

Only the Sabelles

Émilie Quebalec

Résumé

L'article présente un récit de fiction spéculative qui articule une réflexion écologique, philosophique et politique à travers une narration littéraire sous la forme d'un journal d'expédition. Le texte s'ouvre sur un paragraphe contextuel qui situe l'œuvre dans le cadre d'une recherche collective consacrée à la redirection écologique et à l'invention de récits capables d'inspirer de nouvelles manières d'habiter la planète, en soulignant son caractère expérimental et testimonial. La narration principale prend la forme de notes personnelles rédigées par un narrateur humain qui accompagne une expédition scientifique composée majoritairement d'êtres futurs appelés les Theix. Située dans un temps lointain après l'effondrement de la civilisation contemporaine, l'histoire alterne entrées datées, observations subjectives et réflexions intimes, faisant apparaître une tension constante entre mémoire technologique et écriture manuscrite. Le narrateur décrit la découverte d'un écosystème fluvial habité par les Sabelles, des créatures aquatiques qui semblent constituer une conscience symbiotique étroitement liée au paysage lui-même. Tout au long du journal, le texte explore des thèmes tels que la relation entre l'humanité et l'environnement, la perte de la centralité humaine, la cohabitation entre les espèces, l'éthique de l'exploration scientifique et la notion d'équilibre entre les dimensions naturelles, culturelles, technologiques et historiques.

Mots-clés : Fiction spéculative; Récit d'expédition; Cohabitation interspécifique; Écologie narrative; Décentrement de l'humain.

Abstract

The article presents a work of speculative fiction that weaves together ecological, philosophical, and political reflection through a literary narrative in the form of an expedition journal. The text opens with a contextual paragraph that situates the work within a collective research project dedicated to ecological redirection and to the invention of narratives capable of inspiring new ways of inhabiting the planet, emphasizing its experimental and testimonial character. The main narrative takes the form of

CONTACT: Émilie Quebalec, Science fiction author, contact@emiliequebalec.com, <https://emiliequebalec.com>



Aion Journal of Philosophy and Science

© 2026 the Authors

This work is licensed under a

[Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) License.

personal notes written by a human narrator who accompanies a scientific expedition composed largely of future beings known as the Theix. Set in a distant time after the collapse of contemporary civilization, the story alternates dated entries, subjective observations, and intimate reflections, revealing a constant tension between technological memory and handwritten writing. The narrator describes the discovery of a fluvial ecosystem inhabited by the Sabelles, aquatic creatures that appear to constitute a symbiotic consciousness closely intertwined with the landscape itself. Throughout the journal, the text explores themes such as the relationship between humanity and the environment, the loss of human centrality, interspecies coexistence, the ethics of scientific exploration, and the notion of balance between natural, cultural, technological, and historical dimensions.

Keywords: Speculative fiction; Expedition narrative; Interspecies cohabitation; Narrative ecology; Decentering of the human.

In 2023, the writer Émilie Querbalec met the consultant Vanessa Weck, a specialist in ecological redirection, at the CerisyLaSalle conference “Where Are the Technologies of the Future?”. Together, they formed the core of a “Green Team”, soon joined by glaciologist Jeanne Gherardi, comic artist Jeanne Puchol, and consultant Camille Cazin. Since then, they have been working to invent narratives capable of inspiring a desire for change, aimed at living in peace on a planet that is hospitable to all living beings, as well as to rivers and landscapes. “*Seules les Sabelles*” is a testimony to this research, which is also a quest to reinvent the identities of the participants.

