

Editorial

# Introduction: Thinking Cinema—With Plants

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There is a moment in Peter Brosens and Jessica Woodworth's *Khadak* (2006) when the image of a tree is rotated 180 degrees. The branches that are silhouetted against the crisp blue sky gradually shift round to the bottom of the screen, pointing downwards as the trunk rises into the air, the mesh of branches now resembling a mesh of roots even though they remain suspended rather than grounded. Plant life, or more particularly, the life of this tree, is not the main focus of this eco-crisis film set in Mongolia, but from the outset it is recognized as an important part of a network of relationships connecting soil to sky, human to nonhuman, and materiality to the spiritual vitality of Shamanism. Usually shown the right way up, the image of a single tree in an expansive frozen landscape appears several times throughout the film. Bagi (Batzul Khayankhyarvaa), the main protagonist, has a special relationship with it, as he does with animals and the land, embracing the trunk and placing his ear against it to listen to the life force that courses through it and connects it to other things. It also features in the foreground of shots that mark a transition from traditional to enforced newer ways of life, such as from travel by horse to motor vehicle. And in the final shot of the film, after Bagi's departure, a close-up of the tree's bark shows a steady flow of water running down its trunk, a possible sign of sentience and of mourning for the multiple losses caused by rapid industrialization—the needless mass slaughter of animals, the mining of the land, and the death of people. The rotation of this tree in the midst of a world that metaphorically has been turned upside down is a literal turning point: it marks a change in vision and the emergence of critical thinking as momentum gathers for a revolution. In keeping with the image of this upside-down tree, this Special Issue explores relations between cinema and plant life to show how the conjunction of film and the vegetal can turn thinking about thinking on its head.

The topic of this Special Issue was initially inspired by contemporary philosophical engagements with two distinct disciplines: film studies and plant studies. In film studies, from the work of Stanley Cavell to that of Gilles Deleuze [1–3], and from analytical to continental philosophy, the question not only of how filmmakers think through film but how film itself thinks galvanized a major area of enquiry in the multi-faceted sub-discipline of film philosophy [4,5].<sup>1</sup> Within plant studies, and in keeping with research in plant science that has explored plant intelligence and sentience in recent years [6–11], the question of whether, and if so how, plants think has prompted much debate, with philosopher Michael Marder devoting one major study specifically to what he terms “plant-thinking” [12]. Whereas the aims of attending to film thinking and plant-thinking are, at first glance, completely unrelated and specific to their respective fields, these divergent areas of inquiry nonetheless share a desire to think about their components—philosophy and film, and plants in relation to the capacities of other life forms—on a par with one another and thus non-hierarchically, while still recognizing their differences. It is with such a lateral impulse in mind that this Special Issue invited its contributors to think across the realms of film and plant studies, encouraging a variety of responses to the question of how we—scholars, readers, spectators—might go about “thinking cinema—with plants”, and attending to how filmmakers and films are already doing this. The Special Issue brings together film scholars working on the vegetal from a range of different methodological positions: from the historical and archival through film theory and philosophy to film practice. Drawing



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upon plant life and plant scholarship to pose innovative questions within film studies, and placing film, film theory, and philosophy in dialogue with work in plant studies, this Special Issue responds to the call from *Philosophies* to cross borders between different paradigms of intellectual investigation in the search for new modes of inquiry.

As Teresa Castro, Perig Pitrou, and Marie Rebecchi point out in an edited volume on animist cinema and the vegetal, vegetal life has captured the public as well as academic imagination in recent years and has generated a “vegetal turn” [13] (p. 7). The implications of this turn for work in film studies in particular are just beginning to be explored, and this is where this Special Issue seeks to make an intervention.<sup>2</sup> The vegetal turn both follows on from and intersects with other such shifts within the era of the so-called Anthropocene, chiming with the decentring of the human and care for the nonhuman that Richard Grusin points to as part of the nonhuman turn [14]. But, it places emphasis on what Jeffrey T. Nealon has termed the liminal place of plants within the wider biopolitical focus on “life” in humanities theory today, which has devoted more attention to animals to date [15] (unpaginated e-book preface, loc. 151). In contrast, the burgeoning field of critical plant studies has brought together philosophy and plant science with a range of work in the arts and humanities over the past decade, in order to make the hitherto marginal vegetal central [16–19].<sup>3</sup> As Teresa Castro notes in her signal article “The Mediated Plant”, the post-natural plants that appear through technologies such as film are our “queer kin”, which urge us forward in what she, citing philosopher and eco-feminist Val Plumwood, affirms as an urgent “struggle to think differently” [20]. Such interest in plants in film and beyond relates to other works in film scholarship and criticism [21–23],<sup>4</sup> as well as to broader thinking in the environmental humanities that shows how intertwined plants are with other life forms, and how our thinking needs to work collaboratively with them in order to effect change.

