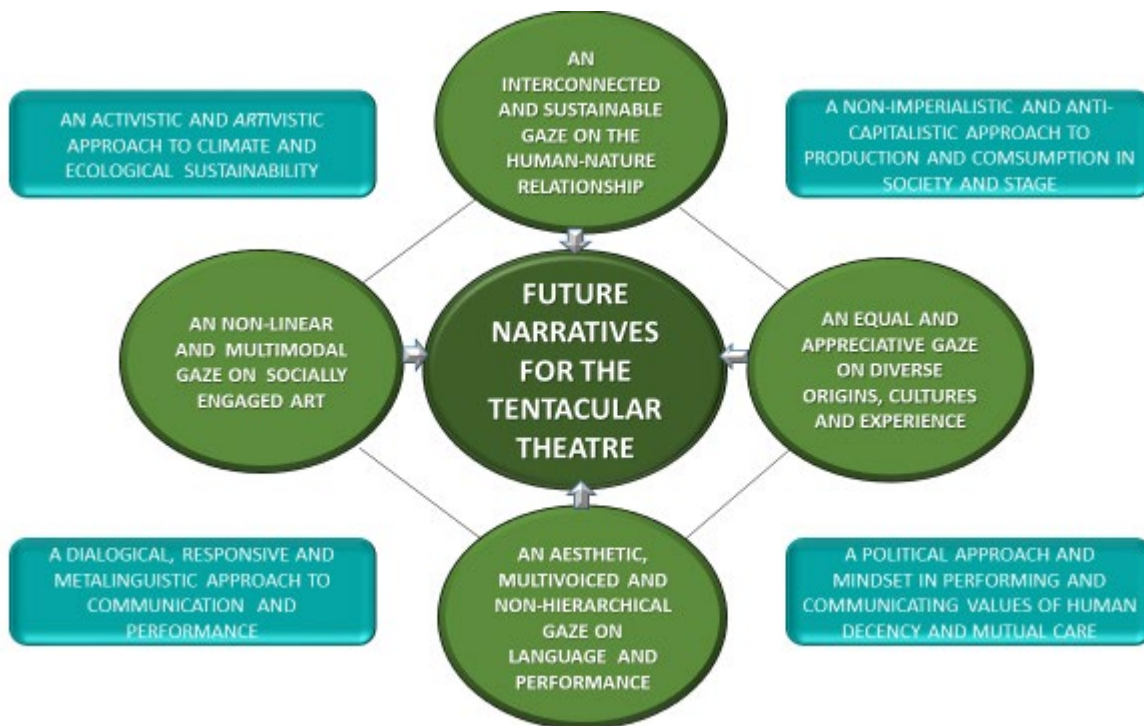
A MULTIFACETED GAZE FROM THE TENTACULAR THEATRE

Although the task may be hard, our goal is simple. We want to take responsibility and allow our minds to imagine a future that is not apocalyptic. Through theatre and performing arts, we dare to stay curious and ask questions. We dare to state our values and act accordingly. We dare to shift our mindset and reevaluate how we as humans can position ourselves in relation to nature in order to be capable of creating new narratives for Planet Earth. *And* we dare to do so seriously and playfully.

Thus, our focal point is the new concept of the **tentacular theatre**, as inspired by Donna Haraway and the notion of a multifaceted and diverse being that doesn't always choose the easiest and quietest path:

“In fact, staying in trouble requires learning to be truly present in the present, not as a dying flitting between horrific or heavenly pasts and apocalyptic or redeemed futures, but as mortal chalks woven together with myriads of incomplete configurations of places, times, subjects, meanings...” (Donna Haraway, 2016)

From the central image of the tentacular theatre, we will gaze at each of the societal subjects, as mentioned above and illustrated in the figure below:





AN INTERCONNECTED AND SUSTAINABLE GAZE ON FUTURE NARRATIVES FOR THE HUMAN-NATURE RELATIONSHIP

"A new relationship with nature must necessarily show itself in a different practical relationship with nature, but it also affects to the highest degree our way of thinking, the way in which we understand ourselves as people in the world, it has both philosophical and existential dimensions. Therefore, there is also reason to treat it as an independent theme..." (Birger Steen Nielsen, 2023)

"It is almost a return to a primitive state. We again feel the forces of nature the hard way. The notion that we have full control over nature and our lives has been shattered as the consequences of climate change take hold with floods, forest fires, droughts and all kinds of storms all over the globe. Nature is dangerous again and contributes to the dizzying feeling of uncertainty and unpredictability that many are experiencing right now. The safe ground we have stood on is gone and the worldviews we have spent a long time building up are cracked, and it is very difficult to predict where the world is going..." (Jakob Vengberg Sevel, museum inspector at the museum ARoS and the exhibition Human Nature, 2017)."

