Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

Master's Degree programme

in Environmental Humanities

Final Thesis

Mutating minds in a changing world

The case of the Mutoid Waste Company and the development of alternative ways of living in the Capitalocene.

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Academic Year
2022/ 2023

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INTRODUCTION

On the 13th of May 2020, while in Italy we were trying to ease lockdown measures after two months of closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Facebook page of Extinction Rebellion Italia published a video called *Voi la vedete? Vous la voyez?*[1] that really impacted me. The video, composed of very powerful footages of contemporary time, was complemented with a mesmerizing voiceover that said:

> Can you see it? Can you see how absurd this society is? Can you see how absurd it is to leave the power over life and death to a mercantile logic? Can you see how absurd it is to brainwash us from an early age in a competition skewed by our social backgrounds? Can you see how absurd it is to pretend that an infinite growth is possible in a finite world? Can you see these meager privileges, you can only enjoy them to the detriment of the poorest and of the planet. Can you see all these unnecessary products? They can only be made by exploiting the poorest and a nature that can't take it anymore. You don't need them, but they are sold to you as a source of happiness. Can you see how unfair it is to be able to work from home during a major health crisis? Others don't have a choice and have to go out with fear in their chests to earn the income that will help them survive. Can you see those lies forbidding you to think that another society is possible? Those lies denying future dangers? Can you see that other crises are looming? Only the strongest will survive in the fight for the meager remaining resources […]. (Extinction Rebellion UK, 2020. 0:00-3:40)

This compelling video translated into words and images what I was feeling. If I was already distrustful of the capitalist system dominating our world, in which the economy is more important than human rights or the environment, during the pandemic I felt this feeling exacerbating, I was outraged.

At the time, I was attending the first year at the University of Environmental Humanities in Venice and I was delving into the debate about how to name the new epoch in which we are nowadays, profoundly influenced by human activities. While I

[1] The original video was published on 29th April 2020 by Extinction Rebellion France.

understood the importance of the term Anthropocene, whose popularity played an important role in the divulgation about the climate crisis paving its way outside the academia, I personally felt more attracted to another proposal, the one of Capitalocene. Theorized independently by Andreas Malm, Donna Haraway, and Jason Moore, the concept of Capitalocene was meant to recognize capitalism as the central, shaping element of our current epoch. It caught my attention because while the term Anthropocene could inadvertently cast a shadow of negativity upon human nature itself, the Capitalocene highlighted that the real problem was to ascribe to certain human activities, those driven by the dynamics of capitalism, rather than an inherent flaw in human nature. This perspective lit a glimmer of relief in my head, and I felt that it could shift the focus from fatalism to agency. That is the reason why I consider the debate surrounding the choice of nomenclature for our epoch important, because it carries profound implications for how we perceive our place in the world and how we can react. Environmental problems are in fact also social and cultural issues. I had this in mind when I started my research, which began from the urgency of elaborating new ways of living on this planet in order to survive and deal with the environmental crisis. What is necessary in this complex framework is to work on many dimensions that «include building new environmental imaginaries, formulating new discursive practices, and making changes in economic and political structures» (Opperman and Iovino, 2017, p. 3).

When drafting climate policies, governments can rely on the reports provided by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the main international body that collects scientific assessments on climate change, which is organized into three Working Groups. Working Group I focuses on The Physical Science Basis of Climate Change, which in the language of the IPCC is presented as caused by ‘human activity’. The other two address the responses to this change through two main strategies, adaptation in Working Group 2 (Climate Change Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability) and mitigation in Working Group III (Mitigation of Climate Change). This approach seems to focus mainly on the consequences of this climate change, without really delving into the evaluation of the causes, which are to be analyzed not only through scientific data but also by investigating cultural and social aspects. This, of course, shapes the definition of the proposed reaction to the issue. According to the Capitalocene theory, the more necessary thing to do is to recognize the role of capitalism and colonialism – construed through the concept of value and

commodification practices – that become in this perspective the historical subject to be observed of the abstract category of humanity (Moore, 2016b). The term Capitalocene has the power to show that the ecological crisis is a structural consequence of capital reproduction (Soriano, 2023); hence it encourages reflections at the structural level. However, the understanding of the deep, pervasive influence of capitalist dynamics in every aspect of our globalized world can also provoke a paralyzing sense of helplessness. How can we even picture a different kind of society at this point? How can we imagine to change the way in which capitalism and its commodification of life shape and dominate the very contour of our planet?

The reading of Tsing's book *The Mushroom at the End of the World* helped me shake off this anxious thought. Her reflection on «the possibility of life in capitalist ruins» (Tsing, 2015) had a profound impact on me. Until that moment I had stuck in my head the words that I read in *Realism Capitalist* by Mark Fisher, that said «It is easier to imagine the end of the world than an end to capitalism» (Fisher, 2009, p.1). Hence, the mere idea of the possibility of the end of capitalism seemed impossible to me, but to thrive on its ruins? What a dream! Thanks to Tsing's mind-opening book, I became more motivated and interested in researching alternative ways of living.

My memory brought me back to a very special community that I happened to meet some years ago. Founded in the early '80s in England, the Mutoid Waste Company comes from the punk movement, and its members recycle metallic scrap and other waste materials to build sculptures and to create incredible acrobatic performances with a post-apocalyptic aesthetic. In the beginning, they were travelers, bringing their shows and their art around Europe, but since 1990 some of them have settled with their mobile homes in the so-called Mutonia, the village founded by them near Santarcangelo di Romagna (IT). In their life, the Mutoids opposed the consumerist and capitalist society in their own creative way, upcycling waste into anything they could imagine and illegally occupying abandoned places to organize moments of aggregation outside the business logic. Since the beginning, they live doing what they want; nevertheless, they managed at one point to be recognized as a valuable heritage. Learning about their choices and their lifestyle, encouraged me to take into account the possibility and even the reality of many different modes of existence beyond capitalistic structures – at least at a small scale. That is why I choose to observe their reality as a case study for my thesis.

Objective of the research

The core objective of my thesis is to provide support to the proposal of the term Capitalocene and to observe how this argument could serve for the creation of effective and renovated ecological practices. I will do so by observing the experience of the Mutoid Waste Company and its history. The presentation of this case study will be my contribution to the Anthropocene/Capitalocene debate. I think that the Mutoid Waste Company works powerfully as case study for my intent exactly for its characteristic of not being born with explicit environmentalist intent. Just by questioning capitalism and its mechanisms, the group ended up conducting many ecological practices, some that go beyond generic discourses about sustainability. I could have chosen to observe one of the many idyllic ecovillages existing nowadays, but I chose to explore Mutonia and its inhabitants because I was interested in how they could thrive exactly on the scrap of the capitalist and consumerist society, without concealing it. Ecovillages and permaculture communities are surely praiseworthy and influential in the elaboration of a new culture, but it is important also to dismiss the idea that the only way of being ecological is to work with the soil and to go off the grid. Less intuitively, when visiting Mutonia with its cyberpunk sculptures and post-apocalyptic atmosphere, one immerses oneself in a place that with its history profoundly questions the system that has led to this present, without denying it but rather emerging from its ashes. A return to pristine nature is not possible, and faced with today's crisis, the revaluation of waste materials made by the Mutoids takes on increasingly significant meaning. The core element of their philosophy of life is what they call *mutation*, and not only do they recycle and upcycle waste to create something beautiful or useful, but they also actively oppose the paradigm that commodifies any aspect of life and creates this waste. Their initial intent was more linked to social criticism, against a system that annihilates individuals by making them think that the only purpose of life is to work and to consume, against institutions that prioritize economy to human rights – not even bothering dissimulating –, against the accumulation of useless goods. Their major concern was freedom of life and of expression. However, social and environmental issues are related, so their cry "Mutate to survive" portrays in a very evocative way the necessity of "re-enchanting our world" – using Silvia Federici's words (2019). The point of the Capitalocene argument is that discourses about sustainability are not enough if they do not confront the capitalist system and the structures of power that perpetuate social inequalities and

environmental degradation. The re-enchanting that is needed has to go deeper and question the socio-economic structures that are now dominant, recognizing also that some of the structures we are criticizing have become ingrained in our collective consciousness (Vacchelli, 2020). The mutation preached by the Mutoids brought to the creation of a non-hierarchical society based both on freedom and on collectivity, but also – and necessarily – on art and fun. I believe that this is an act of resistance within the capitalist system that shows the possibilities of resilience of human creativity and the power of collective actions.

Structure of the work

This research paper consists of six chapters. The first chapter is dedicated to my considerations about the research itself, how it developed, and the problems I encountered. I will discuss the methodology of my investigation, including my approach to the sources of information and the implication of my positionality as an external visitor of Mutonia and as a student of Environmental Humanities embarking on anthropological research for the first time. In the end, the work could not become the ethnographic research that I first envisioned, but it poses as exploratory research, hopefully laying the foundations for possible future projects.

Chapter II covers the theoretical framework of the debate around the terms Anthropocene and Capitalocene and the implication of terminology to name our epoch. I will first examine the weak points of the term Anthropocene and consequently investigate how Capitalocene could be a more adequate option, not only to describe the situation but even to inspire more efficient actions. The crucial aspect I linger on is that the Capitalocene argument shows the pervasive influence of capitalism, which, according to Moore and other scholars, is not just an economic system, but a way of organizing nature, based on practices of othering and power relations (Moore, 2016a; 2016b). This theory underscores the fact that the current ecological crisis is a structural issue, and I investigate how this perspective could fight a paralyzing idea that human activities are inevitably problematic for the planet. Terminology is crucial because the choice of one term or another could mold our perception of a problem and consequently influence our attitudes and actions. Thinking in terms of the Anthropocene could in fact bring an attitude of catastrophism. I will show, through the readings of Eva Horn (2018) and Hanna Arendt (1961), how this fear is just the other face of the coin of our

anthropocentric temporal regime, a linear conception of time which according to the promises of capitalism was directed toward an endless growth that now is showing to be impossible. Nevertheless, alternatives are possible, and we need to find creative ways to react. Here I link the case of the Mutoid Waste Company and its background in the punk movement and its Do-It-Yourself ethics. I then introduce the following chapters by briefly explaining why I believe that their distancing from certain mechanisms of capitalist society makes them a good case study to support the Capitalocene theory and provides interesting ideas for the elaboration of a renovated ecological awareness.

Chapter III is dedicated to the introduction of the Mutoid Waste Company. Here I briefly reconstruct their story, from their early days as nomadic artists and rave organizers in neoliberal England to their settlement in Mutonia and to today's projects.

After this presentation, I could proceed in the next chapters to propose the considerations I made about their lifestyle in my quest for practices that could be considered sustainable. As a guideline and yardstick, I evoked the official strategies at the policy level to deal with climate change, adaptation and mitigation. I started from the aspect of their life that most foreseeably fits into standard environmentalist discourse, namely their practice of upcycling discarded materials, not only for their sculptures and mechanic installations but also for everyday objects. In opposition to buying new stuff, they delve into the only assured abundance of our time, the one of waste. Chapter IV is thus dedicated to the concept of adaptation, which I compared to the Mutoids' concept of mutation. However, this mutation does not entail only the transformation of wasted materials, but it is a philosophy that encompasses every aspect of their life, and the more I observed the Mutoids' reality, the more I realized how the importance of their practices did not lie only in recycling. Hence, the reflections on the concept of waste could not stop at the symptomatic aspect of the problem but went inevitably to discuss its relational essence and the concept of value. I investigate this aspect through the readings of many anthropologists who dedicated their research to waste, such as Eriksen (2016) and particularly Armiero (2021), who proposed the fascinating perspective of the Wasteocene. He explains how modern relational processes typical of capitalist society are responsible for creating wasted things, people, and places. This idea links with Moore's concept of the cheapening of nature, according to which Capitalism is fundamentally based on othering practices, construed through the systemic undervaluation of nature and certain humans that do not enter the category of Humanity with capital-H (2016b). Thanks to this perspective, I could start to envision

how the Mutoids entangle in different kinds of relations – with materials but also with people and places – that Armiero calls "commoning relations" (2021, p. 3), the only type that can eradicate the Capitalocene.

Chapter V covers the other most evident sustainable aspect of the Mutoids' life, namely their anti-consumerist lifestyle, which I compared to the IPCC strategy of mitigation, which often relies on technological advances to allow continuing *Business as Usual*, showed to be unsustainable on many levels by more and more scientific research. The issue of waste is just one example, and the scientific framework of the nine planetary boundaries shows the other limits of our finite planet that have to be observed, which are jeopardized – and in many cases crossed (Richarson et al., 2023) – by the ideal of perpetual growth proposed by the neoliberal economy. Drawing on the research of Wiedmann et al., I reflect on the fact that sustainability can possibly be achieved only if technology goes hand in hand with profound changes in lifestyle (2020). This offered me the opportunity to reflect more deeply on the fact that a true elaboration of practices of mitigation could not abstain from questioning the system that is now dominating our world, capitalism – that still tries to offer the vision of growth as possible by theorizing a 'green growth' –, and our involvement in supporting this system. Mutonia appeared to me as a sort of unsophisticated degrowth society as theorized by Latouche (2021) and Gorz (1980). This discourse inevitably entangled with an investigation of the concept of well-being, since the capitalist society – while it promises a seemingly endless satisfaction of our needs – seems to be deeply dependent on human unhappiness.

Hence, I was brought back to the importance of the type of relations we engage with the other, and Chapter VI explores more thoroughly the notion of Armiero's commoning relations as the most effective strategy to develop true ecological practices, as the environmental crisis is not merely a technical or scientific issue, but one deeply rooted in cultural and political dimensions. Thus, what is truly necessary is the creation of what Wahl calls "regenerative cultures" (2016). Of course, as prescribed by the scientist Ponthieu, who worked many years in the context of European Union policy making, a change is needed at the institutional level. Institutions should indeed support regenerative economic models, such as circular economies, local resilience, and equitable distribution of resources, and prioritize and support innovations that contribute to sustainable and regenerative solutions. However, governments are failing, and they mostly address climate change through technical solutions at the symptomatic level

without questioning Western individualism and materialism. Relationships of care and solidarity instead have the power to sabotage certain root aspects of Capitalism that are at the basis of the environmental crisis. The Mutoid Waste Company provides once again a good example for my considerations, embodying the character of "resisting subject" (Armiero, 2021, p. 12) in a world of consumerism and exploitation and offering an alternative narrative. On one hand, I will observe the reality of Mutonia as a community, in which the Mutoids live like an extended family. On the other hand, I will analyze the sharing aspect of the same experience with people from outside, and I will investigate the reality of Mutonia in the context of the theory of the commons by Ostrom. I will then link the new perspective on commons proposed by scholars such as Federici or Armiero, inserting the reflection about Mutonia in the broader context of anti-authoritarian and libertarian spaces like social centers and illegal occupations.

In the conclusion, I will summon my final remarks and briefly introduce possible ideas for further research.

CHAPTER I

Unfolding the research

1.1 Starting point

The starting point of my research is the idea that the term Capitalocene may not only be better suited than Anthropocene to describe our epoch – as it acknowledges the influence of capitalism in the emergence of the contemporary environmental crisis –, but also more effective in inspiring impactful responses. Current institutional-level strategies, anchored to the definition of climate change as derived from general 'human activity', appear somewhat timid, predominantly focusing on addressing the symptomatic effects of the crisis, without a true investigation of the causes of it. The Capitalocene argument seems to have the power to remind us of the true place in the world of our species, as integral components of nature, and points out the structural issues that need to be confronted, potentially inspiring transformative reactions.

To address the topic, I started by doing a review of the existing literature on the debate about the Anthropocene and its criticism, with a focus on the authors proposing or supporting the term Capitalocene. The works by Professor Jason Moore were crucial, as they highlighted the pervasive nature of the capitalist system and the mechanism of cheapening nature that amplifies the anthropocentric divide between the arbitrary categories of Humans and Nature.

My contribution to this dispute is the presentation of a case study that I believe can offer interesting considerations in support of the theory of the Capitalocene argument. The case study I propose is a collective of artists, the Mutoid Waste Company, who embraced since the '8os a lifestyle that defies certain conventional norms typical of capitalist accumulation. My hypothesis, inspired by their art made with recycled materials, was that they could developed many practices considered sustainable in the common environmentalist discourses consequently to their anti-capitalist ethos.

1.2 The case study

1.2.1. Collecting information

My initial desire was to do ethnographic on-field research, but first I started by investigating the existing literature on Mutonia, gathering information from various types of secondary sources. Thanks to numerous video clips and a few documentaries that I could find on YouTube and online, I was able to see scenes from old parties and get an idea of their appearance and of the exceptionality of their shows from the early days. However, these videos would have been difficult to contextualize without the book *Mutate or Die. In Viaggio con la Mutoid Waste Company,* by Rote Zora (pseudonym of Elisa Fosforino)[2], published in 2020, where she traced their history by collecting many Mutoids' personal memories. While the Mutoid Waste Company is often mentioned in books about countercultures and the rave movement, this was the only monograph about them. Moreover, while visiting Mutonia personally, I did not have the opportunity to meet any pioneering parents of the Mutoid Waste Company, but I talked with people who joined the Community some years after the creation of the Italian settlement. Therefore, the historical background I outline in this paper draws heavily on Rote Zora's book, and, to avoid continuous redundancy, I claim here that unless stated otherwise, it must be considered the main source of the information reported in the paragraphs dedicated to the reconstruction of their past. Moreover, I feel that I have to highlight the fact that in this summarized review of the Mutoids' history, I obviously had to make a selection of what I thought to be some of the crucial elements for the purposes of my research.

For the description of today's Mutonia and its inhabitants, I could add to the secondary data – like more recent documentaries and newspaper articles – also the information I collected personally by talking with some of them. Scrolling the Facebook page of Mutonia provided me with interesting insights as well.

1.2.2 Preparatory studies for ethnography

In addition to the studies about the Mutoid Waste Company, I felt that I also needed to prepare myself for the actual practice of fieldwork, as it would have been my first

[2] Rote Zora was actually a radical left feminist organization which emerged in West Germany in the late 70s. It was a militant guerrilla that fought against sexism, patriarchy, anti-abortion movements, and nuclear power.

experience of ethnographic research. With this purpose, I consulted the book by Judith Okely, *Anthropological Practice. Fieldwork and the Ethnographic Method* (2012), that offers a comprehensive and practical guide to conducting this type of research.

1.3.3 Being on site: the collection of data

My plan for the fieldwork was to collect qualitative data, through observation and of course through interactions such as one-on-one interviews or group meeting. First of all, I had to find a way to get in touch with the Mutoids. Mutonia does not have a website; there is a dedicated page on the website of Santarcangelo di Romagna, but no official contact number or email is indicated, so I had to contact them through their Facebook page. I briefly explained the idea for my thesis, and I managed to arrange a meeting with a few inhabitants of Mutonia to introduce myself. I wanted to ask face-to-face if I could stay a while with them, so for this first visit I booked a hostel in Rimini for a few days. The park is open and free for everyone to visit (from 9.30 to 20:00 in the summer and 9:30 to 18:00 in winter), so I decided to get there one day before the scheduled appointments and visit it on my own, to familiarize myself with the site and get inspired by its materiality.

Figure 1. The sign at the entrance of Mutonia. My picture, 2023

Mutonia is itself very much eloquent, it's an ecocultural landscape that comprehends the caravans, the laboratories, the sculptures, as well as the inhabitants, human and

nonhuman, and the semi-wild vegetation that grows all around, intertwining with the human constructions. At the entrance, in the middle of a wild bush, there is a sign indicating the name Mutonia and a few rules for the visitors to follow – like parking outside and respecting the inhabitant's privacy – and I thought it was interesting how the only fact of being surrounded by an apparently non-domesticated nature gave me a sense of abandonment.

I entered the yard and there was nobody. Immediately inside, the sculptures begin, together with piles of objects like mannequins or other weird stuff. The tiny houses intersect with these objects and all around the vegetation grows free to entangle with those peculiar elements. The grass was cut only in front of some doorways. Walking there alone, I felt that I understood why many articles described it as a post-apocalyptic atmosphere. I could hear some welding noises in the background, indicating that someone was working on some material.

Figure 2. A view of Mutonia. My picture, 2023

The next day, I finally met some of the Mutoids. The first one greeting me was Tommy, who welcomed me at the entrance of Mutonia and guided me to his little yard where we could sit to have a chat surrounded by all the odd things that he collected as material for his creations. Later he took me to Andy's house, where we had a coffee together. Then Andy introduced me to Lyle Doghead. Thanks to Andy, I could arrange the meeting with Davide and Francesca the day after. Honestly, I was a bit caught by

surprise, as I did not expect to have proper interviews already on the very first day; however, meeting them one at a time created the right situation to start right away. I did not even know with whom I would have talked, apart from Tommy and Andy, so I had some prepared questions but not too defined, I was open and curious to meet anyone. The interviews I took were thus semi-structured, that started in a similar way for everyone, and then developed in different directions according to each interlocutor, going with the flow in an interactive process, where my questions and comments developed spontaneously according to the unfolding of the conversation. We spoke in Italian, even with the people coming from England. We talked in an informal setting, as I was invited by everyone in their home or in their yard, where I could also meet many nonhuman animals inhabiting Mutonia, like Tommy's cat, which appears also in the documentary *Mutonia | Hometown* by ZimmerFrei (2013), and a few dogs. I recorded the dialogues and listened to them various times when I went back home, looking for recurring elements that could inspire me for insightful connections for my thesis.

1.2.4 Limitations of the ethnographic research

These interviews and informal conversations provided me with precious material, but I was also hoping to have a more immersive experience, as «Those anthropologists who depended more on question-and-answer exchanged without participation could well be criticized for reductive verbalized accounts» (Okely, 2012, p. 84). Sadly, I could not have the true 'participant observation' experience, crucial for the ethnographic research method. In her book, Okely explains that

> It is important to distinguish different kinds of participant observation. Like the word 'ethnography', participant observation has different interpretations for different disciplines. The ideal and traditional practice for social anthropologists is at least one year of shared residence and 24-hours-a-day presence for a total participation and joint living. (*Ibid*.)

