

FOREST AS A JOURNAL

no. 1 2021





Forest

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Forest as a Journal Editorial

Guest Editors
Jurga Daubaraitė and
Jonas Žukauskas

This first issue of ** as a Journal*, focuses on *Forest*. Forest as a constructed space unavoidably reliant on human actions, no longer nature, but infrastructure; an environment of natural systems governed, exploited, and regulated by human interventions, technologies, industries, institutions and agencies. How can cultural practices enhance the optics through which society senses a forest?

The former natural habitats that defined the Baltic region (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) – the forests and wetlands – were terraformed to become silviculture plantations, arable land and urban structures through waves of colonisation. Most of the recent attempts to break away from linear infrastructural dependencies that were conceived in the years of Soviet central planning into rhizomatic networks of interdependencies of the European Project are reflected in material flows, policies, territories and continuities of practices shaped by the overlay of these two modernities. Subsequent investments in the timber industry, technological advances, the restructuring of forestry and scientific institutions, the deregulation across national borders and the global climate disaster insist on an urgent need for cultural practices to re-assemble images and concepts in order to reconstitute an understanding of the forest as a vital and central infrastructure.

During the winter and spring Covid-19 lockdown of 2020 and 2021 we worked with the Neringa Forest Architecture programme (curated together with Egija Inzule), residents at Nida Art Colony, as well as a diverse group of others dispersed across wide geographies to translate the forest into a journal. The diverse ecologies of voices echo each other and form an assembly of photography, cartography, design, research, artistic work into a publication that may be conceptually compared to an optical device dedicated to reflect on the ways to be in, and with a forest.

To reflect the topic of this issue, graphic designer Gailė Pranckūnaitė created a special typographical layer as an intervention into the template of the Journal.

Following his visit to Nida, Preila and Juodkrantė last year *Jochen Lempert* responded with a selection of Neringa forest photographs. *Jonas Žakaitis* conversed with *Nene Tsuboi* and *Tuomas Toivonen* about their Kulttuurisauna routines, the synthesis of sound, and culture in relation to natural systems. *Sofia Lemos* unfolded the sonicity

of labour and forests on the move, reflecting upon the histories of timber rafting down the Daugava river in her writing about *Currents*; a large scale art installation and performance piece by *Lina Lapelytė* and *Mantas Petraitis*. We interviewed *Cooking Sections* (*Daniel Fernández Pascual* and *Alon Schwabe*) about dispossession that becomes increasingly common through the protection of natural environments and the right of trees not to be offsetted by prescribing them a value to compensate for the guilt of CO2 emissions made far away. *Gabrielė Grigorjeva* wrote about the conceptualisation of forest time, its definitions and spatial categorisation. *Jonathan Lovekin* and *David Grandorge* contributed photographs from their series *Infra* depicting Baltic forests and wetlands carved out for peat extraction, stacked in piles of logs and shredded into biomass. *Signe Pelne* explained the mechanisms of biofuel, carbon sequestration and subsidisation. *Mindaugas Survila* and *Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė* discussed how the meanings of forest are formed through their respective documentary film editing processes. With her baby, *Agata Marzecova* walked the forests around Nida contemplating the diverse landscapes and ecologies of care. *Amelia Groom* discussed the ‘symbiogenesis’ of lichens to reflect relationality in the artwork and soundtrack *Songs From The Compost* by *Eglė Budvytytė*. *Aistė Ambrazavičiūtė* revealed her creative process in synthesising lichen architectonics in her digitally generated architectural images. We conversed with *Laura Garbštienė* and *Onutė Grigaitė* about ways of being and living in woodlands, weaving and dyeing with plants, reading the roots of a plant, and the concealed relationships we are losing due to extensive logging and those we might save if we can learn about species by responsibly exploring forest habitats currently closed due to environmental protection regulations. *Rasa Juškevičiūtė* photographed and *Kotryna Lingienė* wrote about the studio and translation of timber into exquisite furniture by *Jonas Prapuolenis* whose career spanned the larger part of the twentieth century and became a design classic. *Monika Janulevičiūtė* carved intricate furniture pieces while reflecting on the simplest and modest yet authentic typologies of resourceful furniture found in photographs of homes advertised on real estate websites. Together with *Egija Inzule* we wrote about the timber cycle that became the basis to initiate the Neringa Forest Architecture research and artistic

residency programme at NAC we are curating together. *Virginija Januškevičiūtė* introduced the photographer Algirdas Šeškus’ return to painting - for which he painted a forest.

* Initiated by the Lithuanian Culture Institute, each issue of this biannual magazine encourages the co-creation and research of topics valuable to both local and global readers, and features a different focus word in its title, relating to the topic explored by the guest editors of that issue.

Neringa Forest

Jochen Lempert







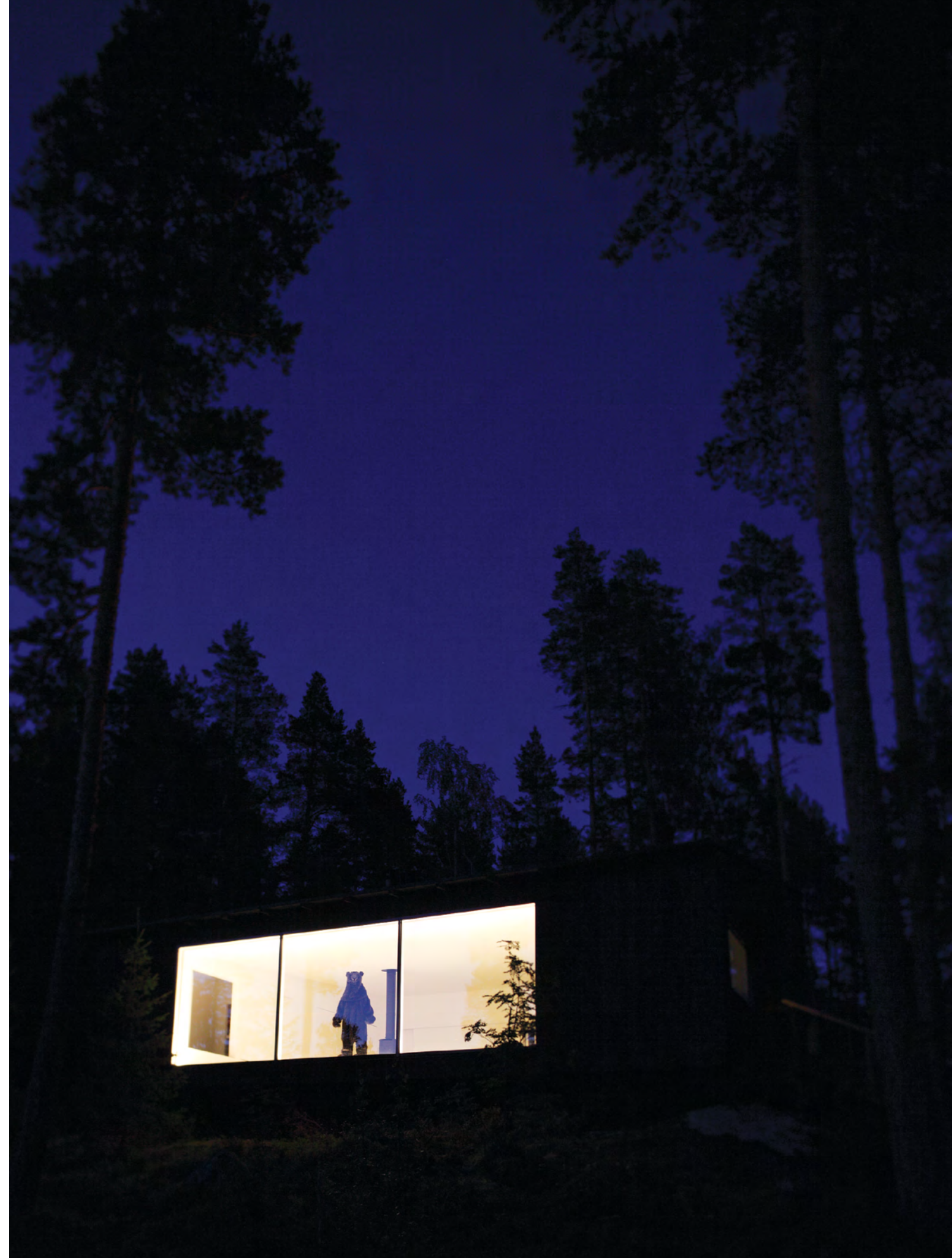




Thinking Things Through a Forest

A conversation with
Nene Tsuboi and Tuomas
Toivonen by Jonas Žakaitis

Lakeside house



Jonas Žakaitis:
Dears. I don’t even want to count the years since the last time I saw you. I remember walking around the foundations of Kulttuurisauna with Tuomas, when it was just a crazy idea about to turn into bricks and mortar. Then I remember bathing in it a few years later, already full of steam and visitors, with Nene floating around, smiling and handing out towels like a friendly house spirit. I clearly remember our conversations then and how the sauna changed all of us that were involved – it started a life of its own and you both went along with it: your bodies, your daily routines, all of it morphed to live the life of that place. Not an idea, not a concept, but a real building with smoke coming out of it and people coming in to get warm. I remember how new all of this was to me at that time and how it was unlike anything I’d seen in contemporary art, my only lifeworld at the time. And then years and years passed. I heard about your daughter Aura coming into the world, I heard about the whole area around Kulttuurisauna changing and you guys inheriting a forest, but all these things are more like rumours. So I just want to start with a basic question: how are you doing? How is life?

Nene Tsuboi:
Greetings from Mäntyharju – we are staying at Tuomas’ sister’s house which was an old school building she bought five years ago. It’s still very wintry here with lots of snow – we’ve been skiing in the forest around the house, Tuomas cut some trees for next year’s firewood.
Our sauna in Helsinki has been sleeping since last December. We don’t know when we can reopen but probably not until late spring. Like last spring when we closed the sauna for four months, we’ve spent a lot of time at home, at the sauna and in the countryside. It was good for us to have a holiday from the sauna routine, which at one point was beyond our capacity. It became too popular and we didn’t even realise how insane it was to have nearly 100 bathers everyday. Because one of us had to take care of Aura at home, running the sauna was almost a one person operation for the last couple of years.
After the Covid closure we reopened the sauna last midsummer and introduced a new timetable – the sauna was open only in the mornings. At 7am we opened the door and at noon it was closed. We wondered if anyone would come (we had the very same feeling when we opened the door for the very first

time in spring 2013!). But they did, and it was the perfect amount of bathers (around 20 per day). In the mornings the courtyard gets lots of sun and the bathers could see the sunrise while swimming. It was always peaceful. Plus, we introduced a new rule: silence indoors to reduce aerosols (people can chat in the courtyard). We recommended the bathers bring their own towels, seating linen, and water bottles for hygiene reasons and that reduced our dishwashing and laundry work too – perfect. Our work was done by early afternoon and both of us could stay at home with Aura in the evenings. The idea of a morning sauna had existed for some years but the Covid situation made it possible to make this shift really smooth.

JŽ:
So I’m very curious to hear about the visitors to your sauna – especially the regulars. Who are the people coming to the sauna every week? Is it mostly people from your area? Have you got to know them over time and have they shaped your daily sauna routines and traditions in any way? And do you get to hear your visitors’ stories?

NT:
It took me a while to get back to my sauna mindset after our routine was ‘off’ for almost four months... but once I access that part of my brain it’s there and very much alive. All of our customer information is based on our face memories:

- Super regulars (about 10 individuals who visit 2–3 times a week)
- Solid regulars (about 60 individuals who visit 1–2 times aweek)
- Regulars (about 150 individuals who visit once every 2–3 weeks)
- Seasonal regulars (about 100 individuals who come in either summer or winter)

We don’t know most of their names, so between me and Tuomas we use nicknames for them. We know lots of them live and work in the neighbourhood, except some of the super or solid regulars that live in other cities (even in Tallinn).
Tradition and routine is definitely created by the regulars over the years. Regulars also recognise each other since most of them come on the same weekdays and time. The most popular discussion topics between them are about the weather and nature. They want to tell each other whether the sea feels cold

or warm, about the direction of the wind or which birds they have seen in the courtyard. Everyday has different conditions so they never run out of things to talk about. It is also a form of politeness between the bathers, even if you are a first timer or a child, you can follow the conversation. For us it’s very important that bathers come as individuals and not as teams – when people come as groups, this delicate balance of shared space and time with others is easily destroyed by people bringing their own relationships. In Finland there are so many saunas available to enjoy with close family and friends, so we are trying to keep the publicness of the sauna as strong as possible at our sauna.

But right now, having discussions with strangers in public indoor space feels like something from another universe! I’m really curious how public sauna culture will evolve from here on...

JŽ:
This is so beautiful! I’ve never thought of small talk about the wind and water as being the most open handshake of socialisation. I don’t know why, but it made me think about colonies of penguins squeezing together and flapping their wings – maybe they’re doing the same thing?

And speaking about changing conditions – have you noticed any subtle differences in the way bathers move and behave with the changes within your daily routines, say with the music you play or the type of wood you burn in the stove? Maybe just barely perceivable changes that you feel, because you are so in tune with the sauna’s rhythms.

Tuomas Toivonen:
We realised that what we play in the building definitely affects bathers behavior. We quickly realised that having no sound or music in the space makes the atmosphere too unsteady. Especially in the early years when there weren’t the rituals by regulars – it’s really hard to set the right mood. From the moment that someone steps into the building, they need to understand that the sauna is a kind of sacred space (to reinforce that we also have a ‘take your shoes off policy’ at the entrance). In the first year we played the soundtrack to *Fitzcarraldo* by Werner Herzog and old recordings of Enrico Caruso, because the construction of the sauna felt like pulling a ship over a mountain. But the most crazy feeling was after the construction phase was over: we immediately switched our role to sauna operators, I think it was even within the same

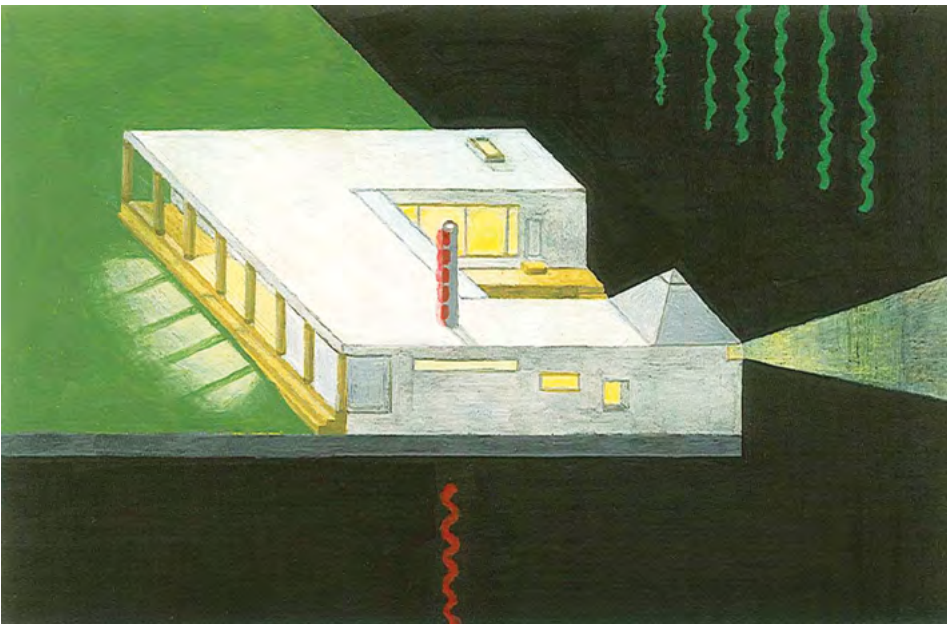


Lakeside house

day – in the morning we gave the construction a final push and by the evening our first bathers arrived. It was just too extreme a change. At the construction site the tasks are different at every stage and you need to fight with new problems cropping up all the time. But all of a sudden our life involved doing the same thing at the same time. I think playing ‘Fitzcarraldo’ was a kind of way to make the change smooth for us (we still play ‘Fitzcarraldo’ on May Day, the sauna’s anniversary). Then in the second year was Claudio Monteverdi’s ‘L’Orfeo’ which is one of the earliest opera ‘works’, which we played for a year and half I think...Then we started to play orthodox monastic music from Valamo and Ambrosian chants for almost for a year, then erner Durand’s ‘Hemispheres’. Up until this point the medium was vinyl, and the player was in the office, so every time the record ended, we would go out to the courtyard, into the office and flip the record, about 15 to 20 times a day (if we were busy there would be silence until we got the chance to go and put the music on again). This was, in a way, a very laboursome method, but it felt right, and it was important to visit the

courtyard to check on things, swimmers, the slipperiness of the deck, pick up the mugs that people had left etc...
Then, Aura was born and after some time, the Durand record was replaced by a more experimental setup with a constantly changing generative ‘soundfield’ playing from various speakers in different locations behind the wall, connected to various sound sources (some kind of complex, parallel autonomous synthesizer setups mostly) but tuned to a non-standard pentatonic scale based on 50 Hz, which is the tone of the electric grid – and also the pitch that is in tune with the ventilation machines, the coffee grinder, the vacuum cleaner or the fans of the pellet burner... and the idea is to ‘conceal’ and ‘musicalise’ the sounds that are in the building anyway. We have also had some live performances behind the wall, but without announcing to anyone that the music is live... so if someone comes to ask ‘What’s this music today?’ only then do they find out it’s live and who is playing...
I think a lot of this electronic soundfield material didn’t sound much like ‘music – but it was very effective in creating a mood that

somehow ‘tensioned a silence’ which is why it felt right. From the beginning we used music as a kind of ‘traffic sign’ that a visitor would encounter at the door – putting them on alert that ‘Ok, things are somehow strange here, I’m not sure what kind of place I have just stepped into, better slow down and look at how other people are behaving, and maybe then figure out what’s going on and how everything works’. Over the years our bathers have become super regular so somehow we could also start taking them to more ‘challenging’ or unusual directions, and this made sense as the place was risking becoming (from our point of view) too popular, so this tensioned atmosphere and constant drone rumbling from beyond the room was one way to give off a vibe that was not too welcoming and then people who came often developed a taste for it.
The wood we are burning is normally pellets; they burn very efficiently and give off quite a subtle scent. But we burn logs as well; each wood has a distinct aroma. Birch is the classic, rustic smell, aspen and ash are a bit more refined and sophisticated. Pine and spruce are more tarry and have an oilier resin-

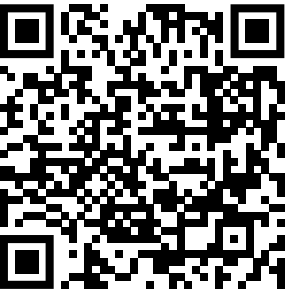


Kulttuurisauna, drawing by Nene Tsuboi

component in the smoke. Sometimes I make a roll with some juniper bark and copper wire to burn slowly over a candle and make it smoke as incense; it has a very aromatic, vapoury, holy scent.

JŽ:
Tuomas, reading your reply, I couldn’t help imagining the sauna itself as an abstract soundscape. And how this soundscape is a mix of rhythms of different orders – the 50Hz of your music, the oscillations of the nervous systems of the visitors, the cycles of daily routines in the building and the changing seasons. Different orders and totally different scales, but all affecting each other. Sort of like the Covid-19 virus these days: does it have a scale at all? It’s supposedly a nanoparticle (around 10 Hz, btw, just googled it!), but it incorporates planes and crowds of people and state borders. So it’s sort of really basic as an organism, but it’s so good at using human infrastructure that the whole nature/culture distinction is just not practical if you want to deal with it. Which (it’s a leap, I know, I know) makes me think of the text you wrote back in 2018 on the plot of the forest you inherited and how you wanted to let it grow ‘wild’ again. Would we even know what that means? Or, to get more speculative, maybe the forest is much more like a virus – maybe it’s not even a definite body and it does not act on any one given scale? Do you go to that piece of land often? How has it changed since your first visit?

TT:
Yeah, for me music or sound has no beginning or end, and it’s a way to adjust and align everything by getting things to resonate together... and the 50 Hz frequency stands for the resonance frequency of human systems and culture, its infrastructures and networks, an organism. And to make that legible with all its tensions and contradictions is a kind of ‘project’ that has emerged in the music programme and recent music projects...here is an example of this non-ending resonance feel:



Peridotiitti, Tuomas Toivonen
<https://tinyurl.com/2vf4uw8z>

– its a kind of sound field that an organism makes (in this case a complex system of synthesis), that reacts to simple inputs, and simulates its reactions in a linear time audible form.
The forest is also an organism, or system, and I think this nature/culture divide that you mention is crucial, as it questions how we are – or are not – part of that system. All species are invasive, but they are often invasive together, and need to find ways to coexist and ‘live’ as they terraform a mineral landscape

and atmospheric chemistry with solar energy into something that suits them better – but the organism of human culture is seldom aligned with the way these natural systems have evolved, and along these misalignments, we can trace the nature/culture divide. Of course, this is now a super topical and urgent matter, as we have to quickly begin steering this human-cultural organism to avoid massive damage and threat to the natural systems – but for sure ‘natural systems’ will prevail in every case, though we may still lose the complex systems like forests that have become so sophisticated. And my realisation has been that we already lost the complexity in most of nature long ago, so either we retreat back and see the kind of order that establishes itself, or take an active role in assisting or ‘playing’ (not play as in a game or play around but play like someone would play an instrument) the system for responses, so we understand its potential and character. But every model is incomplete; I don’t think these systems (human or natural) can be reduced to cybernetic, or computational models...and I’m sceptical of gaia theory as well. I think a kind of hands on science plus curiosity plus animism that involves a dimension of respect could be the way to collaborate – not extracting or hacking individual aspects – with these systems; to change and learn both our own understanding and relationship to them, but also give them ‘offerings’ by working for their benefit, or trying to amplify and foster certain mechanisms and behaviours (like leaving an animal or tree carcass where it fell, not extinguishing a forest fire, or bathing together or enjoying atonal harmonies, or wearing a mask or not speaking if not wearing a mask during a pandemic).
That forest is different every time I visit, as seasons and weather and time pass – but also I’m slowly getting to know it better in detail, its rocks, trees, undergrowth patterns, and its edges, the animal tracks that pass through it in winter...I wish that time would pass faster, and it would get ‘older’ quicker, but I guess Aura will see it. I think the oldest trees are about 150 years old – very thick and tall spruces and a few dozen kelo (dead, dried pines that are still standing). Animals: all kinds of insects, squirrels, birds, bats, forest mice, vipers, rabbits, a fox and even a lynx pass through. They don’t know where one land boundary begins and another ends, but they clearly prefer moving in the least silvicultural parcels of the forest.



New Academy at
Kulttuurisauna



Thinning the forest of Tundra Birch in Neahciljávri



Thinning the forest of Tundra Birch in Gáranasvárri



Varpanen forest



The last trees at Djerpmesjávri



Surveyor marking the corner points of Tuomas Toivonen's forest lot corner points



Tuomas Toivonen's forest

JŽ:
There's a lot to think through in your last reply! And maybe there is a difference in me thinking about a forest and you *owning* part of one. It's one thing to think about nature as a complex system (which it kind of is) and another thing to see how animals and plants move about in an actual place and how your intervention actually changes that. And your triad of hands-on science + curiosity + animism is a truly great proposal. In my mind it folds together a genuine care for something (a forest, a sauna, a community?) without pretending to know or control it. Which is kind of what we need right now, no? I'm also curious to know whether becoming acquainted with that piece of land has changed your architectural practice in any way?

TT:
So far my relationship with that parcel of forest has been very passive. I like to visit during different seasons, and little by little get to know its character and places, its rocks and trees, its constants and its changes. To date I have taken the approach to not cut any trees, I have 'denied' its dimension as a source of raw material – wood – that is an asset that can be sold or used in several ways. Since almost all forests in Finland are silviculturally managed 'tree plantations', this passivity becomes a contrasting gesture – passivity as an active stance. As the forests around us are cut and replanted, my woods will remain and develop

into an island with older specimens and more complex relationships between flora and fauna.
From the perspective of my architecture practice I have also started looking at wood in a new light, some of these tendencies are perhaps influenced by thinking things through a forest:
– I prefer to use wood in a way so that it performs at its best – I want every 2 x 4 in a light stud frame to be working hard on its coordinated and individual tasks instead of having a mass of cross-laminated timber (CLT) with a heavy volume of glue and 'minced meat' whereby the trees have lost some of their potential and dignity. On the other hand, for fast-growing tree plantation stock, the CLT form is more forgiving, the material's structural qualities are no longer that important.
– For building the sauna we used logs as pillars. We went to see these trees before they were felled. Even though the land where they grew lost these handsome pines, the way they are used in the building retains their log-ness or tree-ness. The columns remain fragments of the forest of their origins, and we can tell their individual stories. On some level, this applies to every piece of wood. Each piece of sawn timber comes from somewhere, even if its shape has been standardised and no-one knows anymore which piece of land it was cut from.
– Every old building made of wood contains a forest – we can see it as a set of individual trees cut from specific locations and brought together. When moving through forests in Finland, the lack of old growth forest and old trees becomes apparent quite quickly. Those trees were cut. They were used. The best trees were used for construction. they became buildings, furniture, architecture. Looking at Timo Penttilä's cabin near Sevettijärvi, we can see a building made entirely of massive logs from old kelo trees. Or we can see the surrounding slow-growth forests that are now missing these old trees. In this light, architecture can appear grotesque. Every design is a plan for a massacre (clear-cut) or at least an abduction (the extraction of single logs), every building becomes a nature morte, a trophy, or ossuary of a forest. Naturally this is not only the case for wood, but for every part of a building, especially ones that are made of virgin materials.
– Nothing is neutral and everything is problematic. Perhaps at the core of our life and work is the question of how to make compromises while caring about things – how to make sense of complex perspectives, contradictions and tensions.

Image credits:

All images by Nene Tsuboi and Tuomas Toivonen, except those of the Lakeside house by Maija Luutonen

A Forest's Drive for Motion: Acoustic Ecologies and the Sonicity of Labour

Sofia Lemos



Lina Lapelytė, *Instructions for the Woodcutters*, excerpt from the *Currents*, a work made together with Mantas Petraitis
<https://tinyurl.com/w7adb27a>



Currents, Lina Lapelytė and Mantas Petraitis' site-specific installation on water with pine logs and sound. Commissioned by the 2nd Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art, RIBOCA2, 2020. Photo by Ansis Starks

Currents (2020) is an installation by Lina Lapelytė and Mantas Petraitis which brings together over 2000 pine logs to form a floating island on the water by the 2nd Riga Biennial's (RIBOCA2) main venue, Andrejsala, reminiscent of timber rafting on the Daugava River. This monumental structure reflects on the sonicity of labour and the relationships, ideologies and sensitivities that arose over centuries of Riga's involvement in the timber industry.

Western philosophies have associated forests' rootedness with their immobility.¹ Yet, we know that after the last glacial age, as temperatures began to rise, birch and oak trees began marching northwards, bringing with them their associated flora and fauna. From early on, humans understood forests' drive for motion: they converted their timber into fire, their logs into rafts, and their fibres into paper scrolls. In its boundless movement, bark was converted into nourishment, transport, housing and narrative. For those who are troubled by our predicament in the age of environmental devastation, acknowledging the

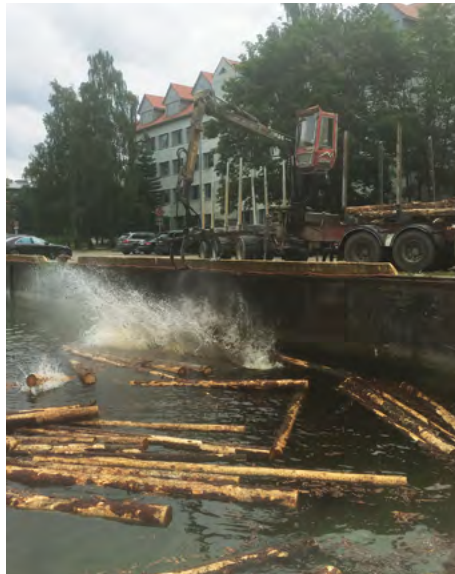
dragging march of a forest renders movement, decay and regeneration as fundamental features of our rapport with the world.

Where woodlands expand a large surface of the land, history and economic development become inherently tied to the movements of trees, thicket and timber. On the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea, Latvian woodlands cover over half of the country. Since the Middle Ages, its forests have supplied Western Europe with timber for ships and buildings. In the 1930s, Latvian timber export represented 10% of the global market. While it provided economic protection, the forest also occupied a privileged space in society having harboured Latvians who fled to the woods to seek refuge inside its bark and atop its canopies during conflicts between the Russian, German and Swedish empires. Today, forests represent the nation's future as new markets emerge for biomass energy projects and biofuel.

Flowing westward over one thousand kilometres in a great arc through Russia and Belarus and discharging into the Gulf

of Riga on the Baltic Sea, the Daugava, played an important role enabling Latvian forests' economic flow. Referred to as the 'highway of rafts', the Daugava was central to the circulation of timber until the river was dammed to build Riga's hydroelectric power plant in 1974. Before, thousands of logs would be brought together on water, forming immense rafts carried by the currents and guided by raftsmen. The latter understood forests' drive for motion and learned to cohabit with the river, working with or against the current to carry the timber. In the apparent stillness of the forest and in the loud of the Daugava, raftsmen communicated through song. Their songs bear witness to their working conditions while capturing the acoustic ecologies of forest and water mobilised by the hope of economic development.

Departing from this global history of labour, Lina Lapelytė and Mantas Petraitis' sculptural and sound installation *Currents* investigates how the pulsing rhythms of raftman's songs are central to capitalist



Installation of *Currents*, photos by Lina Lapelytė and Mantas Petraitis.
Photo overleaf by Ansis Starks





Instructions for the Woodcutters, Lina Lapelytė and Mantas Petraitis, performed by Lina Lapelytė, Aliona Alymova, Salomėja Petronytė. Commissioned by the 2nd Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art, RIBOCA2, 2020. Photos by Andrejs Strokins

modes of production. Composed of 2000 pine logs arranged to form a floating island in Andrejsala, a decommissioned industrial port in Riga, alongside a sound installation playing through the outdoor warning speakers, *Currents* proposed a mode of listening beyond the ear, a visual and sonic composition attentive to the sonicity of raftsmen’s labour and its more-than-human languages.

Walking through the ruined industrial port hundreds of logs drift at bay either too crooked or too thick to be used as wood for cutting before continuing its journey westwards by land and sea. A loudly resounding meter demands our attention. As I tune into its steady compass, I hear a combination of poetry and singing that flirts with the raftsmen’s songs. A female voice describes their rhythmic arrangement, from a seemingly disorganised percussive amalgamation, where the narrator tells us ‘everything belongs to Man’, to the law-like sound of clock-time. The female voice is joined by others, initially in *acapella* and later to the

low-fi sound of electronics. In low tone, as one might imagine the raftsmen’s songs to have been, they softly repeat ‘they were going on and on and on, the super young and pretty old.’

