

“Once I’ve devoured your soul we are neither human nor animal”:

The Cinema as an Animist Universe

Lesley Stern

Of a hundred members and faces that each thing has, I take one, sometimes only to lick it.

—Michel de Montaigne

A cow licks a man, and an interspecies love story evolves. A man licks another man and a love story turns into a tale of animal desire.

Before visiting these scenes in detail, I’m going to summon some unquiet ghosts of my own. I’m going to tell you some stories.

Let us begin in Amsterdam, at the Netherlands Filmmuseum, 1998. For four days and nights we have been watching early actuality films made in former colonial territories and other locations that were considered exotic, strange and distant. Tonight we have seen films of the “Other” over here, at home as it were, including a film called *In Switzerland, in the Canton of Wallis* (1935). As soon as the film is over a voice bursts out “But the cows! What disgusting cows!” Everyone else in the audience, who has scarcely noticed the cows, looks bemused, and so she explains: “this region, it’s my home; the costumes and dances—all are familiar. But the cows! They were all wrong, they were false cows, imported into the landscape, or cut in from another film.” Her impassioned speech is met by an embarrassed silence.

During the silence I find myself back at an SCS Conference, circa 1990. On the stage there is a panel of people, and no one is agreeing with anyone else. The floor is held

by a young, Asian-American woman film-maker, theoretically savvy. Then from the audience a black man, speaking in an African voice, says, “But what about the cows?” People laugh, but he is angry. “How could you,” he asks, “how could you talk about poverty—in a film about Africa—and as you speak the camera shows a herd of FAT FAT cattle! Don’t you understand about cattle, and what they mean in Africa?” She gives him short shrift, irritated by his literal estimation of the real. I understand her impatience, but simultaneously all the cattle from my childhood in Africa amble onto the stage, and I see with grotesque clarity the obscene fat cattle—only obscene because they are out of place.

The third anecdote takes place in an undergraduate seminar at the University of New South Wales, 1999. We are here to discuss, in a class on Performance, two films: one is a documentary on Coney Island, which includes Edison’s one minute 1903 actuality film *Electrocuting an Elephant*; the other is Jean Rouch’s 1954 *Les Maîtres Fous* (*Mad Masters*). The first film was made by Edison, at Coney Island, to demonstrate the power of a new invention, electricity. The elephant Topsy was killed in front of the camera. *Les Maîtres Fous* (1954) is situated in the Gold Coast and shows men in a trance state, possessed by the spirits of the colonial rulers. During possession they kill and eat a dog. Before discussion begins two women express anger that they have been subjected, without warning, to offensive images. In truth it hadn’t occurred to me to offer a warning; in the case of *Les Maîtres Fous* it was in part no doubt, because I had forgotten—or repressed—the dog scene. I say “repressed” because of course I know that this is the scene that has so angered many African viewers and critics because it seemed to represent Africans as primitive savages.^[1] But when I watch this film I always look away when the dog appears on screen. It turns out, however, that the students’ objection has not to do with a possible racism in the film’s perspective. “I accept,” one of the women said, “that in some cultures it is customary to kill and eat dogs, and that’s fine. But not in my culture. I love dogs.” Debate raged. Someone pointed out that Rouch’s commentary over these images states: “They are waiting for a dog. Why a dog? Because it is a strict taboo and if the Hauka slaughter and eat a dog they will prove they are not men but Hauka.” In other words, it is not customary in this society to kill and eat dogs.

The story does not end here however. The next week slapstick was on the agenda, and an examination of the way silent cinema persists in later cinema. Can anyone think of an example of a running gag? I ask. Someone comes up with *A Fish called Wanda* (John Cleese and Charles Crichton, UK, 1988): the continuously failed attempt

to kill the little old woman, each time killing instead one of her little dogs. He describes the working of the gag with great delight, and others join in, escalating the hilarity. Suddenly he meets the stony gaze of the two fierce women. We stop laughing. The next week we examine performative objects, and the example produced in class is *There's Something about Mary* (Peter and Bobby Farrelly, U.S., 1998): the dog which is killed, performs in a state of *rigor mortis* as an inspired object, and then literally bounces back to life. And so it went. Every week we were involuntarily returned to the site of offense. The dead dog refused to die.

And over the years it seemed to grow more dead. To become ghostly. I could not figure out how to parlay these animal stories, stories that began surreptitiously to haunt me; and I could not grasp the way the seminar story harnessed itself to the two cow stories. I returned a few times, over the years, to gnaw at the bone, to see if I could find a way to understand the festering link. Then I put them aside, got on with other work. Now, looking back at my work on things I am utterly amazed that, even though I have repeatedly quoted Kracauer's maxim—"the cinema is not exclusively human"—the dominant dynamic revolves around humans, objects and the cinematic apparatus. Until it came to *Killer of Sheep* (Charles Burnett, U.S., 1978), and the sheep came into focus as bloody hieroglyphs. That film brought to the surface childhood memories of the farm abattoir. Smells, tastes, sensations of fainting. It brought back to me too the elephant Topsy and George Orwell's description of shooting an elephant.[2]

Orwell tells of how an elephant ran amok in the village where he was working in India. Even though it eventually calmed down and there was no justification for destroying it his position as a British functionary demanded that he shoot it. His description is vivid and unsettling. But what seizes me is a phrase used by Ranajit Guha, in his paper "Not at Home in Empire," which argues, against the prevailing view of Orwell as a liberal, that the importance of his essay lies in its "candid documentation of liberalism's failure to act up to its profession of freedom when the crunch comes." [3] Anxiety, endemic to liberalism, permeates Orwell's essay but his realization of this anxiety is experienced only as a "glimpse," in the "moment" when he has shot the elephant. "In the flash of time's passing and... if only for the duration of a blink," writes Guha, Orwell realizes "the possibility of not being at home in empire." [4]

Revisiting the stories of cows and elephants and dogs via Orwell I rub up uncomfortably against my own anxiety, the sense of anxiety, surely, that has kept these stories alive. The anxiety of the liberal humanist who loves animals and movies,

but has somehow failed to make certain vital connections. I watch *Electrocuting an Elephant* again. Perhaps you too have experienced this: As this massive creature twitches and crumbles, so something in you—some bodily solidity—crumbles, leaving a sensation of emptiness, of anxiety. Indeed this inaugural demonstration of the lethal power of energy also serves to demonstrate the ambivalent power of cinema, as many have noted. The circuit of energy, the electrical charge that surges through and kills Topsy, includes the spectator; there is a transfer of movement from the screen to the body of the spectator.

