

# SCREENING NATURE

Cinema beyond the Human

Edited by ANAT PICK & GUINEVERE NARRAWAY



## SCREENING NATURE





# SCREENING NATURE

Cinema beyond the Human

Edited by  
Anat Pick and Guinevere Narraway



berghahn

NEW YORK • OXFORD

[www.berghahnbooks.com](http://www.berghahnbooks.com)

First published in 2013 by  
Berghahn Books  
www.berghahnbooks.com

© 2013, 2022, 2023 Anat Pick and Guinevere Narraway  
Open access edition published in 2022  
First paperback edition published in 2023

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purposes of criticism and review, no part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system now known or to be invented, without written permission of the publisher.

### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Screening nature : cinema beyond the human / edited by Anat Pick and Guinevere Narraway.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-78238-226-3 (hardback) -- ISBN 978-1-78238-227-0 (institutional ebook)

1. Nature films--History and criticism. 2. Environmental protection and motion pictures. 3. Nature in motion pictures. 4. Environmentalism in motion pictures. 5. Ecology in motion pictures. 6. Environmental films--History and criticism. I. Pick, Anat, 1955- editor of compilation. II. Narraway, Guinevere editor of compilation.

PN1995.9.N38S38 2013  
791.43'66--dc23

2013022519

### British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-78238-226-3 hardback  
ISBN: 978-1-80073-941-3 paperback  
ISBN: 978-1-80073-295-7 open access ebook

<https://doi.org/10.3167/9781782382263>



An electronic version of this book is freely available thanks to the support of libraries working with Knowledge Unlatched. KU is a collaborative initiative designed to make high-quality books Open Access for the public good. More information about the initiative and links to the Open Access version can be found at [knowledgeunlatched.org](http://knowledgeunlatched.org).



This work is published subject to a Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial No Derivatives 4.0 License. The terms of the license can be found at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>. For uses beyond those covered in the license contact Berghahn Books.

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. <https://doi.org/10.3167/9781782382263>. Not for resale.



# Contents

List of Illustrations	vii
Acknowledgements	viii

Introduction. Intersecting Ecology and Film <i>Anat Pick and Guinevere Narraway</i>	1
--	---

## PART I. ECO-POETICS: FILM, FORM AND THE NATURAL WORLD

1. Three Worlds: Dwelling and Worldhood on Screen <i>Anat Pick</i>	21
2. <i>Ten Skies, 13 Lakes, 15 Pools</i> – Structure, Immanence and Eco-aesthetics in <i>The Swimmer</i> and James Benning’s Land Films <i>Silke Panse</i>	37
3. Land as Protagonist – An Interview with James Benning <i>Silke Panse</i>	60

## PART II. ZOË-TROPES: ENVISIONING THE NONHUMAN

4. Anthropomorphism and Its Vicissitudes: Reflections on <i>Homme-sick Cinema</i> <i>James Leo Cahill</i>	73
5. Animism and the Performative Realist Cinema of Apichatpong Weerasethakul <i>May Adadol Ingawanij</i>	91
6. Was Blind But Now I See: Animal Liberation Documentaries’ Deconstruction of Barriers to Witnessing Injustice <i>Carrie Packwood Freeman and Scott Tulloch</i>	110
7. Filming the Frozen South: Animals in Early Antarctic Exploration Films <i>Elizabeth Leane and Stephen Nicol</i>	127

## PART III. ECO-POLITICS: ENVIRONMENT, IMAGE, IDEOLOGY

8. Dirty Pictures: Framing Pollution and Desire in ‘new New Queer Cinema’ <i>Sophie Mayer</i>	145
--	-----

9. Utopia in the Mud: Nature and Landscape in the Soviet Science Fiction Film <i>Elana Gomel</i>	162
10. Animals, Avatars and the Gendering of Nature <i>Claire Molloy</i>	177
11. <i>Buried Land</i> : Filming the Bosnian Pyramids <i>Steven Eastwood and Geoffrey Alan Rhodes</i>	194
<b>PART IV. ECO-PRAXIS: FILM AS ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICE</b>	
12. Strange Seeing: Re-viewing Nature in the Films of Rose Lowder <i>Guinevere Narraway</i>	213
13. The Art of Self-emptying and Ecological Integration: Bae Yong-kyun's <i>Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the East?</i> <i>Chia-ju Chang</i>	225
14. <i>An Inconvenient Truth</i> : Science and Argumentation in the Expository Documentary Film <i>David Ingram</i>	241
15. Planet in Focus: Environmental Film Festivals <i>Kay Armatage</i>	257
Notes on Contributors	275
Index	281

# Illustrations

2.1	Neddy Meryll (Burt Lancaster) looks at the sky in <i>The Swimmer</i> (Perry and Pollack, 1968)	39
2.2	Leaves and plane in <i>Ruhr</i> (Benning, 2009)	47
4.1	Screen capture from <i>Bernard l'ermite</i> (Painlevé and Hamon, France, 1931): rendering the charming monstrous and the monstrous charming	83
4.2	Screen capture from <i>Bernard l'ermite</i> : a hermit crab wearing a sea anemone . . .	85
4.3	. . . is 'swallowed' through trick photography. Screen capture from <i>Bernard l'ermite</i>	85
4.4	Screen capture from <i>Bernard l'ermite</i> : hermit crab football	87
5.1	<i>Tropical Malady</i> . Once upon a time there lived a Khmer shaman	93
5.2	<i>Uncle Boonmee</i> . Tong's gesture of hospitality to the ghost	98
5.3	<i>Tropical Malady</i> . The tiger is a hungry and isolated spirit	100
5.4	<i>Uncle Boonmee</i> . The photo that Boonsong has never shown to anyone	102
5.5	<i>Uncle Boonmee</i> . For the nation . . . for what?	104
5.6	<i>Uncle Boonmee</i> . The pose of capture	106
11.1	The Bosnian pyramid	196
11.2	<i>Buried Land</i>	199
13.1	Hyegok in <i>Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the East?</i>	236
13.2	Haejin in <i>Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the East?</i>	237





# Acknowledgements

The editors wish to thank the two anonymous readers for their invaluable comments and advice. Specific portions of the book, as well as its overall structure, benefitted significantly from their observations and suggestions. We also thank the staff at Berghahn, in particular Commissioning Editor Mark Stanton and Production Editor Charlotte Mosedale, for their patience and support in bringing the project to fruition. The contributing authors have helped us broaden our critical and cinematic horizons in pleasantly unexpected ways. It has been instructive to work together. We are grateful to Rose Lowder for kindly permitting the use of a series of frames from her 1994 film *Bouquet 4* on the book cover.

My thanks to Richard Twine, Tom Tyler, Bob McKay, and Silke Panse for tips, references and suggestions along the way. – Anat Pick

I want to thank my family – Mark, Agatha, and Willem – for their love and support as I have worked on this volume. Most of all, thank you to Mark for stepping into the domestic void I occasionally leave when writing. – Guinevere Narraway

# Introduction

## INTERSECTING ECOLOGY AND FILM

*Anat Pick and Guinevere Narraway*

In *The Ecological Thought*, Timothy Morton opens up reflection to an all-encompassing ecological dimension; the ecological thought is, in fact, contemporary thought proper, thought beyond narrow thematics, perspectives and disciplines:

The ecological thought is a virus that infects all other areas of thinking. (Yet viruses, and virulence, are shunned in environmental ideology.) . . . ecology isn't just about global warming, recycling, and solar power – and also not just to do with everyday relationships between humans and nonhumans. It has to do with love, loss, despair, and compassion. It has to do with depression and psychosis. It has to do with capitalism and with what might exist after capitalism. It has to do with amazement, open-mindedness, and wonder. It has to do with doubt, confusion, and skepticism. It has to do with concepts of space and time. It has to do with delight, beauty, ugliness, disgust, irony, and pain. It has to do with consciousness and awareness. It has to do with ideology and critique. It has to do with reading and writing. It has to do with race, class, and gender. It has to do with sexuality. It has to do with ideas of self and the weird paradoxes of subjectivity. It has to do with society. It has to do with coexistence. (Morton 2010: 2)

*Screening Nature: Cinema Beyond the Human* brings together contributions in the area of film that welcome the kind of viral and virulent contact between film and ecology – in Morton's sense – as part of a broader shift in the ways we speak and think about cinema, its theorisation, production and reception. What does the ecological thought bring, or do, to film and to the discipline of film studies?

Morton's point is not to explode the various disciplines into one thoughtful blob, but to work from within disciplines, deepening their scope and reach, tuning into their ecological resonance. Though the task is ultimately a vast one – it entails reconfiguring all branches of knowledge – it can be pursued in a more modest fashion, too, within a specific area of enquiry. We take *Screening Nature* to be one such pursuit within the area of film studies: exposing the field to ecological thinking not as an exclusive substream or strand, but absorbing every aspect of

the study and understanding of film. In the following pages, we wish to lay out some of the key aspects of an ecological thinking of cinema and their implications for both film studies and film theory.

Whether and how cinema registers, records or reveals the material reality of its objects; the place of moving images, photographic or digital, in the audiovisual representation of the world; the relationship between film and what the philosopher Tom Regan (1983) called 'subjects-of-a-life' (sentient human or nonhuman animals); as well as the relationship between film and plant life and inanimate matter, all are ecological matters in the widest and most profound sense of the word. This link between film and the physical world has been a central theme in the study of film and film theory, most notably in the classical theories of cinematic realism of Siegfried Kracauer and André Bazin. Each in his way, Kracauer (1960) and Bazin (2005: 9–16) argued for the affinity between film's photographic ontology and the reality it captures.

Bazin situated cinema at the juncture of filmmaker, camera, and the world. The complex relationship between these three points is, for Bazin, revelatory and affirms – empirically and morally – the reality of the world and the realism of the medium. As will become clear throughout the volume, Bazinian realism is a key framework, which several of the contributors work with or push against. Not all the authors collected here subscribe to Bazin's realist premise. Contributors differ in their understanding of the relationship between the medium and the physical world, and, in particular in the case of digital filmmaking, the link with nature requires new kinds of articulations. Indeed, the proliferation of digital media has exacerbated, not lessened, the need to question film's link to the world. Bazin is a benchmark of sorts for thinking about cinema's commitment to the world. Seen in this way, as a collective offering of multiple perspectives on the relation between film and its diverse environments, we hope *Screening Nature* extends the debate on cinematic realism. What everyone seems to agree on, however, is that realism in whatever version attends to those nonhuman elements in which film is bound up, and contributes to seeing, understanding and speaking about cinema beyond the human.

Film theory and film studies have only recently rediscovered what is surely most visible about film: its entanglement in the world it shoots, edits and projects. As a representational art, film screens nonhuman nature as both revelation and concealment. The ambivalence of the screen and of the act of screening, whether as projecting and exhibiting or as filtering and veiling, comes to define film's relationship to its own materiality: its locations, onscreen lives, *mise-en-scène*, narrative

structures, spectators, exhibition spaces, its carbon footprint and chemical building blocks, from celluloid to silicon. All of these are part of cinema's diverse ecologies.

The glaringly obvious fact of film as a consumer and emitter of fossil fuels has been vastly overlooked in film studies and theory alike. Nadia Bozak's groundbreaking study *The Cinematic Footprint: Lights, Camera, Natural Resources* promises to transform our understanding of film by exploring cinema's energetic entanglements. Bozak's excavation of cinema's 'resource politics' (2012: 1), its participation in 'hydrocarbon culture' (ibid.: 9), is a corrective, shifting attention from critiques of political economy to those of the energy economy of film (ibid.: 9). Here is the second crucial indexical link to the world that has nothing to do with cinema's photographic specificity. If, for classical realists like Kracauer and Bazin, the world imprints itself on the filmstrip in the biochemical encounter between light and emulsion, film in its various technologies (analogue, digital, live action, or animated) also imprints itself on the world. The same is true for nonhuman animals, whose by-products are part of the photographic and media apparatus (from the oil used to power film production, transmission and consumption, to the collagen-containing gelatin of the filmstrip emulsion, or the stearic acid in the plastic parts of computers), and the human labour in front of and behind the camera: animal life is quite literally the stuff of images.

This two-way imprinting process makes film an ecological 'fact on the ground' (beneath the ground, in the seas, and in the air). A revised ontology of the cinematic image is thus one that acknowledges the 'resource-derived, energy-driven essence of moving images' (ibid.: 11). This ontology begs the question of whether film of whatever extraction can be part of an environmentally sustainable economy. So mutually dependent are cinema and natural resources that Bozak (ibid.: 2) asks 'how might an end of oil affect not only the functioning of society and culture at large, and on a global level, but also, as a consequence, the way moving images are produced and received?' In the digital age, images have become a cheap and pervasive resource in their own right, consumed (at a yet unquantified and unqualified environmental cost) by a growing global, increasingly digitally-networked populace, as well as used to educate, advocate, and agitate for personal, social and political changes in relation to the pressing issues of climate change and global warming. Instead of classical notions of indexicality, then, we are dealing with materiality, which both photographic and digital images share; and this materiality is, in turn, indexical in that it refers moving images to the world that resourced them. This hinge or hook that connects the image to the world has yet to become an integral

part of the study of film. As Bozak explains, 'Now, at this moment, the theory, history, and practice of making films can assume an explicit awareness of environment, that images, however intangible or immaterial they might heretofore appear to be, come bearing a physical and biophysical makeup, and leave behind a residue – a cinematic "foot-print", as it were' (ibid.: 8).

A considerable number of the volume's contributions (Armatage, Chang, Ingram, Mayer, Narraway, Packwood Freeman and Tulloch, Panse, and Pick) engage Bozak's view that 'as environmental politics saturates the imagination and populations become more self-aware (if not self-regulating) in their ecological behavior, cinema can be seen [sic] an ecological practice' (ibid.: 8).

As *Screening Nature* is not specifically devoted to the 'cinematic footprint' of moving images,<sup>1</sup> it is all the more important to establish this aspect of the intersecting of ecology and film as an indispensable environmental premise. Bozak's study begins with the image of the seal hunt in Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922). The seal's blubber provides the caloric energy the Inuks need to survive in the Arctic, and it also fuels Flaherty's film production. The analogy of 'a filmmaker and a hunter's parallel search for energy' (Bozak 2012: 189) is encapsulated in the film still as a 'resource image' (ibid.: 2). In this volume, our relation to animals turns in a different direction, away from animals as raw material and towards the paradigms of animal ethics and animal rights. We see these as integral to the intersecting of ecology and film.

In these expanded, and contested, eco-cinematic terrains, speaking specifically about filming nature or of the genres of nature and animal films makes little sense. For each and every film, whatever else it may be, is first and foremost a record of a relationship to the material world and the forging of a cinematic habitat. We are not talking solely about the cinematic inscription of the world but of filmic environments and microenvironments, and of film as an environmental relationship.

Accordingly, this collection does not focus only on nature and animal films, though it includes those too. We take as a point of departure films that foreground ecology in the wider sense of the word. The chapters in this book are primarily interested in how something that figures as 'nature' becomes entangled and enmeshed in everything else. Many of the concerns Morton mentions are found here: ideology, race, class, gender and sexuality, interspecies relations, questions of justice, politics and aesthetics. Rather than closing in on nature as a separate or reified cinematic entity, we think of nature as an opening onto a myriad of concerns that have to do with everyday life, history, the political and the



formal. Seeing nature as present where it traditionally is not, embedded in the most ‘human’ places and spaces – and vice versa, recognising our attempted domination of nature at every turn – is not to make the specific concerns about ecological emergency dissipate or disappear. A sense of urgency motivates the chapters in this book, and we take the ‘ecological imperative’ as the backdrop to the work.

We are not directly concerned here with tracing the conceptual slippage of terms like ‘nature’, ‘the environment’ or ‘the natural world’. The series of readings in *Screening Nature* as well as the collection’s title already imply such an erosion of certainties. We hope the collection offers a well-rounded demonstration of cinematic ecology in action. These demonstrations are, of course, far from exhaustive – they offer a sample, and a varied one at that, of the ecological thought in film texts and critical practices. The volume’s interests span the outputs of particular historical moments and regimes, such as the Soviet Union, contemporary Thailand and Bosnia, formal experiments that disrupt conventions of the human foreground and the nonhuman background, the commercial vicissitudes of wildlife filmmaking, media activism for animal liberation and on the issue of climate change, and the convergence of film form, ecological and religious practice.

If there is an arc to *Screening Nature*, it is the idea that cinema (like other arts) is ecologically oriented and zoomorphic: it expresses the interconnectedness of human and other life forms, our implication in and filtering through material networks that enable and bind us. Film practice, history and theory need to address the zoomorphism of the cinematic medium, not in order to undo the human in a bid for naïve ‘renaturalisation’, but because human exceptionalism makes for poor cinema, for a less interesting and certainly less relevant art. Ecocinema at its best, we would argue, interrogates the chafing of the human against (and along with) everything else.

## The Nature of Film Studies

The contributions to this book are part of an effort to inscribe ecology and nature back into film studies, back to where nature has always been, in the hope of encouraging to normalise, even institutionalise, a more ecocentric attention to cinema – attention to the interdependence of the natural world and humans within it as part of the study and practice of film. For this purpose, green and activist films are not privileged categories. Rather, we are interested in how political, ethical and formal discourses come to bear on cinema’s relation to nonhuman nature and

nonhuman beings. We are also keen to show how aesthetic concerns are inseparable from the material and formal possibilities inherent in nature, which film responds to or invokes. Finally, as discussed above, film as environmental practice signals beyond the textual and symbolic properties of nature towards the web of material and social interactions that underpin the production and dissemination of film. It is not, therefore, simply a matter of claiming that nature is central to film but of showing how film and nature commingle in culturally situated and context-specific ways.

As much of film studies carries on anthropocentrically in ways that single out humanity and obscure the convoluted relations between humans and what Donna Haraway (2008) calls our nonhuman 'mess-mates', a growing body of work in the field is acknowledging the mutual exchanges between human and nonhuman animals and their environments. Gregg Mitman's *Reel Nature* (1999), Derek Bousé's *Wildlife Films* (2000), David Ingram's *Green Screen* (2004), Sean Cubitt's *EcoMedia* (2005), Cynthia Chris's *Watching Wildlife* (2006), Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann's *Ecology and Popular Film* (2009), Scott MacDonald's *Adventures of Perception* (2009), Paula Willoquet-Maricondi's *Framing the World* (2010), Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner's *Cinema and Landscape* (2010) and Stephen Rust, Salma Monani, and Cubitt's *Ecocinema: Theory and Practice* (2012) all link the natural environment to the moving image, while Akira Mizuta Lippit's *Electric Animal* (2000), Jonathan Burt's *Animals in Film* (2004), Raymond Bellour's *Le Corps du cinéma* (2009), Anat Pick's *Creaturely Poetics* (2011) and Laura McMahon and Michael Lawrence's forthcoming *Animal Life and the Moving Image* (2014) rethink film via the 'question of the animal'.<sup>2</sup>

This partial list is ostensibly divided between texts that consider nonhuman nature, and scholarship undertaking an 'animal studies' approach (as well as animal studies' intersectional, politically and ethically engaged sister area of 'critical animal studies').<sup>3</sup> Within and without film studies there is often little rapport between the fields of (critical) animal studies and environmentalism and/or ecocriticism. Our aim here is to query and blur these distinctions by bringing together an assemblage of film studies, critical animal studies, and ecocritical considerations. Collectively, these approaches could be termed 'posthuman' in the sense of looking beyond, queering or contesting cinematic forms that simply corroborate human exceptionalism, both in terms of what the films address and the ways in which they address it. This is what is meant by the subtitle 'cinema beyond the human'.

The theoretical implications of a nonhuman or posthuman cinema to the field of film studies are profound and challenge the conventionally

humanist and anthropocentric parameters of the discipline. The book's underlying argument is, then, that by ignoring the place of the non-human within cinematic imagery and narrative, film studies commits itself to an unduly narrow audio-visual economy that overwrites and reduces the cinema's communicative potential. Even at its most political, film studies has tended to underplay the intertwining of historical, social and ideological concerns with the environments in which they arise and which they constitute. By treating nonhuman environments as mere backdrop or *mise-en-scène* – at worst as available and expendable raw material – our thinking about cinema divides up the frame between the human and the nonhuman in ways that overlook their essential interdependence and reinforces the culture/nature dualism. It ascribes to nature and humans alike a 'naturalness' they do not possess.<sup>4</sup> *Screening Nature* strives to continue the work of revising some of the most deeply entrenched anthropocentric and, in Tom Tyler's (2013) term, 'anthroponormative' hermeneutics of film studies and apply them across the board to all of the medium's carbon-based components, from humans to animals to the film screen itself.

Several principles guided us in selecting the chapters for the book. We wanted to discuss a range of films that do not readily fit into a single genre, style or mode of production. While many of the films do foreground nonhuman animals and the environment, the authors' response to them is not limited to ecological tropes. Addressing the nonhuman is inseparable from addressing the films' broader range of concerns, from sexuality, to science, religion, social justice, aesthetics, ideology and ethics. The theoretical breadth of *Screening Nature* is thus considerable and draws on film history and theory, philosophy, cultural studies, animal studies, ecocriticism, queer theory and religious studies. The collection is also internationally intersectional. Nash (2008: 2) defines 'intersectionality' as 'the notion that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class, and sexuality', while for Twine (2010: 398) the intersectional approach is one 'that attempts to outline interdependencies between social categories of power'. An intersectional view considers critical and identity categories, as well as the idea of categorisation itself, as complex and multivalent. Prevalent in the areas of feminism and sociology since the 1990s, intersectionality has become 'a primary framework for thinking about multiple identities and the interconnectedness of various systems of oppression' (Mehrotra 2010: 417). Our own use of the term does not simply intersect ecology and film, but insists on the need to think through cinematic ecology with race, gender, class and species identities. That the natural world is neither the stage for nor an add-on

to other critical preoccupations, is, perhaps, the collection's main contention. If we provide a concrete sense of the interconnectedness, complexity and promise of the ecological thought within film, then we will have succeeded in achieving our goal.

There are a number of specific objectives we wish to fulfil: firstly, we aim to call on film studies to take up nonhuman nature and nonhuman animals as proper cinematic subjects that necessarily impact on our traditional ideas about narrative, character, spectatorship and cinematic ethics; secondly, we wish to challenge pervasive clichés about nature's 'indifference', since many of the films under discussion ascribe an agency to nature, materially, symbolically or animistically.<sup>5</sup> Jane Bennett's (2010) work on 'vibrant matter' provides a useful framework for viewing the material environment as an undervalued 'actant' with which human beings and cultures intersect and interact. Similarly, we might consider Katherine Hayles's constrained constructivism, which, while acknowledging that our comprehension of nature is determined by our physical, cultural and intellectual make-up, asserts that the natural world places limits on how we read it (Hayles 1995). Our third objective in *Screening Nature* is to challenge the idea that the nonhuman is ahistorical or immutable, a claim frequently made about nature, and which the interconnected approach aims to refute.

In filmic terms, the distinction between human and nonhuman nature can be configured as the tension between the predominance of narrative and landscape (Lefebvre 2006). As we have suggested here, reading films with an ecological eye partly means learning to see beyond the confines of narrative and story, whose natural tendency, as it were, is to suppress the nonhuman elements by relegating them to the role of setting, background or prop. At the same time, it means no longer viewing landscape – itself already a laden human construction – as passive or mute.

## **Root and Branch Interdisciplinarity: Film, Ecocriticism and Animal Studies**

This is the first time, to our knowledge, that a volume on film comprises chapters on both nature and the environment, and on nonhuman animals. By placing such chapters side by side, we are fostering a much-needed conversation about nature and the nonhuman, not only among film scholars, but also, in a number of chapters, between practitioners of the not always happily partnered disciplines of ecocriticism and critical animal studies. *Screening Nature's* mixture of contributions on

the natural environment, animals, or both, reflects the various intersectional concerns about race, class, sexuality and politics. The mix is intentional and, while not intended to be harmonious, the collection is also a kind of community of ideas that we believe should inform a comprehensive look at ecology, posthumanism, animal liberation, and film. *Screening Nature* thus engages with the interpenetration of different structures of domination, including those among humans, but is underpinned by philosophical concerns surrounding species-based domination: the marginalisation, exploitation and oppression of the nonhuman by the human.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, although a number of the authors contributing to *Screening Nature* come neither from the field of critical animal studies nor from that of ecocriticism, it is these two approaches that, in conception and inspiration, inform the collection.

Ecocritics and animal studies scholars, however, have not always seen eye-to-eye. Generally speaking, environmental criticism does not focus on obligations to particular animals. In comparison, critical animal studies will often insist on a commitment to veganism and on ending, rather than ameliorating or managing the conditions of, human use of animals. For environmentalists, concerns over species, populations and ecosystems often trump ethical obligations towards individual animals. Animal liberation and rights discourses regard the relation to particular nonhuman persons as primary. Increasingly however, there is a need, theoretical as well as practical, to find ways of connecting the fields. Matthew Calarco (2009; 2012) works towards what he calls an ethics of 'universal consideration' that accommodates both approaches: '[R]ather than being in opposition to each other, animal ethics and environmental ethics would be seen as two distinct but complementary forms of ethical inquiry and practice that seek to challenge the limits of anthropocentrism' (Calarco 2009: 83). *Screening Nature* aims for a nonanthropocentric critique in which:

[A]nimal ethics becomes but one way among others of thinking through ethics, with specific attention given to the manner in which various animals might have a claim on us and what consequences follow from responding to such claims. That other kinds of beings, systems, or relational structures might have a claim on us is not ruled out but rather is allowed in principle under an ethics of universal consideration. (ibid.)

By placing side by side chapters that focus on the environment and others that focus on nonhuman animals, we are fostering a broader debate that confronts the differences and commonalities between the two approaches whose methods, underlying principles and conclusions



sometimes chime and sometimes conflict. When writing about the moving image, whether one focuses on the environment or on non-human animals, we share a common belief in the significance of the nonhuman world to the work of film studies. Such posthuman commitments are important at a time when environmentalism and animal rights alike are becoming more mainstream yet, paradoxically, ecologically damaging practices and animal welfare standards (as well as the ethical standards for animals in entertainment, including film and television) are arguably at a serious low (Molloy 2013).

## Chapter Outlines

The notion of an environmentally engaged cinema moves beyond what a film shows and tells us about nature towards the web of material and social involvements that underpin its production and dissemination. Film's environmental acknowledgement, as the fifteen chapters in this volume show, is manifold and does not, as we have already indicated, adhere to a particular genre or style. The book's four parts – Eco-poetics, Zoē-tropes, Eco-politics, and Eco-praxis – highlight different kinds of environmental acknowledgement. The mix of theoretical pieces, eco-philosophy, critical theory and close readings, conveys the diversity of work in the field of posthumanist film studies.

Part I, 'Eco-poetics', explores the links between filmic form and the environment. The section begins with Anat Pick's 'Three Worlds', on the ontologies of cinematic worldhood. Using Heidegger's concept of worldhood (*Weltlichkeit*) and Bazin's idea of 'the world in its own image', the chapter explores how different films that feature nature and animals invoke different understandings of the relationship between human beings and the world: the BBC's natural history series' imperial-planetary eye that oscillates between an 'acquisitive' and an 'evocative' mode; Werner Herzog's *Grizzly Man* (2005) that romantically pits 'man' against 'nature'; and the activist documentary *Earthlings* (2005), whose holistic view of a shared life on earth strives towards a multispecies conception of worldhood.

A different view of the bond between image and world is pursued in Silke Panse's chapter on experimental filmmaker James Benning. 'Images are not separated from what is depicted in them; they are part of the world', Panse writes. In this, and the companion interview with Benning (Chapter 3), Panse explores 'eco-aesthetic' cinema that opens out from the image onto the world that contains it. Read against the dominant understanding of Benning as a structural filmmaker, Panse

retrieves the singularity and materiality that Benning's films conjure. Her critique of Bazin's realism through the idiom of eco-aesthetics insists on the consistency and continuity between the framed, profilmic event, and the world beyond (behind) the camera: 'The filmmaker or artist, the work and the "context" or the "environment"', she writes, 'all belong to the same plane of immanence', and so, '[f]ilm and video needs to leave pure aesthetics'.

Part II, 'Zoë-tropes: Envisioning the Nonhuman', examines the different configurations of the nonhuman in film. The double invocation of the cinematic apparatus in the reference to the zoetrope and the allusion to 'mere' animal life via the Greek concept of zoë (naked life, in opposition to the moral and political life, or 'bios' of man), turns to the ironies and complexities of depicting animal life on screen. James Leo Cahill's chapter tackles the visually startling aquatic film-worlds of Jean Painlevé and Geneviève Hamon via the ambiguities of the concept of anthropomorphism. 'The cinema', Cahill writes, 'may be an anthropomorphic machine, but this does not necessarily make it an anthropocentric machine'. The possibilities inherent in the anthropomorphic that emphasise the plastic, transformative, morphing and morphising qualities of cinema make it a fascinating, frequently misunderstood, trope. The shaping and reshaping that takes place in film, 'the plasticity of beings and things revealed by the cinematograph', discloses the fissures at the heart of the anthropomorphic as internally haunted, uncanny, or – in Cahill's use of Freud's uncanny and Lacan's *homme-sick* – the internal difference, longing, and malaise/mal-ease that determine human and nonhuman identity: '[T]he ambivalence of cinematic anthropomorphism, like *homme-sickness* and the *Unheimliche*, prevents it from becoming too stable, static, or fixed'.

The accommodation of uncanny elements in the realm of the natural and the everyday is the subject of May Adadol Ingawanij's piece on 'animistic realism' in Apichatpong Weerasethakul. Apichatpong's aesthetics is closely tied to the jungle in its mythic, semiotic, folkloric and biological diversity as an ecosystem comprising human and nonhuman entities. Using Adrian Martin's notion of *cinematic dispositif*, Ingawanij explores Apichatpong's intermedial cinema as, 'a "catalogue" of references, citations and allusions – an ensemble that presents within itself a diverse array of preexisting media, texts, myths, stories, rituals and other communicative practices'. This 'logic of assemblage' traverses past and present, material and immaterial, human and nonhuman, performing the various elements equally and realistically. The supernatural in Apichatpong's cinema is therefore neither fantastic nor haunting, but historically situated, embedded in the context of Thai colonial and

postcolonial politics in the north-eastern region of Isaan, where many of Apichatpong's films are placed.

In their study of the 'activist gaze', Carrie Packwood Freeman and Scott Tulloch tackle the place of film in the biopolitics of nonhuman life. Examining the rhetoric and witnessing strategies of prominent animal liberation documentaries, *The Cove* (2009), *Dealing Dogs* (2006), *Fowl Play* (2009), *The Witness* (2004), *Peaceable Kingdom* (2004), *Behind the Mask* (2006) and *Earthlings*, the authors claim that these films operate through a 'reverse panopticon', surveilling and exposing the concealed cruel practices of politically and economically influential animal industries, and striving to subvert, even overturn, power relations between industry, its nonhuman victims, the viewing public, and animal activists. As '[b]arriers to seeing are not just material . . . [but] also conceptual', the 'seeing' that these activist films make possible disrupts the 'hegemony of humanism'. The films push against human/nonhuman dualisms to 'promote animal rights ideology, and function as posthumanist cinema'.

Part II closes with a piece on the history of Antarctic animal imagery. Elizabeth Leane and Stephen Nicol's study ponders the unique place of 'the contradictions and incongruities that frequently characterise human relationships with animals' in early Antarctic exploration films. The gap between onscreen animal attractions – including dogs, ponies and native species like the Emperor penguin – and their (offscreen) killing and consumption by the expedition complicates our understanding of human–animal relations and its portrayal in film. The 'central narrative link between wildlife and the human drama – the reduction of the former to food to enable the latter – was not one that the expeditions were keen to showcase visually'. Two main examples of early Antarctic films, *90° South* (1933) and *South* (1919), establish many of the conventions of the wildlife film to come, including a composite narrative, characterisation and storytelling, anthropomorphic identification, the appeal to recognisable gender roles, and an enduring fondness for penguins (see *March of the Penguins* [2005] and *Happy Feet* [2006]).

Sophie Mayer's chapter 'Dirty Pictures', which opens Part III on the eco-politics of film, is a deft illustration of the volume's intersectional bias. Mayer moves across registers, using the migratory agency of water to explore desiring exchanges between bodies – personal, geographic, and political – through the idea of miasmatic contagion. In the films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Lucrecia Martel, Tsai Ming-liang and Sarah Turner, Mayer claims, water dampens conventions of Euro-Western narrativity and heteronormativity, not merely by seeping through boundaries but by the very fact of water's pollutedness. Sexual

and neoliberal politics are explored via the symbolism and osmosis of water as a queer and queering medium, the subject of exchanges between personal and national bodies.

Elana Gomel chooses to write about a lesser-known genre of Soviet cinema: science fiction (SF). Soviet SF has recently enjoyed a small revival (in 2011 the British Film Institute ran a retrospective of the genre), not only because of the new availability of Soviet SF titles but also because SF is a significant testing ground for the ideological permutations of what Gomel calls 'Soviet civilization', a platform for communicating many of the Soviet Union's political hopes and dreams in the making and unmaking of the Communist utopia.<sup>7</sup> Gomel challenges accepted wisdoms about Soviet cinema, in particular reductionist dismissals of its socialist realist style, and opens up the Stalinist and post-Stalinist period to formal and political reevaluation. The relationship to nature emerges as an index of Soviet utopianism, its aspirations, failures and achievements.

If the U.S. is in more ways than one a mirror image of the USSR, Claire Molloy's chapter on *Avatar* (2009) examines America's ideological investment in nature. As with its Soviet counterpart, American SF reflects the self-fashioning of the American empire. Hollywood constructs nature as both fragile and retaliatory. Molloy focuses on the relationship between gender and narratives of domination that underlie *Avatar's* treatment of nature and nonhuman animals. While much has been written about *Avatar's* colonial and racial discourses with regard to 'indigenous' bodies, less has been said about the intersecting of colonising and gendering discourses, and the domination of animals. By examining 'how fantasies of colonisation sustain, and even promote as environmentally sensitive, the subjugation of animals through the intersections of gender and race', Molloy brings out some of the ideological and philosophical tensions between environmental and animal ethics.

In the last chapter of this section, Steven Eastwood and Geoffrey Alan Rhodes reflect on the making of their codirected film *Buried Land* (2010). Eastwood and Rhodes question what it means to document the story of the Bosnian pyramids, a cluster of pyramid-shaped hills near the town of Visoko. The making of these 'ancient' pyramids, a combination of local mythmaking, archaeological heresy and entrepreneurship in postwar Bosnia, becomes the subject of the documentary, self-referentially entangled in questions of representation and truth. The blurred boundaries between natural and manufactured topographies parallel debates on the alleged transparency of documentary truth. The story of *Buried Land* therefore comes to mirror the story of the Visoko

pyramids, the production of film and the production of landscape, both of which are processes that unsettle the notion of 'naturalness' – the present and unstaged reality – of documentary film.

Part IV, 'Eco-praxis', turns to filmmaking itself as a form of environmental practice. *Screening Nature* comes full circle with Guinevere Narraway's discussion of 'ecopoiesis' in the work of experimental filmmaker Rose Lowder. Lowder's work is informed by an ecological ethic involving a production practice that has a low impact on the environment. Moreover, her method is consciously and politically embodied and emplaced. She films in local and familiar places and accepts the accidental technical, natural and social events that occur during and after filmmaking, responding to the exigencies of her tools and the environment by incorporating them in her work. Yet Lowder's filmmaking is nevertheless deeply formal and structured. This reflects a concern with waste, both literal (the squandering of film stock) and metaphorical (the effusion of images). It is through her highly structured yet pleasurable and receptive texts that Lowder undermines the culture/nature dualism in her work, disrupting our conventional ways of seeing nature and opening up the possibility of a relationship of mutuality with the nonhuman.

A different escaping of dualisms is explored in Chia-ju Chang's chapter on spectatorship as a form of Zen Buddhist practice. Through the viewing practices they encourage, films do not only express but may also embody a spiritual-ecological awareness that draws on the nondualisms of Zen. While aspects of Buddhism like *ahimsa* (nonviolence) have been widely recognised for their 'green' and animal rights potential, the 'soteriological aspect of Buddhism has not been fully articulated with regard to its ecological relevance'. Focusing on Bae Yong-kyun's 1989 *Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the East?*, Chang reads the film's invocation and incorporation of *kōan* practice (the method of Zen training that proceeds via a series of questions or narratives designed to deliver the student beyond his or her dualistic attachments) not as a retreat from or critique of the supposed ills of contemporary life but as a way of showing 'how filmmaking practice and film art can be a form of religious experience'. Approaching *Bodhidharma* as a '*kōan* film', Chang argues that it invites a mode of viewing that rehearses meditation and *kōan* practice, and shows how film itself can function as 'an agent of transformation of ecological consciousness'.

A different mode of eco-praxis is critiqued in David Ingram's piece on *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), a veritable classic of environmental documentary. Ingram is concerned with how ecologically oriented films communicate their message to bring about change. He examines



the film's argumentative strategies vis-à-vis its scientific credentials. The demands of scientific nuance and specialisation on the one hand and the need for 'epistemological closure' in the public sphere on the other produce the 'narrative of scientific consensus and epistemological certainty over the theory of anthropogenic global warming' central to *An Inconvenient Truth*. Gore's 'rhetoric of scientific certainty', Ingram shows, is not only fodder for climate change sceptics but has come under critique from the political Left. Beyond the specific issues raised by *An Inconvenient Truth*, then, Ingram considers the 'validity of Enlightenment notions of rationality and science' and sheds light on the difficulties in harnessing scientific evidence for the purpose of social persuasion.

We close with a chapter on film's exhibition context. Kay Armatage provides a comprehensive critical overview of different festival outlets for a (broadly defined) ecocinema, and looks at some of the problems generated by the rise and rise of environmental film festivals. Her close look at Planet in Focus offers a case in point for the growth and mainstreaming of ecologically themed film events, central to ecological outreach and activism yet part of the growing commercial awareness around the production and dissemination of nature films. Planet in Focus, Armatage shows, has expanded from a niche to a wider public event and, though expansion brings with it its own complications, it signals the welcome maturation of the environmental movement. Armatage's piece paves the way for further considerations of the potentialities, pitfalls and obligations of public – artistic, commercial and activist – engagement at the intersection of ecology and film.

## Notes

- 1 Narraway's chapter touches on the environmental impact of filmmaking through her discussion of Rose Lowder's work. Lowder's films represent an environmental activism both in terms of Lowder's efforts to produce low impact texts and through the potential of her films to change the viewer's engagement with the more-than-human world.
- 2 The list is partial and does not include contributions to ecocriticism that pioneered the linking of ecology and literature, such as Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995). Moving image work followed suit, and the present book aims to push further the environmental paradigm shift in the study of film.
- 3 Although different scholars prefer different labels (or none at all), and while there is much crossover between the two fields, the distinction between

animal studies (AS) and critical animal studies (CAS) is largely a matter of political emphasis. AS explores various aesthetic, philosophical, and interdisciplinary questions pertaining to animal representation, human–animal relations and the human/nonhuman boundary. CAS espouses a commitment to animal liberation and veganism, with activist links to other social justice movements. Much work in CAS is thus intersectional, working on the continuities of oppression of human and nonhuman animals, bringing together feminism, anti-capitalism, LGBTQ, race, and ethnic minority rights. See the Institute for Critical Animal Studies website, <http://www.criticalanimalstudies.org> and the *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* (JCAS), <http://www.criticalanimalstudies.org/journal-for-critical-animal-studies>. This expanding field of enquiry is not a binary domain. Alongside, or overlapping with, AS and CAS, is the area of human–animal studies (HAS), associated with the Animals and Society Institute (ASI), <http://www.animalsandsociety.org/pages/human-animal-studies>.

- 4 On such processes of ‘naturalisation’, see Noël Sturgeon’s (2009) *Environmentalism in Popular Culture*. Sturgeon explores the ideological mobilisation of nature in American popular culture, in particular ‘the naturalisation of violence and conquest and of white, suburban, nuclear family’ (Sturgeon 2009: 149), by employing what she calls a ‘global feminist environmental justice analysis’ (ibid.: 6).
- 5 Werner Herzog has been one of the main proponents of this nonsense. On Herzog’s notion of nature’s indifference, see Brad Prager’s ‘Landscape of the Mind: The Indifferent Earth in Werner Herzog’s Films’, in *Cinema and Landscape* (2010), pp. 89–102.
- 6 See also, Erika Cudworth’s (2005) *Developing Ecofeminist Theory*, in which Cudworth argues for the viability of ecofeminist methodology to understand wide-ranging and interrelated forms of social domination.
- 7 The series ‘Kosmos: A Soviet Space Odyssey’ ran from July to August 2011 at London’s BFI Southbank. See also ‘Red Skies: Soviet Science Fiction’, <http://old.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/feature/49760>, and Jonathan Romney’s ‘Berlinale 2011: Strange Energies from the East’, <http://old.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/newsandviews/festivals/berlin-2011.php> (accessed 20 May 2013).

## References

- Bazin, A. 2005 (1967). ‘The Ontology of the Photographic Image’, in *What is Cinema?* Vol. 1. Trans. H. Gray. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 9–16.
- Bellour, R. 2009. *Le Corps du cinéma: Hypnoses, émotions, animalités*. Paris: POL.
- Bennett, J. 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Bousé, D. 2000. *Wildlife Films*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Bozak, N. 2012 *The Cinematic Footprint: Lights, Camera, Natural Resources*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

- Buell, L. 1995. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Burt, J. 2004. *Animals in Film*. London: Reaktion.
- Calarco, M. 2009. 'Toward an Agnostic Animal Ethics', in P. Cavalieri, *The Death of the Animal*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 73–84.
- . 2012. 'Identity, Difference, Indistinction'. *The New Centennial Review* 11.2: pp. 41–60.
- Chris, C. 2006. *Watching Wildlife*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Cubitt, S. 2005. *EcoMedia*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.
- Cudworth, E. 2005. *Developing Ecofeminist Theory: The Complexity of Difference*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Haraway, D. 2008. *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Harper, G. and J. Rayner (eds). 2010. *Cinema and Landscape*. Bristol: Intellect.
- Hayles, N.K. 1995. 'Searching for Common Ground', in M.E. Soulé and G. Lease (eds), *Reinventing Nature? Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction*. Washington, DC: Island, pp. 47–63.
- Ingram, D. 2004. *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press.
- Kracauer, S. 1997 (1960). *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Lefebvre, M. (ed.). 2006. *Landscape and Cinema*. New York: Routledge.
- Lippit, A.M. 2000. *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Macdonald, S. 2009. *Adventures of Perception: Cinema as Exploration. Essays/Interviews*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- McMahon, L. and M. Lawrence (eds). 2014 (forthcoming). *Animal Life and the Moving Image*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Mehrotra, G. 2010. 'Toward a Continuum of Intersectionality: Theorizing for Feminist Social Work Scholarship'. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work* 25.4: pp. 417–30.
- Mitman, G. 1999. *Reel Nature: American's Romance with Wildlife on Film*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Molloy, C. 2013. 'Animal Cruelty and Reality Television: A Critical Review', in M. Brewster and C. Reyes (eds), *Animal Cruelty: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Understanding*. North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press.
- Murray, R.L. and J.K. Heumann (eds). 2009. *Ecology and Popular Film: Cinema on the Edge*. Albany: State University of New York.
- Nash, J.C. 2008. 'Rethinking Intersectionality'. *Feminist Review* 89: pp. 1–15.
- Pick, A. 2011. *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Prager, B. 2007. *The Cinema of Werner Herzog: Aesthetic Ecstasy and Truth*. London: Wallflower.
- Rust, S., S. Mohani and S. Cubitt. 2012. *Ecocinema: Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.
- Sturgeon, N. 2009. *Environmentalism in Popular Culture: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and the Politics of the Natural*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

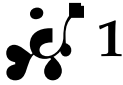
- Twine, R. 2010. 'Intersectional disgust? Animals and (Eco)feminism'. *Feminism and Psychology* 20.3: pp. 397–406.
- Tyler, T. 2013. 'New Tricks'. *Angelaki* 18.1: pp. 65–82.
- Willowquet-Maricondi, P. (ed.). 2010. *Framing the World: Explorations in Ecocriticism and Film*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.

PART I 

## ECO-POETICS

FILM, FORM AND THE NATURAL WORLD





## THREE WORLDS

### Dwelling and Worldhood on Screen

Anat Pick

Cinema cannot escape nature. In relation to nature, film is either placed or, if ‘the world is not enough’, displaced. But however fantastical, even non-photographic, film springs forth from the world to which it ultimately returns. When speaking of the worldhood (*Weltlichkeit*) of film, I am thinking of the ways in which films construct their own worlds and in so doing assert the ontological property of film’s ‘groundedness’ – its dwelling in the totality of its construction. This chapter examines films in which nature and conceptions of worldhood come together, not as mirror images or as overlapping copies, but by invoking different senses of dwelling inspired by visions of nature: cinema’s attesting to the ways in which nature prompts us to think of our place in the world, what in *Being and Time* (1927) Heidegger described as the fundamental structure of ‘being-in-the-world’. Of course, every film has its worldhood (even if some films are manifestly ‘poor in world’), but the examples that concern me here are those whose central theme is the natural world, and whose connection to place, their mode of dwelling, is achieved primarily through their relation to the environmental question, what Timothy Morton (2007: 175) calls the ‘what-is-it?’ of nature.<sup>1</sup>

In what follows I explore three alternatives of cinematic worldhood in popular films that foreground the environment. If the images of the BBC’s signature natural history productions like *Planet Earth* (2006) lean towards ocular inflation,<sup>2</sup> Werner Herzog’s ‘wildlife fantasies’ (*Fata Morgana* [1972], *La Soufrière* [1977], *Lessons of Darkness* [1992], *Grizzly Man* [2005], *The Wild Blue Yonder* [2005], *Encounters at the End of the World* [2007], and *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* [2010]), on a different scale, offer Herzog’s ‘ecstatic truth’ (Herzog 2002: 239) about humanity’s placement in the world. Yet Herzog’s critique of the commercial natural history film betrays its own romantic conceit, positing man (for Herzog’s dramas are predominantly male) and nature in direct opposition. A third conception of worldhood is expressed in *Earthlings* (2005), a holistic activist film that wears its worldly credentials on its sleeve.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike David Attenborough's work, which tends to underplay issues of anthropogenic ecological pressure, and against Herzog's reactionary tales that cast nature and man in a state of inevitable conflict, *Earthlings'* graphic exposure of human violence against nonhuman animals seeks to transform human–animal relations by encouraging humans to 'make the connection': *Earthlings* sees worldhood in radically nonanthropocentric terms and promotes the idea of a more-than-human community.<sup>4</sup>

While my three examples are not definitive representatives of depictions of nature and animals on screen, they do cover a fair bit of ground: from television, to semi-independent and new media productions. Each alternative at once registers and transcends a concrete (ontic) worldview, and signals the (pre-ontological) notion of worldhood. And each raises questions about the ways in which the relationship between images, nature and worldhood is articulated. In these films, 'nature' is both an enclosed system, scientifically and aesthetically knowable through what Morton (2010) calls 'ecomimesis', and the mode of our being-in-the-world, which grounds our concrete relations to nature's beings and things. Thinking the two configurations of nature cinematically also recalls the cinematic realism of André Bazin, which inspires a nonanthropocentric appreciation of onscreen worldhood.

Cinema's acknowledging of reality is not only, as Bazin claims, impersonal but also 'inhuman'. As Fay (2008: 42) argues, Bazin's 'realism, as reimagined through animals and nature, is not merely the replication or record of the world as we humans perceive it (nor is it merely the space humans and animals share); rather, it reveals the details of animate and inanimate life that are lost to anthropocentric attention and history'. Realism therefore encourages a view of the world as a biodiverse, material plane. At its most distilled, Bazin (2005: 21) envisions cinematic realism as 'the world in its own image'. None of the films discussed below is paradigmatically Bazinian, though each contains intimations of worldhood through the filming of nature and animals or via the image of Earth seen from space. The trajectory proceeds from nature as a finite terrain to worldhood as a non-spatial mode of being-in-the-world, and back to nature again.

## First World

The online spoof *I Hate Nature* features a recognisably breathless impersonation of David Attenborough over footage of the BBC series *Planet Earth*.<sup>5</sup> Attenborough proclaims his repugnance at the animals he studies. Animals are 'boring and they suck', he says, looking up at



a family of koala bears lounging in a tree. Although the short describes animals as ‘gross’, recasting Attenborough as a ‘zoocidal’ filmmaker, the butt of the joke is not nature or animals but their packaging by the BBC–Attenborough powerhouse. Poking fun at a ‘national treasure’ disguises a more serious critique by suggesting that it is possible to have had enough, not only of Attenborough’s ‘schoolboy enthusiasm’ (Cubitt 2005: 47), but of the hackneyed tropes of nature’s cuteness and majesty, the sneaky configurations of nature as a secular Eden and faux sublime, formulations that simultaneously tout and tame the so-called mystery of the natural world. Beneath its reverent façade, the parody suggests, lurks the Freudian id of natural history film culture, whose idioms are contempt and disgust.

Not only the voice-of-god but also the eye-of-god is typical of the scope and reach of the big BBC productions. Wildlife programmes are the fruit of particular modes of production. Bousé (2000: 1) makes the striking claim that wildlife films and nature are, in fact, poorly matched: ‘The lives of wild animals, like the stillness of open spaces, may simply be unsuited to film and television representation’, not because they are impossible to capture but because mainstream wildlife film and television are subject to commercial demands. ‘[T]he real sources of film and television’s incompatibility with nature lie in the economics and institutional agendas to which they have been conscripted’ (ibid.):

Stillness and silence have almost no place in wildlife film, or in film and television generally – not because they are incapable, as media technologies, of conveying these qualities, but because stillness and silence are incompatible with the social and economic functions of film and television, and with the expressive ‘vocabularies’ they have developed in fulfilling those functions. (Ibid.: 4)

Such films are closer to Hollywood features, making use of such cinematic devices as emotive musical cues, close-ups, a composite but invisible narrative, individual characters, and dramatic storylines. ‘Wildlife films may be full of scientific facts, but they have largely been freed of the responsibility of looking just like reality. Like advertising, they have become an entertaining art that operates according to its own codes and conventions’ (ibid.: 7).

What precisely are the ‘economics and institutional agendas’ that shape wildlife films? Claire Molloy (2011: 83) points out that the diversification and generic blending in contemporary wildlife programming responds ‘to declining audience numbers and changing consumer demands’. ‘What such programmes do is relocate “wild nature” into the domestic and culturally organised spaces of media reception – the

living room, the cinema and so forth – and in doing this, they construct a relationship between viewer and animal that reduces distance and fulfils a desire to bring animals close'. Beyond its commercial and psychological imperatives, Molloy's description of a relation of containment between human viewers and the represented world has an ontological dimension. In their sheer grandeur, penetration and condensation of space through the use of high-end cameras and non-sync sound in postproduction, wildlife films are not just purveyors of knowledge about and sympathy for the natural world, but emblems of the technical prowess required to 'produce' nature. With 3D and CGI, wildlife films offer an increasingly immersive spectacle.<sup>6</sup> But spectacular immersion, implicit in titles like *Life on Earth* (1979), *The Blue Planet* (2001), *Planet Earth*, *Frozen Planet* (2011) or *Earthflight* (2011), titles that capture, contain and project the very limits of the earth, can have an uprooting as well as a grounding effect.<sup>7</sup>

At the opening of her early collection of political essays *Oppression and Liberty*, Simone Weil states that 'it is clear that capitalism stands essentially for economic expansion and that capitalist expansion has now [Weil is writing in 1933] nearly reached the point where it will be halted by *the actual limits of the earth's surface*' (2006: 1, emphasis added). Although her essay is primarily a critique of revolutionary Marxism and Stalinism – capitalism is in crisis, 'yet never have there been fewer premonitory signs of the advent of socialism' (ibid.: 1) – Weil's statement is ecologically charged and suggests the close ties between capitalism and environmental exploitation. Something of this expansionist ethos and stretching of limits is, I think, present in Attenborough's palatial rendering of nature.<sup>8</sup> It is this capaciousness, or decadence, that *I Hate Nature* picks up on and mocks.

The Earth's image captured from space at the opening of *Planet Earth* is a recurring motif in fiction and nonfiction films that signifies the earth's limits. Limits can function progressively, reminding us of the beauty and frailty of Earth, or possessively, affirming a dominant human perspective. Stephen Yearly explains that '[t]he photographic portrayal of the globe viewed from an orbiting spacecraft has been used repeatedly to evoke the Earth's isolation in space, its fragility and wonder, and the sense that the beings on it share a restricted living space surrounded by an unwelcoming void' (cited in Garrard 2004: 160). But orbiting spacecrafts and satellite technology also mark the new frontiers of visibility and the extension of optics that overpower the Earth: 'As the century of unbounded curiosity, covetous looking and the de-regulation of the gaze, the twentieth has not been the century of the "image", as is often claimed, but of optics – and, in particular,

of the *optical illusion*' (Virilio 2005: 28–29). Earth becomes the ultimate plaything – abstracted and aestheticised – of global capital, or what we might call *bio-optical politics*:

The Earth, that **phantom-limb**, no longer extends *as far as the eye can see*; it presents all aspects of itself for inspection in the strange little window. The sudden multiplication of 'points of view' merely heralds the latest globalization: the globalization of the gaze, of the single eye of the **cyclops** who governs the cave. (Ibid.: 18)

Heightened visibility, what I have called 'ocular inflation', promotes a uniform view of the world, encapsulated in the image of the blue planet, or Earth seen from space. Ocular inflation means that in seeing so much, we see too little.

Virilio's polemic explores this paradox through the interlocking of neoliberalism and film. In *The Information Bomb* (2005), Virilio links the world's relentless exposure through the use of ever more precise optical technology to the military-industrial complex. The problem is not reality's loss in the image, the postmodern problem of pure simulacra, but reality's overexposure. The image of Spaceship Earth discussed by Garrard (2004), with which many science fiction and natural history films begin, is a symbol of this overexposure. 'In the West', Virilio writes in *The Vision Machine*, 'the death of God and the death of art are indissociable; the *zero degree of representation* merely fulfilled the prophecy voiced a thousand years earlier by Nicephorus, Patriarch of Constantinople, during the quarrel with the iconoclasts: "If we remove the image, not only Christ but the whole universe disappears"' (Virilio 1994: 17). Enhanced optics heralds the end of representation; without iconic representation, without images pointing to the unseen, the seen universe vanishes. Under conditions of optical overexposure, what Virilio calls the 'zero degree of representation', the world itself disappears.

Negative readings of new technologies in wildlife cinema as combining militaristic expansionist drives with what Baker (2001: 174) called the 'Disneyfication' of nature may not do justice to the intentions of filmmakers or audience responses. Filmmakers often cite conservation, animal protection and the cultivation of a public appreciation of nature as their chief motivation. Dismissing these films as by-products of the military-industrial complex is surely reductive. Sean Cubitt provides a more favourable view of technology:

The construction of technology as the pariah that embodies all the most evil elements of the polis and turns them against nature is not an alternative politics . . . techne is the only route through which we now can sense

the world, most especially that part of the world's conversations which are not conducted in wavelengths we can hear, see, or otherwise apprehend. (Cubitt 2005: 59)

The titles and imagery of mainstream wildlife films are ambivalent: their planetary ambition is overblown, yet they are also and more humbly aware of the unity of our world *as* world. At once poetic and predatory, technology embodies the tensions of a totalising (and totalitarian) vision. The crisis of capitalism is inherently ecological, yet, to reiterate Weil, never have there been fewer premonitory signs of the advent of a genuinely environmental politics – at least not yet in prime-time wildlife programming.<sup>9</sup> Popular wildlife cinema is caught between an acquisitive relation to nature, and an evocative mode addressed to nature's worldhood that eschews the crudely possessive. What does it mean for film to be thus split between the acquisitive and the evocative mode, and how might different evocations of cinematic worldhood be achieved?

## Second World

Werner Herzog's work has recently reemerged under the sign of nature.<sup>10</sup> His 'science fiction fantasies', as he sometimes calls them, have assumed the position of counter-cultural wildlife films. Herzog wants to dismantle what he sees as the unqualified enchantment with nature of natural history films. Yet, if Attenborough's fascination with nature may be said to harbour latent hostilities (that *I Hate Nature* wittily unearths), Herzog's *disenchanted* view of nature as 'chaos, hostility, and murder' and 'overwhelming fornication'<sup>11</sup> gives way to an inverse romanticism: the humanist myth of a violent chasm between civilisation and wilderness. While nearly all of Herzog's films deal with the fraught relations between humanity and nature, *Grizzly Man*, Herzog's most popular nonfiction to date, and one of his most haunting, does so explicitly.

*Grizzly Man* is an aggregation of layers, made up of Timothy Treadwell's videos, interviews, and Herzog's distinctive narration. This layering undercuts Herzog's stated position in the film's voiceover. The release of more films about nature – *The Wild Blue Yonder*, *Encounters at the End of the World*, and *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (should we include *Into the Abyss*, Herzog's 2011 documentary on death row, in this list? Why not, as it continues Herzog's enquiry into the opacity of human nature) – only sharpens the sense of Herzog's misconceptions of nature.

In *Grizzly Man*, as Morton claims, ‘Herzog’s bleakness, ironically, is far closer to wilderness-speak than Treadwell’s cuddliness’ and so undermines the film’s critique of deep ecology (2010: 74–75). The denial of the possibility of mutually friendly relations between humans and wild animals is not borne out by Treadwell’s self-shot footage, but functions more as Herzog’s auteurist conceit.

Jeong and Andrew (2008) agree that Treadwell has not failed in his ‘becoming-animal’, if this is what his exercise amounts to (I think it does not quite).<sup>12</sup> The notion that it is somehow wrong or misconstrued (naïve or sentimental, affects Herzog particularly dislikes) to commune with wild bears suggests a clear division between the wild and the civilised, and a clear delineation of nature. But neither enmeshment in nor separation from that thing we call ‘nature’ solves the problem – ontologically, politically or ethically – of our placement in the world.

With Nietzsche, we can think of Treadwell’s experiment as a successful tragic performance: an attempt to live out the contradictions and tensions between human and bear worlds and the establishing of a hybrid space, a kind of ‘natural theatre’.<sup>13</sup> Nor is the terrible price paid after thirteen summers at the jaws and claws of an unknown bear, proof that nature and culture do not coexist, or that, conversely, we must seek to conjoin them more harmoniously or deeply. The dynamic boundaries between human and nonhuman life do not flatten out differences, but the different worldhoods at stake are more concrete and complex than either identitarian separation or non-identitarian ‘becomings’ suggest.

In spite of themselves, Herzog’s films, nearly all of them, illustrate the mutual permeability of nature and culture beyond simple division or merger. As I have argued elsewhere, the recurring use of blank gazes, Herzog’s characters held motionless by the camera as they look ahead (‘staring’, rather than ‘talking’ heads) is a mark of indeterminate humanity, neither absorbed by nor wholly apart from the rest of material life.<sup>14</sup> The inanimate and animate in Herzog’s work are connected in ways that are difficult to disentangle, no matter how vociferously Herzog insists on the fractious encounters between Nature and Man.

### Third World

Though no one could confuse Shaun Monson’s documentary *Earthlings* (2005) with Richard Kalvar’s (2007) collection of zany photographs by the same name, neither are these two works unrelated. *The Paris Review* states: ‘We don’t really need to know more about Kalvar’s human subjects – “earthlings” as he calls them – although every one of the

photographs leaves us wondering: what's happening, what do these people think they're doing?' (2007: 113). Kalvar establishes a humorous rapport between ourselves and the photographed subjects because we know we are looking at people and places at once familiar (New York, Paris) and in a galaxy far, far away. Monson's *Earthlings* travels in the opposite direction, from estrangement to kinship, in a world devoid of odd but benign rituals, where zaniness has tipped over into unimaginable cruelty. Still, the gesture of home and away is the same, and the appeal to the totality we call Earth as a means of proximity and distance is equally powerful.

*Earthlings* is a film in five sections, each examining an area of animal use: pets, food, clothing, entertainment and science. Similar to videos shot (undercover or not) by organisations like Mercy for Animals (MFA) or People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), *Earthlings* weaves together footage from factory farms, slaughterhouses, laboratories, circuses and puppy mills.<sup>15</sup> This web-friendly format does not easily translate into the feature film because the collage of atrocities is a challenge to watch for a whole ninety minutes. Indeed, *Earthlings'* availability for free online streaming is key to its grassroots, word-of-mouth appeal. Both like and unlike its predecessor, Victor Schonfeld and Myriam Alaux's *The Animals Film* (1982),<sup>16</sup> *Earthlings* straddles the line between activism and cinema in the manner of other recent animal, ecological, and social justice documentaries.<sup>17</sup>

*Earthlings* advances a politics of shared worldhood. We share the world with the animals we eat, wear, breed and enslave, and, like them, we too are sentient. Unlike the weak worldhood of dominant depictions of nature examined earlier, *Earthlings'* perspective is postcolonial, imagining a world in which living beings coexist in their commonality as earthlings. Anthropomorphism is not an issue because animals are unlike and also like us. Charges of anthropomorphism deflect from the tough questions about how to live together in a common world without causing needless suffering. *Earthlings* asks viewers to 'make the connection' between different beings who are nonetheless kin. 'Beneath the many differences there is sameness', rooted in being creatures of Earth.

Like *Planet Earth*, *Earthlings* opens and closes with the conventional image of Spaceship Earth. Here, the view from space is equated with a non-speciesist gaze, made explicit by the film's comparison between the different tiers of discrimination: racism, sexism and speciesism. The narrator, Joaquin Phoenix, sets up the film's premise:

Since we all inhabit the earth, all of us are considered earthlings. There is no sexism, no racism or speciesism in the term earthling. It encompasses

each and every one of us, warm or cold-blooded, mammal, vertebrate or invertebrate, bird, reptile, amphibian, fish, and human alike. Humans, therefore, being not the only species on the planet, share this world with millions of other living creatures as we all evolved here together. However, it is the human earthling who tends to dominate the earth, oftentimes treating other fellow earthling and living beings as mere objects . . . If a being suffers there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration.

Sentient animals are separated not by degrees of intelligence that render their value higher or lower (always lower than ours), but through radically unequal power relations. It is not intelligence but power, the morally neutral distribution of forces, which determines human exceptionalism. If power precedes value, then to enable new values (and new relations) requires exploring not the capacities of different creatures, but the institutions and apparatuses that contain and control them. From an abstract notion of power, *Earthlings* drills down to examine the concrete forms of domination that subject animals.

Some of *Earthlings*' most troubling footage of animal abuse offers a complex view of the workings of power. The notion that animals are considered mere things is often used to explain human domination of other animals but, though *Earthlings* repeats this, the footage tells a different story: the swearing directed at pigs and elephants, which accompanies their physical abuse by slaughterhouse workers and circus trainers, makes little sense if the perpetrators believed the animals to be things. Although institutions depend on the 'thing-like' status of nonhuman animals, abusers do not, in fact, treat animals as unfeeling 'others' but as vulnerable persons. Kinship and otherness are thus dynamic, ever changing constructs in the ongoing ebb and flow of what Colin Dayan (2011) calls the 'making and unmaking of persons'.

To counter violence, *Earthlings* affirms that animals share with us the orientation of worldhood: animals are not just 'in the world'; they actively inhabit their world. This might seem to limit the kinds of animals that *Earthlings* morally considers by focusing only on those that are self-aware. But is there really a way of delineating where consciousness begins and ends, whether it must be intentional, to the point of affording it to some organisms and not others?<sup>18</sup> In *A Foray Into the Worlds of Animals and Humans* (1934), Jakob von Uexküll suggested that even simple organisms like the tick inhabit their world and construct their environment by responding to and conversing 'meaningfully' with sensory stimuli. Ontologically disparate, animals' perceptual worlds (*Umwelten*) are the biosemiotic creations of their organisms, and the human is but one *Umwelt* among them.

The modes of care or concern that for Heidegger define Dasein's being-in-the-world (as if humans were the only beings who actively form their world) gives way in *Earthlings* to being-with-others, and also to being-for-nonhuman-others, in the Levinasian sense. Worldhood in this film tends away from the controlled aerial views that affirm human mastery. From the serene visions of Spaceship Earth we plunge deep into the gutter: the abattoir kill floor, the circus ring, the battery cages, all the violence, torment and filth that currently pass for species coexistence.

Even if *Earthlings* subsumes all worlds under a single planet, on behalf of animals whose worlds are not too unlike ours, worlds we can at least recognise as worlds, the very fact that nonhuman creatures have 'a world of their own' should unhinge human exceptionalism. While focusing on mammals, *Earthlings* excludes no one, though it uses different strategies for different animals. Against consuming those commonly known as 'seafood', for instance, *Earthlings* makes the environmental rather than the ethical case. The film's core worldview is nonetheless inclusive: if animals' worlds may be irreconcilably different, the fact that all inhabit a world is not. This alone is a powerful appeal for a more-than-human conception of worldhood.

### 'The World in its Own Image'

It is our function in this world to consent to the existence of the universe.  
— Simone Weil, *The Love of God and Affliction*

Bazin's 'The Myth of Total Cinema' begins by turning on its head the Marxist account of cinema's origins in Georges Sadoul's *Histoire générale du cinéma* (1946). Bazin 'finds in Sadoul's history of the invention of cinema less a description of scientific and technological progress than evidence of an obsessive fascination with achieving a complex and "total" mimesis of the world. It is this mimetic vocation of cinema that functions like an ideal, arguably in Sadoul's history, and certainly in Bazin's understanding of cinema's origin' (Gunning 2011: 121).

The mimetic obsession of cinema's pioneers precedes (and exceeds) the technological inventions that enable the world's reproduction. At the technical level, 'there was not a single inventor that did not try to combine sound and relief with animation of the image' (Bazin 2005: 20), but 'total cinema' entails more than sound, relief, and animation. It entails the idea that cinema's *telos* is mimetic. In a striking passage Bazin (ibid.: 21) concludes that: 'The real primitives of the cinema, existing only in the imaginations of a few men of the nineteenth century, are



in complete imitation of nature. Every new development added to the cinema must, paradoxically, take it nearer and nearer to its origins. In short, cinema has not yet been invented!

The conflation of past and future, idea and technique, is given a twist in Herzog's *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, whose 3D technology is used to convey two-dimensional images.<sup>19</sup> But mimetic accuracy is not what Bazin's total cinema finally means. Gunning believes that, 'Bazin's *idée fixe* of total cinema extends beyond "mechanical reproduction" and signals a desire for an ideal which we recognize as his central theoretical claim about cinematic realism' (Gunning 2011: 123). Bazin describes this ideal as 'an integral realism', neither mechanical verisimilitude nor the artist's personal expression, but 'a recreation of *the world in its own image*' (Bazin 2005: 21, emphasis added). Bazin:

[M]oves beyond the subject, envisioning an image of the world not dependent on the expressive role of artistic subjectivity. Bazin may root the origin of the cinema in the obsession of its inventors, but the significance of this ideal cannot be reduced to subjective investment . . . Bazin's total cinema strives to achieve 'the world in its own image'. This unique image seeks precisely to overcome the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity, and even between materialism and idealism. (Gunning 2011: 123)

To satisfy 'subjective investment', cinema deploys techniques that trick the eye, but these, according to Bazin, are 'pseudorealist' and do not yield the world in its own image. Although it is difficult to distinguish between pseudorealism and total cinema, the BBC productions discussed above are pseudorealist insofar as they satisfy the desire for an illusion of closeness with nature, and use perspective (telephoto lenses, blue chip, post-production sound enhancement, and so on) non-reflexively to create an immersive but highly contrived experience of nature. Consciously or not, *I Hate Nature* reminds us that however difficult it is 'to separate total cinema from this appetite for illusion' (Gunning 2011: 124), alert, indeed ironic, viewing can pick up pseudorealist cues.

Total cinema delivers us from one form of subjective investment to another that reflects on our participation in the environing world. The extinction of subjectivity is not therefore a withdrawal but a mode of involvement. Total cinema enacts Weil's consenting to the existence of the universe. 'If we take seriously Bazin's differentiation of a true and a pseudoreality', Gunning writes, 'total cinema offers more than a complex process of duplication'.

Bazin calls this something more: 'the world in its own image'. I read this phrase as equivalent to the phenomenological concept (used by both

Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger) of *the worldhood of the world*. *The worldhood of the world forms the ultimate referent of the myth of total cinema*. Thus total cinema does not posit a Hegelian universal totality but rather the phenomenological image of the world as bounded by a horizon, and it is in the nature of a horizon to be expanded. (Gunning 2011: 125, emphasis added)

Here, as Morton suggests, are nature and the environment as interrogative structures rather than given totalities, ever changing articulations of the relation to place and space. Films invoke worldhood in different ways. Their ‘ultimate referent’ is not a thing or a place but a mode of involvement.

The three worlds discussed are examples of three modes of worldly engagement. If *Planet Earth* flaunts a world empty of people (Garrard 2012), such absence arguably makes for poor environmental involvement, since neither the human presence by proxy of powerful technology nor Attenborough’s human voiceover is problematised. In Herzog’s world, people are cast as nature’s opponent, and nature is separate and ‘out there’. *Earthlings* engages with nature as a global home. The film cries out against the ubiquity of human domination, the result of a misconstrued orientation of worldhood. *Earthlings* is a view of the world in its own image, and though embodied in the overused trope of Earth seen from space, ‘earthlings’ is not, in fact, an image at all: it is the possibility of reorienting ourselves away from the pseudorealist taxonomies of speciation, and the brutal practices they are used to excuse.

