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INHABITING THE BORDER

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ABSTRACT.-The ecosystem crisis and ecological fragmentation reflect the levelling of our aesthetics, the isolation of various hyper-specialized and compartmentalized fields of research. "Inhabiting the border" asserts the importance of links, of interdisciplinary and interspecies relations, insofar as they preserve the primordial poetics of the living, this relationship of belonging to multiple singularities. The frontier is the place where worlds meet, and this space is a fertile refuge. This article emerges from a one-week stay from May 2nd to 11th, 2023 in the Forêt de la Massane National Nature Reserve, as a SACRe-PSL doctoral student and artist photographer. Deeply moved and inspired by the subtlety and richness of the ecosystem of this primary forest, I developed a new aesthetic technique that aims to translate the complexity of living things and the multiplicity of their intricacies: photographic assemblage. Different photographic fragments are selected or duplicated and bonded/assembled together, despite their differences, to (re)constitute a polyphonic, hybrid nature, whose shapes intertwine or not, in an alliance of opposites – which can ultimately be viewed as being very similar. The aesthetic is organic, the image vital. It evokes both art nouveau and virtual reality, and is the place where naturalistic photography meets pictorial inventiveness.

INTRODUCTION - SYMBIOSIS AS A FICTIONAL RESOURCE

As part of my PhD in Sciences Arts Création Recherche (SACRe-PSL), which I have been carrying out since 2021 at ENS and Beaux-Arts de Paris, I am interested in the notion of symbiosis as a fictional resource. Symbiosis defines an interspecies interaction that is mutually beneficial and sustainable. I study a specific form of symbiosis that creates networks between individuals and different species, especially between fungi and plant roots, also known as mycorrhizal symbioses. As part of my study, I have been collaborating since October 2021 with the team Interactions et Evolution Végétales et Fongiques of the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle de Paris (INEVEF from the ISYEB laboratory), directed by Marc-André Selosse (mycologist – MNHN/CNRS) and Florent Martos (ecologist – MNHN/CNRS). The aim of this PhD is plastic, meaning that it will take the form of an exhibition accompanied by a written document. I will be presenting photographic works and textual fragments through a performance.

From May 2nd to May 11th, 2023, with the consultation and support of Elodie Magnanou and the entire team of the Massane forest National Nature Reserve, I had the opportunity to carry out a week-long residency in this freely evolving French beech forest. I was graciously accommodated in a stone hut that was both my resting and working place. This article describes that stay: it presents the reflections and photographic propositions that emerged during the residency. Firstly, I will first set out the technical context of the residency, based on an anecdote, and then address a few preliminary reflections on language and its issues, in order to provide a theoretical background for my aesthetic work. The following sub-sections will deal with the three different work phases I went through: photographic portraits (section 3), theoretical hypothesis (section 4), sketches of photographic assemblages (section 5). These phases make up what I call the process of work's emergence, which culminated in the practice of photographic assemblage that I have deepened since this residency.

I should also point out that, as part of a doctoral research program based on artistic practice, it is as an artist-researcher that I express myself here. While presenting the theoretical background of my practice, I will also highlight the poetic, empathetic and emotional aspects of my research as singular and legitimate forms of knowledge, understanding and perhaps transformation. I cannot say at the moment what their values are, but I know they matter. I particularly cherish my status as an artist, which, while it does not exempt me from producing thought, does not force me to do so in a way that is standardized by academia. I view creation as a perfectly valid way of understanding the human condition and my work can be viewed as a process of emergence through which I aim to gain more understanding. As a creator committed to an artistic approach, I propose an aesthetic project based on my obsessions, cracks and emotions.

DOCUMENTS AND METHODS

A brief history or anecdote

First, I'd like to mention a working detail: during my residence in the Massane forest, the team generously provided me with an electric generator so that I could recharge my electronic devices. This generator is, I believe, in permanent residence at the refuge, and I had in any case requested one beforehand, as my study of the Massane ecosystem presupposed a whole panoply of extremely energy-intensive technical tools such as camera, batteries, XQD and SSD memory cards, hard disk, computer and so on. And so, on the third day of my residency, when I started up the generator on the refuge's exterior platform, I realized the extent of the olfactory and noise pollution emitted by this machine, coupled with the long hours required to recharge my voracious instruments. I felt like I was imposing myself crudely on this subtle environment. My initial introduction to the environment struck me as lacking in empathy, understanding and elegance. Out of respect for the environment and in order to cause as little disturbance as possible to the Massane ecosystem that welcomed me, while at the same time remaining true to my values, I decided to stop using the generator. This forced me to change the way I worked. I wished to conserve battery power as much as possible and therefore I could only view my pictures once my residency was over. This trivial experience enabled me to point out a major paradox that many research projects today have to face: the need for cohe-

rence between one's aspirations (and those of one's research) and the means used to achieve them. The way in which many of the tools (techniques or technologies) chosen to study an ecosystem (with the aim of protecting and/or caring for it), paradoxically begin to constrain it, to prevent it from perpetuating itself. I will come back to this later in this article (section 2).

Genesis of the title and language regime

Inhabiting the border (*Habiter la frontière*) is the title of a book written by Léonora Miano that I read during my residency at La Massane. In this book, an eponymous text transcribes the author's speech at the Journée internationale de la Francophonie at the University of Copenhagen (Denmark) in 2009. It particularly inspired me. Here, Miano defines the border as "a space of relationship":

"(...) The border, as I define it and inhabit it, is the place where worlds touch, tirelessly. It's the place of constant oscillation: from one space to another, from one sensibility to another, from one worldview to another. It's where languages mingle, not necessarily thunderously, but naturally impregnating each other, to produce, on the blank page, the representation of a composite, hybrid universe. The border evokes relationships. It says that peoples have met (...) [and that] they have given birth to meaning" (Miano L 2012).

