

Screenshot of IHME Helsinki 2022 Commission Amar Kanwar's *Learning from Doubt* online course's login page.

## **Into the Forest with Doubt – What can contemporary art in the form of an online course teach us about knowledge?**

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The IHME Helsinki 2022 commission, Indian film-maker and artist Amar Kanwar's *Learning from Doubt* online course, based on his extensive artistic installation *The Sovereign Forest*, is an excellent example of how the collaboration of art and science within the framework of contemporary art can enable multiform learning. Kanwar's artistic method of *doubt*, which he imparted and applied also on his online course, can be quite efficient in shaking up prejudices and attitudes towards knowledge.

## The nature of knowing and uncertainty

Where does learning begin? What can be defined as the *sphere of learning*? These were among the questions that sprang to my mind at the beginning of Kanwar's ten weeks long online course, as I started familiarizing myself with the course materials. Kanwar had selected a wide range of reading, on subjects such as Indian folklore, the country's linguistic variety and the relationship between Indian poetry and nature, which was made available to the course participants on the website of his artwork taking the form of an online course.

The purpose of the material was to orient the course participants towards a specific state of mind – to help us 'prepare ourselves for learning'. The proposed optional preliminary assignments served to prove how our thinking or conceptions regarding knowledge are not free of value judgment. Our thinking is influenced not only by the results, findings, innovations and various theories produced by science but also by the people and experiences we encounter in our lives, as well as by cultural material, such as poetry, songs and visual art.

We know – or *think* we know – stories that we've never read, such as various tales of creation or mythical beliefs, for example. But does this kind of knowing really differ from our other conceptions regarding the world? How can we, as individuals, structure our reality with theories that we haven't thoroughly familiarized ourselves with? Can we build an understanding of reality based on the theory of evolution, genetics or quantum mechanics if we don't personally know or understand the bases of those theories?

The question of doubt, that lay at the core of the course, made me slightly suspicious of the very method of the course and of its relationship to knowledge. For a long time already, our everyday lives have been marked by a certain kind of doubt regarding knowledge and the nature of truth. Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine, this question has come to touch people's daily lives all around the world. Various conspiracy theories have become an established part of politics, and the role of fake news – and, as a result of the war, even downright propaganda – as a tool for controlling people and societies has been accentuated.

It is becoming more and more difficult to define what critical thinking actually means. Thinking requires theoretical tools and notions, of course, but it's just as obvious that critical thought cannot be based solely on theory. What's more, the experienced meaningfulness of life cannot be exhaustively explained by theory. The human mind yearns for absolute truth and strives to take a conceptual hold of reality, while, at the same time, various truths are competing with each other for the status of the one and only *real* truth. It would indeed seem more plausible to believe that several different kinds of truth exist at the same time.

At the very heart of the IHME Contemporary Art Festival, which existed between the years 2009 to 2018, were audiences, participation, the public character and societal impacts of art as well as the everyday social meanings created by art. As the festival was transformed into the IHME Helsinki Contemporary Art Commissioning Agency, it adopted as its new centres of focus the dialogue between art and science, along with action in relation to climate and environmental issues.

The leading principles of IHME Helsinki's work are the promotion of cultural education and contributing to ecological sustainability. Based on these cornerstones, IHME evaluates the climate and environmental impacts of its activities and strives to protect natural biodiversity. As an organization, IHME aspires to continuously learn from its activities and to help create the preconditions for an eco-social transition – that is, to the comprehensive transformation of our societies to becoming ecologically, socially and economically more sustainable. The *Learning from Doubt* -online course excelled in conveying these themes. In addition, it illustrated how contemporary art can expand its conceptual and content-related impacts by freeing itself from the confines of conventional exhibition spaces and representational artefacts.

Within universities' institutional frameworks, multidisciplinary cooperation surpassing the boundaries between branches of learning is all too often aimed mainly at giving birth to new innovations and polishing the institutions' own public image. The participants of Kanwar's online course – among whom were many students of the Academy of Fine Arts of the University of Arts Helsinki as well as those of the Helsinki University Institute of Sustainability Science HELSUS – got a unique opportunity to experience a slower type of learning, focusing on their personal subjects of interest. Indeed, for many, the course proved much more significant an experience than what could possibly be measured in course credits.