## Notes

- 1 ‘The environment is that which cannot be indicated directly. We could name it apophatically. It is not-in-the-foreground. It is the background, caught in a relationship with the foreground. As soon as we concentrate on it, it turns into the foreground. In ecological terms, nature becomes bunny rabbits, trees, rivers, and mountains – we lose its environmental quality, though this is what we wanted to convey. We are compelled to rely on ecomimesis, a list that gestures toward infinity. The environment is the “what-is-it?”, the objectified version of our question. As soon as it becomes an exclamation it has disappeared’ (Morton 2007: 175).
- 2 For a comprehensive look at the BBC’s long and varied history of natural history programming, see Timothy Boon’s (2008) *Films of Fact*.
- 3 For a different reading of *Earthlings* in this volume, see chapter 6, ‘Was Blind But Now I See’, by Carrie Packwood Freeman and Scott Tulloch.
- 4 *Earthlings*’ cover image shows a plant, a cow, and a human (Phoenix himself), with the tagline ‘make the connection’. *Earthlings* is the first of a

- trilogy whose second, forthcoming installment is *Unity*, on the ‘unifying force of consciousness found in nature, animals and humankind’. See <http://www.earthlings.com/> (accessed 25 March 2013).
- 5 *I Hate Nature*, by the New York comedy group Olde English, retrieved from <http://www.oldeenglish.org/podcast/i-hate-nature>.
  - 6 *Born to be Wild 3D* (Lickley, 2011) combines the wildlife film with 3D technology to create an immersive nonfiction about orphaned elephants and orangutans in Kenya and Borneo. The 2012 Disney film *Chimpanzee* is another example of a documentary that appeals, via narrative and technological cues, to the desire to come close to wild animals. But, as Lori Gruen suggests, for those ‘working hard to end the use of chimpanzees in entertainment . . . this film walks a fine line. It is designed to entertain and chimpanzees are the entertainment’, <http://ethics-animals.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/chimpanzee-movie.html> (accessed 26 March 2013).
  - 7 Compare these to James Benning’s laconic *Ten Skies* (2004), *13 Lakes* (2004), and *Ruhr* (2009), discussed in the next two chapters of this volume.
  - 8 ‘Rendering’ in the sense of both digital filmmaking and the production of animal by-products. On the notion of rendering in the context of biopower, see Shukin (2009).
  - 9 In fiction films, the situation is different: from *Fern Gully* (1992) to *Madagascar* (2005), *Wall-E* (2008), *The Road* (2009), *Avatar* (2009), or *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012), and in the 1970s cycle of ecological science fiction like *Silent Running* (1972) and *Soylent Green* (1973), environmental dystopias and the destruction of nature are essential motifs.
  - 10 Released in 2009 by Revolver, the DVD box set *Werner Herzog – Encounters in the Natural World* includes *Encounters at the End of the World*, *Grizzly Man*, *White Diamond*, *La Soufrière* and *Flying Doctors of East Africa*. The list is incomplete, leaving out other available titles like *Fata Morgana*, *Lessons of Darkness* and *The Wild Blue Yonder*, as well as fiction films that may be considered under the same rubric (*Aguirre Wrath of God*, *Fitzcarraldo*, *Signs of Life*).
  - 11 In *Grizzly Man* (2005) and Les Blank’s 1982 documentary *Burden of Dreams* on the making of Herzog’s *Fitzcarraldo*, respectively.
  - 12 Treadwell communed with individual bears. Living with and among them was not, for him, simply a matter of dissolving his human identity, though it was partly that too. Treadwell engaged in animal advocacy, education and outreach; his commitment to *these* Grizzlies in *this* national park is not, then, the rhizomatic process of becoming-bear.
  - 13 For a detailed Nietzschean reading of Herzog, see Pick (2011: 168–79).
  - 14 *Ibid.*: 155–62.
  - 15 Organisations like Mercy for Animals, <http://www.mercyforanimals.org/>, PETA, <http://www.peta.org/>, or Animal Defenders International (ADI), [http://www.ad-international.org/adi\\_home/](http://www.ad-international.org/adi_home/) use film to expose the conditions and practices in all branches of animal business. Much of the footage is shot undercover, and the industry has been fighting back using so-called ‘Ag Gag’ legislation and the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act. On the push-back against environmental and animal activists, see Phil Potter’s *Green is*

- the New Red* (2011), and the accompanying blog, <http://www.greenisthene-wred.com/blog/> (accessed 26 March 2013).
- 16 Originally broadcast on Channel 4, *The Animals Film* uses a mixture of materials, including found footage, cartoons and underground videos. The BFI's 2009 DVD edition includes footage censored by Channel 4. The planetary theme is apparent also in Schonfeld's radio programme *One Planet: Animals and Us*, available here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p005k2zy> (accessed 26 March 2013).
  - 17 Monson exposes harrowing truths in order to confront and transform his audience. A different approach is adopted in Marisa Miller Wolfson's *Vegucated* (2010), which reaches out to viewers via the personal journeys to veganism of the documentary's subjects, reminiscent of Morgan Spurlock's *Super Size Me* (2004).
  - 18 See, for example, Marder (2013) on the new frontier of 'plant ethics', Morton (2007), especially his reading of *Frankenstein* and *Blade Runner* as texts that 'enjoin us to love people even when they are not people' (ibid.: 188), and Sagan (2010), 'Umwelt After Uexküll', Introduction to *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*. Sagan discusses the difficulty in categorically distinguishing human from machine 'thinking'. Ultimately, it is difficult to tell 'real' from 'artificial' life, a point illustrated in the famous Turing test.
  - 19 I am grateful to Silke Panse for pointing out this Herzogian irony. Some of the Chauvet paintings resemble clips laid out on an editing timeline. Bazin's idea of the inverse relations of past and future explains the strange pairing of two-dimensional cave art with 3D technology.

## References

- The Animals Film*. 1982. [Film]. Directed by V. Schonfeld and M. Alaux. U.K.: Beyond the Frame, Slick Pix.
- Baker, S. 2001. *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity, and Representation*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- Bazin, A. 2005 (1967). 'The Myth of Total Cinema', in *What is Cinema? Volume 1*. Trans. H. Gray. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 17–22.
- Boon, T. 2008. *Films of Fact: A History of Science in Documentary Films and Television*. London: Wallflower.
- Born to be Wild*. 2011. [Film]. Directed by D. Lickley. U.S.A.: Walker World Pictures.
- The Blue Planet*. 2001. [Television]. BBC1.
- Bousé, D. 2000. *Wildlife Films*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Burden of Dreams*. 1982. [Film]. Directed by L. Blank. U.S.A.: Flower Films.
- Cubitt, S. 2005. *EcoMedia*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.
- Dayan, C. 2011. *The Law is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Earthlings*. 2005. [Film]. Directed by S. Monson. U.S.A.: Nation Earth.

- Fay, J. 2008. 'Seeing/Loving Animals: André Bazin's Posthumanism'. *Journal of Visual Culture* 7.1: pp. 41–64.
- Garrard, G. 2004. *Ecocriticism*. London: Routledge.
- . 2012. 'Worlds without Us: Some Types of Disanthropy'. *SubStance* 127, 41.1: pp. 40–60.
- Grizzly Man*. 2005. [Film]. Directed by W. Herzog. U.S.A.: Lions Gate, Discovery Docs, Real Big Production.
- Gunning, T. 2011. 'The World in Its Own Image: The Myth of Total Cinema', in D. Andrew and H. Joubert-Laurencin (eds), *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and Its Afterlife*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 119–26.
- . 2012. 'Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality', in G. Koch, V. Panterburg and S. Rothöler (eds), *Screen Dynamics: Mapping the Borders of Cinema*. Vienna: Synema, pp. 42–60.
- Heidegger, M. 2005 (1927). *Being and Time*. Trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- . 2009. 'The Most Immediate Explication of Dasein Starting from its Everydayness. The Basic Constitution of Dasein as Being-in-the-World', in *A History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*. Trans. T. Kisiel. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 151–250.
- Jeong, S.H. and D. Andrew. 2008. 'Grizzly Ghost: Herzog, Bazin and the Cinematic Animal', *Screen* 49.1: pp. 1–12.
- Kalvar, R. *Earthlings*. 2007. Paris: Flammarion.
- Marder, M. 2013. *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Molloy, C. 2011. *Popular Media and Animals*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Morton, T. 2007. *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . 2010. *The Ecological Thought*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Paris Review*. 2007. 'Richard Kalvar: *Earthlings*'. *The Paris Review* 49(180): pp. 113–24.
- Pick, A. 2011. *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Planet Earth*. 2006. [Television]. BBC1.
- Potter, P. 2011. *Green is the New Red: An Insider's Account of a Social Movement Under Siege*. San Francisco: City Lights.
- Shukin, N. 2009. *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Super Size Me*. 2004. [Film]. Directed by M. Spurlock. U.S.A.: Samuel Goldwyn Films, Roadside Attractions.
- Uexküll, J. von. 2010 (1934). *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans: With a Theory of Meaning*. Int. D. Sagan. Trans. J.D. O'Neil. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Vegucated*. 2011. [Film]. Directed by M. Miller Wolfson. U.S.A.: Green Planet Films.
- Virilio, P. 1989. *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*. Trans. Patrick Camiller. London: Verso.

- . 1994. *The Vision Machine*. Trans. J. Rose. London: BFI.
- . 2005. *The Information Bomb*. Trans. C. Turner. London: Verso.
- Weil, S. 2006 (1955). *Oppression and Liberty*. Trans. A. Wills and J. Petrie. London: Routledge.
- . 2001. 'The Love of God and Affliction', in *Waiting for God*. Trans. E. Craufurd. New York: Perennial, pp. 67–82.



## TEN SKIES, 13 LAKES, 15 POOLS – STRUCTURE, IMMANENCE AND ECO-AESTHETICS IN *THE SWIMMER* AND JAMES BENNING’S LAND FILMS

Silke Panse

The following chapter develops the notion of eco-aesthetics with respect to moving images and argues that the connections between the world and the image – including the land and the landscape – are what make the documentaries of the experimental filmmaker James Benning eco-aesthetical. Focusing on a shot in Benning’s digital video *Ruhr* (2009), this chapter examines the film and video subgenre of planes-behind-leaves-in-the-wind and asks who or what moves leaves in the wind in moving images. André Bazin, who endorses a transcendent continuity between the world and the cinematographic image (1967: 14), I suggest, sees film as part of nature while ultimately separating humans from nature *and* from the image. Whereas with Bazin, transcendence rules out immanence, the leaves in the wind in *Ruhr* are imperceptibly moved by the airplane moved by humans and there is no transcendence. This chapter argues that immanence is vital for an eco-aesthetics that links the plane of the world (ecology) with that of the image (aesthetics) and that neither a Bazinian cinema nor eco-cinema is necessarily eco-aesthetical.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to the readings of Benning as a filmmaker of the perceptible, this text proposes that his films bring out the *imperceptible*, and that eco-aesthetics are about what cannot be directly perceived.

Benning is generally seen to be making structural films of landscapes, because he follows a predetermined structure, such as that the duration of a shot is the length of a reel of film. *Ten Skies* (2004), for example, consists of ten shots of ten skies for ten minutes and *13 Lakes* (2004) of thirteen shots of thirteen lakes also for ten minutes. His films adhere to the conditions of structural film in that they have ‘a fixed camera position’ (Sitney 1969: 1), a ‘minimalisation of the central action’ (ibid.: 4) and a ‘structural monotone’ (ibid.: 4). By contrast, this chapter argues that Benning’s films differ fundamentally from the pure aesthetics of structural cinema as well as from the structuralism in the

Hollywood movie *The Swimmer* (Perry and Pollack, 1968), which I shall term a structuralist film. Instead, I suggest that Benning's films are post-structural, that he makes impure rather than pure films and that they are not of landscapes, but of land.

## The Dehumanised Nature of Human Consciousness

In 1967, Gilles Deleuze observed that, in structuralism, it is space itself which is structural: 'places in a purely structural space are primary in relation to the things and real beings which come to occupy them' (2004: 174). While linguistic structuralism differs from visually determined structural film, the fact that space dictates relations through structures – and that the structure of these relations is spatial – also applies to structural films of nature. Experimental films of landscapes such as those by the Canadian Michael Snow or the British filmmaker Chris Welsby explore the parameters of space through decentred camera movement in multiple directions on self-constructed tripods. This is a nature devoid of humans. Deleuze mentions structural film briefly and writes about Snow's *La Région Centrale* (1971), filmed in the mountains of North Quebec: 'Snow films a "dehumanised landscape", without any human presence, and puts the camera under the control of an automatic apparatus which continually varies its movements and angles. He thus frees the eye from the condition of relative immobility and of dependence on coordinates' (Deleuze 1992: 230). This vision 'remains that of one eye only, but it is an empty, hyper-mobile eye'.<sup>2</sup> P. Adams Sitney, who defined the term 'structural film', extends this eye to the mind: 'It is cinema of the mind rather than the eye' (Sitney 2002: 348). These structural films of landscape have severed their connections with humans. But the 'dehumanised camera' (ibid.: 359) without an operator serves only human consciousness. Sitney writes about *La Région Centrale* that, 'the film-maker elaborated on the metaphor of the moving camera as an imitation of consciousness' (ibid.: 356). When Sitney states that 'the persistent viewer would [consciously] alter his experience before the sameness of the cinematic image' (ibid.: 351), specificity is read as 'sameness' without any acknowledgement of the diverse material relations between the medium, the machine, the depicted and the filmmaker. In what has been called 'pure film' (James 1989: 236), first, the material relations of what is in front of the camera are reduced to those of the cinematic image, and second, what is in the image to our conscious and rational viewing. The only material that is included in Sitney's consideration is cinematic material (ibid.:



359). Consequently, it does not matter what the film shows, be that nature in *La Région Centrale* or a room in *Wavelength* (Snow, 1967): ‘The specific content of both films is empty space’ (Sitney 2002: 356). The eye is linked to the brain with no material connections between them and what is being looked at. Nature is merely a backdrop for human consciousness without any materiality and life of its own.

## Structuralist Pools

‘God, look at that water. And look at that sky!’ Neddy Merryl (Burt Lancaster) enthuses in *The Swimmer* (Figure 2.1), looking offscreen down at the pool and then up at the sky. If Neddy could look at the water in *13 Lakes* and the sky in *Ten Skies*, their material existence would be apparent. But as a character in a structuralist fiction film, Neddy desires a nature from which he is disconnected. In the film adaptation and John Cheever’s short story (1964), Neddy swims home through an eight-mile long string of pools with only mediated access to nature in his suburban neighbourhood. In *The Swimmer*, nature is thoroughly stratified. The water in one of the pools has been filtered so much that when offered clear alcohol in a glass, Neddy jokes that he just wants a bit of the pool water. The fluids he puts inside him are as clean as the ones he swims in. Nature is partitioned into ‘the lawns, the gardens, the woods, the fields’ (Cheever 1985: 722) – and, of course, pools. ‘Pool by pool, they form a river, all the way to our house’, gushes Neddy, calling



**Figure 2.1** Neddy Merryl (Burt Lancaster) looks at the sky in *The Swimmer* (Perry and Pollack, 1968)

the 'stream' of pools after his wife, 'the Lucinda River'. Neddy maps out his route home through a list of names of pool owners.

In structuralism, relations are not material, but symbolic. The structures that run through human and nonhuman nature and culture are the same. 'Father, mother, etc. are first of all sites in a structure', observes Deleuze (2004: 174), also citing the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan: they 'model their very being on the moment of the signifying chain which traverses them' (ibid.). In *The Swimmer*, nature belongs to couples. Individual psychology is 'determined by a transcendental topology' (ibid.). The 'subjects' of structuralism 'are above all the places in a topological and structural space defined by relations of production' (ibid.). Because 'the sites prevail over whatever occupies them' (ibid.), structuralism is transcendental. The structures the swimmer passes through are already in place, and are merely repeated through him. For structuralists like Lacan, 'structure is incarnated in realities and images according to determinable series' (ibid.: 172). A discontinuation threatens the whole series, or as Cheever notes when the swimmer happens upon an empty pool: 'This breach in the chain of water disappointed him absurdly' (Cheever 1985: 717).

When the swimmer finally arrives at his home, it is overgrown with nature. The tennis courts where he had imagined his daughters playing are desolate and covered in leaves. Water is not contained in pools anymore, but has turned into a thunderstorm pouring down onto him. Exhausted, freezing and seeking solace, he limps barefoot in his trunks to the door of his home and finds it locked. While Neddy desperately bangs on the closed door, the camera pans through a broken window into the house that is deserted, without his wife and daughters. The home is as empty and inaccessible as the subject. 'Structuralism is not at all a thought that eliminates the subject, but a thought that shatters it and systematically distributes it', writes James Williams (2009: 53). In *The Swimmer*, the subject is shattered, both physically and metaphorically. The swimmer pursues a quest for an origin that turns out to be empty, in a structuralist film with a grid of pools and an empty centre.

*The Swimmer* has a signifying chain, but no story. In the film adaptation, it is as if Hollywood is trying to counter the fact that the original does not have a narrative arc but a geographical line with a hysteric casting of nature as the incompatible object of desire: not a femme fatale, but a *nature fatale*. This anxiety of the human being overwhelmed by nature is present only in the film version. Its default realist image is more vulnerable to the impact of nature than literature because of the environment's indexical imprint on the celluloid; because the materiality of film is more part of the environment than the semiotics of language.

The fear that the structure might not hold up against materiality (that it might not be everything) materialises only in the film. Nature as nature does not feature in Cheever's story. The short story revolves around the emptiness of only existing in language. In Cheever's original, no nature has taken over what used to be Neddy's home, only his car has a rusty door handle and his house a loose rain gutter. The incompatibility of man and nature, which is first idolised and then becomes life threatening, is only developed in the screenplay where it is integral to the film's *dénouement*. Ageing is not as threatening in language as it is for a character in a Hollywood film. In the film, nature denotes decay and is set against the human subject who is not a part of it. While at the beginning of Neddy's journey, nature signifies life, at the end of it, nature means aging and death. The closer the swimmer gets to nature, the more he is separated from other humans and physically worn out. Nature is not compatible with human structures. In *The Swimmer*, nature is what Lacan would have called the Real and inaccessible.

There is a gap between what Neddy had imagined and what is actually there. He starts his day vigorous and fit for his age and nearly drowns in one of the pools by the end of it. The day could have lasted months or years. Leaves are falling in what seemed to be summer. The line of pools is not only spatial but also temporal, or as it has been described at the time: 'Neddy is swimming through his past to the nameless horror of an unrefracted present' (Canby 1968). The unrefractedness in this structuralist film is the empty space the human subject finds when it looks for its origin and is faced only with unstratified nature. The empty home the swimmer returns to – revealed through the square of a broken window – is like the empty object at the centre of structuralism: its lack of identity is what enables the structure (Deleuze 2004: 188). Only because of this unoccupied space can structures proliferate: 'There is no structure without the empty square, which makes everything function' (Deleuze 1990: 51). The subject is constructed in its subjection: 'The subject is precisely the agency which follows the empty place: as Lacan says, "less subject than subjected – subjected to the empty square"' (Deleuze 2004: 190). The structures are humanly determined, also in nature. The swimmer is the nomadic subject of structuralism, incapable of achieving completion, and separate from any materiality.

## Post-structural Skies

For the structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, although structures develop differently in different environments, these are

‘integrated into ideological systems’ (1985: 110). Even the sky is populated by humans and their stories: ‘in the sky, the hero meets two old women’ (ibid.: 111). Lévi-Strauss looks at the sky as part of a myth that is cast as an apparently ‘objective’ structure, rather than an underlying origin. In structuralism, elements determine each other and themselves in symbolic relations (Deleuze 2004: 176). Structure incarnates itself in its own series (ibid.: 172). Structuralism translates difference in negative opposition and ‘when difference is read as opposition it is deprived of the peculiar thickness in which its positivity is affirmed’ (Deleuze 1997: 205).

Deleuze suggests a new structural space that coincides more with Benning’s films than with structural or structuralist films. Benning’s films are not merely about a structure of, in themselves, negative and empty elements that only acquire signification in combination. The films positively affirm the material presence of a lake or a sky. While the swimmer swims through empty signifying chains, Benning’s *13 Lakes* bring out the thick materiality of difference and the minimalist images fill up with our thoughts. But each lake also becomes more singular as part of a series than it would merely as an individual lake, or even just a still image: ‘structure has a value of its own’ (Williams 2009: 47). The structure of Benning’s films generates a new space, which can neither be abstracted nor repeated.

While in structural and structuralist film the subject of the structure is structure (Deleuze 2004: 178), Benning’s films go beyond the structures they employ. They are not about the structure of something and are merely structured according to a principle, but they generate something new. The structures of Benning’s films do not repeat questions that ‘always find the answer that they deserve as a function of the symbolic field in which they are posed’ (ibid.: 182). By moving beyond a symbolic structure that produces the original they are able to discover material economies, for instance that of water in the California Trilogy. Benning’s skies and lakes are not structured through a grid of singular points that pervade the whole film. Because the structure of Benning’s films – like the length of a film reel, or the time a train takes to pass through the frame or a cigarette takes to be smoked – is external and not combinatory, it allows the films to be open.

Parodying structural filmmaking, Peter Greenaway’s *Vertical Features Remake* (1978) lists arbitrary tree trunks and wooden posts in nature in quick succession. Since the trunks are only there to signify a vertical feature, they merely repeat the structuring element. While new thought unravels when watching a Benning film, thinking does not move beyond recognising already existing structures in *Vertical Features*

*Remake*. As a parody of a structural film, it remains structural. By contrast, the external structure of Benning's films and the long duration of shots allows for an opening up from the inside. Félix Guattari would call this the 'praxic opening-out which constitutes the essence of "eco-art"' (2005: 35). Benning describes his structural framing as 'a container that allows a freedom'.<sup>3</sup> Using the same metaphor, Claire Colebrook finds that in structuralism there are no external containers: space is 'the effect of a synthesis of points, not a container or ground' (2006: 195). But in Benning's films, new relations can be thought in each shot. There is no latent structure incarnated, no inherent skyness or lakeness in an abstract structural relation. The sky or the lake is not structured, only the film. While the shots of *Ten Skies* might all be of the same length and of the sky, they are no generalities abstracted from particular examples. They do not tell us that all skies are the same, or that it all comes down to the same sky. The structuring elements differ qualitatively from what they generate. Not only is each sky and each lake different, but in one shot the cloud, the smoke and the steam continue to change or the same object changes over several shots.

The ephemeral clouds in *Ten Skies* could have been isolated as an aesthetic event, or dramatised like in a nature programme on turbulent weather that presents nature as a spectacle, but for Benning, 'there is no need at all to call on a transcendence' (Deleuze 1994: 17); instead, the singularity of the mundane is appreciated. Often the cause for what we see in the image remains offscreen, such as what produces the steam or the smoke in the skies of *Ten Skies*. What looks beautiful could be pollution, problematising the deceptiveness of an isolated aesthetics in an eco-aesthetical move. By not tracing an image, subject or an object back to their original source, the films focus on the singularities of what we see and hear.

Water, sky and wind are collective forces of moving materials (unlike human or nonhuman animal nature, there is not one individual wind or sky). A sky can be framed, but one sky cannot be separated from another in terms of its matter, only arbitrarily in a frame or by a set point in time (or by seeing symbolic structures in it). Already in the mid-nineteenth century, the art critic John Ruskin criticised 'the old masters' for separating the cloud from the sky and the fact that 'no kind of connection is ever hinted at' (1913: 219). His topics in *Modern Painters*, such as the skies and water, are like those of Benning's films of the same elements. Benning shares Ruskin's appreciation of changeability and mutability. Even if painters have to freeze change, it was already clear that nature is 'never the same for two moments together' (ibid.: 217). Something that is changing while keeping the connection

between the different elements thus reveals what Deleuze would call its consistency. What happens in the frame is ‘an opening into consistency’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2003: 334). The plane of consistency cuts across ‘chaotic variability’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2009: 208) and ‘concretely ties together the heterogeneous, disparate elements’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2003: 558) in a consolidation of multiplicities. It is opposed to that of structuration with lines of selection ‘that reduce production to representation’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2000: 310) and is united under a ‘plane of organisation’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2003: 558). The plane of consistency is also called the plane of immanence.

### **Eco-aesthetics and Imperceptibility**

The term ‘eco-aesthetics’ brings together two separate planes, that of ecological materiality and that of the image. We cannot make images of a burning nuclear reactor from nearby without being affected by its radioactivity. Documentary images are not separated from what is depicted in them; they are part of the world. The immanence of the world to the work and the artist is an ethical and ecological issue. Images are not just visual. The image and the filmmaker are parts of ‘the environment’ that is not only around us, but goes through us. In their emphasis on the materiality of only the medium and on medium specificity, experimental and avant-garde film and video have often not been eco-aesthetical. Pure film assumes a position separate from the relations of the world. In the legacy of the avant-garde, the artist is separated from the world and the work from its environment. For an eco-aesthetics, we have to leave the avant-garde’s aesthetics of disconnectedness as well as the phenomenological stance of the artist as recording mere impressions. The filmmaker or artist, the work and the ‘context’ or the ‘environment’, all belong to the same plane of immanence. Images cannot merely be about pure aesthetics anymore. Images and their makers (or takers) are part of the world. Film and video needs to leave pure aesthetics. Images can only be impure.

It is also necessary to distinguish eco-aesthetics in moving images from an ecocinema that is driven by human argument and content. Ecocinema is said to be built on ‘the capacity to choose consciously’, which ‘is uniquely human’ (Willoquet-Maricondi 2010: 45). This emphasis on conscious choice makes ecocinema a Cartesian endeavour that separates humans from the rest of nature, exactly the reason why there is the need for an ecocinema in the first place. ‘Cognitive estrangement’ – conscious distancing – is regarded as a premises for ‘environmental

awareness' (Ingram 2012: 45). Like structural film, this ecocinema too is very much a rational cinema. The ecocinema of Hollywood fiction films and eco-documentaries in which eco-logical connections are made only at the level of content cancels out eco-aesthetics. Narrative cinema – including ecocinema – is not eco-aesthetical because it over-codes through human subjectivity and argument. A film can also be eco-aesthetical without images of nature. A one-hour shot of the steam of a coke-plant chimney in *Ruhr* (2009) might not show nature, but if a film would only be eco-aesthetical if it portrayed nature, then ecocinema would be in danger of using contemplative images of nature to recycle the picturesque. Benning's films do not represent an ecological subject matter. They are eco-aesthetical precisely *because* they do not represent subjects or a subject matter as separate and closed systems. Eco-aesthetics operate through forces rather than conscious actions. Benning's documentaries do not impose, but generate passive creation: 'contemplating is creating, the mystery of passive creation' (Deleuze and Guattari 2009: 212). Contemplation becomes a subject that 'fills itself with what it contemplates' (ibid.). All things are contemplations, 'not only people and animals, but plants, the earth and rocks' (ibid.).

But the difference between ecocinema and eco-aesthetics is not just one between content and form, or a repetition of the two avant-gardes of the 1920s (such as Eisenstein vs. Léger) and the 1960s (such as Godard vs. Brakhage) (Wollen 1982). Both are modernist avant-gardes distanced from the world; one in historical materialism and through alienation, the other through a materialism of the materiality of the medium, as in Greenbergian modernism or pure cinema, 'an art of pure signifier detached from meaning as much as from reference' (ibid.: 95). Neither connects the image to the world in a new materialism of eco-aesthetics.<sup>4</sup>

Appreciations of moving images of nature are often rooted in phenomenological experience. Scott MacDonald, for example, defines ecocinema as providing 'an evocation of the experience of being immersed in the natural world' (MacDonald 2004: 108). Instead, I would say that our materiality and that of our images are part of the environment, which is why we cannot be immersed in them. We cannot be immersed in immanence. Post-environmentalists convincingly point out that 'if humans are part of the environment then the concept of environment is meaningless' (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 2006: 198). We are part of the environment, or perhaps rather, 'we are the environment'<sup>5</sup> and the environment is us, or in other words: 'We are vital materiality and we are surrounded by it' (Bennett 2010: 14). We are all organisms. Benning's films do not manifest an environmentalist view of a nature separated from humans.

Benning's films have been claimed for structural as well as phenomenological readings despite the fact that these are built on opposing philosophies. The cinema of apperception – structural film – where 'apperceptive strategies come to the fore' (Sitney 2002: 348) should be unreadable in phenomenological terms of perception. Phenomenology asks us to look and listen without any references. But Benning's emphasis on looking and listening is only the first step of an artist generating a work. It follows a rejection of a pre-given individual subjectivity. In his classes, he famously asks his students to forget their personal narratives and any attempts of dramatisation and to merely experience what is happening for a long time in a not very eventful place. Unlike phenomenology, for Benning, looking and listening is vital for forging new perceptions and connections rather than repeating previous ones or memories of experiences. In the resulting film, the sounds and images are framed and composed and often sounds from different sources are added. When we watch the product of this process, we see different assemblages to those perceived at the time by the filmmaker. Thought is produced in the process of generating these images. The eco-aesthetic connections of Benning's films become apparent from what we cannot, or what we cannot *immediately* perceive.

### **Planes in the Plane of Immanence**

After several shots of things reassuringly moving, Benning's first digital video *Ruhr* shows foliage not in movement. If this were shot on celluloid, the film grain would still be moving, or the projection would make little jolts, even if nothing moved in front of the camera, but because the images are in high definition, we cannot see anything moving.<sup>6</sup> Since there is also no perceptible sound and this stillness continues for nearly two minutes, a fear that not only the movement *in* the images, but that the movement *of* the images has stopped became palpable at the premiere of the video at the Duisburg Documentary Film Festival in the Ruhr area of Germany, where it was shot. After a couple of long minutes of stillness, a plane flies behind the foliage and we hear its sound. Everyone breathes a sigh of relief. The leaves remain static, though, and stay like this again for a while after the plane has gone. After half a minute, the wind picks up and leaves fall, then dies down again and stillness returns. Then another plane flies behind the foliage and, again, only after a while do the leaves move. At this point, we recognise it is the plane that makes the wind move and the leaves fall, only that the wind arrives much later than we see





**Figure 2.2** Leaves and plane in *Ruhr* (Benning, 2009)

and hear the plane. This process repeats itself several times during the eighteen minutes long take which makes us aware how we cannot immediately see the way things affect one another and that we understand the impact of an action only later. In what could be a description of the time between the moment of the plane flying and the waiting for the wind moving the leaves and the image, Deleuze (2001: 29) writes: 'This indefinite life [of the plane of immanence] does not itself have moments, close as they may be one to another, but only between-times, between-moments; it doesn't just come about or come after but offers the immensity of an empty time where one sees the event yet to come and already happened'.

Today, the exceptionality of foliage moving in the first Lumière cinematograph screenings has changed to the exceptionality of foliage *not* moving in high definition. We think moving images should be seen to move, even if the objects depicted in them are momentarily still. The temporary suspension of movement makes us aware of an anxiety that the movement could stop, as if the ceasing of movement in a film means the end of our life that is so determined by images. Deleuze wrote about the celluloid image: 'At the point where the cinematographic image most directly confronts the photo, it also becomes the most radically

distinct from it' (1994: 17). Stillness is even more approximated in this digital long take. While one might think that because of its material properties, celluloid manifests eco-aesthetical connections better than the abstract digital image, the ontological stasis of the digital (which in action cinema ironically excels in generating an excess of artificial movement) captures the stillness before the plane's impact much better than celluloid and allows the ecological issues at stake to become perceptible. 'What we must do is reach the photographic or cinematic threshold' Deleuze and Guattari (2003: 281) called for. This shot in *Ruhr* reaches the threshold of high-definition video. In contrast to computer-generated images, the indexical link of digital documentary images to what they depict enables us to make the connection between the plane and the wind. The plane generates its own ecosystem, which the movement in the moving images is part of. 'Abstraction' writes Franco Berardi, 'reaches its perfection in the digital era. The labour of physical transformation of matter has become so abstract that it is now useless: machines can replace it completely' (2009: 61). Benning's first high-definition video *Ruhr* brings the material labour of the nonhuman protagonists to the fore through the abstract labour of digital video. In what could be called 'impure video' – and unlike in much experimental, 'pure' cinema – the materiality of the medium does not prevent contemplating the material connections of the world it depicts, but instead brings out the imperceptible.

## Leaves in the Wind

Leaves moving in the wind have been a recurring subject since the earliest cinema. To seeing the first cinematographic images of leaves rustling in Lumière's *Repas de bébé/Baby's Dinner* (1895), the audience, who was used to the motionless proscenium arch, reacted with amazement, even if their motion was only in the background of the human action. But it was not the case that *any* movement was seen as exceptional to an audience that had not seen moving images before. The viewers accepted the movements of the human subjects at the dinner table, 'because they were perceived as part of the performance' (Vaughan 1999: 5), even if those were apparently natural acts like feeding a baby. But that objects without consciousness should move undirected by humans on the screen – that was astonishing, even if it was regarded as normal that leaves move without human help in life. The shock was that plant nature seemed to suddenly have come to life on screen, when leaves were not supposed to move without human direction. So in the

reaction to the first moving images of moving nature, there was immediately a separation between what were regarded as natural objects and conscious human agency.

By the end of the 1940s, D.W. Griffith, known for non-leaf related human epics, complained that what is lacking in film are more images of wind in trees. But at the same time, 'after fifty years of cinematic realism' (Bazin 1997: 108) dominated by the legacy of Griffith's narrative tradition, André Bazin insists on a neorealism that shows much more than wind in trees: 'The cinema has come a long way since the heroic days when crowds were satisfied with the rough rendition of a branch quivering in the wind!' (ibid.). He believed that cinema should show humans in their environment, which is far more than merely a branch in the wind. To show a character's environment 'in a given place at a given time' (Bazin 1967: 50) was essential. But are we only looking at an environment in the image, or is the image regarded as part of the environment?

The question of what force is moving the leaves defines the relation between human, nature and the supernatural and decides if that between humans, nature and the moving image is one of transcendence or immanence. Wind in leaves is often cast as supernatural in the movies. In a fiction film, where humans arguably attempt to direct everything, botanical nature must be seen to be directed too. It cannot be that nature moves by itself, it must be moved by something supernatural. The difference of these documentary cutaways to leaves in the wind is legitimised, within the reasoning of the fiction film, by the otherness of the supernatural. Nature is either moved by a transcending higher consciousness or is itself the transcending entity. Nature can only turn against humans, because it is regarded as separate from them. Wind in trees in fiction films often announces either a good or a bad supernatural force. In *The Holiday* (2006), leaves in the wind denote the magic of romance. In the case of nonhuman, botanical nature fighting back against humans in *The Happening* (2008), nature itself is the transcending force and wind – mostly noticed when in trees – is the way plants transmit neurotoxins which make humans eradicate themselves. In the *Final Destination* franchise, wind in trees (and wind generally) announces the presence of death. Here nature is merely a conduit that is transcended by the supernatural.

The Catholic Bazin believed in the continuation between the world in front of the camera and that of the cinema, through the long take and the long shot, as a transcending act of spiritual oneness between humans, their environment and God. He would have opposed the casting of nature in service of a story, objecting that 'the sheep wore around

their necks the imaginary ribbon of the plot' (1997: 107) – even for a story that tells of transcendence. Bazin praised the cinematographic image for a 'natural automatism' (Wollen 1982: 118) that is devoid of human subjectivity – unlike painting which involves the human hand – and 'affects us like a phenomenon in nature, like a flower or a snowflake' (Bazin 1967: 13). For Bazin, the image is natural because it is automatically generated without human agency. But by saying that there is no subjectivity in nature and in the photographic image, and that only humans express subjectivity, Bazin separates humans from nature as well as from the image. While the character in the image is part of 'the natural image of the world' (ibid.: 15), Bazin's vision of a natural image excludes man from its production. Peter Wollen describes Bazin's ontology as such: 'the work of art is returned to an integral objecthood of nature, existing as a pure being' (1982: 193). Thereby, 'the being of the pro-filmic event (the objects within the camera's field of vision) was transferred to the being of the film itself' (ibid.: 189). So while Bazin would have rejected 'pure film' for its emphasis on form, he endorsed 'pure being' and this depends on the separation of the film, as part of nature, from its human creator.

Therefore, a Bazinian cinema is not necessarily eco-aesthetical (and neither is the long take *per se*; the highly stylized opening tracking shot of the fiction film *Touch of Evil* [1958], for example, might be a long take, which Bazin praises [1967: 34], but it is not eco-aesthetical). Bazin appreciates a neorealist cinema of recognition that is based on identity: 'a reality that everyone . . . personally recognises' (1997: 108). Since one can only recognise what one knew before, Bazin values film for being a repetition of a reality, an 'ontological identity between the object and its photographic image' (1971: 98). But this identity relies upon a separation of life in the image from that outside of it, a separation of the naturalness of the image from the subjectivity of its human producer. This is why for Bazin, it was reasonable that the documentary quality of images, which he valued, was contained in a fiction film where what is in front of the camera is a world that is treated differently to the one behind and around it. In a documentary context of image generation, the 'ontological identity' might have been too mutable: 'Meaning resided in the pro-filmic event' (Wollen 1982: 205), in the event as a copy unaltered by human agency. This 'cinema whose essence was elsewhere, in the pro-filmic event' (ibid.: 191) only accounts for what is in front of the camera, not for the camera's exo-filmic environment, which encompasses the camera and its human operator as part of its environment. The separation between the pro-filmic world and that around the camera and outside the frame is based on the identity of the image and

the model. It occludes the immanence of the human outside the image to the film, the video or the file, and the filmed material. Despite his rejection of scientific fragmentation, Bazin sees and seeks a reality that is unaffected by who is looking at it and filming it and centres only on the visible to the exclusion of imperceptible material relations. There is no immanence in this ontology.

In contrast to Bazin's cinema of recognition, Benning's films make us aware of what we cannot perceive, and generate thoughts we cannot recognise. By excluding his personal subjectivity and by looking at the world, however, Benning's documentaries do reveal something of reality in the Bazinian sense. His long takes, which allow the complexity and multiplicity of relations to grow in thought, can also be regarded as Bazinian, since they are 'based on a respect for the continuity of dramatic space and, of course, its duration' (Bazin 1967: 34). But Benning takes the Bazinian long take forward into eco-aesthetics through the immanence of video to the world and that of relations outside of the frame to the image. Only if we think that we are part of the generation of the image can we think of moving images eco-aesthetically and ecologically. In eco-aesthetics, moving images are part of the world and its material processes. In the plane of immanence, there is no 'pro-filmic'.

There is a subsection of artists' films of planes filmed through leaves in the wind. Guy Sherwin's *Filter Beds* (1990–1998) features impressions of long grass and branches with planes flying in the distance. But through self-conscious play with the focus and editing that fragments the space, the images all point back to the artist as the one whose subjective impressions they are. They are predominantly about the aesthetics of reading an environment through film. The artist here is not part of the environment which serves as his material. If we follow Bazin's assertion that the image is the model, then this kind of experimental cinema cuts up the world.

Conversely, while the cuts of Helga Fanderl's three-minute-long Super 8 film *Airplanes II* (2006) follow in quick succession, making the film appear more fragmented, the images as well as their human operator are firmly planted in the ground. Each shot trails a plane as it flies behind the foliage, shot from the same position. Because the film is edited in the camera, there is a connection between the film and what is being filmed, and we are aware that each plane flying behind the trees is a different plane and that these are not copies of the same shot duplicated in postproduction. Because the camera follows the planes in the background, the trees in the foreground get blurred and the images assume a dramatic and painterly viscosity, but they are still connected with what is filmed. Since Fanderl traces the planes from directly below,

they go downwards from the top to the bottom of the image in the brief period they are captured. Therefore we repeatedly see a plane going down in the image, even though it continues to fly upwards. Fanderl's position is that of a human as part of the environment, struggling to see and understand it. The stuttering images, the many edits of what looks the same, but actually is a different plane, are like repeated attempts to get looking at the world right. Fanderl's decision to edit in the camera and not to leave her spot shows a determined insistence on the site and on the relation of the human to her environment as a location she (and we) cannot escape. Rather than cutting up life through film, her films transform, as she writes, 'fragments of real life into a cinematic form of existence' (2010: 18).

The appreciation of leaf action predates film as well as video. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: 'The waving of the boughs in the storm, is new to me and old. It takes me by surprise and yet is unknown. Its effect is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over me, when I deemed I was thinking justly or doing right' (1836: 13–14). Just when we thought we were doing right with watching boughs wave on celluloid, we have to admit that they stop moving better in high definition. Contrary to Griffith's desire for more wind in more trees – 'What the modern movie lacks is beauty, the beauty of the moving wind in the trees', because 'we have lost beauty' (Goodman 1961: 11) – the wind in Benning's trees is not merely about aesthetic beauty. Contrary to fiction films, the leaves are not moved by a supernatural force. Unlike Bazin's claim that the cinematographic image contributes to 'natural creation' (1967: 15), documentary eco-aesthetics problematise what is natural in what is created. *Ruhr* reveals the wind as the result of human action. It is humans who are (indirectly) moving the leaves. The airplane in the plane of immanence offers no line of flight (what Deleuze calls a way out). Nothing is transcended.

## **Impure Landscape in Impure Film**

Perhaps because landscapes have been the subject of paintings for longer than they have of moving images, art history has so far advanced a more complex take on them than film studies. Art distinguishes between pure landscape (figurative, but without human figures) and pure painting (which is abstract). (Benning's documentaries of land are what in painting would be called figurative and in film realist.) Since what is pure about painting is abstract, and what is pure about landscape is figurative, there cannot be a pure landscape painting. But

the automatic realism of the indexical moving image makes pure landscape film possible. This might be the reason why, whereas art history has moved beyond the idea of pure landscape painting, film scholarship still invokes these purist modes. In *Landscape and Film*, referring to Kenneth Clark's *Landscape into Art* from 1949, Martin Lefebvre repeats the notion of a pure, 'autonomous landscape' (Lefebvre 2006: 23) separated from humans and their narratives. In order to uphold this autonomous space in cinema, not only are landscape aesthetics disconnected from land materiality, but also space from time: 'time itself (the film, the story) is arrested in order to deliver to our view a space' (ibid.: 52). Developed in response to fiction film, time is equated with narrative, and narrative with story. Presuming that if there is no story nothing happens, landscape in film is marked as 'a space freed from eventhood' (ibid.: 22) that excludes organic and inorganic material events. Without the predetermined narrative of the film, time is cast as frozen in *temps mort*. In the opposition between watching either pure landscape in order 'to contemplate the filmic spectacle' (ibid.: 29), or anthropocentric narratives, contemplation is likened to spectacle, as though the extraordinary explosions of an action movie are like nothing happening on an ordinary lake for ten minutes in a documentary. This binary approach is obviously in contrast to Benning's, whose non-narrative films of land allow for the self-generation of narratives and who determines that there is no difference between narrative and contemplation: we cannot escape generating narratives even if we just look at the sky.<sup>7</sup> To cast landscape as an 'extra-diegetic space lacking narrative function' (ibid.: 33, 44), conceals the narratives that are already taking place in constructing the land.

What Lefebvre reads as dead, Deleuze sees as the condition of modern cinema: 'the pure and direct images of time', an 'unaltered form filled by change' (1994: 17). Benning finds that 'You can't show nothing by looking at something for five seconds'.<sup>8</sup> You have to show nothing for longer. The sameness in the structure of Benning's films makes sure that the images start off with the same chance, such as in one shot length for all. When asked if the pared-down aesthetics and structural simplicity of his films match the low income economics they depict,<sup>9</sup> Benning does not see the conditions of poverty merely as a lack but decisively registers minor environments that are usually not looked at for any length of time. Poverty is not a term that applies to nature. There is no poor nature, or as Ruskin wrote: 'The sky is for all' (1913: 217).

Pure landscape depends on the separation from its human environment. While the land is owned, the landscape is not. Landscape is

the view of the land. In 1836, Emerson, like the swimmer, observed how land is private property: 'Miller owns this field, Locke that, and Manning the woodland beyond, but none of them owns the landscape' (1836: 11). For Emerson, looking at the view of the land, finding his 'head bathed in air' (ibid.: 13) – not water – was enough. Instead of traversing the land defined by structures, like the swimmer over a century later, Emerson sought the totality of an overview through a part of himself: 'I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all' (ibid.). Unlike the dehumanised reduction of the human to an eye in structural film – as in Snow's camera machine in *La Région Centrale* – and much of film scholarship's association of landscape with emotional detachment (Lefebvre 2006) as well as the visual distance of the long shot, Emerson's relationship to nature does not rely on spiritual distance, but – like that of Bazin – on a metaphysical harmony between man, nature and God: 'The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God' (1836: 13). What circulates through man, though, cannot have been shaped by him, states Emerson. For all the circulation, there is no immanence. Only the supernatural creates nature. This circulation only goes in one direction; there is no accounting for mutuality. What 'distinguishes the stick of timber of the woodcutter from the tree of the poet' (ibid.: 10) is that the wooden stick is a natural object that has lost its poetic integrity by having been worked on by man for man. Only nature not worked upon inspires artistic work: 'you cannot freely admire a noble landscape, if labourers are digging in the field hard by' (ibid.: 81). An image of the land is especially not a landscape, if someone works in it (Mitchell 1994: 14). Emerson wrote that 'the greatest delights which the fields and woods minister, is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable . . . They nod to me and I to them' (1836: 13), vegetable at the time being a synonym for plants. W.J.T. Mitchell explains: "'Landscape" must represent itself, then, as the antithesis of "land," as an "ideal estate," quite independent of "real estate"' (Mitchell 1994: 15). Therefore, the land is not depicted in a landscape. While Benning is said to make landscape films, they are, in fact, films of land.

In eco-aesthetics, the image cannot be separated from its material connections to the world, nor the workers' activities from the image of the land they maintain. Benning's films are post-structural and materialist documentaries not in terms of the materiality of the film or of a historical materialist reading, but with an emphasis on the immanence of referential diversity that goes beyond the self-reflexive explorations of experimental landscape film that are often a record of their own making. Benning's impure moving images allow connections to emerge



that are not merely aesthetical. In contrast to eco-documentaries that show us what we usually do not see, Benning's documentaries show us that we cannot see everything and that not everything can be seen. They are eco-aesthetical because they are not simply about the here and now of centred perception, and because they play with how we do not see where something comes from, where it goes and even what it is that we are seeing.

## Land Film

How can a work be a part of the world, create a world (Massumi 2002: 173) and be a document of both? I would suggest that a work can only be in the world and generate a world *because* it is a document; because it does not repress its own singularities by repeating an original referent, be that as fiction or art. Perhaps we can apply Deleuze's suggestion of a description to Benning's documentary images: 'We recognise here the very specific genre of *description* which, . . . instead of being concerned with a supposedly distinct object constantly both absorbs and creates its own object' (1994: 68). Documentaries are most profound, in my view, when they are like this crystalline description.

Before Deleuze conceived of the crystal image of time in 1985, the land artist Robert Smithson saw the crystal as an image of frozen time and made the earth work *Spiral Jetty* (1970) in the Great Salt Lake of Utah. The jetty is covered in salt crystals and changes with its surroundings over time. Sometimes the land art becomes invisible as it is completely covered by the lake. The spiral shape of the whole jetty is supposed to mimic the structure of a crystal (Smithson 1996: 147). Smithson saw film itself as a spiral made up of frames (*ibid.*: 148). So, one would think that a durational film of the crystals of the jetty changing over time would be the ideal crystal image of time. However, these might be images of crystals in time, but they are not crystal images. *Casting a Glance* (2007) – Benning's film of Smithson's land art – is merely representing crystallisation by subordinating it to the identity of the concept in art. Whereas when looking at the lakes in *13 Lakes*, 'the actual image becomes virtual' (Deleuze 1994: 70); when looking at the lake that contains land art in *Casting a Glance*, the 'perpetual exchange between the virtual and the actual', which defines a crystal (Deleuze and Parnet 2007: 150), is ossified and the virtual has been frozen with the art concept.

Benning has been influenced by Smithson's emphasis on entropy, that is, an object in nature is declared a piece of art and then left to its

own devices. This is followed by nature taking its course and humans negotiating the boundaries of the artwork. However, this comparison only allows for the one relation – that between art and nature – to be thematised. When we see the surface of a lake in *13 Lakes*, we are free to explore our thoughts in response to the images and sounds, but, even if we also only see the surface of a lake in *Casting a Glance*, they are tied down by the art that lies underneath despite us not seeing it. In the film, the jetty becomes ossified as art, and both film and art cease to be immanent. Deleuze describes how a still life with its presence and composition of objects ‘which are wrapped up in themselves’ (1994: 16) differs from an empty landscape without content. In *Casting a Glance*, the presence of land art turns moving images of land into a still life.

Because the concept is the only thing that distinguishes conceptual art from everything else, it is based on a repetition of the identical. In contrast to conceptual art, Deleuzian concepts are not about the identity of the concept. Following Deleuze and Guattari’s rejection of conceptual art in *What is Philosophy?* and Deleuze’s critique of the concept as a repetition of the same in *Difference and Repetition*, Smithson’s land art has a confining effect in Benning’s film of it, and Benning’s other land films chime much more with Deleuze’s cinema and Guattari’s eco-sophy. In that sense, the concept of land art in its representation in film works against eco-aesthetics. *Casting a Glance* submits to the art it depicts by being about it. Land film therefore seems best when it films land and not land art – the lake and not the jetty.

## Notes

- 1 The term ‘eco-aesthetics’ has been used by Rasheed Araeen in his manifesto ‘Eco-aesthetics. A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century’, in which he opposes the ‘transformation of land into art’ (2009: 682) by the self-centred artist and suggests that ‘art become part of living processes of productivity of the land itself as well as its inhabitants’ (ibid: 682): art as part of the world rather than objects in institutions. This chapter develops the notion of ‘eco-aesthetics’ with respect to documentary film and video in the trajectory of the ecological philosophy of Félix Guattari who used the terms ‘eco-logic’ and ‘eco-sophy’ (2000), with the latter also being employed in a different manner by the deep ecologist Arne Naess.
- 2 Gilles Deleuze cites Marie-Christine Questerbert, *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 296, January 1979 (Deleuze 1992: 230, fn. 21).
- 3 James Benning in the interview in chapter 3 of this volume (p. 66).
- 4 This was the gist of my response to Chris Darke’s question following my paper ‘Planes in the Plane of Immanence, or: Who or What Moves the

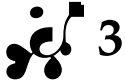
- Leaves?’ at the symposium *Screening Nature: Flora, Fauna and the Moving Image*, Queen Mary, University of London, 18 May 2013.
- 5 David Suzuki says this in *Force of Nature* (Sturla Gunnarsson, Canada 2010).
  - 6 Benning discusses the stasis of movement of the digital video image in the interview in chapter 3 of this volume (p. 61).
  - 7 James Benning in the interview in chapter 3 of this volume.
  - 8 Benning maintains that the viewer always creates narratives, in the interview in chapter 3 of this volume (p. 61).
  - 9 Benning’s answer to my question at the Q and A to his multimedia presentation ‘Milwaukee to Lincoln, MT’ at the *Visible Evidence XVI* conference, University of Southern California, 15 August 2009.

## References

- 13 *Lakes*. 2004. [Film]. Directed by J. Benning. U.S.A./Germany: Benning, Westdeutscher Rundfunk.
- Airplanes II*. 2001. [Film]. Directed by H. Fanderl. Germany/France.
- Araeen, R. 2009. ‘Ecoaesthetics. A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century’. *Third Text*. 23.5 (September): pp. 679–84.
- Bazin, A. 1967. *What is Cinema? Volume I*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- . 1971. *What is Cinema? Volume II*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- . 1997. ‘Farrebique or the Paradox of Realism’, in B. Cardullo (ed.), *Bazin at Work*. London: Routledge, pp. 103–8.
- Bennett, J. 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press.
- Berardi, F.B. 2009. *The Soul at Work. From Alienation to Autonomy*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).
- Canby, V. 1968. ‘The Screen: Cross-County “Swimmer”: Burt Lancaster Stars in Cheever Story’, film review of *The Swimmer*, *New York Times*, 16 May. Retrieved 4 June 2012 from <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9A06E1D9163AE134BC4E52DFB3668383679EDE>
- Casting a Glance*. 2007. [Film]. Directed by J. Benning. U.S.A.: Benning.
- Cheever, J. 1985. *The Stories of John Cheever*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Clark, K. 1976 (1949). *Landscape into Art*. London: John Murray.
- Colebrook, C. 2006 (2005). ‘The Space of Man: On the Specificity of Affect in Deleuze and Guattari’, in I. Buchanan and G. Lambert (eds), *Deleuze and Space*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 189–206.
- Deleuze, G. 1990. *The Logic of Sense*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . 1992 (1986). *Cinema 1. The Movement-Image*. London: The Athlone Press.
- . 1994 (1989). *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*. London: The Athlone Press.
- . 1997 (1994). *Difference and Repetition*. London: The Athlone Press.
- . 2001. *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*. New York: Zone Books.

- . 2004. *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953–1974*. Los Angeles and New York: Semiotext(e).
- Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari. 2000 (1984). *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: The Athlone Press.
- . 2003 (1988). *A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- . 2009 (1994). *What is Philosophy?* London and New York: Verso.
- Deleuze, G. and C. Parnet. 2007 (1987). *Dialogues II*. New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press.
- Emerson, R.W. 1986 (1836). *Nature*. Boston: James Munroe and Company.
- Fanderl, H. 2010. 'Film Live'. *Sequence* 1: p. 18.
- Filter Beds*. 1990–1998 [Film]. Directed by G. Sherwin. U.K.
- Final Destination*. [Film]. 2000. Directed by J. Wong. U.S.A.: Zide/Perry Productions, Hard Eights Pictures.
- Goodman, E. 1961. *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Guattari, F. 2005 (2000). *The Three Ecologies*. London and New York: Continuum.
- The Happening*. 2008. [Film]. Directed by M. Night Shyamalan. U.S.A.: Twentieth Century Fox, Spyglass Entertainment, Blinding Edge Pictures, UTV Motion Pictures.
- The Holiday*. 2006. [Film]. Directed by N. Meyers. U.S.A.: Columbia Pictures, Universal Pictures, Relativity Media.
- Ingram, D. 2012. 'The Aesthetics and Ethics of Eco-film Criticism', in S. Rust, S. Monani and S. Cubitt (eds.), *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*, AFI Film Readers. New York and London: Routledge, pp. 43–61.
- James, D.E. 1989. *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Lefebvre, M. (ed.). 2006. *Landscape and Film*. New York and Abingdon: Routledge.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. 1985. *The View from Afar*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- MacDonald, S. 2004. 'Toward an Eco-Cinema'. *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 11.2 (Summer): pp. 107–32.
- . 2005. *A Critical Cinema 5. Interviews with Independent Filmmakers*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.
- Massumi, B. 2002. *Parables for the Virtual. Movement. Affect, Sensation*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- La Région Centrale*. 1971 [Film]. Directed by M. Snow. Canada.
- Repas de bébé*. 1895. [Film]. Directed by Louis Lumière. France: Lumière.
- Ruhr*. 2009. [Film]. Directed by J. Benning. Germany: ZDF/3sat, Schaf oder Scharf Film.
- Ruskin, J. 1913. *Modern Painters*. Volume 1. London: George Allen and Sons.
- Shellenberger, M. and T. Nordhaus. 2006. 'FAQ: Post-Environmentalism', in M. Andrews (ed.), *Land, Art. A Cultural Ecology Handbook*. London: Royal Society of Art and Arts Council, pp. 196–99.
- Sitney, P.A. 1969. 'Structural Film'. *Film Culture* 47 (Summer), pp. 1–10.
- . 2002. *Visionary Film. The American Avant-Garde 1943–2000*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Smithson, R. 1996. 'Spiral Jetty', in J. Flam (ed.), *The Collected Writings*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press, pp. 143–53.
- Spiral Jetty*. 1967. [Film] Directed by Robert Smithson. U.S.A.
- The Swimmer*. 1968. [Film]. Directed by F. Perry and S. Pollack. U.S.A.: Columbia Pictures, Horizon Pictures, Dover Productions.
- Ten Skies*. 2004. [Film]. Directed by J. Benning. U.S.A./Germany: CalArts, Westdeutscher Rundfunk.
- Vaughan, D. 1999. *For Documentary: Twelve Essays*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Vertical Features Remake*. 1978. [Film]. Directed by P. Greenaway. U.K.: Arts Council of Great Britain.
- Wavelength*. 1967. [Film]. Directed by M. Snow. Canada/U.S.A.
- Williams, J. 2009. 'Deleuze and Structure: How Far Can You Bend it?', in H. Berressem and L. Haferkamp (eds), *Deleuzian Events: Writing/History*. Berlin: Lit Verlag, pp. 44– 57.
- Willoquet-Maricondi, P. 'Shifting Paradigms: From Environmentalist Films to Ecocinema', in P. Willoquet-Maricondi (ed.), 2010. *Framing the World: Explorations in Ecocriticism and Film*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, pp. 43–61.
- Wollen, P. 1982. *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies*, London: Verso.



## LAND AS PROTAGONIST – AN INTERVIEW WITH JAMES BENNING

*Silke Panse*

*The following interview took place at the Duisburg Documentary Film Festival, Germany, on 4 November 2009, the day after the premiere of Ruhr.*

SP: Your films allow for numerous relations between nature, humans, machines and labour to develop. You have often said that landscape is a function of time. Would you also say that the subject is a function of landscape?

JB: My first film where I really directly tried to address that was *Landscape Suicide* [1986], where I thought that the subject really was a function of those events that happened in the landscape. It was a highly affluent community in California, where Bernadette lived and her family was poor, so there was this class isolation within that kind of social landscape where she felt very much outside of it. And then, in the second part of that film, Ed Gein living in the Wisconsin winter, there was a real physical separation due to landscape and climate: that he lived out on a farm and was by himself. So the events that happen to both Bernadette and Ed Gein are somewhat a function of where they lived. And in the case of Bernadette, it's more of a social landscape and a class difference landscape, which is also connected to the actual landscape, you know. Her house was in a little bit poorer neighbourhood and all run down and then she had these very affluent classmates, which was a big effect on her. And then Ed Gein, this physical landscape of being locked up in a cabin by yourself all winter long and isolated through the actual amount of snow and cold. So that film, it directly answers the question you asked, or tries to anyways, or at least poses that same question.

SP: Do you regard the phenomena, sites and landscapes of your films as protagonists as well as the people, because you listed them in the end credits of *The California Trilogy* as though they were subjects? If we are part of the landscape, is the land a subject too?

JB: Yes, I think, that's what I'm doing with the end credits. In *13 Lakes* [2004], I named the lakes, and in *Ruhr* [2009] I say what the seven shots are. In The California Trilogy, the credits document what's going on there, what small city it's near and then who owns the land. It's kind of a political reading of landscape itself through ownership, in other words, who makes the profit and who does the hard work. The hard work is in the image and who makes the profit shows up in the credits. Especially in The California Trilogy I am using the landscape as a protagonist. With each film I can talk about how it's a protagonist in a different way of course. But they all have a sense of themselves, almost as a personality. It also references our own need to always have narratives. Our minds always try to create narratives in anything, even in *13 Lakes*, your narrative might be 'what is he doing while he is filming'? Your mind always comes back to these narrative questions. So in another way, I give those titles to reference that kind of narrative. There is this little voice that creates language and narrative in your mind.

SP: Is that why you ask your students to drop their subjective narratives in favour of what they are looking at – so that they can see something that is not them? And is that why you usually use a static camera, because if there's too much camera movement, you can't see the movement of what's in front of the camera and that's the same with subjectivity: if you focus on it, you can't see anything else?

JB: Yeah. Most of the time, I can describe a shot as everything moving but the camera. You see everything that moves, because the camera doesn't, because it has a fixed gaze. I think the best examples of that are the airplanes landing in *Ruhr*. How the fixed gaze allows you to see that there's no movement. And the new digital media allows no movement at all. While film has a jiggle from the projection and from the registration of the film moving through the camera, you can't record the stillness like digital can. And that very much interested me, that when nothing moves, nothing moves. It looks like a projected slide, because there's no grain dancing. It's just there. And you really become aware of stillness. And then when one little leaf moves, it's perceptible. Because nothing's moving and then when something moves, it jumps off the screen. That would never register like that on film.

SP: Because there is always the movement of the image.

JB: Yeah, especially grain movement. So I became very aware of that and then when the airplanes come through and the whole image explodes with movement because the plane brings a weather system along with

it that was very exciting for me. And then for the weather system to pass and for the image to go back to being dead steady again, except for maybe now one branch keeps moving because it got set in motion, and it may stay in motion until the next plane happens or it may stop. So there are all these really subtle investigations that I can now do with these really steady frames, something I always wanted, and never was achieving.

SP: Would you say that in this shot in *Ruhr*, in which the planes make the leaves move, you are raising an ecological issue in that we can only perceive the impact of the plane after we cannot see it anymore? Is the stillness of digital video better for looking at land in an ecological way, because it can make these changes more apparent since only if the image itself is still, can we see the movement it depicts?

JB: I think that's implied. If it can look deeper and be more subtle, then it'll reveal things deeper and more subtly. Things that couldn't be revealed about the relationship of man to landscape now can be, and this shot is an example. You also have to film on a very still day to recognise that planes landing bring a weather system through, which I never knew before and was lucky enough to be there to observe this by myself in real time. I thought: this is amazing, I hope it's being caught on digital format. And then it revealed itself much clearer than film ever could. I can look longer now too, because sometimes it takes a much longer look before you see any change.

SP: The steam coming out of the coke-plant chimney in the one hour shot in *Ruhr* also always looks different.

JB: Yeah, it's a function of being lit by the setting sun. You have a change in the way that the water vapour is lit by the sun and the way the sky changes against during sunset too. So there are two things changing at the same time. I like that you are referencing one thing against another, but each one is changing. And that was really part of it, and then also that I was very aware of the process of making coke. Generally what happens is that they cook coal in those furnaces for twenty-five hours. It's called 'the push', where they push the coal out of the furnace and it fills a train car, and then that train car is driven on some tracks a little bit away and put underneath that quenching tower. And then for seventy seconds ten thousand gallons of water are dumped onto that super-heated coal that has become coke. It quenches that for seventy seconds and then that's what releases the water vapour up this tower which has a series of baffles. And this coke plant filters out the impurities out of the water vapours, so hopefully most of them



are gone when they enter the sky. Of course they are not all gone, but they are the best filtering system that we know of at this point. So that happens about every ten minutes, but sometimes they heat the coal a little longer for a different grade, and this can put the process behind, so when I filmed it, I started in the middle of the ten minutes, so you wait five minutes and then you get a spilling of the water vapour, and then you wait the actual ten minutes for the second one, and then the third one, they are doing a different grade, so you almost skip a session and you wait twenty minutes. So each time you are waiting a little longer. And then after that there are two more, I think there are eight or nine minutes, they are a little faster. So there is a certain anxiety of waiting and there's a twenty-minute stillness in that hour long shot, and during that time the sky changes a lot, so at that point I'm hoping you are paying attention to the pure light changes and you have this anticipation for something that happened that isn't happening. And then it finally happens and then it goes back on schedule and is rather reliable. But I like that, that this timing changes. And the same thing happened earlier with the airplanes landing, that the first plane lands quite quickly and then – I can't remember the order – if it's the second one you wait a while for, and then other ones are all within two or three minutes, so they are quite quick. There's kind of a process that is happening in these iterations, but then the schedule breaks down, so your perception of time changes. I like that consideration of time. Film is very much a perception of time and a marking of time through these different processes.

SP: In many of your films the shot length is predetermined by your decision before the filming that it is going to be the length of the film reel, or a train or a cigarette.

JB: In *RR* [2007], that's when I felt the most comfortable [with the shot length] although I think that I should have made the shots longer, now that the film is done. There should be more before and after each train, like the way that the train interrupts the landscape and then, when it goes, the landscape slowly reappears and re-establishes itself after it has this great interruption happen. It would have been nicer to have more time at least at the end of the shot. I actually thought, when I was filming, that I was giving myself much more time, but because I was shooting on film, and it was costing money, I would cut it off maybe a little too early. Now with high definition, I could run the camera for twenty minutes after and then choose the appropriate time. It would be much easier.

SP: There are a couple of shots in *RR* where the train stops in the middle of the shot and one gets anxious because it might take hours until the train moves again.

JB: Yeah, I wouldn't be that bold to wait two hours for the train to start up again, but sometimes it happens that they are delayed waiting for another train because they share a track and it's coming the opposite way. But I like those moments because they were all surprises for me too. So sometimes they would stop and I was just about ready to run out of film, so I was glad that they stopped, because if they would have kept going it wouldn't have recorded it all, but if they stopped, then I could say, 'Ok, I can cut'. My rules were: either you see the whole train or you see it until it stops.

SP: There are other shots in *RR* that problematise these principles, like when the train 'leaves' the image while still being in the image – it becomes invisible since it has driven into the vanishing point – but one can argue that it is still in the frame, it's just not visible in the image.

JB: Yes, again I probably would have liked to hold these a little bit longer too, where they just would have become a point rather than still recognisable as a shape. Sometimes they did get down to a point.

SP: There's a shot in *El Valley Centro* [1999] in the Renaissance perspective where an airplane sprays pesticides, and flies over the camera, that is, your head, and by implication over the audience, indicating that the filmmaker and the viewer are not separated from what they are looking at.

JB: Almost all of *El Valley Centro*, I watch what's going on, set up the camera and then record it. They're not acting for the camera, they are just doing their work, like ploughing the field or picking cotton or hoeing rows of weeds, but when I tried to do a crop duster, I was just in their way, because they don't want to spray me with insecticide because it's rather dangerous. And my idea was to set up the camera and then run to my car and hide in it, but as soon as I set up the camera, they would fly by and shake their fist at me, because they wouldn't spray if I was there. And I immediately realised, well I'm disrupting their work and that this wasn't right, and they don't want to put me at danger, so I did that once and realised that this is impossible and then I hired a plane. So that shot is choreographed and we used water rather than insecticide. I shot it two times. The first time I did it with coloured water and he didn't fly where I told him to. And then the second time he did exactly what I wanted and flew right at me. But then we were

out of the coloured water, so we used regular water. I had this kind of bright green yellow water before, that's very [pauses]

SP: [fills in] painterly

JB: Yeah, it's very painterly. Sometimes they use these very weird coloured chemicals and they are very beautiful when they flow across the landscape.

SP: What is so exceptional about your films is that aesthetics, nature, economics and also politics are not separated; like in *Ruhr*, when what could merely be an aesthetic trope – such as the Romantic *Rückenfigur* (the back of a person in a painting) – becomes political when it is the backs of Muslims praying in a mosque and it is the movements of the protagonists that change the aesthetics of the image over time.

JB: I am of course very interested in developing my own aesthetics and my own way of looking, but I am also very aware that sometimes aesthetics can perceive what is going on in a less political way than it should be perceived. And I think perhaps duration is what helps bring the political back into the shot. First, the act of filming in that way is somewhat political just by taking a film variable and extending it through a place that most people don't live, so they are a bit uncomfortable with the duration. But they are also then forced to have new readings of what they're looking at. So at first it might be a totally aesthetic experience, but hopefully through duration that breaks down and there are hints in the image that become political or social. You see that all the men are wearing jeans and some of them are designer jeans, so this is kind of weird. But noticing that they are all jeans; that this seems to be a function of the working class and that these are all immigrants, and immigrants many times remain in the working class, or many of them do. So in a way that shot is aesthetically beautiful in the way they move and it's in unison in that, and then at the end of the shot, they depart in some of state of pray[er], but they don't do it in unison now, so it becomes an individual commitment to the religion whereas before it was as a group commitment. And I like the kind of social and political implications of that – that we see that those that stay in for a pray on their own are very moved by their own religion. They are very dedicated to it in a sense. And when I watch it in a group I have less feeling that way. People go to the church every Sunday in the Christian religion. You just fulfil that event. And that's what it seems to begin with, but then at the end it's very moving for me to see them praying individually, with great intensity, much more than I've seen in any other religion. I guess I haven't been in a church, well, really

ever, except to look at the architecture. So I grew up without religion, so I have a bit of a bias against it, but when I see something like this, it confronts my own prejudice that I have against organised religion. I see that there perhaps is a great benefit; having such a commitment is something holy. And maybe that's kind of a hole in my own life, you know. I don't have that kind of ceremony or commitment to something I just can't understand. I was never raised with that, so at this point I am too pragmatic and I need a mathematical solution.

SP: Your later films seem to have become more spiritual through looking at land.

JB: Yeah, well, landscape makes you realise how small you are. I think, just the understanding of how small you are is really a part of being spiritual, you know – that there is a kind of giving in to the whole and that the individual is so small. I think that's religious with a small 'r' anyways.

SP: This is interesting because you are regarded as a structural filmmaker and structure as an essential pattern that is not changing, but in your films structure opens up something new that is even spiritual.

JB: Yeah, that's an interesting take and it's something I hope that happens, you know – that it's a container that allows a freedom and it's a container that allows each participant to bring their own self to the film. When you look out, you are looking in, and you can re-evaluate those prejudices that you're judging this against, because maybe they were misperceived and maybe this new experience can help you re-evaluate the old experience, which would change the way you experience this. So it's kind of a give and take with the present and the past. I think it's really an equation for growth to be able to judge your values, rather than have your values judge what you are looking at.

SP: Yes, a lot of filmmaking is about re-creating an idea that existed beforehand, even in documentary. There are not many films that actually *look*.

JB: *Home Improvements* [1985] by one of my favourite artists of all time, Robert Frank, has a kind of honesty about it. I actually have a quote of him in my pocket, which I was going to use last night. This is from *Home Improvements*: 'We are always on the outside trying to look inside, trying to say something that is true. But maybe nothing is true, except what's out there and what's out there is constantly changing'. It's a definition of what I feel I'm doing too, that I'm always trying to find something that's true, but maybe nothing's true, but what's out there.

What you look at is true, but what you look at is always changing. So I very much believe the same quote. When I saw it years ago, it very much woke up something inside me that helped me understand the way I'm working.

SP: Even in one shot?

JB: Yeah, yeah. When he's doing this – it's up in Nova Scotia – he has the camera and is looking into the mirror and then he says, 'And what's out there' (and pans outside and his house is right on the ocean, and there are waves and there is the fog rolling in), 'And what's out there is the truth, but what's out there is constantly changing', and literally it is. The weather is constantly blowing foam and bright sunshine and all different things. So he is referring to the landscape as the truth that is constantly changing. But it is rather a metaphor for ourselves changing our own perception of things as we gain more experience.

SP: How do you think nature relates to structure? Would you say that we are part of nature?

JB: Well, nature is very defined by structure. I mean the Spiral Jetty refers to that – that the salt crystals that grow on the jetty actually grow as spiral growths. There are spirals in many things, seashells and the way trees grow, you have these kind of Fibonacci series in the way they break down and repeat themselves, so there's kind of a mathematical structure to almost all of nature that has a kind of beautifully defined system, but it's not dogmatic. It's there. It all works. And when we enter that system, we always kind of make a break in it. Humans have become too smart to fit it. We don't have to fit in, we can change things. The problem isn't that we'll destroy the earth, but that we'll destroy the ecosystem that supports us. The earth will go on after this system collapses. But it's because we don't fit into those beautiful structures that are part of nature and we defy them.

SP: In *North on Evers* [1991], *Four Corners* [1997] and *Utopia* [1998] life histories are told over images that do not directly show what the narration refers to. In *Four Corners* the image lags behind what we have been told, and in *Utopia* the whole soundtrack of Richard Dindo's film *Ernesto Che Guevara, The Bolivian Diary* [1994] is heard over images of the desert from Death Valley to the Mexican borderlands instead of Bolivia. Rather than looking outside onto a corresponding landscape, these films generate new, mental landscapes and geographical trajectories.

JB: In making *North on Evers* I was interested in creating a text that you would read first and then the images would occur later, so that you

would have a text–image relationship where the text you read would create a movie in your mind and then you can compare the actual movie you are watching to what the text evokes. And then when I made *Four Corners*, I kind of continued that idea by writing four different histories and then people read the histories over a painting, and then after that history is read, you see thirteen shots that illustrate that history, sometimes literally. But it's removed from the actual readings and the literalness of those images. It isn't like it's illustrating it immediately, but you have to reorder the images you see in context with the text you just heard, which is kind of similar to the way *North on Evers* worked. I always can't believe when people cut literal images to text to illustrate it, you know, they say: 'Oh, the bunny ran away' and then they have to show you what a bunny is. And so with *Utopia* I felt, well, by using Richard Dindo's text, which uses Che Guevara's diary I could literally cut images to that film, but the literalness is wrong because it's not the right place, so I could take a revolution that happened or tried to happen in the late sixties and import that into southern California where it's deserved and then illustrate it with images to tie what's happening in southern California to his revolutionary text or diary. One of the reasons I wanted to do this is because in this earlier diary, the motorcycle diary, when Che went around South America he talked about how he was politicised by seeing U.S. agriculture and fruit growers in South America exploiting their land and their people's labour in such a way that he became very anti-imperialistic. So I thought that this film was kind of a reverse imperialism to bring the revolution to where it belonged. And the same kind of thing was happening in the Imperial Valley where now people from South America and Mexico were imported into being used as cheap labour in America, so it's a kind of opposite way. So I would oppositely bring the revolution so that place [southern California]. So if Che is talking about coming to a small village and crossing a railroad track, I might cut to a railroad track as that set, which is the kind of literalness that generally would bother me, but since this isn't the right railroad track, there is a kind of discrepancy to be negotiated, that's much more interesting than if it was the right railroad track. Why are we considering a railroad track in southern California rather than being in Bolivia? I thought by stealing the soundtrack of Richard Dindo, that this was kind of the final text–image act I could do for a while, that was kind of the ultimate thing to end with – a stolen text that would liberate kind of my ideas about revolution and southern California. That really propelled me into wanting to stop using text for a while and now I haven't really used text for over ten years. Maybe I'll do it again, I don't know.

SP: Maybe also the tracing of the movements of peoples in these text-image films has shifted to following natural matter like water in the form of lakes, clouds or steam and the influence of economics on nature?

JB: Yeah, farming in the Central Valley each year grosses more money than all the gold that was ever found in California. So there is this irony of everybody going to California to find gold and they kept crossing the Central Valley and this is the real goldmine, you know, through this artificial farming system that's been developed there. Of course it won't last forever. Irrigation farming over time will ruin all land.

SP: Can you elaborate on the difference in the relationships between humans and nature in the three films of the California Trilogy? You said that nature is a different kind of protagonist in each film.

