

SYMBIOPOLIS

for a time in need of new narratives.

Never waste a good crisis: the great apocalypse

Despite the numerous Climate Summits and biodiversity COPS in the first quarter of the 21st century, humanity descended into an unseen catastrophe. Overpopulation, unchecked climate upheaval, the shutdown of the Atlantic Ocean current, relentless storms, and parching droughts that birthed devastating forest infernos all converged in an era now etched in history as the 'Great Apocalypse.'

During this grim epoch, unsettling encounters during the redistribution of species around the globe, led to the emergence of a 'zoonotic' pandemic, caused by viruses transmitting from one species to another, leading to a scale of mortality that was unprecedented. The healthcare system crumbled, supply chains disintegrated, industrial production ground to a halt, plunging society into chaos.

Simultaneously, climatic shifts laid waste to animal, microbial, and plant societies. This led within a matter of years to a complete ecosystem and civilization collapse.

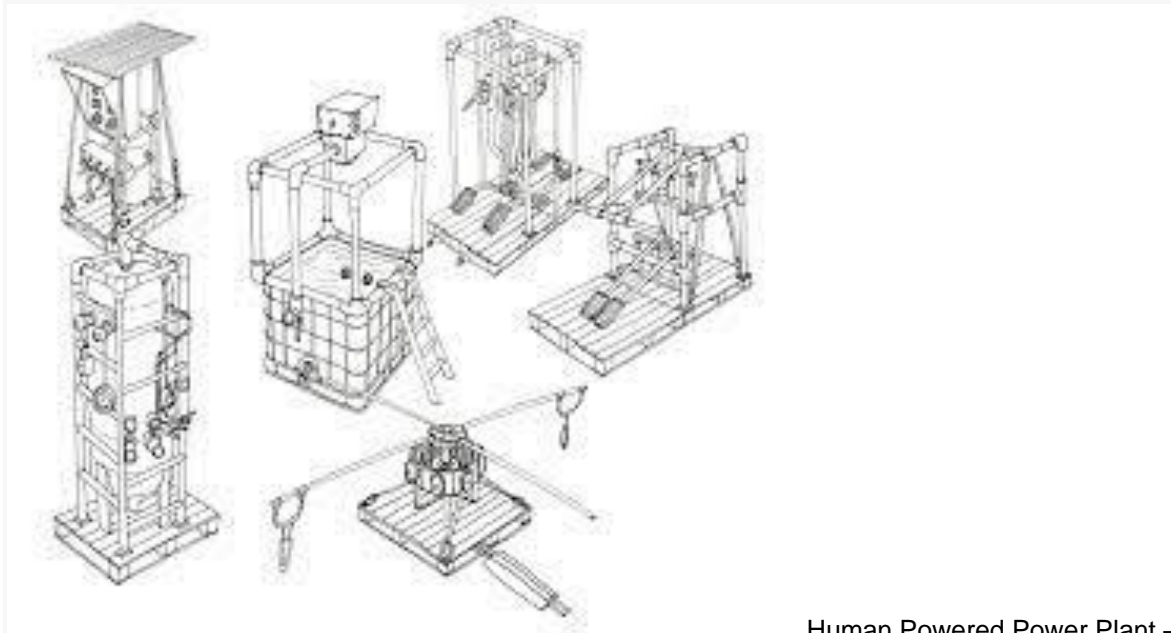
As the world was battered by storms, floods and colossal forest fires, life on Earth seemed to sputter and fade. It became painfully evident that the long-feared 6th mass extinction was no longer only visible in statistics but a day-to-day reality, its speed and origins unparalleled. The Great Apocalypse marked an era devoid of victors, serving as the tumultuous bridge between the Anthropocene and our current era, the Symbiocene. Despite the fact life on earth took hard hits, with a global temperature rise of 2,4 degrees, sea rise of 50 cm and a plant and animal life extinction of 60% with an overrepresentation of vertebrate life, humanity as a species passed through the eye of the needle again, thanks to the fierce creativity of forced improvisation.

