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Learning from land cinema: political pedagogy, plots and plantations

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Abstract

This article explores community film-making in Negros, a sugar plantation island in the Philippines, as a material and discursive intervention in pedagogical practices of eco-cinema and environmental media studies. It focuses on the contemporary Filipinx and Taiwanese American artists Enzo Camacho and Ami Lien, whose film-making uses phytography, a process that harnesses chemicals within plants as a photographic developer. The article considers the phytogram as an index of contested land, and the co-production of film as a pedagogy of resistance against the plantation's political and ecological hold. Drawing on the radical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, and histories of plantation resistance developed by Sylvia Wynter, the artists practise phytography and gardening as forms of pedagogy and protest. Local grandmothers, expert in botanical medicine, source plants for phytochemical adhesions. Working with them, the artists facilitate teach-ins, workshops and discursive screenings to resist state and hacienda violence, and techno-scientific practices of monoculture. This approach, I argue, recalls Third Cinema's anti-colonial politics and extends them in ecological directions emblematic of a genre I am calling 'land cinema'. Rejecting the *tabula rasa* blankness of new film stock and associations with *terra nullius* forms of colonial thinking, phytography resembles composting, the ground of the image reimagined as an earthy site of multispecies connection. Phytography also intervenes in cinema's imbrication with extractive materials and processes, speaking to a recent environmental turn in film

and photography studies. Made collectively on the edges of Negros's sugar plantations, Camacho and Lien's phytograms cultivate material pedagogies for climate justice.

Keywords environmental film studies; media literacy; extractivism; collaboration; Southeast Asia

Introduction

There are two words for hunger in Hiligaynon, a language spoken in the Negros Island region of the Philippines. *Gutom* describes regular hunger. *Tigkiriwi* describes a hunger that immobilises the body and mind when a person has not eaten for days. In *Langit Lupa* (*Heaven and Earth*), a 56-minute non-fiction film made by the Filipinx and Taiwanese American artists Enzo Camacho and Ami Lien in 2023, as part of a larger exhibition called *Offerings for Escalante*, a Negros sugarcane farmer describes how *tigkiriwi* gnaws at the stomach. 'That is what sugar farmers endure', he says, 'for three to four months each year'. Because the island's plantations are monoculture cash crops, exported by *hacienderos* (landowners), its land lies barren after harvest and before planting. If stormy weather coincides with this fallow period, fishing boats cannot sail, so farmers and fisher folk go without income and food. They call these gruelling months *tiempo muerto*, dead season.

Islanders resist this deadly situation, however, and resistance is the focus of Camacho and Lien's film. Practising a form of survival and resistance ('survivance', we could call it, borrowing an Anishinaabe coinage) (Vizenor, 2009), community members in Negros re-establish land relations by growing their own food on it. Much like the enslaved African communities whom Sylvia Wynter (1971) describes in Caribbean contexts, cultivating small plots on the edges of plantations, Negrense people grow aubergine, okra, sweet potatoes, water spinach and peas to feed themselves. Although, as Wynter (1971) points out, self-sufficiency reduced maintenance costs for plantation owners, it also provided a source of cultural sustenance, rejuvenating land through mixed planting and the cultivation of meaningful culinary, spiritual and medicinal plants. Wynter (1971) is a key reference for Camacho and Lien. In the Philippines, the practice of growing a plot beside the plantation is known as *bungkalan* (from the Tagalog *bungkal*: to till soil). *Bungkalan* is agrarian self-help, a form of ecopolitical activism predicated on collaborative learning (Wright and Labiste, 2018). *Bungkalan* wrests the idea of tilling from *terra nullius* associations with colonial land expropriation (Casid, 2004) and reroutes it towards political and soil literacy, stewardship and commoning.

In this article, I explore Camacho and Lien's expanded film-making practice, which also involves teach-ins, papermaking workshops and phytography – a technique whereby chemicals found within plants act as a natural developer for celluloid film (Doing, 2020). Made in collaboration with multiple generations of Negrense people, this expanded practice, I argue, constitutes a form of *bungkalan* – that is, a long-term work of ecopolitical activism and learning. To understand the pedagogical potential of Camacho and Lien's filmic *bungkalan*, I first look to textual and contextual aspects of their film-making – specifically, the presentation of colonial history as a past that is not past in the Plantationocene present. Then, I attend to the ecopolitical significance of the celluloid and botanical ingredients with which they make images. Finally, I consider Camacho and Lien's community film screenings on *bungkalan* plots as continuations of Third Cinema's discursive practices, and as a form of dialogic critical pedagogy. In the conclusion, I map *bungkalan*'s relevance to green film education in a wider constellation of global contexts.

My focus on materiality in the central section of the article speaks to a shift in the humanities towards projects of exhuming the ecocidal and genocidal histories of objects and technologies (Arabindan-Kesson, 2021; Beckert, 2015; Bosma, 2023; Miles, 2023; Mintz, 1986), and in film studies and photographic history, of analysing media's extractive animal, vegetable and mineral constituents (Angus, 2024; Bozak, 2011; Cubitt, 2016; Lovejoy, 2023; Vaughan, 2019). A focus on materiality is important because it constructs an argument whereby film cannot simply look political, but must also be political in the way that it is made, including through its ecological footprint and the labour relations involved in its production. Specifically in green film education contexts, for example within the UK, research groups led by Karel Doing (Oxford) and The Sustainable Darkroom (Bristol) offer tangible applications of this material ethics.