### **Local conflicts and manifold resistance in India**

Apart from his films, filmmaker and artist Amar Kanwar is also known for his installations in which he combines various different media to treat the themes of power, violence and justice. Making a record of the heritage of the societal resistance pursued in India and in the country's border regions occupies a central position in Kanwar's work.

While acquainting myself with the *Learning from Doubt* -online course reading material, it quickly became apparent that India cannot be understood within the framework of European nation-state thinking. India is like its own separate continent altogether. The legacy of historical imperialism that the country continues to carry to this day has provided a propitious environment for the

development of various conflicts and the continuation of violence. Differences between groups of people and social classes are manifest in the country's enormous linguistic diversity as well as in the caste system, in vigour to date.

For Kanwar, language and poetry are essential tools for examining the aforementioned themes. This can be seen notably in his film *A Night of Prophecy* (2002). The movie depicts the relationship between resistance and poetry – the latter consisting not only of written texts but also of the living oral traditions shared by communities. Poetry can serve as a witness of violence, continuing to live and be transmitted from generation to generation, thus preventing unredeemed injustices from being forgotten. One can see poetry playing such a role for example among the Dalits – also known as the 'untouchables' –, the people excluded from the traditional caste system.

Enormous India conceals within it also an innumerable amount of local conflicts that receive very little attention. Disagreements and persecutions that may have lasted for decades cause friction between religious communities. The human rights organization Human Rights Watch has reported that the [Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party \(BJP\) leading the Indian government uses extremely hard measures to restrain the country's media, civil society and other critical voices](#). Arbitrary and groundless charges have been raised against activists and journalists, and the government has adopted laws that discriminate against religious minorities, notably Muslims.

The video essay *A Season Outside* (1997), which was also included among the online course film material, shows how the tensions between communities concretely manifest themselves in people's everyday lives and what kind of ethical deliberation is required for making the decision to resort to – or restrain from – violence. The events are situated at the Attari-Wagah border station between India and Pakistan, where both countries' troops perform a daily ritual intended to illustrate the nations' friendly relations. This despite the facts that the relationship between the two countries can at best be described as 'cold' and that the atmosphere prevailing at their borders is marked by a constant threat of violence.



*A Season Outside* was screened in Helsinki at the first ever screening of Amar Kanwar's films on 4 May 2022. Picture: Veikko Somerpuro

In this video essay, we hear Kanwar himself as the narrator asking a Buddhist monk how to restrain from violence in resistance, while there would indeed seem to be ‘more than enough reason’ for resorting to it. In his response, the monk underlines the connection that ties action to future, calling action ‘the embryo from which the future will arise’ and emphasizing the equal importance of both. Kanwar goes on to ask: ‘What is the action?’, to which the monk replies: ‘The action is, first, the decision to be non-violent.’ As Kanwar then marvels, ‘how is *that* the action?’, the monk replies: ‘To be non-violent is not to withdraw from conflict, but to intervene – actively.’ ‘But then what tools do I have to intervene?’ Kanwar insists, and the monk replies: ‘The greatest tool is the decision itself. For once you take the decision, *then* you devise the strategy.’ In conclusion to the conversation, the monk notes to Kanwar that the ‘practice of non-violence’ is indeed the only way to come to accept the absolute truth that consists, in fact, in the relativity of all truths.

Non-violence as a strategy of resistance has a long tradition in India. The most widely known example of its manifestations lies surely in the civil disobedience called for by **Gandhi**. The resistance that Kanwar has captured in his works – including passive resistance – has taken various forms, and its legacy possesses a variety of meanings. Resistance lives on in India: both in non-violent forms – such as songs and verses repeated in everyday life – as well as in varieties more inclined towards violence, in both active as well as passive modes.

## The Sovereign Forest – Enter from anywhere

Among Kanwar's artworks, the most renowned is likely to be the installation – or, to be more accurate, the *ensemble* of installations – *The Sovereign Forest*, on which he began working already in 2010. It comprises several self-standing yet interconnected installations, containing, for example, photographs and films, handmade books, fictional letters and an abundance of archival and documentary material, dating both from further back in history as well as from closer to the present day. Parts of this ensemble, created and developed as an ongoing process, have been displayed in prominent international contemporary art exhibitions, but in its entirety, it has very seldom been brought within audiences' reach. The material for the online course comprised to a great extent of the videos and the literary, visual and auditive materials pertaining to *The Sovereign Forest*, as well as its documentary sources.