This is how I experience it now: identification with the animal body is invoked and sundered all within the space of a moment. A mighty divide opens up. Between us and the elephant. Between species. And we find ourselves to be not only an elephant or a dog but on the side of the killers. Of the humans who kill other creatures sometimes just because they can. For a moment, for the duration of a blink, I glimpse the possibility of not being at home in the empire of the human. I suspect that in the seminar the fierce women were articulating this glimpse as the somatic inflected by a stab of the ethical. Just a stab, just this painful side of a pinprick. For even though the cinema is not exclusively human it has surely been permeated by the spirit of human exceptionalism. Bad blood enshrouds the inception of cinema, and its legacy is a haunting. When we watch movies today we cannot avoid the presence of ghosts: slaughtered elephants, galloping horses, sacrificial dogs, carnivorous bears—all hover and materialize and enter our dreams.

HOW DO I KNOW?

Derrida at the end of the twentieth century and Montaigne in the 16th century, in two of the most sustained meditations on the intersection of animal and human life, both circle around the figure of a cat. Derrida writes, “But I would prefer not ... to appear naked before a cat, and then for our eyes to meet. What happens when, naked, one’s gaze meets that of what they call an animal?”^[5] And Montaigne: “When I play with my cat, how do I know that she is not passing time with me rather than I with her?”^[6] In both *The Animal that Therefore I Am* and *An Apology for Raymond Sebond* it is the collaboration of a human and a domestic cat that makes possible, as we might say in Latourian mode, the essay or the event. For Derrida the look is the pivot, and it leads

into thought. “The animal looks at us, and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins there.”[7] For Montaigne it is rather an exchange, a gestural encounter.

Derrida’s essay is an impassioned and profoundly moving meditation. In pointing out that it is the category of “the animal” that allows killing with impunity, he exposes—with devastating exactitude—the ethical caveat in humanism. His essay is at once a meditation on the general—*the* animal, *the* human, and an argument for particularity, attention to detail, specificity. The catch-all term “the animal,” he argues, “summons “a vast encampment, zoo, forest ... an abattoir, a space of domestication for all the living things that man does not recognize as his fellows, his neighbors, his brothers.”[8] He is at pains to stress that he is not talking about any cat or all cats: “No, no, my cat, the cat that looks at me in my bedroom or bathroom, this cat that is perhaps not “my cat” or “my pussycat,” does not appear here to represent, like an ambassador, the immense symbolic responsibility with which our culture has always charged the feline race.” “And if I say “it is a real cat” that sees me naked, this is in order to mark its unsubstitutable singularity.”[9]

Derrida’s insistence on the particular is integral to his practice of deconstruction. If we are interested in how sentences are put together, in what words *do*, in what is said and not said in discursive formations, then it is only through close and detailed attention to specific instances, through a mode of analysis that is an undoing (of the obvious, of certitude, of the way things are) that we can come to know. And if it matters, the way that sentences are put together, if the particularity of every sentence formation matters, so do other kinds of relationships matter, and the particular way each one is articulated. So he is at pains to stress that “his” cat is a particular cat, not hypothetical, and that a relationship exists between the cat and himself. The embarrassment that her look at him induces, is the starting point. It makes him think.

Derrida’s toing and froing between the general and the particular is exemplary as a practice of undoing (the undoing, simultaneously, of western philosophy and of unquestioned human superiority). As a philosopher, he is primarily concerned with the doing and undoing of philosophy, of grand general categories, and his dwelling on looking and thinking is inspirational for visual studies.[10] Of course looking and thinking are rivers that run through cinema always and everywhere. And critics and theorists from John Berger to Anat Pick have followed and developed such lines of inquiry.[11] But when it comes down to it my sensibility is more attuned to and inspired by that of Montaigne, the essayist, and in following his lead I am more enticed by the

mystery of a gestural exchange, an encounter between humans and animals, summoning into our presence today cinematic instances where the sensuous and the somatic are given greater play. There is little sense in Derrida's essay of his "becoming with" this cat (to use Haraway's term), of being entangled in the day-to-day, little curiosity about the cat's sensibility.^[12] In contrast, Montaigne's disdain of human pretension and human claims on rationality, throughout his oeuvre, provokes endless speculation about the lives of animals and the ways in which they interact with and intersect the human.

"When I play with my cat, how do I know that she is not passing time with me rather than I with her?" Two things are striking about this small question: the invocation of play, as an index of relationality; and the undermining/de-centering of human perception and knowledge. Montaigne's question about knowing is not primarily epistemological, it is at once more simple, and unanswerable: how do I know what it is like to be a cat? And how can I possibly assume that it is I who sets the agenda in our exchanges.^[13] The questions he asks are suggestive for those of us engaged with the cinema. How can the cinema imagine the life of animals?

Montaigne's question about his cat is frequently quoted, but few writers have taken note of the extensive passages following. He begins by asking why should we think ourselves so superior because we have speech. Moreover, is it mostly through spoken language that humans communicate? No, he says, it is through gesture, through bodily inflections of the eyes, head, hands. Then Montaigne goes on to discuss individual instances of the way animals communicate: with each other, with humans, and across species. He draws particularly from the ancients, from stories and legends and local gossip and his own experience. What emerges is not philosophical reasoning or deconstruction. It is more like story telling as a practice of musing, an accumulation of particularities, a game, a speculative exercise. Moreover, all his stories are grounded in detailed attention to the world of material engagements between animals and humans, to the life of creatures.

HOW ANIMALS ACT

Does the distress of the Swiss woman and the African man simply register a naive demand for the real, or does it alert us to the capacity of the cinema to evoke material

conditions and relations? Their memories, I imagine, might summon in each case a landscape, an environment, a place in which cows figure as integral, articulated with other elements. The films they are complaining about are inattentive, and that inattention constitutes an act of violent eradication. Their cows are unsubstitutable.

Their absent cows are insistent in the scenario, just as insistent as the cow in the Iranian film of that name (directed by Dariush Mehrjui, 1969). In *The Cow* she is both a real cow, present in the image, unsubstitutable, and a symbolic cow, standing in for the state. She carries immense symbolic responsibility. Yet the gestural exchanges between the cow and the man are quotidian and tender. The only cow in the village, she is pregnant, and he cares for her: walks with her, feeds her, embraces her, sleeps with her at night, eventually spending all his time with her. When she dies he cannot accept her not being there, and takes her place in the stall, starts becoming cow, eating straw and mooing.

