



DISPATCH 002 – The Tree and I

Does the tree's significance lie in how much fruit it yields? In the number of birds and insects it hosts? In the quantity of carbon dioxide it converts to oxygen? In how many humans and animals seek out the cool of its shade? All of the above? But none of this even begins to grasp the place of the tree in my life (not to mention in the lives of others), the pleasure I derive from its presence, its wordless companionship? Do these facts bear on its significance? And there is a prior question: does the tree's value lie in what it enables, in its function and contribution? Or is the matter of its significance independent of the benefits it is seen to provide? Put another way, are significance and meaning intrinsic to the tree's existence?

- Lata Mani, from *The Tree and I*, in “The Integral Nature of Things: Critical Reflections on the Present.” London: Routledge, 2013

The long days following the summer solstice are here, making our gardens burst forth with abundance. In pruning, weeding, watering and harvesting, we at SAVAC find ourselves frequently slipping into a contemplative mode.

This month, as part of the network's offerings we are also proposing an exercise in creating an epistemology shaped by nature in all its unknowable complexity. We are launching a [Transplant Field Guide](#), created by artists Meech Boakye and Christina Kingsbury. Boakye and Kingsbury have been working with “degraded” sites, in post-industrial areas, re-wilded parklands and vacant parking lots, building

relationships with life forms which co-exist and thrive there. Through the field guide, they hope to collectively explore, with network members, what kinds of lessons toward imagining queer and anti-capitalist living can be gleaned from these environments. To facilitate an exploration of Toronto's urban ecology with the field guide, we are inviting artist Alize Zorlutuna, whose practice explores relationships to land, culture and the more-than-human, while thinking through history, ancestral wisdom and healing. On Thursday, July 21, Alize led a walk through the Toronto West Rail Path, using Boakye and Kingsbury's text as a guide. Visit the SAVAC Instagram ([@savac](#)) to view highlights from the walk.



For our friends further afield, we invite you to take up the field guide and go on your own journey of exploration— most of these transplants can be found all over Turtle Island and in many parts of Europe and Asia.

Our ways of knowing and being often lead us to center ourselves in the continually unfolding process of learning from and relating to nature. We may thus be tempted to reduce processes far beyond our scope of understanding into a mirror of our own limited understanding, subjugating nature to a received narrative about human ways of being. As our companion for the summer, Lata Mani proposes instead:

What might it mean to invert the question: to ask rather how we might be engaged by nature in ways not of our own making and not an effect of our agency in the sense of conscious, purposive action? What happens when we accord to nature a degree of autonomy, as having the force or energy to cognitively move us in ways surprising and unpredictable? How might we more fully embrace the idea of ourselves as one entity among innumerable others in a web of relationships, movements and flows most of which do not emanate from us?

How then, do we think beyond the warm and pleasant feelings that arise from being in the garden? How do we name the insurmountable challenges, unresolved questions, and trepidations for the future and bring them into an engaged practice of growing and nurturing? To facilitate a deeper engagement with the life that surrounds us, we turn once again to Mani:

Observing the rest of nature inspires questions of an existential kind. Something about the beingness of plants, minerals and animals can lead one to revisit the self-evident. The familiar can lose its assuredness, seem vulnerable and contingent [...]

[...] Wind, rain, sun, dew, tectonic plates, rocks, soil, animals, insects, birds, humans, etc. have made this landscape what it is. What appears as settled is the effect of multiple, continual processes. What seems old may likely be of more recent origin than what appears new and vice versa.

These questions may constitute the grounds for a lifetime of inquiry and reflection, but Mani offers a particular orientation that may allow us to proceed beyond our received cognitive limitations:

Nature's non-resistance is not a passive stance. It is an active approach in which the first principle of action is acceptance of things as they are. Trees bend in the direction of the wind to survive and birds ride air currents to conserve energy. Cultivating non-resistant presentness can temper human hubris. It relaxes the cognitive hold of constructs that may be obscuring what is before us and The ease with which we feel restored in its presence suggests that this is our nature also, only we are inclined to forget.

While these pages limit our exploration of Mani's to excerpts, we highly recommend visiting the text in full at [this link](#). Please do write back to us and let us know your thoughts. We eagerly await hearing from you.

FIELD NOTES



In every dispatch this summer, we will be featuring the work of our members. Hitoko Okada is an interdisciplinary artist, curator, storyteller and community arts facilitator. Her fibre art and curatorial practice explore the politics of fashion, Japanese heritage textile folk crafts, gendered and racialized garment labour from personal, historical, critical, and anti-capitalist perspectives. She engages ancient cultural practices of Japanese indigo and kakiskibu dyeing, kami-ito thread-making, and weaving shifu to connect to ancestral knowledge to deepen relationship to cloth, plant kin, soil, healing and spirit through a diasporic lens.

Okada is an organizer, founder and current steering committee member of the Art Installers Alliance of Ontario- an emergent grassroots organization of, by, and for precariously employed art installers to resource, advocate and build community to create a more secure and humanizing arts sector for them. She currently lives and works in Hamilton.

These images are of Hitoko and fellow Ishtar's International Network of Feral Garden's member, Meera Sethi. They are harvesting, stripping the indigo leaves for a test batch of fresh leaf indigo dye- *Tadeai* (たदैあい). Dye from fresh leaves is very different from a fermented anaerobic indigo vat. The tadeai palette is turquoise to pale blue. In Hitoko's words, "it feels alive with the plant's spirit." This urban farm is her backyard was reclaimed from a gravel parking lot into a food and indigo producing garden. Find out more about Hitoko's practice on her instagram ([@hitokookada](https://www.instagram.com/hitokookada))



Join Hitoko this Saturday, July 20 at 1:30 pm for a fresh leaf indigo dyeing workshop at Neighbour to Neighbour Hamilton Community Food Centre. Participants will share in making a communal fresh leaf indigo dye bath, to take home a silk scarf they have dyed. Optional shibori, itajime and tataki-zome applications will be demonstrated for resist pattern making. The workshop is intergenerational and free. Spaces are limited.

To reserve space: Contact Caitlin at 905-574-1334 ext. 304 or email: ccraven@n2ncentre.com