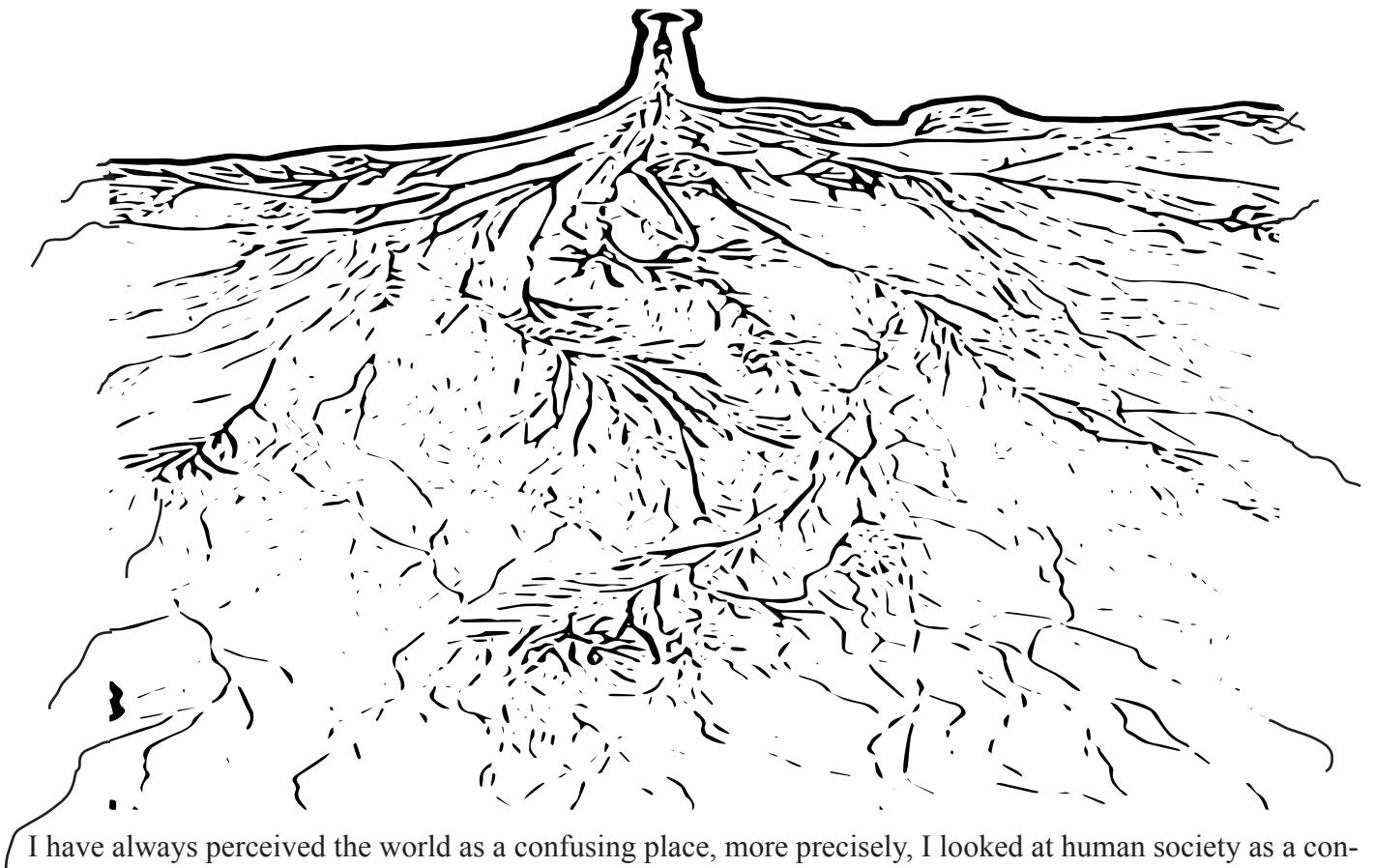


To be With

“How can experimental moving images serve as a tool for creating new narratives that transcend and challenge Western anthropocentric and colonial ideology through tales of multispecies collaboration?”

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Introduction and literary review: The mushroom



I have always perceived the world as a confusing place, more precisely, I looked at human society as a confusing place. As I observe the city around me - a bubble of fast paced, over consumerist and individualistic society - invisible people beg on the side of the road, while fashionable people run around with their take-away matcha latte. Most of the products I observe around me come from far away, are made by exploited people, produce toxic waste, and are now damaging someone in London with their chemical materials. If I look at the news and venture outside this bubble, the situation worsens. It is crystal clear now, the price for our lifestyle is not paid by the wealthy western world. People in the ex-colonies (or current colonies) pay for the environmental destruction that we cause and are killed by oppressive colonial states that our governments condone and support. I could write a whole piece of research on the absolutely insane state of humans; however, in this paper, I aim to understand why certain dynamics are so embedded in our society, how we can change perspective and how can we alter the course of this mad rush towards catastrophe. As an artist and inhabitant of the privileged part of the world, I often wonder if I could make a change, or better be an organic part of the change.

This research is a journey that crosses, experimental filmmaking and a fraction of the academic world that touches ecology, decolonial struggles, and social justice, not as separate issues but as connected elements.

Texts that are incredibly helpful in understanding the late capitalist society we currently live in, and how we could rethink it. However, through my journey I want to find out how this fraction of academia relates to art: can art be of support in switching narratives and creating new possibilities and aid in the creation of new ideas for world making? Can art be a medium in helping humans to reflect on their role in society and seeing different perspectives? And finally, can art make us less individualistic, more connected to other humans and non-humans?

A turning point in my journey came during a lecture led by writer and researcher Elisa Adami, who now mentors my writing. The session introduced me to decolonial studies through the lens of film, a perspective I had never encountered before. Elisa presented works that explored the decolonization of land and people while fostering connections and solidarity across communities. I realized that to incorporate this kind of work into my artistic practice, I must delve deeper into what I now call Resistance Art: a form of art that challenges dominant ideologies, disrupts mainstream narratives, and tells stories of resistance, solidarity, and transformative change.

I also encountered non-human guides to accompany me on this journey—figures that imparted unique qualities and lessons. The mushroom taught me about interconnectedness and how to unite disparate worlds. The goat showed me resilience and endurance. The crab taught me adaptability, the ability to navigate between realms, and to see with a fresh perspective.

My first guide for this research journey is going to be the mushroom. Apparently isolated, mushrooms grow at the bottom of the forest, but in reality their mycelium connects the whole forest. Not only the mushrooms communicate between them, but also they connect all of the trees and the plants around them. In this nonlinear research an ally capable of linking different ideas will come in handy.

So, before I address my central research question: “How can experimental moving images serve as a tool for creating new narratives that transcend and challenge Western anthropocentric and colonial ideology, through tales of multispecies collaboration?” Following the entangled mycelium, I will now pin down what I mean by Western colonial and capitalist ideology and why I believe they should be challenged. I will now lay the academic grounds for this paper.