What are the transformative processes that enable empathy, engagement, thinking-with, across difference that divide the human and more-than-human worlds? In part the appeal for attentiveness is for activating cinematic means by which we might notice aspects of animal doing that assumptions of human superiority have blinkered us from noticing. Once we are more attentive to particularities we find ourselves looking, like Alexander Hammid in his film *The Private Life of a Cat* (U.S., 1947), more closely at the way that animals act. And we confront the question: Can animals act? Yes. They can act in the sense of being trained to perform, to model energy just as human actors do.^[14] But they also act in that they do things, they act in ways that may be opaque to us humans, they interact with other animals and their environments, and even with humans. They act in cinema in the sense that we talk about all things in film being actors, or more precisely *actants*. They *do* things and they interact with other things, other beings on screen.

All bodies in film are performative, articulated within a larger performance text that is the film. All bodies in film are also fictional—cut up, dispersed, faded in, spaced out, speeded up, slowed down. The theoretical challenge for those interested in performance has been to understand *how* the body in cinema—all bodies, animal and human—can produce affects and transmit energy, how the body of the actor, through disposition, movement, timing, can initiate a circuit of mimetic affect linking viewers with the screen, how it can do all this even though it is fictional. The answer to some large degree must reside in the fact that although the cinematic body is fictional,

insubstantial, ephemeral, it is also indexical of the real, and it is in this tension (between the indexical and the fictional) that mimetic engagement is generated. And it is this body, at once fictional and indexical of the real that provides a vital conduit between the movies and the world we inhabit outside the film theatre.

The distress in the classroom occasioned by the deaths of the Elephant and the Dog clearly bore upon the question of acting. The indexical nature of the animal body in these films, the dominance of the documentary impulse, reduced their capacity for action, for acting in any sense. In these instances the animals were in no sense acting, they were acted upon, powerless to resist. Their deaths were not faked, they were really being killed on camera.[15] The visceral responses—shock, nausea, revulsion[16]— expose a clear division between the human and the animal when it comes to acting in cinema, between the assumed rights of humans to act as rulers of the empire, and the defencelessness of animals reduced to bare life, denied the capacity to act. Montaigne says

there is a kind of respect and a duty in man as a genus which link us not merely to the beasts, which have life and feelings, but even to trees and plants. We owe justice to men: and to the other creatures who are able to receive them we owe gentleness and kindness. Between them and us there is some sort of intercourse and a degree of mutual obligation.[17]

But the question of possession and performance is not straightforward. When one of the increasingly fictitious women says, “But not in my culture. I love dogs,” I’m inclined to say, “are you so sure, can we be so certain that our love of dogs is so sacrosanct that it allows us to speak of dogs as though there were indeed a general category—“the dog”—rhyming harmoniously with “the human”? Any more than we can speak of the cow as though it were a general category. If the cinema is a medium that migrates, moving across borders, evidencing curiosity rather than simply dedicated to revealing the known and familiar, then we might have to live with the fact that different cultures articulate different kinds of animal-human relations, and negotiate different taboos differently.

Cannibals, wrote Montaigne, “do not upset me so much by roasting and eating the bodies of the dead as those persecutors do who torture the bodies of the living.”[18]

But cinema is a magical medium, and as well as murder and anxiety, it can conjure other worlds, other modes of engagement, other imaginative perspectives on human and nonhuman relations and encounters. All things in cinema come into being—come alive, acquire performative powers—through cinematic magic. And we often engage with the world through cinema, via modes of mimeticism, empathetic projection, animistic gestures.

And so the time has come to move from the register of torment to that of play.

ZEST AND TINGLE

“We make each other up, in the flesh,” says Donna Haraway speaking of kisses exchanged with Cayenne, the Australian shepherd, she lived with at the time: exchanging saliva and love, what Lynn Margulis calls symbiogenesis.^[19] Margulis describes “symbiosis” as “simply the living together in physical contact of organisms of different species. Partners in symbiosis, fellow symbionts abide in the same place at the same time, literally touching each other or even inside each other.”^[20] In the marvelously titled *Vesper’s Stampede to My Holy Mouth*, a 1991 video, and in the related series of photographs called *Infinity Kisses*, Carolee Schneemann documented her exchange of kisses with a dog. More recently two films made by women feature such scenes: *Wendy and Lucy* (Kelly Reichardt, 2008) and *Baxter and Me* (Gillian Leahy, 2016). In both cases play is central to the relationships.

Wendy and Lucy is a kind of road movie, about a girl and a dog. It begins with a long slow sequence of Wendy throwing a stick and Lucy retrieving. Though these terms, “throwing” and “retrieving” rather misrepresent the distribution of agency in a scene that evokes a playful relationship between two beings. When Wendy’s car breaks down so does everything else. Lucy is taken to the pound and a good deal of the movie is devoted to Wendy’s attempts to find her. When she at last succeeds it is only to discover that Lucy has found a new home with someone who can evidently care for her better than Wendy can, given her currently straightened circumstances. The scene takes place when Wendy visits Lucy who is in a large, fenced yard. She pulls a branch out of her bag and the game commences: joyfully at first. But what begins with exuberance soon turns to pathos, as separation looms. Their kisses are exchanged through a chain link fence. In this very restrained, low-key film a fence is surely just a

fence. But it would be reasonable to suppose that it might also suggest the prohibition on interspecies commingling. More than this, however, I think the scene is charged by the intensity of affection that has slowly accrued through the movie, so that the energetic exchange between Wendy and Lucy, blocked and mediated by the fence, is transferred to the viewer as a surplus of sensation, at once joyful and painful, not least because although they do communicate Wendy cannot fully explain why she is leaving. Just as the film itself cannot, or will not, explain everything or anything, preferring a mode of quiet focused attentiveness.

Watching this scene I am reminded of *Bestiaire* (Denis Côté, 2012, Canada), a version of slow cinema set in an African safari Park north of Montreal, in which the camera dwells on zebras, elephants, camels, ostriches and lions, our view blocked or mediated by fences, bars, gates and snow.^[21] The aim seems to be to cultivate a disinterested gaze at animals, thus enabling a point of view which does not try to anthropomorphize, but sees them as distinctly other. It suggests the cinema itself as a kind of prison or zoo. The provocation is to open the cages as in the ending of *Eyes Without a Face* (Georges Franju, France, 1960) and *12 Monkeys* (Terry Gilliam, U.S., 1995): to free the animals from a human gaze that is imprisoning. Less interested, these days, in delineating categories of otherness and cataloguing the crimes of othering, I am more drawn to movies that speculate about the zone of human/animal interaction, and in cinema which can conjure not an identification so much as empathetic imagination. *Wendy and Lucy* evokes a zone in which animals and humans interact, participate in the same game, but also act differently, kiss differently perhaps. The film evokes the “zest and tingle” that William James speaks about. The phrase describes the sensations that humans and dogs share though they might experience the sensations through different activities: dogs in the rapture of discovering hidden bones, humans in being absorbed in a book. In each case it represents complete absorption in what one is doing.^[22] They might also experience the sensations through joint activities, the zest and tingle experienced in throwing a stick or kissing.

