

The Roots of Earth

Johannes Pfeiffer



Johannes Pfeiffer, *Das Grosse Schweigen* (*The big silence*), 1995, mixed media installation, Monastery of Eberbach, Germany

Technical Sheet

Author: Johannes Pfeiffer

Title: Das Grosse Schweigen (The big silence)

Year: 1995

Media: Installation

Place: Hospital cellar of the Cistercian monastery of Eberbach, Germany

Material: Forty Robinia trunks stripped of bark and sapwood - Illuminated by black light.

- The *Robinia* trees were felled in the woods near the monastery, processed and then transported to the monastery's hospital cellar, where they were set up
- The heartwood of this tree species has a fluorescent property that oxidises and fades when exposed to sunlight.
- The tree trunks are untreated, without any addition of colour.

Conceptual References and Reflections I

The Roots of the Earth –The Spiritualized View of the Earth

The starting point for dealing with this topic can only lie within us, within our socialization and within the reciprocal relationship between us and the world surrounding us. My socialization and the specific path I have taken and that has led me to art is the decisive factor for my creative work.

Thus, every action and every created form contain the effects of my accumulated experiences.

I assume that artistic creation arises from a need, an inner need. Either I feel this need or do not feel it. It is the artists' trigger. Only if the inner need to make art is strong enough can art be created. Art is not a unique act, but a way, a development, a creative process over a certain period of time.

What are the roots of the earth? What does this expression mean?

The roots (of a plant) primarily serve to absorb water and the minerals dissolved in it as well as to fix a plant at its site. Frequently, the roots also take over other functions, most frequently that of a storage organ for reserve substances. (from: Wikipedia)

Figuratively, it means that it is due to the roots of the earth that we have life. Man is able to rely on the energies lying in the ground and to change or rather adapt them so that they help him to survive.

- Only the earth enables nature to sink roots in it.
- Roots are the communication between the earth “under the earth” and the earth “above the earth.”
- The roots provide us with support.
- The roots provide us with nourishment. They serve as a means of transport for the nutrients of the soil.
- The roots have different forms. The roots of fungi cover big areas of the soil.

The mycelium is a threadlike, mostly invisible web under the earth consisting of the cells (hyphae) of a fungus, which represents the actual organism. It supplies the absorption of nutrients, grows in the ground or in the wood and can reach huge proportions, whereas the visible fungus is only a fruit body that releases spores for reproduction. (*continues...*)

Conceptual References and Reflections II

A mycelium can reach gigantic proportions and is considered the largest living organism on earth. The largest known mycelium of a honey fungus (*Armillaria ostoyae*) in Oregon covers an area of over 9 square kilometres (about 1200 football pitches) and is approximately 2400 to more than 8000 years old.

During my research I came across the Gaia-Principle by way of the mycelium.

Marco Pogacnik, geomancer and artist, went on a hike through the Slovenian primeval forest with a well-known biology professor. Huge trees dominated the forest. These ancients of the primeval forest can live as long as 300 years. Being incredibly high and wide, they claim almost all the sunlight and most of the space for themselves. They appear unwavering, indestructible in their power as rulers over the forest.

Underneath them young trees have grown from seed. As far as possible, they are doing their best to grow among the giant trees. The limits of upward growth are quickly reached, there is not enough sun, not enough room. Often these young trees stay small and medium-sized seemingly unchanged for many years, nothing happens to their outward development.

Marco Pogacnik asks his companion what this apparent standstill in nature could mean: "It just seems as if there will be no development. If only a limited growth in height is possible for these young trees, they will invest in the growth of their roots! If their upward and sideways expansion do not work, they will expand downwards and into the depths! For many years almost all their energy flows into the strengthening of branches and the deepening of roots. During this process they connect and lay powerful underground foundations. A dense loadbearing root system, a second soil underground is created.

And some day, sometimes due to a storm, sometimes simply due to infirmity or trunks that have become hollow inside, the all-occupying jungle giants collapse as if by themselves. This can happen relatively fast and unexpectedly.

As soon as the space towards the sky has become free and with the sun shining on their crowns the young trees start to direct their energy growth from the roots to the branches – and in no time they take possession of the space their ancestors previously held.

This abnormally fast growth and taking possession of the space is only possible because prior to this a long and intensive investment was made in the training and connecting of the roots. This means that they can grow to full size at the right moment and take over the new tasks." (Quote translated from: Gaia-Prinzip.com - <https://www.gaia-prinzip.com/news/im-ganzen-verwurzelt-sein>)

As far as I am concerned, I would consider this principle to be applicable to me. This means, for different reasons, while waiting for a first step to take action before the beginning of a project where energy cannot be immediately realized the energy goes into the depth. The energy compiles roots or rather enlarges the network of roots. It creates a solid fundament so that the circumstances that block the project can create solid foundations for the execution and further development of a project. The development or rather further development of the roots could be equated with a development on the spiritual level. (*continues...*)

Conceptual References and Reflections III

This brings us to the spiritual view of nature: the outwardly invisible development of the spiritual level, of the spiritual faculties and energies, which first build a network of roots in the depth and then continually spread into different areas, before they can, like the projection of a previously abstract thought, develop freely to the form of an image, a word, a sound, a beam of light, a material object. If this phenomenon comes into the open and becomes more or less visible, new relationships can be formed. Then the foundations are laid for a prerequisite, or even better, for dynamics that permanently create new relationships that in turn create new relationships etc.

Thus, systems, communication- and connection systems of greatest complexity are created, which, like a universe, compose a large whole. One could describe it as the breathing of the earth.

This being rooted I have already spoken about is the prerequisite for artistic work. The artist must be able to fall back upon an extensive network of knowledge. Consciously or unconsciously.

I assume that an artist who occupies himself with spaces, with exteriors and interiors must fulfil three conditions:

- He must have access to Unconscious Knowledge.
- He must have a language, a form of expression (form, colour, sound, word, movement).
- He must be able to express in his own language what he has experienced in Unconscious Knowledge.

During my research I have come across a quotation: *It is impossible to reach real identity without being rooted in the whole.* (David Bohm, quote translated)

Thus, I assume that the deeper, the wider the artist's rooting in the earth, the more authentic and expressive is his work. He is the one medium that can give expression to the power of the earth lying in the ground. It is exactly this possibility of having access to the accumulated energies of the earth, which forms the relationship between us human beings and nature. This act of exchange, of access to the energies of the earth is not a single action, but a permanent interaction which is continuously being renewed and updated. This way, the artist is always involved in a permanent process, which influences not only his work, but also his personality. (*continues...*)

Conceptual References and Reflections IV

What remains? What fascinates me with my artistic work so much is experience. The experience I have when building up a site-specific installation. The experience that includes everything, earth, men, atmosphere, weather, the history of the place, the social network of relationships, communication, culture and much more, in short, the immersion in the site and finally, the result of one's own artistic intervention. This experience is the only thing that remains, probably the only thing that really remains that constitutes the rootedness, that constitutes communication. Experience means interaction with sites, people, cultures and stories of the sites; it means immersion, getting involved with something, it means communication and finally rootedness. Real experience also means that some part of oneself, of his own mycelium has remained at the site of the experience. I would like to state that experience is only possible through the rootedness with the respective site.

Experiencing is the source and starting point of the rootedness with the earth.

Johannes Pfeiffer, January-February 2026

Translated by Barbara Pfeiffer-Schultz