If I make this detour via literature, it is because I believe that writing proceeds from the same movement as photography: to write is to show and to transform, it is to choose from reality what we want to import. It is about resonance, in that grammar animates what exists. The production of symbols and images is of the same flesh, and this activity is not so far removed from that of artifact-making (in other words, the manufacture of tools and instruments) from which photography springs: both proceed from one and the same flesh, the flesh of language. In his latest book, the historian and political scientist Achille Mbembe writes: "Images and symbols on the one hand, tools and instruments on the other, have in common that they are utensils of life"(Mbembe A 2023). My aesthetic activity aims to use Mbembe's definition of the utensils of life to restore the vitality that constitutes the living. The living is contingent, born of the conjunction of forces that apparently have nothing to do with each other, but whose conjugation produces the miracle. The living carries with it an element of mystery that lies at the root of all enchantment and creation, from poetic creation to technical gestures.

More than ever before, the forces of becoming, virtual or real, are increasingly carried by a constellation of technical objects to which we attribute the name of technology. An archetype of the factitious, technology is in itself a system of meanings, a constitutive dimension of the human imagination. This insatiable human need for fables and myths seems to have been taken over by technology. Technology now tends all by itself to absorb "the attributes of religious thought, magical or animistic reason and aesthetic activity" (Mbembe A 2023). What resides in machines, then, is human reality, human gesture fixed and crystallized in functioning structures. And if the human is present in machines, machines in turn "work on the human, crossing it and investing it" (Mbembe A 2023). In this double movement, instrumental reason and the power it engenders are "freed from the weight of meaning" (Mbembe

A 2023). What is left of the human subject, once reason has been sucked in by the technologies of calculation? This is a deadly path. What must come, therefore, is what Mbembe calls "a way of thinking about life, about the reserve of life, about what must escape sacrifice" (Mbembe A 2013). This way of thinking about life must be based on an ethic (and therefore an aesthetic) of encounter and relationship, on the sharing of singularities and on learning to live with one another. It will have to make possible what Mbembe calls an "en-commun" that presupposes "a relationship of coappartenance between multiple singularities" (Mbembe A 2010).

The illusion of technical neutrality

When I photograph, I try to get the best shot (in the sense that the lighting is good, all the colors are deployed as well as possible, etc.). The most important moment is the moment of shooting, followed by post-production work which allows images to unfold in a better way; however, I do not directly modify their colors. I need to make one point clear here: with photography, there's always a relationship of "truth" that I think you need to be able to consciously delimit: digital images are translated by sensors and algorithms, and all visible colors are equivalently manufactured, translated, by the digital back of my hybrid camera. I do not create new colors myself, but the colors generated in the image and then modified by post-production software are already technical colors, colors manufactured by our technical tools. An image is, in the best of cases, a blend of what the photographer conceptually wants and what the camera technically can achieve. It is possible for an image to show what the photographer did not expect – which is certainly why it is used in science, to guard against certain human ideological biases – but it can never show what the camera cannot. It is the camera and the photographer who define and constrain reality, not the opposite.

My working hypothesis for plastic research is as follows: as a fabulist species, human beings inhabit a world based on the images they form of that world. On one hand, these images are composed of symbols (words) that tell a story – it is this alone that clarifies a sometimes troubled feeling. On the other hand, images are used to represent a reality that is inaccessible to metaphor. These are the languages, the mediating tools, the utensils of life, which form the basis of the symbolic environment from which we think, act and live. Building ways of living in a sustainable world requires ways of making languages (images and symbols, tools and instruments). These languages are both the formal translations of the type of relationship we cultivate with the things in this world, and the references from which we inhabit a world. The various fabrications of our images have the power to allow or prevent the restitution of the ways in which things and beings exist. Collapsing ecosystems are the vanishing relational modalities that support life and human language, weakening our ways of relating to the world. So, in images too, it is necessary to preserve the dialectic, the subtlety of relational complexities, their vital diversity, which tell us in various ways (harmonies, oppositions, divergences) how it is possible to connect.

In *L'Œil et l'Esprit* (1964), philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty reminds us that a certain conception of science engenders a misconception of our relationship with the world, in that it consists in completely excluding all forms of sensibility. The body that we possess is

not just an object of study, it is also an inhabited body meant to be experienced and lived in. Moreover, it should be noted that rules create habits, and to a certain extent, these no longer allow us to make ourselves available to the unpredictable. As soon as you have a formula, you become its captive... It is therefore necessary to let go of a certain idea of things and of oneself, in order to allow them (and oneself) the possibility of becoming something else. My photographic practice is a critique of Cartesian space: it refuses to think of the relationship of things side by side in a geometric, homogeneous, isotropic world, to consider them as parts that are external to each other. The luminosities of things themselves interact, because they are caught up in the "fabric of the world", in this texture of the visible. In the same work (L'Œil et l'Esprit) Merleau-Ponty observes an outdoor swimming pool and shares his impressions with us. He understands the water of the pool as it is, with the encroachment of the reflections of the surface and the lines of the tiling at the very bottom. There is depth because things are one behind the other, because they interpenetrate. With the reflections of the water on the cypress trees, it also inhabits this space, and the visible itself comes to life, as if it were alive. All too often, vision forgets its premises: we tend to talk about the results – what we see – but we forget to talk about how we see, by what devices, what means.