However, life in Mutonia was a bit different from what I imagined. I discovered that it was different from the early years of the settlements – when the Mutoids did everything together. Nowadays, it is more of a village of artists that still share common ideals and lifestyles, but each with its own little home and its own projects. Therefore, there was not any collective activity I could join to justify a prolonged stay in Mutonia. I had

already imagined that I would not have helped the artists in welding sculptures or anything like that, but I was hoping at least that I could help as a volunteer in the organization of the Workout Stage, now that Covid-19 was not an obstacle. However, they told me that they were not planning on doing it that year either. Thus, even though I tried to immerse myself a bit more in their mindset by visiting Gambettola, the nearby village of the scrapyards, and to be very conscious about the waste I produced, I am aware that due to the shortness of the time I could spend with them this research can be said to be lacking an important element, as «the fieldworker as participant is open to learning beyond the verbal and cerebral. Participant observation involves more than co-residence, verbal interaction and observation; it also involves knowledge through the body, through all the senses [...]» (Okely, 2012, p. 77), and this requires time. I reflected a lot on this issue and the reading of the book by Okely made me question many aspects of my research, considering the implications of the different levels of involvement. As Okely wrote, «Paradoxically, the detached observer may be more likely to transform contexts. She or he is threatening precisely because she or he is not involved, appearing as voyeur and critic. Alternatively, if the anthropologist joins in, she or he may cease to be intrusive» (*Ibidem*). Without the trusting relationship that can develop only through time, the risk is that the answers to the researcher's questions could be incomplete or not totally truthful. In general, I feel that our dialogues were honest and open. Just on rare occasions, I feared that having introduced myself as an Environmental Humanities scholar, they could be swayed and think that I would criticize them if I discovered something not particularly sustainable. However, my task was to make them understand that I was not there to judge. Moreover, I explained from the beginning that I did not approach this reality hoping to find a perfect example of sustainability – if one can exist – but in order to think beyond the concept of sustainability as intended by conventional institutional perspectives. What I wanted to explore was a conception of ecology more similar to the one theorized by philosophers like Timothy Morton, according to whom «Being ecological [...] is not about spending time in a pristine nature preserve but about appreciating the weed working its way through a crack in the concrete, and then appreciating the concrete. It's also part of the world, and part of us» (as in Meis, 2021). As I already said, I was not looking for quantitative data, such as a precise measure of their carbon footprint, but qualitative ones.

Eventually, I feel that the shortness of my visit was more limiting on my side. As a matter of fact, I am quite shy when I meet new people. At first, I was even a bit

intimidated; I had spent the last months reading about them and watching them in documentaries, they were sort of celebrities to me! However, thanks to their kindness and down-to-earthness, I could overcome this feeling right away, but I still felt like an outsider sometimes. It was my first experience as a researcher entering the life of someone, and I felt vulnerable. I read in the book by Okely that «The anthropologist can be a vulnerable figure in the field often, but not always, the outsider with prior affinities» (Okely, 2012, p. 5), however, it was something linked more with my insecurities, rather than the behavior of my interlocutors. Moreover, due to time and budget limits, I did not manage to meet other inhabitants of Mutonia, and I am aware that the size of the target sample is quite limited. Nevertheless, I still had the opportunity to listen to many interesting stories and perspectives and I believe that, in the end, this thesis poses itself as exploratory research, hopefully laying the theoretical foundations for some collaborative projects in the future.

1.3 The development of the research

This thesis was built on a mix of deductive and inductive processes, as I surely approached the readings and the interviews with a certain theory in mind to prove – that by opposing certain capitalist mechanisms, one will inevitably establish a (more) sustainable way of living – but the unfolding of my reflections around this topic developed mostly thanks to what I caught from these interactions. I approached the Mutoids intrigued by the premises of the aspects most evidently linked with environmentalist discourses, hence their artistic recycling practice and their alternative lifestyle resembling certain characteristics of a degrowth society, far from capitalist consumerism. I considered these two aspects confronting them to the strategies to deal with climate change proposed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – adaptation and mitigation – which offered me various considerations about waste management and scientific frameworks such as the nine planetary boundaries. Nevertheless, by observing the reality of the village and by meeting the Mutoids in person, I could go deeper in my reflection about transformative ecological practices and explore through this perspective many theories that I had encountered during my studies at university, such as the Theory of the Commons by Ostrom or the Wasteocene argument by Armiero. Especially the latter provided me with the crucial perspective on wasting relationships as the basis of our epoch of capital accumulation. This theory

made me truly understand how reflections about how to be “ecological” cannot avoid tackling cultural and social aspects, and his claim on the importance of developing different relationships, ones of care and solidarity, in order to sabotage the Capitalocene, ended up guiding my research. Moreover, I had already in mind to tackle aspects of degrowth theories, but I did not plan to end up talking about happiness. However, it arose as a major topic in discussing with the Mutoids about their lifestyle. Thanks to these connections, I could envision a more profound idea of transformation, one that truly challenges the Western capitalist mode of life.

Hence, the definition of the outline was not linear, but I investigated through the new perspective that Mutonia was offering me the various theories that the same experience of the research evoked me. As Okely pointed out, «the unplanned character of ethnography is precisely its value» (2012, p.48). Only by meeting the Mutoids in person, I could understand more clearly what the mainstream institutional strategies to deal with the environmental crisis lack, recognizing the importance of reflecting more deeply on the relations we engage with other humans and with the nonhuman world.

Beyond doubt, the unfolding of my research was influenced by my educational background**.** A bachelor’s degree is usually expected to be followed by a specialization course, however, these two years exploring the Environmental Humanities were more about learning to broaden the scope of inquiry. By drawing on diverse disciplinary perspectives and methodologies – and their intersections – I could learn to tend towards a holistic approach that can provide a more comprehensive understanding of complex issues like environmental ones.

CHAPTER II

Theoretical Framework: DIY in the Capitalocene

2.1 The Anthropocene

Right while I am writing this chapter, people of the Italian region Emilia-Romagna – where Mutonia is located – are picking up the pieces after facing a terrible flood. The rain normally expected to fall in six months fell in the first half of May, accompanied by strong wind and storm surges, making twenty-one rivers overflow and flooding thirty-five municipalities (Icona Clima, 18 May 2023). Mutonia stands on the river Marecchia, one of the overflowed rivers, and some of the inhabitants decided to move to a parking area in Santarcangelo for a few days. Just some weeks before, it seemed that the main concern was about drought – I actually happened to talk about it also in some conversations with the Mutoids – but the less and less exceptional drought and floods are two faces of the same coin. While extreme weather events have always existed – and still keeping in mind that other factors such as land use are involved in determining their consequences –, we are witnessing how these events are becoming more frequent or more intense in many regions of the world. For both scientists and non-scientists, it is now hard to negate that the planet is showing signs of increased instability. In 2000, the Nobel Prize-winning atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen proposed to use the term Anthropocene, coined by Eugene Stoermer, to indicate a new geological era for our planet. While suggesting that the Holocene, a geological epoch characterized by great stability, had come to an end, the term was highlighting the fact that this was largely due to human activity (Steffen et al., 2011). The term has quickly become the subject of many debates in the academic world – whether about its scientific validity or its starting point – however, it became significant for its role in spreading awareness of the «quantitative shift in the relationship between humans and the global environment» (*Ivi*, p. 843) also outside the academia. As a matter of fact, the term is always more popular in documentaries and books for wide audiences, but also in social media and demonstrations slogans aimed to show that human activity is embedded in a single

planetary system, and therefore has consequences. However, the word Anthropocene presents some questionable issues that must be addressed. Terminology is indeed a crucial tool in conveying messages, as how we decide to name something will influence our response to it.

In the essay *Anthropocene, Capitalocene, and the Problem of Culture*, Professor Daniel Hartley summarized the main critiques that have been done to the Anthropocene (2016, p. 154-165). The first criticism is that the term refers to an «ahistorical, abstract humanity» (*Ibid.*). Who is the *Anthropos* in the Anthropocene? In discussing the responsibility of the environmental crisis, can we really talk about humanity in general, denying class struggle and oppression? Professor Joni Adamson raised this same issue in her essay *We have never been Anthropos* (2017), in which she points out that we cannot give all humanity the same responsibility, nor can we say that all humanity is facing the same problems. According to the complexity of the crisis described by the Anthropocene, we must also consider the complexity of humanity, in which humans are «internally differentiated and constantly developing through contradictions of power and re/production» (Hartley, 2016, p. 154-166). The second critique is about «Technological Determinism» (*Ibid*.), dedicated to those who date the beginning of the Anthropocene to the invention of the steam engine in the XIX century – like Crutzen and Stoermer themselves. This again does not delve into the complexity of class differences, and Hartley supports Moore in considering that a major turning point in the relationship between humans and nonhuman nature lies around 1450, with the origin of the capitalist civilization and its practices of commodification and its bold global conquest strategies (Moore, 2016). In this way, power relations and disparities are taken into account. The third issue listed by Hartley is the «annihilation of the time of praxis», in the sense that the Anthropocene's «specific narrative mode translates the time of initiative and praxis into the time of pure physical necessity» (*Ibid.*), in a way that considers the present only in function of a future thought as a linear progression that often leads to catastrophic scenarios. At the same time, the fourth critique points out that this conception of time is linked to the Anthropocene's «Whig view of history», that is to say, the narrative of endless progress. Finally, the last criticism illustrated by Hartley is that the Anthropocene seems to call for «apolitical technical and managerial solutions» in which scientists propose technical solutions to specific problems composing the environmental crisis, without really questioning the system that provokes

those problems in the first place, and the interconnectedness of all those problems (*Ibid.*).

In addition, the term Anthropocene can be seen as anthropocentric in itself, as it actually follows the philosophical position that Moore calls "Cartesian dualism" (2016b, p. 83), which separates humans from the rest of nature.

Therefore, besides the already mentioned debate about the potential beginning of this new epoch, there is also a prolific debate about better alternatives to name it. *Anthrobscene, Plantationocene*, *Technocene, Necrocene,* and *Chthulucene* are just a few examples of many. Among all, I was particularly captured by *Capitalocene,* proposed independently by Andreas Malm, Jason Moore and Donna Haraway.

2.2 The Capitalocene

In today's world, it is evident that the people involved in decision-making tends to prioritize the maintenance of economic stability and growth, often to the benefit of a select and privileged few, while disregarding the well-being of a larger segment of the population that struggle to meet their basic needs. This focus on profit and the accumulation of wealth leads to economic inequalities, while perpetuating oppression, marginalization and exploitation of both human and non-human worlds. The proposal of the term Capitalocene speaks for the idea that what should be blamed for the current ecological crisis is not human activities *per se,* but the complex system of Capitalism, that in only 500 years brought about unprecedented levels of extraction and accumulation (Moore, 2016a; Armiero, 2021). The anthropologist Jason Hickel, in an interview for *Il Manifesto,* highlighted that Capitalism is not just about market and trade, which have existed for thousands of years, but

> What makes capitalism distinctive is that it is organized around and dependent on perpetual growth. It is the only economic system in human history that is intrinsically expansionary. The thing about "growth" is that it is a propaganda term. In reality what is usually going on is a process of extraction, enclosure and commodification, which quite often harms human communities and living ecosystems. (Levantesi, April 20, 2021)

This idea of growth links to the perception of boundlessness. Capitalist view considers nature, the environment, and certain humans as endless resources to exploit, or as an

unlimited place where to discard waste. Professor Jason Moore has deeply investigated the Capitalocene argument, which, according to him, exposes three aspects that remain concealed in the Anthropocene framework (Moore, 2016b). The first one is that it shows that capitalism is not just an economic system, nor just a social system, but it is

> a way of organizing nature as a whole… a nature in which human organizations (classes, empires, markets, etc.) not only make environments, but are simultaneously made by the historical flux and flow of the web of life. In this perspective, capitalism is a world-ecology that joins the accumulation of capital, the pursuit of power, and the co-production of nature in successive historical configurations. (Moore 2016a, p. 7)

The other two aspects that the Capitalocene theory highlights is that Capitalism does not start only with the industrial revolution in England, but its history goes back to power relations from the sixteenth century, and its geography encompasses more than this Eurocentric perspective. As I already mentioned, according to Moore the origin of Capitalism is to be found in the three centuries after 1450, with the huge landscape revolution that occurred through colonial conquests (Moore, 2016b). Hence, the Capitalocene theory challenges the «naturalized inequalities, alienation, and violence inscribed in modernity's strategic relations of power and production» (*Ivi*, p. 82) that the Anthropocene disregards with its generalized "Anthropos". As written by Donna Haraway, «the Anthropos did not do this fracking thing and he should not name this double-death-loving epoch» (2016a, p. 47). By calling this epoch of crisis Capitalocene instead of Anthropocene, we can escape the horrible thought that we, as humans, are inevitably bad. Nowadays, I frequently hear people claiming that we humans deserve to be extinct. During the pandemic the slogan "We are the virus" was too easily adopted by many people, often accompanied by pictures of wild vegetation or nonhuman animals reappearing in deserted cities. Professor Eva Horn, in her book *The Future as Catastrophe. Imagining Disaster in the Modern Age,* reflects on the popularity of apocalyptic scenarios in pop culture, like cinema and books, and she points out the fact that often the image of «quietly decaying, empty» cities (2018, p. 2), like New York in *I am Legend,* is not only a scaring scenario, but it is often at the same time «also a secret desire: an image of postapocalyptic peace that can only come when mankind has finally vanished» (*Ibid.*), in which natural world is finally relieved from human presence and can thrive again recovering and flourishing like in an ancient pristine time.

Horn writes that «Humankind blissfully dreams of its own extinction» (*Ivi*, p. 3). If on one hand, apocalyptic scenarios in literature and cinema can help us reflect about the concreteness of our present impact on the planet, on the other hand, however, a misanthropic narrative that wishes for the end of humanity does not bring us anywhere. Not only does it not lead to any constructive reactions, but it also carries on the troublesome dualism that separates the human and the nonhuman, a differentiation that is inadequate for understanding and addressing the ecological crisis. According to Latour, the cause of this crisis is exactly the cognitive division between nature and culture. He explains in his book *We Have Never Been Modern* that this separation of the two spheres is the paradox of modernity, as in reality everything in this world is a hybrid (1993). By challenging the dichotomy between nature and culture, Latour argues for a more holistic understanding of the world. With the Capitalocene, we can abandon any useless superficial misanthropy and understand that it was not an undifferentiated humanity that provoked deforestation, biodiversity loss, and climate change, but the specific way of organizing nature that we developed in the last centuries – one that separates an external category of "resources" to be exploited, and then depleted it so quickly and so greedily to make earth-human systems extremely unstable. Only from this awareness, we can start elaborating on alternatives; «If we agree that the human species as a whole is not responsible for the Anthropocene, we can also thereby reevaluate its origins and more importantly [...] the possible exit strategies», argues Marco Armiero (2021, p 7).

More and more scholars, both in scientific and humanistic fields, are pointing out the problematics of the dominant capitalist culture and the necessity of a change; Haraway for instance reports the point of view of a complex system engineer, Brad Werner, that during a meeting at the American Geophysical Union in San Francisco in 2012 exclaimed that «the only scientific thing to do is: Revolt! » (Haraway, 2016, p. 47). However, we do not need to be scientists to see that this global system is destroying our world, and that this system can survive only thanks to the struggle of a part of the population and the environment. It is the "Patchy Capitalism" described by the anthropologist Anna Tsing, a capitalism that no longer brings progress, but only precarity (Tsing, 2015; Haraway, 2016), constantly requiring «the production of misery and scarcity on a world scale» and «the degradation of human life and the reconstruction of social hierarchies and divisions on the basis of gender, race, and age»

(Federici, 2018, p. 21). As the sociologists and philosopher Silvia Federici powerfully wrote,

> It is not science fiction to imagine that we are guinea pigs in a capitalist experiment in nonevolutionary species change. We are not alone in this process. Animals, from protozoa to cows, are being engineered and patented to eat oil spills, produce more eggs per hour, secrete more hormones. Increasingly, the land is no longer valued for how much food it can grow or what kind of buildings it can support but for how much radioactive waste it can 'safely' store. Thus tired earthly commons, the gift of billions of years of laborless transformation, meet tired human bodies. Capital has long dreamed of sending us to work in space, where nothing would be left to us except our work machines and rarified and repressive work relations. But the fact is that the earth is becoming a space station where millions are already living in space colony conditions: no oxygen to breathe, limited social and physical contact, a desexualized life, difficulty of communication, lack of sun and green … even the voices of migrating birds are missing. (*Ivi*, p. 29)

However, this same capitalism that is unequivocally showing its structural unsustainability and injustices, operated in such way to colonize our bodies and our minds, and now it seems the only possible alternative. I quote here again the famous sentence «It is easier to think about the end of the world than the end of capitalism», attributed both to Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek, (Fisher, 2009, p. 1) because I find it extremely relevant. The central statement of the book *The Great Derangement*, by Amitav Ghosh, is that the climate crisis is at its core a crisis of culture, and especially a crisis of imagination. The Jungian psychoanalyst James Hillman, in the book *We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy – And the World's Getting Worse* (1993), illustrated this metaphor of colonization of the "economic empire" explaining that its power is to rule us through psychological means. Capitalist economy has been interiorized so deeply that it is difficult to think outside its categories, we left it modelling our perceptions. For instance, many people still believe that this system is good because it can provide jobs, while unemployment is actually a structurally functional part of it (Vacchelli, 2020). Why is it so difficult to imagine a different world, for example a world in which our value does not depend on the job we do or how many things we own? Are we really doomed to a future of submission to this abstract tyranny – the neoliberalist economy – that can only lead us to extinction?

2.3 Progress or Apocalypse, problems of futurism

In the prologue of *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, Anna Tsing quotes William Cronon's distinction between "first nature" – the one of ecological relation, also including humans – and "second nature" – the capitalistic transformation of the environment. Tsing then adds a third kind of nature, «the one that manages to live despite capitalism» (Tsing, 2015, p. VIII). In her book she follows the Matsutake, a kind of mushroom that thrives in devastated areas, and explains that

> to even notice third nature, we must evade assumptions that the future is that singular direction ahead. Like virtual particles in a quantum field, multiple futures pop in and out of possibility; third nature emerges within such temporal polyphony. Yet progress stories have blinded us. (*Ivi*, p. VII)

But in which sense "progress stories have blinded us"? As we already mentioned above when talking about the implications of the term Anthropocene, our relation to time plays an important role. Modernity's promises of progress lay on a linear timeline, in which the future meant constant growth and development. In her book *Between Past and Future. Six Exercises in Political Thought* (1961), the political scientists Hannah Arendt reflects on the fact that humans are the only element of the environment that lives "between past and future", while nonhuman natural elements live an eternal present. She distinguishes between mortal humans, with life perceived as a linear direction, and immortal natural elements, following a recurrent cyclical order made of decomposition and procreation: «the rectilinear course of its movement [...]» – she wrote – «cuts through the circular movements of biological life. This is mortality: to move along a rectilinear line in a universe where everything, if it moves at all, moves in a cyclical order» (1961, p. 42). Discourses of progress are embedded in this kind of futurism. However, in the last decades, progress intended as exponential growth has shown its unsustainability, and the optimistic previsions of advancement left space for a widespread *collapsism*, a feeling that collapse is about to happen. Horn explains that this change in mentality actually started during the Cold War, when the atomic bomb incarnated the possibility of destroying any possible future for humans. Today the scenario of a catastrophe is not about a nuclear explosion but a «type of catastrophe far less tangible: the looming catastrophe without event, whose most poignant – yet still

uncannily opaque – image is that of climate change» (2018, p. 14). We are aware that we are at a tipping point, a point in which just going on *Business As Usual* has proven to be lethal for our existence, but we cannot really predict what is going to happen or when. The Anthropocene it is a catastrophe that

> lacks identifiable agents, a precise moment in time, and a definite location in pace, and it is not confined to any particular single scenario. The catastrophe without event is characterized by disparate, diffuse, and ultimately undefinable scenarios, temporalities, localities, and processes. (*Ibid*. p. 9)

However, whenever we believe in progress or in a catastrophe, we are always in the same anthropocentric temporal regime, a future-oriented arrow in which man can succeed or decline. The question, according to the anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen, is «what could be a feasible alternative in a world society which seems to have locked itself to a path which is bound to end with collapse» (2016, p. 12). Professor Erik Swyngedouw even argues that the same fostering of fear of collapse is essential for capitalism to continue (2010). This is why we need counter-hegemonic narratives. Tsing highlighted in her book that many analysts have already deeply examined the broken dreams of modernization, and what is urgent now is to address «the imaginative challenge of living without those handrails, which once made us think we knew, collectively, where we were going» (2015, p. 2). So, what can we do? We need to find creative ways to react. Tsing argues that

> only an appreciation of current precarity as an earthwide condition allows us to notice this—the situation of our world. As long as authoritative analysis requires assumptions of growth, experts don't see the heterogeneity of space and time, even where it is obvious to ordinary participants and observers. Yet theories of heterogeneity are still in their infancy. To appreciate the patchy unpredictability associated with our current condition, we need to reopen our imaginations. (*Ivi*, p. 4)

2.4 Do It Yourself

In the introduction of her book *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016), Donna Haraway illustrates the two responses that we often see in front of catastrophic events of the Anthropocene or the Capitalocene. The first one is

blind faith in "technofixes", the belief that technology (or God) will somehow fix everything. Haraway makes clear that technology can surely help, the point is to not rely only on it and hope for a kind of miracle. The second type of response is «a position that the game is over» (2016, p. 3), the cynic conviction that it's too late to do something. None of the two options triggers any helpful reactions, and for this reason, Haraway's intent is to show the importance of «eschewing futurism» (*Ibid.*), to refuse these kinds of debilitating approaches to the future, preferring the more pragmatic strategy of «staying with the trouble» (*Ivi*, p. 1). This requires «learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings» (*Ibid.*).

What I argue here in this dissertation is that by observing the Mutoids we can envision some possible ways of s*taying with the trouble.* Their historical background, grounded in the punk subcultures that arose in the late '70s, is particularly interesting for this purpose. In those years, the fear of nuclear war was still widespread, and the British government was carrying on a public information campaign called *Protect and Survive*, with pamphlets, radio and TV programs, and articles explaining what to do in case of a nuclear attack and how to prepare for it (Rote Zora, 2020). The informational videos from the campaign, which are easily found on YouTube, are anguishing to watch even now, and we can understand how the dramatic reality of the nuclear bomb influenced people's minds about the future. It displayed the real damage that our species could possibly do to ourselves and to the environment, and the possibility of having no future at all became realistic (Quinn, 2015; Horn, 2018). In the book *The Rise of Nuclear Fear,* the physicist Spencer Weart suggests that this nuclear fear fueled a sort of diffidence towards technologies and those who regulate them, but also towards the same societal structures that support them in general. Hence, the opposition against nuclear power intermingled inevitably with resistance towards modern social hierarchies (Spencer Weart 2012 as cited in Horn, 2018). In the meantime, Britain was undergoing a period of crisis on many fronts. In an interview reported in the book *Punk Rock. An Oral History* (2012), the singer of Sex Pistols John Lydon (aka Johnny Rotten), recalls that

> Early Seventies Britain was a very depressing place. It was completely run-down with trash on the streets, and total unemployment – just about everybody was on strike.