Western ideology is an ideology of separation, othering:

wilderness - civilization

white - non white

human - non human

These divisions between humanity and nature are deeply rooted in Western philosophical tradition, which differentiates between "intellect" and "emotion," between "cultural" rationality and the primordial, "natural" subconscious. These dichotomies have become so deeply ingrained in Western thought that they have assumed the status of ontological and epistemological frameworks shaping how we think about and study the world.

In my view, the human-nature binary - together with colonialism and capitalism - lies at the heart of the climate crisis we are currently facing. The natural world is perceived as an external entity, a realm of resources to be extracted in the pursuit of progress—conceived as linear growth from point A to point B. Following the mycelial structure of mushrooms will help us to connect these different matters and understand how they interact.

As I begin to make these connections, the first author who comes to my mind is Amitav Ghosh. Amitav Ghosh is a writer of both fiction and nonfiction stories, which explore the connection between ecology, nature conservation, natural destruction, colonialism and capitalism. In an interview for *Between Covers*, The writer argues that the climate crisis is deeply tied to historical and geopolitical conflicts. He contrasts Western views, which only focus on future solutions, with perspectives from the Global South, which see the current climate struggles as rooted in past injustices (Ghosh, Amitav Ghosh : *Smoke and Ashes*, NA). In *The Nutmeg's Curse*, Ghosh explains, the climate crisis is seen as a geopolitical issue, worsened by the West's focus on maintaining dominance through military spending rather than climate action. Actions like Biden's¹ climate policies, countered by economic moves against China, exemplify how geopolitical rivalry hinders genuine solutions (Ghosh, *The Nutmeg's curse*, 2021).

Moving deeper into these theories William Cronon in the article, "The Problem with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature" challenges the concept of wilderness and describes how it was invented in the 19th century. In fact, before that time wilderness was a word with a very negative connotation. With the advent of the frontier and the far west in the US, European Colonialism and the idea of the Sublime (originated by the literary movement of Romanticism,) the wilds became something attractive, a place where people could observe nature in its uncontaminated way.

While wilderness came to represent the sublime's powerful awe, it was also being domesticated—not only by settlers but by those who celebrated its rawness. By the end of the nineteenth century, the reverent veneration that the romantics felt in nature was moving towards a more sentimental view. As tourism grew, the wilderness transformed from a place of reverence into a scenic attraction for enjoyment, thus taming the sublime (Cronon, 1995).

¹:President Biden's economic plan aims to disadvantage China despite they provide cheaper electric cars that could help reduce the use of fossil fuel.

That is the time when natural parks began to be established. They were thought of as places of environmental protection, and for experiencing wilderness, to then return to the comforts of civilization.

The question of whether natural parks truly preserve nature or serve as a means of control is particularly relevant in colonized lands. A practical example investigated by the researcher and journalist Olivier van Beemen in an article written for the *Groene Amsterdammer*, is African Parks, a company that manages 22 parks in 12 African countries and receives funds from the EU, various charities and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Founded by a Dutch industrialist, the company has gained permission from local governments to control parks for about 10-25 years, employing armed rangers to protect animals and exclude local communities who once lived in harmony with the land. The parks attract white tourists and promote a "business approach to conservation", alienating the local population. Behind these actions, there is an idea of Africa as an "Eden," untouched by industrial destruction, which still persists in Western media such as the Lion King and many others. (Beemen, 2024)

In *The Invention of Green Colonialism*, Guillaume Blanc critiques how the admiration for African nature was accompanied by its exploitation and destruction. Blanc writes that the same people who were fascinated by the nature of the African continent are the same who then exploited and destroyed nature. By the end of the 1800s about 6500 animals per year were killed in hunting trips (The first natural park in the USA was founded in 1872). It was around that time that hunting reserves started to appear. Places where white "hunters" were welcome to hunt, in opposition to any black person seen as "poacher". By the first half of the 1900 natural parks started to be founded in Africa by colonial authorities. Today, with over 300 parks, space for indigenous populations is increasingly limited, alongside a prevailing belief that white people are better suited to protect African nature than the indigenous people themselves. (Blanc, 2022)

Looking at both old and more recent colonial histories helps us understand how our society works today. For example, capitalism together with the industrial revolution, were only possible because of European colonialism which provided the necessary resources for the big economic and technological leap that happened at the end of the 18th century in England and later in the rest of Europe and the world (Gosh, Amitav Ghosh : Smoke and Ashes, NA).

What happens next? Society, as we know it, begins to take shape. Since the industrial revolution, we live in what is often called the Anthropocene—a geological age defined by the profound impact humans have on the planet. Ursula K. Le Guin illustrates this shift, noting how humans once adapted to nature, as seen in tools like the water mill. Today, however, we have gained the ability to reshape nature to our will. The issue is that this influence has grown excessively. Our economy is built on the relentless exploitation of nature, driven by consumption and the pursuit of endless progress (Guin, 1989) .

This mindset, still tied to ideas like those in *The Stages of Economic Growth*, a non-Communist Manifesto (Rostow, 1960), perpetuates a toxic cycle of consumption and exploitation. It is now clearer than ever that the planet cannot provide infinite resources, and the notion of perpetual growth will inevitably lead to social and ecological catastrophe.

It seems impossible to create anything outside the framework of capitalism. As Mark Fisher famously noted, “It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.” In Fisher’s view, capitalism is not just an economic system but a dominant mode of thought that absorbs all previous historical narratives, making itself appear as the only conceivable reality. Part of this is due to capitalism often being perceived as the lesser of two evils—for example, despite global injustices and hunger, we reassure ourselves that at least we are not living under the terror of regimes like Stalin’s. Moreover, capitalism is remarkably adept at co-opting even its own opposition. This paradox is exemplified by Kurt Cobain and Nirvana, whose initial aim was to challenge dominant ideologies, but who eventually became integral to the capitalist music industry. As Fisher observes, nothing sells on MTV quite like opposition to MTV (Fisher, 2009)

Capitalist Realism is surely an enlightening text when talking about capitalism and its alternatives. And I believe Fisher’s analysis to be very useful to understand the dynamics of capitalism and how totalizing it is for our society. However I also believe that the first step in dismantling the capitalistic ideology is to imagine its end: Imagining the end of capitalism is an act of resistance.

To imagine the end of capitalism we need to look at its edges, messy and uneven. Maybe we will have to follow our myceliac guide at the end of the world.

How can we understand the ways of survival and collaboration? How can life prosper in a world determined to commodify and privatize every aspect of human relations and non-human life? These are the questions that Anna Tsing aims to answer in her book *The Mushroom at the End of The World, How to Survive in Capitalistic Ruins*. (Tsing, 2015)

The text explores life in late capitalism focusing on uncanny connections such as the one between the Oregon forest, Matsutake lovers in Japan and Ming refugees from the Cambodian war.

In her ethnographic book Anna Tsing talks about the Matsutake mushroom and how this very special being is able to thrive in the ruins of capitalism: the destroyed landscapes left by logging and deforestation. Not only is the matsutake able to thrive, but it also helps the trees to restore themselves. Through this small being, Anna Tsing analyzes capitalism, the United States, the environmental crisis, and the lives of all those she describes as precarious. Through this ethnographic book, Tsing shows us how many aspects of our world are actually interconnected and she begins to untangle the complicated threads of our present world.

