ENTANGLED LIFE

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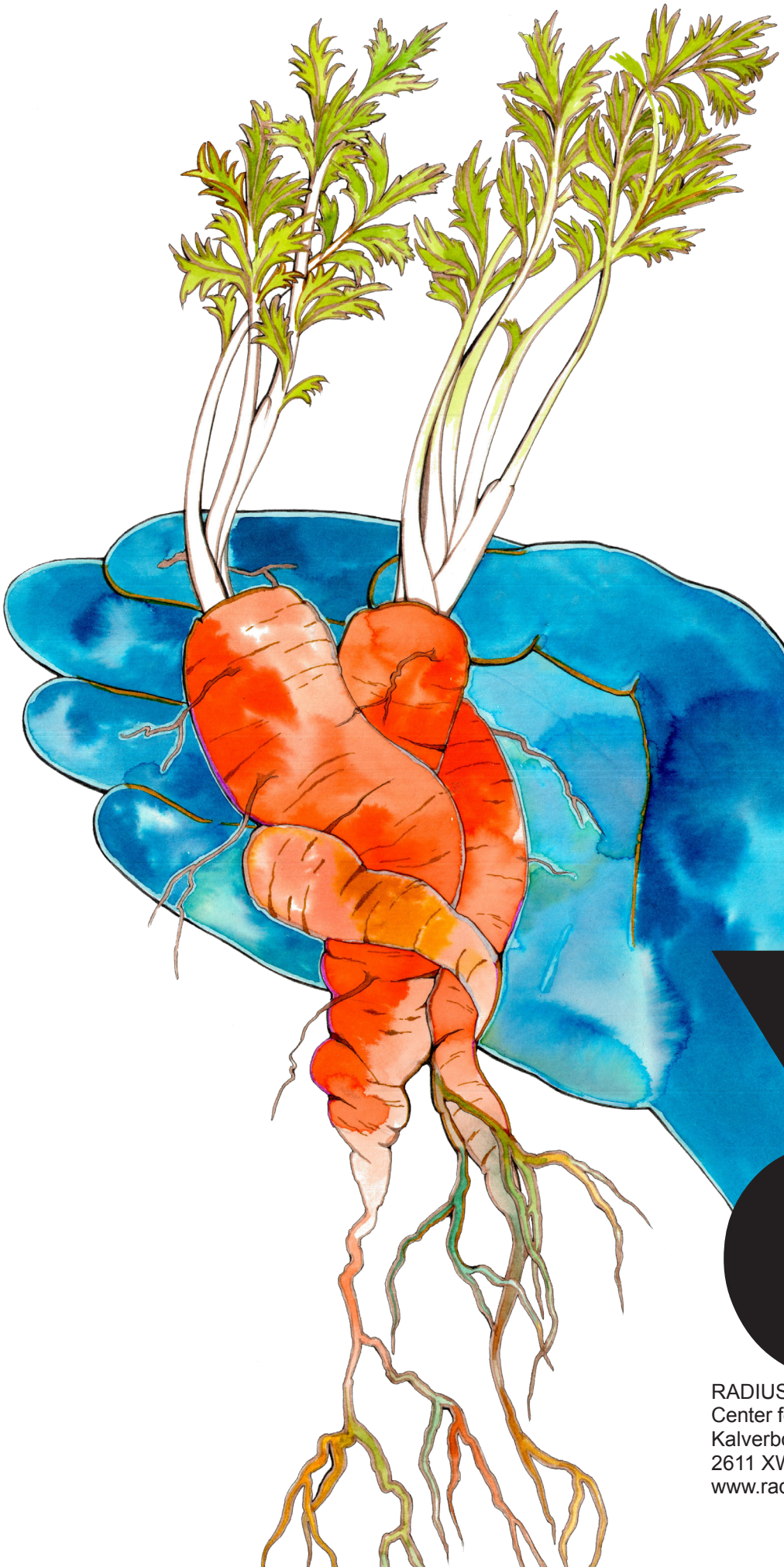

RADIUS
Center for Contemporary Art and Ecology
Kalverbos 20
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Underland
Year Program 2022–2023

RADIUS commences its first year of existence with an exhibition program consisting of four chapters. Partially modelled after the eponymous novel by Robert MacFarlane, the *Underland* exhibition cycle is an exploration of subterranean spaces as observed through art, literature, mythology, science, ecology, memory, and the physical landscape. We descend into RADIUS' subterranean exhibition spaces, through the surface of the Earth's biofilm, to make an observation about what takes place underneath man-made layers of concrete, tarmac and the constructed artificiality of our surroundings, to examine our relationship to darkness, life and death beneath ground level.