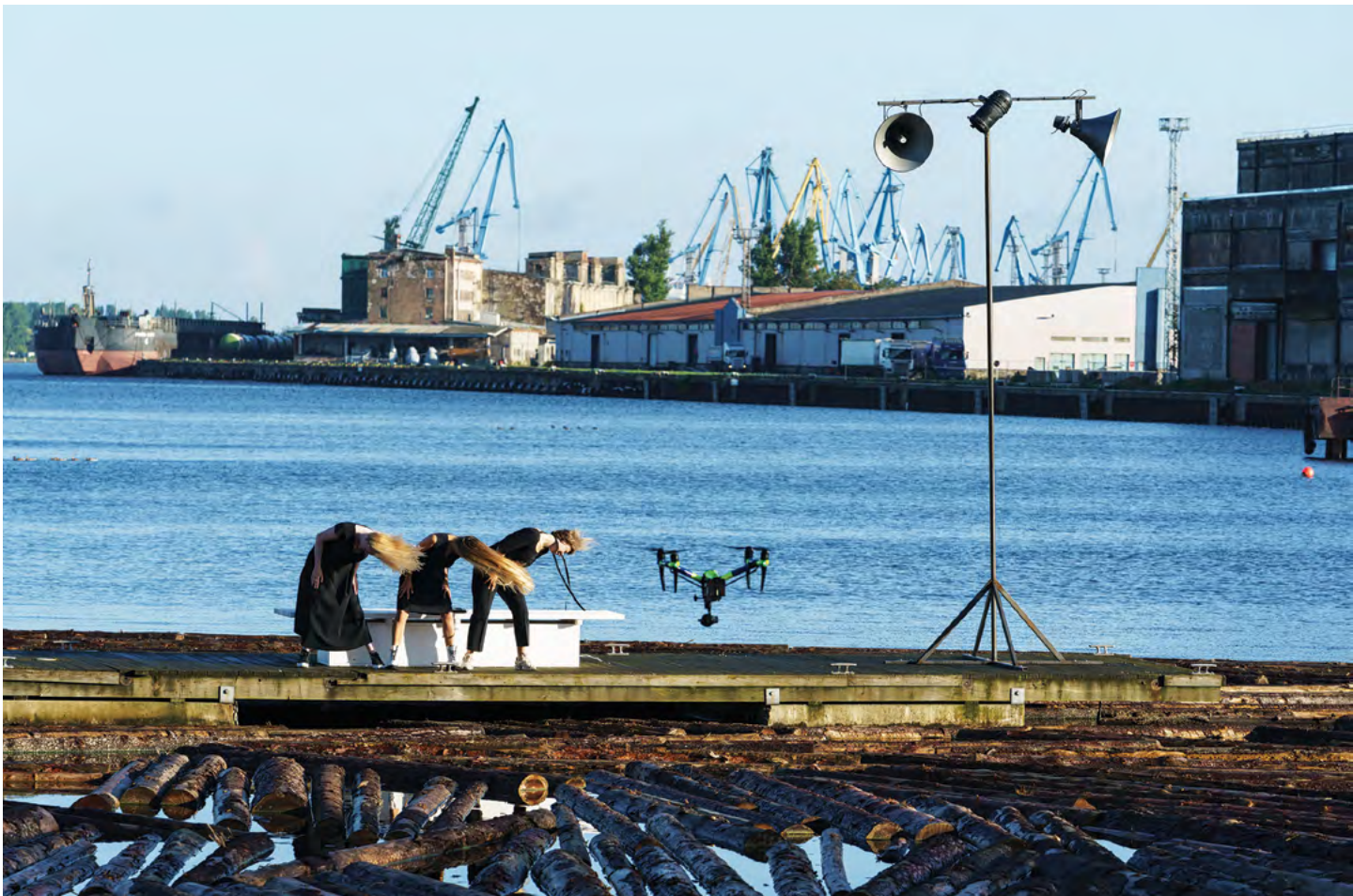
For the documentation of the installation, filmed on the deck that traversed the bay of pine logs, Lapelytė was joined by two singers who in unison turned their heads in circular motions in a gesture close to slow headbanging. In the performance itself, their voice goes out of words and into sound. The wood crackling at their feet and the river underneath them join in as a chorus of concatenated sounds, as if singing in unison the law-like sound of clock-time.

The socio-politics and sonicity of labour

Since the invention of the bell tower, as Lewis Mumford shows in his seminal *Technics and Civilization*, the measurement of time ushered a particular rhythm into the life of the craftsman and the merchant.² In

the nineteenth century, a wider debate about the management of time focused on how to organise labour and balance economic development with workers’ rights. Rhythm was at the centre of this project. Echoing modern theories of resonance in the fields of acoustics and musicology during the formative period of modernism around the 1900s, the ear was simultaneously linked to the perception of time. These transformations profoundly impacted how meters, alongside clocks, organise time.

During this period, German economist Karl Bücher’s *Arbeit und Rhythmus* [Labour and Rhythm] published in 1896 extensively reprinted until 1924, sought to uncover a relation between labour and rhythm by analysing work songs as well as performance in so-called premodern societies throughout the globe. Bücher examined work songs of ancient societies in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East and in relation to the work performed, such as milling, digging, lifting, carrying, scrubbing, and so forth. Despite his ethnographic efforts,



Bücher was unable to conclude a singular musical rhythm that could have dominated relations between song and labour. Yet, he nevertheless observed an ‘original unity’ in which ‘labor, play, and art blended into each other’ to establish ‘rhythm as an economic principle of development.’³

According to Bücher, this unity was possible to the extent that in song, the worker did not perceive the commodity-form produced by their labour as alien to his or her expectations of life. For the economist, song was a relational language that allowed rhythm to stand as an emancipatory alternative against the law-like authority of clock-time. In modern management theory, however, his study supported a view of rhythm said to taxonomise time. At this time, chronophotographic investigations of labour processes inaugurated an international science of work. Frank B. and Lilian M. Gilbreth’s time and motion studies, for instance, used chronophotography and cinematography to closely analyse work processes in order to determine optimal task management while reducing externalities to a minimum.

While conventional views of time describe it as forward-moving, one-dimensional, universal and made up of spatial successions, musical time shows us how it is made up of tempos, rhythms and syncopations that ward off, suspend, accelerate and re-organise our perception. I suggest that workers’ songs alongside other evolutionary tempos might help us reframe our socio-political chronologies. Indeed, raftsmen’s songs strengthened working class solidarity and more-than-human kinships through sound and ritual. Sang to the metre of synchronised axes cutting into the wood and at the tempo of deforestation, these songs tell us about enmeshed dramaturgies of time.

Rhythm’s inherent capability to facilitate a shuttling across temporality and in delays, repetitions, glitches and overlays urges us to re-engage with raftsmen’s songs and their productive rhythms as tools for interrogating the foundations of modernity and capitalist development. For Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung,

‘Sound is considered as a testament of and survival device for workers, one that is

imbued with necessity, hope, and love, as it exists as the noise of tools and machines, as a vibration of exhausted bodies, as chants of protest, as laments and elegies of loss and pain. (...) These range from alleviating the pain of working under extreme conditions such as plantations, waste dumps, or 3 miles down the earth in the mines, as Gil Scott-Heron points out. Songs help to increase and survive the requests of high productivity by keeping with the rhythm of the work, or reducing the sentiment of boredom like it would be the case while sowing, picking cotton, mowing the lawn or cooking.’⁴

As Ndikung points out, the sonic opens up the effects of practices that divide subjects from objects, exposes the routes of racial capitalism and it renders hearable modernity’s organisation of labour-time. In my research around what I term the ‘sonic continuum’, I look at how non-linear and syncretic sonic histories manifest our understanding of time and, by extension, our experience of the world, as constantly seized by the language that describes it. In an effort to de-essentialise

the ear and denaturalise the historical construction of time as a category of modern Western knowledge-making, I try to grapple with how time controls representation and what consequences this might have for the field of visual cultures.

Thinking through sound, silence and speech, whose voices are heard, who listens, and by what means, visual artists have explored the sonic as the articulation of tempos and cycles of time. By assembling multiple, overlapping timeframes, artworks and installations such as *Currents* propose rhythm as a relational language, which might inspire a sense of co-belonging between humans (historically recent and distant), non-humans (large and microscopic), and environments (near and far). In *Currents*, the sonic movement away from representation into expression serves as the stage for a poetics of temporal disjuncture revealed in mechanical motions of repetition and staged as tempo and text.

Temporal Disjuncture

The role of sound and phonic substance in *Currents* orients us towards an ethics of listening that enables us to recognise not only their shared forms of being and belonging with one another, but also with the river and the forest as they relate to gender, ecology and life under capitalism. *Currents* enmeshes the day-to-day struggles of raftsmen and their life-long and oftentimes generational connection with the surrounding watery and vegetal elements, with the accelerated tempo of economic development, the slow violence of deforestation and the longer scale of environmental change. By creating temporal complications in a rhythmic episode that disturbs the linear time of capitalist production, the installation puts forth renewed kinships and a longer tempo of auditory awareness.

Movement, circularity and repetition are the rhythmic aesthetics that Lapelytè and Petraitis’ monumental installation tuned into, offering us a take on the expressive dynamics of listening across auditory registers of human and non-human solidarity across capitalist development. Inasmuch as deforestation and extraction are expressed in the law-like meter of clock-time, the raftsmen’s songs also sound out other possible connections between human, river and forest. At this temporal disjuncture, Lapelytè and Petraitis’ collaboration allows us to listen to the movement of forests alongside the

tempi of rivers and the currents of economic development, conjoining our senses with the unsound and the silenced to imagine new solidarities, aural alliances and forms of attunement.

Endnotes

- 1 See, for example, Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*, New York, 2013; Luce Irigaray and Michael Marder, *Through Vegetal Being*, New York, 2016; and Emanuele Coccia, *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture*, Cambridge, 2018.
- 2 Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, Chicago, 2010 [1934]), p. 13.
- 3 Karl Bücher, *Arbeit und Rhythmus*, Leipzig, 1909 (1896), p. 413.
- 4 Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, ‘Force Times Distance: On Labour and Its Sonic Ecologies’, Sonsbeek 20–24 no.1, June 2020. <https://www.sonsbeek20-24.org/en/editorial-room/issue-one/force-times-distance-labour-and-its-sonic-ecologies/>, accessed 23 June 2021

Photo by Ansis Starks



The Right not to be Offsetted

Interview with
Cooking Sections
(Daniel Fernández Pascual
and Alon Schwabe) by
Jurga Daubaraitė and
Jonas Žukauskas



OFFSETTED traces the emergence of the valuation of nature. The upcoming book will unpack forms of dispossession that are becoming more and more common through the protection – not only destruction – of natural environments. Tying into current struggles for climate justice worldwide, the publication contests neoliberalism as a saviour of its own ecological contradictions: assigning financial value to nature in order to conserve and rebuild it.

CLIMAVORE was born to explore how to eat as humans change climates: a form of devouring that follows the consequences of anthropogenic landscapes affected by intensive forms of extraction. Different from carnivore, omnivore, locavore, vegetarian, or vegan diets, it is not so much the ingredients that define CLIMAVORE, but rather the infrastructural responses to human-induced climatic events. New seasons of food production and consumption have begun to appear.

Jonas Žukauskas:

Descartes, in his writing on optics, proposed an analogy of a blind man and the stick he uses to sense the space and objects around him. Similarly we use certain optics to understand the environment and natural systems that make our worlds; we use optics to sense space and enable our movements.

Your practice is a great example of one that uses different optics, it crosses and cuts through different ideas to re-assemble them in order to re-constitute new knowledge. How do you see your relationship to nature and the forest?

Daniel Fernández Pascual:

Like the analogy of the stick, we like to use artefacts or items, or sometimes food ingredients to try to sense, to a certain extent, different landscapes, conflicts, or different constructions of space. With our current research in forestry in Sweden we are interested in understanding what a forest is and what it is not. In a way a big part of it is just a timber plantation. What happens when we are surrounded by tree plantations instead of a forest? What are the different metabolic relations we have towards these constructed

ecosystems? In our work we are looking at how food and feeding connect these different environments with the forest and sea.

Jurga Daubaraitė:

Like the curious connections of salmon from sea to forest. How are these seemingly unrelated things connected?

Alon Schwabe:

This connection research is in the making. Salmon is a very interesting fish, a creature that works against gravitational forces, and swims against the stream upwards. They have this metabolic system that, after they spawn, they lay eggs and most die. Their carcasses get metabolised by different animals, even by the trees, so they bring marine nutrients like nitrogen from the sea into the forest. And trees that grow along salmon rivers show signs of being much taller, growing much greener. We are doing lots of work to understand these metabolic connections between salmon, sea and trees through the idea of the metabolic forest; thinking about all these species consuming each other, and trees as a key part of the trophic chain.



JŽ:
And the clear-cutting and Swedish model of forestry?

DFF:
The more you clear-cut, the less capacity the soil has to store heavy metals that appear naturally in the soil, like mercury. Apparently most soil has mercury and it’s fine, as long as there are trees with roots retaining it, but when land is deforested, all those minerals start flowing into rivers, severely affecting fish.

AS:
We have been interviewing scientists from Sweden as there is a whole stream of research looking into the environmental effects of clear-cutting and how it has changed the whole landscape of the country; and whether this idea of a ‘forest’ still exists at all. Because most of Sweden now has planted forest, it is more of a plantation.

DFF:
In numbers, some claim less than 10% of Sweden is actually ‘forest’, even though it’s all covered in trees.

AS:
At the moment there are different environmental groups that are monitoring, advocating and working against these timber plantations, so we are really trying to understand what goes beyond the forest itself, and how trees are interconnected. Not only to each other, and how trees communicate, but how trees are part of these metabolic relationships that expand beyond the forest,

having ramifications that go deep into the sea (either the Baltic or any other).

JŽ:
So the stick is much longer than it appears. Initially our fascination was that everyone with an interest in the forest wants to extract something; to cut timber, forage, use it for recreation – all these interests are really shortsighted and unaware of each other and most importantly unaware of the autonomy of nature. And you bring these controversies to art institutions and cultural organisations to reveal them. Your CLIMAVORE project led to outcomes such as taking salmon off the menu at the Tate galleries for good. How far do you go with your practice?

DFF:
In general we start with a question that interests us, an event or anecdote. We respond to invitations – sometimes it is self-initiated work, but we try to think about what happens outside the exhibition space, or how to engage with certain practices of the institutions that we work with that we could disrupt and how the work can become an embedded part of their own practices. In the case of Tate, for instance, where we recently did an exhibition, there was an installation where you could listen to atrocious stories about farmed salmon. But more importantly, we used Tate as a platform to change certain food practices. We worked with Tate Eats for 1.5 years to remove farmed salmon from their museum restaurant menus forever. For us, this was the core of the exhibition, and then you would of course go to the exhibition space to see the installation about the construction of salmon as a colour and a fish. But the core action was the act of removing salmon in perpetuity.

JD:
I remember the petition that you’ve been working on as part of your exhibition ‘Offsetted’ in New York , how did that initiation for an amendment of the right of trees continue legally?

DFF:
That project was connected to offsetting mechanisms and how the trees of New York have been used for centuries, in a way, to displace the population from Native Americans, African Americans, and low-income inhabitants in certain neighbourhoods. On the other hand, trees have also been used by

people to stay in place. Grassroots movements have been forming throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries for people not to be priced out of their homes. In many cases, this struggle has brought neighbours together as a resistance movement to protect a single tree or a park. We wanted to trace all those different stories, all the way to the present, when there are all these new tree planting schemes. Michael Bloomberg’s 2007–2008 plan to plant 1 million new trees in the city has created a lot of tension. Some of the trees have been used to offset carbon emissions, but even more so in certain neighbourhoods, especially Puerto Rican or Lantinx, where people are seeing trees as a warning sign to be priced out. When new trees arrive, the neighbourhood improves, but it also means that new developments, and new tenants push up the rent. So, in some cases people have even been uprooting newly planted trees, because they see them as a threat. We collaborated with lawyers from CELDF that work with environmental organisations and deal with the rights of nature to think about a new critical framework for the city of New York. They have worked in Ecuador and Bolivia to write the rights of nature into the Constitution, and the more recent Lake Erie case; pushing for it to gain non-human rights recognition. So we worked with CELDF to write an amendment to the City’s code and grant trees the right not to serve as carbon offsets. We used the platform of the exhibition to write that legal draft.

JŽ:
Interestingly, just a couple of days ago we witnessed the cutting of an old chestnut tree in the centre of Nida near the city municipality. It looks like the old tree was taken out to make space for new paving tiles. There are currently a lot of discussions in Lithuania about the rights of nature. And there are proposals to set the value of carbon offsetting to existing green spaces in the cities, which seems to be a symbolic game to encourage conservation when there are no other tools available. What history does this idea hold?

DFF:
Carbon trading is a big market that started with the Kyoto protocol in the 1990s as a way for the Global North to agree to ‘reduce’ emissions, not to pollute less. Instead, a new form of speculative trade was invented to send your pollution quotas to countries in the Global South, who are suddenly trapped in a





neocolonial logic involving the responsibility to cleanse the damage of the high-emitter countries, which happen to be in the Global North, or otherwise service them through outsourced manufacturing.

AS:

So in a sense Kyoto was an act of levelling, between ‘overdeveloped’ nations and ‘underdeveloped’ ones to put it in crude terms. Instead of saying that the former need to under or re-develop themselves in different ways, essentially it created a speculative market in which carbon is now externalised and traded in stock markets by the latter.

DFF:

There are numerous books written about how you calculate carbon emissions, carbon storage, and the value behind carbon costs; how much a company needs to pay for a ton of carbon, etc. Instead of reducing pollution they just quantify how much money needs to be paid to keep polluting as much, if not more. You can even trade those rights with other nations that have very few factories, and magic, it balances out. That is the perversity of

net-zero emissions. The system, created by the Kyoto protocol, has escalated especially since the 2007–2008 financial crisis, when many investors in housing were about to collapse, and moved into trading so-called ‘natural capital’. Today it has expanded from carbon to all kinds of species, whose level of conservation is now traded in a speculative market to profit from conservation quotas for some of these species.

JŽ:

And in city planning I find it quite disproportionate that a line of trees around a tall building could offset any amount of its environmental impact. Is it a game of aesthetics then?

DFF:

Yes, in the way it is. You could say that it is a capital gain. Basically, developers engaging with offsetting and mitigation schemes can just continue doing what they do, and pay a ‘compensation’. Different algorithms have been created to calculate the value of a tree. For example the tree in Nida, if you want to cut that down you need to replant 127 trees,

because that’s its value according to some environmental report. And the people who defend this position argue that you cannot convince a decision- or policy-maker of its value unless it does not have an economic value attached to it. But the problem continues when you start calculating that value because you are ignoring human, social and many other values that are literally priceless. Why should it be quantified in the first place? We’d rather say: it needs to stay there. These are the main debates that have been around in the last decade: how to calculate value, but there is no point in doing it.

JŽ:

And you proposed to alter the structure of the law to give rights to the forests, the right not to be offsetted?

DFF:

It’s as simple as it sounds: granting trees rights for them to be considered as entities not to service humans or the city, and allow them to just be trees.

JD:

Have you sensed a different approach to trees and nature, and the forest through your work in the US and Sweden recently?

AS:

Yes, first of all trees have already been commodified and industrialised in Sweden for a very long time in a material way, and less in a financial way. One is timber, another is carbon stocks. The timber/forestry industry is so strong and prevalent in Sweden that when you speak about trees, their role as a commodity is what is driving the very physical conversation. Whereas in New York trees have a much more speculative meaning. What is happening now is an attempt to to extract, and mine a new way to engage with the environment through the market of net-zero emissions to offset our environmental guilt.

JŽ:

While looking into the biofuel industry in the Baltics we recently realised that to simply stop burning fossil fuels, while using the same energy infrastructure, you have to replace fuel by cutting down a lot of forest. The process still releases the same amount of CO₂, which is then captured with the replanted forest. In contrast to leaving the forest, burning the coal. The existing forest is not so quick to capture the CO₂. It’s like a lie that leads to bigger lies?

DFF:

I agree. It is just pure greenwashing. Biofuels are quite problematic. First of all, because they erode the quality of the soil, do not allow other species to grow, and use a lot of pesticides in order to grow. Since they are not destined for food consumption, no one cares about the quantity of poisonous chemicals used.

AS:

Another interesting thing about greenwashing in regards to offsetting in a Swedish context is how it connects to the global carbon emissions market. There have been a lot of tree-planting initiatives, taking the clear-cutting model from Sweden into many nations in Africa. What was supposed to empower those nations in the postcolonial struggle for liberation and setting up their own economy, eventually turned into these carbon offset plantations in Mozambique, Uganda, Tanzania and many others, dispossessing people from their land for the sake of cleansing the carbon emissions of the Global North. One

of the largest investors in Uganda for instance was the Swedish Pension Fund; a massive conglomerate. Last year it pulled out from all investments in African forestry due to growing pressure from citizens who did not want their life savings used to displace indigenous populations from their ancestral lands for the sake of carbon offsetting.

JŽ:

So the short term message – to offset the pollution, you aim to complicate that image and invite people to see all the other aspects of this model.

AS:

Yes, well, the main thing to do would be to stop polluting. Sounds logical.

DFF:

Because if offsetting had to happen on site, you cannot displace it, you would look into sorting out the problem. How to do that? It’s complicated.

JŽ:

How do you think about making the long term actual? So often in politics most important decisions are likely to be taken in the short term, within electoral cycles, and the long term question of natural systems becomes the elephant in the room.

AS:

Maybe we don’t have enough years of practice to answer it. But firstly, how do we define ‘long term’? What is becoming clear for us is that engaging with this question, trying to define it, pushes us to expand our understanding of ecology, whether it is offsetting or salmon. These are questions that have been unfolding for decades if not centuries, so trying to rethink and address them requires a really long time. We are curious to understand what it takes for a research project to have a long run. This goes against the way that cultural production currently operates in the entire field, which brings questions about legacy and what stays beyond and after exhibitions. How can projects change institutions? Their lifespan could be three, five, ten years which is already not enough time, as it needs perhaps 50 years minimum!

DFF:

Yes, I remember a soil scientist saying that if a plot of land has been polluted with all sorts of heavy metals for 50 years, that soil needs at least the same amount of time to be cleaned up. So when we start looking into these periods of time – pollution and clean-up time – the long term easily becomes 50 to 200 years.

AS:

The fact that there is not going to be salmon on Tate menus anymore is a way to start articulating that, but of course, there is much, much more work to be done. So I cannot say that we can already retire :)

JD:

Will the rights of trees have a continuation in the Swedish system of plantations?

AS:

This time we are trying to think not through carbon design but metabolic exchanges.

The legal system is interesting but has its limitations. In the Swedish context a lot of these lands were originally colonised, displacing or eradicating Sámi people from them. We recognise that there are limitations to what the law can do, even if there is political will, which many times is lacking.

Photographs

Offsetted, Cooking Sections (Daniel Fernández Pascual & Alon Schwabe), the Arthur Ross Architecture Gallery, Columbia GSAPP, New York. Photo by James Ewing, Courtesy GSAPP, 2019



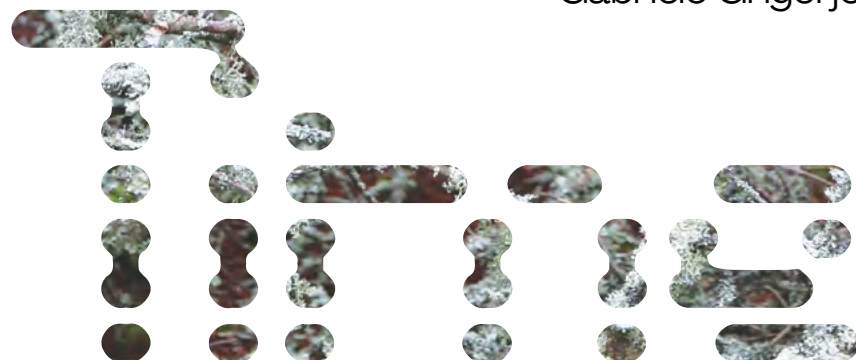
On Forest



and Time



Gabrielė Grigorjeva



... earth, terra, tellus mean both the soil and the planet, two meanings and one. But to the Athsheans soil, ground, earth was not that to which dead return and by which the living live: the substance of their world was not earth, but forest.

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Word for World is Forest*

It has been estimated that there are nearly 1,600 definitions of forest¹: from complex and generative ‘multinatures’² and social ‘superorganisms’³ to green deserts, and monoculture plantations, the forest occurs as a constellation of images, meanings, and architectures.

Ursula K. Le Guin’s science fiction novel, *The Word for World is Forest*, written in 1968, contends that forest and world are ‘two meanings and one.’ Borrowing this notion from Le Guin, this short essay explores the forest as a multiplicity of relations, perspectives, and temporalities. The following paragraphs will touch on a number of perspectives and geographies: from the rainforest to the humble mountain pine forests waiting to be cut down in Neringa Forest, Lithuania. Rather than seek definitive answers, the purpose of this work is to explore and present the different entanglements, and at times discontinuities, at play when we consider what on earth is a forest. This forms part of my ongoing research developed during the Neringa Forest Architecture residency at Nida Art Colony.

Written as a response to the geopolitical turmoil, and the ecocidal violence of the American war in Vietnam, Le Guin’s story describes a world in which the chauvinistic inhabitants of a deforested and naked Earth, colonise and enslave the non-violent population of a forest-abundant planet. It describes a struggle for justice and resistance amid the militarised plight for resource extraction and planetary dispossession. More than half a century later, the political imaginary of Le Guin’s science fiction seems ongoingly prescient.

Last year saw the rise of the Covid-19 pandemic, which is thought to be linked to the increasing fragmentation and degradation of tropical forests⁴ In 2020, forest fires raged across state borders and continents, including

Australia, Siberia and North America, with some of the worst fires recorded in the Amazon rainforest.⁵ Home to 33 million people and thousands of species of plants and animals, the Amazon is one of the largest and most biodiverse tropical rainforests in the world. Under the leadership of President Jair Bolsonaro, the rate of deforestation in the Amazon has surged exponentially, as forests are systematically cleared to pave the way for the cultivation of soy and cattle, poaching and mining for minerals.⁶ Satellite data suggests that the number of fires in the Amazon has doubled in just one year.⁷

The Amazon is home to primary forests, which consist of trees that are hundreds and even thousands of years old. Old trees perform a pivotal role in the forest ecosystem: providing food and habitats for multiple species of plants and animals, regulating the climate and the hydrological cycles, sequestering carbon, and mitigating the effects of climate change. During respiration trees release a small part of the CO₂ they absorb during photosynthesis into the atmosphere, while the rest of the CO₂ is transformed into carbon to produce sugars required for their metabolism. The older and larger the tree, the more carbon it stores. During forest fires, carbon dioxide stored over hundreds of years gets released into the atmosphere.⁸

Unlike deforestation, the full extent of forest degradation is not visible from above but has a significant impact on the livelihoods of the indigenous communities,⁹ the wider ecosystem, and forest’s natural resilience to fires. In 2020, degraded forest areas in the Amazon were twice the size of the deforested areas, yet the statistics often occlude this data. Assessing the extent of forest degradation using satellite technology is not feasible, and in order to understand the full picture, data from the ground is required.¹⁰ But the very people on the ground – the Amazon’s indigenous people – who have been at the forefront of environmental justice movements protecting the forest for centuries, are being systematically evicted, massacred, and dispossessed of their lands and knowledge. The ongoing and systematic colonisation of the Amazon and its peoples is driven by the old rhetoric of the Amazon as *terra nullius* – implying that the forest is a wild, homogeneous space open to ‘civilisation’ and exploitation. At the root of this presumption is the illusion that the Amazon is a pristine ‘natural’ landscape, devoid of both humans and design – standing in direct opposition to the city. Paulo Tavares’

work on this enduring western binary is illuminating. He writes:

In the same way we read the city as a historical text produced by social forces coded into material form – layers on top of layers of ruins forming a living social fabric – the forest stands to be interpreted through the syntax of spatial designs. Yet these living ruins are neither fully or exclusively human, nor are they completely natural. Rather, they are the product of long-term and complex interactions between human collectives, environmental forces and the agency of other species, themselves actors in the historical process of ‘designing the forest.’¹¹

Deemed by the western imaginary as the last frontier of ‘pristine nature,’ the Amazon serves an important point of reference in this discussion. As the future of planetary health hinges on the prosperity of forest ecosystems, it is a prominent symbol of planetary-wide ecological and climatic turmoil. The following chapters will explore forest definitions, practices and politics, in the context of how forests are made and unmade, and the role the deep-rooted binary worldviews play in the many ways we care for and relate to forests.

So what exactly is a forest?

Depending on the geography and species composition, it can take anything between 100 to 1000 years for a forest to establish itself: the process involves a succession of at least two generations of a given tree. Among the nearly 1,600 definitions of the forest, there are four dominant definitions adopted globally, yet none of which take the age of a forest into consideration.

Definitions play a huge role in understanding the health of forests. According to the FAO, UNFCCC and UN-CBD definitions, both the rainforest and a monoculture plantation have equal standing as ‘forests.’ This has a significant impact on the future of forests and forest-dependent communities, especially in the Global South, where the interests of the plantation industry have prevailed in wrecking the ecosystems and destroying livelihoods.¹² A major report exploring the role that definitions play in forest policy, claims that in order to ‘meet ambitious global restoration targets, policy makers,

governments, scientists, and agencies need to adopt a richer concept of a forest than the dominant FAO definition that has governed [global] forest policy to date.”¹³ Rather than an overarching and thus largely reductive approach, the authors of the study call for an adoption of a diverse set of definitions that capture the abundance of concepts and perspectives on what makes a forest a forest, in all its spatiotemporal dimensions.

Trees (and only trees) are at the centre of these definitions. While the tree is certainly one of the most dominant features in the forest, the forest is much more than a collection of trees. From the forest floor upward through the understory, extending all the way up to the crown of the tree, the forest is a turbulent and generative multination: a community of soils, minerals, plants and animals. It both forms and is part of the atmospheric and hydrological cycles, and responds to environmental change in a complex web of relationships that bind us together.

Arguably, it is the combination of intertemporal multi-species entanglements and interdependencies which make the forest a forest. For the forest ecologist Suzanne Simard an established forest resembles a complex and interconnected society:

An old-growth forest is neither an assemblage of stoic organisms tolerating one another’s presence nor a merciless battle royale: it’s a vast, ancient and intricate society. There is conflict in a forest, but there is also negotiation, reciprocity and perhaps even selflessness. The trees, understory plants, fungi and microbes in a forest are so thoroughly connected, communicative and codependent that some scientists have described them as superorganisms.¹⁴

Despite the wealth of knowledge and research in this field, the age of forests is not the only crucial detail the FAO, UNFCCC and UN-CBD definitions omit. Critical information concerning the condition and species composition of the forest is left out: whether the trees are native or introduced; whether it is a monoculture or a mixed forest, whether it is undisturbed primary forest or a degraded forest, or a mixture of both. There is no indication of the health of the forest: is it healthy? Has it been subjected to diseases or pests? Has it suffered damage from drainage, clearing, fragmentation, isolation, species elimination, introduction of alien or invasive

species? Has it been affected by fire, wind or air pollution?

These globally-adopted definitions are based on the view from above, which reduces forests to quantifiable metrics: a minimum area of land covered by a minimum number of trees of a minimum height and canopy percentage. The same ‘God’s eye view’ informs forestry management practices, which divide forests into grids and ‘stands.’ Forest stands are units, which are generally standardised in terms of their species mix, age and other tree metrics, predicated on their efficiency and usefulness to humans (such as timber or carbon sequestration). This makes forest inventory and planning easier, but at the same time reduces the forest to a collection of trees to be measured, counted and controlled, often overlooking the wider ecosystem and relations in the process.

Consequently, the very definitions that have been designated to protect forests, allow states and corporations alike to quantify virtually any land consisting of trees as forest, regardless of the species composition, or purpose: whether it is a national park or a timber plantation. Blurring this distinction is problematic. It sanctions the assumption that an old-growth forest and a plantation have equal standing, when in reality they are distinctly incommensurable entities. While the planted trees in a timber plantation are certainly alive, deprived of their multi-species relationships they stand still in both space and time. Emphasising the spatial characteristics of what constitutes a forest, the UN definitions overlook an integral part: that of time. Thus, a timber plantation is not only a spatial paradigm of land organisation, which has divided ‘unruly’ ecosystems into grids, but also a temporal one – organising the turbulent intertemporal cycles of the forest along the linear axis of industrial timescales. By restricting the species composition, age and other multi-species relations, the plantation model denies the forest its right to live and die according to its own temporal rhythms of ongoingness and demands to be distinguished as such.

