

# Thinking Like a Mountain

Supplement

## Thinking Like a Mountain

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“O land that the Serio bathes and the Brembo floods, you show your mountains and valleys on one side and your wide green plain on the other, now broad, now sublime, now deep [...].”

(Torquato Tasso, *A Bergamo*,  
16<sup>th</sup> century)

### Walking with the landscape

The area encompassing the city of Bergamo and the surrounding province is sometimes given the alternative name “Orobic” due to the Alpine arc of the so-called “Orobic Alps.” The name relates back to the ancient pre-Roman population who lived in this part of Italy. It is an area of extraordinary geological and anthropological complexity, where the high northern massifs link up with the large industrial settlements of the plain—which replaced the green fields eulogized by Tasso in the late 16th century—

# Thinking Like a Mountain

through a dense network of valleys shaped by human actions.

Over recent years I have walked a great deal in this landscape of transitions and contrasts, visiting towns and shelters, through woodlands of pine, larch and spruce attacked by the auger beetle, making my way along the rocky upland paths and the snow-covered gorges, and sometimes sleeping under canvas or outdoors. Walking is an act that drives us to renegotiate our own position in the world. Every step, if listened to, affords an opportunity to open up to the relationships that bind us to the Earth. The artist Michael Höpfner, who based his work on the walks he would take, loved to say that walking is a form of knowledge; to acquire it, you have to stop reading and start putting one foot in front of the other.

These personal experiences are intertwined with reflections that, as a museum, we began to flesh out in 2020, at the height of the pandemic, which left an indelible mark on Bergamo. Since then, especially through Radio GAMeC, we have questioned the role of the institution from various perspectives. How, in this day and age, can a museum act in a more situated and sustainable way? And, along this trajectory, which opportunities and experiences can the languages of the visual offer us? Out of these questions—and this direct knowledge that walking has given me—came the idea of the *Biennale delle Orobie* or “Orobie Biennial”: a multi-site project, arising out of the desire to recognize in the landscape of Bergamo not only a context but an active partner and, in a certain sense, a teacher.

# Thinking Like a Mountain

The chosen title—*Thinking Like a Mountain*—was borrowed from the collection of memories and reflections written by Aldo Leopold, titled *A Sand County Almanac* (1949). It is a book that fell into my hands during the first lockdown, thanks to four old friends from Prato, who had recently put together a new, complete edition of it, not shorn of the chapters on hunting, as had been the case in the first Italian edition.<sup>1</sup> It is in that posthumous volume that Leopold—an American ecologist, forester, and hunter—describes the episode underpinning his “land ethic”: the killing of a pack of wolves, carried out to protect the deer and flocks on which the local economy depended.

In the eyes of a dying female wolf—in the extinguishing of that “fierce green fire”—Leopold recognizes the myopia of his own anthropocentric gaze: he had always thought of “nature” as a set of resources, not as a balanced system. Out of this experience came his paradigm shift: the awareness that every natural element has an intrinsic value, regardless of its direct utility for mankind. As Leopold wrote: “I now suspect that just as a deer herd lives in mortal fear of its wolves, so does a mountain live in mortal fear of its deer. And perhaps with better cause, for while a buck pulled down by wolves can be replaced in two or three years, a range pulled down by too many deer may fail of replacement in as many decades.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). First published 1949 by Oxford University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 122.

# Thinking Like a Mountain

Anticipating many of the modern-day ecological preoccupations—even if he was a white man of the early twentieth century, and so still shot-through with a thoroughly anthropocentric culture—Leopold invites us to move from a mechanistic to an organicist model, from an extractive vision towards a regenerative one, from a fragmented time to the long term. As the author put it, “only the mountain has lived long enough to listen objectively to the howl of a wolf”. Only the perspective of the mountain, with its depth of time and of geology, can help us to understand the ultimate reasons for the existence of the wolf and can offer us a yardstick for grasping the deepest sense of our living together.