Baxter and Me opens with a series of still lives—of a house and its objects, a sleeping woman with a large brown dog curled up on top of the covers, molded into the curves she makes, or he makes, the curves they make. The early morning sounds of birds on the sound track give way to a woman’s voice: “Once upon a time dogs came in from the woods. They traded their freedom for food and shelter. And here I am living with a big brown beast in my bedroom.” Baxter wakes and snuffles and nudges the woman, kisses her awake, tickly kisses that she dodges and laughingly returns. You can feel

the zest and tingle. Gillian Leahy once made a film called *My Life Without Steve* and in some senses *Baxter and Me* is the sequel that could be called “My Life With Dogs” since it narrates, via the current pairing, every dog that Gill has ever lived with, and where “Dogs” could be wryly considered a noun that incorporates “Men,” since it includes some of the men she has had relationships with. The voice over speculates on various aspects of the intermingling of humans and dogs, on the imbalance of the relationship as well as the pleasures, on authority and subservience. She wonders, at one stage, whether Baxter loves her or if he is just acting.

We know dogs and other animals can act, and also that, in certain circumstances, in certain collaborative associations, they perhaps enjoy performance. Are dogs, the domestic animals most amenable to training, simply adept at mimesis? Perhaps they have a particular talent for pretending to believe in the human capacity for simulation, over the long years of domestication they might have cultivated the power to preserve the secret of authority (of humans) as a performance.^[23]

Gill concludes that it doesn't really matter whether Baxter loves her or not, she certainly loves him. “I can count the ways,” she says. Me too. Most of the dogs in her film are dead and gone and Baxter then takes his place as one in a general category—dogs I have known. But he is also Baxter, the one and only.

SOMETIMES ONLY TO LICK IT

We see them, two young men in long shot, standing on a country road in Thailand, at night, lit by a street lamp. The film is Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Tropical Malady* (Thailand, 2004).



Tropical Malady (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Thailand, 2004)

Film clip, via criticalcommons.org

The tongue tastes, makes love, forms words. Montaigne licks things in order to tease out stories.

Of a hundred members and faces that each thing has, I take one, sometimes only to lick it, sometimes to brush the surface, sometimes to pinch it to the bone. I give it a stab, not as wide but as deep as I know how. And most often I like to take them from some unaccustomed point of view.^[24]

Here, in *Tropical Malady*, there is no speech. These tongues enter a realm between kissing and devouring: an exchange that is human and at the same time an intimation of something- other-than or more-than-human.^[25]

Blackness fills the screen for several seconds and then the second part of the film begins. In a very different register, in a different location. Drawn into the blackness we are about to be drawn into another story. Or into another version of this story.

But before this happens the darkness draws me into another cinematic world: The scene that is summoned for me in this interstice, this moment of breathing and gathering of breath, is from another movie, a silent Hollywood film where a cow licks a man.



Go West (Buster Keaton, U.S., 1925)

Film clip, via criticalcommons.org

Thus begins a love story in which the cow and the man form a companionate species.^[26]

The stone is a particularly charged thing in this scene from *Go West* (Buster Keaton, U.S., 1925). It enables other things to happen. We might say that the event—the falling in love, the enchantment of the Keaton character through touch and taste and feeling—is enabled by the stone. The cow, the man, the stone: they form a circuit of energy, a production of pathos, via which we are drawn into the magically charged cinematic space. Keaton's world is always animistic. It isn't here as though the cow, in itself and in its cowness, is rendered magical. No it is through the circuit of things, through touch, through gestural relations. But what is extraordinary is the crafting, via the particularity of this cow and this man, of *Brown Eyes* and *Friendless*, of a tender interspecies connection, one that we are drawn into through touch and taste.

How inspired, that small domestic ritual: burying the stone. It animates the scene. It occurs within a local, specific, intimate, context; it traces an exchange between a specific human and a very particular animal. Yet it also occurs within a larger terrain of *the* cinema in which *the* animal has so often been sequestered.

And perhaps within that larger terrain there is something exchanged between these two particular films, on the face of it so different, linked by an animist impulse.^[27]

Almost all the writing on *Tropical Malady* speculates about why the film is so abruptly broken into two parts, and about the relationship between them. In some respects it seems that there is little connection, apart from the presence of the same two actors in each part. The first charts a romantic relationship that takes place mainly in a large

Bangkok-like city and also in country areas near the city. The relationship evolves in a delightfully languorous quotidian manner, there is little sense of narrative causality, much emphasis on the materiality of day to day encounters, the objects and creatures, people and foods that participate in the love story. The lighting is natural or bright, the mood predominantly playful and musing. The second half takes place primarily at night and in the jungle. The figure who had played Kang, a soldier, is again a soldier but this time sent off on forest patrol or so we assume, since we have overheard a conversation between women referring to a monster that has been killing cattle. The Thai title *Sud Pralud* translates as something like “Strange Creature.” In the DVD film commentary Apichatpong remarks that although people think of a monster, it is actually something more casual. He does, however, stress that the term evokes the idea of shapeshifting, of something that can change in front of your eyes.

Where the first half of the film seems to unfold as cinematically modern, the second half uses devices of silent cinema—title cards, written text, drawings, very little human speech. But it is scarcely silent. As the soldier moves warily through the jungle the sounds—twigs snapping underfoot, the wind in the grass, insects buzzing, the crackling of the broken walkie talkie, monkey chatter, growls, howls and roars—enter into him, into us, filling us too with anticipation and terror. What is it he hunts: a man or a monster? And is he the hunter or the hunted? The strange creature seems at times to be a hybrid incarnation, embodied by a naked tattooed man (the actor who played Tong), walking on all fours, and at times it materializes as a tiger.