We live in a precarious world, Tsing Writes—a world precarious for all of the planet's diverse inhabitants. Precarity, which is often described as an anomaly, is actually the norm (Tsing, 2015).

Our mushroom guide led us below the surface, deeper into uncharted territory, laying the foundation for what lies ahead. With the ground now prepared, we are ready to embark on an adventure—one that seeks films capable of inspiring change and transformation. The Goat will led us through paths of resistance and endurance, it will show us two films that show different forms of resistance: the one of guerrilla fight, and the one hidden in the imperturbable gestures of everyday life. Both these resistances happen in alliance with the non human realm.

Regarding the crab, it will lead us through water and land and it will show us how to turn our perspective upside down; the crab will introduce us to films that teach us how to embody nature and collaborate with it..



Resistance: The Goat

When thinking of resistance, endurance and multispecies assemblages that can endure even in the most dangerous war and post war landscapes, I think of goats and goatherds.

Their thousands and thousands of years old relationship is central in understanding the interconnection between humans, animals, and land.

Anthropologist Munira Khayyat, examines life in conflict zones, and perspectives from the Global South.

Through years of fieldwork, Khayyat reveals how war zones are not only sites of destruction but also environments where life persists.

In the article titled “How to Live (and Die) in an Explosive Landscape,” Khayyat narrates the story of a Lebanese Goat shepherd and his goats.

In 2006, during the last days of the war between Lebanon and Israel, the region of south Lebanon was targeted with hundreds of cluster bombs which pose a huge risk for the livelihoods of those who sustain themselves with a rural life.

In this environment of continuous dangers, the goat is the only domesticated animal that can survive, because she can reach the highest peaks, and sustain herself foraging almost any plant.

She doesn't need a lot of water or food, and her physical weight is light enough not to set mines off. The capability to survive in such a hostile landscape, allows goats to support humans surviving in the same conditions.

(Khayatt, 2023).



This story, such as Tsing's ethnographic story of the Matsutake mushroom, has the power of showing a world of interconnections, otherwise difficult to grasp. The alliance between human and goat in southern Lebanon is a tangible story, related to someone's everyday life but it is connected to war and occupation, it is connected to multispecies alliances, and the power of collaboration.

This chapter explores moving image and collaborative resistance: It questions how filmmaking can provide a tool for resisting oppressive regimes or ideologies and how collaborative documentary can be a powerful medium in showing real life utopias, sharing new ways of living and the possibilities of resistance.

This chapter studies two artists – Marwa Arsanios and Jumana Manna – who use their films to strike back, and to create powerful multispecies alliances between art, nature, and humans, in order to endure under forceful occupation and even while fighting a war.



Who is Afraid of Ideology? Part One (Arsanios, 2017)

*“We are not outside observers of the world
nor are we simply located at particular places in the world
rather we are part of the world in it’s ongoing intra activity “*

This is the sentence that opens *Who is Afraid of Ideology?* a series of four films created by Marwa Arsanios. Marwa Arsanios is a Lebanese filmmaker, researcher, and multidisciplinary artist; she focuses on reconsidering politics with a particular attention to climate justice and land struggles. Her artistic practice often revolves around fostering dialogue, facilitating mediation, and exploring the creation of new relationships with both humans and non-human agents. She identifies strongly as an anti-colonial and anti-capitalist activist. In a 2022 interview, Arsanios described film as a medium for communication, a way to engage with people, reflect on critical issues, and open up spaces for meaningful conversations (Arsanios, Marwa Arsanios: *Who Is Afraid of Ideology?*, 2022,). In another online lecture given for UMPRUM Praha, she delves deeper into the significance of art in her work, emphasizing how it serves as a concrete and politically charged expression (Arsanios, *Lecture*, Marwa Arsanios, 2022).

As an artist, she serves as a profound source of inspiration for me, as her work seamlessly bridges the divide between the realms of academia and the expressive world of art and moving images. Through her creations, film becomes more than just a medium; it transforms into a powerful tool for both conveying ideas and instigating change. Her approach exemplifies how art can be intellectually rigorous while remaining deeply emotive, using the cinematic form not only to illustrate but also to bring new realities into being.

From a more theoretical perspective, this work holds remarkable significance for this research, as it engages with ecological themes through a profoundly complex and multifaceted lens. It delves into the intricate relationships between humans and the natural world, as well as the nuanced dynamics among individuals and communities, rigorously interrogating the forces of colonialism and occupation. This layered approach not only enriches ecological discourse but also challenges conventional narratives, offering a critical and expansive understanding of these interconnected issues.

Who is Afraid of Ideology ? explores different micro utopias which relate to the relationship between humans and nature, indigenous populations and their land, and the intertwined connection between colonialism and environmental destruction. Arsanios challenges the western epistemology, giving a new perspective on how to make utopias. The first parts of *Who Is Afraid of Ideology* shows the Kurdish movement for liberation. The films focus on female fighters, forty of whom left their villages and are now living and building a female-only village; where women who run from a difficult situation, or simply do not wish to marry, can find safety. The second part of *Who is Afraid of Ideology?* is about this village.

Marwa Arsanios traveled to a Kurdish-inhabited area where she met with Pelşîn Tolhîdan a writer and a member of the Kurdish Guerrilla. She had first got to know Pelşîn through her texts and gradually the two started a collaboration. Pelşîn Tolhîdan's thoughts and writings are gathered in the film. The writings of Pelşîn Tolhîdan are central in understanding the connection between colonialism and climate justice. For instance, in one of her texts "Ecological Catastrophe: Nature Talks Back" She describes the terrible things that humans are doing to nature but also how the places impacted by colonialism suffer the consequences of climate change to a greater extent.

" We are under siege from a nature that has been wounded, divided, desecrated, poisoned, damaged, and made to bleed," (Tolidhan, 2018)

The documentary is a collaboration between Marwa, women of the Kurdish Guerrilla, especially Pelşîn Tolhîdan, and the nature of Kurdistan. The medium of the film allows for the juxtaposition of different elements, such as Arsanios' voice, the voices of the fighters, and the vivid details of nature. These depictions of nature move away from the traditional portrayal of wide, empty landscapes. Instead, the camera captures nature's livelihood and intricate variations, forging a connection between the Kurdish female fighters and the land they inhabit (Tolhildan, 2017).

Through this approach, Arsanios reclaims the representation of nature from its colonial framing as *Terra Nullius*—a land seen as empty, savage and belonging to no one. By focusing on the microscopic life within each small part of the environment, she shifts the perception of the land from a sterile, distant landscape to a site teeming with vitality, resisting notions of ownership or propriety. The camera, which moves as though searching, becomes a key tool in Arsanios' practice. Its movements evoke a human presence and invite viewers to actively engage with the land. By making the act of filming visible, Arsanios emphasizes the medium's role, rejecting the illusion of neutrality and encouraging viewers to critically consider how land and life are represented.