In four chapters, *Underland* invites you to join on a series of journeys through "deep-time"—a vast geological time—along water sources and caverns, composite layers of soil, mines and drilling sites for unearthing minerals and fossils, fungal and root networks, and storage and hiding places providing shelter and protection within the increasingly unstable environment of the Anthropocene, the current era in which humankind dominates. The basis for considering the Anthropocene as our current geological epoch rests on the claim that the historically accumulated, planetary environmental effects of an expanding human population, technological innovation, and economic development have become inseparable from the Earth's geological processes.

The compounded crises of capitalism, sociopolitical unrest, environmental catastrophe, and technological transformation is becoming increasingly pressing and tangible, both on a local level and on a planetary scale. In addition, the struggle for social emancipation and the role of colonialism and racism are inextricably linked to the current ecological depression, re-drawing attention to the fragility of Earth and life itself. The gravity of the situation is such that it is no longer possible to place ourselves outside the ecological breakdown equation. As the underground journey at RADIUS begins, the obscured depths of the underland are blazed with open-hearted encounters across deep time that reveal pathways to weather the Anthropocene.

The *Underland* exhibition cycle is developed to provide a sense of grounding for the art center in its early beginnings, but predominantly serves as a public conversation starter for a continuous program around ecology and climate concerns, as facilitated through current artistic practices. Not dissimilar from science, art has the capacity to raise perception and consciousness for those elements, processes and dimensions that bypass our human sensorial capacities altogether. Both engaged in developing languages to inform an understanding and gain traction with our speculative present, we believe that art as a field must extend and apply itself without invitation, to trigger responses where none have been called for, and to confront what we take for granted. Moving through critical zones, the artists in *Underland* seek to unearth and undermine a singular human-centred perspective as to register more reality thanks to multiple templates, for which pluralism is understood not as a plurality of perspectives on one reality, but as a multiplicity of agencies that register numerous realities.

From fieldwork-taking to patchwork-making, *Underland* is envisioned as a space for synthetic thinking, science fact and fiction, forging new bonds between human and non-human forms of agency. From thinking and acting in a human-centered vacuum, to a life continuum.

ENTANGLED LIFE

The Forest as Neural Network

ABBAS AKHAVAN
URSULA BIEMANN
SUZETTE BOUSEMA
EGLÉ BUDVYTYTÉ
WIM VAN EGMOND
JOHANNE HESTVOLD
NONA INESCU
DOMINIQUE KOCH
MILAH VAN ZUILEN

***ENTANGLED LIFE* is the third exhibition of the *UNDERLAND* year program, exploring the multispecies entanglements that occur in forest ecosystems through the work of nine artists. Moving from the world wide web to the wood wide web, this exhibition seeks to advocate for a heightened notion of symbiosis, mutualism, reciprocity and interdependence.**

Forests, home to eighty per cent of the Earth's biomass, have long been places of mystery, imagination, wilderness, and wisdom. Despite being overly present in our common imaginary, forests have long been treated as resource-making agents to quench human needs and desires.[1] By simplifying them in such manner, the vastly rich interdependent relationships and exchanges that take place in forests—among trees, plants, fungi, microbes, soils, carbon, nutrients, and water—are played down and relegated to a strict botanically resourceful reading. The third chapter of *Underland* engages several artists who share an interest in exploring the multispecies entanglements that occur in forest ecosystems, through practices across science and art, to ultimately propose ways of mutual interdependence and kinship. How can we employ nonhuman knowledge in forests to veer towards a radical opposition to the climatologically and ecologically man-made unsustainability and disaster that define the Anthropocene? How can we apply the symbiotic and mutually supporting forms and processes that characterise such living systems to human societies?

Trees, whether in boreal, tropical, or temperate forests, depend on their microbial partners. Millions of species of fungi and bacteria swap nutrients between soil and the roots of trees and plants through mycorrhiza—the mutual symbiotic association between a fungus and a plant—forming a vast, interconnected network of organisms throughout the forest commonly called the *wood wide web*. Just like the world wide web allows for fast and multi-layered exchange of information through the internet, the *wood wide web* hosts interspecies communication and exchanges which keep forests alive and healthy. Furthermore, mycorrhizal networks challenge human societal constructs. Fungi exemplify a total transgression in orthodox scientific structures by not only operating within frameworks of community and cooperation, but also in the transgression of gender categorisation by being non-binary organisms. In human terms, it could be said that fungi work in queer ways when they are relying on

1 The environmental orientation that conceives the Earth as a resource whose utility is determined by human needs and interests is called Prometheanism, coined by John Dryzek, based on the Greek myth of Prometheus, who stole the fire from the gods to give it to humans.