JB: The trilogy started as just one film, *El Valley Centro*. Because I had just made *Utopia*, I was interested in this corporate farming that would use illegal labour, very cheap labour, and use irrigation systems that were both built by the federal government and the states. So they were receiving the cheapest water in the world and perhaps also very cheap labour. I approached it in a very political way in the sense of who does the work and who makes the profit. I thought that would just surface in the images. And I think it does. I only used thirty-five images and then I put the credits at the end to reinforce what the images already say in case you were locked into it in too much of an aesthetic way and didn't see these politics that occur in the images. *LOS* [2000] then is the urban companion to go from rural to urban and the connection there seemed to be that Los Angeles was built on that water system; that they stole water from the Owens Valley and nearly completely destroyed Mono Lake and there was a fight between the farmers that they were losing their water rights to the city. But then I also realised that it would be difficult to do a complete portrait of Los Angeles with just thirty-five shots. So, when I made *LOS* – it's of course a cityscape – I thought, well, I can express my feelings of Los Angeles, which are kind of love-hate, and then because of that I wanted to show certain systems at work like a recycling plant and a car being torn apart and a community garden. And then, I thought then I need a freeing to going back into landscape and made *Sogobi* [2001], which I would start as that you wouldn't have any reference to humans and then slowly they'd be reintroduced and as we get to the end of the film you would become very aware of the kind of encroachment of human behaviour on the landscape. And then the three films are tied together by water always running through all three films. The last shot of the first film, *El Valley Centro*, is water being

pumped over a mountain to another place to irrigate and then the first shot of *LOS* is water coming down the spillway that was built by Mulholland to bring water to Los Angeles. That's the very first spillway. When that was opened five thousand people stood alongside there with a cup and Mulholland said, 'there it is, take it', and they all dipped in and took a drink of water. It's this kind of ceremonial gesture that water was now here and life would thrive in California, which is pretty much true. And then the last shot of *LOS* is the beach at Malibu – which is rather serene – and then the first shot of *Sogobi* is the violent surf at Big Sur where it's very wild looking, and then the last shot of *Sogobi* is the same as the first shot of *El Valley Centro*. In *El Valley Centro* you saw the water going down and then in the last shot you see the spillway sticking out of the water and the lake has dropped, and so you see the apparatus that causes this kind of surreal hole in the water. So, there is this connection of water flowing through all three films and then at the end the water is lowered. It doesn't have the abundance that the first film starts with as a kind of a metaphor for how important water is now and how much it's going to be in the future.

## References

- 13 Lakes*. 2004. [Film]. Directed by J. Benning. U.S.A./Germany: Benning, Westdeutscher Rundfunk.
- CASTING A GLANCE*. 2007. [Film]. Directed by J. Benning. U.S.A.: Benning.
- Ernesto Che Guevara. The Bolivian Diary*. 1994. [Film]. Directed by Richard Dindo. F/CH. Arte, Ciné Manufacture, La Sept Cinéma, Les Films d'Ici, Télévision Suisse-Romande (TSR).
- Four Corners*. 1997. [Film]. Directed by J. Benning. U.S.A.: California Institute of the Arts.
- El Valley Centro*. 1999. [Film]. Directed by J. Benning. U.S.A.: Benning.
- LOS*. 2000. [Film]. Directed by J. Benning. U.S.A.: Benning.
- North on Evers*. 1991. [Film]. Directed by J. Benning. U.S.A.: Benning.
- Home Improvements*. 1985. Directed by R. Frank. U.S.A.: Frank.
- Landscape Suicide*. 1986. [Film]. Directed by J. Benning. U.S.A.: Benning.
- Sogobi*. 2001. [Film]. Directed by J. Benning. U.S.A.: Benning.
- RR*. 2007. [Film]. Directed by J. Benning. U.S.A./Germany: Benning, Westdeutscher Rundfunk.
- Ruhr*. 2009. [Film]. Directed by J. Benning. Germany: ZDF/3sat, Schaf oder Scharf Film.
- Ten Skies*. 2004. [Film]. Directed by J. Benning. U.S.A./Germany: CalArts, Westdeutscher Rundfunk.
- Utopia*. 1998. [Film]. Directed by J. Benning. U.S.A.: Benning.



PART II 

## ZOË-TROPES

ENVISIONING THE NONHUMAN





## ANTHROPOMORPHISM AND ITS VICISSITUDES

Reflections on *Homme*-sick Cinema

James Leo Cahill

The cinema is a marvellous apparatus for taking us outside ourselves and outside of the world in which we believe ourselves to live.

—Jean Epstein, '*Alcool et cinéma*'

### *Homme*-sick Animals

In a 1973 television broadcast, subsequently published as the text *Télévision* (1974), Jacques Lacan responds to an offscreen question from Jacques-Alain Miller about the strangeness of the word 'unconscious'. After stressing that the unconscious requires language and is proper to speaking beings alone, the psychoanalyst introduces two neologisms, '*en mal d'homme*' and '*d'hommestiques*', which he treats as synonyms. Lacan coins these terms to refer to animals, who are presumed to be outside of language, but who are nevertheless affected by the unconscious through their intimacy with humans and thus their proximity to, and haunting by, human language (Lacan 1974: 15–16). Lacan addresses these terms in a single sentence and then moves on, but their conceptual potential merits pause. *D'hommestiques*, comprised from *de* (of, for, by), *homme* (man), and *domestique* (domestic), suggests that this category of animals belongs to the domain of man and to the familiar realm of the home and the homely. The possessive *d'* demarcates a history of ontological entanglement, wherein creatures bargained, surrendered or were stripped of the perceived autonomy and freedom enjoyed in the wild – their *homme*-lessness – in order to become familiar, familiarised, homely, and enter into domestic relations. *Mal de* refers to sickness of or sickness from something, and *en mal de* means lacking, yearning for, or craving something. The phrase '*les animaux en mal d'homme*' expresses a craving for man as well as an affliction of and from man. The translation of Lacan's '*animaux en mal d'homme*' as '*homme*-sick animals' in the English version of the text supplements

the term's conceptual richness (Lacan 1987: 9). *Homme-sick*, intermingling French and English idioms, emphasises a profoundly ambivalent dialectic of desire and disease: an impossible longing to return to a sheltering origin (home), an imagined longing for the company of man (*homme*), and the very real afflictions and risks associated with this domestic arrangement (sickness).

Humans perpetuate *homme-sickness* through their compulsion to domesticate and familiarise animals. But humans also suffer from this 'animalaise'. We too are *homme-sick* animals. *Homme-sickness*'s classic symptom is anthropomorphism, or the projection of human values and meanings onto animals, plants and inanimate objects. Anthropomorphism frequently expresses a hubris borne of humanity's perceived special status as the top of the animal kingdom, above all other beasts, as well as a narcissistic desire to recognise one's reflection everywhere and in everything. In this sense, anthropomorphism supports an anthropocentric worldview that places humans at the centre of the universe. Such a perspective effectively marginalises and subjugates other forms of life. Anthropomorphism has tended towards anthropocentrism, but this is not the only possibility. The same ambivalence that structures *homme-sickness* is at work in anthropomorphism, and may produce expressions of anthropomorphism that complicate and even counter anthropocentric perspectives. The historians of science Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman take such an approach, arguing that anthropomorphism needs to be evaluated contextually. If its usage in the West over the past two centuries has tended to reinforce anthropocentrism, anthropomorphism may also be conceived in a manner that privileges the *morphos*, or transformative potential, rather than the *anthropos*, or human aspects, of the concept (2005: 6).

Sigmund Freud's *Das Unheimliche* (The Uncanny), his 1919 study of the unsettling intimacy of the domestic and the familiar with the wild, the unfamiliar and the strange, clarifies the shared theoretical stakes of *homme-sickness* and the vicissitudes of anthropomorphism. Freud's examination of *unheimlich* experiences – 'that class of frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar' – provides a model for thinking beyond the principle of identity: being as a self-evident, self-identical phenomenon (Freud 1953: 220). The manner in which *Das Unheimliche* traces and tracks the wildness haunting the domestic strongly resonates with *homme-sickness* and its dynamics of desire and malaise. In certain contexts, the two terms – *Unheimliche* and *homme-sickness* – can serve as translations of each other.

Freud opens *Das Unheimliche* with a multilingual etymological excursus on the shared ambivalence of the terms *heimlich* (homely,

familiar, domestic) – from the root word *Heim* (home) – and *unheimlich* (unhomely, unfamiliar, strange). The ambivalence of this set of terms is so strong that these antonyms also function as synonyms, effectively referring to the same phenomena (ibid.: 221–26). For this reason, Freud designates the prefix ‘un’ in *unheimlich* as a ‘token of repression’ symptomatic of the dis-ease born of strangely familiar and familiarly strange experiences, complicating Ernst Jentsch’s 1906 definition of the *Unheimliche* as intellectual uncertainty (ibid.: 241). Freud understands the *Unheimliche* as an epistemological crisis whose causes lie in encounters with the return of the repressed, including encounters with the very ‘fact’ of the unconscious. This is what differentiates the *Unheimliche* from other kinds of frightening or confusing experiences. From this perspective, what haunts and disturbs a house, what makes a home unhomely, are the unconscious conflicts of the people who enter and inhabit it. The confusion as to whether sources of anxiety emanate from within or without, from the psyche or the physical environment, from presence or projection, and the discomfiting sense of the existence of an internal alien Other, produce the haunted homme. The malady particular to this form of homesickness is quite literally a *mal d’homme* (a *homme*-sickness) born of and by the unconscious: the very attribute, as already suggested through Lacan, that purportedly makes the human the animal that is not one.<sup>1</sup>

One and not one. One and more than one. Samuel Weber, in his reading of Freud’s analysis of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s ‘The Sandman’ and its themes of optics and castration anxiety, emphasises that the epistemological crisis of the *Unheimliche* is characterised by a threat to the phantasmatic integrity of perception and of phenomenality (1973: 1132). The incredible sights and sounds of *unheimlich* phenomena, such as the multiplication of doubles, automata and compulsive repetitions, make one doubt one’s own organs of perception. Weber argues that the indecidability characteristic of the *Unheimliche* ‘affects and infects representations, motifs, themes and situations’ in a manner similar to Walter Benjamin’s theory of allegories, which ‘always mean something other than what they are and draws their own being and substance into a vortex of signification’ (ibid.). The epistemological uncertainties and the confusion caused by the fluidity of signification – wherein something may stand for or even become something, anything, entirely different – may also ‘infect’ the perceiving subject. *Unheimlich* experiences reveal fissures in the principle of identity and its fiction of the self-identical subject. The crisis of perception sparked by the encounter with unconscious matter produces a momentary sense of dislocation of the subject.

Freud insisted that expressions of the *Unheimliche* encountered in the arts, 'that we merely picture or read about', were of a different order from the rare cases of the *Unheimliche* of empirical experience (Freud 1953: 247). Yet this distinction represses the *unheimlich* attributes of cinema, whose effects can serve to centre or displace the subject. Film's confluence of reality effects, temporal and spatial plasticity, and phantastic and fictive capacities blur Freud's aesthetic and psychoanalytic dimensions of the *Unheimliche*. The causal connection between the referent and signifier of the filmic image operates through and reinforces the principle of identity (connecting the self with a precise image), but this existential bond also alters and even threatens it through the production of doubles.

Just as film brings together and amplifies the aesthetic and experiential *Unheimliche*, it also maintains the co-presence of both aspects of the double. Referring to the temporal structure of return in the *Unheimliche*, Freud speculates that if doubles originally acted as a magical insurance against death, in an age of disenchantment they become harbingers of death and vulnerability (*ibid.*: 235–36). André Bazin, in his 1945 essay 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', which begins by placing art on the psychoanalyst's couch, refers to the double-status of photographic images as fulfilling a 'mummy complex' (a symbolic solution to the problem of death) while also having 'ghostly' (*fantomatique*) qualities capable of literally defamiliarising even the most familiar of family portraits by suffusing them with the 'troubling presence of lives halted in time and liberated from their destiny' (Bazin 2009: 3, 8, translation modified). Bazin emphasises the fact that an 'impassive mechanical device' freed from any 'anthropocentric usefulness' produces these effects, and in a manner that minimises the intervention of human agency (*ibid.*: 8, 4, 7). The impassive camera, which sustains a rigorous indifference to what it films, endows the medium with an anti-anthropocentric potential. As Bazin explains in his 1951 essay 'Theatre and Cinema II', the cinema has a centrifugal, decentring orientation, producing a radically equalising vision of the world in which 'human beings (*l'homme*) do not necessarily have preferential status over beasts or forests' (*ibid.*: 194).<sup>2</sup>

The cinema has the virtue of producing *unheimlich*, unhomely, *homme-less* perspectives, displaced from the sheltering confidence of anthropocentrism. The cinema may be an anthropomorphic machine, but this does not necessarily make it an anthropocentric machine. Narrative and documentary cinema in the West have historically tended to favour the use of anthropomorphism in service of anthropocentrism, both by using animals as fleshy puppets for human concerns and by yoking the

camera's lens to a correspondence with Cartesian space and its subsequent disciplining of human vision. But the ambivalence of cinematic anthropomorphism, like *homme-sickness* and the *Unheimliche*, prevents it from becoming too stable, static or fixed. Cinematic anthropomorphism may produce effects that go beyond the principle of identity, emphasising its plastic aspects, and the possibility of rendering the anthropological more dynamic. This is cinematograph's Copernican vocation: the capacity for anti-anthropocentric displacement.

### Cinematic *Homme-sickness*

Copernican perspectives, critical of anthropocentrism, have been marginal and even marginalised in film theory and practice, but they have not been wholly absent. The minor oeuvre of the French biological and wildlife filmmaking team Jean Painlevé (1902–1989) and Geneviève Hamon (1905–1987) engaged in a series of generative confrontations with anthropomorphism and its vicissitudes, exploring the tensions between the anthropocentric and anti-anthropocentric orientations of cinema. Painlevé and Hamon approached the symptoms of *homme-sickness* as one of the defining problems of cinema: anthropomorphism presented a challenge to be negotiated, a key aesthetic strategy to be exploited, and even a call to responsibility. These tensions surface in a particularly visible manner in the films they made during the transition to sound in France.

Between 1928 and 1930, Painlevé and Hamon produced and released eight documentaries on marine wildlife intended for popular audiences: *La Pieuvre/The Octopus* (1928), *Le Bernard l'ermite/The Hermit Crab* (1929), *La Daphnie/The Daphnia* (1929), *Hyas et Sténorinques, crustacés marins/Hyas and Stenorhynchus, Marine Crustaceans* (1929), *Les Oursins/Sea Urchins* (1929), *Caprelles et Pantopodes/Caprella and Pantopoda* (1930), *Crabes/Crabs* (1930) and *Crevettes/Shrimp* (1930). Each of these films, with the exception of *Caprella and Pantopoda* was originally released as a silent print. Painlevé rather reluctantly began to sonorise the films in 1930 with the release of *Caprella and Pantopoda*, which featured spoken commentary by Painlevé and a score conducted by Maurice Jaubert. Based upon the strength of this experiment, including public praise from Fernand Léger and Marc Chagall (*Deux Aveugles* 1930: 6), in 1931 Gaumont distributed sonorised versions of *The Hermit Crab*; *Hyas and Stenorhynchus*, *Marine Crustaceans*; and *Crabs and Shrimp* (a reedited version of the two separate films), also featuring scores conducted by Jaubert.

Painlevé described the double aim of these short films as ‘treating the morphology, the behaviour, and the development of a living being, from birth to death, from a scientific and photogenic point of view’ (Painlevé 1930a: 6). The strange charm of the films, dedicated to the lives of curious aquatic creatures, quickly earned Painlevé a reputation as one of the leading documentary filmmakers in France. (Critics frequently overlooked Hamon, who worked on all of the popular documentaries credited to Painlevé but remained out of the spotlight even after she began getting equal billing as codirector in 1960.) Reviews praised the combination of scientific rigor, photogenic elements, and surrealist humour in these films, and were quick to remark upon how their array of scientific film techniques, including microcinematography and time-lapse, slow motion and x-ray photography, produced an astonishing aesthetic surplus. In a review published in January 1929, Maurice Bourdet of *Ciné Miroir* marvelled at the oneiric quality of these documentaries, in which cinema spectatorship becomes the *mise-en-scène* of particularly unheimlich experiences: ‘In making us carefully examine these infinitesimal beings, for whom he acts as a historian, or better yet, a novelist, Jean Painlevé leads us into the domain of dreams, where, to our astonished eyes, beings and things spill beyond the limits of their forms’ (Bourdet 1929: np). The technical spectacle of these films, with their multitude of striking visual perspectives, achieves the rather surrealist goal of objectively blurring the boundaries between empirical observation and dream. Bourdet’s description of the plasticity of beings and things revealed by the cinematograph evokes a cinematic experience less determined by reassuring identification than by metamorphosis.

Painlevé and Hamon connect a critical regard for wildlife with an interest in exploring the plasticity of film as a medium and experience. The arrival of sound film production in France provoked considerable anxiety for the filmmaking team.<sup>3</sup> Sound film production posed steep economic challenges to independent filmmakers such as Painlevé and Hamon, who self-funded their films. Painlevé estimated each of his early silent films was made for under twenty thousand francs (Anon. 1933: 2).<sup>4</sup> The capital investment required to produce sound films could easily be more than four times as expensive, as was the case with their 1935 short film *L’Hippocampe/The Sea Horse*, distributed by Pathé-Natan, which cost approximately ninety thousand francs to produce (Ensault 1982: 17). In the face of such mounting expenses, financial and aesthetic independence would be increasingly difficult to maintain (Hamery 2008: 73–107). The arrival of sound film also raised aesthetic concerns regarding whether the addition of prerecorded sounds would



affect the power of the medium's visual aspects, reducing it to a form of 'canned theatre'. In the case of animal films, the addition of the human voice and standardised music considerably strengthened the possibilities for (and probability of) anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism. Painlevé fretted that sound film production would increase the domestication of their motion pictures, threatening to diminish their unhomely qualities. In this context, Painlevé engaged in a series of critical speculations on the medium, which turned with considerable frequency towards questions of the utility and disadvantages of anthropomorphism for cinematic wildlife.

At the moment of sound film's arrival Painlevé declared the voice was 'in contradiction with the photographic image' and also 'truly an irritant' (Painlevé 1929: 18; Painlevé 1930b: 3).<sup>5</sup> In 'Les Films Biologiques' (Biological Films), an essay that begins by addressing scientific cinema and ends by connecting it to avant-garde cinema, Painlevé identifies himself as a partisan of 'pure films', though he admits, such purity is more an ideal than an easily realisable goal, as one must keep audiences engaged (Painlevé 1929: 18). Part of the purity of silent cinema that Painlevé wanted to preserve was the international aspect of its visual language, which had the universalist aspirations to act as a form of popular Esperanto equally accessible to scientists and the street urchin (and why limit the universal to humans). Painlevé fretted that the wholesale embrace of the talkie carelessly 'tosses to the floor' cinema's most utopian aspect (though he joked elsewhere that the desire to see films such as the hardboiled detective serial *Bulldog Drummond* in its original idiom might inspire people to learn other languages) (Painlevé 1929: 18; Painlevé 1930b: 1).

Painlevé's insistence upon the differentiation of the explanatory function of spoken language from the evocative plasticity of photographic images derived from a desire to preserve cinema's visual immediacy. Painlevé writes: 'by definition the voice is made to be understood . . . it is thus incompatible with all the plastic, deformable, and imaginative visuals that represent photographic art' (Painlevé 1929: 18). He initially rejected the all too functional aspects of vocal expression, what his one-time collaborator Antonin Artaud described as the 'alimentary' and 'trapped beast origins' of language (Artaud 1958: 46). In the absence of an Artaudian language freed from functional utility and endowed with a wild animal gaiety, capable of producing physical shocks equal to that of the image, spoken language primarily had the normative effect of fixing images in meaning. Painlevé protested that the voice deprived the spectator of the alluring ambiguity and undigested significance of images and the freedom of engagement they solicit (Painlevé 1929: 18).

Verbal discourse, according to the uninitiated Painlevé, sacrificed the potential 'sensation of plenitude' that well-crafted silent films produce (Painlevé 1930a: 6).

In addition to taming of the wild potential of images, Painlevé expressed concern for the manner in which spoken and written language could be used to cover up faulty filmmaking or fabricate intentional falsehoods from documentary footage. In an unpublished typescript with the handwritten title 'Le Cinéma', written for a lecture shortly before recording the first set of commentaries for his films (he makes reference to this in the concluding lines), Painlevé dramatised an imaginary conversation with a theatre manager about the need to sonorise his films.<sup>6</sup>

- From now on, we can only ensure a serious run if you give us documentaries with sound.
- Nevertheless, I cannot make an octopus speak . . .
- Why not . . . ? Ah, yes. Very well, speak yourself. But do not tell the audience anything boring or difficult.
- I see: some drolleries.
- That's it, some drolleries about the octopus. Or better yet some well-matched music, something that sticks well.
- For octopus music, something a bit slimy. We'll tell the musicians not to empty their woodwind instruments . . .
- Do what you like provided that it is evocative. If need be record noise, as long as it is sound. We have not spent millions transforming our theatre in order to project silent films. (Painlevé 1930b: 1)

Painlevé rehearses familiar tropes of the struggle between artistic or intellectual integrity verses commercial appeal and entertainment value. The extract also emphasises his sense that the mounting pressures to add sound to film were frequently arbitrary and unmotivated by considerations of content or the use of the medium. The distracted attitude with which the imaginary manager suggests that if the octopus cannot be made to speak on film then the filmmaker must speak for and about it, indexes Painlevé's discomfort with pressures to engage in unfocused anthropomorphism. This point is reinforced by the manager's demand that all information and commentary be presented in a light and amusing manner: neither too serious nor too dull lest it alienate a public in which exhibitors – at least in Painlevé's account – had so little faith.

The stakes of anthropomorphism raised by Painlevé's reflections pose the vital questions 'can the subaquatic be made to speak' and how does one represent phenomena of natural history. The challenges of filming with wild animals, or even with animals familiarised with the

disturbing conditions of filmmaking, such as the presence of humans, oppressively bright and hot lights, the surfeit of noises, and the occasional use of upsetting forms of stimulation meant to spur the animals to act, require incredible discipline, dedication and patience. (The extraordinary patience and dedication of wildlife filmmakers inspired Scott MacDonald to refer to these films as a form of ‘committed’ cinema [MacDonald 2006: 18].) The passive patience and respect for contingency necessary to capture animals performing gestures of their own accord, helps preserve something of the wild in wildlife films. While Painlevé concedes that *mise-en-scène* and montage are a necessary part of zoological cinema, he is wary of the manner in which these techniques come to stand in for impatient and bad filmmaking, and the production of what he labels ‘counterfeit documentaries’ (Painlevé 1930a: 6).

He expands upon the concern for authenticity in his essay ‘*La Beauté du film documentaire, le film biologique*’ (The beauty of documentary film: the biological film):

The most well established observations collapse, the most surely organised reflexes cease to function due to the unusual lighting passing through the filters, while acts of hunger cease due to a change in milieu. One would like to find the emotional factor and control its variations even though, constantly swinging between anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism, we are incapable of understanding an animal that does not remain within the field determined by these two blinders. (Painlevé 1930a: 6)

Situated between the antipodes of anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism, the activity of wildlife filmmakers is determined largely by contingency and chance, and requires incredible patience. These two poles, which Painlevé also refers to as blinders (*oeillères*), such as are placed on workhorses to restrict their field of vision, both determine and severely limit one’s perspectives and the possibilities of comprehension. The radically indifferent mechanical eye of the camera thus plays an important role in loosening the double-bind/double-blinders of anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism.

Painlevé conceived of anthropomorphism as something ‘one cannot entirely cure oneself of’ (Painlevé 1929: 17). Addressing himself as much as others, he cautioned that filmmakers must ‘tickle as little as possible the anthropomorphism which sleeps within all of us’ (Painlevé 1930a: 6). Nearly six decades later, in an interview for the televised series *Jean Painlevé au fil ses films* (Jean Painlevé through his films) (Derrien and Hazera 1988), he made the rather astonishing proclamation that: ‘We commit anthropomorphism. We have the

right to commit anthropomorphism. We have the duty to commit anthropomorphism. If not, we would be incapable of appreciating any element around us'.<sup>7</sup> In the context of Painlevé and Hamon's ongoing cinematic experiments (spanning close to two hundred films over six decades), the apparent human chauvinism of the right and duty to commit anthropomorphism is tempered by their artful use of film's unheimlich, unhommely capacities. Painlevé's seemingly contradictory positions on anthropomorphism as both a problem and a responsibility converge in treating it as ontological and, in a sense, inescapable. But this ontological inescapability should not be mistaken for anything inevitable, unchangeable or ahistoric. An acceptance of the fact of anthropomorphism places critical focus on its practices and uses: it is not a matter of *if* one commits anthropomorphism, but *how* and towards what ends.

Anthropomorphism in its various guises recurs throughout Painlevé and Hamon's work. Their film *The Hermit Crab* offers a valuable case study of the ambivalent engagement with anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism in their œuvre. Hermit crabs are perhaps the most familiar creatures in Painlevé and Hamon's cinematic menagerie (with the exception of the pigeons of their 1982 film *Les Pigeons du square*). Their very names evoke a class of people (hermits) defined through their mode of dwelling in solitude; furthermore, these animals – alive or dead – were common souvenirs from summer holidays spent at the seashore. The 1931 sonorised version of *The Hermit Crab* preserves the title cards from the 1929 silent version, but adds spoken commentary by Painlevé and a score featuring musical themes from the composer Vincenzo Bellini under the direction of Maurice Jaubert. The fourteen-minute film provides an ethological depiction of hermit crabs, who, due to their soft abdomen, seek shelter in shells that have been, as the commentary explains 'abandoned by their landlords'. Painlevé and Hamon give particular attention to the manner in which crabs choose and secure their shell homes, as well as how they 'evict' other crabs from shells they find more desirable. Taking a page from the caricatures of J.J. Grandville, the film playfully examines hermit crab fashions, including shells covered in sponges and sea anemones, and depicts prolonged battles between crabs that are narrated like boxing matches. The film also includes a series of behavioural experiments, including removing a crab's eyes to demonstrate how it selects a shell using its sense of touch (a classic laboratory experiment for zoology students), provoking a 'housing crisis' (*crise du logement*) among a frantic cluster of naked crabs trying to enter a single shell, and staging a football match between crabs using a cork ball.

Despite the many ways that Painlevé and Hamon engage in anthropomorphism, nowhere in *The Hermit Crab* or any other of their films are the onscreen creatures personalised or familiarised with names. Creatures are frequently individualised, to discuss distinct behaviours or physical attributes, but the films refer to them by their species name, or by the ‘social role’ they are performing at the moment. In this manner, the filmmakers respect a certain distance even as one visually passes into and through the creatures via the techniques of microcinematography and vivisection.

The foregrounding of techniques of scientific cinematography helps syncope the interplay between anthropomorphic identification with the hermit crabs and moments of sudden estrangement. Early in the film, the commentary announces: ‘With some magnification, one can make a monster out of this charming little animal’, followed by a rapid succession of six extreme-close-up magnifications of the mandibles and eye stems of hermit crabs, which appear frightening, strange and terribly beautiful (Figure 4.1).



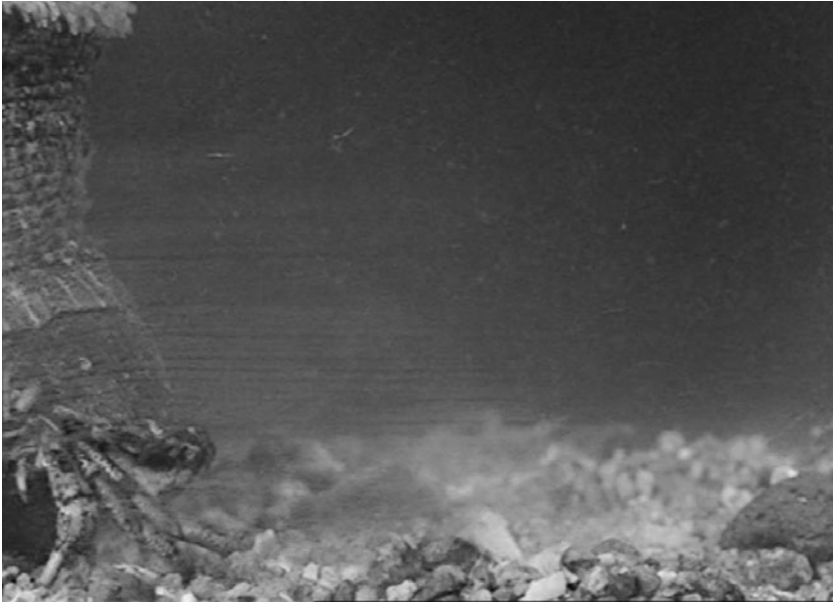
**Figure 4.1** Screen capture from *Bernard l'ermite* (Painlevé and Hamon, France, 1931): rendering the charming monstrous and the monstrous charming. © Les Documents Cinématographiques

This revealing technical demonstration, which is repeated in the film's penultimate sequence of 'lunch on the sand' in which the commentator expresses the fact that 'unexpected exquisite things can be found in the sand', has the effect of destabilising perspectives and producing momentary experiences of *dépaysement* or disorientation. The multiple identities of the crab – that of a charming little creature and a gigantic monster – produced by filmic techniques keep the film's anthropomorphism from settling too comfortably into anthropocentrism, while the dialogue emphasises the film's intentional, creative acts of morphism ('*Avec certains grossissements on fait un monster de ce charmant petit animal*': With some magnification one can make a monster out of this charming little animal).

These self-critical gestures are multiplied by the film's playful critique of conventions of wildlife documentaries and the technologically assisted misinformation they often produce. In the essay 'La Beauté du film documentaire' Painlevé critiques the sloppy and even dishonest filmmaking of a production he had recently seen at a specialty cinema: *La vie au fond des mers* (Life at the Bottom of the Sea).<sup>8</sup> Painlevé complains of the bad titling – the film purportedly refers to a hermit crab as a hermit crayfish and claims it is limited to northern seas – but he is truly incensed by the film's description of the relationship between the hermit crab and sea anemone. Quoting from the film, Painlevé recollects a particularly egregious falsehood: 'The anemone loves to ride on the back of the hermit crayfish. Reaching the end, the ingrate anemone eats it' (Painlevé 1930a: 6). Painlevé and Hamon 'remake', or invent, this scenario in their own film. The sequence begins with the whimsical introduction of the sea anemone as a 'pot of flowers' that hermit crabs enjoy wearing as an accessory. The commentary explains: 'It is impossible for a sea anemone to eat the hermit crab . . . Yet this is shown in documentary films with trick photography'. Suddenly, through a Méliès-style replacement splice, the hermit crab carrying the sea anemone on its shell disappears, as if it had been sucked straight through its own the shell and into the stomach of the anemone (Figures 4.2 and 4.3).

The humorous moment serves to differentiate this film from its supposedly less rigorous competition, while also, like the creation of monsters from charming little creatures, drawing attention (and possible self-critique) to the film being projected, soliciting a bit of scepticism for the film's own truth claims.

Despite the reflexivity of *The Hermit Crab*, Painlevé published a number of apologies for the film's anthropomorphism in texts that appeared prior to the release of the sound version. These apologies register regret



**Figure 4.2** Screen capture from *Bernard l'ermite*: a hermit crab wearing a sea anemone . . . © Les Documents Cinématographiques



**Figure 4.3** . . . is 'swallowed' through trick photography. Screen capture from *Bernard l'ermite* © Les Documents Cinématographiques

for having indulged in forms of ‘unscientific’ anthropomorphism. In 1929, with reference to the original silent print, he explains that the ‘vivacity’ of the hermit crab’s behaviour ‘inspires dreaming’ and while one cannot cure oneself completely of anthropomorphism, he notes that at least he had the decency to restrict it to the football match at the end of the film – forgetting, perhaps, the numerous episodes of anthropomorphism throughout the preceding twelve minutes of the film, or, perhaps, understanding the preceding instances to be sufficiently scientific (Painlevé 1929: 17). In 1930 he explains anthropomorphism as a response to the impenetrability of animal behaviour, an opacity in part due to the blinders of anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism: ‘it’s truly through the inability to delve into their reflexes that I have once used three non-objective title cards in a film on behaviour’ (Painlevé 1930a: 6). It is difficult to pin down to which three ‘non-objective title cards’ Painlevé is referring (there are certainly more than three in the film). Yet these seem to be allusions to the football match at the end of *The Hermit Crab*, as well as the experimental ‘housing crisis’ staged in the film, which he refers to in an interview as a ‘regrettable title, because it belongs more to human experience than zoological reality’: there are plenty of shells in the sea (Le Roy 1931: np).

The football match was inspired by the crabs’ response to a small cork ball introduced into the aquarium, which, according to Painlevé, ‘required this mise en scène’ (Painlevé 1929: 17). The crabs are drawn to the ball, and Painlevé speculates it may be due to the fact it resembles an enigmatic shell with no entrance: an impossible home. The theatrical set up of two goals and a sign reading ‘the decisions of the referee are final’ is undeniably absurd (Figure 4.4).

But at the same time that the film indulges in a rather goofy set gag, the shabbiness of which almost renders it an allegory of cinematic anthropomorphism, the commentary’s identifying gesture of attribution of a sense of wonder and astonishment to the crabs stands in relief with the moments of blatant sadism of the film’s earlier experiments. How can one perform acts of violence against a creature that feels wonder?

Painlevé and Hamon’s reflexive filmic anthropomorphism does nothing to justify, excuse or explain away their episodic cruelty: it reveals the contradictions of *homme-sickness* in a heightened manner, inscribing them into the very surface of the film. The title card and sequence Painlevé found most regrettable also turns out to be most revealing in this respect. The staged ‘housing crisis’ and the plight of these homeless and homesick crabs struggling to find shelter lest they become victims of their own exposure emphasises the primary concerns of





**Figure 4.4** Screen capture from *Bernard l'ermite*: hermit crab football. © Les Documents Cinématographiques

homme-sick animals and cinematic homme-sickness. The vulnerability of the homeless and at times unhommely creatures, amplified by a wild anthropomorphism, invites reflection upon a shared fragility, which extends to that of the spectator's own perspectives vis-à-vis the cinematic apparatus.

This may be *The Hermit Crab's* most striking lesson concerning cinematic homme-sickness. The fictions of anthropomorphism are not primarily a matter of the sentimental projections that humans assign to animals. The fictions of anthropomorphism are, rather, those of the self-identical, stable referent that self-satisfyingly engages in or condemns these practices. The homme-sick animals that therefore we are, tend to gravitate around and circumscribe a privileged locus in homme. But the eccentric potentials of a psychoanalysis attuned to its own wildness, and a cinematic practice open to its own unheimlich capacities, presents two techniques that help unsettle homme even in the act of producing a transcription and translation of it. To conclude, it is in this sense, this direction of cinema's potential effects that one might remember the moral of one of cinema's great explorations of displacement and exile: there's no place *like* homme. There's no place like *homme*.<sup>9</sup>

## Notes

Thanks to Brigitte Berg and Les Documents Cinématographiques for access to archival materials. Unless otherwise noted, translations from French are my own.

- 1 The human as the animal that is not one suggests both humanity's perceived separation from other animals (not one: different) but also the non-identical nature of the subject (not one: plural, many, divisible) and this complication of the principle of identity.
- 2 For recent studies of Bazin's thought regarding animals see Fay (2008), Pick (2011), and Jeong (2011). For a reflection on Bazin's anti-anthropocentrism see Dalla Vacche (2011).
- 3 The commercial exploitation of sound films became a viable option beginning in 1927 with the release of *The Jazz Singer*, but French film studios and exhibition spaces held out on investing in the necessary infrastructure for sound production until 1929. On the economic and aesthetic impact of the coming of sound on avant-garde and independent filmmakers in France, see Ghali (1995: 305–317) and Abel (1988, vol. 2: 5–37).
- 4 Twenty thousand francs is approximately €10,568, £9,180 or \$14,565 (Canadian), adjusted for inflation for 2012. Painlevé left no paper trail on the expenses for his films up until *The Sea Horse* in 1935, and even afterwards documentation is scant, so his figures should be taken as approximate.
- 5 Painlevé and Hamon would come to embrace the critical possibilities of spoken commentary and increasingly adventurous musical and sound compositions, particularly in their postwar films.
- 6 The theatre manager in this scene is a parody of the producer Henri Diamant-Berger, who exhibited Painlevé's first films at his Studio Diamant cinema. In a letter dated 9 April 1930, Diamant-Berger urged Painlevé to add sound to his 'little silent films', as this was 'the only way to get them onto screens' (Diamant-Berger 1930: 1).
- 7 '*Nous faisons de l'anthropomorphisme. Nous avons le droit de faire de l'anthropomorphisme. Nous avons le devoir de faire de l'anthropomorphisme. Sinon nous ne serions pas capables d'apprécier aucun élément autour de nous*'. Painlevé says this in episode 1 of the series, with reference to his film *The Octopus* (1928).
- 8 A film with the same title played at the Vieux-Colombier from 27 March to 2 April 1925. Also, although further research is necessary, another film bearing the title *La vie au fond des mers* (Ministry of Agriculture, France, 1911) features many of the same creatures documented by Painlevé, but does not match Painlevé's description, suggesting (1) that there are several films using the same title; (2) that Painlevé accidentally conflated a number of films into one; or (3) that he is taking a bit of poetic licence and acting as an unreliable commentator.
- 9 Rushdie (2008) reads *The Wizard of Oz* as an exploration of exile, and calls for a revision of Dorothy's famous mantra as 'there's no longer any such place as home'. I thank René Thoreau Bruckner for this citation.

## References

- Abel, R. (ed.). 1988. *French Film Theory and Criticism, 1907–1939*. 2 vols. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Anon. 1933. 'Jean Painlevé'. *Pour Vous* 250 (31 August): 2.
- Artaud, A. 1958 (1938). *Theatre and Its Double*. Trans. M.C. Richard. New York: Grove.
- Bazin, A. 2009 (1958). *What is Cinema*. Trans. T. Barnard. Montréal: Caboose.
- Bourdet, M. 1929. 'Science et Cinéma: Comment M. Jean Painlevé "filme" la vie des crustacés'. *Ciné-Miroir* 11 (January): np. Held in Fonds Jean Painlevé, Les Documents Cinématographiques, Paris.
- Caprella and Pantopoda (Caprelles et Pantopodes)*. 1930. [Film]. Directed by J. Painlevé. France: La Cinématographie documentaire.
- Crabs (Crabes)*. 1931 (1929). [Film]. Directed by J. Painlevé. France: La Cinématographie documentaire, Gaumont.
- Dalla Vacche, A. 2011. 'The Difference of Cinema in the System of the Arts', in D. Andrew with H. Joubert-Laurencin (eds), *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and Its Afterlife*. New York: Oxford, pp. 142–52.
- Daphnia (La Daphnie)*. 1929. [Film]. Directed by J. Painlevé. France.
- Daston, L. and G. Mitman. 2005. 'Introduction', in L. Daston and G. Mitman (eds), *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 1–14.
- Deux Aveugles. 1930. 'Un entr'acte aux "Miracles"'. *L'Intransigeant* (23 December): p. 6.
- Diamant-Berger, H. 1930. Letter to Jean Painlevé. Held in Fonds Jean Painlevé, Les Documents Cinématographiques, Paris.
- Ensault, P. 1982. 'La Vie de Jean Painlevé'. Unpublished transcript. Held in Fonds Jean Painlevé, Les Documents Cinématographiques, Paris.
- Epstein, J. 1975 (1946–1949). 'Alcool et cinéma', in P. Lherminier (ed.), *Écrits sur le cinéma, vol. 2: 1946–1953*. Paris: Seghers, pp. 175–259.
- Fay, J. 2008. 'Seeing/Loving Animals: Andre Bazin's Posthumanism'. *Journal of Visual Culture* 7(1): pp. 41–64.
- Freud, S. 1953 (1919). 'The Uncanny', in J. Strachey (trans. and ed.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17. London: Hogarth, pp. 219–54.
- Ghali, N. 1995. *L'Avant-Garde Cinématographique en France dans les années vingt*. Paris: Editions Paris Expérimental.
- Hamery, R. 2008. *Jean Painlevé, le cinéma au cœur de la vie*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes.
- The Hermit Crab (Le Bernard l'ermite)*. 1931 (1929). [Film]. Directed by J. Painlevé. France: La Cinématographie documentaire, Gaumont.
- Hyas and Stenorhynchus, Marine Crustaceans (Hyas et Sténorinques, crustacés marins)*. 1931 (1929). [Film]. Directed by J. Painlevé. France: La Cinématographie documentaire, Gaumont.
- Jean Painlevé au fil de ses films*. 1988. [Television]. Directed by D. Derrien. Conceived by H. Hazera. France: GMT, Les Documents Cinématographiques, La Sept.

- Jeong, S.H. 2011. 'Animals: An Adventure in Bazin's Ontology', in D. Andrew with H. Joubert-Laurencin (eds), *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and Its Afterlife*. New York: Oxford, pp. 177–85.
- Lacan, J. 1974. *Télévision*. Paris: Seuil.
- . 1987. 'Television'. Trans. D. Hollier, R. Krauss and A. Michelson. *October* 40 (Spring): pp. 6–50.
- Le Roy, F. 1931. 'Le cinéma documentaire: Apôtre du film documentaire M. Jean Painlevé propose au spectateur de féeriques voyages'. *Ouest Journal* (28 Mars): np. Held in Fonds Jean Painlevé, Les Documents Cinématographiques, Paris.
- MacDonald, S. 2006. 'Up Close and Political: Three Short Ruminations on Ideology in the Nature Film'. *Film Quarterly* 59(3): pp. 4–21.
- The Octopus (La Pieuvre)*. 1928. [Film]. Directed by J. Painlevé. France.
- Painlevé, J. 1929. 'Les Films Biologiques'. *Lumière et Radio* 10: pp. 15–18.
- . 1930a. 'La Beauté du film documentaire, le film biologique'. *Monde* 18(85) (January): p. 6.
- . 1930b. 'Le Cinéma'. Unpublished manuscript. Held in Fonds Jean Painlevé, Les Documents Cinématographiques, Paris.
- Pick, A. 2011. *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Pigeons of the Square (Les Pigeons du square)*. 1982. [Film]. Directed by J. Painlevé. France: Les Documents cinématographiques.
- Rushdie, S. 2008. *The Wizard of Oz*. London: British Film Institute.
- The Sea Horse (L'Hippocampe)*. 1935. [Film]. Directed by J. Painlevé. France: La Cinématographie documentaire, Pathé-Natan.
- Sea Urchins (Les Oursins)*. 1929. [Film]. Directed by J. Painlevé. France.
- Shrimp (Crevettes)*. 1931 (1929). [Film]. Directed by J. Painlevé. France: La Cinématographie documentaire, Gaumont.
- Weber, S. 1973. 'The Side-Show, or: Remarks on a Canny Moment', *MLN* 88(6): pp. 1102–33.



## ANIMISM AND THE PERFORMATIVE REALIST CINEMA OF APICHPATPONG WEERASETHAKUL

May Adadol Ingawanij

Animism makes real the permeability of human and nonhuman worlds. As a structure of perception and framework of experience, the relevance of animism to the theme of cinema beyond the human lies in its conception of the self as porous with respect to a multiplicity of life forms. In the animistic universe, the movement of *anima* creates duration characterised by untimely appearances and the cyclical trajectory of rebirths and returns. This chapter approaches the recent films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul, primarily *Sat pralaat!/Tropical Malady* (2004) and *Lung Boonmee raleuk chat/Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010), as presentations of animism's historicity.

The fundamental attraction of Apichatpong's films lies in their combination of sensorial intensity and temporal reflexivity. We perceive non-synchronicity of time and indeterminacy of space through juxtapositions that stimulate our senses of hearing and touch as intensely as sight. This is the main reason why Apichatpong is being canonised as a filmmaker whose works exemplify aesthetic contemporaneity in world/art cinema. I want to build into this critical contextualisation a terminology that has so far been somewhat bracketed; and that is realism.<sup>1</sup> Both *Tropical Malady* and *Uncle Boonmee* embody certain characteristics that Thomas Elsaesser classifies as typical of contemporary world cinema's 'contractually secured' ontology of realism (Elsaesser 2009: 13). Rather than privileging sight, in accordance with the paradigm of monocular perspective and its epistemological assumption of human centrality, this realism stimulates spectatorial perception through sound and tactility. There is a corresponding shift towards presenting as real or 'normal' altered or existentially uncertain states. This last element resonates with the underlying structure of Apichatpong's films. The logic of his formal assemblage can be understood as realist in a sense that parallels Elsaesser's contractualist description, a terminology that seems better oriented towards mind-game or puzzle films. For our purpose, the ethnographer Ashley Thompson, writing about spirit

possession in Cambodia, has proposed a highly suggestive definition. Animistic practices of possession and mediumship engender reality of a performative nature: 'a reality that vanishes into thin air as soon as it is not experienced as real' (2008: 100–1). This is the same epistemological grounding as that which underscores Apichatpong's layering of diegetic worlds in which material immaterialities are perceived as real.

Exploring Apichatpong's practice within the framework of animism entails a different starting point from classical film theory's investment in cinema as a perceptual training ground for a reenchanting relationship with the world (Epstein 1988). For Jean Epstein, it is the camera that allows us to perceive that quality of *photogénie* that the naked eye cannot see, and in this sense his conception of cinema's capacity of revelation overlaps with the affective and epistemological investment in the camera's indexical power (Doane 2002: 226). The property of the film image as a trace, or a material record of contingent details in excess of the narrative system, allows the spectator to perceive the world as in constant flux. As Mary Ann Doane (*ibid.*: 228–29) points out, underlying this idea of trace as the sign of contingency is a utopian desire which relates cinema's capacity to index an outside, an excess, with the possibility of overcoming modernity's destructive systematisation. Yet the fragmented quality of Apichatpong's films and installations suggests the fruitfulness of an approach that first identifies an overall pattern of textual assemblage. Adrian Martin's (2011) recent redefinition of cinematic *dispositif* as the arrangement and articulation of elements of form according to a work's internal textual logic is especially useful in this regard.

## An Intermedial Topography

In proposing *dispositif* as a methodology of film analysis characterised by a renewed attentiveness to the process of assembling various levels and layers of formal elements, Martin (2011) emphasises the overlap between this approach and the notion of cinema as an intermedial art. This point goes further than simply recognising that films absorb, mix and refer to different media forms, texts and influences. Cinema, and more specifically contemporary world cinema, is intermedial due to its tendency to assemble disparate elements without fusing them into a seamless whole. Rather than picturing a film as a representational machine that sutures various elements into a coherent fictional world, the emblematic image is of the film as a 'catalogue' of references, citations and allusions – an ensemble that presents within itself

a diverse array of preexisting media, texts, myths, stories, rituals and other communicative practices. Meaning can be produced from the intervals between parts and from the way that distinct fragments resonate within a particular logic of arrangement.

The jungles of *Tropical Malady* and *Uncle Boonmee* allude to an otherwise disparate range of local forms and references: oral stories and legends, modern and pulp fictions, the obsolete aesthetics of plebeian cinema and other entertainment media in Siam, and the significations, tales and photographic discourses that are part of the country's violent modern politics. The literary figuration that begins the jungle quest in *Tropical Malady*, and continues throughout this part of the film in the guise of the intertitle narration, is an explicit gesture of intermedial layering. The credit title that appears halfway through the running time announces the textual source of inspiration for this part: the *Long phrai* series of jungle adventure stories written by a leading writer of mid-twentieth-century Siam. The Thai-language title of the film, *Sat pralaat!* (strange beast!), is the same as a chapter title in one of the novellas in the series.

Noi Inthanon's novella is itself a reflexive take on Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*, and features a hunter who goes into the jungle in western Siam in search of a man-eating tiger. *Tropical Malady* extends this genealogy of jungle adventures by obliquely reconfiguring elements of character and time in Noi Inthanon's tale. Its presentation of the soldier Keng's experience of temporal alterity in the jungle both alludes to the hunter's adventure in the lost world, and reworks the tale's underlying assumption of time as modernising speed and



**Figure 5.1** *Tropical Malady*. Once upon a time there lived a Khmer shaman

mankind's forward marching. The hunter's adventure ends up catapulting the temporal rhythm of Peking Man's secret world into the accelerated pace of man's nuclear age. He thereby destroys the invisible corridor linking the modern to prehistoric time-space. In contrast, the soldier at the end of the film turns into an acutely sensate creature who moves like a wild animal.

The pre-modern cosmology rooted in what is now South East Asia posits the forest as a space into which the essence of self takes flight. The forest is the domain of wild nature and malignant spirits, but it is also a zone in which *anima* finds shelter. In her work on Khmer folk tales and Cambodian history, Penny Edwards characterises the forest of the pre-modern tales as 'a place of transformation and transition' whose cosmology implies 'different notions of boundaries to those formalised in the colonial period' (Edwards 2008: 138). It is the place where human beings' metamorphosis into animal form signifies the possibility of freedom or the preservation of the essence of self (ibid.: 144). This conception of forest cosmology and topography differs from those European fairy tales that represent the transformation of human characters into animals in the wild as a loss of humanity, impelling an ending whereby the characters return home and revert to human form. In one of the Khmer tales, three daughters go into the forest and over time acquire the physical appearance of birds, which releases them from their previous existence with their abusive mother. In their transformed state, the sisters communicate in birdsong but still understand human language, and so they have become both less and more than human beings (ibid.: 146). The ending of this tale is similar though not identical in its implication to that of *Tropical Malady*, whose last shot shows the beginning of Keng's metamorphosis into 'neither man nor beast'.

The nature of the space at the edge of the forest is a historically determinate matter. Its modern conception as a boundary separating the cultivated from the wild is a palimpsest; below this persists the remaindered reality of a porous zone that challenges colonial or auto-colonial demarcation. As we shall see, the intermedial characteristics of the forest in *Uncle Boonmee* allude to this zone at the 'edge' as the site of creaturely subjection to state terror during the Cold War. The film is the centrepiece of the *Primitive* art project, which was an oblique response to a national political climate of escalating anxiety about a dying king and the ensuing resurgence of reactionary forms of royalist nationalism. With this film, Apichatpong adopts the day for night technique to shoot the sequences that take place in the forest. The addition of the lens filter turns the real forest into an explicitly 'manmade' surface that references a disparate range of aesthetics and events.



*Uncle Boonmee* is shot on Super 16 film stock in a gesture recalling the obsolete aesthetics of the 16mm ‘quickies’ that circulated in Siam during the Cold War period as culturally delegitimised popular entertainment. The aesthetic otherness of these quickies is the reference of such compositional arrangements as the usage of frontal shots. A cut suspends the story of Boonmee’s impending death to narrate the story of the union between a princess and a catfish creature. This segment presents an urtext-form of local folk tales of human–animal union. Elements of low budget science fiction and comic books are also present via the figure of Boonsong, the red-eyed ape-man who is Boonmee’s long disappeared son. *Uncle Boonmee* shows other creatures (‘monkey ghosts’) that have the same appearance as Boonsong, figures who silently roam the forest and whose beaming red eyes look out directly from the furthest plane. Arranged there as enigmatic details within a dispersive, fragmented film, they are motifs whose muteness resists transparent signification and yet also invites a look of recognition in return. To develop this observation further entails digressing into a brief account of the particularities of modern political destruction in Siam, which turned the jungle and its adjacent spaces of habitation into historical ruins.

## Ruins

With increasing imperialist competition for territories in the Far East from the late nineteenth century, Siamese kings sought to turn what had been a territory of overlapping principalities into a royal absolutist state. This gave rise to a spatial articulation of power that would eventually render as ‘primitive’ the cosmology of the forest as a site of metamorphosis. The jungle came to be represented as a wild space populated by ‘uncivilisable’ beings, while villages at the edge of the jungle were inhabited by ‘loyal, backward subjects’, of modernising and enlightened royal leadership (Thongchai 2000: 534–37).

Not long after the publication of Noi Inthanon’s adventures, the Cold War in South East Asia intensified, and Siam fell under the sphere of influence of the United States. The trope of ‘culture versus nature’ came to be mobilised to legitimise the authoritarian regime of a succession of military rulers. The most historically decisive of these leaders made development, and the elevation of the monarchy into the sacral emblem of Thainess, the central claim to legitimacy. Over the course of the 1960s development rhetoric and policies became increasingly driven by the anti-communist agenda (Thak 2007: 155–59). The emblematic

initiative of highway construction was designed to consolidate the U.S.'s strategic position, primarily by making the north-east region of Isaan accessible as a military stronghold. Isaan became a flashpoint due to its geographical proximity and archaic cultural ties to an Indochina that was now rapidly transforming into communist states. A highway system also facilitated the surveillance of Isaan's population, especially those who lived around the edges of the forest and the borderland demarcating the separation of Thailand/Siam from neighbouring communist states. These terrains could no longer be left as porous zones of transition into wild nature. Villages were now regarded as spaces to cultivate, organise and police. The aim was to transform the people on the edge of wilderness into subjects of official nationalism through a combination of development incentives and state violence. Cultivation was now meant to prevent people from taking flight into the jungle where communist insurgents were hiding and building their base.

Consequently, during the Cold War the jungle itself became a space of flight, danger and the habitation of spirits in a different sense from previous cosmological associations. Insofar as its density and depth could conceal communists, insurgents and others fleeing the security apparatus, it was at once a space of shelter and a territory of threat. At the same time, the jungle had the awesome capacity to swallow up the lifeless bodies of slain communists, or those accused of being such. Later on, in the unanticipated aftermath of the massacre of students and other demonstrators in Bangkok on 6 October 1976, the jungle also came to acquire another mournful association: the post-Cold War landscape of history's recurring wreckage. After state forces and ultra-nationalist vigilantes had killed, raped and tortured demonstrators dehumanised as communists intent on bringing down the throne, students and radicals who had survived that day's atrocities disappeared into jungles in the north, north-east and south of the country to join the communist insurgency. But a few years later the Communist Party of Thailand itself was on the verge of collapse, and by the early 1980s most of those who had fled into the jungle were making their melancholic outward exodus. In this sense, from the 1980s, as Siam turned to economic globalisation and the incorporation of ex-radicals under the 'end of history' rubric of Thai-style semi-democracy, presided over by a politically and ideologically ascendant monarch, the jungle became at once a topography bearing the silent remains of neo-colonial and nationalist barbarity while indexing the ruins of a radicalism thus far neutralised of its capacity to haunt (Morris 2003).

Isaan is the region where the story of the dying of Boonmee takes place, and the fact that its once-stigmatised language is spoken in the

film is a political point readily grasped in the context of the film's domestic reception. It is an Isaan of the present in which the barbarity of anti-communist nationalism and the promises of communist and socialist ideals alike have been dead for around three decades, yet their ghosts and creatures endure. More precisely, their creatures and ghosts remain but are suspended in a state of silent waiting: they cannot haunt as yet but neither have they become permanently erased. The logic of assemblage of *Uncle Boonmee* evokes this quality of untimeliness-without-haunting, a stranded temporality.

### Performative Reality

It is useful in this context to differentiate Apichatpong's performative realism from the genre of the fantastic that, at first glance, appears to encompass both *Tropical Malady* and *Uncle Boonmee*. The fantastic is a 'drama of disbelief' played out as a wavering between the competing perspectives of the marvellous and the scientific. The former accepts that there are events in the world which defy rationalist explanation, while the latter seeks to unveil supernatural events as illusions that can be scientifically accounted for (Lim 2009: 29–30). In contrast to the fantastic's hesitation, the diegeses of *Tropical Malady* and *Uncle Boonmee* present worlds in which characters knowingly inhabit non-synchronous time and respond readily, through verbal and gestural acknowledgement or bodily immersion, to appearances, presence and events of a marvellous nature. Often this is also where the charm and deadpan humour of Apichatpong's films lie.

Consider, for instance, how the human characters receive the return of Huay, Boonmee's ghost-wife and Jen's elder sister. Appearing in the frame as a see-through, superimposed silhouette, the spectral shape gently acquires density and turns into an elegant, womanly figure, seated almost facing the camera on the spare dinner chair next to Jen's friend Tong. At the sight of the apparition the three human beings are initially stopped in their tracks, and Tong backs slowly away to stand behind the seated Boonmee. At this point all three humans are in the frame and the ghost is offscreen to the left. Looking quietly startled, Jen gently asks, 'Is that you?' and upon hearing the ghost's response Boonmee calls out her name. This brief hesitation is immediately broken when Tong, the urbane visitor from Bangkok, whispers to Auntie Jen, 'Is that your younger sister?' Her age-sensitive response is the film's humorous way of alluding to the notion that ghosts do not age while mere mortals do, and at the same time Jen's very human



**Figure 5.2** *Uncle Boonmee*. Tong's gesture of hospitality to the ghost

flash of indignation augurs a rhythmic shift. The scene continues in the rhythm of affectionate urgency; long-lost loved ones have much to catch up on. Tong is now seated again next to Huay. Boonmee then hands Tong a glass of water to pass on to her. This is at once a gesture of mundane hospitality, an expression of deep love and care for the ghost-wife who, as the ill man says, must have travelled far to be here with them, and a verification of Huay's material presence through acknowledging the possibility of her maintaining the bodily sense of taste. Tong overcomes his hesitation and gingerly places the glass of water in front of the figure.

Not long after this gesture there is a cut to a medium shot of Tong turning his face to offer a charming smile of friendly recognition to Huay offscreen – a shot held for a surprising duration. Jen asks her sister whether she has been receiving the offerings she has been making to her, a question referring to the Buddhist-animist ritual of making food and other offerings to the dead to ensure that their *anima* does not lack the necessities that would nurture them in the indeterminate time-space of waiting for reincarnation. Huay confirms that she has been receiving the offerings and tells them that she takes comfort in hearing the voices of Jen and Boonmee communicating with her. For the ghost the sound of their voices across the threshold verifies the continuation of her loved ones' attachment to her.

The figuration of Boonsong calls to mind science-fiction iconographies and the intermittent science-fiction (SF) ambient in other works by Apichatpong. It would be stretching the point to distance the critical

enframing of his films from the fantastic only to shoehorn them too closely into SF. They are much less concerned with presenting SF's speculative tendency than with alerting spectators to the motion of otherwise imperceptible life forces in the existing world. But one connection is useful to articulate, insofar as it concerns Apichatpong's presentation of human movement in the jungle. I am thinking here of Vivian Sobchack's classification of low-budget American SF movies of the 1950s and 1960s as movies that attract and disorient spectators by subverting existing landscape and making the familiar appear as alien, thereby creating diegeses in which human beings find themselves 'truly lost in space' (2004: 113).

## Metamorphosis

Keng sets off into the jungle on the trail of a tiger that has been causing the disappearance of villagers and their work beasts. The figure's apparitional form is of a naked human figure with tiger stripes painted on his body. It looks like Tong, who we encounter in the first half of the film as the young man that Keng desires. The camera tracks the body of the actor Banlop Lomnoi in order to record his constant movement, and the editing cuts between long shots of his alert, purposive march into the thicket in the far plane, and close-ups of his face and hands as he pauses to listen to rustling sounds from unseen sources, or crouches to sniff and touch signs of the tiger's presence. The effect is both to maintain Keng/Banlop's body as the focal point in the frame, and also to visualise this body as one that is still acting upon nature as if it were a passive object of his search. The formal arrangement at this point evokes his separateness from the physical environment of the jungle.

This state begins to unravel when he comes face to face with the creature, and shortly afterwards is pulled into rough physical contact with it in a fight. As the film drifts towards the ending there is a greater mobilisation of static shots in close-up and medium distance. What transpires as a consequence of this compositional shift is the concentration of small, irrepressible movements upon the surface of Keng/Banlop's body.

*Tropical Malady* presents a human being's metamorphosis as magnified reflexes leading to the physical learning of new actions. Keng's voyage is similar in this sense to the astronauts who learn to move in the spaceship of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Of the latter, Annette Michelson (1969: 59) writes that its exploration of the astronauts' learning to function in the Discovery creates a space, 'somewhere

between screen and spectator', characterised by a heightened awareness of one's physicality, implied to be the epistemic ground of consciousness. In Keng's case, the more bruised and poorly equipped he becomes, the more receptive he is to the darts and tremors of things and beings inhabiting the jungle's shadows. Having come into direct contact with the tiger creature, his body becomes a porous surface rather than the deliberative figure of an observer or searcher. In this duration the soldier hears the message a monkey channels to him. The monkey's chatter, charmingly translated for us via the subtitles, tells Keng that he must either kill the creature or let himself be killed by it in order for the two to be united as 'neither beast nor man'. As the monkey utters its message Keng backs away but does not take his eyes off it. The look of deadly, haunted concentration that intensifies on his face tells us that he fully grasps the animal's counsel.

Inhabiting this same topography of Keng's transformation is a wandering *anima* recently unmoored from the dead body of a cow. Approaching this same point of death-transition as the cow-being, or so it seems, Keng whispers '*ror duay*' (wait for me) to the animation figure, then slowly falls on his hands and feet and begins to mimic the gestures and noises of beasts. During the closing minutes of the film, the movement of time onscreen distils into such transient things as the flickering light of wandering fireflies, and the slow formation of perspiration on the soldier's face as he comes face to face once again with his soulmate, which now has the objective appearance of a tiger on a tree. The close-ups make powerfully perceptible the thickening film of sweat on his face. Tears slowly well up in his eyes in a close-up that shows



**Figure 5.3** *Tropical Malady*. The tiger is a hungry and isolated spirit

– on this surface of taut muscles, glistening sweat beads, and chattering teeth – the time of nascent metamorphosis into another life form.

## Waiting

Keng's metamorphosis feels like a happy ending, one that situates *Tropical Malady* as a redeemer of anarchistic prehistory: the flight to freedom of the pre-moderns in upland and other historically ungovernable refuge zones in South East Asia. In an implicit contrast to this ending's radically nostalgic invocation of primitive origins, *Uncle Boonmee's* presentation of the jungle voyage alludes to another kind of primitive past: those historical experiences of state brutality that have yet to be publicly voiced in Siam. In particular, it points to the presence of one such type of creature stranded among a nation's ruin. These are the lost souls that have neither become, in representation, subjects of the official nationalist narrative that contains loss and impunity within the discourse of the heroic preservation of the throne in the face of the communist threat, nor been articulated as victims of anti-communist brutality in the discourse of the trauma of October 1976, which only began to surface from the mid 1990s. The latter's historical subjects are predominantly those who had been student leaders and activists as the atrocities were committed, and its themes have tended to revolve around ambivalence, silence and the melancholy of the intellectuals (Thongchai 2002). In comparison, Apichatpong makes another ethical gesture of training his gaze lower and further on the ground.

At the dinner table Boonsong tells the story of his transformation. His narration prompts a long flashback scene that begins with an interior shot of a young man standing inside a darkroom, whose attention is caught by a photograph. A close-up of the image visible through a magnifying glass shows us the blurred contour of a monkey-like creature captured mid-flight.

Boonsong the creature recounts that he had 'never shown anyone' this photograph, which had then obsessed him. Boonsong's story is like that of the Chinese painter who is so absorbed by his completed painting that he enters into it while beholding it. The capacity of the photograph to show the trace of a thing the youth couldn't quite decipher had him gripped. The jungle that he then entered in search of the enigma is presented to us as a 'picture', which first appears as a film image of a photograph not seen by anyone else in the diegesis, then as a pro-filmic space made pictorial through the day for night technique. Deeper into the jungle Boonsong discovers its secret: the *ling phi* (monkey ghosts)



**Figure 5.4** *Uncle Boonmee*. The photo that Boonsong has never shown to anyone

existing there. As he utters this name, Huay repeats it in a voice that indicates her immediate recognition. Her son confirms that these were indeed the creatures that ‘we had heard about when we were young’. Boonsong the creature now reveals that his transformation was a consequence of the primordial act of mating with a female *ling phi*. The Boonsong who returns is no longer the young man in the darkroom but neither is he really a ghost. In the jungle he became transformed but did not literally die.

The *ling phi* are ontologically closer to the neither-girl-nor-bird creatures in the Khmer folk tale than the ‘neither man nor tiger’ virtuality gestured at beyond the closing credits of *Tropical Malady*. In the Khmer tale, the sisters’ flight into the jungle physically changes them and keeps them from harm. Edwards (2008) observes that in periods of horror such as took place during the civil war in Cambodia, a tale of this nature would have resonated powerfully with personal experiences of unthinkable violence. The transformation and flight of the sisters spoke for experiences of brutality, annihilation, and the desperate search for safety and survival of those creaturely subjects who belonged in peripheral zones ‘at the edge of the forest’. *Uncle Boonmee* echoes this tale in its allusion to the flight of the weak in an interlinked context of terror. The red-colour motif and the figuration of the apes in the style of science-fiction B-movies, the quintessential genre of Cold War paranoia, call to mind Siam’s ‘American Era’. The presentation of a photograph in its evidential capacity, yet one that visualises an enigma and lacks an accompanying caption performing the transparency of



meaning, recalls a contemporary discourse of the photograph in Siam. The brutality of 1976 exceeds representation but it was the first event of political horror in the country that was widely photographed. During the fifteen years or so of silence that followed the accidental discovery of journalistic snapshots of brutalised bodies and frenzied onlookers, which were circulating quite freely but could neither be appropriated for historiographic narration nor propaganda, was a shared experience of shock that impelled the politicisation of the generation that came after. Juxtaposing Boonsong's description of these creatures as beings in local legend with his figuration as ontologically indeterminate (less and more than human/beast/ghost) calls forth past experiences of flight in the Isaan in which the father and son belong. The disappeared come back as 'neither man nor beast' creatures in the jungle that the human protagonists are told about but do not seem to see. Yet, despite their invisibility to the protagonists, these creatures are visible to us spectators and, through their direct look at the camera, engage our look in return.

Perhaps these silently roaming ape-creatures share a history with Jen's father. Later, in *Uncle Boonmee's* central scene, she mentions the story of his flight during the anti-communist purge, when he received the command from the authority to hunt down communists. To avoid doing so he slipped into the jungle and learned to communicate with animals instead. The flatness of Jen's narration of her father's story is one example of the film's subtle provocation. She cites personal experiences of the civil war that have not been archived: in this case, the flight of powerless locals who wanted to be neither insurgents nor foot soldiers of official nationalism. Through the filmic utterance of Jen's father's story, *Uncle Boonmee* makes generalisable this dimension of personal experience, yet the film does so as if merely wandering into an incidental detail. The same tone is maintained throughout the scene where Boonmee and Jen are waiting for his Laotian carer to turn up for Boonmee's daily treatment. The waiting, and the company of his remaining family member, becomes the duration in which a dying man takes stock of his life. Entirely out of the blue Boonmee mentions that he believes his sickness is the karmic result of having killed too many communists. Jen listlessly tries to reassure him that he did so '*phuea chat*' (for the nation), but Boonmee brushes this response aside with words and gestures that stick in the mind because they are at once so weightless and unresolved. This man must have once been a soldier or paramilitary, a foot soldier of the state who may once have finished off the man who now cares for him. In response to his sister-in-law's half-distracted attempt to give him easy redemption he now mumbles the



**Figure 5.5** *Uncle Boonmee*. For the nation . . . for what?

non-sequitur, '*phuea chat*, for what . . . my waist hurts'. The conversation runs out of steam.

In contemporary Siam, anonymous faces from the Cold War period are represented in national historical discourse via the legibility of two photographic images: either student protestors upholding the Thai flag and the royal portrait, or a bloodthirsty mass. The official nationalist narrative domesticates revolt by linking such images of protestors with the rhetoric of a royalist nation's democratic progress (Morris 2009). There is an iconic photograph of the 1976 massacre. It shows a crowd of mostly young men looking voraciously on while a man is captured in mid-motion gleefully swinging a folding chair at a brutalised corpse that hangs from a branch. This image of a lynch mob out to defend the throne remained illegible until post-Cold War geopolitical shifts made possible the hegemonic articulation of its caption. Thongchai Winichakul (2002) observes that one of the key conditions for partially lifting the taboo against talking publicly about 6 October was the tacit acceptance of the conservative enframing of the event, which associates communist and socialist identification with the mistakes of youthful extremism. It became possible to publicly acknowledge that those who were brutalised and killed were victims only within this rhetoric. The atrocity could now be framed as a fatal combination of youthful extremism and extreme exertion of violence for a legitimate cause, rather than as a state crime. This logic permits a limited form of memorialisation, and discourages efforts to name the truth of culpability and demand accountability at the very top. And within this logic of containment

the shocking photograph hovers ambiguously between an image that evidences the ultranationalist subjectivity of the Cold War period and one that represents the danger of 'political extremism' in general. More recently, during the state persecution and killing of red-shirt protesters, establishment royalists made dire, oxymoronic predictions of a rerun of '6 October' unless the military decisively suppressed the demonstrators. This is an especially perverse example of the conservative appropriation of domesticated old ghosts in defence of an establishment threatened by the challenges of the emergent mass politics of the past decade. Abstracted from the event indexed, the figures visible in the photograph now risk the danger and irony of being translated by royalist nationalism into a physiognomy of the 'tyranny of the mass', their meaning stabilised in terms of a volatile, easily manipulated mass, a dangerous force constantly vulnerable to political brainwashing.

Consider, in comparison, Apichatpong's second provocation in *Uncle Boonmee*. The young fighter Boonmee would have had his place in history secured as one among the majority of murderous though legitimate subjects of anti-communist nationalism, much like the crowd of onlookers in the iconic photograph. But Uncle Boonmee is now a dying man and, as he approaches the finality of this life cycle, the life story that the film enunciates on his behalf both references the image of the murderous mass and subverts the discourse of historical subjectivity that helps secure its continuing reproduction. Boonmee killed communists for the nation, but Uncle Boonmee can no longer remember why he did so. The static shot composition of the film's central scene is such that Jen is seated in profile near the foreground, while the dying man lies on his back next to her and is placed further into the spatial plane. As their strangely insipid conversation grinds to a halt he looks away into the background, and the film cuts to a tighter close-up of his upper body. It holds this shot of a man who can neither remember nor forget; whose face is turned away from the camera to look into the distance. Then there is a cut to a profile shot of Jen as she looks quietly at Boonmee, before she too turns her face away from the camera towards the trees in the background. This is the duration of hesitation. A man no longer wants to commemorate the narrative that was meant to monumentalise his service in action. But neither can he erase the fact that he had killed people once branded enemies of the nation and may be called to account for his action in that indeterminate time-space of transition out of current corporeal form into the unknown.

The photographic discourse of political violence returns during the segment of the film where Boonmee goes to die in a cave. As his eyesight dims, he begins to tell the story of his dream about riding a time

machine into the future. Now Apichatpong cuts to a photomontage accompanying Boonmee's voiceover. He arrives at the city of the future ruled by an authority that hunts down beings from the past and makes them disappear by shining a light on their bodies to forcefully externalise their memory images. Unlike the citation of the photograph as trace in the segment that parallels this one, the photographs presented here strike poses that are at once playful and creepy. A long shot shows a field bordered by a wood in the background. In the distance an orange creature seems to be fleeing in the direction of the trees.

In the foreground the youths, who are visible from behind and dressed in army gear, stand with rifles slung over their shoulders. These photographs perform narrative gestures and belong to an earlier phase of the *Primitive* project. They are, in this sense, records of a participatory art process in which local youths are invited to perform an array of narrative gestures, but this form of 'play' took place in a very particular location. The shots were taken in Nabua, the north-east village where the first fighting between security forces and communist insurgents broke out in the mid 1960s. Knowing this extra-textual information transforms the photomontage into what looks like stilled gestures of reenactment, performed by youths who may well be the offspring of local men that had fled from this 'edge of the forest' when security forces turned up to capture communists. Or, they may be descended from those locals who took up arms on the state's behalf in the hope of ensuring their survival and that of loved ones. The stilled poses as gestures of opening towards a collective narration of repressed social memories are arranged to coincide with the duration of Boonmee's



**Figure 5.6** *Uncle Boonmee*. The pose of capture

tale – a premonition of the eternal present ahead. In this advancing present-to-come, the surveillance state drains untimely beings of memory images and secures social control. The hesitation of the dying man comes back as an echo in this assemblage. The segment presents a forking path to collective remembrance and total amnesia and stops short of stepping further down either way.

