For Forest, or when you can't see the trees for the wood

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Abstract

On 8th September 2019, the "international freelance mediator of contemporary art" Klaus Littmann opened *For Forest - The Unending Attraction of Nature in Klagenfurt* (Austria), a monumental art installation of almost three hundred trees in the city's main stadium, the Wörthersee-Stadion, accompanied by a series of cultural events. This project, which took as its starting point a drawing from 1970-71 by Max Peintner, and which claimed to have ecological aims, took advantage of a wide range of institutional conditions and needs, as well as corporate links of dubious social commitment. The following text sets out these circumstances in detail, in order to contrast the central aspects of Littmann's work with a methodological framework of Marxist heterodoxy in relation to the forest, the land, dispossession and exploitation. By exploring the cultural and aesthetic imaginaries contained in *For Forest*, this article investigates how these characteristics can be instrumental to the prevailing universal and ahistorical idealism, as well as being useful for the hegemonic political-economic positions that help shape it.

Keywords

forest; dispossession; exploitation; metabolic rift; ecological aesthetics.

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Fig. 1. Klaus Littman, *For Forest. The Unending Attraction of Nature* (2019). Photo: Gerhard Maurer. Source: https://forforest.net/presse/

To build a forest

For Forest (2019) was a lavish public art intervention, created by the self-proclaimed "international freelance mediator of contemporary art" Klaus Littmann, and held in the city of Klagenfurt (Austria) between 8th September and 27th October 2019. Klagenfurt, capital of the *Land* of Carinthia, and a city of just 100,000 inhabitants, hosted almost 150 cultural events —exhibitions, cinema, theatre, opera, conferences, round tables and concerts, and so on— that, around the idea of forest, sought to promote the defence of nature and greater ecological awareness. For the project's flagship installation, *For Forest - The Unending Attraction of Nature* (fig. 1), Littmann planted almost three hundred trees inside the city's main stadium, the Wörthersee-Stadion, a modern, 32,000-seater venue. Entry to the installation was free, and spectators could thus observe this small artificial forest to admire "the unending attraction of nature".

This vision, somewhat reminiscent of Herzog,[1] had been provided to Littmann by his colleague Max Peintner, some time beforehand.[2] Peintner, a Swiss architect and artist linked to the Viennese Radicals movement,[3] made a series of drawings during the 1970s in which he presented, in detail, some dreamlike, dystopian and techno-futuristic scenes concerning the imminent destruction of nature (*MoMA*, 2020). In *Die ungebrochene Anziehungskraft der Natur* (1970-71) (fig. 2), Peintner envisioned Vienna's Ernst-Happel-Stadion crowded with people, surrounded by buildings and factories with large industrial chimneys spewing out smoke. On the pitch was a dense forest, guarded by men in black (fig. 3). Almost forty years later, Littmann

translated that image into a real scene. The trees would be real trees; the stadium, a real stadium; the public, a real public.
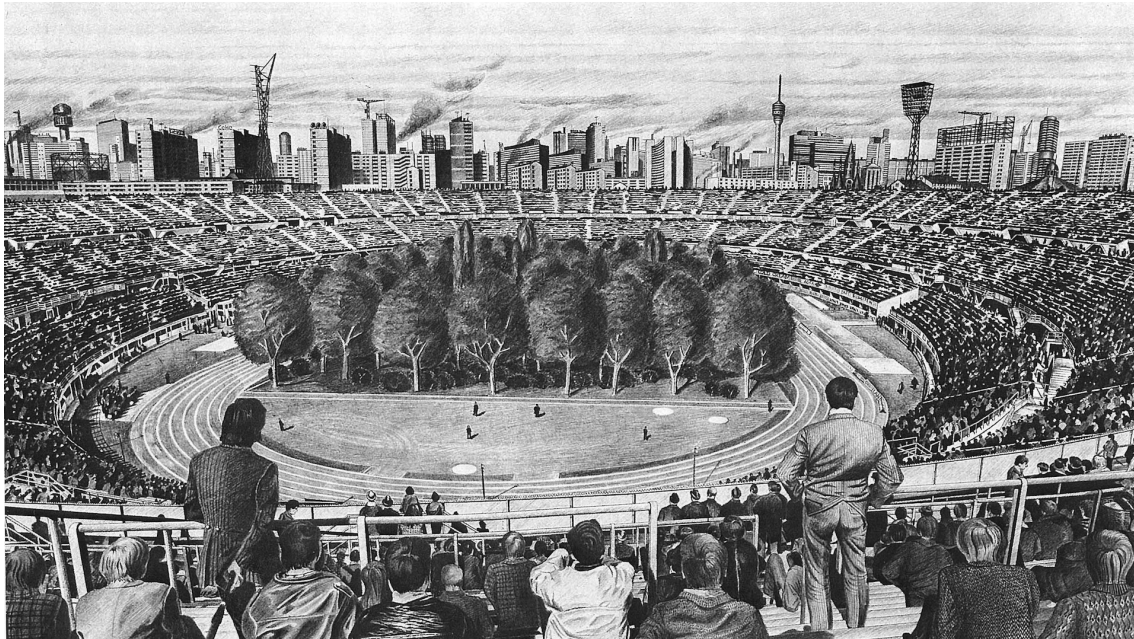

Fig. 2. Max Peintner, *Die ungebrochene Anziehungskraft der Natur* (1970-71).