In her book *Monocultures of the Mind*, Vandana Shiva shows how the monoculture paradigm permeates the social and psychological realms too. In the Kolar district of Karnataka, India, small-scale agroforestry practices based on cultivation of multiple biodiverse species, grown both privately and in common ownership, were replaced with a centralised mega project of eucalyptus tree

plantations, sponsored by the World Bank. In India’s ‘age-old’ approach to cultivation and maintaining food security in arid and semi-arid landscapes, ‘each rural home was a nursery, and each peasant a silviculturist:’

The honge, tamarind, jackfruit and mango, the jola, gobli, kagli and bamboo traditionally provided food and fodder, fertilizer and pesticide, fuel and small timber. [...] The invisible, decentred agroforestry model was significant because the humblest of species and the smallest of people could participate in it, and with space for the small, everyone was involved in protecting and planting.

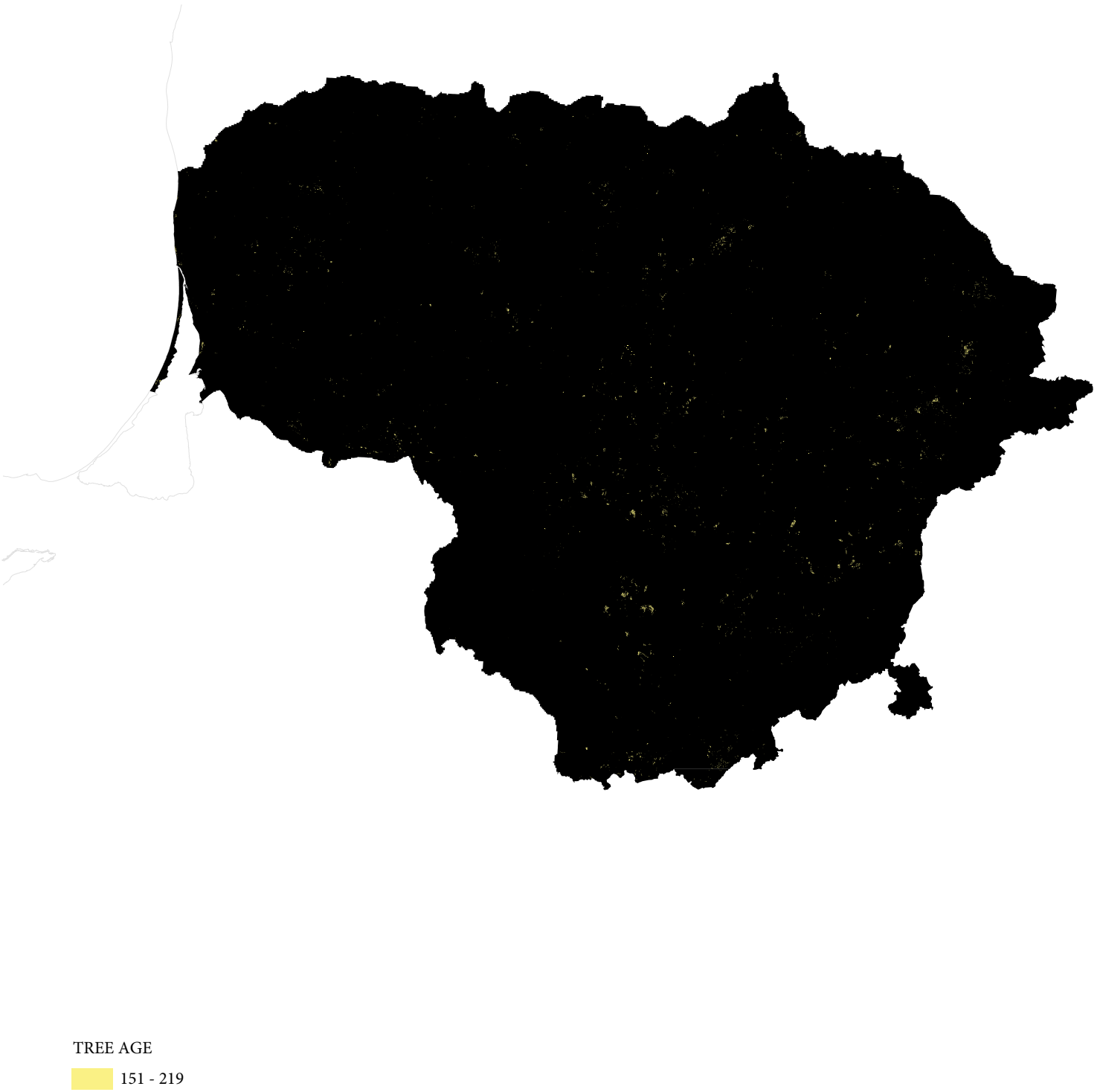
Masterminded in national and international capitals, the so-called ‘social forestry’ project of eucalyptus plantations was implemented by ‘people who could not know the purpose of the honge and the neem, and saw them as weeds,’ placing the ecosystems and communities that depend on them at risk.¹⁵

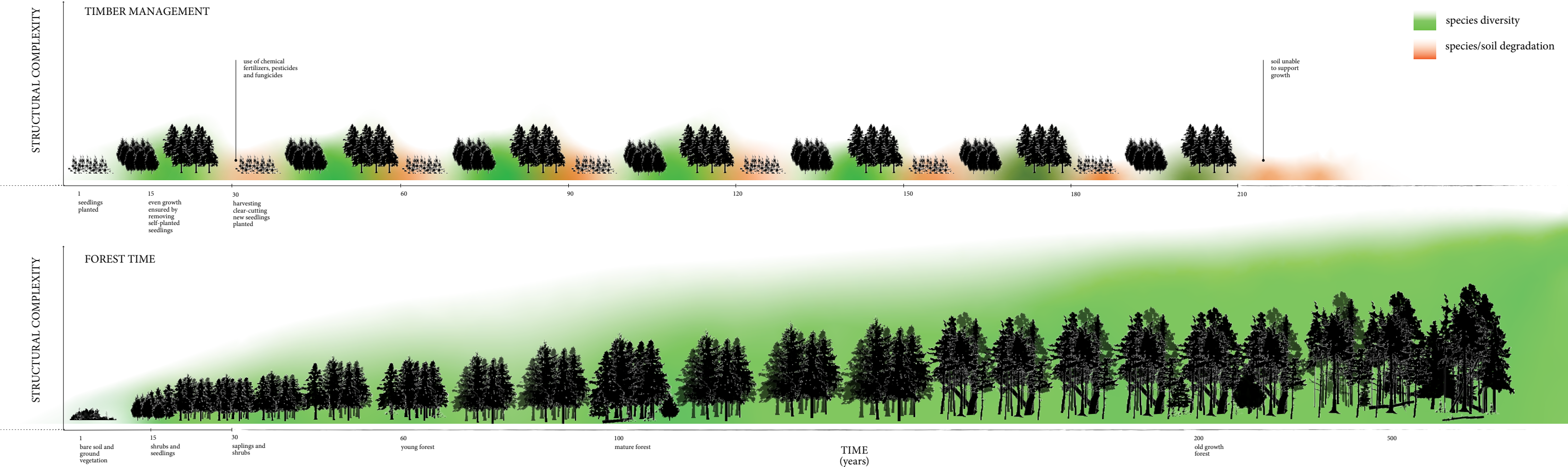
Trees, forests and silviculture practices all over the world are systematically transformed and eliminated to make way for the ‘scientific,’ rational forest of fast-growing, manageable and profitable species of tree. Definitions play an important role here. ‘The reductionist mind’¹⁶ not only impoverishes the forests’ biodiversity but eradicates the often invisible and dynamic human practices of forest management based on coexistence and codependence, placing both the ecosystems and our own survival at risk.

Forests embody dynamic dispositions of time: they are both timekeepers and time-makers. Simard’s work highlights that the ‘wood-wide-web’ – a network of tree roots and mycelia, which allows trees to cooperate and exchange resources – is organised around the ‘mother trees.’ These ancestral networks maintain the longevity and intactness of the forest ecosystem, as well as encourage biodiversity and genetic heterogeneity.¹⁷

However, old-growth forests are increasingly scarce. An old-growth forest is a type of forest that has sustained two or more generations of trees, which are left to grow, mature, reproduce, fall, decay and regenerate, usually without human interference. Depending on the species of tree, this process can take hundreds and even thousands of years. Although it is still possible to find old-growth forests which span two hundred

While Lithuania’s forests occupy 33.5% of total land cover, according to the Ancient Woods Foundation (Sengirės fondas), old-growth forests make up only 0.009% of Lithuania’s territory – making old-growth forests a critically rare occurrence here. This map shows stands where the dominant three age is equal to or higher than 151 years old.





years or more in Lithuania, such forests are fragmented and scattered in small patches across younger forests. While Lithuania’s forests occupy 33.5% of total land cover, according to the Ancient Woods Foundation (Sengirės fondas), old-growth forests make up less than one percent or 0.009% of Lithuania’s territory, making old-growth forests a critically rare occurrence here.¹⁸

The reasons why modern forest management practices tend to advocate the proliferation of young forests are too complex and diverse to be documented here in detail, but the way that forests are defined, perceived, managed and used, play an important part in how these practices (and thus forests) continue to be shaped. With the work of ecologists, such as Simard, we are beginning to understand that without the presence of old forests, many species of plants, animals, fungi, moss and lichen, face extinction. So too the forest, and ergo the human.

During my research as part of the Neringa Forest Architecture residency at Nida Art Colony in Lithuania, I learnt about the peculiarities of forest governance in a multifaceted landscape comprising forest,

sand and water. Neringa is a highly prized ‘cultural landscape’ holding the prestigious UNESCO World Heritage status. The 98km sandy peninsula – the Curonian Spit – sits between Kuršių marios [the Curonian lagoon] and the Baltic Sea. The vast majority of forests we see here today were planted at the end of the nineteenth century as part of a huge afforestation effort to protect the peninsula from sea erosion, after a number of villages were swallowed up by sand. Due to widespread deforestation during the preceding century, forests covered as little as 10% of total land cover in Neringa. As a result, a species of mountain pine [Latin: *Pinus mugo*] was introduced from Denmark and has successfully adapted to the poor sandy soil of the Curonian Spit. Sometimes referred to as a ‘dwarf species,’ mountain pines are distinct for their low-lying shrubby impermeability. A little more than a hundred years on since their arrival, the ‘alien’ mountain pine forests have successfully proliferated supporting dynamic lichen, moss, fungi and soil ecosystems, and providing habitats, shelter and fodder for deer and many other critters.

DEFINITIONS

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO; 2000) defines the forest as follows:

Land with tree crown cover (or equivalent stocking level) of more than 10% and area of more than 0.5ha. The trees should be able to reach a minimum height of 5m at maturity in situ. May consist either of closed forest formations where trees of various storeys and undergrowth cover a high proportion of the ground; or open forest formations with a continuous vegetation cover in which tree crown cover exceeds 10%. Young natural stands and all plantations established for forestry purposes which have yet to reach a crown density of 10% or tree height of 5m are included under forest, as are areas normally forming part of the forest area which are temporarily unstocked as a result of human intervention or natural causes but which are expected to revert to forest.

Despite this, the ‘unsightly,’ brushy and ‘impenetrable’ mountain pine forests are being cut down with impunity, because they have – reportedly – ‘outlived their purpose.’¹⁹ The Neringa forest recreation plans foresee that 1300 hectares of mountain pine forests will be cleared over the coming decade; of which 450ha will be replanted with the same species of mountain pine, and 850ha will be planted with a native species of pine.²⁰ Once cut-down, the timber is generally used for the production of biofuel or paper. Due to their proximity to the sea, the wood is not considered useful for other purposes. The governing bodies claim that clearings are crucial for fire prevention,²¹ but activists and ecologists continue to question their motives.²²

On top of its UNESCO status, Neringa belongs to the EU’s *Natura 2000* protected area network; in addition some areas have national strict nature reserve status. Such areas of protected forest have the most potential to thrive and turn into old growth forests. However, the very same institutions that protect these landscapes, design and impose management strategies that undermine this possibility.

What drives this need to erase and remake forests?

Once the saviour of the peninsula, the mountain pine has become the villain. In the current forest reconstruction plans, they are being cut down with complete disregard for their extended multi-species pluri-chronic entanglements. Donna Haraway’s description of the ‘chthonic ones’ fits the unruly mountain pine.²³ Some of the chthonic mountain-pine woods reach over 120 years, which deem them ecologically mature and therefore highly valuable to the ecosystem. Rather than implementing ecological strategies to enhance the ‘overgrown’ areas of the forest, the said plans involve clear-cutting vast areas. Here, the widely adopted aforementioned definitions of forest come into play. We can determine the density of tree cover in relation to land and its value (or lack thereof) through biomass, without any real sense of what goes on on the ground and beneath it. While the rest of forest relations and companions remain largely invisible, we perpetuate the colonising impulse to control and amalgamate.

In the aforementioned forest reconstruction plans in Neringa, it is the age of the trees that seemingly justifies their demise. Rather than celebrating maturity, in forestry lexicon, the forest is considered ‘mature’ when it has reached peak timber capacity/ value and is ready to be cut down. While an ‘over-mature’ forest implies that the quality of timber is beginning to decline. According to forestry professionals, the mountain pine is considered mature and reaches its ‘peak’ at 50 years (though some biologists and ecologists believe that *Pinus mugo* can live up to ten times longer). Despite the multiple jurisdictions or claims to protection, at the ‘ripe’ age of 120, Neringa’s mountain pine forests are rendered futile.

The death process itself performs important ecological processes. Many species of insects, fungus and plants depend on rotting wood, some of which are rare. Trees that are in the process of dying (which can take hundreds of years in some species) and dead (or fallen) trees perform critical ecological functions: from creating habitats to other species to enriching and recovering the soil:

The function of dead trees in the ecosystem has rarely received the consideration that it deserves. At the time a tree dies, it has only partially fulfilled its potential ecological function. In its dead form, a tree continues to play numerous roles as it influences surrounding organisms. Of course, the impact of the individual tree gradually fades as it is decomposed and its resources dispersed, but the woody structure may remain for centuries and influence habitat conditions for millennia.²⁴

In fact, a tree is much more alive when it is considered dead: ‘some processes associated with dead trees begin while the tree is still alive...fungi are already at work rotting the woody material, and animals excavate the dead parts of living trees. In contrast, a dead tree or log in an advanced state of decay may include a considerable number of living cells, as much as 35% of the biomass may be live fungal cells alone (Swift 1973).’ This is demonstrated in Jerry F. Franklin, et al. ‘Tree Death as an Ecological Process’ study, which claims that ‘trees [might] have the potential to be immortal.’²⁵

Yet in addition to clear-cutting, which involves (quite literally) hoovering up the ground cover, forest management processes also involve selectively removing most (and in some cases all) decaying matter from the ground. Despite the well-documented evidence of the importance of old-growth multi-generational forests, strict nature reserves comprise only 1.1% of Lithuania’s forests, special-purpose forests (ecosystem protection and recreational forests) make up 12.0%, protected forests – 14.6%, while the remaining majority of forests comprise of commercial forests, where timber production is prioritised, encompassing 72.3% of forests.²⁶ As has been demonstrated in the planned clearings of the century-old mountain pine forests, the conservation status is not always enough to protect the forests’ right to old age and ongoingness.

It seems inevitable that in a capitalist economy, forests become problematic because they cannot be made infinitely more efficient and productive in terms of capital value, unless they are managed in grids, as plantations.

DEFINITIONS

United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UN-CBD; 2010):

A land area of more than 0.5ha, with a tree canopy cover of more than 10%, which is not primarily under agriculture or other specific non-forest land use. In the case of young forest or regions where tree growth is climatically suppressed, the trees should be capable of reaching a height of 5m in situ, and of meeting the canopy cover requirement.

Other familiar attempts at capitalising forests include concepts such as ‘ecosystem services’ and ‘carbon credits,’ which further reduce natural processes to market-based human-centred concepts/values. It is no surprise then, that by rationalising the forest and reducing it to mathematical units we can only see the forest as such: a quantifiable resource to be measured, and then extracted. Forest management and conservation practices must not be governed by capitalist rhetoric which favours productivity over longevity, and in turn produces plantations. Forest practices and definitions necessitate a spatiotemporal politics

that embraces multi-species entanglements and their divergent temporalities.

If on the one hand, we want our forests to return to their pre-industrial state of ‘naturalness’ (whether this means planting new forests or transforming existing ones), then on the other, we try to put these dynamic ecosystems in step with human timescales and industrial rhythms. We are bound by the same binary. Given that humans have a long history of interdependence with the forest, the two do not have to be mutually exclusive. The legacy of a forest greatly surpasses us as individuals and any future we can imagine, but that is not to say that humans and forests cannot co-exist. We can join the indigenous communities in the Amazon, and learn to relate to the forest in all its spatiotemporal dimensions: where the forest is a co-designed and collective political space that continues to thrive and provide support for its various companions and future generations: human and more-than-human alike.

What happens when we accept that we can never control and manage the totality of forests and their more-than-human entanglements, but can only strive to couple and co-evolve in radically open-ended ways? In her novel, Le Guin offers one possible starting point:

One way to stop seeing trees, or rivers, or hills, only as ‘natural resources,’ is to class them as fellow beings - kinfolk.

DEFINITIONS

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UN-CCD; 2000):

Dense canopy with multi-layered structure including large trees in the upper story.

APPENDIX

Research on forestry practices in Lithuania

Lithuania adopts the European Union definition of forest, which applies the FAO classification. Based on this definition, Lithuania’s forests occupy 33.5% of total land cover. Pine is the dominant tree species, covering more than a third of all forest land.²⁷ Nearly a third of all forests are protected under *Natura 2000* (EU-wide network of protected habitats), and other national zoning initiatives.²⁸ However, less than 0.1% of Lithuania’s forests consist of primary or natural forests.²⁹

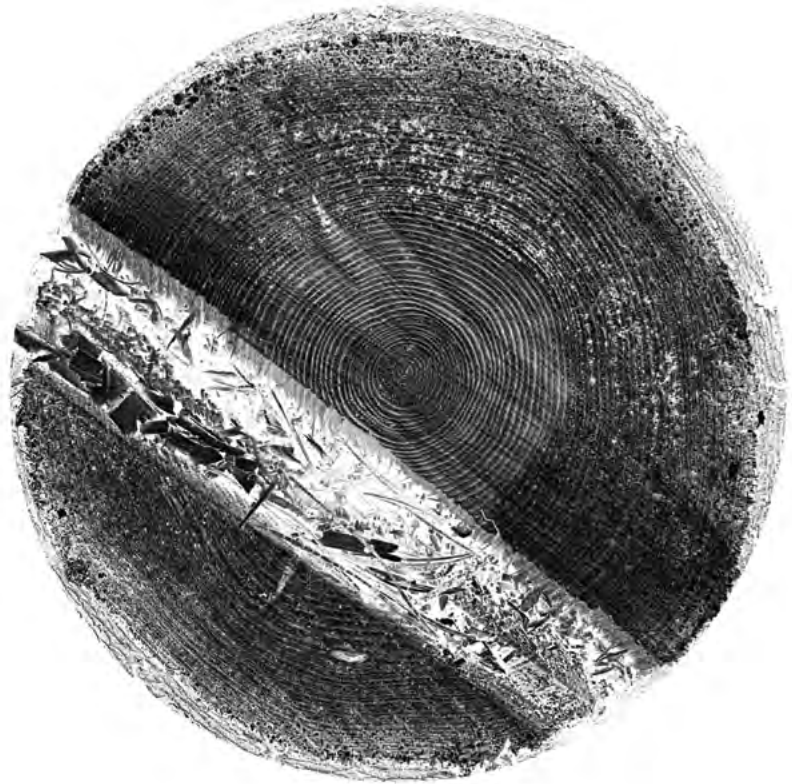
In Lithuania and across Europe (including the Baltics, Scandinavia, France and Germany), forests and their governing institutions have undergone radical reforms, which resulted in the degradation of forests, and centralisation of forestry practices. Since the reforms were implemented in Lithuania in 1992, this has resulted in intensified forest management irrespective of the status of the forest (whether privately or government-owned, protected or otherwise). Natural forests (diverse in terms of age and species) are being cut down in the name of ‘climate change.’³⁰ In some cases, they are left to recover naturally, in others – where economic interests prevailed – they are replanted with productive timber plantations.

As discussed above, timber forests are characterised by linear timeframes: evenly aged seedlings are planted and harvested at the same time. Contrary to ‘natural’ forests, plantation forests are ‘forever young.’ They grow quickly and, depending on the species and geography, could be harvested as soon as they reach as little as 10 years (and in some cases even less)³¹. Factors such as the species of tree, spatial organisation and imposed lifespan, are usually determined and adapted to fit the machinery used to harvest the timber. Non-native species or hybrids are imported and introduced for their capacity to grow on very poor (e.g., sandy) soils, and/or to grow faster and to produce more timber than native tree species. Some of the most popular ‘fast wood’ species globally are conifers and eucalyptus. The widespread precedence of fast-growing tree species reduces the genetic diversity of a forest and

can cause extinction of the indigenous tree species (and other plant and animal species simultaneously).³²

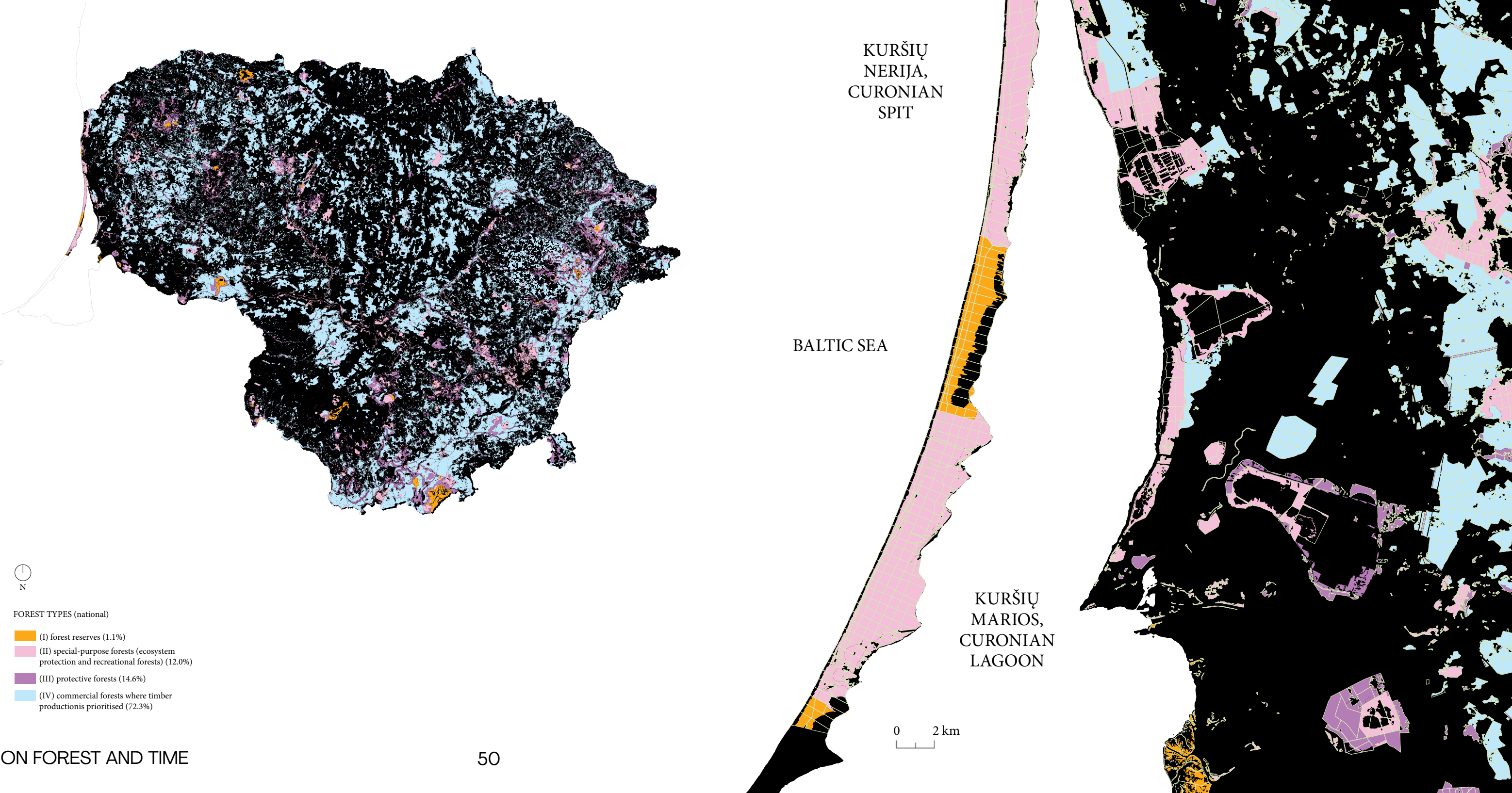
In the Baltic countries and Lithuania in particular – clear-cutting is the dominant method of forest management, often regardless of the status of the forest. It is the cheapest and deemed most efficient, but it is also the most destructive: using heavy machinery all pre-existing trees are cut at the same time, stripping most of the underbrush, and upturning the soil, causing it to be depleted quickly so biodiversity cannot be sustained. Without the support of older trees and their companion species, trees are prone to diseases, so fungicides and insecticides are required to sustain yields.

Evenly aged monocultures pose a much higher risk of fires, because the lack of other vegetation, density and dry soil allows it to spread quickly. But for a growing number of forest managers and experts – these risks outweigh the benefits. This rational form of forestry represents a solution that responds to two seemingly incommensurable problems: the rising demand for timber and the need to tackle climate change.³³ In some countries, such as Germany, France or Sweden, this has formed a part of an established daily forestry ‘business’ for centuries.³⁴



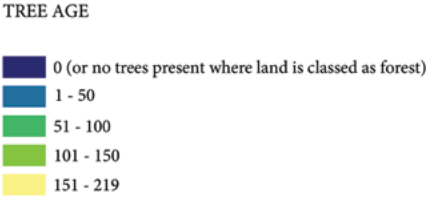
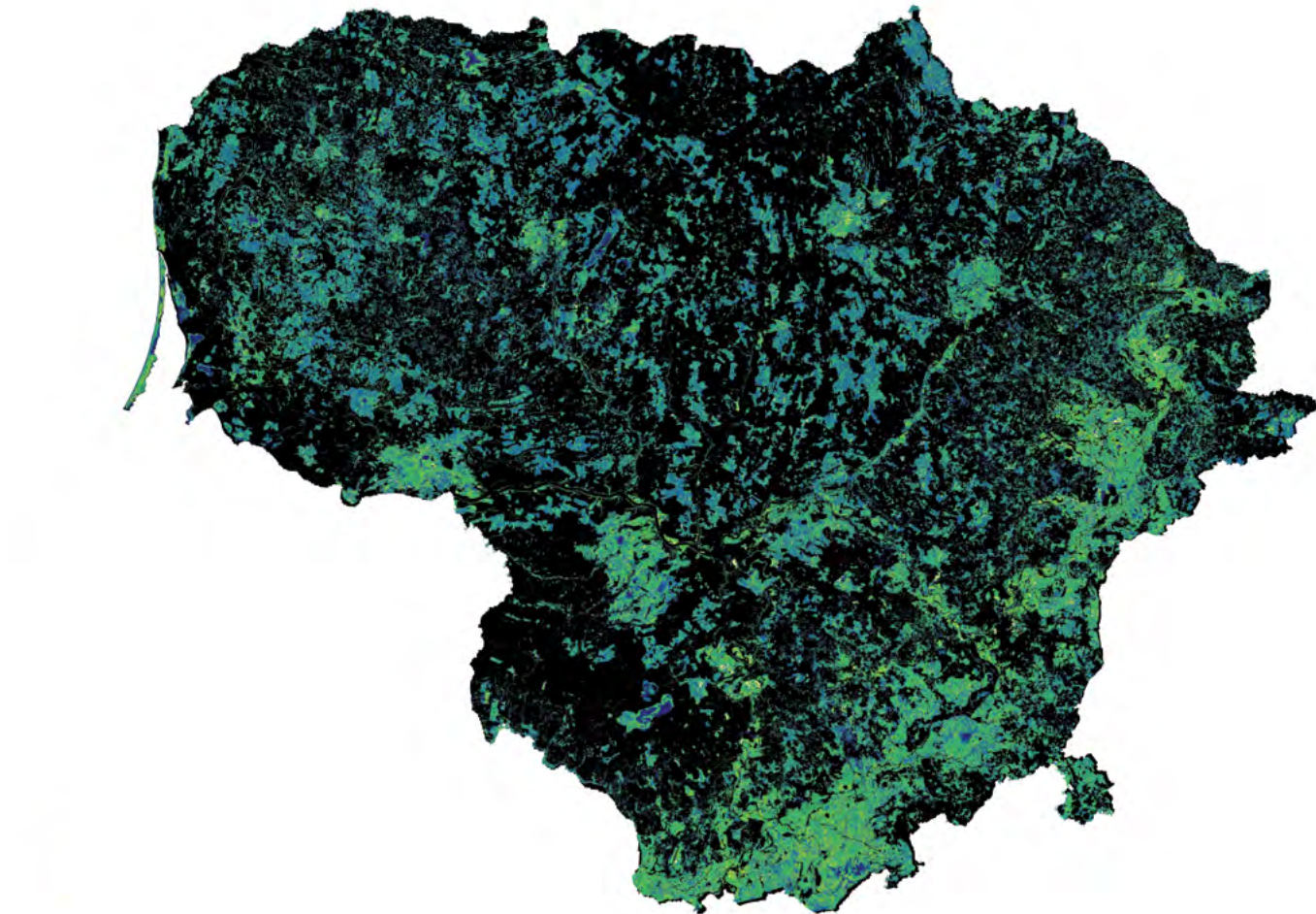
Forest as a Journal

Lithuania adopts the European Union definition of forest, which applies the FAO classification. Based on this definition, Lithuania's forests occupy 33.5% of total land cover. Pine is the dominant tree species, covering more than a third of all forest land. Nearly a third of all forests are protected under *Natura 2000* (EU-wide network of protected habitats), and other national zoning initiatives. However, less than 0.1% of Lithuania's forests consist of primary or natural forests.



Forest as a Journal

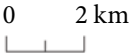
Timber forests are characterised by linear time-frames: evenly aged seedlings are planted and harvested at the same time. The widespread precedence of fast-growing tree species reduces the genetic diversity of a forest and can cause extinction of the indigenous tree species (and other plant and animal species simultaneously). Without the support of older trees and their companion species, trees are prone to diseases, so fungicides and insecticides are required to sustain yields. Evenly aged monocultures pose a much higher risk of fires, because the lack of other vegetation, density and dry soil allows it to spread quickly. This is further demonstrated in the diagrams on pages pp. 44-45.



BALTIC SEA

KURŠIŲ
NERIJA,
CURONIAN
SPIT

KURŠIŲ
MARIOS,
CURONIAN
LAGOON





Endnotes

1 As of March, 2013, Gyde Lund found 1597 forest definitions used globally. See: Gyde Lund, ‘What is a forest? Definitions do make a difference: An example from Turkey’, *Eurasscience Journals*, Avrasya Terim Dergisi, 2014, 2 (1), pp. 1–8.

2 Bruno Latour, ‘From Multiculturalism to Multinaturalism: What Rules of Method for the New Socio-Scientific Experiments?’ in *Nature and Culture*, 6(1), Spring 2011. © Berghahn Journals, pp. 1–17.

3 Suzanne Simmard, ‘The Mother Tree’ in *Intercalations 4: The Word for World is Still Forest*, Anna-Sophie Springer and Etienne Turpin (eds.), K. Verlag and Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, pp. 66–72.

4 John Vidal, ‘Tip of the iceberg: is our destruction of nature responsible for Covid-19?’, *The Guardian*, 18 March 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/18/tip-of-the-iceberg-is-our-destruction-of-nature-responsible-for-covid-19-aoe>, accessed 21 May 2021. Also Jeff Tollefson, ‘Why deforestation and extinctions make pandemics more likely’, *Nature*, 7 August 2020, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-02341-1>, accessed 21 May 2021.

5 According to the Global Witness report, 2019 was the year in which a record number of fires broke out across the Amazon. Satellite data showed an 84% increase compared to the same period in 2018. See: ‘Defending Tomorrow: The climate crisis and threats against land and environmental defenders’, *Global Witness Report*, July 2020.