"I would be hard-pressed to say where the painting I am looking at is, for I don't look at it as I look at a thing, I don't fix it in its place; my gaze wanders through it as through the nimbus of being, I see according to or with it, rather than I see it" (Merleau-Ponty M 1996).

My visual practice aims to make the world rustle where it has been assigned prefabricated signifiers. It creates a space where things interpenetrate, a place of telescoping and hallucinations. It is a question of representing, not by reducing a space or one thing to another, but by producing a threshold of indistinction that makes it impossible for the different parts to truly dissociate. Things are defined by their overflow, by their vastitude. From this point onwards, it is the connection, the relation, that delimits the space for the interplay of possibilities that shimmer around the images, without limiting this interplay itself.

La Metaphor (B. Morizot)

How can we represent the multiple singularities described by Achille Mbembe? How can we create forms of co-ownership between them? As frugivorous primates, visual animals with no sense of smell, a species among 8 million others species with whom we share the habitat that is the Earth, heirs to a brain not exactly shaped to think about the adventure of life on Earth, what linguistic and conceptual resources can we mobilize to try to sense these different dimensions of the living? What kind of language do we need to get close to something? This is the question the philosopher Baptiste Morizot set out to answer in his lecture at the Collège de France, as part of the "Penser le vivant autrement" ["Thinking differently about living things"] seminar, for the Biodiversity and Ecosystems Chair (2022-2023) (Morizot B 2023). In his introduction, Morizot explains that there are many obstacles to believing in our ability to have an obvious and easy understanding of living things. Firstly, because we think of the living as living, always from within and never in front of it. Secondly, because our primary tool, a body made up of a primate brain, was not initial-

ly developed with philosophy in mind. The stakes are high. In this context, the use of rigorous concepts with sharp edges is certainly necessary to clarify different dimensions (such as the classical concepts of ecology and evolution), but at the same time, every time these local concepts are mobilized, they segment the object we want to think of and isolate a small part of it. This is not enough to get to the heart of the living world, because the living world is irreducible, and is made up of "embedded diversities" (Wilson EO 1985).

In a simple world, the reality of phenomena must be formulated in the most abstract and rigorous concepts possible. When the world is not simple, when it is made up of a multitude of intrinsically complex dimensions, metaphor becomes a potentially highly effective instrument of thought and understanding. Living things resist rigorous conceptualization in the style of exact mathematics, and in so doing they call for something akin to what Morizot describes "metaphorical exploration". Metaphor is an image, and therefore non-rigorous. It is not the opposite of reality, but explores an imaginative rationality (Johnson M, Lakoff G 1986). It is one of the most important tools for trying to partially understand what cannot be fully understood. Of course, not all metaphors are adequate. The point is to use metaphors that are part of a deep understanding of the phenomenon they describe, that are both conceptually relevant and that induce the right modes of action (i.e. in line with the subject of the metaphor). A metaphor should never be taken totally seriously: the point is not to project all the properties of the source object onto the derived object, but to focus on an essential point of analogy between the two. Like the photographic image, the metaphor, as an element of language, makes visible a hidden aspect of a phenomenon, but it is also a way of opening up very specific paths of action: by making it visible in a certain way, it "makes possible certain modes of action" (Morizot B 2023). To close his presentation, the philosopher multiplies his metaphors for the living, deliberately plunging us into mental discomfort. He says: the living is a fire and at the same time it is not quite a fire, because it is also a Persian carpet, although not quite, because it is at the same time a library, it is at the same time a coral, it is at the same time a symphony.

While symbols and images are produced from the same pulpit (that of language), their agentivity (in other words, their modes of operation) are different. When you look at an image, you "know", but you don't have the grammar to understand "how you know". That is what made me choose images in general, and photography in particular, over words. There are unspeakable experiences that only suspension and silence can reveal. This is also what drives me to create signs that don't take the univocal form of a calculation that defines and reduces, but rather that of an ambiguous, polyphonic, contrapuntal, polysemous language. Whatever utensils of life I use my concern is to use them to generate forms that support life. To sustain life means to take the side of the primordial poetics of the living, that is, of the emergence of presence, of that which thwarts the expected, of the indeterministic and potential dimension in which the freedom and creativity of the living take root. At the other end of the poetic spectrum is the prosaic, i.e. the mechanical, the utilitarian, the measurable, the calculable, the reproducible. In *L'Invention des sciences modernes*, philosopher Isabelle Stengers tells us: "There is nothing 'objective' about the construction of objectivity: it involves a singular but non-exemplary way of relating to things and to others" (Stengers I 1993). Currently saturated in our belief systems, the prosaic is imposing itself as a univocal, totalitarian power (we've lost the wisdom of balance), generating a probabilistic, standardized, mathematized language

at the source of life's algorithmic orientation, of what some call generalized promptism (Sadin E 2023). This probabilistic language is a language regime destined to become the majority in our symbolic landscape and in our interpersonal relations. The increasing automation of human affairs, the deployment of an accounting vision of the world that overlooks other modes of existence (which are nonetheless our own), has given rise to major drifts and damage, of which global warming is one of the most obvious. By compartmentalizing the sensible and intelligible worlds in this way, we risk losing touch with reality, killing them off bit by bit, precisely because they only come alive and come to life when they are in contact with each other.

"Science manipulates things and refuses to inhabit them. (...) The thought of science - the thought of flying over; the thought of the object in general - must place itself in a prior 'there is', in the site, on the ground of the sensible world and the worked world as they are in our life, for our body" - not this "information machine" body, but this sensible body, "so that with my body the associated bodies, the 'others' (...) that haunt me, that I haunt, with whom I haunt an actual Being, may awaken" (Merleau-Ponty M 1996).

