

THUY-HAN NGUYEN-CHI

A field of Blue, interrupted. While taking on contemporary associations in the digital age as a vexing and certain screen of death, the field of Blue extends through the history of art with accrued strata of phenomenological experience—from Derek Jarman to Yves Klein; debility to originality; quotidian feeling to spiritual immanence; chroma-key to ultramarine. [1]

Thuy-Han Nguyen-Chi works through this lineage, amongst many others, to contend with her archive of loss; of images that have no physical substrate but continue to possess. Before resolving to any form, there is blue; and even as images start to precipitate, Nguyen-Chi continually returns to blue as a field of pre-and post-perception, an interval between death and rebirth. [2] While for Jarman, Blue is a physiological and emotional contention with declining vision, Nguyen-Chi's embrace of Blue and the fallibility of vision is informed by the possibility of suspended motion—always already knowing and learning through irresolution. [3] Across her oeuvre, an unsettled eye cast in electric ultramarine glances upwards, struggling to focus, slips into the non-terrestrial planes of sky and sea—deliberately swathed from the immediate volumetric pressure from these spheres and zones by the presence of a mediating surface. Much of life, as expunged in the longue durée of imperial power, is sifted through the un-inhabitable, towards “a landscape of liberty”, [4] a field of blue.

There is no insistent afterimage that forms; [5] Nguyen-Chi choosing instead to allow several keystone frames to recur, amidst consultation of historical footage and performance of her forebear's journeys through exile. A mirrored reflection of night-time sky splintered by red-hot embers, “narcotic” tilt-shift glimpses downwards at the topography of an open wound; [6] leitmotifs serving as utterances of an ongoing dialogue, less as symbolic fragments meant for productive montage. The continuous epistolary form of Nguyen-Chi's practice and cinema cuts through accretions of violence as settled fact, [7] syncopating the rhythms of didactic vision and allowing a tidalectic connection to suppressed collective memory. [8]

Ethics is not a geometrical calculation; “others” are never very far from “us”; “they” and “we” are co-constituted and entangled through the very cuts “we” help to enact. Cuts cut “things” together and apart. Cuts are not enacted from the outside, nor are they ever enacted once and for all.

(Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 2007) [10]

Into the Violet Belly begins with an intergenerational theft of vision, from hard drives and flesh. This loss of not just the past but a basis to imagine a future, shared between daughter and mother,

is embodied by an inverted horizon bisecting ocean and aerial expanse—first appearing on a laptop screen in the dark, then later fully on the screen of our viewing. In the latter uncompressed instance, the frame sways upon the rolling waves, allowing the oceanic expanse to fill more of the frame, till the surface current appears to be both in reverse and real time.

These re-orientations attune us to Nguyen-Chi's desire for intra-being, in which time-space and matter need not be cleaved. In the scene immediately preceding the ocean and aerial expanse, tides swell upon a black-sand beach front hosting a cluster of eggs; this horizon rotates 180 degrees in a cinematic movement reminiscent of Michael Snow's construction of fully-automated vision in *La Région Centrale* (1971)—[9] yet to radically different effects, Nguyen-Chi's inflection of the inverted horizon fully compelling the viewers into their shared corporeal being. Adjacently, *Into the Violet Belly* is premised on such essential need for continuous breath, as it exists in the historical forced amphibiousness of Vietnamese exiles, and in the contemporaneous moment of Nguyen-Chi and her mother's plunging into the ocean. Nguyen-Chi turns to figuring the cetaceous to parse this sustained breath, wading through the desktop editing view of minuscule digital avatars partially forming a whale to sense the collective capacity of a lost generation, interspersed with its final rendering in the same body of water she and her mother submerge themselves in. Mother and daughter flit between recollecting the fear of being unable to swim in her initial fleeing from Vietnam, to the acceptance of death as they review footage of their leap into the ocean in an editing bay—braiding these narratives of displacement with the centuries-old creation myths of Vietnam.