2 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins.* Princeton, NJ, USA: Princeton University Press, 2015.

different species with different genders and sexualities reciprocating to subsist. On the other hand, mushrooms, the fleshy, spore-bearing fruit of a fungus, bear the potential to speculate possibilities of life in capitalist ruins, as anthropologist Anna Tsing postulates.[2] Mushrooms namely are highly adaptable organisms that are able to thrive in climatologically degraded, polluted, and contaminated lands and soils, illuminating potential ways of co-living in the Anthropocene.

The complex underground world that is the wood wide web works through collaborative intelligence, or what professor of forest ecology Suzanne Simard has described as forest wisdom.[3] This kind of wisdom is not new to indigenous peoples. Generation after generation, they have developed cumulative, local, and spiritual knowledges on nature which conceive the forest as a conscious, interrelated entity in which they are also participants in a non-hierarchical way. For instance, the Huu-ay-aht First Nations people, living in the Barkley Sound region on the west coast of Vancouver island, have shaped a forest wisdom around the concept of *Hishuk Tsawak*, a worldview meaning 'everything is one, everything is connected'.[4] Indigenous forest wisdoms differ from orthodox western science not only because the latter studies the different elements of the environment separately, but also because it works under the assumption that mind and matter are separate, which in turn leads to assuming that humans are outside the environment and thus able to control or manage it. As a consequence, the standardised western scientific knowledge and language feels inadequate and insufficient to grasp the interdependent and all-encompassing ways of the forest networks; likewise, forest wisdoms are increasingly being incorporated in more unorthodox scientific studies. As an example, researcher Michael Marder claims that plants possess intelligence and consciousness, and accordingly advocates for more context-sensitive ways of acting upon one's environment.[5]

Confronted with the challenges of climate change, there is so much to be learnt from the collaborative practices that keep forests alive by means of intricate symbiotic relationships, both above and below ground. They are a testament to most ancient synergies that come through even in major ecological disruptions. The forest, its root structures and the symbiosis found in its plants and fungi serve as inspiring analogies for reciprocity and mutual interdependence to counterpoint the greedy and selfish extractivist practices based on human exceptionalism. As biologist Lynn Margulis claimed, symbiotic or cooperative bonds between species are crucial evolutionary forces, and in turn "evolution is no linear family tree, but change in the single multidimensional being that has grown to cover the entire surface of Earth".[6] This third chapter of *Underland* seeks to speculate on a broader consciousness of plant-thinking and fungal networks, to host an assemblage of artistic and scientific practices that seek to inspire mutually caring ways of being of acting to find ways to simultaneously survive and subvert the Anthropocene.