The question of social context also returns here via an association: the resonance between this duration of hesitation and the air of collective waiting as a country experiences ‘twilight’. The image of a receding light has become an urgent metaphor to describe the anxiety and anticipation that characterises present Siam’s collective waiting for the death of a king. Ultimately this is what *Uncle Boonmee* is about, a fissured formal arrangement that somehow archives for future spectators an atmosphere of suspension as this country looks backwards and forwards, in dread and duplicity, knowing that an end is coming yet not quite daring to imagine change. Cinema is not especially suited to representing causality and as a filmmaker Apichatpong is not one who narrativises consequential relations. In this respect his commitment as a filmmaker is far removed from those third-world intellectual filmmakers of the past who saw their historical role as one of radical education, raising consciousness through narrativising the causes and textures of a hopeless existence for the political hope of change. And to this extent his take on cinema’s nebulous link to the social seems closer to the utopian impulse enchanting its historically popular forms. Change comes apropos of nothing, but it is the sensation of change that cinema can present so well. Following almost immediately from *Boonmee* and Jen’s drifting offscreen looks after their conversation about the past/*chat*/nation runs aground is the story of a princess who trades her jewels for the possibility of change. In the closing sequence of the film the camera pauses on the unreadable look offscreen of the figure that is Auntie Jen, or her double, or her *anima*, as a Thai pop song plays. There’s nothing especially remarkable about this until one listens to the lyrics. In Apichatpong’s filmic universe a young voice beckons that unreachable thing in the sky to come down to his level, for a change.<sup>2</sup>

## Notes

- 1 But see Teh (2011) and Anderson (2012).
- 2 With thanks to the Leverhulme Trust for an Early Career Fellowship that facilitated the research for this work. The chapter forms part of my project on intermediality, history and cinema experience in Siam.

## References

- Anderson, B. 2012. 'The Strange Story of a Strange Beast: Reception in Thailand of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Sat Pralaat*', in M.A. Ingawanij and B. McKay (eds), *Glimpses of Freedom: Independent Cinema in Southeast Asia*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Southeast Asia, pp. 149–63.
- Doane, M.A. 2002. *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Edwards, P. 2008. 'Between a Song and a *Prei*: Tracking Cambodian History and Cosmology through the Forest', in A.R. Hansen and J. Ledgerwood (eds), *At the Edge of the Forest: Essays on Cambodia, History, and Narrative in Honour of David Chandler*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program.
- Elsaesser, T. 2009. 'World Cinema: Realism, Evidence, Presence', in L. Nagib and C. Mello (eds), *Realism and the Audiovisual Media*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 3–19.
- Epstein, J. 1988. 'Photogénie and the Imponderable', in R. Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory and Criticism Volume II: 1929–1939*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 188–92.
- Lim, B.C. 2009. *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Martin, A. 2011. 'Turn the Page: From *Mise en scène* to *Dispositif*'. *Screening the Past* 31. Retrieved 10 August 2011 from <http://www.screeningthepast.com/2011/07/turn-the-page-from-mise-en-scene-to-dispositif/>
- Michelson, A. 1969. 'Bodies in Space: Film as Carnal Knowledge'. *Artforum* February 1969: pp. 54–63.
- Morris, R.C. 2003. 'Returning the Body without Haunting: Mourning "Nai Phi" and the End of Revolution in Thailand', in D.L. Eng and D. Kazanjian (eds), *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*. Berkeley, LA, London: University of California Press, pp. 29–58.
- . 2009. 'Photography and the Power of Images in the History of Power: Notes from Thailand', in R.C. Morris (ed.), *Photographies East: The Camera and Its Histories in East and Southeast Asia*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 121–60.
- Sobchack, V. 2004. *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Teh, D. 2011. 'Itinerant Cinema: The Social Surrealism of Apichatpong Weerasethakul'. *Third Text* 25.5 (September 2011): pp. 595–609.
- Thak C. 2007. *Thailand: The Politics of Despotism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Publications.
- Thompson, A. 2008. 'Performative Realities: Nobody's Possession', in A.R. Hansen and J. Ledgerwood (eds), *At the Edge of the Forest: Essays on Cambodia, History, and Narrative in Honour of David Chandler*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, pp. 93–119.
- Thongchai, W. 2000. 'The Quest for "Siwilai": A Geographical Discourse of Civilisational Thinking in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Siam'. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59.3 (August 2000): pp. 528–49.

- . 2002. 'Remembering/Silencing the Traumatic Past: the Ambivalent Memories of the October 1976 Massacre in Bangkok', in C.F. Keyes and S. Tanabe (eds), *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory: Modernity and Identity in Thailand and Laos*. London and New York: Routledge/Curzon.
- Tropical Malady (Sat pralaat!)*. 2004. [Film]. Directed by A. Weerasethakul. Thailand, France, Germany, Italy: Kick the Machine Films, Anna Sanders Film, TIFA, Thoke+Moebius, Downtown Pictures.
- Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (Lung Boonmee raleuk chat)*. 2010. [Film]. Directed by A. Weerasethakul. Thailand, UK, Germany, France, Spain: Kick the Machine Films, Illuminations Films, The Match Factory, Anna Sanders Films, Eddie Saeta.



## WAS BLIND BUT NOW I SEE

Animal Liberation Documentaries' Deconstruction of Barriers to Witnessing Injustice

*Carrie Packwood Freeman and Scott Tulloch*

You will see some images of animals suffering. You will also see how these same images motivated one person to make a difference.

—Disclaimer for *The Witness* (2004)

The images you are about to see are not isolated cases. These are the industry standard for animals bred as pets, food, clothing, for entertainment and research. Viewer discretion is advised.

—Disclaimer for *Earthlings* (2005)

'You better hope the anti-vivisection people don't get a hold of this film', laughs a laboratory worker as she videotapes herself tormenting a scared monkey during shock treatments – a video that prophetically ends up in the activist documentary *Behind the Mask* (2006). This is just one of dozens of examples of video footage that industries never meant to see the light of day, but which documentarians critically showcase for public scrutiny. While some footage in animal liberation documentaries was created by animal-exploitative industries as inhouse training or private research videos, most documentations must be filmed by activists themselves via covert operations designed to uncover what is concealed in industries profiting from agriculture and fishing, fur, marine parks, circuses and biomedical research.

Activists circulate these disturbing images on the internet or in leaflets, and, increasingly, they are weaving them into feature-length documentary formats where the narrative structures define nonhuman animals as morally relevant victims, animal rights activists as heroes, and animal exploiters as villains. These documentaries warrant attention not only because they often win film-festival awards, but also because they function as a critical counterpoint to the hegemony of speciesist rhetoric circulating in the public sphere. Documentaries about the exploitation of animals and animal liberation activism are not a new phenomenon, but the explosive proliferation of these films in the past decade further justifies critical enquiry.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter we



analyse seven recent animal liberation documentaries, their use of undercover images, and their rhetorical function as social change advocacy. Utilising the power of nonfictional moving image, the seven documentaries introduced below challenge anthropocentrism by making nonhuman animals a central character and plot point, characterising their treatment (however legal) as criminally abusive.

The first three documentaries, *The Cove* (2009), *Dealing Dogs* (2006) and *Fowl Play* (2009), all centre on activist undercover campaigns to document abuses of specific species: dolphins, dogs and hens, respectively. *The Cove*, 2009 Academy Award winner for best documentary, features dolphin-trainer-turned-activist Ric O'Barry's quest to stop the slaughter of dolphins in a cove in Taiji, Japan. In an 'Oceans 11' spy-adventure format, he and his volunteer team risk arrest setting up underwater cameras that successfully expose the slaughter. The HBO documentary *Dealing Dogs* follows 'Pete', an investigator for Last Chance for Animals, as he works incognito at an Arkansas kennel that sells dogs to research labs. His laborious attempts to visually record violations of the Animal Welfare Act culminate in the arrest of the nation's most notorious 'B-dealer' of randomly sourced dogs. *Fowl Play* focuses solely on rescuing egg-laying hens. Activists from Ohio's Mercy for Animals sneak onto egg factory farms at night to conduct open rescues (without concealing their identities), recording the miserable conditions, occasionally rescuing some hens from rubbish bins or manure pits, and gaining exposure for the footage in the news media and schools.

Human moral development is the theme of two 2004 Tribe of Heart documentaries by Jenny Stein: *The Witness* and *Peaceable Kingdom*. In *The Witness*, an unlikely animal rights activist, Eddie Lama, a Brooklyn metals contractor, narrates his personal journey from first cat-sitting for a girlfriend, to rescuing strays, going vegan and becoming an anti-fur activist, even outfitting his company vans with anti-fur banners and screens airing undercover fur footage that shocks passersby on Manhattan streets. *Peaceable Kingdom* talks with ex-farmers and farmed animal rescuers to examine America's disconnected and abusive relationship with animals used for food. The film features footage from stockyards, hatcheries, factory farms and slaughterhouses. The message is one of personal growth and redemption, as viewers meet farmers who have opened their hearts to befriend and protect the very animals they used to kill.

The last two films, *Behind the Mask* (2006) and *Earthlings* (2005), are comprehensive in terms of promoting protection for all animal species, with the former focusing on activists and the latter on the victims who inspire their commitment; both barrage the audience with fast-paced

montages of animal suffering designed to stir outrage and pity. *Behind the Mask* provides a sympathetic introduction to radical activists, such as those in the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), who don ski masks and risk arrest to liberate animals from labs and fur farms. The documentary's images fulfil one of ALF's guidelines: 'To reveal the atrocities committed against animals behind locked doors'. *Earthlings'* hard-hitting exposés on animals used for pets, food, clothes, entertainment and science 'demonstrates in five ways how animals have come to serve mankind', as explained by narrator and Oscar-winning actor Joaquin Phoenix. The beginning and ending actively promote animal rights and more ethical relations by emphasising the connection among all species as fellow earthlings.<sup>2</sup>

In the sections that follow we begin by explaining how this collection of animal liberation documentaries' prominent use of undercover footage functions as a reverse panopticon, where the underdog activists gain surveillance power over industry by shining the light of scrutiny on its actions – elevating the audience above the barriers to witness prisoner conditions. Barriers to seeing are not just material, however; they are also conceptual. The hegemony of humanism is a basis for justifying discrimination and exploitation of other animals. Consequently we also examine how and when the films deconstruct the problematic human/animal dualism, promote animal rights ideology, and function as post-humanist cinema.<sup>3</sup> This form requires viewers to identify not only with activists as protagonists but also with nonhuman animals, and to dis-identify with industry antagonists. The rhetorical construction of antagonisms in these films disrupts viewers' comfortable belief systems, and visuals of cruelty reveal a chasm between humanity's self-concept as humane and the brutal reality of our domination over other animals. Antagonisms function to create identity crises for viewers, which filmmakers hope viewers will resolve through moral development, mirroring that of the protagonists. Far from being objective narrators, these documentarians serve as critical rhetoricians who construct storylines that promote and legitimise animal rights activism by framing activists as freedom fighters protecting the innocent. This situates animal rights in the respected vein of civil rights, adding credibility to the animal cause and further bridging the human/animal divide.

## The Power of Seeing (or Not Seeing)

Indicative of the films' strategic function and form, there is fundamental power in what is (not) seen. Industries intentionally obscure animal

suffering. There are material barriers, fences and buildings that prevent seeing, and animals are kept hidden in the dark by industry and governments that profit immensely from animal products. However, we would be in error to say that only powerful entities and material objects conceal industrial spaces of animal suffering from the public's view. Much of the public is complicit in the obstruction of these spaces, as psychological and emotional barriers serve to support self-deception. The public consumes animal products as well as innumerable products tested on animals in alarming proportions. These finished products, themselves void of visible suffering, are part of the core fabric of everyday life. But to see the blood and maltreatment these products inherently entail would be to furnish a painful dissonance with the comfort provided by these products in our lives. Thus, much of the public voluntarily opts out of seeing the industrial spaces of animal suffering (Joy 2010).

Animals are treated like raw materials and processed as manufactured commodities in post-industrial society. There is a confluence between industry's strategic obstruction and the public's blissful ignorance that leads John Berger (1980: 24) to claim: 'everywhere animals disappear'. There are, however, other forms of exploitation of animals that are extremely visible. Entertainment industries like circuses, rodeos, bullfighting and zoos rely on the animal being seen. However, these manufactured forms of visibility are compensatory, and such theatrical displays are further manifestations of how animals have been 'rendered absolutely marginal in society' (ibid.). In these forms of visibility the animal is reduced to a spectacle, an object subject to the human gaze and consumption. Liberation films run the risk of generating contrived displays of animals too. However, it is precisely the malign (in)visibility of the animal that adumbrates the radical potential of posthumanist films to render the nonhuman animal visible. By thrusting nonhuman animals onto the 'public screen' (Peeples and Deluca 2002), undercover footage functions to shatter obstructions and reconstitute the industrial spaces of animal suffering with glass walls. Films such as *The Cove*, *Dealing Dogs*, *Fowl Play* and *The Witness* all represent the extreme measures activists take to capture and disseminate moving images of the these spaces.

In *The Cove*, under the suspicious and watchful eye of Japanese and local officials, Ric O'Barry and his team plant cameras disguised as rocks and sensitive audio equipment positioned by world-class free divers to bring the images and squeals of dolphin slaughter to the public screen. Similarly, in *Dealing Dogs*, false identities, sophisticated phones and software to communicate with fellow activists, miniature

cameras and microphones enable Pete to capture and relay footage of the horrendous conditions and illegal treatment of dogs at the kennel. Films such as *Fowl Play*, *The Witness*, *Behind the Mask* and *Peaceable Kingdom* present montages of undercover footage. Common among all the documentaries in our sample is a plethora of grainy, low-resolution images that typify undercover footage captured on concealed handheld cameras. The films are shaky, momentarily a piece of clothing or a body breaks into the frame, and dates and times often appear in the corner of the image. However, this quality, or lack thereof, does not detract from the films. As a semiotic encoding of authenticity, the low-tech style enhances their effect, serving as an unambiguous cue to viewers that the footage had to be captured undercover.

Further emphasising the importance of seeing, protagonists in *The Cove* and *The Witness* construct makeshift mobile audiovisual-display devices to publicly expose animal suffering. In *The Cove*, O'Barry straps a television to his body and walks into an International Whaling Commission meeting, strategically injecting brutal footage of fishermen spearing dolphins, and showcasing it to bureaucrats and members of the news media. Similar actions are taken in *The Witness* as Eddie Lama converts his van to display undercover footage of fur-industry spaces as he traverses Manhattan's crowded streets. If we follow through with the analogy of *The Witness's* title, having witnessed the crime and violence committed against animals, the viewers are now expected to do something: report the crime, testify and seek justice on behalf of the victims.

The truth of a violent human–animal hierarchy is covered in dark recesses. Hence, seeing functions as a strategic resource for activists. Derrida (2002a: 372) recognises a strange power in seeing the animal (see us), contending that in this moment we are forced to cross the border and see 'the animal in me'. According to Derrida, by seeing 'the animal in me', we may recognise the artificial line society has constructed between human and animal and the violent subjection that anthropocentric subjectivity has enabled. These films direct a spotlight on the pervasive violence committed against animals. And, witnessing this treatment of the animal makes a mockery of our self-image as humane. Derrida suggests that violence against animals must and will change, particularly because the 'spectacle man creates for himself in his treatment of animals will become intolerable', due to the negative 'image of man it reflects back to him' (2004: 71–73).

Theoretical support for the presumed power of (not) seeing is buttressed in the corpus of Foucault, who was preoccupied with the practices of seeing. According to Foucault (1994: 107), it is through the

gaze that clinicians of the nineteenth century accumulated knowledge, displacing religious doctrines and crude classificatory systems for medical diagnosis and treatment. In this moment of medical history, Foucault argues, seeing, speaking and knowing converge: 'The relation between the visible and the invisible – which is necessary to all concrete knowledge – changed its structure, revealing through the gaze and language what had previously been below and beyond their domain' (ibid.: xii). In relation to the undercover footage and films explored here, Foucault's case study of clinical medicine reveals the contingency between practices of seeing and the transformation of power, knowledge and truth regimes. The films in our sample generate discursive disruptions, including legislative amendments and the closure of spaces of animal suffering, such as the Martin Creek Kennel, which was closed down largely because of the undercover footage Pete captures and which *Dealing Dogs* further disseminates. The act of seeing (the previously unseen) spaces of industrial animal suffering is a precondition for the constitution of a broader public discourse and discursive transformations.

Foucault's relevance to the analysis at hand can be further extended through his theorisation of the relationship between seeing and power relations. Foucault (1995) references the panopticon, a space that enables hierarchical surveillance. The panopticon is a circular prison with a tower in the centre where anonymous observers may watch any prisoner at any time. However, the incarcerated can never tell whether they are being watched or not. The ceaseless potential of being seen, a sense of intense monitoring of bodily conduct, imposes self-discipline and rigid adherence to the expectations of behaviour. The panopticon can be extended to represent how power relations and the gaze function in other social contexts of the modern institution, such as the school, factory, etc.

These films take the form of a reverse panopticon. We add the preface 'reverse' for several reasons. First, as a subversive tactic, the reverse panopticon is divergent from the top-down hierarchical structure associated with the traditional panopticon. Through undercover footage, the marginalised ideology and discourse of animal rights asserts itself through the gaze and directly challenges the powerful and vested interests that activists oppose. The traditional panopticon is about maintenance of order and discipline; the reverse-panopticon form of these films aims at discursive disorder. While the traditional structure enables the privileged gaze of one or several individuals, the reverse panopticon undermines this privileged perspective, inviting all viewers willing to bear witness. Although much of the public still avoids

these films, this form of surveillance power exponentially extends the vigilant gaze on violent practices.

The concept of a reverse panopticon does not ignore that undercover footage is difficult to obtain, or neglect that activists' surveillance is sporadic at best. Notions of a reverse panopticon revolve around these challenges and power differentials, as opposed to traditional notions of the panopticon where surveillance is unabated and relatively constant. However, even the irregular surveillance is enough to generate apprehension among exploitative industries about the anonymous and ceaseless potential of activists' undercover gaze.<sup>4</sup> The exposed images convey to actors in exploitative industries that they may always be watched, by anyone among them. There is unique power in the reverse panopticon as surveillance is decentralised, not emanating from a fixed location situated prominently in space as with the traditional form. While the traditional panopticon is a defensive strategy, part of the calculated management of a power-knowledge regime, the reverse panopticon is an offensive tactic by the marginal Other on enemy terrain (Certeau 1984: 36). Surveillance in the reverse panopticon is agile, multiple and amorphous. In each of these films protagonists are repeatedly interrogated as to whether they are undercover activists. Anyone new or unfamiliar in these violent industrial spaces cannot be trusted, a paranoia that is arguably a consequence of the reverse panopticon. The vantage of the reverse panopticon can loom anywhere, from the apparently loyal employee, or in the dark of night as activists with cameras slip in and out of facilities. With the proliferation and broader dissemination of undercover film that these documentaries permit, the uncertain threat and incessant fear of activists' surveillance may impose self-discipline and gradually alter the treatment of animals in these horrible spaces. However, the radical characteristics of these films are not limited to these elements and are expanded in the films' subversion of the human/animal dualism.

### **Animal Rights Ideology and Deconstruction of the Human/Animal Dualism**

To qualify as posthumanist cinema in the twenty-first century these documentaries must push beyond mainstream animal welfare views towards animal rights. To distinguish the two ideologies, animal welfare is largely limited to prohibiting 'wanton cruelty' or suffering in excess of what is 'necessary' while humans use other animals for human benefit (Francione and Garner 2010). Alternately, animal rights asks

that humans stop using and domesticating other animals (Regan 1983), legally categorise sentient nonhumans as individuals not property (Francione and Garner 2010) and combat species-based discrimination to fairly consider the interests of nonhuman animals (Singer 1990).

Animal rights principles challenge the human/animal dualism (Freeman 2010). From a Derridian standpoint, this binary does not merely represent a neutral categorisation but rather serves as a ‘violent hierarchy’ (Derrida 2002b: 41) where human dominates and is defined in opposition to the so-called animal. In support of deconstructing this discriminatory opposition, we examine how these films strike a balance between emphasising kinship and embracing difference among humans and other animals to avoid privileging only those animals that resemble humankind. Additionally, while these films frequently portray nonhumans as victims in need of human mercy and rescue, which could be construed as a patronising reinforcement of stewardship models that are more indicative of animal welfare than rights, we explore how they also enable animal agency, voice and dignity. Thus, we critically analyse how these films simultaneously shatter and reify human/animal dualisms.

In support of animal rights, our analysis reveals that all these documentaries honour the lives of featured animal species as inherently valuable sentient beings that should not be forced to suffer at the hands of humans, particularly in an industrial setting. The moral of most of these documentaries fits animal rights ideology in terms of discouraging the use of animals for food, clothes, science or entertainment. Industry’s mistreatment and cruelty toward animals is constructed as the films’ major conflict. Resolution comes primarily in terms of animal activists rescuing victims, but some films also ask viewers to play a role in resolving the conflict by eating vegan (*Peaceable Kingdom*, *Witness*, *Fowl Play*, *Earthlings*) or eschewing captive exhibits (*Cove*) and fur (*Witness*). Whenever an abolitionist solution is not clarified, the viewer may infer that tougher laws and regulation are an implied resolution.

In defining and promoting animal rights philosophy, *Earthlings* is the most explicit documentary, being the only one to use the word ‘speciesism’ or cite Singer’s (1990) utilitarian principles according to which it is wrong to privilege the trivial interests of one’s own species by sacrificing the major interests of another. Joaquin Phoenix’s narration critiques humanity’s power to dictate when and how domesticated animals will die and to force wild animals into permanent retreat, disregarding that ‘they have the right to be here just as much as humans do’.

*The Cove's* protagonist Ric O'Barry expresses a rights sentiment when he declares 'it's all about respect now, not exploitation'. The film emphasises dolphin freedom specifically, as O'Barry is shown liberating many from captivity. The documentary frames the taking of dolphins for entertainment or meat as kidnapping and murder rather than just a welfare issue. Viewers learn that O'Barry has sacrificed an opportunity to become a millionaire in the dolphin trade because he refuses to see them as tools for human amusement or profit. The advocacy for dolphin rights is overt, but the limitation of rights to cetaceans here, however appropriate to the narrative focus, may inadvertently have audiences questioning whether they have any obligations toward other species, such as non-mammals or those used for food. For example, fish are the most ignored species among the documentaries, despite their pervasive exploitation for food. When fish are featured, only in *Earthlings* and *The Cove*, they tend to be discussed in scientific terms, as members of ecologically vital species or as a food source, rather than as the sentient individuals that mammals or land animals are.<sup>5</sup>

The paradox for animal rights is that it needs to emphasise similarities between human and nonhuman animals in order to deconstruct the dualistic thinking that separates them, yet one must also respect the diversity found across the species spectrum (Freeman 2010). *Earthlings* strikes this balance saying, 'Beyond the many differences there is sameness', and *Behind the Mask* features Steven Best noting that humans do not have a licence for moral superiority, as nonhumans are superior in some capabilities and humans in others. To challenge the hierarchical human/animal dualism, one would expect to see direct comparisons between humans and other animals. While *Earthlings* uses the term 'nonhuman animal' several times, the dualistic terminology used by most documentaries fails to acknowledge humans' animality; consider the caption in *Behind the Mask* that reads 'no animals or people were hurt in this action'. Yet while most documentaries do not refer to humans as animals, many make the link by directly comparing the suffering and capabilities of nonhumans to those of humans. It is popular (*Behind the Mask*, *Fowl Play*, *Cove*) to have scientists and doctors bridge the species gap, presumably to add credibility by citing scientific evidence of nonhuman cognition or sentience. At other times the films make definitive statements, such as Phoenix in *Earthlings* emphasising the kinship between all animals as fellow earthlings and noting that, like humans, other animals are 'psychological centres of a life that is uniquely their own' and that 'they too are strong, intelligent, industrious, mobile and evolutionary'.



*Earthlings* does not shy away from making an overt and often controversial comparison between the slaughter of humans and nonhumans, citing Isaac Bashevis Singer's quote comparing humans' treatment of other animals to the worst racist practices of the Nazis. *Earthlings* launches an additional direct attack on humanity's moral superiority by citing Mark Twain's quote that man is the most detestable species because he inflicts pain for sport – a sentiment bolstered by sadistic scenes of angry men beating animals in a variety of sports and industries, undermining notions of a humane civilisation.

Throughout *The Witness*, Eddie Lama stresses that the difference between humans and other animals is merely conceptual rather than real, implying speciesist prejudices can be unlearned. As a subtle way of comparing human and nonhuman animals, Lama occasionally employs ambiguous terms such as 'someone' or 'anyone' for subjects, to allow viewers to envision any sentient individual experiencing that scenario – human or nonhuman.

But even when documentaries avoid direct comparisons to humans, all seek to convince viewers that other animals have consciousness and sensitivity – in essence, agency. Viewers can then interpret animals' screams, confinement and wounds as indicative of physical and emotional pain. To emphasise the significance of nonhumans as *someone* and not *something*, films often feature rescued animals with names or mention them in the dedication or credits. Documentaries afford animals agency in terms of presuming they have a perspective and desire for a better, freer, more natural and familial existence for themselves. For example, *Witness* and *Earthlings* clarify that no animal would choose to be harmed or killed, and in *Peaceable Kingdom*, Lyman, a former rancher, says that no cow goes 'hippy skippy' to the slaughterhouse begging to be a burger. The scene in *Earthlings* where the elephant Tyke goes rogue at the circus, attacking her trainers and busting out of the gates, indicates she is exercising revenge on her oppressors and asserting her independence from tyranny, at least until men kill her in a torrent of bullets. Viewers also witness many instances across documentaries of animals vocally protesting and struggling to escape their confines, demonstrating their preference for freedom.

While animal rights ideology includes empathy and some notions of pity and mercy, the overriding value sought is respect. Respect comes with not only seeing others as conscious individuals capable of suffering, but conversely in seeing them as dignified, vibrant, independent survivors. Documentaries do this best when they show images of 'wild' or free animals enjoying their lives in a natural habitat. *Earthlings* features many wildlife scenes at the beginning and end, *Witness* does

so with fur-bearing animals, *Behind the Mask* does so with liberated beagles and bunnies, and *The Cove* with free-swimming dolphin and whale families – especially when activist Dave Rastovich describes how a dolphin saved his surfer friend from a shark attack, allowing the dolphin to be the hero and rescuer. *Earthlings* quotes Henry Beston saying that humans err when they view other animals as incomplete or underlings, as they are gifted, ‘finished and complete’, ‘other nations caught within ourselves in a net of life and time’.

A vital part of affording animals respect, dignity and agency is to allow them a voice. While these documentaries are largely about humans enacting heroic rescues or experiencing moral development, the audio-visual medium offers opportunities for viewers to viscerally experience nonhuman communication, usually in the form of cries and struggles of protest, or gazes where fright, frustration or pain is written on their faces. *Earthlings* has viewers look into the soft and conscious eyes of a skinless fox, red and raw as a piece of meat, slowly expiring after her fur was ripped off. Akira Lippit (2000: 168–69) notes the power of the animal gaze to speak in terms of posing a nonverbal challenge to the human/animal dichotomy: ‘the animal’s pathic projection pierces the global divide, facilitating an encounter between the human and animal *topoi*’, where their ‘gaze exceeds the “thingness” of a nonhuman being and penetrates the human sphere’.

The notion of nonhuman animal voice is complicated by the fact that animals cannot vocalise in a human language; some film characters acknowledge this as putting animals at a disadvantage in terms of expressing their desires in a way that humans respect. In *The Witness*, Lama describes pigs as helpless because they cannot say ‘please, please don’t kill me and the kids for a pizza with sausage’. *Behind the Mask* shows activists speaking on behalf of animals by spray-painting a laboratory wall with the phrase: ‘Experiment on yourself. We are free. The animals’. And the lead singer of Goldfinger sings songs from the non-human perspective saying ‘Free me – I just want enough space to turn around’ and ‘I’m a happy dog, someone saved me today’. *The Cove* critiques the one-way human communication with dolphins, as we teach them sign language despite their lack of hands, instead of being humble enough to learn what they have to teach us about communication.

Because humans identify with storytelling, filmmakers utilise human spokespeople to give voice to other animals by narrating their stories. While the story of humans in the documentaries is a journey of moral development, the rescued nonhumans develop mainly in terms of becoming healthy and happy, making friends and showcasing their personality (a personality that reveals itself once they are freed

from stressful, abusive conditions). *Peaceable Kingdom* tells the story of Snickers the cow and his mother, not just in terms of their rescue to Farm Sanctuary, but also in terms of how Snickers interacts with or ‘rescues’ Harold Brown, a former animal farmer. Recognising Brown, Snickers runs up and presses his nose into Brown’s chest. Brown tears up as he explains ‘he knew just where to hit me’, meaning Snickers opened his heart to loving ‘food’ animals the same way that he loves dogs and cats. *Behind the Mask* features undercover lab worker Michelle Rokke choking up over her inability to save James, a primate with whom she had bonded through grooming and feeding until he lost trust in all humans, eventually being killed for product testing. And in *The Cove*, O’Barry describes how the dolphin Cathy, who played Flipper, chose to commit suicide via drowning after saying goodbye to him. These stories demonstrate agency, not just via the life choices made by these animals, but also in terms of their positive influence on their human friends.

Filmmakers recognise that it is not only the voices of the nonhumans which deserve foregrounding but also those of human activists working on their behalf, and the next section examines how filmmakers provide a supportive venue for the voices of animal activists who are otherwise marginalised in a commercially dominated public sphere.

## Documentarian as Critical Rhetorician

Unlike so-called objective journalism, the documentaries we explore are polemical and do not neutrally document activism. As the activists in the films advocate for animals, the filmmakers advocate for the activists as underdogs whose ideology society unfairly marginalises. By helping to frame activist image events, the filmmaker serves as a critical rhetorician. DeLuca (1999) suggests that critical rhetoricians function to: (1) legitimise activist actions; and (2) put activism in historical context in relation to other social justice movements. While DeLuca is primarily referring to scholars, the documentarians in our sample also fulfil this role as critic by strategically constructing preferred readings of the activism they document. Raymie McKerrow (1989: 91) also provides a fitting definition of critical rhetoric as a critique of domination with an emancipatory goal: ‘a critical rhetoric seeks to unmask or demystify the discourse of power’. Activists and documentarians who produce image events demystify structures of power through their strategic use of the following rhetorical tactics: (1) antagonism – foregrounding moral inconsistencies, such as visually undermining the façade

of industrial and moral 'progress' by exposing its dirty and unjust foundations; and (2) (dis)identification – showing human protagonists siding with the nonhuman, placing themselves among those who are vulnerable and at risk from human antagonists (DeLuca 1999).

The films' most overt strategic deployment of antagonism is to prove the industrial and callous nature of any legally sanctioned business that views nonhumans as commodities for profit. This is accomplished through repeatedly showing the dingy, bloody, mechanistic, filthy, painful and unnatural conditions in which industries position animals. Industry workers are never shown being caring or affectionate, and the animals are never shown as vibrant, clean, healthy and happy (until they are rescued by activists). In line with the demystifying function of critical rhetoric, filmmakers juxtapose the dark side of industrial production with the industry's false-consciousness-inducing cheerful advertising, benign architecture and attractive products that consumers willingly purchase. Protagonist commentary suggests the public is unaware of the ugliness and cruelty, presuming laws protect animal welfare. Thus, the films attempt to reveal the antagonism between an inhumane reality and an omnipresent perception of a humane and civilised society.

Another major antagonism is humans' *self-conception* as humane while simultaneously supporting widespread unnecessary animal exploitation. Viewers are left to resolve the cognitive dissonance resulting from witnessing the brutality and injustice of a system they implicitly sanction as consumers and citizens. This assault on viewers' moral integrity is exacerbated by provocative questions about why it is acceptable to eat or mistreat certain animals when we would not approve the same mistreatment of a companion animal.

These antagonisms help build (dis)identification – a strong rhetorical technique where viewers are expected to identify with protagonists (human activists and nonhumans) while disidentifying with antagonists (industry management, its workers, and other abusive individuals). Documentarians construct narratives to have broad resonance and not just preach to the converted using insider language. These films' widely resonant narratives establish a probable subject position for their viewers: primarily American, probably meat-eaters, and concerned about animal welfare but not yet convinced about the necessity for an animal rights movement. As emancipatory critical rhetoric, documentaries seek to raise awareness so viewers experience, via antagonistic provocations, a change of heart about animal use, reconceiving it as a criminally unjust exploitation deserving of boycotts or government regulation. To avoid being labelled self-righteous elites, activists often

express populist sentiment, drawing upon their own conventional roots (ex-meat-eaters from rural communities or tough streets) or concern for siding with the underdog. This fits strategic advice that social movements build unity through a collective identity that avoids being narrow or elitist (Tarrow 1998).

The documentarian justifies animal activism by linking it to historic actions to help human victims of injustice, adding credibility to animal rescues by framing activists as heroic, self-sacrificing freedom fighters in the familiar, culturally accepted vein of civil rights, abolitionism and women's rights. This tactic follows social movement scholar recommendations to lend familiarity to new ideas by linking them to iconic cultural figures defining moral progress (McAdam 1996; Tarrow 1998). *Behind the Mask* makes the most frequent comparisons between animal rights and human rights, referencing Martin Luther King, Harriet Tubman and Nelson Mandela. Rather than convincing viewers to change their view of nonhumans, *Behind the Mask* seeks to change impressions of imprisoned ALF activists, so animal exploiters are viewed as the real terrorists.

Despite the films' denigration of exploitative humans, they optimistically suggest that humans can change their oppressive ways, as racists and sexists have changed theirs over time. This offers hope that animal-loving humans can re-identify with humanity if they can get humankind to actually be kind, a notion especially expressed by rancher-turned-vegan Howard Lyman in *Peaceable Kingdom* with his reference to the reformed slave trader's lyrics in *Amazing Grace*, 'was blind but now I see'. Furthermore, *Earthling's* final message that 'we are all earthlings' optimistically promotes a universal identification with all living beings.

When protagonists in *The Witness*, *Peaceable Kingdom* and *The Cove* narrate their own transformation from animal-eaters, farmers, trainers or researchers, to newfound vegans and activists, this implies they share the common-sense pragmatism of 'regular' folks in the audience, as they were once just like them. Their journey of moral development models a path that viewers are implicitly encouraged to follow. Reformed farmers discuss how they once purposely disidentified with farmed animals so they could kill them, while allowing themselves to identify with dogs and cats. They now recognise they were denying their true and natural identification with cows, pigs and chickens based on peer pressure from the farming community. *Earthlings* is the most aggressive documentary in terms of asking people to see themselves as guilty parties, charging: 'Ignorance has prevailed so long because people do not want to find out the truth'. By highlighting antagonisms

over moral integrity, *Earthlings* asks viewers to identify their own guilt for complicity in aiding the documented animal exploitation, to end their state of denial and take accountability for what they have witnessed. This highlights these documentaries' normative nature, as their critical rhetoric prescribes hopeful alternatives for change (McKerrow 1989).

## **Towards Posthumanist Ethics and Action**

The intensified frequency of posthumanist documentaries that feature undercover film of animals and activists counter their invisibility, and provide alternative narratives to the hegemonic discourses of post-industrial society and a commercialised public sphere. This chapter demonstrates that these documentaries serve several vital functions in the strategic arsenal of animal rights activists. Three specific functions of these films have been emphasised here, including: (1) thrusting clandestine spaces of animal cruelty onto the public screen and exerting a reverse-panopticon pressure on industries; (2) challenging the human/animal dualism, the violent hierarchy it justifies, and the (imagined) humane self-image of society; and (3) serving as a critical rhetoric that constructs dissonance-producing antagonisms, (dis)identification, and legitimacy of the movement.

The potential power of posthumanist films and their functions should not be underestimated. However, nowhere in this chapter have we levelled claims that these films have precipitated a radical reordering of society or emancipation from a more powerful constellation of discourses that naturalise and obscure violence against animals. This chapter is not intended to be a romanticisation of these films and their social effects. We do, however, strongly contend that the films strive to propel the necessary preconditions for emancipatory social transformation: witnessing and acknowledging that injustice is being committed; challenging injustices by deconstructing powerful binaries, including their structural and linguistic manifestations; and critiquing injustices by demystifying the complex power relations they entail and positing alternative orders. Undercover footage and cinema offer a powerful vessel to fulfil these preconditions and are strategic resources for social movements.

So the old hymn goes, 'was blind, but now I see'. But, advocates of social change will aptly recognise this adage is incomplete. Beyond the broader proliferation of these images, beyond these preconditions for change (seeing, knowing, critiquing and the imagination of alternative

social orders), a crucial question remains: What will actually galvanise the broad social action necessary to expansively alter discourse(s) and produce significant material transformations in space and the social order? Requisite to achieving these emancipatory ends is the construction and internalisation of a universal posthumanist ethics paired with sustained action. With the unabated use and abuse of animals, this utopia is distant, but not unreachable. There the proverb is revised, ‘was blind, but I now I see, believe, and do’.

## Notes

- 1 *The Animals Film* (1982) is evidence of the sustained presence of this documentary film genre and its tactical pertinence for animal rights and liberation activism.
- 2 On *Earthlings*, see also chapter 1 by Anat Pick in this volume.
- 3 We define posthumanism as a non-speciesist worldview envisioning the human animal as one animated, morally relevant subject among many who share a larger ecological community, where human interests do not automatically warrant privilege over the interests of other species.
- 4 In the U.S., industry fear of the activist gaze is evident in recent legislative efforts, the increased proposal of ‘ag-gag laws’ (Bittman 2011) designed to silence activists and reinforce barriers to seeing in states such as Iowa, Minnesota, and Florida. These laws would make it illegal to obtain and distribute video, audio recording or photography without farm owners’ written consent.
- 5 The exception is the sport-fishing segment of *Earthlings* where Phoenix explains the fishes’ complex nervous systems, comparing them to humans, while viewers witness a marlin suffocating and bleeding to death on a boat.

## References

- The Animals Film*. 1982. [Film]. Directed by V. Schonfeld and M. Alaux. U.K.: Beyond the Frame.
- Behind the Mask: The Story of People Who Risk Everything to Save Animals*. 2006. [Film]. Directed by S. Keith. U.S.A.: Uncaged Films.
- Berger, J. 1980. *About Looking*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Bittman, M. ‘Who Protects the Animals?’ *The New York Times*, 26 April 2011. Retrieved 22 May 2011 from <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/04/26/who-protects-the-animals/>
- Certeau, M. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- The Cove*. 2009. [Film]. Directed by L. Psihoyos. U.S.A.: Lionsgate.

- Dealing Dogs: The Betrayal of Man's Best Friend*. 2006. [Television]. Directed by T. Simon. U.S.A.: HBO.
- DeLuca, K.M. 1999. *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Derrida, J. 2002a. 'The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)'. *Critical Inquiry* 28(2): pp. 369–418.
- . 2002b. *Positions*. New York: Continuum.
- . 2004. *For What Tomorrow: A Dialogue (Cultural Memory in the Present)*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Earthlings*. 2005. [Film]. Directed by S. Monson. U.S.A.: Nation Earth.
- Foucault, M. 1994. *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*. New York: Vintage Books.
- . 1995. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Fowl Play: The Untold Story behind Your Breakfast*. 2009. [Film]. Directed by A. Durand. U.S.A.: Mercy for Animals.
- Francione, G. and R. Garner. 2010. *The Animal Rights Debate: Abolition or Regulation?* New York: Columbia University Press.
- Freeman, C.P. 2010. 'Embracing Humanimality: Deconstructing the Human/Animal Dichotomy', in G. Goodale and J.E. Black (eds.), *Arguments about Animal Ethics*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, pp. 11–30.
- Joy, M. 2010. *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows: An Introduction to Carnism*. San Francisco, CA: Conari Press.
- Lippit, A.K. 2000. *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- McAdam, D. 1996. 'Framing Functions of Movement Tactics', in D. McAdam, J.D. McCarthy and M.N. Zald (eds), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilising Structures, and Cultural Framings*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 338–55.
- McKerrow, R. 1989. 'Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis'. *Communication Monographs* 56(2): pp. 91–111.
- Peaceable Kingdom*. 2004. [Film]. Directed by J. Stein. U.S.A.: Tribe of Heart.
- Peebles, J. and K. DeLuca. 2002. 'From Public Sphere to Public Screen: Democracy, Activism, and the "Violence" of Seattle'. *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19(2): pp. 125–51.
- Regan, T. 1983. *The Case for Animal Rights*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Singer, P. 1990. *Animal Liberation*, 2nd ed. London: Random House.
- Tarrow, S.G. 1998. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2nd ed. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- The Witness*. 2004. [Film]. Directed by J. Stein. U.S.A.: Tribe of Heart.





## FILMING THE FROZEN SOUTH

Animals in Early Antarctic Exploration Films

*Elizabeth Leane and Stephen Nicol*

At the beginning of *90° South* (1933), Herbert Ponting appears on screen to introduce viewers to his visual narrative of Robert F. Scott's second expedition (1910 to 1913):

I would like to say just a word or two about the great white south. The Antarctic continent is the home of nature in her wildest and most relentless moods, and it is there that the hurricane and blizzard are born. Though much larger than Europe, that vast continent has never been inhabited by man. It is utterly devoid of vegetation, and no land animals of any kind exist there. The only living creatures are those that come out of the sea, and the heart of that ice-bound wilderness has been trodden by only ten men since the creation. It is the uttermost end of the Earth.

In a period when cinema had recently begun to attract substantial audiences, and when safari films set in exotic locales were particularly popular, footage of 'nature in her wildest and most relentless moods' was bound to create interest (Bousé 2000: 46–57). Yet British and American audiences who had recently thrilled to dramatic scenes of animal hunt in far-flung expanses such as Africa and the Arctic – *Polar Bear Hunt* (1907), *Arctic Hunt* (1911), *Paul J. Rainey's African Hunt* (1912) – were not likely to be content merely with *human* heroics and tragedy played out in this remote southern environment. A key cinematic drawcard of the time was the inclusion of 'quaint scenes of animal life' (McKernan 2000: 100). Ponting and his counterparts, officially employed to document human endeavour, were thus required by commercial necessity to foreground animal life in the very region where it was sparsest.

In this chapter, we analyse the representation of animals in Ponting's film – a 1933 reworking of material shot over twenty years previously – alongside another prominent Antarctic exploration film of the same period, Frank Hurley's *South* (1919), the film of Ernest Shackleton's Imperial Trans-Antarctic (or *Endurance*) Expedition (1914 to 1917). In response to contemporary interest, Hurley and Ponting tried to create films that combined human drama with footage of exotic animals, with

limited success. While there was no lack of human drama, it was not always possible to film it; and animal drama, where it could be captured or manufactured, did not intersect with the human narrative in easy or palatable ways. The gaps and incoherencies in these influential films reveal the complex and problematic nature of human–animal relations in what historians sometimes term the ‘Heroic Era’ of Antarctic exploration.

The images that Antarctic cinematographers and photographers took of native Antarctic species were for many people their first visual encounter with these animals. Luke McKernan (2000: 92) observes: ‘The classical era of polar exploration and the start of motion pictures took place at almost the same time’. The earliest land-based Antarctic expedition, which departed in 1898, reportedly took with it a ‘kinematograph camera’ first manufactured only the previous year (McKernan 2000: 92; Bottomore 2005: 523). Ernest Shackleton certainly took a ‘cinematograph machine’ on his *Nimrod* expedition of 1907 to 1909, ‘in order that we might place on record the curious movements and habits of seals and penguins, and give the people at home a graphic idea of what it means to haul sledges over ice and snow’ (Shackleton 1909: 26). His expedition film, now lost, was shown extensively and was a commercial success (McKernan 2000: 93–94). Numerous other expeditions followed suit, including those led by Jean-Baptiste Charcot, Roald Amundsen, Robert F. Scott, Douglas Mawson and Nobu Shirase. The latter three also included a professional cameraman, with Scott being the first leader (just) to take this step. Thus, uniquely, the public encountered films and photographs of the continent at roughly the same time as it encountered the first written, oral and artistic responses.<sup>1</sup>

Little was known about some Antarctic species, such as the emperor penguin, before the early twentieth century, so photographs and films were central to the initial public perception of these animals. The first penguins seen outside the southern hemisphere were the king penguins exhibited at the Zoological Gardens in Regent’s Park, London, in 1865 (Martin 2009: 78); they were described by one contemporary reporter as ‘singularly misshapen’ and ‘grotesque’ (*The Times*, 18 April 1865: 10). Rockhoppers – also a subantarctic species – were in the same zoo later in the century (Martin 2009: 86). But the two penguin species that breed in the Antarctic continent – Adélies and emperors – were much harder to transport. The first of these to reach northern hemisphere cities alive were brought to the U.S. by Richard Byrd’s second expedition in 1935, and it was only in the 1940s and 1950s that zoos began to maintain them for any length of time.

Antarctic animals were therefore a novel attraction for cinemagoers. But complicating this was the primary role they played in Antarctic expeditions. In a continent ‘utterly devoid of vegetation’, the only source of fresh food was animals, native or imported. Isolated from human communities, the expeditioners became very fond of their sledge dogs and the latter feature prominently, often as individualised subjects, in exploration films. Yet dogs (and also ponies) were not infrequently consumed, either by each other or by the men, both by plan and by the exigencies of circumstance. While their deaths were not shown or mentioned on screen, audience members familiar with these celebrated expeditions would have known of their fate from other sources, adding a disquieting element to their fond portrayal.

Native animals, which represented exotic and unusual life forms for audiences at home, also provided companionship of a kind for men living in an otherwise desolate region (this was especially the case for penguins [ibid.: 89–90]). But they, too, could likewise be reduced to supplies shortly after their images were captured. Wild animal death was admittedly a normal, indeed highly popular, component of films at the time. Yet in most cases the animal killed was a fierce predator, hunted down and shot. The killing of marine animals, such as emperor and Adélie penguins and Weddell seals, that were slow and clumsy on land, had little of the drama of the conventional big-game hunting scene so beloved by audiences of the period. As cultural historian Brigid Hains (2002: 60–61) writes: ‘[I]t was hard to extract much manly adventure from shooting a Weddell seal . . . there was little honour, and no courage, required . . . Ironic humour was probably a more honest response to the strange helplessness of Antarctic wildlife than triumphal slaughter’. Thus, the central narrative link between wildlife and the human drama – the reduction of the former to food to enable the latter – was not one that the expeditions were keen to showcase visually.<sup>2</sup>

For all of these reasons, the contradictions and incongruities that frequently characterise human relationships with animals become evident in early Antarctic exploration films in unique ways. In the following, we examine how these incongruities play out specifically in Ponting’s and Hurley’s films.

## **90° South**

Like those before him, Scott knew the value of photography and film on a polar expedition, not only as a scientific record of a new environment

but also as a means of promoting and generating funds. Ponting, who was selected from around one hundred applicants for the position of Photographic Officer (Lynch 1989: 294), had established himself as a professional travel photographer over the previous decade, travelling widely in Europe and Asia. Unsurprisingly, images of animals were central to his work: at the beginning of his photographic career he won a prize for a photograph entitled 'Mules at a California Roundup' (ibid.: 292) and during his later travels would take risks to capture wild animals in their natural habitat. Photographing alligators in Calcutta in 1907, he ignored the Indian locals' repeated advice and approached the animals at close range: 'I took a leap and then ran. I was not a fraction of a second too soon, for the brute's jaws came together with a loud snap that fairly made my blood chill' (Ponting 1908: 354). As this description indicates, Ponting was happy to adopt the discursive conventions of the safari hunt, with the photographer/hunter portrayed as daring and adventurous, and the animal subject as a hostile enemy.<sup>3</sup> In an earlier attempt to photograph alligators, he had given up and shot one instead (ibid.: 353). One photograph in his collection (circa 1910) shows him on a ship's deck surrounded by hunting trophies: antlers, whale bones, a mounted polar-bear head and a mounted walrus head.<sup>4</sup>

While a veteran of wildlife photography, Ponting was new to cinematography in 1910. He learned the skill for Scott's expedition, taking with him two film cameras, two kinds of cine film and a developing machine, and shooting twenty-five thousand feet of film during his time in the far south (Lynch 1989: 298). The resulting footage was put to various purposes. Scenes of the sea voyage down to Antarctica and the establishing of the base hut were sent back with the expedition ship in early 1911, edited by the Gaumont company (who had agreed to produce and distribute the film in exchange for forty per cent of the proceeds) and screened under the title *With Captain Scott, R.N. to the South Pole* (McKernan 2000: 95; Lynch 1990: 222). A further batch of film was screened as a 'second series' in late 1912, by which time Ponting himself had also returned.<sup>5</sup> Both screenings were very popular, although Amundsen had, according to Ponting, 'knocked the bottom out' of the market for the latter by reaching the Pole first (Huntford 2001: x; Jones 2003: 182). After the announcement of the death of Scott and his companions in 1913, the material was reedited and released as *The Undying Story of Captain Scott* – although the lack of actual footage of the polar journey (Ponting had accompanied Scott's party only a short way) would always create problems for the filmic recreation of the story. In early 1914 Ponting launched into a series of highly popular lectures using photographs and footage, and the same year he purchased

Gaumont's rights to the film (Lynch 1990: 222). In 1924 he reedited and combined the earlier series into a longer feature with the title *The Great White Silence* (Jones 2003: 262) and, near the end of his life, added music and a voiceover to yet another edit, released as *90° South* – the version with which present-day viewers are most familiar.<sup>6</sup> Although neither of the later features was a commercial success, Ponting's work was critically acclaimed both at the time of its first release and retrospectively. McKernan, for instance, deems Ponting's film in both its silent and sound versions, 'one of the certain masterpieces of documentary in the earliest years of cinema' (2000: 96).

Animals – both those native to Antarctica and those the expedition brought with them – were central to Ponting's work. Historian Max Jones (2003: 185) notes that 'animals were the leading actors in Ponting's lectures, with sections devoted to seals, skua gulls, and penguins'. Ponting believed that 'the masses' needed to be entertained if they were to be educated, and that key to this was the introduction of 'numerous animal scenes, without which the "show" would be a total failure' (cited in Jones 2003: 185). Penguins were particularly popular, with the *Daily Telegraph* observing that they provided 'scene after scene of inimitable comedy' (ibid.: 186). Penguins were also used to promote the series: a toy penguin named Ponko (the nickname bestowed upon Ponting by his fellow expeditioners) produced for the lectures formed 'one of the earliest examples of film merchandise' (McKernan 2000: 96). *The Great White Silence* likewise features 'a marked emphasis on animals, particular penguins (inevitably), to what seems to [modern audiences] the surprising detriment of the human story' (McKernan 2010).

*90° South* is similar in its foregrounding of animals, with native Antarctic species (skuas, Weddell seals and Adélie penguins) taking up at least a fifth of the live-action content. Derek Bousé (2000: 48), in distinguishing the 'expeditionary documentary' such as *90° South* from the safari film, notes that the former concentrates on 'historically distinct' events while the latter features 'straight wildlife footage' that has a 'seeming detachment from the events of history'. He notes however that Ponting's film does include 'some straight wildlife scenes' which, given the 'noncooperation of the animals', form a contrast with the 'expeditionary footage' – the 'carefully composed' scenes of Scott and his men. Bousé's observation points to the problem Ponting faced in his attempt to incorporate commercially popular animal scenes into his narrative of the attempt to reach the Pole: the lack of any role for native Antarctic species on the journey, except as fodder for the men and dogs. Situated at Cape Evans on Ross Island, he had access primarily to nearby Adélie penguins and Weddell seals, neither of which

posed any kind of threat to humans. The fiercest animals in the region from a human perspective are leopard seals and killer whales, but, largely confined to the ocean, these did not present many opportunities for an early cinematographer. Ponting certainly had his share of dangerous encounters – a close call with killer whales is often related in accounts of the expedition, a blow from a swooping skua gull made him fear the loss of his eye, and a bite from a Weddell seal drew blood (Ponting 2001: 63–65; 213–14; 221–22) – but all of these incidents were dramas of his own cinematographic efforts rather than the endeavours of Scott's exploratory activities, and were not, obviously, themselves filmed. One of the expedition's most dramatic animal narratives – a three-man expedition to an emperor penguin colony at Cape Crozier, famously recounted in Apsley Cherry-Garrard's book *The Worst Journey in the World* – could have provided wonderful photo opportunities, but Ponting was not a member of the team, which at any rate undertook the task in the darkness of the Antarctic winter. But Scott's primary focus and efforts centred on the interior plateau, where animal life is entirely absent. Dogs were part of the depot-laying support team, but not the polar party itself. The narrative of the polar journey is one in which, as human drama heightens, both native and domestic animals inevitably disappear.

In compensation, Ponting had to manufacture some drama of human-animal encounter in *90° South*. He employs the familiar dynamic described by Bousé (2000: 153) in which viewers of wildlife films are "'teamed" emotionally with one or the other of the animals involved' in predation scenes. One of the most arresting sequences of Ponting's film, shot from the expedition ship the *Terra Nova*, shows images of killer whales' dorsal fins cutting through the ocean, with Ponting noting in voiceover that this was a 'sinister sight' for those familiar with the 'evil record' of the fins' 'owners below'. On the ice edge is a Weddell seal, encouraging her baby out of the water to escape the approaching killer whales. Ponting emphasises her bravery as, 'frenzied with fear', she hurls herself 'almost into the jaws of the terrible creatures, to try to lure them from her cub'. With the chase reaching its height, the drama is resolved by a *deus ex machina*: 'The killers are drawing nearer every moment, but we are waiting by the loaded whale gun [the *Terra Nova* was an old Dundee whaler]. There, the harpoon strikes! Then the frightened monsters dive under the ice, and mother and baby are saved'. The same incident is described in Ponting's book of the expedition, *The Great White South* (1921), in much the same language (Ponting 2001: 214–16), but with a different ending: mother and baby disappear beneath the water 'not five yards ahead' of the orcas, with no animals

to be seen again. Ponting can 'only conjecture the tragedy that was perhaps being enacted below the ice', and reflect that 'the love of some wild creatures for their young is not inferior to that of human beings' (ibid.: 216). As a postscript, he notes that a Sydney newspaper reporter to whom he related the story embellished it with a bloody ending; but Ponting himself seems to have done the opposite in *90° South*, inserting a cut to the harpoon scene (showing nothing of the seals) to create a composite event, to use Bousé's term (2000: 10). The happy ending thus produced casts the expeditioners as the seals' rescuers and the killer whales as expendable 'monsters'. This scene is the only point in the film where comparisons to the traditional big game hunt can be drawn.

No doubt aware of the bathetic potential of attempts to construct thrilling or daring encounters with penguins and seals, Ponting for the most part contextualises his footage of native animals as domestic and comedic, as 'behaviourally typical' (ibid.: 48) scenes rather than narrative dramas with beginnings and endings. There are brief references to the scientific value of the footage – behaviours recorded for the first time – but highly anthropomorphised scenes of courtship and family life dominate; and, although some attention is paid to the interaction of female seals and their cubs, most of the domestic focus is placed on penguins. This accords with Bousé's (ibid.: 154) observation that, while family and mating scenes were unusual in wildlife films of the early twentieth century, films about birds formed an exception. Against medium shots of pairs or groups of penguins, Ponting provides an interpretative voiceover, paying much attention to courtship (the 'proposal of marriage' from a 'gentleman' to a 'lady' by the offering of a stone, the 'settl[ing] down' of the 'newly-weds') and child-rearing (females are keen to 'adopt' and 'kidnap' chicks). He makes no mention of the penguins' egalitarian division of labour, in which each parent incubates the egg alternatively, while the other adds stones to the nest and goes for food (Ainley, LeResche and Sladen 1983: 79). In *90° South*, it is only females who sit on eggs and males who roam: 'One often sees nice little domestic scenes, such as this: the wife sitting on the eggs whilst the husband keeps guard'. The 'wives' are shown 'calling their husbands home'. It is notoriously difficult to determine the sex of Adélie penguins and techniques for doing so were not fully established until the 1950s (ibid.: 20), so Ponting's assigning of sex to the birds he filmed would likely have been based on a combination of conjecture, anthropomorphism and Edwardian gender stereotypes.<sup>7</sup> Conflict is represented by the stealing of eggs by other penguins and by skua gulls, designated as 'thieves'. The expeditioners themselves are shown interacting with the penguins in one comic scene: they 'liven

[the penguins] up a bit!' by doing the 'penguin trot', in which the men appear to herd the birds in random directions, an activity 'they seemed to enjoy as much as we did'. Unsurprisingly, nothing is shown or mentioned of one of the expeditioners' main domestic interactions with penguins – the one which occurred at the dinner table. The fact that 'seal meat' forms most of the men's meals is mentioned in passing, with a still showing the cook stirring 'seal soup'; there is no recognition of the incongruity of this activity with the heroic rescue of a mother and baby seal from killer whales intent on much the same thing.

If, as the *Daily Telegraph* observed (cited in Jones 2003: 186), scenes of novel and amusing native animals provided some relief from the human tragedy of Scott's expedition, the introduced animals provided some relief from the unrelentingly alien environment of the continent. These animals are presented in terms of their closeness to humans. The ship's mascot, a black cat named 'Nigger', is shown in the arms of an expeditioner, who pets him playfully. The dogs receive inserted individual still portraits (a privilege offered to few of the human crew). The named Siberian ponies are paired with expeditioners: 'Wilson always worked with Nobby, the best-looking of all our shaggy little Russian broncos . . . Lieutenant Bowers with Victor . . . and Petty Officer Evans . . . with Snatcher'. There is an implicit parallel constructed between the men and the non-native animals. Scenes of dogs hauling supplies immediately cut to scenes of men doing the same; the dogs are 'gluttons for exercise' – as, presumably, were their human companions. Disembarked from the ship, 'Nigger' is shown energetic and in 'fine spirits' – qualities also attached to the men throughout the film. The introduced animals are visually quarantined from the native ones. Conspicuously absent to those familiar with written narratives of the expedition are violent carnivorous encounters: orcas menaced ponies who had become trapped on a floe (Scott 2006: 140–41), dogs attacked penguins (Ponting 2001: 61–62). The only sign of this relationship is one scene in which the excited dogs are tossed seal meat.

The relatively nonchalant way in which the consumption of seals is mentioned, in contrast with the lack of any mention of penguin meat (which, as Scott's diary makes clear, was regularly in their larder along with mutton and seal), reflects changing attitudes towards penguins at the time. While sailors in earlier periods had eaten astounding numbers of penguins when rations ran low, by the turn of the twentieth century large-scale killing of the birds for utilitarian purposes was becoming increasingly unacceptable (Martin 2009: 44–46, 84–86). Penguins, as bipedal flightless birds, were easily anthropomorphised and during



the later nineteenth century they had 'established their roles as entertainers in zoos'. Their image as an exotic creature was gradually being 'defused', or at least combined with a sense of affection and appreciation of their perceived comic value (ibid.: 79–80). Ponting's film itself formed part of this process, with his narrative reinforcing the image of the 'queer little penguin' as 'a corpulent old gentleman, dressed in immaculate white waistcoat with satiny top coat' (Ponting 1913: 568). It is not surprising, then, that when Douglas Mawson, at exactly the time Scott's expedition was in the Antarctic, observed the boiling down of huge numbers of king penguins for oil on Macquarie Island, he was filled with disgust and anger. The penguins' plight became a cause célèbre over coming decades, and prominent among their champions was Ponting's most famous counterpart, Australian cinematographer and photographer Frank Hurley.<sup>8</sup>

## South

Hurley had already been south as cinematographer and photographer for Mawson's Australasian Antarctic Expedition (AAE) when in 1914 Shackleton secured him for his Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition, which aimed to make the first crossing of the continent. Footage from the AAE had been shown in Australia, the U.K. and the U.S. from 1912 to 1915 (Turnour 2007: 12), with promotion emphasising animal content. Audiences in the U.S., for example, were encouraged by promotional posters to see 'Sir Douglas Mawson's Marvelous Bird, Animal and Travel Motion Picture' (cited in Hains 2002: 72). These showings were a success, and a syndicate offered the cash-strapped Shackleton funds in exchange for photographic, cinematograph and press rights for coverage of his proposed expedition, with a stipulation that Hurley shoot it (McKernan 2000: 99).

As events transpired, Hurley was forced to film under conditions very different from those expected. Shackleton's ship the *Endurance* never reached land, becoming wedged in the sea ice and eventually sinking.<sup>9</sup> The men lived on ice floes for months before taking to boats and reaching the inhospitable Elephant Island, whence Shackleton and a small group made a remarkable boat journey to South Georgia and organised the rescue of the others, including Hurley. As the *Endurance* was being crushed and the men shifting onto the ice, Hurley was required to abandon all of his cine film and plates. He later dramatically returned to the ship, diving below the waterline to salvage plates and a canister of film. His cine camera had to be discarded (ibid.), but

not before he had taken footage of the men camping nearby on the ice floes.

Hurley's situation, then, was both like and unlike Ponting's. He shared with Ponting the absence of any shots of the expedition's exciting climax: the scenes of the men's time on Elephant Island, the boat journey to South Georgia and the crossing of its mountainous terrain, and the final rescue are all missing from his film, for obvious reasons. But where Ponting, living on the continent's coast, had regular access to animals, Hurley, trapped by the sea ice, could access only those who happened by. Animal encounters would have been comparatively rare deep in the Weddell Sea, particularly in winter, so there would have been fewer opportunities to film the seals and penguins that audiences craved. Thus the scenes taken of the voyage south focus heavily on dogs, again individualised and named.<sup>10</sup> Wildlife is far less in evidence; even penguins are for a long time conspicuously absent. The intertitles of *South* sport penguins in their artwork, but none are seen onscreen until almost half an hour into the eighty-eight-minute film, and then it is a very brief shot of a group of four emperors. These penguins, the intertitles explain, '[f]or some reason or other . . . refused to make friends with the party'. The penguins had reason to be standoffish: although no mention of it is made in the film, they were killed and skinned shortly afterwards. Shackleton hoped to take the skins back home as gifts and the meat was presumably consumed: one of Hurley's photographs shows the cook about to cut steaks from an emperor hanging upside down in the galley (Hurley 2001: 268, 278). Seals feature even less: a group of crabeater seals is shown porpoising through the ocean about a quarter of an hour in, but the next (and only other) shot of seals (probably Weddells) shows them as long, frozen slabs of meat – 'for feeding the dogs', notes the intertitles, but the men regularly consumed seal as well. Therefore, in an environment where native animal encounters were relatively rare and usually ended violently, Hurley's cinematographic opportunities were limited. Even the dogs became part of the problem: when seal and penguin meat began to run low, they began to be shot, and all were dead by the time the men took to the boats. No mention of their fate is made in *South*; as McKernan (2002) observes, after a certain point they simply disappear from the film.

Thus Hurley returned from the Antarctic in late 1916 with two ingredients missing from his film: images of the climactic ending of the expedition drama and live footage of animals. The latter seemed to worry him most. The same day that his ship docked in Liverpool, Hurley was in London handing over his work and talking to one of the directors of

the film syndicate. His diary entry for the following day reads: 'Deeply considered film affair, and arrived at the decision that it would be inadvisable to have it projected or marketed in anyway [sic] whatsoever, until an addition of suitable animal life in which the film is lacking be secured'. He determined to return to South Georgia to 'take the necessary subjects', which would increase the film's value 'tenfold' (Hurley 1917: 15 November 1916). Departing the following February, he took with him 'two beautiful Pomerian pups . . . for stage effects', although there is no sign of them in the footage (*ibid.*, 11 February 1917).

The abundant wildlife of the subantarctic island more than compensated, quantitatively at least, for the missing Antarctic animals: Hurley shot footage of albatrosses, elephant seals, king and gentoo penguins, shags, giant petrels and cape pigeons.<sup>11</sup> Before his return to the far south, he had attended Ponting's lectures multiple times; he was 'in raptures' over them and noted in his diary the way Ponting's splendid 'patter' gave 'the impression the penguins were actually performing to his words' (*ibid.*: 11 December and 18 November 1916). His own footage of seals and penguins is similar to Ponting's, using mainly medium shots of individuals or small groups of animals; although there are slow pans over larger groups, there are few long, establishing shots, and none showing whole colonies, of which there are many at South Georgia. Scenes of family life are prominent, with the intertitles providing the inevitable anthropomorphism. This is particularly the case with penguins, which are by now inevitably dubbed 'Charlie Chaplins'<sup>12</sup>: there are scenes of 'The Foundling', 'Adopted', 'Mother and perambulator combined' and 'When Father says swim we all swim'. Again, there are no scenes of narrative drama; some baring of teeth by elephant seals, including an 'enraged' bull backing away from the camera, is the only sign of apparent hostility or danger.

These images of native animals are all shown in a long (twenty-minute) sequence that runs to very nearly the end of the narrative. The result, as one modern reviewer notes, is that a 'compelling adventure film wraps up as a quirky general interest nature film' (Siebel 2003: 176). All of the burden of constructing narrative links with the expedition falls on the intertitle writer who, as McKernan wryly observes (2002), shows 'some ingenuity' in this task. The primary link between the expedition drama and the South Georgia animal scenes is food: a medium shot of a young albatross on a nest is juxtaposed, bathetically, with the comment that 'Shackleton and his men made their first meal off these birds, when they landed on South Georgia'. Similar gastronomic links are made with elephant seals. This long, late sequence of animal scenes, with their tenuous and carnivorous connection to

the exploration drama, might draw a puzzled smile from the modern viewer, for whom superbly filmed wildlife footage is easily accessible. For contemporary viewers, relatively unused to subantarctic wildlife, they were a drawcard rather than a distraction – scenes without which (Hurley believed) the remarkable human narrative of the *Endurance* was not worth coming to see.

Both *South* and *90° South* demonstrate the multiple, and often incongruous, relations into which humans and animals were put when the former first entered the Antarctic continent, and the challenges that expedition cinematographers faced as a result. For the reasons outlined above, neither Ponting nor Hurley could coherently integrate the commercially necessary animal scenes into the human narrative each had been employed to depict. Yet, despite these constraints, both men produced films that were popular when first screened and are still regularly seen today.<sup>13</sup>

Their achievement is even more significant when contextualised within the history of the perception and treatment of Antarctic wildlife over the last two centuries. Ruthlessly exploited by sailors, sealers, whalers and seabird hunters until the mid nineteenth century (and in some instances beyond), Antarctic animals are, in the early twentieth-first century, protected like few others. The Antarctic Treaty System (in particular the 1991 Protocol on the Environment) strictly limits human interaction with them, and excludes all non-native life from the continent (except humans). Ponting's and Hurley's films were thus shot during a transitional period in human attitudes towards these animals, and were themselves part of this transition, bringing the first moving images of the animals to the public and establishing visual conventions that persist until the present day. Around the same time that Ponting and Hurley were taking their footage, the 'natural history film' was first being recognised as a genre, and in the decades following the release of *90° South* this genre – now called the wildlife film – developed coherent, distinctive conventions (Bousé 2000: 38). While a detailed analysis of later Antarctic wildlife film is beyond the scope of this chapter, the most cursory glance at recent prominent examples, such as the blue-chip *March of the Penguins* (2005) and even narrative animations such as *Happy Feet* (2006) show strong connections: the focus on the anthropomorphised penguin family and on courtship and gender relations; the vilification of 'enemies' such as killer whales or skuas. *South* and *90° South* are not only important in the history of early cinema, they are significant in the evolving history of human–animal relations in the world's largest wilderness.

## Notes

- 1 The first series of photographs of any animals (penguins and albatrosses) was taken by the Antarctic *Challenger* expedition of 1872 to 1876 (Bousé 2000: 40).
- 2 The cinema version of the film produced by Roald Amundsen's Norwegian Antarctic Expedition does include a scene of the men preparing a pig for slaughter (on the ship), although it stops short of showing the actual death, which was filmed. The lecture version (shown to both English and Norwegian audiences) has footage of the shooting of seals. This may indicate different national attitudes towards the public visibility of animal slaughter at the time. The lecture version also has scenes of dogs attacking seals. See Diesen (2010: 181–82).
- 3 As Finis Dunaway (2000: 216) has shown, 'the idioms of the gun and the camera' were not as 'polarised' at the time as might be thought: 'photography offered similar pleasures, excitements, and thrills of the chase relished by hunters'.
- 4 See P2005/5/1401, Scott Polar Research Institute Picture Library, University of Cambridge.
- 5 These early releases of Ponting's footage have unfortunately now been lost (McKernan 2000: 96).
- 6 This might change: a restoration of the longer 1924 version, *The Great White Silence*, premiered at the London Film Festival in October 2010, and has recently become available on DVD.
- 7 Ponting could have known from his fellow expeditioner Murray Levick's scientific study *Antarctic Penguins* (1914) that incubation was shared between the male and female parents (91–93), but the film does not give this impression.
- 8 In the wake of the success of the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition film, Hurley (along with Mawson and Cherry-Garrard) 'used his growing celebrity' to campaign against the penguin-oil industry on Macquarie Island, targeting the press and business groups. The island was declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1933 (McGregor 2004: 207).
- 9 The expedition consisted of two parties: in addition to the men with Shackleton there was a depot-laying party at the Ross Sea on the opposite side of the continent. They had their own still and cinematograph cameras. Some unedited footage (about eight minutes) of the party survives ('Recently Discovered Footage'), and animals play a prominent part in this cinematic record too.
- 10 There is no sign of the ship's cat, Mrs Chippy, who later became enough of an icon of the journey to have his 'diary' published in 1997 (see Alexander), although Hurley certainly took his photograph.
- 11 The cape pigeons feed on whale offal, and images of blue whales – being flensed at the Stromness station – are also included, with an explanatory comment noting that their blubber was used to make munitions.

- 12 Chaplin's first film, *Making a Living*, had screened in 1914, at the same time that Ponting was giving his highly popular lectures. Chaplin denied basing his walk on that of the penguin (Martin 2009: 110).
- 13 Hurley's film, shown as an accompaniment to Shackleton's lectures in 1919, did not draw large crowds in the postwar climate (Huntford 1996: 673). However, retitled *In the Grip of the Polar Ice*, it achieved 'outstanding success' in Australia, where Hurley himself lectured to it (McKernan 2000: 101).

