Article

Juha Suonpää's documentary "Lynx Man": From Filmmaker to Active Witness

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the question of filmmakers' intentions and what transcends them in the context of ecocritical filmmaking. While making his second feature-length documentary, *Lynx Man*, director Juha Suonpää installed more than thirty trail cameras in the forest near his main characters home. By installing the "camera with no authorship" (Farocki, 2001), was he indeed allowing this camera to capture "operational images that do not depict or represent, entertain or inform but rather track, navigate, activate, oversee, control, visualise, detect and identify?" (Parikka, 2023). When Suonpää left the cameras alone to the forest, they became witnesses to the forest life. Using Barad's intra-action, Morton's mesh, and Ivakhiv's process view, I treat *Lynx Man* as a sequence of events that happen between bodies, places, and devices. I try to understand nature filmmaking as a cluster of intentions that creates wider possibilities for accessing the reality of nature. A selection of the cinematographic choices used in *Lynx Man* will broaden and challenge the concept of authorship, arriving at the notion of chance as a narrative tool.

KEYWORDS: eco-criticism, film editing, narrative, chance, intention

INTRODUCTION

This article asks a simple question: what do filmmakers intend, and what happens in their films that goes beyond these intentions, particularly in ecocritical films? I examine Juha Suonpää's feature documentary *Lynx Man*, in which more than thirty trail cameras were set up around the main character's home in the forest. These cameras operated independently and were set up in a complex system by the filmmaker, capturing the everyday life of non-human animals. The article starts with an overview of the ecocritical scholarship in film and gives an overview of the key developments in the field – starting from the desire for new ways of seeing nature, which together with the development of technology has led to highly manipulated, anthropocentric and market-driven views of the world around us. I then provide an overview of ecological films as relation-building with the Other, building on the ideas of Barad's intra-actions and the emergence of agencies in the course of it, Morton's "mesh" and strange strangers and Ivakhiv's process-relational approach to film.

I then move on to Harun Farocki's idea of 'operational images.' Such footage can be considered as images made to track, detect and record rather than entertain. Jussi Parikka adds how we can also see how design choices – where a camera is placed, what it senses and how the software

sorts – shape what appears on screen. I compare the idea of non-representational images of Farocki and Roland Barthes, highlighting the importance of space left for emergence of narratives. Building on the above-mentioned theoretical basis, my aim while analysing the screen shots from *Lynx Man*, is to maintain a focus on filmmakers' practical choices: set-ups and the space left for chance. I analyse practical decisions and the filmmaker's agency while installing several cameras instead of one, and investigate the point which a tool that simply records also begins to shape the story.

By examining *Lynx Man* closely, I argue that authorship and intention are not erased by operational images – in this case, trail cameras. Rather, they are relocated. Intention lies in the setup and the willingness to let events unfold. Chance becomes a narrative tool by itself, offering surprising shot structures which emerge without human involvement. The result is a film that captures forest life at its own pace, while still bearing the filmmaker's mark, highlighting his ethical intentions. This article closely follows the practical process and choices made by the filmmaker: moving from intentions to infrastructures, from plans to encounters, and from human control to shared, sometimes surprising, appearances.

ECOCRITICISM AND ECOCINEMA

Ecocriticism, the study of human-nature relations in literature, film and other cultural expressions, as defined by Bracke and Corporaal (2010), explores the relationship between narratives and representations of nature through a critical lens. Ecocritical approaches to film did not emerge fully formed from film studies; it evolved from literary ecocriticism's efforts to treat the environment as something more than just a backdrop. In the 1990s, Lawrence Buell provided the audiovisual field with its initial framework. In his book *The Environmental Imagination*, he poses ecocinema's fundamental question: "Should this or that literary expression of gratitude at one's return to nature be taken as a responding to nature, or as disguising a human interest, ..., or simply as affirming the tradition of nature affirmations?" (Buell, 1995). The term 'ecocinema' was further developed by Scott MacDonald, amongst others, who stated that the role of ecocinema "...is to provide new kinds of film experience that demonstrate an alternative to conventional media spectatorship and help nurture a more environmentally progressive mindset" (MacDonald 1996, 20). It became apparent that ecocinema has a clear intention – to change the viewer's attitudes towards nature. However, the focus on the new experiences that audiences craved, together with the rapid development of technology, took mainstream ecocinema to another extreme – a highly anthropocentric viewpoint – through the manipulation of reality and questionable authenticity of the relations on screen.

