

LIBRETTO
English version

A musical and visual
performance by
Olivia Pedroli



THE LAST WORD

B

WHAT DO WE LEAVE BEHIND ?

HOW DO WE PASS ON
WHAT WE HAVE ACQUIRED ?

HOW DO WE CHOOSE
TO BE PRESENT IN OUR LIVES
AND THOSE OF OTHERS ?

WHAT DOES THIS SAY
ABOUT US ?

Der Unterzeichnete Hans-Rudolf Christen, geboren 4.2.1916...

It was just a simple dictaphone, left behind by her grandfather after his death. Olivia Pedroli had picked it up without much intention, thinking that she might one day find a use for it. She then immediately forgot it in a drawer; indeed, phones can record voice notes, without time limits nor crackling. Until one day, without knowing why, she switched on the device – and her grandfather's voice emerged from the tape. "I didn't recognize him straight away."

To record his will and testament, he had put on his lawyer's garb: the bureaucratic inflections, the verbalized punctuation – like a last dictation to an imaginary secretary.

**DOES SOUND
REMEMBER?**

Hans-Rudolf Christen, who feared discord among his family above all else, wanted to leave his affairs in order. He distributed his inheritance with a pedantic care, thinly veiling his primal dread of fratricidal strife.

Olivia Pedroli, who had long been working on archives, recorded traces, the dislocation of formats, and the fragile memory of our echoes, thus embarked on a quest – searching for last wishes, testamentary impulses, the irrepressible desire for control and its inaccessible corollary, letting go. She knew only too well that recorded voices are ghostly presences and that breath, saturation, the idly spinning tape – and everything else that contributes to the randomness of the conservation effort – all but add to our deep sense of loss.

The Last Word is a circular dance in three acts. It deals with the past, the present and the future, each with their own unalterable rhythms that betray the very nature of their obstinacy: the end of the dictaphone tape, the groove of the record, the computer-generated heart reproduced in 3D by the ETH Zurich.

The raw sound material, just like the music that envelops it in the manner of certain opportunistic mushrooms, is defined by its texture, its stamp. Olivia Pedroli is fascinated by sound before being submerged by meaning.

She has thus chosen voices that sizzle with fear, like that of the Spanish railwayman whose convoy has just crashed onto its side and whose microphone captures only breath, static, whistling. Federico García Lorca's poem, which speaks of the choreography of sensations, is transcribed by a computer voice. Stephen Hawking's warnings

INTRODUCTION
By Arnaud Robert

against Promethean vanities can paradoxically only be heard through digital translation.

"I think the development of full artificial intelligence," said Hawking, "could spell the end of the human race."

Faced with a world governed by individualistic pleasures, cannibalistic consumption and base desires, Olivia Pedroli does not choose morality. She bears a cautious tenderness for this grandfather who wished to bestow peace as a legacy. Fundamentally, throughout this project, she is simply tracing the path laid out by humans and their techniques; not dealing out any lessons. She finds herself in front of an acoustic piano, then an analogue keyboard, then a computer, like those musicians who bewitch catastrophe; indeed, she deeply admires the work of the British composer Gavin Bryars, who dreamed up the last notes of the Titanic's sunken orchestra.

Music is an amplification of reality; it is also its anchor, its invisible clarity. Olivia's music responds to voices like reeds in the wind, like shadows to prey. Her music does not underline emotion, but rather gives it perspective, attention, and necessity.

The Last Word also gives voice to the power of perpetuation, in spite of all reason. There is the voice of the grandfather and there is the heart of Olivia's son, recorded before his birth. Between these two sounds of poor quality and low definition, faced with sonic imprints that encompass the entire universe, something of our inadequacies and our vital energy comes into play. Hesitant yet resolute, Pedroli has, little by little, discovered the voice of her being.

THE LAST WILL

Olivia Pedroli has kept the essentials of her grandfather's will, recorded on a dictaphone found in his office after his death: the punctuation marks and the terms that relate to his family. The rest has been removed.