In a recent article on *Afterall* Marwa Arsanios spends some pages talking about the role that art, and in particular filmmaking, have in matters of solidarity and resistance to oppression: “there is a story of partisanship and militancy in the arts, a union of films and anticolonial history that has produced a culture of resistance” she states. Further she expresses how this militant art builds a front and alliance that is necessary to create a counter image to colonial and capitalist visions.

(Arsanios, Melek- Mashaa', 2024).

Who is afraid of Ideology? Part 1 is a great example to answer the question Arsanios poses in the article. The film is dispersed; it is not an easy watch, and the viewer is continually reminded that they are watching a film. The usual tacit agreement between spectator and filmmaker is shattered, as there is no attempt to uphold cinematic illusions. In this way, Marwa Arsanios highlights her own position as the filmmaker, actively engaging with the process of interviewing. Arsanios wants to remind the viewer that what they are watching is mediated, and that she is merely using the language of film to present it (Arsanios, 2017).

Who is Afraid of Ideology? part One is a manifesto of ecology, a stream of consciousness, informed by different voices, it is not a typical discourse, rather a flow of ideas. Through the film, Arsanios reads texts from scholars such as Neil Board or Vicky Kirbi and later moves on to what the fighters for the liberation of the Kurdish-inhabited area have to say. The film shows the mountains of the Kurdish-inhabited area.

The scenes are repetitive, with seemingly careless framing—such as instances where Marwa is seen sitting in a car reading—constantly reminding us of her presence as a director. She does not position herself as an omniscient observer of an untouched landscape, a common trope in many documentaries. Instead, she emphasizes her positionality, actively engaging in the conversations with the Kurdish fighters. We hear her questions in Arabic, followed by English translations of the responses. Another distancing technique Arsanios uses is the frequent mismatch between sound and image, a technique that further emphasizes the mediation of the technical and filmic apparatus. This disjunction reminds us that we are not simply observing reality, but rather experiencing it through a specific cinematic lens. By drawing attention to this mediation, Arsanios makes the viewer more aware of the constructed nature of what they are watching.

The spoken word in the films expresses the importance of ecology and highlights how past indigenous generations had a strong connection to the nature they inhabit. “They would sing songs to the mountain not about the mountain” says one of the voices interviewed, the juxtaposition of sound and images, creates a unique connection between the surroundings and its inhabitants.

Tolhidan's voice is one of the most present, in her texts she explores the idea of ecology, as taught to her by her mother and she describes humans as one of the many inhabitants of the world, on the same level, for example, of a cat, or a fox. Furthermore, she expresses the contradiction between war and ecological thinking and explores the difficulties of protecting one's land by also putting it at risk. Through Tolhidan's text, Arsanios explores the contradictions of fighting for one's home, while also protecting nature. She expresses the difficulty of when, sometimes, during the guerrilla, they are forced to cut a tree, or to hurt nature for survival's sake. WTolidhan also talks about the sensitivity of guerrilla fighters towards even the smallest element in nature; this happens because they are aware of the connection between humans and nature that western liberal culture often forgets. According to PelŞÎn Tolhidan the western state is an entity that separates citizens from nature: "in the state, nature itself is eradicated from its inhabitants becoming something sterile and idealized" (Arsanios, 2017).

Responding to Mark Fisher's call for alternatives to capitalism "before the end of the world," Arsanios presents us with a pathway of resistance against oppressive systems. Her work reveals the strength found in resilience, in breaking free from mainstream norms, and in nurturing an independence of thought that defies conformity and redefines freedom. This film shines a light on alternative ways of living and thinking, offering a vision powerful enough to challenge Western capitalist ideologies by demonstrating that other possibilities exist.

It is a challenging, multi-layered journey, intricate and at times confusing, yet we follow our symbolic guide, the goat, who safely leads us across treacherous terrain. We accept that we may not understand everything, but we hold on to something meaningful. Our foraging companion can take us to new places and even to another time. In 2022, in Palestine, even before the devastation Israel is now inflicting on the Palestinian people, life was already shaped by the struggle of occupation. The Israeli government has long acted as an oppressor and colonizer. Now, our trusted guide, the goat, will help us cross borders and sustain us on this search.



Foragers (Manna, 2022):

Another example of film used as a tool for showing resistance is *Foragers* by Palestinian visual artist and filmmaker Jumana Manna who mixes archive footage, documentary, and fiction.

Jumana Manna's work explores how power shapes bodies, land, and materials, examining the impact of colonial histories. Using sculpture, film, and writing, she explores preservation's paradoxes, particularly in architecture, agriculture, and law (Manna, Info, N.A.).

In her lecture on the film *Foragers*, Manna reflects on the colonial appropriation of nature, specifically examining how the British Empire extended its control to plants. She highlights the creation of botanical gardens—analogue to zoos, natural history museums, and archaeological collections—as showcases of colonial "beauty" designed for the gaze of those in the imperial core. This dynamic involved both the forced cultivation of specific plants, such as opium in Asia, and the systematic collection of botanical "wonders" from across the empire. These practices underscore the colonial authority over determining which plants were preserved, cultivated, or eradicated—an exercise in classification and control (Jumana Manna Master-class, 2023).

Manna's discussion intersects with themes explored in Amitav Ghosh's writings, which delve into plant intelligence, ecological relationships, and the entanglement of capitalism with colonial extractivism. Ghosh examines how these systems, rooted in colonial histories, continue to shape ecological exploitation and the prioritization of certain life forms over others (Gosh, Amitav Ghosh : Smoke and Ashes, 2022)

In 2022 with her film *Foragers*, the artist produced a filmic investigation on the foraging of two native plants "Akkoub" and "Zaatar". The film explores the policing laws enforced in 1977 by the Israeli government that banned the foraging of these wild plants. Both plants are symbols of Palestinian identity (Manna, 2022). The ban was officially justified as a measure to protect these plants; however, this reasoning appears questionable when considering the extensive environmental damage Israel has inflicted and continues to inflict—not only in Palestine but also in Lebanon and across the broader region.

For example, the carbon footprint of only 60 days of the Israeli war on Gaza exceeds the annual footprint of 20 climate vulnerable countries. Not to mention that since 1967, Israeli actions have destroyed over 800,000 olive trees in Palestinian territories, significantly impacting the culture and economy of Palestinian communities.



Screen grab from *Foragers*,
Jumana Manna (2022)

These trees, vital for livelihoods, are often uprooted, burned, or vandalized, particularly during settlement expansions in the West Bank. Destruction intensifies around the olive harvest season, with over 9,000 trees damaged or destroyed between August 2020 and August 2021 (Hedroug, 11). Or the phosphorus bombs dropped in Lebanon, which are so damaging for the ecosystem. This goes without mentioning the human cost of the Israeli ethnic cleansing operation².

