

A Cinema of Living-ness
Images for searching, striving, making,
healing, thinking, always
Caroline Parietti and Cyprien Ponson



(Way back)

On a boat, off the shore of a *heavenly* isle the other end
(beyond
mere image) of hell / political jail, something
grows obvious: to dedicate henceforth all of one's
strength to Earth.

(Then)

On the streets, cries

The tied of seasons

Roaming memory

On a cinema quest

The film erupts from the heart (of the forest)

Before the film, there was nothing, that is, everything was. To be what one pursues. Complete was the forest, doing, undoing itself to the beat of each monsoon, migration or gesture of animal scope (therefore, human). Draining is tradition; so is Memory-picking, to let it grow anew. Yet, of gold and materials, the drunken drugged-up gluttony of dilated technology has sped up the crop: from wounded, to gaping, torn apart, dislocated. The mosaic may shatter: into what chaos, as yet un-experienced? Mute goes the forest song, unless our combined bodies stop the frenzied machines pounding away at her flesh of leavewoodbranchbarktrunk. Cellulose neurosis.



(Then II)

Somewhere in the hidden lands of tropical forests, they say people are ardently resisting to preserve their territories, their very existence.

Does the fight merely oppose locals against timber companies? Does it occasionally get more complex?

We set off out of pre-existing solidarity: how does one fight, elsewhere, to open up one's life path?

This takes place in Penan country, Borneo Island.

There we are headed.

So be these images.

This text flew downstream from the film born of this encounter and its limitless extension into our minds and lives. To memory, in the now.

Under the apple-tree of childhood,

as writing resumes,

veils the sky with a cloud



The washed-out paper under your fingertip was a book a tree was a clearing a line of lines in the forest was inside it including the raw material of words and objects around



with each of your pores' eyes you watch the image open up jut out surge vibrate in the swaying of your body framing it the place backside forward / listen listen listen as the picture gives birth within you explodes exposes silently screaming lies on your stomach – calm yourself, have a little walk, climb uphill, down up there you can drink and rest, quietly, digest your gaze



Over there / about 3°57'45.6"N 115°13'05.1"E / riding roads track dust to the gut-greens through the palmed maze & further still ocean of trees at the hilly neckline of

this boundless space, remote yet a part of predator societies, behind the seen is where gets filmed.



Étape de recherche d'affiche, Léonard Thoyer & Emmanuelle Tornero

Legs are our bodies' trees, a shin bone turns timber. In Penan tongue, the colour *marung* means both blue & green: why separate the inseparable, day fading into night into day in the great forest. Ahead of us tread-tell those who have been waking up and going to sleep there long. The spoken thought reflects the vibrant surrounding architecture. What we see there oversteps the frame, secret sky, every endless tree overwhelms our eyes, each word opens up a new clarity in the ignorant mixture of our mouths. *Lem kenin ké', in my heart = I think*. The word is tasting bud on a tongue – the tongue grows supple now, fills with soil. Leeches stick to our teeth, dregs of red earth clog the creases in our retinas.



And so the film is where the images of the forest meet with our bodies searching for them, but also, more so, with those experiencing these images and fearing their loss. Imaging: perhaps a way to ward off loss?

There is no answer, no, there is but what occurs, has occurred here. There is but what remains. Now. Words buried, images always. For the dwellers in the shade of the tall trees, embracing the film, one of many actions, is also born out of an emergency, a lethal potentiality: the annihilation of shade and shadows. Counter-imaging to seed other seens? Reversing such gazes, such fates? As we stand here, with our body-camera, do we write through the looking glass? We set off to film the end of a nomadic lifestyle as a house was to be built: what meets us is a home destroyed, a piece of the world resisting being torn apart, the realness of this loss, yet realness also of a full presence, in deed, a memory in action, a daily struggle relentlessly proving itself – relentlessly growing anew, like language, the tongue of a people, the tongue of a land. We say *we stand by you*, and others answer *yes, that is right*; but what actually seals our pact is the unexpected deviation off the beaten path: images only come into being along this lost way.



In the Penan forest, our foot-bodies in the soil of Sarawak, whose skin was sold off on the cheap, a part of the vast Borneo, the isle of omen-bearing birds and chattering streams, Forest Kingdom amongst sea empires, striated with colonial borders, soon-to-be Capital Isle – an isle, still, with infinite flora, now growing in straight lines. By her stripped-off downside lurks the entropy of Soul: forests are the starting point of our lives. But then, then what becomes of us?

