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# “THE CAMERA IS MY HUNTING WEAPON”: THE POETICS OF RÉAL J. LEBLANC, INNU FILMMAKER<sup>1</sup> DOSSIER INTERSECTING GAZES

J'ai toujours vécu ici  
je sais qu'après chaque tempête  
le soleil éclaire la terre de mes frères  
aujourd'hui, les vents ont diminué  
il est temps de guérir  
de panser les branches cassés  
régler des compromis  
comprendre les erreurs  
qui ont changer nos vies

Réal Junior Leblanc

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<sup>1</sup> I was invited to participate in a round table discussion entitled “Indigenous Cinema: Mediation and Politics”, which took place on October 18, 2016. On this occasion I was able to meet Réal Junior Leblanc and watch his films for the first time. In addition to Leblanc, Tukumã Kuikuro (from the Kuikuro Cinema Collective), André Dudemaine (organizer of the Festival Présence Autochtone, in Montreal), Ariel Ortega (Guarani Mbya filmmaker) and Tatiane Klein (PPGAS / USP) also participated in the table. I would like to thank the organizers, Dennis Bellemare, Maria Inês Ladeira and Paula Morgado, for their invitation to participate in the Seminar “Olhares Cruzados Brasil/Canadá”, which was the venue for this meeting, and to the editors of the GIS magazine for their kind invitation and encouragement to publish the present notes (in fact, “breaches”, as suggested by the referees), which are the result of a preliminary contact – therefore not sufficiently informed – with the fantastic universe of the films made by the Indigenous peoples of Quebec.

In a debate that took place in October 2016 at the University of São Paulo, as part of “Seminário Olhares Cruzados Brasil/Canadá”, young Innu filmmaker Réal Junior Leblanc exclaimed: “The camera is my hunting weapon.” He certainly made use of a metaphor: the camera is an instrument of political struggle that is able to draw attention to the claims of the Innu people in relation to the wider society, as well as to become a powerful way of transmitting “culture.”<sup>2</sup> But perhaps it is convenient to go beyond this metaphorical sense, since it is the way of life connected to the practice of hunting that Réal Junior Leblanc’s films intend to restore<sup>3</sup>. Formerly known as Montagnais, the Innu – like most of the autochthonous peoples of Québec (Canada)<sup>4</sup> – are hunters, and this does not indicate a mere mode or technique of subsistence, but a whole disposition towards the so-called “natural” world, challenging the frontiers that modernity established between nature and culture, humanity and not humanity. Thus, when Réal Junior Leblanc calls his camera a “hunting weapon”, he goes further than the political struggle – the fight for rights, for the land, for “culture” –, adding to it a concern to portray and *regain* another way of dealing with the environment and the beings that make it. This is where his cosmopolitical proposal lies, never ceasing to be associated with an ethics and an aesthetics.<sup>5</sup>

Innu of the Uashat mak Mani-Utenan community, Réal Junior Leblanc defines himself as a filmmaker and a poet. As many Québec-based Amerindian filmmakers, he produced his movies through the Wapikoni Mobile Project, which also provided his initial training. He also belongs to a generation of young Québec native poets, among whom many prefer to write in French – a white, colonial language –, to reach a wider audience<sup>6</sup>. Given this double transit, the main characteristic of Leblanc films

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2 The use of quotes in “culture” is a reference to Manuela Carneiro da Cunha’s reflection on the objectification process of the anthropological concept of culture by the Indigenous peoples themselves. *Cultura com aspás e outros ensaios*. São Paulo: Ed. Ubu, 2017.

3 For a discussion on the relationship between ethnographic cinema and hunting, see Paulo Maia’s article, “O Animal e a Câmera,” about an exhibition of the same name that happened during the XV Doc Forum, in 2011. In: *Catálogo Fórum Doc 2011*. Belo Horizonte: UFMG/Humberto Mauro, 2011. For a summary on the anthropology of hunting, see Uirá Garcia’s entry “Caça” In: *Teoria e Cultura (UFJF)*, v. 11, p. s/n, 2016.

4 In Canada, the term “autochthonous” encompasses two categories that remain distinct: the Amerindians and the Inuit.

5 Leblanc’s films could fit into what the organizers of the XXI Festival Fórum Doc called “images of the Anthropocene”, that is, films that reflect on this interference of the “human” in the very constitution of the Earth and its usually destructive effects. See the article by Frederico Sabino, Carla Italiano and Junia Torres, “Os fins deste mundo: imagens do Antropoceno”. In: *Catálogo Fórum Doc 2017*. Belo Horizonte: UFMG/Humberto Mauro, 2011.

6 Leblanc published poems in two anthologies. Susan Ouriou (ed.) *Langues de notre terre: poèmes et récits autochtones du Québec*. Alberta: Banff Centre Press, 2014. Maurizio Gatti.

is the link between word and image, with poetry as a fundamental part of his work. Of the seven films he has made, four have been defined on the Wapikoni Mobile website as “experimental”, one as “animation” and two as “documentaries”. However, Leblanc goes beyond labels, for his interest lies in the making of poetic films, even when the chosen genre approaches the documentary. His films are not interested in approaching documentaries as a reliable record of reality. Recording political or cultural events and producing a memory for future generations is certainly urgent. However, he always aims the poetic discourse. It is as if only poetry was capable of expressing the subjective dilemmas of the director, who was overcome by the anguish of inhabiting an ambiguous world, divided between the way of life of the “ancients” and the experience of modernity, in which both community and environment seem to loosen up more and more. Together, poetry and cinema announce a possible resumption of these ties.