From these questions, the next logical step in the development of ecocritical thinking in film was to reimagine cinema as an ecological process. Karen Barad, in her 2007 book *Meeting the universe halfway* introduces the term 'intra-action,' which stresses the importance of mutual constitution of entangled agencies. She redefines the word interaction, explaining that "the notion of infra-action recognises that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action" (Barad 2007, 33). So, there is no agency before mutual entanglement; it is not an inherent, separate property; and it only emerges in the course of intra-action. Several years later, Timothy Morton (2010) coined the term 'mesh,' which states that nature is not a background against the interactions, but part of it and "there would be no mesh if there were no strange strangers" (Morton 2010, 47). In Morton's view, interconnection implies separateness and difference. Inside the mesh live the strange strangers, and the mesh is the entanglement of them all. These two thinkers present a complex view of eco-aesthetics and both imply that relations emerge during the interaction, rather than existing previously – a fundamental

notion when looking at the process of making and relating to ecocinema.

In his book *Ecologies of the Moving Image*, Adrian J. Ivakhiv also reframes film as a process-relational event. Ivakhiv (2013) divides ecologies (interlinked registers through which moving images exist and act) into three groups – the material, the social, and the perceptual – and he stresses the importance of the relationship between the one who sees and the one who is seen. He separates the object-world (which is objectively present and can be acted upon, but is not itself capable of acting intentionally) and the subject-world (which is open to the actions of a subject and can bring change). More importantly, however, he notes things which we are not sure of, "which at the outset – say, at the hypothetical zero point before an infant learns to distinguish between them – include everything" (Ivakhiv 2013, 12). Similarly to Barad and Morton, Ivakhiv also arrives at the issue of humans meeting the unknown and overcoming the subject-object duality, arguing that the other does not exist before we meet it. The practical decisions of the filmmakers of how to approach this mystical other became crucial in the process of ecocinema.

Anthropomorphism has poisoned ecofilms, to the extent that mainstream films need accompanying making-of films to prove their authenticity, and some scholars like Bart H. Welling suggest that biocultural scholars should delve into the "vast archives of filmmakers' biographies, letters, interviews, documentary scripts and outtakes, studio and museum records, promotional materials, special internet features, and other film paratexts … to reconstruct the anthrozoological contexts that have had a bearing on the behaviour (including the affective responses) of filmed animals" (Mossner 2014, 94). This suggests that there is an ongoing crisis of trust in ecocinema. The sub-genre of making-of documentaries (MOD) of ecofilms, often as important as the film itself, is a developed genre in its own right. According to Louson (2021), three methods are used in MOD films to back up the authenticity of the blue-chip nature films: talking-head interviews, behind-the-scenes footage showing the skills and hardships of the filmmakers, and high-definition footage from the film being made. The latter defines the success of the making-of process. Gouyon characterises this approach as 'claimed artificiality:' filmmakers openly acknowledge the staging, and they recruit audiences as "virtual witnesses" (Gouyon, 2016, p. 85). In her article, Louson goes on to demonstrate how MOD films are fictional constructions to demonstrate the authenticity of the intra-action between the filmmakers and the filmed subjects, often purposefully leaving out crucial information such as the combination of many animals presented as one character.

As mentioned previously, Barad's concept of intra-action, where agency emerges through an encounter rather than existing prior to it, is not evident in many mainstream ecofilms. The filmmaker's agency, often anthropomorphised, is highly developed, constructed, and leaves little room for the emergence of the relation to the Other. Stephen Rust (Rust et al., 2012) argues that the cultural logic of late capitalism articulates a 'cultural logic of ecology,' in which dominant consumerist ideologies are presented as both the cause of and the solution to climate change. In this ideological economy, filmmakers are often pressured to package ecological concerns as sellable content, prioritising marketability over relational authenticity. Mäkelä and Meretoja (2012) introduce the term 'story wars,' describing a trend of reducing narratives to easily shareable and commercial forms. They warn of the effects of this practice on relations among underrepresented communities and ecosystems. They propose a model with six evaluative dimensions for the ethical assessment of social and cultural narrative practices in context, which I will later apply on Juha Suonpää's *Lynx Man*. The model asks whether narratives expand or diminish our sense of what is possible, cultivate or distort personal and cultural self-understanding, promote or

impair our ability to grasp the experiences of others in their singularity, build inclusive or exclusive narrative in-betweens, develop or impede awareness of perspectives, and function as ethical enquiry or dogmatism (Meretoja, 2018; 2021).