Israel, since the very beginning of its occupation in Palestine has had and keeps having a colonial attitude not only towards the people but also towards land, plants and animals, explains Rabea Eghbariah in an article titled: “The Struggle for Za’atar and Akkoub: Israeli Nature Protection Laws and the Criminalization of Palestinian Herb-Picking Culture” First of all, the Zionist state treated the Arabic, Palestinian land as a savage land that needed to be cured: the first step was reforestation of pines which not only served as a symbol to substitute the Palestinian olive trees, but also the pines covered the ruins of Palestinian villages destroyed during the Nakba. A second aspect of this land shaping and appropriating of the Palestinian nature happens later, during the 1960s and 1970s, when the Arabic breeds of black goats and camels were accused of erosion of the land and of destroying the trees and were systematically replaced by white goats and European cattle (Eghbariah, “The Struggle for Za’atar and Akkoub: Israeli Nature Protection Laws and the Criminalization of Palestinian Herb-Picking Culture.”, n.a.).

If we look at the general lack of interest for the environment by the Israeli state, it sounds like a quite bizarre law from their side. Especially when dealing with plants which do not die when foraged but which instead grow stronger.

2: Since October 7, 2023, more than 43,972 deaths have been reported in the Gaza Strip, including approximately 16,500 kids. Most of the casualties are civilians.

One of the opening scenes of *Foragers*, consists of a fragment of archive footage: The footage shows an extract from a '70s Israeli TV program in which za'atar is discussed. The program shows an Israeli businessman bragging about his decision to cultivate and sell za'atar. He also says that za'atar will become the herb symbol of Israeli cuisine and culture. He is aware of the fact that Palestinians, but also other Arabic cultures make great use of the herbs, and he wants to sell it and cultivate it (Manna, 2022). In this way the herb, which was a public good, foraged by Palestinians turns into a commodity that profits Israelis.

Through an investigation around this law and the ones who breach it, Manna's film delves into the complex relationship between business and politics in the systematic erasure of Palestinian culture, revealing how even the act of foraging wild plants is deeply intertwined with larger struggles over land ownership and sovereignty.

The film illustrates how such seemingly small, everyday practices are linked to the broader dynamics of power, control, and cultural survival.

Foragers shows how the Palestinians are deeply connected to their land and its fruits, the film shows how Nature is part of their culture, not something separated and disconnected. This is opposed to the western ideology of having a binary that separates nature and culture, society and wilderness, rational and irrational.

The film shows how, on the contrary, for those who forage Za'atar and Akkoub, and cook it, nature is connected to their culture, foraging is enhancing their connection to the land. There is a scene in the film where a Palestinian man is in a police office, where he is accused of foraging Za'atar. His response to this accusation is "I am nature, I would never hurt nature." This discourse counters the notion that the colonized are wild and barbaric while the colonizers bring civilization. During an online Masterclass for the Centre for Palestine Studies, Manna expressed how this sentence is the thesis of the film. It serves as a response to the trope of the native population equated to a barbaric land, which needs civilization and cultivation. In affirming that he is nature our character appropriates and reverses this narrative. *Foragers* shows how the Israeli state delegitimizes the connection between Palestinians, who are the indigenous population of that land, and their nature (Manna, Jumana Manna Masterclass, 2023).

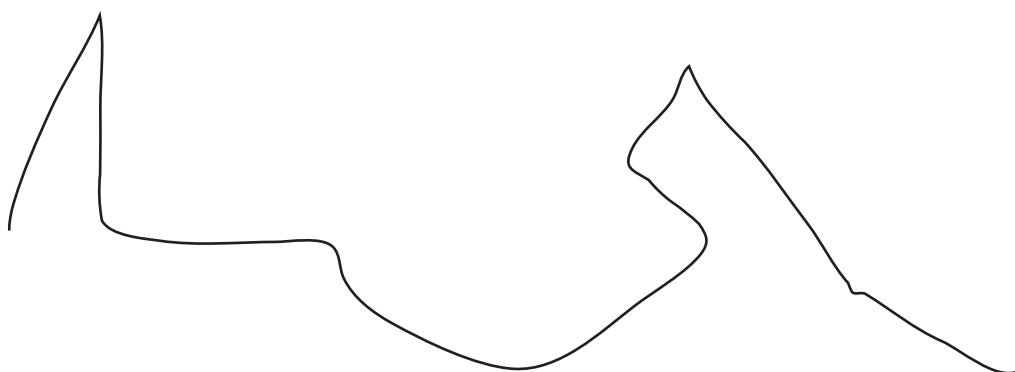
The control of Botany is typical in colonial history, Manna explains, in this way colonial power gets to decide what is worth preserving and cultivating and what not. In this context of preservation, the question is not if to preserve but how, and who gets to decide. The film also explores the concept of colonialism and conservation around corrosion and ruins. In the same lecture, Manna delves into the idea of preservations that always includes an erasure, something that is not preserved. Conservation becomes narration, especially in colonial histories, in recording and categorization there is an erasure of native power. As a matter of fact, colonial power often freezes the preexisting culture, creating an artificial collection of what is left of the past.

An example of this process can be found in museums that gather everything which is displaced by colonial experience (Manna, Jumana Manna Masterclass, 2023). Moreover, in an article for e-flux, Jumana Manna discusses how restoration often removes places or objects from their original context to recreate an idealized version of the past. She highlights how National Zionism is a project to take back land for Jews, framed within the idea of a modern nation-state. Manna points out that these efforts, including preserving history and nature conservation, are used to justify territorial claims and build a specific national identity (Manna, Where Nature Ends and Settlements Begin, 2020).

The tradition of foraging is being abandoned by the younger generations, constantly alienated from their nature and culture, and they are losing contact with it. *Foragers* is also a way to save this tradition from erasure. Film, like archiving and other art forms, has the capacity to alter this story of cancellation. For example, there is a scene where the filmmaker, while foraging with her parents, walks through some ruins: a village destroyed during the Nakba. Manna's mother describes the houses, who lived there, and where everything was. This history is now preserved in the film forever. Cinema opens an interruption that allows us to experience what's hidden, what's forgotten. The lives of the ones who forage are also remembered and archived through the movie.

Overall *Foragers* deals with preservation in an everyday-life sense, that defies the institution of hegemonic power, in this sense the film especially explores Resistance, in a very special way, as it shows resistance as something simple and apparently small. Yet these small acts of disobedience to an unjust law can shake the foundations of an oppressive system of thought.