Amid the chaos, humanity was pushed to embrace a nomadic and experimental existence, a stark departure from the sedentary lifestyles that had defined us for millennia. Following these initial decades of crisis, people slowly regrouped and resettled in areas that showed promise on a planet perpetually gripped by climatic turmoil. From the ashes of the Great Apocalypse, the 'New Tribes' arose—a coalition of youthful, resilient, self-organizing states. Among them stands Symbiopolis, nestled in an archipelago, a beacon of hope in a rare fertile spot in his barren world .

The birth of a biosphere centric society

The symbiotic society of Symbiopolis is born from the convergence of diverse hypercreative expertises—ecologists, engineers, bio-hackers, farmers, artists, designers, community workers, and construction artisans. This eclectic blend of talents proved indispensable in crafting innovative solutions, steering clear of the pitfalls of past ideologies that once bedeviled humanity. The Symbiopolis archipelago boasts the purest air, a blessing partly owed to the whims of ocean currents, oxygen producing primeval forests, the magic of the mangroves aerial roots and the natural ecosystem of the underwater kelp forests. These form the resilient foundations of the pristine Symbiopolis 'biosphere reserve'.

The tidal rhythms and coastal winds generate power for the Symbiopolites through tidal- and windenergy infrastructure. However when the wind's breath does falter, Symbiopolites start to work out and the Human Powered Power Plant steps in to replenish the water batteries on the main isle. Symbiopolis is a very physical nation.



Human Powered Power Plant –

Melle Smets and Kris De Decker

The Symbiopolites continuously reconfigure relationships, actors and collectives in order to preserve their fragile ecosystems. Take, for example, the Kelp Forests of Symbiopolis—a tale of care that blossomed into a relation involving humans, Kelp, and the sea's lifeless expanse. Kelp strands, laden with proteins, not only produce tons of oxygens (On a healthy planet kelp forests produce around 70% of the total oxygen on Earth) but also offer shelter for juvenile fish and other marine species, ensuring the survival of various species. The Symbiopolites delicately thin out the forests to harvest raw materials for Eco Glass (a beautiful thick and sturdy eco plastic for making artifacts) and use the leftovers to enrich the Symbiopolis soils with nutrients. These disturbances provoke healthy regrowth of the Kelp as well as the space for other marine flora and fauna.



Thanks to a Carbon Partnership in a worldwide Carbon network, Symbiopolites have harnessed the knowledge of Climate Farming to produce oxygen and capture carbon and its surpluses to great advantage. Consequently, the Carbon Sink techniques they've devised are now adopted by neighboring communities. This expansion has enabled them to seed and cultivate kelp forests, mangroves, and other vital 'carbon sinks' beyond their archipelago's boundaries. This is a blessing at the end of the 21st century where CO2 levels are exceeding 950 PPM .

However, not all Symbiopolites view the carbon partnership as an equitable deal, as spirited discussions in the weekly forums reveal. Other Nations, adhering to different ideologies and driven by their nutrient scarcity, want to adopt the Kelp forests strategy for their own coastal areas, but do it in an old fashioned and short sighted way.

The other Tribes ecosystems will crumble if not provided with fresh seedlings each season, and adopt it in a connective, whole systems approach involving all other actors of their local ecosystems. They have to change their behavior towards the Kelp and the biosphere. The core belief of the carbon partnership is an unreciprocated commitment to one another, yet Symbiopolites grapple with the realization that some communities offer nothing in return. Making mutual commitments to other-than-human species often proves easier than tending to one's own.

Symbiopolis circular and nature-inclusive buildings are made of salvaged woods, and other apocalyptic debris and built to promote the Tribes' biodiversity. Humans initiate the building process, and within a mere two years, the Dendrons unfurl. Swifts, bats, bees, and other welcomed inhabitants, join the construction, gradually weaving a multispecies enclosure. The niches that form the structure's walls, enhancing their own populations while paving the way for human habitation in nearly half of these burgeoning structures. Living amongst all and expressing gratitude for the abundance received is the Symbiopolites' way. In Symbiopolis, all life is sacred and protected and constantly monitored to create the fittest ecosystem in the world.