Taken together, these debates demonstrate that the ethical aspirations of ecocinema are consistently challenged by anthropocentric authorship, market forces, and questionable demonstrations of authenticity. If, as Barad suggests, agency emerges within relations rather than prior to them, the decisive question becomes not only what filmmakers intend, but also how relations emerge on the screen without filmmakers' involvement. This takes us to operational images – images produced for sensing, tracking and sorting systems (e.g. trail cameras, drones, and thermal cameras and their software), rather than to address a human spectator. Examining how this technology prefigures encounters and visibility allows us to reassess authenticity and agency in ecodocumentaries at the creative and infrastructural level.

OPERATIONAL IMAGE

The term 'operational images' was coined by Harun Farocki, who became interested in working with images which are not recorded for the purpose of an audience to see them, but for operational reasons such as surveillance and data collection. They are "made neither to entertain nor to inform" (Farocki 2001) and "they are devoid of social intent" (.ibid). Blumenthal-Barby translates the essence of the operational image further – as images which come from the war process, they already agree with its reality (and do not question it ethically) for as ""cinematography of devices" is no less than the displacement of the "human" variable" (Blumenthal-Barby 2015). The operational image from Farocki's work agrees that human is not important in the context of war, it pushes the human element out and looks at reality as if the human does not exist. In his essay "Phantom Images," Farocki argues that technical images claiming merely to depict a process's operating principle are at times deeply mystifying. He brings examples of the profound feelings produced by a camera attached to a missile warhead or looking down on an empty battlefield: "Such images challenge the artist who is interested in a meaning that is not authorial and intentional, an artist interested in a sort of beauty that is not calculated" (Farocki 2003). He argues that those images come close to the "unconscious visible" (ibid.).

Farocki credits Roland Barthes for inspiring the term 'operational images' and expands the notion to the technology used to depict the images: "Even a tool communicates not only with the materials of its trade, but also with the human senses" (Farocki 2003). Thus, Farocki acknowledges there is always a human who installs or places the camera. Roland Barthes, in his essay "Camera Lucida" (1993), separates 'punctum' and 'studium' while looking at photographs. Studium is coded, while punctum is not. Punctum is a non-representational layer of the photograph that touches the viewer without a clear reason and always lacks intention. In an attempt to bring punctum as a term over to film (Nimik 2025), I stress that, in the case of filmmaking and similarly to photography, the balance between lack of intention and the constructional and creative force is a crucial element in achieving authenticity or uncalculated beauty, as Farocki puts it.

While Roland Barthes's punctum and Harun Farocki's operational images come from very different traditions (semiotics and media archaeology/critical theory, respectively), they both describe moments when an image exceeds its apparent function – when it acts or pierces beyond the visible. Both describe the emergence of narrative structures and cinematic mysticism without human interference. But as noted above, the installer of the operational image and the filmmaker with a camera are both also someone who moves in an environment and looks for the emergent intra-action with the environment or subjects he or she films. The operational images are always installed by humans. So, the design,

selection and placement of the camera – its lenses, triggers and thresholds – are infrastructure decisions that decide what can appear. However, they cannot decide what will appear and when. It is the lack of the presence of human agency while recording that effectively moves 'intention' from the person who created the content to the system that controls visibility and action. What will be seen is defined by the machine and the Other it meets. An intra-action is taking place in the chosen environment, without the presence of a human.

Ester Leslie (2004) also investigates the possibility of lessening the intentions of the filmmaker and joins the correspondence between Farocki's 'operational images' and Benjamin's 'optical unconscious' (1935) and concludes that it,

> "...suggests that film itself, the cinematic strip, the processes of montage, could outstrip the intentions of the filmmaker. Film presents, in a sense, its own unconscious to the audience. This unconscious is comprised of chance details, moments when the images and activity recorded performs in unanticipated ways or is perceived in ways unattainable by the unassisted eye" (Leslie 2004).