6 Jair Bolsonaro’s programme of persecution of indigenous people and climate denialism, deforestation rates in the Amazon have surged by 50%. Indigenous people along with human rights activists are taking President Bolsonaro to the International Criminal Court for crimes of ecocide. Silva Junior, C.H.L., Pessôa, A.C.M., Carvalho, N.S. et al, ‘The Brazilian Amazon deforestation rate in 2020 is the greatest of the decade’, *Nature, Ecology & Evolution*, 5, 2021, pp. 144–145. See: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-020-01368-x>, accessed 21 May 2021.

7 According to preliminary satellite data from space research agency INPE. See: Camilla Costa, ‘Amazon under threat: Fires, loggers and now the virus’, BBC News, 21 May 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-51300515>, accessed 21 May 2021.

8 Ibid.

9 A record 212 land and environment activists were killed in 2019, with Colombia and the Philippines accounting for half of the 212 people. See: ‘Defending Tomorrow: The climate crisis and threats against land and environmental defenders’, *Global Witness Report*, July 2020.

10 Ibid.

11 Paulo Tavares, ‘In the Forest Ruins’, *e-flux*, Superhumanity issue, 9 December 2016, <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/superhumanity/68688/in-the-forest-ruins/>, accessed 21 May 2021.

12 See the well-documented cases of environmental destruction as a result of the plantation industry here: <https://worm.org.uy/browse-by-subject/tree-plantations/>, accessed 21 May 2021. The open letter, calling on the FAO to revise its definition was published by the World Rainforest Movement in 2017 and is available here: <https://worm.org.uy/actions-and-campaigns/how-does-the-fao-forest-definition-harm-people-and-forests-an-open-letter-to-the-fao/>, accessed 21 May 2021.

13 Robin L. Chazdon et al, ‘When is a forest a forest? Forest concepts and definitions in the era of forest and landscape restoration’, *Ambio*, Vol. 45,5 (2016), 538-50, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4980317/> accessed 21 May 2021.

14 Susanne Simard in ‘The Social Life of Forests’, interview by Ferris Jabr, *New York Times*, 2 December 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/12/02/magazine/tree-communication-mycorrhiza.html>, accessed 21 May 2021.

15 Vandana Shiva, *Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives on Biodiversity*, Natraj Publishers, 2011, pp. 29–30.

16 Vandana Shiva’s term.

17 Concept discussed in Suzanne Simard, ‘The Mother Tree’, *The Word for World is Still Forest Intercalations 4*, Anna-Sophie Springer and Etienne Turpin (eds.), K. Verlag and Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, pp. 66–72.

18 Ancient Woods Foundation: <https://www.sengiresfondas.lt/en/>

19 Disparaging language is often used to describe the mountain pines in the press, portraying them as ‘impenetrable’ and ‘unsightly’.

20 See: <https://www.neringa.lt/index.php?1585649300>

21 Notable forest fires raged Neringa in 2006 and 2014, which were caused by anthropogenic activity.

22 This podcast gives a flavour of the ongoing debate. Translation: ‘Single-use planet: why forests are being cut down in Neringa.’ See: <https://www.lrt.lt/mediateka/irasas/2000143593/vienkartine-planeta-kodel-kertami-neringos-miskai> accessed 21 May 2021.

23 ‘Chthonic ones are beings of the earth, both ancient and up-to-the-minute. [...] Chthonic ones romp in multi critter humus but have no truck with sky-gazing Homo. Chthonic ones are monsters in the best sense; they demonstrate and perform the material meaningfulness of earth processes and critters. They also demonstrate and perform consequences. Chthonic ones are not safe; they have no truck with ideologues; they belong to no-one; they writhe and luxuriate in manifold forms and manifold names in all the airs, waters, and places of earth. They make and unmake; they are made and unmade. They are who are.’ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2016, pp. 1–2.

24 Jerry F. Franklin, H. H. Shugart and Mark E. Harmon, ‘Tree Death as an Ecological Process’, *BioScience*, September 1987, Vol. 37, Issue 8, p. 550.

25 Ibid. pp. 550–553.

26 These estimates are based on the 2019 study. See: Iveta Varnagirytė-Kabašinskienė, Diana Lukminė, Stasys Mizaras, Lina Beniušienė & Kęstutis Armolaitis, ‘Lithuanian forest biomass resources: legal, economic and ecological aspects of their use and potential’, *Energy, Sustainability and Society*, 9, 41 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13705-019-0229-9>, accessed 21 May 2021.

27 Among 11 species of pine grown across Lithuania, only *Pinus sylvestris* is native to Lithuania. See the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) report: <http://www.fao.org/3/w3722e/w3722e22.htm>, accessed 21 May 2021.

28 According to the Lithuanian State Forest Service [Lietuvos Miškų Tarnyba], Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania: As of 2017, forest land occupies 33.5% of the country’s territory. More than 32.5% of all Lithuanian forests are within the boundaries of protected areas or their buffer zones. According to the methodology used by the State Forest Service, all land that is legally designated as forest and land that is planned to be afforested are included within this assessment. This includes arable land or land overgrown with bushes, non-replanted clear-cuts, nurseries, seed plantations, tracks, forest roads, quarters, etc.

According to a 2019 study, forest land in Lithuania is divided into four protection classes: strict nature reserves (1.1%); ecologically significant (12%): protected (14.6%); and commercial (72.3%). In reserves all types of cuttings are prohibited. In national parks, clear cuttings are prohibited while thinnings and sanitary cuttings are allowed. Clear cutting is permitted, however, with certain restrictions, in protected forests; including thinnings. In commercial forests, there are almost no restrictions as to harvesting methods.

See: Varnagirytė-Kabašinskienė, Lukminė, Mizaras, Beniušienė & Armolaitis, 2019.

29 According to the Ancient Woods Foundation [Sengirės fondas], although it is still possible to find old-growth forests that span an average lifetime of two hundred years, such forests are fragmented and make up 0.009% of Lithuania’s territory. See: <https://www.sengiresfondas.lt/en/>, accessed 21 May 2021.

30 To promote his campaign to ‘renew’ Lithuania’s old forests with young plantations, Lithuania’s environmental minister Simonas Gentvilas came under attack on social media due to his claim that old forests emit more carbon than they sequester, and that the solution to climate change is young forests. He has also expressed his support for use of timber in biofuel production.

31 Based on the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO/ UN) definition, the tree can be cut as soon as it reaches 5m.

32 Christian Cossalter and Charlie Pye-Smith, *Fast-Wood Forestry: Myths and Realities*, 2003, <http://www.fao.org/forestry/42658-0b8ddd1c5c20b4980467f2f4724f445a7.pdf>, accessed 21 May 2021.

33 Herein lies the paradox of the FAO/ UN definitions of the forest. When monoculture plantations used for timber production are defined as forests, governments and corporations can claim that ‘productive’ forests help fight climate change.

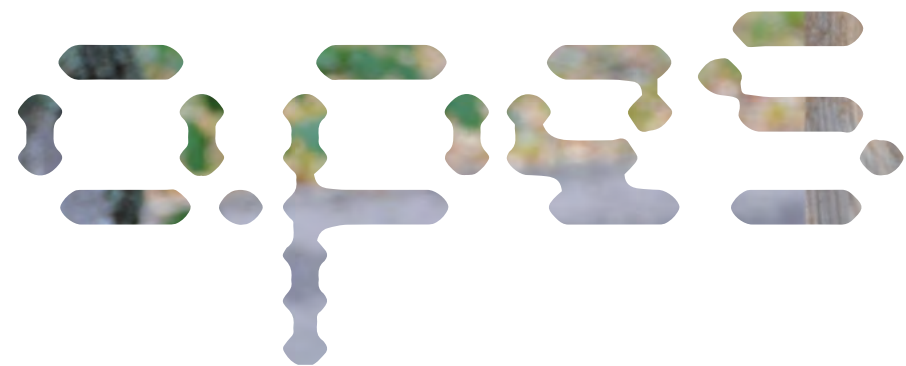
34 Robin L. Chazdon et al, 2016.

Image credits:

All images by Gabrielė Grigorjeva

Infra- Baltic Landscapes

Jonathan Lovekin and
David Grandorge



Photographs

Laugas Purvs 5, David Grandorge, 2015 (p. 55)
Narva 13, David Grandorge, 2016 (pp. 56–57)
Laugas V, Jonathan Lovekin, 2015 (pp. 58–59)
Toila, Jonathan Lovekin, 2016 (pp. 60–61)
Zokniai Airfield 6, 10, David Grandorge, 2015 (pp. 62–63)
Zokniai III, Jonathan Lovekin, 2015 (pp. 64–65)
Zokniai VI, Jonathan Lovekin, 2015 (pp. 66–67)















Cormorants in Ancient Woods

A conversation between
Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė and
Mindaugas Survila

Rūgštus miškas, Acid Forest

Can you imagine a tourist attraction where people come to see a dead forest? Where they are not only observers, but also the ones being observed and heard by black cormorant birds? *Acid Forest* is an ironic creative documentary about an unusual tourist attraction: dying, leafless trees overtaken by thousands of cormorants, impacting the ancient forest with their acid-fortified faeces and causing visitors to reflect on the relationship between humans and nature. ‘Apart from the main storyline, I kept my focus on playful dialogues, illustrating how a range of political questions, historical narratives, migration vectors, and cinematic experiences intervene into the human projections of nature. I hope this helped the environmental paradox of *Acid Forest* to become a metaphor for the surreal world we live in,’ says the director of the film.

Directed by Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė, co-author and producer: Dovydas Korba

Sengirė, The Ancient Woods

Filmed in one of the last remaining patches of old-growth forest in Lithuania, *The Ancient Woods* is a place where the boundaries of time melt and everything that exists neither withers nor ages but ‘grows into’ eternity. This poetic and atypical nature film takes its viewers on an endless journey – from forest thickets to wolf caves and up to a black stork’s nest, and then deep into the water to an underwater forest before returning to the human beings inhabiting the edge of the woodland. There’s no commentary, only the rich, almost palpable sounds of the forest and the magical situations captured by the camera.

Directed by Mindaugas Survila

Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė:

Did the overarching idea for *The Ancient Woods* come to you as a concept for a film or as part of a broader strategy?

Mindaugas Survila:

Neither – neither my earlier film, *The Field of Magic*, or *The Ancient Woods* arose out of a need for me to justify myself as a director – I just wanted to tell a story. *The Field of Magic* is a film about people who live next to a landfill and go to work there every day. I filmed them because I just couldn’t believe that such a community existed so close to Vilnius, in this day and age. In part, because I wanted to tell a story, and in part because I wanted to learn about and understand these unique people myself. As for *The Ancient Woods*, as a biologist I already had enough practical knowledge and information, but my main goal was for people to learn more about old-growth forests and why they should be valued beyond just their monetary worth. It was an ideological shift. What about you? How did you become interested in *Acid Forest* and how did you begin to construct it?

RB:

My connection to nature is not scientific, but direct and pure. I was never interested in nature films. But since childhood, I used to spend every summer in the forest, by a lake, without electricity – running around barefoot, picking berries and mushrooms. Like an animal. I didn’t have any defined function in nature. Later, in London, I lived on a street where all the trees were bricked in right up to their trunks, their knotted branches cut back. I’d pass by those mutilated, crippled trees every day. That conflict between trees and humans seemed to call out to be explored as a theme, but photographs would not have sufficed. I was studying my MA in screen documentary at Goldsmiths University and I was looking for a subject for my final diploma project. The conflict between the cormorants, trees, and humans in Juodkrantė as a subject for a film came up in a conversation I had with my father – he was the one who brought it to my attention. I started the film as a research project, without knowing too much about the subject in advance. I only heard later that cormorant dung, even though it dries out pine tree roots, is excellent for other plants. Cormorants basically transform the soil. One bird-watching tourist whom I met on the observation platform told me that in Peru, cormorant dung, called *guano*, has been harvested for fertiliser for over one and

half thousand years, since the days of the Inca Empire. There was a time when people were even sentenced to death for disturbing these birds. Ironically, the process is exactly the opposite in Lithuania, where chicks are condemned to death before they’ve even hatched. But, returning to the origins of the film, my desire to explore this subject came from my cinematographic intention, with no ideological ambitions.

MS:

People classify feature films as fiction and documentary films as the truth, even though both types are edited, with the focus directed at details chosen by the director. How should we value a film – how much ‘organic truth’ does it contain? Because, in truth, without a point of view imposed by a specific individual, there would just be a security camera, for example, relaying an image – but even then, someone would have to introduce a ‘human hand’ by actually placing the camera in a specific location and pointing it at something. How do you decide, as a percentage say, how much ‘truth’ your film contains?

RB:

That’s a good question.

MS:

Maybe based on the amount of material – how much material has been compiled and how it’s been specifically selected. Then the question also becomes: what was chosen and what didn’t make it into the film?

RB:

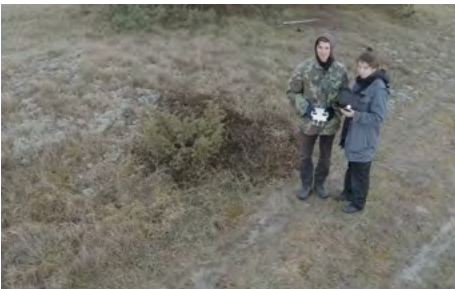
Legendary documentary director Frederick Wiseman has a wise phrase mentioned in the book *Reality Fictions*¹ You construct a documentary film from things filmed in real life, but new meanings are formed through the editing process. I’d be interested to know how much truth you think there is in *The Ancient Woods*?

MS:

If you walked into the woods, what are the chances that you’d actually see a capercaillie or a Ural owl? Practically none, I think. No forest like the one shown in *The Ancient Woods* exists in Lithuania. It’s a ‘fairy tale’ created from tiny fragments recorded from a forest. It was 400 hours of material filmed over many years, but the way I see it, I had to work very hard every minute, every second towards that goal – it wasn’t just random imagery. And because of that, I feel like the film is a complete fairy tale.



Photos from the making of *Rūgštus miškas*, *Acid Forest*, Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė and Dovydas Korba



There’s not a single hint of a ‘randomly placed camera’, because we construct the world we want at that moment.

RB:
But *The Ancient Woods* focuses quite a bit on nostalgia and a longing for what’s gone, or very nearly gone. It’s very justified, and you couldn’t call it untrue.

MS:
Right, you wouldn’t call it ‘untrue’, but there was a great deal of work put in to convey what had existed before. If I were to make a film (even a feature film) set today, in 2021, then I’d just go out into the street and have wonderful sets for this period. If you’re filming something set in 1923, then building sets would be quite expensive. I had a similar situation with *The Ancient Woods*: I tried to film how forests used to be (reconstructing tiny sections), and I had to devote a lot of energy to tell a story about something that is almost entirely gone.

How much ‘truth’ do you think there is in *Acid Forest*?

RB:
Not to get totally depressed, but Dovydas and I never actually counted how many terabytes of material we’d filmed, but what we included was about 0.0000th of what we’d filmed. Shooting the tourist observation platform required the most time. The selection process reminded me of sorting through rubbish. It’s good that I had a strategy and I knew in advance what subjects I was interested in – when considering the conflict between people and the trees and birds, I noticed an interesting parallel with social life and politics, and with historical narratives. The decision had been made to control one species of bird because of its specific characteristics, and they’re trying to make sure that this process doesn’t harm any other species – something similar to the principles of ethnic cleansing. But if we tried to talk about that in all seriousness in the film, we’d come off a bit moralistic. Having in mind the parallel we were seeking for, you couldn’t come up with anything better than the survival myth around Hitler’s bunker which appears in the film as a joke. There are also clearly racist parallels in judging the cormorants: someone doesn’t like their black colour, birds are subjected to aesthetic categories and superstitions just like people. The geopolitical angle also comes across quite vividly: American tourists complain about needing a visa to visit

Kaliningrad and ask the Russian tourists what rules apply to them. And in the film, all of this is observed and heard by the birds, whose movement and freedom to choose where they want to be is also being restricted. The selection of the material was very deliberate and there were so many different versions during the editing process that it’s clear there’s quite a bit of fiction there, but it’s assembled from the documented gifts we were given.

MS:
That’s the beauty of documentary film: in rare instances, it gives you a gift. And the longer you work, the greater the chance that you’ll receive another gift. As you said, it seems as if everything is so simple, that everything just happened and that you filmed it, but you need a lot of energy to create that impression for your audience.

RB:
Exactly. There’s a Polish director named Paweł Wojtasik. One of his films shows these moving blocks – travelling along so easily and gracefully, like in some wonderful musical symphony, but they’re actually blocks of excrement at a cleaning facility. He says that he refines a project until it appears ‘effortless’ – until you no longer feel any work of the filmmaker at all. Is it easy for you to stop the editing process?

MS:
It would be helpful if there were a strict producer who’d tell you that your time was up. When you’re very demanding of yourself and you want to ‘make it a bit better’ – it’s not easy. But then a festival or some other consideration draws nearer and you’re forced to stop. Maybe people in other crafts, like carpentry, have it easier: you cut your boards, assemble a table, polish and paint it, and that’s it – the work is done, because that’s how the table is supposed to look. But with a film, you might be the only one with a sense of how it’s supposed to be. And you’re not absolutely sure. Many things become so much clearer after some time has passed. And while editing it’s a good thing to take breaks along the way, to give you time to pull back and actually see the real situation.

How did you manage to stop?

RB:
A festival forced me to stop as well. Clearly, to submit an unfinished film to a festival also requires you to reign in your self-criticism. To me it seemed the film still had so many issues, but the premiere suddenly came and I didn’t

expect it to be well received – afterwards, we went back to edit a bit more. It’s great when you can distance yourself. Now, I go to the cormorant colony and I’m really glad I don’t have to film anything.

And do you continue the same project, just in a different form?

MS:
Old-growth forests are home to 15,000 different species, and I only included 60 in my film. Old-growth woods are the kinds of places you could talk about for the rest of your life. My Lithuanian language teacher Stepas Eitminavičius used to say that some come to know the world by wandering around it, from top to bottom, while others just sit at the far end of a field and watch how a cornflower blooms. It’s a real problem for biologists. If they sit down in the middle of a field, for example, they can’t just enjoy the sun and the wind. They sit there and think about the plants that are there, how they interact, and, given the soil and the plants, about what kind of bugs would live there – it’s all very interconnected. Sometimes I miss the ability to disconnect and go out into the woods and just be, without analysing.

RB:
How are the Ancient Woods thriving in virtual reality following the film? Are they expanding in size or has *The Ancient Woods* project just changed in format?

MS:
Anyone can enter the Ancient Woods with their browser, and look right and left, up and down, etc. As you turn, the sound follows you. And if you hear a sound that intrigues you, for example, you can click and go into a stump to see how bugs live. If you hear the sound of an owl, you can rise up into the treetops and watch a family of owls. The image and sound quality will be similar to that of the film, but here everyone will create their own script and choose how to spend their time. I hope that about 15% will consist of material already filmed , and the rest will still have to be recorded to build interactivity. For example, if I need to make it possible to look from side to side, then I’ll have to film more general images, so I’d have something to choose from. The sound recording technology is also a bit different. We’re essentially at the hardest stage right now – fundraising. But we’re creating it gradually. We have the equipment and we’re testing it – my brother is doing the programming. There is all this maintenance work. For example, we have to make special

nest boxes for filming. People are curious and like to go inside places – especially where it’s harder to get into. So, we’re creating those kinds of spaces where anyone on an interactive platform can explore ‘with one click’ and enjoy an undiscovered world.

RB:
You’re not afraid that the subject might drag on for too long?

MS:
Working as a cameraman for a sports TV channel was good practice for learning how to pan a camera, because a football player and a moose run in a pretty similar way. *The Field of Magic* was basically just observation. Someone once said that ‘Survila films people like they would be little animals’. To me, that’s a huge compliment. Because imagine if, as we’re talking here, the Pope would walk into the room and say: ‘Keep talking, please continue – pretend I’m not here.’ I don’t doubt that the conversation we were having immediately before would change (no matter how hard we tried not to). The same thing happens when a camera crew arrives at their subject. Very often, films (whether feature or documentary) are a mirror reflection of their director. And while filming *The Field of Magic*, I felt completely uninteresting compared to my subjects. To me, *The Ancient Woods* and *The Field of Magic* are very similar films. The only difference is that, in *The Ancient Woods*, I went completely unnoticed. But I guess I did edit it together differently to how a thrush might do it. You can still sense the artist’s hand... Oh, well.

People sometimes ask: ‘So, it’s another project about nature – another film like *The Ancient Woods*?’ I could say the same thing to those who create films about people: ‘So, your second film is also about people, and the third one, too? Don’t you have any other subjects besides people?’ (*smiles*)

So, nature is very diverse and full of themes. But the problem is that people can only really understand human emotions well. For example, if they see someone crying when they call their son whom they haven’t seen in fifteen years, they immediately feel that emotion. But in *The Ancient Woods*, when a moose walks through the woods – is it sad or happy? People can’t usually tell anything from a moose’s expression... That’s why it’s hard to create films about nature, to be able to touch your audience through other means.

RB:
We had that same issue with *Acid Forest*. I remember how my first emotion was empathy for the birds, which is what probably led to us filming them from close up – even though that meant interfering with them a lot more. But in the film you can see the care from very close up: you see how the female and male trade share in the hatching duties, how they warm [the eggs] and remain by them at all costs. Humans can easily recognise the birds’ care and close bond. But people in the film are tiny, like ants in a wide frame. It’s harder to identify with them – we wanted to change the species hierarchy.

MS:
I was driving with a friend and we were talking about films and the future Ancient Woods. He said: ‘Thrushes, for example, don’t create poetry, after all.’ I asked him how he knew that. Because I’ve never walked around a city and seen someone reading poetry in the street. So, couldn’t I also claim that people don’t create poetry? How much effort have people truly made to really listen to a single thrush, every evening, and decide whether it’s poetry or not?

RB:
I remember how different the cormorant sounds were. How they’d launch up and screech in fear when an eagle flew nearby, or how they’d return home to find that crows had eaten their eggs or made the chicks fall out of the nest in fear. I could hear how their voices changed in horror. But when they paired up, the dynamic was entirely different.

MS:
Just like you need to spend time with humans to get to know them, you have to do the same with animals.

RB:
But only a few people bother to do that.

MS:
There’s no point, because there’s no benefit to humans. Everyone allocates their resources and time to different things, in the end. From an evolutionary perspective, for example, people have adapted over a very long time not to see plants. If a bird suddenly moves on a branch, say, then they’ll notice it immediately, but they won’t see the plant, since it’s not going to run away and offers little benefit. That’s why there are many more ornithologists than there

are botanists. And natural scientists, when they first start, they very rarely begin with botany and then move on to ornithology. They usually begin with ornithology and then start to develop an interest in other areas.

RB:
Very interesting. But if a plant has a functional benefit, then would it not be noticed sooner?

MS:
Yes, but the first reaction is essentially to movement, because that could mean either food or danger – the human brain needs rapid information. Maybe this explains why film people don’t like to use the actual spring green colour of plants in their films, because it doesn’t convey information – it just exists.

RB:
Interesting. I had thought these were aesthetic convictions – that spring green was too bright.

MS:
Maybe that’s just how I see it, maybe it’s not that either. Going back to your question about editing – that you initially worry about it and want to change something, but then you feel the pressure of a festival. When have you felt that nothing needs changing anymore? Do you not get that feeling now?

RB:
I still do. For example, even now I think it’s really a shame that the trees rustle when the Japanese tourists sigh. In the material, you can hear a beautiful synchronicity in the people’s voices, but in the film the rustling of the trees is perhaps too loud – it hides that beauty. I still think that’s a real shame, but I know that it would cost us a lot to fix that one thing.

MS:
I recently saw *The Field of Magic* again after many years, and I thought it was a good film. It’s like sitting down in a field to just enjoy its beauty – the blades of grass rustle and all the serious things disappear.

Endnotes

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Photos from the making of *Sengirè*, *The Ancient Woods*, Mindaugas Survila

On How the Tree Became a Pellet

Capital Forests of the
Baltics



Signe Pelne



The Lesser Tree

To take and receive: though they are logged profusely and systematically, forests regrow with abundance in the Baltic region. In fact, the Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – are situated between temperate and boreal forest zones, meaning that with minimal to no human intervention, the countries would be almost entirely covered by forests. The most fertile grounds of the Baltics were once covered with deciduous forests – today they are used for agriculture. With the more acidic and sandy soils left for forestry, the majority of land across the region was re-adapted for conifers – evergreen, easier to manage and profit from due to their fast growth rates and predictable size and quality.¹

Within the logging industry that is central to the economy of the Baltics, the forest is everything. Woodlands are essential as an industry for capital gain as well as a stable source of employment. In 2020, collectively timber-related products accounted for 5.4 billion in exports alone.² Around 1 in 10 of the forests are under protection.³ However, most of these protected zones are still used for wood production under current regulations with the exception of sanitary cuttings and a status of managed protected areas. Under the guidance of the state even these areas are

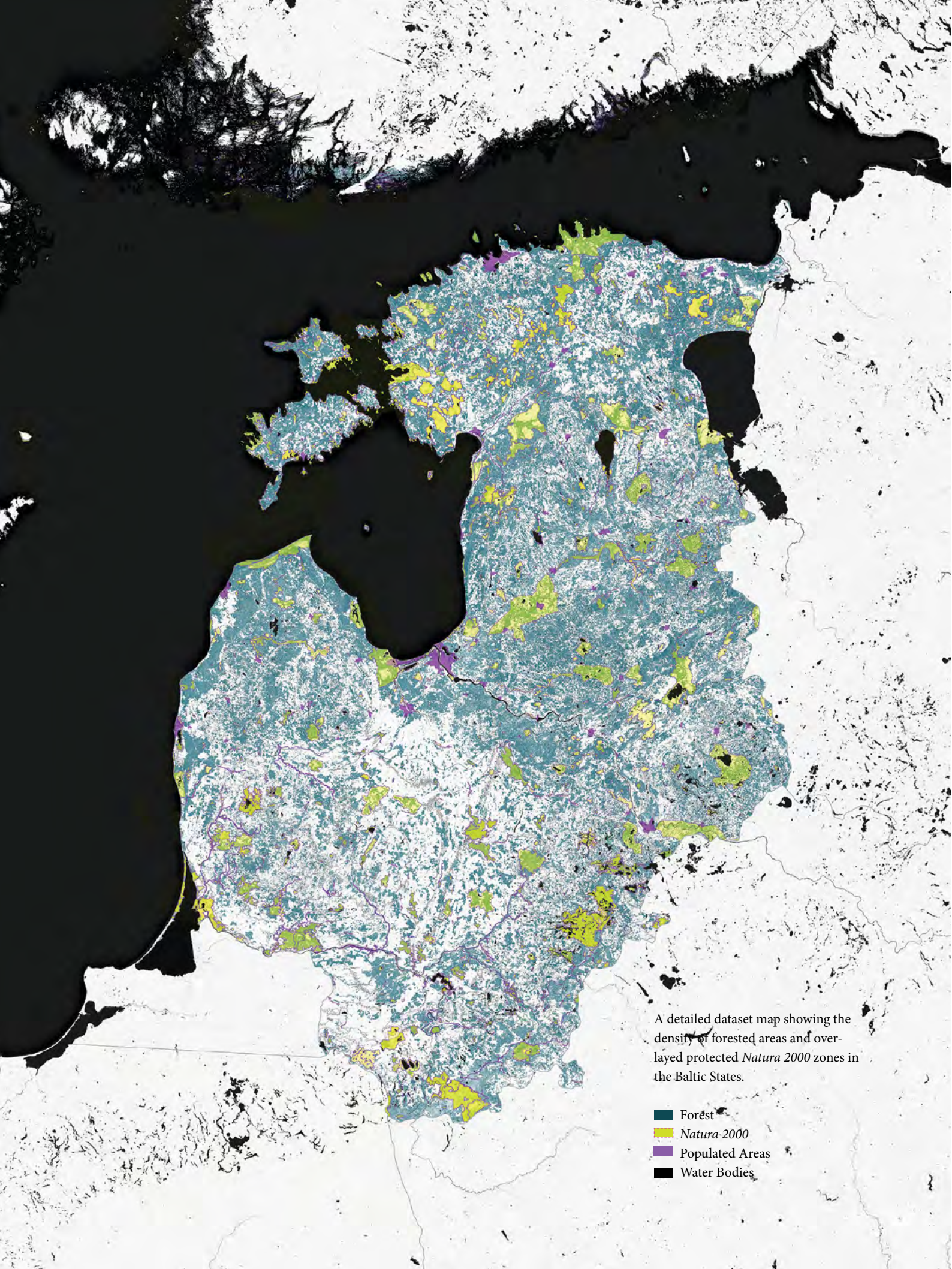
classified as productive forests, thus the ageing forests need to be cut down and newer ones regularly thinned, leaving much of the land available for logging purposes.⁴ The reasons for this are simple – why sustain something that will easily revert back to its former, if however less diverse, state? For this reason, most of the Baltic forests are so young that by some foreign definitions they do not even qualify to be called as such.⁵

Officially Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania maintain approximately 51%, 52% and 33% forest cover to land respectively.⁶ Anything that constitutes ‘a place for trees’ is a forest.⁷ However, it is important to remember that the biological quality, natural vs planted, reforested vs old-growth nature of the forests is by no means a standard for territorial data entry.⁸ Meaning that some ‘forests’ that have recently been clear-cut have very few trees, but are still evaluated and called as such. The justification to classify this land as ‘a forest’ accounts for an assumption that with time it will naturally reforest, thus officially the Baltics are not under the threat of deforestation.

Growing trees remove carbon from the atmosphere and store it in their entire body as well as the forest’s soil. In the context of the current climate crisis forests have also become systematic and cumulative forms of carbon sinks. The accumulation and

upkeep of national forest lands are taken into account when accounting for national carbon footprints and thus these forests have gained even more value. As the tree ages its carbon absorption slows down, however, the carbon already absorbed is locked in and remains largely stable. That is, until the natural death of the tree, when it begins to decompose and the carbon slowly seeps out into the soil and atmosphere.⁹ Thus old-growth forests can also be described as solid carbon banks, emitting and absorbing carbon as they live. Modern forest management uses this as an excuse for clearing old-growth forests, arguing that the newly growing trees tend to absorb carbon much faster, and concluding that the speed of absorption matters more than the quantity in the long term.¹⁰ However, it has been estimated that naturally grown, mature and natural forests can store up to 40 times more carbon than the forests that are grown as younger mono-cultural plantations regularly replanted for the next generation of trees.¹¹

The climate crisis is directly linked to the extraction of fossil fuels and their consumption must be halted. With all the industrial power plants, industry and logistics in place, simply replacing the fuel itself with an alternative source of carbon presented a perfect solution for an extremely complex issue. Thus, fossil fuels are increasingly replaced with biomass.



The logical nature of substituting burned natural gases and minerals such as coal and oil for biomass relies on natural cycles – instead of mining and extracting carbon from the soil, the biomass industry interrupts the decomposition of a tree and cuts trees when they have (by their assumption) lost the ability to absorb more carbon.¹² This allows the clear-cut forest to restart the cycle with newly growing trees. However, when harvested and burnt for energy, all the stored carbon is instead instantly released into the atmosphere. Even if the trees are replanted, it takes 50 to 100 years for the rate of carbon uptake to match what it would have been if the trees had been left untouched.¹³ It also takes more biomass and embodied carbon than coal to produce the same amount of energy. Adding the energy used in extraction, production and transportation, this previously perceived magical solution sadly adds up generating more carbon for the same amount of energy produced than burning coal would have otherwise.¹⁴

Over the last decade, there has been an almost twofold increase in logging within the Baltics. A reduction of the forest cover and its overall quality has led the national Latvian land use from being a net carbon sink to a net carbon source. The same shift is projected in the next few years for Estonia.¹⁵ As the forest cover depletes, the same increase can be seen within the most common supply of biomass – the wood pellet industry. This industry claims to only use wood waste material like sawdust, however, it has since been proven that almost half of the supply for the production of wood pellets comes from whole trees.¹⁶ Furthermore, with such profit initiatives, trees that are not suitable for timber industries would have otherwise been left untouched. This includes any branches and organic debris that would have enriched the soil with carbon. Even the naturally fallen or standing dead trees that would have sustained tapestries of biodiversity for fungi, insects, birds and animals within their decomposing shells, are collected and chipped for wood pellet production. As such, the lesser trees are cut and collected for the value of scenery, control and profit, further establishing the already highly extractive use of forests.

