

To cite this article: Wilkerson, Erin (2025) Feral Filmmaking: Wilding Cinema as a Decolonial Act, *La Furia Umana*, 46, 134-136.

## **Feral filmmaking: wilding cinema as a decolonial act\***

Erin Wilkerson

**Keywords:** Feral filmmaking, wilding  
cinema, permaculture

The question of absence is as political as that of presence.  
—Karen Barad

This is my home  
this thin edge of  
barbwire.  
—Gloria E. Anzaldúa

I wish my work to function as a weed. Weeds are tenacious. They disperse subversively: seeds carried on the wind, or the fur of a wolf, or the boots of a hiker, spreading underground via rhizomatic systems, working alongside mycelium, and feeding from decay. They do not wait to be planted. The term references a plant settling into an undesirable location. Perhaps the most abundant “weed” is the dandelion, an overlooked and highly beneficial plant. They thrive in disturbed soil. Every part, from flower to root, is deeply nutritious for both human and more-than-human consumption, particularly in that they are amongst the first to pop in spring, when we are all in need of nutrient replenishment. Weeds are plants that are unwanted, undesired, and are therein targeted for removal.

Cultivation is a form of manhandling the land, but it is also a term to describe elitism. The holding of these two definitions within the same word is quite telling. It denotes a socially constructed implementation of which men are suited to control land and which are not. The dominant Eurocentric model is called monoculture, wherein fields of a singular species are planted. A process which can only be maintained using extreme measures: namely the application of toxic pesticides to kill weeds or hungry insects, which then absorb not just into food but also waterways and soil which disturbs its delicate microbial content. Monoculture cannot exist without toxicity. Growth that strays from this model is attacked. Dominant science too favors monocultural approaches, Darwinian hierarchies spurred by the theorem of evolution as an individualistic and competitive, rather than a communal act of species evolving alongside each other. It forces the model of an elite observer, and objects of observation. It is work in objectification. It intends to divide, and maintain division.

Culture, then, is the cultivation of social spaces. As such, work in producing dominant culture, much like dominant science, seeks to uphold this current model. Hollywood cinema is a monocultural practice. It intends to function as propaganda for this method of domination by portraying models of reward for subservience. It works in gatekeeping. Phases of filmmaking are bordered by being presented as specialized tasks. And just as in the assembly line, to assert control over production, other tasks are never learned. The material inequality between those in the perceived lower modes of production and the perceived highest is enormous. It is the difference between poverty and hoarding. It maintains a disproportionate amount of screen time for the white male face, which are also the main perpetrators of colonial violence.

This, however, is not the only form of cultivation. Permaculture understands that plants thrive best within diverse communities where each provides different strengths. Some naturally fight pests, some provide shade, grow stalks for others to climb upon, some add nutrients to the soil and some take. Each works collectively to contribute to larger systems where the drastic toxic measures of monocultured spaces are not needed. Wilderness is a form of permaculture, containing foods planted intentionally, and spaces for foraging that are strengthened by the foraging that happened before. The colonial trope to call wilderness uncultivated for not adhering to monocultural practices was utilized to excuse mass theft, displacement, extraction, and murder in the Americas and the global south. The signs of perma-cultivation in wild spaces begin to emerge when moving through them. A group of mango trees in the jungle, or a patch of ramps in the woods. It is taking time to learn which plants are full of nutrients, which seasons they emerge, how to collect them in a way that encourages regrowth. Wilderness is bounty. It is also the understanding that we must care for Earth, just as she cares for us.

Refusing to perform monoculturalism, to rebuke the colonial trajectory, is a feral act. Wilding cinema, or, feral filmmaking, is in direct resistance to the Hollywood model. It functions like a weed: ever-present and spreading, refusing to remain in approved spaces.

Feral filmmaking is rooted in the guerilla methods of Third Cinema, particularly through the Newsreel, a tactic for the quick recording of important events as they unfold, events which are in danger of being erased or suppressed, as they do not bode well for maintaining monocultural supremacy. It is a means to bear witness. It is a “response-ability,” as termed by Donna Haraway. As such, it must be a mobile practice. Gear must be compact, light, and easy to carry. It utilizes modest equipment, with the understanding that modest equipment can be used to create work that is professional, aesthetic, and cinematic. It understands that the Hollywood mythology of necessitating elitist tools is a tactic to hold on to their domination and uphold their hierarchical supremacy. Teaching and learning all modes of film production is then a highly subversive act and creates communities where each person can, and must, take on any role as needed.

Feral filmmaking rejects the mode of dominant science and cinema. It aims to engage in reciprocity, rather than observation and objectification. When expanded beyond the quick response of the Newsreel, it can be utilized as a method for deep research of place. For this, it must work in Deep Listening, as pioneered by Pauline Oliveros, and expanded by Dr. Elena Marchevska. It is rooted in wandering and open engagement with sensorial disorientation. A practice that is first done without cinematic apparatuses. It begins with bodies in place. Documentation begins only after a connection has been made with place, and of course people. It is a subjective practice and looks to cross thresholds.

It is work with ghosts, of searching for tracings of the dead and the hidden. Place, story, history, and character emerge through this practice. The work becomes a dynamism of entangled multiplicities.

As a counter to the erasure of monocultural practices, feral filmmaking must attend to the intentional gaps that are rampant in the archive and the canon, all the gaps from where the weeds have been pulled, sites of redaction. As such, it becomes work in impossible images. To address this, feral filmmaking looks to Saidiya Hartman's "critical fabulation." When she went to investigate her family history, of ancestors stolen from Africa, and shipped to America, the only documents to reference were the ledger books of the very men that inflicted these terrible acts on her ancestors. As such, she could not insert her ancestral legacy in the archive without fictional narrative. Without fiction, the cycle of erasure would continue. And as critical fabulation, feral cinema is documentary, it is fiction, it is experimental, and it is elegy. It refuses to remain contained in borders.

Everything is political. We are either engaged in resistance, or we are protecting the status quo. It is a choice we make every day in the work we practice, research, watch, and canonize. As such, I am a feral filmmaker: subversive and stubborn, disregarding borders and fences, and working towards a new and wild cinema.

\* A previous version of this essay was published in Spanish for the *VIII AricaDoc - International Documentary Film Festival* (2024).

\*

American guerilla gardener turned guerilla filmmaker and visual artist, **Erin Wilkerson**, is the co-founder of the political art collective and production company, Creative Agitation along with her partner, Travis Wilkerson. They have exhibited in the Venice Biennale, Locarno Film Festival, the Viennale, and the Berlinale, and their film, *Nuclear Family* (2021), was awarded *Mencion Especial* at the Mar del Plata International Film Festival, screened in 20+ festivals, and is distributed by Arsenal (Berlin). Grounded in ecology thanks to her early professional work in landscape architecture, her solo practice is rooted in the exploration of global narratives. Her international exhibitions include, *The Second Burial* (2023), which streamed on MUBI Latin America. She has also exhibited at Prismatic Ground (New York), FICUNAM (Mexico), Arica Docs (Chile), and INTERSECCION (Spain). After receiving a PhD in Research and Practice from Liverpool John Moores University, in partnership with the TransArt Institute, comprised of an intensive theoretical study of "Invasive Species" as a study of feral filmmaking as decolonial practice, and an accompanying speculative fiction film, "Strange Flower (little sister to the poor)" about a witch navigating colonial history on the border of Europe with the east, she was awarded Global Fellow at Duke Kunshan University.