Making (many) us

And so we set off there, and there was who we thought we were: creatures of certainties & concerns. Once there, other creatures' intertwined with ours. *Amé penan, we Penans*. Into the forest we followed them, trusting.

Making this film involved groping for the grammar, our grammar, that of the bonding (at one moment in time, in one open space) between mindful bodies, hello we would like to film you, falling down, standing back up, listening better, listening without understanding but feeling: feeling the emotion, the secret within the un-grasped word, and getting it all the same. When eyes meet for real, then pictures reveal bodies, a different way. At one point, the very matter of the encounter surges up & if the camera is on, this substance may be filmed. They are called magical moments. Something is. One feels the power: one hunting, another filming him, then suddenly, the forest. One is singing, another, telling, one listens, round goes the circle, whoever listens to a story forms a society with whomever tells it. [1] Stammering, the story blooms, amongst tree trunks, seeps into the body-trunk.



Carried on our laughs, shared concerns, daily time together, with the canopy watching over Us, the S in Us, daily snake within or in-between, slithers, extending across land to meet the path of other snakes, forming crossing lines: x. It is then that, much like the tree extending its branches around its surroundings, infinitely intertwined, Us becomes Ux. Our Us-es weave together and through this film – its watchful audience – entwine (perhaps) yet other Us-es.

If the world is undone, language stutters. Breach into which to slip new meanings, games, bonds? Lianas. Lianas of Ux. Hoping that in the explosive implosion of our worlds, neither inhumane walls, nor dead words can hold – pronouns pulsating. In Penan language, the third person singular has but one occurrence, whereas the first person plural has six. Hoping Ux to be capable of this: opening up our free-flowing thoughts, the apex of our strengths and tongues, the fecund encounter of our images.

Each dawn opens up a chapter. The Sun at dusk. In the boundless in-between: all, the voracious devouring of history. All times are mingled, all peoples, all words. Stopping for nought, holding on to all. Near the Ocean, outwardly very cold yet in turn too hot, again my eye begins to swell. Beats the wave within it.

Image [2]:

reversed replica of an object mirrored by a reflective surface,

cerebral depiction?

Between body and tongue, a pinch of salt skims off the gaze.

A cinema of documents, a cinema of elements.

Tongue of images

Like water, the image is first raw and live, and if boiled, made digestible: *ba' murip*, life-water flows outwards, ripples in open air and engulfs itself underground, flows through the cracks of the world, rivulet, rivers, gushing streams; *ba' matai*, death-water, the one a human hand places on the stove to cleanse it of its germs and make it drinkable; thereby staying alive.

To drink an image, to absorb its flow.

Germ - elementary state through which every (living) being passes.

Conditional future: if the image weren't boiled, would it be the death of Ux? Only in toxic lands is it lethal or asthenic. Remember the spring from which, in your cupped hands, receiving stance, you would drink in the sacred clearings of your childhood. Remember the taste of water – heed the rock responding... Now they say that even the people Upstream the rivers are engulfed in damaging chemistry.

To engulf, drop - To fall, to collapse down a cavity, a hollow in the terrestrial, marine, cosmic space, and disappear temporarily or permanently.

To damage, strength in action – Thing. *To defile by rendering unrecognisable, or unusable, or by putting in a near-destruction state; Person. To deprive someone of their vitality through mortal torture, to oppress deeply.*

Fathomless cave in the bowels of the Earth, darkness wherein creep the mechanical arms of monstrous machines, where some intend to go colonise the ocean floor, where memory slumbers - the gulf is engulfed in damage. If it is needed of Ux to come back down to earth, to gather our thoughts, then We must heal the damage and face the gulf.



If making cinema is *to give voice to the earth*, [3] yes, YES!, then: how, first, to lend an ear? To learn to see (in) its words?

Ex-trac-ti-vism (*from Brazilian extractivismo*): *this is a word that points to the gathering of forest produce by Amazonian communities (...)* The word "extractivism" evokes a superlative stage of this extraction, to the point of obsession, addiction, even ideology. [4] To take images, without letting them grow again, what sort of material-picking is that? Making enough images to lose oneself into, a flood of them. Sensitive body shan't ingest it all. Best leave some respite, let the veil float, allow shade some space in the reversed cone-shaped red gut. [TLFI, heart] *Each stone you unearth here is a different battle.* [5] Each image matters.