‘Green’ Carbon – Biomass Loopholes

Emitting carbon into the atmosphere causes climate breakdown and it is necessary to reduce its presence in the atmosphere.

However, biomass has somehow created an idea that there is a ‘greener’ kind of carbon, a kind that permits less heating. While extracting carbon from within the ground in the form of fossil fuels is far worse for many other reasons, burning biomass emits carbon and this also directly contributes to the climate crisis. The fact that in theory, it is going to be offset in the next 50 to 100 years for the situation of the here and now is somehow irrelevant.

The wood pellet is classified as a source of green energy and therefore benefits from the EU’s renewable energy subsidies.¹⁷ To describe biomass as a ‘renewable’ source of energy is a long-held fault of a system created by the Kyoto Protocol in 1992, which then served as a collective UN deal for committing to fewer greenhouse gasses. Even the Paris Agreement has inherited these fatal systemic flaws and classified biomass as carbon neutral, rendering it equal to other sustainable sources of energy like solar and wind power.¹⁸ This energy ‘loophole’ has created an ironic system whereby the wood pellet industry can claim subsidies for cutting and producing, while the sustained power plants can claim compensation for shipping and burning – all for the benefit of producing more carbon emissions than they would have from burning coal.¹⁹ We are effectively paying to increase carbon’s presence in the atmosphere – an absurd use of public money.

There is a clear connection between the EU policy subsidised growth of the biomass industry and the acceleration of unsustainable forestry and intensive logging within the Baltic forests.²⁰ This has evolved into a massive industry that has brought the otherwise unnoticed Baltic states to the forefront of the biomass debate. The largest supplier of wood pellets in Europe is Graanul Invest led by Raul Kirjanen. It is both a factory and extensive woodland owner in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania alike. Graanul Invest has benefited significantly from EU subsidy schemes and has cashed in €11m from a total of €48m of subsidies that the Estonian government handed out to biomass producers in 2020.²¹

These narratives of ‘green’ energy play a massive role in EU countries that seem to have been at the forefront of sustainable strategy growth. Roughly two thirds of wood pellets produced in the Baltics add to the green energy goals of other richer countries like the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark.²² Most notably the wood pellets are exported to the UK to fuel the Drax power plant in North Yorkshire, described as the country’s

biggest renewable power generator. Up until 2010, it was a coal-powered plant, however afterwards it started to co-fire biomass and currently the majority of the power plant’s energy is generated from firing wood pellets. It consumes around 7 million tons of wood pellets a year – an approximate equivalent of 470 square kilometers of forests.²³ In the UK ‘green’ biomass energy production claims even further subsidies from the state – £789.5m in 2019 alone to power plants like Drax.²⁴ As of now, 59% of all ‘renewable’ energy in the EU is produced out of biomass.²⁵ The result is an absurd journey of biomass production claiming to benefit renewability.

Carbon sequestration is a convoluted process. The pure mathematics of additions and subtractions has made society believe that simply adding and then later felling trees within the agricultural shapes and systems of plantations will be the silver bullet solution to climate breakdown. Carbon can be falsely accounted for as well as wasted. It has become a money-like exchange unit, circulating as a commodity within climate policies to be exchanged and speculated on. As it circulates in these perplexing policies, it has become a unit of measure that calculates the value of nature.²⁶ On a small scale the use of biomass is not a real threat. Despite everything described it even makes a lot of sense when only reused as leftover debris from the timber industry. However, when small solutions are employed on massive scales, solution finding gets out of hand and subsidising policies, designed to help the transition, miss any real targets. While the EU is distracted by claiming false victories, it is hard to make any real progress by actually transitioning into much less harmful means for generating power.

Curing Natures’ Amnesia – Narratives of Wilderness Reinstated

Seemingly lush and natural forests that occupy almost half of the Baltic territories – of which 1 in 10 are protected by *Natura 2000* and other protection regimes – cover less than 1% of primary and natural forest habitats and carry within themselves very low reflections of sustained biodiversity.²⁷ The little of what is left is scattered across the Baltics in inconsistent patches, surrounded by intensely forested areas, discouraging species exchange and sustenance. With each maintenance clearing and sanitary cutting, these patches become smaller, fragmented and more isolated.

Forests are complex dichotomies of shared



resources, protection and natural selection. Through their mycorrhizal fungi networks, forests harbour almost social relationships. What one tree produces is known to feed and rejuvenate other trees in its proximity. The science behind this is still unclear as it shifts from understanding whether these processes are altruistic or encouraged by the underground fungi networks.²⁸ However, these processes have the potential to change the way we see individualism as the primary force for evolution and to make humans see how a form of socialism is something that controls such ecological systems as forests. In natural forests lie the secrets of sustainability and circular ecology that humans couldn't artificially recreate if attempted. In contrast, human-made forests are designed and planted for efficiency and faster results. This might cater well for efficient logging purposes but it does not nurture any biodiversity or self-reliant and stable biome relationships. Left to decompose within its landscape, trees can foster worlds and layers of nutrients, space and shelter for the thriving biodiversity of insects, fungi, plants and birds. This is not something that is often taken into account when clear-cutting forest territories. The trees that are usually sparsely left to sustain biodiversity within clear-cut forest sites, can rarely sustain the richness of the previously nurtured variety and stable ecosystems. More common still, the trees

that usually rely on close proximity to others and with that defenses from wind, climate regulation and nutrient circulation, rarely survive long.²⁹

The way forests in the Baltics are treated and thought about offers an overall understanding of the Anthropocene – as a habitat shaped for profit rather than for protection and nurturing as we would like to believe. One that has us collectively engaged in nature's amnesia, convincing ourselves that the carefully landscaped and curated habitats are indeed natural and primary. Through every ditch, drained swamp, agricultural land formation and systematic logging practices the Baltics have long forgotten their former state of nature. We live in capitalised landscapes, not natural ones.

Creating natural habitats that are completely absent of any human intervention is increasingly impossible. Humans have managed to influence nearly every natural structure through forest and land management. From biodiversity routes destroyed and the monocultures planted to the very composition of the air and water, forests interact with humans and their interests have touched it all. However, it is good to aspire to the notion of letting parts of these forests be (for lack of a better word) rewilded. Time has come to consider the benefits of something other than human. Discouraging our will

for a clean, correct, maintained and refined nature. Letting everything seed, letting trees rot, overgrow and then self-manage, whilst accepting the non-sublime and the non-pristine of it all. Letting the lesser tree be something other than a pellet, something that cannot be visibly profitable, and if anyone still needs convincing there is a long list of second-hand benefits to the human as well.

Maybe humans should stop expecting that every bit of forest exists purely and solemnly for our benefit. Not all forest is there for the purpose of extraction – be it material, economic or even recreational. Within these aspiring non-capitalist decolonised forests, we might even find a place for the lesser, yet less than irreverent tree. Wild, unaesthetic, unprofitable – it serves the non-human instead.

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On Forest Walking and Ecologies of Care.

Agata Marzecova



The UNESCO protected Curonian Spit – a narrow strip of sand dunes separating the Curonian Lagoon from the Baltic Sea – has been shaped by centuries of drastic deforestation and the extensive afforestation of moving dunes, positioning the existence of a forest as central to the survival of human settlements. As a place with active geomorphological processes and a long history of cultural intervention in land and forests, the spit lacks a firm referent to the ‘natural conditions’, providing a perfect field laboratory of the naturecultural ecologies of the Anthropocene.

Thanks to the Neringa Forest Architecture residency, I spent three months in 2021 observing the local forest ecology. And yet, in this essay, I cannot contribute to the concerning topic of ‘Anthropocene ecologies’ directly from an academic or artistic perspective but only through its collision with an altogether other issue; the necessity of carework. This is because just when I got the chance to visit and research the Curonian Spit, I also had a small child to care for. Attending to the baby day and night, I could not imagine

the duty of care and duty of expertise in anything other than conflictual terms. As each requires time, labour and focused attention, it is difficult to think of them together. However, as feminist theorist Nancy Fraser recently diagnosed: under capitalism, care and ecology have something in common – both of them are systematically undervalued and exploited. Just as the ecological crisis and crisis of care are entangled, the common sense of keeping them as separate is a part of the problem because we cannot adequately grasp one without considering the other.¹

The tension of trying to attend to the concerns which are kept separate and together exactly at the same time has situated my exploration of the Curonian Spit forests in an obscure field of the reproductive, productive and ecological. Counter to my academic training, which would expect me to focus on the most topical, urgent aspects of the forest problematics, I had to sidestep the logic of professionalism to explore what it is that I could do in my situation significantly shaped by the necessity of child care. In this training of the imagination, it was important for me

to find not what I can do despite the baby but precisely what I can do with one. Within my own set of possibilities, I identified one activity that keeps childcare and the forest in proximity – daily walking. Reframing my daily walks with a child from the act of care to the act of care and (knowledge) production, I walked daily with my small companion for three months, experiencing subzero temperatures, melting snow, emerging flowers and finally sprouting trees.

Walking as a method out of a necessity

Although walking has been part of the environmentalist canon since the romantics and naturalists, claiming it as methodology is not an unproblematic choice. The excursive walking performed for informing and shaping knowledge has emerged from troubling histories of race, class, gender and able-bodied privilege normalised through charismatic figures such as the American naturalist Henry David Thoreau. His influential writings on life in the woods – still printed and sold in the twenty-first century – delineated walking as a highly individualistic act that privileged a distanced observation over other eco-social relations.²

Mending such celebratory views, geographer Kathryn Yusoff situates walking as a corollary to the dual experience of colonialism. As she aptly remarked, walking pertains to both ‘the lone white subject of Western Modernity surveying His landscape as possession and diasporic subjects walking their displacement and dispossession.’³ Walking as a method means navigating the line between those who are free to walk and gaze for their enjoyment and those who walk as an act of necessity and survival.

To be clear, carrying a baby does not absolve the weight of privilege nor guarantee mindful sensibilities. But still, my walks were less of a choice and more of a method of necessity as they provided practical means for an essential effort of keeping the carework and academic production in relation and not in dichotomy. I had no clear idea whether I could achieve something of relevance. However, there was a pleasant certainty in the unhurried daily routine, movement and fresh air. Also, when possible, I walked with other people and listened to their forest encounters and relayed experiences of others. So, I spent hours in the pleasant company of a baby and sometimes also other forest-concerned people. My way of

walking allowed me to encounter the forest not as a space of solitude but as a space of sociality and social reproduction.

Forest heterogeneity

Within the very first days of walking the landscape around the residency its variations were highlighted to me. Although I restricted my walks to a circle of one kilometre, rather than one forest, I encountered a heterogeneous assemblage of forest habitats of different ages, planting design and species compositions. The steep slopes of an old dune covered with the old-growth stands of Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) forest coexisted alongside more recently planted plots of Scots pines of different ages and densities. In some places, the pine stands alternated with spruces and mixed forest. Higher and more exposed parts of the dunes were covered with expansive, dense stretches of mountain pines (*Pinus mugo*), originally brought from Denmark. This foreign species, which can root in poor, sandy soils, quickly spread out through massive reforestation activities at the end of the nineteenth century. Involving hundreds of (mostly female) workers, the afforestation aimed to stabilise the dunes in order to save local villages and regionally-important land and water trade routes from wind-blown sand, which was put to motion by earlier forest damage. The interdune depressions and wet planes have been covered with a mix of broadleaf trees, mainly black alders (*Alnus glutinosa*). Most of the trees were planted with the same intention – to prevent sand erosion and promote the development of soils. But even in this highly intentional landscape, forest managers were faced with fighting unwelcome aliens, such as *Robinia pseudoacacia* and rapidly-spreading beach rose shrubs (*Rosa rugosa*). And more. Once an essential landscape element, the hundred-year old and increasingly dry mountain pines were in recent decades burnt by massive fires or preventively cut down, leaving behind jarring clear-cuts to be replanted. The new soil broadly allowed for the reintroduction of ‘native’ Scots pines but still in some places the mountain pine seedlings returned. No longer needed for utilitarian purposes, now they were retained for the preservation of a ‘characteristic landscape’ aesthetic. And still, places where the forest workers were slow to arrive were quickly colonised with dense concentrations of young birches, a typical pioneer tree species, manifesting the gap between forest

management plan instructions and the age-old processes of ecological succession.

A planted forest as a space of ecological relations

My daily walks made me appreciate that the forest is changeable, historical and plural. However, that the Curonian Spit forests are heterogeneous and shaped by a varied planting history can also be inferred from historical maps and satellite imagery. Did my walking lead to any insights which *could not* be accessed through the more conventional research approaches?

In retrospect, I realised that in contrast to the static cartographic imagery, the daily routine of physical walking had accentuated the forest as a space of a multitude of material relations of trees with other lively beings. Instead of the atomised description of the forest as a sum of different and disconnected parts, I experienced a sense of interrelation.

Even the monotonous, geometrically organised stands of impoverished *Pinus sylvestris* monocultures, planted with the sole intention to prevent the movement of sands, have become something else: at once a soil generating technology; but also a habitat of proliferating wood-grown fungi and lichen, home to large flocks of greenfinches, common chaffinches and goldcrests; a habitat for deer and foxes; and, at the same time a biophysical testament to the utilitarian approach to nature, generative of uncanny and haunting sensations. Elsewhere, the monocultures of imported mountain pines (*Pinus mugo*), which could best be described as relics of another era – once useful in supporting the whole spit’s existence but now without any recognised ecological value – presented their drying trunks and extremely dense layers of branches, overgrown by thick layers of lichen, as a new form of wildness. Established through human labour, the thick stands of mountain pines became impenetrable to the human body or gaze. And while they do not offer species diversity nor sense of beauty or sanctity, they generate a sense of quiet otherness – of someone living in close proximity yet unfitting the prevailing aesthetic and value categories. Often described as ‘low biodiversity’ or ‘poor quality’ forests, I found these places to matter not because of nostalgia for the quaint sceneries but because of their unobtrusive but generative vitality, which extended beyond the intentional and descriptive.



Rather than engendering a definite knowledge, my walking encounters have allowed me to experience the forest not as a place composed of trees but of material relations that have proliferated when the trees were left to grow, opening up new questions: how to attune to the lively exuberance of any forest without nurturing a false sense of equivalence among different ecological assemblages? And, how to appreciate what is already there without precluding the possibility of more biodiverse and abundant ecologies?

Imagining more caring forest scenarios with the mountain pines

But how to recognise ecological dimensions of places that do not fit the very categories of ecological science? Drawing on queer and trans theories and their attention to the constitutive yet unacknowledged role of otherness in constructing (often binary) master narratives, geographer Matthew Gandy proposes a queer ecology as a corrective to the participation of ecological scholarship in the normative and reductive framing of the natural. For example, his queering of urban ecology foregrounds the unacknowledged complexity of marginal and interstitial spaces and highlights links between their invisibility to environmental science and the broader societal ‘aversions’ to the aliens.⁴ The emergent notion of queer ecology clearly means more than acknowledging that which unsettles established categories and taxonomies. Notably, against the simplified recasting of the nature-culture binary as a smooth continuum, the queering of ecology exposes how these entangled realms are connected through the situated processes of othering and exploitation – thus potentially finding starting points for conceptualising ecologies more attentive to difference.⁵

What could queer ecology mean in the context of the unnatural forests of the Curonian Spit? Let’s consider the unfitting if not controversial figure of the mountain pines. Although most of the local forest is to a different degree constructed, the mountain pine stands out for its paradoxical position: the tree, which once helped to stabilise the moving sands and preserve ecological and human communities, has been nowadays devalued in multiple ways simultaneously. The species is considered not native, not very beautiful, its habitats are of low biodiversity, and the wood is not of good quality. These categorical descriptions are not untrue, but they make the ecological relations and otherworldly presence of the mountain pines invisible and

unaccountable. What is more, their scientific evaluation is not in contradiction with the extractivist forms of their management through large-scale clear-cuts and massive tree removals.

Making space for the mountain pines in the local ecology would require a critical imagination of different concepts and practices that could account not for what the mountain pines are not (categorically beautiful, biodiverse, native) but for what they are – artificial relics prone to burn yet still lively beings supportive of ecological relations. Focusing on the double characteristic does not simply highlight the ‘queerness’ of these botanical aliens; instead, it invites exploring processes of devaluation: how did something useful and cultivated transform into being overtly dry and dangerous to other communities? The extremely high density and dryness of these habitats is nowadays treated as a natural, inevitable feature of these aliens. However, in fact, it is a product of human neglect. Once densely planted, the mountain pines were left to overgrow and age without any care.

Exploring the ecological position of mountain pines reveals a complicated interplay of the categories of natural and cultural – especially, how carework seems unfitting – in our definitions of a forest, which seem to be polarised between not needing any care intervention (in the case of ‘pristine’ or ‘natural’ forests) or not deserving of care (planted monocultures or non-native species). Looking speculatively at the history of the Curonian Spit through the notion of forest care, suddenly it seems that the artificiality of the mountain pines did not have to predetermine them to the fate of complete obliteration through massive extraction, as the only possible scenario. Critically, proposing the care intervention instead of clear-cuts does not imply that the mountain pines must be conserved and endlessly replanted. The situated notion of ecological care could mean investing in the activities preventive of neglect and the accumulation of unnecessary hazards. And, it could also mean letting the mountain pines be replaced by other species in the cycle of ecological succession.

Incidentally, my project started with the notion of care. Admittedly, for much of my exploration, my consideration of carework remained strictly confined to the world of human relations or perhaps even oppositional to the realm of forest ecology. Walking in the mountain pines and experiencing the gap between their aesthetic otherness, past

importance and current ecological non-value highlighted to me that precisely the notion of forest or ecological care could be the analytics needed for queering the polarity of cultural framings of forest as a space of either static preservation or clear-cut extraction.

Recognising the ecological interrelatedness is not merely about celebrating that everything is connected but about discerning that the naturecultural entanglements are not immutable and could be different. Accepting the unnatural forest as a space of ecological relations and also as a space that may need care, through practices that support what is there, could open up possibilities to shape more diverse and abundant forest ecologies – provided that the cultural forest practices are treated as a terrain of possibility for eco-political transformation away from devaluing practices of extractivism to eco-social relations of care.

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Songs From the Compost: Notes on Symbiotic Relationality and Eglė Budvytė's Lichenous Poetics

Amelia Groom



Soundtrack from the film *Songs from the Compost*:
Mutating Bodies, Imploding Stars, voices and lyrics by
Eglė Budvytė, sound design by Steve Martin Snider
<https://tinyurl.com/mubs8383>



The word *lichen* has speculated roots in the Proto-Indo-European *leigh*, meaning ‘to lick’. Perhaps because of the way it grows over tree and stone surfaces, reaching out and latching on like a many-tongued sprawl.

If you were in New Zealand in 2019, there’s a chance you saw adult humans lying down on the pavement licking lichen. It was a trend. They weren’t studying etymology; they were trying to access the reported Viagra-like properties of a particular sort of lichen, which is known scientifically as *xanthoparmelia scabrosa*, and which grows abundantly on asphalt pavement in parts of New Zealand. Locals would complain that the lichen caused slipperiness on the roads during wet weather. Then rumours about the lichen’s aphrodisiac powers started circulating, and media outlets picked up on its more affectionate, unofficial name, ‘sexy pavement lichen’.

Like most lichen, sexy pavement lichen is very difficult to scrape off, so it invites people to go down on it, to get onto the ground with it and put their faces up amongst it and lick the same surface that it licks. The only problem: *xanthoparmelia scabrosa* also carries potentially toxic levels of heavy metals. Copper, lead, zinc – essential components of our partly mineral bodies, but poisonous in excess.

So lichenologists were worried about the humans on the ground. Dr Allison Knight told one local news service that while the lichen does contain a chemical that is ‘somewhat analogous to Viagra’, she did not recommend ‘going out and licking the footpath.’

The Online Etymology Dictionary, by the way, connects the word lichen with two other words: *lecherous* and *cunnilingus*. It’s a tangled root system: the lingus in cunnilingus is not just the tongue that licks, it’s also the tongue that speaks; the lingua of linguistics, lingo, language.

★

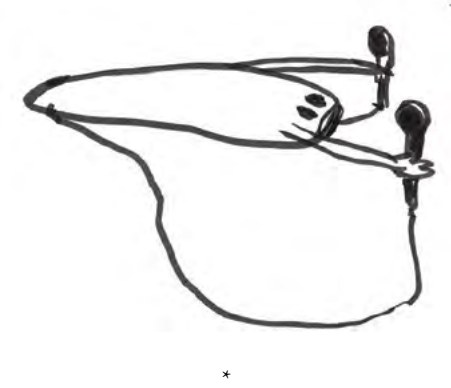
During her visits to Nida Art Colony on the Curonian Spit in 2019, Amsterdam-based Lithuanian artist Egle Budvytytė spent many hours in the surrounding forests, where the entangled forms of life and death and nonlife host incredible varieties of lichen: endlessly mottled grey-greens, powdery yellows, intricate orange lace, tendrils draped around like casually ostentatious feather boas.

Her film *Songs from the Compost: Mutating Bodies, Imploding Stars*, made in collaboration with Marija Olšauskaitė and Julija Steponaitytė, was shot in those lichenous

forests in the summer of 2020. With a cast of teenage dancers and students from a local high-school, the film is a kind of meditation on sylvan-cyborgian symbiosis. The bodies are sites of activity, but they’re never upright; they’re pulled toward the ground and each other, moving between the trees, along the sand dunes and coastal shores, over and into the mossy forest floors.

The soundtrack is made up of a series of many-tongued songs produced by Budvytytė, where digitally processed voices bubble up and break apart – voices licking themselves, recomposing one another:

*I am hatching I’m being hatched
I’m stretching time in your spine so long so
long so long so long
she will take care of you, she will fuck your
past
a crack in the rock, a crack in the narrative
how about decay, rotting, decomposing as
technologies for non-linear time
look into my shapeless eyes
come into my kingdom, moist-wet-slippery-
complex
suck up on my wisdom, muddy-airy-trippy-
perplexed ...*



As composite organisms arising from a relationship between fungi and cyanobacteria or algae, lichens challenge traditional notions of organism and species autonomy, by straddling multiple classificatory designations.

Fungi can’t photosynthesise on their own; they propose a structure, through which their photobiont companions bring the light. But the characteristics of lichen aren’t attributable to any of their individual components. There is no simple division of labour through the allocation of predetermined tasks; this is a mode of collaboration where something happens between the contributors which never belonged to any of them.

A Swiss botanist named Simon

Schwendener first proposed his hypothesis that lichens arise through the mutually beneficial cooperation of genetically separate organisms on 10 September 1867 (four days before the first publication of Volume 1 of Marx’s *Capital*!). It didn’t go down well. Schwendener’s ideas on the matter were vehemently rejected by the scientific community for years – and a final attempt to disprove the symbiotic (‘living together’) theory of lichen was published as late as 1953.¹

In the 1960s, when the biologist Lynn Margulis began championing the theory of ‘syntrophogenesis’ – where symbiosis is the primary mechanism of evolutionary novelty and complexity – she was also widely dismissed. Her work on life’s many layers of cooperation, interdependence and co-creation would gradually become less controversial, but it posed a serious challenge to the Neo-Darwinian emphasis on the competitive ‘survival of the fittest’, and the resistance she faced is telling.

Towards the end of her life, Margulis appeared in a public debate with Richard Dawkins, the Neo-Darwinist who first became famous with a book that emphasised ‘selfishness’ as a core evolutionary principle. In the audio recording of their exchange (which is included in John Feldman’s 2017 documentary *Symbiotic Earth*), there’s a brief moment that’s particularly illuminating:

Dawkins is responding to Margulis’s ideas, and he sounds very unhappy. ‘Take the standard story for ordinary animals,’ he implores, ‘what’s wrong with that? It’s highly plausible, it’s economical, it’s parsimonious, *why on earth* would you want to *drag in* ‘syntrophogenesis’?!’

She responds by laughing and saying, gently, ‘because it’s there.’

Symbiotic relationality isn’t *dragged* in as an unnecessary complication of an otherwise perfectly neat (‘economical’) picture. The complexity is already there – and to knowingly exclude it would amount to an ideological distortion. (Think of the joyless desperation with which Jordan Peterson, some years back, kept trying to make lobsters prove, once and for all, that hierarchical and competitive social dominance is ahistorically ‘natural’.)

Margulis insisted that alliances between algae and fungi have been crucial not just for the existence of symbiotic organisms like lichens, but also for the development of all vegetative life: plants could not have evolved from algae in the oceans and taken root on dry land without the underground efforts of



fungi, who deliver messages and nutrients to their upright photosynthesising cohabiters. The part of a tree that performs photosynthesis is illuminated as it reaches up towards the light, but this is only one feature of an expansive network of alliances. In the dark, wet and wormy underground, where roots are all tangled up with mycelial-bacterial-mineral-chemical-informational transmissions, myths of heroic, entrepreneurial individualism are completely unsustainable.

*

‘In the relative: the negation of a History and the open dawn of histories, what accomplishes Time and hardens it there in the lichen of frail inspiration and the dark stubborn rust of wilful parlance, flush with the earth.’²

This is Édouard Glissant, writing in the 1960s. While science tentatively ‘discovers’ the extent of life’s relationality, the poets are of course already its midst. ‘Let me try clumsily to draw a tree,’ Glissant writes. ‘I will reach a span of vegetation, where only the sky of the page will put an end to the indeterminate growth.’³ The tree drawn in isolated self-sufficiency would be an obfuscation of what Glissant called ‘the poetics of relation’, wherein ‘each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other’.⁴

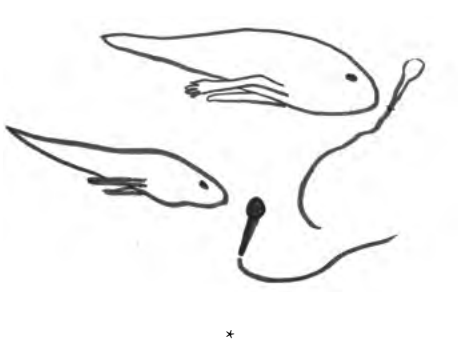
Later in his life, on a visit to his native Martinique, Glissant spoke to the filmmaker Manthia Diawara about the ‘creole gardens’ that were secretly maintained by enslaved communities on Caribbean plantations (in Diawara’s 2009 film, *Édouard Glissant: One World in Relation*). In contrast to the coercive monoculturalism of the plantations, Glissant describes how these small, clandestine gardens were sites of diverse multiplicities:

“They were able to grow dozens of different types of trees, different scents,’ he relates. ‘Coconuts, yams, oranges, pines, dachines, choutchines, sweet potatoes, cassava’. Cultivating these plants involved cultivating intricate knowledge about the ways in which different species can protect and nurture one another, so that the conditions for difference and mutually supportive growth could be held within a violently compressed space, as a necessary means of survival.

‘When I say: tree, and when I think of the tree,’ Glissant wrote, ‘I never feel the unique, the trunk, the mast of sap which, appended to others, will group together this stretch of forest cleaved by light.’⁵

Such a relational attunement does not have to mean that anything can become anything else, or that no specificity can take shape. Glissant describes the ‘span of green’ on a downhill road to the shore, where ‘No trees or outlines are discernible’ – but in the midst of it he is struck by a red flower that ‘glitters and moves immobile’.⁶ He also describes several specific plants that stand out with historical and ancestral significance in the encultured ‘natural’ landscape, but he maintains the overall effect of ‘the surge, the Whole, the boiling density’, where identities are extended – both spatially and temporally – through their relations.⁷

‘What good does it do you to know,’ Glissant asks, ‘if you are not flush with your surroundings, *exceeded?*’⁸



‘We have never been pure. We have never been clean’. These are the opening lines from Budvytytė’s *Songs from the Compost: Mutating Bodies, Imploding Stars*, sung as the bodies begin walking downhill through the forest towards the shore, dappled light reaching between the towering pine trees, onto the moss-cushioned earth.

The next shot pans over someone lying, still, on a lichen-mottled ground, with their back to the camera. A fungal growth is emerging out of their shoulder blades and fanning along the backs of their legs, which are exposed through partly decomposed trousers. The ground is rot and growth, hungry and inventive, reaching up and drawing this hosting body into its fold, breaking down boundaries, and recomposing forms that sprout out of its pull.

The costumes in the film were made in collaboration with the ground. During the first Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns of 2020, when Budvytytė was back in Amsterdam and production and shooting were indefinitely postponed, the artist buried some garments (and pieces of cloth that later became garments) in the garden behind her studio,

inviting input from the soil and its critters. After about six weeks, the fabrics had accrued various inscriptions of decomposition, giving rise to an array of ecological archieropoietas – pictures made ‘without hands’, beyond individual human authorship.

The voices in the songs that form the film’s soundtrack are similarly unclean and composted. By singing through a vocal effects processor, Budvytytė pluralised her own voice into a cyborgian chorus, where the words are rotting, reverberating, mineralising, cracking, burrowing, swelling with microorganisms. ‘I am a host I am being hosted I am a host-hosting’ they sing, over and through one another, in shimmering planetary symbiosis. ‘Baby I’m your stone. I am not your resource’.

This text is a revised and expanded version of an earlier text by Amelia Groom, written for Eglė Budvytytė’s digital artist book *Songs From The Compost*, published by The Baltic Notebooks of Anthony Blunt #3: <http://blunt.cc/312734/notebooks/3/songs-from-the-compost>

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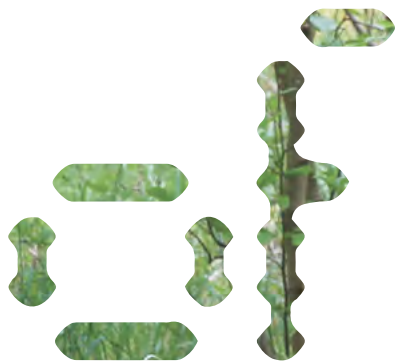
Image credits:

Drawings by Eglė Budvytytė, stills from the film *Songs from the Compost: Mutating Bodies, Imploding Stars*, by Eglė Budvytytė, art direction: Marija Olšauskaitė and Julija Steponaitytė, images with overlay design by Goda Budvytytė





The Grammar of Lichens



Aistė Ambrazevičiūtė



Path to Enlichenment

The concepts of signs and information, and of coding and language, are closely related to the nature of life itself. The materiality of objects informs how people explore, experience and understand their surroundings.¹ The patterns of symbols and changing forms as signs by lichens demonstrate associative connections and intimate dialogues between them and the forest. Some remain abstract.

Lichens form my alphabet of design and together we recreate the grammar of forest tectonics. Stories can help you fall in love with the world and this is our mission. Technology is like a connector to the natural environment. It enables us to experience different relationships to our context, to extend our perception of reality in myriad ways.² The poetics of a place becomes architectonic. I invite you to join the lichens and immerse yourself in the Enlichenment.³

Soft Infrastructures⁴

While in the forest, lichens are always soft to touch. Once you detach them from the substrate, they harden solid. They are also known as extremophile organisms – able to switch off and back on in extreme conditions and therefore inhabit various habitats across Earth.

Lichens are the sensors of the environment and their hyper-articulated surfaces have intimate relationships with their surroundings, forming mutual relationships with others. They teach us how to look around rather than ahead, caring about depth rather than height.⁵

There are soft ways of reading the world; you can collect sensory experiences and follow neuro trails to join the lichens. They share the forest of softness in form, shape and size. Every nuance of lichen architecture has a word (as every feeling has a form).⁶ Their latin titles and epithets, such as *lobaria pulmonaria* or *bryoria capillaris*, illustrate their multifaceted tactilities and the sensibilities of their inhabitable context as well as their feelings towards it. By expressing their emotions to their surroundings so sensitively they are able to be diverse and distinct in their morphologies.