This authentic Bioteecture puts the ideals of Symbiopolites to the test. Complex debates and polarized discussions unfurl, as uncertainty looms about the consequences of unbridled co-habitation. The fear of rodents, cockroaches and other less cuddly animals awake the shadow of new zoonotic viruses, arising from potentially hazardous spillover events, casts a long shadow over the inhabitants.



Jakub Nepras

Amidst this maelstrom of opinions, a fraction emerges advocating for the implementation of additional parameters, an arsenal of safeguards to curb the influx of unwelcome species into the fragile ecosystem. These proponents contend that tighter controls are necessary to ward off potential threats. Another group places unwavering trust in the robustness of Symbiopolis' thriving ecosystems. They point to the bio-department—a provider of the Tribe's organic pharmacy—as an exemplar of sustainability and resilience. "All are lawful residents," proponents relentlessly cry.

The leafy biotecture and the organic mass of the structures and natural ventilation temper the harsh climate. The wasteful practice of artificially climatizing large spaces is eschewed, with a focus instead on tempering the body's requirements for comfort.

Seasonal body shells, crafted with living materials like bacterial skins derived from Symbiopolites symbiotic relationships, maintain stable body temperatures and enhance tactile senses. These body shells also bring individuals closer to the surrounding atmosphere, fostering a deeper connection with the world around them.



Crocheted Membrane by Sonja Bäümel.



Wilder Mann – Charles Freger



Barack het Schaap – Arne Hendriks

An array of sensors, olfactory units, drone-insects, living labs, ocean capsules, and other observational tools enable Symbiopolites to monitor the vitality of their local ecosystems. This data-driven system serves not only to comprehend the consequences of their actions but also feed curiosity and act as a source of celebration and cultivate relationships in the unknown.

Rituals are developed entangling human time with the rhythms of surrounding life. Each resident is furthermore encouraged to employ the vast set of observations and sensory experiences to create artworks that root them in the environment they inhabit.

Among these artworks, the Raumklang network stands as the most famous in Symbiopolis. It translates sounds imperceptible to human ears, such as bat sonar and ultrasonic mouse calls, into real-time compositions influenced by the movements and migrations of other-than-human residents or the so called 'Denizens'.



Raumklang - Zeno Van Den Broek en Robin Koek

This artful 'interspecies friendship' or 'kinship' finds expression in the aboriginal totem system. Each neighborhood or district of Symbiopolis identifies with a specific organism, given on birth, deeply connected to the local biotope. There's the Insect District, the Kelp Kingdom, Bat Land, Seagull Paradise and many others. These totems are not mere symbols but serve to strengthen the bond between humans and their environment, toward specific kindred species. Additional totems and structures are dedicated to worship undomesticated animals that live close to humans, or synanthropic animals such as ants, pigeons, mice, and rats. They are praised and well treated. Humans inhabit a more-than-human world, where worship becomes a tool for connection and flourishing while navigating boundaries and shared spaces.

In this spirit, pigeon towers adorn the central marketplace, constructed from densely "danced" mycelium blocks, which make them more suitable for construction in social building rituals. These pigeon towers are favored by pigeons and invited by pigeon food fests of Symbiopolites to leave their excrements on the towers so when the towers decay, perfect manure for compost. On the outer surface of these towers, Gourmet mushrooms flourish, providing a delectable pairing with the renowned Kelp Noodles. Every Friday night, Gentle Disco Night takes place, accompanied by enjoy noodles and sips of Kelp beer. Once a month, the decayed towers are blended with kelp waste to create organic fertilizer for Symbiopolis' food parks which produce gigantic vegetables.



Gentle Disco and pigeon Tower - Arne Hendriks

PART II: the Cetacean pavilion meeting

Robert leaned in, his voice filled with anticipation as he addressed his assembly of comrades:
"Dear Friends, three years from now, we will mark the 30th anniversary of Symbiopolis. We plan to extend invitations to all 25 member states of the New Tribes that have been dedicated to protecting and rejuvenating Earth's ecosystems since 2075. As one of the leading carbon-negative Tribes, we're eager to showcase the progress we've made since the birth of Symbiopolis. To celebrate this occasion, we propose the construction of a Cetacean pavilion. Jane, the floor is yours."