> Everybody was brought up with an education system that told you point-blank that if you came from the wrong side of the tracks… then you had no hope in hell and no career prospects at all. (Robb, 2012, p. 97)

The economic and political problems were marked by class conflicts, strikes in the industries, and an increasing general discontent characterized also by a rise in public violence (Morgan, 2017). At the end of the 70s, with Thatcher's strategies to recover Britain's economy, inequality and social divisions were exacerbated. Punk counterculture arose in this atmosphere of dissatisfaction, opposing figures of authority and establishment institutions such as the music industry, but also as the government and the societal expectation of mainstream society. Without any trust in this society, the punk movement built itself on the slogan of *No Future*, from the famous song *God Save the Queen* by Sex Pistols published on 27 May 1977:

> [...] God save the queen
> She's not a human being
> and There's no future
> And England's dreaming
> Don't be told what you want
> Don't be told what you need
> There's no future
> No future
> No future for you [...]

The pessimism and nihilism of *No Future* approach resembled the dynamic I already illustrate in this chapter, a sort of ideology of collapse, that in punk counterculture was often put into practice through destructive and careless attitudes. However, as a counterweight to the negativity of this mode of life, another slogan made its way into the punk scene, the one of *Do It Yourself*. This practice was still antiauthoritarian and iconoclastic, but in a creative way (Cordova, 2017). The *DIY* ethos started in the musical world – with the punk rockers that created their own music, zines and fashion outside the mainstream music industry – and extended rapidly to every aspect of culture and spreading in other social movements as a way to emphasize autonomy and empowerment.

The Mutoid Waste Company was born in this framework, embodying exactly this *DIY* ethics. According to Strapper, one of the Mutoids interviewed by Rote Zora, *DIY* was a direct consequence of *No Future*; for him and for the Mutoids, it meant to create their own world, as the direction towards which the existing one was going did not make sense (Rote Zora, 2020). That is why I believe that observing their experience can be useful in the inquiry for new ways of life, so urgent in this time of crisis. The documentary by Dentice and Noia from 1996 describes them in this way:

> Their lifestyle irresistibly evokes what literature and cinema, in movies like *Mad Max*, have enjoyed dreaming about post-nuclear catastrophe. They use only recycled materials and transformed from scrap, old cars, airplane fuselages, pieces of computers, broken televisions, and whatever else consumer society throws away. With this precious junk, the components of the Mutoid Waste Company build mechanical creatures and roaring machines with which they stage high-risk shows. To call them a theater group is an understatement; their creative and poetic rebellion against the pitfalls of an employed and bourgeois life unites many young people in post-industrial societies who have chosen a nomadic life. The Mutoids move around with rudimentary carts and old trailers, living in communities like the hippies of the past, but they lead a tough life. Lots of work, no comfort, always with blackened nails and often without money. (Dentice & Noia, 1996, 0:22-1:31, my translation)

While Capitalism and neoclassical economy were based on the misleading assumption of the abundance of resources, the Mutoids started diving into the only assured abundance, the one of waste. They took everything that the mainstream society was throwing away and they used it to build not only art pieces but also their clothes, tools, pieces of furniture, and everything they needed for their life outside consumerism. If recycling and upcycling are now common practices and even popular in the art world, at the time they were really innovative. The aesthetic that they created with this type of material was a sort of «ironic recall to the Apocalypse», as described by Strapper (Rote Zora, 2020, p. 33). While Thatcher's government was distributing the pamphlet *Protect to Survive,* the Mutoids responded with their own motto, *Mutate to Survive*. Mutation was the core element of their philosophy of life, marked by a sense of humor and the spirit of collaboration, as explained by Giles chatting with Rote Zora. Their parties, shows and creations were a way of exorcizing the anxiety of the time, offering a

proactive response in times of crisis. When nothing is stable, what is needed is the ability to accept and interiorize the possibility of change. While the *No Future* movement was embedded in stagnating apocalyptic narratives, *DIY* and mutation were about reacting to an apocalypse that had already happened: «Totale dominio del capitalismo, cambiamenti climatici, guerre, esodi e virus globali… Il disastro apocalittico è già arrivato, bisogna essere capaci di mutare per affrontarlo. Noi vi proponiamo un antidoto che si chiama mutopia» (Joe Rush in Rote Zora 2020, p. 14,). Professor Frederick Buell, in his book *From Apocalypse to Way of Life*, argues as well that apocalypse is no longer ahead, but we are already «dwelling in crisis» (2004, p. 188). In the context of our current ecological crisis, this perspective is explored by many scholars. The philosopher Timothy Morton, for instance, firmly opposes the idea that the end of the world is coming, as they claim that if by "world" we mean a stable set of point of landmarks to rely on, it seems that the end of the world has already happened. Interestingly, they describe it as a relief, as it gives the possibility to leave behind the inadequate fantasy of anthropocentrism (2018). In the narrations about post-apocalyptic futures, the landscape is always imagined as full of ruins from the past. However, we have to admit that our world is already full of these ruins and that it is not possible to return to an idyllic pristine nature undamaged by ecological devastation. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that the world is hopeless. Tsing's research on matsutake made her realize that it is still possible to coexist with environmental disturbance, on the wrecks of Capitalism:

> These places can be lively despite announcements of their death; abandoned asset fields sometimes yield new multispecies and multicultural life. In a global state of precarity, we don't have choices other than looking for life in this ruin. Our first step is to bring back curiosity. Unencumbered by the simplifications of progress narratives, the knots and pulses of patchiness are there to explore. (Tsing, 2015, p. 6)

Following this line, Morton suggests dismissing the standard environmentalism in favor of a sort of "Dark Ecology", an environmentalism that is realistic in its understanding of the world. They call it "dark" because

> The eco-logical thought, the thinking of interconnectedness, has a dark side embodied not in a hippie aesthetic of life over death, or a sadistic-sentimental Bambification of sentient

> beings, but in a “goth” assertion of the contingent and necessarily queer idea that we want to stay with a dying world: dark ecology. (2007, p. 184-185)

This approach forces us to come to terms with the ecological crisis and to consider all the identities involved, human and nonhuman. The point is to take humans out of their historical time and re-situate them in deep time, as a species among others in the natural world (Scaffai, 2020). Considering the Capitalocene, humans can still go back to be part of this greater whole, while what must come to an end is the particular world system that has managed to become so pervasive that it seems impossible to eradicate. However, Capitalism itself is intrinsically suicidal – other than explicitly homicidal (Vacchelli. 2020). If we manage to discern ourselves from this system, understanding our true place within nature instead of above, we can avoid sinking with this boat.

2.5 Ecological practices in the Capitalocene

As we already said, the term Capitalocene shows that the ecological crisis is a structural consequence of capital accumulation, hence reflections are to be made at the structural level. The IPCC talks about the Anthropocene as something to be «employed as a “boundary concept” (Brondizio et al., 2016) that frames critical insights into understanding the drivers, dynamics and specific challenges in responding to the ambition of keeping global temperature well below 2°C while pursuing efforts towards and adapting to a 1.5°C warmer world», explaining that it «offers a structured understanding of the culmination of past and present human–environmental relations and provides an opportunity to better visualize the future to minimize pitfalls» (Allen, Dube, et al. 2018, p. 54). However, the actions proposed by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change since the first treaty in 1992 seem to be still somewhat timid in really questioning structural elements in the dominant mode of organization of the world, focusing mostly on seeking solutions to scientific issues such as the amount of CO_2 in the atmosphere, but without really questioning the dream of perpetual economic growth that contributes to its production. Through the theorization of the Capitalocene, we are brought to see that capital accumulation plays a key role in the crisis we are facing. Hence, this is what we need to question it when we look for true ecological practices.

In this thesis, I will observe life in the small reality of Mutonia because I believe that their peculiar lifestyle – that was not born out of environmentalist concern– includes many practices that can be seen as 'ecological' exactly in their opposition to certain foundations of the Capitalist model. I believe that we can find in their experience an embryonal renovated ecological awareness – where ecological stands for conscious of the true positionality of humans in the web of relationships with the other-than-human. When we finally distance ourselves from the pervasive capitalist dynamics that dominate our world and our mind, we can finally find our place in the world and elaborate a new ecological thought that infiltrates all aspects of life. That is why I believe that the case study of Mutonia provides a small-scale example supporting the Capitalocene theory.

Moreover, concretely creating alternatives is essential to eradicate the foundations of capitalism (Federici, 2019). In this way, we can envision that the *Anthropos* are not just villains nor just victims but can be part of a change by eliminating the sense of exceptionalities that those roles entail. The Mutoids are advocating for a systemic change, but they are not waiting for it to happen as a sudden transformation. They simply started to live how they wanted, showing that another way is possible.

CHAPTER III

The Mutoid Waste Company

3.0 First encounter

The first time I heard about the Mutoids was in 2019 when I was living in Bologna to attend the University of Modern Languages and Culture. One day, my roommate Camilla casually found out about an event for the first day of May in this place near Rimini called Mutonia, something in between a village and an artistic park full of sculptures made of scrap material. The program of the event – called "Workout Stage" – seemed cool, and the location even more. We were intrigued by this unusual place, and we decided to go with a few friends. As soon as we arrived there, we discovered that the community of artists was quite popular.

Figure 3. The Workout Stage. My picture, 2019

One of the first things that caught my eye was the huge rusty installation composed of two gutted trucks' heads with a Fiat Cinquecento on the side. I would learn only after,

during my research, that the Mutoids scattered a series of similar sculptures, the *Henges*, during their travels, which became a symbol of their origin and ideals. This one in particular was *TruckHenge*. All around, the other sculptures intersected with the caravans – homes of the Mutoids –, the stands of artisans and artists, and the food trucks arranged for the event. At the center of the settlement, there was a big stage for live music. An area was dedicated to debates organized in collaboration with ANPI (National Organization of Italian Partisans), while somewhere else the kids could join workshops and juggling activities. We took a beer, and we walked between the people and the art pieces. Huge robotic creatures, metallic humanoids, colorful monsters, and zoomorphic figures… all these sculptures made with scrap metal or plastic were giving a cyberpunk vibe. At the end of the park, there was a smaller stage for the DJ set, where we stopped for a while to dance. Unfortunately, we had to leave the party in the afternoon, as we had to go back to Bologna by train and get there for the evening. Anyway, we had so much fun that we decided that we would come back to this *Workout Stage* in the years to come. Sadly, we all know what happen then in 2020. According to the measures for the containment of COVID-19, Mutonia had to close the access to the public and – needless to say – they could not throw their traditional party.

3.1 Historical background

3.1.1. The origins

The Mutoid Waste Company was born in 1984 in England after the encounter of Joe Rush and Robin Cooke. To better understand its roots, we need to go back a little in time and have a glimpse of its founders' formation in the British countercultural scene – particularly thriving since the 60s. The newborn youth culture of the late 50s laid the foundation for the emergence of self-determined groups of young people that were refusing the lifestyle of their parents, looking for new ways of expressing themselves (Gillieron & Robson, 2016). As hippies from the 60s or as punks from the 70s, they wanted to rebel against mainstream society, and the underground scene was thriving in London at the time. The numerous empty buildings in Freston Road became home to many squatters that in 1977 self-proclaimed the district as the free and independent State of Frestonia. Our story begins here, as Joe Rush stayed for a while in the mythic Apocalypse Hotel in Frestonia, a sort of punk artistic residence. He described this experience as «fundamental for the beginning of my [his] creative

process» (interview in Zora, 2020, p 22). In this period, he opened his own study where he built the sculpture of the centaur Joe Exile, which he considers his first *mutoid*, arisen from the mutation of some random scrap. When he met Robin Cooke, a mechanic working in the garage on the ground floor of the same building, they started working together right away and he could learn how to properly weld his sculptures from him. In 1980, they created the first «collective mutoid installation» (Rote Zora, 2020, p. 24), together with Alan P. Scott and Joshua Bowler.

In this period, Rush met the new age travelers of the Peace Convoy – a convoy of people that lived on the road, traveling from squats to gatherings – and he was inspired by their lifestyle. He decided that he wanted to spread his idea of art by traveling around like them, bringing fire or juggling shows, parties, and workshops to people. Finally, the Mutoid Waste Company was founded. The core element in its philosophy was the idea of mutation, put into practice in their constant traveling and in the transformation of the waste of the newborn thrown-away society – that they opposed firmly – into new objects, art pieces, costumes, or props for their itinerant performances. They resisted societal norms that dictated one's worthiness based solely on working a salaried job and consumption. They did not feel compelled to purchase new items; instead, they cultivated the ability to repair and craft things themselves, following the punk movement of the Do It Yourself. Their ideal of freedom influenced every aspect of their life, from their clothes – which often incorporated plastic barrels, pieces of metal and eccentric makeup, creating a sort of cyberpunk aesthetics similar to the one of the mutant characters in the comics *2000AD* – to their mobile homes. Moving around England, they occupied abandoned warehouses or factories to park their home while preparing some performances or working on some sculptures, entering into contact with other travelers and squatters.

3.1.2 Free Parties and the Iron Lady

From 1979, Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister of England. Her program was dedicated to fixing the economy of the UK at all costs, even at the expenses of people, for example by implementing some measures of privatization of services and diminishing public expenditure (Banti, 2009). She was particularly intolerant towards rebellious countercultures but her neoliberal practices, nonetheless, fueled even more its grounds of opposition. As a matter of fact, with many factories being shut down and the rise of the prices of rent, more and more empty buildings were occupied by

people opposing her measures and her beloved consumer society. In this framework, a solid network of free illegal parties developed. The Free Festivals were already popular – they had appeared in 1970 with the first festival in Glastonbury – and in this period they became crucial sites of encounter for the different countercultures following a common ideal of freedom (D'Onofrio, 2015). Here people could experience culture and fun outside the logic of the market and find a space where to promote their social battles. However, the government was not in favor of these events. The Windsor Free Festival took place for 4 years from 1972 until it was shut down by the police in 1975. In reaction to this repression, another festival was organized right away in the historical site of Stonehenge. The festival of Stonehenge became a symbol for the hippie and new age movements and took place every year until 1985 (McKay, 1996).

Nevertheless, the more people were attracted to these parties, the harsher the government became in its persecution. In 1985, the recurring Stonehenge festival, which included environmentalist, anti-nuclear, and anti-war activists, was forcibly shut down by pole-wielding truncheons. Festival participants tried to escape to a nearby field of beans with their trucks, but here the fight became so violent that is remembered as "the battle of Beanfield". The Mutoids were on their way to Stonehenge when the fight unfolded, so they changed direction and squatted a shed in King's Cross. Here they threw their first party decorated with their own sculptures and kinetic robots, starting their history of party organizers and show performers. These parties were a critique of a society that wanted to control and subjugate the freedom and creativity of people. In the documentary *I am a Mutoid* directed by Letmiya Sztalryd (2021), we hear Joe Rush exposing their point of view: «We had to start a culture because normal culture didn't provide for us, didn't include us, [...] we basically started to do free festival as one-night parties in the warehouses in the city». Little did I know at the beginning of my research that the Mutoids were one among the true pioneers of the rave movement in Europe! These parties were the occasion to meet other people and new members entered the Company in these years, like Strapper, Emma, Alex Wreckage, Giles, and Lucy. Each of them brought new ideas and contributions. Music became an important element in their shows as well, and while the acid house scene was developing, they also invented their own genre, the "zombie beat", played on barrels of oil.

In 1986 the Public Order Act was approved to penalize people demonstrating and opposing the government's measures. It became illegal to gather with more than 10 people in public spaces without authorization or to refuse to dissolve a convoy of more than 6 vehicles. This strategy did not manage to shut the movement, and the Avalon Valley in Somerset – where the Festival of Glastonbury took place since 1970 – was revived as the new destination for the outsiders of mainstream society. The Free State of Avalonia was proclaimed there in 1985. Two years later, the Mutoid Waste Company participated to the festival and built there *CarHenge*, a massive installation to commemorate Stonehenge. This menhir made of old cars was a social denunciation, as described by Rote Zora in her book:

> Le vecchie auto si sostituiscono alle storiche pietre preistoriche per segnare il trapasso da una situazione originaria, il cui tempo era scandito dalle sole leggi della terra e del cielo, a una condizione umana guidata dall'artificiosa mano invisibile del mercato che delinea schemi mentali e comportamenti tradotti nell'ultimo modello di un bene di consumo di massa, che si può disporre e gettare facilmente. Le auto di CarHenge sono infine colpite con il lanciafiamme. Il gesto finale decreta il compimento di un rituale inverso, bruciando il contemporaneo modello economico e culturale. (Rote Zora, 2020, p. 46)

According to Joe Rush, *CarHenge* was «il simbolo dell'atteggiamento mutoide: se non puoi fare una cosa allora cambiala, trasformala e rendila ancora possibile» (interview in Zora, 2020, p. 46). Coming from the punk background, from which the slogans of *No Future* and *Do It Yourself* still resonated strongly, the Mutoids developed their original radical philosophy of evolution and mutation, using what mainstream society discards to create their own future.

3.1.3 Europe

In 1987 Thatcher was re-elected for the third time, and after yet another removal from a squat in 1989, the Company decided to leave England and move away from the Iron Lady, heading to Europe. From the various testimonies collected by Rote Zora, we can learn that the Mutoids were greeted with a sort of wonder and curiosity by people outside England. There was no rave culture outside of England, but people were intrigued by their originality. The first leg was in the Netherlands. Thanks to

the help of other travelers and the word-of-mouth in the movement, they found the opportunity to organize an exhibition of art in a village near Amsterdam. Arrived there, they found a village that had been swamped by waste, and they helped the residents to clean-up the area. In the meantime, they received a proposal for a job as entertainers in a club in Berlin, and some of them went there, where they were able to park inside the former station Görlitzer Bahnhof, just up against the wall. Here they threw their signature parties and organized workshops open to anybody on creative recycling. However, being so close to the wall, they also felt to make a statement about peace by creating a performance in which one of their sculptures would cross the wall. They built *Käferman*, a giant human figure holding a bird, the *Bird of Peace*, that was intended to be offered to the East Side of the city. Unfortunately, German authorities were suspicious about their activities. The Vopos (the East German Police) thought they were building some kind of weapons and answered with threats. The experience is documented by video clips that are shown in the documentary *I am a Mutoid: A Glastonbury Hero* (2021), where we can see a young Joe Rush and other artists working near the wall and talking to the guards. Ultimately, even the authority of the West side asked them to stop to avoid any problems. Two months later, the wall was opened.

The next step was Paris, where they squatted a place near the station in the center of Paris. Here they organized a big party for 1990's New Year's Eve. Some months later they moved to Barcelona, where they could secure numerous job opportunities as creators of decorations for club and as performers during important events.

3.1.4 Mutonia

While in Barcelona, they received the proposal from Antonio Attisani, the director of *Festival dei Teatri* in Santarcangelo di Romagna[3] to join the Italian festival in July 1990. With the help of Santarcangelo di Romagna's major at the time, Cristina Garattoni, the Mutoids found an ex-cava near river Marecchia where they could temporarily stay with all their camion and equipment while preparing their show. The place was owned by two brothers and – as they were not using it – the major

[3] Santarcangelo's Theatre Festival is an arts festival that takes place in Santarcangelo di Romagna every summer since 1971. It focuses on contemporary theater, dance, and performance art, and it also includes workshops and seminars. Over the years, it gained a strong reputation for innovation and experimentation.

proposed to them a discount on the debt they had with municipal taxes in exchange for the permits of using it for two months.

People living in the area were not accustomed to encountering punk subculture enthusiasts and the arrival of this group, with the unusual vehicles and peculiar clothing styles and colorful mohawk – as it is showed in the short documentary on YouTube called *I Mutoidi Ci Invadono* by Alberto Dentice and Cesare Noia from 1996 –, brought with them a wave of curiosity. The first Mutoids' show in Santarcangelo is remembered as incredible, with their acrobatics performances and their odd vehicles. Joe Rush rode back and forth on his motorcycle on a steel rope ten meters high, stretched between two cranes. In the meantime, the audience was invited to join the show and dance with them while sprinkling their bodies with colored clay (Rote Zora, 2020).

The Mutoids were not looking for anything permanent, but they could use a sort of basis where to leave the heavier sculpture while traveling with a certain performance and people of Santarcangelo were extremely welcoming. Moreover, they discovered a lot of scrap yards nearby, especially in the village of Gambettola[4]. Hence, after the festival, they decided to stay a bit longer than planned. They founded Mutonia and created the *TruckHen*ge, the massive sculpture that still stands majestic in Mutonia greeting its visitors.

The Company was conceded to stay also during 1991 and that year they hosted a party for each night of the *Festival dei Teatri*. In Italy they were receiving numerous requests for various jobs, yet some of them were moved by a nomadic restless spirit and soon went back on the road. In 1992, some returned to Berlin, where they squatted the abandoned area of East Side Galley, near the ruins of the wall, together with the Spiral Tribe[5]. The area was full of old vehicles from the war like tanks and old planes MiG-21 Fighter, and the Mutoids built another henge, *TankHenge*, and the *Pink Panzer*, a pink-dyed tank. In the meantime, others went back to England, but the implementation of the Criminal Justice Act in 1993 exacerbated the old persecution.

[4] In the documentary *Hometown*, the Mutoid artist Lu Lupan explains that the history of the junk yards in Gambettola dates back to the end of the Second World War, when the residents started scrapping all the vehicles abandoned by the Germans (ZimmerFrei, 2013).

[5] The Spiral Tribe was a nomadic free party collective that become a major influence for the underground dance music scene. They were not just a Sound System, they believed that music and culture could be powerful tools for social and political change (D'Onofrio, 2015).

Figure 4. TruckHenge in Mutonia. My picture, 2023.

Mutonia was a sort of refuge in this turmoil, and here the rebel artists were able to live by selling their sculptures and proposing entertaining acrobatic fire shows in clubs or events around Italy. They even participate to Raffaella Carrà's TV show on Rai Tv, for which they were accused of having sold themselves and their rebellious spirit. However, this criticism did not last long, as one day a sculpture similar to a tank appeared in San Pietro Square, pointing to the pope's window. The Mutoid Waste Company's style was recognized, and they immediately gained back the respect of the most skeptical in the underground scene. Moreover, they were also collaborating with social centers in Bologna, Turin, and Milan. Tommy met them in the social center *Zona Cantiere*, in Bologna in 1990, and he explains to me how they start collaborating:

> Spesso li invitavamo a fare serate oppure manifestazioni. Le manifestazioni a Bologna, le prime, erano sempre politicizzate e in mezzo a tutti gli striscioni c'era un camion con l'impianto e noi ballavamo. Chiamavamo loro con i camion, e da lì sono nate poi le street parade in Italia. (Tommy, personal interview, 2023)

Tommy was immediately fascinated by their style and by their art. He stayed in Mutonia occasionally since '94, and in '98 he moved definitely. The new members joining the community in Mutonia in the 90s were numerous, Tommy explains. Andy, from Scotland, was a musician busking around when he moved in 1993. He then founded the *Spammabilly Borghetti*, a rockabilly/punk rock experimental band in pure Mutoid style[6] with whom he played in social centers or in the streets for a while. In the documentary by Marcus Kanter from 1996, he describes the life in the Mutoid Waste Company as "normal life":

> It's fun, 'cause you do things you want to do every day instead of going to work […] it's domestic as well, we cook, we chop woods, we fix things that are broken, it's just like normal life, it's great! Yes, I think the best thing is that every day you do want you want to do and you don't do it if you don't like it. Like sometimes it's like hard work but it is not the same 'cause we are doing it for us, for me and my friends and not for a boss that's paying money so I can have two days to enjoy myself in weekends. […] I'm not rich but I'm happy, I'm rich in here [pointing to the heart]! (Marcus Kanter, 2015, 2:47 -3:31)[7]

Lyle instead is from Canada. He moved to England when he was young, and he started recycling waste scrap material to create incredible kinetic creatures on his own in Manchester, before meeting the Mutoid Waste Company:

> Io sono qua dal '96, sapevo di questo posto e conoscevo alcune persone che abitavano già qua. Io facevo già sculture, giravo, abitavo in un pullman. Ho iniziato a fare le sculture con materiale che trovavo per strada, facevo oggetti piccoli da vendere al mercato e poi ho iniziato a fare le cose più grandi, faccio cose meccaniche come il

[6] You can see a performance of the Spammabilly Borghetti on YouTube, the video called *SPAMABILLY BORGHETTI - ampallang - live "el paso" 1997*. Their sound and energy are complemented with a messy make-up that gives them an edgy, DIY look.