This preliminary "there is", this "ground of the sensitive and worked world", is what I mean by the development of so-called territorial research, which is anchored to a specific land. Such research involves exploring the land, deploying a naturalistic approach through sustained observation (nourished by the experience of prolonged immersion), i.e., through descriptive systems that are precise because they are specific. During my collaboration with researchers from the INEVEF team (and in particular with researcher Florent Martos), I have come to understand that knowing a system well enables you to ask the right questions, take intelligent samples and interpret the data accurately. Having few playgrounds and following them with precision allows us to describe them with intelligence and refine tools with understanding and enlightened awareness. This commitment to territorial research is one of the first things that struck me about the way the Massane is studied.

Zoopoetics (A. Simon)

We are living creatures, heterogeneous organisms, human beings. Zoopoetics is a literary term that helps us to bring to the surface the vital forces that run through us and make our bodies work. Developed by the philosopher Anne Simon over the last twenty years, zoopoetics invites us to consider this engendering of human languages (and various forms of writing) from living forms, "this co-evolution of human languages and the expressivity of other living beings (...) [allows us to see] a primordial poetics of the living". This is exactly the primordial poetics of the living that I want to echo in my aesthetic project, and I want to give it the means to restore itself by repurposing its languages.

"Zoopoetics highlights the plurality of stylistic, linguistic, narrative, rhythmic, thematic and dramaturgical means used by writers to render the diversity of animal activities, affects, feelings and worlds. (...) [Zoopoetics aims to show that literature, through] its (sometimes metalinguistic) fascination with heterogeneous organisms, hybridizations or symbioses, its attention to the sensitive and affective sharing between animals and humans, its concern for singular environments and complex, fragile ecosystems brings a specific and

innovative knowledge - and not simply a representation - about the living, by linking this notion to its incarnation in a plurality of vital forms." (Simon A).

The world we inhabit is first and foremost the world we carry within us. This inner world, now android (since it is worked, traversed and invested by machines), must not, however, forget its resources, its organic part, the *original primordial poetics* it shares with the living. Whatever the utensils (images and symbols, tools and instruments), it is all about celebrating the living within us, on which everything else depends on. In this quest, the other, the environment in which I am immersed, becomes the vector of upheaval, echo, sustenance and regeneration, of self-enhancement. It allows us to take sides with forks in the road, wanderings, falls, flaws, contingencies – in short, with what constitutes us as living beings.

Logbook/Photographic portrait of La Massane. Emergence process n°1 - Documentation photographs

"The hypothesis is as follows: humans developed intellectually in terms of their ability to decipher, interpret and guess, because they moved nearly three million years ago into an ecological niche where finding food required investigation. Native hunting animals are often gifted with a powerful sense of smell. The problem lies in the fact that we were originally frugivorous primates, i.e. visual animals without a sense of smell, who later became hunters and trackers, i.e. dedicated to finding things that are not there. To do this, we had to awaken the eye that sees the invisible, the mind's eye" (Morizot B 2018).

My first day in the Massane forest was a Wednesday. Setting off from Banyuls-sur-Mer, I began my ascent by car and then on foot, with the forest manager Diane Sorel, who also gave me a tour of the reserve, taking great pains to give me all the background information I needed to understand it. The very next day, accompanied by the cool dawn of a Thursday morning, with my camera around my neck, I set off in search of the many beings that populate La Massane. To find these "absent things" of which Morizot speaks, I first used the eye that sees that which is visible: my two (human) eyes, accompanied by the monocular photographic optics of my hybrid digital camera. That's not much, because to see the visible is always to inscribe oneself late, in a present that can only read the impressions of the past, no longer in its direct presences, but via the traces left by beings who cohabit a territory that is both spatial and temporal. I describe these first images as photographs documenting what, at first glance and in a rough general way, I could perceive about the aesthetics of the Massane forest. On the one hand, "portraits" (of trees, rocks, etc.) present an isolated element that clearly stands on its own (with precise details of its size, materiality, inking in a specific place); on the other hand, "narrative images" allow several elements to interact within them. These include the grooves left by saproxylic insects, which are revealed when the bark falls. These carved woods were the subject of numerous photographs and attempts to assemble different perspectives on the same object. I also photographed the dendro-microhabitats, where you can see the traces of the Black Woodpecker extruding from the dead wood, the presence of the Massane cows and the constant cohabitation of the organic with the mineral, the living with the non-living, the dead with the nascent: "Massane is a residential care home, a cemetery, but it's also a nursery, a day-care center... It's everything at once!" confided Diane Sorel. Elsewhere, spaces of light are created as trees die and fall to the ground, making way for new ones. And then, later, at the

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bend of a massive rock that I skirt around from below, I create images that stand out from the crowd: Rhizomes #1 (Fig. 2a) and Rhizomes #2 (Fig. 2b). They are not simply documentary photographs. In their aesthetics, their composition conveys a disturbance of both scale and medium: not quite terrestrial and not quite aquatic, perhaps even a little of both. To me, these two photographs seem to participate in what I call symbiotic aesthetic, since symbiosis is the place of complexity, of the intermingling and indistinguishability of autonomous identities.



Fig. 1.- Aleph from zoopoetics: letters between the beasts A.S #1, Massane Forest National Nature Reserve, France, 2023. 140 x 46,60 cm, variable dimensions.