If you want to visualise what would happen if a building had emotions, I would invite you to observe lichens. They are the nervous system of the forest. Synapses – the elaborate membrane structures, where transmissions between nerve cells happen without touch –



are the sites of change and exchange.⁷ I compare the neural joints of our bodies with the lichens, as synapses of the forest. It is not necessary to touch something to be touched by it.⁸ Lichens trigger my way of experiencing tectonics as the art of joining by not touching. As the hand sees, the eye-draws and the mind touches: we are able to envision our experiences in new ways.⁹

Lichens symbolise forest ornaments, the world of feeling and sympathy. They weave a living system of interwoven patterns, where inner and outer lines of growth intertwine and surfaces become architectonic parts of the matrix itself.¹⁰ As the tree ring becomes bark or the soft lichen hard, I envision architecture metamorphosing to softer interpretation.

To be a Lichen

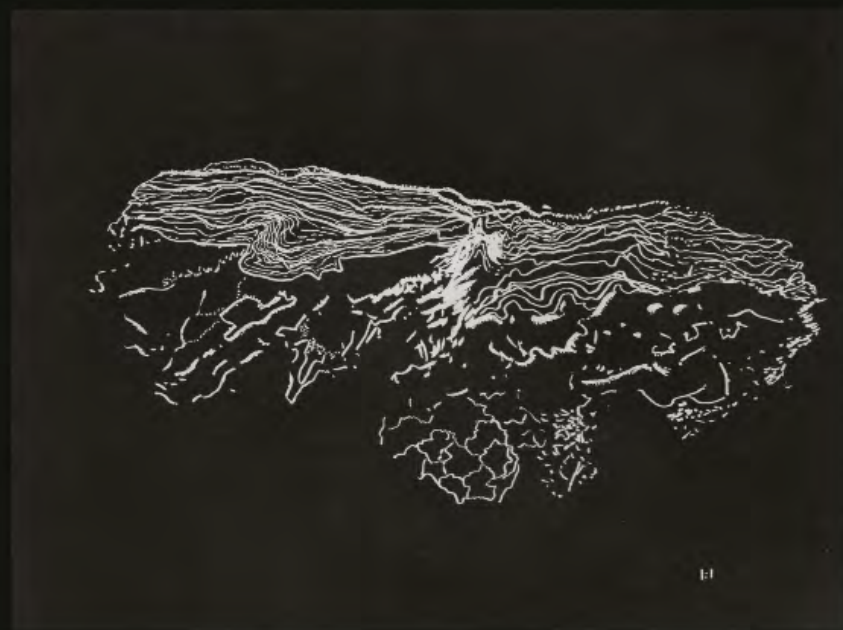
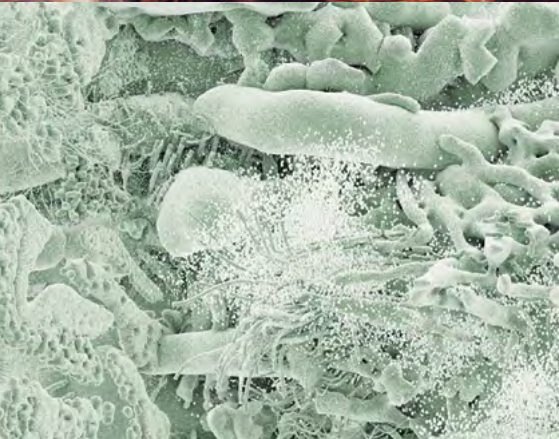
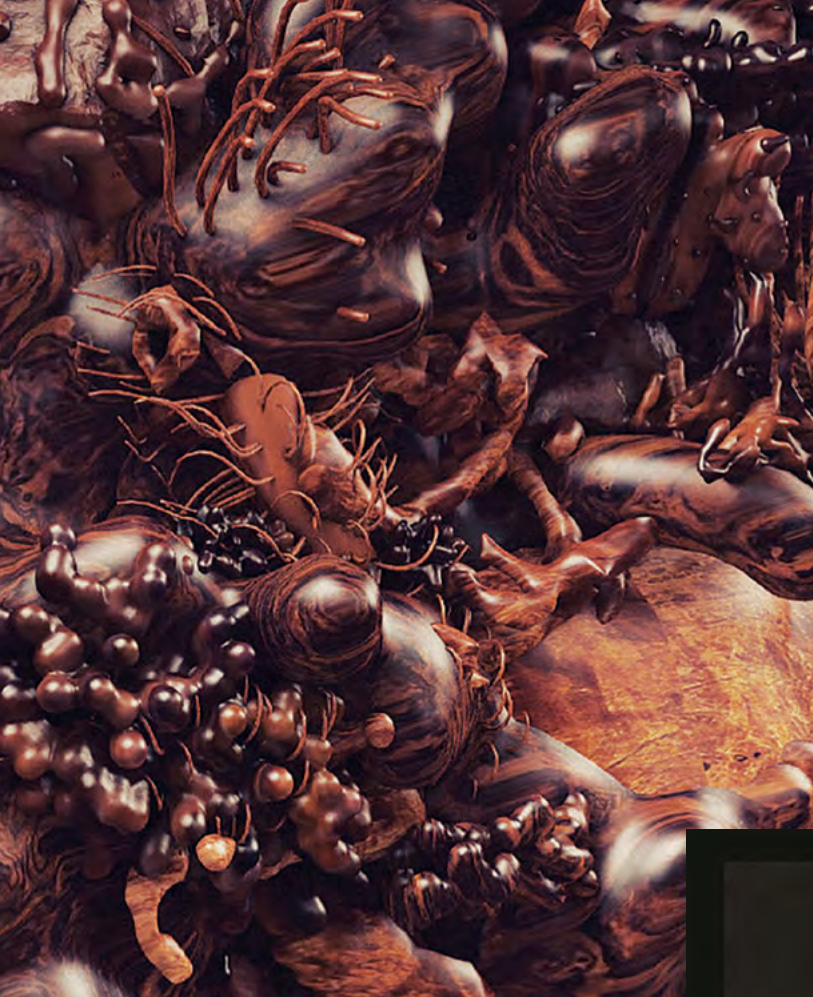
Lichens are comparable to tiny patches of emotions that are widely spread, but remain unnoticed. 'Irregular', 'decentered', 'random', 'crooked', 'small', and 'glitchy' are common cultural associations that undervalue the imperfections of these tiny creatures. In the language of design, these meanings are alike. Lichens have a very different timeline to our own and therefore the first impressions and

emotional associations are of being slow, old-fashioned, outdated or even failures. Meanwhile, in the forest, while some parts succumb to decay, others are just sprouting and these are not only the articulations of life, but the source of beauty.¹¹

Biologically, lichens have so-called emergent properties, which means that even for scientists their growth, to a certain extent, continues to be unexpected and unpredictable. In addition, their mysterious ways bear fruit in polymorphic growth patterns where it is impossible to count or name the exact species.¹² One might even say they share their story intuitively.

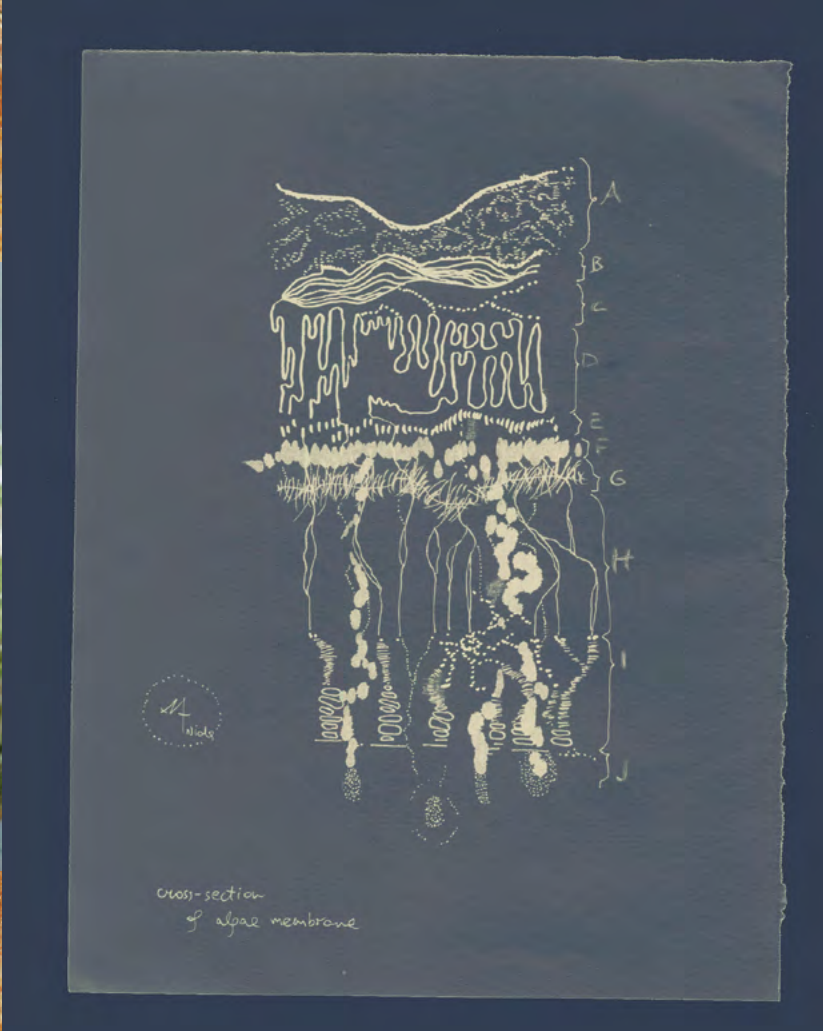
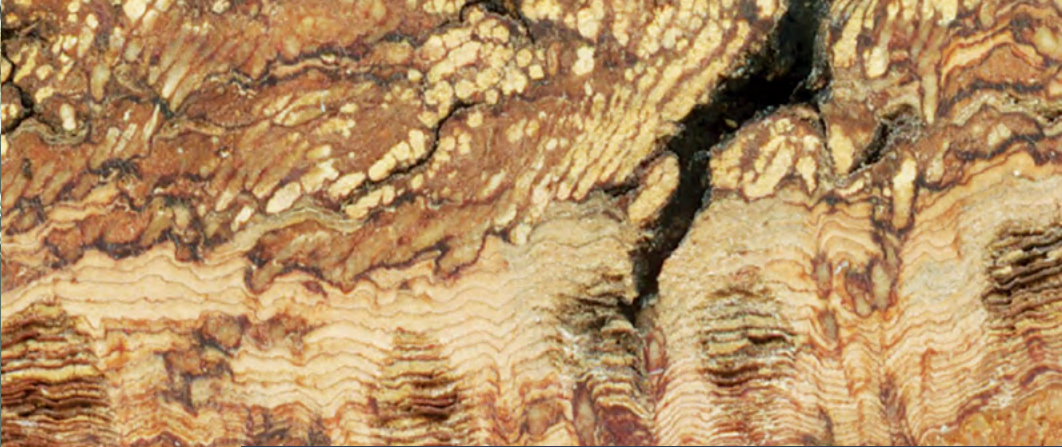
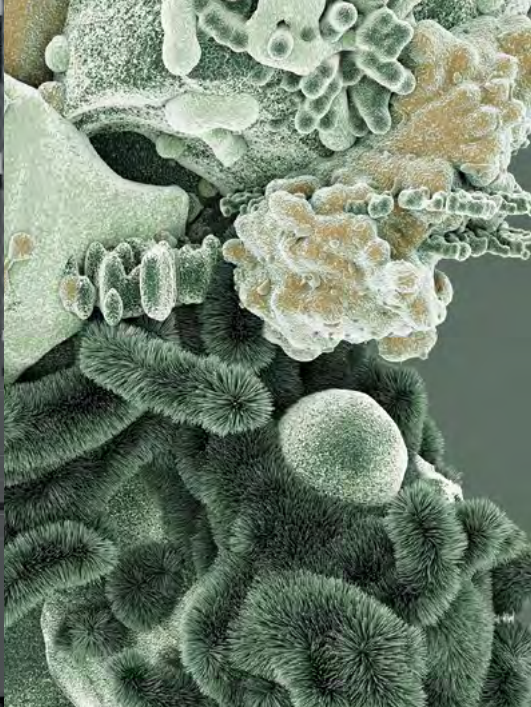
Lichens inhabit the negative spaces of imperfection as unique and fascinating systems. I believe that creativity, like the spontaneous outgrowths of Lichens, is not often linked to any kind of conscious control. By starting to unravel their rules and style, I build mine in parallel. I carefully collect their features and will use them for the overall branding (Gesamtkunstwerk) of the grammar of forest tectonics. Having courage to be bold and shy simultaneously is being a lichen to me.

I am experimenting with ambiguous and multilayered meanings, and associations of lichens, because even their biological



..... Lichens are Places
Places are Milieus
Milieus are Symbioses
Symbioses are Correspondence
Correspondence is Research
Research is to Observe with
Lichens....

manifest of lichen Milieu
x subject of Research



characteristics allow them to be interpreted according to the ever-evolving conditions. In my research, lichens weave the forest tectonics, they are the symbiotic joints that interconnect the polyphonic surfaces. By reading them, I simultaneously interact with mosses, liverworts, barks, mycelium and many others (like myself). Lichen architecture is the forest to me.

To Follow the Lichen

By following these intuitive sideway paths simultaneously, without even noticing, I started building my creative practice. After my walks I always had plenty of dried lichens at home and it inspired me to document and imitate, play, and deconstruct that emotion in three dimensional space. As an architect, the most natural way for me to express my thoughts is through design. I started learning how to model, sculpt, and draw organic, complex forms and intricate patterns in the digital realm. It felt like opening a new door to understanding everything.

Having this parallel micro-cosmos on my screen, on my mind, and in my hands tackled a new beginning. Lichens – like the chameleon or octopus – amazed me with their incredible diversity in form and shape and sparked my curiosity. They became my personal thing, time for myself, searching for unexpected and scattered manifestations of beauty. You don't question your feelings when you are in love, you just love.

Endnotes

- 1 Seetal Solanki, Live Serpentine Galleries talk: Re-learning Perspectives, 26 June 2020.
- 2 Serpentine Podcast, 'Back to Earth: Systems and Sprouts', interview with Jakob Kudsk Steensen, 9 July 2020.
- 3 Enlichenment as referred to on the website: <https://www.waysofenlichenment.net/>, and highlighted in Merlin Scheldrake, *Entangled Life, How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds and Shape Our Futures*, Vintage Publishing, 2020.
- 4 Soft- infrastructures are described as softer, tighter and looser textures of our society. If hard structure is the relationship between all the activities that enhance the organization to complete its functions, soft structure is the relationship among all the factors which takes into account the pursuit of people's interests to support the hard structure functions. The project imagines soft- infrastructures as the transitional nodes between various scenarios. Newsletter project The Bliss of Spam, September 2020.
- 5 Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World, On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* Princeton University Press, NJ, 2015, p. 17.

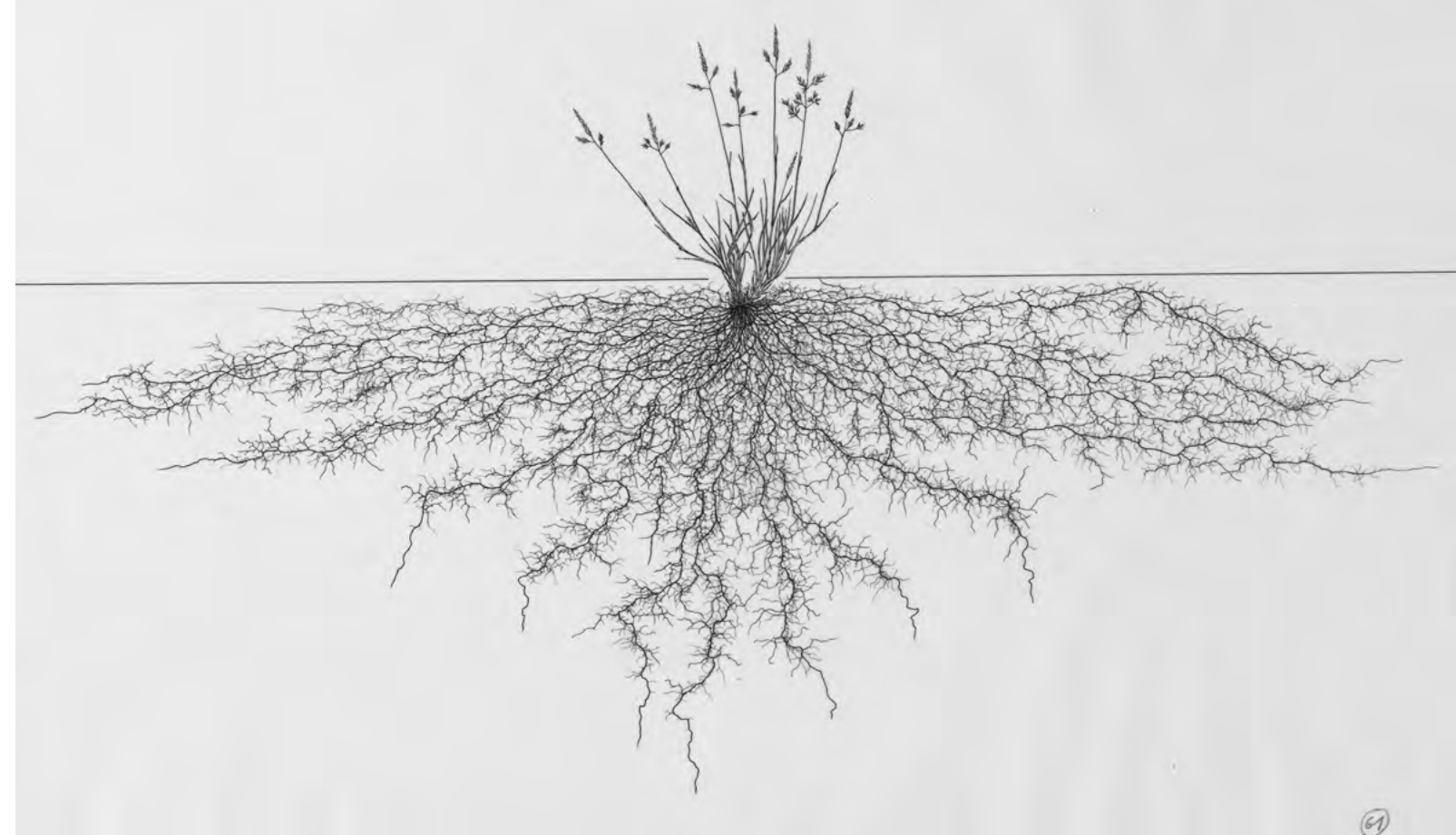
- 6 *Moss definition* inspired by Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses* 2003, p. 7–13.
- 7 Michael Arbib, 'Toward a Neuroscience of the Design Process', in Sarah Robinson, Juhani Pallasmaa (eds.), *Mind in Architecture, Neuroscience, Embodiment, and the Future of Design*, The MIT Press, Cambridge MA, London, 2015, pp. 75–98.
- 8 Jennifer Hahn, 'Andrés Reisinger sells collection of "impossible" virtual furniture for \$450,000 at auction, Dezeen, 23 February 2021, <https://www.dezeen.com/2021/02/23/andres-reisinger-the-shipping-digital-furniture-auction/> accessed 19 May 2021.
- 9 Inspired by Juhani Pallasmaa's talk 'Body, Mind and Architecture' for the 2nd International Symposium SISU – The Impact of Space in Tallinn, 27–30 May 2015.10 Anni Albers, *On Weaving*, Princeton University Press, NJ, 1965, pp. 44–47.
- 11 John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, ch. 3, 'The Nature of Gothic', 1851
- 12 Serpentine Podcast, 'Future Ecologies, Enlichenment and the Triage of Life', 7 August 2019.

Image credits:

All images by Aistė Ambrazevičiūtė

A Forest is Like a City – With its own Streets, Squares and Different Land Uses

Interview with
Laura Garbštienė and
Onutė Grigaitė by
Jurga Daubaraitė and
Jonas Žukauskas



Grey hair-grass (*Corynephorus canescens*) found in L. Kutschera and E. Lichtenegger, *Wurzelatlas mitteleuropäischer Gruenlandpflanzen*, Band 1: *Monocotyledoneae*, Gustav Fischer Verlag, Stuttgart, New York, 1982, p. 516.

In 2020, we joined a hike along the Skroblus River organised by Verpėjos (The Spinners); an artistic initiative, assembled by artist Laura Garbštienė to research and discuss rural traditional lifestyle and nature preservation on a local and global scale. Among the participating artists and scholars, we met biologist Onutė Grigaitė. As we hiked, we talked about Laura and Onutė's unique motivations and how they live, study, and create in these actively deforested woods. Over several days, we followed the course of the Skroblus, a small river that begins in groundwater sources in Margionys and flows along deep fracture lines in the crystalline basin, winding through sand dunes overgrown with pine forests.

Laura moved to the village of Šklėriai, in the southern Lithuanian region of Dzūkija, to rethink her approach to art and her understanding of what constitutes a work of art. Living among the forests, she discovered forgotten practices related to agroforestry, sheep grazing, spinning, and plant-derived dyes, and created her own unique relationship to her environment.

After becoming a biologist, Onutė returned to her home village of Musteika, situated near the Čepkeliai mire, and began to study

an environment she already knew quite well, discovering new species in the process. Able to identify plants and ecosystems by name, she defends the chance to be in nature without severe restrictions, feeling a sense of responsibility through greater awareness.

In the following interview, which we conducted by email over the winter of 2020 and 2021 during the Covid-19 pandemic, we asked Laura and Onutė about their unique inner and personal motivations and their life among the marshes and sandy forests of Dzūkija, where trees are being cleared and environmental regimes are changing.

**Jurga Daubaraitė and
Jonas Žukauskas:**

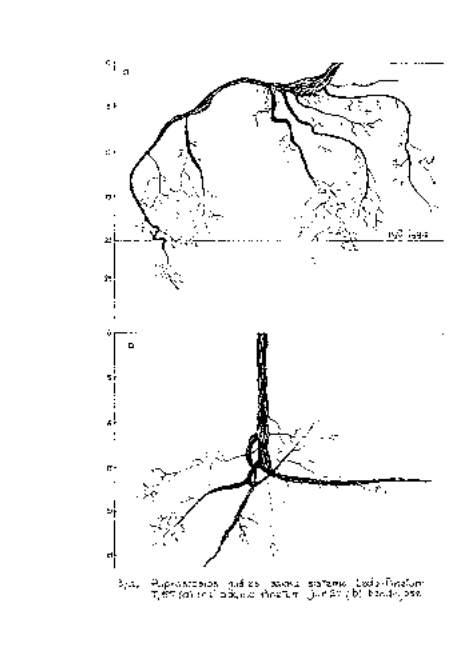
Onutė and Laura, how do you use, impact, and see the forest, since both of you live and work there?

Laura Garbštienė:

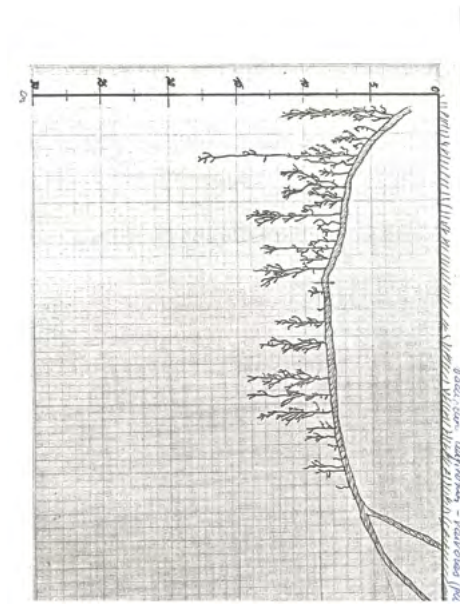
When I'm in the woods I feel like I'm in outer space, in a safe embrace, but in a boundless expanse at the same time, one that is impossible to comprehend. Here are just a few examples:

Losing a knitting needle

I take my sheep into the forest every day, and they lead me further in. My house is in the woods, and the woods are in a village. One September, as the boletus mushrooms had begun to sprout everywhere, I was walking behind the sheep, following where they'd lead me. I left them in a neighbour's field with newly growing trees, and I walked off a few metres away into a pine grove. I had four knitting needles in my right hand with a black sock I'd started, and a fifth needle in my left hand. I was studying one of the boletus and searching around it for smaller ones peeking out through the forest floor, when I heard my dog barking and saw the sheep run off. I ran after them across the small grove and found them all calmly together, while my dog was off in the distance, testing the trajectories of the other forest inhabitants with an occasional bark. I continued my knitting, but the fifth needle was no longer in my left hand. I tried to go back to the boletus I'd found, but all the pine needles and twigs had swallowed up my knitting needle, my footprints, and the precise way back to where I'd been. My feet tread on a motley, multi-coloured carpet. Sometimes I wonder if my needle got stuck in the wool of my oldest



Onutė Grigaitė, Pine roots (*Pinus sylvestris*)



Onutė Grigaitė Bog Blueberry (Vaivoras)
Vaccinium uliginosum roots

sheep – the very sheep I didn’t find time to shear in the autumn.

Losing a lamb

Another September, my small black sheep gave birth to a weak little lamb. I was taking the flock out to the woods and the lamb, left at home, began to bleat and asked to come along. The second day we all went out together, but the lamb would easily tire and would lie down to rest, and as the flock moved on her sheep would cry out. So, I’d pick up the lamb and

encourage the mother to hurry along and find the others. The sheep usually followed the same path, finding new little areas each day. The mother grumbled as she followed behind me, asking for her baby back. So, I’d put him down and, after taking a few steps together with us, the lamb would once again get tangled up in the bushes and piles of branches. The forest was very tasty, because it had been recently cleared. There were all sorts of sprouting black alder, willow, and aspen cuttings as well as cut tree branches that were already dry and therefore less tasty. They hadn’t decomposed yet and were strewn about everywhere, making it difficult to walk through the forest. The lamb grew slowly, but within a week he was stronger and was able to keep up with the others. One evening we stayed out longer, a bit further away – it was growing dark, and the sheep were still far from home. We got home just before dark. In the yard, the mother sheep noticed that her lamb was missing. I went out with a torch to find it, and I ran around in frightened circles, stopping now and then to listen. Sheep usually go quiet if they sense danger, especially in the dark. I listened again and made a few more circles until I finally heard a frail, childlike voice. The lamb was very close by, tangled up in a pile of branches. He had recognised me!

Onutė Grigaitė:

Today, I saw a migratory crane for the first time, and the emerging ants, too. The crane walked through the field all alone, carefully scouting out the few bare patches of ground that had emerged in the melting snow. I wondered what it might find there. I walked over and suddenly I understood: the old grass was studded with vole burrows. Clearly the crane was hunting here, since the bogs were still covered with snow. I got embarrassed that, until then, I’d never known what cranes look for in the fields, and that I’d brought half-frozen apples with me, hoping to feed them...

The guard ants had emerged into the world from the anthill to make ventilation holes. I was looking for living ants, because according to the old custom and belief, if you see an ant before you see a frog in the spring, you’ll be as quick as an ant... So, I saw the ant and brought home the wonderful news to my 88-year-old mother.

As I walked and waded through it, I thought about what the forest meant to me. Calling it a second home would seem both too banal and insufficient. As I live my life, I can always build and create a home – but I can’t do the same with a forest. I often say that humans

are part of nature, but even that is somehow shallow and doesn’t reflect reality.

An image came to mind: I’m like a plant, let’s say a bunch of grey hair grass, and my roots and their root hairs are the interfaces, connections, and synapses connecting me to the forest.

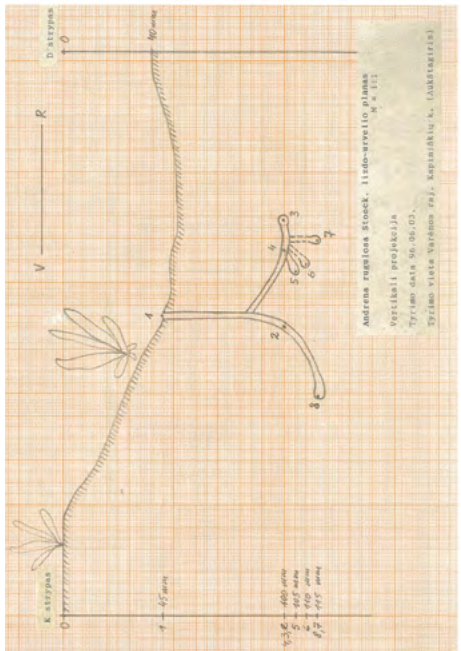
Through all of my senses and vital functions, especially breathing, those bonds reach into every one of my cells. And I name them like a child would: I breathe the oxygen made by the trees, my immunity is protected by the phytoncides from the pine groves, the forest provides me fully-fledged nutrition from the berries, mushrooms, and animals, as well as wood for my home and furniture, it protects me from floods and droughts, brings me sweets made by bees, and heals me with medicinal herbs and twigs. And thousands more yet undiscovered and unnamed but living and functioning reactions connect me to the forest. And if we talk about lifestyle, then mine, as a child of Dzūkija’s woods, is shaped by my experiences in the forest.

I might be wrong, but I’m going to be so bold as to compare life in the city with life among forests. I imagine that a human in the city is like a stone or a brick that interacts with his or her environment solely on the surface of that brick or stone. But a human interacting with the forest, as I said earlier, is like a plant with thousands of tiny roots, through which communication goes both ways.

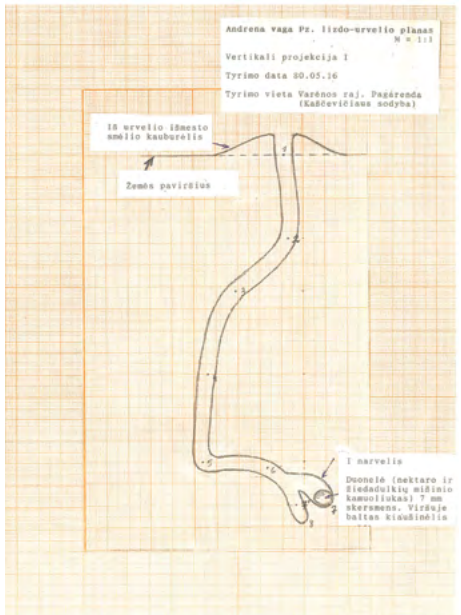
It pains me to think about the cleared forests, where the trees ‘die’ like people in a war. But I also ache for those reserve-protected forests, where no human is allowed to set foot, and where any of the signs of their harmonious coexistence is wiped out. Because we’re naturally encoded with the imperative to be in contact with nature, I believe that, once we recover from this chronic stroke, we’ll learn how to rediscover and build that connection with nature, with the forests, and with our environment, as part of our own roots.

JŽ:

I keep remembering how Laura and I drove around the area, along the Čepkeliai mire to Musteika, through the Vazdeliai Forest, where there are so many fields of cleared trees. I remember thinking about how I could look into the future, to watch the plants grow over many years in those clear-cut spaces, and how their interrelationships might recover. But do forests recover? After all, there are thousands of species working together along interrelated cycles; the time needed to grow a forest and



Virgilijus Monsevičius, *Andrena Rugulosa*,
Underground Beehive



Virgilijus Monsevičius, *Andrena vaga*,
Underground Beehive



recreate these connections is unfathomable for a human – you need to have a grasp of so many concepts and such complex knowledge to understand it all. Where we are now, on the Curonian Spit, the *Pinus mugo* (or mountain pines) being clear-cut were planted on drifting sand dunes more than one hundred years ago. When the mountain pines are completely cleared, they’re naturally be replaced by deciduous birch trees that prefer the new combination of a warming climate and the soils created by the mountain pines. When the forest changes this way, we lose our trails and the familiar species whose names we know... Laura, you were telling us recently about some aspens near you that were cut down for no reason, and whose wood no one eventually purchased. How do we rediscover our trails and the familiar trees and plants in cleared and reviving forests?

LG:

Every year, I can’t wait for the puddles and snowdrifts to dry up so we can go into the woods!