Nevertheless, relevant to the ecocritical studies, the unconscious of the film strip does not free it from responsibility. The operational images help us to redefine authorship through its simultaneous existence and lack thereof. As Parikka suggests, "machine vision should be understood not merely as a special case of vision or seeing, but (at least as much) as an operation of navigation and movement that is infrastructured across different layers of urban and non-urban environments" (Parikka, 2023, p.205). From an ethical point of view, this means making one's choices clear (being open about how it was set up) and taking responsibility for any harm or problems that result from where and how the camera is made to look. In Emmanuel Levinas' (1985) terms, this would leave room for chance, make the technology visible, and resist total control so that the Other's claim remains possible. Levinas, the author of the Ethics and Infinity (1985), who similarly to Farocki refers to the Other as mystery, reminds us of the responsibility of meeting the other: "Since the Other looks at me, I am responsible for him, without even having *taken* on responsibilities in his regard; his responsibility is *incumbent on me*. It is responsibility that goes beyond what I do" (Levinas 1985, p. 96). It is the responsibility of filmmakers to look at the Other, but also allow themselves to be looked at and to allow authentic intra-action to take place.

Mette Hjort (2016) makes an intentionalist proposal in her essay "What Does It Mean to Be an Ecological Filmmaker?: Knut Erik Jensen's Work as Eco-Auteur," where she emphasises the importance of not merely looking at the filmmaker's intentions, but also whether those intensions have been realised. She proposes that it is the practitioner's agency, self-understanding, aspirations and decision-making that form the "intentions constitutive of ecological filmmaking" (Hjort, 2016); the intention to recognise the interdependence of living species within an ecosystem (ethico-cognitive goal); the intention to evoke, document, or analyse the negative impacts of human agency, and to advocate change (activist goal); the intention to foster accurate beliefs about the natural environment, and to encourage sound thinking about it (cognitive goal); the intention to adopt filmmaking practices that avoid harmful direct effects on the environment, as well as practices that reduce the indirect environmental costs of filmmaking to the greatest extent possible (normative goal); and the intention to appreciate nature on its own terms (aesthetic goal) (ibid.).

She also points out that first three intentions may be negotiable, but the last two must be fulfilled for one to be considered an ecological filmmaker. Notably, she also remarks that ecological filmmaking "is an endeavour that admits of failure as well

as success, the latter being predicated on the actual realisation of the requisite intentions" (Hjort 2016). Using Hjort's mapping of the practitioner's agency, in the following section I intend to analyse the intentions of the filmmaker and the emergence of the intra-action with the Other based on the Finnish feature documentary *Lynx Man*, directed by Juha Suonpää.

THE MACHINE IN THE NATURE

In order to make *Lynx Man*, Juha Suonpää installed more than thirty trail cameras in the forest surrounding his main character's home. This was not his idea originally; his main character Hannu had already installed some cameras and was tracking the lynxes. However, Suonpää took the 'surveillance' to another level – to the filmmaker's level. By installing the 'camera with no authorship' (Farocki, 2001), was he in fact enabling this camera to record "operational images that do not depict or represent, entertain or inform but rather track, navigate, activate, oversee, control, visualise, detect and identify" (Parikka 2023)? When Suonpää left the cameras alone to the forest, they became independent witnesses to forest life.

The idea of removing the 'human' variable raises many questions. What difference would it have made if Suonpää had installed only one camera in the woods? What does the multiplicity of camera angles add to the concept of an operational image? Does an operational image remain operational if it is multiplied? Farocki (2000) says that security cameras show the norm and expect deviations from it. In the case of trail cameras in the forest, they are set up there with the intention of capturing something that we know is there but that we cannot be certain of. In this case, our intention is to capture something we cannot anticipate, and the filmmaker's intention becomes very visible – he wants to capture that "unanticipated something" from different angles, allowing him to use cinematic language (wide, medium, close-up shots) later to amplify the unexpected. We feel and share the filmmaker's intention. These cameras wait in the forest for passing animals and for so much more that we cannot describe before we witness it.

Juha Suonpää was inspired to make *Lynx Man* after an accidental meeting with Hannu. He encountered Hannu, a pensioner, at a nature protection conference in Finland, where Hannu presented images captured by trail cameras he had set up in his forest around his home. Juha said in personal correspondence that he was mesmerised by the truthfulness of those images and the empathy emanating from Hannu. There was no excessive beauty, just a genuine relationship between Hannu and the lynxes living in the forest surrounding his house in western Finland. Juha said that he immediately wanted to be part of that world and relationship.