"Historically, nature and women have suffered more or less the same fate in society and art. In society, they have been subordinated and marginalised, while in art, they are celebrated as (beautiful) subjects. Often, women have even been portrayed as a kind of being of nature. This image of the woman as a being of nature has helped justify her exclusion – an exclusion from power, freedom and rights..." (Josefine Klougart, 2023)

According to Donna Haraway, tentacular thinking is a way of thinking based on the principles of interweaving, networking and non-linearity. The term hereby refers to tentacles, which are sensory threads in invertebrates and serve to absorb nutrients, being sensory organs as well. Donna Haraway uses the term tentacular thinking as a counter-term and critique of an anthropomorphic way of thinking, where animals and nature are not produced in their own right, but are given human features, as has been seen throughout the ages in the visual arts, but also in drama and performing arts. The tentacles, on the other hand, represents something non-human and implicitly raise the question of how a many-armed and many-brained creature, so profoundly different to two-armed, two-eyed, two-eared and one-brained human crea-

tures, can generate other forms of knowledge, obtained in another context as situated experience from a perspective so immediately different from the human perspective of linearity in development, experience, action and subjugation.

A related approach is increasingly gaining ground in the global criticism of climate change, being perceived as today's terrifying expression of the imbalance that the oppressive relationship between human and nature has caused as a consequence of the capitalist and imperialist exploitation. Thus, we witness a counter-movement and counter-culture, which speaks and acts against the classic capitalist oppressive relationship between human and nature.

WE CLAIM:

We agree with Haraway's concept of tentacular thinking as our starting point for creative processes and performances that respect nature in an equal and reciprocal relationship with humanity. We want the tentacular theatre to be a place for interrelations and connections between people as a theatre where this is nurtured and network is fostered. Thus, we want this theatre to be a space, where nature, humans and technology can be experienced sensorially, as if we all had tentacles.

WE CLAIM:

Through our new concept of the tentacular theatre, we want to use our creativity, imagination and performing arts to create new representations of a human-nature relationship, where nature, instead of being the classic object of human striving, becomes the subject of its own development- and growth processes.

WE WILL:

We will realize tentacular thinking through new artistic approaches that, like tentacles in nature, unfold our narratives in interwoven scenarios and course of action without linear connection to the Aristotelian unity of action, time and place.



WE WILL:

Through our art, we will contribute to promoting the societal climate agenda and the civilization-historical debate, which puts the survival of Planet Earth at the center and announces that there is no longer a Plan B for the regeneration of the climate and the environment after the destruction our social system has caused nature over the centuries.

WE WILL:

We will strive to create a sustainable theatre, where we emphasize both in production, props and physical settings, the use of materials that are degradable to the greatest extent possible and in accordance with climatic and environmental reproduction needs and requirements.

A NON-LINEAR AND MULTIMODAL GAZE ON FUTURE NARRATIVES FOR SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART

"We believe that theatre can be used as a tool of reflection and expression for both individuals and communities. Educational theatre allows us to reach out to a variety of students, both child and adult everyone continues learning...As the globe continues to shrink and the physical boundaries between communities diminishes we are becoming aware of past, present and perhaps future injustices. We believe in endowing performing artists with the tools to constructively critique the systems they are both subject to and practitioners of. Activism plays a critical world in the human experience, and none should lose an opportunity to be active. As a reflection of the human experience, Theatre is a living art, a bright enigma and a shared experience. It encompasses multitudes, and is well fit for moving an audience towards progress..." (HEAT, Healing, Education, Activism Theatre, <https://www.theheatcollective.org/#home>)