The extraction stage substantially determines all the subsequent stages. [6] When we worked the collected images – aesthetic extractivism? – bouncing, slimy, all the Penan words seeped into us. Travels between tongues, distorting mirror. And these words very softly settled into the images. Hark, they are alive, take heed! One word at a time, they speak and unveil. Discreet worlds hold secrets – the film, our mountain, veiled tree castle, opens its barbican for you.

What is at stake everywhere is the hope to pass on memory, that of piled-up experiences: illusory if unable to birth themselves.

This film shows a 1h25-long succession of images, an encounter with people who reveal themselves, commit physically to the land, fight for their living conditions; the film wants itself immersed in the forest, in its thoughts. Talking about the film to people upstream is difficult, how can we say? If the eye opposite does not watch it, how to talk about it? We have no words. Images alone talk - it is

them one needs to discuss with, to let one's own images talk. All we do, is open the door to a possible encounter.



Every image is a mask [7]; images mask one another, tying Ux-es together, in cruxes. Intimate fibres.

Bodies lent to thoughts. From the walls of our imaginations, being able to move the lines of what may be, towards the better or the worse. Transformative gesture of the secret hand. The mind, at least the human mind, owns this ability, to allow for atrocities to be ingested. Moving walls.

Must we temper with this pliability?

But how? How to touch this hidden skin?

Parts of this membrane, under such frequent strain, have become very slack in places.

Other pieces, barely experienced (touched?), grow more flexible, or necrose, or stiffen.

Those are the areas to be found again. It is not the memory that is smashed, no: but our casing that we have damaged.

Layers, burn-protection,

yawning gap letting some grit through?



The animal: unknown. In the raw light, the I that seize all knows not.

Through the eyes, does the cinema – (see-through) veil – unveil?

Should one strive to weave a permanent veil, or to disintegrate it?

But if elemental dementia already stirs the souls, then what is to be done

Severed forest, fevered eyes – poultices of cinders

How to gaze, gaze at the gaze? Unveil the veil.

The direct sun will burn your I.

This animal: a nebula?

Made up of minute isles, it is Ux who trek these boundless stretches of land, collecting their deposits. At the tip of the touching finger, touches that skin. Within the stream of images flowing between bodies between screens between machines between lives also our deaths are being built. It is as if a body in action turned mirror, and if destruction always happens – small scale, large scale, that of fate or design – so our visions happen, too. To ward off bad luck is to vomit the unimaginable, the mutilated life, to overcome the fright of a bad death, to invoke the possibility to march to one's death at one's own pace – life-borne, not lifeless. To invoke a life on Earth lived with honour. Sacrificing no body, never, nowhere, everywhere. In Penan land, what was at stake in this hope was to believe together that to imagine a film could participate in keeping a land alive, fertile, along with its living beings, in a thick Forever. For us, making a film, however fragile the promise, remains geared towards this hope. That is our commitment, our exorcism.

"Forming forest"



Upon returning from Borneo, we inhabited the images that inhabited us. Inhabiting the film was our home, night and day. In this economy, carrying our film-in-a-bag from one dwelling to the next, under the ridges of the lost lands (clever gypsy word) & the French outback – for it seems easier for us to be projected onto arable land – relying on the delicate net of disseminated untameable little worlds, thanks to the many

humble, yet ever-so-precious, acts of solidarity from people who believe in giving freely, we were able to carry on making the film, meeting each of its needs: sort out, transcript, translate, write, sleep, eat, edit, un-edit, repeat, again and again, re-edit, add a soundtrack, subtitles, colours. Dreaming it every instant, never saying so. Sleeps, weeks, seasons. Little hands, big hearts; short nights, tall orders. Secret life of ants in their galleries, where one feasts happily over treasures drawn under the sun. The only business we deemed desirable was a partnership of craftspersons: those who make do with the pulp in each finger, and rely on the collective no matter what – all this, important, as exhausting as enthralling, keeps on giving us the will to make life, our life, stories, meals, hiding nooks, together. Everything found its groove. Some years went by, of images and tongues bubbling within us. Bodies striving to hatch, bodies criss-crossed and criss-crossing damp places, intent on listening to the forest-tongue. Weeks, sowings, seasons. Then there was the film, buzzing with insects, interspersed with words of truth.