One way of conceiving of the two parts is to see them as contrasting facets. So that where Part One gives us the idyll, Part Two gives us the dark side of desire. Where the first part gives us the quotidian, domesticity and civilization, the second gives us the exotic, nature, wildness. Where Part One adheres to commonsense categories that distinguish animal and human, Part Two is a meditation on the animal nature of man. The film is prefaced by a quote: “All of us are by nature wild beasts. Our duty as human beings is to become like trainers who keep their animals in check and even teach them to perform tasks alien to their bestiality.” This prepares us somewhat to expect a tale about the essentially wild animal nature of human beings, about the thinness of the veneer of civilization. But if we have some familiarity with Apichatpong’s previous films we know to expect something other than a series of paradigmatic oppositions, and rather more of an intermingling, a crisscrossing of paths and tracks and creatures and memories and emotions. Hybridity is the norm in his films, not an exception. The domestic is not seen as the obverse of wildness, the living are not

separated from the dead by a ravine-like divide, ghosts have a material presence. In Apichatpong's cinema animals and humans live together, act together, just as do ghosts and people—in domestic settings and in the jungle. In *Uncle Boonmee who can Recall his Past Lives* (Thailand, 2010) the title character's son who simply disappears one day reappears and takes his place at the dinner table as a creature in an ape suit with burning red eyes that puncture the darkness. My contention is that Part One and Part Two are enfolded from the beginning, that the enfolding of animals and humans exists within the city and within the domestic realm where pets live with people, as well as in the jungle, where tigers and monkeys communicate not only with each other and with the soldier but with us too.

STATIC FROM MY HEART

Tropical Malady begins with an episode that seems to have little to do with the narrative that eventuates: some soldiers discover a body in a field. One of the soldiers talks flirtatiously to a girl on the crackling walkie talkie. He says, "That's static from my heart. It's calling out to you." "The ghost," we are later told, "is fascinated by the soldier's mysterious sound device." He steals and breaks it, thus severing the soldier's connection to the conventional world. In this opening scene a naked man creeps across the landscape, unremarked upon, perhaps unnoticed, but signaling a surreal dimension: the presence in the everyday of beings who shift shape, of material ghosts on the edge of the frame, the edge of consciousness.

The walkie talkie functions in *Tropical Malady* the way that the stone does in *Go West*. It is a performative thing that enables other things to happen, it links humans and animals and the environment in a charged circuit of affective relations. It is animated and it animates. It occupies an intermediate zone between human speech and other communicative sounds. It is a technological device for conveying speech, but so are subtitles, intertitles, voice-over, the recording devices of sound cinema. It is, like cinema, and perhaps standing in for cinema, a mode of animation. If we think of cinema as an animating process then we can imagine it as aimed not primarily at representation but rather with a calling forth, a calling into being.

It is not only humans who speak in *Tropical Malady*, and there are also many sounds, and many interchanges, about which we can only speculate. "Humans are still the

ones who blather on,” says Bruno Latour.^[28] What is Tong’s white dog thinking or feeling when she watches him so intently, what do the sounds of the jungle mean, what does the licking feel like and where will it lead? The crackling sound of the walkie talkie persists from the beginning to the end of the film, rendering it frequently impossible to distinguish human voices from other sounds.

Montaigne, speculating about animal speech, says

we can see that they have means of complaining, rejoicing, calling on each other for help or inviting each other to love; they do so by meaningful utterances: if that is not talking, what is it? How could they fail to talk among themselves, since they talk to us and we to them? How many ways we have of speaking to our dogs and they of replying to us!^[29]

In the second half a monkey speaks to the soldier, his chattering rendered not in a voice but through titles: “Soldier! The tiger trails you like a shadow. His spirit is starving and lonesome. I see you are his prey and his companion. He can smell you from mountains away. And soon you will feel the same. Kill him to free him from the ghost world. Or let him devour you and enter his world.” Clearly we are here in an animistic universe. But is it only in jungles that animism is a force, and only in such exotic locations that humans and non-humans communicate, that the larger-than-human world becomes palpable?

Benedict Anderson asks various viewers within Thailand and in other Asian countries what to make of the second half of *Tropical Malady*. His friend Ben Abel, an Indonesian Dayak who was raised by his animist grandfather on the fringes of what was then, forty years ago, the immense, largely untouched jungle of Borneo says, “more or less in the following vein” as Benedict puts it: “You know if you grow up in or near the jungle, as I did, the distance city people feel between human beings and the animal world is hardly there. You begin to understand the meaning of the different sounds the birds and beasts make hunting, mating, escaping, warning, and so on. Also, people can pass from one world to the other—an uncle who died recently can be recognized in an owl hooting at night. When they sleep, peoples’ spirits leave the body, and bring back messages, sometimes in dreams.” ^[30]

As the two guys are driving home one night, in the first part, the beam of the vehicle picks up a creature lying in the road. It is Tong’s white dog, he picks her up and carries

her to the car. Next we see Tong asleep in a hammock, the dog on his chest looking at him intently as he sleeps. Noticing everything. Shining white through the blackness of the night. A supercharged thing. Like Derrida's little cat it looks, but unlike that cat it is enmeshed in a "becoming with" world. Then they are at the veterinary hospital and a vet in a lab coat is showing ultrasound images to a group of students, explaining the cancer that is afflicting the dog, and the options for treatment, including euthanasia. In the waiting room the two men are shown, dispirited, upset. Tong, unable to deal with filling out the forms hands the paperwork to Kang. Earlier, when the lovers were goofing around, doing tricks, one of them says, "I'm not a dog." But in a way he is. They are. Kang has entered as a third term into duo of dog and man, but not as an impediment, rather an amplification of affection. But death too has entered their relationship. The pathos of this scene is acute: the intimacy and the pain. But the mood shifts, and soon afterwards we see Tong playing with a puppy in his lap. It is called Tiger.

Tropical Malady is a film about the way in which animals and humans are enfolded in the landscape, the cityscape, in fleeting encounters and evolving relationships. Perhaps if we think of it for a moment as a kind of ecosystem-in-process we can imagine it as at once powerfully alluring, and fragile. Material and ephemeral, a kaleidoscope of shifting shapes. Which suggests that we might also approach it as an animist world.