"You can create meaning in an infinite number of ways. Voice quality and body language can tell a lot about the intention a language user has with an utterance. Colours, music, typography, scenography, graphics and clothing can make other contributions to the formation of meaning. When you combine several such modes of expression in a multi-modal text, it is like layering several transparent layers of meaning on top of each other. No team is understood to be isolated, but play together..." (Anne Løvland, 2010)

We want to practice and promote socially engaged art. However, as socially engaged artists, cultural workers and scientists, we are also aware that there are both

communicative, political and financial limits to our work as to many people's everyday life in our European context:

WE CLAIM:

We believe it as our obligation to contribute through our art to - directly or indirectly - making visible social and cultural challenges and articulating living conditions that both economically, politically and attitudinally call for change.

WE CLAIM:

We will engage in artistic performances from basic concepts of social justice and humanity as well as equality, equity and respect for diversity in both society and art.

WE CLAIM:

We believe our artistic performance becomes more qualified, relevant and gains greater impact when we dare to break the framework of the classical, specialized and linear idiom of the theatre by giving space in performances to the reality where people live, work, love and struggle for a better existence and a better world.

WE WILL:

We will collaborate multimodally with other artists and break down the traditional division and silo thinking between the arts.

WE WILL:

We will actively position art into everyday life through activism.

WE WILL:

In our artistic expression, we want to be inspired and even provoked by people and environments who do not have a close experience of using theatre and the

performing arts, and who do not necessarily have an educated and socioculturally conditioned attitude to the utility value and importance of art.



AN AESTHETIC, MULTIVOICED AND NON-HIERARCHIBAL GAZE ON FUTURE NARRATIVES FOR LANGUAGE AND PERFORMANCE

"Based on Dewey and Vygotsky, the aesthetic forms of expression can be seen as special languages that people, like other languages, use to retain, process and express experiences. Both a content side, a form of expression and a communication intention are linked to aesthetic languages. Like all languages, aesthetic languages are also culturally conditioned. They refer to a specific cultural context and are learned in an interactive interaction with others who master them...In dialogue with the surrounding culture, these languages are used to interpret and express experiences and impressions. Thereby we are influenced by and influence the culture itself..." (Merete Cornet Sørensen & Benny D. Austru, The Danish Learning Portal, Ministry of Children and Education).

"The beneficial effects of seeing and experiencing theatre and working with theatre in educational processes already in kindergarten are well documented. Through working with theatre, the children learn to communicate, collaborate and relate to others. They learn to include their peers in the dramatic play. Skills that they take with them into everyday life. They simply become more empathetic and socially wise..." (Dorthe Skøtt Bébe, forewoman of the Theatres' Interest Organisation in Denmark, 2016).

"I am happy with the term "actor" - partly it signals an empowerment of the participants - I can choose on and off, and partly it is related to actor . To act - to do is, in my view, more accurate. We work here with the actor perspective, which is of the opinion that the (late modern) individual(s) has the opportunity to change his/her living conditions far down the road. The approach leans on Reform pedagogy, where knowledge is not forced, but is an active process based on the actors' own experiences, interests and initiatives, and the process should be characterized by democratic thoughts about co-determination... (Morten Svalgaard Nielsen on forum theatre, 2020).

Aesthetics was often reduced to the study of the beautiful. But the concept embraces much further and deals with the idioms used within various artistic expressions in a given historic, cultural and societal context. The aesthetic language can teach us about an artist's way of expressing experiences or processing emotions via drama, dance, paintings, music, texts, poetry, etc. However, as aesthetics' interpretations of an artistic idiom are linked to time and place, history and culture, the aesthetic language in a hierarchical class society can exclude social strata and population groups that are not accustomed to a cultured and elitist context, but used to making use of

another, less recognized and represented aesthetic language. Thus, theatre and performance arts can appear with one specific linguistic voice, reserved for a cultural elite with exclusive and hierarchical insight into the codes of this language. The theatre may thereby convey a meta-linguistic approach that helps to preserve social and cultural hierarchies in a continuous social exclusion mechanism, based on one-way communication without any dialogical and responsive openings towards other life worlds and experiences.

WE CLAIM:

As performing artists, we want to contribute to spreading a new aesthetic language, based on experiences from socially engaged art and aims to promote dialogic communication that can resonate with a wide and diverse audience.