The name of the installation, *The Sovereign Forest*, refers – quite literally – to the sovereignty of the forest, to its inalienable right to exist. This is one way to articulate the question of ecological sustainability. In *The Sovereign Forest*, the focus of attention is on the Indian state of Odisha (officially called Orissa until 2011), located in the Eastern part of the country. While the state possesses extensive mineral resources, up to 70 per cent of its inhabitants make a living in agriculture and fishing.

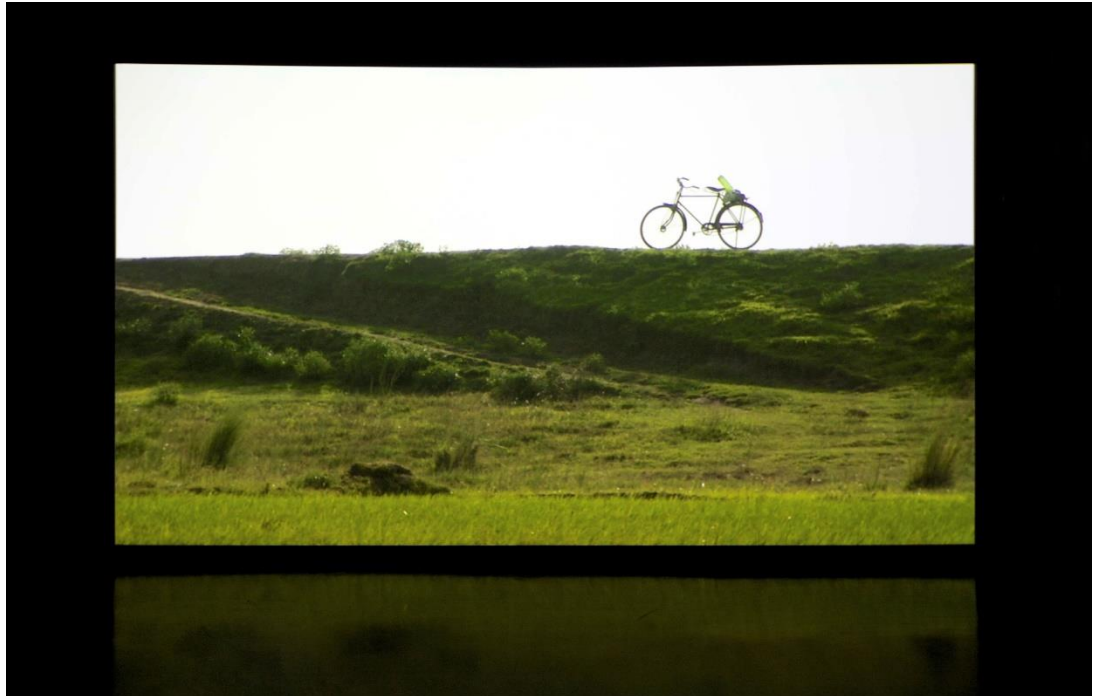
*The Sovereign Forest* examines how those inhabitants of Odisha who've continued to practice traditional forms of livelihood, as well as the Adivasi, the indigenous inhabitants of India, struggle to defend the preconditions for the continuity of their living conditions and modes of life as well as the fulfilment of their rights. Archived and documentary material depicting their resistance in particular, but also the history of Odisha and the various conflicts experienced in the region more generally, form an essential part of the installation entity, complemented by visual and literary material produced by Kanwar himself. Precisely this kind of bringing together of archival materials, that have initially been produced for other kinds of purposes, and material produced by the artist himself is very characteristic of Kanwar and forms an essential ingredient of his artistic method of doubt.

Indeed, during the *Learning from Doubt* online course, a lot of discussion took place, among other things, on the question of how documentary material and archives can function as evidence demanding for justice. For example, among the individual works pertaining to the entity of *The Sovereign Forest*, the book-form *In Memory Of* (2012) testifies how [many Odishan farmers and even entire families have ended up committing suicide as it has become impossible for them to continue practising their traditional livelihoods](#). Another book, *The Prediction* (1991–2012), attests to how the labour union activist **Shankar Guha Niyogi**, assassinated in 1991, predicted his own assassination. Niyogi was among the founders of the [Indian labour union and political movement Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha \(CMM\), the initiators of which were driven by, besides workers' rights, an ecological](#)



[consciousness](#). *A Scene of Crime* (2011) is a video piece examining the gathering and nature of evidence: it depicts the subjugation of nature in Odisha to the profit-seeking interests of the Indian government and big business corporations.