Camacho and Lien's intervention in material discourse is profound. While *Langit Lupa* draws attention to its material connection to extraction, and to documentary's legacy of objectification in colonised, classed, raced and gendered contexts (Rony, 2021), it also uses *bungkalan* and phytography to shift from critique to creativity, from plantation to plot. The film champions Negrense peasants as expert agronomists, political leaders and teachers. It is made and screened collaboratively with them as testament to their strength, and as a catalogue of the film-makers' and the community's ongoing efforts in education. Local, sustainably grown plants are used in the film's phytographic sections to contrast with its documentary sequences that depict the island's monoculture sugarcane plantations. The film's legacy is in this combined oppositional and propositional approach – a combination that is a hallmark of what I call 'land cinema'.

Building on work in fields of environmental justice, film and documentary history, and ecological art, I propose land cinema as a coinage to describe lens-based media that represent complex relations with lands and the lifeworlds they contain (Voelcker, 2025). Land cinema understands political, ecological and aesthetic aspects of land as a web of related concerns. Land cinema is oppositional in the way it documents territorial expansion, material extraction and labour exploitation, and propositional in its presentation of grass-roots and collective possibilities for ecological and social repair. Recognising the camera's historical imbrication with imperial and industrial projects of objectifying communities and landscapes as resources for extraction, land cinema reappropriates lens-based media as tools for resistance and responsiveness, reframing land as a locus of eco-ethical responsibility.

Land cinema speaks profoundly of our current moment of ecological crisis, but, as I have argued elsewhere (Voelcker, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b), the genre has deep roots – not least, in Third Cinema and other radical anti-colonial, labour and feminist cinemas of the 1970s, which Camacho and Lien cite as influences. Much has been written about these activist and participatory movements, particularly documentary's social function and contribution to political literacy (Adamson, 2018; Aguayo, 2019; Dickinson, 1999; Grant, 2016). Camacho and Lien's work contributes to this film history with an intervention inflected with *bungkalan*'s ecopolitical pedagogy.

In a contemporary media landscape saturated by divisive images and misinformation regarding land rights and climate change, theorising land cinema as a sustained theoretical framework and genre is an urgent task for imagining, imaging and enacting climate justice. My aim here is to present Camacho and Lien's expanded filmic *bungkalan* as an example of land cinema operating as a pedagogical tool across generations in community. Filled with methods for communicating political history and ecology through creative forms of learning, Camacho and Lien's work offers what Caroline Levine (2023) calls a workable blueprint for the future, a kind of seed catalogue of ideas to sow in other lands.

Useful in and beyond the film classroom, cinematheque or gallery (and not forgetting grass-roots screenings on *bungkalan* plots), Camacho and Lien's work espouses an approach to climate justice that uses film not simply as a tool for illustrating a problem, but also as a perspectival medium that requires critical interrogation itself. Camacho and Lien bring film education to *bungkalan* as a reminder that achieving fair political representation and land rights also requires thinking about what Fatimah Tobing Rony (2021) calls 'visual biopolitics' (who is represented and how, and who is erased or misrepresented). Conversely, Camacho and Lien also offer *bungkalan* to film education as a reminder of film's ecological and social footprint, historically and today. Every image, *Langit Lupa* teaches us, is a perspective, a narrative, a politics, a demand – and an artefact made from material resources. Asking questions about perspective, about the land relations being represented or obscured in an image, and about how that image is made and circulated, empowers viewers as active participants in conversations about climate justice.

Filming *bungkalan*

Bungkalan has been described as a praxis of action and reflection that connects environmentalism with social justice (Sy, 2022). *Bungkalan*'s cooperative cultivation of organic polycultures through sustainable agroecology counteracts the semi-feudal, profit-driven model of the *hacienda* system, as well as the

exhaustion of land and biodiversity through plantation monocultures. Mixed crops grown on *bungkalan* plots include many types of fruit, vegetable and rice, as well as nitrogen-fixing legumes that also function as windbreakers. Focusing on sustaining respectful human–nature relations through cooperative labour, *bungkalan* facilitates intergenerational learning and prioritises food crops over cash crops (Sy, 2022). In this sense, *bungkalan* characterises what political ecologists (Foster et al., 2011) call a 'natural praxis' of peasant-led environmental activism, whereby farm workers collectively contribute to 'making their own destiny' through self-sufficiency in resistance to imperialist exploitation (Wright and Labiste, 2018: 143). Another way to understand *bungkalan* is as a method of repairing what Karl Marx (1976, 1981) described as a 'rift' in the social and planetary 'metabolism' under intensive agricultural industrialisation, whereby humans are alienated both from each other and the natural resources sustaining them.

Drawing upon soil science, and particularly the work of Justus von Liebig, Marx developed his theory of political economy to map how concentrating areas of mass production and consumption destabilises ecosystems, disrupting the relationship between urban and rural space. This disruption also characterises colonial expansion, whereby an imperial metropole robs a rural colony of its land, resources and labour power (Foster, 2000). From the 1860s, together with Friedrich Engels, Marx emphasised the ecological dimension of such antagonisms by considering the alienating effects of capitalist imperatives for growth that exhausted both 'the soil and the worker' (Saito, 2023). 'In nature', Engels (1975: 459) writes, 'nothing takes place in isolation. Everything affects and is affected by every other thing.' Both Marx and Engels emphasised that landownership and the monopolisation of resources exacerbated ecological alienation and class antagonism (Marx, 1976; Marx and Engels, 2010). Liebig (1859: 183) also used a vocabulary hinting at political dimensions as he argued for 'restitution' – by which he meant 'giving back to the fields the conditions of their fertility'. *Bungkalan*'s project aims to return fertility to the fields, and fields to the Negrense stewards whose labour cultivates them.