Riding roads track dust to the guts of intersecting mazes ocean of stories of things of sorrows of accumulated images. Stupor: forgotten stridulations. Hoped-for existence, plant-words, organic philosophy – the nomadic thought fights for its sprouting conditions. We have been carried on our own wind. Foxing the lands, throwing the enemy. Our lady-fox friend, an image editor, commenting upon our taking the film hither and thither, *says you are forming forest*. Yes, we must form forest, get our images out wherever we can, wherever people pay attention and lend an ear-eye. Yes, we must pour forth the voices carrying invigorating images in the loud destructive racket of societies living on mineral economies – with their fossil veins (treasures), excavated.

Imagine your whole gut out in the open, your body drilled by the impact. Imagine the mountain burning with no time to catch its breath. Imagine getting your childhood, your living-ness, stolen from you.

Imagine an image is not this, not the astonishing effort of extracting materials. Liar-image. Still pulsating. The landscapes we encounter play monkeys on our retinas. Behind the curtain, tarmac delta: Beauty – life cry?



Que venga patz, que venga guèrra

Semeni, ieu, l'èrba d'agram... [8]

A cinema of living-ness

Death was opening its tail, unfolding the glacial fireworks of all these eyes open onto the world backstage, this hellish landscape. [9]

We imagine cinema to be alive, or so we hope. Living-ness as the overcoming of horror. Living in spite of death. Also living-ness, enlivening existences, as potential expansion. Alacritous magic - to gain a new grasp on words: alacrity, vitality - to look for images *that cast nice shadows*, as Jalung says at the onset of the film. Through ruins, roiling soils, knowing stones, embodied bodies, life flows. If we listen for real, will these invincible images remember Ux? Open up to Ux?



subversion / duration / to set one's gaze

The cinema of living-ness, in the way we phrase it in the present tense, conveys this search. It would be animated cinema, animal in that respect, cinema of colours, bearing the gazes it attracts, activating or animating, thereby allowing thought to be river unto itself. Cinema of substances, built with our whole bodies. This cinema spreads to each mundane gesture, it is the fire fuelling us. It is our continuous means, not to earn a living, but to live; taking up everything, from morning grain to evening weed. From the coma in each sentence to the rationale for each road. Its shape is our life shape, it ends up framing it. As such, by choice and by lack thereof, it makes rather obvious sense to abstain from any determining merchant logic, which would hardly agree with it (it: our cinema, our film, our daily life?) The cut opens of its own accord.



If the stone cut the foot blood splays on the skin colour comes out apply soil a few leaves wait do not rub wait for the soil to relieve maybe heal. Images lick the soul's blade – mind your knife, it's sharp. What's the handle made of, pray tell?

This cinema is watching Ux, this cinema is about Ux. It may have become for Ux the sole way to keep on believing in what we hope.



**A staircase of broken images breaking one after another –
what is not said in this photo, is the voice.**

Healing the thought implies repairing, but also making lively images. What is to be done with the rest – the gulf engulfed in damage?

How to mourn?

Eye's work.

visual field, slanted mountainside higher to the left than the right

in *the image perceived ahead of me*, short grass, lime green, frayed or mossy, streaked with brown streaks,

a sense of racing in high alert, out of breath, through *the image slanted* horizontally

when from my universe hidden to the left rushes forth a pack of wolves,

galloping

as well, headed not straight at me but in the direction of my own

direction

Combinations, editorial mountains? Films in which the strolling would not be out of regret, but of our desires' demands? Films like images of the night it is up to Ux to defend, to defend against its own death, to let breathe and exist, images of nocturnal days into which our minds will slip, intent on deciphering? Films to protect the existing conditions of blind spots & awaken hearts to their own thought, films to sob & howl & make a voice tremble & receive all but give in to nought. Films to remember what goes through Ux, what relentlessly makes Ux, what unmakes Ux. Forest-films.





The image perceived ahead of oneself: the dream. It shows in night time, and in daylight too. Every instant of our lives. Round the corner of every street or stream. Eyes open, thus opening. The only thing we can do: in-/de-cribe our dreams. Everything that follows lives outdoors, innocently, intensely. Everything shapes & misshapes Ux. We navigate wide oceans. If there is no wild forest left, our deforested thoughts must find anything to answer & to hold on to, materials, images – memorised, forgotten, instant, upcoming.