The undersigned Hans-Rudolf Christen
born on 4.2.2.1916
son of Gotfried and Frida Christen *hyphen* Hodler
of Bern *parenthesis*
place of origin *close parenthesis*
and Herzogenbuchsee
domiciled in Bern 3006
expresses his last will as follows:
first
comma
that the spouses
on 11.04.1988
period
slash paragraph 1
period
new line first
period new line secondly
period
thirdly
comma my eldest son *comma*
period
new line
my wife and the three children
period new paragraph
2 in Roman numerals
inheritance agreement
underline
first
under 3 in Roman numerals
comma
Lise and the three children

the inheritance agreement
underline the inheritance
agreement
distribution of property
of the spouses
of the will *parenthesis 3*
in Roman numerals
close the parenthesis
period new line to avoid
any misunderstanding *comma*
Lise Christen *dash*
dash
this last will
period new line
comma an inheritance
agreement
comma
comma protection for
the surviving spouse
community of heirs
Lise and the three children
who survive me *period*
period new line secondly
period small a period
underline colon
comma
detached house
comma
comma
all in my name
comma
quotation marks
close quotation marks
part of the community

SOUND ARCHIVE
Translated from German

of heirs *comma*
underline
of my wife Lise Christen
all is to be underlined
period new line
Lise
comma
comma
the community of heirs
period new line
underline
of Lise
from the community of heirs
to third parties
parenthesis
close the parenthesis
comma
one of the children
colon
colon new line a
period new line b
thirty-three percent
of the community of heirs
new line c
the transferee
comma
to the other two children
of Lise and me
thirty percent each
parenthesis
close the parenthesis
period new line d
comma
period new paragraph
underline colon
Lise
period the community of heirs
of each of the three children
period
one of the children
comma
colon new line a
colon
parenthesis

close the parenthesis
for a child
parenthesis
below b colon
below
below children
open and close quotation marks
parenthesis
to own children *close*
the parenthesis
comma
thirty percent each
to his brothers and sisters
still alive
parenthesis
same
close the parenthesis new
paragraph two capital B
colon part of the community
of heirs
Lise
comma
of Lise
dash
comma
Lise
period dash of the community
of heirs
comma
parenthesis
close the parenthesis
Each of the three children
parenthesis including their
children
close the parenthesis
dash the same
dash semi-colon
inheritance
period
comma
period period new paragraph
thirdly

A FATAL ACCIDENT

The communications between a train driver trapped in his cabin and the control centre are recorded in the minutes following a terrible accident. This message was immediately broadcast by the media.

TRAIN DRIVER

There must be people injured, a lot because the train overturned.
I can't get out of the cabin.
Can you hear me?

CONTROL CENTER

Yes.

TRAIN DRIVER

It was green. I lost my focus for a moment and, how do you say, I had to go to 80 and I went to 190 or something like that.
I told the security people that it was dangerous, that one day we would lose focus and pay for it.
Oh, my God.
I told security it was dangerous.
We're human and we can miss it.
This turn is inhuman.
With one light... it's not fair that they did that.
The driver must be... but we're human.

CONTROL CENTER

Calm down.

TRAIN DRIVER

No, it's on my conscience, and the poor passengers.
My God, my God, my God, poor travelers
Please don't let anyone die
My conscience...
My God, poor travellers. Poor travellers....

SOUND ARCHIVE
Translated from Spanish

LITERARY WORK
Translated from Spanish

THE DUENDE

During a performed reading in Buenos Aires in 1933, Federico García Lorca tackled the strange power that is *duende*. The conference was broadcast on the radio, but all recordings of the poet's voice are lost. In *The Last Word*, the Google speech synthesis program renders it audible.

I shall try to give you a simple lesson in the hidden, aching spirit of Spain.

Whoever finds himself on the bull's hide stretched between the Júcar, Guadalfeo, Sil and Pisuerga rivers [...] often hears people say, "This has much *duende*".

All over Andalusia, [...] people speak constantly of the *duende* and identify it accurately and instinctively whenever it appears. [...] Manuel Torres, who had more culture in the blood than any man I ever met, pronounced this splendid sentence [...]: "All that has black sounds has *duende*". And there is no greater truth.

These black sounds are the mystery, the roots fastened in the mire that we all know and all ignore, the fertile silt that gives us the very substance of art.

The *duende*, then, lies in what we can do, not in what we have done. It is a struggle, not a thought. I have heard an old maestro of the guitar say, "the *duende* is not in the throat; the *duende* climbs up inside you from the soles of the feet". Meaning this: it is not a question of ability, but of true, living style, of blood, of the most ancient culture, of spontaneous creation.