Bungkalan's project of restitution challenges landownership and the monopolisation of resources imposed under the Philippines' semi-feudal and industrialised sugarcane export trade. Practising organic and collective agriculture, *bungkalan* exercises multiple forms of social cooperation, 'including *damayan* (emergency aid among farmers), *suyuan* (exchange of working shifts between families or teams), [and] *saklay-barangay* (planting of vegetables and herbal medicines for the community)' (Sy, 2022: 76). *Bungkalan*'s progressive vocabulary draws on the rich agricultural terminology of Tagalog farmers, in which ideas of organic and social care are co-constitutive, and political organisation stems from land-based cultivation in the face of extractive violence.

Steeped in this vocabulary, Camacho and Lien (2022) describe *bungkalan* as both protest and cultivation, outrage and care. They gradually introduce this combination of affect in *Langit Lupa* through interviews with elderly farmers and in collaboration with Negrense children, with whom they devised re-enactments of peasant campaigns and memorials in order to teach (and learn) the island's past. In some languages, such as Welsh, to teach and to learn are described by the same verb – a useful confusion for understanding *bungkalan*'s multidirectional and multigenerational pedagogy. Teaching/learning about land and its history is vital for continued survival and resistance.

The Philippines is one of the deadliest countries in the world for environmental and land activists (Regencia, 2019). *Bungkalan* projects are consistently disrupted by military and police surveillance (including the establishment of watchtowers to monitor them), environmental hazards such as typhoons, and extra-judicial killings (Sy, 2022). Indeed, many past peasant campaigns have ended in tragedy, one of which – the Escalante massacre of 1985, when paramilitary forces murdered 20 civilians and injured many more – is commemorated in and by *Langit Lupa*. Today, such commemoration is more important than ever, as Ferdinand Marcos Jr's regime suppresses testimonies of structural violence and continues to threaten *bungkalan*.

The children with whom Camacho and Lien re-enact a memorial procession to remember Escalante serve as reminders throughout the film of inheritance and futurity, both in terms of intergenerational trauma, and in terms of *bungkalan*'s future-oriented practices for cultural and agricultural repair. During

the re-enactment, the children process towards the camera in a subtle implication of the audience, carrying farming tools as symbols of agrarian protest, as their forebears did in the Escalante campaign. The camera is positioned at the children's head height, a formal decision that refuses to look down on, or to dismiss, these inheritors of the future. A haunting composition combining voice and synthesis plays on the soundtrack, devised by the Filipino artist Alyana Cabral, who collects traditional folk songs from peasant communities and works with local choirs to keep the songs and their messages alive.

Camacho is a child of the island himself: his mother is from Negros. At the same time, he and Lien characterise the kind of film-maker that Trinh T. Minh-ha (Trinh, 1991) calls insider/outsiders, filming Negros's ongoing history of extractive violence from a perspective enabled by living in Berlin and New York City and exhibiting work in biennials and galleries across the world. Camacho and Lien spend several months of the year on Negros, making work 'first and foremost for communities on the island' (Camacho and Lien, 2024). Grass-roots screenings held on *bungkalan* plots connect local and international perspectives. Time spent away, meanwhile, learning about other cinemas, artist practices and examples of agrarian resistance, enrich Camacho and Lien's perspectives. Karel Doing's work in phytography is one such example; Sylvia Wynter's in Plantationocene histories is another. Camacho and Lien's itinerance and commitment to cross-cultural research exemplifies a form of what Kuan-Hsing Chen (2010: 223) calls 'internationalist localism'. Such mobility is a central methodology for land cinema because it rejects both the universalising approaches of globalisation and a rhetoric of localism that can disguise parochial oppression (Dirlik, 1997; Kester, 2023). Communicating what Elizabeth Povinelli (2023) calls a shared but differential relation to extractivism, land cinema fosters cross-cultural solidarity as it mediates between localised action and wider calls for social and ecological change. Examples I have discussed elsewhere (Voelcker, 2021a, 2025) include the farming–film-making collective Ogawa Productions in Japan, and the agricultural and artistic cooperative Somankidi Coura in Mali.

Maintaining relations across estranged and asymmetrical rifts opened by extractivism, be they between Negros and Metro Manila, or the Philippines and the US, Camacho and Lien's land cinema returns the plantation to the purview of the metropolis, bringing its strange, controlled ecosystem on to the screen of biennials and galleries as a trace of capitalism's forgotten other, its fuel and food. When Achille Mbembe (2019: 27) writes that 'democracy, the plantation, and the colonial empire are objectively all part of the same historical matrix', he could almost be describing the message of *Langit Lupa*. So-called liberal democracy, Mbembe (2019: 27) explains, exteriorises its violence to 'the colonies and other third places', and registers peasant killings as an aberration, located beyond the walls of the society we believe we inhabit. *Langit Lupa* dismantles those walls. 'The colonial plantation laid the foundations for the whole world order we have inherited', write Camacho and Lien (2022: n.p.):

> we can trace its legacy not only in the plantations that still exist today in the Philippines and elsewhere, but also in our urban slums and our gated communities, in our war zones and our stock markets, in our prisons and our art museums. This is to say that, in many ways, we have never left the plantation.