In fact, the emphasis on the expression of subjectivity, the political content and the conciseness (none of Leblanc’s films is more than seven minutes long) represent important traits of the films produced under the Wapikoni Mobile project. Created in 2003 by filmmaker Manon Barbeau, in partnership with the Atikamekw Nation Council and the First Nations Council of Québec and Labrador (of which Leblanc has been a representative since 2012), the Wapikoni Mobile project consists of mobile studios that visit several Québec Indigenous reservations, holding workshops (of six weeks, on average), during which young members of the community produce short films of different genres – documentaries, fiction, video clips and animations – and record music.<sup>7</sup> Leblanc refers to these mobile studios as a “tin can of dreams”, encouraging young people not only to portray their realities and to speak of their “culture”, but also to create stories, visual discourses and musical works. As stated on Wapikoni Mobile’s website, the main objectives of the project are “[to] enrich First Nations’ cultural heritage (...) in addition to creating an Aboriginal film industry in Québec”.<sup>8</sup> The project is focused on working with young people, often living in risky situations involving domestic violence, alcoholism, as well as high rates of suicide and drug addiction. Situations resulting from a long process of expropriation and exploitation, including a violent policy of sedentarization, force removals and forced schooling, as well as the intensification of extractive activities in

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*Mots de neige, de sable et d’océan*. Montreal: CPFM, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Wapikoni Awashish is the name of a young Atikamekw who collaborated with Manon Barbeau in a fiction film, which had the participation of several Indigenous actors. Wapikoni died in a car accident in 2002. The following year, Barbeau decided to pay homage to her, who would have become a full-fledged filmmaker.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.wapikoni.ca/a-propos/qui-sommes-nous> Accessed January 23, 2018.

the second half of the twentieth century. It is in this context that social and environmental themes become a fundamental part of the filmmakers' creations, who see the camera as an instrument of struggle and return, but also as a vehicle for the expression of a divided subjectivity between immeasurable worlds.<sup>9</sup>

## TOWARDS A POETICS OF THE EXPERIMENTAL

One of the hallmarks of Wapikoni Mobile's production is the profusion of so-called "experimental" films, films that break with narrativity and give way to creative freedom. They are usually very short films, bumping into the aesthetics of video art or even the video clip. "Experimental" for Réal Junior Leblanc seems to be the best way to achieve his poeticity, making movies the way one writes a poem, that is, to create meaning through the unexpected association of images and sounds. The form through which he makes his movies is never disconnected from his subject: talking whenever possible about the return of fundamental ties; not only community ties, but above all the link that connects every subjectivity to the so called natural world – the world of trees, clouds, mountains and stars. Leblanc's experimental-poetic films act in this sense as "cosmopolitical manifestos"<sup>10</sup>: they start from a threat – cultural loss, environmental catastrophe – and celebrate the inseparability between body and cosmos, between subjectivity and environment, indicating new paths, other ways.

*Eclipse* (2'31", 2013), filmed in partnership with Jani Bellefleur Kaltish, also of Innu origin, is a manifesto against the destruction of the environment by whites.<sup>11</sup> The film begins with a text over a dark screen: "One day... Nature will revolt. She will let go of us. Our Mother Earth has, too, her dreams". From then on, images of a solar eclipse are shown alongside a series of elements – trees, sky, clouds, raindrops, rocks, river, foliage. As the sequence progresses, a somewhat incidental song appears in crescendo and texts in French are inserted on the images, always addressing a second-person singular:

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9 On working with young people, see Stéphane Guinant Marceau. "Le Wapikoni Mobile: conquête d'un nouveau territoire de citoyenneté pour des jeunes autochtones". In: *ACME* v. 12, n. 3, 2013; PP. 551-575.

10 "Cosmopolitical Manifesto" is one of the ways in which Bruce Albert defines his book in co-authorship with Davi Kopenawa. *A queda do céu: palavras de um xamã yanomami*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2015. In short, it is the production of a discourse that connects the political ecology of non-Indigenous environmentalists and the Indigenous shamanic cosmology, thus producing an unexpected meaning for what we define as politics.

11 Watch the full movie: <http://www.wapikoni.ca/films/eclipse>. Accessed January 23, 2018.

You destroy everything on your way to make money.  
What are you going to do after you poison us all?  
Are you simply going to watch us die?  
What are you looking for in this land?<sup>12</sup>

We may say that this addressee, the potential audience, is the white man, evoking the figure of a terrible predator, able to convert, like the eclipse, light into darkness, the natural landscape into city. The texts disappear, and the sequence of images continues, now including urban elements, such as the image of a tree that follows the facade of a building and an aerial image of City of Montreal. On the last images of the film – the solar eclipse and raindrops, both referring to the passage from light to darkness, akin to the invasion of the city – a new text is shown: “The earth is already tired of us. We lived our last moments free and savage”.<sup>13</sup> The last and disheartening text differs from the previous by changing from “You” to “We”. Because of the French grammatical structure, it is difficult to tell if it is an inclusive or exclusive first-person plural. It is possible that Leblanc and Kaltish are talking about “we the Innu” (which, as in other Amerindian languages, means “human being, people”). But it is also possible that they are incorporating the whites. After all, the tragedy of the exhaustion of Earth can bring them together. In any case, apart from the disheartening element, Leblanc and Kaltish celebrate through this very brief sequence of images the potential beauty of what these “last moments”. Nothing is said about the meaning of the eclipse for the Innu, but in view of other Amerindian elaborations, it is possible to understand it as a sign of impending catastrophe or violence – the collapse between heaven and earth, for example –, requiring human urgent ritual actions, as if they could remake the world.<sup>14</sup> We can understand this little film essay not as resignation to a possible end, but as a critique and call for resistance in an era conventionally called the Anthropocene, in which a certain kind of humanity changes geological structures.

