

Taming the Forest

a response to the 2021/22 [NaturArchy](#) curatorial statement by JRC SciArt (Resonances IV)

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Rewire Art:Science

Art-science experiments or other multidisciplinary collaborations have never been a simple process, which is also a result of disciplinary boundaries problematically manifested across education, and even in fairly inefficient innovation ecosystems.

The aim of this collaborative project is to give attention to real differences of thinking and approach in art (new media, animation, music) and science (cultural history, critical theory, philosophy), and eventually manifest this in (collectively) experienced physical situations. We try to remain sensitive for the contrasting yet complementary positions that art and science are taking in our collaborative work. The goal is to integrate both quite radically, surpassing the usual dominance of science, for which art is useful (only) when it illustrates already established scientific theories, or simply represents beauty, reduced to a tool for illustration of scientific findings. Even if this was challenged already a century ago by the avant-gardes, from which we openly seek inspiration in this project.

This new sensitivity for combining science and art and letting diverse minds work shoulder to shoulder on a common challenge (finding), is being achieved through regular group-reflection meetings. Students and mentors have been working on egalitarian terms, iteratively discussing the meta-level of the research approach, embracing the differences and looking for common points, taking the artistic methods and creative thinking as equally relevant for meaningful innovation.

In the global world of transition and the crisis of capitalism, contemporary art is understood as a critical practice – which means that through art we question the didactic assumptions of the hegemony of politics and ideologies, and the ways they are performing the normal/normative actions in society. In that sense art is about establishing a field of critical and subversive practices, it questions the struggle for power, freedom, identity, emancipation, and even education. Here, the scientific historiographical approach refuses to

exercise judgment, replacing decision taking with theories, logical deduction and data analysis, and eventually opening the field for artistic synthesis.

Post-growth, degrowth and other relevant concepts that may provide viable alternatives for our progress-driven society, are not experiential (enough). Even more, these concepts are currently discussed predominantly in the context of the economy and sustainable production, and not in the field of arts and humanities, which would be crucial for discussing the post-growth-based values, their contents and contexts to be promoted and experienced in our everyday life. Blending artistic and scientific approaches can provide a complexity that is needed to tackle this paradox – this is to be understood as the key departure point of the present collaboration:

Demistify Nature

If we want to really embrace the complexity of natural systems, we should stop romanticizing nature and demystify it – by means of both art and science. Human choice is not only subjective, but also a collective choice on how (not) to impact nature (Guattari 2000). We survived, prospered and gained domination as a species due to our adaptability based on harvesting natural energy ever since. We cannot photosynthesize yet. Not without technology. But if humans are especially fallible animals, how is our choice today different from past choices to impact nature?

We often understand it as our birth right to take “Energy,” but we are still doing it without securing “Equity” (Ilich 1974). From deforestations of the past centuries through the wide-scale economical exploitation of oceans and soils, to the “New Extractivism” (Joler 2022) of the digital age, the natural disasters came hand in hand with social, moral and physical decadence such as wars and pandemics. Our choice to impact nature is both collective and individual, based on both objective and subjective factors, therefore ecological extractivism may have both rational and irrational reasons.

We now understand the copper & silicium rewired Earth is stared on by our own eyes-in-the-skies, while the blue marble became Gaia’s single eyeball staring out at the black hole, the technological apparatus clearly hinting at new geopolitical “Stacks” (Bratton 2016). Nevertheless the perception of wild and pristine nature keeps dominating the human scale: the forest still presents the most common metaphor of (bio)diversity, even if we cannot really get lost in it anymore, and both deities and species seem to be dying out.

Resettle Forest

Combining the research areas of five different academic collaborators, a complex-enough perception of nature and particularly the forest through historiographical and artistic perspectives shall arise at the JRC 2022 Resonances IV SciArt Summer School event:

Historic perspectives on forest management reaching two centuries back show how extracting natural resources – be it for direct energy, construction or food – were in the past linked to a variety of interdependent factors. It should be emphasized that farmers or more correctly rural people, were not the only users of forests in modern times. As consumers of forest goods we must also mention manors, cities, (proto)industries whose production was based on wood, wood trade etc. The social and economic struggle of rural people is often mentioned as the main reason for excessive use of the forest and it too was consequence of a variety of factors which differed in space and time Thus we shall, **combining artistic and scientific methods, interpret geological maps and correspondence in a wider historical context** of 19th-century Komen community (Slovenia), which was part of the process of afforestation of the Karst that took place in the territory today belonging to the territory of Slovenia and Italy. The interpretation in this part of the collective work will cover the view of afforestation (often on common land) and land use, as reflected in the evidence of negotiation and legal cases between the villagers of Komen and the district administrative authority of Sežana.

Humanity is neither nature's ruler nor its nemesis – forgetting we are an animal like any other is harmful to both us and the planet. However, we are the only animal able to look at our own choices over generations and decide whether to continue or change course. We are now rushing to save species, undoing the damage done by our predecessors. But evolution marches on regardless – what happens when ecosystems leave their species behind on their own? At which point do we decide to let history have them instead? One human cannot end or save an entire species, but **what if we were actually faced with such decisions – to let a species die for the sake of another? What if others around us also had that choice, and used it? Would we try to bring back what once was, or let life go on the way it is going?** This part of the collective work is intent on making people think about the human impact on accelerating this phenomenon to the point of imbalance.

Everything you find in nature vibrates to their own frequencies. You **hear the sounds** of birds and animals but can **rarely visualize those sounds**. And then you **see a plant or a tree**, you see them grow, you see them sway in the wind but you **do not always hear the sounds** produced by them. Still, there are ways to visualize sounds and sonify images/data. Running sounds through a **spectrum analyzer** or even a **chladni plate** can visually represent the harmonics and frequencies it consists of. Also, connecting a nail that's on a tree to an arduino breadboard via a steel thread allows us to hear the chemicals running through in the form of white noise. When by yourself in the forest, birds eventually are the only thing you hear. However you cannot hear the truth hidden beneath the bark of a tree, where both energy and information flows. By **ways of bio-sonification of plant life and visualization of animal communication** we shall reinterpret how a new interspecies kinship may intertwine theory and practice of life on Earth.

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