When Donna Haraway declares “We must think!”, for example, she is continuing the thread of a feminist collective thinking-with, generating a call to action in the service of developing further “tentacular” ways of thinking that challenge human exceptionalism [24]. Haraway includes the “tendrilled ones” with myriad other critters among the tentacular who can tell the story of the Chthulucene, in which human beings are not the only important actors. Plants are therefore vital participants in the development of such alternative ways of thinking, and a focus on plants need not be at the expense of thinking with other creatures of all kinds, human and nonhuman, biota and abiota. Furthermore, within critical plant studies, the notion that plants might serve as the model for all animate life, rather than being at the bottom of a hierarchy of which the apex is the human, is part of the radical botanical thinking pursued by Natania Meeker and Antónia Szabari, which includes film among the other arts in developing such radical thought [25]. Meeker and Szabari draw upon the distinct theoretical responses of Nealon and Marder to the specificity of plant life and its relation to philosophy. In *Plant-Thinking*, Marder interrogates the history of western metaphysics in order to challenge the consignment of plants to the margin of the margin in this philosophical tradition and to articulate a conception of “plant-thinking”, which is allied with the more prominent place plants occupy in contemporary western philosophy as well as non-western and feminist thinking [12] (pp. 1–6). Marder defines plant-thinking as follows, encapsulating at once:

(1) the non-cognitive, non-ideational, and non-imagistic mode of thinking *proper to* plants (what I later call “thinking without the head”); (2) the human thinking *about* plants; (3) how human thinking is, to some extent, de-humanized and rendered plant-like, altered by its encounter with the vegetal world; and finally, (4) the ongoing symbiotic relation between this transfigured thinking and existence of plants [12] (p. 10).

Engaging critically with Marder’s work, Nealon argues that he preserves a life-as-hidden-secret model with an anthropomorphic identity logic that he extends to plants and that, for Marder, plants become the new animals [15] (p. 12). The specificity of Marder’s

first point in his definition of plant-thinking seems distinct, however, from the zoomorphic and anthropomorphic tendency. While Marder has himself been critical of the ways in which film has approached plant life through time-lapse cinematography, saying that it replicates the imposition of an alien frame of reference upon them [26], his work has been taken up productively by film scholars who have begun to conceive of how cinema might help secure ways of “existing alongside, not above, plants”, as film scholar Chris Dymond puts it [27]. Following on from this, several of the contributors to this Special Issue engage with Marder’s multi-faceted conception of plant-thinking in a filmic context as one among many theoretical and philosophical speculative prompts towards thinking otherwise.

Contributors to this Special Issue take up the titular concern, understanding “thinking” in abstract and concrete terms as well as in dialogue with a wide selection of philosophical and theoretical work that ranges from vegetal philosophy and existentialism, through feminist, transgender, and critical race studies, to the thinking that underpins the American conservation movement, Saugeen First Nations epistemologies and cosmologies, Indigenous thinking from the Amazon and beyond, and the Māori world view. In Teresa Castro’s piece, for example, “thinking with” concerns a concrete experiment in terms of filming. As opposed to “thinking about”, “thinking with” is an invitation to “do your thinking” otherwise through film and with your entire body, not just with your brain, an idea that Castro shows the filming process demonstrates well and that works in collaboration with the plants filmed. In Castro’s analysis, such thinking is associated first and foremost with the filmmaker in relation to their plant subjects, but it also extends to the process of writing about these films, and indeed, to reading this writing as well as watching the films. The different ways in which the scholars who contributed to this Special Issue think cinema with plants is indebted implicitly and explicitly to not only how the films but also their plant subjects can be understood as thinking entities. The contributions also gesture towards the other unforeseeable connections that future readers and viewers will make in their own encounters with these films as well as this scholarship, which, to return to the rotated tree of *Khadak*, ally themselves with plants not only to turn thinking about thinking on its head, but also to ask what and where the “head” is in this context.