The contrast between urban and natural landscapes is the subject of *Shamanitu* (2012, 1’39”), co-directed with Kevin Papatie, of the Anishinaabe

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12 In the original, “Tu détruis tout sur ton passage juste pour faire de l’argent / Que as-tu faire après nous avoir tous empoisonnés? / Tu vas juste nous regarder juqu’à ce qu’on meurt? / Qu’est-ce que tu recherches encore sur nos terres?”

13 In the original, “La terre s’épuise déjà de nous. / Nous vivons nos derniers moments libres et sauvages”.

14 On eclipses in Amerindian mythology, see Claude Lévi-Strauss – *O Cru e o cozido: Mitológicas I* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2004) and *A origem dos modos à mesa: Mitológicas III* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2006). For a reflection on the subject based on material from the Kuikuro of the Upper Xingu, see Carlos Fausto “Sangue de lua: reflexões sobre espíritos e eclipses” (*Journal de la Société des Américanistes* v. 98, n. 1, 2013).

(Algonquin) people, and one of the first filmmakers involved with the Wapikoni Mobile.<sup>15</sup> In this film, a shaman uses his powers to regenerate the city. In the first scenes, he plants glass seeds on an urban terrain, from which images of trees sprout, taking over the urban landscape and growing on the city walls. In the last scene, a fish covers the sky of Montreal, until it gives way to the lettering with the name of the film. Instead of dismay, this very brief film bets on the idea of the regeneration of the city through the action of an Indigenous shaman. The tension between worlds in *Shamanitu* is, indeed, the theme of several of Papatie's films, which certainly had much influence on Leblanc, given his questioning and poetic style. *Entre l'arbre et l'écorce* (Between the tree and the bark, 2008, 3'41") picks up on what the director himself defines as "identity search".<sup>16</sup> "I live in two worlds, but none of them inhabit me", whispers the narrator in voice-over. *Nous sommes* (We are, 2009, 2'31"), in turn, is a film-manifesto based on Papatie's encounter with the Zapatistas.<sup>17</sup> After a series of scenes shot in Mexico, images of pollution and environmental destruction are displayed. In the Anishinaabe language, we hear a whispered voice-over say: "We are the water", "We are the earth", "We are the animals", "We are the air", and "We are the forest". On the last images, which go from a blurred landscape to a close-up of the eyes of a child, we hear: "We are the devastated landscape. Our territory is us. Let us rise". Inspired by the experience with the Zapatistas, Papatie asks his people to abandon the feeling of discouragement and resignation and embark on an active struggle against destruction, a struggle that restores the identification – in the absence of a better term – between the people and the others that make up the world, because the devastation of the territory is the devastation of communities, of "ourselves", of what we are.

The two experimental films that Réal Leblanc directed alone explore even more the experiment of conjugating poetic texts and images. His first film, *Tremblement de terre: Nanameshkueu* (Earthquake: Nanameshkueu, 2010, 2'51"), defined by him as "a celebration of the Innu culture", speaks of a kind of fusion between the subjectivity of the narrator-poet and the environment.<sup>18</sup> Always in a split screen, the image contrasts natural and urban landscapes, clear and dark, sky and earth, voids and bodies. We hear Leblanc reciting, over and over, a poem in French whose verses only occasionally refer directly to the images shown.

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15 Watch the full movie: <http://www.wapikoni.ca/films/shamanitu>. Accessed January 23, 2018.

16 Watch the full movie: <http://www.wapikoni.ca/films/entre-larbre-et-lecorce>. Accessed January 23, 2018.

17 Watch the full movie: <http://www.wapikoni.ca/films/nous-sommes>. Accessed January 23, 2018.

18 Watch the full movie: <http://www.wapikoni.ca/films/tremblement-de-terre-nanameshkueu>. Accessed January 23, 2018.

Since the night of times  
I contemplate the moon  
I howl my songs to it  
The moon knows my hatred  
The mountains are impregnated with my tears  
(...)  
All I want is to hunt and fish  
And return to my forgotten lands  
There, where my grandparents lived  
My heart beats to the rhythm of the rain  
My soul heals little by little  
(...)  
After each wave that fades away  
A new one is reborn even stronger  
I am Nanameshkueu  
I am the one who will rekindle the fire of my people<sup>19</sup>

The persona of the poem is Nanameshkueu, the Earthquake, a non-human being, a personified geological force. We have no further information about the Nanameshkueu entity in the Innu cosmology. It appears here under the sign of anger and solitude, but also as something that can destroy and regenerate. “I am Nanameshkueu”. The poet identifies himself with this destruction and regeneration force, metamorphosing into it. “I am the one who will rekindle the fire of my people”. He alludes to the rebirth following a hecatomb. In what way can this identification result in what Leblanc called the “celebration of Innu culture”? The poem certainly speaks of regeneration and rebirth through the possibility of composition with the various elements of the world, a possibility inscribed in the Innu system of thought and way of life. In the last images of the film, we see the face of a child superimposed on images of landscapes and the shadow of an anthropomorphic body, already present in previous scenes.