The idea that the plantation continues to shape the world's social fabric supports an argument put forth by several recent theorists (Barua, 2024; Davis et al., 2019; Haraway and Tsing, 2019; Yusoff, 2018) that our current geological era might better be called the Plantationocene than the Anthropocene, in order to locate the specific sites, agents and techniques responsible for exploiting lands and livelihoods and driving climate breakdown. While some instances of plantations as material practices and world views are historical, others continue, as is the case with semi-feudal landownership and cash crop exports in the Philippines. To repeat Camacho and Lien (2022), we have never left the plantation.

Camacho and Lien's historical understanding of the present reveals what we might call, following Kyle Whyte (2016), a 'colonial déjà-vu' of exploitation. Exploitation in Negros began when Spanish colonisers arrived in 1565, continued in its annexation to the USA in 1901 and its exploitation as a cash crop for

sugarcane, and it reached nightmarish levels of violence in the mid-1980s as the Marcos dictatorship's monopolisation of the sugar trade led to famine. It was in protest against this social and ecological devastation that farmers in Escalante marched in 1985. Throughout *Langit Lupa*, static landscape shots frame the island as a place haunted with these memories – memories that resist erasure, and that infuse the future with anger and energy.

In its combined focus on past instances of violence and their present continuation, the film dismantles a common presumption that climate crisis is new or in any way unforeseen, rather than an expansion of what the world's poorest have endured over five centuries of colonial predation. This intervention also opens space for acknowledging historical instances of strength and solidarity, not just of suffering. Working against an insistence that there is no alternative to capitalism (Fisher, 2009), Camacho and Lien cultivate images, imagination and grounded evidence that communal and non-extractive ways of living can and have existed – flourished, even – through *bungkalan*.

'The Escalante massacre', explain Camacho and Lien (2024: n.p.), marked both 'a rupture and inflection point.' Describing the massacre as such, the film-makers invite audiences to think back and forward in time. The massacre, they suggest, was a crisis that was also a turning point (indeed, this is the original, medical, definition of 'crisis'). Likening their approach to what Douglas Crimp (1989) calls 'mourning and militancy', Camacho and Lien understand activism as arising from, rather than being prevented by, anguish and loss. *Langit Lupa* learns from the past to face the future, inviting audiences to appreciate not only the film's memorial aspect, but also its contribution to change making. This invitation to reflect on the past and act for the future is key to land cinema, and it recalls the teachings of Paulo Freire, an important influence on Camacho and Lien.

First published in Portuguese in 1968, Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* argued for a dialogic form of learning that would energise, empower and activate both teachers and students (indeed, Freire's model of learning de-emphasised this very distinction). Countries that had long been dominated by colonial education systems training passivity and servitude, including Freire's native Brazil, required an ideological overhaul, he argued – a revolutionary pedagogy. 'Conscientization' was how Freire (2005: 35) described the process whereby people could come to develop a critical understanding of their material reality, learning to perceive its social, political and economic contradictions, in order to transform it. Embraced and adapted by educators the world over, including bel hooks and other intersectional feminists interested in developing non-hierarchical classrooms in the 1980s, Freire's work is by now a standard reference in critical pedagogy.

In 1974, Freire travelled to newly liberated Guinea-Bissau to advise on its education programme. This was a time of great possibility, as African nations gained independence, established governments and overhauled education systems. It was also a time of Pan-African and Third Worldist solidarity, when leaders in disparate regions recognised shared experiences of struggle, and exchanged ideas, books, films and visits to unite against the entrenched abuses of colonialism (Parrott, 2022; Parrott and Lawrence, 2022). When Freire came to consult in Guinea-Bissau, he was reading the writings of Amílcar Cabral.

Cabral was a Bissau-Guinean and Cape Verdean soil scientist and political revolutionary who led independence movements across Lusophone Africa, and who was assassinated in 1973. His emphasis on cultural transformation and literacy immediately attracted Freire. 'National liberation' was 'an act of culture', Cabral (1973: 43) wrote, and because imperialism encompassed both formal colonialism and socio-economic neocolonialism, cultural projects including education programmes – and cinema – were vital for achieving independence.

Cabral had worked as an agronomist for the Portuguese regime, all the while secretly forming an anti-colonial movement to overthrow it. Conducting experiments in pedology on the colonial farm, he came to understand plantation logic from the inside, recognising the toll that over-intensive farming took on soil vitality as inextricably linked to the toll colonial capitalism took on its subjects (he too read Marx's work on metabolic rift). As if reclaiming colony's etymological connections with farming, which it shares

with the word culture, Cabral developed an anti-colonial argument for the importance of simultaneously helping lands and labour forces exhausted under imperialism, through cultural and agricultural restitution.