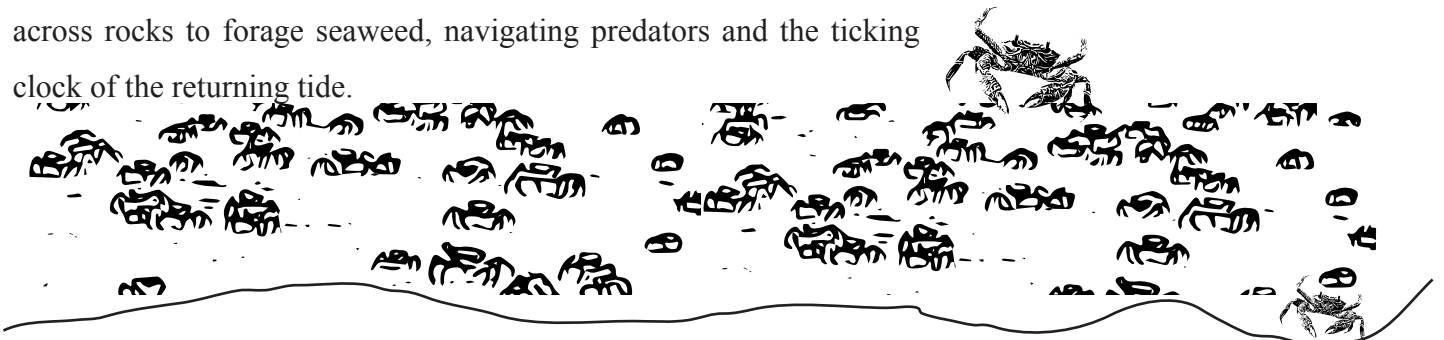
Our animal guide led us through uneven terrain, revealing two distinct forms of resistance, and taught us how to fight back in alliance with our non-human companions.



looking with other's
eyes:
The Crab



To escape our human perspective, we turn to a humble guide: the crab. Living between land and sea, the crab thrives in constant transformation, its rhythm dictated by moon and tide. With each ebb, it scurries across rocks to forage seaweed, navigating predators and the ticking clock of the returning tide.



Between earth and ocean, the crab learns to see the world from many perspectives, adapting with every step. We, too, can follow its example—learning to move between worlds, to adapt, and to view the shifting tides of our environment with fresh eyes, seeing beyond the limits of our own experience. In this chapter I invite my readers to take off their extractivist goggles, and to embrace the spirit of the crab. The life of the crab means adaptation, transformation and synergy with the surroundings, abilities that we have since long abandoned. Ursula Le Guin reflects on our relationship with nature and explains precisely how it has shifted from one of adaptation to one of extraction. We no longer feel the need to mold ourselves to nature's rhythms; instead, we seek to adjust the world around us to our will (Guin, 1989).

Also Donna Haraway, challenges the centrality of the human within nature and constructs a world of symbiotic interconnections. In her essay on “Tentacular Thinking”, part of the book *Staying With The Trouble*, Donna Haraway dives into the importance of non-human agency, during the geological age when humans have become the primary force shaping the Earth – alternatively named the anthropocene.

With her metaphorical almost ironical style, Haraway takes issue with the term Anthropocene: When Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer proposed the term "Anthropocene" to describe the significant impact of human activities on Earth's geology, signaling a new epoch beyond the Holocene, they were not taking in account that those changes were not Anthropos made, but capitalism made. These changes which are proper catastrophes and environmental destruction happened since the advent of capitalism, not the advent of humans. The anthropocene should thus be named *Capitalocene*. In such a socio-geological era human- nature relations become “transactions”, extractivist projects (Harway, 2016).

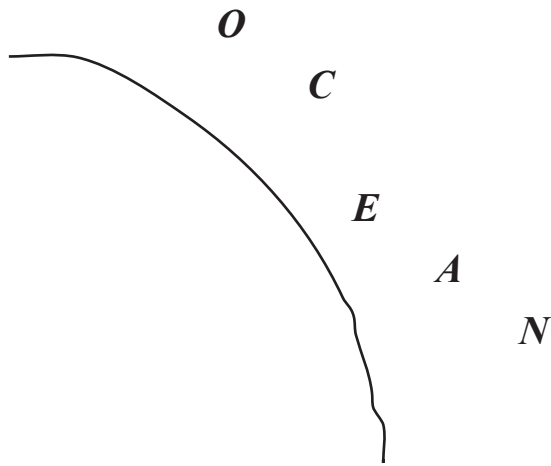
As an alternative, Haraway introduces the concept of the *Chthulucene* to describe an age of multispecies alliances and interconnections that embraces encounter and contamination over separation. In particular, she proposes the concept of *sympoiesis* as an example of multispecies co-creation. The term comes from ancient Greek and it means to ‘make with’ and it is opposed to the term *autopoiesis* which means to ‘self make’. There aren’t autopoietic organisms, says Haraway. Everything is interconnected (Harway, 2016).

As a filmmaker I treat and see film as a sympoietic practice:—a form of creation that arises from the communion of many elements and talents. Like an organism, every contributor plays an essential role in the process of making a film. Technology, too, is a vital part of this organism, as humans collaborate with machines to bring a vision to life. The films I explore in this chapter exhibit another layer of sympoiesis. Not only do they employ a sympoietic medium, but they also treat nature as a collaborator rather than an object to from. These works immerse themselves in nature’s perspective, inviting us to experience the world through its eyes. This chapter examines artists who engage with nature as an equal partner, pulling us away from an anthropocentric view and into a world shared with diverse and interconnected species. By shifting from a human-centered perspective to a symbiotic one, these artists strive to forge a deeper connection and coexistence alongside nature.

An interesting reflection on the immersive quality of filmmaking is given by Jayne Parker who describes cinema as a strongly physical experience, something which makes the spectator embody the story and submerge in it. It is a way to embody information rather than learning it. Moving images can provide valuable insight into viewing the world from a fresh perspective. Art, in particular, has the power to help us see through others’ eyes and feel with their senses. Many artists draw inspiration from nature, treating it as a collaborator and adapting to its rhythms and modes of existence. Through their work, they encourage the viewer to do the same (Parker, 2017).



Let's then follow our animal guide, walking on the bottom of the ocean where a crab cage, filled with 16 mm celluloid film, lies. We might recognise it as the work of some artist. The artist in question is David Gatten.



There are filmmakers and artists who interact with nature through the cinematic medium, as writer and artists Catherine Elves says: They use the impact of sun, weather, plants or animals to create a responsive system, which also functions as a way of being interconnected with the landscape. Becoming the landscape instead of objectifying it (Elves, 2022). My favorite example is a film I haven't had the chance to watch yet. Despite many attempts, it seems the only way to see this film is by visiting the Filmmaker's Cooperative in New York. The title of the film is *What the Water Said* by David Gatten. (Gatten, 2007)