In the trajectory of the Orobic Biennial, Leopold’s book served as a conduit for the desire to adopt a multi-focal viewpoint on the land in which we live and on what we do there. It is a view that is at once close-up—as necessitated by the practice of walking—and “from a certain distance,” being the physical and geological distance from which the mountain teaches us to look. If, for Leopold, “thinking like a mountain” meant appreciating the deep interconnectedness of the elements of the ecosystem—an invitation to contemplate nature and its creatures as an organism blessed with equilibrium, harmony and beauty, on which our own integrity and health depend—during our journey his story embodied the attempt to conceive of ourselves and to act as a collective body, as an organic, multi-species system; one capable of combining a more conscious thinking-in-the-round with an imaginative, creative, and adventurous form of local action.

# Thinking Like a Mountain

## Being in “our time”

“Nobody lives everywhere; everybody lives somewhere,” wrote Donna Haraway in *Staying with the Trouble* (2016).<sup>3</sup> Every consciousness is situated: it arises from a body, from a place, from a time. This awareness has guided our conception of the Orobie Biennale from the outset. The major international exhibitions aim to achieve globe-spanning visibility and to work on the most extensive scale possible: an ambition that, as the years go by, has shown itself to be less and less sustainable, and has by now become anachronistic. This state of affairs generated the idea of experimenting with the alternative biennial model of a situated, relational platform.

The choice of the title in Italian—*Il Biennale delle Orobie*, with the masculine definite article, rather than its customary feminine equivalent, *La Biennale*—was an attempt to stress a deliberate distancing from the standard format. Accordingly, the program for our Biennial was viewed not as a cyclical event but as an extensive process, distributed over two years: a sort of local workshop, based on the engagement between artists and local communities, conceived on a variable scale, proportionate to the (human and economic) resources of each individual context. Our intention was not to “go there to do something,” but rather to “try to be there.” Being with the time, with the people, with the complexity of the landscape. Every project thus endeavored to take shape *together with* a place, not simply *in* a place, accepting the idea that listening and relating

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<sup>3</sup> Donna Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 31.

# Thinking Like a Mountain

require slowness and reciprocity. Collaboration is an art based on waiting, and so, to paraphrase Anna Tsing, it can be said that significant links are not imposed from above, but grow from below.<sup>4</sup>

For this reason, our method incorporated various phases: meeting and getting to know each other, facilitated by local mediators; the sharing of requirements and intentions; joint development; the selection of the artists; definition; and, last of all, co-production. It is a pathway far-removed from the idea of arriving somewhere with a pre-packaged product and a pre-defined budget. It is a method that, inevitably, takes time.

And it was precisely time that showed itself to be the most fragile element. Taking more time—measured on the rhythms of inter-relation, not on those of production and consumption—is today an act that is as crucial as it is difficult. As Byung-Chul Han has observed time and again, time today is no longer experienced as duration; it is fragmented into functional moments.<sup>5</sup> Immersed in an accelerated temporality, we struggle to pause, to let things mature in their own time. We have borne witness to this numerous times: not just with artists, often forced to reconcile research, work and a lack of financial security, but also with communities, immersed in dense schedules and

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<sup>4</sup> See Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Numerous books by Byung-Chul Han have described the dimension of fragmented time, from *The Scent of Time*, trans. Daniel Steuer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017) to *The Burnout Society*, trans. Erika Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), and *Non-Things: Upheaval in the Lifeworld*, trans. Daniel Steuer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022).

# Thinking Like a Mountain

ever more compressed lifetimes. We all find it a challenge to allow ourselves time to pause.

And yet, it is perhaps precisely in this difficulty that it is possible to measure the ultimate meaning of our endeavors. Trying to stay a little longer, and not to flee into the rhythm of the event, has become for us an act at once political and poetic: a way to reaffirm that culture is not consumed but cultivated; that the encounter with a place or with a community—of whatever nature it may be—is not a form of exposure, but a process; and that every process demands shared attention, care and time. It was in this slowing down, which today is almost impossible, that the *Biennale delle Orobie* tried to find its own form.

## “More than human” communities

A further distinctive element of *Thinking Like a Mountain* was the broadening-out of the concept of community beyond the dimension circumscribed by mankind. The program recognized the existence of cohabitation networks that include various life forms—animals, plants, water, soils, and atmospheres—with which we share the space and time of existence. In the wake of the reflections of Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing and Donna Haraway, together with those of other scholars, thinkers, curators, and mountain practitioners—brought on board through public meetings and contributions to the magazine, edited by Valentina Gervasoni—the project tried to reinstate value to the ecological interdependences that bind mankind to the

# Thinking Like a Mountain

multiple agents of the living world.