PERFORMATIVE ACTS

It seemed until fairly recently that the notion of animism, weighed down by an unsavory political heritage, was obsolete. Colonial anthropology often invoked animism, conceived of as a belief in spirits, to describe the delusional naivety of so-called 'primitive' peoples. But scholars from a variety of disciplines are becoming engaged with the project of thinking what a new animism might look and feel like. This "new animism" is eclectic and manifests in a variety of ways but in general registers a shift from the metaphysical to the materialist, a shift from espousing spirits that live in trees to a re-imagining and re-describing of the world around us as a larger than human multispecies world. A world that is relational and embodied. Animism for Graham Harvey describes "performative acts in which people engage with other species or with material things."^[31]

Isabelle Stengers, in a finely argued article, “Reclaiming Animism,” is wary about simple reclamation. “Reclaiming means recovering what we have been separated from, but not in the sense that we can just get it back.” She conceives of the project of reclaiming as entailing a struggle and a need to heal, of honoring of that experience that makes us witness to what is not us: “the kind of agency that doesn’t belong to us is animation.” Perhaps it is better, she muses, to revive more compromised words, which have been restricted to metaphoric use only. “Magic” is such a word. She writes that “[o]ne is never animist ‘in general,’ always in terms of an assemblage that produces or enhances metamorphic (magic) transformation in our capacity to affect and be affected—that is also to feel, think and imagine.”[32]

Can we think of cinema, in the kinds of assemblages it mobilizes and instanciates, as having the capacity to perform metamorphic or magical transformations? Rachel Moore certainly thinks so, [33] and so does Vivian Sobchack. She prefaces *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* with a passage from *Tristes Tropiques*[34] and also quotes the Claude Lévi-Strauss of *The Savage Mind* when she is charting out the mimetic character of Kieslowski’s cinema: “the analysis of the practico-inert ... revives the language of animism.” [35] Sobchack goes on: “And certainly, at some deep foundational level there is something of this mimetic ana-logic and animism operative in *all* cinema—which may well be, then, merely a modernist form of the savage thought that Lévi-Strauss describes as “a system of concepts embedded in images.”[36]

I turn again to that remarkable book, *Tristes Tropique*, and am surprised at something that never registered before, perhaps because in the past the allure of structuralism was stronger for me than the provocation of poetry. It is the suggestion of Buddhist sentiment, particularly at the end of the book, initiated by the observation that “[t]he world began without man and will end without him.” The human species is not the only species and in fact what matters in the end (“Oh! Fond farewell,” doffing his cap with a splash of irony, “to savages and explorations!”), is the possibility of *unhitching* for a moment, of being able to grasp something “below the threshold of thought and over and above society.” Of being able to grasp this (and the book comes to an end with these words):

in the brief glance, heavy with patience, serenity and mutual forgiveness, that, through some involuntary understanding, one can sometimes exchange with a cat.[37]

Cinema is an animating force *par excellence*. It is predisposed towards a kind of democracy of all cinematic things and predisposed towards magic, but more often than not it works to lure us into predictable identifications. It is more common that we glimpse *moments* of magic, or surprising animation, rather than a sustained enactment of cinema as animistic. But in the cinematic worlds of Buster Keaton and Apichatpong we experience the magic of metamorphosis.

ABDUCTED INTO ANOTHER LANDSCAPE

David Abram, in his book *Becoming Animal* has a chapter on “Shapeshifting” in which he writes about shamanistic possession as a process of “being drawn, physiologically, into the terrain of certain stories—abducted into another landscape that would only belatedly release me back into the palpable present...”[38] This resonates with Apichatpong’s conception of cinema as an animist universe, of cinematic practice as a calling into being. “Merely calling to the creature in one’s imagination,” writes Abram, “will never suffice; one must summon it bodily, entering mimetically into the shape and rhythm of the other being if the animal spirit is to feel the call.”[39]

Possession, however, is not always only or simply a matter of becoming other; it also involves exchange, an exchange that often occurs within a charged performative space, wherein the audience is summonsed to participate in the transfer of intensity. At an early presentation of this paper Therese Davis drew my attention to Darlene Johnson's remarkable film *Crocodile Dreaming* (Australia, 2006), in which the great Australian Aboriginal actor David Gulpilil stages, within a contemporary fictional framework, a sacred performance of becoming crocodile (his actual dreaming story which he got permission to film from other custodians).[40] It is a stunning performance, to my mind generated through a reciprocity of the actor as shaman and the cinematic magic performed by Johnson and her crew via special effects recruited from horror movies. No doubt the relay of electricity registers differently for different audiences, but the film through its performativity seems to me to comment on the very idea of animism, and via its weaving of the sacred through a contemporary story of “two worlds” gives a politically situated slant to the idea of animism, and to “our capacity to affect and be affected—that is also to feel, think and imagine.”

Apichatpong seems to conceive of cinema as something like possession, shapeshifting, abduction. And he has likened cinema to an animal: early Thai films “could be compared to an animal adjusting its eyes to a new world.”^[41] He is particularly fond of fables, old television, novels, Thai horror films that are also always comedies.^[42]

Tropical Malady is itself a kind of strange monster, which shifts shape, enticing us into a metamorphic register of engagement: drawing us at some moments into empathetic engagement, at others into bodily mimetic identity, and at others into speculation about what it is like to be a bat or a tiger or a white dog, about agency that doesn't belong to us.^[43] What is remarkable about the film is its attentiveness to other than human modes of existence, to the environment as a space and place filled with assemblages of people, things, animals, moods, circulating currents and ideas.

If Apichatpong conceives of the cinema as an animist universe he nevertheless puts into play certain tropes that question the idea of simple immersion. The film is framed by two looks that, in their rhyming and dissonance, articulate the complexity of film viewing. In both instances the actor who plays Kang looks out from the world of the film, looks at us. The first look, near the beginning of the film, before characters have been established, has no narrative motivation and at first it seems we are being somewhat coerced by this lengthy shot into a rather programmatic reminder that the cinema is a fiction, that the actors are not necessarily there as emotional repositories. But then Kang's impassivity turns into something more playful, flirtatious, speculative. It seems to me that Apichatpong is inviting us, in this shot, into the world of the film where we will not always be afforded easy identification, where “the look” will tangle with touch. The invitation is to imaginative engagement, to enter in to new relationships, speculative play, to join the dance that moves between a recognition of otherness and a process of becoming.

At the end of the film Kang, by now realized as a character (albeit mysterious and mostly mute) comes face to face with the monster he has been hunting and/or who has been hunting him. In this final, extremely suspenseful encounter, the monster materializes as a real tiger. The night is black, and when Kang switches on his flashlight suddenly the tiger, in all his terrifying glory, is illuminated. Fear and anticipation have summoned us bodily and at this point we almost jump out of our skins. For ten minutes, ten minutes of focused intensity, the film cuts between the tiger and Kang, finally holding for an almost unbearably long time on a close up of Kang. He

is looking at the tiger. And he is looking at us. He is not now disaffected, flirtatious, inviting. Over his face a disembodied voice speaks: “And now I see myself here. My mother. My father. Fear. Sadness. It was all so real, so real that they brought me to life. Once I’ve devoured your soul, we are neither animal nor human.” I speak of the voice as belonging to the tiger, but it could be Tong, the demon lover becoming tiger ghost, or it could be Kang himself, becoming tiger, or it could be a sensation arising within ourselves.^[44] But although it does not originate from any one identifiable source it is certainly a mistake to call it disembodied. It is flesh enfolded.