Every man and every artist [...] climbs each step in the tower of his perfection by fighting his *duende*, not his angel, nor his muse. This distinction is fundamental, at the very root of the work. [...]

The angel dazzles, but he flies high over a man's head, shedding his grace, and the man effortlessly realizes his work or his charm or his dance. [...]

The muse dictates and sometimes prompts. [...] Poets who have muses hear voices and do not know where they are coming from. They come from the muse that encourages them and sometimes eats them alive. [...] The muse and the angel come from outside us: the angel gives lights, and the muse gives form. [...] But one must awaken the *duende* in the remotest mansions of the blood. And reject the angel, and chase away the muse with a kick [...]. The true fight is with the *duende*.

The great artists of the south of Spain, whether Gypsies or flamenco players, singers or musicians, know that no emotion is possible unless the *duende* comes. They may be able to fool people into thinking they have *duende*, [...] but we have only to pay a little attention and not surrender to indifference in order to discover the fraud and chase away their clumsy artifice.

The *duende's* arrival always means a radical change in forms. It brings to old planes unknown feelings of freshness, with the quality of something newly created, like a miracle, and it produces an almost religious enthusiasm.

In all Arabic music, whether dance, song, or elegy, the arrival of the *duende* is greeted with energetic cries of "Allah! Allah! Allah!" – which so resemble the "Olé!" of the bullfight that no-one knows whether they are not one and the same – while in all the songs of southern Spain its arrival is greeted with cries of "Viva Dios!" – the deep and tender human cry of communication with God by means of the five senses, thanks to the *duende*, that shakes the body and voice of the dancer. [...] Naturally, when this flight succeeds, everyone feels its effects; both the initiate, who sees how style has conquered a poor material, and the unenlightened, in the throes of some authentic emotion. [...] All arts are capable of *duende*, but where it finds greatest range, naturally, is in music, dance and spoken poetry, for these arts require a living body to interpret them [...]. Every art, and in fact every country, is capable of welcoming in the *duende*, the angel and the muse. And just as Germany may greet – subject to exceptions – the muse, and Italy forever lets in the angel, so in all ages has Spain been moved by the *duende*. For it is a country of ancient music and dance [...] a country of death, open to death.

Everywhere else, death is an end. Death comes, and the curtains are drawn. Not in Spain. In Spain they are opened. [...] A dead man in Spain is more alive as a dead man than anywhere else in the world.

When the muse sees death arrive, she closes the door, raises a plinth or promenades an urn and writes an epitaph with waxen hand, but soon she is watering her bay laurel again in a silence that wavers between two breezes. [...]

When the angel sees death come, he flies in slow circles and weaves tears of narcissi and ice into an elegy [...]. But how it horrifies him to feel even the tiniest spider on his tender rosy foot!

The *duende*, however, does not come at all unless it sees that death is possible, unless it is sure that death will prowl around the house, unless it is certain that death will shake those branches we all bear

and which we cannot, nor ever will be able to, console.

Through idea, sound or gesture, the *duende* enjoys fighting the creator on the very edge of the well. The angel and the muse escape with a violin or a compass; the *duende* wounds. In the healing of that wound which never closes, lie the strange, invented qualities of a man's work.

The *duende* works on the body of the dancer as the wind works on sand. With magical power it changes a beautiful girl into a lunar paralytic, or brings an adolescent blush to the broken old man begging in the wineshop, or the odor of a nocturnal port to a woman's hair; it works continuously on the arms with expressions that give birth to the dances of every age.

But it can never repeat himself. This is essential to emphasize. The *duende* does not repeat itself, any more than do the forms of the sea during a squall.