As Ngāpuhi artist Nova Paul and scholar Tessa Laird recognize in their contribution, which focuses on the intricate relationship between Paul’s experimental film practice and trees, Māori have long known that the “head” of the tree is its root system, not the leafy canopy. For Paul and Laird, film thinks, but so too do trees. The Darwinian notion of a “root-brain” has been revisited in contemporary plant science [7], as has the contention of plants “thinking without brains” [9]. As Paco Calvo notes, the roots of plants are intimately entwined with fungi, another vital kingdom of organisms, and he uses this interdependency to ask: “If plants can have such an interchange with other plants and other species, would it not be less of a stretch of the imagination to think that plants might be able to communicate within their own bodies, in a complex way that might be akin to ‘thinking?’” [9] (p. 39). Myriad trees, flowers, fruits, vegetables, and ruderals feature in this Special Issue’s filmic explorations as just such complexly functioning entities entwined in networks that extend ever outwards to connect soil and sky. Yet, the plant severed from its initial connections—the cut flower, for example—is as prevalent in film as the wild ones or the cultivated ones that grow in gardens. And the pot plant as well as the artificial flower are just as pertinent when considering the relationship between cinema and plants, as the articles by Georgina Evans and Sarah Cooper in this Special Issue attest. From experimental filmmaking to a Netflix production, and across varied genres, from natural history film to arthouse cinema, and from a Hollywood studio comedy of the 1950s to a longform streaming television series, contributors have explored thinking with and without the head from cinema’s moment of inception.

As scholarship on early film has demonstrated, and as Colin Williamson’s article in this Special Issue also shows, film has long served to scrutinize plant life, making use of microcinematography and time-lapse technology [28–31]. Plants and film have been inextricably linked with each other since the emergence of technologies in the nineteenth

century that led to the birth of cinema. While nonhuman animals were more obvious sources of interest for early cinematographic studies of movement, plants served such a purpose too, provoking even greater wonderment for scientists and lay observers alike as their habitually imperceptible movements were made visible. Flowers, in particular, were a focal point not only for the beauty of their unfurling, but also due to the fact that they permitted technical and aesthetic investigations of cinema itself. Williamson returns us fittingly to this early moment of cinema through his archival research into the American nature filmmaker Arthur Pillsbury. Pillsbury's pioneering time-lapse work with plant life shaped attitudes to nature in the U.S. context while also permitting the filmmaker to think through the techno-scientific potential of cinema at the beginning of the twentieth century. Historicizing and contextualizing the distinctiveness of Pillsbury's time-lapse engagements with plants, Williamson encourages us to think again about the time-lapse footage that surrounds us today, cautioning against ahistorical readings of its ubiquity from early cinema through to the present.

Not all early interest in plants was directed by the filmmaker's choice of them as subjects, however. While the makers of some of the earliest vegetal nonfiction films were as interested in using film to study previously unnoticed aspects of vegetal life as they were in presenting them to a mainstream public as entertainment, some films drew inadvertent attention to plants quite apart from their explicit subject. As the contributions to this Special Issue from Evans, Castro, Paul and Laird, as well as from Anat Pick and Chris Dymond remind us, the Lumière brothers' *Repas de bébé/The Baby's Meal* (1895), filmed by Louis and showing Auguste and his wife Marguerite feeding their daughter Andrée, has become more noteworthy for the movement of the leaves in the background of the shot than the principal subject of the film. The location of plants in the background or on the margins of cinematic shots usually contributes to their being taken for granted or ignored—a filmic manifestation of the liminal philosophical position that plant theorists have identified. Such side-lining and backgrounding are also instrumental in continuing what biologists James Wandersee and Elisabeth Schussler have termed “plant blindness” [32]. In the case of the Lumière brothers' film, though, attention to what the filmmakers included in the background has opened up other ways of thinking about and seeing both cinema and plants. As Pick has observed elsewhere, referring to *Repas de bébé* among other films, such images of plants are constitutive of a cinema of “letting be”, which she characterizes as nonviolent and non-possessive. *Repas de bébé* may place emphasis on eating, but the relation to the leaves in the background leads Pick to speak of it as an example of what she terms “vegan cinema” due to its non-devouring gaze [33].