## References

- 90° South. 1933. [Film]. Original production, photography and narration: H.G. Ponting. Restoration: National Film Archive (U.K.). © 1933 and © 1991. Distribution: Image Entertainment.
- Ainley, D.G., R.E. LeResche and W.J.L. Sladen. 1983. *Breeding Biology of the Adélie Penguin*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Alexander, C. 1997. *Mrs Chippy's Last Expedition, 1914–15: The Remarkable Journal of Shackleton's Polar-Bound Cat*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Arctic Hunt*. 1911. [Film]. Directed by F.E. Kleinschmidt. U.S.A.: F.E. Kleinschmidt.
- Bottomore, S. 2005. 'Polar Expedition Films', in R. Abel (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, pp. 523–24.
- Bousé, D. 2000. *Wildlife Films*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Cherry-Garrard, A. (1922). *The Worst Journey in the World*. London: Constable.
- Diesen, J.A. 2010. 'The Various Film Versions'. *Roald Amundsens Sydpolekspedisjon 1910–1912*. Booklet accompanying DVD. Oslo: Norwegian Film Institute, pp. 179–84.
- Dunaway, F. 2000. 'Hunting with the Camera: Nature Photography, Manliness, and Modern Memory, 1890–1930'. *Journal of American Studies* 34(2): pp. 207–330.
- Fisher, M. and J. Fisher. 1957. *Shackleton*. London: James Barrie Books.
- Hains, B. 2002. *The Ice and the Inland: Mawson, Flynn, and the Myth of the Frontier*. Carlton South: Melbourne University Press.
- Happy Feet*. 2006. [Film]. Directed by G. Miller. U.S.A.: Warner Bros, Village Roadshow Pictures, Kennedy Miller Productions, Animal Logic, Kingdom Features Productions.
- Huntford, R. 1996 (1985). *Shackleton*. London: Abacus.
- . 2001. 'Introduction', in H. Ponting. *The Great White South: Traveling with Robert F. Scott's Doomed South Pole Expedition*. New York: Cooper Square Press, pp. vii–xii.
- Hurley, F. 1917. 'My Diary, Shackleton Expedition, from 5 September 1916 to 25 April 1917'. Canberra: National Library of Australia, Digital Manuscripts Collection, MS 883 Papers of Frank Hurley, Series 1, Diaries 1912–1961, Item 4. Retrieved 17 December 2010 from <http://www.nla.gov.au/apps/cdview?pi=nla.ms-ms883>

- . 1948. 'Shackleton's Argonauts', in *Antarctic Eyewitness: Charles Laseron's South with Mawson and Frank Hurley's Shackleton's Argonauts*. Sydney: HarperCollins, pp. 171–292.
- . 2001. *South with Endurance: Shackleton's Antarctic Expedition 1914–1917: The Photographs of Frank Hurley*. Ringwood, Victoria: Viking.
- Jones, M. 2003. *The Last Great Quest: Captain Scott's Antarctic Sacrifice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Levick, G.M. 1914. *Antarctic Penguins: A Study of their Social Habits*. London: William Heinemann.
- Lynch, D. 1989. 'The Worst Location in the World: Herbert G. Ponting in the Antarctic, 1910–1912'. *Film History* 3–4: pp. 291–306.
- . 1990. 'Profile: Herbert G. Ponting'. *Polar Record* 26: pp. 217–24.
- March of the Penguins*. 2005. [Film]. Directed by Luc Jacquet. U.S.A.: Warner Independent Pictures. Adaptation of *La marche de l'empereur*. France: Bonne Pioche and Alliance de Production Cinematographique.
- Martin, S. 2009. *Penguin*. London: Reaktion.
- McGregor, A. 2004. *Frank Hurley: A Photographer's Life*. Camberwell, Victoria: Viking.
- McKernan, L. 2000. 'The Great White Silence: Antarctic Exploration and Film', in *South: The Race to the Pole*. London: National Maritime Museum, pp. 91–103.
- . 2002. Audio commentary on *South*. In *Two Great Adventurers. South: Sir Ernest Shackleton's Heroic Expedition to the Antarctic. Snow, Sand and Savages: The Life of Frank Hurley*. DVD. Restoration: National Film and Television Archive. © 2002 British Film Institute. Production Company: Imperial Trans-Antarctic Film Syndicate. Stills provided by the Royal Geographic Society. Distribution: Umbrella Entertainment.
- . 2010. 'The Great White Silence'. The Bioscope: Reporting on the World of Early and Silent Cinema. Weblog. Retrieved 19 December 2010 from <http://bioscopic.wordpress.com/2010/10/21/the-great-white-silence/>
- Ponting, H.G. 1908. 'Photographing Alligators'. *Scientific American*, Supplement, 6 June: pp. 353–54.
- . 1913. 'To the South Pole with the Cinematograph: Film Records of Scott's Ill-Fated Expedition'. *Scientific American*, 21 June: pp. 560–61, 568–69.
- . 2001 (1921). *The Great White South: Travelling with Robert F. Scott's Doomed South Pole Expedition*. New York: Cooper Square Press.
- Polar Bear Hunt [Isbjørnejagten]*. 1907. [Film]. Directed by Viggo Larsen. Denmark: Nordisk Film Co.
- Paul J. Rainey's African Hunt*. 1912. [Film] Cinematography by J. C. Hemment. U.S.A./Great Britain: Paul J. Rainey.
- 'Recently Discovered Footage: The Ross Sea Party', extra segment in *Two Great Adventurers*. 2002.
- Scott, R.F. 2006 (1913). *Journals: Captain Scott's Last Expedition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shackleton, E. 1909. *Heart of the Antarctic*. London: William Heinemann.
- Siebel, H.V. 2003. 'The Endurance: Shackleton's Legendary Antarctic Expedition (2001) and: Shackleton's Voyage of Endurance (2002), and: 90° South: With

*Scott to the Antarctic* (1933) and: *South: Ernest Shackleton and the Endurance Expedition* (1919) and: *Shackleton's Antarctic Adventure* (2001). *The Moving Image* 3(1): pp. 174–78.

*South*. 1919. [Film]. Directed by F. Hurley. In *Two Great Adventurers*. 2002.

Turnour, Q. 2007. "A.K.A. *Home of the Blizzard*": Fact and Artefact in the Film on the Australian [sic] Antarctic Expedition, 1911–1914'. *Journal of the National Film and Sound Archive, Australia* 2(4): pp. 1–12.



PART III



## ECO-POLITICS

ENVIRONMENT, IMAGE, IDEOLOGY





## DIRTY PICTURES

Framing Pollution and Desire in 'new New Queer Cinema'

*Sophie Mayer*

In an interview to mark the release of *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010), Apichatpong Weerasethakul told Steve Rose that:

His next project involves his heroine, Tilda Swinton. It concerns the Mekong river, he explains, and will address the relationship between man and water, the catastrophic flooding which is blamed on Chinese dams and diseases spread by industrial-scale pig farming. None of which particularly brings to mind Tilda Swinton. 'It's definitely not going to be a film that will just have a foreign movie star for the sake of it. It's going to be an exchange of ideas, of images, of . . . I don't know. It's like a game for me: the river, the pigs, and Tilda Swinton'. (Rose 2010)

This chapter is a foray into Apichatpong's 'game'. Both politically and critically, it addresses the urgent question of pollution, considering why Apichatpong's films, along with those of contemporary filmmakers Tsai Ming-liang, Lucrecia Martel and Sarah Turner, formally frame meditations on pollution through hybridising cinematic genres, mingling or doubling timelines, letting the camera roll for irregularly framed long takes that revivify Antonioni's 'dead time', and creating leaky and unstable sound spaces. Environmental pollution is paralleled in each film with what could be called human 'pollution': the presence of marginalised human characters such as economic migrants, indigenous people, and lesbian and gay people. The filmmakers share multiple connections: through their (marginal, in contemporary cinema) concern for the natural world; through their marginal location as arthouse/festival filmmakers; and through their marginal identities as gay men and lesbians. B. Ruby Rich informally grouped Apichatpong, Tsai and Martel as practitioners of a transnational, queer, affective 'new New Queer Cinema' during a presentation at the *Screen* conference in 2007 – an insight that makes sense of the presence of Swinton, talismanic icon of queer cinema as Derek Jarman's muse, in the muddy waters of the Mekong.

Queer sexuality suffuses the work of Apichatpong – not only through male characters engaging in flirtations, but as an attitude towards boundaries. In *Uncle Boonmee*, as every critic has noted, a princess has sex with an animatronic talking catfish (possibly Boonmee in one of his former lives), while in *Blissfully Yours* (2002), the film I focus on here, young lovers Min and Roong are nibbled by ants before they nibble each other. This desiring relation between all elements of the immanent world has been related by critics such as Tony Rayns (2007) to Apichatpong's Buddhism, but it is equally a feature of the avant-garde urtext of queer cinema, *Flaming Creatures* (1963). Desire dissolves boundaries of gender, age, era, species and dream across Apichatpong's oeuvre, and its dissolutive power is often analogised, visually, by water: the catfish and the princess commingle under a spectacular waterfall.

Critic Kai-man Chang (2008a; 2008b) has noted the boundary-dissolving properties of water in the films of Tsai Ming-liang: in *The River* (1997) and *The Hole* (1998), water breaks down constructed boundaries between individuals. While this appears destructive, tearing down the house in *The River* erases walls of secrecy and shame in the heteronormative family (and, in parallel, in the paternalistic state). In Lucrecia Martel's films, there is a similar move towards dismantling the white European bourgeois family imported to Argentina, as polluted swamps and flooded dams bring tensions and crimes to light in *The Swamp* (2001) and *The Headless Woman* (2009). In both films, a specific instance of water pollution creates an opening through which a desiring relationship across ethnic boundaries (Hispanic and indigenous) between women, which are also class and age boundaries, could alter the dynamic of the family (and analogically, of the state). Water dominates the soundtrack of Martel's films, as Eleanora Rapan (2007: 45) discusses in her reading of *The Swamp*, where she notes the sonic continuity of 'water – contained in different ways or coming from the sky in the form of rain'. Martel's liquescent soundtracks include the unsettling liquid sounds of a theremin in *The Holy Girl* (2004), which ends with the two teenage female protagonists afloat, fully clothed, in a hotel swimming pool.

Water is a complex metaphor for female sexuality and femininity for all three filmmakers; as Gina Marchetti (2005: 118) argues, 'associated with sexuality, yin/femininity, and the sex industry in Chinese thought, water [is] an important destructive and unifying element in all of Tsai's films'. Reading the film of Marguerite Duras's *The Lover* (1992), Marie-Claire Barnaud (2001: 93–94) suggests that: '[A]fter the nurturing fluidity of (fresh) water follows the monstrous (salty) water of the sea which destroys family relations . . . The river gave. The sea shall take back'.<sup>1</sup>

The nurturing river and the monstrous sea are both feminised into the figure of the mother/lover in EuroWestern thought. Alluding neither to an originary state of innocence or availability (the nymph embodies both) nor to a nurturing maternity, new New Queer Cinema's water extends the possibility of connection and immersion, while at the same time creating alienation through its threat of dissolution and its elemental difference. In Martel's films, characters chafe at the inland confines of swamps and swimming pools, while in Tsai's *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone* (2006), the Straits of Malacca act as the unseen route for migrant labourers travelling south and air pollution blowing east. The linear narrative and clear dualism of life and death that appear in the European films Barnaud considers are absent in the postcolonial films I read.

Instead, these films exploit the conflicting nature of water, as itself and as an analogy for desire (which is itself an analogy for a liberatory politics): destructive and generative, life-giving and death-dealing, liberating and dissolute, pure and therefore pollutable and polluting.

Sarah Turner's film *Perestroika* (2009) travels towards one of the world's most polluted bodies of water, Lake Baikal, and draws attention to pollution as a function of retention: because of the lake's depth and size and minimal outlets, water molecules reside in Baikal for up to four hundred years. Pollution, in Turner's film, both is and destroys memory, and therefore both drives and dismantles desire. The pollution of the lake, and the signs of climate change in the Siberian landscape, begin to affect and/or are analogised by the protagonist's disintegrating relationship with her female partner, who has joined her on a memorial journey.

The idea of *miasma*, pollution, is central to the narration of the family tragedy as it emerges from Greek tragedy, and again as it is explained by Freud with reference to the Theban plague that prompts Oedipus' self-investigation, and which is allegorical for the infection of sexual desire that runs through the family. Miasma marks the crisis of matter's interdependence, what Judith Butler names throughout *Frames of War* (2010) as injurability and intimacy. Although the scientific theory of miasma as the basis of infection was disproved by the discovery of germs in the nineteenth century, the moral – and quasi-scientific – force remains, influencing environmental anxieties as well as debates on migration and sexuality, and the ways in which they are strategically drawn together by contemporary conservatives. As Jasbir K. Puar (2007: xii) explores in *Terrorist Assemblages*, there are new normative versions of lesbian and gay sexuality 'enabled through "market virility" and "regenerative reproductivity"' that are considered

non-polluting because they reproduce both capitalism and the nuclear family; Marchetti (2005) observes how Tsai's *The River* critiques such globalised formations. The films I discuss here take up, as Butler has done, the possibilities of queerness for modelling a new interrelation, with an emphasis on the integration of new human interrelations and new interrelations between humans and the environments from which capitalism seeks to alienate them.

These four filmmakers begin by disrupting the identification of landscape with white colonial heteronormativity, and in doing so recover, or release, or reinvent a spiritual access to and meaning of landscape predicated not on naturalising the nuclear family, but on erasing boundaries of all kinds: generational, gendered, sexual as well as national, economic and political. While making clear that both physical access, and a metaphysical relationship, to water is currently bounded by class, gender, ability, nationality and sexuality, these films offer a guardedly utopian possibility of a post-capitalist, post-industrial, postcolonial moment in which, through the crossing, renegotiation or subversion of bounded access, water and humanity radically and mutually return to meaning and sanctity. The films *un-screen* nature, through a filmic relocation of the human in the environment, returning to a more intricate, interdependent and diverse ecology.

Apichatpong's exploration of human-pig-water interconnections may focus on the conflicts over usage as documented by UNESCO's report on water conflict and cooperation in the Mekong Delta (White 2002), a cinematic location that resonates with a specific (and highly cinematised) political conflict: the Vietnam war. Apichatpong's films are never apolitical, often adopting the tangential strategy of locating current events and conflicts within the Thai landscape. *Blissfully Yours* can be read as a romantic comedy, but, in siting the second half of the film in Khao Yai National Park, Apichatpong overlays his young lovers not only with archetypes of Eden and Arden, but with a complex national and transnational history. Khao Yai is in the centre of Thailand, halfway between the capital city of Bangkok and Apichatpong's home province of Khon Kaen, encompassing vital catchment areas for four river systems that stretch across the country. As a network, a river system undermines the duality of margins and centres: the border is connected vitally to the centre of the country by river systems. The drainage systems also cross national boundaries: the Takhong, running north-east into the Mekong, connects Thailand to Laos and on to China; the Saraburi ultimately runs into Burma. The 'artificial nature of geopolitical borders influences water quality and water scarcity. Many of the important water basins of the world straddle political borders'

(Donahue and Johnston 1998: 2). Water seemingly reinforces but materially undoes national boundaries, highlighting their permeability – emphasised by Min’s illegal migration via a river. Khao Yai is a national(ist) symbol, but the film points implicitly towards interdependence, as well as to the significance of the natural for the national. Khao Yai was the first national park in the country, established in 1962 by the resonantly named Boonsong Lekakul (Boonsong is the name of Uncle Boonmee’s son in *Uncle Boonmee*, who becomes, through love, a monkey ghost).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the centre of the forested area was settled by up to thirty households of the Ban Tha Dan people and the Baan Tachal people from the Nakhon Nayok Province to the south. Although formally recognised by the government as a subdistrict known as Pak Ple, the area, due to its distance from the capital, became a refuge for those criminalised and displaced by central government, leading to the cancellation of its subdistrict status and the community’s forcible relocation. Pak Ple sounds like a classic temporary autonomous zone, an area that – in its marginality – exceeds government control. Apichatpong’s young lovers and their older female colleague/friend Orn certainly travel to Khao Yai to locate themselves beyond the state and corporate frameworks that control them from the opening of the film, in which Orn is trying to convince a doctor to provide both medical care and naturalisation for Min, who is a Burmese economic migrant; Roong works in a factory producing outsourced Disney merchandise. Yet the national park is not innocent ‘nature’ beyond the reach of legislation and capital: it was established by law on land taken from the Ban Tha Dan and Baan Tachal indigenous peoples. Vandana Shiva notes that:

Tracing the shift from cultural space to territorial space in Thailand [Benedict Anderson] shows how, between 1900 and 1915, the traditional words *brung* and *muang* largely disappeared because they imaged sovereignty in terms of sacred sites and discrete population centres. In their place came *prathet*, ‘country’, which imaged it in the invisible terms of bounded territorial space. Laws of nature and their universality were replaced by the laws of a police state which dispossessed people of their original homelands to clear the way for the logic of a world market. (Mies and Shiva 1993: 105–6)

While the film is attentive to the lushness of the natural world made possible by national park status, it also unsettles viewers by marking the presence of territorial space and the market through an incessant mechanical whine, eventually located as machinery belonging to illegal loggers, and which directs the viewer to listen *against* the noise and

for water. As Diana James (2006: 88) remarks: '[I]n modern industrial society water becomes a noun and losses [sic] its power as an active verb. Its verbal nature, its voice, is lost in the modern mechanised hum'. Between the aural pollution of illegal logging and the foregrounded sounds of the river and insects (intensified in the edit studio in Bangkok) is Min's voiceover, which reveals that he is an economic migrant and that his skin rash may be caused by hiding from police in a septic tank.<sup>2</sup> His voiceover repeats a 'pollution' of the frame: text and drawings from his diary that are superimposed on the image. Min is thus a figure of pollution in the supposed purity of Khao Yai. The film ends with the two women bathing him in the water in which he has recently ejaculated: the multiple and contradictory relations of purity and pollution as they are identified with the 'natural' and the 'human' float through the film.

Bodily fluids are part of the transformative, immersive ecology of Apichatpong's films, most notably in *Tropical Malady*, where the film's dual/blended narrative hinges on a scene in which Tong urinates by the side of the road and Keng – a soldier who has been stationed in the countryside near Tong's family house – smells Tong's fingers in their first moment of sexual intimacy. In a post asking what queer writing can do and identifying its radical, corporeal force, Lucas de Lima (2010) asks: 'What if piss, not mind/body dualism and the Enlightenment, provided our radiant stream'.<sup>3</sup> In foregrounding carnal nature through a moment of sexuality that is perverse, non-reproductive and homosexual, Apichatpong bodies forth a natural carnality not aligned to Genesis/genetic accounts of heterosexual reproduction, or the heteronormative Romantic sublime. Not only do Apichatpong's films model an ecology (at once Buddhist and postmodern queer) in which humans return to nature through the body, but his films proceed through the 'lovely replicative baroque of ferns and invertebrates (such nice organic prophylactics against heterosexism)' rather than linear cause and effect (Haraway 1991: 150). Temporality and causality are challenged by repetitions, unmotivated shifts of location, doubled characters, absurdist interactions (such as Orn's with the doctor), and the languorous reveries of fixed shots, often accompanied by what one could call the glocal-alia of Thai pop music.

Tsai Ming-liang's films share several of these qualities. *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone*, in particular, shares its dual narrative structure hinging on a repeated character with Apichatpong's *Syndromes and a Century* (2006). Both take up the shifting relation of centre and margins in industrialising South East Asia: *Syndromes* depicts the same characters in different scenarios at two hospitals, one in rural Khon Kaen and one in



Bangkok, while *I Don't* casts the same actor, Tsai's frequent collaborator Lee Kang-sheng, in two divergent roles and differently classed spaces in a single moment in Kuala Lumpur. In one, he is bed-bound in a family home; in the other, he is Hsiao Kang, a Chinese migrant rescued from a beating by Rawang, a Bangladeshi migrant labourer who shares his only possession – a mattress – with the stranger. Hsiao Kang's precarious life (to take up Judith Butler's phrase) in its ecological as well as intimate dimensions is symbolised by the butterfly that alights on his shoulder, but also by an early scene in which Rawang helps him to urinate. The stream of urine produced collaboratively continues, in a sense, to pour through the film (just as the water leaks continuously in through domestic structures and the city in Tsai's *The River* and *The Hole*), manifesting finally in a deep pool of water on which Rawang, Hsiao Kang and Chyi (who has been nursing the bed-bound man as well as having public sex with Hsiao Kang) float out of the film, slowly past the bottom of the frame and into the film's margin.

The pool is a site of the 'kind of unregulated permeability [that] constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment': it both defines (and undoes all definition of) the margin (Butler 1990: 32). Tsai (cited in Chang 2008a: 45) stated that he 'will continue to be interested in people who are blue-collar, marginalised and subjugated'. Ian Johnston (2007) notes a visual manifestation of this concern with the marginalised and/as permeable, arguing that the mise-en-scène of *I Don't* shows that, 'Tsai loves the old, the dilapidated, the derelict, as if these fragile, crumbling, damp structures are representative of their inhabitants at their most vulnerable, needy, and authentically human'. The title of Chang's article 'Drifting Bodies and Flooded Spaces' (2008a) suggests a parallel between these marginalised characters and the marginal spaces they inhabit, as well as the marginal sex acts located there.

Writing about cruising al fresco, David Bell (1995: 306) comments that 'the sex act . . . is taking place in *public space* . . . But in terms of the identities of the participants, their knowledge of each other, and the wider "public" knowledge of the activities that go on in a particular setting, public (homo)sex can be very private . . . far removed from notions of sexual identities, sexual communities and sexual politics'. This privacy is delinked from the privacy of home, which excludes queer sex. Tsai's films suggest a new formation of home/privacy that is contingent and temporary, but also located in relation to others through the world. Anne-Marie Fortier (2003: 129) suggests via Avtar Brah's concept of 'homing desires' (in *Cartographies of Diaspora* [1996]), that 'homing desire also refers to a longing to belong, and as such, it suggests that "home" is constituted by the *desire* for a "home", rather than

surfacing from an already constituted home, “there” or “here”. In this sense, home is produced through the movement of desire’.

There and here are confused in *I Don’t* both textually through the syncretic globalised soundtrack, featuring such appropriative impurities as the Canto-pop version of ‘Sing a Song of Sixpence’ played by buskers near the start, and paratextually in the knowledge that Tsai is Malaysian-born Chinese but lives in Taiwan, both ‘at home’ and a stranger in Kuala Lumpur. The mattress and the industrial pool are produced as home through the movement of desire towards interconnection between humans, and between humans and the natural world – which is also a movement away from the bourgeois family home/state, and rhetorics of exclusion and pollution.

The moment that links the dual narrative of *I Don’t* is the 2005 emergency declared in Malaysia due to airborne pollution from the annual forest fires that occur across the Straits of Malacca in Indonesia. Air currents, like the river systems in *Blissfully Yours*, act both to isolate the characters and remind us of their global connections on circuits of migration. As Johnston (2007) notes, ‘in a radio broadcast [towards the end of the film] we hear the blame for this shifted onto migrant workers and the supposed illegal fires that they light in Kuala Lumpur’.<sup>4</sup> Politically, the haze is polyvalent, available for re- and mis-interpretation; Tsai uses both his characters and cinematography to undermine politically expedient blame, and redefine migration and pollution as a product of necessarily permeable boundaries in an interdependent ecology. ESCAP (2000: II: IV: D: 2), a UN development agency, notes that it is the lack of state infrastructure in Malaysia, and particularly the neglect of vulnerable poor and migrant communities, that has created the circumstances for waterborne and airborne pollution in Kuala Lumpur, circumstances that inform the urgent melancholy of *I Don’t* and its closing embrace of/on the polluted waters/communities of the city.

The politics of pollution are the invisible controlling narrative of Lucrecia Martel’s cinema. While Amy Taubin (2009), among others, has written perceptively about the class and race politics in her films, and their oblique but powerful reference to repressive state politics under the junta, there has yet to be an analysis of the politics of water in Martel’s films.<sup>5</sup> Martel was born in Salta, northern Argentina, where her three films are set. Regarded as provincial by metropolitan Argentineans, Salta, bordering six provinces and three countries, is both nationally and transnationally a margin-at-the-centre, a border-in-the-middle like Thailand’s Khao Yai National Park. Historically, Salta represents the southernmost extent of the Incan empire. Like Tucumán, which it

borders, Salta was one of the first provinces to have its water supply privatised under the conditions set by the World Bank after Argentina's economic crisis in the mid 1990s. In Tucumán the international consortium led by French Compagnie Generale des Eaux, 'immediately faced sustained protest from water users throughout the province [as . . .] citizens felt that their rights had been violated and opted for a strategy of civil disobedience, refusing to pay their water and sewage bills', leading to a high-profile court battle between the province and the consortium (Giarracca and Del Pozo 2005: 91). The public-private partnership (PPP) with a local company in Salta, however, was considered an economic success by the World Bank, whose report on the project (Saltiel and Maywah 2007: 3) noted that 'a virtuous cycle of improved service leads to increased support to the PPP which results in political willingness to grant tariff increases'.

Yet the PPP was discontinued by the regional government in 2009 due to pollution of the Arenales river. Lomniczi, Boemo and Musso (2004: 65–66) draw particular attention to mercury pollution in the Juramento river water system in Salta, noting that: '[T]he maximum tolerable concentration according to National Law # 24051 of 1 µg/L for drinking water supply, was exceeded in more than 20% at the thirteen sampling points . . . Mercury is one of the most toxic metals, interfering seriously with the human central nervous system'. Both the mysterious origin of the pollution, and mercury itself, are present in *The Headless Woman*: Veronica, the protagonist, works in a dental office whose effluent may be affecting the new local pool, and mercury is traditionally used in dental fillings; Veronica, 'her face frozen in a mask of graciousness', appears to have had both her literal and affective nervous systems damaged by mercury (Taubin 2009: 21). Shortly before the film's release, Argentinean president Cristina Fernandez announced a municipal works funding project specifically for wastewater treatment and flood defences, after serious sustained flooding in the province in 2007 and 2008, to which *The Headless Woman's* flash flood refers.<sup>6</sup>

The characters in *The Headless Woman* are bound together by water, from the opening gossip about the new swimming pool, through the torrential rain that brings Veronica's lover to her marital home, to the corpse in the blocked pipe that connects Veronica's middle-class family to the indigenous village where her sister's gardener lives. Water campaigner Colin Ward (1997: 15) cites and translates Joaquín Costa's nineteenth-century *Colectivismo Agraria en España*, which found that 'water communities . . . are admirable examples of solidarity and social cooperation of a truly marvellous delicacy and perfection, unequalled by the most complex works of precision engineering'. Opponents to

privatised or state water projects 'may form coalitions that cut across class, ethnic, political, and religious lines to protect a water resource that they define as necessary for the continuation of local social and biological life' (Donahue and Johnston 1998: 340).

Such collectivity does not manifest in Martel's films – yet the potential is painfully palpable, always as an unrealised desiring relationship between women, and across a boundary. As Claudia Sosa (2009: 257) notes: '*The Headless Woman* offers one exception to [the] patriarchal machinery of silence. Candita, Vero's 13-year-old niece, is in love with her aunt . . . stress[ing] the non-normative ingredients that Martel attributes to the queer romance'. Candita has an indigenous girlfriend, never named in the film, who shows Vero to, and around, the indigenous village where she is looking for (or looking to erase) evidence that she killed an indigenous boy. Through desire, Candita and her girlfriend extend to Vero a way out of the stifling bourgeois life that has led her to cover up the murder. Candita herself is trapped (symbolically) in bed by a waterborne disease – yet she is the only person who actively swims in the new pool: at once an agent of pollution and a free spirit. 'The purificatory power of water, to wash away all pollution, all sin, all physical filth, is an essential feature in the religious symbolism in societies. This quality does not arise because of its intrinsic purity but because it absorbs pollution and carries it away' (Lahiri-Dutt 2006: xv).

Vero turns away from Candita's ferocious kiss at the end of the film, with its power to absorb pollution because of pollutedness, and retreats to an enclosed world of grown-ups where the 1970s popular Argentinean song '*Soleil Soleil*' both confirms her self-willed bourgeois blindness to injustice (Taubin 2010: 23) and drowns out the water noises that have persisted on the soundtrack from the opening rainstorm. Yet the final shots are through thick, waved glass that submerges Vero and the others at the party in exactly the water – nature, interdependence, vulnerability – whose value they have tried to expropriate (Vero has a European-style lawn garden watered by sprinklers in a semi-arid area), while denying the mutual responsibility entailed in a common resource. Drowning rather than baptising, obscuring rather than clarifying, the watery glass points to water's close relationship with cinema. This underwater blur is an instance of Martel's frequent over-determination of pro-filmic spaces, which make cinematic-as-psychosexual references to Hitchcock and Antonioni; thus, the diegetic world is perceived here through a *film* (water, glass, celluloid itself and cinema history). This parallels the viewer with Veronica as voyeurs disengaged from material experience.

Martel's films ask how, and whether it is possible, to absorb the visual pollutants – including film itself – that maintain the nature/culture dualism and the post-Enlightenment sense of human authority over nature separated into the domain of the visible, and therefore knowable. Her eccentric, irregular framing (often clipping the heads of characters shot in medium close-up), in tandem with her condensed but elliptical storytelling, returns aspects of the world to unknowability and demotes the viewer, like the protagonist, from authority.

Turner's *Perestroika*, a docu-fiction, creates a similar affective resonance between the protagonist's experience of amnesia at a site of water pollution, and the viewer's imbrication in the cinematic ecology. A documentary record of a journey on the Trans-Siberian Express railway from Moscow to Baikalsk, undertaken by Turner in December 2007 to mark the twentieth anniversary of a similar journey with her friend Sian Thomas, who died in Moscow in 1993, the film begins and ends with the image of smoke rising off the freezing waters of Lake Baikal, at once an ecological nightmare and a profound figuration of the painful, illogical ways that memory arises and transforms us. The representation of Baikal is connected, implicitly, to the dual erasure of histories, as it is to the loss and return of memories of Sian: the Soviet erasure of local, folk and religious cultures, and the post-Soviet erasure of Communist history, in whose last moments Turner initially travelled through Russia.

'Lake Baikal, the Pearl of Siberia or the Sacred Sea, is referred to as "Ye glorious sea, ye sacred Baikal" in an old Siberian song. The lake is indeed old: clay samples taken in 1990 show that Lake Baikal is at least 30 million years old, making it the world's oldest known lake' (Van Allen 1996). Centrally located in the Eurasian landmass, yet further from an ocean than any other great freshwater lake, Baikal is another margin/centre like Khao Yai and Salta. Although there are over one hundred chemical industries along the shore, the pollution of Baikal is primarily caused by a cellulose wood pulp and paper mill; while this cellulose is used mainly for clothing, as cellulose acetate or cellulose nitrate it is one of the two components of celluloid. Baikal is becoming film, polluted by film, even as Turner processes it through her video and digital video cameras. The pulp mill was closed in late 2008, but reopened in January 2010 for economic reasons (Harding 2010). The factory, as the town's only major employer in an area potentially recuperable for tourism, is caught on the hook of economic valuations of the environment that 'reduces the biosphere to a subsidiary of the economy. In reality it's the other way round. The economy, like all other human affairs, hangs from the world's living systems' (Monbiot 2010).

The narrator's memories and emotions 'hang' from Baikal as a living system: in particular, the frozen lake stores and, through the journey towards it, releases memories of Sian.

Most haunting are two musical recordings: a tape of Russian traditional singers that Sian gave to Turner on the first trip, and a recording of the group led by Sian singing a canon in a crumbling mausoleum. In reaching towards folk culture and sacred space, *Perestroika* is not reactionary or conservative, but searching as Winona LaDuke (2004: 11) does to answer the question: 'How does a community heal itself from the ravages of the past? . . . in the multifaceted process of recovering that which is "sacred"'. This does not involve a return to the Romantic sublime, nor a loose appropriation of indigenous symbolism. Chumash poet Deborah Miranda (2002: 144) argues that: 'We [indigenous writers] know that if we use natural landscape as metaphor, we are being predictable, but on the other hand, these are not "just" natural images to us. Often, the natural world contains much religious, culturally specific importance that is impossible to ignore but difficult to negotiate'.

It is this cultural specificity which threads through the representation of ecologies and their pollutants in these films, but also threads together their resacralisation. Water rights campaigners themselves return to the resacralisation of water as a precursor to all and any legislative and representational change. Diana James (2006: 85–86), having worked with the Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytatjara people around Uluru in south-western Australia, acknowledges her guides' stories, 'as being the source of my desire to re-sacralise our connections to land and water . . . Symbolic consciousness is as important for sustainable use of water as technological knowledge and regulations'.

While this chapter cannot provide it, we require an equivalent of Laura Mulvey's 1975 definitional essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' that dismantles the ways that nature is screened(-off) on film, exactly as Mulvey argues that women are, in order to secure the viewer's 'mastery of vision', the sublime stance that remains mainstream environmentalism's approach to nature. Rather than psychoanalysis, such an essay might draw on the emerging phenomenology of landscape. Social anthropologist Veronica Strang (2004), who looks closely at communities' understanding of water by connecting symbolic and affective dimensions to water use, informs my approach here, triangulating narrative cinema, environmental science and poetics, in an attempt to respond to Rachel O. Moore's provocative reading of fire and its elemental cinema in *Savage Theory* (2000). The biosphere is constructed through our linguistic and imagistic relationship to it, which

are in turn dependent on (and informative of) our relationships with each other. In his note for the Second Run DVD release of *Blissfully Yours*, Apichatpong comments that: 'A few days after the last scene was shot, the setting was destroyed by a big flood. A large tree in the background plunged into the water and the stream turned muddy. We again thanked the forest goddess [for whom the crew left traditional sacrifices] for allowing us enough sun to capture the beautiful images in our film'.<sup>7</sup> The story resonates with ecofeminist activist Vandana Shiva's (Mies and Shiva 1993: 6) claim that 'an ecofeminist perspective propounds the need for a new cosmology and a new anthropology which recognises that life in nature (which includes human beings) is maintained by means of cooperation and mutual care and love . . . To this end ecofeminists use metaphors', as these filmmakers do, in a materially engaged strategy that situates culture and nature as imbricated and mutually engendered and engendering. The cinematic image, as image, is always a metaphor, and the camera's attention can work to resacralise landscape through its claim to all the complexities and delights of embodiment. The impure, contradictory game of water and bodies is played for real stakes in, to paraphrase Marianne Moore, imaginary gardens.

## Notes

- 1 '[A]lors à la fluidité bienfaisante de l'eau (douce) du fleuve, succède l'eau (salée) monstrueuse de la mer qui détruit les relations familiale . . . La mer a donné. La mer reprendra' (Barnaud 2001: 93–94).
- 2 According to Tony Rayns (2009: 70), Apichatpong had AIDS in mind when shooting the scenes about Min's skin rash. While this chapter does not allow space to consider all the implications of this subtext, I note, following Susan Sontag (1991), that AIDS/HIV is the contemporary condition *par excellence* that conflates physical infection (the virus) and moral pollution (gay sex, drug use or immigration status). In *Blissfully Yours*, the septic tank relates this pollution directly to water, to the bodily processes of urination/defecation and the industrial world's desire to disguise, rather than deal, with them.
- 3 Uncle Boonmee has a kidney disease that requires a drain, and several scenes in *Uncle Boonmee* concern the caring attention of first Jaai, his Laotian assistant, and then Huay, the ghost of his wife, as they assist him with the drain, so that the excretion of pollution becomes a gesture of care and connection.
- 4 Johnston (2007) makes a striking connection between the ecological portent of the dark haze and the prosecution of homosexuality in Malaysia, noting that the film's Chinese title has a secondary meaning of 'a black

- eye', a reference to the accusation of sodomy orchestrated by the Malaysian Prime Minister against Anwar Ibrahim, the former Deputy Prime Minister, in which a stained mattress was produced as evidence. Ibrahim appeared in court with a black eye.
- 5 See also Sandhu (2010) and Sosa (2009) for references to the junta in *The Headless Woman*. With reference to *The Swamp*, several critics make a connection to the junta's alleged practice of dumping the bodies of *desaparecidos* at sea from helicopters. While this is a powerful resonance for the amnesiac/revelatory nature of water in Martel's films, and particularly the body found in the drain in *The Headless Woman*, the films make no specific reference to the sea.
  - 6 Retrieved 1 December 2010 from <http://www.bnamericas.com/story.jsp?sector=4&idioma=I&noticia=468571> Problems continue: Eltransigente.com.ar reported a complaint over alleged water contamination in the Argentine province of Salta with demands for around 4.8 billion pesos (\$1.17 billion [U.S.]) to cover damages and recuperation costs from company Aguas del Norte, the local consortium formed to take over from the PPP. (Translation retrieved 13 July 2011 from <http://www.freshfruitportal.com/2011/04/28/argentine-province-in-hot-water-over-contamination/>)
  - 7 Retrieved 1 December 2010 from [http://www.secondrundvd.com/release\\_more\\_by.php](http://www.secondrundvd.com/release_more_by.php)

## References

- Barnaud, M.C. 2001. 'L'amant et l'eau.' *L'avant scène* 500 (2001): pp. 93–94.
- Bell, D. 1995. 'Perverse Dynamics, Sexual Citizenship and the Transformation of Intimacy', in D. Bell and G. Valentine (eds), *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 304–17.
- Blissfully Yours* (Sud sanaeha). 2002. [Film]. Directed by A. Weerasethakul. Thailand: Anna Sanders Films, Kick the Machine, La-ong Dao.
- Butler, J. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- . 2010. *Frames of War*. London: Verso.
- Chang, K. 2008a. 'Drifting Bodies and Flooded Spaces: Visualising the Invisibility of Heteronormativity in Tsai Ming-liang's *The River*'. *Post Script* 28.1: pp. 45–62.
- . 2008b. 'Gender Hierarchy and Environmental Crisis in Tsai Ming-liang's *The Hole*'. *Film Criticism* 33.1: pp. 25–44.
- Donahue, J.M. and B.R. Johnston. 1998. *Water, Culture and Power: Local Struggles in a Global Context*. Washington, DC and Covelo, CA: Island Press.
- ESCAP. 2000. 'Assessing Integration of Environmental Measures into Development Planning: Water Pollution'. *Integrating Environmental Considerations into Economic Policy Making Processes*. Volume II: Local/Provincial Processes, Chapter IV, Malaysia. Retrieved 1 December 2010 from <http://www.unescap.org/drpad/publication/integra/volume2/malaysia/2my04d02.htm>



- Flaming Creatures*. 1963. [Film]. Directed by J. Smith. U.S.A.
- Fortier, A.-M. 2003. 'Making Home: Queer Migrations and Motions of Attachment', in S. Ahmed, C. Castañeda, A.-M. Fortier and M. Sheller (eds), *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*. Oxford and New York: Berg, pp. 115–35.
- Giarracca, N. and N. Del Pozo. 2005. 'To Make Waves: Water and Privatisation in Tucumán, Argentina', in V. Bennett, S. Dávila-Poblete and M. Nieves Rico (eds), *Opposing Currents: The Politics of Water and Gender in Latin America*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, pp. 91–106.
- Haraway, D. 1991. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.
- Harding, L. 2010. 'Anger at Putin Decision to Allow Lake Baikal Paper Mill to Reopen'. *The Guardian*, 20 January. Retrieved 1 December 2010 from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jan/20/vladimir-putin-lake-baikal-mill>
- Headless Woman, The* (La mujer sin cabeza). 2009. [Film]. Directed by L. Martel. Argentina, France, Italy, Spain: Aquafilms, El Deseo S.A., R&C Produzioni, Slot Machine, Teodora Film.
- Hole, The* (Dong). 1998. [Film]. Directed by M. Tsai. Taiwan, France: Arc Light Films, Central Motion Pictures Corporation, China Television, Haut et Court, La Sept-Arte.
- Holy Girl, The* (La niña santa). 2004. [Film]. Directed by L. Martel. Argentina, Italy, Netherlands, Spain: La Pasionaria S.r.l., R&C Produzioni, Teodora Film, El Deseo S.A., Fondazione Montecinemaverita, Hubert Bals Fund, Lita Stantic Producciones.
- I Don't Want to Sleep Alone* (Hei yan quan). 2006. [Film]. Directed by M. Tsai. Malaysia, China, Taiwan, France, Austria: Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC), Dama Orchestra Malaysia, EMI Music Taiwan, Government Information Office of the Republic of China, Homegreen Films, New Crowned Hope, Soudaine Compagnie.
- James, D. 2006. 'Re-Sourcing the Sacredness of Water', in K. Lahiri-Dutt (ed.), *Fluid Bonds: Views on Gender and Water*. Kolkata: Stree, pp. 85–104.
- Johnston, I. 2007. 'Butterfly Dream'. *Bright Lights Film Journal* 57 (August). Retrieved 1 December 2010 from <http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/57/sleep.html>
- LaDuke, W. 2004. *Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming*. Boston: South End Press.
- Lahiri-Dutt, K. 2006. 'Introduction', in K. Lahiri-Dutt (ed.), *Fluid Bonds: Views on Gender and Water*. Kolkata: Stree, pp. xiii–xl.
- de Lima, L. 2010. 'Kitsch, *The Lion King*, Poetry'. *Montevideo* 18 November. Retrieved 1 December 2010 from <http://www.montevideo.com/?p=534>
- Lomniczi, I., A. Boemo and H. Musso. 2004. 'Mercury Pollution of the Juramento River Water System (Salta Province, Argentina)'. *Journal of the Argentine Chemical Society* 92.4–6: pp. 65–75.
- Lover, The* (L'amant). 1992. [Film]. Directed by J.-J. Annaud. France, UK, Vietnam: Films A2, Grai Phang Film Studio, Renn Productions, Timothy Burrill Productions.

- Marchetti, G. 2005. 'On Tsai Ming-liang's *The River*', in B. Chris and F. Lu (eds), *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After*. Aberdeen: Hong Kong University Press, pp. 113–26.
- Mies, M. and V. Shiva. 1993. *Ecofeminism*. London: Zed Books.
- Miranda, D.A. 2002. 'Dildos, Hummingbirds and Driving Her Crazy: A Search for American Indian Women's Love Poetry and Erotics'. *Frontiers* 23.2: pp. 135–49.
- Monbiot, G. 2010. 'We've Been Conned. The Deal to Save the Natural World Never Happened'. *The Guardian*, 1 November. Retrieved 1 December 2010 from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cif-green/2010/nov/01/deal-to-save-the-natural-world-never-happened>
- Moore, R.O. 2000. *Savage Theory: Cinema as Modern Magic*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press.
- Mulvey, Laura. 1975. 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. *Screen* 16.3: pp. 6–18.
- Perestroika*. 2009. [Film]. Directed by S. Turner. U.K: Film London Artists' Moving Image Network (FLAMIN).
- Puar, J.K. 2007. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press.
- Rapan, E. 2007. 'Sound Continuity and Tragedy in *La Cienaga*'. Trans. G. Costantini. *Filmwaves* 33: pp. 42–45.
- Rayns, T. 2009. 'Towards the Wondrous Void'. *Vertigo* 4.3: pp. 70–71.
- River, The* (He liu). 1997. [Film]. Directed by M. Tsai. Taiwan.
- Rose, S. 2010. "'You Don't Have to Understand Everything'" [Interview with Apichatpong Weerasethakul]. *The Guardian*, 11 November. Retrieved 1 December 2010 from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2010/nov/11/apichatpong-weerasethakul-director-uncle-boonmee-interview>
- Saltiel, G. and N. Maywah. 2007. 'Argentina: The Salta Water Public-Private Partnership'. *en breve* 102 (February): pp. 1–4.
- Sandhu, S. 2010. '*The Headless Woman*, review'. *The Telegraph* 18 February. Retrieved 1 December 2010 from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturecritics/sukhdevsandhu/7262988/The-Headless-Woman-review.html>
- Sontag, S. 1991. *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors*. London: Penguin.
- Sosa, C. 2009. 'A Counter-Narrative of Argentine Mourning'. *Theory Culture Society* 26: pp. 250–62.
- Strang, V. 2004. *The Meaning of Water*. Oxford: Berg.
- Swamp, The* (La cienaga). 2001. [Film]. Directed by L. Martel. Argentina, France, Spain: 4k Films, Wanda Visión S.A., Code Red, Cuatro Cabezas, TS Productions.
- Syndromes and a Century* (Sang sattawat). 2006. [Film]. Directed by A. Weerasethakul. Thailand, France, Austria: Anna Sanders Films, Backup Films, Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC), Fonds Sud Cinéma, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Illumination Films, Kick the Machine, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, New Crowned Hope, TIFA.
- Taubin, A. 2009. 'Identification of a Woman'. *Film Comment* 45.4: pp. 21–23.
- Tropical Malady* (Sud pralad). 2004. [Film]. Directed by A. Weerasethakul. Thailand, France, Germany, Italy: Backup Films, Anna Sanders Films,

- Downtown Pictures, Kick the Machine, TIFA, Thoke Moebius Film Company.
- Van Allen, A. 1996. *Lake Baikal Pollution in Russia and Tourism*. TED Case Studies 5.1. Retrieved 1 December 2010 from <http://www1.american.edu/ted/baikal.htm>
- Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (Loong Boonmee raleuk chat). 2010. [Film]. Directed by A. Weerasethakul. Thailand, UK, France, Germany, Spain, Netherlands: Kick the Machine, Illuminations Films, Anna Sanders Films, The Match Factors, Geißendörfer Film- und Fernsehproduktion (GFF), Eddie Saeta S.A.
- Ward, C. 1997. *Reflected in Water: A Crisis in Social Responsibility*. London: Cassell.
- White, I. 2002. 'Water Management in the Mekong Delta: Changes, Conflicts and Opportunities'. IHP-VI, *Technical Documents in Hydrology*: p. 61.



## UTOPIA IN THE MUD

Nature and Landscape in the Soviet Science Fiction Film

*Elana Gomel*

### Judging Nature

In Ivan Efremov's utopian novel *The Hour of the Bull* (1968), the heroine, a citizen of the perfect society of the future, declares: 'Only man has the right to judge nature for the excessive suffering on the way to progress' (Efremov 1988: 422). Nature is an enemy to be subjugated, mastered and 'judged'. And yet the utopian world she inhabits is not a high-tech landscape of sterile towers but a pastoral of unspoiled greenery, a 'marvellous garden' (ibid.: 175). This strange duality encapsulates a problematic relation of nature with the ethics and aesthetics of socialist realism. On the one hand, nature is regarded as the wellspring of human creativity, occupying the empty spot of divinity in the millenarian narrative of Soviet history. On the other hand, nature is hostile and amoral and its conquest by humanity is a necessary prelude to the Communist utopia. Nature is both an ally and an adversary; both God and Satan.

This duality permeates Soviet civilisation throughout its history.<sup>1</sup> Ambivalence towards nature is inextricably linked to the fraught and contradictory image of the utopian subject, the Soviet New Man, whose creation is the regime's ultimate goal.<sup>2</sup> Nonhuman and human nature alike are to be 'judged', conquered and transformed. And yet, this transformation is never quite successful; there is always a material remnant that resists its ideological appropriation. With regard to the subject, this remnant is the stubborn corporeality of the body; with regard to nature, it is the persistent physicality of the landscape. Subject and nature become enmeshed in a relation of mutual mirroring, standing for each other within the Soviet imaginary.

In this chapter I will analyse these articulations in one particular genre of Soviet cinema: the science-fiction (SF) film. Despite its ostensible marginality, the genre of SF reflected the underlying ideological structures of mainstream Soviet literature with unusual clarity because it was not bound by the latter's temporal and spatial limitations. Similarly, SF

cinema was highly symptomatic of the trends in Soviet visual culture as a whole. While the number of SF films made in the USSR was relatively small compared to other cinematic genres, such as the historical epic, the industrial drama, the war movie and the comedy, they constitute a fascinating corpus, which illuminates what Foucault (1974: x) calls 'the epistemological figures' of Soviet culture as a whole. They are particularly useful in relation to representations of nature since the setting (the fictional world of the text) constitutes the artistic dominant of the genre of SF, both in literature and in cinema (Suvin 1979).

Soviet SF reached its peak in the period of the Thaw (the 1960s) when, liberated from the excesses of the Terror, the utopian impulse sought new forms of expression: '[D]uring the first two decades after Stalin's death, Soviet filmmakers produced innovative works that revived the avant-garde spirit of the 1920s and revolutionised the visual and narrative aspects of film art' (Prokhorov 2001: 7). Several important SF films, to be discussed below, were part of this general cinematic renaissance.

As opposed to the preceding decades, the 1980s was a period of widespread decadence and anxiety caused by the war in Afghanistan and worsening economic conditions. Yet at the same time, the easing of censorship in the perestroika created the conditions for some of the most interesting Soviet films ever made, which summed up, bitterly denounced and occasionally attempted to revive the seventy-year long failed utopian experiment.

Throughout all of these permutations, Soviet SF cinema grappled with the paradoxical role of nature. On the one hand, Soviet technological utopia was premised on its control of the natural world. On the other hand, it derived its legitimacy from the natural law as revealed by Marxism-Leninism, which saw itself as a materialistic philosophy rooted in the scientific knowledge of reality. The goal was synthesis: 'Asserting control over nature could be understood as a synthesis of nature and culture that, thereby, produces a new entity, an achievement of real quality' (Margolit 2001: 30). But this synthesis could never be achieved because of the mute recalcitrance of nature, the dumb resistance of the material world, which no matter how sternly judged and fervently wooed, refused to be transformed. And thus utopia remained permanently stuck in the mud.

## **From Steel to Flesh**

As opposed to pre-revolutionary agrarian socialism, Bolshevism was resolutely urban: '[A]fter 1917, cities were welcomed as the training

grounds for producing the armies of model citizens' (Kotkin 1995: 18). As popular writers Ilya Ilf and Evgeni Petrov wrote in 1932: '[T]ogether with cobbled pavements, human cobbles disappear as well. As the city is being perfected, so are its inhabitants' (1981: 27). In the period of Russian constructivism (1919 to 1930), the landscape of the future was a cityscape of glass towers, standardised mega-blocks and modernist efficiency, inhabited by the purified and transfigured Communist Elect: the new socialist subjects of the technological age, whose streamlined psychic architecture would be shaped by the stark, functional lines of their environment (Stites 1989: 52).

During high Stalinism (between the mid 1930s and mid 1950s), the constructivist man-machine is transformed into the iconic figure of the blond, muscle-bound, preternaturally productive and ideologically pure Soviet subject: the 'healthy, virile and handsome' forerunner of the utopia (Kaganovsky 2008: 6). But this shift towards a more organic image of the New Man brings with it a concomitant emphasis on the vulnerabilities of the flesh. The strange obsession with maiming, illness and disability evident in such Stalinist classics as Nikolai Ostrovsky's *How the Steel was Tempered* (1935), is interpreted by Kaganovsky (*ibid.*: 7) as a compensatory 'response to the narrative of "extravagant virility" produced by Stalinist art'. But it can also be seen as an expression of the anxiety of the natural: insofar as the human body is gradually removed from its identification with the glass-and-steel cityscape, it becomes prey to those very forces of nature that the Soviet utopia sets out to harness and subjugate.

This dynamic can be seen in one of the early Soviet SF films, *Space Flight/Kosmicheckiy reis* (1935). The black-and-white silent movie depicts the first flight to the Moon of a motley space crew consisting of a bearded scientific patriarch (modelled on the revered pioneer of space exploration Konstantin Tsiolkovsky), a young woman assistant and a boy stowaway. The film starts with panoramic shots of a monumental city of the future, recalling Boris Iofan's never-realised project for the Palace of Soviets – the monstrous tower topped by a hundred-metre tall statue of Lenin. But as the action shifts to the crew, such mundane and intensely physical needs as a warm pair of boots for walking on the Moon's inhospitable surface become paramount, while the unorthodox physiques of an old man, a woman and a child create an implicit contrast with the absent 'healthy, virile and handsome' New Man. The moonscape, rendered through a stark accumulation of sharp angles and flat surfaces, similarly contrasts the majestic sweep of urban technology at the beginning of the film. It is an image of both menace and indifference, resisting appropriation to the optimistic narrative of

the conquest of nature. As opposed to the iconic cityscape, it has no signifying role; it simply *is*.

## The Conquerors and the Conquered

The conquest of nature became the buzzword of Stalinism. The country's rapid industrialisation made any large-scale project seem possible and the 'reorganisation' of the landscape was seen as a necessary prerequisite for building a utopian society. Many such projects were not only ecologically destructive but patently useless from an economic point of view. They functioned instead as techniques of ideological self-fashioning, in which the Soviet subject and the Soviet terrain would be transformed together.

Boris Groys has argued that Stalinism fulfilled the aspirations of the avant-garde to build Communist society 'as a total work of art that would organise life itself according to a unitary plan' (Groys 1988: 23). But it is an artwork in a style quite different from that of constructivism. In the 1930s, modernism was denounced in the name of socialist realism, which created what J. Hoberman called 'a purely ideological landscape' of monumental buildings and oversized statues (Hoberman 1998: 16). If 'under Stalin . . . the life of society was organised in monolithic artistic forms', these forms were neo-classicism and the imperial baroque (Groys 1988: 9).

The way in which spatial practices (to use Henri Lefebvre's [1993] term for cultural utilisation of space) and techniques of subjectivity dovetailed in the transformation of nature is epitomised by the city of Magnitogorsk (the Magnet Mountain), founded in 1929 to exploit the iron-rich zone near the Ural Mountains. The city was simultaneously a major industrial project and a model urban environment. Its founding principle was architectural uniformity that was supposed to generate the corresponding uniformity of mindsets and lifestyles. In actuality, the city became a polluted hotchpotch of overcrowded barracks, mud-huts, apartment blocks and labour camps. The incorporation of labour camps and penal settlements into the city fabric indicates an important element in the Soviet utopian project. The space of terror in Stalinism was not hidden but rather displaced; situated within the normative space of society but wrapped in a heavy mantle of euphemisms, doubletalk and silence. These camps were scattered throughout the country but united in the popular imagination, collectively known as the Zone. This shadowy geography of camps and prisons existed within the official geography of the Soviet Motherland;

and since the inmates of the labour camps were employed in heavy physical labour, the Zone became conflated with the transformation/domination of nature itself.

The work of the most important Soviet SF writer of the 1930s, Grigorii Adamov, provides a perfect example of this conflation between the domination of nature and the Terror. Adamov wrote three novels, *The Conquerors of the Interior/Pobedityeli nedr* (1937), *The Mystery of Two Oceans/Taina dvuch okeanov* (1939) and *Banishment of the Ruler/Izgnaniye vладыki* (1941–1946). Each novel depicts the conquest of a hostile natural environment: the underground geothermal springs, the depths of the ocean and the far reaches of the Arctic respectively. In each novel, the hostile environment is successfully subdued and harnessed to the service of the Soviet Motherland. But despite the fact that natural obstacles – earthquakes, sea monsters, bitter cold – provide enough dramatic tension, each novel adds a subplot of a fight against spies and saboteurs that claims the life of a sacrificial victim: a child or a teenager. Through this ‘collaboration’ with the enemy, nature becomes an active, albeit malevolent, force. The fact that its primary victims are children indicates a shift in the symbolic valence of childhood: it is identified not with pastoral purity but rather with civilising energy, which opposes the supposedly backward pull of nature.

Adamov’s most popular novel *The Mystery of Two Oceans* was made into a film in 1956. Produced after Stalin’s death, the film still reflects the ideological configurations of the Terror. It opens with shots of sinking ships, which smoothly fade into a dark paranoid scene of enemy agents (who in this Cold War era are American spies rather than the anonymous saboteurs of the original novel) plotting further destruction in a Moscow apartment.

*The Mystery of Two Oceans* is an exception, as there were few SF films made during the Stalinist period. Margolit (2001) argues that the disappearance of landscape in the Soviet films of the mid 1930s was connected to the regime’s attempt to eliminate all spontaneity from its representations of space. However, it is arguable that the ‘humanisation’ of nature, whether positive or negative, does not so much disappear from Soviet cinema as become taken for granted, shifting into the background as the struggle with the enemy assumes a more overtly violent form. But nature-as-enemy reappears in the post-Stalin period of the Thaw, just as does its double, nature-as-ideal.



## Landscape in Exile

Rosalind Marsh (1986: 137) links the 'new wave of Utopian science fiction' in the 1950s to the debunking of Stalinism by the twentieth Party Congress, but, in fact, the genre's 'heroism, socialist humanism and unlimited faith in science' were a direct continuation of the Stalinist episteme. While the political upheaval of the Thaw is not to be underestimated, it did not transform the underlying structure of Soviet civilisation. The concrete name of the Leader simply became the abstract Name of the Father, to use a Lacanian metaphor, but the main principles of Soviet utopian aesthetics remained the same. Still, the masochistic process of self-conquest and self-fashioning was toned down in favour of highlighting its spectacular result: the New Man in all his glory. And similarly, the laborious and violent process of the conquest of nature was overshadowed by the display of its utopian result – the fully 'humanised' landscape of the future. The war with nature was over: '[T]he Thaw in film begins not by returning rights to man but rather, by returning these rights to nature' (Margolit 2001: 34). However, this humanisation was merely a more insidious version of the Stalinist ethos of conquest, as it robbed nature of its own essence.

The armistice with nature finds its expression in what is probably the most popular work of Soviet SF, Ivan Efremov's *The Andromeda Nebula* (1957). Efremov and somewhat later the brothers Arkadii and Boris Strugatsky, were responsible for the unprecedented flowering of Soviet SF literature and cinema, making the genre gain 'greater popularity in the USSR than in almost any other country in the world' (Marsh 1986: 138).

*The Andromeda Nebula* is a fully fledged utopia, set thousands of years into the future, when humanity has completed the conquest of nature and has transformed itself. Wild nature has been tamed and normalised, while disease, physical imperfection and racial difference have all been eradicated. The future utopian subject is a Communist *Übermensch*, biologically superior and mentally liberated, having transcended the petty divisions of nationality, language and ethnicity. The uniformity of the human physical type across the globe is paralleled by the uniformity of its tamed and humanised landscape. Ecologically, anthropologically and architecturally, the entire planet has become a single homogenised space. All the cities are essentially the same, perfectly designed and perfectly executed, with no heterogeneity, variety or waste. The only vestiges of natural landscapes are parklands and gardens.

However, the novel opens not on this utopian Earth but on a hostile black planet orbiting ‘an iron star’ where the stranded crew of the spaceship *Tantra* is attacked by giant starfish-like creatures. Exiled from the utopia, wilderness retreats into outer space where it plots against humanity. This zone of rebellious nature outside the boundaries of utopia is, once again, conflated with the carceral Zone. This conflation is clear from the fact that the only remnant of wilderness on Earth itself is a prison colony where the deviant, the lazy and the maladjusted are banished, to live out their ‘quiet years’ in subsistence farming (Efremov 1959: 260). Nature is both prison and prisoner; the enemy to be exiled and the space of exile itself.

In 1967 *The Andromeda Nebula* was made into a movie, which tried to reproduce faithfully both the message and the aesthetics of the original. The film is marked by two complementary visual strategies: rapid shifts between the sunshine-drenched views of Earth and the darkness of space; and the extensive use of close-ups. The physically perfect and yet still recognisably human faces of New Men (and Women) of the future are set off by the postcard-perfect landscapes of white beaches and snow-capped mountains on the tamed home planet. The landscape of the future is a Communist pastoral, regaining a sort of prelapsarian innocence through being tamed and regulated by man. The planets of the ‘iron star’ and their savage creatures, on the other hand, are the dark side of nature as constructed by Soviet ideology – not merely dangerous but purposefully evil.

Another interesting moment in the film is the encoding of time through space. The sunny Earth is the future; the dark space is the past. Because history comes to a halt in the perfection of utopia, the flow of time becomes frozen into divisions in space.

However, the film is much less successful than the book in embodying a vision of the Soviet utopia. This is partly due to the technical limitations of the visual medium, which highlights less than eugenically perfect faces of the actors. But another reason cuts to the very heart of the Soviet dilemma with regard to the representation of nature. The scenes set on the dark planet are far more compelling and exciting than the wooden placidity and obligatory goodwill of those set on Earth. In fact, the chief lure of *The Andromeda Nebula* and other SF films of the period was the excitement and adventure found in confrontation with nature-as-foe. Since onscreen violence was not encouraged (with the exception of Second World War and Civil War historical epics), struggle with nature provided the only legitimate pretext for thrills.

Thus, even representations of the utopian future could not escape the ambiguity of nature. Exiled and disavowed, wilderness returned

as the necessary Other of humanity, suborning the very core of the utopian project. The neat dichotomy of humanity/nature was undermined by its own unstable dynamics, as the poles bled into each other. Landscape became the locus of Soviet humanism's battle with itself, and the subsequent cinematic and literary attempts to escape this dilemma by erasing the negative image of nature and finding in it a source of value became infected by the same ambiguity.

## Pastoral in Space

This ambiguity becomes central in what is undoubtedly the Golden Age of Soviet SF cinema – the 1960s and 1970s. Probably the most critically acclaimed product of this age is Andrei Tarkovskii's *Solaris* (1972), based on Stanislaw Lem's novel. Technically accomplished and overloaded with mystical and religious symbolism, Tarkovskii's *Solaris* indicates a new development in Soviet utopia: retreat from the technological future back into the pastoral past. This past, however, is as imaginary as Efremov's Communism and as ideologically saturated. While dissident in the narrow sense of running foul of censorship regulations, Tarkovskii's films are nevertheless part of Soviet civilisation, expressing its underlying tensions. *Solaris* in particular seems to be torn between an elegiac nostalgia for some lost unity of humanity and nature and insistent humanisation of the landscape. The result of this artistic and ideological tension is a symbolic muddle.

Lem was highly critical of Tarkovskii's *Solaris*, which he felt distorted the novel's concern with the Other into preoccupation with the Same: 'I have fundamental reservations to this adaptation . . . As I told Tarkovsky during one of our quarrels – he didn't make *Solaris* at all, he made *Crime and Punishment* . . . Because there exists the Ding an sich, the Unreachable, the Thing-in-Itself, the Other Side which cannot be penetrated' (Lem cited in Bereś 1987).

Lem's point in the novel was precisely to represent the intelligent Ocean of Solaris as the opaque and impenetrable 'thing-in-itself' whose interaction with humanity could not be reduced either to moral dilemmas or to religious scruples. Tarkovskii, however, transforms the Ocean into an omnipotent (and largely invisible) judge of the characters' moral lapses, subordinating the alien planet to their emotional and spiritual quests. Nature is drawn within humanity's circle, reduced to a sympathetic mirror of its concerns. The film performs a sort of symbolic colonisation of its fantastic landscape.

The last scene of the film, in which Kelvin returning to the station finds it transformed into a replica of his childhood home and kneels before his father in a reenactment of Rembrandt's *Return of the Prodigal Son*, encapsulates the film's symbolic conquest of the stubborn alterity of the nonhuman landscape. And yet this scene also reflects the ambiguity of any such conquest. Who or what is the entity that 'forgives' Kelvin? Tarkovskii's Christian iconography sits rather awkwardly within the film's SF framework, which focuses in on the impenetrable difference of the alien landscape.

SF cinema of the Thaw sometimes does, however, reimagine nature as mysterious and sublime. The 1969 film *The Mysterious Wall/Tainstvennaya stena*, though not as artistically accomplished as *Solaris*, can be seen as an interesting counterpart to Tarkovskii's humanised landscape. In the film, an enigmatic and impenetrable wall, appearing out of nowhere, isolates a band of scientists in the Siberian wilderness. Much like the crew of the *Solaris* station, they experience flashbacks through which the presumed alien intelligence behind the wall is attempting to communicate with them. The emphasis in the film, however, is not on the (rather trivial) content of their memories but on the opaque nature of the aliens. The wall is embedded in the stark Siberian landscape, whose icy beauty serves to underscore its metaphysical otherness. If nature speaks to humanity at all, its language is incomprehensible and its goals are its own.

## The Zone Strikes Back

As the Soviet Union begins to fall apart under the onslaught of economic hardship, ecological disasters and ideological fatigue, SF films respond to the situation. Two main responses can be identified: stressing the hostility and intractability of nature, or retreating into pastoral nostalgia. Tarkovskii exemplifies the second trend but the first was equally widespread. It can be seen in two popular films of the late 1970s and early 1980s: the 1979 *The Dead Mountaineer's Hotel/Otel u pogipshego alpinista* and the 1985 *Day of Wrath/Den gneva*. The films are significant for two reasons: both are based on well-known SF texts; and both are set in fictional Western countries, reflecting the regime's greater openness to the West. But just as the capitalist enemy becomes more human, nature becomes more malevolent, absorbing many of the former's ideological characteristics.

*The Dead Mountaineer's Hotel* was based on the Strugatsky brothers' popular novel of the same title (they also wrote the screenplay). The

novel is an alien invasion thriller, set in an isolated alpine hotel. The formula, familiar from many Western movies, such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, was new and exciting to the Soviet public. The film capitalises on this newness, underscoring the noir elements of the plot, such as the chain-smoking detective, the exotic femme fatale (who turns out to be an alien robot) and the sense of claustrophobia and menace. Visually, the film alternates the dark interiors of the hotel with the brilliant whiteness of the snow and ice outside, the two combining to create an ominous setting, in which civilisation and wilderness are equally threatening, generating an overwhelming sense of unfocused and pervasive malevolence. The fact that the movie was made by the Estonian studio Tallinfilm and dubbed in Russian underscores its departure from the aesthetic and ideological norms of Soviet cinema.

*The Day of Wrath* was based on a story by the talented SF writer Sever Gansovsky, which describes the artificial creation of a race of intelligent bears who escape from the laboratory and rampage through a rural region of (probably) America. The story is a tight apocalyptic meditation on the dangers of meddling with nature; a theme that becomes increasingly prominent in Soviet SF as the extent of the devastation wrought by ecological megalomania becomes evident. Artistically, the film is less successful than the story but it underscores the underlying fear of eco-apocalypse: nature is malicious and vengeful and it pays back tenfold for the damage inflicted upon it.

The connection between the natural wilderness and the carceral Zone, implicit in the Stalinist rhetoric of space, is made quite clear in *The Day of Wrath* (saved from the wrath of the censor only by the fig leaf of its pseudo-American setting). The wild region where the mutated bears terrorise the poor and helpless population is a thinly veiled allegory of the Gulag. But its sublime beauty, emphasised by lingering shots of waterfalls, mountains and wooded canyons, conflates the immorality of the Terror and the amorality of nature. The same conflation is articulated in the parallels between the opening scene, in which a bear is being vivisected in the lab, and the subsequent discovery by the protagonist of the same lab used by the bears to vivisect humans. Neither in the story nor in the film are the bears represented as victims; rather, they are inhuman avengers, coming back to wreck havoc upon civilisation as payback for its attempt to master and transform nature. Despite the rise of eco-awareness, nature is not valorised. The enemy may have been recognised as too strong to conquer, but it is an enemy still.

## The Motherland's Embrace

The rise of Russian nationalism in the late 1960s and 1970s as an alternative to Communism had a profound influence upon both literature and cinema. The so-called village school of Russian writers extolled the lost virtues of the rural countryside and Orthodox Christianity, occasionally sliding into xenophobia and anti-Semitism, yet also encouraging eco-awareness. Nationalism made a strong connection between the Russian landscape and the pre-revolutionary past.

The 1973 film *Sannikov's Land/Zemlya Sannikova*, based on a pre-revolutionary SF novel by Vladimir Obruchev, is simultaneously a lost world adventure, in which a group of free-spirit vagabonds discover a miraculously fertile land beyond the Arctic circle, and an elegy for a romantic past of dashing officers, intrepid explorers and gypsy songs. Set sometime in the late nineteenth century, the film is an imperial fantasy of exploring the primitive, much like H.R. Haggard's romances *She* (1887) and *King Solomon's Mines* (1885). However, made a hundred years later than its British counterparts, reflecting the twilight of the Soviet empire, the film is pervaded by a sense of nostalgia. The sets of small-town pre-revolutionary Russia merge with the pristine landscapes of the newly discovered land as an image of what has been irrevocably lost. When the land is devastated by an earthquake, its fragile beauty destroyed, the implications of the approaching social earthquake for Russia are clear.

## The Final Reckoning

Just before the final collapse of the Soviet regime and disappearance of the Soviet utopia both as an ideological structure and as a literary and cinematic genre, one of the most thoughtful examinations of this utopia made it to the Russian screen. S. Rybas' *Mirror for the Hero/Zerkalo dlya geroya* (1987) is a reckoning with the dream of conquering nature, which eschews both facile apologetics and equally facile condemnation. It is also an elegy for the aborted New Man, which rediscovers the recent past of Stalinism in all its complexity, while showing the human and ecological cost of the utopia beyond the clichés of the Gulag.

The film starts with a confrontation between a father and son in a mining town in the USSR's coal country of Donbas. The father, an old engineer, is bitterly disappointed with his son Sergei, a 'hollow man' whose lavish (by Soviet standards) lifestyle and successful academic career cover up the absence of any ideals, such as motivated the father's

generation during and after the Great Patriotic War. To teach Sergei a lesson, his father reads to him his own fictionalised account of the dismantling of an ecologically damaging dam and return of huge tracts of the holy Russian soil to their pristine state. The irony, of course, lies in the fact that such dams were an integral part of the Stalinist conquest of nature, whose feverish patriotism the father finds so sorely lacking in the last Soviet generation. This irony is not lost on Sergei who blames his father's utopian enthusiasm for his own apathy. After a heated exchange, Sergei storms out, wanders to a rock concert and meets a slightly older engineer Andrei, who has just been released from prison where he served time for the collapse of a coal mine under his supervision. The two are miraculously transported back to 1949 where they have to relive the same day over and over again – 8th of May, one day before the celebration of the victory over Nazi Germany, the most important commemoration in the Soviet calendar.

The film avoids the most obvious paradoxes of the situation: it is neither *Back to the Future* nor *Groundhog Day*. Even though both protagonists meet their younger versions – Sergei encounters his girlish mother pregnant with himself and Andrei becomes a mentor to his own child-self – the emphasis is on the exploration of the collective rather than the individual memory and trauma.

The paranoia, poverty and repression of the postwar years are shown realistically. There are endless images and posters of Stalin on every street corner; mutilated war veterans are roaming the streets; life is hard and shabby. And yet the film also insists on the genuineness of the utopian fervour that motivated the Soviet people in 1949. Stalinism is not an imposed doublespeak but a real faith, whose rituals are intertwined with the townspeople's everyday struggles and pleasures. The fight for increased coal production is simultaneously an unrealistic demand from above and a popular initiative from below. The utopian goal may be unreachable but the utopian impulse is unquenchable.

The beautifully recreated landscape of a Donbas town that plays a central part in the film's visual poetics reflects this duality. It is horizontally divided into the idyllic rural township with grassy streets and blooming cherry trees above ground and the dark, dripping, rat-infested mines below. But this horizontal division hides a deeper interdependence: the town depends on the mines for its survival. Similarly, when Sergei hops on the train to go to Moscow, the live action gives way to a montage of sepia-coloured photographs of the era, expressing the same ambivalent combination of nostalgia and rejection.

The ultimate question the film poses is of the nature of the past. Can it be changed by being reimagined or relived? Or is it a dead weight

on the living whose influence, as Sergei tells his father in the opening scene, destroys his capacity for experiencing the present? Sergei and Andrei argue this point as they realise they are trapped in the endlessly recurring day. Sergei sees the past as ‘a book or a movie’ and its inhabitants, including the younger avatars of his parents, as zombies, impossible to reason or communicate with. Andrei, on the other hand, comes to believe that if they can make this one day ‘the way it should be’, they can escape the nightmare of the past. For him, it means causing the closure of ‘mine number nine’, whose catastrophic collapse in the future will have caused his imprisonment. Finally, despairing of convincing the authorities, he blows up the mine, while Andrei confronts the security officers who are about to arrest his father. Both are then returned to the present whose landscape (including the interior of Sergei’s father’s house) we recognise as the direct continuation of the landscape, both literal and metaphorical, of 1949.

*Mirror for the Hero* pushes the boundaries of Soviet cinema as far as they would go. After the historical rupture of 1991, the new Russian cinema and literature adopt a different idiom, interrogating the past (if at all) from the standpoint of post-utopian disillusionment. But *Mirror for the Hero* refuses simply to discard the legacy of the failed utopia, burrowing through the layers of Soviet history in search of a viable national and social identity. This identity is no longer the New Soviet Man whose shabby afterlife is embodied in the bitter old age of Andrei’s father. But nor is it the Westernised yuppie lifestyle of Sergei himself, which is depicted as empty and alienated. Even nativism proves an inadequate prop; despite some idealisation of ‘the common man’, the drunkenness and brutality of rural life are not masked as they are in Tarkovskii’s films. Eventually, *Mirror for the Hero* remains mired in its own irresolvable ambiguities, which are also the ambiguities of Soviet civilisation on the verge of dissolution.

Nature in Soviet SF cinema, as in Soviet cinema in general, is neither an antagonist nor a protagonist. Nor is it the repository of humanist values, antithetical to the oppressive regime, as the simplistic reading of Soviet history would have us believe. Rather, nature and the landscape become overloaded with so many contradictory meanings that they deliver mutually exclusive messages. Nature is the enemy to be conquered and the universal mother to return to; it is an image of the pastoral past and of the equally pastoral future; it is humanity’s mirror and its Other. One might argue that such contradictory inscriptions of nature are part of any discourse, since nature is what culture makes of it. But in Soviet discourse, the ambiguity of nature is inextricably connected to the very ambiguity of the Soviet utopian project of the



creation of a new society and the New Man. Nature functions in two distinct modalities within this project, both legitimising and opposing it. And these two modalities cannot be reconciled, ideologically, narratively or visually. Nature in Soviet cinema was not a site of the intelligentsia's resistance to the regime. Rather, it was the last refuge of the unintelligible.