*Chevelure de la vie* (Mane of life 2011, 2’12”) celebrates the force of an age-old tree.<sup>20</sup> As in *Tremblement de terre*, a poem dialogues with pictures

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19 In the original: “Depuis la nuit des temps / je contemple la lune / je lui ai hurlé bien des chansons / j’ai toujours été Seul / oublié de Dieu / la lune connaît ma haine / les montagnes sont imprégnées de mes larmes / toujours chassé / faudra-t-il que je me caché encore / parmi les arbres et le brume / pour que le monde me laisse tranquille / Je veux seulement chasser et pêcher / et retourner dans mes terres oubliées / là même où mes grands-parents vécutent / mon coeur bat au rythme de la pluie / mon âme se cicatrise peu à peu / après chaque vague que s’épuise / une nouvele renaît / encore plus forte / Je suis Nanameshkueu / je suis celui qui ravivera la flamme de mon peuple”.

20 Watch the full movie: <http://www.wapikoni.ca/films/chevelure-de-la-vie>. Accessed January 23, 2018.

on the screen, which depict images or fragments of images (closes, foliage, textures) of this ancient and gigantic tree, alternating or overlapping with images of birds, rain, faces, and a flag. In the background, the sound of drums mixes with that of birds and the wind. Once again, R  al Leblanc uses of split screens, overlapping images and even film frames to give rise to animations. In the poem, the great tree, the “mane of life”, is referred to yet again in the second-person singular.

Wrap me in your roots  
while the wind shakes me in your branches  
Protect me from the elements and the enemy.  
While you tell me about your life

Sing me a song with your leaves  
So that I can finally dream again  
Accept me under your shadow and in your sap  
See me as one of your children.

The sound of the wind is your language  
You are the mane of line  
Only you can understand the mountains

Your skin is cracked by the time  
Your thoughts are older than a rock  
Your presence appeases hearts  
Your scent intoxicates souls  
You are the first daughter of land

Listen as your daughters and sons sing for you  
Experience their pains and their marked hearts,  
Invite their soul to rediscover their path  
Join the bark and the skin<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> In the original: Enveloppe-moi dans tes racines / pendant que le vent me berce dans tes branches / prot  ge-moi des intemp  res et de l’ennemi / pendant que tu ma raconte ta vie / chante-moi une chanson avec tes feuilles / pour enfin que je puisse r  ver d’autrefois / accepte-moi sous ton ombre et dans ta seve / regarde-moi comme l’un des tes fils / le son du vent est ton langage / tu es la chevelure de la vie /toi seul peut comprendre les montagnes / ta peau est fissur  e par le temps / tes pens  es sont plus anciennes qu’un rocher / ta pr  sence apaise les coeurs/ ton odeur enivre les   mes / tu es le premier des enfants de la terre /   coute tes filles et tes fils chanter pour toi / ressens leurs peines et leurs coeurs marqu  s / invite leur   me    retrouver leur chemin / assemble l’  corce et la peau

As Viveiros de Castro wrote about Amerindian perspectivism, “You” is a dangerous pronoun, since it implies taking the other – non-human, the enemy, the foreign – as a full subject, and therefore opening oneself up to an experience with the supernatural, representing a risk to “I”.<sup>22</sup> Referring to the other as “You” is accepting their subjectivity, establishing more than a relation, but an exchange (or commutation) of perspectives. If in *Tremblement de terre* the poet takes the place of a geological force, the Earthquake, in *Chevelure de la vie*, he addresses this more than human being represented by the age-old tree. He writes an ode to the tree, letting it envelop him and bind his skin to its bark.

The aforementioned films may be considered poem-films, poetic-experimental films. More than overlapping image and text, they create poetry through the combination, or interchange between verbal and visual. After all, the poetry of the films would not only be in the text, but in the visual discourse, and in the filmmaker’s ability to compose with images. The images do not serve as illustrations to the text, nor the text informs the images. Image and text are both part of the composition created in the editing room. In Réal Junior Leblanc’s creations, it is possible to recognize echoes of the intersemiotic chains that are present throughout the Amerindian arts, adding value to the permutation of sensory codes. In these chains, verbal and visual elements are tied together, translating each other: a drawing may represent a chant, a dance is also a musical score, everything is an image, sound and choreography.<sup>23</sup> In the regime of signs of the Amerindian arts, no *semi on* is able to sustain itself alone: verbal chases visual, visual requests sound, songs are always choreographed. What Leblanc does is to bet on the translation of verbal into visual, and vice versa, through music. His films are poetic, and his poetry is written in both words and images.

In these film-poems, in which images and text are translated, human figures are not central, remaining peripheral or even incidental. Faces and shadows usually appear superimposed to the images of other beings. In *Shamanitu*, the figure of the human shaman prevails, but he is only responsible for sprouting the forest in the city. In general, the protagonists on the screen – who remain in the foreground, never limiting themselves to being “background” – are nonhumans or “more than

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22 “Perspectivismo e multinaturalismo na América indígena” In: *A inconstância da alma selvagem e outros ensaios de antropologia*. São Paulo: Ubu Editora, 2017.