Installation view of  
*A Scene of Crime*  
at documenta 13  
exhibition. Picture:  
Henrik Strömberg.



Prior to the *Learning from Doubt* online course, few of the course participants had seen any of the pieces pertaining to *The Sovereign Forest*. Nonetheless, the themes of the installation ensemble as well as Kanwar's working methods were transmitted to us well enough otherwise so as to provide the basis for worthwhile discussions on both contemporary art as well as on the state of the world in general. The course website and the material therein played a significant role in enabling the course to be carried out successfully. Kanwar's long-standing collaborator, filmmaker and graphic artist **Sherna Dastur** had done excellent work in developing the website into a self-contained platform for getting to know Kanwar's work.

The website had indeed a very exhibition-like feel to it, thanks, among other things, to the numerous visual details alluding to Kanwar's pieces. More important than the visual impressiveness, however, was how the content of the website grew as the course advanced. Since not all the material was available immediately from the start of the course, one could not absorb the course contents in advance. Separate web pages had been created for each week, containing the weekly instructions and access to the literature and those of Kanwar's works that were to be focused on during that precise week. The course literature was easy to approach, and the quality of the audio-visual materials was high.

Not all can be transmitted via the Net, however. Dastur, who also paid a visit to the course, thinks that for really experiencing *The Sovereign Forest*, the act of walking in the physical space between the various parts of the installation, sensing their materiality, even smelling their odours, is fundamental. Dastur has, for instance, produced the paper for the books of *The Sovereign Forest* herself, using materials such as banana fibre.

Although the online course did not allow for a multisensory experience of the installation entity, I consider the course nonetheless a very successful example of what contemporary art making use of digital means can offer to learning. In fact, I was somewhat surprised by how well the course worked out, for, as a result of the proliferation of various types of remote events, online discussions and virtual exhibition tours brought on by the COVID-19-pandemic, I've grown rather reserved about the possibilities of artistic presentation online.

Kanwar himself had a special mediatory role in the weekly remote meetings with the course participants, which formed the basic core of the course. In these meetings, Kanwar disclosed to us his personal thoughts and conceptions regarding doubt and the role of various types of documents and archival material as evidence. Kanwar's own contribution was essential notably for attaining a deeper understanding of the course's artistic contents: without it, the exchange of ideas and open learning based on his work would certainly have been much more difficult and remained more superficial. *The Sovereign Forest* being, by its nature, an ongoing and continuously growing process, the *Learning from Doubt* -online course now realized can in fact be seen as yet another new part of the ensemble. Indeed, Kanwar himself expressed experiencing the course precisely thus: as a new 'identity' that comes to complement the wider artistic entity.

## Unsustainable development

In his book *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology*, art historian **T. J. Demos** presents the view that Kanwar's *The Sovereign Forest* reflects the disparity between the multiple perceptions of reality present in Odisha and the scientific realism characteristic of the Western conception of knowledge. The linguistic, cultural and religious systems of the Adivasi communities are firmly intertwined with the local ecosystems. Their modes of life and living conditions are threatened by the ambitions of big corporations and the Indian state.

Although Kanwar's work is mainly focused on Odisha, during the *Learning from Doubt* online course a lot of discussion took place also on how the extractivism – the extensive exploitation of natural resources – carried out in the region can in fact be seen reiterated in various parts of the world as part



of state policies and of global economy. Within the Western legal system, the sovereignty of Nature – its right to its own existence – has always been secondary in relation to Human.

The so-called Rome Statute, the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court (ICC) headquartered in the Hague, Netherlands, defines the international crimes considered to be the gravest crimes of all. For a long time by now, [attempts have been made to include ecocide on the list](#), as a crime commensurable to a crime against humanity. In Finland, this objective has been advocated by the [Ecocide Law Finland -working group](#), operating as an independent part of the international Stop Ecocide -campaign network.

Bangladeshi researcher and writer [Nabil Ahmed](#) has contributed to the ecocide law campaign with his research conducted in Indonesia and West Papua. He has participated in the work of the international, multidisciplinary Forensic Architecture research agency, and he serves as the founding co-principal of the research and advocacy working group INTERPRT, whose work also takes place somewhere in the borderlands between science and art. In his investigations conducted in South-East Asia, Ahmed has studied how remote sensing can be used in the collection of evidence to prove environmental crimes. According to Ahmed, the question of evidence poses a crucial challenge for advancing the criminalization of ecocide. Ahmed has described this and other challenges of the international criminalisation of ecocide in an interview conducted by **Ute Meta Bauer**, professor and member of IHME Helsinki's Advisory Board, published as an [episode of the IHME Helsinki Art, Science, Ecology podcast in 2021](#).