Much in Cabral's philosophy resonates with *bungkalan*, for which achieving soil and political literacy through a combined cultural practice of dialogical learning in situated contexts is crucial. Camacho and Lien's contribution to *bungkalan*, meanwhile, introduces film as a visual agent in a Freirean process of 'conscientization', chiming with Cabral's belief in cinema's politicising capacities. Illustrating current conditions and imagining them differently, film enables reflection and action, critique and creativity, oppositional and propositional work. Cabral (1973: 43) understood this, describing cinema's potential in establishing 'a strong Indigenous cultural life', and supporting several film-makers from Guinea-Bissau in trips to Cuba's revolutionary film school to learn how to document struggles for land and freedom (Ukadike, 1995). For Cabral, as for land cinema's Somankidi Coura in Mali, and Camacho and Lien more recently, freedom requires both self-sufficiency in growing one's own food on accessible land, and self-representation in being able to tell one's own story and make one's own images. Soil and celluloid, farming and film-making, are combined ingredients for empowerment.

This combined emphasis on spatial and social justice, achieved by agricultural and cultural means, resonates with Third Cinema's political programme. The development of Third Cinema is often traced to Cuba and its Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry, where Cabral sent film-makers to train (Chanan, 1997; Gabriel, 1982; Mazierska and Kristensen, 2020). Spreading across South America and beyond in the late 1960s and 1970s, Third Cinema was committed to representing working-class perspectives and challenging right-wing dictatorships supported by US and European governments in the name of neoliberal 'development'. The term 'Third Cinema' was coined in the late 1960s by the Argentine film-makers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino (2014), who rejected both 'First Cinema', the Hollywood model that produced film as profitable entertainment, and the 'Second Cinema' of the auteurist and predominantly European avant-garde.

Third Cinema was a cinema of imperfection (Espinosa, 1979). Films could seem unfinished aesthetically, in other words, because the political formations to which they contributed were also still in progress. This urgency, combined with a desire to make films within a wider and ongoing struggle for political representation, continued beyond the 1970s in a 'Fourth Cinema', identified with Indigenous film and video-making – a participatory model with which Camacho and Lien's collaborations in Negros can also be compared.

Land cinema, including Camacho and Lien's filmic *bungkalan*, adds an ecological dimension to this history of Third and Fourth Cinema by directing audiences back to the land in a reminder of human dependencies on Earth's natural systems. Yet, unlike much recent environmental cinema and photography labelled 'green' for its representation of issues such as deforestation, and insufficiently scrutinised for the material emissions and cultural extractivism that its production and dissemination incur (Ivakhiv, 2013; Vaughan, 2019), land cinema attempts to reconcile aesthetics and politics. It treats pictures and production in tandem: Camacho and Lien's images are ecopolitical in the way they look and in the way they are made.

Before considering how Camacho and Lien make their films on a material level, it is worth lingering on how *Langit Lupa* looks; or rather, on what is left unseen. During the film, we often find ourselves inside the sugar plantation, the camera placed on narrow paths between canes that tower above, filling over half of the frame. The film's opening sequence, a single shot held for over three minutes, offers a wide landscape view of sugarcanes rising towards a hill in the mid-distance, and a sky hanging low with clouds. Later in the film, we see similarly monotonous landscapes dotted with farm workers and harvesting machines. In such scenes, the camera lingers on the plantation's monoculture topography as an index of violence. All we can see is a field, but when viewed through an ecopolitical lens, we find ourselves occupying a site of murderous and ecocidal extraction. At once invisible yet omnipresent, the plantation dominates.

These seemingly banal scenes, infused with the unseen histories of colonial violence that we hear in voice-over testimonies and grow to recognise in the sugarcane topography, recall a similar mode

of presentation used in one specific form of land cinema developed in Japan around 1970, known as *fūkeiron*, or 'landscape theory'.

Steeped in Marxism, *fūkeiron* film-makers, photographers and theorists argued that Japan's post-war capitalist expansion had desecrated its natural ecosystems, anticipating ecological Marxists such as Kohei Saito by cinematically illustrating the 'rift' that Marx identified in industrialised societies. *Fūkeiron* turned its cameras towards roads, railways, ferry ports, factories, office blocks, workers' housing and shopping malls, as evidence of the specific regulatory power of state, corporate and global alliances. As Yuriko Furuhata (2013: 145) writes, in *fūkeiron*'s rendering, landscape conditions everyday experience by controlling spatial mobility and social relations. 'All the landscapes which one faces in one's daily life', one *fūkeiron* film-maker explained, 'are essentially related to the figure of a ruling power' (Sharp, 2007: n.p.). Another put it even more starkly: '*fūkei* = power' (Matsuda, 1971).

Seen today, *fūkeiron* offers an important message. Polluted, overdeveloped and exhausted landscapes must feature in conversations about land, if we are to address climate justice adequately; environmentalism cannot only be about saving pastoral idylls and wildernesses. To borrow a phrase from Donna Haraway (2016), *fūkeiron* 'stays with the trouble', inviting audiences to view landscapes as crime scenes, with extractive capitalism as the perpetrator.

Langit Lupa stays with the trouble of centuries of plantation violence, lingering on the island's exhausted soil in an anti-pastoral approach to land cinema. Camacho and Lien cite *fūkeiron* as instructive in this approach, which is both subdued and searingly critical, and comparable to other contemporary film-makers invested in filming landscapes as indices of ecopolitical violence – not least, Nguyễn Trinh Thi, whose *Landscape Series #1* (2013) portrays everyday sites across Vietnam as quiet witnesses of history. *Landscape Series* is a slide show comprising hundreds of images sourced from newspaper photographs in which citizens point towards something beyond the frame, out of sight. The cumulative gesture implicates suppressed histories of colonialism, conflict and, more recently, a proliferation of government-sponsored nuclear testing in Vietnam. Landscape = power. Using *Landscape Series* in the classroom (as I do with BA Fine Art students) practises a kind of green film pedagogy using discursive activities of looking and asking questions: *What are we seeing or being prevented from seeing? What might an image hide within its own materiality and composition?*

But *Langit Lupa* moves beyond gestures of pointing and questioning, and beyond the crime scene. Moving from the edge of the plantation and into the plot, it brings audiences into a space where *bungkalan* flourishes. Interspersed with landscape scenes in the sugarcane are sequences shot with Negrense children and elders with whom Camacho and Lien made the film, and snippets of phytographed film that these people made together. The phytograms are patterned with outlines of the same plants used to develop them: they index their own, handmade and earthly manufacture.