## Notes

- 1 I will refer to the seventy-three years of the existence of the Soviet Union not as a historical 'mistake' of an oppressive tyranny but as a cultural and social entity with its own distinct articulations of such basic concepts as humanity, nature, time, space and so on. Perhaps the best way to describe this period is by using Foucault's concept of the episteme (1974). However, I will refer to it as 'civilisation', to emphasise both its all-encompassing character and its dynamism.
- 2 For more on the New Soviet Man, see Kaganovsky (2008) and Gomel (2004).

## References

- Adamov, Grigorii. *Taina dvukh okeanov* [The Mystery of Two Oceans]. Moscow: Onkis, 2004.
- . 1970. *Pobediteli ndr. Izgnaniye vladyki* [The Conquerors of the Interior. The Banishment of the Ruler]. Moscow: Pravda.
- The Andromeda Nebula/Tumannost Andromedy*. 1967. [Film]. Directed by E. Sherstobitov. Moscow: Kinostudiya im. Dovzhenko.
- Bereś, S. 1987. 'Lem About the Tarkovsky's Adaptation'. Retrieved 30 December 2010 from <http://english.lem.pl/around-lem/adaptations/qsolarisq-by-tarkovsky>
- Clark, K. 2003. 'Socialist Realism and the Sacralising of Space', in E. Dobrenko and E. Naiman (eds), *The Landscape of Stalinism; The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, pp. 3–19.
- Day of Wrath/Den gneva*. 1985. [Film]. Directed by S. Mamilov. USSR: Gorky Film Studios.
- The Dead Mountaineer's Hotel/Otel u pogibshego alpnista*. 1979. [Film]. Directed by G. Kromanov. USSR/Estonia: Tallinnfilm
- Dobrenko, E. 2008. *Stalinist Cinema and the Production of History: Museum of the Revolution*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Dobrenko, E. and E. Naiman (eds). 2003. *The Landscape of Stalinism; The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Efremov, I. 1959. *Tumannost Andromedy/The Andromeda Nebula*. Moscow: Molodaya gvardia.
- . 1988 (1968). *Chas byka/The Hour of the Bull*. Moscow: MPI.

- Foucault, M. 1974 (1966). *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Random House.
- Gomel, E. 2004. 'Gods Like Men: Soviet Science Fiction and the Utopian Self'. *Science-Fiction Studies* #94, 31.3 (November): pp. 358–78.
- Groys, B. 1988. *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship and Beyond*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Heller, L. 1985. *Vsellenmaya za predelami normy/Soviet Science Fiction*. London: Overseas Publication Interchange.
- Hoberman, J. 1998. *The Red Atlantis: Communist Culture in the Absence of Communism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Ilf, I. and E. Petrov. 1981 (1932). 'Ancestors of the Metro', in *Days and Years of the Metro/Dni I gody metrostroya*. Moscow: Moskovskii rapochii, pp. 25–32.
- Kaganovsky, L. 2008. *How the Soviet Man was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity under Stalin*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Kotkin, S. 1995. *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilisation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Margolit, E. 2001. 'Landscape with Hero', in A. Prokhorov (ed.), *Springtime for Soviet Cinema: Re/Viewing the 1960s*. Trans. D.A. Seckler. Pittsburg: Russian Film Symposium, pp. 29–50.
- Marsh, R.J. 1986. *Soviet Fiction since Stalin: Science, Politics and Literature*. London: Croom Helm.
- Mirror for the Hero/Zerkalo dlya geriya*. 1987. [Film]. Directed by Vladimir Potinenko. Sverdlov: Sverdlovskaya kinostudiya.
- The Mysterious Wall/Tainstvennaya stena*. 1969. [Film]. Directed by I. Povolotskaya and N. Sadkovich. Moscow: Mosfilm.
- The Mystery of Two Oceans/Taina dvukh okeanov*. 1956. [Film]. Directed by K. Pipinashvili. USSR.
- Ostrovskii, Nikolai. 1936. *Kak zakalyalas stal/How the Steel Was Tempered*. Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya.
- Plamper, J. 2003. 'The Spatial Poetics of Personality Cult: Circles Round Stalin', in E. Dobrenko and E. Naiman (eds), *The Landscape of Stalinism; The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, pp. 19–51.
- Prokhorov, A. (ed.). 2001. *Springtime for Soviet Cinema: Re/Viewing the 1960s*. Trans. D.A. Seckler. Pittsburg: Russian Film Symposium. Available at: <http://www.rusfilm.pitt.edu/booklets/Thaw.pdf>
- Revich, V. 1998. *Perekrestok utopii/The Crossroads of Utopias*. Moscow: Iv Ran.
- Sannikov's Land/Zemlya Sannikova*. 1973. [Film]. Directed by A. Mkratchyan and L. Popov. Moscow: Mosfilm.
- Solaris*. 1972. [Film]. Directed by A. Tarkovskii. USSR: Creative Unit of Writers and Cinema Workers, Mosfilm, Unit Four.
- Space Flight/Kosmicheskii reis*. 1935. [Film]. Directed by V. Zhuravlev. Moscow: Mosfilm.
- Stites, R. 1989. *Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Suvin, D. 1979. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

## ANIMALS, AVATARS AND THE GENDERING OF NATURE

*Claire Molloy*

During a climactic battle scene in the 2009 science fantasy blockbuster *Avatar*, nonhumanoid animal beings on the exoplanetary moon Pandora unite in an attack against corporate security forces which threaten to decimate the land in the search for a valuable mineral, unobtainium. The animals fight alongside the Na'vi, indigenous blue humanoids who are able to connect via neural bonding with other Pandoran organisms. In these battle scenes, *Avatar* depicts an imagined alliance between animals and humanoids in the face of an impending ecological threat precipitated by capitalistic motives and the unrelenting exploitation of natural resources for reasons of corporate greed. *Avatar's* environmental politics are explicit, extolling the moral significance of nature and stressing the spiritual aspects of ecological interdependence between the indigenous humanoids and Pandora's flora.

In pursuing its eco-agenda, *Avatar* draws on various aspects of environmentalism for its ideological coherence. It critiques technologically empowered capitalistic destruction, which is conflated with familiar themes of greed, commerce, consumerism and an anthropocentric worldview. Human economic activities are depicted as intrinsically destructive and unsustainable and opposed to the Na'vi ways, which are constructed as being in complete harmony with a pristine and timeless nature. Despite being described in an early scene as utterly inhospitable for humans, Pandora is depicted, in the main, as a spectacular yet vulnerable rainforest, and nature is conceived of in both spiritual and gendered terms as Eywa, a feminised deity responsible for maintaining ecological balance and facilitating the material interconnections between the Na'vi and their environment.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it is Eywa that mobilises the Pandoran animals as a cohesive fighting unit in a battle to regain ecological balance and harmony on the planet. In the context of Hollywood eco-narratives where commercialisation, capitalist greed, and power are core motives of villainous corporations and individuals, nature is variously depicted as vulnerable, dynamic, hostile or even vengeful.

This chapter explores the envisioning of nature as endangered and retaliatory and the extent to which such depictions reflect conflicted notions about human–animal and human–nature relations that rely on intersectional constructions of difference. Intersectionality refers to the critical frame used to analyse interlocking categories of difference that include gender, race, class, disability and age, which are deployed to maintain particular structures of power and oppression. I am particularly concerned with the intersections between race and gender and how these structure the various iterations of the human/nature and human/animal dualisms. There has already been much discussion of the racialised representations in *Avatar*.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, following the film's release, criticisms and counter-critiques of its reworking of the colonial 'going native' narrative raged across the blogosphere. Here, I extend the critique of the film's racialised and gendered representations from an Animal Studies perspective to propose that such colonial fantasies sustain problematic human/animal dualisms. This chapter departs from other scholarly discussions on *Avatar* that focus on the politics of race and gender and the discourse on environment by centralising animals and considering their relationship to humans, humanoids and nature-spaces. I propose that, seen through the lens of Animal Studies, *Avatar* reveals distinctions between animals and 'nature' that remain unresolved within many discourses on the environment. Animals are treated as expendable in discourses that construct particular forms of nature – discussed in this chapter as 'nature-spaces' – as vulnerable and in need of defence. *Avatar* thus gives us pause to consider the extent to which the disposability and subjugation of animals has been normalised by paternalistic forms of environmental protectionism.

In pursuing my analysis I am in agreement with Richard Twine's suggestion that Animal Studies and intersectionality can be mutually informing. He argues, 'if the point of critique of animal studies conceptually is a particular assault on human–animal dualism, and that dualism is similarly pertinent to the operation of, for example, gendered, classed and racialised relations, then we can see animal studies as productive to a broader understanding of intersectionality' (Twine 2010: 5).

In examining these intersections between race, gender and human–animal relations, I find Val Plumwood's discussion of the colonisation of nature of particular relevance. She proposes that colonisation 'relies upon a range of conceptual strategies':

The construction of nonhumans as 'Others' involves both distorted ways of seeing sameness, continuity or commonality with the colonised

‘Other’, and distorted ways of seeing their difference or independence . . . The excluded group is conceived, instead, in the reductionist terms established by mind/body or reason/nature dualism: ‘mere’ bodies, which can thus be servants, slaves, tools or instruments for human needs and projects. (Plumwood 2003: 53)

It is the range of conceptual strategies that construct nature as ‘colonisable’ which interests me, and I propose that *Avatar* depicts a doubling of the colonisation of nature. In the first place there is the corporate destruction of the Pandoran forest and the homes of the indigenous population in search of a valuable mineral. Secondly, there is the colonisation of ‘native’ bodies and animal bodies. The construction of difference and similitude is central to the colonisation of nature and, in the film, Cartesian dualism and hegemonic masculinities organise continuities between human, technology, native and animal. In *Avatar*, othered bodies are controlled by human(oid) minds: the human corporate security forces wear Amplified Mobility Platform (AMP) suits, outer machine bodies which enhance strength, mobility and fighting ability; Jake transfers his ‘mind’ into the hyper-muscular primitive avatar body, a genetically engineered hybrid Na’vi body; and both Jake and the Na’vi have a biological mechanism by which they are able to control certain animal bodies with their minds. Thus, the AMP suits, the Na’vi and animals are reduced to bodies which can be conquered and controlled either by technological means (transferring the rational human mind into a Na’vi body), by spiritual means (rebirth into a Na’vi body but retaining the rational mind of a white western male) or by biological means (connecting and controlling the animal body with the human(oid) mind). My intention in this chapter is to examine how fantasies of colonisation sustain, and even promote as environmentally sensitive, the subjugation of animals through the intersections of gender and race.

I begin with a short discussion of the changing depictions of nature and animals in mainstream films and how these relate to wider discourses on the environment. From here I move on to examine the range of meanings attributed to different nature-spaces, where I am especially interested in the connotations of jungle and rainforest. The chapter then explores how conceptions of nature-spaces intersect with gender and race and I relate these to the ‘going native’ narrative. This provides the context for a discussion of animals and how intersecting forms of difference are used as a rationale for their domination, and as a means to differentiate them from a nature that is morally considerable and in need of protection. I argue that this particular structure allows animals to function as the obstacles of masculine contest, which are

then controlled and dominated through the deployment of Cartesian dualisms that subordinate bodies to a hegemonic conceptualisation of the white rational masculine mind.

Maurice Yacowar finds a distinct type of film within the disaster genre that deals with nature as a destructive force. Within this group he identifies three types of 'natural attack': animal attack, attack by the elements and attack by atomic mutation (Yacowar 2003: 277–78). All three types, Yacowar argues, dramatise 'people's helplessness against the forces of nature'; and he notes that, 'animal-attack films provide a frightening reversal of the chain of being, attributing will, mind, and collective power to creatures usually considered to be safely without these qualities' (ibid.: 278). Eco-films certainly overlap with the natural attack type of film and indeed many fit into the disaster genre Yacowar identifies. A case in point is the revenge-of-nature cycle of horror films that emerged in the 1970s. Animal attack imagery was central to films such as *Night of the Lepus* (1972), *Frogs* (1972), *Prophecy* (1979), *Empire of the Ants* (1977), *Day of the Animals* (1977) and *Alligator* (1980), all of which reflected anxieties about some aspect of environmental destruction and pollution, issues that had been brought to the public attention by a burgeoning environmental movement. The films drew on concerns that, during the 1970s, moved onto the mainstream political agenda. At the beginning of the decade Richard Nixon's federal reorganisation plan called for an independent pollution control agency which led to the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA focused primarily on air and water pollution issues (Vaughn 2011: 62–63) and revenge-of-nature films reflected the same concerns and envisioned monstrous animals, the outcomes of illicit experimentation and environmental pollution, taking revenge against their corrupt human makers, usually scientists or the heads of irresponsible corporations. Nature, in animal form, was embodied, unrelenting and vicious.

A tendency to depict nature as a hostile jungle landscape emerged as the momentum of the environmental movement slowed towards the end of the 1970s and concerns over the costs to industry of compliance with EPA standards began to grow. There was a backlash against environmentalism in the 1980s, supported by the conservative policies of the Reagan administration, and throughout the decade environmentalism was displaced from mainstream political agendas as environmental enforcement was reduced in favour of industrial expansion. During this time a cycle of films about the Vietnam war (*First Blood* [1982], *Platoon* [1986], *Full Metal Jacket* [1987]) as well as action and horror films (*Cannibal Holocaust* [1980], *Raiders of the Lost Ark* [1981], *Predator* [1987]) incorporated various depictions of jungle, forest and

wilderness as hostile, brutal and alien landscapes onto which anxieties about masculinity could be projected, explored and played out.

The hostile jungle trope was revised in favour of vulnerable rainforest in environmentally themed narratives during the early 1990s, a move which followed the founding of the Rainforest Foundation and the formation of the Environmental Media Association in 1989, and the 1992 United Nations summit in Rio. A renewed political emphasis on the environment in the early 1990s was accompanied by a cycle of eco-films that spanned genres and reworked the trope of nature fighting back against environmental threats and in defence of ecological balance. Films from this post-1990 cycle, such as *FernGully: The Last Rainforest* (1992), *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), *Happy Feet* (2006) and *Furry Vengeance* (2010) depict nature as timeless and actively working to maintain a harmonious balance. In each case the narrative suggests that a particular equilibrium is desired by nature but the ecological stasis is disrupted by humans. The task of correcting the balance then falls to nature, the moral propriety of its actions being organised by or invoking some essence of Aldo Leopold's assertion that: 'A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise' (Leopold cited in Callicott 2004: 305). An idealised version of harmony and balance drives the narratives forward, and suggests that nature becomes an active agent when called upon to address human wrongs. In *The Day After Tomorrow*, for instance, this dynamism is imagined in the rather bizarre depiction of an instant ice age which manifests first as extreme weather in the form of hail storms, tsunamis, blizzards and tornados and which, as the film continues, compresses the effects of climate change into a period that spans weeks rather than decades. New York becomes a perilous environment which has been flooded and then frozen under enormous snow drifts. Wolves who have escaped from the zoo prowl the polar-like landscape and attack the small group of human survivors; an embodied reminder of nature's ferocity in the face of ecological catastrophe.

In *Furry Vengeance*, the response to ecological threat and environmental destruction also takes the form of animal attacks on humans, albeit for comedic value in this case. Nature is depicted as organised; a form of collective intelligence which, during battles in defence of ecological harmony, can set aside species difference. Foxes, racoons, turkeys, bears and skunks band together to fight against the impending destruction of the Rocky Springs woodland, mobilised as an organised force against a human enemy. Other films in the post-1990 cycle, such as *Ice Age: The Meltdown* (2006), *Evan Almighty* (2007), *Battle For Terra* (2007), *The*

*Day The Earth Stood Still* (2008), *Wall-E* (2008) and *2012* (2009), counter environmental threats with the promise of salvation through reworkings of the biblical ark trope. *Avatar*, which is, in box office terms, the most successful eco-film in the cycle, melds together these themes of environmental defence, ecological balance and salvation with spiritual rebirth. At the same time, the film reveals a range of cultural meanings assigned to nature-spaces such as jungles, wilderness and forests that operate across a continuum from hostile terrain to places of vulnerability and endangerment. I use the term nature-spaces here to highlight the extent to which jungle and forest – and we can add wilderness to this – are, at the same time, objects of discourse with differing symbolic resonances and physical places that are acted in and upon. Nature is broadly considered to be the antithesis of human production (Smith 1984). Conceptualised in this way, it is something that cannot be created but can be used, experienced, exploited or protected. Nature-spaces are, however, the products of human activity in the sense that they are both the imagined spaces of cultural narratives (filmic, literary and so on) as well as being physically bounded geographical places which are identified, classified and named. ‘Jungle’, ‘wilderness’ and ‘rainforest’ can therefore carry markedly distinct connotations, which imply different human uses, relations and types of intervention. For example, Nelson and Callicott argue that ‘the jungle idea connotes disorder and danger, a place in need of discipline by machete, chainsaw, and bulldozer; the rain forest idea connotes complexity, balance, and harmony, a place in need of nothing but wonder and protection’ (2008: 4). David Ingram proposes that the term ‘rainforest’ ‘implies a greater openness to human uses than is possible in a wilderness. “Rain forest” also implies vulnerability and, in contrast to the desire to leave wilderness alone a “perceived need for active intervention” in order to save it from destruction’ (Ingram 2008: 57). For Nelson and Callicott ‘wilderness’ is a far more complex idea than ‘jungle’ in that it, ‘connotes many different and sometimes contradictory things to many people’ (Nelson and Callicott 2008: 4). Wilderness, they suggest, may be, among many other things, a place for quiet, even reverential, solitude; the habitat of fierce predators; or, a place for challenging recreational activities (ibid.). What Nelson, Callicott and Ingram agree on is that jungle, wilderness and forest carry multiple, even conflicting, meanings. Moreover, these are historically-situated and culturally-specific and intrinsically bound to the propriety of human activities.

In the *Avatar* screenplay ‘jungle’, ‘rainforest’ and ‘forest’ are each used to describe the same setting, the home of the Na’vi Omatiyaya clan and where much of the film takes place.<sup>3</sup> How it is named in the



screenplay is, however, less important than the way it is coded as a particular type of nature-space onscreen. When Jake becomes lost in the Pandoran jungle he is attacked by a pack of 'viperwolves' – six-limbed Pandoran animals. The environment is depicted as dark and threatening, the space is populated by the viperwolves, which take up the familiar role of an embodied hostile nature. Jake is saved by a female member of the Omaticaya clan, a Na'vi humanoid named Neytiri who kills three of the wolves and forces the rest to retreat. She admonishes Jake for behaving 'like a baby', being stupid and 'ignorant like a child' in the forest; her assessment of his actions explicitly inscribing gendered difference onto their relationship from the beginning. She is to become the 'mother' and teacher of the 'Jake-child' who will inevitably surpass her abilities in order for him to find his fully matured masculine identity and assume the role of leader of the 'natives'. It is also at this point in the film that the setting shifts from being the hostile place to a glittering landscape – described as 'phantasmagorical' in the film's script – which is illuminated by bioluminescence; the blue, green or violet light emitted by some Pandoran organisms. As Jake is about to embark on the rediscovery of hegemonic masculine identity, the nature-space acquires a new set of meanings. It is transformed from an alien jungle into a vulnerable rainforest and Jake's later interactions with the forest, particularly the Tree of Voices and the Tree of Souls, are marked out by the luminous, ethereal, glow that the flora emit; a visual reinforcement of the spiritual connection that the Na'vi have with the Pandoran trees. In this way, when the rainforest nature-space (which is feminised as Eywa) is threatened with destruction, the trees have been constructed by the narration as morally considerable and therefore the human corporate activities that involve any measure of damage against them are immediately configured as indefensible.

The principles that organise the moral structure of *Avatar* place Na'vi and human practices in opposition, with the unsustainable economics of capitalism, corporate greed and advanced technologies positioned against a hunter-gather community system that operates in harmony with nature and through small social groups. At the most fundamental level these principles function to separate the Na'vi humanoids from humans, the former living in harmony with their environment while the latter exploit nature through the use of industrial technologies. Indeed, *Avatar* relies to a large extent upon associations between pre-industrial peoples and their perceived harmonious relationships with the environment. The narrative makes it clear that the Na'vi knowledge of the forest and their interconnectedness with the environment attenuates the threat of the jungle that is experienced by the humans

who, in direct contrast, are separated from nature. For this reason, the nature-space plays a crucial role in the narrative, transforming from a jungle to a rainforest in need of protection, which in turn provides the setting against which Jake Sully's transformation from ignorant human to ecologically sensitive 'native' can take place. However, this transformation privileges colonial ideas of white Western rationality in that it retells the story of 'natives in need' of a white, male leader, which in turn sustains a myth of hegemonic masculinity. Jake becomes the saviour of the Omaticaya clan, and his spiritual and successful physical rebirth contrast with the failed attempt to transfer Grace's consciousness permanently into her avatar body. In this regard Grace is the experimental body and the expendable female character whose role as the scientist with specialist knowledge of Na'vi people is, similarly to that of Neytiri, superseded by Jake's ability to lead the clan as a warrior.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the transformation of Jake can be better described as a retrieval of an idealised version of masculinity, which requires that women are dispensable bodies, and animals and natives are reduced to irrational, unstable bodies that can be conquered and controlled in ways that mesh Cartesian dualism with colonialism.

In *Avatar*, the film's construction of nature-spaces and their meanings intersects with issues of gender and race, firstly because nature is conceived of as a feminised deity and secondly because the story is a variation on the narrative of the white Western male 'going native'. With regard to this latter point, *Avatar* has been referred to as '*Dances with Wolves* in space' (Boucher 2009) and, in interviews, director James Cameron acknowledges the validity of the comparison. He also points out other key influences which include the work of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Rudyard Kipling and Joseph Conrad, explaining: 'I just gathered all this stuff in and you look at it through the lens of science fiction and it comes out looking very different but is still recognisable in a universal story way. It's almost comfortable for the audience – "I know what kind of tale this is"' (Cameron quoted in Boucher 2009). From a postcolonial perspective it is perhaps more troubling than comforting to see another reworking of the white Western male 'going native' narrative and even more problematic to assume that this is a 'universal story'.

*Avatar* follows in the tradition of colonial stories of the adventure hero in a jungle landscape, which Sara Mills notes has been one of the backdrops against which 'the idealised and stereotypical form of colonial masculinity found within adventure novels and travel narratives was constructed' (2005: 58). She proposes, '[f]or the adventure hero it was essential to view the land as a series of challenges', wherein the

landscape is established as a backdrop 'in the working out of a self-identity' (ibid.: 56). Writing on the subject of colonial narratives Richard Dyer has observed that, '[t]he difficulty of the terrain, its unfamiliarity and its dangers (savage beasts, precipitous mountain passes, tumultuous rivers, thick jungle) provide the opportunity for the exercise of the white spirit, indomitable, organised' (Dyer 2002: 267). Being constructed as places outside of language and culture, jungles have connoted primitiveness, brutality and disorder in contest with white rational masculinity. In Conrad's ([1899] 2007) *Heart of Darkness*, for instance, the darkness of the jungle symbolises savagery, primitive power and 'the destabilisation of masculinity' (Kestner 2010: 111). The jungle is the 'othered' environment in Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), an adaptation of Conrad's story, and in the 1987 film *Predator* (1987) an alien uses active camouflage to become part of the jungle and then attacks, kills and skins members of an Army Special Forces unit. The jungle has thus been repeatedly called upon to signify an alien nature-space in which men must fight for survival. Christine Cornea notes that in both *Apocalypse Now* and *Predator*, the jungle provides an environment which is governed by 'the rules of nature', and where white masculinity can recover the fantasy of the 'noble savage' and a sense of primitive authenticity (Cornea 2007: 184). Similarly, in *Tarzan* and the many screen adaptations of Burroughs' stories that Cameron claims influenced *Avatar*, the jungle plays a key role as both metaphoric parent and educator of white masculinity. As Gail Bederman proposes, 'Tarzan's perfect masculinity stems from two factors – his white racial supremacy, inherited from his civilised Anglo-Saxon parents, and his savage jungle childhood with the primitive apes' (Bederman 1996: 221). Jungle settings have thus functioned as important landscapes for the rediscovery of an idealised masculinity that has been lost or softened by civilisation, and the 'going native' narrative 'provides a fantasy of freedom' and imagery of the primitive Other which 'articulates the nostalgic impulses of capitalist society' for an alternative way of life (Huhndorf 2001: 104).

However, in *Avatar* the nature-space does not remain a hostile force and its protection becomes a key motivation for Jake to lead the Na'vi into a battle with the corporate security forces. As the jungle gives way to the connotations of the rainforest, so the propriety of human(oid) actions are measured against the meanings that are assigned to those particular nature-spaces – vulnerability, balance, harmony and so forth – and the challenges to masculinity, which are usually provided by the landscape in colonial stories, must be found elsewhere. Instead, animals are presented as a series of obstacles in *Avatar*, which must be

overcome through physical domination, rational control and killing. In this way animals are separated from a nature which is morally considerable in the sense that the nature-space becomes feminised and is thus constructed as in need of protection, while the Pandoran animals are depicted otherwise.

In *Avatar* the main antagonist in the film, Colonel Miles Quaritch, gives voice to the colonialist logic that has typically constructed the jungle and its inhabitants in adversarial terms, conflating the terrain, the animals and indigenous peoples and describing them as threatening, treacherous and alien.<sup>5</sup> At one point Quaritch warns Jake Sully, the main protagonist, 'You get soft, Pandora will shit you out with zero warning'. During the briefing for new arrivals on the planet, Head of Security, Quaritch, tells the assembled group:

You are not in Kansas anymore. You are on Pandora ladies and gentleman. Respect that fact every second of every day. If there is a hell you might want to go there for some R&R after a tour on Pandora. Out there beyond that fence, every living thing that crawls, flies or squats in the mud wants to kill you and eat your eyes for Jujubes.

Later, Quaritch admits to Jake that he was attacked during his first day on Pandora. The scarring on Quaritch's head and face suggests that he was mauled by a clawed animal but the actual cause of his disfigurement is never revealed. Refusing reconstructive surgery Quaritch tells Jake, 'I kind of like it. It reminds me every day what's waiting out there'.

Jake, in his avatar body, accompanies Dr Grace Augustine, an exobiologist, on an exploratory assignment into the Pandoran forests. The first imagery of the Pandoran landscape is seen from a high angle as the tilt-rotor aircraft carrying Jake, Augustine and the xenanthropologist Norm Spellman, swoops over immense waterfalls and the expansive forest canopy. The forest teems with insects and animals, none of which pose any threat to the group until Jake is confronted with the territorial display of a hammerhead 'titanothere', a creature which resembles a massive rhinoceros with six legs. The titanothere retreats in the face of the greater threat posed by a 'thanator', another hexapedal animal, this time bearing remarkable similarity to a panther although the creature is far larger, armoured, and has massive distensible jaws. A chase ensues and Jake's only escape route leads him off the edge of a cliff and into a river. Later Jake is attacked by viperwolves but then rescued by Neytiri.

Jake's passage from human to Na'vi is marked by his interactions with animals. The initial state of humanness and ignorance is signified by his being responsible for the death of the viperwolves, and his first task en route to becoming Na'vi is to ride a 'direhorse', a Clydesdale-like

creature. Jake must use his 'queue', a long hair-like braid with tendrils at the end that can be connected to various flora and fauna of the planet creating a neural link that allows the Na'vi to bond with other biological forms. By connecting his queue to the direhorse Jake is able to assume control and direct the horse's movements. The next milestone in Jake's training is reached when he achieves a clean kill, moving him closer toward the status of fully fledged Na'vi hunter. After killing a deer, Jake must then catch and connect with an 'ikran', a large Pandoran bird. The process by which the connection between Na'vi and ikran takes place is suggested by the narration to approximate the breaking of a horse, and once connected the ikran is under Jake's complete control giving him the means to fly. In the same way that previous colonial narratives assert the superiority of the white male, Jake later proves his authority over the indigenous Na'vi by capturing and breaking a 'toruk', a creature similar to a pterodactyl and the most ferocious animal on Pandora. It is this final animal act that secures Jake's position as leader of the Na'vi, from where he takes them into battle against the humans and in defence of the Pandoran biosphere.

Each of the animals Jake encounters is either a threat (viperwolves, titanotheres) or subject to domination achieved by connecting and controlling with the human mind (dire-horse, ikran and toruk). Indeed, it is Jake's ability to tame the most fearsome of all the Pandoran animals (the toruk) that illustrates his superior powers of control over animal bodies. By controlling the toruk Jake assumes the identity of Toruk Makto, a highly revered position held by only five Na'vi before him, giving him the status required to become the clan's leader. Each of Jake's interactions with animals is coded in contrast to his interactions with Pandoran nature-spaces. Whereas the rainforest glitters with bioluminescence, a feature of the film amplified by the use of 3D technology, each of the scenes in which Jake encounters an animal uses naturalistic lighting.

In contrast to the conflation of spirituality, nature and the feminine with Eywa and the rainforest, animals are referred to in different, although still gendered, terms. For instance, when the titanotheres halts his charge Jake says: 'Yeah, that's what I'm talking about bitch. That's right, get your punk ass back to Mommy'. In a later scene Colonel Quaritch also uses gendered language saying, 'Come to Papa' to a 'tamed' thanator before stabbing the animal multiple times. Jake uses the vernacular expression, 'Let's dance', a euphemism that conflates traditional rituals of courtship with aggressive contest, before he 'breaks' the ikran in a scene which has been described in critiques across the blogosphere variously as a depiction of rape, homosexual rape and

bestiality.<sup>6</sup> The violence of the action; the forced ‘bonding’; the close-up on the animal’s pupil, which dilates massively as Jake forcibly connects himself to the bird; and Jake’s comment as the animal lies ‘broken’ on the ground, ‘That’s right, you’re mine’, followed by Jake’s first flight on the back of the ikran that he now controls with his mind all work to reinforce, even valorise, the brutal subjugation of animals against their will. Readings of the scene as rape can be explained by referring to an earlier animal encounter when Jake is instructed to ride the direhorse, in this case a ‘docile’ female. When Jake connects queues with the direhorse, Neytiri tells him to ‘feel’ the animal, her heartbeat, strong legs and so on. This scene establishes that bonding is a sensual experience, but the boundary between sensual and sexual bonding has the potential to blur. In his *Pandorapedia* James Cameron refers to the queue and bonding in the following way:

When an appropriate mate has been selected (which can take many years), the male and female Na’vi will connect queues to create an emotional bond that lasts a lifetime. The intertwining of queues, called ‘Shahaylu’, creates a state of unified body consciousness in which both parties access the physical sensations of the other. While not erotic when used for the control of animals, during mating it creates a heightened awareness of the other person. (Cameron 2010)

Thus, bonding is both sexual and controlling. The unifying of consciousnesses also means that bonding allows Jake and the Na’vi to feel the animal’s experiences, which must include pain, fear and suffering. Yet, this does not prevent violence towards othered animals. On the contrary, sharing the animal’s experience is positioned as a defining feature of human/Na’vi difference. Indeed, the narrative goes so far as to normalise violence towards animals as part of Na’vi customs and, in doing so, appropriates a western fantasy of native–animal relations to maintain the moral legitimacy of such actions.<sup>7</sup>

The connections between Na’vi and animals are quite different to those made with Pandoran trees. Na’vi–animal relations are depicted primarily as being concerned with control, domination and killing. Animals are valued by the Na’vi for their utility, as modes of transport and as food, and for their symbolic value (marking the progress of Na’vi to hunter status). Interconnectedness between Na’vi and trees assumes a different type of relation; it is a spiritual experience and a way to link with their deity Eywa. The trees on Pandora form a neural network, which nonhumanoid animals cannot connect to but which give the Na’vi a link to their dead ancestors who are ‘with Eywa’. When Jake attaches to this network and asks Eywa to assist in the battle with

the humans, she responds by sending the animals to fight alongside the Na'vi. During the battle, hunter and hunted, predator and prey, are united in their defence of the ecosystem against the human corporate power. In *Avatar* nature is thus organised as an active dynamic force that favours ecological balance and harmony and emphasises inter-relatedness, although this is imagined as existing between the indigenous peoples and trees and through a networked system that excludes animals.

The film's foregrounding of the interconnectedness of Pandoran life suggests that preindustrial human–nature relations are more attuned to the maintenance of ecological harmony than the resource-focused and technologically oriented emphasis of mainstream environmentalism. The difference between human notions of value conceptualised in economic and monetary terms, are opposed to the Na'vi concept of value, which depicts life as having worth. In this way, the wasteful and unnecessary killing of the viperwolves, precipitated by Sully's ignorance of the ways of the forest, is contrasted with the 'good kill' of a deer-like creature in the subsistence hunting mode in a later scene. Thus, Neytiri is not concerned with the suffering of the animal but instead with the wastefulness of the killing. Angrily she tells Jake, 'this is sad' and reasons, 'they did not need to die'. Yet this has to be set in context with the rather more instrumental value afforded to animals in the film and reflected in the deaths that are either necessary to Jake's progress towards his goal or, in the case of the final battle scenes, constructed as a visual spectacle. Trees, in contrast, have a different type of value and the most heinous human actions depicted in the film are the destruction of the Omaticaya's Hometree and the security forces' attack on the Tree of Souls, the site of extreme spiritual importance for the Na'vi and their most direct connection to Eywa.

Hometrees are described in Cameron's *Pandorapedia* as similar to redwoods of the Pacific Northwest on Earth.<sup>8</sup> On the symbolic importance of redwood trees, David Ingram writes that the Big Tree was 'a visible sign of the presence of God in nature, and of divine sanction for American national interests . . . The Big Trees thus became an early cause for nature preservationists wishing to preserve them for the access they granted to moral and spiritual enlightenment' (Ingram 2008: 15). Thus, *Avatar* draws on the discourse of rainforest vulnerability, which coalesces with the national and spiritual symbolism afforded to redwood trees to organise their difference from animals.

Marti Kheel has argued that the hegemonic conception of masculine identity has relied on sustaining a belief in the desirability of struggle or conquest and definitions of achievement that require transcending

the natural world, and that the first two occur through opposition to nature and women (Kheel 2008: 41). The hegemonic ideal, Kheel argues, underpins a particular holist philosophy that expresses moral concern for nature and promotes an ethic of protection, ‘proposing human interdependence with nature as well as love and respect for it’ (ibid.: 4): an ethic which maps onto the environmental agenda and moral logic of *Avatar*. However, Kheel argues that this conceptualisation of nature has embedded within it masculinist characteristics that are structured by concepts of rationality, universality and autonomy (ibid.: 3). Sustained by a view of nature as a primitive environment in need of protection, animals are used as symbols and psychological props. Kheel argues that ‘these attitudes are masculinist in that they subordinate empathy and care for the individual beings to a larger cognitive perspective or “whole”’ (ibid.).

*Avatar* provides a holist view of nature that promotes a problematic concept of interconnectedness, wherein the nature-space provides a backdrop for the contest of hegemonic masculinity to be played out and where animals function as obstacles to be defeated, dominated and controlled. In a narrative sense the deity Eywa functions as little more than a donor providing Jake with the extra firepower, in the form of the collective bodies of the Pandoran animals, so that he can succeed in his battle with the corporate security forces. Eywa later becomes the symbolic mother, taking over the role which Neytiri has begun, and rebirths Jake as a fully functioning hegemonic masculine ideal, with all the strength of the native Na’vi but with the rational white Western mind in control of the fantasy of the hyper-muscular primitive body. Gender and race intersect as othered difference, which sustains the mythic role of the white western male as defender of a pristine pure version of nature (the feminised nature-space) and as leader of indigenous people (the irrational native). The destruction of the nature-space by corporate security forces thus provides motivation for the contest which, in the end, cannot escape from the masculinist ideology and ends up pitting two versions of colonisation against one another. In doing so, *Avatar* does succeed in finding its ‘universal story’. It retells the countless stories that normalise the control, domination and killing of nonhuman animals.

## Notes

- 1 Apart from the carbon dioxide and hydrogen sulphide-rich atmosphere, which is made breathable for humans by the use of an ‘exopack’ rebreather



- an unobtrusive face mask which filters atmospheric toxins – Pandora’s initial hostility is realised in the forms of the various animals that attack the main protagonist, Jake Sully, in early scenes. The planet’s flora, on the other hand, is depicted as magnificent, dazzling, unspoiled and far from intimidating.
- 2 There are numerous individual postcolonial analyses of *Avatar* online in addition to study guides that use the film to teach postcolonial theory. For example, see Postcolonial Networks online at <http://postcolonialnetworks.com/>; <http://io9.com/5422666/when-will-white-people-stop-making-movies-like-avatar>; <http://engl243.wordpress.com/2010/01/28/avatar-and-postcolonial-theory/> and [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jared-gardner/emavata-rem-blueface-white\\_b\\_409522.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jared-gardner/emavata-rem-blueface-white_b_409522.html) (accessed 8 March 2013).
  - 3 See *Avatar* screenplay at [http://images2.wikia.nocookie.net/\\_cb20100826145261/jamescameronsavatar/images/f/f5/JamesCameronAVATAR.pdf](http://images2.wikia.nocookie.net/_cb20100826145261/jamescameronsavatar/images/f/f5/JamesCameronAVATAR.pdf) (accessed 8 March 2013).
  - 4 I would argue that the narrative privileges Jake’s fighting capability, battle strategy and physical force over Grace’s empathetic understanding of the Na’vi culture, history and customs.
  - 5 Of note is the Hollywood cycle of Vietnam war films, which tended to construct the jungle and indigenous peoples as treacherous, alien and enemy. This tendency is drawn on in *Avatar* and there are numerous similarities between Quaritch and the character of Lieutenant Colonel Bill Kilgore in *Apocalypse Now* (1979). Of note, for comparison, is the attack on Home Tree in *Avatar* and the Kilgore beach attack in *Apocalypse Now*.
  - 6 See for example: <http://challengeoppression.com/2010/02/16/domination-and-rape-in-avatar-this-is-respect-for-animals/> and <http://www.examiner.com/freethought-in-national/avatar-is-amazing-and-disturbing> (accessed 8 March 2013).
  - 7 The domination of animals is also implicitly, if not explicitly depending on your reading of the film, intertwined with sexual pleasure.
  - 8 See ‘Hometree’ entry in Cameron’s *Pandorapedia* online at <http://www.pandorapedia.com/navi/hometree/hometree> (accessed 19 April 2011).

## References

2012. 2009. [Film] Directed by Roland Emmerich. Columbia Pictures.
- Alligator*. 1980. [Film] Directed by L. Teague. USA: Alligator Inc.
- Apocalypse Now*. 1979. [Film] Directed by F.F. Coppola. USA: Zoetrope Studios.
- Avatar*. 2009. [Film]. Directed by J. Cameron. USA: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, Dune Entertainment, Ingenious Film Partners.
- Battle For Terr*. 2007. [Film] Directed by A. Tsirbas. USA: MeniThings LLC, Snoot Entertainment.
- Bederman, G. 1996. *Manliness and Civilisation: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States*. London: University of Chicago Press.
- Boucher, G. 2009. ‘James Cameron: Yes, “Avatar” is “Dances with Wolves” in space . . . sorta’. *Los Angeles Times*, 14 August. Retrieved 20 April 2011 from

- <http://herocomplex.latimes.com/2009/08/14/james-cameron-the-new-trek-rocks-but-transformers-is-gim'crackery/>
- Callicott, J.B. 2004. 'The Land Ethic', in H.J. Gensler, E.W. Spurgin and J.C. Swindal (eds), *Ethics: Contemporary Readings*. New York and London: Routledge, pp. 303–10.
- . 2008. 'The Philosophical Value of Wildlife', in S.J. Armstrong and R.G. Botzler (eds), *The Animal Ethics Reader*. 2nd edition. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 439–43.
- Cameron, J. 2010. *Pandorapedia*. Twentieth Century Fox. Retrieved 19 April 2011 from <http://www.pandorapedia.com/>
- Cannibal Holocaust*. 1980. [Film] Directed by R. Deodato. Italy: F.D. Cinematografica.
- Castells, M. 2003. 'The Greening of the Self: The Environmental Movement', in D. Pepper and F. Webster (eds), *Environmentalism: Critical Concepts*. London: Routledge, pp. 184–207.
- Conrad, J. [1899] 2007. *Heart of Darkness*. London: Penguin Classics.
- Cornea, C. 2007. *Science Fiction Cinema: Between Fantasy and Reality*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Day of the Animals*. 1977. [Film] Directed by W. Girdler. USA: FVI.
- The Day after Tomorrow*. 2004. [Film] Directed by Roland Emmerich. USA: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.
- The Day the Earth Stood Still*. 2008. [Film] Directed by S. Derrickson. USA: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.
- Dyer, R. 2002. 'The White Man's Muscles', in R. Adams and D. Savran (eds), *The Masculinity Studies Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 262–73.
- Empire of the Ants*. 1977. [Film] Directed by B.I. Gordon. USA: Cinema 77.
- Evan Almighty*. 2007. [Film] Directed by T. Shayyac. USA: Universal Pictures.
- First Blood*. 1982. [Film] Directed by T. Kotcheff. USA: Anabasis N. V.
- Frogs*. 1972. [Film] Directed by G. McCowan. USA: AIP.
- Full Metal Jacket*. 1987. [Film] Directed by S. Kubrick. UK/USA: Natant, Stanley Kubrick Productions, Warner Bros.
- Furry Vengeance*. 2010. [Film] Directed by R. Kumble. USA: Summit Entertainment.
- Huhndorf, S.M. 2001. *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Ice Age: The Meltdown*. 2006. [Film] Directed by C. Saldanha. USA: Blue Sky Studios, Twentieth Century Fox.
- Ingram, D. 2008. *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press.
- Kestner, J. 2010. *Masculinities in British Adventure Fiction, 1880–1915*. Surrey: Ashgate.
- Kheel, M. 2008. *Nature Ethics: An Ecofeminist Perspective*. Plymouth: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Mills, S. 2005. *Gender and Colonial Space*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Molloy, C. 2011. 'Being a Known Animal', in C. Blake, C. Molloy and S. Shakespeare (eds), *Beyond Human: From Animality to Transhumanism*. London: Continuum.

- Naess, A. 2003. 'The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects', in A. Light and H. Rolston (eds), *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Nelson, M. and J. B. Callicott. 2008. *The Wilderness Debate Rages On: Continuing the Great Wilderness Debate*. Georgia: Georgia University Press.
- Night of the Lepus*. 1972. [Film]. Directed by W. Claxton. USA: A.C. Lyles Productions.
- Noske, B. 2004. 'Two Movements and Human–Animal Continuity: Positions, Assumptions, Contradictions'. *Animal Liberation Philosophy and Policy Journal* 2.1: pp. 1–12.
- Platoon*. 1986. [Film] Directed by O. Stone. USA: Hemdale Film.
- Plumwood, V. 2003. 'Decolonizing Relationships with Nature', in W. Adams and M. Mulligan (eds), *Decolonizing Nature*. London: Earthscan.
- Prophecy*. 1979. [Film]. Directed by J. Frankenheimer. USA: Paramount Pictures.
- Predator*. 1987. [Film] Directed by J. McTiernan. USA: Amercent Films, American Entertainment Partners L. P.
- Raiders of the Lost Ark*. 1981. [Film] Directed by S. Spielberg. USA: Paramount Pictures, Lucasfilm.
- Singer, P. 2002. 'The Place of Nonhumans in Environmental Issues', in A. Light and H. Rolston (eds), *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 55–63.
- Slater, C. 2002. *Entangled Edens: Visions of the Amazon*. California and London: California University Press.
- Smith, N. 1984. *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space*. London and New York: Verso.
- Twine, R. 2010. *Animals as Biotechnology: Ethics, Sustainability and Biotechnology*. London: Routledge.
- Vaughn, J. 2011. *Environmental Politics: Domestic and Global Dimensions*. Boston, MA: Wadsworth.
- Vernon, A. 2008. *On Tarzan*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Wall-E*. 2008. [Film] Directed by A. Stanton. USA: Pixar.
- Yacowar, M. 2003. 'The Bug in the Rug: Notes on the Disaster Genre', in B.K. Grant (ed.), *Film Genre Reader III*. Texas: University of Texas Press, pp. 277–95.

## **BURIED LAND**

Filming the Bosnian Pyramids

*Steven Eastwood and Geoffrey Alan Rhodes*

In 2005, the small Bosnian town of Visoko underwent a huge transformation following the public proclamation that ancient pyramids lay buried beneath the surrounding hills. At the behest of amateur archaeologist Semir Osmanagich, and in spite of widespread scientific rejection of the claims, the local community formed a pyramid foundation and began digging. After several small excavations on the slopes of Visociča – the large and unusually triangular hill which has become the emblem of the project – Osmanagich published his book *The Bosnian Pyramid of the Sun*, hosting an international press event at which he claimed Visociča and several other surrounding hills concealed the largest and oldest manmade structures in the world (Woodward 2009). Changes on the ground and to the community of Visoko were fast and dramatic. Thousands of tourists flocked to the sites, partially regenerating the local economy. Murals, models and visualisations of the pyramids were created, drawing upon images of terraced ruins in South America, with the purposes of marketing Visoko as ‘Pyramid town’. Hotel Hollywood, the town’s only hotel, was renamed The Pyramid of the Sun Hotel. Although the geometric hills were physically unchanged to the naked eye, the significance of their shape took on a new aura of mystical history, national pride and international importance. In the minds of the local faithful the landscape of Visoko was transformed.

Over five weeks in 2008, Steven Eastwood and Geoffrey Alan Rhodes shot the feature film *Buried Land* (2010), in collaboration with the people of Visoko. The filmmakers sought to capture on film the transformation of this landscape within the consciousness of the community and to investigate the inherent play between representation and misrepresentation. The method adopted was to deliberately introduce artifice to the events in Visoko, so that scripted scenarios and fabricated landscapes would commingle with actual people, places and events. Reflecting on the process of making the film, the filmmakers will, in this chapter, explore the social and cultural construction of the Visoko landscape

and the ways in which this method of filmmaking approached and articulated that community and geography.

Visociča – a majestic, unusually pyramidal hill with façades aligned to the cardinal directions – has always been central to Visoko's identity and there is a history of ideologies being mapped onto it. In the middle ages it was the seat of the Bosnian kingship, and features prominently in ancient maps, antique photos, postcards, paintings and drawings. During the Bosnian war (1992 to 1995) the neighbouring hill – now called The Pyramid of the Moon – was the site of the Bosnian–Serbian frontline; mortar stands and minefields still dot its plateau. But the claims since 2005 that Visociča in fact hides a new icon of history have raised this hill to international importance, even if most of the international attention focuses on the spuriousness of the claims. ABC, BBC and CNN broadcast the story faithfully, along with national news throughout the Balkans. The Pyramid of the Sun Foundation has declared that the site is larger than the biggest Egyptian pyramids, more than ten thousand years old, and therefore, axiomatically, the cradle of human civilisation. For the first time since the Balkan war, the region has gained global attention. Tourist shops selling depictions of the valley as imagined have flourished; restaurants sell pyramid-shaped pizzas; the mayor has a sphinx miniature on his desk; cafés have pyramid-themed chairs, food and condiments; local traders sell trinkets and souvenirs; local legends (such as one where the hill is an aid to fertility) have taken on new import. Across Bosnia, sides have been chosen between believers and cynics.

The charismatic leader of the effort, Bosnian émigré Semir Osmanagich, has marshalled a group of amateur researchers, mystical-minded converts and young entrepreneurs, earning him the mantle of the 'Indiana Jones of Bosnia'.<sup>1</sup> His books mix first hand studies of Aztec and Egyptian pyramids with savvy uses of satellite photography, thermal imaging and radiocarbon dating. Theories of pre–Ice Age civilisations, Atlantis and supernatural techniques of construction (including the sonic levitation of rock) are also co-opted into his scheme. The Foundation's campaign involves a constant stream of fantastic statements and partial evidence released to help make this new version of history take root. Against allegations of fraudulence, Osmanagich defends himself as a New Age archaeologist, one who does not respect the colonial traditions of a western and therefore non-Bosnian, non-Muslim archaeological establishment, which to him is an orthodoxy unjustly retaining the final authority over what constitutes historical truth. He holds the archaeological establishment in contempt for its conservatism, saying the scientists are restricted by rationalism and



**Figure 11.1** The Bosnian pyramid

empiricism. Instead, Osmanagich is on the side of those there on the ground who want to dig.<sup>2</sup> To date, he has excavated local labyrinthine tunnels (many say these were dug in the middle ages for the purposes of smuggling) and sections of the pyramidal hills, exposing sandstone and conglomerate rock unusual in appearance but explained by critics as typical of the geology of the region.

Aside from a handful of digs, Osmanagich's study has been conducted predominantly in theories and visualisations. A plethora of pyramid images exist in the public domain, some enhanced, many entirely imagined and fabricated, proposing extraordinary vistas. Osmanagich has no way of controlling the viral bandwagon of Orgone-energy followers and UFO spotters uploading digitally rendered visions of a techno-utopia to conspiracy theory blogs and mysticism websites.<sup>3</sup> Some say the Pyramid of the Sun was once a giant gold reflector disc that dazzled the valley, others that the whole of Bosnia is one gigantic sacral geometry. The project is a recipe for hyperbolic speculation about that which lies underneath but cannot be verified or denied within standard taxonomies.

In his 1979 lecture 'Landscapes as Theatre', J.B. Jackson outlines how landscape can be regarded as socially constructed for the purposes of

staging human dramas. Jackson (1979: 4) first establishes that theatre is 'a staged production with a set of socially and artistically determined rules', then describes how 'humans control and design the landscape as if it were a theatrical stage', capping this with the observation that 'theatre imparts the human ability to see ourselves as occupying the centre of the stage'. The hills surrounding Visoko have certainly been host to human drama and conflict. Influenced and invaded from all sides during its checkered history of cultural conflict, Bosnia remains highly complex in its demarcations, as a political landscape, a religious and cultural landscape, and material, nonhuman landscape. Of course any geography can be contested, its territories politically drawn and redrawn, or manipulated to dubious ethnic ends, but, according to those backing the pyramid project, Bosnia in particular now deserves to be reconfigured in the minds of others. Supporters of the pyramid reject the right of remote academics in other cities and countries to tell them what their land is and means. The pyramid has taken on totemic value, as a symbol for Bosnia as a place of majesty, mystery and transcendence rather than an area of trauma. This sentiment is articulated by a tour guide in one of the opening scenes of *Buried Land* who offers that, '[p]eople will no longer think of Bosnia as a place of genocide or war'.

Depictions of the multiple pyramids in the Visoko valley have a benign and near hallucinogenic value, adopting an aesthetic easily identifiable as New Age, complete with spectral light emanations. Often the geometric lines of the hills are enhanced or perfected, or stripped back to reveal the sacred architecture imagined to lie beneath. Visociča becomes an Eden, or nirvana (many testify to its healing properties and its magnetic effect over electronic devices – the filmmakers were warned by several people not to use cameras on the hill). For local painters, Visociča has become an evocative backdrop, reminiscent of the exotic panoramas favoured by Victorian portrait painters and photographers (like Frederick Edwin Church of the Hudson River School, Anton Hasch, and Albert Bierstadt, or the photographs taken of Yosemite Valley by Carleton Watkins). Where landscape painting was once a key player in colonial power, conveying economic might and asserting the social values of the coloniser, now comes the Pyramid of the Sun Foundation's anti-colonial rhetoric, where the visage of the pyramid flattens all prior hegemonies. Bosnia can now be the originator of all cultures (although one might easily argue that Osmanagich is fabricating a past in order to define a new cultural identity with its own rules).<sup>4</sup> These new images of The Pyramid of the Sun are ubiquitous. They are central to the collective cultural imaginary of the town and of

numerous internet communities. 'Could we fill up the grand canyon with its representations?' asks W.J.T. Mitchell in 'Imperial Landscape', the opening chapter to *Landscape and Power* (Mitchell 1995: 14). Like images of Stonehenge, Victoria Falls and the Grand Canyon, Visociča has become a fetishised commodity, presented and re-presented in packaged tours, an emblem of the power struggles, ideations and social relations it conceals. It is as though some secret order wishes to imprint a belief on the town's inhabitants and its visitors, through every outlet possible. Visoko, once known for its leather goods, is now Pyramid Town, boomtown.

For Mitchell (*ibid.*), '[l]andscape is already artifice in the moment of its beholding, long before it becomes the subject of pictorial representation'. Depicted landscapes are always already ascribed, often symbolic, and never neutral in their intention or reception. They may, to our human temporality, seem concretely immutable but they are never fixed in our ideation. Arguments over the contents of Visoko's hills tend towards discourses of ethics, power and ontology (in that order). In a Foucauldian mode, parties subdivide around the question of who gets to say what might be true: who gets to decide where to dig, firstly agreeing what might be found, thereby deciding what can be found. The Foundation privileges the voice of the locals loyal to the cause over experts in other cities and countries. This methodology is of course strongly in contrast to traditional (and perhaps somewhat colonial) sciences, such as archaeology. We might think of it as 'belief archaeology', the mining of imaginations; a jigsaw that cannot and need never be completed. Ultimately, the people of Visoko are searching for a shape, a pyramid within a hill, and if they successfully excavate all that is not pyramid, they will have sculpted into the surrounding landscape the image from their minds. Visociča, hill or otherwise, is an index for the plethora of myths and ideologies ascribed to it and the imaginations of what lies beneath. This, then, is a postmodern land-battle, fought not for actual land but for the map of the land. It was in this contested landscape that the film *Buried Land* was made.

Normative documentary film operates from a dialectics of the objective real originated in the perceived capture of the natural in indexical photography. Although it is constantly noted that the photographic analogue is open to manipulations by the maker and never the unfettered real itself, documentary, in particular ethnographic documentary and the wildlife film, still seeks to maintain the illusion of capturing reality and uses numerous rhetorical devices to do so, most notably the repression of the camera and its operator. Certainly, there is little or no place for subjectivity – except, perhaps, in the





Figure 11.2 *Buried Land*

God-perspective of the narrator – and no license for performativity: the pre-filmic fact of an alteration should not be evident. However, the carefully constructed placement of the spear in *Nanook of the North* (Flaherty 1922), for example, has always been a sticking point in terms of documentary cinema’s claims to veracity.<sup>5</sup> BBC wildlife camera operators recount buying supermarket honey to goad and situate wild bears for their pre-scripted shots.<sup>6</sup> The varying practices of forty-eight documentary makers catalogued in the Centre for Social Media (CSM) study *Honest Truths: Documentary Filmmakers on Ethical Challenges in Their Work* show a variety of complex ethical practices relating to the representation of subjects, where filmmakers were willing to mislead people and manipulate events if this served a ‘higher truth’, one ultimately based on the judgment of the filmmaker (Aufderheide, Jaszi and Chandra 2009). The fact that standard documentary practices often involve coercion, staging, reenactment and biased selection, as evinced from the CSM study, makes for striking parallels between the Foundation’s pyramid project and the rhetorical devices adopted by factual filmmakers.

Rather than make any truth claims of its own, the film *Buried Land* focuses on how individuals, groups and films construct and maintain truths, just as they construct and maintain landscapes. The pyramid project would fail if disproved but survives if it is neither proved nor disproved. This Schrödinger's cat type of proposition became the rationale for producing a film that challenges the semantic and ethical lines between fact and fiction, landscape and meaning. *Buried Land* does not offer knowledge, solve the problem and deliver a pyramid or a hill. Were the film to conclude, hill or pyramid, it would overlook the essentially undecipherable nature of the subject. If it is central to the Foundation's existence that the pyramid not be uncovered (or *not-yet* uncovered), then on a formal level the film must not have the objective of telling or describing, but rather should mimic or duplicate the 'not-yet' central to the scenario. This reflexive, ambiguous area between actuality and imposed fictions reflects the cultural phenomena of Visociča (hill or pyramid?) and the town (mystically transformed or cynically cashing in?). Normative documentary encounters the limits of its own modes of representation when the environment in question comprises of images and concepts that cannot be objectively recorded but instead are mental projections. The heart of the Visoko story is a virtual image and not an actual one. What could a factual film describe in Visoko other than the surface of the hill? If there was a truth to uncover – for example, a conspiracy – then it seemed to be a truth with many sides. A hybrid form was needed to reflect and refract the manifold discourses.

*Buried Land*, the title itself is both tautological and oxymoronic, seeks to destabilise the relationship of trust between audience and documentary film. It does so in a transparent, self-reflexive way, with the intention of critiquing ethnographic film practices, and with the aim of reflecting the macro and micro-ontologies of the Visoko pyramids. *Buried Land* is a document of a group of filmmakers and the Bosnian actor they hired to coax a real community into telling an imagined story.<sup>7</sup> The production, like the formation of the Pyramid of the Sun Foundation, was a process of convincing others to participate and then facilitating in the minds of those participants a vision, in this case a vision of a film, that did not yet exist.<sup>8</sup> Incidents from the daily reality of the production determined much of the fiction within the story, so much so that boundaries inevitably blurred. For example, the diasporic experiences of film student and Bosnian returnee Dalibor Stare, who had accompanied the filmmakers as a translator during research and found his cultural identity challenged by his return, formed the basis of the central character.<sup>9</sup> A tour operator and a local screenwriter, both of whom were contacted during research, became key players in the

production, one as a performer, the other a co-writer. Even the idiosyncratic shape of Visociča (an imperfect triangle that plateaus halfway down one of its sides) helped form the dramatic arc of the film – in essence a rise and partial fall of a protagonist returning to a culture and encountering a landscape. This combination of fiction and reality, and filmic manipulations by the actors and directors, with candid engagements with the real players in the community drama brought about both participation and anxiety. Just as the Pyramid Foundation had been accused of spurious invention, cynical manipulation and media whoring in the advancement of their cause, so too were the filmmakers for producing a film that sat neither in the camp of fiction nor of documentary, but rather attempted to conflate the two. Most notably, a few weeks before the arrival of the film crew for *Buried Land*, the national Bosnian media accused the filmmakers of planning a project like *Borat*. ‘*Buried Land* comes to humiliate Bosnia again’, announced the headlines of the national weekly *Weekend*, and the article continued with suspicions that the filmmakers were planning to inflict a Borat-like ‘Kazakhstan’ on Bosnia.<sup>10</sup> This event came close to shutting down the production. Unlike *Borat*, however, the methodology adopted was inclusive rather than coercive. Thus, the subject of misrepresentation itself became one of the central themes of the film, and directly informed the trajectory of the central characters.

*Buried Land* tells a diasporic story about the difficulties of coming home, against the backdrop of a people sharing a new belief system and a reinvigorated sense of national identity. It uses these narrative devices as a means to articulate the inventiveness and the complexity of spirit of the town. The structure of the story also serves to foreground ethical issues with ethnographic film and the epistemological limitations of the documentary in general. The semi-improvised narrative follows Emir, a Bosnian emigré removed during the war (played by the film’s sole actor, Emir Kapetanović) who has returned to his homeland to assist a western film director (played by one of the actual filmmakers, Geoffrey Alan Rhodes) on a somewhat vague, high-concept film, which they claim will embody the spirit of the Visoko community. Caught between states of patriotism and cynicism, Emir sets out to discover the truth behind the pyramidal claims, harnessing the hopes and imagination of the town in the pursuit of the proposed film. On his route Emir passes through a number of environments, including archaeological dig sites, active minefields (eerily reminiscent of the Zone in Tarkovsky’s *Stalker*), hillside terraces, tunnels, plateaus and summits. As he does so, we are witness to a number of visions of the pyramids themselves, posited as imagined, firstly by Emir and then without the anchor of a character’s

psychology. Accused of making fun of the community, Emir's outlandish behaviour grows confused, until a grandiose shoot at the summit of the Moon Pyramid descends into chaos, and Emir is forced to confront his scepticism.

Every person in the film, aside from Kapetanović and Rhodes, appears as himself or herself, performing who they are in the space afforded to them by the film. *Buried Land* was shot chronologically and as a documentary, which left cast, non-actors and crew often unclear whether shooting was occurring or not. The attitude and delivery of the film extends the methodology of neorealism, Jean Rouch and (latterly) Iranian cinema through the use of free indirect discourse and by having an actor emerge from a documentary space and coexist in dramatic scenes with historical subjects.<sup>11</sup> The frame of the film and the agency of the (semi-)fictional central character(s) acted as a means to collect and reframe what was already taking place.<sup>12</sup> This was done with the full knowledge of those involved. In response to the news article critical of the filmmakers, Radio Visoko wanted to record an interview with Eastwood and Rhodes in order to address the rumours of misrepresentation (and the *Borat* comparison) surrounding the film. Instead, in line with evolving reflexive methods, the interview was held with the characters and forms one of several pivotal scenes in the film. The stage of the production thus became a temporary site that the various players opted to make use of in their own way. This is how filmed representations can generate self-image for a community, who reimagine their streets and houses as scenes and themselves as now players within them. For example, Goran, an amateur archaeologist and one of the key players in the Pyramid Foundation, treated appearing in the film as a means to share stories of his experiences during the war, and as a platform for presenting philosophical ideas and observations about diaspora. Similarly, Avdija Buhić, the tour guide whose real character had evolved into a fictional character now romantically involved with Emir, took the opportunity to challenge the filmmakers about their intentions for the film. Filmed as an impromptu interview with Eastwood, Avdija's misgivings were cut into a scene between herself and Emir, in which she reprimands the central character for his poor representations and the short-sightedness of media-makers in general. The decision to execute the scene in this idiosyncratic way was arrived at as a result of a discussion with all those involved. And so characters introduced at the outset as historical subjects – Avdija the tour agent, 'Zombi' the head digger in the tunnels, Goran the amateur archeologist – move towards the limit of direct cinema, and then in turn towards the limit of docudrama ('based on a true story') until they are players in an

entirely artificial rendering. This method is transparent – no person is tricked – but, in the end, no subject is ever totally complicit; the image each of these subjects had of their portrayal was based on vague outlines and, in this improvisational drama, not even the filmmakers knew precisely how the final film would be configured.

The notion of how truth and value are projected onto an image permeates *Buried Land*. When we first hear the filmmaker Adam (Rhodes) and his guide Emir (Kapetanović) speak, it is to announce the shot, directing the historical subject (Haris, a tour guide) to act naturally and behave as he would when giving an ‘actual’ tour. During the ‘casting’ of the miners who clear the tunnels beneath Visociča, a series of extreme facial close-up fills the screen, framed by soft-focused earth and fauna (much like photographs one might see in National Geographic). Each subject is directed by an offscreen voice (Emir’s) to, ‘Look up, down, to the camera’, and to answer questions about what they believe they have uncovered in the tunnels. Several times the viewer is left in the discomfort of watching one of the miners wait to be directed, his gaze shifting awkwardly, looking into the lens. Returned looks of this kind are a recurring principal of ethnographic cinema, where the viewer is confronted by the face of the Other. The face is emblematic of the desire to know, gain knowledge of and have mastery over the Other. And yet, when magnified to cinematic proportions, the face as site of affect simply serves to articulate the inscrutability of a person. We cannot record the interiority of their thought, their cynicism or belief, their fluid subjectivity. What we can see are the external signs of discomfort. As Nichols (1991) writes, within ethnography there is the demand for diegetic coherence in the representation of the Other. There is an expectation of appropriateness of method and statement. We expect a landscape to be harmonious, self-contained, but in reality the vista is not what we desire. Following screenings of *Buried Land*, audience members (especially western ones) often rushed to the critique that the film should have told and shown more of the town and the town’s people, of the pyramid and the pyramid project, of the truth behind the story. Instead, the film adopts an aesthetic of the inscrutable and of the irretrievable. In *Buried Land* repeated looking at and digging into and under the landscape fail to reveal an undeniable artefact or vista, for instance a golden tomb or hidden chamber, as imagined by the miners, instead presenting more and more strangely shaped rocks and landscapes with various attached claims. Dramatic scenes are book-ended by returning to the view of Visociča, looming above Visoko, unchanged and inscrutable: sometimes redolent of the supernatural, like the mountains in Peter Weir’s *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, Steven Spielberg’s *Close Encounters*

of the *Third Kind* or Roberto Rossellini's *Stromboli*; at other times merely tectonic, a vista for extrapolating cultural constructions and political struggles, like the landscapes in Patrick Keiller's *Robinson in Space* or the 'lakescapes' of James Benning.<sup>13</sup> If anything, it is not the photographic process that captures the slippery changing identity of this landscape, but the effect of montage over duration. Like the Kuleshov effect, each time we return to the image of the Visociča, its meaning is changed by what we have seen and heard in preceding scenes and sequences, so that in one instance it must be pyramid, only to later become merely hill.

Fabricated landscapes are inserted into this indexical geography, mimicking the efforts of the Foundation and its followers. Using South American extant pyramids as models, the filmmakers hired animators to insert composited pyramids into otherwise documentary scenes. Instead of the cutaway to the noted 'artists rendition', as is used frequently in television journalism, these virtual images are imposed within the frame without demarcated borders, so that the fabricated and the indexical exist together within the frame. These superimposed, and later animated, sequences progress from that which is seen by the psychology of a character to the 'seen' of the film itself. The first appearance of such magical realism, when Emir 'sees' pyramids suspended in the valley over the filmmaker's shoulders, creates a tear in the observational documentary frame: 'If I am seeing pyramids then this cannot be a documentary'. During the extended scene on the Pyramid of the Moon – the culmination of the efforts to gather the town to make a film – when Emir attempts to marshal the community in a poor symbolic representation of their spirit and belief, pyramids appear as a vision *behind* the people of the town, once again as though seen by Emir the ringmaster. These are images imposed on the real community who have been marshalled and manipulated by the actor within the documentary to make the film within the film. But the reverse shot of Emir's face has been eradicated. Without Emir to see, it can only be the audience perceiving the phantasmagorical pyramids, shapes that are not diegetically conjured but instead produced by the film and only for the space of the film. The ultimate objects of desire, the truth of the pyramids realised, are given only to the film audience, appearing behind the community who never turn to see them. They seem to represent the ambitions of the film and its desire to capture the self-image of the community, and at the same time this sequence foregrounds the filmic trick and our own aspirations.

*Buried Land* not only draws attention to the epistemological problems of the 'true' documentary image, but also repeatedly poses the problem

of point of view (POV) in the documentary and of a factual film looking: precisely who is looking? What and where is the film 'Buried Land' that Emir refers to during the radio interview and to the mayor? Where is the film crew, wielding this unqualified camera? During the casting of the miners, Emir asks subjects to look straight ahead, into the lens, or to repeat actions, for a recording that is not diegetically taking place. In the plan-sequence at the Pyramid of the Moon dig site, Emir announces that the shoot will be conducted in a single continuous take. There has never been any mention or image of a film crew to help him realise his conceit, but nevertheless, there is a camera – the meta-camera – and it is to this camera the cast turns their gaze in increasing self-assurance. There is undeniably a force behind the camera, but it is not named or located. This impossible camera stands in for the real, offering a complex cinematic event that heralds the erasure of the internal monologue as the structural whole of the film in favour of a free indirect discourse, where, in other words, there is no longer a unity of discourse. The circus master becomes the clown, and the people direct their gaze to the camera, first as an aspect of Emir's delusional psychology, but secondly as the reestablishment of the gaze for the audience's benefit, as if to say, 'I am looking at you looking'. In this way *Buried Land* makes the viewer a voyeur via the first-person shot, then produces discomfort in this point of view during the casting of the miners and in the scene atop the Pyramid of the Moon, when the gaze is forcefully returned. The internal monologue of the film is replaced by the otherness of free indirect discourse. The result makes it difficult to discern non-actor from actor, hill from pyramid – so much so that finally, in the film's closing scene, Avdija Buhic, the historical subject, the tour agent who plays herself (albeit in a fabricated romance with a fictional character) casts Emir, now portrayed (as the miners and townsfolk had been), directing him to look up, look down, look at her, her lines delivered as though quoting.

This use of reflexivity and unstable point of view is a deliberate counter to the trapdoors of ethnographic observational documentary. It is a form of ethnographic surrealism, whereby the film is able to tell the story of a community and a people not its own, through the lens of the story of outsiders misrepresenting a community. Here, a form of documentary looking gives way to a fictional looking, which in turn gives way to a document of looking at looking. A community excavating an imagined pyramid is not dissimilar to a group of people making a film. A film crew is also a group that comes together because of the hysterical notion that they share a vision and can realise it. In their mind's eye they imagine a vision before the camera. In the editing room all the

filmmakers need do is cut away all that is not the image imagined. In *Buried Land*, fiction is to the documentary as imagined landscapes are to the real Visoko landscapes. The film and the Foundation have in common the scrutiny of a landmass that they cannot penetrate. To place a camera down on the ground and begin to describe observationally what can be indexically seen would be to push away the inscrutable. 'Landscape is not a genre of art but a medium. Landscape is a medium of exchange between the human and the natural, the self and the other', states Mitchell (1995: 14) in a series of emphatic remarks. 'Landscape is both a represented and presented space, both a signifier and a signified, both a frame and what a frame contains, both a real place and its simulacrum, both a package and the commodity inside the package'. So too is filmmaking. *Buried Land* became a temporary medium for conducting and transacting difference, for creating new formal relationships between figure and ground, between the actual and the invented.

## Notes

- 1 Though it is a mantel that Osmanagich says he dislikes, it has stuck. The comparison to Indiana Jones – inspired by Osmanagich's always present leather hat – and the detail of the Hotel Hollywood's sudden name change, implying a quick and spurious adoption of the pyramid claims within Visoko, were part of the first BBC and ABC news stories and have been mentioned in most stories since.
- 2 In the introduction to his book *Bosnian Valley of the Pyramids* (2006: 9), Osmanagich asks: 'If the opponents of the Pyramid are truly convinced that it does not exist, why do they try to prevent further digging? What are they afraid of?'
- 3 <http://www.bosnianpyramid.com/> is the main Foundation website, host to an ongoing moderated forum of some sceptics and mostly believers.
- 4 On the role of invention in such matters as tradition and collective historical experience, see Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). Social and political authorities invent rituals and memories of the past as a way of creating a new sense of identity for ruler and ruled, and the 'invention of tradition' as an instrument of rule.
- 5 On staging and 'fictionalisation' in *Nanook* see for example Rothman (1998).
- 6 See for example Mendick and Malnick (2011), and Palmer (2010).
- 7 The same technique is famously used by Kiarostami in *Close Up* (1990). The film exists as a document of the filmmaker coaxing a conman to replay his lie, thereby creating a film that is true in its fiction.
- 8 In fact, it was frequently a process of misrepresentation of the film-yet-to-be. To garner the support of the mayor's office, the filmmakers proposed a film that would be a large-scale land-art project involving the whole community passing a camera to the top of Visociča. To mollify the Foundation,



Eastwood and Rhodes documented the Foundation's 2008 conference and the Egyptian archaeologists brought in to announce their support of the excavations. None of these things were included in the final film.

- 9 'National identity always involves narratives. Ours has become an era of a search for roots, of people trying to discover in the collective memory of their religion, race, community and family, a past that is entirely their own' (Said 2000: 177).
- 10 During Eastwood and Rhodes' time in Bosnia, the film *Borat* was still a point of comparison and fear. Many Bosnians were sensitive to the portrayal of Kazakhstan in *Borat* – they empathised with a small country being taken advantage of and represented to the world by outside media for outside audiences. See B. Svřaka (2008): the reporter had gathered information from the film's development-stage website, which bannered a film 'combining fact and fiction', and 'a scripted actor with the real people and events'. In addition, there was a development trailer, compiled from footage from the initial research trip in 2007. The perception of this trailer suffered from a similar cultural divide as the scandal surrounding Michelangelo Antonioni's 1972 documentary, *Chung Kuo – Cina*. The trailer included young Romany people who lived on the outskirts of Visoko and made a living as guides for the tourists who came for the pyramids. Though these facts in Bosnia were not repressed by a central government-led cultural revolution (as in 1970s China), nevertheless the trailer reflected aspects of the community that were repressed culturally, in a country struggling to reinvent its national image fifteen years after civil war. And, as is the nature of film and documentary, what appears within the frame and within the minutes of the film, becomes the representation of the world itself. By giving screen time to Osmanagich, his cronies and the Romany youths, the trailer had produced a meaning for certain Bosnian viewers (notably the reporter, and Osmanagich's team) that the Pyramid project was a Romany project. This convinced the reporter that the filmmakers had come to Bosnia to make fun of the country, just as Sacha Baron Cohen had in Kazakhstan.
- 11 Three predetermined camera modes were used: direct cinema (a hand held or fly-on-the-wall approach); self-conscious documentary (free indirect discourse); and wholly cinematic (blocked, composed, lyrical shots).
- 12 This practice of using a performed semi-fictional character as a means to encounter a people and a place is a territory previously navigated by Roberto Rossellini, Werner Herzog, Agnès Varda and Abbas Kiarostami, among others. In Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry* (1997) an actor plays a man driving around the outskirts of Tehran looking for a stranger to assist him in suicide. Each of the people he picks up is a non-actor and when they are in front of the lens it is Kiarostami standing-in off camera, delivering the lines of the suicidal man. In *Life, And Nothing More* (1991), Kiarostami casts an actor to play a film director (based on Kiarostami) returning after an earthquake to the rural village where he had previously filmed *Where is the Friend's House?* (1987). This, the second film in the so-called Koker trilogy – the final being *Through The Olive Trees* (1994) – is shot as though a documentary. Each of the films in the series appears to shift in turn to a

higher register of reality, thereby relegating the previous film to fiction. The filmmaker (Kiarostami) is fictionalised once in the second and twice in the third. In these examples it is the director as agent who bridges a fictional environment and a real situation. In each film the relationship between people (or a people) and place is acute.