A woman wearing a scaled body shell, her body adorned with intricate tattoos of a rockfish, kelp seaweed, and an otter representing her totems, summoned a hologram that materialized in the council hall, captivating the audience's attention.

Jane:

"Dear colleagues, as a big advocate of the old masters, I want to take you back to the 1970s for the origins of our pavilion's concept. Allow me to introduce you to the Ant Farm collective, a San Francisco-based group known for their innovative art and architecture. They were pioneers in creating temporary structures that facilitated communication between humans and other species. Doug

Michels was the group's most ardent advocate for multispecies communication and spearheaded the groundbreaking project known as the Dolphin Embassy. This innovative initiative took the form of a free-floating research unit designed to navigate the oceans with the aid of a solar sail. Nestled within the structure was a unique environment, characterized by a balanced combination of wet and dry spaces. It served as both a laboratory and living quarters, fostering collaboration between artists and scientists who shared this space with dolphins. The primary objective was to unlock the potential for communication with these remarkable creatures, as their vocalizations and interactions with humans held great promise and intrigue for the team."

But just as Jane delved into the collective's visionary work, a multi-faceted eye, glowing with green bio-lucent Eco Glass, emerged from the table, projecting a holographic text labeled 'Eco GPT9000.' This Eco data fed AI-system used a metallic voice that filled the room, interjecting with skepticism on Janes' plans.

"Ant Farms project is indebted to the work of the contested scientist John Lilly and his dolphin-human communication experiments of the 1960's. I must express my reservations regarding his research as a suitable reference point in light of our current knowledge and heightened sensitivities. Professor Lilly conducted experiments that involved the captivity of multiple dolphins in his laboratories, situated on St. Thomas and in Miami. Regrettably, these dolphins endured sedation, drugging, and even sexual abuse, all in the name of research. His belief that dolphins could be taught to communicate in English due to their substantial brains strikes me as a misguided and simplistic perspective, one that viewed human culture as the desired reference for all life—an emblem of anthropocentric thinking. While we have made significant strides in fields such as ethology, more-than-human anthropology, and multi-species ethics since those times, I find it crucial to underscore how swiftly we rely on human-centric standards when attempting to comprehend and engage with other forms of intelligence."

Jane, undeterred by the interruption, addressed the critique.

"GPT, I understand the connection to John Lilly's research and the acknowledgment of the wrongdoings involved. However, your interruption was a bit hasty, as it often tends to be. I had intended to address these ethical pitfalls as well. This whole situation brings to mind the plight of cetaceans that were held in captivity, enduring lives of confinement and often dying solely for human entertainment.

Nonetheless, I firmly believe that the core concept, particularly as it pertains to the projects proposed by Ant Farm, holds value for our mission. While John Lilly's work may seem focused on teaching dolphins English, its roots lie in the aspiration to communicate with other-than-human forms of intelligence. This same aspiration drove the development of the Dolphin Embassy within the Ant Farm Collective. Douglas Michels took these ideas beyond the collective and gradually envisioned a society that recognized and actively integrated various forms of intelligence, thereby fostering what could be termed 'interspecies knowledge'.

It is essential to remember that these projects challenged prevailing paradigms and vividly depicted alternative societal models. They provided tangible expressions of these ideas and responded to theoretical concepts such as those centered around multispecies language, as advanced by Ludwig Wittgenstein or Merleau-Ponty.

This tangibility and the pursuit of interspecies knowledge through communication are what we aim to explore further. For our upcoming 30th anniversary, we propose the creation of a Cetacean pavilion, dedicated to celebrating and advancing interspecies knowledge. Our goal is to bridge the divide between life on land and in the water, facilitating interaction and mutual understanding."