Nguyen-Chi's cinematic movement through images and narrative is what Karen Barad would phrase as an agential cut, momentarily bounding a time-space that is not extricable from all others, where self, subject and others cannot be permanently divisible. While this is an underlying ethos of Nguyen-Chi's practice, it is also made visible in the depicted acts of mediation, in the aforementioned sequences of editing and filming, and most notably in the scenes where Nguyen-Chi actively interferes with camera and lens capturing the shot. Set against a chroma-key blue backdrop, before launching into the process of recollection—the torso of Nguyen-Chi's mother adorned in a coral pleat blouse, hands nestling a vibrant red rooster, is first seen with blasted highlights, with a UV filter lens swung open to the periphery of the frame. We hear both voices of mother and daughter, adjustments are made, hands swivel the lens and exposure back in place to focus the image. This momentary splicing of a seemingly discontinuous scene through a Flusserian philosophical gesture of framing clues us into the entanglement of being, that (as Barad would say) framing and parsing can never be done from an outside. Rather than simply implicating an author

imposing a gaze upon a subject, Nguyen-Chi's gestures and interfaces peer into the ethical predisposition to involve us together; in diving, breathing, filming, speaking, hearing, watching.

[1] Nguyen-Chi, Thuy-Han, and Wong Binghao. "Into the Void of Metamorphosis: Thuy-Han Nguyen-Chi and Wong Binghao in Conversation." *post: notes on art in a global context*. The Museum of Modern Art, December 7, 2022. <https://post.moma.org/into-the-void-of-metamorphosis-thuy-han-nguyen-chi-and-wong-binghao-in-conversation/>

[2] Ibid.

[3] Minh Nguyen, "What My Eyes Behold: Artist Profile of Thùy-Hân Nguyễn-Chí." DVAN, August 14, 2019. Accessed October 5, 2025. <https://dvan.org/2019/08/what-my-eyes-behold-artist-profile-of-thuy-han-nguyen-chi/>

[4] Ibid 1.

[5] Minh Nguyen, "A Situation Which Resists Completion." *Passe-Avant*, November 6, 2020. Accessed October 5, 2025. <https://passe-avant.net/features/a-situation-which-resists-completion-thuy-han-nguyen-chi/>

[6] Ibid.

[7] Jade Barget, "Where Memory Burns: Thuy-Han Nguyen-Chí." *THE SEEN*, November 5, 2020. <https://theseenjournal.org/where-memory-burns-thuy-han-nguyen-chi/>

[8] Stefanie Hessler, ed. *Tidalectics: Imagining an Oceanic Worldview through Art and Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; London: TBA21-Academy, 2018).

[9] Thanks to Santiago Bonilla for alluding to this seminal film.

[10] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 178–9.

SIMON LIU

Simon Liu's kinesthetic cinema is borne out of itinerancy; needfully traversing through Hong Kong, England, and the United States as a triad of home turfs, Liu constantly reacts to the transformation of these landscapes. Playing with numerous formal strategies to produce "concrete imagery", [1] Liu works through volume—in the sheer amount of film that he captures, processes, edits and projects, [2] and with the material density of the celluloid substrate. [3] Be it in overlaying images through multiple exposure in a single frame or through intersecting projections, graphic match-cutting the surfaces and infrastructure of a rapidly-changing city, Liu's constant dialing into and away from fidelity is fully, albeit not permanently, embodied; wading through readymade, processual, audio/visual, even "corporate pseudo-babble" noise to come as close as possible to a clear image. [4] Yet, to Liu, a clear image rests not in the stability of the individual frame, but its capacity to move through the psycho-geographies of space and e-motion. [5]

While density and kinesthetics appear to bear contradictory physical forces, what initially appears to be a vacillation between documentary realism and abstraction can only be understood in-situ of Hong Kong's political contingencies. Delaney Chieyen Holton persuasively reverberates the question enacted by artists working against authoritarian obfuscation—*if the violent abstraction of our bodies out of concrete personhood is immanent, can we support our survival by entering into abstraction on our own terms?* [6] To Holton, Liu's adaptation of that strategy and experimentation rests upon only disclosing "the critical minimum of reference required", [7] thus cultivating unassailable latent spaces to constantly derive political resistance from.

A film sixteen thousand splices in the making. — Simon Liu

Flashes of low-lit scenes and pure light trot into frame. In its first breath, *E-Ticket* rolls through a life-span of indexical images and abstracted, vertically windowed fields of color. It never aspires towards pure abstraction: neon orange dates imprinted by the incandescent light of a film camera's micro-LCD projector upon celluloid scores horizontal bands of lavender, teal, scarlet—scanning through years in a second, seemingly leaders into a physical filmstrip sutured over time—all with the fade in of a foreboding chiming church clock.