23 The problem of intersemiotic chains in Amerindian arts is quite complex. On this subject, see, among others: Rafael Menezes Bastos. “Música nas terras baixas: um panorama hoje” In: *Revista de Antropologia* v. 60, n. 2, 2017. Carlo Severi. “O espaço quimérico: percepção e projeção nos atos de olhar”. In: Severi, C. & Lagrou, E. *Quimeras em diálogo: grafismos e figurações da arte indígena*. Rio de Janeiro: 7 Letras, 2013.

human”: the Earthquake, the eclipse, the natural landscape that flourishes again in the city, the age-old tree. “I am the Earthquake”. “You, tree, is the mane of life”. “Earth is already tired of us”. Yes, this is the main point: Earth is tired of “us” – humans – defending our exclusivity, our primacy. Now through Papatie’s words, what we really are “a devastated landscape”. All these films are engaged in the critique of the centrality of this “we”, “humans”, evidencing an “I” that is already Other, a “You”, that is not human, but without which no human could live. Both the images and verses, the visible and the audible, refuse the anthropocentric perspective:<sup>24</sup> the nonhumans are the ones in the center of the scene, the poet talks to them, they speak for the poet, their images proliferate.<sup>25</sup> Differently from other cinematographies, which also remove the human element from the center, it is not a question of capturing an absolute Outside, of filming the “great emptiness”, but of capturing the bond between beings, a world in which everything is subjectivated. Unlike the long plans of a non-Eurocentric cinema, such as that of Abbas Kiarostami, in which the human seems to be lost in the vastness of the landscape<sup>26</sup>, Leblanc’s experiments – as well as that of other Indigenous filmmakers connected to the Wapikoni Mobile Project – favor an editing process in which the borders between human and nonhuman are constantly revised. If the Earth is already tired of us, it is because we need to rejoin with it, to compose with its subjectivity, avoiding a revolt that is fatal to us. Resuming those ties would be a recipe for resistance.

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24 Frederico Sabino wonders about the possibility of a non-anthropocentric cinema, about how to speak, through images, of the world beyond the human. The challenge of Indigenous films, he points out, would go beyond the proposition of something like an “eco-cinema” – a cinema of landscapes – since it would bring to the foreground the need to deal with the invisible, with the cosmos. “Conversa sobre filmes e paisagens”. In: *Catálogo do Fórum Doc 2017*. We might even say that the “beyond human” would not be equivalent to an inert landscape, but a decisive actor.

25 The idea that “who speaks or sings in me is another” is very common in the regimes of enunciation of Amerindian verbal arts, which brings into question the very notion of subject present in much of the modern Western philosophy traditions. For a detailed study on the subject, see, among others, Carlo Severi. “Memory, reflexivity and belief: reflections on the ritual use of language”. In: *Social anthropology* v. 10 n. 1, 2002. and Pedro Cesarino. *Oniska: poética do xamanismo na Amazônia*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2011.

26 See *24 frames* (2017), Kiarostami’s most recent film, in which the contemplation of the natural world appears, in poetic and experimental language, in its most radical form: in each frame, different animals and landscapes parade in front of the camera, there is almost no place for the human.

## MEMORY AND RESISTANCE

*Blocus 138* (Block 138, 2012, 7'13") and *L'enfance déracinée* (Uprooted childhood, 2013, 7'16") are short documentaries about political subjects: the movement of resistance to the construction of a hydroelectric plant and the memory of residential schools. In these films the place of poetry remains central: Leblanc's poems are added to the documentary images, condensing the drama of the discussed events.

*Blocus 138: la résistance innu* presents scenes of the highway 138 blockade, occurred on March 9, 2012, in a protest against the construction of a hydroelectric complex on the river Romaine.<sup>27</sup> The initial text explains that the construction works, which invade almost 500 km of the Innu territory, started without prior consultation with the communities. They result from the so-called Northern Plan, a major economic development project involving extractive activities and the construction of hydroelectric dams. In the last intertitle, before the display of the images and the sound of drums, we read: "The fight is far from over."

Leblanc shoot scenes in two distinct moments: during the day, when the Innu women organize, leading the blockade, and at night, during a confrontation with the police, after a series of threats. The night scenes are certainly more striking. As the police advance, the women sing in unison in the Innu language: "Dear children, we love you. We'll still be there tomorrow." The camera closes in on their faces. The police advance even more, dispersing part of the protesters, while others launch themselves into direct confrontation. Men and women shout: "My thinking is with my children, not with money." "We are losing our culture and our territory." Some are arrested. At the last minute of the film, we hear another of Leblanc's poems over night scenes of confusion and commotion that soon give rise to the credits:

I hear still  
the cries of rage  
and tears of despair  
of my people

I have seen women  
defend Mother Earth  
with songs of peace

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<sup>27</sup> Watch the full movie: <http://www.wapikoni.ca/films/blocus-138-la-resistance-innue>. Accessed January 23, 2018.



I have seen my people  
driven back  
on our own land  
by helmeted strangers

I have seen my elders  
shedding tears  
of forgotten pride

How can we  
defend our heritage  
and our children's future  
against the moneyed giants?