[7] I could have access to this short documentary only on YouTube. I have been unable to ascertain its production details, so I will refer to it based on the information available on its YouTube page.

> rinoceronte che cammina e queste cose sono abbastanza uniche, molte persone fanno sculture fisse, almeno con questo sono ricercato e riesco a lavorare abbastanza bene. […] Ho iniziato a fare le sculture in Inghilterra e giravo in Germania, poi alla fine sono venuto qui e sono rimasto dal '96. Quindi il tipo di vita nomadica lo facevo già, e in realtà tutta la mia vita io non ero mai stato fermo in un posto prima di arrivare qua… che è un po' contrario di quello che può pensare la gente, che ho scelto di fare questo e sono diventato un nomade, un artista… però facevo questa vita parallela con loro e alla fine mi sono fermato (Lyle, personal interview 2023).

In the meantime, some Mutoids felt it was time to leave Mutonia to explore mutation in new different situations. Joe Rush moved near Milan to work on a new project linked with music for a while, until he went back to London. Now he is still living in England, where he collaborates with the Glastonbury Festival since 2000. Robin Cooke went to Australia, where he worked on a project called *Earthdream*[8]. Anyway, while someone left, new members joined, and during the years the different artists elaborated their own projects, as described by Strapper: «Per distinguersi come singoli artisti dal progetto complessivo ognuno ha sviluppato il proprio stile e il modo di fare, anche se alla base siamo tutti uniti da quella che forse è diventata una scuola di pensiero e un modello alternativo di vita» (in Rote Zora, 2020, p. 109). Their community continues to embrace the anarchist vision of a society structured on horizontal principles and the big decisions are still taken together, but with time they became more of a collective of artists sharing a vision, that each of them develops in its own direction. The "yard" – this is what the first generation of Mutoids used to call Mutonia – remains the base camp for all the Mutoids spreading all around the world, but it mutated itself a lot over the years. Until 2003, they remained there pretty much without a true regulation; then the former cava passed under the property of the municipality of Santarcangelo that provide them with a contract of loan for use for free. However, the settlement was violating certain urbanistic regulations and for this reason, in 2013, they were threatened by the serious risk of eviction. I talked about this with Tommy, who explained to me that one of their neighbors, probably the only one not liking them, attempted for years to sue them for illegal occupation of the yard but never succeeded. In 2012, however, he changed his strategy and sued the municipality of Santarcangelo di Romagna for letting them stay, finally finding a

[8] *Earthdream* was a movement of various self-governed groups of young activists with common concerns, like environmental sustainability and the protection of human rights (Rote Zora, 2020).

way to seriously jeopardize Mutonia. On 13 June 2013, the municipality had to sign an ordinance that required the demolition and restoration of the area within 90 days. The people of Santarcangelo mobilized immediately to help them, covering the town with posters screaming "Mutonia must stay!" and proposing a petition in their favor, that collected 12000 signatures (Cerquetti, Nanni, and Vitale, 2019). The only possible way that could save them was to obtain recognition as "cultural heritage". To give them more exposure, Anna de Manincor and Massimo Carozzi, from the collective of artists ZimmerFrei, shot the documentary *Hometown | Mutonia* which was projected at the *Festival dei Teatri* of Santarcangelo of the same year. The documentary showed the exceptional features of Mutonia as a place where an alternative way of living was put into practice, but also its more domestic traits. We see the Mutoids doing laundry, taking a bath, and chopping wood, then kids playing around the yard and cats and dogs walking around undisturbed. For the documentary, Andy composed a song:

> I came to this town back in '93
> I made my home in a box with some people like me
> 20 years down the road
> Someone says I gotta go
> There's no one in this town that I don't know
> This is my town […]
> (ZimmerFrei, 2013, 1:05:50)

In order to make them gain some time, the municipality of Santarcangelo resorted to a jurisdiction according to which the caravans should be considered as equals to real homes, as they had been steady on the ground for such a long time. Thanks to this move, the Mutoids were able to appeal to the Regional Administrative Court. In the meantime, they worked to put everything in order in the yard, hoping that this could help them in the dispute. They built a septic tank and connected themselves to energy and water in compliance with the law like usual houses (Bandini, 2013). As they were accused of being abusive, the jurisdiction managed to insert the village into a project of valorization of the territory that encompassed cultural aspects, including the requalification of the ex-quarry (Cerquetti, Nanni, and Vitale, 2019). Ultimately, Rimini's Superintendence of Architectural and Landscape Heritage and Bologna's

Superintendence of Fine Art recognized Mutonia as an artistic park, considering the same homes and intersecting laboratories as art pieces themselves (Bandini, 2013). Since 2014, the Mutoids are recognized as responsible for the management of the land of Mutonia (Cerquetti, Nanni, and Vitale, 2019). Hence, Mutonia survived. The Mutoids had to mutate and accept legal recognition, but this did not suppress their ideals:

> Noi ci proviamo sempre a rimanere il più liberi possibile, anche se la vita a Santarcangelo è cambiata, perché l'unico modo per mantenere Mutonia è stato quello di farci dare l'etichetta di Parco artistico, però il campo non è solo quello, ma è anche la storia dei nostri ultimi venticinque anni. Mutoid è uno stile di vita, non è il *Mad Max* del cinema, è la scelta di vivere in gruppo e con poco, riciclando il più possibile ed è un modo di essere che resiste anche di fronte alle scelte politiche di chi ci ha permesso di rimanere a Santarcangelo. Per fortuna, non siamo diventati un'attrazione turistica, certo siamo un punto di interesse locale. (Strapper, in Rote Zora, 2020, p 147-148)

Strapper goes on by claiming that now they have to follow certain rules, for example regarding hosting people in Mutonia, but that Mutonia could still be a place for resistance:

> La nostra speranza è che Mutonia possa diventare posto dove ospitare giovani, disoccupati, artisti, militanti dei centri sociali o di qualsiasi altro posto, e che possano dormire in tenda per poter stare con noi una o più settimane per condividere progetti artistici. Questo per me sarebbe bellissimo ed è quello che manca a Santarcangelo, perché non ci stanno dando i permessi per poterlo fare, però con il tempo le cose possono cambiare e ci stiamo lavorando per far diventare Mutonia un luogo di resistenza, come è accaduto durante le feste del Primo Maggio. (*Ivi*, p 149)

3.2 New projects and mutations in Mutonia

Now, after 34 years, Mutonia is still there. While hundreds of Mutoids are spread around the world, in Mutonia there are about 30 people now, also including the new generations of children of the people living there from the 90s. Someone is more stationary than others, but they all bring constant contributions and developments to the

Company. Some of them still manage to live only with their art, while others had to find a job outside, as Tommy explains to me that in the last years, with the crisis and Covid-19, artistic job opportunities had reduced a lot. He, for example, also works part-time as a theater technician.

Moreover, more people joined the community with new projects and perspectives. Francesca e Davide, for instance, moved here with their camion in 2019. They are not artists or performers, but they have a very interesting project called *Cinéma Du Désert*. They created a Solar Mobile Cinema on their camion and have traveled on it since 2009 bringing free cinema – mostly cartoons or documentaries – to remote areas of countries like Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Mongolia and many more. They met each other in the occupation of the Ex-slaughterhouse in Bologna, an occupation that was called *Cantiere Culturale Bolognese* in which they aimed to create a network of organization and where they organized various cultural events. Then they started their life on the road heading to Africa on their camperized camion, with the Italian NGO *Bambini nel Deserto*. Heading to Timbuktu, they got stuck in the sand in the desert and it took various days to free themselves. Many local people helped them during those days, and Davide and Francesca wanted to thank them, so they thought about showing them a movie, projecting it on the side of the camion. «We found out that they'd never seen anything» explained Davide, and he went on:

> […] il 2009 era ancora un mondo diverso da quello di adesso cioè, ora le immagini davvero le vedi su 'sto dispositivo che ti sta in mano... lì c'era una TV nel villaggio, nella casa del capovillaggio sopra un mobile, ma era un totem, un oggetto di potere, non era una cosa funzionale. E quindi [il progetto] è nato così per caso. Abbiamo proiettato cartoni animati come *Alice nel Paese delle Meraviglie*, *Il Libro della Giungla*… La gente ha iniziato a venire lì e ci siamo detti 'questa roba è importante!'. (Davide, personal interview, 2023)

Hence, they started traveling around the world with this new mission. Since 2019, they chose Mutonia as their camp base for the periods in which they are not travelling. Francesca explained to me that they were hosted in Mutonia many times before, and it was a sort of "protected environment" where they could stay for a while to recharge and work on the camion if needed, while having the possibility to chat with inspiring

people. Then, the turmoil of the pandemic convinced them to ask if they could move there permanently. Or at least, for now:

> Sono certo che non è il nostro step finale. Io non diventerò vecchio qui, però voglio che un periodo sia fatto qui, poi non so dove andrò, o se ci sarà ancora il mondo... intanto sono convinto che è la miglior scelta per la nostra famiglia e per il nostro progetto sia quella di esserci approcciati a questa realtà. (Davide, personal interview, 2023)

With their philosophy and lifestyle, they match the values at the core of the eco-cultural landscape of Mutonia. I asked Davide if he considers himself a Mutoid, and he answered that he does since he lives in Mutonia, but at the same time he does not, because the Mutoids have an important history behind, linked to a country and a specific movement to which he does not really belong:

> Mi sento Davide più che Mutoid, perché sono arrivato in un posto ricco di storia dove comunque c'è una certa linea e c'è un certo tipo di cultura che io ho deciso di sposare, ma sento allo stesso tempo che il mio arrivare qua può essere ed è in qualche modo un'evoluzione di questo posto… perché comunque non si può vivere di ciò che è stato ma si vive di ciò che è, e in funzione magari di ciò che sarà! (Davide, personal interview, 2023)

2.3 Mutonia in the Capitalocene

In the following chapters, I will explore life in Mutonia with the help of its human inhabitants. In order to have a sort of frame of reference to observe their practices inserted in the discourse about sustainability, I will draw on the current institutional approach to climate change as a reference point for discussing their practices. While adaptation and mitigation are not direct measures of sustainability, they are key notions in dealing with the environmental crisis; however, by reinterpreting these strategies through the lens of the Mutoids and their philosophy, we can envision what the Capitalocene argument underscores – namely that something in the general institutional approach to the environmental crisis is missing.

CHAPTER IV

Adaptation

4.1 Adaptive capacity

Between November 2018 and January 2019, the scientist Linsey Haram and the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center in Edgewater (Maryland) conducted a study on the Great Garbage Patch in the Pacific Ocean. They collected 105 pieces of floating plastic debris and observed the different marine organisms living on them. They discovered that 80% of the different organisms that they identified were species known to be endemic of coastal areas, organisms that usually cannot survive in the open ocean: «It appears that coastal species persist now in the open ocean as a substantial component of a 'neopelagic' community sustained by the vast and expanding sea of plastic debris» (Haram et al., 2023, p. 687). The plastic habitat became indeed such a stable habitat that coastal species could actually live and also reproduce on it. The study states: «The plastisphere may now provide extraordinary new opportunities for coastal species to expand populations into the open ocean and become a permanent part of the pelagic community» (*Ivi*, p. 693).

In evolutionary terms, adaptation is a crucial strategy for reducing vulnerability, as it is about adjusting over time to the environment as a means to increase the likelihood of survival within that particular habitat and its changes. In the case of the living organisms on the Great Garbage Patch, the huge amount of trash became an 'extraordinary opportunity' because – thanks to the process of adaptation – life could thrive in unexpected ways.

4.2 The concept of adaptation in the climate change framework

The term 'adaptation' in the institutional discourses about how to deal with climate change draws on the evolutionary definition, indicating exactly this capacity to adjust to the situation. In the glossary of the IPCC AR6, adaptation is defined for human systems

as «the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects, in order to moderate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities», and for natural systems as «the process of adjustment to actual climate and its effects», in which «human intervention may facilitate adjustment to expected climate and its effects» (IPCC 2023, Annex I, p. 120). In other words, it involves making practical changes in response to the effects of climate change. I linked the Mutoids' philosophy of mutation with the IPCC strategy of adaptation exactly because it is a way of reacting to what we have and transforming it into an opportunity.

4.3 Mutoids' form of adaptation: mutation

In evolutionary discourses, mutation and adaptation have slightly different meanings. They are both linked with evolution, but while adaptation is an adjustment over time, mutation is a random and spontaneous change in the genetic material of an organism, a change that then provides material for adaptation and allows the population of a species to evolve over time.

The Mutoids claim to have mutation – or better, their interpretation of mutation – as their core philosophy. Their symbol – explains Joe Rush – is the skull of Cro-Magnon (an early type of Homo-Sapiens from Paleolithic times in Europe) with two crossed wrenches above. The skull embodies the metaphor for evolution and mutation, while the wrenches indicate the Mutoids' work, because their philosophy is not really linked with genetic modifications, but entails the idea of reacting to an environment that is not ideal by exploring ways to make it different, adding to the idea of adaptation also the transformative and creative element (Rote Zora, 2020). The point is to understand the necessity of change. The England of the 80s was not tailored to their values and they felt the urgency to distance themselves from a society marked by injustices and power relations, in which people were valued for the work they did and the money they spent, in which they had to do mortgage to have the right to have a home, in which the consumerist lifestyle proposed as source of happiness was creating a huge amount of waste. They decided to pursue a different way of living and forged their own way outside those societal norms by repurposing discarded elements of this same society they were opposing. The philosophy of mutation translated into action with the transformation of waste into art pieces, tools for their performances, or useful objects needed for everyday life, making them able to be independent without having to buy

stuff. However, mutation was a pervasive concept in their whole lifestyle, represented also in their nomadic life, always ready to change the place where to live, while transforming these same places with their passage. Abandoned places became for them spaces where they could recreate life in new ways, with parties far from market logic and incredible shows to surprise their guests. The point, explains Joe Rush, is to let yourself be transformed, in creative ways that are not dictated by the rules of society, and without taking anything too seriously:

> This is what mutations about, you know, this is the difference between mutation and fashion […] the essence of mutation is not taking stuff too seriously… you have to look cool and deadly and chic and smooth, but to be Mutoid you just have to look daft, that's what Mutoids' style is all about! (CordyHouse, 6:53-7:30)

In the fictional documentary *South of Watford*, Hugh Laurie is on a quest looking for the Mutoids that have interrupted his TV program, and he reaches Robin Cooke – "Robin Mutoid" –, sitting in a weird vehicle with on the head a helmet composed of tubes and cables, surrounded by peculiar unidentified objects. He explains to Laurie what mutation is according to him:

> It only comes from within, it comes from creating an object that may look bizarre, frightening, pleasing, but in our case, we are using materials which are readily available from skips, from breakers yards, bits which people may or may not recognize as being such once it is put together into its new component form and that is mutation, is taking something normal, something every day, and twisting it so that visually it looks bizarre (UnitedSystems[9], 2006, 9:14 - 9:55).

Hence, in practice, how can we read this philosophy of life in the framework of adaptation? The most evident aspect of it is exactly how they decided to use waste as material for their transformation. In his book *Overheating. An Anthropology of Accelerated Change*, the anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen explores the side effects of modernity – which he calls "overheating effects" (2016, p. X) – and he explains that waste is the most tangible of all, it is «large, smelly, predominant» (*Ivi*, p.

[9] Again, I could have access to this short documentary only because it was uploaded it on YouTube, and I have been unable to ascertain its original source or production details. I will refer to it based on the information available on YouTube page.

105). In 2018, the Pacific Garbage Patch that we mentioned before was three times the size of France (Lebreton et all, 2018); while in 2001 the world's largest rubbish dump, Fresh Kills on Staten Island, covered more than 20 square kilometers and was more than 200 meters high. It was bigger in volume than the Great Wall of China; it was visible from space (Eriksen, 2016)!

Today, waste management is inevitably one of the hot issues that must be discussed at the policy level. It is a problem that is addressed both by the Working group focusing on adaptation strategies to find solutions to the waste we already have – intended both as physical waste and pollution –, and by the one working on mitigation, looking for solutions to decrease its production. However, in the 80s the awareness about this problem was not so widespread, and the practice of the Mutoids was cutting-edge. Exactly like the marine organisms on the Great Garbage Patch, the Mutoids elaborated a way of approaching this problem as an "extraordinary new opportunity":

> The whole world is being wasted and if you just work with the waste, and you build yourself a life from all the waste, people maybe will think that if we can survive from what everyone else has thrown away, then we are throwing away too much. We're wasting too many materials. Why does everything have to be new and why buy new things? There're very few resources left on this planet to build new things… It's crazy building new things from new materials, we use old. There's still much life left in old stuff. (Andy, in ZimmerFrei, 3:24 – 3:56)

It is like the matsutake that thrive in contaminated areas; the Mutoids shows us that life can find its way on the ruins of a society that creates death.

4.4 Waste and value

In biology, waste is intended as a normal by-product of processes like respiration or photosynthesis, a product that eventually is part of a cycle, becoming at some point the starting point for another process. With the ever-growing human activity, however, this notion has changed. Waste – both solid and aerial, like pollution – is now something that is not able to go back into the natural cycle in the normal time. The prevalence of waste in our contemporary world has grown to such an extent that it became a subject of study also within the humanistic field of anthropology. What is highlighted in these

studies is the immediate link between the concept of waste and the notion of value, theorizing it as a relational concept and raising questions about cultural and social aspects. In the second chapter of the book *Archaeologies of Waste. Encounters with the Unwanted*, edited by Daniel Sosna and Lenka Brunclíková (2016), the socio-cultural anthropologist Joshua Reno categorized various aspects and forms of waste, separating the biological waste, not limited to humans, and the relational waste, one that results «from conscious and contested human decisions about what is worthless or abject» (Reno, 2016, p. 17). According to him, the second type of waste became what lacks value, interpreting the adjective 'valuable' as meaningful or with certain economic worth. However, Reno continues, the possibility of revaluing this same waste highlights how such evaluations are arbitrary and subjective, becoming a matter of perspective. His colleague Roos van Oosten will write a few chapters later: «One man's dung is another man's treasure» (2016, p. 41). In the introduction of the book, Sosna and Brunclíková wrote:

> Waste is rather a dynamic category and being unwanted is only one dimension or phase during its 'social life'. However, the state of being unwanted is a necessary prerequisite for the category of waste. At some point, zero or negative value has to be ascribed to it despite the fact that this perception may change later, during the phase that Reno (2015, 558) calls 'productive afterlife of waste' (p. 5).

This is the central argument of the seminal book *Purity and Danger*, by Mary Douglas, in which she explored how the concept of dirt is not inherent in certain things or actions but emerges as a product of social construction and cultural context (2002). Eriksen comments that waste in this framework is a difficult concept to define, but that at the same time, it is easy to see that in our consumeristic society the threshold for defining something as worthless is continuously lowering- He gave an example that is very normal nowadays, even with all the discourses about recycling and the awareness of the waste problem:

> A friend, who had bought an inexpensive scanner, told me that it didn't quite work the way it should, so he phoned the store. 'Just bring the receipt, and we'll give you a new one' they responded. 'But what about the one I bought one hour ago?' he asked. 'Do whatever you feel like. You can throw it in the container for electronic waste outside the shop if you want to'. The cost of having a new scanner produced in China and delivered

> to a shop in Oslo was less than the act of just turning on the meter for a repair in Norway. (2016, p. 108)

The Mutoids practically oppose this mentality. In a time in which recycling was not in fashion, they understood that we could not keep on throwing away stuff without any concern. Tommy is a sculptor, and when I visited him, he showed me his yard. Here, he is keeping tons of precious materials that he collected over the years, pieces of scrap waiting to become something new. He recognized himself as a sort of hoarder because he never throws away anything:

> L'idea di recuperare, di riciclare, adesso in realtà va molto, perché comunque le materie prime stanno finendo, ma anni fa c'era proprio il contrario: la filosofia dello spreco, l'usa e getta… e in molti stati ancora è così; quindi, il recuperare quelle cose che venivano buttate per poterle trasformare, soprattutto quello che non si poteva più riciclare, trasformarlo in altro e dargli nuova vita e cose diverse, è sempre stato affascinante. Io prevalentemente lavoro con il ferro, mi piace, poi ho anche robe di plastica, robe varie… poi ci sono i costumi di scena per gli spettacoli che sono sempre fatti con un po' di tutto. (Tommy, personal interview 2023)

Even Andy, who is not a sculptor but a musician, embraced this lifestyle of not throwing away anything. While we were drinking coffee in his little garden, he showed me the surroundings and said:

> come vedi vivo con la mia morosa ed è tutto fatto con pezzi di un teatro che si è sgomberato, con oggetti che ti porti via da gente che si libera il giardino… e puoi creare della bellezza e vivere in una bellissima zona, qui seduto fuori sotto l'ombrellone e ti rilassi […]. C'è un pullman lì dietro che era di un altro che l'ha preso a Berlino e l'ha spostato. Fu casa mia, adesso è un po' un ripostiglio e una zona per gli ospiti, ma ricostruisco uno studio di registrazione là dentro. L'idea è che c'è così tanta roba là fuori che non è morta, non è finita… […] La mia morosa lavora con i mobili che la gente non usa più, fa tipo upcycling, prende vecchi mobili per farli diventare più belli di nuovo per poi rivenderli come oggetti d'arte. Tante cose che sono ancora lì sono fatte bene, la struttura basta ridipingerla… li riproponi in un'altra maniera (Andy, personal interview 2023).