Fig. 3. Ernst-Happel-Stadion. © Wiener Sportstätten.

Besides the undeniable visual impact of the project, the presence of a forest inside a stadium raises many questions. The most obvious: how is a project of this magnitude even possible? Without a doubt, Littmann's management skills were the key. Through his studio Littmann Kulturprojecte, Littmann has focused, over the last twenty years, on the development of exhibitions and artistic interventions in public spaces. These projects often insist on literalist representational strategies, which tend to merge the object and medium of representation, as well as using well-known formulas for defamiliarisation and recontextualisation.[4] Although they do not frequent the most respected circuits of contemporary art, Littman's projects entail large budgets and a strong mobilisation of material resources, acquired by the collaboration of public organisations and private capital.[5] As such, it is because of the association between institutional and corporate strategic interests, which are mainly transnational, that proposals such as those of Littmann Kulturprojekte can be developed.

Samstag, 6. Oktober 2018   KULTUR   ♛ Seite 51

Foto: Uta Rojsek-Wiedergut

Littmann (re) mit Mathia-schitz, Wald-ner & Kaiser.

Foto: Uta Rojsek-WiedergutUta Rojsek-Wiedergut

Kunstprojekt mit internationaler Strahlkraft: Der Wald im Wörthersee Stadion.

Klagenfurt: Am Freitag wurde die Villa „For Forest" für Klaus Littmann eröffnet

Fig. 4. Presentation of the project For Forest. "Look at the forest full of trees!", in Kronen Zeitung, 6th October 2018. Photo: Uta Rojsek-Wiedergut.

For Forest (fig. 4) was agreed upon with the Klagenfurt authorities in March 2017. In her first statements, the Social Democratic mayor Maria-Luise Mathiaschitz spoke of a public expenditure of 35,000 euros (Heim, 2017b: 2). However, the first budget forecast was 1.5 million. By February 2019, the number had risen to 2.2 million (*StadiumDB*, 2019a). In September, it reached 10 million euros (*StadiumDB*, 2019b). The project, it was said, received not a single euro of public money, and was financed entirely with private funds, mostly companies in the real estate and construction industries.[6] However, its sheer vastness —Austria's largest public-space art project[7]— was not only a testament to Littmann's ability to manage big projects and surround himself with the right partners, but it also meant that an even more important issue was being overshadowed, i.e. how the little

city of Klagenfurt could possibly offer the material conditions to carry out such a project. Littman's answer was certainly contradictory:

> *For Forest* could have taken place anywhere! It was difficult to find a stadium that would allow the project to take place for nearly 2 months. The main reason […] is that [in Klagenfurt] the stadium […] was not used to its full capacity. (*For Forest*, 2020a).

Indeed, *For Forest* could be *imagined* anywhere, but *realising* it was an entirely different matter. Its feasibility depended on whether there was even such a thing as a large, underused football stadium —and the fact that Littman found one means that this, paradoxically, is his most accomplished site-specific piece. It is therefore important to understand why Klagenfurt could be that *site*. Thus emerges the link between the world of football, the construction industry and politics.

Austria and Switzerland were the organisers of UEFA Euro 2008, and Klagenfurt was one of the eight Austrian venues. Between 2005 and 2007, the Klagenfurt municipality paid for the construction of the Wörthersee-Stadion, and it was built on the site of the original (fig. 5) (*StadiumDB*, 2020a). UEFA, the Austrian federal government and the city of Klagenfurt heralded their construction as a major public investment to promote the economic development of the region.[8] The initial cost, from public funds, was 66 million euros, although the final figure would reach 96 million (Playthegame, 2015: 62),[9] making it one of the most expensive stadiums in Austria and the second-largest in terms of capacity (*StadiumDB*, 2020b). The decision to build the new venue fell to the governor of Carinthia, Jörg Haider, the historic leader of the far-right FPÖ, which at that time ruled the *Land* under the BZÖ. The proposal also had the financial support of the now-defunct Hypo Alpe Adria Bank International. In return, between 2007 and 2010,[10] the stadium was renamed the Hypo-Arena, although in Austria it became known as "Haider's monument" (Heim 2017b: 2) (fig. 6).