- 13 In a similar vein, artist-filmmaker Marine Hugonnier tried but failed to represent a panorama of what some say is the most idyllic landscape on Earth, the Panjsher Valley north-east of Kabul, which has been circumnavigated by warring forces on all sides (*Ariana*, 2003). The film installation emerges as the ‘making of’ a film that was never made, and an essay on our desire to see, show and explicate.

## References

- 13 *Lakes*. 2004. [Film]. Directed by J. Benning. U.S.A./Germany: Benning, Westdeutscher Rundfunk.
- Andrews, M. 1999. *Landscape and Western Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Aufderheide, P., P. Jaszi and M. Chandra. 2009. Executive Summary, *Honest Truths: Documentary Filmmakers on Ethical Challenges in Their Work*. Center for Social Media Study. Retrieved 17 May 2012 from <http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/ethics>.
- Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*. 2006. [Film]. Directed by L. Charles. U.S.A.: Twentieth Century Fox.
- Buried Land*. 2010. [Film]. Directed by S. Eastwood and G.A. Rhodes. U.K./U.S.A.: Paradogs Films/GARhodes.
- Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. 1980. [Film]. Directed by S. Spielberg. U.S.A.: Warner/Columbia.
- Cosgrove, D.E. 1984. *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Crouch, D., R. Jackson and F. Thompson (eds). 2005. *The Media and the Tourist Imagination: Converging Cultures*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Hobsbawm, E. and T. Ranger (eds). 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jackson, J.B. 1979. ‘Landscape as Theatre’. *Landscape*, 23.1: pp. 3–7.
- Lowenthal, D. 1961. ‘Geography, Experience and Imagination: Towards a Geographical Epistemology’. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 51.3 (September 1961): pp. 241–60.
- Mendick, R. and E. Malnick. 2011. ‘BBC Accused of Routine “Fakery” in Wildlife Documentaries’. *Telegraph*, 18 December. Retrieved 1 November 2012 from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/bbc/8963053/BBC-accused-of-routine-fakery-in-wildlife-documentaries.html>.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. (ed.). 1995. *Landscape and Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Nanook of the North*. 1922. [Film]. Directed by R. Flaherty. U.S.A./France: Les Frères Revillon, Pathé Exchange.

- Nichols, B. 1991. *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Osmanagich, S. 2006. *Bosnian Valley of the Pyramids*. Naunagic d.o.o: Mauana-Fe.
- Palmer, C. 2010. *Shooting in the Wild: An Insider's Account of Making Movies in the Animal Kingdom*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Picnic at Hanging Rock*. 1975. [Film]. Directed by P. Weir. Australia: Picnic Productions, Australian Film Commission.
- Robinson in Space*. 1997. [Film]. Directed by P. Keiller. U.K.: BFI.
- Rothman, W. 1998. 'The Filmmaker as Hunter: Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*', in B.K. Grant and J. Sloniowski (eds), *Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, pp. 23–39.
- Said, E. 2000. 'Invention, Memory, and Place'. *Critical Inquiry*, 26.2 (Winter 2000): pp. 175–92.
- Stalker*. 1979. [Film]. Directed by A. Tarkovsky. U.S.S.R.: Mosfilm.
- Stromboli*. 1950. [Film]. Directed by R. Rossellini. U.S.A./Italy: RKO, Berit Films.
- Svraka, B. 2008. 'Buried Land Film to Humiliate Bosnia', 'Film Zatrpana zemlja trebao poniziti BiH?!' *Weekend Magazine* (August).
- Woodward, C. 2009. 'The Mystery of Bosnia's Ancient Pyramids'. *Smithsonian Magazine*, December.



PART IV 

**ECO-PRAXIS**

**FILM AS ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICE**



## STRANGE SEEING

Re-viewing Nature in the Films of Rose Lowder

*Guinevere Narraway*

In *On Photography*, Susan Sontag (1978: 68–69) complains that the ‘true modernism is not austerity but a garbage-strewn plenitude’. This plenitude is the domain, according to Sontag, of photography and film.<sup>1</sup> Sontag concludes that reality – or more precisely, our experience of it – is being depleted by an overconsumption (through an overproduction) of images of that reality. She (ibid.: 180) thus calls for ‘an ecology not only of real things but of images as well’.

The photographic representation of nature features prominently in Sontag’s argument. She (ibid.: 97) asserts, ‘the habit of photographic seeing – of looking at reality as an array of potential photographs – creates estrangement from, rather than union with, nature’. Elaborating on this argument, Sontag goes on to claim that, ‘[k]nowing a great deal about what is in the world (. . . the beauties of nature) through photographic images, people are frequently disappointed, surprised, unmoved when they see the real thing. For photographic images tend to subtract feeling from something we experience at first hand and the feelings they do arouse are, largely, not those we have in real life’ (ibid.: 168).

Sontag is not ultimately making a case for a production and consumption of texts that will change our material relationship to our environment, for a genuinely ecological politics of cultural production and consumption. Indeed her argument reveals little faith – or interest – in the idea that the production of visual texts by conscious agents is a socially and culturally constitutive act and can therefore contribute to any form of transformative politics. Indeed Sontag focuses on the ethical problem of picking up a camera rather than taking a political course of action without reflecting on the fact that picking up a camera may be a form of activism.

In some respects, Sontag’s argument has overlaps with Walter Benjamin’s discussion of the destruction of ‘aura’ through technology in ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’. Benjamin

(1999: 216) defines aura as ‘the unique phenomenon of a distance’. Using examples from the natural world to illustrate this term, he (ibid.) writes, ‘while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch’. Unlike the observation of nature with what Benjamin (ibid.: 217) refers to as the ‘unarmed eye’ however, the reproduction of a natural object in film and photography pries it ‘from its shell’, dislocating it from context and discarding the scale of that object.

Ultimately Benjamin finds two potential outcomes in photographic and filmic reproduction. When the means of production is appropriated by capitalism and the state, he argues in ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, ‘The Author as Producer’ and ‘A Small History of Photography’, photography will only produce ‘reified dream images’ of the democratic promise held by technology (Buck-Morss 1991: 143). Aesthetics are valorised over content and context.<sup>2</sup> Alternatively, photographic and filmic production has revolutionary potential. Although Benjamin’s focus is rarely nature, he does provide an example of what we could call revolutionary seeing in ‘A Small History of Photography’. Reflecting on the revelation of architectural and artistic forms in Karl Blossfeldt’s magnifications of plants in his 1931 volume of botanic photography *Urformen der Kunst/Prototypes of Art*, Benjamin argues that rather than dominating nature, photography can ‘take off the “veil” that our “laziness” has thrown over the old nature’ (ibid.: 158). Blossfeldt’s magnifications change our perspective on the plants by disclosing, in Benjamin’s words (1978: 20), ‘an unsuspected wealth of forms and analogies which we never imagined existed in the plant world’. Benjamin (ibid.: 20–21) argues that these photographs provoke a new way of thinking about and viewing nature.

In this chapter I aim to explore how image production and consumption has the potential to change our engagement with the nonhuman. Here I am not interested in the sort of rhetorical work that we see for instance in films like Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth*, where the environmentalist message is conveyed largely in expository form.<sup>3</sup> I intend instead to investigate how the relationship between form and content in the filmic reproduction of nature, following on from Benjamin’s observations on the photographic reproduction of nature, can be utilised in support of an environmentalist politics.<sup>4</sup>

The work of French experimental filmmaker Rose Lowder is particularly appropriate for my project.<sup>5</sup> Lowder has been making films that centre on the nonhuman since the 1970s. Film scholar Scott MacDonald (2001: 82) has described Lowder’s work as an ecological cinema and this



is evidenced on many levels of her filmmaking practice. Lowder's work is informed by an ecological ethic involving a production practice that has a low impact on the environment, and her meticulously crafted, almost structuralist films, involve a minimum of waste. Formally, these films would seem to have the potential to alienate the audience from her subject. Yet Lowder's method is consciously and politically embodied and her work involves a sensitivity to nature that draws the viewer in to unconventional ways of seeing and experiencing the nonhuman world.

Lowder's highly formal and structured filmmaking practice reflects a concern with both literal waste, in terms of the squandering of film stock, and metaphorical waste, in terms of the effusion of images. In interviews and at screenings, the filmmaker has protested about the extent of waste produced by commercial filmmaking. As a consequence, she maintains a one-to-one shooting ratio – unlike in most commercial filmmaking where the footage shot is invariably far greater than the material in the final cut.<sup>6</sup> Indeed in thirty-five years Lowder has only shot twenty-three hours of footage.<sup>7</sup> She composes all of her films in-camera and often exposes only a single frame at a time. One example of this practice is her 1979 film *Rue des Teinturiers*, of which the Canyon Cinema catalogue contains the following description:

[T]he focus of each image, recorded frame by frame in the camera, is adjusted so that graphic features of items in the street that gives its name to the film are extracted and inscribed onto the film strip in a way which allows their characteristics to be seen, when projected in succession on the screen, as parts of a spatiotemporal situation stretching from a position on a balcony over a canalized river to the road. The film is composed of twelve reels, each filmed on a different day throughout a six-month period, joined together in a slightly nonchronological order so as to avoid accentuating anecdotal [*sic*] aspects of the scene. (Canyon Cinema 2011c)

Lowder's extremely formal description here indicates the challenge of viewing this thirty-one-minute silent film. Yet her practice of changing the focus on her one subject – the balcony garden and street beyond – with the exposure of each frame has the effect of embedding the viewer in the scene, inviting one to contemplate it in all its intricate detail.

Lowder draws her audience into the image in at least two ways. On the one hand the viewer is embedded in the scene through Lowder's frame-by-frame refocusing which creates an expanded field of perception beyond the experience of stereoscopic vision. As Lowder explains, by continually changing focus points the viewer can:

see around the corners of things just a bit. In certain scenes in *Rue des Teinturiers*, you'll notice that at some points you can actually see through the flowering laurel tree trunk in the middle of the balcony. You are seeing *behind* it as well as *it*, because one of the focus points is giving you what is behind the laurel's trunk and another focus point is the trunk itself, and still another is in front of the trunk. (MacDonald 1997)

The viewer is also embedded in the text in a much more abstract sense. With only a limited amount of the image ever in focus and only a limited amount of material in frame, we are drawn to the more non-representational elements of the work such as light, texture, movement, shape and the diversity of colours created by light exposure in a variety of weather conditions, times of day and seasons. What starts as a jarring and alienating viewing experience transforms over time into a meditation on the nonfigurative.<sup>8</sup>

Although Lowder's description of her approach makes her films sound sterile, she clearly remains deeply responsive to the environment around her. This sensitivity to place is essential to her work. She states: 'I go to the place, then I look at it, walk around it, sometimes have visited it many times, at different dates or even every hour of the day, looking at the position of the sun, the light, etc.'<sup>9</sup> Lowder (1997: 57) emphasises that she films in places she likes to be, in the 'outdoors, with my feet on natural ground, preferably in the shade on a sunny day' and that she seeks 'a more human physical home' (Canyon Cinema 2011b). She (1997: 57) contrasts these environments with the 'polluted air, mass competition and the economical goals and interests of our society', implicitly the qualities of the urban landscape which, she finds, becomes 'more and more uninhabitable' (Canyon Cinema 2011b).

The thirty films of Lowder's *Bouquets* series (1994 to 2009) are examples of what the filmmaker characterises as 'a more human physical home', and they indicate the significance and function of place and the environment in her work. Her (2011: 26) description of *Bouquets 21 to 30* is applicable to all thirty *Bouquets*: 'one minute films composed in the camera by weaving the characteristics of different environments with the activities there at the time'. Lowder's account here of the *Bouquets* suggests that she is not concerned with expunging the mark of culture from the image. On the contrary, culture and nature interpenetrate in her films. For example, and as the quote above indicates, each text in the *Bouquets* series is an assemblage of the nonhuman and the human in the locations Lowder shoots.<sup>10</sup>

The 'arrangements' of the *Bouquets* series often suggest the complementarity of culture and nature in place. At times however, they

problematise the relationship between human and nonhuman. *Bouquet 9* for example includes a car tyre and the rubbish left behind by day trippers in a field of buttercups. Environmentalist concerns find perhaps their most eloquent expression in Lowder's work in her 1992 film *Quiproquo*. The film sets up a dialectic of tableaux of the social-industrial world – traffic, power plants, factories, rubbish and trains – and the natural world – flowers, blossom trees, a river, the sea, birds and the sky. Humans themselves only appear twice in the film. At one point we see someone removing rubbish, albeit the rubbish that humanity itself generates. The film is also book-ended by a man wading in the sea.<sup>11</sup> The social-industrial and natural worlds are sometimes shown separately with no obvious commentary on the relationship between the two. At other times, however, they appear in a simultaneity or juxtaposition that invites the viewer to reflect on the impact of human culture on nonhuman nature. These images largely intimate that the human relationship to the nonhuman is at best indifferent and at worst malevolent. Towards the end of the film, for instance, shots of flying birds are interposed with a shot of an industrial chimney belching fire. Lowder does not necessarily imply that the two exist in the same spatiotemporal location, but this is irrelevant anyway as the counterpoint of images strongly suggests the damage caused by pollution to habitat.

Yet *Quiproquo* does appear to stop short of a full condemnation of humanity's relationship to the nonhuman. Humans are after all shown attempting to deal with their waste and there are moments of a strangely peaceful coexistence of the human and the nonhuman. In fact, the penultimate sequence of the film has an upbeat and bucolic quality as the camera tilts down from birds, sunlight and, strikingly, powerlines to the landscape below, enmeshing the industrial and the pastoral.<sup>12</sup>

Despite its environmentalist concerns, Lowder's work evades both schematic formulations of ecocinema as well as the conventions of other nature genres. Her approach does not correspond to the ways in which we have come to expect to see nature on film. On the level of content alone, she challenges our expectations of nature photography and film by depicting the beautiful and the picturesque and yet not excising the unsightly or unforeseen technical, natural and social events that occur during filming. So, returning again to the *Bouquets*, Lowder incorporates elements that we do not necessarily anticipate viewing in the series' pastoral settings. In *Bouquet 4*, for example, daisies appear delicately in front of an old wooden fence covered in peeling paint. Another example can be found in Lowder's film *Impromptu* from 1989. Here the filmmaker is observed while filming by a group of people who arrive unexpectedly in a van.

It is at a formal level however, in the fact that we are consistently made aware that the nonhuman is being mediated through human technology, that our expectations of the representation of nature on film are most conspicuously disrupted. In *Quiproquo*, the form of each nature scene – and indeed of the social-industrial tableaux – varies, and Lowder uses approaches ranging from long takes to flash editing.<sup>13</sup> In her précis of *Quiproquo*, Lowder indicates the integration in the film of her critique of our instrumentalising attitude to nature with an expanded approach to visualising the environment:

*Quiproquo* is a dialogue on the balance to be found between nature and social-industrial technology. As the film refers to the economy of the means involved in relation to what is expressed, it is both a reflection on the potentialities of the medium and an enquiry concerning the implications of the reality portrayed. It is a question of limits and possibilities, the beauty and tragedy of the world, with a critique of contemporary society's dominant choices constantly in the background. (Canyon Cinema 2011a)

Lowder's work can be understood as involving a dialogic relationship between the artist and the material world. She finds an analogy for the way in which production and care are inextricably intertwined in her filmmaking in the relationship of the organic farmer to the land and his work (MacDonald 1997). Nature is neither associated with the sphere of abject necessity nor is it infinitely exploitable. For the artist neither the human nature nor the nonhuman nature she films is merely inert raw material to be consumed. As I have already argued, Lowder's low-impact production practices limit such consumption in a literal sense. But even on a symbolic level, Lowder avoids converting her subject matter into a form with mere exchange or use value in the lens of her camera, and here nature plays a role by resisting full determination during the process of technological reproduction. As Lowder observes of her approach, 'the photographic procedure . . . allows one to handle the content and the form of the material while the process inscribes automatically some of the traces and characteristics of the reality being recorded' (Canyon Cinema 2011b). While the artist uses filmmaking technology to control the structure of the text, the apparatus itself becomes a sort of passive receptor of 'traces' of the world. Lowder's description of the role of the camera here is reminiscent of André Bazin's argument in 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image'. According to Bazin (2005: 13), in taking the photograph the photographer becomes absent, that in photography, 'between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent'. Bazin (ibid.: 15) goes on to argue that:

Only the impassive lens, stripping its objects of all those ways of seeing it, those piled-up preconceptions, that spiritual dust and grime with which my eyes have covered it, is able to present it in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently to my love. By the power of photography, the natural image of a world that we neither know nor can see, nature at last does more than imitate art: she imitates the artist.

The world thus reveals itself in the photograph to a large degree independently of the intentions of the photographer.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast to Bazin's argued absent photographer however, Lowder's films contain an excess of the human in their form and structure. We might consider her work on *Les Tournesols* (1982) as an example:

The film presents a field of sunflowers. The focus is adjusted frame by frame in succession according to a series of patterns on particular plants situated in different parts of the field. The diverse configurations placed on separate frames of the film strip appear, when projected successively, simultaneously on the screen. Thus, filmed one after another at different focal lengths, the sunflowers combine during projection to form one spatiotemporal image. (Canyon Cinema 2011d)

Rather than receding into the background, the apparatus is foregrounded to an extent that the viewer is always conscious of it and therefore constantly aware that they are viewing artifice. Even so, the process of filming and the form of the completed work is a response to the play of the elements on the field of sunflowers. The frame-by-frame refocusing highlights changes in the natural environment and in this way the dynamism of the field of sunflowers is emphasised in the finished product.

The dismantling of received ways of viewing the world, and in particular nonhuman nature, is achieved in Lowder's work not by a purported lack of artifice or by the absence of an ideologically driven subject behind the camera, by an 'impassive lens'. On the contrary, Lowder draws the viewer's attention to the device – to both the film-making apparatus and the filmmaking process – in a disruption of conventional representations of the nonhuman. And it is thereby that we might have a new encounter with nature.

Kate Rigby's work on Heidegger is pertinent here. Rigby (2004: 432) notes that in Heidegger's essay '... poetically man dwells ...', from 1951:

it becomes apparent that some form of exile or at least defamiliarization is intrinsic to dwelling. We must first encounter the absence or obscurity of a place before we can begin to attune ourselves to it in dwelling. The poet admits us into dwelling precisely to the extent that she allows even the most familiar things to appear in all their strangeness, as if

encountered for the first time. Only thus might things cease to be mere equipment.

In Lowder's own engagement with the natural world, she uses her tools to make nature strange to us. The impact of her stylistics on the spectator is arguably that one sees the nonhuman and place with fresh eyes, and such a 'defamiliarization' or 'exile' from our conventional encounters with nature hopefully provides, as Rigby's argues above, an opportunity for one to enter into a revised relationship with the natural environment where it ceases to be of mere instrumental value. Moreover, in drawing the viewer's attention to the filmmaking apparatus, Lowder's films declare themselves, 'carefully crafted works of poetic *techne* rather than spontaneous self-disclosures of *phusis*' (ibid.: 437). It is precisely in drawing attention to themselves as highly constructed representations of nature that Lowder's films disclose that they are not nature itself, and by acknowledging that it cannot speak as nature, Lowder's art does its ecological work:

How then does the work of art 'save' the earth by disclosing it as unsayable? It does so, I would suggest, precisely to the extent that it draws attention to its own status as text and hence as a mode of enframing. In this sense, the literary text saves the earth by disclosing the nonequation of word and thing, poem and place. It may do so in a variety of ways . . . Only to the extent that the work of art is self-canceling, acknowledging in some way its inevitable failure to adequately mediate the voice of nature, can it point us to that which lies beyond its own enframing. (Ibid.)

To some degree, Lowder's concerns reflect that which arguably unites the historically and generically diverse practices grouped under the variously termed *avant-garde*, experimental, independent and underground film: their self-conscious position as a critical alternative, or refutation even, of the commercialism of most feature filmmaking. However if, in Heideggerian terms, we understand commercial filmmaking to literally 'enframe' the world, transforming it through technology into standing reserve, 'mere raw material to be technologically manipulated, reconstructed, and commodified' (ibid.: 431), Lowder's work goes one step beyond the innate politics of much independent and experimental filmmaking. In her work, she circumnavigates the potential instrumental rationality of her camera by using it, and film form, to respond to what Rigby (ibid.: 438) refers to as 'the call of nature's self-disclosure'.<sup>15</sup>

Lowder's use of film form confounds one's normal experience of nature and place in the cinematic text. Indeed, even to a viewer well versed in experimental film, the relationship of form (intensely ordered,

complex structures involving often jarring editing) to content (images of predominantly serene and beautiful locations) can appear to be extremely disjunct in Lowder's work. The disruptive and abrupt structures of the films potentially prevent the viewer from engaging with the subject matter. Lowder appears to defy the Kantian notion of *Naturschöne*, which still structures western conceptions of nature: our anticipation – indeed our requirement – that the beautiful in nature is somehow harmonious.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, as curator Mark Webber's (2002) programme notes on *Bouquets 21 to 24* indicate, Lowder's work engenders in the viewer a very intense engagement with her subject: 'The *Bouquets* are constructed frame-by-frame, in camera, by alternating single images of specific pastoral locations. The images are clusters of perception, which build into improvised portraits of the flowers and vegetation at each site. Condensed moments of time and space form visual bouquets, planted on our retinas, blooming with rich colour and vitality'. Webber's words, his evocation of 'visual bouquets' that are planted and bloom 'on our retinas', perfectly capture the fresh experience of nature provoked over time due to, but also in spite of, the vast amount of visual information in Lowder's films. Lowder's work however, as I have argued, is not just concerned with aesthetics and pleasure – although it is concerned with those things too.<sup>17</sup> MacDonald (2007: 329) asserts that the visual effects created by Lowder's cinematic techniques form 'an implicit metaphor for her hope that the viewer will join her in foregrounding dimensions of her/our surround that in most filmmaking provide at best the background for melodramatic action and entertaining confirmations of the conspicuously consuming status quo'. I would argue that the effect of form in Lowder's work is more than a metaphor but is rather what MacDonald (2004: 109) has elsewhere called 'a retraining of perception'. It is an enactment of a defamiliarised view of nature that will, hopefully, enable the viewer to understand the nonhuman as a great deal more than the mere setting and 'equipment' of our lives.

## Notes

- 1 Although Sontag (1978: 3) asserts that she is exclusively directing her critique at photographs, the distinction between film and photography becomes somewhat fluid as her argument develops. She uses many filmic examples – of particular note are *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) and *Peeping Tom* (1960) – which do not feature a still photographer but a cinematographer. Several times she extends her argument explicitly to film or extrapolates out from photography to film – for example her section on Antonioni's *Chung Kuo* (1972). Sontag (ibid.: 161) also argues that today

- real experiences have come to seem like the images ‘we are shown by cameras’, like movies.
- 2 See for instance Benjamin’s (1985: 254–55) criticism of the photographic work of Albert Renger-Patzsch in *Die Welt ist schön/The World is Beautiful*. Benjamin aligns these photographs with the images of advertising in their valorisation of surface aesthetics at the expense of context.
  - 3 See David Ingram on Gore’s film in chapter 14 of this volume.
  - 4 Paula Willoquet-Maricondi (2010) and Scott MacDonald (2004) also address the function of form in ecocinema.
  - 5 I would like to thank Rose Lowder for generously sending me materials to aid in my research and for responding in great detail to my many questions.
  - 6 Of course the concern with waste is not uncommon among experimental filmmakers whose work rarely generates much capital and who therefore cannot afford the kind of waste produced in commercial filmmaking. At the same time, the artisanal nature of Lowder’s work, her resistance to waste and her respect for her subject are arguably rooted in the ideological discourse of much independent filmmaking.
  - 7 From private correspondence with the author.
  - 8 As a viewer of *Rue des Teinturiers* proposed to me, the two rhythms of the film – one completely jarring in its visual violence, the other hypnotic, taking hold the longer one watches – could be understood as an existential metaphor: the former rhythm connotes the quotidian, the latter connotes the longer rhythms of life, of which one only gradually becomes aware.
  - 9 From private correspondence with the author.
  - 10 The idea of the bouquet here is not only extremely apposite in this sense of bringing together diverse elements of the human and the nonhuman, the cultural and the natural. The form of the films themselves are bouquets in that, unlike her earlier frame-by-frame refocusing, Lowder filmed frames for each film ‘on any part of the strip in any order, running the film through the camera as many times as needed’ (Lowder 2011: 26). The final film thus literally becomes an arrangement of frames.
  - 11 In private correspondence, Lowder has noted that this man is a hunter.
  - 12 The soundtrack is also extremely buoyant in this section of the film.
  - 13 Lowder’s footage of both the natural and the industrial world in *Quiproquo* is accompanied by the distinctly unnatural sounds of a complex electronic score by Katie O’Looney. As with Lowder’s use of form, rather than contributing to suturing the spectator into the text, the soundtrack – sometimes seemingly at odds with the subject matter of the film – demands our attention as much as the image, heightening the viewer’s conscious engagement with both sound and image.
  - 14 Jennifer Fay (2008) compares Bazin’s and Benjamin’s work on photography and film, highlighting how both suggest a posthuman form of perception in the technologically reproduced image.
  - 15 In ‘Toward an Eco-Cinema,’ MacDonald (2004) examines a number of other experimental filmmakers in whose work film form invites the viewer to a new awareness of nature.



- 16 At the ASLE-UK conference in July 2004, Richard Kerridge suggested that Lowder's work is subversive precisely in its anti-pastoral quality to which I am alluding here.
- 17 This is my contention not necessarily Lowder's who in response to MacDonald's (1997) question 'Does it matter to you if others find your films beautiful?' says: '[I]f you try to make something that looks good, you usually fail, because just looking good is not enough. Films which look good to me, look good because behind them is some very profound, essential reasoning. I never try to make a great artwork; I don't know how to do that. The kind of films I end up with, which in the end may or may not be pretty to look at, look that way because their internal structure is very complex'.

## References

- Bazin, A. 2005. 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', in *What is Cinema? Volume 1*. Trans. H. Gray. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 9–16.
- Benjamin, W. 1977. 'The Author as Producer', in *Understanding Brecht*. Trans. A. Bostock. London: NLB, pp. 85–103.
- . 1978. 'New Things about Plants', in D. Mellor (ed.), *Germany: The New Photography 1927–33*. London: Arts Council of Great Britain, pp. 20–21.
- . 1985. 'A Small History of Photography', in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*. Trans. E. Jephcott and K. Shorter. London: Verso, pp. 240–57.
- . 1999. 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*. Trans. H. Zorn. London: Pimlico, pp. 211–44.
- Bouquets 1–10*. 1994–1995. [Films]. Directed by R. Lowder.
- Bouquet 4*. 1994. [Film]. Directed by R. Lowder.
- Bouquet 9*. 1995. [Film]. Directed by R. Lowder.
- Bouquets 21–30*. 2001–2005. [Films]. Directed by R. Lowder.
- Bouquets 11–20*. 2005–2009. [Films]. Directed by R. Lowder.
- Buck-Morss, S. 1991. *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Cambridge, MA: MIT.
- Canyon Cinema. 2011a. 'Quiproquo'. Canyon Cinema catalogue. Retrieved 9 June 2012 from <http://canyoncinema.com/catalog/film/?i=1589>
- . 2011b. 'Rose Lowder'. Canyon Cinema catalogue. Retrieved 9 June 2012 from <http://canyoncinema.com/catalog/filmmaker/?i=204>
- . 2011c. 'Rue des Teinturiers'. Canyon Cinema catalogue. Retrieved 9 June 2012 from <http://canyoncinema.com/catalog/film/?i=1591>
- . 2011d. 'Les Tournesols, Les Tournesols Colores'. Canyon Cinema catalogue. Retrieved 9 June 2012 from <http://canyoncinema.com/catalog/film/?i=1587>
- Fay, J. 2008. 'Seeing/Loving Animals: André Bazin's Posthumanism'. *Journal of Visual Culture* 7.1: pp. 41–64.
- Impromptu*. 1989. [Film]. Directed by R. Lowder.
- Lowder, R. 1997. 'Leaving the Artist's Studio Behind or How to Make Bouquets out of Flowers and Film'. *Cantrills filmnotes* 85/86: pp. 54–58.

- . 2011. 'Bouquets: Life, Place and Purpose Blossoming on Film'. *Artesian* 3: pp. 26–27.
- MacDonald, S. 1997. 'Rose Lowder Interviewed'. *Millennium Film Journal* 30/31. Retrieved 9 June 2012 from <http://mfj-online.org/journalPages/MFJ30%2C31/SMacDonaldRose.html>
- . 2001. *The Garden in the Machine: A Field Guide to Films about Place*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 2004. 'Toward an Eco-Cinema'. *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 11.2: pp. 107–32.
- . 2007. 'Rethinking the Film Experience'. *Environmental History* 12: pp. 328–30.
- Quiproquo*. 1992. [Film]. Directed by R. Lowder.
- Rigby, K. 2004. 'Earth, World, Text: On the (Im)possibility of Ecopoiesis'. *New Literary History* 35.3: pp. 427–42.
- Rue des Teinturiers*. 1979. [Film]. Directed by R. Lowder.
- Sontag, S. 1978. *On Photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Les Tournesols*. 1982. [Film]. Directed by R. Lowder.
- Webber, M. 2002. 'London Film Festival'. Retrieved 20 June 2004 from <http://www.hi-beam.net/fw/fw21/0585.html>.
- Willoquet-Maricondi, P. 2010. 'Shifting Paradigms: From Environmentalist Films to Ecocinema', in P. Willoquet-Maricondi (ed.), *Framing the World: Explorations in Ecocriticism and Film*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, pp. 43–61.

## THE ART OF SELF-EMPTYING AND ECOLOGICAL INTEGRATION

Bae Yong-kyun's *Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the East?*

Chia-ju Chang

From a Zen Buddhist standpoint the intellect and its henchman, the ego, are the primary causes of all pollution.<sup>1</sup>

— Graef, *The Foundations of Ecology in Zen Buddhism*'

The alienation and objectification of the environment – seeing the external world outside of our skins as separate from ourselves and therefore subject to limitless domination and exploitation – is one of the major causes of environmental injustice, species mass extinctions, pollution and other ecological crises. Deconstructing the very notion of the self, a notion referred to by Gregory Bateson (Macy 1990: 53) as ‘the epistemological error of Occidental civilisation’, and the healing of the self–other divide have become a moral imperative across a number of academic disciplines. Despite their differences, the schools or movements within the humanities in the West, such as environmental philosophy, social ecology, deep ecology, ecocriticism, ecofeminism, green cultural studies and ecocinema, to name but a few, all articulate ways in which the nonhuman can be integrated into the human world.

As a religion rooted in pre-modern Asian tradition and later disseminated to the West, Buddhism began to gain a firm foothold in the areas of western spiritual/religious ecology, environmental ethics and social activism in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> To date, much has been said about the ethical aspects of Buddhism such as *ahimsa* (nonviolence) and the practice of Bodhisattvas’ Path, as notably represented by the so-called Socially Engaged Buddhism or Green Buddhism, but the soteriological aspect of Buddhism has not been fully articulated with regard to its ecological relevance. This chapter asks how the soteriological aspects of Buddhism such as *kōan* practice, a type of meditation that incorporates a study of nonsensical narratives such as ‘What is the sound of one hand clapping?’, can help broaden an understanding of our relation to the world – a relation that may be more complex than our existing forms of knowledge can fully

encompass. A turn to Buddhism's soteriological aspect, especially *kōan* practice/study, may help as well to deepen our ethical and aesthetic visions of nondualism and biocentrism.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, if Zen meditation practice can produce a fundamental transformation of consciousness that allows us to see that all things, sentient or non-sentient, are empirically interconnected and that nirvana is nowhere but here and now, thereby disenfranchising the exploitation of the nonhuman world, can we employ film as a vehicle for disseminating that experience and wisdom? In exploring this question, my proposal parallels Buddhist scholar Francisca Cho's call for a nonliterary, non-ideological, 'cultic way of viewing film', which likens filmic spectatorship experience to religious experience (1999: 170).<sup>4</sup> I however want to expand the current scope of the nondualistic Zen experience/aesthetic and of film studies to articulate why such an endeavour is crucial from an ecological standpoint. Here, the term 'ecology' is not narrowly defined as a scientific study of the relationships among organisms in biota per se. Instead, ecology is taken more broadly to mean an ensemble of ways of seeing, which can serve as the critical, ethical and aesthetic foundation for new relations between *Homo sapiens* and the natural world (McLean and McMillan 2010: 162).

A major contribution that Zen can make to film studies – and then to society more broadly – is its nondualistic approach. Frequently, we dualistically compartmentalise, separating mindscape from landscape and spiritual discourse/practice from environmental discourse/practice. Consequently, one's meditation in the Zen hall is perceived as having nothing to do with the external or ecological world out there, and the 'mystical nonsense' of Zen practice, as some activists might put it, might even be considered a hindrance to environmental activism and social transformation, not to mention a waste of time. By the same token, going out into the woods to clean up waste or going onto the street to protest the hunting of endangered animals is considered a job reserved for animal activists. Similar compartmentalisation is also reflected in the way we conceptualise eco-films. While 'eco-films' – features or documentaries – refers to those that deal with ecological issues (such as *An Inconvenient Truth*, *The Day after Tomorrow* and *Hoot*), films that probe spiritual crisis/salvation or question self-identity and reality (such as *Groundhog Day*, *The Matrix*, or *Zen Noir*) can be classified as spiritual, if not exclusively Buddhist. In calling this spiritual–ecological compartmentalisation into question, I argue that such a mentality is a residue of dualistic thinking that fails to see fluidity, interconnectedness, and continuity of things beneath their appearance. As a Zen practitioner and an ecocritic, I aim to flesh out the ecological dimension

of Zen meditation, *kōan* practice and Zen film, and/or develop a 'Zen ecological' reading of film. From a Zen ecological point of view, the spiritual dimension is not an otherworldly, transcendent one but fundamentally this-worldly and ecological. Moreover, Zen sees this-worldness as rooted in a connection to the present moment, which is characterised by emptiness, impermanence, vulnerability, eternal possibility, and the bliss that comes from recognising the self as inseparable from the other.

In this chapter, I use Bae Yong-kyun's *Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the East?* (1989) as a case study to demonstrate that a film devoted to Zen soteriology and to an aesthetic expression of enlightenment can be as transformative ecologically as it is spiritually. As a '*kōan* film', *Bodhidharma* intends to heal the ontological separation from the other and to awaken the audience to their underlying ecological connectedness by inviting them to view the film through 'deep meditation' (Tedesco 1994: 103) and to immerse themselves in the *kōans* presented in the film. *Kōans* refer to narratives that are used in Zen meditation practice to help students cut through egocentric, dualistic thinking. It is in this healing capacity that *Bodhidharma* subverts the mainstream viewer's cinematic expectation and experience as a form of visual consumption and entertainment, and makes a strong case for considering the possibility that cinema, one of the most powerful media of our time, can serve as an agent of transformation of ecological consciousness.

## Filmic Practice as *Kōan* Practice

I hope people see my film through deep meditation, not with intellectual understanding.

—Bae Yong-kyun, '*A conversation with Bae Yong-kyun*'

The South Korean 'New Wave' which began in the 1980s is characterised by the emergence of socially conscious young filmmakers who have gained international recognition. During this period, the incorporation of Zen Buddhism and local shamanism in several Buddhist films such as Im Kwon T'aek's *Mandala* (1981), Chang Sonu's *Passage to Buddha* (1993) and Bae Yong-kyun's *Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the East?* is often regarded as a nativist response to western cultural imperialism, rapid modernisation and materialism, and as a quest for cultural identity in the face of globalisation, as well as a form of resistance to the Hollywood film industry. The appearance of these Buddhist films that incorporate teachings of the Buddha and the lives of Buddhist monks also has to do with a growing concern about acquiring material

possessions, psychological insecurity and the search for a moral vision in modern South Korean society (Lee 2000: 61). As social commentaries, these films are often interpreted in the light of subaltern struggle (for example poverty) in modern South Korea, or as a perennial ethical struggle of a typical East Asian Confucian male subject between familial duty and the pursuit of spiritual liberation.<sup>5</sup> Im Kwon T'aek's *Mandala* serves as an example. In this film, the theme of the quest for Buddhist enlightenment is designed as a prop to critique an individual's turning away from the collective suffering that is so powerfully present in the history of modern South Korea. In contrast to Im Kwon T'aek's film, Bae Yong-kyun's focus on Buddhism and monastic life is not simply a social commentary on modernity: it explores how filmmaking practice and film art can be a form of religious experience.

Against the grain of a dominant political, ideological reading of South Korean Buddhist films and particularly of *Bodhidharma*, Francisca Cho (1999: 170) argues for an alternative perspective on film that is a non-discursive, non-ideological, 'cultic' consideration of filmmaking and viewing that allows the audience to 'participate in a broader and distinctly non-logocentric tradition of religious signification'. According to Cho, the irrational, religious power of film (and art in general) lies in the overwhelming moments of presence in which our normal sense of the real is challenged and reoriented. The power of presence (what Nathaniel Dorsky [2003: 31] calls 'nowness') in film media is capable of challenging or reorienting the audience's sense of the real despite its illusory nature and, henceforth, gives art a religious dimension. And it is through this religious and cultic capacity – more specifically, the power of the ever present 'thus-ness' or Tathātā – that art, 'subjects us to ideological critique because it wills us to free ourselves' (Cho 2003: 108).

There has been a strong interest in intersecting film experience and religious experience on both artistic and scholarly levels (Lynden 2003; Torry and Flesher 2007; Plate 2008). For some filmmakers and theorists, 'film as religion' does not refer to the film's illustrative power to dramatise the lives of religious figures such as in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004). Rather, the film medium itself is a religious expression. This idea of filmic media as religious expression or experience derives from the capacity of the filmic apparatus to produce a certain religious effect. For example, the film scholar Gregory Watkins (1999) points out that the religious potential of film lies in its ability to erase a sense of ontological alienation. He further argues that a religious dimension in film has to do with a 'creative and disruptive approach to the normal and naturalised habits of the typical viewer' and that 'certain techniques in film can function religiously by erasing the distance we

normally feel between ourselves and the worlds we view' (Watkins cited in Cho 2008: 117). Finally, the San Francisco based avant-garde filmmaker Nathaniel Dorsky (2003: 16) has observed a profound, lingering post-filmic experience, and this enables him to conceive of film as a devotional form that is capable of 'reveal[ing] the depths of our own reality', and 'open[ing] us to a fuller sense of ourselves and our world'.<sup>6</sup>

Based on the aforementioned instances, while what constitutes religious effect or experience might vary, all of the examples seem to affirm the possibility of film rendering some form of religious experience. And if there is a powerful dimension of reality (whether God, cosmic consciousness, emptiness or the present moment) with which we have lost contact, both religion and film have the capacity to reconnect us or 'wake us up' to this underlying dimension of reality. Dorsky's treatment of cinema as a form of devotional practice harnessed towards a 'fuller sense of ourselves and the world' provides a conceptual framework with which to approach Bae Yong-kyun's film, especially in considering film as a Zen *kōan* study.

The plot of *Bodhidharma* revolves around three generations of Buddhist monks living in a decaying hermitage on Mt Chonan. Yong-nan (later Kibong), a confused young man, renounces the modern world and goes to study Zen with an ageing Zen master, Hyegok. Hyegok adopts an orphan boy, Haejin. A child of nature, Haejin wanders and explores all day on the mountain. Kibong is torn between familial obligation and a desire for spiritual awakening, a familiar existential dilemma for seekers of enlightenment in East Asian societies. After failing to answer the *kōan* assigned by his master, Kibong employs an extreme form of practice by meditating underneath a thunderous waterfall. He is rescued by his old master and, as a result, the master becomes sick and dies. Before he dies, he assigns Kibong a final task – to cremate his body and to return his remains to nature – as the last *kōan*. Having completed this task, Kibong decides to return to the modern world. He passes down the master's robe to Haejin, who throws it into an oven fire. The film ends with Kibong walking in a field with an ox on his return journey back to the world of 'red dust'.

Despite Bae's denial that his film has anything to do with Zen, *Bodhidharma* is nonetheless an unapologetic defence of Mahayana Zen Buddhism and, more precisely, of *kōan* practice. The title of the film derives from a famous *kōan* collected in *The Gateless Gate* (Chinese: *Wumen guan*). In addition, in the opening titles Bae dedicates his film, 'To the disciple who asked him about the Truth[;] without a word he showed a flower' – another *kōan* reference to Mahākāśyapa, one of

Shakymuni Buddha's earliest principle disciples. In this light, Tony Rayns' critique of *Bodhidharma* as an almost programmatic account of 'the way of Zen' is not completely unjustified. References to *kōans* are ubiquitous: the master's long lecture on the *kōan* practice, familiar Zen images such as reflections in water, the moon, the blue sky, the ox, the 'moo-ing'/Mu sound, and so on. Nevertheless, such a programmatic presentation may be said to be an indispensable strategy in the era of global spectatorship. Moreover, *Bodhidharma* provides an opportunity to reconceive cinema as a site of *kōan* practice.

What are *kōans* and *kōan* practice? *Kōan* practice or study pertains to the incorporation of *kōans* in Zen meditation training. The purpose of using *kōans* is to help suspend momentarily the discursive intellect operating in a dualistic mode, in order to trigger an ineffable state of 'awakening' (Japanese: *Satori*) beyond the reach of all 'dualistic thinking' (Foulk 2000: 15). *Kōans* are made of questions, phrases, dialogues or stories that appear to be nonsensical and often paradoxical to the mind. Meditating on a *kōan* forces one to enter a concentrated state of mind called *samadhi*, where body, mind and the external world begin to integrate, and an attachment to the self begins to weaken. If that state can be sustained, paradox or contradiction can be resolved through an intuitive grasp of the nondualistic or 'empty' aspect of reality.

Meditating on *kōans* allows a practitioner to see fundamental reality as Zen masters see it, and thus from the perspective of an awakened, empty mind. The state of emptiness is aptly described by the cognitive scientist Francisco J. Varela as 'egoless', a feeling that suggests an 'actual experiential sense of no one home' (cited in Lussier 2008: 41). Paradoxically, the feeling of 'no master in the house' imparts a profound sense of connectedness to the universe, where the fear and attachment that govern much of our lives vanish. In this sense, Zen meditation contributes to a sense of personal wellbeing and happiness. More importantly, it is an agent of ecological consciousness, because the experience of enlightenment enables us to see all things, sentient or non-sentient, as empirically and intrinsically interconnected, and that nirvana is nowhere but here and now and is inseparable from our phenomenal world. This imparts a deep spiritual security, deepens our aesthetic visions of nondualism and egalitarianism, and disenfranchises any uncompassionate deeds as well. As indicated by a recent study, advanced meditation practitioners attain a particular mental state, 'a non-referential state of loving kindness and compassion' (Austin 2006: 48).

To facilitate the discussion of *Bodhidharma* as a *kōan* film, I look at it from the following angles: the movie theatre as Zen meditation hall,



the director as Zen practitioner and artist, the audience as meditation participants and the characters as representing different stages of a Zen journey. First, one can easily conceive a movie theatre as a secular Zen meditation hall: it is a dark place in which each attendee takes a seat. The attendees are supposed to remain in solitude (and silence their cell phones!) and prepare to concentrate for a substantial length of time on fixing their minds on the movie screen (mindscreen), the contents of which range from personal reminiscences through subconscious or unconscious aspirations to public memory and more. After the movie (meditation) is over, some might experience a post-cinematic (post-meditation) effect for several days. Some might have a transformative experience with cinema and meditation for the rest of their lives.

From the standpoint of the director, the making of *Bodhidharma* is a form of Zen mindfulness, meditation and working on *kōans*. *Bodhidharma* was a ten-year labour on the part of the filmmaker who wrote, directed and edited the film entirely by himself. The parallel between filmmaking and working on a *kōan* is made manifest as Bae (Tedesco 1994: 106) compares filmmaking to that of *kōan* study when he says, 'the process of creating that movie was like holding a *kōan* in one's mind' (cited in Cho 1999: 170). As Hyegok explains in the film, the '*kōan* is a tool to cross the sea of passion and illusion so as to discover the roots of the true self'. Hyegok instructs his student (and the audience) how to work on a *kōan*: 'If you think about this *kōan* day and night, if you concentrate on meditating, you will understand and come to Enlightenment'. Filmmaking for Bae is analogous to working on a *kōan*. Instead of sitting on a cushion to meditate on a *kōan*, Bae chooses film as his medium and means of meditation. And Kibong can be seen as the director's cinematic alter ego: Bae is to film as Kibong is to his *kōan*. Yet for the director, the task involves not only his own devotional practice, but also crafting a cinematic effect on his audience. Here the filmmaker acts as a Zen gardener to create an environment (Zen garden) so that viewing the film becomes a Zen experience. And this brings us to the notion of the audience as participants in cinematic Zen.

Rhim Hye-kyung (2009: 5) observes that *Bodhidharma* exhibits 'a mathematical precision of dramaturgies – of story, light, sound, [and] music'. This aspect of Bae's craftsmanship is aimed at creating a meditative effect, a prerequisite for *kōan* study, on his audience. As already noted, Bae hopes the audience experiences this film through deep meditation instead of a mere intellectual understanding. The slow-paced, minimal narrative of *Bodhidharma* is intentional so that viewers (participants in this cinematic *kōan*) enter a different mode of consciousness in

which thinking is gradually suspended and other cognitive functions are stimulated.

Take the opening sequence as an example. The slow camera movement, nonlinear juxtaposition of images such as of a Zen master and a toad, and sparse yet poetic verses set a tone for entering an alternative mode of consciousness. It creates a meditative effect by emphasising what Dorsky calls the vertical aspect of time in cinema, or 'nowness' (2003: 33). In this vertical axis of time, the spatial dimension of nowness or presentness comes to life. Switching to a more alert, meditative mode of viewing, the mind becomes more receptive to a spatial, fluid and interconnected dimension of life in the moment that is often ignored and dismissed by linear, rational thinking. The juxtaposition of images of nature and humans – the dilapidated windows, the imagistic presentation of a teacup, the slow walking frog, the child touching the dead cicada, the old monk – signifies the organic, interanimating and coevolving processes of life, old age, death and emptiness. Here the montage serves as a visual device to render a sense of ecological interconnectedness and identification between the boy's encounter with the dead body of a cicada and the living frog and Hyegok's articulation of 'emptiness', that which 'does not come into being, does not die'. With this juxtaposition of the organic flux of life and emptiness, we are invited into the world of *kōan* with its intimate yet impersonal sense of beauty that does not arise from the realm of personal, discriminating consciousness, but from the holistic, meditative state of mind without the rigid conceptual compartmentalisation that creates a subject–object division. Rather than reducing nature to 'nature' – an all too familiar theoretical move of postmodernism – the film moves in the opposite direction, dissolving the human into the flow of natural processes.

The three main characters in *Bodhidharma* might be said to represent three different stages of life. They can also be interpreted as corresponding to the so-called three gates of Zen or the three stages of Zen ecopsychological development.<sup>7</sup> The first stage is 'seeing mountains as mountains; seeing water as water'. This stage designates a stage prior to beginning a Zen journey, wherein one sees the world via an egocentric consciousness and with an unquestioned sense of the boundary between skin-bound subjectivity and external objectivity. The second stage is 'seeing mountains not as mountains; seeing water not as water', in which one embarks on the Zen journey and gives rise to ontological doubts about the status of both self and world. The last stage is 'seeing mountains only as mountains; seeing water only as water', the stage where one has realised that one's ultimate identity is no different from that of mountains and water, a stage of self–other integration. The

first and last stages are deceptively similar but profoundly different in terms of their relationship to the other and the natural world.

Let us first discuss the representation of stage one in *Bodhidharma*. The portrayal of childhood signifies ‘ignorance’ or ‘delusion’ (Sk. *avidyā*): the ego is ‘the discrete, self-consistent, self-individuating, and self-directing centre and end of the individual personality’ (Brown 1994: 126). Consequently, children suffer. Such suffering (Sk. *dukkā*) is a ‘function of that primordial ignorance, which imputes a false self-derived and self-contained identity to persons and things’ (ibid.). Not knowing his mother, the character Haejin represents a Zen trope for one’s ignorance of one’s original identity, resulting in fear and attachment. Despite playfulness and spontaneity, children inflict suffering upon others – Haejin injures a jay, which winds up dying – and are victims of such violence (lack of enlightenment) themselves – Haejin is bullied by children who repeatedly submerge him under the water.

Haejin’s alienation is illustrated in one scene where he finds the milk tooth that the old master had pulled out from his mouth. Spotting Haejin picking up the tooth and putting it in a little box, the master seizes this opportunity to educate the boy about non-attachment: ‘This is separate from your body, but you still feel attached to this tooth. Was it because it was formerly a part of you?’ Not waiting for Haejin to answer, Hyegok himself replies, ‘In fact, there is no difference between this tooth and a pebble on the road’.

Kibong represents the second stage of the Zen journey, which is characterised by a self-reflexive sense of separation. This stage has been addressed in many *kōans* to heal one’s ontological sense of separation. Struggling with his existential crisis, Kibong leaves his blind mother behind to take up the monastic life in pursuit of enlightenment. To capture the process of Kibong’s psychological transformation, the director employs the figure of an ox, a symbol of self-nature in pre-modern Zen literature. Here Kibong’s *zazen* (sitting meditation) is intercut with a scene in which an ox struggles to break out of the ranch. The ox’s struggle represents Kibong’s psychological agitation and his desire for liberation. The wandering ox emerges in the cremation scene at the end of the film, watching Kibong with what appears to be tears in its eyes to suggest the animal’s mental state over the sight of cremation. As an aside, I would suggest that the ox has been transformed from an allegorical creature (as is often seen in the well known ‘Ten Ox-herding Pictures’) into a concrete, physical being endowed with emotions and consciousness.<sup>8</sup> In other words, spiritual emancipation is not represented as an individualistic, transcendent, triumphant or heroic act, but as an erasure of isolated individualism, as seen in both

the representation of Kibong covered with the ashes of his master and the burnt wood, and the participation of the ox, the jay, Haejin and the surrounding environment. After his master's body has been burned, Kibong collects the ashes and scatters them over the river to feed the fish. He then lets the rest of the ashes be blown away by the wind till the last traces of the master are gone and integrated into the environment, morphing into another kind of existence as food or dust. Kibong's journey of liberation in this climactic scene suggests that enlightenment is a realisation of one's own embeddedness in an ecological cycle and that one's enlightenment is in fact a co-enlightenment with all beings and nonbeings.

### **The Importance of Being Undramatic: Cinematic Representation of Emptiness/ Enlightenment**

From the Zen standpoint, language cannot solve the problem of the destruction of the natural world because language itself perpetuates our sense of separation. This vicious regress can only be resolved by devising alternative modes of cognition and expression. And one of these, at least potentially, is film. But film cannot perform this crucial function unless it frees itself from the last vestiges of conventional narrativity – story – which depends on language.

In *The Horse Who Drank the Sky*, Murray Pomerance (2008) claims that cinema is in a state of crisis as a result of the failure of the viewing experience. The common habit of casual viewing derives from the belief that 'the story is what counts, that anything vital is *told* as such, that the *sequentiality* of events is what we should pay attention to' (2008: 34). Challenging the centrality of narrative and arguing that film 'also illuminates and makes possible the conjunction of picture and sound', Pomerance (ibid.: 125) cites George Choin's analysis of a scene in Jacques Tati's *Traffic* (1971) to illustrate the idea of an 'acousmatic moment' and advances, 'Could not the entire narrative of a film also be understood as a ligature or scaffold for the suspension and illumination of a single particular moment?'<sup>9</sup> Here, Pomerance's understanding of the function of the narrative resonates with that of *kōan* narratives.

Tati's *Traffic* is a satire of twentieth-century car culture. In a nutshell, it tells the tale of a simple trip taken by a designer for a major French automotive firm from Paris to Amsterdam for an international auto show. The trip becomes increasingly complicated due to a series of events such as flat tyres, breakdowns, traffic jams, etc. Yet somewhere in the middle of the film, there comes a pastoral moment that intrudes

on the busy flow of dazzlingly modern, industrial life, where technology runs amok. While an explicit critique of modern lifestyle is conveyed here, a reference to Zen, *kōan* and *satori* (or Zen enlightenment) is also being made:

The driver . . . had to spend an uncomfortable night in a garage shed right in the middle of the countryside. He walks out in the morning . . . And what does he see, through an opening in a clump of trees, all the way at the extreme back of the frame, happily positioned in the grass? A cow, an actual, little, postcard or colouring-book cow . . . No sooner has he glanced at the animal and turned his head back – he hardly looked at it, didn't really see – when a sonorous 'Moo' makes him turn his head again, and it's only now, we might say, that he realises the presence of this cow, now become silent. Moreover, the animal is too far off for one to actually see it moo. It's the sound alone that informs us. That's it, it's so small, it's like a little *satori* [enlightenment]. (Choin cited in Pomerance 2008: 125)

Here, Pomerance appropriates Choin's Zennist analysis of this pastoral scene to demonstrate the hierarchical reversal of sequentiality and a particular moment; that is, the idea that the purpose of the entire storyline of a film could be understood as a function to showcase one particular moment.

The sonorous cow's 'Moo' makes an apparent phonetic reference to the famous '*Mu*' *kōan* (Sekida 1996: 27–30). According to the '*Mu*' *kōan*, a monk asked Jōhsū, 'Has a dog the Buddha Nature?' Jōshū shouted a word: '*Mu*'. Though a more appropriate way to comprehend the answer is through seeing it as a pure utterance of the sound *mu* (or 'moo'), at the semantic level, the word *mu* means 'nothingness' or 'emptiness', and by answering 'emptiness', this *kōan* points to the dimension of mind beyond our ordinary discursive consciousness. The reason it is so difficult to pinpoint what emptiness is and to express it, has to do with the fact that it is not an idea or concept but a state of mind, which is often characterised as 'empty-minded'. Just like the '*Mu*' *kōan*, the storyline's purpose can, in a sense, be understood as paving the way for a momentary experience of hearing that merges with the experience of emptiness (or empty-mind). In other words, the 'moo' in *Traffic* brings the character back to a particular acousmatic moment, where he becomes aware of the existence of the nonhuman other.

On watching *Traffic*, one realises that the moment of the cow's mooing discussed by Choin seems too casually arranged, undramatically presented and fleetingly insignificant to be worth paying much attention to. Yet this perfunctory placement of the cow and its alleged insignificance are worth meditating on from the perspectives of both

environmentalism and Zen. From an ecological perspective, *Trafic* tells of a disproportionately modern, technological life and of humanity off on its own, out of touch with all other living beings. From a Zen standpoint, the cow's moo-ing (a homophone of *mu*) reveals yet another dimension of our reality that has been dismissed altogether.

While we can compare and contrast the way cows and their moo-ing are represented in both films, it is more instructive to compare the cow in *Trafic* with the old monk in *Bodhidharma* in terms of the director's portrayal of emptiness: they propose two different representations of emptiness and they both render it in a light, not too serious, manner. When it comes to representing Hyegok's enlightened state of mind, Bae employs a certain camera technique to de-dramatise the character instead of portraying him in a highly dramatised, sublime form. When Hyegok and Kibong both sit on rocks that rise above the river surrounding them, Hyegok tells Kibong about enlightenment. As he continues, the camera zooms in. The director uses a medium close-up of Hyegok's profile but does not give him an individuated characterisation. Instead, the out-of-focus shot blurring Hyegok's head, which occupies the foreground, becomes the foil for the sharply focused shimmering water in the background when he says: 'It will be perfection . . . It will be free of all obstacles and total freedom will prevail' (see Figure 13.1). This use of focus portrays enlightenment as the disappearing of personal identity



**Figure 13.1** Hyegok in *Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the East?* (Still courtesy of Mr Bae Yong-kyun)



**Figure 13.2** Haejin in *Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the East?* (Still courtesy of Mr Bae Yong-kyun)

into a background (for example the river) that comes into focus. This still shot forms a strong contrast with the still shot of Haejin (Figure 13.2), where the focus is placed on the human character. While Hyegok sits upright, Haejin bends forward in sleep, which can be interpreted as a metaphor for an unawakened state of mind. Therefore, this Zen film not only contributes to the repertoire of 'devotional cinema' but also illustrates a connection between Zen and ecology and should be considered as a spiritual eco-film.

### **A Tentative Closure: Towards a Soteriological-based Zen Ecological Thinking**

The experience of Zen practice provides an empirical and conceptual basis for the environmental ethical claims that are not based on human supremacy, or even human separateness from nature. In its application to film, Zen enables us to reconceptualise the cinema as an occasion for the audience to engage in *kōan* practice, as exemplified in Bae Yong-kyun's *Bodhidharma*, and through this practice it can undergo a cognitive shift that purely verbal media cannot bring about. In its subversion of viewer expectations, *Bodhidharma* defies the psychology that underlies our current way of life, which seeks to overcome alienation

by intensifying separation and control: 'holding on' instead of 'letting go'. Each image in the film is calibrated to elicit a specific psychological impact, a more mindful, meditative mode of viewing and an engagement with the moment, rather than deliverance into narrative. An I-thou mutual identification is found when the dying Hyegok, the old Zen monk, tells his disciple Kibong that: 'I am insubstantial in the universe. But in the universe, there is nothing which is not me'. This formulation poses a radical challenge to western or modern anthropocentrism and I take it as a statement of Zen ecology. It also undercuts the isolating individualism that consumerism falsely promises to overcome. This is the Zen way of healing, and, as this chapter is intended to suggest, cinema, like the Zen *kōan*, has proven to be a plausible device for guiding us back into the world that is inseparable from ourselves.

## Notes

I would like to thank the editors, Guinevere Narraway and Anat Pick, for their comments. Also this paper is much indebted to Kurt Spellmeyer, an English professor at Rutgers University, senior Zen teacher and founder of Cold Mountain Sangha, New Jersey.

- 1 In this chapter, I use Zen (Japanese) instead of the less well-known Chinese term 'Chan'.
- 2 In the last several decades, there emerged a so-called 'engaged Buddhist' movement in Asia and the West. For more information on the new developments of Buddhism, see King (2006).
- 3 From the perspective of soteriology, religion can be divided into two basic forms: autonomous/enlightenment and soteriological/salvational. In this chapter, I am referring to the former. See Isshii (2007: 44).
- 4 For Cho, the term 'ideology' used here refers to a 'mental act or cognitive form of signification' (1999: 177).
- 5 Rhim Hye-kyung proposes that 'there is a strong social concern' in *Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the East?*, which prompts the audience to ask 'why Kibong is recruited from the slum milieu; how is this related to his criticism of his master for staying in the mountains, and his final departure from the monastery into the world?'
- 6 I would like to thank Anat Pick for this reference.
- 7 The three gates of Chan/Zen originate in the Tang Dynasty from the famous saying by the Chan Master Weixin: 'Before I had studied Zen for thirty years, I saw mountains as mountains, and waters as waters. When I arrived at a more intimate knowledge, I came to point where I saw that mountains are not mountains, and waters not waters. But now that I have got its very substance I am at rest. For it's just that I see mountains once again as mountains, and waters once again as waters' (cited in Watts 1957: 127).



- 8 The 'Ten Ox-herding Pictures', or the 'Ten Bulls', are illustrations accompanying a series of short poems to depict the stages of a Zen practitioner's progression towards enlightenment. The pictures first appeared in the twelfth century in China, as drawn by the Chinese Zen master Kuo-an Shi-yuan. See Reps and Senzaki (1985: 164–87).
- 9 An acousmatic sound is a kind of 'diegetic sound [that] approaches us from offscreen'. See Pomerance (2008: 112).

## References

- Austin, J. 2006. *Zen-Brain Reflections*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Brown, B. 1994. 'Toward a Buddhist Ecological Cosmology', in M. Tucker and J. Grim (eds), *Worldviews and Ecology: Religion, Philosophy and the Environment*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Cho, F. 1999. 'Imagining Nothing and Imaging Otherness in Buddhist Film', in S. Plate and D. Jasper (eds), *Imag(in)ing Otherness: Filmic Visions of Living Together*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press.
- . 2003. 'The Art of Presence', in S. Plate (ed.), *Representing Religion in World Cinema: Filmmaking, Mythmaking, Culture Making*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- . 2008. 'Buddhism, Film and Religious Knowing: Challenging the Literary Approach to Film', in G. Watkins (ed.), *Teaching Religion and Film*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 117–27.
- The Day after Tomorrow*. 2004. [Film]. Directed by R. Emmerich U.S.A.: Twentieth Century Fox.
- Dorsky, N. 2003. *Devotional Cinema*. Berkeley: Tuumba Press.
- Foulk, T. Griffith. 2000. 'The Form and Function of Kōan Literature: A Historical View', in S. Heine and D. Wright (eds.), *The Kōan, Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 15–45.
- Graef, S. 1990. 'The Foundations of Ecology in Zen Buddhism'. *Religious Education*, 85.1 (Winter): pp. 42–48.
- Groundhog Day*. 1993. [Film]. Directed by H. Ramis. U.S.A.: Columbia Pictures.
- Hoot*. 2006. [Film]. Directed by W. Shriner. U.S.A.: Hoot Productions.
- An Inconvenient Truth*. 2006. [Film] Directed by D. Guggenheim. U.S.A.: Lawrence Bender Productions.
- Isshi, S. 2007. 'Exploring the Path to Buddhist Enlightenment (*Bodhi*) as Ultimate Communication'. *China Media Research*, 3.4: pp. 42–49.
- King, S. 1991. *Buddha Nature*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- . 2006. *Being Benevolence: Socially Ethics of Engaged Buddhism*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.
- Lee, H. 2000. *Contemporary Korean Cinema: Identity, Culture and Politics*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Lussier, M. 2008. 'Self-Annihilation/Inner Revolution: Blake's *Milton*, Buddhism, and Ecocriticism'. *R and L*, 40.1 (Spring): pp. 39–57.
- Lynden, J. 2003. *Film as Religion*. New York: New York University Press.

- Macy, J. 1990. 'Greening of the Self', in A. Badiner (ed.), *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.
- Mandala*. 1981. [Film]. Directed by K. Im. South Korea: Hwa Chun Trading Company.
- The Matrix*. 1999. [Film]. Directed by A. Wachowski and L. Wachowski. U.S.A.: Groucho II Film Partnership.
- McLean, I. and A. McMillan. 2010. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mitchell, J. and S. Plate. 2007. *The Religion and Film Reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Passage to Buddha*. 1993. [Film]. Directed by S. Chang. South Korea: Taehung Pictures.
- Passion of the Christ*. 2004. [Film]. Directed by M. Gibson. U.S.A.: Icon Productions.
- Plate, S. 2008. *Religion and Film: Cinema and the Recreation of the World*. London: Wallflower.
- Pomerance, M. 2008. *The Horse Who Drank the Sky: Film Experience beyond Narrative and Theory*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Reps, P. and N. Senzaki. 1985. *Zen Flesh Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings*. North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishings.
- Rhim Hye-kyung. 2009. 'Review of *Why Has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?*' Press packet of *Why Has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?* Retrieved 19 September 2009 from <http://www.milestonefilms.com/pdf/BodhiDharmaPK.pdf>
- Sekida, Katsuki. 1996. *Two Zen Classics: Mumonkan and Hekiganroku*. New York: Weatherhill.
- Spellmeyer, Kurt. 2010. *Buddha at the Apocalypse: Awakening from a Culture of Destruction*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.
- Tedesco, F. 1994. 'A Conversation with Bae Yong-kyun'. *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* 3.4 (Summer): pp. 103–6.
- Torry, R. and P. Flesher. 2007. *Film and Religion: An Introduction*. Nashville, TX: Abingdon Press.
- Trafic*. 1971 [Film]. Directed by J. Tati. France: Les Films Corona.
- Watkins, G. 1999. 'Seeing and Being Seen: Distinctively Filmic and Religious Elements in Film'. *Journal of Religion and Film* 3.2 (October). Retrieved 8 August 2009 from <http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/watkins.htm>.
- Watts, A.W. 1957. *The Way of Zen*. New York: Mentor-Patheon.
- Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the East?* 1989. [Film]. Directed by Y. Bae. South Korea: Bae Yong-Kyun Productions.
- Zen Noir*. 2004. [Film]. Directed by M. Rosenbush. U.S.A.: Dreaming Dog Entertainment.

## *AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH*

Science and Argumentation in the Expository Documentary Film

*David Ingram*

As the fifth most commercially successful documentary in the history of cinema, *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) raises important questions about the role of screen media in the development of public discourses about the science and politics of global warming, and also about how cinema can represent such a complex and elusive subject. Stephen Rust has shown how the film employed ‘melodramatic affect to present a persuasive argument on global warming’, and thereby made a significant intervention in debates over climate change in the United States (Rust 2013: 202). Rust’s emphasis on the emotional appeal of the film has rightly been a feature of much of the critical writing it has garnered. Drawing on Aristotelian theories of rhetoric, Mark Minster (2010: 29, 37) similarly attributes the film’s effectiveness as ecocinema to its attempt to persuade its audience less by ‘logos’, or an appeal to evidence and logical reasoning, than by ‘ethos’, an appeal to ‘the character and authority of the speaker’, and ‘pathos’, an appeal to the emotions of the audience. The graphs that Gore presents in the film, for example:

operate less for the sake of logos than for the sake of ethos – they tell us at least as much about Gore’s credibility as they do about the chemical composition of the earth’s atmosphere. The content of these graphs, in other words, is scientific. But what the graphs *mean* in the context of the film, the film’s ultimate argument, is that Gore himself has mastered much of the science that has already been done, long before we arrived, and can authoritatively mediate that science for us. (Ibid.: 30)

Yet Minster’s rhetorical analysis begs the question as to whether the audience should accept Gore as an authority figure. The scientific accuracy of his claims about global warming is vital to this question, which can only be answered at the very level of ‘logos’ that Minster tends to downplay. This chapter is thus concerned with shifting the critical emphasis away from the pathos of the film to its logos. Accordingly, it augments screen studies with argumentation theory and science studies

in order to analyse both the ways in which Gore presents his scientific claims in the film and their subsequent reception in the United States and Britain.

Like Minster, Felicity Mellor also argues that the criterion of scientific accuracy is not the most important way to judge the effectiveness of *An Inconvenient Truth* as a documentary about global warming. Indeed, disputes over the accuracy of the film, she writes, led to ‘an almost endless regress’, which ‘opened up room for more and more debate rather than closing down debate into a final judgement’ (Mellor 2009: 5). Keeping the debate open by disputing the accuracy of the film thus provided support for climate change sceptics arguing against the need for political action to mitigate global warming. As Mellor observes in her article’s title, there is therefore a ‘politics of accuracy’ within which the reception of the film should be placed.

This chapter explores further the key point made by Mellor: that the figural nature of the expository documentary film inevitably leads to ambiguities in interpretation. Documentary filmmaker and theorist Michael Chanan (2008: 129) makes a similar point in distinguishing between the problems of representing different types of ‘invisibility’ in documentary film. His analysis also sheds useful light on the textual ambiguities produced when there is an attempt to represent the science of global warming on film. He points out that physical causes, such as the wind, can be shown in film through ‘the visible signs of their effects’. However, social processes are invisible and consequently much harder to represent:

Sometimes their effects are very visible – like slums and hovels and shanty-towns – but the process as such is not a physical object, nor indeed a singular thing, but more like history, which refuses to present itself promptly in front of the camera but remains an absent cause; with the consequence that the signs of those effects are at best amorphous, ambiguous, and open to interpretation. (Ibid.)

Yet when it comes to global warming, the very distinction between physical and social causation is itself uncertain and open to debate. Scientific research is investigating the extent to which global warming is natural or anthropogenic, or a combination of the two. In this sense, it is questionable whether the visual signifiers that Al Gore presents in *An Inconvenient Truth*, such as the ‘hockey stick’ graph, Hurricane Katrina, and the retreating glaciers on Mt Kilimanjaro, are even signifiers of anthropogenic global warming at all, as he claims. These images may be effective as cinematic rhetoric, as Minster (2010: 30) argues, but the history of the film’s reception also shows that they are contested evidence for anthropogenic global warming.

As Bill Nichols (2008: 37) writes, it is the voice in documentary film that usually plays the key role in ‘shaping and focusing the polysemous quality of sound and image’. However, Gore’s verbal commentary in *An Inconvenient Truth* tends to add to the ambiguities of meaning. As journalist Andrew Revkin (2006: 7) wrote in his review of the film: ‘In a lawyerly way, [Gore] often chooses his words to avoid making direct causal links that most scientists say are impossible to substantiate, but uses imagery and implication to convey that humans are fiddling with planet-scale forces’. As we shall see, by using language that works by implication, rather than making his meaning more explicit, Gore’s commentary tends in places to obfuscate some of the key scientific issues discussed in the film.

This chapter proposes that argumentation theory, by seeking to clarify the grounds and warrants of knowledge claims and their rhetorical expression in words, is a useful tool in analysing the way in which scientific claims are made both by *An Inconvenient Truth* itself and in its subsequent reception. Although these claims are complex and detailed, and ultimately beyond the competence of nonspecialists, they can at least be classified into different types of argumentation, and judged strong, weak or fallacious accordingly. By concentrating on the nuances of language used to formulate such arguments, argumentation theory can thus reveal the rhetorical strategies employed both by Gore himself and by the film’s supporters and detractors.

In his study of the *ad verecundiam*, or argument from authority, Douglas Walton notes how such appeals to expertise are time-bound. In parliamentary or congressional debates, for example, ‘there may be severe constraints on how much time can be spent on backing up a claim or giving extensive documentation to support the backing of an argument’ (Walton 1997: 140). In these cases, appeals to expert authority may be relatively weak and incomplete, but not necessarily fallacious (ibid.: 143). Applying argumentation theory to environmental discourses, political theorist Maarten Hajer similarly notes that time constraints particularly affect appeals to expert opinion in scientific debates, when science is being used as a basis for public policy (Hajer 1995: 62). In documentary film, of course, time constraints are even more pressing. Rational argumentation in public discourse is thus never ideal or perfect. As a logician, Walton seeks ‘objective logical criteria’ to distinguish between justifiable and fallacious arguments, while also attending to the messy pragmatics of argumentation in actual situations (ibid.: xiii).

Given that contemporary science is so specialised, it is impossible even for trained scientists to be expert in all aspects of climate science.

Of necessity, therefore, the search for authority by nonspecialists will always be prematurely arrested. Hajer's notion of 'storylines' accounts for how people make cognitive commitments within the messiness and uncertainty of real-life situations. Arguments 'can convince because of some property they have – e.g. plausibility – that countervailing ideas lack, but one has to reckon that in such cases plausibility is the product of persuasion which is not a purely cognitive process' (Hajer 1995: 60). This point is particularly relevant when scientific knowledge forms the basis of policy decisions. Hajer (*ibid.*: 62) gives as an example the acid rain controversy of the early 1980s, noting that the sheer complexity of the subject necessitated an interpretative process of what he calls 'discursive closure', according to which 'complex research work is often reduced to a visual representation or a catchy one-liner'. This act of translation is necessarily 'accompanied by a loss of meaning', which erases the uncertainty and conditionality of the knowledge claims involved (*ibid.*). Storylines therefore imply 'arbitrary confinements' and 'often conclude debates that are still open' (*ibid.*: 5).