Hence, the lifestyle of the Mutoids seems to be a perfect embodiment of the new ideology of recycling proposed by the institutions of the Global North. However, as described by the 2022 Environmental Performance Index (EPI) – a project brought forward by the Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy and The Center for International Earth Science Information Network CIESIN at Columbia University's Earth Institute to provide a data-driven overview of the global status of sustainability[10] – global recycling rates are very low. In their examination of 180 countries, there is a section dedicated to waste management and they evaluated each country with a "recycling rate", calculated as the proportion of recyclable materials recycled, with a score from 0 to 100. They show on their website how even the top performer, South Korea, is not even close to 100, having a score of 67.10. The EPI's 2022 report accounts that at the global level only 24% of recyclable post-consumer material is recycled (Wolf et al., 2022, p. 96). A change is thus needed on various levels.

Moreover, Eriksen highlights how in practice this recycling ideology still relies on the «hierarchical and transnational dimension to this value creation» (2016, p. 111). As a matter of fact, by observing landfills in unequal countries we come in contact with the reality of the injustices that even the recycling industry as it is now perpetuates. As Sosna and Brunclíková pointed out, even the «disposal of mass waste in a special restricted place does not prevent this waste from participating in diverse social, economic, environmental and political relationships» (2016, p. 4). Those places are indeed both a repository for things discarded with ease by rich countries, and at the same time a desperate source of sustenance for others. The landfill become a place where marginalized and unemployed people can find a way to make a living by scavenging through other people waste, and in this way, waste participate as protagonist in the power relations fueling capitalism, promoting a labor market that for poor people is often unofficial and insecure (Eriksen, 2016). Eriksen observed the case of Agbogbloshie, an area of Accra, in Africa, that became a massive repository for electronic waste from the Global North, attracting thousands of people from northern Ghana who get a livelihood by collecting and reselling valuable metal components to businesses that will gain profit by selling their products in other countries. Maybe the

[10] The EPI is not a primary data-gathering organization but rather a project that synthesizes and analyzes existing data from various sources. As it is explained in their report, the rate about recycling is strongly based on data from Chen, et al.'s *The world's growing municipal solid waste: trends and impacts* (2020) and Kaza et al.'s *What a Waste report* (2018). However, the authors admit in their report that recycling data are still hard to assess (Wolf et al. 2022).

defective scanner that Eriksen's friend wanted to fix ended up in places like that, and its pieces were collected by some scavenger and reused to compose a new electronic device somewhere else. In a way, we can say that thanks to these actions this waste manages to be reintroduced in the cycle. However, how can we consider this chain as a functional recycling circle? If it is true that these people are finding an opportunity to make a living thanks to the consumeristic lifestyle carried on by more privileged people, they are actually participating and perpetuating the same dynamics that create the inequalities that marginalized them in the first place. Capitalism is indeed profiting on their work. Capitalism needs oppressed people.

The Mutoids can be said to do the same thing – collecting trash and using it to make a living –, but their practice takes place in a very different frame and the relationship that they establish with waste is completely different. They created an opportunity to distance themselves from a society they found unappealing, and they managed to break free and free their minds from the struggle for survival imposed by Capitalism. This oppressive system in fact works in subtle ways, entering our unconscious and convincing us that we are validated only through constant productivity and consumerism. The creative aspect is very important in the experience of the Mutoids. The Mutoids approach the materiality of waste not just as a way to make a profit – by selling their sculptures – and to save money – by using it to build what they need instead of buying new things –, but they interact with it and listen to it. Joe Rush says that he can work with any material, but he especially likes waste «for the random that it throws up» (Tessuti, 2022, 0:26-0:28). Lu Lupan, another Mutoid artist, feel the same way:

> I really like, for example, going into the junkyard. It's a place full of inspiration for me. […] Naturally for me it's like going to the playground, it's fantastic! […] I've wondered many times, why go to the junkyard and choose that particular lid for a broken pan. I think they carry filaments of energy, something. Objects carry filaments, which are magic filaments that connect the energies of people that they belonged to. Let's say this matter of the objects that are really fascinating is also for the characteristics of aesthetic decay, if you want (Hometown, 2013, 46:40 - 48.28).

Talking with the Mutoids, I had the occasion to consider the Italian situation about waste management from a peculiar point of view. I've never really reflected before on

the fact that in Italy waste management is marked by a significant degree of privatization. Waste disposal and recycling are indeed controlled by private companies contracted by local municipalities. While this approach has certainly some advantages in terms of efficiency and specialized waste processing, as can be proven by the fact that Italy's position on the EPI's recycling rate list is 14th, at the same time I cannot hide that the score on that evaluation is only one of 30.90 over 100. It is clear that something is missing, and that maybe something in the process should be re-thought. One thing that I find interesting to comment on is that this privatization of waste limits the possibilities for individuals who could in some way – like with art – contribute independently to the recycling of discarded materials that would probably remain in the dump forever. Dumpsters and waste containers are considered in Italy the private property of these waste management companies and thus unauthorized scavenging is viewed as trespassing or theft. The Mutoids I talked to explained to me that the situation changed a lot during the last years. They now pay for the scrap they take from the junkyard, and in any case, it is not as easy as in the past.

> Prendere rottami ora è molto più difficile, da quando sono arrivato è molto cambiato. All'inizio degli anni 90 c'erano qui vicino, a Gambettola, non so quanti demolitori, sfasciacarrozze… a Gambettola potevi andare, guardare, cercare le cose tranquillamente; poi con tutte le nuove regole europee tanti di quei posti hanno chiuso, e tanti hanno deciso di non far entrare il pubblico. Ora io ho 3 o 4 posti, invece che 25. [...] Nessuno ti dà il materiale gratis. In Inghilterra sì, quando capiscono che sei un artista a volte cercano di aiutarti, qui in Italia è difficile. [...] Però c'è ancora gente che chiama e dice 'ehi se vuoi ho ferro da portare via', però non è come una volta. Negli anni '90 arrivavano qua lasciando la macchina, toglievano la targa, lasciavano le chiavi e andavano via, però ora non si può fare così! (Lyle, personal interview, 2023)

> Anni fa andavamo lì a Gambettola [a comprare il materiale], entravi dal rottamaio, ci facevi il tuo giretto con il carrello e ti facevi la spesa, salutavi, dicevi 'mi faccio un giro' e ok. Poi hanno cambiato le leggi anche li [...] e quindi hanno chiuso i battenti e non fanno più entrare nessuno, quindi per un po' siamo rimasti tagliati fuori. è difficile adesso trovare chi ancora ti fa entrare a cercare le cose…infatti io ho un tesoretto lì con le cose accumulate negli anni! Però non è impossibile, ancora c'è qualcuno che ti fa comunque ancora andare sia a portare che prendere, prendere è un pochino più difficile però insomma se glielo spieghi... Deve essere tracciato lo spostamento dei rifiuti, quindi quello

> che entra deve essere quantificato, catalogato, e poi rimandato a fonderia, cioè il rottamaio fa quello, piglia lo scarto, separa i vari tipi di metallo, di plastica e di robe e poi li va a mandare nei vari posti dove lo riciclano, quindi deve essere tutto quanto controllato. Poi c'è anche il cambio del prezzo, il mercato che influisce, quindi magari delle volte a loro conviene accumularlo e non venderlo, perché magari il prezzo è basso, quindi aspettano che rialzano come la borsa no? Andavi lì con il tuo carrellino poi lo pesavi, chiaramente a un prezzo molto basso rispetto che comprarlo nuovo. Quando lo vai a vendere te lo pagano molto meno di quanto lo vai a comprare, il rottamaio poi funziona anche un po' a simpatia! [...] Ogni tanto capita che qualcuno porta rottami, poi ogni tanto qualcuno chiama per sgomberare cantine, granai, roba da buttare... la maggior parte la porti in discarica però qualcosa si riesce a recuperare. Ci si arrangia un po', a volte trovi anche nei bidoni della spazzatura, magari vedi il pezzo ti fermi carichi in macchina e vai. Mi è capitato di conoscere grandi aziende dove magari ogni tot cambiano tutti i computer e li buttano dentro un container chiusi li, computer ancora funzionanti…e il tipo mi ha detto 'guarda questa cosa qui non la posso neanche regalare, perché devo dichiarare alla finanza che sto smaltendo, deve essere tutto numerato'... però capito tutta roba che ancora funziona, e non è che dico che devi rivenderla e farti soldi, ma puoi regalarli a qualche centro, e invece non si può. (Tommy, personal interview, 2023)

By hearing these testimonies, it seems that the current system works in a way that contributes to creating more and more waste also by eagerly protecting the one already existing. In the documentary *Mutonia | Hometown,* the artist Lu Lupan comments that

> the laws are getting stricter and stricter regarding refuse that can be considered special, so we passed from a country where every time you went into the farmland it was impossible not to find illegal dumping to a country that is slowly getting rid of the direct chain of direct reuse, not of industrial salvage and recycling, of direct reuse, going into a center of segregated waste and being able to come out with a screw is impossible. It's unbelievable! It makes me very angry. (2013, 47:18 - 47:56)

Of course, it is a positive thing that it is not usual to find illegal dumping as in the past, but I agree with her in the sense that I found it strange that taking stuff from a trash container is considered theft. I am aware that this is also for safety and hygiene reasons, but I believe that by permitting individuals to save items from dumpsters, people could become more familiar with the concepts of reuse and upcycling. Many discarded items, considered useless by one, may hold value for another, and while it is extremely urgent

to promote the importance of not throwing stuff that easily (because the strategy of adaptation needs undoubtedly to be accompanied by the one of mitigation), it could be interesting to find a way to integrate dumpster diving into a legalized and secure process of waste management. This would need clear guidelines in order to meet safety standards to minimize health risks associated with handling trash, but it could provide a big opportunity for fostering an approach to waste management that starts from below. Considering waste as a private good, keeping it inserted into the economic system, often contributes to the oblivion of stuff that could actually have another life, but instead ends accumulating untouched in immense junkyards, as everyone can witness for instance just passing by train through the village of Gambettola. Allowing and fostering a responsible dumpster diving practice would recognize the potential of creativity and the role of the individual in waste management, and this could maybe enhance the recycling rates that are not satisfactory at the moment.

4.5 Wasting relationships

The more I observed the Mutoids' reality, the more I realized how the importance of their practices did not lie only in recycling. The Mutoids' peculiar way of relating to waste is just one aspect of an approach to the world that permeates all aspects of their life. As Rote Zora explains in her book, they see a correlation between a piece of discarded material and the fate of human beings in today's society, as both are easily discarded when they are not considered useful anymore:

> Se il pezzo di rottame può essere metafora di decadimento umano e isolamento sociale, le sculture di scarti mutanti traducono per contrappasso la condizione di rifiuto umano nell'attitudine alla negazione dei valori veicolati dal capitalismo (come quelli di privatizzazione, subordinazione e alienazione) e nel rigetto del sincopatico ritmo di vita ed economico del produci, consuma, crepa. (2020, p.19)

The point is that capitalism is impregnated and dependent on the practice of "othering". As Eriksen pointed out, «one of the most striking expressions of the Anthropocene» is «the routine exclusion of humans from secure sociality and meaningful activities thereby turning them into 'matter out of place'» (2016, p. 115) – quoting the phrase coined by the anthropologist Mary Douglas –, that is to say the exclusion of people who

are not effective producers and consumers. That is what Moore describes as the “dirty secret of modern world history” (2016b, p.79), that is the exclusion of certain humans from Humanity with capital-H. This exclusion is part of the process that Moore baptized as the “cheapening” of nature (2016b), the systemic necessity to undervalue and exploit nature at low cost. Capitalism is fundamentally based on the separation between the two categories of Society and Nature, and on the idea of the supremacy of the first upon the second. However, in this framework, Nature is not just the environment, but it also encompasses the labor of many humans that do not enter in the category of Society (Ivi). Eriksen highlights that exclusion and marginalization have always occurred in history, but

> What is characteristic of the form of exclusion typical of contemporary state societies is the double bind occurring between neoliberal practices and human rights principles. According to the latter, all human lives have value, but the marketisation of social life implies that activities can be ranked hierarchically according to their economic significance. As a result, those whose activities do not register as economically useful have less value than those who make valuable contributions. (2016, p. 115)

In the book *Wasteocene: stories from the Global Dump* (2021), Marco Armiero theorizes waste in a new way. He proposed the new term Wasteocene to indicate that waste is the more evident mark of the epoch in which we live, but not only in its materiality. Reminiscent of the anthropological research that studied waste as a relational concept, he provides his own theory considering waste as a process. He illustrates how the human world is indeed characterized by certain socio-ecological relationships that produce not only physical waste, but also «wasted people and places» (2018, p. 2). Despite being yet another proposal inserting in the debate around the Anthropocene terminology, with his idea he is actually supporting the Capitalocene theory, because he sees capitalism as the dominant system that works exactly through a dynamic of wasting that expands to any aspect of life. Wasteocene, thus,

> I believe that the Wasteocene can be understood only within the wider concept of Capitalocene; it is one of the manifold manifestations of capitalist ecologies producing the contemporary crisis. However, through the Wasteocene, I intend to stress the contaminated nature of capitalism and its endurance within the texture of life. (2021, p. 10)

In this framework, we can understand how making a living collecting waste is not *per se* something that undermines the Wasteocene. Armiero explains that it can become an act of resistance by involving a critique to the same logic that produced it. Considering waste as a process, indeed, he rejects any forms of reification. This is important because if we address a problem focusing only on its evident effect, we will tend to look for some quick fix that could also be useful in the short term, but that does not really bring us near a solution. The example of waste is emblematic, if we consider for example plastic waste or CO_2 emissions as isolated objects, we will risk relying on technical solutions to those problems, waiting for some experts to save us, but as Armiero wrote, «it is not CO_2 emissions that have created the ecological crisis, but socio-ecological relationships that produce emissions» (2021, p. 11). In this way, the Wasteocene highlights the political aspects of the socio-environmental crisis that needs more than specific technical solutions. According to Eriksen,

> In theory, if perhaps not in practice, there is a solution, namely a shift from the logic of spiralling growth that we associate with global neoliberalism, towards a logic of recycling and self-reproducing, sustainable circuits of resources [...]. A shift towards cyclical reproduction has the potential, in principle, to turn all kinds of runaway processes into sustainable systems capable of reproducing themselves indefinitely. This scenario nevertheless presupposes a shift away from the growth ideology and reliance on fossil fuels. (2016, p. 116)

The solution that Armiero proposes is even more revolutionary, as he claims that the only way that could really fight the logic of the Wasteocene is to pursue *commoning* practices, establishing relationships based on reproduction, instead of exploitation and oppression. The point is to realize that as Capitalocene was «relationally made» – as believed by Haraway – hence it «must be relationally unmade» (2016, p. 50).

4.6 Wasted places

Another aspect of the life of the Mutoids that made me realize that they are entangling in the world's ecology in ways that could actually sabotage this Wasteocene, is their relationships with places. They were born as nomads, and their constant

traveling has always been part of their philosophy of mutation. Travel was indeed the constant possibility of mutation, the way to live a life with the potential of continuous change, far from the desire to own any place.

This nomadism was strictly linked with occupations and squatting of places that had been abandoned. This practice was particularly significant in the post-Fordian era of England, when many factories were being closed and abandoned, leaving people without a job and without a home (Rote Zora, 2020). Tommy explained to me that also in Italy, some years after, the practice of occupation became popular and important for the same significance:

> l'occupazione della casa era un'esigenza proprio per il diritto di avere diritto alla casa, la casa era un diritto. C'erano una marea di case sfitte, soprattutto case non private, ma case comunali, perché poi chiaramente volevamo occupare case comunali non private, perché nel privato era facile che ti mandassero via subito, nel comune era più difficile. La chiesa ha una marea di case sfitte, tra l'altro beni culturali abbastanza importanti, però lì c'era proprio l'esigenza della casa in sé, del bene, la casa era un bene per tutti, si occupava prevalentemente per quello. Poi ci sono state le occupazioni delle università, ma quello è un altro discorso, era più legato alla politica e a discorsi di oppressione. (Tommy, personal interview 2023).

However, these occupations were important not only for their remonstrance against these injustices. Even the occupations of just a few days, for a party, are indeed interesting to be observed. The places occupied had been abandoned exactly in the logic of the Wasteocene, and those nomads gave them another life for a while; in a way we can say that they recycled them. As Davide explained to me,

> Una volta ci si riappropriava di questi spazi per farli rivivere in una forma diversa, principalmente facendoli diventare contenitore di qualche forma d'arte, o comunque di condivisione… (Davide, personal interview, 2023)

This practice was theorized at the beginning of the 90s by the philosopher Hakim Bey, who elaborated in the homonymous book the concept of the Temporary Autonomous Zone. The TAZ are spaces or moments in which individuals gather to temporarily break free from the constraints of authority, hierarchy, and societal norms. Organizing a free party in an abandoned warehouse, for example, was not just about having fun, but it was

a sort of experimentation of a non-hierarchic society detached from the business logic and free from impositions and power structures. According to Bey, these zones offered a glimpse of what a liberated society could look like. The TAZ were places where the economic power was negated and different forms of arts and expression could thrive, and for a few days or weeks, those abandoned buildings were enriched with new life and new energy (Bey, 1992). The aspect of the temporariness of these experiences was very important not only for the necessity of avoiding repression by the authorities, but also because it is emblematic of a total refusal of any sort of domination and exploitation. The TAZs are not meant to become permanent fixtures but rather fleeting moments of freedom and autonomy, able to reinvent themselves continually. The stabilization of part of the Mutoids in Mutonia could thus be seen as a sort of loosening of their rebellious side; however, I believe that the way they organize their village is still embodying those values and the commoning practices desired by Armiero to fight against the Wasteocene, as I will explore in a deeper way in Chapter VI.

CHAPTER V

Mitigation

5.1. Mitigation in the climate change framework

As observed so far, being able to adapt to a changing environment is vital, but it is not enough. If we really want to improve our chances of surviving in a changing world, we need to understand which of our actions are creating damage, and find ways to reduce them. Observing our production of waste can give us an eloquent example of how we cannot simply adapt to the damage but we need to mitigate it, as shown by the report *What a Waste 2.0. A Global Snapshot of Solid Waste Management to 2050* published in 2018 by the World Bank. The report illustrates how, going on like we are doing now, the annual production of only municipal solid waste (not industrial waste or pollution) is expected to grow within 2050 from 2,01 to 3,40 billion tons (Kaza, Yao, Bhada-Tata, and Van Woerden, 2018). Even with recent technologies of recycling, it is clear that the production '*Business As Usual'* is not sustainable. But waste is just an example, the same situation is recorded in many other dimensions of the environmental crisis. The framework of the nine planetary boundaries, coming from the field of Earth system science, highlights nine essential processes crucial for preserving the overall stability and adaptability of our planet. Waste is included in the boundary called Novel Entities, while the others are Climate Change, Biosphere Integrity, Land System Change, Freshwater Change, Biogeochemical Flows, Ocean Acidification, Atmospheric Aerosol Loading, and Stratospheric Ozone Depletion. Regrettably, the very recent study by Richardson, Steffen, Lucht et al. shows that right now six out of nine of these boundaries have been transgressed (13 September 2023). With this awareness in mind, the Working Group III in the IPCC is entitled to work on the elaboration of possible mitigation strategies in order to reduce our impacts, with a focus on climate change and greenhouse gasses emissions. However, on the glossary of the AR6 Report, mitigation is described as «a human intervention to reduce emissions or enhance the sinks of greenhouse gasses» (IPCC 2023, p.126), and this definition made me hesitate a little bit.

5.2 True mitigation or techno-fix solutions?

This idea of "enhancing the sinks" of greenhouse gasses made me think about a lecture that I had during my years at university by a professor of Biotechnology and Vegetal Physiology. He presented to us various ways in which development in biotechnology could provide some strategies to fight against climate change, with the increase of atmospheric CO_2 due to human activity taken as the main problem. What surprised me is that he claimed that these solutions were revolutionary because they were going against 'mainstream narratives' that put the responsibility of change on people and their lifestyles**.** Among the discoveries that he proposed, one in particular caught my attention. He explained to us that pale green crops are actually better for the environment than plants with dark green leaves. He explained that the energy for life comes from the sun through two processes: photosynthesis and irradiation. On one hand, in dark green leaves there are a lot of chloroplasts, but the production of sugar is catalyzed by enzymes that are slow and the high number of chlorophylls absorb almost all the radiation. Light green plants, on the other hand, absorb fewer photons and have a higher albedo – that is to say, they reflect more light – and in this way, they can provide energy faster. In the article *Una fotosintesi più efficiente può battere la fame nel mondo* (Bassi, 2021) it is highlighted how the efficiency of photosynthesis is very different in a plant in a laboratory (9,5%) versus the actual photosynthesis that happens in a crop field (0,5%). At this rate, plants cannot produce enough for both our needs for food and energy. In the crop fields, plants work to produce more because they are very close to other plants and they operate as they have to compete with each other, so they absorb as much light as they can. By genetic modifying crops' leaves color and adopting pale green crops in agriculture, which takes approximately 30% of land surface, it seems that we could not only produce more nutrients, but we would also obtain a decrease in temperature of 1,5-2,5° thanks to the plants' new capacity of light absorption (Bassi, 2021). I followed the lesson with interest, but ultimately, I found myself in disagreement with some statements that were made. I felt that the idea of genetically modifying the crops in order to be able to keep on doing as we are doing now seemed a way to say that we do not need to question the flaws and inequalities inside the food production system. In my opinion, reflecting on the issues of climate crisis and world hunger cannot for example avoid discussing animal agriculture. In 2017 the FAO estimated that the greenhouse gas emissions associated with animal agriculture add up to 7.1 gigatons of

carbon dioxide equivalent per year, which means 14.5% of anthropogenic CO_2 emissions. Emissions are produced in food cultivation, land use, animal waste, and animal enteric fermentation (FAO, Livestock Solutions for Climate Change, 2017). It seems clear that addressing the problem of CO_2 we must consider these data. Finding ways to increase photosynthesis can absolutely bring some benefit, but I feel that we should also advocate for a change in lifestyle and promote a sustainable plant-based diet. One goal of the lecture was probably to make us reflect also on the fact that, contrary to the widespread opinion, genetic engineering can provide significant help in our time of crisis. A lot of people indeed oppose Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) indiscriminately, but they are not always bad. It is evident that the planet has changed – and is changing – irreversibly, and any hope of returning to some idyllic 'natural state' does not make sense anymore (Renn, 2018). However, considering the reflection made in the previous chapter, I see this relying on genetic engineering that can modify the color of plants in agriculture as a "techno-fix" approach that professor Raffaetà defines as technological solutions that do not question the structural problems of the system (2021). In this way, «we fail to take nature seriously and to act as subjects inscribed in the very dynamics of natural processes» (Swyngedouw, 2011, p. 263). We cannot, in my opinion, avoid questioning our lifestyle. Even though I myself am impressed by the development of human technologies and even though I understand how these kinds of discoveries can help us face the effects of the environmental crisis, I fear that excessive reliance on technological fixes to deal with the effects of the crisis could result in a sort of de-responsibilization of the individual and of the institutions. The idea that thanks to new technologies we can modify the plants in our monocultural fields making them more efficient seems to still be inscribed in the same narrative of exploitation and productiveness that generated the problem in the first place. It seems that in this way modern capitalism does not need to be questioned, or even it can become the solution. Swyngedouw wrote that

> A Gramscian 'passive revolution' has taken place over the past few years, whereby the elites have not only acknowledged the climate conundrum and, thereby, answered the call of the 'people' to take the climate seriously, but are moving rapidly to convince the world that indeed, capitalism cannot only solve the climate riddle, but that it can actually make a new climate by unmaking the one it has co-produced over the past few hundred years. (Swyngedouw, 2011)

The necessity is to take responsibility and acknowledge that there is something deeper that has to be changed. The idea of transition towards a green economy that can bring a sustainable growth thanks to technological innovation is not promoting any efficient change. Scientific technologies have the potential to be beneficial, but they have to consider the broader context of socio-ecological and political relations in which they are theorized. And we, the individuals, are part of these entanglements of relations, so I believe that we cannot escape an analysis of our lifestyle. Instead, we need to recognize that we are subjects in what Norgaard defines as the «socioecological coevolution» (2008, p. 1) and that the different kinds of relationships that we decide to establish with the other-than-human implicate different consequences. I believe that a true elaboration of practices of mitigation could not abstain from questioning the system that is now dominating our world, capitalism – that still tries to offer the vision of growth as possible by theorizing a 'green growth' **–,** and our involvement in supporting this system.