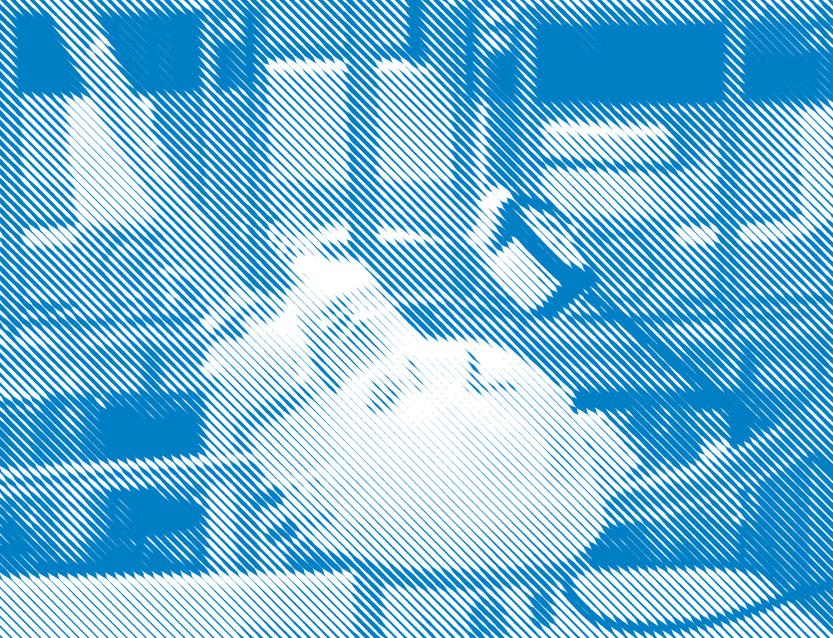
The *duende* is at its most impressive during the bullfight, for it must fight both death, which can destroy it, as well as geometry and measurement, the very basis of this celebration.

The bull has his orbit, and the bullfighter has his, and between these two orbits lies the point of danger, the vertex of this terrible game. You can hold the muleta with your muse, and the banderillas with your angel, and still pass for a good bullfighter; but for the cape work, when the bull is still clean of wounds, and at the moment of the kill, you need the help of the *duende* to achieve artistic truth. [...] Spain is the only country where death is a national spectacle.

Each art has a *duende* that is different in form and style, but their roots meet in the place where the black sounds of Manuel Torres come from – the essential, uncontrollable, quivering, common base of wood, sound, canvas, and word. [...] Ladies and gentlemen: I have raised three arches, and with a clumsy hand have placed in them the angel, the muse, and the *duende*. [...]

Where is the *duende*?

Through the empty arch comes a wind, a wind of the mind blowing relentlessly over the heads of the dead, in search of new landscapes and unknown accents: a wind that smells of baby's spittle, crushed grass, and the jellyfish's veil, announcing the constant baptism of newly created things.



Artificial silicone heart developed with a 3D printer at the ETH Zurich.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

In an interview with the BBC on December 2, 2014, astrophysicist Stephen Hawking warns of the effects of the development of a complete artificial intelligence. It is his famous robotic voice that we hear.

The primitive forms of artificial intelligence we already have, have proved very useful.

But I think that the development of full artificial intelligence could spell the end of the human race.

Once humans develop artificial intelligence, it would take off on its own and re-design itself at an ever-increasing rate. Humans, who are limited by slow biological evolution, couldn't compete, and would be superseded.

CINEMATOGRAPHIC WORK
Translated from Swedish

THE SACRIFICE

In the movie *The Sacrifice*, Tarkovsky's testamentary work, the main character, Alexander, talks to his mistress Maria about the relationship he has with his mother's wild garden. We hear the voices of Erland Josephson and Guðrún Gísladóttir.

ALEXANDER

– Years ago...

Before I was married, I often went to visit my mother in the country.

She was still alive in those days.

Her house, a little cottage, was surrounded by a garden, a little garden, dreadfully neglected and overgrown.

No one had tended it for many years, and I don't think anyone had ever been in it.

Even then, my mother was very ill. She hardly ever left the house. Still amidst the ruined garden, there was something that was, in its way, beautiful. Yes, now I know what it was.

When the weather was fine she often sat at the window looking out at the garden. She even had a special chair by the window.

Once, though, I decided that I would tidy things up in the garden, that is. I wanted to mow the grass, burn the weeds, prune the trees.

On the whole, I wanted to redo the garden in my own taste with my own hands. Yes, simply to please my mother.

And for two solid weeks I went at it with shears and a scythe.

I dug and cut and sawed and weeded. I kept my nose to the ground, literally. And I took great pains to get it ready as soon as possible.

My mother's condition grew worse, and she kept to her bed. But I wanted her to be able to sit by the window and see her new garden.

In short, when I was finished and everything was ready I took a bath put on fresh underwear, a new jacket, even a tie.

