

Hanger Lane Heracleum Mantegazzianum

Super 8, colour and black and white

15 minutes

This film was shot using various Super 8 film stocks between 2000 and 2004 at the Hanger Lane gyratory in North-West London.

The film documents the life cycle of a colony of Heracleum Mantegazzianum (commonly known as Giant Hogweed) plants through the seasons over four years. Heracleum Mantegazzianum is an invasive species to Britain, brought by Victorian plant collectors in the eighteenth century. Since its introduction to the UK it has become largely confined to uninhabited or inaccessible areas, mainly as it is listed as harmful to humans. This is due to the fact that its sap can rob the skin's ability to protect itself against UV rays, leaving it black and blistered where it has been in contact.

As an invasive and toxic species, Hogweed has a special classification according to DEFRA's (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) hazardous substances list, and if found in the UK, citizens are obliged to report its existence so the local council can destroy it.

This particular colony does suffer from occasional attacks by London Transport teams who hack and burn the plants on the roadside. Despite this, an enclosed area beside the Central Line tube tracks allow generations of plants to grow and die relatively undisturbed, and is here where the majority of the footage was captured.

The sound accompaniment utilises recordings of the surrounding location (dominated mainly by the A40 motorway and Central Line tube system), and recordings of found objects acquired along the same stretch of ground. These objects include pieces of rusting metal, car parts, a 9V battery-powered motor, loose discarded cassette tape, dead and dried hogweed specimens and general articles of rubbish. Moreover, the compositional arrangement of this material is intended not to specifically articulate the on-screen activity, but rather to provide an extension to the subject matter. Any perceived disparities in the audio-visual relationship are addressed via the association of sound-object to Hogweed location.

In an attempt to reconcile the acousmatic (pre-recorded sound) and acoustic environments, two prepared loudspeaker drivers are employed as a meeting ground between the utterances of the 8mm projector within the space, and the sound-window unto the location presented via the larger PA system.

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