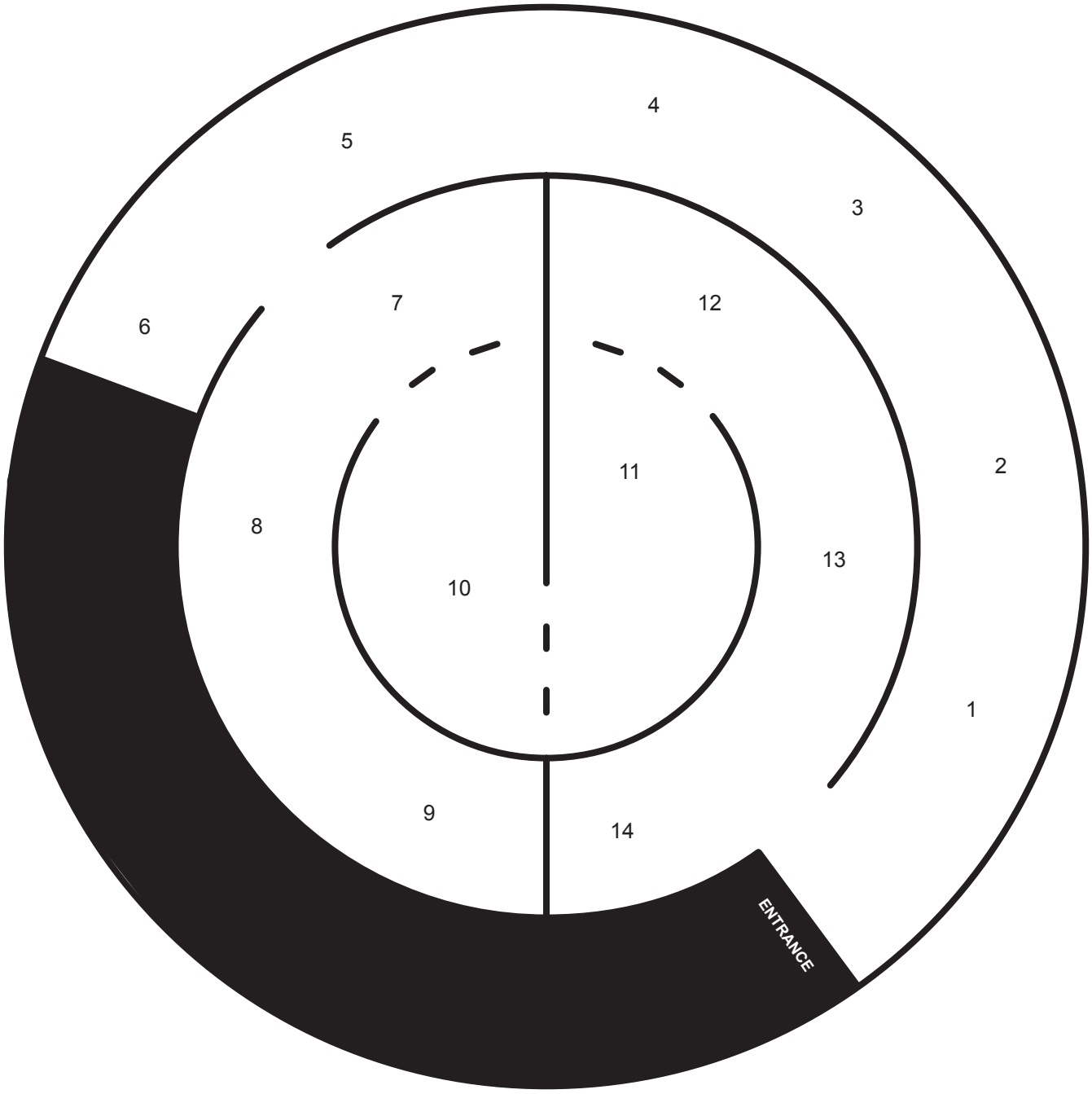
3 Suzanne Simard, "Forests are Wired for Wisdom", *Onbeing* podcast episode, September 9, 2021, <https://onbeing.org/programs/suzanne-simard-forests-are-wired-for-wisdom/>

4 Castleden, H., Garvin, T. and Huu-ay-aht First Nation. '"Hishuk Tsawak" (Everything is one/Connected): A Huu-ay-aht worldview for seeing forestry in British Columbia', *Canada's Society and Natural Resources,* vol 22, no 9 (2009): pp. 789–804.

5 Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking. A Philosophy of Vegetal Life.* New York City: Columbia University Press, 2013.

6 Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan, *What is Life?,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Floorplan



1. Dominique Koch, *Holobiont Society,* 2017
2. Suzette Bousema, *Super Organism*, 2021
3. Wim van Egmond, *Ectomycorrhiza*, 2022
4. Johanne Hestvold, *Demonstration (Zaryadye Park)*, 2021
5. Milah van Zuilen, *Forest floor, Veluwe,* 2022
6. Ursula Biemann, *Forest Mind*, 2021
7. Diana Policarpo*, Bodies we care for,* 2020
8. Diana Policarpo, *Infected Ear*, 2020
9. Diana Policarpo, *Cyanovan* (Protocol), 2020
10. Diana Policarpo, *The Oracle*, 2020
11. Diana Policarpo, *Bosch's Garden*, 2020
12. Abbas Akhavan, *Study for a monument*, 2013-2016
13. Nona Inescu, *Harriet*, 2020
14. Eglé Budvytyté, *Songs from the Compost: mutating bodies, imploding stars*, 2020