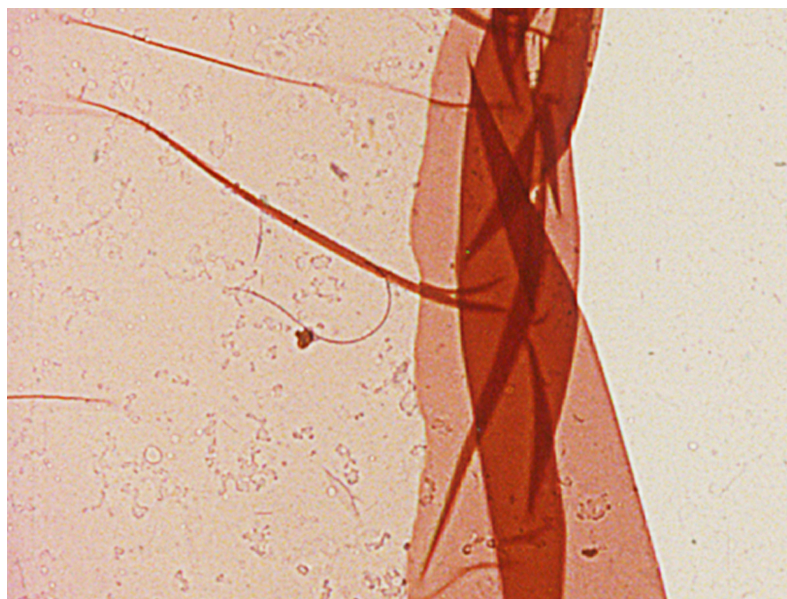
David Gatten is an experimental filmmaker who works extensively with analogue film, often exploring the material qualities of this medium. The short film is a cameraless collaboration between the ocean in South Carolina, a crab cage, and various rolls of 16mm film left in the sea for different lengths of time. The celluloid film is highly sensitive to salty water, allowing the ocean to directly imprint on the film. The sound is created in a similar way, by submerging a magnetic tape into the ocean. When projected, the film reveals an otherworldly sequence of abstract images, formed by the interaction of sand, shells, salt, and animals with the materiality of the celluloid. The sound, too, carries a strange quality, reflecting the material process of the film's creation (Gatten, *Better Living Through Cinema: An Interview with David Gatten*, 2014).

This film exemplifies a work where the filmmaker removes himself, giving voice to other worlds and truly collaborating with nature. Elves describes the film as evoking the sensation of drowning, while artist Jayne Parker speaks of the powerful physical response the film left on her, as intense as the one the water left on the celluloid. She describes how *What the Water Said* gave her the impression of immersing herself in the bottom of the ocean (Elves, 2022).

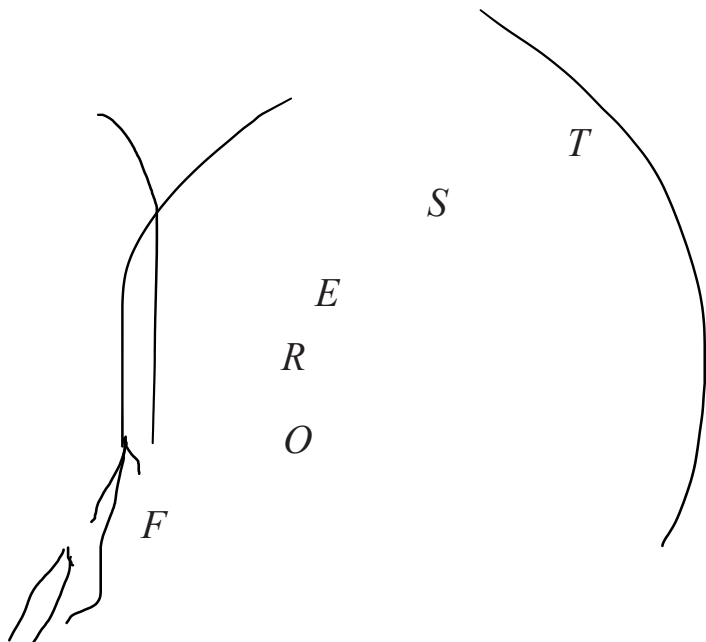
The idea of submersion in a film reminds me of the concept of “submerged perspective”, which was introduced by Macarena Gómez-Barris in *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Gómez-Barris, 2017). It is a decolonial framework that opposes the extractive logics of capitalism, colonialism, and environmental extractivism. This perspective challenges the dominant narrative, which uses exploitation and commodification of natural and cultural materials. Instead, the submerged perspective emphasizes interconnectedness, relationality, and the voices of marginalized communities. Through this lens, Gómez-Barris encourages to look beyond surface-level and profit-driven interactions with the environment; rather she advocates for delving into the entangled histories, cultural knowledge, and ecological practices which support life. The submerged perspective introduces a point of view which includes the lives and perspectives of non-human actors, submerged histories, and the invisible that resist and survive under oppressive systems. It is a call to rethink our relationship with the natural world, putting coexistence and collaboration before domination and extraction.

David Gatten was able to embody the spirit of a crab, adapting to the language of the sea and the weather, letting go of any search for human interpretation and metaphorically immersing himself in the sea; he allowed the collaboration to unfold naturally thus giving the viewer a chance to embody the crab and immersing themselves in the ocean and embracing a submerged view.

Now, we turn to other crabs—freshwater crabs—to explore a different environment. The *Potamon Potamios*, a freshwater crab, inhabits rivers and is often found in the damp areas of woods and forests. It’s ready to lead us to some fascinating works.



Screen grab from *What The Water Said*,
David Gatten (2014)



As we begin to take our first steps into the forest we observe this new environment, forests are multilayered spaces. At the same time physical and metaphorical.

In Europe, during the middle ages, the forest represented the opposite of society, a savage place where there was no space for morals and religion: A place of chaos. When, as William Cronon explains, the concept of *wilderness* emerged, the meaning of the forest also began to transform. It started to represent places of verdant beauty which had to be protected, but also isolated through the institution of natural parks (Cronon, 1995). The forest is a rich, multilayered environment where various worlds: plant, animal, and human interact. Forests around the world carry unique histories, and when discussing artworks situated within them, it is crucial to consider the specific location and context of each forest.

Many contemporary artists work in collaboration with the forest in variegated ways which depend on local conditions. One of these artists is Amar Kanwar who is working on an ongoing and multidisciplinary piece called *The Sovereign Forest* (2011–...)

The Sovereign Forest, initiated in 2011, is an ongoing and evolving interdisciplinary project that encompasses film, written text, poetry, and performance. The artwork is rooted in the conflicted region of Odisha, India. It is particularly compelling because the complexity and multilayered nature of the place resist representation through a single medium or a finite, linear temporality. In this case, the choice of diverse media profoundly reflects and aligns with the subject matter (Kanwar, 2011–...).

The conflict in Odisha involves the local communities, the government, and corporations, who would like to enforce an extractivist policy on the territory. From the 1990s Odisha has been a conflict zone over matters of progress and relocation, because national and international industries began to mine the territory on a massive scale.

For 14 years Kanwar has been filming and testifying the landscape, destroyed year by year by the industrialists. But also investigating the fighting back of the activists and the crimes committed by the industrialists. I am fascinated by this project because it is ongoing and multidisciplinary, with no linear temporality. The Odisha forest in India, has a rich meaning; it cannot be captured within human, linear time, nor can it be confined to a single discipline. I appreciate how Amar Kanwar adapts to this irregularity, choosing not to restrain the Odisha forest within a linear framework. As Kanwar elaborates:

“The validity of poetry as evidence in a trial; the discourse on seeing, on understanding, on compassion, on issues of justice; sovereignty and the determination of the self—all come together in a constellation of moving and still images, texts, books, pamphlets, albums, music, objects, seeds, events and processes.” (Amar Kanwar).