Then I sat down in the chair to see what I'd made, through her eyes, as it were. I sat there and looked out through the window.

I had prepared myself to enjoy the sight. Anyway, I looked out the window and saw...

What did I see?

Where had all the beauty gone?

All that was natural! It was so disgusting.

All that evidence of violence!

I remember once, when my sister was young.

AUDIOVISUAL ARCHIVE

She went to a barber and had her hair cut.
It was the fashion then.
Her hair was unbelievably lovely.
Golden yellow, like Lady Godiva's.
She came home pleased as punch.
Then my father saw her. He began to cry.
I think it was the same with the garden.

MARIA

– And your mother?
[The clock rings 3 times.]

ALEXANDER

– It's three o'clock!

THE LAST WILL

Period below

Bern on 18.06.2009

period

It's over now *comma*

but it still has to be signed.

For all my career, I have essentially looked at one thing, and that is: CHANGE. How the world changes, how we humans change in response to it, and what means we have in the scientific community to assist society in making the hard but necessary changes to limit the magnitude and pace of climate change, and to prepare for the unavoidable consequences that will come.

Over the years, I have convinced myself of one thing: the harder the problem, the softer the solution.

In order to change a fossil-fuel dependent society to a carbon-free resilient one requires a complete “blood transfusion” – not just its driving energy source has to be completely replaced with a new one, but the underlying thinking, the cultural narratives and norms that drive this society must be transformed.

THE CHANGE

That is not just an engineering problem (a hard solution); this is not even just a policy or market problem (a softer, but still tough, incisive solution). All of these will be needed, no doubt. But how do you design policy that works for humans and nature, for current and future generations? How do you ensure the price signals that help us move in a cleaner and more resilient direction work for everyone, particularly the poor, not just the rich and wealthy? How do you make these very hard changes, and keep at them for as long as it takes? These are ethics questions, psychological questions, questions about the narratives we tell ourselves, the values we choose to hold that ultimately drive all of these choices (soft solutions).

Well, these “soft” solutions – it turns out – are the hardest ones. And that's what I have committed myself to.

For the past 25 years, the main context in which I work on these soft solutions is adaptation to climate change in coastal areas. I remember, when I first started, I entitled one of my early papers “*Caught between the sea and a soft place*”, echoing the more commonly known saying about difficult dilemmas, “being caught between a rock and a hard place.” Terrible dilemmas is what coastal communities now and in the future will face: the ocean rising more than 1, 2 or more meters by 2100, and only expensive “solutions” to fight back, adjust to, or retreat from it. We can get glimpses of this future in coastal disasters but more and more, the sea will simply, quietly, inexorably – and everywhere – rise...

To confront this terrifying reality is in some ways like confronting your own ending or at least the potential of your own ending, but on a much grander scale. Most of us are absolutely terrified of that, are afraid to confront our death. We therefore deny our own ending. But that, I think, is exactly what we're asked to do collectively, not just in coastal communities, but as whole societies, as nations, and as a human species: to confront that vulnerability and – in the face of it – become more alive.

This is not impossible. Not even utopian. How often have you heard of a dying person who, when they finally accepted their impending death, began to see greater beauty in every face, in every leaf, in every cloud? Began to share themselves more generously? Let go of what they no longer felt held meaning while giving their precious possessions to loved ones? More importantly even, gave themselves to their friends and family with even greater love? And because of that, felt richer and happier than ever before, and enjoyed every remaining moment, every given day, with life-affirming intensity?!

This is precisely where I think we are. As we stand at the threshold of having to let go of a way of life that has led to the rapid degradation of our planet's life support system – of our air, climate, water, forests, oceans, soils and resources – we are in great pain. The loss of the familiar is incredibly painful. For many it is in fact life threatening. For others, this letting go threatens our egos and identities, our beliefs and habits and so much more.

This then is the time – as a society – when we have to look at what is worth keeping.

In mythology, this process of letting go, and sorting through what's worthy and true, and discovering – or re-discovering – life-sustaining values and ways of being, our truer nature, this process has a common shape¹. You might imagine it like the shape of a U: it begins with that letting go, a descent from where we have been toward a dark, deep, unknown and often terrifying place of not-knowing, grappling with who we've been and searching for who we might become, all the while not knowing whether we will actually ever see the light again. That dark night of the soul.