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To round off this first detour, an aleph (Aleph from zoopoetics: letters between the beasts A.S #1) (Fig. 1), the first letter of the alphabet, already noted by other attentive photographers, grows in the roots of a tree at the Massane along a watercourse that is dwindling year by year. Global warming is here to stay: the lack of water coupled with repeated heat spikes since 2021 are now clearly visible, even to non-specialists. As an island, the Massane remains fundamentally terrestrial, with porous borders. Wind and water, the movement of the organisms themselves – the whole flow of life does not allow for obstructions. Toxic chemicals move, like radioactivity, in this tangled world where the whole is never the sum of its parts. It is this new type of landscape remodeling, initiated by industrial projects, that creates the new challenges of our century and those to come. The vast, majestic, and biodiverse Massane forest is very impressive. While it is also very resilient, the balance of its ecosystem is fragile: for some time now, the conditions for expressing its own powers of repair have been waning, so here too, despite its strength, diversity is collapsing. In "L'appel de la Forêt" [The Call of the Forest], the former curator of the Massane Nature Reserve, Joseph Garrigue, formulates:

"The Massane forest, where I have been working for 31 years, has been a World Heritage Site since 2021, and a nature reserve for 50 years. It is one of the best-known areas on the planet, with 45,000 species listed. We have worked with hundreds of researchers and specialists in a wide range of nature-related disciplines. All the studies carried out on this site show that one of the main reasons for the collapse of this diversity is linked to human activities, and in particular to the massive use of biocides, pesticides and molecules used to treat our domestic animals. Today, we are no longer in a position to protect the areas we have been entrusted to manage" (Garrigue J 2023)



Fig. 2a.- Rhizomes #I, Massane Forest National Nature Reserve, France, 2023. Variable dimensions.
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Fig. 2b.- Rhizomes #2, Massane Forest National Nature Reserve, France, 2023. Variable dimensions.
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Like all living things, the Massane forest is not a clock or a painting, and it is not made up of passive, fixed, replaceable entities that, without the care of human beings, are subject to entropy. In fact, we cannot restore the biodiversity of an ecosystem (this metaphor is erroneous). At best, we can only restore living beings to their conditions of expression, so that they can express their own powers of self-repair and regeneration. Like plants outside their environment,

human beings cannot perpetuate themselves without a world, and these collapsing ecosystems are comprised of many relational modalities that are the very supports of the living fact. The reduction in species diversity is a reduction in the plurality of ways in which living things have invented, over billions of years of co-habitation, ways to (re)connect and generate the life from which we have emerged. A sketch, a simple reminder of zoopoetics, this aleph (Fig. 1) growing in the roots of a Massane tree whispers to us that nature has been the support of human languages since our origins.

Realism is not illustrative - Emergence process n°2

"Perhaps we need to transform our vision of biodiversity to better understand the living world and live with it. (...) Human beings are fabulists who invent all kinds of stories to make sense of what surrounds them. (...) I hope that new visions of the living world can help us find solutions to today's challenges, and live better on our planet." (Courtier-Orgogozo V 2023)

How do we generate these new visions of the world that Virginie Courtier-Orgogozo talks about? Whether we are referring to poetic creation or technical gestures, creations give consistency. They support modes of existence and relational modalities between beings and things. We are already aware, thanks to painting, that on a canvas, the space between things is also painted. This is what Cézanne tells us, and what the *Still Life* genre in general teaches us, where the "nature" represented is for this reason never "dead", but "always alive". To show is always to transform. How, then, can we create images that carry within them more than just the relationships of fragmentation and flattening (or, at any rate, that cannot be reduced to these)? They are the laminating of generality and mortifying abstraction. Following the example of the language of zoopoetics (literature), how can we make photographs that operate at their highest level of figurality, polysemy and complexity, without falling into the illustrative, the descriptive or the definitive? Images that convey the fundamental importance of the entanglements of life on Earth, of metamorphic interrelationships. If art has to carry within it what it is talking about, this does not necessarily mean that art has to be illustrative. It means quite the contrary, in fact. Because illustration often remains on the surface of things. As we saw earlier with Baptiste Morizot, rigorous description and definition are not enough to fully understand things. It is always through the detour that things are revealed.

"So how many paths, furrows, roots and earths did I not take with me to my room? However, when I get home, I often find something missing, and this lack makes my entire collection look out of place. I look for what I have forgotten in a field or on a road, and I find that I am missing not a pebble or a tree, but the circumstance of their vision, the rhythm of the walk, the distraction surprised in its discovery, the turn of thought, the state, the moment. So I go back to the fields to find the state I forgot: it didn't always stay there. Sometimes I find it elsewhere, sometimes nowhere. The stones are empty and the furrows are dead; they are incapable of reproducing the circumstance, the surprise. The state, the moment are no longer found in them." (Réquichot B 1955)

Thanks to the painter Bernard Réquichot, along with a few other writings and works that are foundational for me, and my personal experience of life, I have come to understand