Jonas, I can relate to your desire to study everything and learn how things renew and how they’re interconnected. When I moved to the village, I created a short book called *Kaip pasėti mišką* (How to Plant a Forest). It was a set of instructions about how and when to collect tree seeds, how to germinate them, how long to keep them cold or warm, etc.

I brought back a decaying fruit, full of germinated seeds, that I had found under a quince tree in the spring at the botanical garden in Kaliningrad. I also brought back a branch from a flowering blackberry plant, from which I’ve grown an entire hedge. Bladder-senna seedlings can thrive, but they’re eaten away in the winter by rabbits; they apparently find them tastier than their relative, the common broom shrub, which grows naturally in these parts. The bladder-senna has very impressive roots – they grow like rope in the sand dunes near me, several meters into the ground.

After a while, I lost the urge to systematise everything and follow all of the cycles. I started to get to know everything through the experience of being. The longer I lived in that place, the more I have become one of the many elements of recovery in that cleared plot of forest. I have a hard time seeing the broader picture, because I’m in a very small fragment of time and space.

On the other hand, I want to have a dialogue and collaboration with professional researchers, which interests me not so much for the opportunity to share and spread information, but for the chance to create new meanings. As artists, researchers, or environmentalists, we work in different worlds, and if we venture into a foreign field, our work sometimes appears amateurish and therefore insufficient – which is what may have happened with *Kaip pasėti mišką* (How to Plant a Forest). The aspen trees were very thick and were cut in early spring. The bark peeled off easily from the trees, but I didn’t peel them because I couldn’t lift them. I wanted to strip them and make sashes and weave a carpet. Their bark has a beautiful surface. But they began to go bad and smell, and no one bought the wood until the summer, which is when a biofuel truck came and ground them up. I wanted to take that cubic metre of aspen wood and make all sorts of things from it, increasing its value a thousand times. But if it had been my cubic metre, of course, it would have been thriving and green to this day.

JD:

What about the clear-cut fields – do you visit them, and do the sheep find anything to eat among the stumps? What’s the grazing range of your sheep – where do you go with your flock?

LG:

I think about the sheep a lot. They’ll indicate whether they prefer the pine or the birch grove. But I’ve noticed that the places I like are also more suited to the sheep places where there’s more of everything – more old trees, hollows, creek banks, and shrubbery. They don’t want to get overheated in an open field in the summertime... Sheep probably aren’t true landscape managers – they lead you to the best place and they support that place, but they don’t essentially alter it.

Sometimes they won’t go to a spot, even though it seems to have things to eat. Last year there was a spot with good grass growing, a narrow strip of field between small and dense deciduous forests – between walls of green. I tried to nudge the sheep there several times, but they wouldn’t go. I think that may have been a deer spot – I’d sometimes see them there in the early morning.

If not for the increasing size of my sheep’s nursery school, I would never know it’s already spring – I can truly say I’ve lost track of time. I’ve heard that villagers would sit down to



Photos by Jonas Žukauskas

weave in March. They’d spin a supply of thread over the winter and load up their looms. I got this loom from the village of Margionys already disassembled, but with a design and fabric already started. I was able to put it all together and the pattern stayed the same as that of the unknown weaver from Margionys who had started it. Now I’m weaving it with my own thread.

JD:
This fabric looks like a Dzūkija chessboard, and the pattern is like a forest with a new owner. Can you tell us more about the routine of spinning thread that takes up more than just your wintertime? How did you establish the Verpėjos (The Spinners) artist initiative – what drove you and what were you hoping to find?

LG:
The fabric really is like a chessboard, but I don’t find the military association very appealing. Patterns have names, and this one is called *Žvaigždutės* (little stars). But it’s very similar to abstract, even op art. I think that the art of Dzūkija’s women has endured the longest as a continuing activity, because all of them knew how to weave. Some of the fabrics have a real ethereal effect, because they’re woven in shiny thread that catches the light. If you stare longer into that shimmering, it’s almost like you’re being pulled into another world. I myself only began weaving this year.



I learned to spin wool after I sheared my first three sheep. I wanted to respond to the prevailing view these days that spinning is nothing more than a demonstration of a vanished craft. I wanted to use spinning as a medium to hold a discussion about the cultural and social changes happening here, in a peripheral area, and invite artists and local people of different generations to come and spin together. That’s how Verpėjos came about – the first event of its kind to be both an exploration of art and a workshop for spinning wool. We visited women living deep in the forest, hoping to find those who still spun. Many said they’d only spun thread in their youth, but that they continued to weave all their lives, only with synthetic factory-made yarn. Very often, their guest rooms would be sparkling with woven bedspreads and curtains, all of it coming together into one single composition.

Gradually, the name Verpėjos took on a new symbolic meaning and began to include more people and different activities. We opened a gallery at the train station in Marcinkonys, we hold art exhibitions, but we still run into obstacles for the Verpėjos art residency.

For me, however, spinning is also a daily activity, a ritual. The Verpėjos orchestra project was conceived to invite people from different locations each time to come and spin together, followed by a performance as a ritual initiation into the community of spinners. Spending a

Wool hanks of yarn, colors spun and dyed by Laura Garbštienė using local flora and mushrooms:
■ Brown: fermented Alder buckthorn *Frangula alnus*
■ Light brown: walnut *Juglans exocarp*;
■ Light and dark blue: Dyer’s Woad *Isatis Tinctoria*;
■ Red: *Cortinarius semisanguineus* mushroom;
■ Bright orange: *Marigold Serentis*;
■ Green: Buckthorn *Rhamnus* berries;
■ Green yellowish: Corn Chamomile *Anthemis* and dipped into blue Dyer’s Woad *Isatis Tinctoria*;
■ Orange and khaki: Plains coreopsis *Coreopsis tinctoria*;
■ Light orange: onion peel;
■ Light yellow: Corn Chamomile *Anthemis*
■ Bright yellow – Common reed *Phragmites*

long time together spinning, in silence and listening to the sound of each other’s spinning gestures, is an activity that brings together people of different generations and experiences.

JŽ:
Laura, we love your Skudde breed of sheep and we look forward to seeing them at the Neringa Forest Architecture residency at the Nida Art Colony (NAC). They’ll graze there just like they do with you in Dzūkija, led by a shepherd around the forest and open areas, creating the opportunity to see the landscape by following them in their path.

In my mind, I keep seeing the hanks of yarn you’ve spun from your own sheep’s wool – they seem to be images of your daily walks through nature. What kind of spectrum of colours do you find in the woods?

LG:
I collect forest plants and extract dyes from them. I especially like to pick up parts of plants that are already lying about on the ground. For example, I peel buckthorn, willow, and alder bark from cut branches. There’s always a lot of them left on the forest floor, even after the branches have been collected and ground up for biofuel. I also like cemetery flowers like marigolds, from the village cemetery after the first autumn frosts. They’re already drooping, and some are still planted while others have already been plucked – I find those outside the fence. I’d also once planted some woad





Photos by Laura Garbštienė

flowers in my garden and they grow on their own now, delighting me with wonderful clouds of yellow when they bloom. They thrive here like flowers and could easily move on into the fields if there were any nearby, since they’re very prolific. But I’m surrounded by forest, so they stay put. It’s a biennial plant and seeds itself in the best spots in the garden. I like to concentrate bold colours in one place in my wool, even though sources of vivid pigments in nature are rather limited. That’s why you can only take small, concentrated amounts of them. There’s probably never too much of anything in nature, and I’m careful what I take. And I wouldn’t physically be able to take any more. It’s wonderful when you see a colour that isn’t usually visible. I can’t get much of a red pigment, but if there’s a rainy autumn, I can sometimes find red-gilled webcap mushrooms. Actually, I was very lucky last November and picked a lot of them in the pine forests on the coast of Nida. All sorts of processes occur during dying – fermentation, reduction, and some that are almost comparable to the way milk transforms into yogurt, for example – but it’s also a kind of laboratory process.

JD:
Onutė, you mention ‘disappearing signs of coexistence’, and that you’re pained by cleared forests and the impenetrable reserve areas that are off limits. What kind of new relationship with forests do you imagine? What would be worth changing now and in the more distant future?



Are drawings of plants or lichen part of your academic work? How do you use the drawings and notes in your work, do they become continuing ideas over many years?

OG:
I’m glad that you forced me to search through my old papers for root drawings that I made between 1984 and 1985, when I was preparing my dissertation. I was comparing the roots of land-grown plants with those growing in marshes. I was able to find some – I had to press a few drawings to even out the wrinkles. It’s a schematic that I redrew: roots from small pine trees growing among bog woodland with Labrador tea and dryer lichen pine forests (kerpšilis); and a stem from a bog blueberry growing in a bog. It was nothing special, but I still remember the feeling of digging around in the sand or the peat moss and realising the endless diversity that exists in the roots we don’t readily see...And how they, like some sentient beings, arrange themselves to ensure that their plants thrive and blossom.

As I looked through my things, I found drawings and schematics of wild bee nests by my colleague, the late Dr. Virgilijus Monsevičius. Virgilijus was a European-class specialist in wild bees. He inventoried as many as 324 bee species in Lithuania. Some of them live in the ground and two nests have been recorded in these drawings. The architecture of both roots and ground nests is meant to ensure a good life.

It hurts to see the forest being cleared so widely and disrespectfully. I’m not against

growing parts of forests for harvesting, but I dream of a way of clearing that would protect some of the trees and not harm or hamper them. Yesterday an elderly man from the village told me how they used to cut birch trees 40 to 50 years ago and carry them by hand or pull them on a sled, making sure not to graze or scrape the bark on an adjacent fir tree. But nowadays they come with combines, even when they’re just doing maintenance or thinning work...

It’s painful, because I believe there’s an existential bond between humans and trees. Yesterday, that 82-year-old man said to me: ‘Do you see how many broken trees there are? Old people used to say: “That’s a sign of how many people will be broken or depart this world...”’

In my childhood, when all three generations would gather together, our conversations in the evenings would revolve around what we’d seen in the woods, what paths we’d walked, where we’d picked berries, where the animals grazed, where we’d seen a moose, etc. And how many wonderful names there are! For paths, woods, glades, meadows, pine trees... A forest is like a city with its own streets, squares, and different land uses. Now, we might even compare a ravaged forest to a demolished city.

People used to herd animals, pick berries, hide, and hunt in areas that are now declared reserves. We’ve completely pushed people out, so paths are now overgrown, fields are open, many plants have disappeared, old roads have become overgrown, and we’ve lost open habitats and many rare species along with



Building where the Musteika village school was founded by Honorata and Tadas Ivanauskas in 1918. Photo by Asta Žūkaitė

them. We’ve become so deprived. And we’re not even thinking about how to return people to that harmonious coexistence – quite the opposite. For example, in the Čepkeliai Strict Nature Reserve they plan to reduce or even entirely stop issuing permits for local residents to pick cranberries. I dream of working with local residents and visitors to find ways to revive pathways, roads, and glades through volunteer initiatives, reporting, research, and specialised hikes. I think that most people don’t even know what a natural forest is, because they’ve never seen or experienced one. And I don’t really have anything to offer them, since we’re not allowed to visit the reserve. That relationship with the forest has to be an equal one, established as one would with another being, not a raw material.

They’re trying to ‘reconcile the insatiable forestry industry’ and the naturalists. The imposed point of reference consists of the threat of EU sanctions and the suspension of funding for structural projects so long as *Natura 2000* areas aren’t protected according to commitments undertaken upon admission to the EU – a delay of 12 years already... I’m concerned that there’s no discussion whatsoever about ecosystemic forest services. Or, for example the proposal that has been made to cut out a glade to create more of a mosaic pattern, but when they remove those trees, they’re also removing the nutrition for creatures of the forest floor, such as bacteria, etc., that feed the forest by decomposing organic matter, and so many other as yet unknown interrelationships with other species.

What needs to change, first of all, is our way of thinking, and the starting position for a dialogue. In my mind, society has to receive comprehensive information. What is a forest and what is our real situation – who’s going to tell us this? The timber magnates will do that by representing their own interests, they have the money for that. But how much will the public organisations be able to say without

funding and without a serious scientific foundation and estimates about the natural economy? I hope that artists might be able to build some bridges in this regard...

JŽ:
Onutė, you’re driven by an inner motivation to study and understand how your natural surroundings work. What compelled you to become a scientist?

I ask because I’d like to understand how this motivation is passed on, and how we might think about fostering a relationship with our environment in the future. It seems to me that, outside of high politics, an inner human drive can create the opportunity to change our estrangement from natural systems and change our perception of forests as nothing but a material resource. What do you think?

OG:
The fact that I am what I am now is no great accomplishment of my own – I was simply guided by my inner voice, the advice of others, and fortunate circumstances. I never thought about working as a scientist – I didn’t even know what that was.

I finished first grade in a building in which the first Lithuanian language school in Musteika was opened in 1918 by the young couple Tadas and Honorata Ivanauskas.¹ Their own sense of patriotism brought them back to Lithuania from St. Petersburg, Russia after the revolution, to teach at a forest village school. Since Professor Ivanauskas later visited the school every year, I seem to remember running down the village road in 1969 to greet him. Much later, I learned that he would bring or send his own books for us to read. But I had considerable difficulty reading in those early classes, so I didn’t read those books or have any interest in them. In the village, we played with nature – chasing butterflies and dragonflies, waging war with pine cones, swinging from pine tree branches, tasting shoots and gooseberry bushes – this is how we learned about nature, apparently... Because naturalists were always following Ivanauskas’ trodden paths and finding their way to our village, one of them once spent the night on the hay in our barn, and around 1975 he gave us a copy of Ivanauskas’ *Gamtininko užrašai* (A Naturalist’s Notes). I ‘consumed’ that book and was surprised to see how much he’d written and in such a unique way about places that I knew so well. I also read a copy of the magazine *Mūsų gamta* (Our Nature) that the pastor had given me.

I chose biology because I absolutely wanted to live in the village among the forests. When the Čepkeliai Reserve was established in 1975, I dreamed of returning to familiar places and working there. At the university, I said that if I couldn’t go to work studying the Čepkeliai mire, I would go to Belarus and teach at schools in the Lithuanian communities there. I got the chance to work in Čepkeliai thanks to a miracle and many tears. I’ve always been drawn to the marsh wetlands – of all the biomes, to me they are the most beautiful, lovely, and familiar. After that, the Botanical Institute was working on a monograph about Lithuanian flora, so they needed someone to study high marshes. I finished my dissertation, but after that I didn’t really want to leave my native Musteika village or Čepkeliai mire to work at the institute, so I didn’t continue my work as a research scientist...

Whenever I see children in the village or in the marshland, I always think that those veins that carry the water of life – which we share with our environment – are a part of our nature, both on a physical and a spiritual level. It’s important that those veins do not become blocked or too narrow. Or, what about the sensitivity towards nature felt by artists who’ve grown up in the city. Where does that come from?

As I’ve been thinking, I recall something that Professor Ivanauskas once said: ‘We can’t solve anything with laws if people aren’t taught to love nature from childhood.’

I still hope that future generations will consciously reduce their material demands at nature’s expense and will find more of themselves in nature and more of nature within themselves, and a more fulfilling life at the same time.

After all, that’s why we work together, each in our own way – which is good for us, is it not?

Endnotes
¹ Honorata Paškauskaitė-Ivanauskienė was an educator and Prof. Tadas Ivanauskas was a zoologist and biologist and a leading scientist in interwar Lithuania and, later, during the Soviet occupation.

Photo overleaf by Jonas Žukauskas



The Timber Couturier



Kotryna Lingienė
Photographs of the
studio and residence of
Jonas Prapuolenis by
Rasa Juškevičiūtė



Portrait of designer
Jonas Prapuolenis



‘We’d go mushroom picking with my father; I’d be the one hunting for mushrooms on the ground, and he’d be looking up in search of the perfect trees for his future creations; he’d then inform the rangers of his choices, and they’d cut the wood for him,’ Bangutis Prapuolenis recalls while showing us around a two-storey workshop that once belonged to his father.

Jonas Prapuolenis is arguably the best-kept secret of furniture design in the history of Lithuania. Born in 1900 in a small town in the Suvalkija region, he moved to Kaunas to learn his craft as soon as he could, and never looked back. He later studied in Paris and took inspiration from the art deco furniture designer Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann. In 1937, the Lithuanian prodigy exhibited his work in the Lithuanian section of the Baltic Pavilion at the Exposition Internationale in Paris, where he was awarded gold and silver medals. Bangutis laughs that his father wasn’t too keen on farming, but it’s interesting that Jonas’ father was a carpenter and his mother was a weaver.

The ideas inspired by both interbellum Western fashion and Lithuanian ethnic motifs have survived the test of time. Prapuolenis’ precious work was valued by both the elite of Kaunas and, later, by the Soviet decision-makers. Today, furniture enthusiasts looking to secure an authentic piece made by Prapuolenis have as much chance of winning the lottery. Bangutis, who was in his late teens when his father passed away, inherited Jonas’ talent and insightfulness; he is often commissioned to refurbish items owned by local museums or art deco aficionados. ‘My father had a principle not to copy himself – he’d make a single furniture set, one of a kind. Very, very rarely, he’d make similar versions, but only the original would be branded,’ recalls Bangutis, who’s also a lecturer in furniture restoration. In Soviet times, his father used to make prototypes for mass production but some designs were too elaborate for that.

Young Jonas was a volunteer in the Lithuanian Wars of Independence at the end of the first world war; and like other volunteers, he was given a generous amount of land in lieu of his services, on what was then the outskirts of Kaunas. The city, of course, grew, and just before the second world war Kaunas Clinics – the largest medical institution in Lithuania and the Baltic States – was built right next to Jonas’ land. Back in the 1920s however, Jonas found himself in a poplar grove and used the logs as building materials for his new workshop. He’d sleep there, too, as he didn’t

care much for the comforts of his home. ‘He preferred to create beautiful things for others,’ Bangutis explains while serving hot coffee in porcelain cups and chocolate-coated biscuits. We sit down in the former workshop to warm ourselves up before moving on to the current one.

It’s easy to lose track of time while sinking into the wooden chairs made back in the 1920s for Adomas Galdikas – a famous Lithuanian artist and schoolmate of Jonas – and glancing over at the piles of vinyl records beside you. On top lies ‘Out of This World’ by Tangerine Dream. ‘Yeah, I like music,’ nods the only son



of Jonas. Today, he’s the owner of the most extensive collection of Prapuolenis furniture. Museums are the runners-up. The Museum of Applied Arts and Design in Vilnius owns all of the furniture and other items made by Prapuolenis for the former Embassy of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic in Moscow. There’s an exciting story about it.

‘Romualdas Budrys, head of the Lithuanian National Museum at the time, went to Moscow to retrieve the collection when the Soviet Union collapsed – even the ashtrays there were made by my father. He once told me that, after packing all of the furniture, he walked around the estate and saw a few local workers sitting on a bench. He immediately recognised the Prapuolenis work and did not hesitate to take it too!’. The Moscow furniture is not exhibited, but a few of Prapuolenis’ sets can be seen in their natural habitat in the historic homes of artists and writers in Kaunas.

There’s more to the legacy of Prapuolenis than chairs, tables and closets. A delicate piece of his art has recently been refurbished in the Kaunas Garrison Officers’ Club Building. It

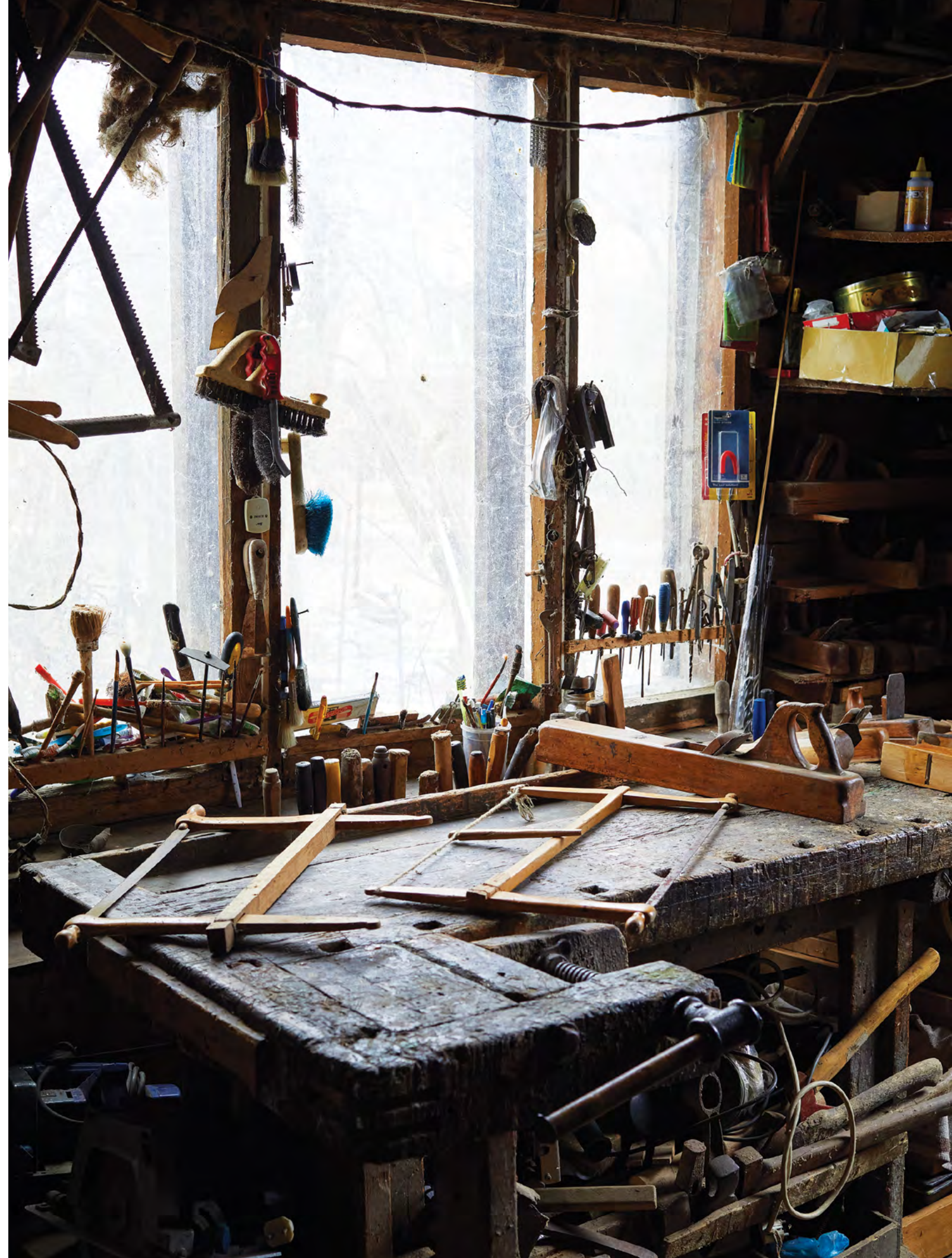
is a wonderful interwar architecture heritage gem representing the subtle blend of modernist trends and national style. The piece – a weaved oak and ash tree parquet floor pattern in the main hall – has witnessed thousands of shoe soles and heels during its 80-something years of history. The staff had intended to replace it, but Bangutis and his colleagues managed to influence the decision.

‘Oh, my father also made jewellery from bone and amber!’ Bangutis adds as we start walking over to the workshop. But first, we must see the tabletop collection, which could easily pass as a painting exhibition.

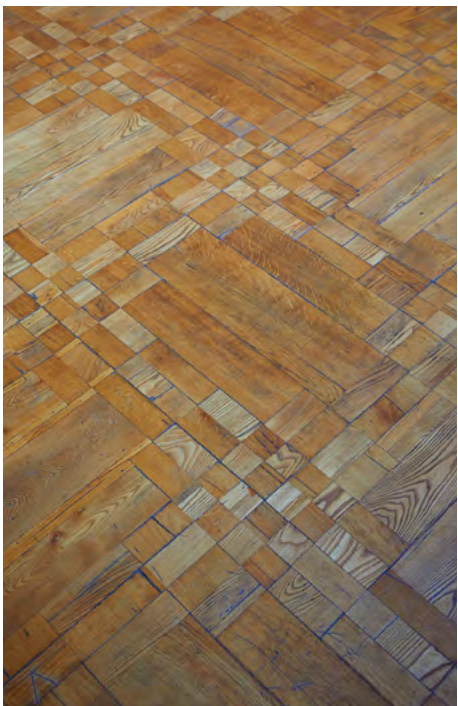
To mark Jonas’ 70th birthday, an extensive exhibition was organised. Together with his most prolific work, Jonas decided to show a variety of tabletops made from Lithuanian timber (he typically only used Lithuanian wood), including apple tree and ash. Each kind of timber and each individual tree has its own distinct texture, as if it were a language of patterns. Jonas developed a special technique of cutting logs into small plates to reveal a specific grain. Other artisans tried, unsuccessfully, to replicate and master this secret skill. Maybe – it’s a wild guess – the skill was down to the tools that Jonas used – machinery, hand planes, and shaving tools that he had made himself. These aren’t just tools but artworks in their own right – the handles are bird-shaped.

Another secret of Jonas’ craft – and one that Bangutis is still trying to master – is the use of wet timber. One has to know precisely how the moisture evaporates from a tree and what shape it will conceive. ‘Everyone knows how to make things from dry wood – but try the wet one!’ Jonas used to laugh. But it wouldn’t be fair to say he didn’t like to share his knowledge. After all, the new workshop was intended to become a craft school. He built it in 1939, and soon enough, the scenery changed. The Soviets occupied Lithuania; Prapuolenis decided it’d be best to leave the idea and save the house from nationalising and himself from deportation. His brothers were taken to Siberia. Jonas remained in Lithuania and started teaching in his former alma mater, and later in Vilnius, before settling in Kaunas for good.

‘Perhaps I learned more from my father’s students than from him,’ Bangutis wonders while showing us a summer house next to the workshop. It’s his father’s last work. Jonas passed away in 1980, just a couple of weeks before his 80th birthday.





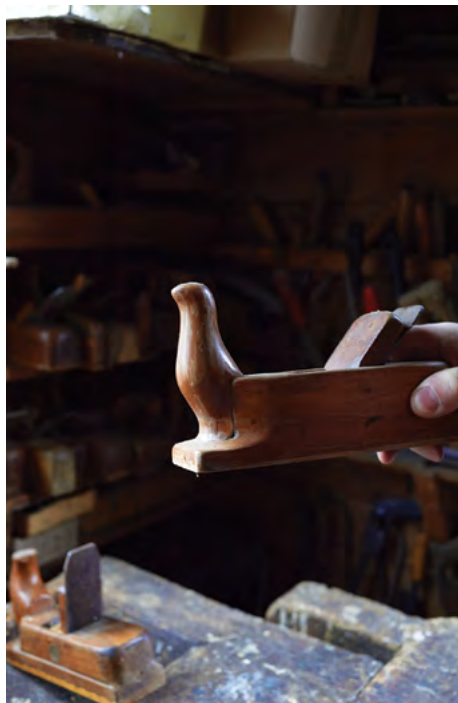


Left: the authentic workplace shaped by the designer himself

Above: the tabletop collection by Prapuolenis, accompanied by a shot of the parquet in the Kaunas Garrison Officers' Club Building







Left: shots from the house, workshop and yard of Prapuolenis, reflecting different timber patterns and uses – his handmade tools, too

Above: attention to the smallest detail – even the handle of the instrument resembles a bird, the signature detail of Prapuolenis

For Potato Peel



Monika Janulevičiūtė



Right now, I am going over screenshots of benches, zoomed in and cropped from photographs taken by real estate agents and the relatives or owners of homes that are up for sale. I try to sort out, at least visually, the benches found in kitchens, main entrances, thresholds of hallways, greenhouses and pre-chambers of saunas. Unknowingly tracing some likeness back to the household members of the legged structures, usually with four legs or two panels at either end and no backrest. They are idling, quietly awaiting labour, a feeling that permeates the boundaries of time. Benches here are simply tools and crutches built to paint the ceilings, kindle fire, wipe the noses of children, and peel potatoes. They accompany the household and are as energetic, stubborn and capricious as mules, lambs and baby goats. They were destined to have limp legs. Their hip joints are already slightly twisted.

I sit down and summon myself for a conversation about what I do with pleasure. Attempts to describe it lurch, uncontrollably. I cannot reach a satisfying aesthetic simplicity for any of these interpretations. So, when I observe my behaviour towards materials, I behave as a decomposer and transformer, because I don't see anything in life in a sort of blank page way. I love to scrape and grind, and I like ambiguity. I tried to recreate and rebuild, not just mimic the benches I saw on real estate portals, from the houses they were used in. And step by step I built and hammered legs into planks and offcuts, materialising my internal topologies of stepping and sitting surfaces. I approach this structure as a carrier, a point of exchange, a haven, shelving actions. Of course, finding myself in such a workflow, stretching almost hysterically from the joy of learning to clumsiness, I became interested in noticing how we 'scratch brackets' on processes that are so long. How do I know this is happening? And how I think and trick myself, and how that sooner or later fails to satisfy. Taking a cue from the mathematician and philosopher Alfred Whitehead, the advance of civilisation is better indicated by the amount of important operations performed without thinking about them, rather than the laborious intellectual scrutiny. I want to consider that remark on positivist, progressive, egalitarian and processual planes. The things we know are partial. It takes a lot of time, or in some cases courage, to sit with it personally, artistically and begin to see this more as an opportunity.

Thinking about the chain of production I returned to F.A. Hayek's *The Use of Knowledge*



*in Society*¹. Manufacturing and logistics are so tense in a fatigued pandemic market, that we ultimately seek decentralised ways of optimising and dispensing materials without needing to tell others what to do about it. As coupling and decoupling members of contemporary communities we genuinely expect some of the non-interference guarantees, as we personally have stakes, hopes and commitments to these economic clusters that we want to see succeed. So, the inefficiency of economic order that we deal with is not that it is irrational. The premise and set up of it is entirely rational, but the knowledge of resources and utilities is fragmented and scattered. That also results in inelapsable partiality and contradictoriness. And as we go on talking about procurements, clear cuttings, subsidies, and the shredding of misplaced mountain pines, we talk about planning, and we talk about commons, we talk about living together. In Neringa, for example, the pines were like tall felted fences, acclimated sandstoppers, postal road guards that later became the cultural imprint of a coastal forest.

Architect and activist Yasmeen Lari, who worked for decades on disaster relief and housing projects for poverty stricken Pakistani villages, accentuated the financial feasibility and physical comfort of vernacular architecture. Her principles closely tie skills with the reinvigoration of the general financial status by making, selling and buying for themselves, rather than being invested in the globalist ideal of production for urbanites

and the wealthy. Something similar is highly noticeable in the language used around Lithuanian *troba* (a traditional wooden house). The building's perimeter is called *vainikas* – a garland. The voids and entrances are not regarded as cut-outs or holes. It's the same with weaving, or basketry – these apertures are not something opposite or outside of the process. On the contrary, they are the process.

The term 'scientific knowledge' has a blind spot and a distaste for the knowledge of people, local resourcefulness and connections, which Hayek exaltedly describes as 'special knowledge of circumstances of the fleeting moment not known to others'. The fascination with the grandness of things and a global cultural focus denies or avoids admitting how much of the local potential, and ultimately different needs, is omitted. This silent narrative of things that are small, liquid and quick to be put in secondary markets or uses, means that a lot of comfort, appreciation, dexterity and elegance gets overlooked and replaced with generic, industrial, uniform objects, as an extremely obvious example of the 'Airbnb-ification' of interiors, which grant seamless travel or even a home from home experience.

Then we return to the point that in a household, or in close proximity, 'produced' objects contain a fraction of specificity and robustness against globality. The surfaces retain high sensibilities: roughness, soundproofing, the modular partitioning of spaces. At the same time, we see how various planes of different aesthetics, affections



and attachments spring out of this, and we compare and rant about it. Handmade, local, socioculturally integral or also in the broadest (even *tackiest* if you want) sense homemade objects are pressured to be both worthless and extremely precious. But they are calendars, *hard drives* – not made or comprehended in terms of efficiency – because in things, in matter, these transformations of attention, work and care rephrase themselves with each sitting.