The new stadium, owned by the municipality, was undoubtedly excessive for the city, a paradigmatic example of what David Harvey calls neoliberal "spatial fix" (2001),[11] and of the ways in which states support investments in "emblematic" infrastructures through mega-events —such as the European football championships— without addressing issues of sustainability, nor the daily needs of the affected populations (Hachleitnera, 2010: 949). However, the public discourse of the institutions involved in the operation ensured that, by closely following sustainability criteria, the stadium would be scaled down after the competition, according to the true needs of the municipality (UEFA, 2008: 33). Thus, the entire second tier of grandstands was designed as a temporary structure to facilitate its dismantling. The non-permanent steel structures could therefore be resold after disassembly, and the capacity would be reduced from 32,000 to

12,000 people, allowing the city to recoup part of the budget (*StadiumDB*, 2013).

Fig. 5. Klagenfurt, Wörthersee-Stadion, c. 1960.

Fig. 6. Worthersee-Stadion c. 2015.

In 2013, the Wörthersee had to close its doors. The dismantling works had not yet started, but the stadium was already at risk of collapse. After the closure, in a predictable discursive U-turn, corporate optimism gave way to

economic pragmatism (Kennedy, 2015: 10). By that point it was known that reducing the capacity of the stadium would cost an additional 20 million, plus there were no buyers for all that steel. Additionally, the strengthening of its temporary structures would cost even more: another 30 million euros. And it was said, in the end, that the Austrian federal government was willing to forget the previous agreements and share 50% of the expenses with the city, as long as the stadium maintained its overblown capacity (*StadiumDB*, 2013). Klagenfurt, ruled at the time by the far-right Christian Scheider (FPÖ-BZÖ), thus began the works that would make the temporary structure permanent.

Of course, the scale of the stadium exceeded the size indicated by every legally required environmental impact report (Hachleitnera, 2010: 849). In 2015, a civil lawsuit was filed to demand the stoppage of the structure's consolidation work and take these reports into consideration (*Klagenfurt*, 2015), and in September a ruling ensured the annulment of the work and the closure of the upper tier. However, in January 2016, a local appeal court reversed that sentence and sided with the municipality, and so the stadium was able to reopen permanently (Sadjak, 2016). Therefore, and to this day, the underlying problem remains unsolved: the needs of the city by no means justify the existence of the stadium.

The maintenance costs of the Wörthersee-Stadion reach two million euros per year. Furthermore, it is difficult to work out the additional costs for Klagenfurt, insomuch that they own a stadium with enough seats for 30% of the local population, whilst the city's own SK Austria Klagenfurt, a modest second division team that struggles on mid-table, can barely attract a thousand spectators to each match (*Worldfootball*, 2020) (fig. 7). This is why the public management company Sportpark Klagenfurt is constantly looking for gigantic events with which to keep the stadium structure as full as possible: concerts, UEFA matches, ice hockey (*Sportpark-Klagenfurt*, 2020)... and art installations.

Fig. 7. Supporters of the SK Austria Klagenfurt cheering on their team. Source:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k53B8gwmLQA

In the end, this is how Littmann came across his opportunity to perform his particular tribute to the forest. Objectives were set, numbers were crunched, and the same logic that led to the very construction of the Wörthersee-Stadion was reactivated. While the entry to *For Forest* would be free, many activities in the parallel programme would charge a fee. Despite the neighbours' doubts, from the very date of its approval (Littman, 2019: 18), it was claimed that the project would bring economic benefits for Klagenfurt and Carinthia, even if the football team's matches would have to be sacrificed (Heim, 2017b: 3).

The consultancy, supervision and installation of the forest was carried out by Enzo Enea and his studio Enea Landscape Architecture.[12] Based in Switzerland, Enea designs gardens for museums, hotels, buildings and luxury resorts. His most ambitious and personal project, the Enea Tree Museum, is a 75,000 square metre park located on the shores of Lake Zurich in Rapperswil-Jona (fig. 8). Enea considers himself a "tree collector" whose vocation came to him "in the garden that his grandfather owned on the outskirts of Bologna, where [...] he experienced an 'almost mystical' moment" (Ezquiaga, 2020). As a tree expert, he conceived Littmann's forest from "the colours and textures of a European mixed woodland" (*For Forest*, 2020b). He came up with a selection of fourteen species that, over the

course of the exhibition, would change colour, to display all their botanical exuberance. 299 trees, grown and cared for in nurseries, and between eight and fourteen metres tall, were planted in the Wörthersee. To minimise costs, and the risks of transporting the trees, Enea worked with three local nurseries (Wank, 2019). But the relationships were not as harmonious as one might expect: recently, one of these nurseries filed a lawsuit for non-payment, after having looked after a hundred trees that were subsequently not used (Mandler, 2020). And even today, the conflict persists: the far-right mayor Wolfgang Germ, of the FPÖ, demands answers from Maria-Luise Mathiaschitz, the former Social Democrat mayor who backed the Littman project so that "the name of Klagenfurt [could go] around the world" (Heim, 2017b: 3).[13]