DOMINIQUE KOCH
Holobiont Society, 2017
Duration: 32 minutes

In 1991, biologists Lynn Margulis and René Fester coined the term holobiont to describe the assemblage between a host organism and the many other indi-vidual species living in it or around it, called symbionts. Coral reefs are a good example to picture a holobiont: many species of coral rely on green algae called *zoochlorellae*, which live inside their cells and provide them with oxygen and sugars. If the algal symbionts leave the coral due to pollution, the coral dies. The concept of holobiont not only can be applied to plants and animals, but also to human bodies. Only half of the cells in our bodies contain a "human genome"; the rest of cells span 160 different bacterial genomes, which form a plurality of ecosystems within ourselves.[7]

In their book S*ymbiosis as a Source of Evolutionary Innovation: Speciation and Morphogenesis,* Margulis and Fester argued that interdependence and cooperation between organisms was a key driver of evolution. This theory was severely criticised at first for it both disrupted the idea that humans are on the top of the terrestrial organisms hierarchy and proposed a deeply entangled an co-dependent system between species to ensure their survival. On top of that, the idea that we are holobionts disrupted the canonical definitions of individuality in anatomical, genetic, developmental, immunological, physiological, and evolutionary contexts.[8]

In her film and sound installation, Dominique Koch applies this theory to a socio-political sphere. Through personal conversations with theorists Donna Haraway and Maurizio Lazzarato, she weaves discussions on the co-dependency of species together with critique on neoliberalism. In so doing, the work reveals that by thinking from the holobiont, we can find alternatives to capitalist ways of reasoning and relating.

Holobiont Society questions the establishment of deep social and ecological inequality for the functioning of Capitalism. Apprehending the holobiont and its scientific, philosophical, and cultural implications entails a radical shift in how we think of ourselves in relation to what surrounds us. When genetic individ-uality is scientifically refuted, the political constructs of purity and superiority fall through. Dominique Koch inserts us into this paradigm and proposes a holistic body of knowledge from which to re-examine our perception of the self and the many multitudes it contains.

SUZETTE BOUSEMA
Super Organism, 2021

Super Organism by Suzette Bousema appears to be an abstract composition, but in fact this tapestry is based on a microscopic photograph of a plant root covered with mycorrhizal fungal threads and spores. This visualisation of a symbiotic organism exemplifies the artist's interest in collaborating with scientists to gain a better comprehension of crucial yet unnoticed ecological processes. Super Organism and its research project was achieved in collaboration with soil scientist Nadia Soudzilovskaia (Leiden University and Hasselt University) and PhD students Riccardo Mancinelli, Weilin Huang, and Chenguang Gao (Leiden University).

Mycorrhizal fungal networks, usually explained as the neurological system of forests, are the largest living systems to ever exist on Earth. Moreover, they perform a vital role in ecosystems: the manifold nets of hyphae that entangle fungi and other plant species to transfer water, carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, and other nutrients and minerals between them. Comparing mycorrhizal entanglements with the human neural network proves to be useful in apprehending their complexity and importance, as well as generating empathy towards species that we cannot perceive with our bare senses. Nevertheless, Bousema seeks to experience mycorrhizae without anthropomorphising it.

Fungal networks are not only the backbone of life in forests, but they also sustain human life on Earth. Some species of fungi are able to store high levels of carbon dioxide underground, others aid plants in surviving droughts or killing pests. Some fungi are even remarkably well at delivering nutrients to crops, cutting down on the need for chemical fertilisers.

The vast underground nets of interspecies collaboration and

7 Scott F. Gilbert, "Holobiont By Birth. Multilineage Individuals As the Concretion of Cooperative Processes" in *More-than-Human*, ed. A. Jaque, M. Otero Verzier, L. Pietroiusti e.a., Rotterdam: Het Nieuwe Instituut, 2021, p. 29.

8 Ibid., 28.

communication braided by fungi are good starting point for thinking about the reciprocal influence of different forms of life. They are particularly illuminating in the study of the self-regulating systems that make Earth habitable. One of the most notable examples is James Lovelock's *Gaia Hypothesis*, co-developed with Lynn Margulis in the 1970s. According to this hypothesis, living organisms interact with their inorganic surroundings to form a complex system to maintain the conditions for life on Earth based on synergetic relationships. The suggestion that organisms co-evolve with their environment challenges a strict taxonomical classification of the world and invigorates a more responsible sense of equity between life forms on the planet.

WIM VAN EGMOND
Ectomycorrhiza, 2022
Duration: 5 minutes

Wim van Egmond is an artist whose work lies close to scientific work. Interested in how contrived nature can be depicted in science—factual, artificial, almost mechanical—he bridges his visual art background with microscopic photography. Within this discipline, the medium of photography is expanded with various techniques to enable us to perceive that the naked eye cannot see.