We sense that we are entering the stroboscopic realm of 1960s flicker films (steered by Peter Kubelka, Tony Conrad, and most presciently, Paul Sharits), this anticipation amounting so gleefully that the image begins to shudder, pronouncing the mechanicity of projectors, juddering. This

pseudo-cyborgian emergence is immediately dispelled by more sustained glimpses of stable, illuminated vertical panes gliding within the frame, match-cut to the improvisational meter of the instrumental that resembles a buoyant Indian *Theka* (groove).

It is through this latent cultural association that we can begin to surmise some of the images, of South Asian Mughal-era architecture (namely *chhatris*, elevated dome pavilions), and of prototypical East Asian neon-light adorned city-scapes, though there still remains numerous unassessable intercut landscapes that pique our interest multilaterally. The acoustic discordance between the regular intervals of standardized clock time and the liberty of improvisation also then clues us into the formal visual strategy of the work, in which Liu experiments with the essential material process of splicing celluloid film in the construction of moving image sequences.

Rather than preserving frames in their original integrity, Liu excises fragments from his personal archive of early filmmaking and photography. He syncopates a 35mm film-strip's supposed playback in regulated 24 frames per second, by delaying the 24mm height of each frame through compression or displacement—though he also inverts this to be lateral displacement. And as with the scratch films of his structuralist forebears, Liu allows these cuts to register within the frame, achromatic Barnett Newman-esque zips of polyester splicing tape diving fields of moving color. This visual strategy becomes most apparent in images of street protest, in which the movement of protesters is inoculated with itself, injecting splice amongst splices a recursion of frames; a truer grip of resistance through physical re-aggregation.

Throughout the work, we rarely experience a so-called full-frame, filling the entire 4:3 proportions of a 35mm image. Only a brief zoom out skywards, sun rays bursting through the clouds (*even then light is interrupted*), men walking down an alleyway at decreasing speed, and the concluding shot of the film, a POV of riding a horse-pulled carriage, the sole sequence where image and audio appear to be synced; hooves trotting which recall the rhythm of the initial flitting sounds that opened the film to form a full loop. Even in its most representational, *E-Ticket* constantly primes our apprehension of its content. Liu is at times, unabashed in his embrace of certain utopic modernist ideals— The spliced celluloid frame raring into assemblages and grids of eliding motion and light, its unimpeded, shutterless movement streaking into beams of pure information.

Unlike the predilection of most archive films to unearth underlying narratives lying beyond the surface of fragments, and against the compulsions of flicker filmmakers that wish to elicit a

presentist event where perception is a process of projected light towards the retina of the receiver, *E-Ticket* is an unflinching and total metabolizing of Liu's memory and instinctual desire to produce images. It lingers in the embryonic possibility of forming images amongst the many motions towards capture; the fixed, resolute frame never a predetermined target. Liu recatalogues, again and again.

[1] Edward Frumkin, "Simon Liu," *BOMB Magazine*, July 17, 2024,

<https://bombmagazine.org/articles/2024/07/17/simon-liu-by-edward-frumkin/>.

[2] Richard Tuohy, "Highview: An Interview with Simon Liu," *Millennium Film Journal*, no. 66 (Fall 2017): 77–86.

[3] Ibid 1.

[4] Matt Turner, "The Creative Approach One Filmmaker Is Taking to Depict the Hong Kong Protests," *Hyperallergic*, September 28, 2020, <https://hyperallergic.com/590002/simon-liu-hong-kong-protests-short-films/>

[5] Such cartographic suturing of movement, space, film and architecture has been pioneered by Giuliana Bruno. See Giuliana Bruno, "Prologue / Architecture / SiteSeeing," in *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (London / New York: Verso, 2002), xiii–xx.

[6] Delaney Chieyen Holton, "Negotiating Disappearance: Protective Abstraction in Simon Liu's Quasi-Protest Trilogy," *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 9, nos. 1–2 (2022): 177–200.

[7] Ibid, 185.

