**Green: an activist film**

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In the film *Green* we bear witness to the violent stripping of vibrant, diverse and dynamic forested landscapes in Indonesia to make way for industrial palm oil monoculture. Communities of elephant, families of orangutan, and the multispecies weave of old-growth forest are felled to make way for the single West African palm species (*Elaeis guineensis* Jacq.) and its attendant ecology of workers, consumers and machines. We are soothed by the voice of the forest, as it speaks in layers of animal and bird calls, wind rustling through trees, and running water; then to be aurally assaulted by the harsh and relentless noise of machines, themselves intimately associated with the fossil fuels that palm oil biofuels seek to replace. Both landscapes are green, and both might claim the nomenclature of ‘forest’. But the qualitative biophysical, economic, cultural and affective differences between them are acute. The complex commodity assemblage that arises in service to palm oil production communicates and interacts with us in a different mode to that of the forested cultural landscape it displaces. This is the language of industrial and finance capital, and of life and labour as alienated commodity. It replaces a language of socio-ecological relationships rooted in places, with one of extraction and conversion to satisfy distant demands and hungers.

In between is a wound that can never be fully masked. The transition between these two green landscapes requires nothing less than a scorched earth policy. Palm monoculture plantations can only be planted in cleared land. They encourage the ripping away of unique forest expressions of emplaced evolution to create a ground zero moment of apocalyptic desolation. In *Green*, this is signified by the haunting and traumatising image of an isolated orangutan mother and baby scrabbling up the last remaining tree in a futile attempt to escape the destruction that is all around. The
dehumanising brutality of this transformation speaks further as we watch a retrieved, lone orangutan being transported in the back of a truck. None of the onlookers appear able to feel enough to stop its head from repetitively hitting the hard metal of the truck floor, or to comfort and connect through gentle physical contact. And it is almost too shocking to write of the image of an orangutan stretched out on bare earth between cords tied to ankles and wrists.

In *Green* this story is told through the juxtaposition of images and the affective sensuality of sound. There is no narration. The story emerges nonlinearly. For the most part there is no overlain music: the soundtrack is generated simply by the sounds emerging from and accompanying what is filmed. Its pace is that of the movement of its images in realtime. The forest generally is slow and entangled: each movement generated and connected seamlessly with that of something else. The scenes of chainsaws converting ancient hardwoods to logs on their way to become floorboards and pulp for paper, and of the industrial palm oil production line, are more jagged, linear and abrupt. Those of supermarket and fuel station consumption of palm oil end products are somewhat more frenetic.

Much has been said by others here [http://studyinggreen.wordpress.com/](http://studyinggreen.wordpress.com/) regarding the genre of *Green* and its destabilising of what is more conventional in the natural history film industry. Its montage style has been referred to as arthouse ([http://studyinggreen.wordpress.com/gill-branston/](http://studyinggreen.wordpress.com/gill-branston/)), political/documentary film
and as experimental film. With its explicit raising of the effects on biodiversity of forest clearance it might also claim the distinction of ‘conservation film’, defined by Chris Palmer in *Shooting in the wild* (2010, Sierra Club Books, p.163) as ‘films that motivate viewers to take action’. Rouxel himself refers to his work as ‘poetic film’. This reflects well *Green*’s generation of narrative through suggestion, and the affective power of its visual and aural aesthetics.

For me *Green* is a contemporary activist film, iterating a style of work common for film-makers using their skill and art to convey critique with political content and to motivate for change. This is a post-modern genre that maximises the production and distribution possibilities enabled by a rapidly changing and more democratically available digital technology, and that seeks to startle and galvanise through the careful construction of image bricolage. Such contemporary non-narrative film provocations were pioneered in *Koyaanisqatsi* (1983), *Powaqqatsi* (1987) and *Baraka* (1992), associated with director/producer Godfrey Reggio and cinematographer Ron Fricke, and by BBC producer Adam Curtis (maker of radical TV series such as the Mayfair Set (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mayfair_Set) (1999), The Century of the Self (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Century_of_the_Self) (2002) and The Power of Nightmares (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/4016713.stm) (2005)).

Particular to activist film, however, is an emphasis on making material available at low or no cost. To inform as a means of encouraging action. Value here is beyond monetary recompense or even viewer numbers. At social movement gatherings over the last ten or so years I have been given, or acquired through minimal monetary donation, similarly made image-montage films highlighting the contexts giving rise to circumstances such as those documented in Green, as well as associated resistances. Examples include, *Trading Freedom: The Secret Life of the FTAA*
http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2005/02/18/17225011.php (Indymedia)
http://www.indymedia.org/, The Fourth World War
http://www.bignoisefilms.com/films/features/89-fourth-world-war (available for viewing at http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=4947562540870341312, Big Noise Films), and Venezuela Bolivariana (http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-1797179074001054188 Calle y Media Collective). Availability through sharing is emphasised further through uploads on sites such as IFIwatch.tv (http://www.ifiwatch.tv/), as well as now through YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/) and via BitTorrent protocol peer-to-peer sharing. As activist films, these are made so as to circulate through word-of-mouth and practices of sharing, and are created with passion regarding the structural contemporary circumstances giving rise to extreme inequity and violent social and ecological transformation. Green, which can be downloaded for free from the film’s website (http://www.greenthefilm.com/, has been made with this poetic activist intent of informing through both radical content and revolutionary sharing. This is film-making as service to an attempt to make a difference rather than a profit. Films where any ‘money shot’ is radically emptied of monetary value.