Again in *Staying with the Trouble*, Haraway invites us to make kin beyond the confines of the species, recognizing that living and dying together is the fundamental condition of every life form on the Earth. Tsing, for her part, recommends observing the world as a set of multispecies assemblages, in which survival and transformation derive from cooperation more than from competition. These perspectives offered a fertile theoretical frame through which to think about the Orobie area not just as a simple backdrop to human action, but as a fabric of symbiotic relationships, in which rocks, plants, water and animals participate actively in the construction of the sense of place.

In entering into a dialogue with the local communities, many of the artists involved explored this vision through forms of research that questioned the relationships between the human species and the other species of the living world. In certain works, listening to the landscape became a tool for ecological and poetic investigation; in others, the attention shifted to the processes of mutualism and coexistence that make life together possible. The project thus highlighted how every creative act can translate into an exercise of shared attention, capable of giving voice to those presences that habitually escape human perception.

*Thinking Like a Mountain* proposed a model of coexistence in which the human does not dominate but is interwoven with the collective breath of all species. The animal perspective, for example, emerged in numerous projects, in

# Thinking Like a Mountain

different ways: sometimes more visionary, in the search for a relationship between equals; and sometimes more critical with respect to the interaction with human beings.

The birds in the performance titled *Que este mundo permanezca* (May This World Remain) –conceived by the Argentine artist Mercedes Azpilicueta for the Biodiversity Oasis in Brembate, a natural expanse at the center of an environmental recovery project, today repopulated by a large variety of flora and fauna—speak of possible futures, unexplored potential, and physical and symbolic transformations. Azpilicueta concentrated in particular on the kingfisher, the green woodpecker, and the hoopoe: three birds that live today in that area and which have had to face, over the years, numerous man-made changes, developing over time new ways to live in the environment.

Birds also appear in the work of Agnese Galiotto, who in the medium-length film *Migratori* (Migrators) and in the fresco *La montagna non esiste* (The Mountain Does Not Exist), painted in Almenno San Bartolomeo, presses ahead with her exploration of the complex interaction between human being and animal, starting from the encounter of a group of ornithologists with a number of examples of different species of migratory avifauna. Thanks to the involvement of a bird-ringing network scattered along the migratory route that traverses Italy lengthwise, Galiotto meditates on the restlessness of the animals and on the variations to which their flight paths are subject due to climate change.

# Thinking Like a Mountain

Rather than romanticizing the world of animals and of nature, artists described the complicated and often conflicted cohabitation of human and animal communities, as in the case of *Paraflu*, the film project by Michela de Mattei and Invernomuto, which charts the return of the wolf to the Lombard Alps. The film, part-documentary and part-abstract representation, problematizes the co-existence of humans and the wild world, interpreting this relationship through an analogy between the wolf and the magician—the wolf seen as a trickster who knows how to confuse and outflank its prey as well as the observer. The complexity of life within an Alpine ecosystem is also described by Giulio Squillacciotti's short film *MUT*, which captures the everyday life of a family on the mountain pastures of Mezzoldo as they care for the land, rear productive livestock, and engage in reciprocal adaptation with their surroundings. The three films were screened in old cinemas and theaters in the villages of Branzi and Vedeseta.

The world of plants is another recurring presence in the projects conceived for *Thinking Like A Mountain*, often in the guise of an autonomous subject endowed with agency, which knows how to offer new pathways for reimagining different modes of coexistence between species. For instance, in Bergamo's botanical garden the Tunisian artist Yesmine Ben Khelil happened upon acanthus, a plant that grows wild in her hometown, in Tunisia, and in the urban landscape of the Italian city. The discovery, which led her to look at the natural world as a store of memories and stratifications of identity, provided the *raison d'être* to establish a dialogue between different places and cultures

# Thinking Like a Mountain

through painting, and to reflect on the migratory dynamics that are a feature of the Mediterranean.

The relationship between human and plant communities is interpreted through a dystopian prism in Agostino Iacurci's neon installation *Dry Days, Tropical Nights*, which imagines a scintillating, disquieting oasis, a portent of the transformation of a landscape subject to imminent desertification. The water crisis returns in the work of the Angolan-Portuguese artist Ana Silva, who exposes the denial of drinking water to some of the poorest communities in Angola, using embroidery not only to tell stories but also as a tool for the transmission of memory and as a practice of collective resistance.