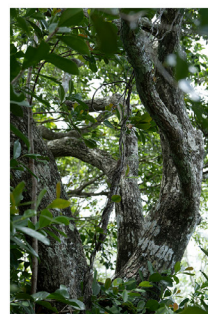
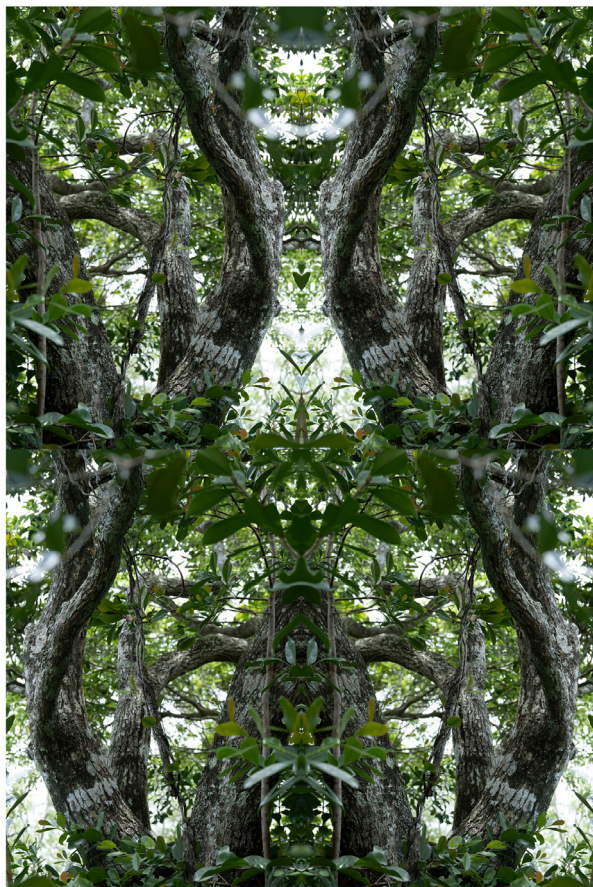
that the possible resurgence of that "long-gone minute" as described by the philosopher Roland Barthes lies elsewhere. Clock time is useful for mapping reality, but inadequate for exploring it. Counted time is not lived time. We mustn't confuse the map with the landscape. It was with this intuition in mind that I made a conscious decision to move away from mimesis, towards a realism that moves away from the illustrative, so that images are first and foremost experiences, sensitive perspectives that are situated but not closed. It is as if the image were made from an elsewhere that crosses the here, to give an account of a here that is both always open and always unstable. It is about taking sides with things. It is about drawing from each anecdotal and specific situation an expression that reveals its primordial poetics. For me, photographic assemblage was the first way of making these intricate links perceptible. Different fragments are linked together to (re)constitute a hybrid original nature. The aesthetic is organic, vital. It is where naturalistic photography meets pictorial inventiveness.

Shadows and assembly sketches - Emergence process n°3

In this final section, I would like to share with you some of the experiments and creative processes that form an important part of my aesthetic research. I think it's important to show you the detours, the unexpected and the essential mistakes that allow me to move forward and that underpin the inventiveness of my creations. Two notions are important in my work: time and immersion. I need to experience the places I work in and the people I live with. It is an experience that involves the body and its senses. It takes time, which cannot be compressed: time for discovery, for taming, for trial and error, for understanding, for digestion, often for reformulation, and sometimes for co-creation. Immersion and time are the foundations of the emergent processes through which works are formulated. Although my aesthetic project is based on a conceptual background (which I have outlined above), it is neither the illustration nor the culmination of this background, nor is it reduced to it. Let's consider it as a variation of another mode, a resonance, an autonomous echo.

In the refuge of the Massane reserve, my first necessary (but not sufficient) stage of plastic work was the creation of photographic assemblages using axial symmetries (vertical axis). This work was based on photographs taken (and developed) earlier, during a scientific mission to Reunion Island. (EPIFUN 2019-2023) (epiphytism as a fungal ecosystem colonized by vascular plants), this mission was led by ecologist Florent Martos and his team of biologists from the National Museum of Natural History in Paris (INEVEF team). The mission took place in the primary tropical forest of Mare Longue, in the south of Reunion Island, between February 27 and March 19, 2023. These images, which had been created via the all-too-perfect mirrors of the computer with technology (and its capabilities) as my only horizon, embodied the perfect prowess of an autonomous technical tool, no longer at the service of my intuitions. However, perfect symmetry doesn't exist in Nature. This process has given shape to a mortifying artificiality, which engendered in me sensations of confinement and suffocation: Vertical axis symmetry #4 (Fig.3). These early explorations were the essential mistakes that led me to the photographic assemblage I use today. In many instances, generating images that frustrate or frighten me, often driving me to despair, enable me to move forward more quickly and to break down outdated and absurd limitations. It is up to me to give each creation its rightful place (is it a necessary step, or a finished work?) and to communicate this as best

I can. Achieving the right perspective takes time and these assessments remain relative and may be subjected to future corrections.



Photographie initiale

Fig. 3.- Vertical axis symmetry #4, photographic montage, with the support of the Plant and Fungal Interactions and Evolution team (INEVEF) at the National Museum of Natural History (MNHN), 2023.

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Fig. 4a.- © Célia Boutilier, Inhabiting the border L.M (rupture), Mare Longue native forest, Réunion, 2023. Photographic montage, 140 x 195, 40 cm. With the support of the Plant and Fungal Interactions and Evolution team (INEVEF) at the National Museum of Natural History (MNHN).
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Fig. 4b.- Inhabiting the border L.M (link), Mare Longue native forest, Réunion, 2023. Photographic montage, 140 x 195, 40 cm. With the support of the Plant and Fungal Interactions and Evolution team (INEVEF) at the National Museum of Natural History (MNHN).

