

Christina, 21st of March 2020

Crocodiles, Aligators and Narratives

Val Plumwood had a conflict with a crocodile. She went alone into the swamps. Her boat was overturned and miraculously, she survived the crocodile's attack. She was rescued by the ranger and brought to a hospital. The ranger and the authorities wanted to kill the crocodile – so it would not harm anybody else, and as a form of revenge. But Ms. Plumwood was against it, advocating that she had intruded into the animal's habitat and not respected the animal's nature. The crocodile was not killed. Many years after she recovered, she wrote about the incident. Prey and predator, meat eater and vegetarian, how can a human be prey and become food for a predator. Plumwood was a vegetarian all her life.

After my last gift, Federico suggested a poem by Luca de Lima – about a friend Ana who had experienced an accident with an alligator. She had not survived. Another woman, different ending.

If these incidents were only reported by the newspapers, if they had become an event without a narrative that emerged from the event, I might not know anything about Val Plumwood, about the crocodile's strategy to kill its prey, or about Ana whose accident inspired Luca de Lima to write Wetlands.

The importance of the narrative seems immense. It becomes the essential part, with the event disappearing to the background, almost.

So, I have been wondering about the importance of the narrative versus the event.

In the case of my work, there is no event at all. The Institute for Relocation of Biodiversity is creating responses, stories, proposals that are inspired by real conditions and situations.

However, the aim is never to truly change the real situation – chances that the endangered animal will be saved are low.

The aim is more to create a narrative, to embed the knowledge, the care, the worries and the conceptual possibilities and to weave a story.

The story is a possible narrative for the future of the planet, and it is utopian. At the same time, it is a process where a thought densifies and becomes a written thought, or a spoken thought or a video or a text fragment.

Why is narrative so important for humans? At times, the concept is more important than an activity. Talking about climate change seems enough to be absolved from having to change anything in our behaviour. Is this an ultimate form of denial? Is this a joke or a sarcastic response to an unsurmountable problem that we have manoeuvred ourselves into?

Is it group dynamics or peer pressure or a lack of responsibility?

And are narratives also important for life forms that are other than human? How do their narratives look like?

The other day, I saw a presentation by Vinciane Despret. She was wondering about her dogs and how narratives function in their minds. And if the concept of consecutive actions, of doing one thing after the other in a logical sequence simply does not apply to animal brains.

The viral event that came upon us has triggered a new narrative in humankind. Or actually several narratives that are not yet fully developed. We find ourselves in the middle of them and we don't yet know which ones, which main narratives will remain.

Meanwhile, we are explaining to each other how it all works, how it came to be, how we will find an exit out of it. And this story telling seems to ease our situation. But it also seems to disconnect us from reality. Does it?!