I weep  
for all the rivers  
they will divert  
for all the forests  
they will plunder  
for all the lands  
they will flood  
for all the mountains  
they will raze

To them, I say always  
from the depths of my soul  
No<sup>28</sup>

The poem recited at the end of the film condenses the drama of the images we saw in the previous six minutes. If the movie began with the phrase “The fight is far from over,” it ends up in a poetic tone with “To them, I say always... No”. With this, it praises the resistance, suggesting the message of the aforementioned experimental films: it is necessary to deny the spirit of destruction of the “helmeted stranger’s” society, binding once again the weakened ties within the community and between society and environment, preventing the rivers from being diverted, forests from being plundered, lands from being flooded and mountains from being razed. *Blocus 138* is, in fact, the Innu version of a history of resistance and of tragic scenes that are repeated throughout Indigenous America. Hydropower projects that divert rivers and call into question the sovereignty of Indigenous territories and ways of life are

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28 Réal Junior Leblanc, “Roadblock 138 – Innu Resistance”. In: *Languages of Our Land: Indigenous Poems and Stories from Quebec*, ed. Susan Ouriou, trans. Christelle Morelli. Alberta: Banff Centre Press, 2014; p. 53.

everywhere in this vast continent. There are also manifestations of resistance everywhere, which are constantly reinventing themselves, allied to aesthetic forms that include music, dance and cinema. However dramatic the situation may be, the struggle turns pain into joy, oscillating between celebrations and wars. This is the message conveyed by close-up image of the Innu women who, faced with the confrontation of the police, never stop singing and celebrating the resistance.

Resistance is also the theme of *L'enfance déracinée*, a film about the memory of the Indigenous people who were forced to spend their childhood in the residential schools of Sept-Îles, away from their families and ways of life.<sup>29</sup> The memory of these residential schools and their ethnocide politics is an open wound in Canada, finding echo in many other countries in America. Children were separated from their parents, forbidden to speak in their language and to practice their rituals and other customs. The residential schools were the result of the Indian Act of 1884, a radical policy of assimilation of Indians by the Canadian State. With the support of religious missions, more than 150,000 children were forced to go to these establishments. Alongside the residential schools a policy of sedentarization and removal was put into practice, with the purpose of erasing the peoples' ties to the land. In the same period, the ban on the *potlatch* on the West Coast and the *Sun Dances* in the Plains region was enacted, a law that would only be repealed in the 1950s. Furthermore, it was only on June 11, 2008 that Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized, publicly and on behalf of the state, for the immense "cultural genocide" committed by that country. But this apology could not erase the memory of the atrocities and pain, nor do the necessary justice.

Because it is an open wound, the memory of the residential schools is a recurring theme in the films made by the Indigenous peoples of Canada and, more specifically, the films made under the Wapikoni Mobile project. See, among many, *L'Amendement* (The amendment, 2007, 4'58"), by Kevin Papatie.<sup>30</sup> The film mentions the 1920 amendment that makes the school compulsory for all Indigenous children, at the risk of penalizing parents. Papatie portrays, in very brief and close scenes, four members of his family: Zoe, his grandmother, who "does not speak French"; Noah Louis, her son, who went to school at age seven and "speaks French"; Nadia, his daughter, who "almost forgot the Anishnabe language"; and finally Ingrid, daughter of Nadia, still a child, who does not speak the language of the family anymore. Papatie makes an energetic speech about

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29 Watch the full movie: <http://www.wapikoni.ca/films/lenfance-deracinee>. Accessed January 23, 2018.

30 Watch the full movie: <http://www.wapikoni.ca/films/lamendement-abinodjic-madjinakini>. Accessed January 23, 2018.

the near extinction of his language, the result of a violent politics of assimilation. At the end of the film he concludes, “These are four generations, two residential schools, two cultures, and one extinction.” This is how a language and a people are exterminated, and that is why Papatie’s insists on making his films in the Anishnabe language. In a more recent film, *Kokom* (2014), Papatie returns to the figure of his grandmother, forced to send her children to the residential school.<sup>31</sup> However, the film ends with a positive message: after many years of oppression, thanks to the elders’ perseverance, “the Anishnabe roots sprout again”.

In *L’enfance déracinée*, Leblanc returns to the place where the Sept-Îles residential school was built and operated from 1951 to 1972 to gather testimony from witnesses who were there. Only one building survived demolition, and over the ruin of the others a new community was established. Leblanc recognizes himself as “a descendant of these uprooted children,” of the tragic history of removals, genocide, and ethnocide. The film alternates between archival images – images of life at the residential school, of children, priests, state officials – and scenes from the community that was established and grew there. Another poem by Leblanc is presented throughout the film, overlapping with archival and current images. Here are the first verses:

Why did you snatch my people from their parents’ arms?  
Who were you to empty my village of its children?  
I am the descendant of those uprooted children.

No effort was spared to change our identity  
devour our traditions  
erase our history  
destroy our culture<sup>32</sup>

During the film, Leblanc meets a woman who lived, as a child, in the residential school. We do not know her name. In most scenes, she does not look at the camera, remaining self-absorbed, painting a canvas. Moments later we learn that what makes her paint is the ability that this art has to reconnect her to the Innu cosmological universe. Almost at the end of the film, the camera shows the completed canvas: a wolf howling at the moon. And she comments: “I’m glad to find something I lost.” We do not know exactly what cosmological theme this is, only that it refers

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31 Watch the full movie: <http://www.wapikoni.ca/films/kokom-cd9b74>. Accessed January 23, 2018.

