

For an animistic cinema. Filmmaking in pandemic times.

2021. Anywhere. We (from south, west, east, north) participate in the Berlinale Talents. We've never met in person.

An excessively arrogant relationship to something we have come to call nature (call this relationship the violent cycle 'extractivism - productivism - consumerism'), briefly paralysed human circulation on a planetary scale by means of the zoonosis of a seemingly insignificant virus. After all, that inconvenient little animalcule had the annoying characteristic of travelling with us, which had to be prevented.

So we, as 'Talents' were left at home, condemned to exercise our talents from behind a screen, in the bedroom, living room, kitchen and so on. The window (that other and more real screen) in the room (for those who had one), soon became redemptive and gave us hope of escaping.¹ The fact that this year's theme was 'Dreaming' might well have contributed. This 2021 edition was conceived as 'a joint dream world for this year's Berlinale Talents Everywhere experience'; and as 'the virtual Berlinale Talents Dreamworld'. We had 'dreamy guests' (Céline Sciamma, Apichatpong Weerasethakul...) who brought us into a collective dream mode and were invited into Dream Journeys. Dream on!

We were in-animated mobility-wise due to polluted lungs and contaminated breaths. The human/nature divide shattered (*i.c.* zoonosis). But immobilised, we came to breathe through dreams. We did not physically meet in Berlin, but our souls met through dreams. Dreams are the spaces where souls meet. That's *animism* at work. [Anima: breath/soul/mind.] And animism is precisely another transgression of that human/non-human dichotomy.²

Since cinema conveys dreams, and since minds meet in dreams; cinema is the medium of animism. Cinema has always been animistic. Remember its capacity to impute life in inanimate objects, to animate still images. Remember all the images that were anything but inert, but on the contrary had agency, acted upon you, moved you, had intentionality and power to compel and captivate you.³ Remember how cinema re-animates (and restores) the world.⁴ As early as 1923, Jean Epstein wrote that one of cinema's greatest powers was its animism.⁵ Film re-enacts a long abandoned animism.⁶

So we decided to dream through film and film through dreams by communicate through video letters. The window as an aesthetic trope is our analogy to the silver screen.⁷ All talents (filming, editing, composing, narrating...) were combined in a cinematic journey. It became a multi-voiced cinematographic experiment, a creative process where each participant created a narrative piece. The project reflects the many maker's states of mind using the visual medium in multiple ways. Patterns and connections emerged to build a universe. With the desire to deepen our exchange, we discover what connects us and experiment new ways of filmmaking and collaborating by embracing our physical distance as a strength.

We want to be cross-borders in various ways: geographically and also by blurring the lines between formats, a blend of film genres according to each Talent's specificities and desires. We discover the project while making it. We are process-driven, we don't have fixed rules and we work with a collective horizontal approach. We produced a chain of video letters and we are deepening this approach. By the exchange of materials we are seeing what emerges as themes.

The dream as film and film as dream is a gathering of our minds. We exchange and multiply each other's perspectives on the world we once stood in and took for granted, but which we now contemplate from a distance. Inevitably, the question arises as to which world we are leaving behind (a child invites her mother in her dream) and whether we want to return to the new "normal". Bits of pieces of past and future further destabilise the fixed position behind the window. Stuck in loops, we wish we could edit reality. We do. We are in confinement, and offer breaths of thoughts, vomits of thoughts and invent memories.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ijGMSx7gCA>

² Philippe Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture*, Gallimard, Paris 2005

³ David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago University Press, Chicago 1989; Louis Marin, *Des pouvoirs de l'image: Gloses*, cit.; Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1998; W. J. T. Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2004.

⁴ Castro, T. et al. 2020. *Puissance du végétal et cinéma animiste: la vitalité révélée par la technique*. Presses du réel. Castro, T. 2016. An Animistic History of the Camera: Filmic Forms and Machinic Subjectivity, *Film Forum*. 247-255. Castro, T. 2016. Penser le 'cinéma animiste' avec Jean Epstein", Hamery, R. et al. *Jean Epstein. Actualités et postérités*, PUR, 247-260.

⁵ Jean Epstein, *De quelques conditions de la photogénie* [1924], in Id., *Écrits sur le Cinéma*, Seghers, Paris 1974, vol. 1, p. 140.

⁶ Iris Barry, *Let's Go to the Movies*, Payson and Clarke, New York 1926, p. 27.

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHZ5AYVJjys>