



ANOTHER KNOWING



How do we define intelligence? Does it require reason, thought, a weighing of the factors at hand? How do we define memory? Does it require neurons? How do we define consciousness? How do we define free will? If you ask these questions of Dr. Stefano Mancuso of University of Florence's International Laboratory of Plant Neurobiology, the answers may surprise you. For Dr. Mancuso, intelligence is the ability to solve problems; memory can exist outside of a neurological framework; consciousness is simply being aware of one's environment; and yes, plants have free will. In *Another Knowing*, an experimental documentary I am currently producing, I explore the idea of plant intelligence and the philosophical implications of the emerging research.



In my interview with Dr. Mancuso, he begins:

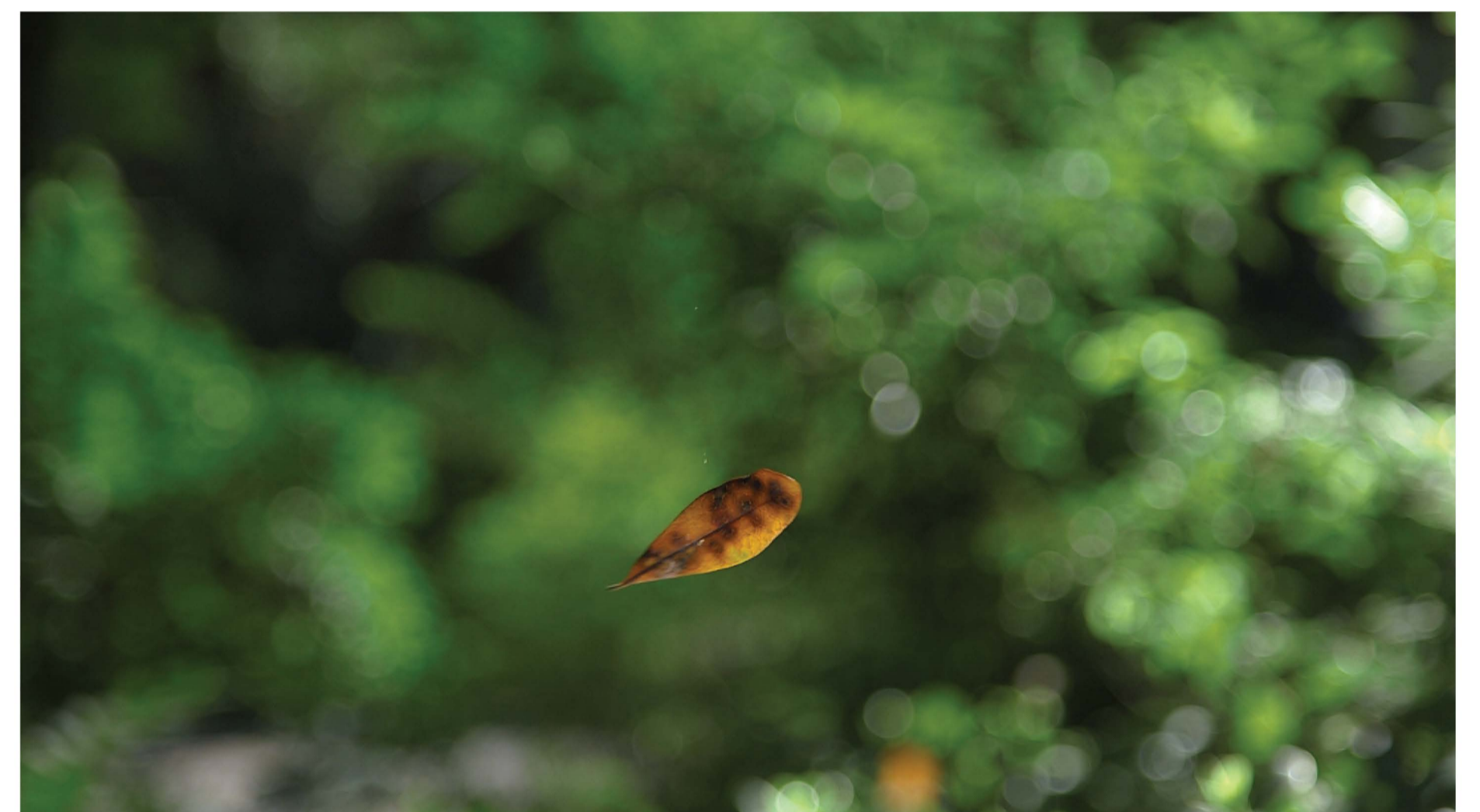
“Imagine you are a plant....”

But most of us can't fathom a plant's daily existence. Their achingly slow pace of life is beyond our comprehension. We take for granted the incredible systems each plant uses to survive and reproduce, all while being unable to move. Mancuso's research brings these systems to light, but the challenge of the documentary is in creating visuals to interact with the audio.

Film is made up of still frames, usually recorded and projected 24 frames per second. This approximates the motion we are accustomed to in reality. Time lapse photography usually involves shooting only 1 frame per several seconds and projecting them at 24 frames per second. So time lapse can bring slow-moving subjects to life, making it an ideal choice for this project. We have all seen the sped up blooming of a flower, unraveling with a yawn and a stretch (we can even anthropomorphize them at this rate!).



Beyond the beauty of a bloom, what can we learn by seeing plants sped up? There is the ingenuity of the bean plant, whipping its stalk to find a pole, miraculously finding it without the aid of our five senses. This video does not prove that plants have a human-like intellect, but it does provoke us to ponder another kind of intelligence. We might realize that we should not anthropomorphize plants; that relating all living organisms to humans, weighing them by our own standards, means that we cannot fully see what they are capable of in their own terms.



If time lapse can allow us this revelation, perhaps it can lead to a new perception of plants—in reality or in 24 frames per second. To build toward this perception, the real-time visuals that I use are focused on finding angles, perspectives and moments of plant life (and death) that the viewer does not often look at. The dangling of a fallen leaf from a spider's imperceptible thread speaks to the sense of wonder that I felt when I learned about how much plants can do, for example. In exploring these experimental approaches to plant visuals, I hope to give viewers a complex sense of their own relationships to plants and what they may have taken for granted.

Malia Bruker
School of Communication
www.maliabruker.com
malia.bruker@cci.fsu.edu