32 Réal Junior Leblanc, “Uprooted childhood”. In: *Languages of Our Land: Indigenous Poems and Stories from Quebec*, ed. Susan Ouriou, trans. Christelle Morelli. Alberta: Banff Centre Press, 2014; p. 57.

to the first verses of *Tremblement de terre*. In her testimony to Leblanc, this woman talks about how she was sexually abused at age six, how she constantly lived in fear, seeking support from peers of the same age. She also talks about how she was prevented from speaking her own language. We see documentary footage again, including scenes of children dealing with priests (their possible aggressors) and a girl who is smilingly staring at the camera. We also do not know whether this girl is the witness speaking in voice-over. In any case, it represents a myriad of victims, people who shared the same fate. The woman tells of her return to the community, after a time in the residential school. It is a devastating landscape: everyone drank there, his father had become an alcoholic, and the sexual abuse common at the residential school became a reality in the villages as well. It is a portrait of the deepest of pains.

In the last scene of the film, we see the administration building, the only structure remaining after the 1972 demolition, being set on fire by firefighters. The year is 2012. About this image, Leblanc says that the residents of the Malietenam community experienced the act as a “healing ritual”. Soon afterwards, archival images are fused with images of the local community. We listen to the poem’s last verses:

The wounds of the past  
have not yet healed  
but my people’s hope has been rekindled

Though the shadow of residential schools  
hovers still over our communities  
I know today’s youth will find there  
a way to free themselves<sup>33</sup>

The end of *L’enfance déracinée* is a call for resistance. The last building of the residential school is consumed by fire, the witness of the atrocities rediscovers the Innu universe through painting, the community grows over the ruins, Leblanc recites his protest poem, stimulating the memory of past events. Art plays its part in reconnecting with a world that has almost been lost. Just as in *Blocus 138*, Leblanc praises the resistance through images and words, combining struggle and art. *L’enfance déracinée* is a film about ethnocide, which is often equivalent to genocide. *Blocus 138* is perhaps a film about ecocide, about trying to reverse the effects of building a hydroelectric dam that will affect all Nitassinan, “our land,” the land of the Innu. Now, in the experience of the Innu

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33 Réal Junior Leblanc, “Uprooted childhood”. In: *Languages of Our Land: Indigenous Poems and Stories from Quebec*, ed. Susan Ouriou, trans. Christelle Morelli. Alberta: Banff Centre Press, 2014; p. 57.

and Leblanc itself, ethnocide, ecocide and genocide are equivalent.<sup>34</sup> The river's death is not unlike the death of tongues and people. Everything falls apart. The expulsion of the Amerindians from their lands is confused with the parents being forced to send their children to residential schools. The intensification of development projects coincides with an attempt to destroy thoughts and practices that recognize in natural or geological forces subjectivities with which one needs to coexist, so that life and society may subsist.

## A COSMOPOLITICAL AESTHETICS

We could say that Réal Junior Leblanc's cinema puts forward a cosmopolitical proposal in the sense attributed by the philosopher Isabelle Stengers: it unsettles the very meaning of politics, conceived of as a kind of action among humans that unfolds in an inert, discouraged world<sup>35</sup>. Stengers' cosmopolitical proposal, which is based on problems concerning the modern sciences and environmental issues, requires that we bring "nature" into politics, that we politicize the sciences, that we show that humans are not alone in the world, and that we consider modes of existence that we thought were unlikely. The failure of the opposition between inert nature and human action has become evident in the so-called modern world, through the environmental and climate crisis, because of the destruction caused by humans themselves. In "catastrophic times", which follow from what geologists have called the Anthropocene, the Earth – tired, exhausted, and revolted – becomes an agent of retaliation and reveals its subjectivity, claiming a new political approach and the reestablishment of ties that were lost<sup>36</sup>.

For Amerindian peoples like the Innu, what we call "nature" has never been dissociated from what we refer to as "politics": the action of making collectives and composing common worlds. Perhaps this is so because terms like "nature" and "politics" do not make sense to them. The Innu have always cultivated ties with nonhuman beings, with the beings of the Earth, and more than ever they now know that they need to reconnect with them, going against the background of the triumphalist history of colonization, which is guided by a narrative defending progress. As a countercurrent, the reawakening of these ties resonates closely with the

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34 For a discussion of the inseparability between ethnocide and ecocide, based on an analysis of self-demarcation processes in Amazonian lands, see Luísa Molina Pontes. *Terra, luta, vida: auto-demarcações indígenas e a afirmação da diferença*. Masters thesis. UnB, Brasília, 2017.

35 Isabelle Stengers. "La proposition cosmopolitique". In: Lolive, Jacques & Soubeyran, Olivier (eds.). *L'émergence des cosmopolitiques*. Paris: La Découverte, 2007.

36 Isabelle Stengers. *Au Temps des catastrophes: résister à la barbarie qui vient*. Paris: La Découverte, 2009.

ethics and aesthetics of Leblanc's cinema, which seeks to restore fundamental ties between those who recognize themselves as humans and the environment around them, populated by different kinds of beings.