Fig. 8. Enea Tree Museum. Source: https://www.enea.ch

Furthermore, the project's links to the construction industry did not end after it came to a close. The trees, it was said, would be "carefully replanted on a public site in close proximity to Wörthersee Stadium at a scale of 1:1 and remain as a living 'forest sculpture'", much in the style of Enzo Enea's Tree Museum. A pavilion would also be built to house the project's documentation, as a permanent memorial for the grateful city of Klagenfurt.[14] However, the plans seem to have changed: two hundred trees were temporarily moved to the Praskac nursery, near Vienna. And the remaining trees were cared for in a Klagenfurt nursery, waiting to be reused for a new project in Carinthia that was due to be announced sometime in 2020. In the coming months, as stated on the project website, an architecture competition will be launched for the construction of the *For Forest Campus*, to be located in the city of Tullnerfeld, where the two hundred trees in Praskac are supposed to go (*For Forest*, 2020a). Littmann

is happy to tweak and scale back his environmental concerns: in terms of his ecological commitment, he lets the bricks do the talking.

Furthermore, it is curious that the project developers' powerful PR department has been so reluctant to share any information regarding the forest's dismantling, its current status and the aftercare of the trees. Thus, the Twitter profile, @forforest_art, has not provided any details about the project since its closing date. On the contrary, its pinned tweet between October 2019 and July 2020 reads "That's a Wrap!", on one of the photos of the forest that circulate online (fig. 9). While essential information from this ecological project is vanishing, *For Forest* becomes a "global initiative" with the subtitle *The Voice for Trees*, to sponsor the Austrian World Summit climate conference, organised by the Austrian federal presidency and its illustrious fellow citizen Arnold Schwarzenegger.[15]

Fig. 9. Pinned tweet of the account @forforest_art (June 2020).

The PR strategy is thus consistent with one of Littmann's main goals: that "this picture […] stays in people's minds" for their entire lives (Booker, 2019). By means of a striking image, it was all about "challeng[ing] our perception of nature and sharpen[ing] our awareness of the future relation between nature and humankind" —a relation that, if and when harmed by the ecological crisis, could be dangerously reduced in the future to

"admir[ing] the remnants of nature in specially assigned spaces, as is already the case with zoo animals" (*For Forest*, 2020c). But as a zoo, *For Forest* garnered somewhat modest numbers: 200,000 people came to see the installation itself, but only 40,000 attended the other events (*For Forest*, 2020a).

In terms of gauging its success, perhaps more than anything it was a triumph in PR. Identical descriptions and images could be read on dozens of trending pages, Facebook statuses, Twitter hashtags, and Instagram tags. They all praised the work's laudable intentions, as well as its ingenuity and the unusualness of the means employed. "A forest in a stadium", in short, is clickbait in itself. Art functioned, like so many other times, as the ideal "social lubricant" for the circulation of images and imaginaries (Haacke, 1982) —a very refined form of exchange value, hurtling through social media. The picture does stay in the mind; and perhaps this even constitutes, in itself, the memorial so yearned for by Littmann.

A contribution to the critique of ecological aesthetics based on *For Forest*

For Forest could be interpreted as a megalomaniac work that precludes, in each of the social relations of production that it establishes, and also in each strategic, aesthetic and discursive decision, any possibility of being read in terms of the most basic defence of the environment. The forest's disproportionate scale might seem, at first glance, to overshadow all the particular details of the ecological conflicts that the project was supposed to highlight. This becomes clearer when we make even the slightest effort to engage with basic environmental concerns, at least as a starting point that would allow us to determine an aesthetic of political ecology (Demos, 2013).[16] However, the image of a forest in a stadium has certain clout —it stays, as Littmann puts it, in the "memory".

Thus far, our reading of this matter has deliberately put questions of representation to one side, in order to focus on the links between material and discursive practices. In a sense, we have resisted the image. In what follows, we first want to consider the current relevance of the methodological framework proposed by Marx, and systematised by the so-called "metabolic rift school" as materialist political ecology, in order to shift the discussion about *For Forest* towards the historical constitution of the difference between nature and society under capitalism. As such, we understand that, from Marx's unfinished project of political ecology, classic dilemmas of representation addressed by critical theory —such as the relationship between naturalism and fetishism, or defamiliarisation and emancipation— can be reworked today without the need to return to the

"critique of representation" framework, to thus regain critical effectiveness when it comes to understanding artistic practices from the perspective of political ecology. This is decisive when realising that what occupies the centre of contemporary debates in art and ecology, more than the products, images or "results", are the social relations and visual epistemologies put forward by artistic practices —that is, the processes and the work, distribution and efficiency of the rifts, and the disputes come about within them.