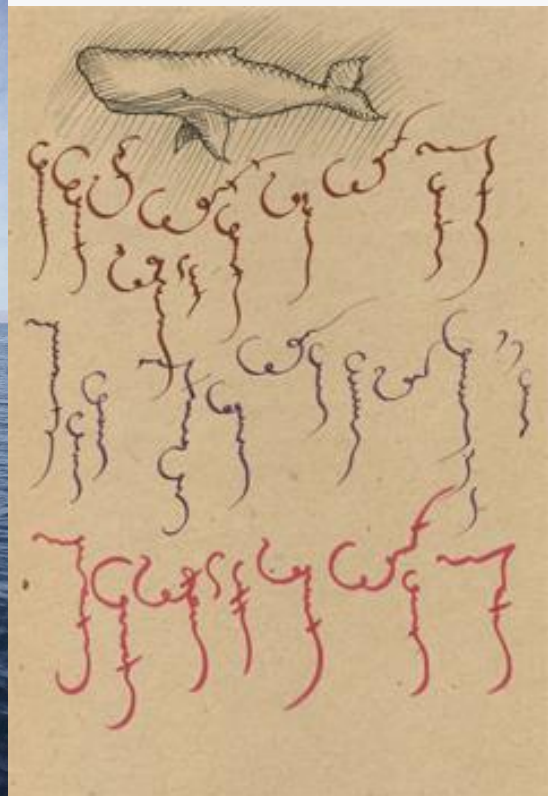
Jake, representing the Snake pit District, interjected with enthusiasm:

"I'm glad to hear this broader approach! Let's move beyond the fixation on specific cetacean species as the only intelligent life in the oceans. Dolphins, Orcas, Whales and Octopuses all have been idealized in the past. It's time we celebrate cetacean intelligence as a whole."

Jane concurred:

"Exactly Jake. Our initial focus will be on bioacoustics, exploring the significance of sound and echolocation in the cetacean community."

We also intend to showcase the work of artist Ariel Guzik, who spent a decade attempting to communicate with cetaceans through harmonic tuning and empathy, rather than mere translation. It's about empathy and love in a universal basic interaction. I believe it will expand on our Raumklang network and deepen our bodily attunement to the vibrations of kindreds. Bernard Cousteau, a prominent member of the CETI program, has diligently gathered approximately 2 million cetacean sounds through the use of soft-skin water drones. Leveraging this invaluable data, our Eco Chat system has employed the CETI dataset along with the Gaziks notation system to craft authentic visual representations of the various dialects spoken by cetaceans. These visual depictions will be meticulously engraved onto new totem structures along the coast. When the winds sweep through these coastal areas, they will set in motion resonances that become audible to us.



Ariel Guzik - Holoturian

The establishment of the cetacean pavilion serves a crucial purpose in helping us gain a firsthand understanding of the consequences of our actions. This deeper awareness will guide us in refining our acts of care towards the environment. As an initial proposal, I recommend the creation of a designated harvesting-free zone within the pavilion's scope."

As Jane shared their plans, Helen from the Seagull District voiced her concerns, skeptical of the proposed restrictions and boundaries. She argued that multi-species ideals should not eliminate: *"Strict bans, interspecies boundaries, anthropomorphic traps ... your multi-species sensitivities and ideology is gradually becoming a complex burden and restriction on our freedom. Our parents who built Symbiopolis would never"*

Jane countered Helen's objections firmly. *"Helen, our commitment to decentering human-centric thinking is fundamental to Symbiopolis. We cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of our ancestors as we are still amidst the consequences of the past. Our actions today must prioritize the well-being of all species. I ..."*

Robert, sensing the escalating tension, swiftly initiated a film presentation. The film depicted divers on a Kelp farm, where a bottlenose dolphin engaged in a playful interaction, creating a melody alongside a Zoo-musician and ending it by creating a bubble ring.

As the film concluded leaving the room in stunned silence, Robert urged unity. *"Let us not overlook the importance of physically engaging with the life around us. In doing so our personal paths will become clear, and questioning our motives will no longer be necessary. Let's postpone this meeting, for I am confident that our direct engagement with life around us will dissolve the need for further discussion. Instead let us gather at the pigeon towers for an exceptionally grand "Gentle Disco" event, as tonight the spirits themselves join in the dance. Who among us wishes to partake in this unique celebration?"*

Jane enthusiastically exclaims, *"I'm in!"* Jake stands up, Herbert from the Bat District fetches some beers, and others follow suit. Helen and her group reluctantly joined, closing the hall's doors, murmuring about Robert's concluding words. There is much work to be done.

Beneath the spirits' watchful gaze, the denizens of Symbiopolis embarked on a journey to explore the world beyond the confines of their discussions.