Van Egmond combines skills from nineteenth-century naturalists with modern digital methods to portray microbes and micro-landscapes. In his pursuit to increase the scope of human vision, he developed optical techniques such as microscopy, time-lapse, and focus stacking. For the past few years, he has focused on studying fungi and other soil organisms. As part of a collaboration with Professor Doctor Gerlinde de Deyn from Wageningen University & Research, he made a series of time-lapse films that revealed the hidden life in the nets of plant roots, fungi, bacteria that extend vastly under the ground.

The film presented in *Entangled Life* continues his fascination for fungal networks. Ectomycorrhiza (ECM) is a form of symbiotic relationship that occurs between a fungi and the roots of various plant species. Ectomycorrhizas form on the roots of around 2% of plant species, usually trees such as pines or willows. Ectomycorrhizas are further differentiated from other mycorrhizal by the formation of a dense hyphal sheath, known as the mantle, surrounding the root surface. The hyphal network helps the plant take up nutrients including water and minerals, often aiding it in surviving adverse conditions. In exchange, the fungal symbiont is provided with access to carbohydrates. A common example of ectomycorrhiza are truffles.

Van Egmond spent several years capturing the slow process of the growth of tree roots and the development of the fungi network that connects the tree roots with its surrounding. The result is the presented video work, where we are offered fascinating microscopic details, which, due to their magnification and the loss of a sense of scale, can be perceived as complex, abstract forms unfolding in a non-human time.

JOHANNE HESTVOLD
Demonstration (Zaryadye Park), 2021

Johanne Hestvold explores and challenges how we read forms, shapes, and objects that surround us in everyday life and that more often than not go unnoticed. Through her sculptural practice, Hestvold transforms ordinary, mass-produced things into pieces of material permanence and solemnity. *Demonstration (Zaryadye Park)* is part of a series of sculptures based on the shape of discarded takeaway containers collected by the artist in public parks in Norway. In the studio, Hestvold redraws them into enlarged moulds filled with a mycelium composite of Ganoderma, a type of wood-decaying fungi, and hemp shavings. Inside the containers, the artist presents a maze-like cartographic layout of famous parks and gardens. For this piece, Hestvold chose Zaryadye Park, a gigantic park adjacent to the Red Square in Moscow divided into four areas corresponding to Russian climatic zones: forest, steppe, tundra, and floodplains. The park, which also offers a picturesque view of the Kremlin, contains a soaring bridge, a media centre, and ice cave, a concert hall, amphitheatres, and a flying theatre attraction. Inaugurated by Vladimir Putin in 2017, the park stands as an urbanistic and political feat of contemporary Russia.

Mycelium composite is a non-toxic material that starts decomposing within a decade. Contrarily, polystyrene, a synthetic polymer manufactured from petroleum and used in most disposable food containers, might take up to 900 years to decompose. The ephemerality of the meal in the containers contrasts

with the material permanence of its plastic residue. In its appearance of a robust, abiding vessel, Hestvold's work reflects on the unsustainability of everlasting polluting materials and their trivial usage while alluding to the nationalistic use of landscapes for political glory.

Hestvold's practice resonates with philosopher Jane Bennett's "vital materialism", which advocates for a more sensible recognition of the active participation and agency of nonhuman organisms in human affairs.[9] Hestvold invites a more conscious relationship with commonplace things and illuminates the often overlooked biological, ecological, and political conjunctions between the human and the nonhuman.

MILAH VAN ZUILEN
Forest floor, Veluwe, 2022

Milah van Zuilen describes herself both as a visual artist and a forest ecologist in training. With fieldwork at the core of her practice, she collects organic material—mostly leaves—treats them, and sorts them into grids, making geometrical arrangements. Seen from afar, they resemble air photographs of crop fields. This illusion points to Van Zuilen's interest in the contradiction between the complexity of nature and the human urge to rationalise and neatly organise it for their own benefit. The square, a shape often used in taxonomy and cartography to organise nature, becomes an instrument of rationalisation. The vast square stretches of land manicured for agricultural exploitation in the Netherlands are a familiar example.