Starting from this framework, and in contrast to it, we will later trace those elements that, in *For Forest*, reflect the imaginaries of the forest as being *pure* nature according to binary models that, while allowing us to think about the legitimacy of the dispossession and exploitation of land, also form a subject-object relationship which is divided according to ideal, abstract and ahistorical conditions. Imaginaries that are, ultimately, instrumental to the interests that serve as both institutional and cultural support for this idealistic aesthetic approach to the ecological question.

1. Marx and the forest: rift, dispossession and land

As outlined above, we will begin with a brief overview of those features of Marx's ecological thought, as well as certain Marxisms that may be of importance when addressing a critique of ecological aesthetics based on *For Forest*.

In this sense, the contribution of the so-called "metabolic rift school" stands out. This approach, developed by John Bellamy Foster, starts from the unfinished critique of Marx's political economy and links it to the research it contains on the ecological question. As such, this school of thought borrows the notion of metabolic rift from an expression in volume III of *Das Kapital*, where Marx pointed out that capitalist property relations and their tendency towards accumulation "provoke an irreparable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism and natural metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of the soil".[17] Foster (2004 [2000]) expanded upon Marx's late studies into the metabolic link between the natural and social fields, to highlight how this link "took on […] a specific ecological meaning" via the interaction contained in "the concrete organization of human labor" (Foster, 2000: 158).[18] Thus, there would have been a rift in the conditions of the metabolic interaction between the natural and the social, with the historical development of the capitalist mode of production, under the processes of dispossession, enclosure and accumulation which, in short, brought about the disproportionate spatial separation between country and city. Although an interest in expropriation processes is already present in Marx's earliest work, from the study of legislative changes related to the forest that

institutionalised the theft of the commons that lies behind private property (Marx, 1975 [1842]),[19] it is from his later research into the "so-called primitive accumulation" (Perelman, 2000) that Marx would systematise the specific historical relationship that exists between the privatisation of land and the commodification of its resources under capitalism. It is in this alienation between nature and society —the peasant being dispossessed of his means of subsistence, expelled to the urban space and forced to sell his labour power to survive— where Marx observed a central aspect at the origin of the rift between country and city that is produced under capitalist conditions. In this way, as Raymond Williams would note, country and city appear not only as categories "of ideas and experiences, but [also] of rent and interest, of situation and power" (1973: 7). And in the field of culture, this separation would also appear as a reconfiguration of the relationship between nature and society, in which the "idea of nature" is permeated with "an extraordinary amount of human history" (Williams, 2005 [1980]: 67).

As Kohei Saito (2017) has pointed out, this concern is prevalent throughout Marx's writings, i.e. that of the historical relationship, within capitalism, between property —based on the framework of expropriation— and the resulting alienation between society and nature —based on the framework of exploitation. It reaches its peak in his later work thanks to his dedication to the study of natural sciences, where he would find a scientific expression of the antagonism between country and city.[20] This is how Marx would elaborate a critique of political economy in relation to the depletion of the soil in capitalist production, based on the accumulation of large properties and the "disturb[ance] [of] the metabolic interaction between man and the earth", as a result of the ever-increasing "preponderance" of "the urban population" that deepens the rift between country and city, and ends up "destroy[ing] at the same time the physical health of the urban worker, and the intellectual life of the rural worker" (Marx, 1982 [1867]: 637). Marx would become interested, in his later studies, in deforestation —as part of the deterioration of the soil due to the intensification and extension of capitalist agriculture— in relation to desertification, as well as in the consequent climatic changes to which this leads, due to the "radical reorganiz[ation] [of] the universal metabolism of nature from the perspective of capital's valorization" (Saito, 2017: 250).

These underlying links, such as the one between deforestation and desertification, the product of extensive historical processes of expropriation and exploitation, as well as the resulting relationship between collective territory rights and the access to its resources, and social and ecological justice, have been extensively developed in recent decades, both within the most unorthodox trends of Marxism and within other currents of thought in dialogue with that school. These concerns, of course, involve aspects related to social domination under capitalism which, aside from the central

position of labour in its antagonism with capital, but also in relation to it, explore areas that are equally integrated into the relations of power and subordination that capital reproduces and generates as a functional part of its logic, such as those related to gender (Fraser, 2014; Federici, 2010 [2004]; Bhattacharya, 2017), race (Taylor, 2016; Nishime and Hester Williams, 2018), ethnicity or nationalism (Anderson, 2010; Brenner, 2018). In this way, the outlined disputes have situated the dispossession of life itself (be it through "non-productive" work, care, health, physical integrity or territory) at the heart of the ecosocial criticism of capitalism.