Nouvelle Venise,

07.12.2128 AC

It is with emotion that I begin this journal today. The paper rustles beneath my pen, the ink unfurls its curves and dots, its empty and filled spaces. I feel like a Marco Polo, a Zheng He, or an Ibn Battuta, ready to embark on a journey unprecedented in the history of humankind. This writing is to be distinguished from my memory stream. Here I will record my observations, impressions, and reflections in full subjectivity, and should misfortune befall me during this expedition, I wish it to be entrusted to the good care of my supervisor and friend, Elio Venturi. I thank Lislac Myun for tolerating these eccentricities and for having authorized me to take these objects with me. For the rest, I place myself entirely in the wisdom and science of the Theix

Trieste,
07.16.2128 AC

Today I met the two other members of the expedition. All of them are Theix; I am the only contemporary, perhaps even the only one of my species, although I harbor some doubts about Hisoa Rel, whom I suspect of being a Sensile. I would like to ask Lislæ Myun about it, but the Theix remain extremely discreet regarding the evolution of the technologies they share with us, and I fear I will have to settle for a polite refusal. Who knows? Perhaps I am a distant ancestor of these beings from the future: a seed sown in the past that, two or three hundred thousand years later, would have germinated to give birth to a Sensile. Elio would no doubt have told me that such speculations are my way of compensating for my original sense of imposture. I would have replied that this is merely the embryonic form of a neurosis, irrefutable proof of my human nature.

It is true that the Theix are so radically different from us that one might believe they come from another planet. Two or three hundred thousand years, that is our current estimate of the span of time separating us from their civilization. These figures are based on the dating of certain remains discovered during archaeological excavations on the Adriatic coast, which explains our presence here. The Theix have several theories about the beginnings of their civilization. The great unknown is the period stretching between our time and theirs. There exists a shadowy zone, a rupture, a *terra incognita* devoid of any written record, even in the oldest Theix archives. What happened during this interval? How could our contemporary civilization have disappeared leaving so few traces, and how did theirs emerge? These are the questions that drive us today, and I am proud to be among the scientists who, I hope, will help lift the veil on this mystery.

Trieste,

Or perhaps not. Location and dating impossible. My stream indicates a date that can only be false: 20 July 2128. Hisoa Rel warned me that my recordings might be completely interrupted as soon as I leave our capsule. This information makes me reconsider Lislæ Myun's initial tolerance of my request to take this notebook with me. Perhaps she knew from the outset that their devices would fail upon arrival. The idea of losing my memory stream frightens me, but I will try to keep track of the days in this journal.

Day 3

It seems that we are not alone here. Lislæ and I were taking samples from the stream that runs at the bottom of the woodland when we realized we were being watched. Up to now, we had seen all kinds of birds and insects flitting around us,

and a few mammals had also approached our capsule, but we had not yet had what one might truly call an encounter. The animal observing us might have been a distant descendant of a beaver, but its size was closer to that of a squirrel. It stood on a rock, a twig in its hand, its lively brown eyes following each of our movements with curiosity. There was no doubt that this rodent had seen us and that our behavior intrigued it to the highest degree.

The Theix have very strict protocols regarding the footprint they leave in any place they visit, and our camouflage suits were supposed to prevent this kind of contact. Yet not only had this rodent seen us, it also seemed to cast a critical, or at least detached, gaze upon our presence in its environment.

My first instinct was to consider that this event could not have any critical consequences, given the insignificance of the creature in question. But the Theix had taught me how harmful such an attitude could be, so I remained motionless, waiting for a sign from Lislae to know what course of action to adopt. After a few minutes, our squirrelbeaver resolved the misunderstanding on its own by emitting a series of whistling sounds, which turned out to be a rallying signal for its fellows. Lislae then chose flight, and I am grateful to her for not reproaching my clumsiness when I stumbled and sprawled fulllength on the bank, covering myself in mud and ridicule.

Day 5

Virae Mnet, our therolinguist, made contact with them. Our small furry animals turned out to be mischievous companions, eager to make our acquaintance and ready to guide us into their world.

Day...

I no longer know what day it is. Our days are now punctuated by visits to the river that flows at the bottom of the valley. Our furry ambassadors call it “Mother-ofAllLife”, but we simply call it ‘the river.’ For lack of suitable cartography, it is difficult for us to know whether this corresponds to the Reka, the river that once rose in northwestern Croatia and flowed into the Adriatic via Slovenia. Be that as it may, this river, which thus seems to preside over the destiny of all in this valley, is inhabited by creatures we have named the “Sabelles” as their appearance evokes that of the polychaete annelid worms found on our ocean floors. The Sabelles communicate with one another, and we believe they form a kind of symbiotic consciousness that permeates their entire ecosystem. Virae Mnet has set about translating their language, and for this he has tools that the linguists and ethologists of my time would be intensely jealous of. Theix technology never ceases to amaze me. How could they have developed such an advanced civilization while maintaining this almost animistic philosophy that characterizes their relationship with the universe?