In contrast, and in other forms of filmmaking ever since these early years, plants have sometimes had starring roles as very explicit vegetal embodiments of a devouring rather than non-devouring gaze. When plants have formed the subject of horror films, for example, they have often been sources of fear precisely because they could eat us. Among the more socially, historically, and culturally specific anxieties that scenarios in plant horror may encapsulate (see, for example, film historian Andrew Howe's work [34] for discussion of this), there is a more widespread confrontation with mortality at stake here in the foreknowledge that they have of our own demise.<sup>5</sup> As is apparent in plant horror scholar Dawn Keetley's observation on how human mortality involves a turn from flesh to food [35] (p. 1), many a plant horror fiction story or film simply acknowledges and hyperbolizes the fact that we will all one day become sustenance for plants. Plant horror has been a prominent area of study when thinking about plants in literature and film, as Georgina Evans notes in her contribution to this Special Issue, taking up an interest in plant life that links to early film and horror. Mindful of the fact that the plant that is out of place is often a cause for fear in horror or is denigrated as a weed, Evans turns to a quite different way of thinking about the out-of-place plant. Focusing on the philodendron in the 20th Century Fox studio comedy *Desk Set* (1957), she discusses the pot plant, directing attention to the frequently overlooked category of the houseplant in work on the vegetal. The pot plant—a luscious philodendron in Bunny's (Katharine Hepburn) high-rise office—is

aligned with Bunny's organic working and thinking styles, which stand in opposition to computational thinking. The philodendron is posited by Evans as excessive and is understood to reframe figure and ground in a manner that links the philodendron to the explicit presence of the plants of early film and horror. Evans argues that *Desk Set* shows a vegetal landscape that reveals the commonplace instrumentalizing of plants in modernity, but in which Bunny's philodendron emerges as an exception, not in terms of the "out of placeness" that denotes invasion or horror, but which prompts a need for thinking otherwise, oriented towards care and responsibility.

The alignment between Bunny's thinking and her burgeoning pot plant, in contrast to computational thinking, gestures suggestively beyond the philodendron's potted existence towards the ways in which plants can offer alternative, and more ethical, models of networked thinking to those based on the model of computer networks. Enmeshment in questions of care and responsibility emphasizes the ethics of attentiveness to plant life when thinking with the vegetal in filmic contexts, and stretches beyond care for the individual plant, potted or otherwise. The ethical stakes of bringing plants and film together are high, however, for other reasons. This is not only because film technologies can reinsert the human at the heart of the encounter with plants (cf. Marder's objection to time-lapse distortion of the time it takes plants ordinarily to move and grow, bringing them up to the speed of human perception [26]), but is also because of the pollutant place of cinema within capitalist and extractive regimes, which have had, and continue to have, such a decimating effect on the planet from the celluloid to the digital era of film and streaming media. While the contributors to this Special Issue are interested in how film might enable rather than disenable ethical relations with the plant world, all are conscious of the role film has played and continues to play within an epoch of anthropogenic destructiveness.

Even prior to the earliest encounters between plants and film, plants have unconsciously, and for millennia, harboured within the structure of their cell walls their future existence as film. Cellulose, vital to our green kin, would eventually, via collodion and then celluloid, feed the photographic and film industries. This positions film within a problematic history of extractive relationships with organic substances that characterizes the ongoing use and abuse of natural resources. More broadly, the extractions of minerals, metals, and plant-based substances from the earth that have enabled the film industries to thrive link up with pernicious extractions of other kinds. William Brown's article in this Special Issue on Barry Jenkins's 2021 adaptation of Colson Whitehead's 2016 novel *The Underground Railroad* centres on the role played by okra in this work and its relation to the soil and the mycorrhizal connections that sustain it. An extractive logic transplanted this plant as well as Africans who endured the Middle Passage to the New World slave plantations, but the plant, similar to the people, survive, according to Brown's argument, by going through "black holes". Bringing together critical race studies with critical plant studies, Brown argues that it is not possible to think or philosophize the plant or the medium of film (or by extension, television or streaming media) without philosophizing race. Brown holds that okra represents an otherwise lost African past in *The Underground Railroad*, both for the protagonist Cora (Thuso Mbedu) and for the show as a whole. *The Underground Railroad* serves here to bring together plants and plantations, soil and wormholes, along with Blackness and black holes, which Brown gathers together critically and creatively under the umbrella term "black (w)hole foods".

