

VISIONS DU RÉEL 2021 Compétition nationale

Marion Neumann • Réalisatrice de *The Mushroom Speaks*

“Le champignon est un organisme situé entre la vie et la mort, et ça me fascinait”

par MARTA BALAGA

19/04/2021 - Dans ce documentaire de la réalisatrice allemande résidant en Suisse, il est temps d'en savoir plus sur tous les types de champignons



Cet article est disponible en anglais.

Co-world premiering at Visions du Réel in the National Competition and at CPH:DOX, **Marion Neumann's** *The Mushroom Speaks* [+] is all about the fungal realm and the people who decide to uncover its secrets. Including those of a more psychedelic nature.

Cineuropa: Someone says in the film that you don't look for mushrooms – *they find you*. How did they find you, then?

Marion Neumann: I grew up close to the forest, precisely with this sensation of being “found” by the mushrooms. Then I met people from the film who inspired me to start doing the actual research: mostly **Peter McCoy**, who co-founded Radical Mycology [a grassroots mycological advocacy organisation], and **Geoffroy Renaud-Grignon** [founder of Champignons Maison]. It was their enthusiasm that did it. It was less about the actual mushrooms and more about this whole way of

being. Being “shroomed”, as one says! People who are close to this subject are very passionate – you have to be. It’s all so complex.

The way you show fungi in the film, they feel like something alien. This mysterious being, the power of which we don’t really understand, since only 1% of them all have appeared named.

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Visually, it’s all very seductive. Fungi transform quickly into something else, so of course it’s interesting to me as an artist. I tried to be diverse and organic in my approach – this film goes everywhere and you don’t know where you are.

My background is in cinematography, but it was actually the sound that I found the most conceptually complex to translate. We are so used to images: the mushroom is present in art, design, fabrics, food or medicine. So with **Olga Koksharova**, the sound artist I was working with, we wanted to make it a listening experience as well. I was interested in this idea of being really present, really in the moment. Perhaps this is the psychedelic aspect of it that I wanted to express here? I think the sound does make you experience the present better. Precisely because you are not always sure what it is that you hear.

You decided to add subtitles, but there is no voice accompanying them or no one actually talking. This is quite unusual. Or maybe it’s the mushroom speaking, just like in the title?

This would be the most obvious answer, and I am also referring to **Terrence McKenna** here [American ethnobotanist and mystic who advocated for the use of psychedelic plants]. He wrote this text, *The Mushroom Speaks*, referring to his experience under the influence of magic mushrooms. He claimed that they are all speaking to us, offering us their knowledge. They just need our hands to heal the Earth.

It was one question, if – and how – I would want to work with this text. The mushrooms spoke to him, but he suggested that we should speak to the mushrooms as well and just ask questions. I like this idea of being humble and starting a dialogue with something, being in communication with everything that surrounds us, especially nature. Through the silence and the fact that you need to read these subtitles, you internalise it all more. You integrate the content differently. I tried to turn them into a visual element of the story, although of course I know it can be perceived as a mistake. It’s quite conceptual, so either it works for you or it doesn’t.

What were you looking for when finding all these people? We go from scientists to someone sharing stories about rather peculiar home remedies.

It started with this “radical mycology” movement, activism and young people who decided to follow mushrooms. Peter McCoy really unites all of this – the subtitle of his book is *A Treatise on Seeing and Working with Fungi*. Of course I have met many more people and I would have preferred to make a three hour movie instead, going more into the direction of translating fungal consciousness for example. But then I started to pay attention to how these people relate to each other, and what it means to be an individual within a collective. Also, I knew I wanted to start in the forest – just where it started for me. With **Ursula [Weiher]**, “the witch” of the film, many important things find their way into her approach: the citizen science, magic, childhood, survival.

The most difficult part was the whole concept of psychedelia, as it’s really the question of direct experience, not to mention there are already so many films about it. Many lifeforms can carry this mystery, but the mushroom is really an organism situated between life and death. This is something I was fascinated by, so I think that, ultimately, I will make several films about mushrooms. They change all the time; they are neither male nor female, they can adapt. This resilience is in us too I guess, but it’s not systematic.

Lire aussi

The Mushroom Speaks [CH] (2021): fiche film