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Fig. 4c.-0Untitled (landscape #2), Grand Canyon National Park, USA, 2022. Photographic montage, 140 x 178 cm. © Célia Boutilier

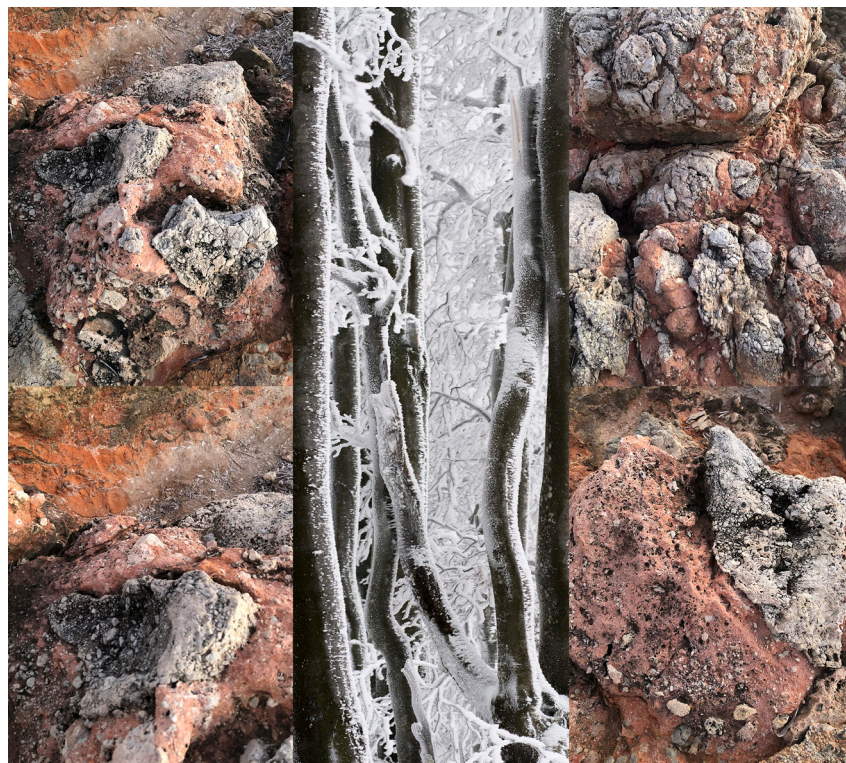


Fig. 4d.- Holobionte (visio-functional unit), photographic montage of seaside rocks and snow-covered trees (slightly frosted), Mallorca, Spain and Plancher-les-Mines, France, 2023. 90 x 92,50 cm, variable dimensions. © Célia Boutilier

My second attempt at plastic formulation was to deploy shadow play: materializing the presence of others (off-camera) in the image, on the surfaces of rocks, trees and so on. These shadows created by others come to speckle the surfaces. I also created a number of composites on the banks of a stream, where shadows, water, stones and wood are articulated. Following my period of residency at La Massane, these initial unsatisfactory plastic attempts led me (through the horror or frustration that they engendered in me) to a second round of photographic assemblages. This time, the process turned out to be non-automatic and freeing, in that I allowed myself to agglomerate together photographs of different natures, sometimes even with no apparent links.

Thirdly, I began to sketch out for the first time the practice of assembling different photographs, no longer used as motifs. Since I hadn't yet developed the photographs I had taken at the Massane, I worked with images I took from other locations (USA, Reunion Island, mainland France and Spain). These finished assemblages have already been shown in art exhibitions. I present them below in the results section. As my work is a long-term process, it was only in October 2023 that I began to visualize and work on the images of the Massane, resulting in the first sketches of photographic assemblages: these images were presented exclusively at the scientific symposium marking the 50th anniversary of the Massane Forest on November 24, 2023. These are works in progress which have not yet been finalized and are still at the sketch stage. Nevertheless, I thought it would be interesting to present some of them for discussion. In these assemblages, the rupture between the different images is visible, is not systematic (Feuillages #1 (Fig. 5a) and Massane assembling #3 (Fig. 5b)).



Fig. 5a.- Feuillages #1, photographic montage, Massane Forest National Nature Reserve, France, 2023. Variable dimensions. © Célia Boutilier



Fig. 5b.- Massane assembling #3, photographic montage, Massane Forest National Nature Reserve, France, 2023. Variable dimensions. © Célia Boutilier

RESULTS

This article presents the conceptual reflections and photographic proposals that emerged during my week-long residency (May 03 to 10, 2023) at the Massane Forest National Nature Reserve. This residency at the refuge enabled me to develop a new plastic technique, that of photographic assemblage of different elements. Having changed my working methods, I began to generate assemblages from images already developed, and continued this practice after the end of my residency. These images come from the EPIFUN scientific mission (EPIFUN 2019-2023). They formed the basis of three assemblages: Border Identity L.M (break) (Fig. 4a), Border Identity L.M (link) (Fig. 4b), and Human Scale (and epiphytism on rocks). Other photographs were taken in national parks in the American West (USA), in mainland France and in Spain (2022) (Fig. 4c, Fig. 4d). These finished assemblages have been the subject of art exhibitions, notably during the SACRe-PSL 10-year festival at the Gaité Lyrique (November 16-19, 2023). In these assemblages, the rupture between images is sometimes visible, but they work as "staples" (i.e. points where, despite the differences (in scale, texture etc.), a coherent link is woven between one or more elements, each time different and singular for each image). The "staple" can be a shadow, a piece of wood, a reflection, a curvature, for example.

An image is always a mediator, a fabricated and fragmentary element that allows me a certain grasp – limited in time and space – of reality. Once this point has been accepted, each image is worked on for its own sake, so that it unfolds as best it can. If it is combined with others, sometimes its own unfolding can merge with the other images, sometimes it cannot. In this case, the rupture remains visible. To take a concrete example, there are two versions of the work *Inhabiting the border L.M.: with (rupture)* (Fig. 4a) viewers try to find coherence and come to see a unity, whereas with *(link)* (Fig. 4b), the obviousness of the innocent, coherent image gradually gives way to lingering septic doubt. Finally, in *Untitled (Landscape #2)* (Fig. 4c), the color of the two shadows doesn't coincide – but this doesn't prevent the viewer from making the connection. I have noticed that when there are fairly visible breaks, the human brain is always looking to make a connection. Conversely, when the rupture is invisible (let's say scarred) and we still feel that something isn't totally coherent, we tend to be more skeptical. Perhaps we are always more critical of what seems obvious and familiar.