An implicit critique of extractive activity informs other articles in this Special Issue, but there is a strong sense in which film's relation to the vegetal in this regard does not necessarily culminate in an ecological, ethical, or political impasse in all contexts, as the contributions from Paul and Laird, Patrícia Vieira, and Pick and Dymond lay bare, all of which draw upon different kinds of Indigenous thinking with film. Mindful of what film scholar Nadia Bozak aptly terms our "cinematic footprint" [36], these contributors interrogate, nonetheless, the role that film can play more positively in spite of its complicity with extraction and other damaging practices. Vieira's contribution focuses on animism and Indigenous Amazonian filmmaking, which derives from a region in which vegetal



beings have great importance and which is grounded in the everyday lived experience with flora. Such filmmaking foregrounds a strong affinity between the human communities and plants with which they share their existence. Vieira responds to the challenge of “thinking cinema—with plants” by considering persons as plants, in a reversal of plant scholar Matthew Hall’s formulation in his book-length study of plants as persons [37]. She reflects on both the ontological and epistemological consequences of this inversion in the human approach to vegetal life. Cautioning against a Romanticized view of what an Indigenous cinematic vision might express, Vieira argues that Indigenous filmmakers, trained in a medium developed at the heart of western modernity, nonetheless navigate cinematic conventions to bring new content and forms of seeing into being. The resultant film that she discusses in detail is an animistic phytofilm about plant-persons and their interactions with humans.

Following on from this productive vision, Pick and Dymond’s contribution demonstrates how filmic encounters with plants can see regeneration and sustainability encouraged rather than curtailed by ethical practices of growing, harvesting, and eating. Pick and Dymond think cinema through its vegetal entanglements by considering work by Indigenous artist-filmmakers who encounter plants not as resources to be plundered, but as inspirational instructors whose own agential inputs are welcomed into the filmmaking process. In their first case study from the Saugeen First Nation community filmmaking project, for example, they show how the flower processing of film serves as a sustainable alternative to harsher chemicals. The filmmakers ask permission from the plants before picking and only ever take less than a quarter of the plant so that it continues to flourish. Pick and Dymond point to the extractive colonialist roots of film, from celluloid through to digital culture, defining their alternative conception of “permacinema” against this. Focusing on films made by Indigenous artists informed by Indigenous epistemologies and cosmologies, they situate permacinema in a wider project of decolonization and rewilding.

For Pick and Dymond, “[i]f film thinks, it lives, and whatever lives grows”. Plant growth is distinguished sharply from economic growth models that are the stock-in-trade of capitalist extraction, and is aligned alternatively with what Pick and Dymond describe as the politics, ethics, and aesthetics of degrowth. Developing these profound ecological reflections based on the relation between plants and film, as well as expanding the Deleuzian notion of the filmmaker who thinks in images rather than concepts, Nova Paul’s own experimental films are, as she and Tessa Laird outline in their article, co-produced with trees. Like Pick and Dymond’s article, Paul and Laird’s is co-written, and they speak of the braided voice as emblematic of a kind of thinking that is not that of a singular individual entity, pre-empting their move beyond consideration of plants in individualistic terms. Exploring the technological and the ecological, as these are incarnated by trees and not just film, Paul and Laird ask how trees think through Paul’s films, which are made with kaupapa Māori values. Their article shows how the films are not so much *about* trees but *by* trees. Highlighting how Paul’s films are made without harsh chemicals (cf. the Indigenous filmmaking practices in Pick and Dymond’s study), Paul and Laird detail how a chlorophyll developer is used to make, rather than take, images, which reveal the “mauri” (life force) of the trees. Paul and Laird note that recent scholarship on plant intelligence has recognized that trees think, but tends to position trees as independent scholars. Their own work is geared towards acknowledging the whole enmeshed forest, beginning with the undergrowth and the mycorrhizal web of relations. Furthermore, their filmic tree thinking unseats Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s upright image of arborescence, recognizing a positive genealogy of kinship between the human and the more-than-human, from trees to film, to understand the arboreal in terms of myriad nodes within underground networks. The cinematic “thinking-with” the arboreal that emerges through Paul’s films shows how Indigenous living and thinking have long known that trees provide the template for thinking and being, and that all creatures are dependent on their wisdom.