Artists in the UK have taken a completely different approach, seeking a connection with forests that, unlike others, are not at immediate risk of disappearing. One such artist is Emily Richardson, who created *Aspect* (2004) (Richardson), a nine-minute time-lapse film composed of footage she collected over an entire year in the woods. *Aspect* aims to reveal the vitality of the forest, its relentless "breathing," which is hidden from us due to its vastly different temporality.

However, the project I will explore in greater depth is *Interwoven Motion* (Andrews) – a video installation by artist Chris Meigh Andrews. This project has captivated me: It is an example of sympoiesis—a form of collaborative creation—as much as *What the Water Said*. Both these works demonstrate the “crab-like” qualities of adaptability to the environment discussed in this chapter, however *Interwoven Motion* is particularly special, uniquely adopting a synergetic and collaborative approach with the environment, transforming nature into an ally. *Interwoven Motion* is the result of research the artist did to explore the possibility of constructing an everlasting outdoor video sculpture for the Chiltern Sculpture Trail at Cowleaze Wood in Oxfordshire. Although the original project did not exceed the report stage, the research produced a series of gallery-based video installations utilizing solar and wind power, such as *Perpetual Motion* (1994), *Fire, Ice & Steam* (1995), *Mothlight* (1998), *Mothlight II* (2001), and *For William* (Andrews C. M., 2004)

For *Interwoven Motion* Meigh Andrews collaborated with a tree; with the whole forest. He created a site specific temporal video installation: the video was displayed on a screen located at the bottom of a tree trunk. It showed a live image, transmitted from four surveillance cameras located on the top of the tree, at the four cardinal points. Each point of view was shown on rotation and the image switched in a rhythm depending on wind power. In this way the visitors could see the forest from the tree's point of view. The sound was provided by the surrounding forest making the experience possible only in that precise location. The power that allowed the camera and the screen to work was provided by wind and sun. This outdoor video installation gathers many of the elements important to the artist's practice. It juxtaposes the natural and the artificial: the use of technology designed for interior use situated within an outdoor environment. This work aims to contrast the power and delicacy of the technology with the durability and precariousness of the tree and the landscape it inhabits. Moreover the artist highlights and juxtaposes different notions of temporality—permanence and impermanence.

The work was installed on Forestry Commission land, in a quite remote location. The solar panels and wind turbine disrupted the regular landscape of the protected forest; giving a sense of hybridness. For ten days the eden-like landscape of eden-like beauty was “contaminated” with the interaction of human made technology. *Interwoven Motion* just like the imagery that generated, was intentionally transient. Components such as the wind turbine, solar panels, video cameras, image switcher, LCD video display, and cabling were attached to a living tree for a period of ten days. These technologies served as temporary alterations, and they left no trace.

For those who encountered the piece, there was no accompanying clarification or background provided. Its purpose was left entirely up to interpretation, inviting each viewer to form their own unique response to its puzzling presence in the landscape. *Interwoven Motion* represents a symbiotic and sympoietic relation between the artist, the spectators and the forest: the artist enables the tree to show its point of view, while the tree, with the help of the surrounding forest, allows for the image to be displayed.

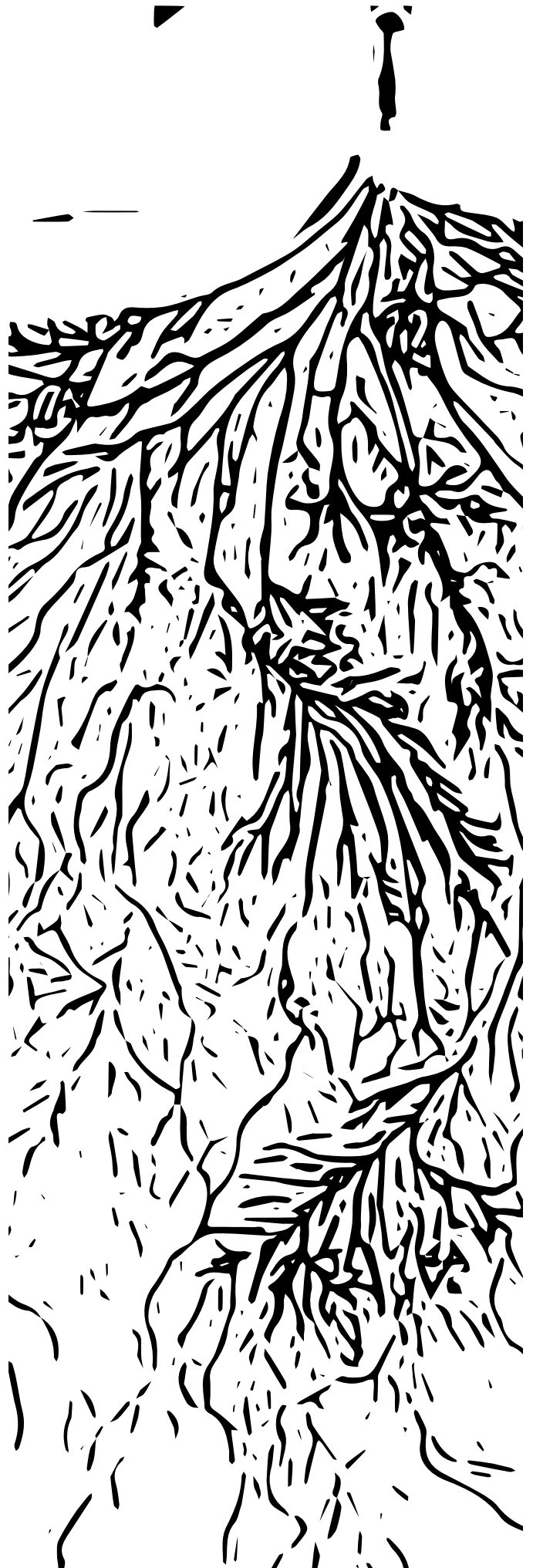
Interestingly, the video sequences themselves are secondary, acting more as fleeting moments rather than the main focus. At the centre of the work was the interaction between light and wind. These elements not only generated the electrical energy required to sustain the video and electronic parts; they also influenced the visual experience rooted within the piece. Sunlight shifts, the transforming shapes and movement of clouds and foliage, and the changing weather conditions all became elements embedded in the artwork.



Summing Up: Back to the Mushroom

Looking back at this very long journey, I wonder what we came to, as expected I do not have a specific and finite answer to my questions, but I learned some concepts, some ideas.

I learned that everything is connected, and understanding requires seeing the broader context. without the expectation to know everything but with the desire to understand how things relate. I learned that because everything is interconnected, I too am connected to my surroundings, and I should make art aware of this. And I learned about listening and collaboration to make art in symbiosis, listening to my companions enhancing them and learn how to put myself aside sometimes. As a privileged person I should enable, not impose my ideas. I learned resistance and endurance and that resistance is easier if you have allies' humans or not, I learned that collaboration and companionships are difficult but make you strong. I learned that remembering is an act of resistance, film can be an act of resistance. And finally, I learned how to submerge myself instead of observing; to look at the world from other's eyes, creating with awareness, and forging connections that honor the complexity and interdependence of the world around us.



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