In its own way, Leblanc's cinema summons up what Félix Guattari, inspired by Gregory Bateson, called "ecosophy", the idea that mental, social and environmental dimensions must be considered as interrelated in a system<sup>37</sup>. In his view, all modes of subjectivation cut across these three levels. The "identity crisis" that takes hold of the lyrical self of the poems or the characters in Leblanc's cinema, as well as among other filmmakers involved with Wapikoni Mobile – "I live between two worlds", "I am a descendant of rootless children – is an integral part both of a community crisis – the break-up of families with the advent of residential schools, alcoholism, drugs, loss of "culture" – as well as of an environmental crisis – the diversion of rivers, pollution, global warming, natural disasters. In *Tremblement de Terre*, the Self becomes the Other: "My heart beats in the rhythm of the rain", "I am Nanameshkueu, the Earthquake." In *La chevelure de la vie*, the secular tree becomes the great interlocutor, a great You: "You are the hair of life". "You are the Earth's first daughter." The images in both films indicate overlapping modes of existence. Human figures appear only incidentally, while meteorological, geological, plant and bird phenomena are foregrounded. This anti-anthropocentrism reappears in documentaries; if human people are always foregrounded in it – for example, demonstrators who sing and confront the police, children who are "educated" in residential schools, a distinguished painter – it is also true that these characters are part of a cosmic plot: demonstrators fight to protect the rivers and the Indigenous territory; children taken to the residential schools are also being driven out of their land, and this turns out to be an exorcism of all the beings associated with them; the painter rediscovers themes belonging to Innu cosmology. Being evicted from their land produces the extinction of their languages; the construction of the hydroelectric puts Innu children at risk once again, taking their future away from them. It is therefore necessary to say "no" and to recover the future and the ties that have been weakened, and thus to avoid a ruthless revolt of the Earth.

We need a new contract, says Elizabeth Povinelli, in concluding that the social contract no longer accounts for the situation established by the Anthropocene. True antagonism would not be between humans and non-humans, but between "various forms of human life-worlds and their different effects on all other forms of existence, including other human life-worlds".<sup>38</sup> She

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37 Félix Guattari. *As três ecologias*. Campinas: Papirus, 1990.

38 Elizabeth Povinelli. "Depois de outras naturezas e de novas culturas, um outro modo". In: *Catálogo da 32ª Bienal de São Paulo – A Incerteza Viva*. São Paulo: 2016, p. 82.

suggests that in order to conceive what is human and what is not, what is alive and what is not, we need to think of another analytics of existence – of an “otherwise”. Povinelli proposes to refer to this “otherwise” as the “geon-topower” of late liberalism – in other words, the power to define what the earth is and the beings that inhabit it in order to take advantage and profit from them. For the Indigenous Australians of the Karrabing collective, with whom Povinelli works, geological formations, for example, are first of all the subjectivities with which one must compose, admitting that they participate decisively in history and politics. Be it a mining or a digital technology project, geological formations must be considered. The audio-visual experiences of the Karrabing assume that it is possible to transpose and translate the analytics of native existence – with its subjectivation of geological forces, with the hyper-reality of its dreamings – into filmic and other kinds of images, thereby raising the awareness of non-Indigenous audiences. In short, the films produced by the Karrabing collective provide for an ethical and aesthetic experience – a way of translating this “otherwise”, a refusal of the separation between myself and another, human and not human<sup>39</sup>.

The aesthetics of Leblanc’s cinema also seeks to translate this “otherwise” that cannot be reduced to an opposition between human and non-human, nature and things. His film-poems make the earth, the mountains and the trees speak; they remove the human subject from the center of the scene, exhibiting other forms of subjectivation. What have we done with the Earth? How to get back to Earth and its beings? How to stop the wave of destruction – of the world and of bodies – carried out by the whites? Film and poetry, images conjugated to words, prove to be a powerful instrument in this direction. A “hunting weapon”, as Leblanc defined it: not any weapon, but one capable of re-establishing a relationship with the infinite world of hunting, a world full of dangers, populated by the most diverse beings. For game animals are not merely external objects – they are a “you”, a subjectivity with which a game of perspectives takes places, destabilizing the position of humans, making them wonder about what is human in the animal and what is animal in the human.

It can be questioned whether these weapons, however powerful, will always be the weapons of the colonizers. Be that as it may, the Indigenous appropriation of technologies such as the audiovisual, whose language had to be decoded, and the French language, whose adoption led to the suppression of so many native languages, always involves some kind of transformation. As the Wendat poet Jean Sioui writes, “Thanks to the generosity of the nations, the French language – the language of the white –, receives an infusion of red blood – a new life”<sup>40</sup>.

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39 Elizabeth Povinelli. *Geontologies: a requiem to late liberalism*. Durham: Duke Press, 2016.

40 Apud Susan Ouriou. “Introdução” In: Ouriou, S. (ed.) *Langues de notre terre: poèmes et*

The same could be said about cinema: could its appropriation by Indigenous peoples bring new life to it, subverting its narrative commonplaces, its restricted forms of circulation, and above all its anthropocentric insistence? This recalls what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, reflecting on Kafka, called a “minor literature”: to make use of the foreign and dominant language in order to subvert it, to search for other potentialities in it, to fertilize it<sup>41</sup>. In this sense, Réal Junior Leblanc offers us a “minor” cinema and a “minor” poetry, which make the technologies and forms of language stutter. Unique movie-poems, poetic documentaries, all of them engaged in the creation of an “otherwise”, of an anti-anthropocentric ethics, of a cosmopolitical aesthetics.

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<sup>41</sup> Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari. *Kafka: por uma literatura menor*. São Paulo: Ed. Autêntica., 2014.

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