Moreover, the mechanical crows conceived by Marta Cuscunà warn us about the world to come. Housed in the little old Art Nouveau theater of the Circolo della Fratellanza in Casnigo, the crows discuss the damage to the planet perpetrated by humans and—inspired by feminist and interspecies sci-fi narratives—they prophesy possible futures in which ecosystems and progress become harmoniously realigned. In contrast, the metamorphic future is already a reality in the works of the Atelier dell'Errore collective, which are inhabited by mutant creatures and polymorphic animals that live on the edge, on the threshold of reality, and which describe unexplored desires by means of myth and experimental storytelling.

Different perspectives on futures yet to be invented are indicated by the regenerative capacity of *Mother of Millions*

# Thinking Like a Mountain

(*Kalanchoe delagoensis*), a plant native to Madagascar that is able to reproduce by creating clones of its leaves. It inspired Gaia Fugazza to create a large-scale sculpture adopting anthropomorphic forms, the arms of which flower with shoot-children. In an embrace addressed to the community, *Mother of Millions*—sculpted as part of a residence in the Val Taleggio, organized by the NAHR association—invites us to rethink what is human within a constantly transforming ecosystem, connected to a multiplicity of other subjects, in a dense web of relations.

Last but not least, a number of artists conducted research into the paradigm shift in the way in which we look at and think about the landscape, starting from an engagement with the classical and modern traditions of illustration. Julius von Bismarck created a painting that is both *of* and *in* the landscape, depicting a portion of the Dossena mines with black and white lines that make the landscape itself disappear; a subtraction that reminds us how the representation of nature has always been filtered by anthropocentric idealizations and perspectives. Analogously, Pedro Vaz addresses traditional views of the landscape, where the mountain is always shown as monumental and distant from the observer. Vaz contrasts this gaze with an embodied viewpoint: that of the hiker who, on the slopes of the iconic Mount Presolana, has the irregular rockface for a surrounding horizon. It is an invitation to look at the mountain not with detachment—considering it to be separate from us—but with a readiness to enter into it and to be *in* the mountain.

# Thinking Like a Mountain

## Like intertwined ropes

Another distinctive characteristic of the program was the way in which certain projects wrestled with the theme of generations, identifying in the continuity of the life cycles a lens through which to rethink the relationship between culture and environment. During the biennial, the works of the artists and of the communities involved gradually highlighted the process-based and generative dimension of time, viewed not as a resource to be managed but as a shared terrain of transformation. In this sense, the thinking of Tim Ingold provided an important frame of reference in theoretical terms.

In his book *The Rise and Fall of Generation Now* (2023), the anthropologist opposes the idea of the generation as a separate temporal layer—a concept typical of the digital imaginary and of linear evolutionary models—proposing instead the metaphor of the intertwined fibers of a rope.<sup>6</sup> This image suggests a conception of time and of transmission based on interconnection, on reciprocal learning, and on continual transformation. For Ingold, human beings are part of a vital continuum that encompasses all life forms and their temporalities. This vision, which has for decades now undergirded an ecological and relational approach to anthropology, has recently been radicalized into an explicit critique of big science and the dominant technological culture, which are accused of pursuing an “escape from Planet Earth” rather

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<sup>6</sup> Tim Ingold, *The Rise and Fall of Generation Now* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2023).

# Thinking Like a Mountain

than its regeneration.

As Ingold stated in an interview, “The entire digital world is not even remotely sustainable in terms of its consumption of energy and raw materials, and the pollution it generates, and it will not last beyond this century.”<sup>7</sup> Ingold’s vision of the development of the tech sector has become so radical as to lead him—in an apparent challenge to the epistemic limits of our current intellectual capacity—to imagine a future “beyond the digital” and to condemn the post-humanist vision, which is guilty, in his eyes, of having compromised the ability of our species to come up with a pro-active, positive role for itself in the ecological regeneration of the planet. What Ingold hopes for is the recovery of an alternatively anthropocentric vision of the world, “non-dominant” in nature and capable of giving faith back to the future and courage back to personal and collective action.