The generation and movement of affect is not connected to character, it is not a question of identification but rather of intensities that move in and out of the body, and between bodies—outside the film, within the film, between the film and the film theatre. *Tropical Malady* entices us to participate in “performative acts in which people engage with other species or with material things.” The film summons us to imagine and experience our own bodies as part of a meshwork.^[45]

MAKING US WITNESS TO WHAT IS NOT US

Listen again to Isabelle Stengers: “Reclaiming means recovering, and, in this case, recovering the capacity to honor experience, any experience we care for, as “not ours” but rather as “animating” us, making us witness to what is not us.”^[46]

Reclaiming the torment of reality represented by those dogs and cows and elephants that refused to go away, attending to that torment or call it a haunting if you like, by turning to some different forms of cinematic engagement with the more than human world, this has been for me the beginning of a recovery.

The tiger calls out to us dramatically, but Apichatpong gives equal attention to dogs and those other gorgeous domestic animals, cows. In the jungle the first cow the soldier comes upon has been killed and devoured, disemboweled, its bloody innards spilt out on the ground. This confirms the presence of a monster. The second cow the soldier himself kills, by mistake, thinking—in the grip of terror—that it is a monster. It is still breathing, heaving, when he reaches it. Fade to black. Cut back into his face, then to a tree lit up in the darkness, animated by a myriad of swirling glowing fireflies. Then a cut back to the now dead cow. As we watch, before our very eyes, a translucent milky ghost cow rises up, detaching itself from the cow corpse which remains on the

ground. The beautiful white ghost walks away, elegantly, glidingly just like Brown Eyes in *Go West*. As Kang follows and watches it merges into the forest. The tree with the fireflies fades to black.

It is this body, at once fictional (cut up and redistributed) and indexical of the real that provides a vital conduit between the movies and the world we inhabit outside the film theatre. I imagine this magical surreal moment migrating cinematically, I imagine the ghost cow walking back to Africa, back to Switzerland, into those films from which she was once so casually banished.

Lesley Stern is the author of *Dead and Alive: the body as cinematic thing*, *The Smoking Book*, *The Scorsese Connection*, and co-editor of *Falling for You: Essays on Cinema and Performance*. Her essays have appeared in journals such as *Screen*, *M/F*, *Camera Obscura*, *Film Reader*, *Image Forum*, *Trafic*, *Emergences*, and *Critical Inquiry*. She is interviewed in this issue of *The Cine-Files*, discussing her work's abiding interest in cinematic affect.

Notes

Earlier versions of this paper were presented at Monash University and at Savannah College of Art and Design. My thanks to the organizers for inviting me and the participants for their suggestions and feedback. Jeffrey Minson and Katrin Pesch have patiently read many versions, and their comments and suggestions have helped to make it a better paper. I am also grateful to Susan Harding who inspired me to think seriously about the new animism, to Kari Weill who shared her depth of knowledge about the world of animal studies, to Leslie Dick who encouraged me to keep going with this project, to Therese Davis for some vital suggestions, and to Tracy Cox-Stanton who has been an unfailing support and inspiration throughout the project, and a very patient editor.

[1] Teshome Gabriel, *Third Cinema in the Third World: the Aesthetics of Liberation* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1982), 75-77.

[2] George Orwell, "Shooting an Elephant" (written between 1930 and 1936) in *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 38.

[3] Ranajit Guha, "Not at Home in Empire," *Critical Inquiry* 23:3 (Spring 1997): 482-93, 490.

[4] Guha, "Not at Home in Empire," 493.

[5] Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 61.

[6] Michel de Montaigne, "An Apology for Raymond Sebond" in *The Complete Essays*, ed. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 489-683, 505.

[7] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 29.

[8] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 34. Some writers have argued that cinema itself has contributed to this corralling of animals into a zoo. Akira Lippit, for instance, has argued that, "[T]echnology and ultimately cinema came to determine a vast mausoleum for animal being." See Akira Lippit, *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 187. In 1977 John Berger wrote a famous and for many in animal studies, foundational essay, "Why Look at Animals?" (John Berger, *Why Look at Animals?* [London: Penguin, 2009]) and Jonathan Burt sees Lippit's assertion as an extension of Berger's thesis to cinema (Jonathan Burt, *Animals in Film* [London: Reaktion, 2002], 27).

[9] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 9.

[10] As Barbara Creed has pointed out, Derrida's proposal (that as well as questioning why we look at animals, we should also experience ourselves as seen by them, as existing within their world of vision) offers an important challenge to film and media scholars investigating the nature of the gaze in relation both to human and animal. See Barbara Creed, "Nenette: Film Theory, Animals, and Boredom," *Necsus. European Journal of Media Studies* (June 3, 2013). <http://www.necsus-ejms.org/nenette-film-theory-animals-and-boredom/> Accessed October 2013.

[11] John Berger, *Why Look at Animals?* and Anat Pick, *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

[12] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 20-23. Although critical of Derrida in this respect, her reading is also generously appreciative.

[13] In another version of “An Apology for Raymond Sebond” he added “We entertain ourselves with mutual monkey-tricks. If I have times when I want to begin or to say no, so does she.” *The Complete Essays*, 505, FN 46.

[14] Eugenio Barba, from whom I have borrowed these terms, calls this a “decided” body and he writes, “The actor gives himself [sic] form and gives form to his message through fiction, by modelling his energy.” Eugenio Barba, *Beyond the Floating Islands* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986), 94.

[15] Like the rabbit in *Rules of the Game*, so acutely discussed by Vivian Sobchack in “Inscribing Ethical Space: Ten Propositions on Death, Representation and Documentary,” *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 9.4. (Fall 1984): 283-300.

[16] The fierce women are not alone. Paul Stoller claims to have shown *Les Maîtres Fous* to his students at least fifty times, and at least one student has vomited on each occasion (Paul Stoller, *The Cinematic Griot* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992], 158). Peter Loizos says, “If I could not do some careful preparatory teaching, I would not show the film to first-year general arts undergraduates, because I think it would put some of them off the people in the film. But I would show it to final-year anthropology specialists without any qualms” (Peter Loizos, *Innovation in Ethnographic Film: From Innocence to Self-consciousness, 1955-85* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993], 49). Bill Nichols says that this kind of shocking film-making doesn’t allow room for reflection and transformation, it produces a kind of visceral response that is ego-defensive, that does not lead to self awareness (Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994], 76).