Film-making as *bungkalan*

The phytograms are important presences in *Langit Lupa*, alongside footage shot on a digital camera and 16 mm colour film, recalling the cellulose basis of film itself in a material nod to cinema's land-based origins, as well as the vexed relation between plants and people in Negros.

On the one hand, we might view the phytograms and think of materialist films of the 1970s, and land cinema film-makers such as Rose Lowder and Anne Charlotte Robertson, who were interested in the organic materiality of celluloid (Voelcker, 2022a). But film is more than plants – and its cellulose base is hardly without ecological or political impact itself, sourced from monoculture cotton crops and treated with nitric acid obtained from mined saltpetre. As Alice Lovejoy (2023) has pointed out, during cinema's golden era, much cellulose came from cotton plantations worked by Black sharecroppers in the southern United States. If we add to this history the fact that mined silver and slaughtered cows are required to produce film's silver-and-gelatin-based photographic emulsion, then material entanglements with extractivism continue (Bozak, 2011; Haid, 2023).

On the other hand, rather than only invite audiences to consider film's reliance on industrially produced materials, the phytograms re-root cinema in the plot on the edge of the plantation. We are looking at shapes of plants grown outside and in resistance to plantation capitalism, imprinted and developed on film that is made with those same botanical ingredients. Through phytography, Camacho and Lien explore how memories accumulate in the botanical, filmic material, both communicating histories of labour and land dispossession *and* how materials can work towards transformation, the phytograms' alternative botanical development offering an earthy analogue for political change making. The film's material basis becomes a form of *bungkalan*. Seen in this light, the film itself, strewn with leaves and produced through botanical reaction, develops the plantation as a situation of prolonged crisis into a site of mediation through material contact between colonial, industrial and Indigenous worlds. Put differently, the film reveals a set of truths about itself as a photographic medium.

In their links to vision, photography and film can help us see differently. In their historical development alongside imperial means to shape narratives of supremacy, including in colonial representations of plantations as exotic conquests and industrial triumphs (Mukherjee, 2024), photography and film call attention to their perspectival power. And, in their imbrication with extracted fossil fuels, plant fibre and animal products, photography and film identify their own materiality as both entangled with extractivism and as potential plant- and land-based media for rupture and reparation. Characterising a trend in artistic production that appropriates and adapts media to communicate ecocritical and ethical messages (Angus, 2024; Arabindan-Kesson, 2021), phytography intervenes in cinema's imbrication with extractive materials and processes. On the edges of the plantation, other ways of seeing and making develop.

The location of Camacho and Lien's filmic *bungkalan* on the edge, and in the plot, speaks to the work of several scholars who propose a critical and future-oriented approach to climate crisis and emphasise the potential of artistic and activist work in doing 'otherwise', as Anna Tsing (2012) puts it, on the 'unruly edges' of extractive capitalism. Camacho and Lien's filmic *bungkalan* provides a vivid example of such doing in its land- and lens-based approach, which establishes what Marisol de la Cadena (2015) calls an 'a-grammatical' relation of responsibility with the other-than-human world. Rather than perpetuate power relations whereby humans are subjects who act upon nature as an inert object (the *haciendero* controlling the peasant, who controls the sugarcane), this a-grammatical relation proposes alliances across people and species so that plants–soils–animals–humans flourish together.

Central to Camacho and Lien's phytographic process is its community aspect of bringing old and young folk together on *bungkalan* plots to source plants and transform them into both photographic developer and images. Lien also turns plants into paper, using sugarcane fibre, vegetable pulp, banana stalk, charcoal ash, water spinach and papaya seeds to make thick collaged images of Negros's mountains and sea. In one image, *Social Volcano* (2023), a volcano billows ash into the sky in the shape of a strange bird. The image draws on Negrense folklore and symbolises a cycle of regeneration in which animals, humans and the landscape are all part. The title, meanwhile, speaks to a metaphor used (Whyte, 2010) in the context of civil uprisings in China to describe an eruption of protests against rising inequalities unleashed by market reforms and economic growth. Rejecting the blankness of bleached white paper as being akin to *terra nullius* thinking, Lien sees paper ('the ground of the image') as always and already a site of contact, relation and transformation (Camacho and Lien, 2024). In this sense, Camacho and Lien's phytography and papermaking resemble composting (Haraway, 2016), the ground of the image reimagined as an earthy site of multispecies connection.