From this perspective we can read some of the intergenerational working practices that involved artists, cultural mediators, and inhabitants of the Orobie area on the occasion of *Thinking Like a Mountain*. The collaborations prioritized processes of mutual learning and the informal transmission of knowledge. Ingold’s approach resonates within this vision. The image of the intertwined rope became a metaphor for the generative relationships that the Orobie Biennial sought to trigger: not a sum total of individual events but a fabric of experiences and interactions. Thus the emerging idea of the future is not that of a horizon to be

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Tim Ingold, by Federica Lavarini, “La Lettura,” *Corriere della Sera*, August 25, 2024, 25.

# Thinking Like a Mountain

planned out, but that of a field of possibilities in a state of becoming, generated by the encounter between different generations, languages, and life forms.

*Massi Erratici* (Erratic Boulders) was an emblematic project created by Studio Ossidiana in collaboration with Frantoio Sociale that originated from a workshop with a number of students from the Accademia di Belle Arti in Bergamo and which tried to rethink the demolition of buildings as a possible social practice. Out of this arose a new configuration of the spaces giving access to the museum, now more clearly oriented towards hospitality, through the production of a modular system created using construction-site waste. Over the course of 2024-2025, these spaces played host to a number of workshops and intergenerational exchange sessions with various groups of people and visitors.

The transformations of the landscape and its social and cultural implications are also pertinent to the work of Abraham Cruzvillegas. For his site-specific installation, he drew inspiration from the economic history of Dalmine, located within an area that saw enormous upheaval over the last century: having had a rural economy based on farming, it underwent a rapid process of industrialization to become a hub for metalworking. Work was a recurring theme in a number of other projects at the biennial, serving as an interpretative key through which to consider the value system of a society and on how it evolves from generation to generation. Chiara Gambirasio, for example, orchestrated workshops with a group of women who, since

# Thinking Like a Mountain

childhood, have frequented the summer camp run by the TenarisDalmine company at Castione della Presolana—a highly symbolic site that throughout the twentieth century hosted several generations of children of the steelmaking giant’s employees. Similarly, Cecilia Bengolea interviewed some current and former women employees of the Linificio e Canapificio Nazionale fabric-manufacturing company in Villa d’Almè. Their voices were used to compose the soundscape of the choreographic piece *Spin and Break Free*, a performance reflecting upon contemporary alienation that arose out of the observation of the repetitive movements of the machines used for the spinning of wool and hemp.

A practice geared towards the relationship with the local communities marked out the work of Francesco Pedrini and Asunción Molinos Gordo. Pedrini spent a lengthy period with the community of Roncobello, fostering relationships with the local teachers and students, hearing all about the archeo-astronomical history of the Orobie as recounted by the inhabitants and a number of experts, as well as about the effects of the presence of the auger beetle in the valleys around Bergamo. *Magnitudo* (Magnitude), the poetic observatory of the skies that he created in a clearing near the Passo del Vendulo, embodies and drives forward the link established with the community: every month, for a year, the inhabitants set a stone into the sundial made by the artist, until they had eventually outlined the infinity symbol on the wood—a metaphor for the time spent together.

The practice of Asunción Molinos Gordo is also based on

# Thinking Like a Mountain

exchange and shared experience. *Crops Are Not Orphans* was an artistic workshop that saw the participation of people active in the collective vegetable gardens in the province of Bergamo, and which for several months considered the affective, cultural, and historic genealogies of a number of seeds selected by them. The artist was inspired by the concept of “seed kinship,” being the capacity of seeds to generate affective bonds and to encourage a sense of belonging. From here came a map of the links between the participants and their land, which highlighted the importance of generational transmission.

Out of the numerous activities carried out, the artists’ residences proved to be of great value in the effort to experience a “new time” in the local communities, not just for the artists involved—who were able to access pathways of training and practice—but also for the communities themselves, who had the opportunity to share their stories and to think together about what to do and how to proceed. For the municipality of Dossena, Francesco Ferrero, along with the children at the local school, recast ancient symbols to create a new form of heraldry, reimagined to tell the stories of the present day. Meanwhile, Mozzarella Light collective sought the frequency that would best encapsulate the identity of Roncobello, in a sonic self-portrait ringing out every day from the church’s bell tower, in collaboration with the bell-ringers of the Federazione Campanari Bergamaschi and the Scuola Campanaria. Back in Dossena, Giammarco Cugusi and Roberto Picchi imagined a multi-stage route starting from the masquerades that were held until recently in the town during Carnival. Figures such as the Harlequin or

# Thinking Like a Mountain

the *Homo Selvaticus* also reappeared in the project of Adele Dipasquale and Roberto Casti, who descended into the bowels of the mine to read in a contemporary key the atavistic relationship, embodied by masks, between the spirit world and the plant world, only to then reemerge with a new song composed together with an older group of ex-miners, the young people of the parish church choir, and the local children.