Suonpää identifies as an environmentalist and an artist with a long-standing interest in the relationship between humans and nature. His first feature documentary was called *Wolfman* (2013), followed by *Lynx Man* (2023). There is a further film titled *Rat Man* to follow. *Lynx Man* was produced in Finland during a time when, despite the fact that lynxes are on the verge of extinction, the state granted 300 licenses to hunt them. One of Suonpää's clear intentions was to use film language to disagree with this decision by the authorities. He has very clearly stated his agency and intention as a filmmaker in one of his articles:

> "The fate of lynx and man is shared. The solution to the problems is not possible with the current thinking models, but with a radical change. According to Californian management professor Nancy J. Adler, "the problems of this time cannot be solved at the same level of consciousness at which they were born. A new kind of agency is needed and a radical emergence of beauty to inspire people (Adler, 2011)" (Suonpää 2020).

Suonpää also identifies as a patient observer, giving nature the space it needs to manifest itself (Suonpää, 2023):

> I believe that you have to wait patiently to capture something unique. It took me 15 years to make *Wolfman*. As a filmmaker, I am a one-man band. I work as a professor at a university, so it gives me much-needed flexibility to wait and collect material. I remember when I was an environmentalist in the 1980s; I remember how strongly I felt. We have the technology to change things, but we have to change our hearts first. We need to reimagine our relationship with nature. These animals are predators, but we need to learn from them, too, by seeing them hunt in a sustainable way, for example. In these villages, away from the cities, there was always some "crazy" guy. They were needed – also to introduce other perspectives and ways of thinking. It's a political statement to be crazy.

Suonpää consciously uses his cinematic skills to amplify the craziness of the main character. He depicts a lonely person who lives on the periphery, using this as a doorway to the world of the forest. Following lynxes through the trail cameras, Hannu identifies and names the lynxes, witnesses their everyday life, and gradually starts to identify as a lynx.

In the same Cineuropa interview, Suonpää talks about his democratic approach to filming his subjects:

> The ironic thing is that I have never seen lynxes in real life. Some would say: "How can you make a nature film about animals you have never seen?" But there is a respect between me and the lynx. I have been "exploiting" them in the film, in a sense, but in a very democratic way. They decide when they come. It was important to give them this freedom instead of chasing them with a camera. One of them, Joseph, would often leave his mark, peeing right into the lens. (ibid.)

With those excerpts from Suonpää's interviews, we have mapped at least four clear, verbalized intentions the filmmaker had while making *Lynx Man* that can be related to the ecological filmmaking intentionality proposal mentioned by Hjort above: wanting to be part of Hannu's world and his relationship with the lynxes (ethico-cognitive goal); finding solutions to ecological problems through the beauty of art (activist goal, aesthetic goal); changing our hearts before we change our minds (activist goal); and the democratic exploitation of the lynxes – they decide when they appear (normative goal, cognitive goal, aesthetic goal).

It is now necessary to consider how the images of *Lynx Man* match this division of filmmaker intentions and if these intentions alone are enough to open the world of lynxes to the spectators and thereby create the feeling that the film eventually creates – that we see a glimpse of a world where the human being is an outsider, a world which is inaccessible for humans no matter how hard he or she tries to enter it.

MAPPING OF THE INTENTIONS BEHIND IMAGES IN *LYNX MAN*

I will attempt to map the different camera angles used in *Lynx Man* and relate them to the filmmaker's intentions. Figure 1 shows four images from a 'subjective' camera. The camera is inclusive, present in the moment, and the subject is aware of it. Furthermore, the subject and the camera are collaborating – Hannu is preparing to install the cameras in the forest. This is something that the filmmaker and the subject appear to be doing together, because the character is talking to someone behind the camera. Although we never see the person behind

the camera, we sense their presence. We also sense Hannu's agenda: he is driven to connect with the forest world. Through these images, however, there is not much sense of a shared agenda with the filmmaker; it seems to be Hannu's plan alone. However, the 'filmmaker' is a reference to the director of the film – Juha Suonpää. Hannu is a subject for Suonpää, similarly to the non-human animals in the film, and he does not make directing decisions for the feature-length documentary in the making.

In **Figure 2**, there are three different representations of the trail camera. In the first still photograph, Hannu is standing with his arms wide, presenting himself as a test subject for the camera, planning the camera position. He is fully aware of being captured by the trail camera. The following two images show animals that are captured by the camera but are completely unaware of it. Various species of animals pass in front of the camera without engaging with it – the trail camera captures operational images. However, the fourth image, in which Hannu passes the camera seemingly unaware of it, creates a strange shift compared to the first two images: Hannu has become equal to the animals. He is captured on equal terms; there is no difference between a man and an animal passing the camera. We feel as if he is one with the animals.