One of the most significant recent contributions on dispossession relates to the indigenous question, a field of study with particular relevance throughout the entire American continent, with different characteristics depending on the region. With regards to colonial settlement and dispossession in North America, social critique has deftly exposed the need to reformulate the notion of dispossession itself and the authority to speak about it, in order to develop an all-encompassing critique of the historical conditions that constitute and legitimise private property amid processes of colonial domination. Thus, for example, Robert Nichols starts from the long history of grievances over the territory and original populations of Standing Rock, up to the most recent struggle against the approval of the Dakota Access Pipeline. He suggests that we rethink the concept of dispossession as a critical category "in its own right" —that is, freed from its "historically subordinated role within the broader theory of primitive accumulation" (Nichols, 2020: 55), which, in turn, also allows us to rethink the category of land.

In line with reinterpretations of primitive accumulation, such as those by Rosa Luxemburg and contributions from Frantz Fanon,[21] Nichols suggests a shift, in terms of dispossession, that allows us to transcend the limitations of the domain of capitalist and colonial thought, and recover the idea of land in relation to work. This vision allows him to oppose both the pristine idea of wild nature, and the understanding of work (and its product) within the logic of mercantile exchange (Nichols, 2020: 74). For the worker, "the earth is his original larder, so too it is his original tool house" and it is "available without any effort on his part as the universal material for human labour", writes Marx (1982 [1867]: 284-85). And as Nichols points out, "nature is not eternally self-same but is itself the product of previous generations of human praxis", resulting in "a necessarily temporal and historical character" (Nichols, 2020: 76). The land, in short, links nature and work, indicating thus a specificity that is not only *historical*, but also *spatial*.

By revisiting *For Forest* from the methodological perspective as offered by the Marxian categories, it is possible to question the ways in which its visual

epistemology relates to concepts such as metabolic rift, dispossession and land, in order to expose the sham —even more notorious than its institutional audacity— of its supposed ecological claim.

2. A new naturalism for an old idealism

In the dominant visual culture, the construction of the forest obeys an epistemology that makes it an untamed space of *wild* nature, a blank slate that lends itself to its design and *improvement* —to the planning and productive exploitation typical of the instrumental rationalism of capitalism.[22] *For Forest* emphasises the abundant imaginaries of the forest that are part of this systemic cultural matrix that articulates, under capitalist conditions, the relationship between the country and the city. Thus, it is relatively easy to detect, in *For Forest*, a series of particular forest-like qualities that Littmann blatantly exploits: innocence, virginity, impotence, femininity, fertility, passiveness, stillness, primitivism, essentialism and exoticism. Essentially, a kind of parochial idea of the forest, a type of mystifying idealism, one that has been *naturalised* for so long by the dominant discourse that even Marx confronted it by challenging the "true socialists" (Foster, 2004: 195-198).

In this sense, it is unsurprising that, in his reflections, Littmann suggests that *For Forest* is a dystopian vision analogous to the zoo. For him, the zoo is the final refuge of a living nature at danger of extinction, whose freedom has sadly been taken away in order to preserve its existence. However, the zoo is a historical device of animal exhibition, pertaining to the colonial visual epistemology. Littmann's botanical zoo would like to be a reminder of the looming drama, but it is nothing but the structural survival of an age-old fetish that activates a totally depoliticised sentimentality.

Besides, this analogy with the zoo obscures the piece's closer links with other examples from the same history of Western visual culture, i.e. with works that more clearly show the relationships between Eurocentric essentialism, dispossession, violence and the struggles for social and ecological justice. This is the case, for example, of the epistemology of the circus and the instrumentalisation of Native American survivors, as happened with the Sioux and their Ghost Dance, for a fetishistic spectacularisation of the social violence that was exerted, fundamentally, on the right to the territory (Denzin, 2013; Raheja, 2011). As a visual device, *For Forest* revives, in a certain way, that same literal sense of the spectacle, aimed at provoking both fascination and abstract compassion —a kind of sweetened botanical archive that, framed by the stadium, serves as an instrument to legitimise the logic of enclosure and exploitation of the land.[23]

In any case, *For Forest* is not only linked to the nineteenth-century modes of exhibition of the natural sciences and their cultural variants, but also to naturalism itself in the arts. The overwhelming literality of the forest in Littmann's work, which seems to merge the object of representation with material means, allows us to resume the discussion about the differential features between naturalism and realism. According to a classical formulation by Williams (1977), a contradiction between literality and historicity underlies the conflict between these two currents. Thus, while naturalism "merely reproduce[s] the flat external appearance of reality with a certain static quality", realism would be characterised by its desire to show "the essential historical movements, […] the dynamic reality" (Williams, 1977: 65).