Transgenerational memories, shared by a community, gave rise to Sonia Boyce's *Benevolence*, a project that involved a number of students from the Gaetano Donizetti Higher Institute of Music in Bergamo on the staging of an unannounced performance in the heart of the oldest part of the city. Just as occurred during the Covid-19 lockdown, when people sang out from their own homes to encourage themselves and to express mutual solidarity, in the same way the performers of *Benevolence* looked out from a number of balconies in Bergamo's Piazza Vecchia and sung popular songs associated with the imagery of the mountain, such as *Bella Ciao*, which over the years has become a global, intergenerational hymn to resistance and freedom. The square was transformed rapidly into a space of connection, thanks to the impromptu, emotional participation of a number of passersby.

The Bergamo area was also at the center of the project by Maurizio Cattelan, who with the multi-site exhibition *Seasons* offered up a meditation on lifecycles and history, on the transfer of values across generations, and on time itself. The large marble eagle, stretched out, motionless in

# Thinking Like a Mountain

the former Oratory of San Lupo—inspired by his viewing of the twentieth-century eagle of Dalmine, the first emblem of Fascist authority and, later, a symbol of the towering summits—speaks to us of an ever-fragile nature, collapsed empires, and ephemeral ideologies. Moreover, the eagle acts as a counterpoint to the child sitting on the shoulders of the statue of Garibaldi, in the traffic circle known as the *Rotonda dei Mille* in Bergamo.

The desire to foster the sense of community also recurs in the practice of the Argentine artist Gabriel Chaile, who rediscovered in the breadmaking tradition of the Val Seriana—the *michini* of St Patrick safeguarded by the elderly people of Vertova—a link to the *ollas populares*, customs involving the sharing of food, typically found in Latin America and based on spontaneous forms of collective solidarity. Chaile's oven was inaugurated with a Bread Baking Ceremony that highlighted the possible connections with geographies, epochs, and cultures that are apparently distant, and demonstrated how shared experience can be an engine for innovative, new relationships.

## **To pause is to inhabit**

Along the route of *Thinking Like a Mountain*, the creation of the new Aldo Frattini Bivouac, based on a design by EX., arose out of a collaboration with the Bergamo branch of CAI (the Italian Alpine Club) and took on a particular meaning, thrusting the theme of temporary habitation to the center of a more wide-ranging exploration. Situated at an altitude of

# Thinking Like a Mountain

more than 2,000 meters, on the Alta Via delle Orobie, the bivouac is located in a landscape of extraordinary ecological intensity. Within the Park of the Orobie Bergamasche—a protected area extending across almost 70,000 hectares—there live “more than human” communities that are difficult to see in other zones within the province, including eagles, chamois, and stoats, as well as numerous ibexes that, several decades back, returned to inhabit those inaccessible lands. The bivouac has not been inserted against a scenic backdrop, but into a living system of relationships, in which even the wild fauna and the extreme environmental conditions implicitly engage with the art of inhabiting.

To bivouac is to pause, making the best of the situation, on a provisional basis. In an epoch of acceleration, which measures everything in terms of efficiency and productivity, the Frattini Bivouac encourages visitors to suspend their forward motion, to decelerate, to temporarily interrupt their hike and prepare to watch and listen. Its presence at a high altitude, in an area so rich in wild fauna, questions the relationships between art, architecture, and the mountain. The work was designed to be a “slowing-down device” that can even be used in hiking—a discipline that is becoming increasingly athletic and competitive, while also being considered a form of disposable tourism—as well as an invitation to consider inhabiting as being about mediation and living together.