Figure 3 shows one trail camera that is recording another trail camera capturing animals. We witness how the animals pass a trail camera, so the trail camera becomes a character of the film. Viewers become fully aware of the presence of the trail cameras, which are also used to invite the animals to communicate with humans. Hannu puts different oils and scents on the cameras to encourage the animals to investigate them more closely, enabling him to capture more powerful images. In essence, we are looking at an image of a trail camera witnessing how another trail camera is recording a relationship with the forest inhabitants. The filmmaker's intentions are very present here: he wants the viewer to understand his intentions, creating a certain openness, as if to say, "I have nothing to hide; this is my method."

In **Figure 4**, we can also clearly see the filmmaker's intentions when choosing the positions for the trail cameras. One camera captures close-ups, while the other provides wide shots. This raises the question of whether the main character of the film actually places the cameras himself, or if the locations for the trail cameras are chosen by the filmmaker. It is difficult to believe that Hannu understands film language and the need to edit between different sizes of shots. The rapid cutting between the moment when the moose hits the mirror and the subsequent wide shot very much gives away the intentions of the filmmaker. It suggests that the filmmaker and the main character are making this film, or at least observing the animals, in close cooperation, if not that they are making the film together.

In **Figure 5**, we see a different type of image: the close-up. The animals' approaching the camera creates a beautiful sense of closeness to them. However, the filmmaker uses the same aesthetic to capture his closeness to the main character, Hannu. Filmed at night with the trail camera's infrared mode, Hannu becomes a subject very similar to the animals captured by the trail cameras. There is little distinction between them anymore – they become one.

Before capturing the images in **Figure 6**, the filmmaker shows us how Hannu installs the mirror in the forest. Here, the intentionality to achieve an effect for the sake of the film becomes even more apparent, in the way a distinctly human object is introduced into an animal environment, with a usage that is completely alien to them. This could even be perceived as a form of provocation, intended to make the audience feel the impossible differences between humans and animals, letting the metaphor of vanity emerge. Animals witnessing their double do not know how to interact with it.

In **Figure 7**, we see how the filmmaker stages artistic images by using different concepts. For example, he projects the

FIGURE 1

FIGURE 2

FIGURE 3

FIGURE 4

FIGURE 5

FIGURE 6

trail camera footage onto the wall while Hannu is sleeping, to create the effect of his being part of the animal world. He then uses different artistic elements, such as lynx masks and antlers, which Hannu holds close to his face to suggest that he is one of the animals or a hybrid of the two species. In a sense, Suonpää achieves the same effect here as with the close-ups of the trail camera on **Figure 5** – we sense that Hannu is one with the animals.

In **Figure 8**, the camera captures both a lynx and Hannu in the same place: in the corner of his house. In the context of the film, these images are highly significant – the elusive animal, whom the film's director has never seen in person, has visited Hannu's home. This means that they have become very close in the context of the narrative of the film – they live in the same space and share the land.

In **Figure 9**, we see the culmination of the image hierarchy: Hannu and a lynx are in the same shot together. This is no longer a trail camera image – we are back to the 'subjective' camera, which we saw at the beginning of the film when Hannu was setting up the trail cameras. However, the animal is dead, so the meaning of this image is multilayered – direct contact is only possible if one of them dies. This creates a powerful metaphor again for the viewer: we can only connect with animals on their terms, as Suonpää states in the aforementioned interview. However, the filmmaker has established a close relationship with the protagonist, resulting in an intimate close-up that enables us to empathise with the protagonist's pain and sorrow.

The multiplicity of the wisely chosen camera angles in *Lynx Man* creates a playful web of images which relate to each other in unexpected ways. Operational images are not necessarily aesthetically beautiful and emotional – which are prerequisite for common ways to create meaning in eco-films, but they can be powerful in their accidental structures. They are powerful because of the viewer's inability to anticipate what will occur in the shot. A certain playfulness emerges, together with narratives which are proposed by the other, not the filmmaker. I argue that it is the imagination of the viewer together with the unexpectedness of the unfolding process, and the simultaneous lack of presence of the human gaze while filming, which all create strong effects in the viewer. Through the accidental encounters, the subject-object duality described by Ivakhiv arrives at the space in the middle where we are not sure who is a subject and who is an object, as the non-human animals are looking back at us similarly as we are looking at them. This is where the unconscious becomes visible and an intra-action is created.