The question of unsustainable exploitation of natural resources is not unfamiliar in Finland, either. Finnish mining legislation has long been outdated compared to those of other industrialized countries, and [by no means all were satisfied with the new, reformed Mining Act, that entered into force in 2011](#). The reformed Act has been criticized, among other things, for inadequate mining taxation and lacks in corporate social responsibility obligations. Finland is an attractive investment destination for large-scale international companies: the compensations paid to landowners are minimal, and the scope of the rights that can be granted for mineral prospecting is quite extensive in international comparison.

Environmental values and the need to protect biodiversity and organisms' living environments have motivated resistance against multinational mining projects in Finland as well. Examples well-known in the country include the [Viiankiaapa-movement](#) defending a protected wetland area in the municipality of Sodankylä, Northern Finland, from being destroyed by mining activities, as well as the [Pro Heinävesi -movement](#) opposing a graphite mining project planned in the municipality of Heinävesi, in Eastern Finland.

During the online course, the relationship between sustainability and resistance was concretized, among other things, in the example of the seedbank founded by Indian farmer **Natabar Sarangi**, which Kanwar has also documented. At the beginning of the 1990's, after retiring from his occupation as a teacher, Sarangi undertook the practice of India's traditional, organic farming methods. Together with his son, Sarangi set up a community of farmers collecting the seeds of various varieties of rice: by the year 2019, [the community had managed to store in their bank the seeds of more than 700 different varieties of rice from various parts of India](#). The members of the farmers' community use varieties known as 'kharif crops' (or 'monsoon crops'), which are sown, grown and harvested during the monsoon season, and the cultivation of which is based on making use of the natural floods brought on by the monsoon rains.

The significance of the seedbank and of the traditional farming method was elucidated to the course participants through the interviews of Sarangi and other members of the seedbank community, made available to us on the course online platform. The interviews were supplemented by pictures of the seedbank pertaining to *The Sovereign Forest* ensemble, as well as literature on the so-called Green Revolution, helping to see the seedbank project as, ultimately, another form of resistance.

[The term 'Green Revolution' refers to the technological upheaval of agriculture that took place from the mid-20th century onwards and the ensuing increased productivity of cultivated land](#). It is considered to have been sparked off by the experimentations in the field of food production conducted by U.S. researcher **Norman Borlaug** in the 1940's in Mexico, and to have spread from there to other Latin American countries, Asia and other parts of the world, driven by United States' interests. [While the Green Revolution did significantly help in reducing world hunger, at the same time, as it was based on the methods and innovations of Western science, it caused agriculture all around the world to become more and more reliant on chemistry](#). In India, the Green Revolution is known to have reduced poverty and increased food production in terms of quantity, but, [according to research, it did not improve people's health more generally, and its impacts on nature were by no means beneficial](#). Extensive areas of land and water have been polluted by pesticide residue, and entire ecosystems have been thrown out of balance.

India is the world's second-largest producer of rice. Most of the rice exported by India are basmati varieties, which are quite cost-effective to produce relative to the cultivated area. Along with the Green Revolution, multinational seed-producing companies became an established part of the Indian agricultural industry, and, [as a result of their tendency to favour only few varieties, the number of available rice seed varieties has collapsed](#). It is estimated that, [prior to the Green Revolution, more than a hundred thousand distinct varieties of rice grew in India and tens of thousands in the Odisha region alone](#).

The work of Sarangi and of the seedbank community he has founded is not only helping to maintain biodiversity – it is also political. A large proportion of Indian farmers do not hold rights over the seeds they use but are dependent on various types of supply chains. As a result, the knowledge concerning the cultivated plants and how to optimize cultivation according to seasons is also becoming more and more of a ‘given from above’. The seedbank reinforces the farmers’ self-sufficiency both in terms of seed supply as well as agricultural knowledge.

The community shares information about the specificities of the different varieties of rice, such as their aromaticity and role in seasonal cooking, as well as about the associated traditional beliefs concerning, for example, their use in curing diseases. Knowledge and practices are shared also about the use of different types of soil.