In their association with composting, we might compare Camacho and Lien's phytography and works on paper with the films of Tomonari Nishikawa, which explore the unseen yet atmospheric and palpable damage of nuclear radiation in Japan. In *sound of a million insects, light of a thousand stars* (2014), a two-minute 35 mm film made by burying colour negative under fallen leaves near the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, flickers and scratches on the film are material indices of the radioactive pollution the Japanese state has tried to bury. Like phytograms, the film visualises earthly and botanical traces as reminders of damaged lands. But, like the phytograms, Nishikawa's film is also beautiful and

instructive. Its critique is accompanied by creativity. Staying with the trouble by exhuming, developing and projecting it, Nishikawa invites audiences to learn about land in a physical experiment with its elements.

Powerful indices of contested and damaged lands, and documents of ecological care, Camacho and Lien's phytograms, like Nishikawa's film, suggest that 'we become-with or not at all' (Haraway, 2016: 4) – that is, we can only address climate justice and a prolonged situation of ecological and social crisis by getting creative, collaboratively, on damaged lands. As Maan Barua (2024: 3, 11) puts it, this is an alternative politics of 'living alongside', inhabiting 'landscapes fissured by colonial history', and accepting the Plantationocene as 'an alternative starting point for understanding planetary change'. Such starting points are important foundations for green film education, from British artist Hannah Fletcher's Sustainable Darkroom workshops that teach low-toxicity chemistries and practices in photography, to Future Materials Bank's database of sustainable materials, based at the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht, the Netherlands.

Screening as *bungkalan*

Camacho and Lien help us think about film education in new ways, both by drawing attention to film as a perspectival and material medium with unique colonial and industrial legacies, and as a tool to use within contemporary projects for ecological and political literacy. *Bungkalan* can inform how makers and scholars of film think about the medium by focusing on its land-based construction and impact. Simultaneously, *bungkalan* can draw on film's capacity to bring people together in its production and screening to contribute to climate justice initiatives in Negros.

Collective production and screening are hallmarks of Third and Fourth Cinema and their land cinema extensions. From the origins of Third Cinema in the 1960s, subjects of films were often involved in production, and films were sometimes paused mid-way so that audiences could debate what they had just seen. Film-makers were not precious about their products – the process of bringing people together was more important. Camacho and Lien emphasise the importance of screening their films (and works in progress) for local audiences in Negros, who often instruct on edits and additions. Speaking to similar methods used by land cinema film-makers working with Indigenous participants in the 1970s and 1980s, such as Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva in Colombia, this open approach constitutes a filmic parallel to Freire's dialogic teaching, whereby communities are active participants in the learning process, and reflect on material conditions of their own lives and surroundings as a 'situated pedagogy' (Freire and Shor, 1986; Voelcker, 2025).

Following a Freirean model, the kind of community film-making (and phytography and papermaking) that Camacho and Lien facilitate flattens hierarchies into a shared process of teaching/learning. There is also a feminist politics to this pedagogy, akin to that developed by hooks (1994) and others (Webb et al., 2002), which challenges a dominant ethos of competitive individualism, recognising the situated nature of knowledge production, celebrating personal voices and experiences in all their diversity, and emphasising empathy and critical thinking as skills. This approach challenges conventional understandings of theory and instruction, as well as myths of objective knowledge production. Knowledge, expertise and theory, Camacho and Lien suggest, spring from the plot on the edge of the plantation. Camacho and Lien's workshops, for example, depend on 'the help of the grandmothers' who are expert in botanical chemistry and know where to find banana stalk, coriander, coconut husk, papaya seeds, and garlic and onion skins to pulp for phytography and papermaking.

Camacho and Lien's emphasis on learning from local, land-based and frequently female epistemes celebrates what Usha Iyer (2022: 183) has recently described as 'polycentric, dialogic, connected, reciprocal knowledges'. From these reciprocal knowledges grow political solidarities, against what Vandana Shiva (1998) has called 'monocultures of the mind'. In Negros, Camacho and Lien (2020: n.p.) explain, this form of political pedagogy is common, with 'seasoned peasant activists' travelling from

plantation to plantation, teaching other farmers 'how to build legal claims' or 'replace chemical fertilizer with a mixture of fermented fish guts, rice, and molasses'. Such ecopolitical education is important in countering the importation of corporate-owned technologies that have encroached on the Global South with high-yield monocultural and genetically modified species and chemical fertilisers, under the banner of Green Revolution and the illusion of epistemic privilege achieved by modern biotech science (Shiva, 1991). The film-makers contribute to *bungkalan*'s itinerant, horizontal and networked practice of learning in community, through images. They want to learn, they explain, 'from the innovative practices of the Filipino peasantry in order to fundamentally rethink what it means to be both an artist and a citizen' (Camacho and Lien, 2020: n.p.).

Resisting what Freire criticised as a 'banking model' of education, whereby information is deposited from teacher to student, Camacho and Lien's collaborative *bungkalan* activities resonate with Freire's transformative teaching practice, with knowledge co-produced in a non-hierarchical exchange. Proposing that the teacher be remodelled as a researcher or artist, to better account for this explorative and interpretative process, Freire could almost have been describing Camacho and Lien's research- and art-based methods (Freire and Shor, 1986). Expanding their film-making practice to include teach-ins and workshops held at *bungkalan* sites, the film-makers' collaborative productions and screenings cultivate a pedagogy of resistance against the plantation's political and ecological hold.