Farocki's work creates strong affective and ethical responses in viewers because of their impersonal, indifferent nature and the attempt to reduce the human variable. They create horror, unease, melancholy, and fascination. Operational images are affectless in function, but not in effect. Farocki uses operational imagery to critique systems that act without us, but Suonpää builds an operational system to collaborate with the non-human other – shifting 'intention' from control to purposeful anticipation and ethical inclusion. Suonpää installs the operational cameras purposefully to capture images to be shared later with the viewer. He has two Others he is communicating with, namely Hannu and the non-human animals in the forest. With the non-human animals, Suonpää creates his intra-action by allowing the camera to capture them in their own terms – they come and go as they please. Suonpää does not hide his intentions; on the contrary, he makes them as visible as possible by showing trail cameras recording other trail cameras. But simultaneously, he is also not in control of the images he captures. Forest life together with the camera setup settings define what is being recorded and when.

With Hannu, however, he is clearly co-operating and sharing his intentions openly – all the staged shots suggest they are together working towards a common goal for the film. How much Hannu realised or internalised the goals of Suonpää remains unknown and very difficult to

FIGURE 7

FIGURE 8

FIGURE 9

answer, as documentary subjects who live alone create a multilayered relation with the filmmaker who keeps visiting them and suggesting actions to stage film shots which do not belong to the every-day life. A deep relationship develops, something additional but undeniably interlinked to the film.

In Meretoja's (2018; 2021) ethical terms, *Lynx Man* meets all the requirements for an ecodocumentary as it expands our sense of what is possible (we can witness forest life in a new, original but uninterrupted way), cultivates personal and cultural self-understanding (it takes to us to the microcosmos of the lynxes), promotes our ability to grasp the experiences of others in their singularity (both Hannu and lynxes), builds inclusive narrative in-betweens (Hannu 'transforming' into a lynx), develops awareness of perspectives (lynxes are in danger, while humans can be outsiders from the forest's perspective), and functions as ethical enquiry (allowing animals to relate to the cameras on their own terms).

In addition, Hjort's intentionalist terms are met – Suonpää recognises the interdependence of living species within an ecosystem, he advocates change through showing the effects of human agency (hunting of lynxes, urbanisation), the trail camera footage fosters accurate beliefs about the natural environment as well as reducing the effects of filmmaking on the environment, and has a clear intention to appreciate nature on its own terms.

TEMPORALITY OF THE IMAGES

This article has analysed *Lynx Man* images as stills, but film is an art form that moves through time. Therefore, we must also briefly consider the temporality of the images. Returning to the contrast of visible, identifiable intentions and the layer which cannot be controlled by the filmmaker, this all develops over time in the feature-length film. The filmmaker cannot control the pace of the passing animals and rhythm of the shots. The beauty of the trail camera footage appears as the non-human Other reveals how time moves in their everyday life. How fast they move, how long they choose to stare to the camera, how they spend their moments being unaware of the camera: all of these constitute a very strong and mystical feeling of meeting with the Other, because we meet their uninterrupted time-space. How time moves in the trail cameras is entirely defined by the animals moving past.

Further questions arise: is Hannu being looked at in the same time-space as the trail cameras look at the non-human Other? Is Suonpää capturing his time-space or is he constructing it to relate it close to the animals? Several qualities are given to the images through editing (which would deserve another in-depth analysis as a feature-length narrative development). Firstly, the trail camera shots are edited to invoke the blinking of the eye. There are several black frames between each image, which enforces the feeling of being a witness – we feel as if Hannu is looking at the trail camera footage. Through editing, something operational has been given a human quality. Juha Suonpää playfully demonstrates how it is, in fact, the plurality of intentions that creates a powerful and profound effect in depicting the intra-action between non-human animals and humans. Throughout the film, the viewer gradually becomes aware of being an outsider in a world that does not belong to them – the film gives the viewer an outsider experience. Hannu's time-space skilfully comes closer to the non-human Other in the course of the film, finally ending up sharing the time-space with the lynxes when they visit his house during the powerful culmination of the film.

In a sense, Suonpää is adept at switching between his various identities, whether filmmaker, friend, activist, scholar or artist. He does this to allow his different identities to express themselves without hiding any of his agendas. Interestingly, the film's editing style also relies on these switches: the moment a clear narrative begins to emerge, the director-editor team cuts it off and reverts to glimpses and moments captured by the cameras.