Therefore, Littmann's piece proposes a kind of new naturalism: in its literal replica of a forest, it detaches itself from history, production relations, social conflicts and the metabolic rift that underlies its image of nature. But also, going against the naturalistic tradition, in which literality is a strategy for bypassing cultural mediation, *For Forest* extols this very mediation: by confronting the spectator with a defamiliarised scene —the image of a forest inside a football stadium— Littmann provides the piece with its specific discursive intentionality.

Thus, we could summarise *For Forest*'s aesthetic strategies based on three interrelated axes. In the first place, the piece is within a naturalistic tradition, understood in both senses of the word: as part of a colonial visual epistemology founded on violence, dispossession and exploitation, and as part of an aesthetic strategy anchored in the power of literalism. Secondly, *For Forest* boosts the aesthetic effectiveness of literalism thanks to modernist strategies of decontextualisation. However, these strategies are not understood as that exercise in emancipatory vocation of modern aesthetics, for which defamiliarisation in the interests of "pure form" would mean a break with forms of fetishistic domination (Groys, 2014). On the contrary, in *For Forest* this decontextualisation is an operation of the forest's abstraction and fetishisation, emphasising the perpetual rift between country and city, between nature and society. Finally, the literality of the proposal means that it must be realised on a 1:1 scale —in the case of a forest, these are colossal dimensions. But this large-scale work is not carried out due to any desire for phenomenological confrontation with the presence of the viewer, nor for a problematisation of the possibilities of tackling the spatial and temporal magnitude of the ecosocial crisis from representation. Instead, its scale expresses the dynamics of growth, accumulation and systemic replication of the large properties, and its logical continuation can be found in the "spatial fixes" of mega-events.

Naturalistic literalism, defamiliarisation and large scale are thus a series of aspects in line with the rifts and reconfigurations of the relationship between nature and society that are typical of capitalist epistemology. Furthermore, their probability of occurring in the same time and place is so scarce that, as mentioned above, they could only ever be found via a consideration of the work as a site-specific piece. Even so, and despite its specificity, *For Forest* offers valid analysis categories for other artistic proposals due to the relationship it establishes between aesthetic choices and the dominant poetics, useful for the ahistoricality of so-called "green capitalism". These categories are also helpful for understanding the mechanisms of sentimental fetishisation that set hegemonic cultural imaginaries in motion, either thanks to instrumental institutional politics or through other sectors of greater "cultural sophistication".[24]

But good intentions are never enough. *For Forest*'s vision of the forest as a sacred place, threatened by the imminent destruction of Earth's ecosystem and turned into a reserve, is built upon specific practices: ones that derive from the disruption between the country and the city under the historical conditions of the capitalist exploitation and dispossession of land. The production and exhibition of a piece like Littmann's, a piece whose *raison d'être* is based on these very practices that it avoids mentioning, allows a radical critical reflection on the specificity of these conditions. And then we can make out, right there, in this misty realm where institutional aesthetic operations and great works of capital overlap, how the real opportunities to build a forest, like the one hoisted in *For Forest*, come about.

Fig. 10. *Klaus Littman, For Forest. The Unending Attraction of Nature* (2019). Photo: Gerhard Maurer. Source: https://forforest.net/presse/

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Notes

[1] Significantly, *For Forest*'s film programme opened with the screening of Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* (1982). *For Forest. Das Kinoprogram*. Originally downloadable at https://forforest.net/en/press/

[2] It should be noted that, although Littmann does not mention it, *For Forest* has certain links with Joseph Beuys' *7,000 Oaks*, presented at Documenta 7 in 1982. See https://www.7000eichen.de/index.php?id=2 . Littmann's "carelessness" is even more striking considering that he is a self-professed disciple of Beuys (Littmann, 2020a).

[3] This is a school whose conception of nature has certain concomitances with ecofascist discourses (Melis, 2017: 15).

[4] See, for example, *Real Fiction Cinema* (2010-2016), held in cities in Switzerland, Italy and China (Littmann, 2020b).

[5] The exhibition *Kultort Stadion* (*The Stadium as a Place of Worship*, 2003), for example, pre-empting his fascination with sports architecture, was organised alongside the German Football Federation and funded by UEFA. https://es.uefa.com/insideuefa/news/newsid=259797.html

[6] *For Forest*'s production plan had key points: fundraising through the "Adopt a Tree" project (5,000 euros per unit); contributions in the form of private sponsorship (such as the company Sportpark Klagenfurt, manager of the sports venue); and the capital contribution of a small group of patrons, notably including real estate companies businesses (*For Forest*, 2020a).

[7] This is how Peter Kaiser, Governor of the *Land* of Carinthia, describes it in *For Forest Projektzeitung* (2019: 18).