5.3 Recognizing the problem of overconsumption

How can we believe that the institutions are really committing to the necessity of mitigation, while at the same time, they demonstrate to be willing to protect certain economic interests at all costs? The study *Scientists' Warning on Affluence* (2020) proposed by Wiedmann, Lenzen, Keyßer, and Steinberger claims precisely that sustainability can possibly be achieved only if technology goes hand in hand with profound changes in lifestyle. However, these scholars argue that our society is stuck to the ideal of growth and it still actually encourages consumption. If already many research and publications have acknowledged the impact of economic growth and affluence, what these scientists want to emphasize is that it is important that decision-makers and governments realize that mitigation of environmental degradation must involve a straight reflection on economic production and overconsumption. And their argument is clear: «Since the level of consumption determines total impacts, affluence needs to be addressed by reducing consumption, not just greening it» (Wiedmann et al., 2020, p. 3). The point is that – being now almost 8 billion people on Earth – even a 'green growth' seems to be just a myth. As we already commented, the functioning of Capitalism is grounded exactly on the maintenance of differences between rich and poor countries. In the book *The Great Derangement. Climate Change and the Unthinkable*,

Amitav Ghosh meditates about the systemic inequalities of modernity, and points out that capitalism can work only if some countries remain underdeveloped:

> […] the patterns of life that modernity engenders can only be practiced by a small minority of the world's population. Asia's historical experience demonstrates that our planet will not allow these patterns of living to be adopted by every human being. Every family in the world cannot have two cars, a washing machine, and a refrigerator – not because of technical or economic limitations but because humanity would asphyxiate in the process (2016, p. 92)

As Ghosh explains, this is nothing new, and many people understood it a long time ago, like Mahatma Gandhi who in 1928 wrote «God forbid that India should ever take to industrialism after the manner of the West. If an entire nation of 300 millions *[sic]* took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts» (Gandhi, 1928 as cited in Ghosh, 2016, p.111).

The researchers Joel Millward-Hopkins, Julia K. Steinberger, Narasimha D. Rao, and Yannick Oswald elaborated in 2020 a new study to estimate the lowest energy requirement to provide well-being to the entire global population. It is a complex study, and it first demands for a definition of "well-being", or of "decent material living" (p, 1). The authors created a model that takes into account nutrition, living condition and a decent shelter (with sufficient space, illumination, thermal comfort...), hygiene and water supply, clothing, healthcare, education, communication, and information (they calculated one phone per person and one laptop per household) and a certain extent of mobility. They imagined a world where the energy supply and the technology were aimed to provide everyone with this kind of possibilities and they observed that, with an intelligent adjustment of all our resources and tools, together with the reduction of over-consumption, our planet could actually host an even greater number of people, still without any systemic injustice. Undoubtedly, this is a theoretical study that seems very difficult to actuate, because it would require a transformation in the global structure of the world and in the mentality of people, but also more material changes, for instance in the houses already existing. However, it shows that in the drastic transformation that we need in order to avoid a collapse, the material sacrifices required from wealthy people are smaller than what we could expect, while even the lives of poor people would improve significantly. With their research, they wanted to respond to the «clichéd

populist objection» (Millward-Hopkins, et al., 2020, p.8) that people raise to environmentalists, claiming that they seem to solicit that «we return living in caves» (*Ibid*.). A similar assertion was made by the writer Roy Scranton, who said that to be a true environmentalist and have a zero-carbon footprint, a person would have to die. The writer Jonathan Safran Foer replayed to him in this way:

> […] the planet isn't what we want to save. We want to save life on the planet – plant life, animal life, and human life. Accepting the necessary violence of our existence is the first step to minimizing it: we must consume resources in order to survive. This would remain true in any political utopia. But plenty of species, including humans, have managed to live in harmony with nature, and they do not so by committing suicide. They do so by taking less than the planet is able to produce and nurturing ecosystem. They do so by living as though we have only one Earth, not four. By treating the planet like our only home (Foer 2019, That is the Question)

In the 1970s, the French philosopher André Gorz proposed the concept of "degrowth", a concept that will be popularized by the economist Serge Latouche. Gorz explains that

> The point is not to deify nature or to "go back" to it, but to take account of a simple fact: human activity finds in the natural world its external limits. […] The response of economists up to now has essentially consisted of dismissing as "utopian" or "irresponsible" those who have focused attention on these symptoms of a crisis in our fundamental relation to the natural world, a relation in which all economic activity is grounded. […] Only one economist, Nicholas Georgesco-Roegen, has had the common sense to point out that, even at zero growth, the continued consumption of scarce resources will inevitably result in exhausting them completely. The point is not to refrain from consuming more and more, but to consume less and less—there is no other way of conserving the available reserves for future generations. This is what ecological realism is about. (Gorz, 1980, p.13).

The problem is that these kinds of proposals, that challenge this idea of development as a synonym for having more and more, are frequently disapproved because they are seen as a demand for a sacrifice too big. The peculiar way of life of the Mutoids, that looks for freedom in any aspect of life, bring them easily to questioning any aspect of consumeristic society:

> Vivere in un veicolo è fantastico, ha i pro e i contro, perché [gli altri] dicono 'ah che bella vita che fai', ma io dico 'guarda non sai quante volte vorrei starmene seduto sul divano a non fare niente, cioè dopo aver fatto le mie 8 ore con il cervello spento che mi hanno garantito di poterne stare altre tot a casa a fare quello che voglio, comprarmi quello che voglio…', poi in realtà però mi dico 'ma a me che me ne frega?' cioè i pantaloni li ho comprati usati, questa [pointing at the T-shirt] me l'hanno regalata, i calzini si bucano li rammendi, le scarpe le compro usate su Vinted. (Davide, personal interview, 2023)

5.4 Mutonia as a degrowth society

What I observed in Mutonia was that the inhabitants practically construed a sort of small-scale unsophisticated degrowth society described by Latouche with his eight R's: Re-evaluate, Reconceptualize, Restructure, Redistribute, Relocalize, Reduce, Re-use, Recycle (Latouche, 2021). This lifestyle was surely influenced by their initial nomadic lifestyle; Francesca explains to me that living in a vehicle and traveling makes you inevitably more aware of your consumption:

> Impari quanto consumi, le risorse… Anche semplicemente la cosa di usare l'acqua delle taniche ti porta a sapere precisamente quanta acqua consumi in tot giorni, ti porta a dire 'aspetta magari non trovo da riempire le taniche questa settimana, consumiamo un po' meno'; ti porta a farti la doccia o lavare i piatti in maniera più consapevole. (Francesca, personal interview, 2023)

Now, after the renovations in 2013, they are all connected with water pipes and electricity cables like regular houses, but their mindset remains one of simplicity, without too many pretensions about luxury but a lot about freedom. They live in their very tiny houses, they try not to buy unnecessary stuff, they try to repair old things until possible… The main driver for their choices is the point of not being dependent on money to have a happy life, so they learned to live with less material things, and they enjoy it:

> Questo vivere un po' così, con basse esigenze, possiamo legarlo anche al discorso del reddito di cittadinanza, anche all'idea di far trovare lavoro a tutti, però solo tre giorni a settimana… io sono un pochettino più sognatore-anarco, vorrei vedere un mondo dove ognuno ha il suo piccolo lavoro e fa quello che vuole…. In tutto ciò devo dire che ho

> tanto tempo, nel senso che a non dover pagare un affitto così alto come gli altri, io non sono più schiavo di quel mondo lì. Certo sì uso la macchina o il furgone per andare a lavorare e suonare a distanza, però non c'è più bisogno di andare da A a B tutti i giorni e accendere, consumare gomme, freni, nafta; perché ho tempo di stare a casa e godermi le cose qui, anche quello potrebbe essere una scelta ambientalista […] noi nel nostro piccolo forse possiamo dimostrare un mondo diverso, dove puoi rilassarti, fare qualcosa che ti piace. (Andy, personal interview, 2023)

Andy then admitted that of course they need money like everyone else to eat, pay the bills, and buy what they cannot build themselves, hence they still need to find some occupations to earn some money. The organization of the Workout Stage, explain Andy, was also a mean to set aside some money for the common fund, but the years of Covid caused of course some problems. Nevertheless, their lifestyle and the fact of living in a small mobile home requires less money than a more usual life. However, it involves inevitably also certain choices that could be seen as a sacrifice from outsiders. In the documentary *Hometown | Mutonia*, Lyle shows his house and describes it: «Aesthetically, I like this place, it's fine, because I made it out of materials that I found and trying not to spend any money», and then comments, with a laugh: « It's not insulated very well! » (2013, 13:15-13:33). Talking with the Mutoids and hearing their testimony, I did not have the impression that they are living in discomfort. Francesca told me that one time they were visiting a school in Trentino telling their story, and the young students were astounded by their lifestyle and assumed that their life could not be comfortable. So, she and Davide decided to show them their camion, in which they have their beds, their kitchen, their bathroom:

> Il lusso è estremo secondo me! […] il ragionamento va da quello che in qualche modo è costruito e influenzato dalla società, cioè il fatto che uno arriva a chiedersi 'ma ne varrà la pena che mi faccio un mutuo per 30 anni della mia vita e sono legata a questo per avere una casa, anche solo una casa modesta… cioè secondo me decrescere è mettere in testa questo ad ognuno di noi: capire che non è che vai a stare peggio, ma che ritorni ad essere un attimo più proprietario della tua vita, del tuo tempo, e non avrai più tante ansie da prestazione; e capire che quello che ti basta è veramente l'essenziale, quello che hai già. Secondo me è un passo verso la libertà, un modo di staccare a questi schemi, questi step della perfezione imposta da un sistema che comunque non si regge se non consumiamo, non si regge più. […] Anche per le pulizie, vivere in un ambiente pulito e sistemato è una

> cosa bella per tutti, ma ti pare che debba passare cinque piani di casa e dopo essere frustratissima e arrabbiata, e magari andarmi a comprare una nuova maglietta perché sono frustrata? Cioè, in un modo o nell'altro è tutto un risparmio, di tempo, di energia… è anche un po' un ritorno all'essere umano, no? (Francesca, personal interview 2023).

So I did not calculate quantitatively the footprint of the activities in Mutonia, but I believe that this mindset of living with the bare minimum and recycling and reinventing old stuff is remarkable in today's world. Of course, the old vehicles' gasoline consumption and the energy needed for the artists' welding machine could be considered problematic aspects from an environmentalist point of view, but we have to remember that the company was not born as an environmental movement. However, in their own small way they demonstrated self-awareness and the willingness to change some aspects, looking for mitigation measures on different levels. Lyle admitted to me that he is personally a bit ashamed that they are not all autonomous with solar panels. He actually installed some for his home, but he does not get enough energy for his laboratory. Nonetheless, he tried to lower his impact in other different and ingenious ways:

> Ho fatto un sidecar per portare il mio cane anni fa; avevo un cane di 70 kg, e a pedali era difficile da portare! Ho messo un motore elettrico e lo uso per andare in paese per il supermercato o il ferramenta, invece che prendere il furgone prendo sempre questo mezzo elettrico che riesco a caricare con i pannelli solari, è un mezzo completamente green fatto da me! Poi avevo un sistema per raccogliere tutta l'acqua dal tetto della casa e la usavo per scaricare il water […] Ora non sta piovendo, non c'è acqua da raccogliere. (Lyle, personal interview, 2023)

As Davide told me, anyone there tries to do what believes to be necessary:

> Noi abbiamo ritenuto necessario fare da subito il cinema a energia solare; viaggiamo spesso con il camion però abbiamo ritenuto necessario piantare degli alberi per compensare la CO_2, io cerco di fare il meglio che posso. Dopo un anno che sono qua ho i pannelli solari, sono stato il primo a metterli, poi anche altri mi hanno visto e mi hanno chiesto di metterglieli. […] Cerchiamo di avere un impatto più basso verso l'ambiente, non solo riciclando l'impossibile, ma anche proprio vivendo con meno. Poi ovvio, il camion non l'ho riciclato, però tutta la roba l'ho comprata di seconda mano, la cucina, il tavolo, tutto tranne il boiler a gas perché avendo le bambine neonate all'epoca mi

> sembrava importante avere una cosa affidabile, nuova, ma prodotta per durare 10 anni. […] E per quello che usiamo di gasolio cerchiamo di piantumare qua e là, che poco serve eh, serve più che altro alla nostra coscienza perché comunque stai consumando risorse. (Davide, personal interview, 2023)

If this could seem like a lot of work, the Mutoids claim to be happy. In almost any conversation I had with the Mutoids, the idea of going back to live in a regular apartment was imagined with a sort of horror. Tommy and Francesca describe this simpler lifestyle as an enrichment:

> É uno stile di vita che si sviluppa a fianco della normalità imposta dalla società… per me la normalità è questa, all'inizio mi sembrava strano ma dal primo giorno ho capito che mi adattavo benissimo. Non è una decrescita, è una crescita. Ma non una crescita industriale, economica, una crescita mentale. (Tommy, personal interview, 2023)

> Io mi sento la persona più fortunata del mondo perché ho avuto il coraggio di fare questa scelta. E non è assolutamente una vita di carenza, anzi! Semplicemente è un po' un cambio di paradigma rispetto a quello a cui uno è abituato, però non mi sento carente rispetto a chi ha un appartamento. […] Se poi uno veramente va a vedere a livello materiale è pochissimo quello che ti serve per vivere una vita degna di essere chiamata vita… o meglio, è il giusto! Per me è talmente automatico che è difficile da scardinare, io penso che sia proprio impresso dentro la genetica della gente e non mi sento un'alternativa perché ho fatto questa scelta, mi sento semplicemente che ho seguito il mio istinto, senza neanche pensarci troppo… […] È semplicemente una scelta che per me è preferibile a tante per tantissimi aspetti, dall'umano all'impatto ambientale che hai, allo spazio che occupi nel mondo. (Francesca, personal interview, 2023)

In the conversations collected by the writer and journalist David Cayley, the philosopher Ivan Illich suggests rethinking our position in this society:

> always ask, what can I do, at this very moment, in the unique hic et nunc, here and now, in which I am? What can I do to get out of this world of needs-satisfaction […] and feel free to hear, to sense, to intuit what the other wants from me, would be able to imagine, expects with a sense of surprise, from me at this moment? (Cayley, 2005, p. 222)

The problem is that this idea of degrowth seems to trudge on its way outside the theorizations in the academia. If, in theory, it is impossible to negate that a shift towards a mindset of degrowth would enhance the possibility of survival of our species, in practice it seems hard to internalize and to actuate. Serge Latouche spoke about «colonization of the imaginary», explaining that «we are dealing with a mental invasion in which we are victims and the agents. It is largely self-colonization, a partly voluntary servitude» (2014, *Imaginary, Decolonization of*). I think this is what the Capitalocene is about. We understand that the problem is the fact that we let capitalism become the dominant system, recognizing the ruling power it has also on our mind, and from this, we can open the possibility of a change. By identifying and challenging our role in supporting capitalism, we can actually challenge it. If policymakers – often devoted to protecting the economy at all costs – are failing to address the role of overproduction and overconsumption, we as consumers can reclaim our power of dissenting and start disrupting this system. Latour highlighted the fact that the pandemic and the lockdowns made visible many flaws in our economic system, but at the same time they showed that it is actually possible to slow down this same economy that has always been portrayed as unstoppable. And thanks to this experience, we can understand that

> One thing leads to another, and if we all began on a personal basis to ask such questions on all aspects of our production system, we would become efficient globalisation interrupters, just as effective, in our millions, as the infamous coronavirus as it goes about globalising the planet in its own way. (Latour, 2020, p. 2)

In his book *We Are the Weather. Saving the Planet Begins at Breakfast*, Safran Foer explores the impact on climate change of our food choices. He argues that our eating habits are something that each of us can directly control, and the individual's decision to adopt a more plant-based diet is one of the most effective ways individuals can combat climate change, and to explain this he wrote a powerful passage that works also in a more general sense about out consumption: «If I were any other kind of animal, my obligations would end with my desire. But I am a human, and that is where my obligations begin. The decision to fight for what's right requires us to cut ourselves off from what's wrong» (2019, That is the Question). However, in order to avoid feeling that we have to sacrifice too much, we need to really become aware of our consuming habits and deeply reconsider our needs. Nowadays, the Internet can provide us with

everything we desire in a few hours, but do we really need so much stuff, and do we really need this velocity?

The Mutoids, with their life and their practices, show that it is not so difficult to reduce one's needs once one manages to escape the pervasive trap of capitalism and its logic of accumulation. Thus, how is our idea of 'well-being' influenced by the societal structures built by capitalism?

5.5 About well-being

What do we mean with well-being? What does it mean to have a good life? Different notions have been elaborated by different disciplines like religion, philosophy, or economy. In the economic field, the mainstream idea is that happiness is linked with a continuous acquisition of wealth (Manfredi, 2022). The index of Gross Domestic Product is a measure of economic growth that considers the goods and services produced, but it has often been used to talk about the well-being of a nation. However, it has been largely studied that it is not suited for this task, and scholars are interrogating themselves about how to really measure well-being, going beyond the mere observation of economic activity.

In ecological contexts, well-being has been distinguished into two notions, the hedonic and the eudaimonic. The hedonic approach is a more subjective concept that includes the question of happiness, derived from the philosophy of Epicure, while the eudaimonic approach involves the observation of more objective elements, trying to elaborate universal basic human needs that must be met (Hopkins et al, 2002). This was the case of the study I presented above – *Providing decent living with minimum energy: A global scenario,* by Hopkins, Steinberger, Rao, and Oswald – that was aimed to estimate the energy required for "decent living standards" (2020, p. 2) for the global population. But what does "decent living" mean? In the study they recognized a list of material living standards that according to them were objectively necessary, considering that «The argument that such basic needs are universal and independent of cultural context, rests on the distinction between *needs* and *need satisfiers*», and they explain that «*Needs* are universal; *satisfiers* culturally specific» (*Ibid.*).

The hedonic approach is based on the individual perception, and according to it, a good society builds on the maximization of individuals' happiness. This perception seems to fall easier in the narrative of capitalism and often assumes that rising incomes

will raise well-being, because the more money I have the more I can have of everything. It does not pay too much attention to the social aspect of wellbeing. An eudaimonic approach, instead, asks inevitably for institutional and social change, and «From this perspective, true happiness can only be obtained by turning away from the world of positional consumption and insatiable desires» (*Ibid*.). Nevertheless, it is not necessarily the case that these two approaches are in conflict. The Mutoids' happiness shows us that abandoning the myths of growth and accumulation does not inevitably lead to a sad life. Thanks to the decolonization of their mind from the capitalist model of accumulation, materialism, and competition, they could embrace an idea of wealth and richness that is more related to "less" and "simple". This resonates in my mind as the concept of *Buen Vivir* that I have learned in the reading of the works of the anthropologist Kristina Lyons, a concept that was born in a specific context in South America, that rejects the human-centered pursuit of growth and separates the idea of abundance and wealth from productivity (2020). This requires a slowing down of thinking and acting that is not necessarily a return to the past, but that can be another way to approach life, not necessarily dependent on the capitalist idea of progress. One important aspect, according to Francesca, is indeed showing that this idea of degrowth, of living with less, should not be pictured only with an extremist image of primitivism and renunciation:

> La decrescita non è negativa, e soprattutto non deve essere vista con solo quegli esempi estremi, di quelli che vanno a vivere in un posto senza elettricità, che mangiano solo erbe e frutti spontanei, cioè ci sono delle vie di mezzo e uno non deve vederla come una carenza che ti priva di tutto quello che ti piace, ma te la devi aggiustare un po' a seconda di quello che ti piace fare. Io mi tolgo delle cose, ma non è che mi tolgo tutto, fai delle scelte, no? (Francesca, personal interview, 2023)

5.6 Going back to relations

Life in Mutonia shows a possible alternative. I do not believe that this experience could or should be reproduced at the global scale, but their mindset is something to learn about. The concepts of consumption and waste are inevitably interlinked, as «waste is the underbelly of consumption» (Eriksen, 2016, p.106). One interesting element to underline is that it has been observed by many scholars, and assessed also in the report by the World Bank I cited above, that «the richer you are, the more waste you produce»

(*Ivi*, p. 110). Eriksen pointed out the example of Americans, which produce waste 200 times as much per capita compared to Indians (2016). The historian Christof Mauch explains that we never had a society or a culture that did not produce waste at all, but waste was not really an issue before industrialization, population growth, and globalization (2016). Just a few decades ago, even in Western countries, the economy was working more as a circular economy, in which products were designed for longevity and recyclability, and when something broke the tendency was to try as much as possible to fix it before throwing it away and having to buy another one. However, with modernity something changed, and the hedonic idea that to be happy meant to have more co-developed with an economic system based on production and pursuit of profit. The unregulated and continuous production in this system economy needs for its survival someone to consume its outputs; corporations and companies need people to constantly buy stuff and they have a clear method to convince us to do it. Advertising has a key role in making us desire things that we do not need, accompanied by the implementation of the strategies of planned obsolescence (by which products are designed not to last long) and perceived obsolescence (the idea that the product we bought is so outdated and out of fashion that we have to replace it with the new version, even though it still works well). Moreover, the Internet and globalization made all these processes even faster. Even though these dynamics are now known by everyone, a great number of people still accommodate them, accumulating so much stuff that eventually ends up forgotten or lost. What is at stake here, again, are the *wasting relationships* theorized by Armiero, relationships «which make profit on the devaluation of life» (2021, p. 56). Capitalism lives thanks to the pleasure we find in having new stuff. The philosopher Timothy Morton proposed an interesting perspective on consumption. They claim that it should not be demonized in itself, as «The revolutionary cry is not that consumerism gives us too much pleasure, but rather that consumerism isn't enough pleasure; we desire a lot more than that» (2017, chapter 5). Morton advocates for a «spiritual consumerism of experiences» (*Ivi*), in which consumption is not to be considered something negative. To consume is for them an ecological practice *per se*, as it means to enter in contact with something other, underlying also the component of desire of entering in contact with this other. The point is not about enjoying a brief endorphins rush, but to deeply enjoying the other thing and the experience of relating to it. Moreover, one important aspect of their reflection is that sometimes something could be a source of pleasure for an individual, but in the meantime, it causes an incredible

amount of displeasure in others; this is sufficient to make the possibility of pleasure gone (2017). And here I see a strong connection with Armiero's thought; if wasting relationships «produce profit from exploitation and othering», commoning relationships «produce wellbeing through care and inclusion» (2021, p. 3).