The use of visualization tools in science, as in art, leads us to a worrying situation: that of being dependent on a tool that enables us to see what is inaccessible to the naked eye. This is the case when we visualize scales far removed from our own: from the very small (the atomic) to the very large (the cosmic). Sometimes I use these technical images of the "very small" (i.e. microscopic images) directly in my photographic assemblages. This use is referential and stylistic, because the aesthetic of the scientific expert has an authority of its own, and these images become its vehicle in the eyes of the general public: they create a double effect of troubled revelation and fascination - which works at least for untrained eyes, for those who can't read them completely. In fact, any image whose cultural background eludes us remains opaque to its viewer. When the referent is identified, we forget that we are looking at an image. Consequently, when I use these technical images (or create images that imitate their style), the referent, even when identified by few specialist researchers, doesn't provide the expected information: it is a missed appointment. Identification is not the site of any demonstration (Genet J 2013), meaning is not to be found in it. When placed in dialogue with other scales and styles, these technical images participate in an aesthetic of rupture, confrontation and dissonance, breaking the continuity of meaning and narrative.

Firstly, the documentation I draw from these collaborations with researchers enables me to expand the possibilities of fiction and fictionality. Secondly, I realized that narration defines the way in which a story is told, the way in which different pieces of information are articulated and represented. Narration is a matter of style. The style I have chosen to deploy since 2019 is one of hybridity, of assembling elements, of meeting zones, of spaces of contact, of symbiotic and twilight places where the obvious is suspended and where, in a strange familiarity, things are related, and where the confusion of scales (from satellite to microscope) and all other forms of telescoping practices (such as metaphor or zoopoetics) impact the solidity of bodies, the sharpness of contours and the fixity of images. The individual is then the bearer of more than itself because the image is made from an elsewhere which telescopes/intersects with the present. The image therefore conveys the idea that the present is always both open and unstable.

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I am interested in looking for things that are invisible to us without certain tools, because they reveal the complex links we maintain with our technologies. There is a tension in the fact that the tools that enable us to see beyond our limited perceptual organs are actually made from them, they are their extensions. What resides in machines is human reality, human gesture fixed and crystallized in functioning structures. And if the human is present in machines, machines in turn "work the human, crossing it and investing it". In this collection of images, you can see that I took photographs on a human scale, but their framing and perspective confuse our perception of the real scale: with Holobionte (a visio-functional unit) (Fig. 4d), the photograph of a snowy, frosted landscape can be perceived in the first place as biological cells – could this be a membrane? It creates an impression of the aesthetics of electron microscopy, when in fact it has nothing to do with it. Although I can use technical images of very small objects, I mainly use human-scale objects. As humans with our own system of feelings and emotions, I have noticed that things on a human scale are easier to understand and identify. Coupled with or echoing the aesthetics of new visualization tools (those that go beyond our own perceptive limits), these images of things on a human scale enable me to generate bridges while playing on thresholds. I find these disturbances interesting for the experience they provoke in the viewer.

DISCUSSION

"(...) it's important to recognize that nature arouses admiration, wonder, respect and appeasement in many humans, and just because it is difficult with our scientific methods to apprehend and quantify this important characteristic of nature doesn't mean we should neglect it." (Courtier-Orgogozo V 2023)

This article focuses on several ways in which the utensils of life (images and symbols, on the one hand, and tools and instruments, on the other) make it possible to restore this primordial poetics of the living, to represent it without reducing it. By rendering the visible in a certain way, these utensils open up paths of action: since what characterizes the living is variation itself (and not an immutable, static rule), variation becomes the mode of representation of the living (and therefore of the world). I hypothesized that the crisis of ecosystems and ecological fragmentation reflect the levelling of our aesthetics, the isolation of various hyper-specialized and compartmentalized fields of research. I have explained why, and in what ways, the "Inhabiting the border" aesthetic project asserts the importance of connection, of interdisciplinary and interspecies relations, of preserving the primordial poetics of the living, this relationship of coappartenance between multiple singularities. The border is the place where worlds touch, and this space is a fertile refuge.

This practice of photographic assemblage developed at La Massane opens up vast plastic possibilities. However, these images are not discursive or descriptive. They don't carry a theory or a statement, they don't demonstrate anything. They are to be appreciated as forms which, all at once, can echo each other and open up something new: a dialogical, polyphonic, contrapuntal experience of the senses, which can sometimes be a fertile ground for conceptual or metaphysical reflections (on the living world, for example). It is not to say that they can't also accommodate other things, which I am still unaware of (Genet J 2013). I think a work

can also be a document. Several photographic assemblages can have a historical aspect in that they can give certain information about La Massane, over a given period of time (Feuillages #1 (Fig. 5a)). This is not the primary intention of the work, nor is it reduced to it. As far as the production of photographic pieces is concerned, my working method is always a long period of time in the studio, with images that I hang on the wall and gradually bring together. Then, the images either stay put or they don't. And most of the time, they don't. Those that fall (the majority) create fertile ground for those that remain (the minority), which may carry messages greater than those I would like to include. Often, the photographic assemblages that best hang together on the wall are those I hadn't thought of beforehand, whose internal logic remains mysterious, complex and ambiguous. However as imaginative as my mind may be, I realize that this is nothing compared to the immense creativity of the living world and the paradoxical, subtle and coherent associations it is capable of generating. I follow my intuition (based on a form of technical knowledge and my own sensitive experience), to show in a certain way what is already there.

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