[8] For the then-mayor, Harald Scheucher, the added value in infrastructures of the city could be calculated in earnings of about 50 million euros, plus 45 million in increased purchasing power. In

addition, the stadium would have "an effect on the employment of around 1,500 new jobs per year" (Anderwald et al., 2005: 74-75).

[9] Other sources put the initial expenditure at 72 million euros, after acknowledging unforeseen increases in the budget (Hachleitnera and Manzenreiter, 2010: 849).

[10] The Hypo Alpe Adria Bank was an Austrian private bank whose criminal financial activities grew exponentially in the 1990s, until it declared bankruptcy. The bank was rescued and dismantled in December 2009 by the Austrian government (*Reuters*, 2009).

[11] Harvey defines "spatial fix" as "capitalism's insatiable drive to resolve its inner crisis tendencies by geographical expansion and geographical restructuring" (Harvey, 2001: 24), "achieved through fixing investments spatially, embedding them in the land, to create an entirely new landscape […] for capitalist accumulation" (28).

[12] For further information, see https://www.enea.ch

[13] In the days before the opening, Littmann denounced acts of violence and intimidation instigated by BZÖ sympathisers and militants (Landsberg, 2019), which gives an idea of the ideological unrest in which *For Forest* was entangled. Littmann has said about his work that it is "an opportunity to come to terms with the past" and that it "denazifies Carinthia" (Raymund Spöck, in Littman, 2019: 14).

[14] This information was on the project's homepage until April 2020. It has since disappeared. It remains, however, at Littmann, 2020c.

[15] https://www.austrianworldsummit.com/partners. It should be noted that, alongside these events, Klaus Littmann also announced, through social media, his new climate "awareness" project: *For Water*.

[16] T. J. Demos defines this as "a political ecology based on a commitment to environmental sustainability, biodiversity, social justice, human rights, economic equality and democratic practice — which identifies the overarching criteria for consideration of the artistic practices and critical positions" (Demos, 2013: 7).

[17] This passage reads like this in the original writings prior to the edition prepared by Engels, just as they have been recovered by Kohei Saito (2017: 206). Foster's reading (as with the translations available in Spanish) is based on Engels' edition, which obscures the relationship between social and natural metabolism mediated by the soil (Marx in Foster, 2004: 240).

[18] Among the extensive literary production of this school, linked to the magazine *Monthly Review*, it is worth highlighting Burkett (2014 [1999]); Burkett and Foster (2017); Foster, Brett and York (2010); Foster and Clark (2020); and Foster (2020).

[19] Similarly, E. P. Thompson, regarding the dispute between the common law of the plebs and the legislative changes of the elites in the transition to capitalism in England (1993 [1991]), became interested in the origin of the Black Act, which introduced the death penalty for those who, with their faces painted black, would go to the forests at night to cut down trees, hunt or fish (Thompson, 1975).

[20] See the role of the German chemist Justus von Liebig first, and then that of the agronomist Carl Fraas, in this development of Marx in Saito (2017).

[21] Fanon's influence is also highly relevant, from the title itself, for another significant contribution to this same field of studies, as is Coulthard (2014). In response to this work, and as an important contribution to the debate, see Foster, Clark and Holleman (2020).

[22] A criticism, in this sense, can be found in Tavares (2018), whose work incorporates otherwise neomaterialist perspectives. For a reply to these positions from approaches with affinities to the metabolic rift school, see Malm (2017).

[23] The material dimension of the operation is even more disturbing given the fact that forests take up 61% of the land surface in Carinthia (*For Forest Projektzeitung*).

[24] In fact, despite its negligible impact on the art world, there is a significant coincidence between this series of aspects in *For Forest* and others that can be traced in quite a few pieces also proposed on ecological issues, but closer to the interests of the art world as legitimised by the institutions of the contemporary medium. Although it goes beyond the scope of this article, see, for example, the case of *Um sagrado lugar* (*A Sacred Place*) by Ernesto Neto and the critique by Clemente Vega, 2018 —which investigates the marked depoliticisation when comparing the 2015 and 2017 editions of the Venice Biennale—; or *Sun & Sea* (*Marina*) by Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė, Vaiva Grainytė and Lina Lapelytė, winner of the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale 2019 (*Sun & Sea*, 2019a and 2019b; Lesser, 2019). In the latter case, it is also meaningful that the curator of this edition, Ralph Rugoff (who just a few months earlier had curated the exhibition *Among the Trees* at the Hayward Gallery in London, full of great stars of contemporary art, to "explore our relationship with trees and forests") decided on *May You Live in Interesting Times* as the title for the Biennale because with "a title like *Life in the Anthropocene* everyone's going to look at every work through that" (*Christie's*, 2019). It is worth noting that various local and international environmental organisations publicly expressed their discomfort that neither the exhibitors nor organisers of the Biennale contacted them to minimise the environmental impact of the event (Judah, 2019).