TULAPOP SAENJAROEN

Rife with alluring, bright, and sometimes vexing images, Tulapop Saenjaroen's cinema yearns for subjectivity when the paradoxes of de-individuation and hyper-visibility in late capitalism reach a fever pitch. We are almost always wondering who the subject of Saenjaroen's films is, his constant de-individuation of vision flitting through human, mechanic, and occasionally anthropomorphic, personas and vantage points. We also wonder who and what these images are for, as we sense that their autonomy is often precarious. Yet, even in this willful indeterminacy, we can say the images are at the very least decidedly *cute, zany, interesting*—essentially all three aesthetic categories that Sianne Ngai argues as definitive of postmodern, hypercommodified, mass-mediated and performance-driven experience. [1] They appear to go with the flow: Every image is propelled into a frenzy requiring flustered adaptation, adopting a supposed pliability to be dominated and (re-)defined; open to work and working. Absurdist, dark humor veils and unveils how playfulness has become work (and vice versa), that dwelling in this submission in inundated stillness is a survivalist tactic. Saenjaroen offers us glimpses into oft-forgotten slivers of Cinema's History through many of his films, often seamlessly introduced with a widely variegated range of context (or no context) which then propels the films forward—exemplifying our consistent propensity towards images by the simple virtue of idiosyncratic curiosity.

Can a global port city be a soft place to land?

Notes from the Periphery follows a barnacle searching for respite through a landscape in flux: namely, the port city of Laem Chabang. The barnacle, itself initially rendered as a rasterized sketch, inoculates the viewer into the permissive porosity demanded by global capital.

Saenjaroen, on behest of the barnacle, denatures documentary footage of the port's infrastructure, allowing repeated incursions into the domineering and surveilling perspectives that fuel terraforming impulses. Industrial shipping containers nestled within the vista of a coastal mountain range are scrutinized by a hand tracing provisional outlines on transparencies; montaged friezes of unending physical labor populate the shorelines. These orthographic glyphs recur throughout the work, mounted against glimpses of leisure, the cityscape and signal towers alike, as a motif of constant expansion.

Instead of eliding these spaces and their inhabitants through fricative superimposition, [2] Saenjaroen waves the digital Magic Wand (or Eraser) over these scenes of trade, allowing his object selections of contiguous pixels to weave through one another. What appears to be glitching, corrosion and distortion, with layers of footage that are propelled by their own movement and enlargement, is in turn an active digital reconstitution of the landscape. Shorelines, Greenery, Lorries, Dump Trucks, Cargo Ships, Fences, Checking Posts, glide, sail and revolve coterminously through one another; refusing to reify a dialectical opposition between freight and fish, global versus vernacular harvesting. The seamlessness and mutability of this visual infrastructure even attempts and fails to pulse through discord and resistance, met with the peaking saturation of polychromatic heat sensing and neon-green night-visions of civilian protest. Rendering this vibrant range of peripheral spaces in a singular plane, we witness a contemporaneous negotiation of “(de)materialized, “(de)regulated” and (dis)organized labor”, [3] rather than a belated stitching of latent memories after aporia or the pure frenzy of directionless data moshing.

The work concludes with a wistful return to the Barnacle, with non-manipulated visual sequences featuring an unmoored Soliloquy of its life-cycle. The seemingly objective nature-writing narrative underscores the Barnacle’s adaptativity and precarious embedding within intertidal, indeterminate, and uninhabitable zones—only to be framed as non-exportable, parasitic impediments tethered to and dependent on man-made infrastructure.

... I can erase and draw myself. I can start anew. (Saenjaroen, Squish!)

No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discoloured, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it is the model. (Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image”, 1945; emphasis original) [4]

Squish! follows an animation cel ruminating its perpetual state of potential, never reaching actuality. Set in an artist’s studio, the Cel takes many forms upon itself, wrestling with its unsubstantiated extrication from production (and therefore purpose). The cel is a thing that has to end itself to progress into its final form. Quite literally, the cel is itself an abbreviation, a singular piece of celluloid, a material upon which other objects are illustrated. The cel allegorizes its condition, as disaggregated bodily parts of a supposed corpus.

Saenjaroen clues the viewer into the logics and compulsions of animation, by isolating an essential act of cel animation—tracing, forming an image from its index—in unflinching detail, where we see the streaks of marker from fluctuating pressure. Saenjaroen dwells in this state of arrested development, knowing that the fixated study of material imperfection not only unveils the confluence of labor and sociotechnical practices that allows us to see in motion, but also allows us to apprehend the full indexicality of moving images—its capacity to reveal more of the world than we can naturally perceive. [5] Yet, the Cel by itself is always expected to become more than what it is.

Not for want of trying. The Cel's attempts to fulfill its form flashes through a poetic sequence of libidinal longing, tensing and terse flesh; a convoluting sketch of a net diagram, the jaunty trot of a dog; the inflation of a balloon; the writhing of plastic caterpillar toys in a potted plant. Saenjaroen recalls Thai animation history to figure the Cel's utter abjecthood; its lack of relative immediacy (compared to live-action film) betrays it, requiring too much time—more than a lifetime—to be complete.