Nevertheless, I am not saying here that all the responsibility for this change should fall on the shoulders of consumers, as I believe it is essential and required that change comes primarily from governments that should regulate producers and corporations more firmly. However, we have plenty of evidence that governments often prefer to protect certain economic interests and we can expect that tangible changes will take a lot of time. Dissenting from this system could be our contribution to the process. I believe that the strength in Armiero's theorization lies in the reflection on the fact that discourses about Wasteocene are not only about oppression and subjugation, but they also include «resisting subjects» (*Ivi*, p. 12) that are produced within it. As a matter of fact, «As wasting is a social relation reproducing power inequalities, it is inherently a political and not a technical fact» (*Ibid*.). I see Mutonia as one of the many "resisting subjects" existing nowadays, and in the next chapter I will finally observe how their practices are to be inserted into the framework of the commoning relationships proposed by Armiero as the "antidote" (2021, p.13) of the great crisis we are facing, that go deeper than the technical approach to climate change proposed by the institutions.

CHAPTER VI

Wrecking the Capitalocene

6.1 Commoning relationships in the Capitalocene

Adaptation and mitigation represent the categories of the main coping mechanisms devised by human institutions to address the impact of climate change, but it is evident that these strategies are being applied on a level of symptom-treating rather than truly addressing the root causes. We saw how the theoretical framework of the Capitalocene reveals that the environmental crisis is not merely a technical or scientific issue, but one deeply rooted in cultural and political dimensions. According to Moore, Capitalocene poses its origin not just in the advent of modern capitalism, but even before, already in the period of European colonial expansion, when capitalist-colonialist economic relations took form as practices of othering that shaped the world through dominance and subjugation. (2016). This theoretical perspective seems to align with Armiero's concept of wasting relationships, at the basis of his notion of Wasteocene – that he himself describes as an integral part of the broader Capitalocene framework –, namely relationships that commodify both human and non-human entities and create marginalized subjects. However, the flaws of the capitalist world-ecology are becoming increasingly palpable even for those who are privileged in this system, and it is now impossible to cover our eyes to the evidence of the need of a shift. And we need to believe that a shift is possible.

After 15 years working in the field of sustainability – including a PhD entitled *Design of Human and Planetary Health: A Holistic Integral Approach to Complexity and Sustainability* – the biologist and educator Daniel Christian Wahl wrote the book *Designing Regenerative Cultures* (2016), where he essentially advocated for a shift in mindset from an extractive approach to a regenerative one. The regenerative cultures he hopes for are based on the transformation of primarily interpersonal relationships that oppose western individualism and materialism; cultures «rooted in cooperation» (Wahl, 2016, p. 191). Armiero speaks the same truth, by describing these renovated socio-

ecological relationships that can rise as an alternative way of life as «rooted in commoning practices» (2021, p. 58). And here and there this shift is already happening in the world, Armiero indeed describes in his book many examples of different embodiments of this idea, which «are not designed in a laboratory or prescribed in academic volumes, but alive and experimented everywhere within the very fractures of the Wasteocene» (*Ibid*.). The Mutoid Waste Company and the life in Mutonia pose as a good case study offering another example of these experimentations, embodying the character of resisting subject in a world of consumerism and exploitation. Not only is their art based on recycling in the most rebellious sense of the term, in which the discarded materials become a subject in the establishment of significant bonds, but also the way they live their daily life as a company is suggestive and worthwhile for the intent of my thesis.

6.2 Commoning relationships in Mutonia

The Mutoid Waste Company originated as a nomadic group of artists and performers who share not only an artistic vision but also a broader philosophy that opposes normative societal expectations and consumerism that permeates every aspect of their life. In the early days, they were a small group, traveling together forming a convoy of home-vehicles to bring their ideals around. Their communal life and work challenged the individualistic tendencies propagated by contemporary society. Hence, on one hand, we can see the embodiment of *commoning relationships* in their togetherness. Cooperation constituted part of the structural basis of their philosophy, as living a life in which you try to *DIY* as much as possible is clearly easier if you have the support of other people, that maybe can do something that you alone could not do. Moreover, their shows and performances and even some sculptures were collective projects, so the decisions were taken together. They created a small-scale society without hierarchical power structures. When they settled in Mutonia, their commitment to communal living endured, establishing a settlement organized around principles of shared responsibility and cooperation. The first period of life in Mutonia was a true experiments of community living; they ate together, they shared the bathroom in the only concrete building in the ex-quarry at the time, and the money earned by working together was put in the common fund for every expense. I learned from Lyle that they even divided

things like tobacco. Lu Lupan comments this period to Francesco Pattaccini from the website *L'indiependent*e:

> Nel '96 quando sono arrivata, si trattava di una comunità molto più stretta, numericamente e artisticamente, tutti i lavori venivano divisi in parti identiche. Ci si supportava molto e ognuno era vicino all'altro a seconda del bisogno. Era proprio un'isola differente, in cui rifugiarsi, rispetto a tutto il resto. (Pattaccini, 2018)

Over the years however, as I have already described in chapter 2, the company underwent a transformative evolution, as some members left and kept on travelling, while new members joined, kids arrived in the picture and the more traditional concept of family intertwined with the community life. Moreover, while maintaining the same guiding principle, each artist started pursuing with more commitment their own personal projects. Life in Mutonia gradually adapted to this change and daily activities became more diversifies and decentralized; however, the essence of this togetherness persists, and the spirit of the company remained as a core element in their life and in the management of the settlement. Everyone has their own little home, but two common places remain, the house in concrete – where they gather for reunions or to eat together for special occasions – and a warehouse (Cumbo, 2022). The governance structure of the community is basically participatory and egalitarian, eschewing the hierarchical system often associated with capitalist societies. Decision-making is collective, even though it is not always easy. Davide explained to me that they have an internal e-mail where they make small decisions – the ones that can be taken via e-mail – as it is impossible to have all the members to be present in Mutonia at the same time, as they all still travel a lot. For big decisions, anyway, they try to meet up in reunion in presence, with the ones away connecting online. In the interviews I had, it emerged a few times that misunderstandings or disagreements happens – one of the main one concerns the organization of the Workout Stage, as some of them would like to do it again, especially because it was a great opportunity to raise some money for the communal fund for the manutention of the yard, but others are not so convinced. Anyway, some frictions are understandable when people with different personalities come together to live, even though they share similar perspectives and lifestyle. Nevertheless, life in Mutonia resembles a large family where the members value each other and know that they can count on each other:

> È come vivere in un paese di un tempo, secondo me, dove comunque c'è più rapporto di vicinato, e ci si sente un po' una grande famiglia. E con questo però non vuol dire che ci si sente obbligati a dover condividere tanto la quotidianità; quindi è vero, ogni nucleo fa un po' una vita a sé, però si sa che insomma siamo tutti insieme. Ed è un po' il motivo per cui ho scelto di venire qua, perché vivere in una comunità in senso stretto, dove ogni giorno tutti i pranzi sono condivisi, cose condivise… cioè, devi sceglierlo proprio come approccio di vita. Per me, per esempio, una realtà così è meglio, dove ognuno ha tra virgolette la propria individualità ma sai anche che sei un'entità comune… poi qui ci sono 30 e passa anni di storia insieme, sono tutte personalità artistiche, quindi molto forti, e vengono comunque tutti da un movimento di contestazione, messi tutti insieme son dei begli animali selvaggi, ci sono 30 anni di storia insieme di vita vissuta! (Francesca, personal interview, 2023)

They however have also many occasions to gather informally, like for example for birthdays – there are more than thirty people living there, so they have plenty to celebrate! The documentary *Mutonia | Hometown* is interesting because – as I already said – it also shows the more domestic aspect of Mutonia, and a lot of space is dedicated to the children of the company, the new generation of Mutoids. The recurring leitmotiv in their testimony is exactly this idea of a big extended family, that is inevitably influenced also by the fact that they have an unusual conception of home – having lived all their life in their little mobile homes – and they end up spending a lot of time together outside (ZimmeriFrei, 2013).

This aspect of familiarity is possible because Mutonia is on a certain degree exclusive. As I will explain later, not everyone can just decide to move in Mutonia with its van. However, they are not at all a closed community; for example they were able to build a strong relationship of solidarity with their neighbors from Santarcangelo di Romagna since the first moments of their settlement in the ex-quarry. Strapper described their richness to Rote Zora as the ability both of staying together and engaging with new people, fostering everywhere the sense of community: «Quel primo anno riuscimmo a portare al campo meccanici della zona, saldatori, falegnami, ma anche gente comune che ci aiutava in tutti i modi a costruire nuove strutture» (in Rote Zora, p. 85). The people of Santarcangelo helped them from the beginning in their settling, by offering them food and help in exchange for little welder jobs or for taking their scraps. Furthermore, the Mutoids have always been willing to share their

experience in many ways, for instance they often collaborated with the Municipality of Santarcangelo di Romagna and schools by organizing laboratories on creative recycling and their created for many years the decorations for Christmas for the village. In *Mutonia | Hometown*, Lyle highlights that this mutuality is very important for them: «Maybe people think that we want only park here for free, live apart and give nothing back, but it's not like that, we want to give something back, but it became more difficult than ever» (ZimmerFrei, 2013, 1:03:14-1:03:31). The same organization of the Workout Stage was not only an important mean to earn some money by selling beverages and art pieces, but was also prompted by this desire of sharing and gathering people:

> Noi facevamo la zona bimbi [at the Workout Stage], c'era un angolo per bambini nel giardinetto con popcorn e granite... io sono di quelli che spera che venga rifatto perché è una di quelle cose che va fatta come posto. Al di là che tu vuoi o non vuoi, è comunque un posto che non è nostro, noi siamo "ospiti". […] È bello per un posto così condividere una volta all'anno questa cosa, al di là che è aperto tutti i giorni, però non c'è una situazione di festa. (Davide, personal interview, 2023)

The Workout Stage was legal, but the vision behind its organization was the same driving force that boosted the old illegal parties in the abandoned warehouses, namely the willingness of creating spaces for people outside the business logic, spaces where people can gather and be free. Moreover, it is important to stress once again that the yard is open every day for anyone who wants to visit it. The space is indeed the place of their homes, but it has been from the beginning accessible for visitors, who can find disseminated everywhere the captivating Mutoid sculptures. This is an essential aspect of the Mutoid art, as it is – like their parties – the embodiment of their antiauthoritarian philosophy. Joe Rush explains that

> One of the things I feel about the mutoid art is that it's really being accessible to everyone. I don't believe in confusing people with art, you know, by producing stuff that is so deep and meaningful that nobody understands what it's about, I just can't see the point of it myself. I think you've got to remember as an artist that you are an entertainer, and you are entertaining people. […] we've never done galleries as such, we've always done parties and in the party all the sculpture are there (CordyHouse, 2008, 5:22- 6:14)

Hence, the Mutoids have always been open to the outside, they are not interested in just living in their own bubble to escape a reality they do not find satisfactory, but they are active subjects in their critiques to the individualistic nature of a society ruled by the capitalist economic system. According to Joe Rush, they have always sought to extend support to local struggles of the people they encountered during their journeys, «perché gli altri siamo noi e noi siamo gli altri, per cui tutti insieme siamo l'umanità, ognuno di noi è portavoce dell'umanità» (Joe Rush in Rote Zora, 2020, p. 63). And in exchange, they have often received support from people outside the company, showing how engaging with the other through commoning relationships of reproduction and care have the potential to generate a positive cycle, where the care given to others leads to reciprocal support, potentially amplifying the network and impact of other commoning relationships.

6.3 "Regenerative Cultures" (Wahl, 2016)

In his book, Wahl highlights the necessity of creating a social foundation for an ecological thought that truly rethinks our life on this finite planet. This is an important aspect that is increasingly coming out in the environmentalist discourse. The movement of XR incorporated his expression "regenerative cultures" in its manifesto, and on their website they describe their action in this framework of regeneration in this way: «we try to reconnect with ourselves, friends, fellow activists, society, and the natural world. Furthermore, we learn inclusivity, mutuality, empathy, and equality anew. We seek regenerative solutions up against any challenge» (XR, Regenerative Cultures). What is becoming more and more clear is that we cannot deal with the environmental crisis and reflect on ecological practices just by looking at scientific data and trying to fix the most palatable symptoms, but we need to go deep to look at our relationships with other people, with nonhuman animals, with the surroundings. In the seminal essay *The three ecologies* (2000), Felix Guattari claimed that addressing the ecological crisis requires a holistic approach and collective efforts in different fields. Therefore, he challenges the conventional separation between the three dimensions of the social, the environmental, and the mental. This stems from the recognition that environmental issues cannot be isolated from either social or mental factors, as they are intricately interwoven and mutually influencing each other. This insight is pivotal, highlighting the imperative for social and political changes to effectively deal with this crisis. From this perspective, we

can understand the influential role of capitalist ideologies, capable of profoundly shaping individual behaviors and desires. Overconsumption, for instance, has been observed by many scholars as correlated to happiness, being a sort of coping mechanism for the crisis of the social capital. People often seem to engage in excessive consumption as a response to certain unhappiness provoked by «the poverty of human relations and for the feeling of loneliness» (Ponthieu, 2020, p. 55). Establishing more fulfilling relationships with others could reduce the impulse to consume. Similarly, Ivan Illich explored the concept of conviviality as the opposite of industrial productivity,

> to mean autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment; and this in contrast with the conditioned response of persons to the demands made upon them by others, and by a man-made environment. I consider conviviality to be individual freedom realized in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value. I believe that, in any society, as conviviality is reduced below a certain level, no amount of industrial productivity can effectively satisfy the needs it creates among society's members (Illich, 1973, p. b II: Convivial reconstruction).

The elaboration of ecological practices is thus inevitably intertwined also with reflections on social aspects, and the redesign of our communities and system of governance and business is compelling. Over time, numerous authors, including Wahl, have emphasized the need for a genuine ecological awareness to facilitate the realization of renovated sustainable and egalitarian societies that challenge dominant power dynamics (Guattari, 2000; Wahl, 2020). Wahl proposes a perspective that draws upon biological knowledge, questioning the mainstream neo-Darwinian perspective that separates the individual organism from its environment and that presents scarcity and competition as the main drivers of evolution. According to him, scientific knowledge in the ecology field outdated these ideas, showing the importance of mechanisms like cooperation or symbiosis, and system thinking for long-term survival. Wahl reports the theory of the biologist Craig Holdrege that proposes a shift from the perception of organisms as separated individual entities towards a perspective in which «the organism *is* the interaction with other organisms within the context of a habitat» (Holdrege, 2000, p. 16; as cited in Wahl, 2020, p. 192). Wahl explains that Holdrege suggests adopting a perspective that views organisms as integral members of a differentiated whole. According to Whal, «The emerging understanding of life reflects the paradox of

existing simultaneously as individual participants in – and as subjective reflections of – the whole» (Wahl, 2020, p. 193). This renovated vision of our identity as biophysical beings can offer possibilities of renovation also in the field of the economy that is ruling and damaging our world, helping in the development of a more "life-friendly economy" (*Ivi*, p. 194). By observing the world through this perspective, we see the impact of collaborative interactions in the creation of resilient ecosystems, challenging the dominant behavior of competitive self-interest fostered by capitalist ideology. Wahl quotes the biologist Andreas Weber, who explains how Charles Darwin was influenced by the economic theories of his time, like Adam Smith's invisible hand and Robert Malthus' and his Malthusian trap, both founded on the concepts of competition and scarcity. However, Wahl continues, if we understand life and the world as a system as a whole, we can see the relationships that entail in it, and we can see how «life thrives through collaboration» (*Ibid.*). Solidarity is thus not merely a sentiment; it is the catalyst for a shared journey toward a more resilient future. To build the social transformation hoped in this rethinking of our world in the Capitalocene, we need to find again the true essence of the Anthropos, «understanding ourselves individually and collectively as 'being in and through relationships'» (*Ivi*, p.195). As Whal States,

> In the end it comes down to asking ourselves: will we continue to strive to out compete each other and in the process unravel the thread that all life depends upon? Or will we learn to collaborate in the healing of the whole through transformative innovation and regenerative design creating vibrant cultures and thriving communities for all? (*Ivi*, p. 193)

6.4 The role of institutions in *regenerative cultures* and the commons

One of the fundamental elements at the basis of the IPCC is the idea that mitigating the effects of climate change requires global cooperation and collective action among countries. However, institutions like governments – that potentially have the power to influence cultural narratives and economic dynamics – are often showing to be more interested in preserving the economy of their country in the capitalist sense, rather than truly promoting alternatives. Governments talk about sustainability but are not able to leave behind neoliberal policies and the unbearable ideal of economic growth that fosters competition among the same countries that should cooperate. The transformation

of these institutions is hence an essential component of transitioning towards regenerative ways of living.

The scientist Eric Ponthieu worked many years in EU policymaking and during these years, he felt that governments were failing in addressing the climate emergency. After this long experience, he wrote the book *The Climate Crisis, Democracy and Governance – Transition in Ten Steps: Action Points for Governments* (2020) in which he proposed a manifesto of 10 actions[11] that according to him are necessary to be taken by governments, businesses and communities. He believes that effective political leadership – one that places climate mitigation and adaptation at the center of their policy and their action – is vital. One of the necessary things he underpins to hope for a possibility to deal with the climate emergency is the necessity to foster a new economic system, that according to him should be brought about primarily by governments, supported by businesses, organizations and local communities:

> Governments' leadership must take different forms. Listening to scientists and the concern from the streets, they must unroll the necessary measures for an environmentally sustainable transformation of society that generates positive responses from its social and economic constituents. Instead of modestly attenuating the negative impacts of market driven economies, they must seize the initiative and establish a new economic system in the form of a well-being economy that brings benefits to all. At the heart of the required political decisions is the obligation to change lifestyles in a way that is relatively painless and positively socially endorsed (Ponthieu 2020, p. 2).

Ponthieu explains how the neoliberal economy paradigm, focused on growth rather than the well-being of people, is now revealing its inability to maintain the same promises anymore, nor for everyone (Ponthieu, 2020). Consequently, governments should engage in a deep transition at all levels, «Turning climate protection into a consensual transformation of society» (*Ibid*.) – to quote one of the ten points.

The ten action points of the manifesto – which focuses mainly on the European context – imply the importance of the role of the state, actually advocating for its re-

[11] The 10 points are: 1. Ambitious States in the Driving Seat; 2. Turning Climate Protection into a Consensual Transformation of Society; 3. Partnering with Civil Society and Citizens to Co-elaborate and Co-implement Policies; 4. Developing Capacity to Deliver the Long-Term Vision; 5. Developing Integrated and Holistic Approaches Underpinning the Long-Term Vision; 6; Mobilising the Business World; 7. Financing the Transition; 8. Acting Effectively at the Local Level; 9. Paving the Way for a Reform of Economic Policies; 10. Making Sustainable Consumption Mainstream and Popular (Ponthieu, 2020)

legitimization, as it «has been disputed and downgraded since the turn of the 80s to better reflect free-market economic principles» (*Ivi*, p. 62). Ponthieu clarifies that «Re-legitimising the role of the state means concretely that it has to be entrusted with the responsibility to design and implement a new social contract built upon environmental economic model and made up of ambitious, inclusive and voluntarist policies» (*Ivi*, p. 63). While a change at the institutional level is imperative in the Capitalocene – as this theory shows how the problem is a structural one – it is evident that progress in this regard is delayed. Governments carry the responsibility in promoting a virtuous cycle of constructive climate action, but I believe that even small realities far from the top-down system of regulation can have an impact in fostering new cultural and social values that challenge the dominant logic of capitalism. That's the heritage of the punk movement and its DIY ethos, that encourages people to forge their own rules when dissatisfied with the existing norms. If you don't like how something is done, do it in your own way! Coming from this background, the inhabitants of Mutonia created an interesting example of self-organization that provides insights into the relevance of a decentralized, adaptive, and collaborative approach. In this regard, it becomes pertinent to consider the theoretical contributions of Nobel Prize-winning political economist Elinor Ostrom. With her theorization on the commons, she went against the widespread theories about the management of the commons claiming that communities are not able to self-manage a common-pool resource sustainably, and always require an external top-down regulation to rule them in the use of CPRs:

> Hardin's tragedy of the commons, the prisoner's dilemma game, and Mancur Olson's logic of collective action. All three models lead to the prediction that those using such resources will not cooperate so as to achieve collective benefits. Further, individuals are perceived as being trapped in a static situation, unable to change the rules affecting their incentives. (Ostrom, 1990, p. 182)

These three theories «are used to justify the policy recommendation that external governmental authorities should impose solutions on individuals who jointly use CPRs» (*Ibid.*), as if without these hierarchical regulations people would only follow self-interest and fell into the model of free riding and inevitably overexploit a certain resource. The research by Ostrom shows that this is not true, demonstrating that a group of people (that she calls "participants") can successfully self-organize and sustainably

manage their commons through self-governed collective action. Hence, among public and the private, she introduces this third way to manage a common-pool resource, and she observed many case studies analyzing different aspects that influence the efficiency or the failure of this self-management. Remarkably, many communal projects have even demonstrated to be more effective than many governmental policies in safeguarding resources (Ostrom, 2009). Challenging this pessimistic idea that humans require a hierarchical power to rule their behaviors, she is questioning the assumption that the Anthropos are intrinsically flawed which could be made in the framework of the Anthropocene. However, the pervasive influence of capitalism as a global system has infiltrated various spheres where power structures and money are involved, and consequently, contemplating the role of institutions brings to light the necessity for decentralized governance structures that empower local communities and encourage collective decision-making in dealing with climate change. Moreover, while addressing this issue requires collective action on a global scale, the significance of bottom-up approaches has been underscored by numerous scholars, Ostrom as one of them, according to which there is no universal "one size fits all" solution, emphasizing the uniqueness of each location and context. This sentiment is echoed also in Wahl's notion of regenerative cultures, as he speaks about cultures in the plural, meaning that in each cultural and ecological context, different regenerative cultures will manifest (2016).