We could argue that all the footage he has chosen from his trail cameras, out of thousands of hours of material, makes him a witness who selects the Barthes' 'punctums' by setting in- and out-points in this accidental footage. He chooses and even chases images with a certain structure, rhythm and accidental narrative that make them powerful and helps to grow the sense of the humans' outsider status. Thus, he could be termed a chance-seeker.

Chance-seeking (Bardone, 2011) is an apt term for describing the filmmaker's approach of being patient and allowing the Other to express themselves. In short, it means being purposeful without being predictive and is an affordance. The filmmaker navigates in an environment, being open for the unexpected, according to the rules he has set himself. Adopting the perspective of a chance-seeker when looking at Suonpää's work highlights the clear distinction between Farocki's 'operational image' and Suonpää's multiple trail cameras. Suonpää is an active witness with articulated intentions using operational images, whereas Farocki refrains from defining his intentions working with operational images, other than essayistic criticism of the captured material. Suonpää installs the cameras in the hope of capturing moments in the forest that will enable him to create a film that matches his intentions and philosophy, but he cannot control what happens within the images themselves. The rhythm, tone and atmosphere of the images emerge without interference from the director. Intentions are an important part of a filmmaker's agency, but they alone do not create the effect of authenticity; on the contrary, as explained above, intentions can be a counterforce to the authentic intra-actions with the other. The ability to switch openly between identities and intentions enables filmmakers to practice intra-action and 'vincularidad,' or the "awareness of the integral relationship and interdependence amongst all living organisms (in which humans are only a part) with territory or land or the cosmos. It seeks connections and correlations" (Mignolo, Walsh 2018).

CONCLUSION

Juha Suonpää employs a participatory approach when making his film *Lynx Man*, collaborating with the main character Hannu, as well as the non-human animals. He invites them to participate, but allows them to do so on their own terms. This participatory approach enables the audience to experience the life of the forest for themselves. It is important to note here that this article does not cover the film's sound and editing, which could be another interesting research topic. In this article, I explore the starting point of the filmmaker's intentions, which are especially crucial when making ecological films or any other film depicting a world to which the filmmaker does not belong. I argue that intentions alone do not make a film captivating and immersive. Suonpää successfully transports viewers to the realm of the forest and the life cycles of lynxes and other forest animals. He bases his directorial decisions on his philosophical worldview, creatively translating them into practical intentions. Personally, he wants to experience the world of Hannu and his encounters with lynxes. He believes that art can provide solutions to ecological problems and shift the focus of human empathy. He also treats the animals democratically, allowing them to approach the many trail cameras he has set up in their own time.

This article explores what filmmakers intend and what exceeds these intentions in ecocritical filmmaking. Juha Suonpää's *Lynx Man* demonstrates that intention does not disappear when the cameras run independently; rather, it becomes part of the setup, encompassing decisions such as where to place the cameras, what to record, and how much space to leave for spontaneous events; and the trail cameras illustrate this. They work without a person present, yet they still bear the mark of a person's decisions.

The promise of ecocinema – to help us pay closer attention and care more widely – cannot be delivered by intentions and representation alone. As Barad, Morton and Ivakhiv suggest, agency emerges in

the relationships between bodies, places, and devices. Large-scale productions often hinder this by maintaining tight authorial control and 'proving' authenticity through behind-the-scenes extras. Reflecting on the work of Farocki and Parikka has helped to articulate the shift from excessive human manipulation of the images to the idea of images generated without humans. Some images are 'operational:' they track and sort rather than perform for us. When such cameras are multiplied and connected to software, the system begins to determine what can appear. Disclosure matters, showing that the apparatus – angles, triggers, and edits – keeps responsibility in view and allows the audience to see how the film was made.

The film also reminds us that chance can be a narrative tool. Unplanned moments arise: an animal turns, pauses and stares; a pattern emerges across shots. These are not the opposite of intention; they are the results of 'purposeful anticipation,' where design makes room for the unplanned. When that space is maintained, a connection with others can emerge at its own pace. In conclusion, ethical, intra-active ecological films should do three things: make their set-ups visible, design for contingency, and take responsibility for what their systems reveal and conceal. Taken together, these steps do not guarantee 'authenticity,' but they bring it into the shared space between human choices, machine operations, and the lives that meet the camera.

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