[17] Michel de Montaigne, “On Cruelty,” in *The Complete Essays*, 488.

[18] Michel de Montaigne, “On Cruelty,” 482.

[19] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 16.

[20] Lynn Margulis, *The Symbiotic Planet: A New Look at Evolution* (London: Phoenix 2013), 2.

[21] *Sweet Grass* (Lucien Castaing-Taylor, Ilisa Barbash, U.S., 2010) represents a very different example of “slow cinema.” See the fine analysis by Belinda Smail in her forthcoming *Regarding Life: Animals and the Documentary Moving Image* (SUNY Press, 2016).

[22] William James, cited by Sarah Bakewell, *How to Live—Or—A Life of Montaigne in One Question and Twenty Attempts at an Answer* (New York: Other Press, 2010), 181.

[23] Traces of Taussig infiltrate my speculations here. His focus is on women in a particular context, not dogs, but his argument resonates. See Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 83-86. Thank you, Therese Davis for drawing my attention to this.

[24] Cited by Sarah Bakewell, *How to Live*, 225. The quote is from Montaigne's essay, "Of Democritus and Heraclitus."

[25] In an excised last scene of *Tropical Malady* you see a man eating another. This scene is preserved in the video *Tong*, that turns the hand-licking scene of *Tropical Malady* "into boy-boy blood-sucking in a gay cruising area, which looks forward to the gore-feasting bird of *Vampire*, a short work commissioned by Louis Vuitton and itself a kind of postlude to *Malady*, set in barely lit jungle." James Quandt in *Apichatpong Weerasethakul*, ed. James Quandt (Wien : Österreichisches Filmmuseum: SYNEMA, Gesellschaft für Film und Medien; [New York, N.Y.]: Distributed in North America by Columbia University Press, 2009), 19-20.

[26] Temple Grandin in *Thinking in Pictures* has a chapter, "A Cow's Eye View: Connecting with Animals" in which she tells of how she fell in love with Arizona while visiting her aunt's ranch, and so returned later to Arizona state for graduate school. Grandin Temple, *Thinking in Pictures: And Other Reports from my Life with Autism* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 109.

[27] There is another, quite extraordinary, licking scene in Apichatpong's latest feature, *Cemetery of Splendour* (Thailand, 2015). Since writing this paper I have read Anna Powell's essay, "The Feel of the House of Usher" in this edition of *The Cine-Files* on Svankmajer's *The Fall of the House of Usher* in which she quotes Svankmajer: "I am a hand. And a hand is a tool. I am, therefore, a tool [...] I am a victim of tactilism [...] a hand with six fingers with webs in between. Instead of fingernails I have petite, sharp, sweet-toothed little tongues with which I lick the world." Film-making as a licking into being.

[28] Bruno Latour, "Association of Humans and Nonhumans," in *Politics of Nature*. He is concerned here to redistribute "speech impedimenta" by taking "an initial opposition between mute entities and speaking subjects and making it undramatic." See Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004), 71.

[29] Michel de Montaigne, "An Apology for Raymond Sebond," 512.

[30] Benedict Anderson, "The Strange Story of a Strange Beast: Receptions in Thailand of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Sat pralaat*" in *Glimpses of Freedom: Independent Cinema in Southeast Asia*, ed. May Adadol Ingawanij and Benjamin McKay (Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2012), 155.

[31] *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism*, ed. Graham Harvey (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2013), 6.

[32] Isabelle Stengers, *Reclaiming Animism* <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/reclaiming-animism/> Journal #36, 7, 2012. Special Issue on Animism.

[33] Rachel O. Moore, *Savage Theory: Cinema as Modern Magic* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000).

[34] "Thought and sensibility take on new dimension, in which every drop of sweat, every movement of muscle, every quick-drawn breath becomes the symbol of story; and as my body reproduces the particular gait of that story, so does my mind embrace its meaning."

[35] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, trans. George Weidenfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 249.

[36] Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2004), 87. My thanks to Tracy Cox-Stanton for reminding me of this passage from Sobchack.

[37] Claude Lévi Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (London: Penguin 1992 [1955]), 415.

[38] David Abram, *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology* (New York: Vintage, 2010), 231.

[39] "Merely calling to the creature in one's imagination," writes Abram, "will never suffice; one must summon it bodily, entering mimetically into the shape and rhythm of the other being if the animal spirit is to feel the call" (Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 239).

[40] Distributed by Ronin Films, *Crocodile Dreaming* can be rented/watched on Vimeo for 48 hours for US \$3.99. See Therese Davis, "Between Worlds: Indigenous Identity and Difference

in the Films of Darlene Johnson,” *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 29: 1 85 (2014): 81-109.

[41] Apichatpong Weerasethakul, “Ghosts in the Darkness,” in James Quandt, ed., *Apichatpong Weerasethakul*, 111.

[42] Speaking of reincarnation and the idea of the animist belief, he says, “In a way, I feel that we're always connected, maybe you and me, we've been connected—not only now, but before. That's why we've crossed paths. And this manifests beautifully for me in fables, old television, novels in Thailand.” In an interview with Jordan Hruska, “The Architecture of Apichatpong Weerasethakul,” *Art in America*, 28th September, 2010, <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/interviews/apichatpong-joe-weerasethakul/> . Accessed 15 Oct 2013. For more on Apichatpong's affection for old Thai movies and television see Ryan Inouye, “Apichatpong Weerasethakul: In Time,” in *Apichatpong Weerasethakul*, ed. Gary Carrion-Murayari and Massimiliano Gioni (New York: New Museum, 2011), 18-27.

[43] This humility and curiosity is echoed in many ways by later thinkers, most famously perhaps by Thomas Nagel who asked, “What is it Like to Be a Bat?” “I want to know,” he wrote, “what it is like for a bat to be a bat. Yet if I try to imagine this, I am restricted to the resources of my own mind, and those resources are inadequate to the task.” And so perhaps the best we can do is to try and imagine what it is *like*. Nagel was a philosopher of mind and he was primarily concerned with the mind-body problem, but the questions he asks are suggestive for those of us exploring representational systems such as the cinema. See Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like to be a Bat?” *The Philosophical Review* 83: 4 (October 1974): 435- 450, 439.

[44] Even Apichatpong wavers: it's the tiger, but it “could be him, the same guy” (in the DVD commentary).

[45] I borrow the term “meshwork” from Tim Ingold, “Being Alive to a World Without Objects,” in Harvey, *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism*, 223. Ingold has in turn borrowed the term from Henri Lefebvre.

[46] Isabelle Stengers, “Reclaiming Animism.”