Van Zuilen observes an overlap between how landscapes are scientifically captured and artistically interpreted. In her work, she attempts to critically question the similarities between both actions while dissolving the urge to use nature as a means to strict scientific or artistic ends. In allowing herself to be influenced by how the landscapes she explores are found naturally, her compositions stand as bridging topographical articulations. For *Forest floor*, Veluwe, the artist conducted fieldwork in the Lunterse Buurtbos, in Lunteren, province of Gelderland. She collected fallen foliage on the forest floor, comprising Quercus rub (northern red oak), Fagus sylvatica (beech), and Quercus robber (common oak).

According to Bruno Latour, the presupposed gap between nature and culture determines how we see ourselves in relation to the world. Consequently, this leads us to believe that scientific ecology and political ecology are two separate fields in which nature is an object of study instead of a subject to relate to.[10] In her work, Van Zuilen investigates this assumption and seeks to supersede an anthropocentric view on the landscapes that surround us.

URSULA BIEMANN
Forest Mind, 2021
Duration: 31 minutes

Ursula Biemann's most recent work *Forest Mind* invites us on a journey through the rainforests of Colombia to learn about plant intelligence and the epistemic colonisation of Amazonian belief systems. In this work, the parallels between DNA technology and the shamanic understandings of the interconnectedness of all life on Earth become evident.

Western science used to consider Indigenous knowledges mythical and fantastical, but now it is changing its view and considering them sensible and genuine tools for equitable world-making. Similar to a Shaman who recounts the story of an Indigenous figure that succumbs to the weight of the Earth and reorders it with a song, Biemann narrates the most advanced findings about the origin of the universe in an equally imaginative manner. Mathematics, astrophysics, and neuroscience require an imaginative, intuitive, and sensorial approach to abstract concepts. Forest mind posits story-telling as a legitimate tool to decipher the most complex and existential questions about the world.

Modern science and Indigenous cosmologies have long been considered incompatible, as the dualistic and mechanistic processes of the former contrast sharply with the animistic and spiritual dimensions of the latter. In *Forest Mind,* Biemann brings them closer without naiveté, as she traces the colonial foundations of Western natural sciences, regarded as accomplishments of the taxonomical desire to render the world completely logical. She locates the root of reshaping our relationships to Earth in the shift from describing and naming every living and nonliving thing to encounters between different yet equally worthy intelligences.

9 For further reading, see Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010.

10 Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia. Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime.* Cambridge, UK: Polity Books, 2017.

For Biemann, ecology can be applied to understand how interactive and interdependent the world is. Merging documentary and speculative visual languages, she assembles undocumented histories, brings nonhuman voices forward, uncovers postcolonial dynamics, and reinscribes territories to create encompassing and integrating knowledges. At the same time, she experiments with new methodologies to store this knowledge: in collaboration with ETH Zurich, Biemann looks into the possibility for sound files to be transcoded as DNA sequences and encapsulated in microscopic imperishable glass cases. In doing so, Biemann once again bridges different forms of wisdom, and thus arrives at an all-encompassing overview of how we can grasp the world.

ABBAS AKHAVAN
Study for a Monument, 2013–16

Abbas Akhavan's *Study for a Monument* presents a series of plants cast in bronze and carefully laid out on white cotton bed sheets. They represent plant species native to areas between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, what today is mostly Iraq and Iran. Enlarged and fragmented, the setting of the plants might evoke an archeological site, a forensic experiment, or perhaps a mass grave. In their resemblance to human skulls, spines, and other bones, they exude an unnerving and confronting aura.

This work started from the artist's interest in horticulture, which brought him to research at the Kew Gardens in London, the biggest herbarium in the world, holding over 30,000 plant species. There he stumbled upon an archival publication titled *The Flora of Iraq*, where over 3,300 species of flora native to Iraq's deserts, marshes, plains, and mountains are gathered and categorised. Financed by the Iraqi Ministry of Agriculture in collaboration with Kew Gardens, the project followed the fervent interest in plant taxonomy and taxonomical expeditions in the nineteenth century, where thousands of native species of flora were brought to European nations to study, collect, and display. In addition to the desire to compile and classify flora and fauna, the act of delocalising species collaterally traces new trajectories to the cultural and political contexts from which they were taken away, throughout history.

The dissected bronze plants of Akhavan address different events in the contemporary history of Iraq. After Iraq's defeat in the Gulf War—a consequence of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait—Shia muslims took refuge in the Mesopotamian marshlands, in the south of the country. Sadam Hussein's regime sought retribution and drained the whole land, set it on fire, and executed thousands of rebels, indigenous populations, and displaced civilians. As a result, thousands became refugees in the neighbouring country of Iran. An act of ecoterrorism, the destruction of the marshlands is considered one of the biggest environmental disasters in history, as well as a catalyser of environmental and human trauma.