This approach has significant implications for the field of green film pedagogy and, more broadly, for ecological arts education. To offer just one local example, I see a form of land cinema and *bungkalan* thinking flourishing at the university where I currently teach. At Goldsmiths' Centre for Art and Ecology, a Research Garden is convening classes on plant-based food and pigments, rewilding, soil care, composting, eco-therapy and eco-pedagogy. Unsurprisingly perhaps, one of the Garden's founders, Ros Gray, has a background researching militant anticolonial film-making, her path from film studies to ecology suggesting a deep-rooted understanding of the link between cinema and land. Initiatives such as Goldsmiths' Research Garden, as well as those discussed above, including The Sustainable Darkroom, Doing's phytography workshops, and Future Materials Bank, evidence the uptake of green film pedagogy in diverse regional and educational contexts.

Conclusion

It is no coincidence that Camacho and Lien involve very old and very young people in their community workshops and screenings. Like land cinema artist and film-maker Zhang Mengqi (Voelcker, 2024), who has worked with children to film over 10 documentaries to date, each painstakingly chronicling the memories and everyday lives of elderly villagers in rural China whose stories of the Cultural Revolution and Great Famine are erased in official histories, Camacho and Lien recognise these old and young generations as carrying wisdom from the past into the future. Extraction, the film-makers suggest, steals from these past and future generations by damaging their intricate structures of accumulated cultural meaning. Relationships maintained across these generations, embedded in landscapes, and maintained through film-making, repair and give meaning.

Camacho and Lien's long-term commitment to Negrense communities is also striking in its refusal of a common extractive practice whereby film-makers enter communities to record injustice and then exit 'with images that only benefit the maker's professional goals' (Aguayo, 2019: 233). Land cinema is filled with figures such as Camacho and Lien, akin to those whom Rob Nixon (2011: 17) describes as 'long-termers' – people who measure value according to sustainable metrics and timescales, unlike prospectors who arrive, extract, despoil and depart. And, as *Langit Lupa* makes clear, generational responsibility also pertains to the care of other-than-human beings, including plants and soil – in other words, to land as an integrated system. Land is both 'geos' and 'bios', with past, present and future contained within it (Lyons, 2020).

Today, some nations are beginning to emphasise generational responsibility to climate justice through formal policy-making, although much remains recommendation rather than law. In 2015, Wales

passed a Future Generations Act that drew inspiration from Seventh Generation planning, a concept long used by the Iroquois Nation to make decisions based on their impact seven generations on. In Japan, a new movement called 'future design' has popularised citizen's assemblies in which local residents contribute to planning their communities, with half of those gathered representing people in the present day and the other half tasked with imagining themselves in four decades' time. These kinds of practices refuse to let the slow violence of climate injustice be pushed to the Global South or future generations (Davies, 2022; Nixon, 2011). Land cinema does something similar, as it invites audiences to recognise regional entanglements between the Global North and South, and to connect episodes from the past to present and future challenges. Mali's Somankidi Coura continues to this day, its membership now exceeding three hundred. Camacho and Lien's work continues to place Negros on a planetary map and timeline. But unlike a policy document or citizen's assembly, these works of land cinema and green pedagogy are also deeply sensuous.

Understanding the power of sights and sounds to reconnect us with land through embodied, aesthetic experience, Camacho and Lien refuse spectacle in a Debordian sense, whereby images serve passive consumers (recently, for example, many images of climate catastrophe have replicated disaster-movie aesthetics). Instead, Camacho and Lien embrace the visual as visionary, producing images as imaginative interventions in the Plantationocene present. This is not to say that *Langit Lupa* is ungrounded, however, or stuck in what Levine (2023: 8–9, 11) describes as a 'preparatory moment' of 'nebulous' hopes so common in the aesthetic humanities. Documentation of verdant *bungkalan* plots is surely proof that their work moves beyond gestural appeal into practical action spanning economic, ecological, political and aesthetic fields.

Although *Offerings for Escalante* has travelled far as an installation of works on film and paper, Camacho and Lien's filmic *bungkalan* is hardly a project that culminates in a packageable film product with easily definable (and sellable) outcomes. The project demonstrates, rather, the ways in which land cinema can act as a social and spatial commitment to process, encompassing film, film-making, film screening and film culture, and extending off the edge of the screen, out of the plantation, into education and activism held among onions and papayas and coconuts, in the plot.

Even if we experience *Offerings for Escalante* in an urban setting (it has been shown at Para Site in Hong Kong, CCA Berlin, Glasgow International and MoMA PS1), rather than projected on to a makeshift awning on a vegetable plot, *Langit Lupa* and the works on paper than accompany it serve as a striking reminder of film's planetary entanglements and the strained relations between urban and rural space epitomised by Negrense peasant struggles. Although – and perhaps because – moving images are available to so many of us today, in our pockets and at the swipe of a finger, the promise of a social infrastructure such as that constructed by Camacho and Lien through *bungkalan* has never been more important. Watching together, land cinema can carry us out of ourselves to experience other perspectives and other landscapes, at the same time as framing our own within a bigger picture.

Commonly, the field of film studies is divided across theoretical approaches that teach through close readings of the film text, or explore cinema's wider social and cultural contexts, or, in a recent materialist turn, uncover the ecological footprints of photographic, projection and streaming media. Camacho and Lien teach us that these methodological domains are connected. Film education and environmental pedagogy are entwined and co-constituting praxes.

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Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

Filmography

Landscape Series #1 (VN 2013, Nguyễn Trinh Thi)
Langit Lupa (*Heaven and Earth*) (PH 2023, Enzo Camacho and Ami Lien)
sound of a million insects, light of a thousand stars (JP 2014, Tomonari Nishikawa)

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