The spirit of what (pl)anthropologist Natasha Myers has termed the “Planthroposcene” is evident across these and other articles in this Special Issue, which seek alternative path-

ways through the ruins of the Anthropocene towards different futures in which humans cooperate and collaborate with plants as well as the other life forms they sustain. Myers's neologism envisages plants as our ideal companions in the creation of what might come next. Myers writes: "The Planthropocene does not name a time-bound era but an aspirational episteme marked by a profound acknowledgement of the joint and uncertain futures of plants and peoples, and a profound commitment to collaboration" [38] (p. 126). Elsewhere, and indebted to the scholarship of biologist Lynn Margulis whose work on symbiosis emphasizes histories of involvement and entwinement with forms of life and beings beyond the human, Myers and historian Carla Hustak foreground "involutionary" rather than combative and competitive evolutionary developmental relations [39]. Involution is a matter of co-evolution, which means getting involved in each other's lives. For Myers, the Planthropocene "is a call to change the terms of encounter, to make allies with these green beings" [38] (p. 127). Myers has herself collaborated with filmmaker Ayelen Liberona to think through film in order to consider such plant-human involvement and allegiance [40], and other film-focused collectives have also focused on rethinking the terms of encounters with plants [41].<sup>6</sup> These collaborations and encounters mean making allies of the less showy and frequently denigrated green beings of the plant world, as well as those more spectacular plants that otherwise command our attention and stimulate our desire for them. In this Special Issue, Teresa Castro turns to the margins of the plant world to centre attention on ruderals and plant-like lichens—which she terms "strange, queer, and turbulent creatures"—to explore just such collaborative and synergistic bonds with them in an era of eco-crisis.

Often referred to as weeds—those plants that, as nature writer Richard Mabey suggests, we ignore at our peril since "they may be holding the bruised parts of the planet from falling apart" [42] (p. 20)—ruderals grow on wastelands or among rubbish. Castro's focus on their place within the films she studies puts forward a compelling case for their centrality in our anthropogenic times. She posits them as exemplary companions to think with in our profoundly ruptured ecological epoch, but also as a way of engaging less anthropocentric histories. Entering into what artist Sarah Cowles terms "ruderal aesthetics" [43], Castro focuses on these plants of the limit—oft politicized and vilified for their resilience to be described as "invasive" or "non-native"—to point towards "the prospect of world-making in the midst of the devastation". Indeed, alert to connections between organisms in such world-making, and referring in particular to the composite organism of the lichen—which can be plant-like but which is not a plant—Castro suggests that thinking with ruderals and lichens challenges the insularity of the individual, pointing towards the kind of symbiosis that Margulis envisioned and others have explored since. Castro considers how film not only bears witness to complex "natureculture" entanglements, but can also be a way of reconfiguring affective ecologies and of reclaiming the involutionary modes of attention of which Myers and Hustak speak.

In her article, Castro refers in passing to the fascinating, albeit ecologically problematic, connection between the film and artificial flower industries—a link which Sarah Cooper picks up on in her contribution. From cellulose through collodion to celluloid, the thread that binds plants to the photographic and film industries also ties them to artificial flower making, which was thriving at the time of the 1920s in the U.S., the setting of the book on which Jane Campion's film, *The Power of the Dog* (2021)—Cooper's main focal point—was based. Collodion and celluloid served the making of artificial flowers, but a more common substance for such flower making, also indebted to cellulose, was paper. Embedding this film in Campion's wider oeuvre, Cooper looks at how the film questions historically entrenched associations between flowers and female sexuality by homing in on the significance of the paper flowers made by Peter (Kodi Smit-McPhee) and their entwinement in myriad human power relations in this revisionist Western. Inspired by the plant-thinking articulated by Marder and the flower thinking of Emanuele Coccia, Cooper traces a filmic "thinking without the head" through the film's *mise en scène* on the basis of what happens to one particular paper flower. Indebted throughout to a questioning of

binary thinking, and in tune especially with the work of Roland Barthes and transgender scholar Eliza Steinbock, she shows how this paper flower brings a shimmering, yet fragile, floral aesthetic into being.