The Cel resigns itself, aware of the deep irony of its existence, throwing itself into the insipid ironies of neoliberal self-commodification. It flits through numerous new forms, of chilling Youtube Videos and Self-Help Wellness Apps, yielding its inertia to the value of others. It takes the form of flexibility, surrendering to the pretense of productivity.

[1] Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 1.

[2] Contrary to readings of the work using proto-typical cinema language. See Jesse Cumming, "Out of Time," *Cinema Scope* 97 (2024).

[3] Steffanie Ling, "Tulapop Saenjaroen A (Digressive Focus Program)," *e-flux* (2020), <https://www.e-flux.com/events/programs/475990/tulapop-saenjaroen-a-digressive-focus-program>

[4] André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What Is Cinema?*, vol. 1, ed. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967 [1945]), 9–16.

[5] Hannah Frank, "Traces of the World: Cel Animation and Photography," *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 11, no. 1 (2016): 23–39.

YUYAN WANG

Yuyan Wang should be your favourite cinephile's favourite cinephile. Wang models the earnest desire to study and be affected by moving images, as a form of habitual practice that supersedes any intellectual or aesthetic endeavour. Fashioning herself as an Image-worker, Wang fastidiously indexes and manages every frame of interest independently, inclining her body to scrutinize every sequence. We sense this labor—every image feels tight, or rather, taut, even if they are of every composition and shot size. While other forms of found-footage appropriation and their treatment, namely their processes of de- and re- contextualisation, can often feel tedious, we inhabit Wang's fixation immediately, enjoying its rigor and attention.

Chief of Wang's contemporaneous cinephilia is a meditation in/of our media milieu. This simple premise is motivated by Wang's early compulsions towards Cinema, thriving in the medium's ability to simultaneously render suspense and action through cinematic movement. Cinephilia's activated spectatorship is transmuted by Wang to surf through all other moving images; deliberately wrangling the impulses for complete absorption and Eisentinian physical intervention borne out of montage, producing an amphibious state of viewing instead.

Whilst Wang's practice fits within a lineage of artists and filmmakers seeking to sculpt and parse the atmospheric, modes of being that are inherently porous, Wang does not figure the ecological nor merely skirt the systemic registers of unruly infrastructure. Wang works primarily through the libidinal force of moving images to enjoin itself to another, traversing furiously across the continuity and discontinuity of image networks. Rather than exploit the other senses of Cinema to evoke the spatial, most notably through sound, Wang is thoroughly committed to *détournement* in *découpage*. Working through images isn't for blatant subversion, but in the truest sense of *détournement*, hijacks (what Wang calls) the industrial spheres of image production to move through inundation in plain sight.

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In *One Thousand and One Attempts to be an Ocean*, Liquidity is not a metaphor. Often taken to symbolise mutability (in conjunction with an endless menagerie of values, ideologies, financial contingencies, affects), Liquidity is more precisely a state that we Humans cannot achieve—despite mostly being liquid. Wang excoriates this impossibility of becoming liquid by coursing through its

matter, its all too familiar physical properties examined through indexical images of fluid substances; but also generating Liquidity's laws through non-liquid matter and subjects. Exponentiating Liquid motion upon Liquid motion seems effortless, gravitational; Wang interpolates the wilful passivity acculturated by the endless flow viral satisfaction clips to relish in the seeming limitlessness of diffraction.

See yourself, you are the steps you take

You and you, and that's the only way

Shake, shake yourself, you're every move you make

So the story goes

—Yes, "Owner of a Lonely Heart" (1983)

The zombified life-cycles of petrol-chemical substance haunts *Green Grey Black Brown*, a capitalist animism reverberating through its primordial liquid to plastic form—egregiously through its synthetic mimicry of nature. Yet, what is truly perverse about this depiction of a zombified substance is not the endless torment of never-being-able-to-fully-live-or-die, but rather that it continually oozes through Wang's apparatus neither recycled nor transformed. What are moving images of Oil, its products, byproducts, and negative externalities, if they cannot be fully extracted from their substrate? No matter how many strata of land are raked, simulated topographically, burnt, sprayed with fertiliser, we roil in the boundless, animated potentiality of oil.