The fostering and dissemination of traditional crop varieties and farming methods that the community practices can also be seen as a way of acting for the climate. The chemical farming that gained in popularity alongside the Green Revolution has significantly reduced the thickness of soil humus layers, where carbon is stored and where microbes and enzymes also thrive. Traditional, organic farming methods help to maintain soil fertility and thus to produce sustainable yields.

### **The struggle for sustainability requires extensive literacy**

Science journalist **Mikko Pelttari**, who has specialized in climate and environmental issues, has studied the question of understanding climate change and its societal dimensions in his book *Lämpenevä maa – ilmastolukutaidon käsikirja* (‘Warming earth – a handbook of climate literacy’). Pelttari defines the concept of ‘climate literacy’ quite broadly: it covers not only the skill of critical media literacy in relation to climate reporting but also the ability to autonomously acquire new information about climate change and to process one’s knowings both alone and together with others. For Pelttari, basic natural scientific knowledge as well as *scientific literacy* in general form the core of climate literacy. However, among its essential elements, he also includes the capacity to discern the societal, social and psychological relations between the climate crisis and our ways of life, and the ability to put the information about the causes and consequences of the crisis in the right proportions and temporal perspectives.

Although the concept of climate literacy was not as such employed during the *Learning from Doubt* -online course, the need for a corresponding know-how as a prerequisite for understanding Kanwar’s art, on the one hand, but also contemporary art in the era of eco-crises more generally became clearly apparent as the course went on. Similar competencies are of use, for example, when

seeking to understand the local challenges of the Odisha region, concerning people's living conditions and the use of natural resources. The course also provided the opportunity to exercise the skills of cooperation and co-learning, also included in the set of skills covered by the concept of climate literacy, as well as the skills to discuss even divisive issues openly and to relate new information to previously acquired conceptions.

'Climate literacy' also encompasses the ability to take a critical stance towards such scientific concepts that have eased their way from the sphere of science into our everyday language – take 'sustainability', for example. Pelttari sees 'sustainability' as an excellent example of such a 'scientific-seeming' term that, while also borrowing a certain prestige from science, is often used in order to bridge the gap between science and other spheres of culture and has thus gained an established position in public debate, but whose exact meaning is most often left regrettably open. The word is very often used rather ambiguously and in such ways where it becomes associated with a no less ambiguous concept of 'greenness', energy efficiency or even merely slight improvements in the production process of a specific commodity.

When, at the beginning of the 1970's, the English language word 'sustainable' was first taken up and began to be more generally used to denote a principle describing societies' desirable development, the 'development' it was most often associated with was such, where people's quality of life and well-being would increase while material consumption would remain unchanged. Etymologically speaking, the adjective 'sustainable' is a derivative of the verb 'sustain', stemming from the Old French *soustenir* ('sustain', 'hold up', 'bear'), itself based on the Latin prefix *sub-* ('below', 'up from below') and verb *tenēre* ('to hold'). Against this background, one would be inclined to regard sustainability and endless economic growth as a bad match to begin with. While calling for caution in the use of language, Pelttari nonetheless also emphasizes that an exact definition of sustainability may not be needed if we could only arrive at a shared understanding of what constitutes a 'minimum of sustainability' – in other words, 'what sustainability should at the very least mean in any specific context'.

During Kanwar's course, the problematic nature of the concept of 'sustainability' came to the fore, on the one hand, when reflecting upon the Green Revolution and its bearings on food production in general, and, on the other hand, when considering the challenges specific to Odisha on a more local level. The discussions held on the subject also attested to the need to divide the notion of 'sustainable development' into several distinct spheres: ecological, economic and socio-cultural sustainability. Looking at sustainability through its various manifestations and on as concrete a level as possible may help in avoiding the obvious risk of straightforwardly assimilating 'sustainable development' with what we tend to conceive of as 'progress'.

In the Odisha region, one essential question related to sustainability is how to secure people's living conditions and the preservation of the Adivasi belief system as prerequisites of cultural and social sustainability. [Local resistance against major industrial projects planned or already carried out in the region continues](#), and the Adivasi are persistently struggling [to protect the nature so closely intertwined with their belief systems](#). Life in its various forms is threatened in Odisha as we speak: [mining activity has obliterated nearly 1,700 square kilometres of the state's forests during the last twenty years](#), and [people are being forcibly displaced and houses demolished](#) to make way for large corporations' irrigation systems and dam projects.