I think that the management of the park of Mutonia is an interesting case to be observed from this perspective for its decentralized approach that challenges top-down decision-making process, illustrating the potential for alternative models based on community.

6.5 Mutonia in the Commons' framework

Ostrom's work has demonstrated the effectiveness of community-driven, decentralized governance structures in ensuring the sustainable use of shared resources, shattering «the convictions of many policy analysts that the only way to solve CPR problems is for external authorities to impose full private property rights or centralized regulation» (Ostrom, 1990, p.182).

How can we link her work to the case study of Mutonia? In her framework, common-pool resources CPRs are resources that are non-excludable – that is to say, it is not easy to exclude individuals from using the resource – and rivalrous – meaning that

one person's use diminishes the availability of the resource for others, like for instance in pasturelands or fisheries. These resources are characterized by a shared nature, that makes them susceptible to the already mentioned 'tragedy of the commons' dilemma. In the case of Mutonia, I would like to reflect on the concept of soil and inhabitable land exploring their potential interpretation as a common good. I believe that the broader concept of soil can fall into her definition of a common-pool resource, given its physical finite nature and potential use by various individuals and organizations. Furthermore, soil is susceptible to degradation when it is poorly managed. Inhabitable land, however, is different from classic CPRs described in Ostrom's framework, as it is often subjected to private property rights or government regulations that establish ownership and land-use guidelines. Nevertheless, the '80s travelers and the political squatters' movements demonstrated that even private land can become a sort of communal land; managed – even just temporarily – as a common good. As explained by Silvia Federici, the squatters' movements

> have formed in many urban peripheries throughout the world since the 1980s, products of land expropriations but also signs of a growing population of city dwellers 'disconnected' from the formal world economy, now organizing their reproduction outside of state and market control (Caffentzis and Federici, 2014 p. i95).

With their practice of occupying abandoned buildings and spaces, squatters practically transformed private (and often forgotten) spaces into revitalized spaces of community, managed in a decentralized way through the optic of shared fruition, echoing the principles set forth by Ostrom for the sustainable management of common pool resources. Having obtained legal recognition as a sculpture park in 2013, Mutonia is not a squat. However, the history of its inhabitants and their connections to this rebellious movement is a fundamental element of its identity. Ostrom's principles, hence, can be extended to encompass the communal approach taken by the Mutoids toward the landscape of the ex-quarry. In the paper *Managing the landscape as a common good? Evidence from the case of "Mutonia" (Italy)* the researchers Mara Cerquetti, Caterina Nanni, and Carmen Vitale from the University of Macerata investigated the possible linkages between, or even a convergence of, the notions of landscape and common good, and it is noteworthy that they selected Mutonia as a case study for their research, posing the question whether its land could be classified as a common-pool resource

(2019). In Ostrom's framework, the management of CPR involves finding ways to ensure sustainable use and conservation of the resource over time, while also ensuring equitable access of the resource among different users. Cerquetti, Nanni, and Vitale explained how the Mutoids' settlement prevented the deterioration of the environment of the ex-quarry, contributing indeed to the regeneration of an abandoned area, and even increasing the biodiversity of the land. In this sense, we can observe how cooperation in the Mutoids' life is not only between human beings but also with the other-than-human, as Mutonia is made also by its vegetation and its nonhuman animal inhabitants.

In our conversation, Lyle recalled that when they first arrived there, the quarry was a desert, there were no trees and no grass, just a lot of piles of gravel. The Mutoids

Figure 5. Collaborations in Mutonia. My picture, 2023

planted trees and plants and then left them to grow freely. Now plants grow around and even inside the sculptures, not as a sign of abandonment but in the sense of living together and transforming each other.

Moreover, the presence of the Mutoids and their art has brought benefits also for the cultural aspect of Santarcangelo di Romagna and has pedagogical effects, like common goods, in which participants found a strong sense of community that influences also the non-participants that are often invited to join (Cerquetti, Nanni, and

Vitale, 2019). The researchers concluded that Mutonia is not properly a common good as in Ostrom, but its peculiar management gave similar results to the ones expected by the management of commons. Moreover, Mutonia proves to meet certain principles that Ostrom identifies as affecting the likelihood of successful commons management institutions, facilitating cooperation, and encouraging responsible resource use (Ostrom, 2009). The ten second-level variables that she lists as favorable include the limited size of the resource system – that in Mutonia is a well-delimited area with well-known boundaries – and the small number of users – which at the moment are about thirty people. However, not even all the Mutoids live there permanently, as the Mutoid Waste Company counts now actually hundreds of members around the world. Anyway, not everyone can just decide to become a Mutoid and move to Mutonia with their van, so the space maintains a certain level of exclusivity. Usually, new people end up moving there after knowing them for a while, and after showing to share certain values. This reflects another element that for Ostrom is important in favoring a successful self-management of a common, what she calls "norms/social capital" (Ostrom, 2009, p. 421). According to Ostrom, sharing moral and ethical ideas is positive for a group of users because it enhances mutual trust and makes confrontation easier. This links with the next factor, defined "collective-choice rules" (*Ibid*.), that in Mutonia is seen in their way of making decisions together. Mutonia and its landscape are thus perceived as a common good, even if it arises on land initially owned by private citizens and subsequently acquired by the municipality of Santarcangelo, which granted usage permits to the Mutoids, and even if it incorporates private usage by the Mutoids within their homes. This arrangement is intertwined with their public engagement in managing the park as an artistic space open to visitors, creating a space that fosters positive values and shares beneficial externalities with people outside (Cerquetti, Nanni, Vitale, 2019).

I believe it is interesting to observe how these positive shared aspects are often typical of unconventional spaces like social centers and illegal occupation. Social centers – that often arise in occupied abandoned buildings, private or public – embody in a way the dream of the affirmation of commons over private property. The book *The Squatters' Movement in Europe Commons and Autonomy as Alternatives to Capitalism*, published by the Squatting Europe Kollective, explores the political squat movement in Europe and North America in urbanized countries, where

> in the last four decades the implementation of neoliberal policies, gentrification and other processes of social displacement and segregation, the shrinking stock of social housing, the privatisation of public services and spaces, and the commodification of larger aspects of our lives, seriously threaten any aspiration to a just city (Fainstein, 2010; Harvey, 1973) or to fulfil the 'right to the city' (Lefebvre, 1968). (2014, p. 2).

In this context, political squatters defend the idea that the right of a shelter should not be subjected to the business logic as in capitalist society and they aim to prefigure alternatives that transcend this unjust system. Moreover, the movement addresses more than just housing concerns; it also emphasizes the significance and entitlement to free communal spaces for interaction and cultural exchange, as it is seen in the social centers frequently established in the occupied buildings:

> Regardless of the kind of social needs behind squatting, political squatters argue that it is not legitimate to leave private property abandoned. The right of use should be prior to the defense of absolute private property. Making profit from private property does not justify social inequalities regarding access to housing or social spaces" (*Ivi*, p.3).

The people living in these places are often stigmatized as being freeloaders, parasites of society who simply do not want to work or pay rent, but they actually often demonstrate a deep commitment to the well-being and cultural vitality of their community. Social centers' residents usually actively engage in meaningful community-building initiatives, organizing events or workshops open to anybody. By fostering an environment of shared learning and collaboration, these spaces become powerful platforms for cultural exchange and social interaction. Tommy shared with me the memories of the many concerts organized by the social centers he used to attend in his youth, and he recalled how these events were made highly accessible, with only a symbolic entry fee to cover expenses. The driving force behind their approach was the ideal of the right of culture for everyone. It seems that the idea of a world without governors and without power relations fosters a sense of responsibility towards others (Armiero, 2021). However, we see how realities such as social centers are often neglected by authorities, which in their repression support the capitalist idea of entertainment as business and not as an opportunity for community creation. As a matter of fact, «Capitalist development requires the destruction of communal properties» (Federici, p. 87). In this sense,

> Squatting is the most salient symbol of opposition against the damages caused by an unjust distribution of wealth and rampant urban speculation. Living with others without exploitation and being efficient about the preservation of collective needs by making use of the dark holes in urban capitalism (the vacant spaces), squatters offer a political example which is easy to imitate. If the actual circumstances of vacancy and squatting cannot always define a frontal and decisive alternative to capitalism, in most of the cases political squatters, their multiple practices and their critical discourses represent a valuable symptom and indication of how to overcome capitalist society. (Squatting Europe Kollective, 2014, p. 8)

The case of Mutonia is quite unusual in this framework because the Mutoids' history of travelers and rave organizers inserts them in the squatter movement, but in their Italian settlement they found the support of the institutions that normally repress these kinds of illegitimate realities like social centers. The permanent village of Mutonia did not rise properly in a legitimate way, but it was not even an illegal occupation. They were invited temporarily and hosted in the ex-quarry by the Municipality of Santarcangelo di Romagna, which subsequently helped them to find a way to remain there. First, the Municipality managed to become the owner of the land, then they helped them gain recognition as a sculpture park, which finally avoided the risk of eviction. With the agreement stipulated in 2013, the park was given collective-use status, while of course preserving the privacy of the homes of the Mutoids. This agreement delineated tasks and responsibilities for both the Mutoids – which must ensure the artistic work and the care of the park and its public use – and the Municipality of Santarcangelo di Romagna – which commits to support them in their initiatives (Cerquetti, Nanni, and Vitale, 2019). The administration of the park became a form of "shared administration" (*Ivi*, p. 9) between these two parties. This is a nice example of how even governments and official institutions can support bottom-up initiatives even when they do not really fit in their system but prove to be beneficial. The conclusion of the study by Vitale, Cerquetti, and Nanni points out that Mutonia poses itself as «a model for the sustainable management and use of the landscape» (*Ivi*, p.1) that can be translated also into the discourses about effective climate governance, highlighting the benefit of a bottom-up approach that encourages participatory decision-making involving different stakeholders. This idea of a comprehensive governance is advocated also in the regenerative cultures described by Wahl and by Ponthieu in the points "Partnering with

Civil Society and Citizens to Co-elaborate" and "Co-implement Policies and Acting effectively at the local level", where he claims that «Governments and regions also have to support local and sub-local multi-stakeholder networks bringing together communities, citizens and civil society» (Ponthieu, 2020, p.5).

Commons encompass distinct modes of participatory governance reflecting the needs and the skills of its commoners. They are not private nor public, «They are relational thresholds and spaces of radical openness reflecting the autonomy of the collective» (Mollona, 2021, p.10). The philosopher Massimo de Angelis describes commons as

> social systems formed by three interconnected elements: (1) a commonwealth, that is a set of resources held in common and governed by (2) a community of commoners who also (3) engage in the praxis of commoning to reproduce their lives and their commonwealth, social labour and correspondent forms of social cooperation. (2021, p. 643)

Hence, many scholars, including Armiero, agree and believe that commons are not just material goods managed in an alternative way to private property, but they are the same relationships that they generate. Armiero described commoning as a practice «which (re) produce commons, transforming it from a "thing" into a collective practice, a relationship. […] we can say that commons are both what we share and the social infrastructure for sharing it» (Armiero, p. 13). Only by engaging in this collective practice we can sabotage the «capitalist institutions of money, work, property and market consumption and the associated ideologies of scarcity, competition and self-interest» (*Ivi*, p.) that is at the heart of the Capitalocene.

The philosopher Roberto Mancini thinks that thanks to the possibility of what he calls a "coral thought", society can start to see itself as one and can start dreaming with a new collective hope. Between 2007-2009, he published thirty-three short essays for the Italian journal *Altraeconomia*, in the section called *Idee Eretiche*, where he discussed the illegitimate nature of our actual dominant economic system, with the intent to foster critical reflection and a new narrative about an "economy of relationship, of care, and of common good", against this economy that systemically exploits and destroys. He underlines the importance of recognizing the possibility of a new economy, that here and there has already arisen; an economy whose semantic field

would be very different from the capitalist's one, including words relating to conviviality and well-being, like gift, spirituality, and justice. These are elements that are part of Wahl's concept of regenerative cultures, in which collaboration would bring abundance for everyone. According to Wahl, to move toward a regenerative world,

> We need to reflect on how we will have to change individually and collectively to create this future. […] We need to ask important questions about why and what if. We need to rediscover the common ground of human community. This will enable us to co-create a future worth living in. We need a collective narrative about who we are and why we are worth sustaining, a shared story powerful enough to keep us all innovative, creative and collaborative as we question into the what, how, when and where (2016, p. 16).

By questioning our world in this sense and listening deeply, we can understand that we are connected to each other and to the nonhuman world. As Tsing says in *The Mushroom at the End of The World,* «the time has come for new ways of telling true stories beyond civilization first principle» (2015, p. VII) that separated humans from nature. I believe it is remarkable that new spaces of liberation that are arising from an anarchic/punk background, for instance Agripunk Onlus in Tuscany, are pursuing an ideal of 'total liberation', where the critique to social aspects entangles actively with multispecies relations. In this context, the commons would also include nonhuman entities, like in a sort of compost community described by Haraway (2016). While observing alternative agricultural practices, the anthropologist Kristina Lyons powerfully wrote that «transformative potentiality is not a human privilege, but always a relational matter dispersed in the connections and labor among people as well as other beings and things» (Lyons, 2020, p. 134).

CONCLUSION

[…] Sometimes you felt so small, so a t o m i s e d
your mind encased in iron – no, you couldn't possibly secure
humanity's survival alone!
But already millions were rising right around the globe […] 35
Helen Moore, *Spaced Out*

I personally learned about the term Anthropocene quite late, in 2019, when I was living in Bologna and Fondazione MAST proposed a multimedia exposition called like this. The protagonists were the photographs by Edward Burtynsky and the movie he created together with Jennifer Baichwal and Nicholas de Pencier, called *ANTHROPOCENE: The Human Epoch* (2018), portraying the transformation that activities like industrialization, deforestation, mining, urbanization, and agriculture provoked on planet Earth. The large format of the photographs and the big screen where the movie was projected contributed to conveying the immensity of those alterations, leaving the spectator with a sense of defeat. «Human activities» – states the Summary for Policymakers in the IPCC AR6 – «[...]have unequivocally caused global warming […] » (2023, p. 4). So, is this it? Does the main feature of an epoch we decided to call by our name – the "Human Epoch" – really have to be destruction? Do we really want to self-annihilate like this, without giving ourselves any chance of redemption?

The proposal of the term Capitalocene is instead a proposal of commitment to change, as it truly gives some guidance on what to work on. With this term, we can escape the generalized (and anthropocentric) notion of the "Anthropos" and embark on a deep analysis of what enabled certain human activities to become so careless of the ecosystemic functioning of our planet, and hence the unfolding of the current environmental crisis. The Capitalocene argument moves the focus from the abstract entity of undifferentiated humanity to a historical subject and highlights the crucial role of capitalism – and its relations of commodification and accumulation – in this crisis. Many of the critiques that are made to the term Anthropocene find in this alternative a resolution, and, more importantly, a more substantial possibility of change is encouraged. In this perspective, the search for solutions does not stop at the

symptomatic level, identifying the problem of unsustainable activities in their emissions of greenhouse gasses, but questions the very dynamics that are beyond these activities at the structural level. The main point, which with the notion of Anthropocene is still in a way carried on, turns out to be the separation between Nature and Culture, a dichotomy that entailed the instauration of relationships of power, namely the deliberate dominance of the category of Humans over the Other-Than-Human. This separation became the breeding ground for practices of othering that characterize capitalist relations, in which nature and "the other" become something to be exploited for the accumulation of wealth of a few.

The term 'economy' comes from the Greek word *oikonomia*, composed by *oikos* (household) and *nemein* (manage), literally meaning "the management of the household". How come that this discipline for the administration of our home, the planet, became just about money and monetary interests, unmindful of the true functioning of its ecosystems and its finite resources? It is now more evident than ever that this administration is not sustainable. The crucial point emphasized in my thesis is that in order to address climate change effectively, we cannot avoid a reflection on this conception of economy and its influence. Effective mitigation and adaptation are unattainable as long as we uphold an economic model that contradicts ecological principles in the name of the ideal of endless economic growth. The pursuit of capital accumulation, grounded on individualistic and selfish ethos, stands in direct opposition to the transformative actions required to address the root causes of the environmental crisis. The Capitalocene argument indicates that to develop ecological practices and environmentalist policies, the reflection cannot stop just at scientific data about greenhouse gasses, we need a transformation also at the social and cultural levels. However, not everyone is convinced that environmentalism has to be necessarily anti-capitalist. That is why I decided to present the particular experience of the Mutoid Waste Company as a case study for my dissertation.

By observing this artistic collective, which originated as a rebellious movement against certain aspects of neoliberal England of the '80s, I wanted to find evidence for my hypothesis that just by opposing certain dynamics of the capitalist mode of organizing life, one would almost inevitably develop a "greener" lifestyle, as intended in the common discourses about sustainability. Their practice of recycling scrap material for their artistic pieces and everyday things arose primarily as a strategy to be more independent from monetary needs, eliminating the necessity to buy new stuff –

and hence the necessity to have a regular salaried job – rather than environmentalist ethos. However, this philosophy of life, unplugged from the imperatives of "Produce, consume, die", provocatively sung in the 80s by the Italian group CCCP, brought this group of people to establish a lifestyle that appears very interesting for the environmentalist discourse. Their recycling and their opposition to an overconsumption attitude were already very eloquent for the purpose of my research. Nevertheless, what I discovered through my investigation and my interviews was a more profound idea of ecological thought, one that the still anthropocentric perspective of the Anthropocene lacks to tackle. I found in fact support for the theory of the Wasteocene proposed by Marco Armiero, according to which «capitalist institutions of money, work, property and market consumption and the associated ideologies of scarcity, competition and self-interest» (2021, p.13.) are the foundations for relations with the other – being it an object, place, nonhuman being, or another human – based on a notion of value and hierarchy that produces waste in all dimensions. Being ecological became in this framework the opposition to these kinds of relationships, understanding our world as the ecosystem that it is and our essence as part of its web of connections. This would entail a perspective that values and respects other beings in their integrity, leaving behind individualistic and exploiting attitudes. This means abandoning the mindset of the settler, which prioritizes the dominance of one group over others, and reimagining our conception of abundance and richness. Being ecological does not have to take the semblance of an eremitic life made of sacrifices, but would mean cultivating other aspects such as reciprocity, collaboration, and mutual care. The Wasteocene theory, inserted in the framework of the Capitalocene, shows how the ecological crisis we face today is in fact not just a matter of environmental degradation, but a fundamental crisis of relationships, and calls for a paradigm shift in our understanding of our true place in the world. This would involve a total reconfiguration of our systems of governance, economics, and social organization.

Driven by the ideal of freedom, the Mutoids' peculiar way of relating to waste is just the tip of the iceberg of an approach to the world that permeates all aspects of their life. By opposing the capitalist ideal of monetary wealth, the Mutoids could construct deep relationships that go beyond business logic or power dynamics, and create a small society based on the sense of community. Their lifestyle is simple, as they live in their small mobile homes and they try to avoid buying stuff, but they do not feel as if they were sacrificing anything. Discourses about degrowth always relate to questions about

happiness and well-being, but what is at stake here is the real meaning we give to these two concepts. By cultivating the richness of community, it is possible to envision a society decolonized from the craving for an economic growth only possible at the expense of others.

Therefore, what I ended up focusing my reflection on is the importance of relationships, on how we relate with what is other than us. Drafting from the theory of Marco Armiero, I could explore the aspect of commonality in Mutonia from its perspective on commoning practices, which according to him «aim to reproduce resources and communities and in doing so, they dismantle the othering project, create communities, and have the potential to undermine the Wasteocene regime» (2021, p.47). With this in mind, I could see how the experience of the Mutoid Waste Company, which can still be subject to some criticism if we observe it only from the sole perspective of emissions, poses itself as an embryonal example of true environmentalism, one about connections and creativeness. That was also the message of the video *Voi la vedete? Vous la voyez?* by XR that I quoted in the beginning, which concluded like this:

> Can you see it? Can you see this other society? It would no longer be based on competition and exploitation. Can you see the glimpse of it? A united, resilient society, compatible with the living world. Do you want it, this other society? It's time to rebel (Extinction Rebellion UK, 2020. 3:43-4:23)

It is, in fact, time to rebel. I want to stress once again that with this I am not saying that all the responsibility falls on the shoulders of the individuals – as governments and businesses are the main subjects that should change – but I want to claim the importance of understanding of how much this unjust system entered our mind, and how we can stop supporting it. Capitalism is often depicted as something impossible to eradicate, as it is a sort of divine power that is above us, on which we have no power at all. Once I ingenuously joked with a friend of mine by saying that we could just print more money to solve many problems, and I immediately received a lesson on how that would cause the value of money to drop and on other economic theories that I was actually already aware of. What this interaction made me really think about is how deeply we are regulated by this system, as it is an unalterable and inevitable physical system. However, capitalism is just something we invented. It is a narrative; it is just a story.

And clearly, stories can be very powerful in shaping the world, depending on how much we believe and participate in it. However, other stories can be invented, stories of solidarity and care. In her essays collection *Re-enchanting the World. Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*, the philosopher and sociologist Silvia Federici elucidates that throughout human history, the principle of commoning has always been a core element in almost every society (2018). I believe that this insight relates to the argument supporting the term Capitalocene as it directs attention to the systemic changes that led to environmental degradation, social inequality, and the concentration of power, emphasizing the role of capitalism in shaping the contemporary crises we face and not implying an intrinsic flawless nature of human beings. Federici highlights that «not only have commons existed for thousands of years, but elements of a communally based society are still around us, though subject to constant attack that recently has intensified» (Federici, 2018, p.87). All around the world, many initiatives linked with commons are proliferating; Federici listed examples like communal gardens, time banks or the squatter's movement, not just as isolated bubbles but as real alternatives to the neoliberal organization of life in capitalism. These experiments are «a political frame for thinking of alternatives to capitalism» (*Ibid.*). That is why I thought that it was important to bring a case study to observe; we need to see that other possibilities of life are not only possible but also already happening, as «At the source of people's engagement is their belief that it is worth a try» (Ponthieu, 2020, p. 53). We need to hear stories like these to truly understand that our imaginary has been colonized by an ideology, and as such it can be decolonized. We can become resisting subjects to this tyranny that describes the Anthropos as individualistic and selfish beings. We, humans, are not inevitably villains; we are able to collaborate, and we should play this capacity as our card for survival, rather than competition.

In my opinion, the Mutoids are like the Matsutake, showing the «kind of collaborative survival» (Tsing, p. 4) we need to live on a contaminated planet. That's the message of hope I would like to bring with my thesis. We have to accept that our existence entails a certain level of resource usage, but we can change the way we relate with the outer world. By rediscovering our potential for community – not only with other humans but also with other-than-human – we can imagine a possible different future even in this damaged world.

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