We're still at the bottom of this transformative curve and we'll have to come back in many ways from this place of dying to our old ways, this death, and eventually return to life. Often in that dark, seeking

place, we discover something truly profound about who we really are or what it is that we want to take forward.

If we successfully transition through this threshing time – and there is no guarantee we will, but it is possible! – we will ascend again from the depth, return to life, and in fact learn to live into a new life, one in which we try to embody those new values, those new-found truths.

Increasingly in my work, I'm confronted with people who feel hopeless and overwhelmed by climate change. I think, we have lost the cultural knowledge of what this journey looks like. And so, all people see is a terrifying future, horrible dilemmas, and no way through. They see only the losses, but no possibility of a positive outcome. They want someone to come in and fix the problem with a seawall, with a technological fix, something... anything... but they don't know of the "soft" work which is actually the harder work that needs to be done to make it through. It is the hardest transformation that humans have ever had to go through. In fact, from a societal and species perspective, it is the riskiest test to fail.

And we might. I don't know. But I think it is the worthiest task to dedicate ourselves toward: to help us recognize where we are, and support ourselves and each other through this difficult transformation. And maybe in the process find our way to becoming a life-sustaining species on this planet. As long as I am still here, that is my work, my *real* work.

¹ The three-partite transformative archetype was described in greater detail and applied to the idea of a cultural transformation in the face of climate change in the following, jointly written paper: Berzonsky, C. L. & S. C. Moser (2017) "Becoming *homo sapiens sapiens*: Mapping the psycho-cultural transformation in the Anthropocene", *Anthropocene*, 20, 15-23.

INTRODUCTION

By Arnaud Robert
Translated by Sarah Jane Moloney

THE LAST WILL

Translated by Martine Dethurens

A FATAL ACCIDENT

Available on: www.rts.ch/info/monde/5190358-les-declarations-du-conducteur-juste-apres-l-accident-du-train-en-espagne.html
06.09.2013, 16h17.
Translated by Martine Dethurens

THE DUENDE

Taken from: Federico García Lorca, “Play and Theory of the Duende”,
In Search of Duende, New York, New Directions Books, 1998.
Translated by Christopher Mauer, revised by Sarah Jane Moloney

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Available on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fFLVyWBDTfo>
02.12.2014, 4'18”.

THE SACRIFICE

Taken from: Andrei Tarkovsky, *The Sacrifice* (1986).
Translated by Andrey Nekrasov.

EPILOGUE

By Susanne Moser.

Sound extracts from the shows are made available to the holders of this booklet for private listening. They can be accessed freely by following this link or by scanning the flash code opposite.
<https://qr.go.page.link/mWta6>



The Last Word is produced by the Betacorn Company and co-produced by the Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne, the TPR in La Chaux-de-Fonds and Usinesonore in Bienne. Its first performances in the fall of 2019 were given at the TPR in La Chaux-de-Fonds from October 24 to 27, in Nebia in Bienne on November 2 and at the Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne from November 12 to 16.

General design, writing, composition Olivia Pedrolì
Light creation and technical management Stéphane Gattoni
Sound creation and sound management Robert Torche
Outside eye Nicole Seiler
Administration and production Mariana Nunes
Resonator for piano Robert Kieffer
Costume Les Récupérables, alterations: Aurélie Wiedmer
Set construction Atelier du Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne
Translation of surtitles Martine Dethurens
Libretto proofreading: Antonin Wiser, layout: Florence Chèvre

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The Last Word is an transdisciplinary creation by the Swiss musician Olivia Pedroli which explores the themes of inheritance, transmission and life choices. Alone on stage, the artist unravels the threads of time – from past generations to future perspectives – and invites the audience to share in an audio-visual experience in which successive layers unfurl, in the form of sound archives, original compositions, song, videos and speech synthesis.

This libretto brings together the English translations of the various texts integrated into the scenography of the piece: transcriptions of sound and audio-visual archives, taken from very different backgrounds (family, society, science, cinematography, literature, technology), yet all chosen for the vital emotion and symbolic power which they impress upon us. An introduction by Arnaud Robert, journalist, documentary filmmaker and writer, and an epilogue by Susanne Moser, IPCC expert and specialist in our vulnerability and resilience in the face of climate change, encircle them and put them in perspective.



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