WE CLAIM:

As performing artists, we want to collaborate with all kinds of theatre related artists and designers as well as artists from other arts in a creative process to develop a new aesthetic movement and an artistic community about an aesthetic that emphasizes the equal and non-hierarchical conversation with an audience that represents diverse voices.

WE WILL:

We will design and promote a new performative language, inspired by and incorporating a diversity of socio-linguistic and cultural-linguistic traditions and worlds of experience as identity markers for a diversely composed audience and target groups for our work.



AN EQUAL AND APPRECIATIVE GAZE ON FUTURE NARRATIVES FOR DIVERSE ORIGINS, CULTURES AND EXPERIENCE

“Art and cultural actors also have a role in influencing society. Artistic and cultural activities help to break or maintain norms and stereotypes about, for example, gender, ethnicity, age, through characters in films or the musicians and composers who are given the most space on the stages. We believe what we see most – becomes the normal... When art and culture help to strengthen the stereotypes in society, it also affects workplaces in the arts and culture industry, because societal norms create the conditions for the norms that contribute to transgressive behavior and sexualized positions of power in the workplace. Here is a golden opportunity for a win-win situation...” (Tinne C. Nielsen & Lynn Roseberry, 2020).

“Our conception of migration may be radically altered as environmental realities such as flooding or droughts force us to redefine our understanding of national borders. Movements around social equity and human rights will have to continue to grow and join forces as citizens assert their demands for political and cultural representation. Art will evolve as well, becoming increasingly diverse, more collective and experiential. It might not look, in form and in content, like we have expected...” (The non-profit organization More Art, <https://medium.com/more-art/redefining-the-future-of-socially-engaged-art-25ca04e7e75a>)

There is a tendency to normalize and even naturalize what we see most frequently or in greatest quantities. Gender is an obvious and most familiar example of a centuries-long naturalization that made woman and man the global standard for forms of cohabitation as well as sexual activity and – not least – societal hierarchies and right of decisive positions. Naturalization simultaneously excludes all those who, in a historic-cultural perspective, have had other gender identities and cohabitation needs for just as long.

A corresponding naturalization and normalization has occurred in terms of race and ethnicity, partly as a result of the imperialist eras of capitalism, where the classic norm of the white heterosexual male has subjugated and terrorized people of other ethnic origins as lower-ranking, inferior and destined for gross oppression. It is also reflected in the arts, be it paintings of the noble savage or in stage figures and stereotypes that implicit reflect subordinate positions as well as Eurocentric and colonial perceptions and even contempt of women, transgender people, ethnic minorities etc.

WE CLAIM:

We want to contribute with examples of a theatre that does away with any kind of oppressive and undignified representations of underprivileged social groups. We are not opposed to a theatre that reflects society's socio-economic and socio-cultural discrimination. But we demand of ourselves that our theatre and performing arts convey a solidarity attitude towards discriminatory behavior of both a direct and indirect nature.

WE CLAIM:

We want to promote a theatre that distances itself from any naturalization and normalization of hierarchical and oppressive structures that objectify different population groups in our own societies as well as on a global scale. We will demand of ourselves that we always start from the fundamental and ethical point of view that all people, regardless of origin and background, are subjects in their own individual history as well as in society's collective history.

WE WILL:

We will make our stages available for dramatizations that dare to express discriminatory behavior and social conditions, be it from both an individual and societal perspective. In this way, we will contribute to giving underprivileged and oppressed population groups back their subjectivity as equal and respected citizens.

The partnership behind the Future Narratives for Planet Earth project partnership is formed by 7 organisations from different European countries:

UNIT Graz, Austria (Coordinator)

www.uni-t.org

CESIE ETS, Italy

www.cesie.org

mhtconsult, Denmark

www.mhtconsult.dk

Theater Bellevue, Netherlands

www.theaterbellevue.nl

QENDRA E ARTEVE VIZUELE MULTIMEDIA, Kosovo

www.qendra.org

Hessisches Landestheater Marburg GmbH, Germany

www.hltm.de

Het nieuwstedelijk vzw, Belgium

www.nieuwstedelijk.be



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