In addition to the global climate crisis, international political crises and ruptures also affect people very concretely on the local level. As a most recent example, one can cite Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine and its impacts on food and energy prices and availability. At the beginning of Kanwar's course, the war had not yet started, and hardly anyone could have anticipated its outbreak. In practically no time, it has revealed our dependency on various types of resources imported from all around the world. As a result, in the context of their course assignments, many of the course participants ended up reflecting upon not only the sustainability of their own lifestyle but also their personal backgrounds, the traditions prevailing in their social environments, as well as the wrongs committed by humans against other human beings or the rest of nature. Personally, in the context of my course assignment, I continued my reflections on how the wars fought in Finland have impacted the forest ecosystems of our country.

At the end of the course, the opportunity was offered to all participants to have a personal, one-on-one meeting with Amar Kanwar either face-to-face in Helsinki, at the IHME Helsinki premises, or via remote access. In the final collective meeting, Kanwar disclosed to us what kind of an impact carrying out the *Learning from Doubt* -online course had had on him personally: he said it had indeed transformed his understanding of how *The Sovereign Forest* -ensemble could extend further on. By bringing the struggles of the Odisha Adivasi to international attention, the installation ensemble participates, for its part, in the fight to promote genuinely more sustainable lifestyles both locally as well as on a wider scale around the world.

### **Straying in the forest with one's thoughts**

On the 4th of May, 2022, when the course had already ended, IHME Helsinki organized the Finnish premiere of Kanwar's films in the Bio Rex cinema auditorium of the Lasipalatsi culture and media centre, in Helsinki. One of the films shown at the screening was *Such a Morning* (2017), in which a

renowned professor of mathematics retreats to the forest, to live there in solitude in an abandoned railway carriage. The story, which is conveyed to the spectator with the aid of textual elements and images of nature, leads one to believe that the professor has not disclosed his plans of seclusion to his colleagues beforehand. Following the professor's mysterious disappearance, a whole gamut of speculations starts spreading at the university about the causes of his departure: he is suspected of having suddenly lost his self-confidence, experienced misfortune in love or lost faith in the ideology he used to uphold. Or might it be because he is slowly going blind?

During his quiet life in solitude, the professor experiences hallucinations, which he notes down in a special 'Almanac of Darkness'. On the basis of these notes, he writes letters addressed to his colleagues and students explaining the choices he has made. He writes, among other things, about the '49 different forms of darkness', as well as how 'a light lifting you up into the cosmos can serve as a cure to blindness'.

At the beginning of the course, we were given the professor's 'seventh letter' as proposed reading. The letter – which, as such, does not appear in the movie *Such a Morning*, but accompanies it as an external, complementary element – brings to the fore the challenge of comprehension: on what basis can we build our understanding, when each new idea that reveals itself to us can just as well be true or untrue?

From **Georges Bataille** to **Donna Haraway**, the theorization of un-knowing and uncertainty has developed its own, established tradition. Nonetheless, finding the right balance between various forms of knowledge, various conceptions of knowledge and various ways of producing knowledge is and remains one of the core challenges of university education and learning. Art can challenge theoretical analysis also in the fields of epistemology and ontology and point out the cognitive significance of bodily experience.

For me, the *Learning from Doubt* -online course offered a special opportunity to perceive how contemporary art can help its audiences navigate more smoothly in the shadow zones of knowledge. In a time marked by both political as well as ecological insecurity and unpredictability, doubt and the acceptance of the uncertainty of all knowledge can serve as strengths: by setting thought in motion they can prevent one from sinking into apathy and initiate action. At times, it may do one good to go astray in the forest with one's established beliefs – and all the better if one can allow the forest to become a part of one's thinking and let it shape one's conceptions of the world, of life and of truth. Contemporary art can, at best, guide us to the beyonds of our own understanding, while, at the same time, offering a more comfortable position from which to face our ignorance.

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*IHME Helsinki seeks ecologically more sustainable, low-emission ways to engage in international cooperation and to bring its commissioned works to the reach of audiences also abroad. In the case of the IHME Helsinki 2022 commission produced by Amar Kanwar, IHME decided to participate in Kanwar's *The Sovereign Forest* -project, which has been taking place for nearly two decades in the Indian state of Odisha as a collaboration between the artist and the local people and communities. Due to the delays and changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, IHME's on-the-spot cooperation with the artist and the local population in India, planned to take place in 2022, has been postponed to the year 2023.*



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