Focused as it is on an artificial flower, Cooper's article questions the reproductive circuits that usually lead from flowers to fruits. Following on from this line of questioning, and in separate locales, historical associations between flowers, as well as fruits, and the feminine are taken up critically in Graig Uhlin's and Laura Staab's articles, respectively. Uhlin considers the work of Agnès Varda (whose film *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse/The Gleaners and I* (2000) also features in Pick and Dymond's piece). He examines *Le Bonheur* (1965) and *Sans toit ni loi/Vagabond* (1985) in particular for their critical invocation of a patriarchal association between women and plants. Thinking with plants in relation to the feminine in Varda's work, Uhlin challenges the ways in which plants and women are thought of in the metaphysical tradition to have a negative relation to freedom. He draws together the post-war existentialist philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir with the more recent vegetal philosophizing of Luce Irigaray and Marder in order to consider how conceptions of female liberation in post-war France shape the cinematic rendering of vegetal being in Varda's filmmaking. Uhlin notes the political value of such work that connects women and the vegetal, in contrast to a patriarchal association of women and flowers. Discovering the encounter with the vegetal in silence, Uhlin argues that the liberated woman and the liberated plant speak a language audible to each other, but not to the phallic order.

In her contribution, Laura Staab turns to consider the place of fruit—apples, lemons, and oranges—in experimental writing and experimental filmmaking by a selection of women, with an extended reflection on the work of Hélène Cixous and Laida Lertxundi. Staab points to how both the writer and filmmaker see in art, literature, and philosophy an historical relation of women to nature. Staab acknowledges how “thinking women with fruit can be disturbing and vexing”, particularly in a contemporary feminist context. She is interested, nonetheless, in how women in Cixous's and Lertxundi's work look at times at fruit, pointing to how their texts and films loosen any essentialist association between women and nature. Across Cixous's texts and Lertxundi's films, Staab argues, fruit is not positioned as equivalent to feminine anatomy, and their gathering of images of apples, oranges, and lemons in all their juiciness is not metaphorical of feminine jouissance. In this feminist take on associations between women and fruit, Staab draws upon a range of feminist philosophy and eco-philosophy in order to show how Cixous and Lertxundi's explorations of women's eyes looking at a piece of fruit can enable us to see and think the world anew.

This vision of citric vibrancy and thoughtful possibility brings this introduction to a close. Each contribution to this Special Issue raises its own questions about the relation between plants and film relevant to the specificity of the materials they discuss and their particular historical and geographical contexts. Yet, there is a shared hope that runs throughout the Special Issue as a whole: that it will stimulate further conversations about what it means to think cinema with plants, and encourage many more fruitful encounters between film and the vegetal realm.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This area of research has flourished over the last two decades. For just one early example of work on film and thinking that draws upon the philosophy of Deleuze, see Daniel Frampton [4], and for an early example drawing upon the philosophy of Cavell, along with Wittgenstein, see Rupert Read and Jerry Goodenough's edited volume [5].
- <sup>2</sup> Castro, Pitrou, and Rebecchi's volume is pivotal in this regard, as are other volumes and individual articles cited elsewhere in this introduction that include plant-film connections among discussion of the other arts and within wider ecological investigations.
- <sup>3</sup> Michael Marder's *Critical Plant Studies* book series with Brill features a range of contributions to this growing field. See, for example, Randy Laist [16], Prudence Gibson [17], and Giovanni Aloï [18]. Giovanni Aloï and Michael Marder's forthcoming reader from MIT brings together some of the key contributions to date in this area [19].
- <sup>4</sup> The beautiful "Full Bloom" series on MUBI, for example, written by Patrick Holzapfel and illustrated by Ivana Miloš, reconsiders plants in cinema and why filmmakers have given myriad different flowers, trees, or herbs special attention in their films [21]. There are also expansive studies of film that look at the screening of nature by broaching animal and plant life: see, for example, Anat Pick and Guinevere Narraway [22]. More recently, Elio Della Noce and Lucas Murari involve plants within the discussion of the wider ecologies of experimental film under the umbrella of expanded nature [23].
- <sup>5</sup> The important edited volume *The Green Thread* in which Howe's work was published features stimulating essays by Patrícia Vieira, Guinevere Narraway and Hannah Stark, Pansy Duncan, and Graig Uhlin that also focus on plants and film, with Uhlin's in particular engaging with Marder's work on plant-thinking.
- <sup>6</sup> For events at Tate Modern London in October 2022, the Counter Encounters collective (Laura Huertas Millán, Onyeka Igwe, and Rachael Rakes) organized films around the theme of encounters with plants from an anti-capitalist and anti-colonialist perspective, which their Special Issue of *World Records* explores in further detail [41].

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