This text is dedicated to my first bench and was a starting point for an upcoming body of work. The comparative study yet to be bound is looking into the overlapping of craftsmanship and design as resilient artistic practices. The figure and structure of a bench becomes a metaphor to look into quotidian necessities, decorum, and the relationships between these value points in different regions.

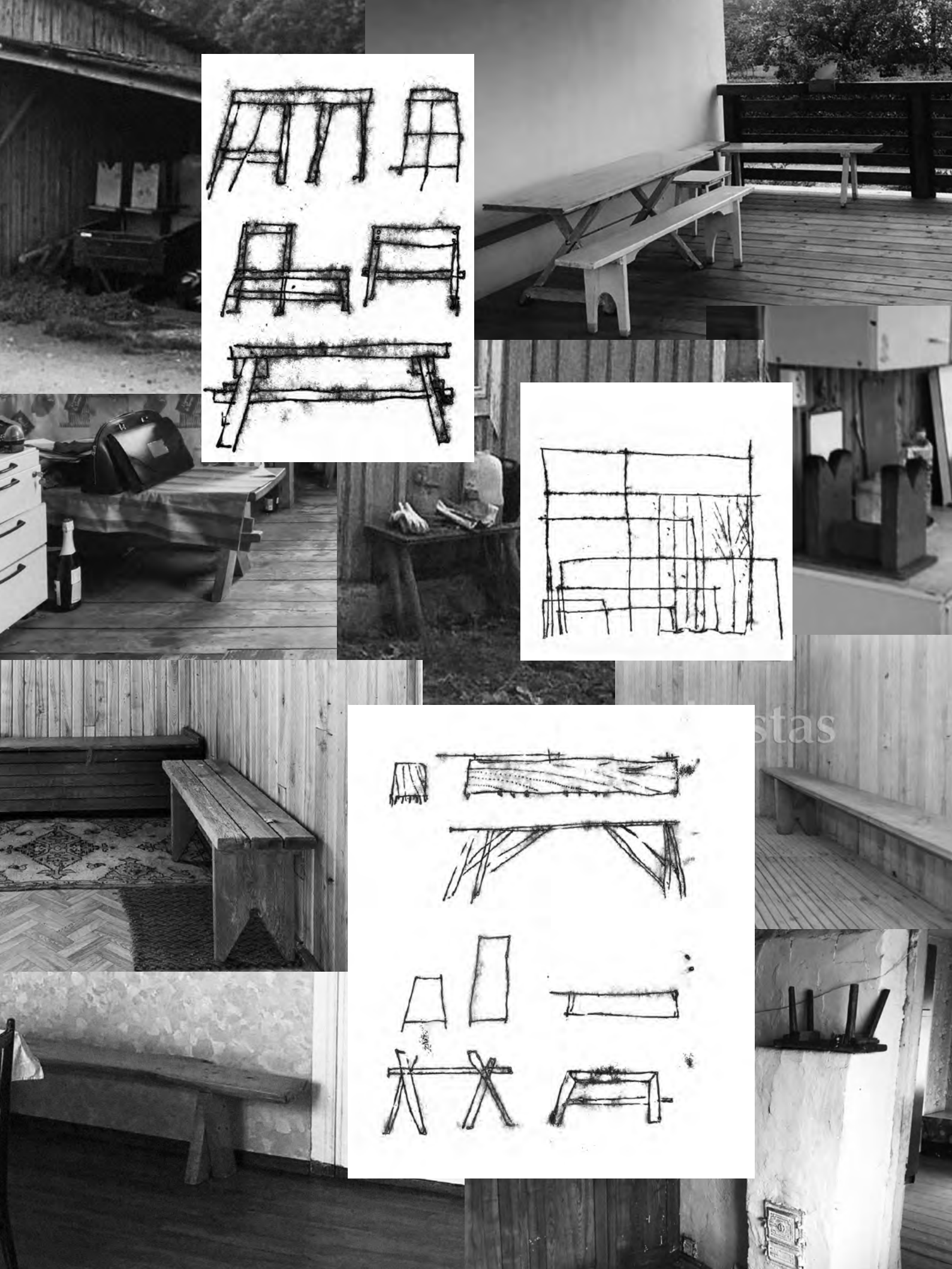
Endnotes

1 Friedrich A. Hayek, ‘The Use of Knowledge in Society’, *American Economic Review*, XXXV, No. 4, September 1945, <https://www.econlib.org/library/Essays/hykKnw.html> accessed 19 May 2021.

Image credits:

Right: photos found on property websites with drawings by Monika Janulevičiūtė

Above: photos by Gedvilė Tamošiūnaitė



Neringa

Forest

Architecture

Jurga Daubaraitė,
Egija Inzule and
Jonas Žukauskas





Mountain pine forest in Neringa to be clear cut

Reflecting on the agency of cultural practices and institutions in framing environmental relationships we initiated the project Neringa Forest Architecture (NFA) at Nida Art Colony (NAC) of Vilnius Academy of Arts (VAA), in Nida, which is located in the Lithuanian part of the Curonian Spit – a 98 km long, and 0.4–3.8 km wide sand dune that separates the Curonian Lagoon from the Baltic Sea. Over the past 200 years, afforestation and sequential planning on the spit have terraformed the environment to manage natural geomorphological processes. The unique role and duty of care for this constructed cultural landscape poses complex challenges for the agencies and institutions that maintain it declared the Curonian Spit National Park in the 1990s and later, together with the part in Kaliningrad Oblast, Russia, included it on the UNESCO world heritage list.

The main institutions responsible for forest management on the spit are the Curonian Spit National Park and Juodkrantė as well as the Nida forest districts belonging to the Kretinga Forestry. They plan and carry out fire prevention and landscaping fellings, design and implement open spaces for grasslands, and reconstruct mountain pine forests; vast landscape areas that have reached their biological age limit. Through this work,

approximately three thousand cubic metres of wood is annually logged in Neringa.

As this timber is often irregular due to coastal climatic conditions it is considered unsuitable for more complex industrial processes. Therefore, most of the logged timber is currently shredded into chips that are used by biofuel or paper producing companies. In 2015 the last sawmill operating on the spit in Juodkrantė, which was preparing lumber for local use, was closed down. The remaining work spaces and storage facilities have been or are in the process of being redeveloped to become holiday rental homes. The forestry regulations on the spit were gradually adapted to optimise, simplify and prioritise outsourcing timber from mainland industrial suppliers – extending its geography by hundreds of kilometres.

As a continuous programme, NFA involves a growing assembly of collaborations and participants to look at this cultural landscape from myriad perspectives and practices as a case study in the context of the Baltic and Scandinavian forests, considering it as an entanglement of natural systems, representations, colonial and industrial narratives. NFA focuses on the forest as a constructed space, an infrastructure, an environment reliant on human actions –

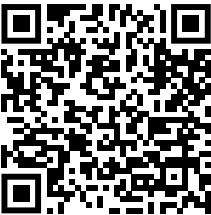
shaped, regulated, governed and exploited.

What narrative, which history and myths form the basis of the societal regulations, agreements, political decisions and understandings that define this landscape? Which definition of nature is used to perform the spatial arrangements and representations that this landscape stands for? Why does this landscape, this forest, look the way it does and what are the institutions that commonly formulate and implement its imaginary?

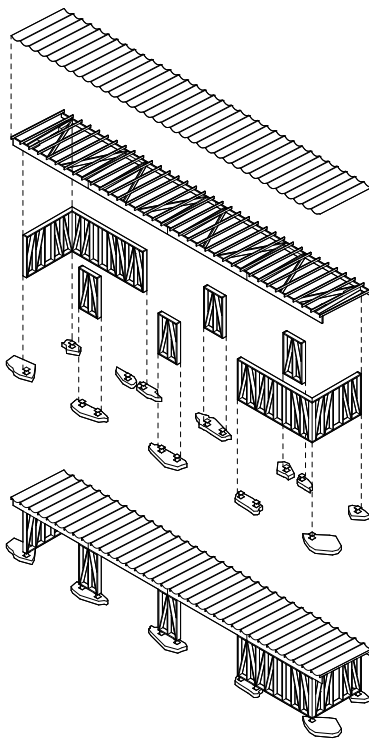
We said we would launch a programme that starts from, is based upon, and is represented by a pile of timber, first seeking possibilities to make use of the industrial process taking place in Neringa as part of NAC; an art institution invested in giving agency to matter. In order to modify the perception and enable an immersive approach to tackle some of the questions above, in dialogue with Forest Parts (a research project started in 2019 by Jurga Daubaraitė and Jonas Žukauskas in response to the urgency of societal debate sparked by recent forestry reforms in Lithuania) we thought this material, a nearby resource, could open up possibilities for diverse practitioners residing at NAC, as well as VAA students, to engage with the local infrastructure, acknowledging and studying the specificity of this material as well



as contributing a little to breaking the spell of expanding the elimination of production facilities in the Curonian Spit. This practice results in the disappearance of public facilities tailored by and for the local inhabitants as most of the space is turned into the service of holiday makers.



Forest Parts, the Pine Sample – a display of Neringa Forest as infrastructure, past and future: a research project by Jurga Daubaraitė and Jonas Žukauskas, 2019



The Curonian Spit was declared a resort destination of Prussia by Wilhelm II in the late nineteenth century. Visitors from the north of Germany embarked to experience this region as a new holiday destination. In the realm of imperialism, similar to the exotisation of remote, not yet industrialised territories with a strong presence of nature in the European colonies, the Curonian Spit underwent a comparable process. Its unique white dunes and particular habits of the seemingly isolated local inhabitants, gave space to imagination based on comparisons en vogue at the time: ‘Sahara of the North’ has been an often quoted description of the grand dune surrounding Nida. Holiday makers, among them artists, writers, filmmakers, contributed to building this common imaginary based on a perception from the ‘outside’, depicted in the form of paintings, storytelling, and moving image that in retrospect continues to influence the formation of the landscape we are currently surrounded by.

A material study allows us to avert focus from the grand, distanced image to acknowledge the multiplicity of elements with their own histories and roots allowing us to trace the complex entanglements of narratives shaping nature as a human-made system. In conversation with forester Romas Andrusevičius, who is implementing logging plans and administering contractors in Nida, an agreement was made and a process was defined that allowed NAC to purchase timber from Kretinga Forestry. The first batch of around twenty cubic metres of timber logged during the winter months was acquired in 2020 and the second in 2021. A surprisingly broad spectrum of timber are logged in Neringa, among them pine, spruce, black alder, birch, ash, robinia, linden, maple and chestnut. These logs were then cut into planks of various

sizes and thicknesses by the portable sawmill operated by Nerijus Bužas.

While the timber logs are stored and cut in the front yard of NAC, the car park is turned into a public workshop. In plain sight, NAC guests and passersby can follow the process of the timber entering this institution step by step from the nearby forest, to be used by VAA students and other practitioners associated with the NAC programme. Material processes are those that relate us to the place; local timber is not only a resource, it forms a portal, a possible entry point to study the landscape and complexity of natural processes in relation to the socio-political forces that form it.

Using the first batch of cut pine and spruce logs, a timber seasoning shed, designed by Jurga Daubaraitė and Jonas Žukauskas was constructed in June 2020 with the help of the artist Jurgis Paškevičius and many more supporters who were visiting and residing at NAC at that time. The structure floats on steel stilts fixed on foundation pads of shapeless concrete blocks salvaged from demolition works on the nearby Urbo Hill. The galvanised sheet metal roof is folded in sturdy U-shaped sections and untreated wood naturally greys from exposure to the sun and rain. The bark left on the outer edge of the boards softens the building’s silhouette against a background of regrowing woodland nearby.

Exposed to the wind, the shed is a display of different kinds of wood sampled from diverse locations in the Curonian Spit.

Dedicated to the preparation and storage of this unique and, for us, priceless material on site at NAC, it is a display of analogue data, an archive, a document, a material memory, an imprint of the landscape: the local timber sections inscribed with the morphology of growth rings reflect coastal and soil conditions resulting in twisted geometries and textures. In addition to the timber samples and timber library itself, maps, diagrams and selected stories of afforestation and logging in the Curonian Spit, printed on galvanised tin and mounted on the walls of the shed, provide facts and further information for general contextualisation and an understanding of the intertwined narratives at stake.

Time in Neringa is defined by two seasons: the high season, the summer months, buzzing with visitors and seasonal workers, and the off-season – the rest of the year. NFA works to a different time scale and, besides tourism, focuses on maintenance and infrastructure activities carried out in the spit. Instead of an ‘off-season’, we call this time the ‘timber season’. This is the time when timber is selected, logged and processed in the woodlands of the spit. This time also marks the period in which the Neringa Forest Architecture residency programme takes place.

The first participants of the residency programme arrived in Nida in November 2020. The architect Mantas Petraitis began working on the *Mountain Pine Alphabet*; a selection of organically grown joints of branches from the mountain pine fellings that he will use for furniture making. As a continuation of her residency, the artist Laura Garbštienė proposed that NFA work with her flock of Skudde breed sheep and bring them to Nida to graze in the forests over the summer. This proposal led to the initiation of the shepherd’s residency and we welcomed the sheep to Nida from June to October 2021 as a means to open up a discussion on cultural practices in relation to agroforestry and shepherding as an artistic process.

The architect and artist Aistė Ambrazevičiūtė embarked on a period of in depth research of lichens morphology in the forests of the Curonian Spit, while the journalist Adomas Zubė looked into the topic of forest fires in the Curonian Spit over the

Opposite Page:
Top: Talk with VAA students, photo by Julija Navarskaitė

Bottom: Jurgis Paškevičius helping build the timber seasoning shed



last 30 years. Spatial practitioner Gabriele Grigorjeva analysed concepts of forest time and cartographed its spatial definitions and the relationship to politics, while designer and researcher Signe Pelne researched the biofuel industry in the Baltics. The artists Antanas Gerlikas, Monika Janulevičiūtė, Andrej Polukord, and Nina Svensson worked in the wood workshop producing prototypes and sketches for works to come as well as furniture and textiles for NAC, thus contributing to changing the tactility of the industrial materials used in the building and enabling it to become a more authentic place and represent the production processes at stake in its programme.

The joy of experimenting with raw lumber and getting to know its character, and working with material that was not usually part of one’s vocabulary was shared by Bakers Forum (Jonas Palekas and Kamilė Krasauskaitė) and the graphic designer Nerijus Rimkus, who besides making timber furniture has developed the visual identity for the NFA project and its website. Furniture designer, maker, and one time journeyman Philipp von Hase supported NAC in planning and developing its workshops, while ecologist Emma Holmberg studied the language of woodworms and made tar from mountain pine roots. Film editor Anne Hovad Fischer, and researcher and environmental scientist Agata Marzecova investigated various kinds of stories of women appearing in the landscape of the Curonian Spit.

Besides the residency programme Neringa Forest Architecture is growing as a sedimentary infrastructure for many activities – children’s books that explore the natural world and the forest; walks organised in collaboration with local foresters, landscape planners and architects who are invested in the history, present and future of the Curonian Spit; as well as a series of talks and further occasions to share the viewpoints and create a platform using the local resource as a meeting point and common point of departure. The pile of timber becomes a signifier for shared knowledge and further debate on environmental relationships and cultural practices in the intersection of politics and technology.



Walk with Gediminas Virgilijus Dikšas, who is showing a map of tree species zoning around Nida



Mountain pine forest planting

Opposite page: Neringa Forest Architecture natural timber seasoning shed with lumber prepared in the forest seasons of 2020 and 2021

Image credits:

All images by Jurga Daubaraitė and Jonas Žukauskas, except talk with VAA students, photo by Julija Navarskaitė



Forest Paintings by Algirdas Šeškus

Virginija Januškevičiūtė





Algirdas Šeškus is predominantly known as a photographer who was active for a decade between 1975 and 1985, and then again from around 2012, after his early work gained recognition – first in Lithuania, and then internationally. His untimely casual-looking, and seemingly disorderly, early photographs have since been published in a number of catalogues and collected by major museums, and he has produced a handful of artist books featuring his recent digital photography. However, approximately two years ago he once again quit photography and returned to the medium that he had given up on back in the 1970s – oil painting.

The new paintings are part of his life-long exploration of art as ‘presence’, ‘being’, ‘entity’, as ‘all that there is’, ‘without features or nuance’. To Šeškus, art is either there or it’s not, or it’s not enough, and that’s all that matters. Not the subject matter, not what the artist wants, not the process and not the parts. An artwork, regardless of the medium, is a vessel for *everything* and should only be judged in regards to how well it contains it. In fact, the better the artwork, the closer it is to nothing at all.

‘I started painting because I wasn’t happy with the level of concentration in photography. Concentration of everything, and of art in particular,’ said the artist in a recent interview. ‘We used to ask what art is *like*, and I think the contemporary answer is *entity*. Maximum concentration, which turns into nothing. So if I see something – no matter where, in life, in photography, in other people’s work – and I realise that I can perhaps achieve a higher concentration, I paint,’ says Šeškus.

Contributors

Agata Marzecova

Agata Marzecova is a Tallinn-based researcher with a dual background in ecology and photography & new media. In her environmental research, she investigates changes to the ecosystems of small lakes and their catchments during the transition from Holocene to Anthropocene. In recent years, she has been working on art-led collaborative projects, which explore the porous boundaries between science, technology, aesthetics and environmental politics. In 2021, Agata was a resident of the Neringa Forest Architecture programme at Nida Art Colony (NAC) of Vilnius Academy of Arts.

Aistė Ambrazevičiūtė

Aistė Ambrazevičiūtė is a digital artist and experimental architect based in Lithuania. Her work focuses on the decorative arts of architectonics, where she celebrates and employs the forms, shapes and textures found in the intricate and complex nature of things. The goal of her practice is to stimulate the art of noticing and visualising unimagined reality. She is a creator of Plantasia Lab, where she designs digital plants using the intuitive imagination of technology. Currently she is a PhD-in-practice candidate at the Vilnius Academy of Arts working on the grammar of forest tectonics by lichens.

In 2021, Aistė was a resident of the Neringa Forest Architecture programme at Nida Art Colony (NAC) of Vilnius Academy of Arts.

Amelia Groom

Amelia Groom is a Berlin-based writer and art historian. Recent texts have addressed rust, stones, pareidolia, blurs, lichen, ventriloquism, and silence. Between 2018 and 2020 she was a postdoctoral fellow as part of the interdisciplinary research project 'environs' at ICI Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry, and in 2021 and 2022 she will hold a postdoctoral research position at The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. Her book *Beverly Buchanan: Marsh Ruins* was published in 2021 as part of the Afterall One Work series.

Eglė Budvytytė

Eglė Budvytytė is an artist based in Vilnius and Amsterdam working at the intersection between visual and performing arts. She approaches movement and gesture as technologies for a possible subversion of normativity, gender and social roles, and for dominant narratives governing public spaces. Her practice, spanning songs, poetry, videos and performances, explores the persuasive power of collectivity, vulnerability and permeable relationships between bodies, audiences and environments.

Cooking Sections

Cooking Sections is a London-based duo examining the systems that organise the world through food. Using site-responsive installation, performance and video, they explore the overlapping boundaries between art, architecture, ecology and geopolitics. Established in 2013 by Daniel Fernández Pascual and Alon Schwabe, their practice uses food as a lens and tool to observe landscapes in transformation. They have worked on multiple iterations of the long-term site-responsive *CLIMAVORE* project since 2015, exploring how to eat as humans change climates. In 2016 they opened The Empire Remains Shop, a platform to critically speculate on implications of selling the remains of the Empire today. Their first book about the project was published by Columbia Books on Architecture and the City. They lead a studio unit at the Royal College of Art, London, and were guest professors at the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich.

Cooking Sections has been nominated for the 2021 Turner Prize. They were awarded the Special Prize at the 2019 Future Generation Art Prize and were nominated for the Visible Award for socially-engaged practices. Daniel is the recipient of the 2020 Harvard GSD Wheelwright Prize for *Being Shellfish*.

Their latest book *Salmon: A Red Herring* is published by isolarii (2020) on the occasion of the namesake Art Now exhibition at Tate Britain.

Egija Inzule

Egija Inzule is the curator and director of Nida Art Colony (NAC) of Vilnius Academy of Arts in Nida, Lithuania. In order to respond to the hybrid character of NAC that includes running a residency programme, organising an international doctoral school, curating the

arts programme, hosting student seminars and managing the general premises of NAC, Inzule develops processes and initiates productions that emerge from historical, geopolitical and sociopolitical analysis and reflect on the Curonian Spit with a focus on the significance and agency of NAC in this context. Inzule has worked as a curator in the teams of castillo/corrales, Paris; Istituto Svizzero di Roma; and Shedhalle, Zurich. She is currently based between Zurich and Nida.

Gabrielė Grigorjeva

Gabrielė Grigorjeva is a London-based spatial practitioner and researcher working at the intersection of visual arts, architecture and environmental politics. In her research-led practice, she uses text, cartography and image-making to devise spatio-temporal approaches to complex territorial and geo-ecological disputes. Gabrielė holds a MA in Environmental Architecture at the Royal College of Art, where her work focused on the politics of resource extraction in the Atacama Desert, Chile. She is currently developing research on the concept of 'Planetary Health' in collaboration with Dr David Cross at the University of the Arts London. In 2021, Gabrielė was a resident researcher of the Neringa Forest Architecture programme at Nida Art Colony (NAC) of Vilnius Academy of Arts.

Jochen Lempert

Jochen Lempert is a biologist by training and a photographer based in Hamburg. During the 1980s he was a member of the experimental film and film-performance collective Schmelzdahin, where they researched the effects of bacteriological and chemical alterations of Super 8 film. Since then, in exhibitions and publications, Lempert has focused on analogies and correspondences of the animal and vegetal world. He almost exclusively uses a 50 mm lens to reproduce a natural view, and prints his black and white images on barite paper himself.

Jonathan Lovekin

Jonathan Lovekin is a British photographic artist based in London. In the last decade he has worked mainly with large format cameras, photographing rural and industrial landscapes; places normally overlooked or disregarded. He distills in the purest form, a knack for making

us look willingly at the most unlikely things, with the sensation that they are inexhaustible. Recently he has embarked on a series of portraits that absorbs details of human experience.

David Grandorge

Since 1996, David Grandorge has pursued the photography of buildings, cities and landscapes, their confluence and their reciprocities. His photographs, most often characterised by compositional precision and laconic expression, attempt to reveal the complexity and depth of the entanglements of humankind and the world. A book of his work *Still Beautiful* was published in 2018.

His work has been published and exhibited internationally, including the Prague Biennale of 2005, and the Venice Architecture Biennales of 2008, 2012 and 2016. He has held solo exhibitions at Rake Visningsrom, Trondheim (‘The World is Still Beautiful’), Peter von Kant, London (‘Without Sun’) in 2013 and Six Second Gallery (‘Landscapes of Variable Temperature’) in 2018.

Jurga Daubaraitė and Jonas Žukauskas

The guest editors of the *Forest as a Journal*, Jurga Daubaraitė and Jonas Žukauskas, are a duo of spatial practitioners currently based in Vilnius. Through architectural, curatorial and research projects they aim to create new relations between societies and their environment, past and future, by seeking to rearticulate architecture across a wider ecology of practices. They curated the exhibition ‘The Baltic Material Assemblies’ at the AA Gallery and RIBA in London (2018), and were co-curators of The Baltic Pavilion at the 15th International Architecture Exhibition at the Venice Biennale (2016), and co-editors of *The Baltic Atlas* published by Sternberg (2016). Among other projects Daubaraitė and Žukauskas are currently working on the Creative Playground and Garden in Vilnius.

Together with Egija Inzule, as well as working together on the new publishing initiative Kirvarpa, they initiated Neringa Forest Architecture at Nida Art Colony in 2019, as a research and residency programme based on spatial and material processes. The programme that investigates the Curonian Spit as a case study in the context of the Baltic and Scandinavian forests, considering it as an

entanglement of ecologies, representations, and both colonial and industrial narratives.

Kotryna Lingienė

Kotryna Lingienė is a Kaunas-based culture journalist and editor working with both text and audio. She has a background in architectural history, with a focus on the interwar modernist legacy in Kaunas; the former temporary capital of Lithuania.

Rasa Juškevičiūtė

Rasa Juškevičiūtė is a photographer and filmmaker working in Paris and Lithuania. She directs, shoots and edits her films. Her work is often multilayered, connecting fashion, fine art and activism. She is inspired by different subcultures and real-life situations.

Laura Garbštienė

Laura Garbštienė is an artist based in Šklėriai, a small village near Dzūkija National Park, where she lives with a small herd of Skudde sheep, spinning their wool as a daily practice. She promotes spinning as an anti-capitalist movement that unites people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Laura is interested in temporal art forms, as well as spinning as a process that in itself has the magical power to unite, and simultaneously help us understand the constant change and flow of nature. In 2017 she founded Verpėjos (The Spinners) – an artist-run initiative to research and discuss rural, traditional lifestyles and nature preservation, and activate discourse on changes and processes, both local and global. Since 2019 she has run a gallery in the historic Marcinkonys trainstation building, and in 2020 established the Verpėjos residency programme. In 2020, she was a resident of Neringa Forest Architecture programme at Nida Art Colony (NAC) of Vilnius Academy of Arts.

Onutė Grigaitė

Onutė Grigaitė describes herself as ‘a child of the Dzūkija forests to my very roots’, and believes she was destined by Dalia, the Baltic goddess of fate, to be born, grow up, and live in a village among the marshes and woods. After graduating she was given the chance to work and study the botanical world of marshes, forests, and fields. Her hope is that more people

will become open to learning about Nature and thereby discover the sacredness of both Nature and their own Being.

Mindaugas Survila

Mindaugas Survila has a MA degree in biology from Vilnius University, and has since been following his childhood dream to make films about what is closest to him – nature. At the end of his graduate studies in Ecology and Environmental Management Mindaugas completed his first film *Meeting the Ospreys*, which was followed up by the documentary poem *The Field of Magic*.

Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė

Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė is working in the contexts of cinema, performing art and visual art. In her creative practice she often explores the gap between objective and imagined realities and playfully challenges an anthropocentric way of thinking. Her most recent collaborations are the opera-performance *Sun & Sea* (created with Vaiva Grainytė and Lina Lapelytė) and the creative documentary *Acid Forest* (created with Dovydas Korba).

Monika Janulevičiūtė

Monika Janulevičiūtė is a Lithuanian designer and artist. Her practice is focused on local and leftover resources, learning structures, adaptations and co-developments between self-defined or regional communities. This process goes tightly together with the writing, drafting and prototyping of objects; posing a range of questions on affordability and value between design and art. In 2021, Monika was a resident of the Neringa Forest Architecture programme at Nida Art Colony (NAC) of Vilnius Academy of Arts.

Nene Tsuboi and Tuomas Toivonen

Nene Tsuboi is a designer and Tuomas Toivonen is an architect. Together with their daughter Aura they live in Helsinki, Finland, where they run a public sauna, an architecture practice and an educational space. They also own a small patch of a forest with 1000 trees near the shore of the Yövesi lake.

Jonas Žakaitis

Jonas Žakaitis is a writer, running coach, and physiotherapist based in Vilnius. He previously worked as a gallerist, philosopher, and curator. He is the author of a collection of short stories called *90s*, inspired by life in 1990s Lithuania.

Signe Pelne

Signe Pelne is an architectural designer and researcher within the field of architecture, living and working between Riga and London. Pelne is an alumnus of the University of Westminster and is currently completing her MA in Architecture at the Royal college of Art, London. She has also studied in Copenhagen and Beijing and has participated in numerous architectural workshops in Canada, Germany, India, Latvia, and Estonia. Predominantly analysing the historical, architectural, and ecological contexts of the site, her projects focus on ways of tackling issues of contemporary living, climate crisis and the Anthropocene. In 2021, she was a resident researcher of the Neringa Forest Architecture programme at Nida Art Colony (NAC) of Vilnius Academy of Arts.

Sofia Lemos

Sofia Lemos is a curator, writer, and researcher working on the curatorial as a mode of enquiry that melds perceiving, sensing, feeling and knowing as knowledge-making practices. Rethinking sites of knowledge in relation to their conceptual emergence, unresolved histories and multidimensional narratives, she explores how thinking through and with contemporary art opens up other modes of being and belonging based on experience, sensation, embodiment, plurality and positionality. She is the inaugural Curator of a new institute for arts, environmental and social justice established by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21) and Curator of Public Programmes and Research at Nottingham Contemporary, where she has initiated numerous collaborative research programmes, including the multi-platform commissioning series Sonic Continuum (2020-ongoing). Recently, Lemos was Associate Curator Public Programmes of the 2nd Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art – RIBOCA (2020).

Lina Lapelytė

Lina Lapelytė’s performance-based practice is rooted in music and flirts with popular culture, gender stereotypes and nostalgia. Her works engage trained and untrained performers often in an act of singing through a wide range of genres such as mainstream music and opera. The singing takes the form of a collective and affective event that questions vulnerability and silencing.

Lina’s collaborative work with Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė and Vaiva Grainytė – the opera *Have a Good Day!* holds several awards and has been touring extensively. In 2019 their durational performance work *Sun and Sea (Marina)* represented Lithuania at the 58th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia and was awarded the Golden Lion for Best National Participation.

Mantas Petraitis

Mantas Petraitis is a Vilnius based architect, who regularly works with artists alongside his own design practice – Implant Architecture, which focuses on technical and cultural sustainability. Past projects include the design for Lapelytė’s exhibition ‘Pirouette’ at Rupert in Vilnius; ‘Skateboard prayer, or Head below the heart’ by Eglė Budvytytė; and ‘Behind the White Curtain’ by Darius Mikšys at the 54th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia in 2011. In 2020, Mantas was a resident of the Neringa Forest Architecture programme at Nida Art Colony (NAC) of Vilnius Academy of Arts.

Virginija Januškevičiūtė

Virginija Januškevičiūtė is a curator and advisor at the Contemporary Art Centre (CAC) in Vilnius. In 2020 she curated ‘Splitting the Atom’ (together with Ele Carpenter), a solo exhibition with Arthur Jafa and, together with the CAC’s entire curatorial team, the open-call exhibition ‘Head With Many Thoughts’. She also curated ‘TV’; a solo exhibition of Algirdas Šeškus in 2017 and the XII Baltic Triennial in 2015. An online project ‘History of Joy Part 4’, featuring artists from the Baltics and curated alongside Kaspars Groševs and Siim Preinman – a collaboration between Kim?, Riga, CAC Vilnius and Tallinn Art Hall – will launch in the summer of 2021.

Algirdas Šeškus

Algirdas Šeškus is a photographer characterised by an interest in the nature of the image – matching intent and meaning with fact (when the event is the actual shooting) – and by the de-contextualisation of content. He constantly balances artistic nihilism and the fetishism of the creative act, between the underground and official art scene, between collectivism and individuality.

Algirdas studied between 1968 and 1970 at the Vilnius Art Institute. In Moscow, he completed a cinematography course and worked as a television and radio operator from 1979 until he retired. He has been a member of the Lithuanian Society of Art Photography since 1989 – the Union of Lithuanian Art Photographers. In 2014 he was awarded the Lithuanian National Prize for Culture and Art.

Imprint

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that is continually building up knowledge and material processes, which are reflected on in this journal. Special thanks to Bangutis Prapuolenis who kindly opened the studio and archive of his father, Jonas, and Marija Olšauskaitė who assisted photography sessions by Rasa Juškevičiūtė.

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Neringa Forest Architecture natural
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Ohne Distanz: Litauische Kultur

in
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2021

Find out more about the project “Without Distance: Lithuanian Culture in Bavaria 2021” by visiting www.litaueninbayern.lt

In the next issue of ** as a Journal*, the asterisk will be replaced by the word 'cosmos'. The guest editor of the Cosmos issue, Julijonas Urbonas, whose Lithuanian Space Agency represents the country at the 17th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, in 2021 will invite readers to leave the ground and delve into the space above our heads. How does it read, feel, taste, and sound? Catapulted up there, our reach and imagination are confronted with the hostility of outer space – otherworldliness at its most acute. The Cosmos issue will look into how we can attune imagination to such a departure from our terrestrial origins. We look forward to meeting you again in autumn 2021.

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