



### **FUGUE For A Spiritual Life (UK)**

★★★★

**Directed by Thomas Wohlmüt**



In an era where environmental collapse and spiritual disconnection threaten to overwhelm our collective consciousness, Thomas Wohlmüt's "Fugue for a Spiritual Life" emerges as a masterfully crafted meditation on humanity's relationship with the sacred. Drawing parallels to Werner Herzog's "Cave of Forgotten Dreams" (2010) and Ron Fricke's "Baraka" (1992), Wohlmüt's documentary traverses the sublime landscapes of the Lake District, creating a visual symphony that echoes the contemplative power of Terrence Malick's "A Hidden Life" (2019). Through the philosophical musings of Reverend Stephen G Wright, the film constructs a phenomenological bridge between environmental crisis and spiritual awakening, reminiscent of the ecological-spiritual dialogue present in Viktor Kossakovsky's "Aquarela" (2018).

The film's genius lies in its deceptive simplicity, employing iPhone 14 cinematography that transforms technological minimalism into transcendental art. Wohlmüt's composition choices reveal an acute understanding of the Japanese concept of 'ma', the meaningful negative space between moments. The drone footage, rather than serving mere aesthetic purposes, becomes a metaphysical apparatus for viewing humanity's place within nature's grand tapestry. This technical approach creates a fascinating dialogue with contemporary works like Charlotte Wells' "Aftersun" (2022), where everyday technology becomes a vessel for profound spiritual exploration.

At its philosophical core, the documentary grapples with three interconnected theoretical frameworks: deep ecology, as conceived by Arne Næss; contemplative phenomenology, drawing from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work; and what might be termed 'spiritual materialism', the paradoxical relationship between physical environmental collapse and metaphysical awakening. Wright's peripatetic discourse, set against the backdrop of ancient fells and valleys, excavates these concepts with remarkable accessibility, achieving what Gilles Deleuze might term a 'minor cinema', one that speaks to universal truths through intensely localised experience.

What distinguishes "Fugue for a Spiritual Life" from conventional spiritual documentaries is its refusal to resort to didacticism. Instead, it creates what I would term a 'contemplative dialectic' between viewer and subject, environment and inhabitant, crisis and transformation. The film's structure mirrors its title's musical reference a fugue where themes of ecological awareness, spiritual awakening, and human responsibility weave together in counterpoint, creating a harmonic complexity that rewards repeated viewing. Particularly striking is a sequence where Wright discusses the concept of 'relinquishment' of letting go of our anthropocentric worldview while the camera slowly pulls back from an ancient stone wall, revealing its integration into the broader landscape, a visual metaphor that recalls the ethereal environmental consciousness of Andrei Tarkovsky's "Stalker" (1979).

To you, Thomas Wohlmut, I must express profound admiration for crafting a work that demonstrates cinema's capacity to function as both spiritual practice and ecological wake-up call. Your decision to embrace technological minimalism while achieving maximum philosophical impact reveals a deep understanding of documentary's transformative potential. In an age where environmental documentaries often resort to apocalyptic sensationalism, you've created something far more valuable, a contemplative space where crisis becomes opportunity, and spiritual awareness emerges as a practical response to environmental collapse. This film stands as testament to the possibility of finding profound meaning precisely when things fall apart.

**- Reviewed by Adrián Pérez**