The first layer was thick: it was plain that time had frozen it, trapped it in its long-lasting stillness. The substance looked a clearly definable colour. It could have been labelled with a word others would understand: orange, rust, aluminium, canary, emerald. Yet barely had the eye risen to pursue its gazing along the texture of that skin, when this colour initially sensed changed tone. Upon repeating the experiment a few times, one realized that altering the speed of the eye's course upon the image it grasped allowed to discern intermediary colour sensations. Light canary, molten aluminium.

Reversely, holding absolutely still, by deepening the breath which may otherwise have caused the iris to twitch, allowed to -

Yet as hours went by dedicated to this activity, it became gradually possible to see more colours surge transparently from underneath, bubbling up and turning ponds, then lakes. From this engulfed depth one could -

It was warm outside.

Then, from the wide waters of the world, the children drew rivers, traced deltas, dipper feathers, horse froth, omens, for the terns alone to surmise.

In the worlds we inhabit, certain images demand to be excavated, looked at and redesigned. In saturated imaginations, there is some sorting out to do, and

some tidying up. Some images demand to be turned, honoured or countered. Preserved. Wept over. Screamed. Erased. Distorted. Escorted. Fixed. Embodied commitment. To recycle – to give shape again, thus life. In certain wistful places, with imaginations made brittle by violent surroundings, muted out of spite or hidden for safety, images hope for their unfolding, their opportunity. These images, it is up to Ux to grant them existence. Is it not? So it is, hopefulness as gestures, traces, words.

And he told me about his nights of loneliness

And of his clouded dreams. [10]

Our images are our sole lands, our lands are our images. In the light of extractivist transformations, terracing, polluting, discriminating, killing, they metamorphose. What images do we want? What images are we headed to? Our responsibility in this is boundless. Can't be imagined? Yes it can. Animal images, mechanical images. *We have the land here, something must be made of it. [11]* To have: *To be related (tangibly or abstractly, permanently or occasionally) with someone or something. [12]* Our forests, our architectures - our intertwined fate - are forged by our choices, by our thinkings which are our doings.

They say, this is what happens now, but we won't let the land disappear.

We will keep on fighting for her, and if they catch one of us, there will still be others. [13]



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Caroline Parietti and Cyprien Ponson

Caroline Parietti and Cyprien Ponson are the authors and directors of [BÉ' JAM BÉ the never ending song](#) (2017).

To see the trailer : <https://www.dawaidawai.net/MOVIE-BE-JAM-BE-the-never-ending-song>

NOTES

[1] ; *whoever reads it, also partakes in this society*, Walter Benjamin develops in his essay *The Narrator* (Der Erzähler, 1936), later translated as *The Story-teller*. Here we choose this translation into French by Maurice de Gandillac (1959) rather than Benjamin's own translation (1939) [The French quote is translated into English here]: *Whoever listens to a story finds him/herself in companionship with the one who tells it; even the one who reads it partakes in this companionship*.

[2] Translated from the TLFi French online dictionary (as are all subsequent definitions)

[3] A proposition by Fl. Ossang a cross-conversation: Cinéma / Politique - Paris 2004 <https://www.debordements.fr/Cinema-Politique-Paris-2004>

[4] Taken from *Extractivisme. Exploitation industrielle de la nature : logiques, conséquences, résistances*, Anna Bednik, Le Passager Clandestin, 2016, pp. 17-18

[5] *Kazarken - En creusant*, Güldem Durmaz, A nous 2 asbl, 2016, 90'

[6] Excerpt, idem, p. 12

[7] Gabriel Teshome, *The Intolerable Gift*: <https://www.teshomegabriel.net/the-intolerable-gift/>

[8] (*Come peace, come war, / I'll just be sowing twitch grass...*) in the song *L'èrba d'agram* (Agram, 2017) in the Occitan polyphonic band Barrut, adapted from Joan Bodon's eponymous poem.

[9] Jorge Semprún, returning from Buchenwald, in *L'écriture ou la vie*, Gallimard, 1994, p.36. He mentions the Spanish word *vivencia*, "lived experience" (p.182), to "capture, in one fell swoop, life experiencing itself" (p.149) or rather this death which he has "explored from end to end " (p.24)

[10] *Hamama & Caluna*, Andreas Muggli, HSLU Hochschule Luzern Design & Kunst - Video, 2018, 22'

[11] *Le jardin*, Frédérique Menant, La Surface de dernière diffusion, 2019, 16'

[12] TLFi, first definition.

[13] Peng Megut, inhabitant of Long Tevenga, protagoniste in the film, 2014