A day of rain...

I rediscover the pleasure of writing in this notebook, safe and dry inside the capsule. I regret not being able to faithfully transcribe all the richness and detail of this wild and enchanting world. I think back to a remark by my friend Elio Venturi: we cannot do without the Earth, but the Earth, for its part, can do without us. That is exactly what seems to have happened after the collapse of our contemporary civilization, if the memory of the Sabelles is to be believed. No man or woman has ever fished along its banks, hunted in the gamerich hills, lit fires, or built a pirogue to travel downstream to the “seathatbestowsrain”. When asked whether I myself am a “human”, I spontaneously answered in the negative. For the first time in my life, I felt no need to pretend to be what I am not, nor to prove anything to my supervisor. What I felt then, what I still feel, and which fills me with joy, is, I believe, what is called “freedom”. A very human feeling, paradoxically, Hisoa Rel pointed out to me when I confided these thoughts to him.

A day of flowers and joy

Unable to specify our exact position on the timeline, we have decided to call the era in which we find ourselves “the world of the Sabelles”. The Theix have a rather original theory about how causal loops can interlock. Until now, Lislæ Myun had seemed relatively confident about the future of our exploratory undertaking. But today she appears disoriented. Are we really where we thought we were? She revealed to me that one of the objectives of her mission had been to place a beacon like the one that allowed them to reach our contemporary era. The deployment of such artifacts is authorized only if all conditions are met with regard to what they call the balance of their ecumene, which encompasses not only their natural environment but also their cultural, technological, and, since they have learned to travel through time, historical environments.

I asked Lislæ whether the Theix would be willing to renounce this technology if it turned out that our presence today could lead to the collapse of a temporal loop. She replied that the Sensiles had given up developing all kinds of technologies in the past, and that our exchanges had been initiated only insofar as they conformed to their predictions and did not threaten the stability of their ecumene.

Was the world of the Sabelles also consistent with their hypotheses? I asked her then. Lislæ admitted her ignorance, and I knew that it would be impossible for me ever to know whether the Theix had intended for me to be created in order to initiate an already existing temporal loop, or whether events were simply slipping beyond their control. Curiously, this left me indifferent. It seemed fairly clear that, whatever

the answer to that question might be, none of us would be returning home. The four of us were prisoners of this world, and there was no other way out of this situation than erasure. Since this end seems inevitable, I then implored her, grant us a little more time. Just a few more days, before triggering the protocol that would erase all traces of our presence here.

A day of dry wind and dust

Virae Mnet chose to stay with Lislæ Myun at the capsule to prepare our final journey, while Hisoe Rel and I are taking advantage of this reprieve to head once more toward the river. There is still so much for us to observe and learn, so many long reveries to whisper at the water's edge in the company of the Sabelles. I have transcribed the substance of our exchanges in the pages that follow. These notes may seem incomprehensible at first glance, but I believe they may help to better understand how the river ultimately came to shape all our thoughts, to permeate our entire being. If one listens closely, one can hear its limpid voice repeating to us that a joyful coexistence is possible, and that from our encounter a new ecumene might be born.

But the moment when this journal comes to an end is approaching. The few days granted by Lislæ Myun have passed...

...

The clearing where we had once set up our camp has been returned to its original state. There is no longer any capsule. No mark, no trace has been left behind. The tall grass rippling in the wind shows no sign of passage, save for that of a doe and her fawn—a thin trail through the grasses, barely a rustle.

Hisoe and I are careful not to disturb this secret harmony. Without making a sound, we retreat, two fused shadows melting back into the forest. My intuition was right: he and I share the same deep nature. If there is a continuity between my time and his, it is probably the one born of this encounter. And even if today only the Sabelles know of this union, I dare to believe that it is not accidental.