Study for a Monument speaks of the many human and nonhuman genealogies that plant species are able to trail. They appear as confiscated goods—reminiscing of Iraq's cultural artefacts stolen by the American military in the 2003 invasion—leftover weaponry, and inanimate bodies. In layering archival remains and material trauma with the past and persistent injuring of land and people, *Study for a Monument* posits how trauma can be disclosed, how we can feel, and how we feel for others.[11]

NONA INESCU
Harriet, 2020

Encased against a blackboard and in vicinity of other specimens, a dissected human nervous system is an object of morbid astonishment at the Drexel University's medical campus in Philadelphia, United States. The system once belonged to Harriet Cole, a black woman who worked as a maid at the university hospital. She passed away from tuberculosis in the late 1800s and allegedly donated her body to science. Her nervous system was dissected by anatomist Rufus Weaver, later preserved and installed for educational purposes. The dissection was considered a feat in specimen preparation, and consequently gained admiration and curiosity across the country. Nevertheless, Harriet Cole's identity was hardly ever mentioned. The fact that she was a racialised Black woman in the United States at the end of the 19th-century casts doubt on her consent on the donation of her body, specially considering the a long-standing history of coerced experiments and horrific treatments to racialised women in Western medicine.

In *Harriet,* Nona Insecu connects the formal and ecological traits of the nervous and root systems by retracing the nerves of Harriet Cole in metal. Inescu

11 Georgina Jackson, "The Body in Ruins: Abbas Akhavan's Study for a Monument", *Afterall,* 21st September 2016, https://www.afterall.org/article/the-body-in-ruins-abbas-akhavan-s-study-for-a-monument

reveals the similarities that can be traced between human and more-than-human organisms, as well as calling attention to the histories of violence and erasure in the making of “modern” science.

The presentation of the original dissection is gruesome, reminiscent of a cabinet of curiosities or a freak show in its display and treatment. Inescu carefully soldered every nerve of the original, a delicate technique that connects metal parts and wires together, underpinning the formal brittleness of the nervous system, and at the same time restoring a sense of dignity to Harriet Cole’s story. With this, Inescu proposes an inspiring blend between fact and imagination in the scientific pursuit of understanding and sensing the world.

EGLÉ BUDVYTYTÉ
Songs from the Compost: mutating bodies, imploding stars, 2020
Duration: 30 minutes

The film *Songs from the Compost: mutating bodies, imploding stars* is set in the pine forests and sand dunes of the Curonian Spit, Lithuania. Colourful lichens—an organism usually composed of fungi and algae—cover the ecosystem’s surfaces. There, an array of slithering bodies perform a choreography in which the artist’s songs come to life. The lyrics to these songs are drawn from Lynn Margulis’ writings on endosymbiosis and Octavia E. Butler’s speculative fiction. By adding digital effects to her own voice, Budvytyté composes an eerie choir of reverberations that sing of planetary symbiosis that shape-shifts between genders and identities.

Songs from the Compost: mutating bodies, imploding stars is an exploration on alternative collectivity. One rooted in the permeability between human bodies and the environments they dwell in. One that escapes rational understanding as it budges in a trance. One that is inexorably queer and rejects self-sufficiency. One that stresses the necessity of conscious interspecies relationships.

The performer’s bodies gravitate towards horizontality, denying a vertical hierarchy between humans and their surroundings and fusing themselves with the rich assemblages of soil, moss, and sand. They are all seeking for deep entanglements in which a clear differentiation between bodies progressively blurs and an interspecies intimacy emerges. Equal parts living and dying, flourishing and rotting, the choreography becomes a translation of the different kinds of symbiosis: either mutualistic, where both parts have a reciprocal benefit; commensalistic, where one part benefits while the other remains unharmed; or parasitic, where one part takes over the other.

“How about
decay, rotting, decomposing
as technologies for nonlinear time”, the artist sings. Welcoming an entanglement beyond the human requires to rejoice in the drearier sides of symbiosis. Speculative fiction is a powerful tool to embrace them, and a beautiful relief is to be found in the abandonment of the dichotomies that make us fear them.

Underland, Chapter 3
ENTANGLED LIFE
24 September – 27 November 2022

Abbas Akhavan
Ursula Biemann
Suzette Bousema
Eglé Budvytyté
Wim van Egmond
Johanne Hestvold
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