Living for two years in a land as immense and diverse as the Orobie, and not just within the walls of the museum or the

# Thinking Like a Mountain

spaces of the web, led us to grapple with material difficulties and relational complexities. Undoubtedly, certain collaborations were less shared than others. And it is likely that nobody ever really created those kinships that Donna Haraway was hoping for—processes that require continuity and a relationship-based, multi-species approach which creates sustainable worlds. This does not mean that no seeds were planted, that there were no generative relationships, which attempted to “be inside the problem,” and which addressed complexity with awareness, grasping contradiction and uncertainty as tools for learning and transformation; or that there were not moments of planning together in dialogue—shared practices that sought to foster links which could meet tangible needs, opening up the possibility of generating not just knowledge and culture, but also sustainability and new forms of caring for the local area.

Looking again today at how we got to where we are, the word that is closest to what we sought to do is perhaps the same word that I used in the first editorial for the magazine: togetherness. It is a term that does not denote a unity, but a proximity; not a closed form but a constellation of presences that support one another. It is in this togetherness—fragile and always incomplete—that the deepest meaning of our program was to be found: learning to pause and live together, without eliminating our differences but, rather, allowing them to engage in a dialogue with each other, within the long timeframe of the landscape.

*Thinking Like a Mountain* asked questions on the role of the museum, of art, and of those who live in and interpret a given

# Thinking Like a Mountain

area in this day and age. What does it mean, today, to think and act as a cultural institution? What responsibilities can art have in a time marked by the ecological crisis and by an increasing loss of collective meaning? In the contemporary art system—characterized by rapid cycles of production and consumption, attention economies, and increasingly globalized competition—the principle of the “biennial,” as traditionally understood, now appears to be shot-through with a paradox. We move forward without taking a break: we travel, we install, we dismantle. An obsession with rapid transit that ends up contradicting every attempt at embedding. Where art could offer a time for pause and reflection, too often we find ourselves reinforcing the acceleration and fragmentation of a world in crisis.

And it is perhaps here that we find one of the crucial nodes of our time: how can we continue to believe in the transformative power of art without reproducing the same logic of extraction that surrounds it? Perhaps we can find the key in the idea of hiking through the landscape and coming face-to-face with the local communities: proceeding on foot, and not zooming along, can become an ethical and political image of what it means to run a museum, an institution, today—moving forward without dominating, accepting the strain, the slowness, the obstacles. The mountain teaches us that the path is not a straight line, but a continuous rising and falling, a precarious equilibrium between thrusting forward and pausing. In its long, geological time, the mountain relativizes our emergencies. Every step is an exercise of measurement: it reminds us that stability is not an arrival point, but a process.

# Thinking Like a Mountain

## Postscript

Last week I made my way up to the Aldo Frattini Bivouac together with my friend Paolo, on a wonderful, late-fall day, shrouded in mist from dawn 'til dusk. First of all, we reached the Fratelli Longo Shelter and from there, via the iced-over Passo Valsecca, we arrived at the red tent. It was the last, feasible window before the heavy snows that will make the place inaccessible to most people until next summer. We did not meet anyone, aside from a couple of white partridges and a family of ibexes that accompanied us for a while. On the long descent towards Carona we had fascinating discussions about politics, economics, and family histories, as well as, of course, about hikes, ascents, and roped climbing parties. Paolo has read perhaps rather less than me, but he has certainly hiked a lot more. You can see it from the way he places his foot, how he attacks the ascents, how he spears the ice, almost dancing as he goes. He knows the Orobie better than anyone, and he has names for every peak, every ridge, and every mountain lake. I wondered which of the two of us knows more about the world: not the world of ideas, but that of relationships, long timescales and fragile equilibriums—the geological world, which reveals itself only to those who make their way patiently through it.

Erling Kagge would say that walking slowly opens up the silent spaces in which the landscape speaks to us; Bruce Chatwin would have it that every walk redraws our inner maps; and Henry David Thoreau would tell us that freedom begins when we fall into sync with the rhythm of the earth. Adventurous authors knew this, like Alexandra David-Néel,

# Thinking Like a Mountain

who in crossing Tibet was looking for a transformation of her perspective, and Nan Shepherd, who learned in the Scottish Highlands to get to know the mountain “from the inside.”

Paolo has probably not read anything by these writers, and yet I have the impression that he knows them better than me. His is a form of knowledge that is not accumulated but traversed; one which does not interpret the world but feels it, step by step.