Hajer argues that this premature epistemological closure is a necessary precondition for action in the public sphere. In the ongoing debate over global warming, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is the main site of such epistemological arrest, in that many nonspecialists choose its reports as their primary source of authority. Indeed, the IPCC's Third Assessment Report in 2001 formed the basis for the narrative of scientific consensus and epistemological certainty over the theory of anthropogenic global warming that was central to the claims made by *An Inconvenient Truth* (Houghton et. al 2001). As a surprise hit in the summer of 2006, the film itself reinforced this 'storyline', which subsequently came to dominate the framing of global warming in public discourses in this period. In response, so-called sceptics continue to argue that this scientific consensus is false, and has merely been enforced by the IPCC and its supporters to censor dissident and unorthodox scientific views.

Writing about *An Inconvenient Truth* in *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Global Warming* (2007), lawyer Christopher Horner, Senior Fellow at the libertarian Competitive Enterprise Institute, thus accused Al Gore of being guilty of both 'sins of omission', that is, of ignoring counterarguments, and 'sins of commission', or what he called 'flat-out misrepresentation', in the latter's attempt to assert the consensus position. 'Gore's movie', according to Horner (*ibid.*: 214), 'presents only evidence, largely anecdotal, favourable to his political agenda. He often presents it in misleading ways not only ignoring but occasionally editing out evidence belying his alarm, even when it conclusively puts

the lie to it.' Horner (ibid.: 222–23) points out, for example, that Gore omits to mention two papers published in 2004 that counter the claim that global warming is responsible for the melting of the Snows of Kilimanjaro. 'Revealing this truth', Horner (ibid.: 223) writes, 'requires time-consuming and distracting explanation, unlikely to advance Gore's Man-as-Agent-of-Doom hypothesis, and certainly not his anti-energy zeal'.

Horner's comments raise important questions about the time constraints that the film medium itself places on the communication of complex information in what Bill Nichols (1991: 34ff) calls 'expository' documentaries, such as *An Inconvenient Truth*. Like all media, including books, the expository documentary film has formal limits as a knowledge-producing medium. The evidence Gore presents in his film is necessarily selective, then, because of the nature of the filmic medium itself. But when does necessary simplification become misleading oversimplification? Some science documentaries, such as in BBC television's long-running *Horizon* series (1964 to present day), often establish a narrative of investigation, in which the film enacts a journey of discovery from ignorance to knowledge, and objections and alternative hypotheses are overcome in the pursuit of reliable scientific knowledge (Corner 2000: 145). Of necessity, however, *An Inconvenient Truth* presents Gore's pre-formulated slideshow on global warming, and so tends to gloss over problems and counterarguments. Indeed, comparing the film with the book that accompanied its release demonstrates the ways in which Gore adapted his presentation for cinema. In the book, Gore (2006: 65, 78) makes brief references to opposing views on the so-called Medieval Warming Period, for example. In the film, however, presumably for entertainment purposes, he adopts a mocking, comic voice on the phrase 'Medieval Warming Period' to suggest the pomposity or dogmatism of his opponents. Returning to Walton's study of the *ad verecundiam* argument will allow us to investigate the linguistic bases of Gore's use of polemic at such moments.

Walton (1997: 228) defines the appeal to expert opinion as, 'a kind of defeasible, presumptive reasoning that shifts burden of proof in reasoned dialogue'. When used validly, the respondent can ask critical questions of the appeal, on matters of credibility, trustworthiness, consistency and evidence (ibid.: 223). Walton thus distinguishes between *ad verecundiam* arguments that are 'fallacious' and those that are merely 'presumptively weak or unjustified': a fallacy occurs when 'what is basically a presumptive and defeasible type of argument is presented in an absolutistic and final manner in a dialogue' (ibid.: 230). An example of this is the 'dogmatic' appeal to authority, in which an argument is

put forward 'to appear to make it unchallengeable (not open to critical questioning)' (ibid.: 239). By presenting an argument in this way, the speaker is trying to silence his or her opponent prematurely. Walton cites argumentation theorist Snoeck Henkemans' work on 'dialogical clues', including the use of linguistic qualifiers such as 'certainly', 'necessarily', 'beyond doubt' and 'obviously', which speakers use in an attempt, as Walton (ibid.: 259) puts it, to 'preempt or block the asking of one or more of the appropriate critical questions'. This analysis of *ad verecundiam* arguments has an important bearing on *An Inconvenient Truth*, in that on occasions Gore's rhetoric lapses into a fallacious use of expert argument, as defined by Walton.

In a key speech in the film, Gore criticises what he calls the popular 'misconception' that there is disagreement among scientists over global warming: 'I've seen scientists who were persecuted, ridiculed, deprived of jobs, income, simply because the facts they discovered led them to an inconvenient truth that they insisted on telling'. This is the classical, empiricist view of science: scientists go where the facts lead them, and this knowledge is the basis for discovering truths about the real world. This rhetoric of scientific truth was taken up by journalists, as the word 'Truth' (with a capital 'T') in the film's title gave them a source of punning headlines. *Variety* (Higgins 2006: np) went with 'Paramount tells the "Truth"', while the *Los Angeles Times* (Welkos 2006: np) worked up the martial associations: 'Gore arrives in Cannes armed with the "Truth"'. David Edelstein in the *New Yorker* (Edelstein 2006: np) took the implication further into hyperbole: 'By all means, see the film, and watch who attacks it and on what grounds. Only a brainwashed audience (and its brainwashers) could portray anything Gore says about global warming as even remotely controversial'.

Gore's emphasis on scientific certainty, consensus and truth in *An Inconvenient Truth* may be explained by the film's social and political context. In an interview with *Grist* magazine in May 2006, Gore justified his desire to make a film about the science of anthropogenic global warming, rather than its social or political aspects, as a necessary intervention at a time when the American public was still in denial over the subject (Roberts 2006: 3). The film thus explicitly addressed an American audience ('we as Americans'), and attempted to establish the theory of anthropogenic global warming as a scientific fact.

Gore's narrative of scientific certainty was also a response to specific political developments in the United States at the time. In a memo leaked to an environmental organisation in March 2003, Republican Party consultant Frank Luntz appeared to advise activists deliberately to exploit the uncertainties in the science of global warming for their



own political ends. 'Should the public come to believe that the scientific issues are settled', Luntz (2002: 7) wrote, 'their views about global warming will change accordingly. Therefore, *you need to continue to make the lack of scientific certainty a primary issue in the debate*, and defer to scientists and other experts in the field' (Burkeman 2003: 1; emphasis in original). As BBC environmental journalist Roger Harrabin wrote in 2007, this right-wing political campaign explains why Gore made his film a 'polemic', in which, as he put it, 'assumptions became assertions and worst-case scenarios became the norm' (Harrabin 2007: 2). 'The sceptics', he continued, 'knew that they did not need to win the battle of climate facts, they just needed to keep doubt alive'; Gore's film was a response to 'that often cynical campaign, attempting to put climate change beyond doubt and remove ambiguity from presentation of the scientific facts' (ibid.: 2–3). In doing so, Gore simplified the equivocations and uncertainties in the IPCC's Third Assessment Report of 2001.

Two topics in particular demonstrate the way in which Gore's rhetoric of scientific certainty went beyond the findings of the IPCC's Third Assessment Report: the 'hockey stick' graph and glacial melting. The hockey-stick graph played a central role in popularising the narrative of scientific certainty after the report's publication in 2001. The IPCC's First Assessment Report in 1990 had suggested that temperatures were higher in the Medieval Warming Period than today (Houghton et al. 1990: 202). However, the Third Assessment Report included a graph labelled 'Millennial Northern Hemisphere (NH) temperature reconstruction (blue) and instrumental data (red) from AD1000 to 1999', from a 1999 paper by Michael E. Mann, Raymond S. Bradley and Malcolm K. Hughes, which showed a correlation between global temperatures and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and demonstrated that the pre-industrial era was not warmer than today (Houghton et al. 2001: 134). The 2001 report thus played down the significance of the Medieval Warming Period, while the sharply rising blade of the 'hockey stick' graph appeared to demonstrate that the twentieth-century warming period is historically unprecedented. In doing so, the graph provided support for the hypothesis that industrial emissions are accountable for recent temperature rises. The hockey-stick graph was given prominence in the Summary for Policy Makers section of the IPCC report, and subsequently became a much promoted icon of the case for anthropogenic climate change (ibid.: 3).

The vocabulary of the Third Assessment Report is noticeably provisional and measured in its presentation of the hockey-stick data, as the following extract shows: 'New analyses of proxy data for the Northern Hemisphere indicate that the increase in temperature in the twentieth

century is likely to have been the largest of any century during the past thousand years' (ibid.: 2). 'Likely' is defined as a 'sixty-six to ninety per cent chance'. This 'judgmental estimate of confidence' thus acknowledges uncertainties in the paleoclimate research (ibid.). In *An Inconvenient Truth*, in contrast, Gore exceeds the claims made in the IPCC Report by omitting its nuances and emphasising certainty rather than probability. He begins by acknowledging the complexity of the science involved in correlating global temperature with atmospheric carbon dioxide. 'The relationship is actually very complicated', he says, 'but there is one relationship that is far more powerful than all the others, and it is this: when there is more carbon dioxide, the temperature gets warmer, because it traps more heat from the Sun inside'. Having thus acknowledged that the science is complicated, Gore goes on to state unequivocally that the hockey-stick graph is uncontroversial:

There is not a single part of this graph – no fact, date, or number – that is controversial in any way or in dispute by anybody. To the extent that there is a controversy at all, it is that a few people in some of the less responsible coal, oil, and utility companies say, 'So what? That's not going to cause any problem'. But if we allow this to happen, it would be deeply and unforgivably immoral. It would condemn coming generations to a catastrophically diminished future.

In this speech, Gore brings together three typical ways in which he frames global warming in the film: as a moral rather than a political issue, as a dangerously apocalyptic future and as scientifically certain. The latter claim is of most concern here. Gore's emphasis on the certainty of the science appears somewhat disingenuous, in that to say that nothing in the hockey-stick graph is 'controversial' or 'in dispute' at the very least ignores the ongoing criticisms of the graph, which statisticians Steve McIntyre and Ross McKittrick had been airing extensively in the Climate Audit blog since 2004.

McIntyre's criticisms of the hockey-stick graph have focused on the statistical techniques used to generate the apparently unprecedented twentieth-century increase in global temperatures (McIntyre 2008). In a move typical of the political Right, Christopher Horner (2007: 221) took these criticisms as proof that the graph is 'thoroughly discredited'. However, such conclusions both distort McIntyre's work and overstate the scientific arguments against anthropogenic global warming by exaggerating certainty in the opposite direction to Gore. Dessler and Parson point out that arguments for global warming do not rely solely on the validity of a single graph. They observe that sceptics state 'that recent criticisms have destroyed the hockey-stick plot – and, since the

entire scientific case for global warming is built on the hockey-stick plot, that these criticisms show that global warming is a scientific fraud. This argument completely misrepresents the true state of knowledge about past climate variability and the origin of recent warming' (Dessler and Parson 2006: 140). Moreover, in an ongoing dispute, McIntyre's statistical work continues to be countered extensively and in detail on the Real Climate blog.

In departing from the tone of provisionality in the IPCC's Third Assessment Report, Gore may have been influenced by NASA scientist James Hansen (2005: 1), whose early use of the 'tipping point' metaphor indicated his belief that the IPCC was underestimating the urgency of the need for mitigation policies against anthropogenic global warming. *An Inconvenient Truth* adopted the notion of abrupt climate change that has been a feature of Hansen's work, according to which, because the Earth's climate is a chaotic, nonlinear system, sudden jumps from one state to another are possible.

The notion of abrupt climate change reinvigorated the apocalyptic mode in debates on global warming by introducing a new conception of time into such discourses. Environmental scientist Mike Hulme (2009: 201–2) writes that, 'the time-delayed, ambiguous, remote and often abstract nature of the risks of climate change does not generally evoke strong visceral reactions in the lay public'. That the 'time-delayed' nature of climate change is a problem in communicating its risks to the public may explain the emphasis on an accelerated timescale in *An Inconvenient Truth* and its attendant publicity material. For example, Jeff Skoll, CEO of Participant Productions, the film's production company, said of Gore's slideshow on global warming that it 'presented the urgency of what's going to happen not in the next twenty to fifty years, but in the next five to ten years' (Thompson 2006b: 29). This sense of imminent and sudden catastrophe allowed for the promotion of the documentary film as a hybrid of popular melodramatic genres such as disaster science fiction, horror and the thriller. The trailer and poster used the tagline, 'The scariest movie you'll ever see', while the first advertisement for the film, published in the *Los Angeles Times* on 21 May 2006, read: 'It Grabs You Like A Thriller with an Ending that will Haunt your Dreams'. Eugenia Peretz's review from *Vanity Fair* was given prominence: 'Should be seen by everyone who cares whether or not the human race will still exist in fifty years' (*Los Angeles Times* 2006, E1).

The second of Gore's scientific claims that I will consider, on glacial melting, shares this tone of sudden and imminent apocalypse. Gore says in the film: 'If Greenland broke up and melted, or if half

of Greenland and half of West Antarctica broke up and melted, this is what would happen to the sea level in Florida. This is what would happen in the San Francisco Bay. A lot of people live in these areas. The Netherlands, the Low Countries: absolute devastation'. Although he does not explicitly mention a specific timescale here, Gore uses the present tense, rather than the future, to describe the impact of rising sea levels. He repeats this grammatical emphasis in his subsequent references to the current populations of Beijing, Shanghai and Calcutta, and then in his references to two traumatic events in recent American history: 'Here is Manhattan. This is the World Trade Centre memorial site. After the horrible events of 9/11 we said never again. This is what would happen to Manhattan. They can measure this precisely, just as scientists could predict precisely how much water would breach the levee in New Orleans'.

In contrast to Gore's 'storyline' of glacial melting, the IPCC Third Assessment Report made both the timescale and the probabilistic nature of projected glacial melting explicit: 'Ice sheet models project that a local warming of larger than 3°C, if sustained for millennia, would lead to virtually a complete melting of the Greenland ice sheet with a resulting sea level rise of about seven metres' (Houghton et al., 2001: 17). In *An Inconvenient Truth*, Gore retained the reference to the size of sea-level rise, but crucially ignored the reference to 'millennia'.

These ambiguities became a source of disagreement in the debate over global warming that surrounded the British court case brought against the film in October 2007. Judge Barton used the IPCC Report as his basis for ruling that Gore had exaggerated the timescale of possible sea-level rises from anthropogenic climate change. 'It is common ground', he said, 'that if indeed Greenland melted, it would release this amount of water, but *only* after, and over, millennia, so that the Armageddon scenario he predicts, insofar as it suggests that sea level rises of seven metres might occur in the immediate future, is not in line with the scientific consensus' (Dimmock 2007: 8).

However, whereas the Judge heard in Gore's words an implication about the 'immediate future', Gavin Schmidt, a climate modeller at the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, and Michael Mann, coauthor of the hockey-stick graph, apparently heard no reference to timescale at all in Gore's words. Replying to the Judge's ruling on the Real Climate blog, they wrote that, in the film, 'no timescale for (the sea-level rise) was specified'. Confirming the amount of sea-level rise mentioned by Gore, they commented that the 'rate at which this is likely to happen is however highly uncertain as we have discussed previously' (Schmidt and Mann 2007). However, by not directly addressing the reference to

millennia in the IPCC report, Schmidt and Mann avoided the point of contention altogether, thereby making their defence of Gore's claims a weak one.

Roger Harrabin (2007: 2) observed in an article on Judge Barton's ruling that more recent scientific findings, released after the film, suggested that the timescale for the melting of Arctic ice may be shorter than the IPCC stated in its 2001 report, so that Gore's implication of imminent sea-level rise may be scientifically defensible after all. Nevertheless, Gore's failure to differentiate explicitly between certainty and probability, or between worst-case scenarios and mid or low-range predictions, renders problematic the way he communicates the issue of glacial melting in the film. The content of Gore's message was not as certain and incontrovertible as he implied, and his choice of words opened up the film to subsequent criticism. The disagreement over semantics between the Judge and the climate scientists was a consequence of the vagueness and evasiveness of Gore's language, in that, by omitting a clear and unambiguous reference to the timescale of glacial melting, he confused and ultimately misled his audience on this issue.

One of the ironies in the controversy over anthropogenic global warming is that the notion of scientific consensus, which has been a target of sustained attack from the political Right because it underpins many calls for global warming mitigation policies – including those made by *An Inconvenient Truth*, has itself been subject to criticism within academic science studies, which identifies itself with the political Left. Writing in *The Postmodern Condition* in 1979, Lyotard argued that legitimation in science proceeds through 'dissension' rather than through a goal of universal consensus. Consensus 'is a horizon that is never reached' (1984: 61). Developing Thomas Kuhn's notion of revolutionary paradigm shifts in science, Lyotard (*ibid.*) asserted that, 'someone always comes along to disturb the order of "reason"'.

In *Science in Action*, Bruno Latour (1987: 4) also questioned the notion of consensus in science, arguing that science studies should focus on 'science in the making' rather than on 'ready made science'. By 2004, however, Latour acknowledged that the global warming debate had begun to pose challenges to this approach. Responding to Frank Luntz's memo to Republican activists, mentioned earlier, Latour's essay in *Critical Inquiry* displayed a rare moment of methodological self-doubt: perhaps his own interest in emphasising epistemological uncertainty was not necessarily politically progressive after all. As Latour (2004a: 2) put it, Luntz was presiding over an 'artificially maintained scientific controversy' for political reasons, and was inadvertently using an argument familiar to left-wing science studies about the social construction

of consensus to further his own conservative political agenda. In the controversy over global warming, wrote Latour (*ibid.*), ‘dangerous extremists are using the very same argument of social construction to destroy hard-won evidence that could save our lives’. Latour thus asked of himself: ‘Why does it burn my tongue to say that global warming is a fact whether you like it or not? Why can’t I simply say that the argument is closed for good?’

Latour took up the issue again in *Politics of Nature* (2004b: 111), noting, like Maarten Hajer, that there is a practical ‘requirement of closure’ in all scientific investigations. Wishing to avoid what he believes to be the dogmatic and authoritarian implications of empirical arguments from ‘matters of fact’, Latour proposed an alternative notion of ‘matters of concern’, in which the social processes involved in the construction of facts are openly acknowledged. This approach has particular implications for the science of global warming: ‘[W]e can wait for the sciences to come up with additional proofs that will put an end to the uncertainties, or we can consider uncertainty as an inevitable ingredient of crises in the environment and in public health. The second attitude has the advantage of replacing something that is not open to discussion with something that can be debated’ (*ibid.*: 63). Replacing ‘matters of fact’ with ‘matters of concern’ is for him the best way to ‘fight against the artificial continuation of scientific controversies’ such as global warming (*ibid.*: 278).

The critique of scientific consensus in Lyotard and Latour, outlined here, is only partly valid, however, and risks dogmatic oversimplification. As philosopher Stephen Toulmin (1976: 181) observes, consensus ‘frequently’ exists in science, and, far from being impossible or undesirable, is a necessary part of the progressive accumulation of scientific knowledge, which is always provisional and subject to revision. As he puts it, ‘this shared ground, point of view, and basic concepts form the joint body of “common sense” that permits the scientists concerned to carry on a mutually intelligible debate’ (*ibid.*). Critical realist philosophers such as Toulmin have thus addressed questions of scientific epistemology with greater clarity and plausibility than Latour and Lyotard, by retaining critically reflexive concepts such as ‘fact’ and ‘objectivity’ that poststructuralist philosophy tends to reject. Extending critical realism to the study of documentary film, Carl Plantinga (1997) concludes that critically maligned notions of ‘reality’, ‘truth’ and ‘objectivity’ are necessary and defensible concepts. His argument is based on a critique of the limitations of poststructuralist thinking: ‘If there exist no truths and no facts of the matter, then we have no basis for disputing the claims or perspective of any nonfiction film, and no basis for choosing

one moral or political representation over another, aside from the sheer narcissistic faith that our beliefs or methods are superior' (Plantinga 1997: 219–20). Plantinga's proposal of a notion of "'approximate truth", always fallible, partial at best, finally inadequate, and subject to revision', thus avoids the philosophical problems encountered by Latour and Lyotard, and is an insightful way of approaching the claims to 'Truth' constructed by Gore in his documentary film (*ibid.*).

Ultimately, the disputes over the public presentation of the science of global warming explored in this chapter thus involve wider questions about the validity of Enlightenment notions of rationality and science. Reason emerges from its posthumanist critiques as culturally situated, physically embodied and temporal. At their best, such critiques have led not to an abandonment of reason and rationality, but to their critical evaluation. Indeed, rational criteria, such as those critically explored by Walton and Hajer's use of argumentation theory, are vital if a viewer is to decide whether to trust *An Inconvenient Truth* or *The Great Global Warming Swindle* (2007), or neither.

By 2009, the hockey-stick graph was no longer the centrepiece of global warming advocacy, and the importance of consensus and certainty in climate science was being questioned in the pointedly titled *Why We Disagree About Climate Change*, in which Mike Hulme tries to establish a role for science beyond the apparent need for consensus. 'We disagree about science', he writes, 'because we have different understandings of the relationship of scientific evidence to other things: to what we may regard as ultimate "truth", to the ways in which we relate uncertainty to risk, and to what we believe to be the legitimate role of knowledge in policy making' (2009: 106). Significantly, Hulme's book does not attempt to resolve either the scientific or the political arguments about climate change once and for all.

The challenge for documentary films about global warming is that the methods and findings of climate science are understood and communicated to the public as effectively as possible. This will involve an understanding of science as probability rather than as certainty. Writing at the end of the so-called Science Wars in American academia in the late 1990s, Jane Gregory and Steve Miller (2001: 71) concluded that:

[T]he key to the relationship between science and the public is trust, and that trust is established through the negotiation of a mutual understanding, rather than through statements of authority or of facts. Among other things, that means that while science has every right to defend its role as a provider of 'reliable knowledge' in our society, scientists need to make clear that one of the key features of science is its inherent provisionality.

They add that this is especially true of areas of ‘science-in-the-making’ such as climate science. Despite the film’s many strong points, and its vital role in putting the subject of global warming onto the political agenda in the United States, this lesson could be applied to Gore’s presentation of the case for anthropogenic global warming in *An Inconvenient Truth*. Analysis of the reception of the film demonstrates that the formal limitations inherent in audiovisual communication can play a large part in keeping interpretation of a documentary film open and contested. Yet the filmmakers themselves made choices in form and content that shaped and partly determined that interpretative process.

## References

- An Inconvenient Truth*. 2006. [Film]. Directed by D. Guggenheim. U.S.A.: Participant Productions.
- Burkeman, O. 2003. ‘Memo Exposes Bush’s New Green Strategy’. *Guardian*, 4 March 2003: pp. 1–2. Retrieved 15 March 2011 from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2003/mar/04/usnews.climatechange>
- Chanan, M. 2008. ‘Filming the Invisible’, in T. Austin and W. de Jong (eds), *Rethinking Documentary: New Perspectives, New Practices*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Open University Press, pp. 121–32.
- Corner, J. 2000. ‘Visibility as Truth and Spectacle in TV Documentary Journalism’, in I. Bondebjerg (ed.), *Moving Images, Culture and the Mind*. Luton: University of Luton Press, pp. 143–53.
- Denby, D. 2006. *The New Yorker*. 12 June, np.
- Dessler, A.E. and E.A. Parson. 2006. *The Science and Politics of Global Climate Change: A Guide to the Debate*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ‘Dimmock v Secretary of State for Education and Skills’. 2007. England and Wales High Court (Administrative Court) Decisions. Retrieved 15 March 2011 from <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2007/2288.html>
- Edelstein, D. 2006. *The New Yorker*, 5 June, np.
- Gore, A. 2006. *An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We Can Do About It*. Bloomsbury: London.
- The Great Global Warming Swindle*. 2007. [Film]. Directed by M. Durkin. WAGtv.
- Gregory, J. and S. Miller. 2001. ‘Caught in the Crossfire? The Public’s Role in the Science Wars’, in J.A. Labinger and H. Collins (eds), *The One Culture? A Conversation about Science*. London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 61–72.
- Hajer, M.A. 1995. *The Politics of Environmental Discourse: Ecological Modernisation and the Policy Process*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hansen, J.E. 2005. ‘Is There Still Time to Avoid “Dangerous Anthropogenic Interference” with Global Climate?: A Tribute to Charles David Keeling’. Retrieved 15 March 2011 from [http://www.columbia.edu/~jeh1/2005/Keeling\\_20051206.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/~jeh1/2005/Keeling_20051206.pdf)



- Harrabin, R. 2007. 'The Heat and Light in Global Warming'. *BBC News*, 11 October. Retrieved 15 March 2011 from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/7040370.stm>
- Higgins, B. 2006. 'Paramount Tells the "Truth"'. *Variety*, 18 May, np.
- Horner, C. 2007. *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Global Warming and Environmentalism*. Washington DC: Regnery Publishing.
- Houghton, J.T., et al. (eds). 1990. *Climate Change: The IPCC Scientific Assessment. Report Prepared for IPCC by Working Group 1*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2001. *Climate Change 2001: The Scientific Basis. Contributions of Working Group I to the Third Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hulme, M. 2009. *Why We Disagree About Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Latour, B. 1987. *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . 2004a. 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern'. *Critical Inquiry*, 30.2. Retrieved 25 April 2013 from <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/89-CRITICAL-INQUIRY-GB.pdf>
- . 2004b. *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. Trans. C. Porter. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press.
- Los Angeles Times*. 2006. Advertisement. 21 May, p. E1.
- Luntz, F. 2002. 'The Environment: A Cleaner, Safer, Healthier America'. Retrieved 25 April 2013 from <https://www2.bc.edu/~plater/Newpublicsite06/suppmats/02.6.pdf>
- Lyotard, J.-F. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- McIntyre, S. 2008. 'Gore Scientific "Adviser" Says He Has No "Responsibility" for AIT Errors'. Retrieved 15 March 2011 from <http://climateaudit.org/2008/01/13/sticking-thermometers-in-places-they-dont-belong/>
- Mellor, F. 2009. 'The Politics of Accuracy in Judging Global Warming Films'. *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture*, 3.2, July: pp. 134–50. Retrieved 25 October 2012 from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17524030902916574>
- Minster, M. 2010. 'The Rhetoric of Assent in *An Inconvenient Truth* and *Everything's Cool*', in P. Willoquet-Maricondi (ed.), *Framing the World: Explorations in Ecocriticism and Film*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, pp. 25–42.
- Montford, A.W. 2010. *The Hockey Stick Illusion: Climategate and the Corruption of Science*. London: Stacey International.
- Nichols, B. 1991. *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- . 2008. 'The Question of Evidence, the Power of Rhetoric and Documentary Film', in T. Austin and W. de Jong (eds), *Rethinking Documentary: New*

- Perspectives, New Practices*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Open University Press, pp. 29–38.
- Plantinga, C.R. 1997. *Rhetoric and Representation in Nonfiction Film*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Revkin, A. 2006. 'A Former Next President Finds His Bully Pulpit on Screen'. *New York Times*, 22 May, Arts Section, p. 7.
- Roberts, D. 2006. 'An Interview with Accidental Movie Star Al Gore', *Grist*, 9 May, pp. 1–4. Retrieved 25 April 2013 from <http://www.grist.org/article/roberts2/>
- Rust, S. 2013. 'Hollywood and Climate Change', in S. Rust, S. Monani and S. Cubitt (eds), *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*. New York and London: Routledge, pp. 191–211.
- Schmidt, G. and M. Mann. 2007. 'Convenient Untruths'. *Real Climate*. 15 October. Retrieved 15 March 2010 from <http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2007/10/convenient-untruths/>
- Thompson, A. 2006a. 'Purveyors of "Truth" are Thinking Globally'. *Hollywood Reporter*, 5 May, pp. 6, 37.
- . 2006b. 'Skoll Puts Politics in Spotlight.' *Hollywood Reporter*, 19 January, pp. 9, 29.
- Toulmin, S. 1976. *Knowing and Acting: An Invitation to Philosophy*. London and New York: Macmillan.
- Walton, D. 1997. *Appeal to Expert Opinion: Arguments from Authority*. University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Welkos, R.W. 2006. 'Gore Arrives in Cannes Armed with the "Truth"'. *Los Angeles Times*, 22 May, np.

## PLANET IN FOCUS

Environmental Film Festivals

*Kay Armatage*

### Case Study: Planet in Focus

On opening night, 13 October 2010, Planet in Focus (Toronto) kicked off its eleventh environmental film and video festival with an unprecedented splash.<sup>1</sup> The opening film, *In the Wake of the Flood* (2010) was accompanied by its director, documentary stalwart Ron Mann, as well as its subject, Margaret Atwood – a Canadian literary star of international magnitude. Atwood and her husband Graeme Gibson, known for their long dedication to the environment and particularly the protection of birds, were there in person to receive the festival's 2010 Eco Hero award. After tumultuous applause for the film, The Echo Choir performed songs from the original film score, bringing one hundred women's voices to the stage. It was a rapturous occasion, with a sold-out audience alongside representatives of the event sponsors, Random House Publishers and Lush Cosmetics.

Random House supported their bestselling author, Margaret Atwood, on her eco-friendly book tour promoting her futuristic environmentalist allegory *The Year of the Flood*. Criss-crossing the U.K., North America and Europe, Atwood not only travelled by ocean liner and train to reduce the tour's carbon footprint, but she also worked with local community groups on musical theatre productions based on the novel's ecological hymnary – songs that praise the new-millennial patron saints, including philosopher Henry David Thoreau, environmentalist Rachel Carson and naturalist Euell Gibbons.<sup>2</sup> In each location, the grassroots approach involved inspirational figures as narrators, accompanists and choirs, theatre volunteers on costumes and props – all local – and the composer and conductor who travelled with Atwood. Her conception of the live version of the book was to go beyond identifying environmental and social ills such as climate change, pollution, economic inequity and racism. Rather, Atwood sought to inspire her audience into awareness and civic action.

The other sponsor was Lush Cosmetics, a Canadian retail chain of products made from organic vegetarian ingredients with little or no preservatives or packaging and no animal testing, which – like The Body Shop – claims to use its buying power to effect positive change in the world.<sup>3</sup> In addition to partnering with regional and national groups to lobby for new green regulations, Lush supports hundreds of environmental groups through its direct action ethical campaigns. Shortly after the gala screening, Lush donated CAD \$10,000 to one of Margaret Atwood's favourite bird sanctuaries. Balzac's Coffee ('Artisanal, Sustainable, Local and Natural') joined in by featuring displays of their shade-grown coffee (friendlier to birds) and partnered with Atwood to produce a Smithsonian Institute certified 'Bird Friendly' blend, pledging CAD \$1.00 from every pound sold to be donated to the Pelee Island Bird Observatory.<sup>4</sup>

As the Planet in Focus festival got rolling, participants repaired to a nearby martini bar to celebrate their new standing. No longer an event attended only by the committed few, Planet in Focus (PIF) had arrived. With funding from a variety of governments and foundations, sponsorships from corporations and foreign consulates and support from dozens of community partners, the festival is thriving.

In the ensuing five days of the festival, one hundred films screened in four venues on a wide range of topics. As Artistic Director Kathleen Mullen put it, 'environmental issues can mean just about anything: genetically modified food, climate change, human rights, social issues, indigenous rights, innovation, farming, health, wildlife and so much more' (Mullen 2010: 3). Festival events included panel discussions on topics such as 'Reaching the Unconverted' and 'The Green Pitch', a photography exhibition, school programmes, children's day, spotlights on biodiversity, and post-screening discussions with filmmakers. A one-day festival sidebar, The Green Market, was established in 2007 with a mandate to advance exposure and marketing opportunities for environmental films and videos. The full-time festival staff of three (augmented at the time of the festival by many volunteers) is justifiably pleased with their success.<sup>5</sup>

Ten years into their operation, PIF is currently undergoing major changes, moving away from a uni-dimensional festival organisation to becoming a year-round environmental arts corporation.<sup>6</sup> As with other topical, politically committed festivals, the challenge is to reach beyond the core audience of self-described environmentalists. To this end, the Mixed Greens programme, a monthly screening series that supports the festival through audience expansion strategies, is entering its third year. PIF tours the 'best of the fest' to museums and schools in other

parts of Canada and coaches teachers and students in high schools on how to produce their own mini-festivals, augmenting the educational initiative with a two-week summer day camp teaching young people how to make films sustainably (with results exhibited in the festival).

In fact, most sizable festivals carry on auxiliary programming throughout the year, keeping their brand in the public eye while simultaneously accessing a variety of funding opportunities. PIF also runs a charitable foundation that distributes donations from corporations and individuals to environmental causes. Sarah Margolius, PIF Executive Director between 2010 and 2012, suggests that the auxiliary programming supports the annual festival, rather than the other way around.<sup>7</sup>

Remarkably for a small festival, PIF also maintains an archive of all film submissions, whether selected for screening or not over the past ten years, and routinely lends out copies for preview or research to other aspiring groups, exhibitors and newly founded festivals in other locations. The archive is remarkable because what Dina Iordanova (2012) calls 'social concern' festivals rarely have either continuing staff or space, as often such festivals are run by volunteers working from home or temporary offices, with directors changing regularly. Thus, valuable documents – catalogues and other historically useful records, in addition to the visual material – tend to disappear. PIF, in contrast, is privileged to work in a municipally subsidised heritage complex, with sufficient extra space to archive the collection of more than four thousand titles, the largest resource of its kind in North America.

The most far-reaching of the PIF programmes is Green Screen, which works with industry stakeholders to 'establish standards, guidelines and resources that will keep the industry at a competitive advantage by establishing the most advanced green protocols in the creative industries'.<sup>8</sup> Margolius (2011) explains that their mission is not just to showcase films but also to attend to environmental production practices.<sup>9</sup> To reduce the footprint of film and television production, the pan-industry Green Screen initiative involves collaboration among trade associations, unions and guilds, production and postproduction facilities, suppliers, distributors, festivals, service providers, industry associations and government.

The Green Screen Toronto Environmental Impact Calculator, developed by PIF, enables comparison to a 'business as usual' industry baseline to determine environmental savings, as well as to identify the production's overall environmental footprint. In this initiative, PIF aligns itself with other similar projects, such as the online Code of Best Practices for Sustainable Filmmaking developed by the Center for Social Media, American University, Washington, D.C. This code

supplies online 'carbon trackers' that assist in calculating the amount of emissions a production is likely to create. After the initial calculation, steps are taken to reduce the footprint to a minimum at every production level – fuel for transport, aviation and generator use, as well as paper consumption, electricity use, film stock and related items – and the tracker can also assess the actual reduction of energy and resources used during the production's lifecycle (Center for Social Media 2009). There are many different offsetters available, with different online calculators, a wide variety of elements addressed and slightly different formats for inputting data. The data calculation instrument that PIF is developing to measure impact differs from many in its calculation of waste as well as emissions, and has already been in successful use with local feature film and television productions. In its fourth year, the programme is well on its way to becoming a sustainable social enterprise.

## Environmental Film Festivals in Long View

Planet in Focus is just one of many environmental film festivals around the world, most of which have been established since the 1980s, the decade of the florescence of film festivals on a global scale (Stringer 2001: 135). Although small new festivals in multiple centres populate the institutional environment, there are some long-established exceptions. Ekofilm – International Film Festival on the Environment and Natural and Cultural Heritage (Czech Republic) is the oldest European film festival on the environment. Founded in 1974 as a contribution to the World Environmental Day declared by the United Nations, it runs annually over a week-long period, and as such is not only the oldest but also one of the largest specialised festivals in the world, exhibiting upwards of two hundred titles, including feature films, television-length documentaries and shorts. Such a wide selection is, perforce, eclectic (a characteristic of most of the festivals, no matter how many films are exhibited). In 2010, Ekofilm included films on hot peppers, the gardens of Delhi, and the great grey shrike, advocacy/educational documentaries and popular titles such as *The Fabulous Story of Poop – In the Name of the Throne* (2008).<sup>10</sup>

The Grenoble International Nature and Environmental Film Festival, founded in 1976 and thus one of the oldest in Europe, was the first film festival in France dedicated to wildlife and environmental themes. It was begun by FRAPNA (Federation Rhône-Alpes of Nature Conservation), itself established in 1971. Within a few years, the Grenoble festival was

flanked by the Festival International du Film d'Environnement and the Green Lifestyle Film Festival, both founded in 1983 and located on the Ile-de-France, and Rencontres Cinéma-Nature located in Dompierre-sur-Besbre, founded in 1989.<sup>11</sup>

Wildscreen Festival, founded in 1982 in Bristol, England – a centre for wildlife filmmaking – was another early entry. Running every other year, it has become one of the most important environmental festivals in the world, attracting hundreds of delegates who work in film, television and the global press, as well as those actively involved in working to conserve the environment.<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting that there is often a blurring of boundaries between environmental film festivals, such as PIF, and wildlife film festivals, such as Wildscreen, as Mullen contended above. Wildlife films, especially of the sort honoured at Wildscreen, rarely espouse a political agenda regarding animal rights or conservation.

Wildscreen exhibits approximately one hundred films over a five-day run – an average title count for the larger festivals but at this juncture the scope of the Bristol event far exceeds most other environmental festivals. With Sir David Attenborough as principal spokesperson, it attracts major sponsorship from Animal Planet, BBC Earth, National Geographic and the World Wildlife Foundation, as well as industry leaders such as Panasonic. Festival sidebars include a substantial market for world sales, multiple workshops and master classes, myriad networking opportunities and demonstrations of the latest technology (3D in 2010, as well as underwater filming and digital manipulation). Wildscreen's Panda Awards in twenty-three categories, including sound, music, script, editing and cinematography as well as specific targeted awards (new media, newcomer, popular broadcast), are touted as the 'the "Oscars" of the wildlife TV and film industry'.<sup>13</sup> And like the Oscars, the Panda Awards tend to go to works from major producers, including Animal Planet, National Geographic Television, Disney, WNET (U.S.A.) and the BBC. This list of prizewinners may understandably raise sceptical eyebrows; dominant producers such as Disney, National Geographic and BBC Television are frequently critiqued from within ecocriticism and human-animal studies for their problematic environmental politics, as I will summarise a little later on.

From the early 1990s to the present day, hundreds of environmental film festivals have been established all over the globe. In the south, a prominent example is the Reel Earth film festival in Palmerston North, New Zealand. In its seventh iteration in 2011, the week-long festival offered prizes in categories such as Environmental Sustainability, Science Communication, best New Zealand film, best feature and best

'Ultra Short'. In 2011 the festival found a thematic concentration in films about mining, and continued its practice of offering filmmaking seminars and a 'sustainability expo' featuring a range of products and ideas. Its major sponsors are home-grown institutions (the city council and the local university) and MWH, a New Zealand engineering and environmental consultancy.<sup>14</sup>

Earth Vision–Tokyo Global Environmental Film Festival is typical of many festivals in major cities. Established in 1992 to coincide with the Tokyo Earth Summit, Earth Vision was the first international environmental film festival in Asia. Like the majority of speciality festivals, it runs over a weekend and features many local films. Dozens of such small festivals are known from Italy to Iceland, from Brazil to Bali – non-profit events organised by local governments, environmental groups, schools and other community organisations. Paralleling PIF's touring and schools project, Earth Vision boasts a similar practice, lending out a programme of the top films, including award winners from previous Earth Vision festivals, for non-profit screening/exhibiting events at various locations.<sup>15</sup> Kevin McMahon (2011), director of multiple award-winning *Waterlife* (2009), has said that his film has been exhibited on an ongoing weekly basis in environmental film festivals in both large and small centres around the globe.<sup>16</sup>

By the end of the twentieth century, environmental film festivals comprised a movement of global reach. In acknowledgement of such growth, Ecomove International was launched in 2002 by five European international film festivals and Earth Vision Tokyo as a network of such festivals across the world. Ecomove International organises and supports environmental media events on a world scale and, every second year, stages a festival where the world's best environmental films are shown and awarded. The member festivals, many from the eastern European block, are among the premier institutions in Europe.<sup>17</sup> With outreach partners in South America, South Asia and Asia, Ecomove has offered summer university courses on the communication of sustainability (from polar bears to new images that might trigger changes in consumer behaviour or in the structure of our energy supply) and conferences on media, climate and energy. In addition, Ecomove is an active producer of media packages on topics such as climate change and water as well as offering a variety of support services to European organisations involved in environmental projects.

In North America, there are several significant festivals as well as many smaller ones – 'pinpoints on a vast, sprawling map of trans-cultural film exhibition and consumption' (Stringer 2001: 134). Mark



Haslam laid out the contours of such social concern festivals: in contrast to the major festivals, which rely heavily on stars to draw in audiences, and in turn, revenue, and corporate sponsors, minoritarian festivals rely primarily on funding from ‘arts councils and other government sources’ as well as volunteer labour, ‘which often exceeds the value of all other contributions’ (Haslam 2004: 49–50). Of the small festivals in small centres, the American Conservation Film Festival (ACFF) could be considered typical. Located in Shepherdstown, West Virginia (population 5,951 and with ‘a vibrant arts community’), its mailing address is a Post Office box, indicating that it has no permanent office space and that its organisers are volunteers who probably change frequently. The website announces that it was started by a ‘group of volunteers who shared both a devotion to film arts and a commitment to sound environmental science’.<sup>18</sup> Over four days, it showcases fifty films in government and university venues. Well-known productions that have travelled the circuit of major festivals and have even opened commercially in major centres are exhibited alongside local productions. *The Cove* (2009), for example, was shown in Shepherdstown in November 2010, after having played in mainstream and documentary festivals in 2009 (Sundance, Hot Docs, Seattle, Sydney, Amsterdam, and many others) and having won the Academy Award for best documentary in February 2010. Others, such as *Toxic Soup* (2010), were doing the rounds of second and third tier U.S. festivals (Atlanta, New Jersey, Twin Cities, Louisville).

*Waterlife*, a wonderful film that documents the industrial pollution of the Great Lakes and the threat to North America’s drinking water, has played at countless such smaller festivals, in addition to major international festivals and large documentary and environmental film events. In recounting the dedication of both organisers and audiences at these small festivals, McMahon (2011) augments Lewis Lapham’s contention that environmentalism amounts to a new secular religion with his observation that environmental film festivals bring together the new congregation (Lapham 2010). Even if the film is exhibited on a temporary screen from a DVD in a community centre, with the audience sitting in uncomfortable folding chairs, McMahon says, they stay there not only for one hundred or so minutes of the screening, but remain engaged for up to two hours of discussion afterwards. For filmmakers, he says, these discussions are extremely rewarding, and many of the participants remain engaged long after the screening. He gestured towards a box on his office shelf that contained clippings, poems, information and artefacts – materials received from audience members for future environmentalist projects.<sup>19</sup>

## Interested Communities

McMahon (2011) suggests that the hundreds of small festivals are filling a gap that people perceive, not unjustifiably, in mainstream media. Although much of the insight available in the films shown at these festivals can be gleaned by assiduous information gathering through newspapers and the Internet, the environment is not a priority on television – the source of most people’s information, especially in North America. On the other hand, in Australia, the debate around climate change and green issues is very present in the media. Previous Australian politicians and governments have been toppled by advocating green platforms, but former Prime Minister Julia Gillard has come out firmly on the side of science, and a carbon pricing scheme, commonly referred to as a carbon tax, was introduced by the Gillard Government on 1 July 2012. It requires businesses emitting over 25,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions annually to purchase emissions permits. The scheme directly affects approximately 300 ‘liable entities’ representing the highest emitters in Australia.

Yet in the west, as opposed to other minoritarian causes such as gay issues, which have increasingly become part of the mainstream, the environment has diminished in priority even with public broadcasters, who increasingly cite ‘green fatigue’ as a deterrent to environmentalist programming. Although *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) sparked a surge of interest, theatrical revenue for such documentaries dropped off rapidly, leaving television as a main outlet for environmental content. And as Kevin McMahon points out, because automobile companies largely underwrite television the polar bears, sharks and big cats – ‘charismatic mega-fauna’ – tend to dominate western broadcast media of this type.

Haslam emphasises funding or sponsorship as another nodal site of ideology, as most of these festivals have charitable status thereby allowing private as well as corporate donations to be written off as tax deductions. Focusing on funding, Haslam points to the ways in which different festivals interpolate donors, as diverse citizens or merely as consumers, as well as to curatorial aspects: corporate sponsorship generally leads to exhibition of ‘big’ films, allowing less space for local productions or community interests. Thus he urges programmers, curators and festivals, ‘to play a more deliberate role in presenting critical images and ideas in counterpoint to the increasingly dominant ideologies of the mainstream media juggernauts’ (Haslam 2004: 49).

In support of such a sense of interested community, ACFF makes a point of showcasing local (Appalachian) and independent films.<sup>20</sup> In this practice ACFF reinforces Haslam’s second major edict for social

concern festivals, 'fill the gap, don't reproduce the pap'. On one level this has curatorial implications:

[I]t means giving preference to works that will not have a commercial theatrical release or be broadcast in the same geographical region. But deeper than that, it means scanning the contemporary and historical media environment for the voices that have been excluded, the genres that have been marginalised, the topics that have been suppressed, the filmmakers whose contributions have been undervalued, the audiences that have been ignored or underserved. This should be the ground from which our curatorial vision and *raison d'être* emerge. (Ibid.: 52)

These values are essential to understanding Haslam's larger concept of niche film festival culture. As he puts it, '[i]n order to resist potential contamination of one's aspirations, festivals and programmers should clearly articulate their programming and curatorial values' (ibid.: 50).

Resistance to contamination and its oscillating alternative positivist component fuel environmental film festivals, as well as many other nature or single-issue environmental festivals that show films only as one element of the event. Here, Benedict Anderson's (1991) concept of 'imagined communities' comes into play; the production of such communities is, indeed, one of the principal functions of festivals. As Stringer (2001: 134) argues, '[f]estivals function as a space of mediation, a cultural matrix within which the aims and activities of specific interest groups are negotiated'. McMahon puts this concept another way by inflecting Anderson's imagined community with a more active notion of an interested community. He suggests that the audience comes away with a sense that they possess an underground knowledge that is not otherwise widely available – like *samizdat*, he says – unfolding information that is perceived to be suppressed by the mainstream. Stringer also nods in this direction in his contention that film and festival scholars need to consider the exhibition site as 'a new kind of counter public sphere' (Stringer 2001: 136).

## **Aesthetics: Art and Advocacy**

Although Margolius eschews any hints of competition among environmental film festivals, claiming collaboration as the principal mode of connectedness among the global players, the emphasis on premiers in the catalogues of most festivals, and the claims of the large ones, such as Wildscreen ('the most influential and prestigious'), belie such a simplistic, although laudatory, view.<sup>21</sup> Environmental film festivals, like the major international festivals (Cannes, Berlin, Toronto, etc.), as Stringer

notes, constitute a coalition of the state, local government, corporate sponsors and intellectuals who are making an intervention into the festival scene by bidding for audiences and titles. The contradictions of such a position are obvious, as festivals must work in two directions at once. 'As local differences are being erased through globalisation, festivals need to be similar to one another, but as novelty is also at a premium, the local and particular also becomes very valuable' (Stringer 2001: 139).

Here we come to the crux of the aesthetic issues that such festivals juggle. On the one hand, as Haslam indicated, the emphasis in many green festivals on local issues and local productions, as well as on films unlikely to secure theatrical distribution or television broadcast, tends to prioritise content and advocacy over cinematic quality. This is not always the case, but it is possible to characterise the dilemma of the issue-specific and committed festival in this way. Films by local activists and young filmmakers are often the most passionate and even the most convincing, even if lacking in cinematic quality.

Indeed, for some audiences and critics, professional cinematic qualities – 'slickness' – may even cast the advocacy agenda into doubt. Formal or conceptual films with environmental agendas are also unlikely to play at environmental film festivals, as these films usually screen in forums specifically geared towards art rather than advocacy, such as galleries and cinematheques. Films by Rose Lowder and James Benning – two filmmakers featured in *Screening Nature* – are examples of films that are now being considered for their environmental content as well as their formal structure, although they have rarely – if ever – been showcased in eco-festivals. Exceptions include the award-winning films of the Greek Ecocinema International Film Festival, which have often been formally inventive: in 2006, for example, Nikolaus Geyrhalter's *Our Daily Bread* (2005) won the festival's top prize.<sup>22</sup> In a similar vein, the influential Oberhausen International Short Film Festival 2011 featured a special programme, 'Shooting Animals: A Brief History of Animal Film'.<sup>23</sup> Oberhausen is a particularly interesting case: as a largely experimental festival, formal innovation usually trumps advocacy, yet this recent move suggests that environmentally engaged themes are gradually making their way into nonspecialised festivals as well.

One of the selections that got a lot of attention on the eco-festival circuit was the 2009 YouTube hit *Plastic Bag*, by Ramin Bahrani of *Man Push Cart* (2005) fame. Premiered at the prestigious Venice International Film Festival, *Plastic Bag* has been shown at renowned film festivals such as Telluride, as a result of its impeccable cinematic

credentials, before migrating to YouTube. *Plastic Bag* is the everlasting autobiography of a plastic bag; it is witty, cinematically accomplished, and narrated by festival darling Werner Herzog as the voice of the so-weary-of-immortality plastic bag.

While local and special topic films may address the 'interested communities', it is important for advocacy festivals to interpolate new audiences as well. Thus most green festivals show a wide variety of programming, precisely to reach beyond the ranks of self-described environmentalists.

Wildlife and nature films bring in the families. In these films we find vast differences in levels of cinematic sophistication. Substantial budgets, specialised production crews and advanced technologies have been hallmarks of the study of animals, insects, nature and the atomic world since the earliest days of cinema. *Microcosmos* (1996) was in a sense an endpoint for microcinematography, rather than something new; in 1908, scientific films made with advanced equipment revealed the Brownian movements of the molecular structure of matter (Landecker 2005: 903–37). Through the use of slow and accelerated motion, as well as underwater and infra-red cinematography, 3D, and now digital manipulation, 'nature' has been cinematically revealed in a wide range of subgenres – travelogues, documentaries, instructional programming and reality-based television, to name a few – and these have been created by a heterogeneous group of filmmakers: hunters, animal rights activists, ethnologists, professional film crews, committed conservationists and commercial exploiters (Chris 2001: 431–32).

Wildlife films especially have become a new area of scholarship over the last decade. Many studies reveal extreme scepticism about the intentions or capabilities of such films to persuade audiences about the environmental dangers we presently face. On the contrary, for some scholars, the cinematic qualities (beautiful images, invisible editing, overarching narrative structure, compression of time, lighting of night shoots, and so on) are the very qualities that obviate this potential. This is certainly the case for Derek Bousé, who castigates nature films as riven by cinematic convention and artifice to the detriment of their value as scientific observations; he declares them docudramas rather than documentaries (Bousé 2000). Finis Dunaway ('Hunting with the Camera', 2000), Cynthia Chris (*Watching Wildlife*, 2006) and Barbara Crowther ('Viewing What Comes Naturally', 1997) alert readers to the presence of sexism and racism in nature films, while Allen Feldman (1998: 494–502) warns that films that purport to be scientific or ethnographic can be 'sheer propaganda, ethnographic realism in the service of the state'.

David Ingram concentrates on representations of environmental issues in Hollywood-style theatrical films. He reveals a substantial shift in representational practices, from the pre-1960s tendency to represent wild animals as malevolent to the dominant representation of the last fifty years, of animals as benevolent and endangered. Ingram points out, however, that these recent representations of wild animals and of conservationists are ambivalent at best and often reveal immense cultural contradictions. 'Hollywood environmentalist movies', he concludes, 'are ideological agglomerations that draw on and perpetuate a range of contradictory discourses concerning the relationship between human beings and the environment' (Ingram 2000: viii).

Such arguments may come as no surprise to people trained in cultural studies or late-twentieth-century film theory. Perhaps a more alarming critique comes from Greg Mitman, who demonstrates that the proliferation of animal images has not only failed to educate the public about conservationism, but instead has created a wide-spread fascination with a few charismatic species, such as the dolphin, increasing rather than counteracting their exploitation as performers, in military service, in sometimes dubious scientific experiments and by the pet trade (Mitman 1999). Louie Psihoyos's *The Cove* begins with this premise. Mitman's arguments could well lead to the conclusion that, as opposed to inducting new converts into the congregation, environmentalist agendas may be undermined by the exhibition of mainstream wildlife films. Ralph H. Lutts (2001: 634–35) offers a more acerbic view of the issue in his review of wildlife cinema scholarship: 'Films about wildlife tell about much more than just wildlife . . . Each is shaped, for example, by the capabilities of cinematic technology, the filmmakers' objectives and biases, the economics of the entertainment industry, prevailing concepts of nature, and the perceived tastes of viewers. In other words, they are socially constructed representations of nature.' The only positive comment he can offer is that they are 'useful sources for environmental historians'. As these scholars suggest, the art and advocacy dialectic is an ongoing conundrum for environmental film festivals.

## OMG: Politics and Effectivity

While for Lapham environmentalism is the new secular religion and for McMahon the environmental film festival audience is the new congregation, for Slavoj Žižek such 'greenthink' is analogous to soccer fans cheering at their television screens. Žižek could be describing Margaret Atwood's tour when he writes:

The typical form of fetishist disavowal apropos ecology goes like this: ‘I know very well (that we are all threatened), but I don’t really believe it (so I am not ready to do anything really important like changing my way of life).’ But there is also the opposite form of disavowal: ‘I know very well that I cannot really influence the process that can lead to my ruin (like a volcanic outburst), but it is nonetheless too traumatic for me to accept this, so I cannot resist the urge to do something, even if I know it is ultimately meaningless’ . . . What is really hard for us (at least in the West) to accept is that we are reduced to the role of a passive observer who sits and watches what our fate will be. To avoid this impotence, we engage in frantic, obsessive activities. We recycle old paper, we buy organic food, we install long-lasting light bulbs – whatever – just so we can be sure that we are doing something. We make our individual contribution like the soccer fan who supports his team in front of a TV screen at home, shouting and jumping from his seat, in the belief that this will somehow influence the game’s outcome. (Žižek 2010)

So, can these festivals actually effect change? *Plastic Bag* could not be more innovative, entertaining or informative, and in many parts of the world (for example, Ontario, some European countries, New Zealand, and some states in Australia) legislation is in place to limit the use of plastic bags. Obviously, films like *Plastic Bag* have not initiated such moves, and yet media representations of environmental issues are clearly one of the ways through which the environmental agenda can be conveyed to environmentalists and the non-converted alike. Ingram’s chapter on *An Inconvenient Truth* in this volume is an interesting discussion of the function of rhetoric in converting the yet-to-be converted. And yet, can the environmental film festival have an effect beyond convincing the ordinary consumer to ‘green up’ (in futile ways, as Žižek would have it)? Would Žižek be happy if environmental film festivals could move governments to regulate the plastics industry? Or even acknowledge the human impact on global warming? Could that happen?

Washington, D.C. Environmental Film Festival is the largest and the oldest of the U.S. environmental film festivals. Founded in 1993, the festival takes place over twelve days in March, exhibiting over 150 films (including many premieres) in fifty-six venues around the city. Most of them are free to the public. As one blogger put it, comparing the Washington festival to Sundance: ‘Not in freezing, old theatres in some overrun city in Utah, the Environmental Film Festival takes advantage of the great wealth of resources in the District of Columbia, including prime screening venues like The National Gallery of Art, American History Museum, seven different embassies, Georgetown University, and the National Museum of Natural History among many others’ (Prediger 2010).

The national embassies typically exhibit films from their own countries; for example, the Canadian Embassy hosted the screening of *Waterlife*, produced by the National Film Board of Canada. McMahon, who attended the screening, brought intelligence, rationality and career-earned sophistication to his analysis of the potential impact of such festivals on policy and regulation. He said that in the U.S. capital, the audience consisted of government bureaucrats, rather than politicians – one ‘could smell the difference’. He recounted a heated discussion in which he argued Canada’s position on proposed U.S. legislation concerning environmental control of the St. Lawrence Seaway: ‘While interested and engaged, nevertheless the bureaucrats ultimately could only educate themselves and spread the word; they are inevitably held back by the politicians and policy makers’.<sup>24</sup> As Prediger put it, the audience in Washington is composed of, ‘[e]co-movie buffs who had eschewed the beauty of the outdoors to watch the beauty of the outdoors indoors in the form of a wellspring of eco-conscious cinema’ (Prediger 2010).

Yet even in the face of reactionary governments – yes, even so-compromised Obama, and let’s not talk about Canada (the tar sands, asbestos, potable water for First Nations) – we must not despair. As the small ‘congregations’ in local sites nurture their own activist agendas, the Internet opens new possibilities. With *Plastic Bag* at more than 478,000 hits on YouTube the film rivals attendance of many mainstream productions, while the cutting-edge *Waterlife* interactive website now clocks at more than three-quarters of a million viewers.<sup>25</sup> As environmental film festivals increasingly hone their skills in social networking, YouTube, Vimeo, blogs, sophisticated websites and other new virtual tools, the potential reach of even a small local film event is global.

Oh Žižek, I know you do not agree.

## Notes

Former University of Toronto Cinema Studies Masters students Joceline Andersen, Christopher Heron and John Semley made invaluable contributions to this project through research and discussion of ideas. Sarah Margolius and Kathleen Mullen of PIF and Kevin McMahon, director of *Waterlife*, spent hours discussing ideas with me. Thank you all very much.

- 1 A useful resource on environmental, and other, film festivals, is the Film Festival Research Network (FFRN) founded by Marijke de Valck and Skadi Loist. The website contains a bibliography of existing literature, and serves



- as a hub for researchers in the field. See <http://www.filmfestivalresearch.org>
- 2 For details of the green mandate of Atwood's tour, see <http://www.yearoffheflood.com/us/tour/greening-the-tour> (accessed 28 January 2011).
  - 3 The Body Shop was known for its activist global agenda and no animal testing. But in 2006, The Body Shop was bought by L'Oréal, which does test its other products on animals.
  - 4 See [www.balzacscoffee.com/](http://www.balzacscoffee.com/) (accessed 18 January 2011).
  - 5 Sarah Margolius, unpublished personal interview, 12 January 2011; hereafter, Margolius interview.
  - 6 For up-to-date information on Planet in Focus and the changes it has undergone since the time of writing, see the festival website, <http://planetinfocus.org>
  - 7 Margolius interview.
  - 8 <http://www.greenscreentoronto.com/initiative/> (accessed 18 January 2011).
  - 9 Margolius interview.
  - 10 <http://www.ekofestival.cz/404.php> (accessed 15 January 2013).
  - 11 See [www.iledefrance.fr/festival-film-environnement/](http://www.iledefrance.fr/festival-film-environnement/) (accessed 10 April 2013).
  - 12 <http://www.wildscreenfestival.org.uk> (accessed 18 January 2011).
  - 13 <http://www.wildscreenfestival.org/index.php?pageid=371&parentid=0> (accessed 21 April 2013).
  - 14 <http://www.reeearth.org.nz> (accessed 27 July 2011).
  - 15 <http://www.earth-vision.jp/top-e.htm>. (accessed 19 January 2011).
  - 16 Kevin McMahon, unpublished personal interview, 24 January 2011; hereafter McMahon interview.
  - 17 Earth Vision (Japan), Ekofilm (Czech Republic), Envirofilm (Slovakia), Green Vision (Russia), Puchalski Nature Film Festival (Poland) and Sondrio – International Documentary Film Festival on Parks (Italy).
  - 18 <http://www.conservationfilm.org/> (accessed 31 January 2011).
  - 19 McMahon interview.
  - 20 <http://www.conservationfilm.org/festival/2010/> (accessed 21 April 2013).
  - 21 Margolius interview.
  - 22 <http://www.ourdailybread.at/jart/projects/utb/website.jart?rel=en&content-id=1130864824951> (accessed 21 July 2011).
  - 23 <http://www.kurzfilmtage.de/en/metanavigation/press/press-releases/festival-2011/shooting-animals.html> (accessed 21 April 2013).
  - 24 McMahon interview.
  - 25 <http://waterlife.nfb.ca/> (accessed 30 January 2011).

## References

- Anderson, B. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- An Inconvenient Truth*. 2006. [Film]. Directed by D. Guggenheim. U.S.A.: Lawrence Bender Productions, Participant Productions.

- Atwood, M. 2010. *The Year of the Flood*. New York: Random House.
- Bousé, D. 2000. *Wildlife Films*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Center for Social Media. 2009. 'Code of Best Practices for Sustainable Filmmaking.' Retrieved 21 January 2011 from <http://www.centerforsocial-media.org/fair-use/related-materials/codes/code-best-practices-sustainable-filmmaking>
- Chris, C. 2001. 'Review of *Reel Nature*'. *Isis* 92.2: pp. 431–32.
- . 2006. *Watching Wildlife*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- The Cove*. 2009. [Film]. Directed by L. Psihoyos. U.S.A.: Diamond Docs, Fish Films, Oceanic Preservation Society.
- Crowther, B. 1997. 'Viewing What Comes Naturally: A Feminist Approach to Television Natural History'. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 20.2, March–April: pp. 289–300.
- Dunaway, F. 2000. 'Hunting with the Camera: Nature Photography, Manliness, and Modern Memory, 1890–1930'. *Journal of American Studies*, 34.2 (August): pp. 207–30.
- The Fabulous Story of Poop—In the Name of the Throne*. 2008. [Film]. Directed by T. Berrod. France: Mona Lisa Productions.
- Feldman, A. 1998. 'Faux Documentary and the Memory of Realism'. *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 100.2 (June): pp. 494–502.
- Haslam, M. 2004. 'Vision, Authority, Context: Cornerstones of Curation and Programming'. *The Moving Image* 4.1: pp. 49–50.
- In the Wake of the Flood*. 2010. [Film]. Directed by R. Mann. Canada: Sphinx Productions.
- Ingram, D. 2000. *Green Screen: Environmentalism in Hollywood Cinema*. Devon: University of Exeter Press.
- Iordanova, D. 2012. 'Film Festivals and Dissent: Can Film Change the World?', in D. Iordanova and L. Torchin (eds), *Film Festival Yearbook 4: Film Festivals and Activism*. St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies, pp. 13–30.
- Landecker, H. 2005. 'Cellular Features: Microcinematography and Film Theory'. *Critical Inquiry* 31.4 (Summer): pp. 903–37.
- Lapham, L. 2010. 'Mandates of Heaven'. *Lapham's Quarterly*, Winter. Retrieved 27 January 2011 from <http://www.laphamsquarterly.org/preamble/mandates-of-heaven.php?page=all>
- Lutts, R.H. 2001. 'Review'. *Environmental History*, 6.4 (October): pp. 634–35.
- Microcosmos*. 1996. [Film]. Directed by C. Nuridsany and M. Pérennou. France/Switzerland/Italy: Galatée Films, France Cinéma 2, Canal +.
- Mitman, G. 1999. *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mullen, K. 2010. 'Festival Welcome'. *Planet in Focus Environmental Film and Video Festival Catalogue.*, Toronto 2010.
- Our Daily Bread*. 2005. [Film]. Directed by N. Geyrhalter. Austria/Germany: Nikolaus Geyrhalter Film Produktion, ZDF.
- Plastic Bag*. 2010. [Film]. Directed by R. Bahrani. U.S.A.: Noruz Films/Gigantic Pictures.
- Prediger, J. 2010. 'Watching the Green Screens at the Environmental Film Festival in D.C.'. 27 March. Retrieved 21 January 2011 from <http://www.grist>.

- org/article/2010-03-26-watching-the-green-screens-at-the-environmental-film-festival-in/
- Stringer, J. 2001. 'Global Cities and the International Film Festival Economy', in M. Shiel and T. Fitzmaurice (eds), *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*. London: Blackwell Publishers.
- Toxic Soup*. 2010. [Film]. Directed by R.O. Delaney. U.S.A.: Man Bites Dog Films.
- Waterlife*. 2009. [Film]. Directed by K. McMahon. National Film Board of Canada.
- Žižek, S. 2010. 'O Earth Pale Mother!' *In These Times*. Retrieved 28 January 2011 from [http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/6079/o\\_earth\\_pale\\_mother/](http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/6079/o_earth_pale_mother/)





## Notes on Contributors

**Kay Armatage** is Professor Emerita, Cinema Studies, and Women and Gender Studies, University of Toronto. She is the author of *The Girl from God's Country: Nell Shipman and the Silent Cinema* (University of Toronto Press, 2003) and coeditor of *Gendering the Nation: Canadian Women's Cinema* (University of Toronto Press, 1999). Her current research is on international film festivals, especially women's film festivals, and the Metropolitan Opera Live HD Transmissions.

**James Leo Cahill** is an assistant professor of Cinema Studies and French at the University of Toronto and an editor of *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*. His writing appears in *Discourse*, *Ecce*, *Framework*, *Journal of Visual Culture*, and *Spectator*, as well as DVD booklets and international exhibition and festival catalogues. He is presently completing a manuscript on the cinematic wildlife of Jean Painlevé and Geneviève Hamon.

**Chia-ju Chang** is an assistant professor of Chinese at the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at Brooklyn College, CUNY. She received her PhD in Comparative Literature from Rutgers University. Her teaching and research interests include environmental and animal literature, ecocriticism, ecofeminism, ecocritical (or green) cultural and film studies, Buddhist environmental ethics and eco-literary translation. She has published articles in both English and Chinese, including, most recently, 'Trans-species Care: Taiwan's Feral Dogs and Dog Mother Activism' (2012). She has served as an executive officer for ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, 2009 to 2011). She is also a literary translator. Her poetry translation has been published in *Poetry Sky* and *ISLE* (Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment). Currently, she is working on a literary translation project concerning Taiwan's stray dogs. Chang is also actively involved with Taiwan's animal rights groups and activism.

**Steven Eastwood** is a filmmaker and artist who works with fiction and documentary. He completed his first feature, *Buried Land* in 2010 (in collaboration with Alan Rhodes), official selection: Tribeca, Moscow, Sarajevo, Mumbai. His group and solo exhibitions include Jerwood Gallery, London; QUT Gallery, Brisbane; Globe Gallery, Newcastle; KK Projects Gallery, New Orleans. Eastwood formed the production company Paradogs in 1997 and his documentary *Those Who Are Jesus* (2001) was nominated for a Grierson Award at BAFTA. He is currently Programme Leader in Film and Video at the University of East London, U.K. He has convened a number of symposia including Powers of the False, and Interval 1 & 2, and is the cofounder of the arts laboratory event OMSK. Eastwood has published numerous book chapters and articles. He gained a theory-practice Ph.D. through UCL, The Slade.

**Elana Gomel** is associate professor at the Department of English and American Studies of Tel-Aviv University, Israel. She has been a Visiting Scholar at a number of institutions, including Princeton, Stanford, and University of Hong Kong. Her interests include narrative theory, Charles Dickens, and science fiction. She is the author of four academic books, including *Bloodscripts: Writing the Violent Subject* (Ohio University Press, 2003) and *The Pilgrim Soul: Being Russian in Israel* (Cambria Press, 2009). Her latest book is *Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination* (Continuum, 2010). She has published numerous articles on science fiction, posthumanity, narrative theory and other subjects. She is currently at work on a book about impossible spaces.

**May Adadol Ingawanij** is a senior research fellow at the University of Westminster. Her current research into Indian film exhibition and cinema experience in Siam historicises the trajectory of circulation of film forms across borders in Asia. In the areas of contemporary cinema, May's research interests concern South East Asian cinema, especially independent practices, documentary and avant-garde aesthetics, and moving-image installations. She has published on the work of Apichatpong Weerasethakul and the Filipino filmmaker Lav Diaz. In 2009, she organised the event cineSEA: independent moving images from South East Asia, which included a masterclass with Apichatpong at CREAM (Centre for Research and Education in Arts and Media) alongside screenings and a symposium. May's PhD traced the relationship between cinematically spectacular heritage films, royalism, and the Thai bourgeois fantasy of attaining global prestige.

**David Ingram** is a lecturer in Screen Media at Brunel University, London. He is the author of *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema* (University of Exeter Press, 2000) and *The Jukebox in the Garden: Ecocriticism and American Popular Music Since 1960* (Rodopi, 2010), as well as several articles on film and music.

**Elizabeth Leane** is a senior lecturer in English literature at the University of Tasmania. She holds a BA and a BSc (in physics) from the University of Adelaide, and an MSt and DPhil (in English literature) from the University of Oxford, where she studied as a Rhodes Scholar. Her books include *Reading Popular Physics* (Ashgate, 2007), *Antarctica in Fiction* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), and the coedited collections *Considering Animals* (Ashgate, 2011) and *Imagining Antarctica* (Quintus, 2011). She is currently writing *South Pole* for Reaktion Books' new series, Earth. She has also published widely in academic journals such as *Polar Record*, *Ariel*, *Anthrozoös*, *Science Fiction Studies*, *Signs* and *Review of English Studies*, and is Arts editor of the *Polar Journal*. In 2004 she travelled south on the icebreaker *Aurora Australis* as an Australian Antarctic Arts Fellow.

**Sophie Mayer** is the author of *The Cinema of Sally Potter: A Politics of Love* (Wallflower, 2009), and a regular contributor to *Sight & Sound* and *The F-Word*. She co-curated Punto de Vista's *The Personal is Political*, the first ever retrospective of feminist documentary in Spain, in 2011 with Elena Oroz, and is the coeditor of *There She Goes: Feminism, Filmmaking and Beyond* with Corinn Columpar (Wayne State, 2009). She is also the author of three collections of poetry, *Her Various Scalpels* (Shearsman, 2009), *The Private Parts of Girls* (Salt, 2011) and *Kiss Off* (Oystercatcher, 2011).

**Claire Molloy** is Professor of Film, Television and Digital Media at Edge Hill University. She has a background in commercial photography, filmmaking and communications design. Her publications include *Memento* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010) and *Popular Media and Animals* (Palgrave, 2011). She is coeditor of *Beyond Human: From Animality to Transhumanism* (Continuum, 2012) and *American Independent Cinema: Indie, indiewood and beyond* (Routledge, 2012). Her research interests include media industries, cinema, entertainment media, nature, animal studies, and animal ethics. She is a fellow of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics.

**Guinevere Narraway** teaches at the University of Tasmania. She received her PhD in German Studies and Visual Culture from Monash

University, Melbourne. Her doctoral thesis, 'Making Nature: Visions of Mastery in Third Reich Cinema', undertakes an examination of the representation of instrumentalising modernity in film under National Socialism. Narraway's teaching and research interests are primarily concerned with the representation of nature in moving image culture. She has published on the mountain films of Luis Trenker and on Leni Riefenstahl's Nuba photographs. Most recently she has had an article on nature and flesh-eating in Jonathan auf der Heide's 2009 film *Van Diemen's Land* published in *Senses of Cinema* (2012). Her chapter, coedited with Elizabeth Leane, 'Things from Another World: Dogs, Aliens and Antarctic Cinema', is forthcoming in the collection *Cinematic Canines: Dogs and Their Work in the Fiction Film*, edited by Adrienne McLean and published by Rutgers University Press.

**Stephen Nicol** obtained a BSc in Zoology from Aberdeen University, an MSc in Oceanography from Southampton University and a PhD in Biology from Dalhousie University, and worked at the Australian Antarctic Division as a research scientist and program leader from 1987 to 2011. He has conducted research on many aspects of krill biology and the Southern Ocean ecosystem, and has published over two hundred articles, including management papers, refereed articles, popular science and travel writing. Currently he is Adjunct Professor at the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies at the University of Tasmania, and serves on the scientific boards of a number of companies and associations that require information on the Antarctic krill resource. He is also enrolled in an MA in Creative Writing at the University of Tasmania.

**Carrie Packwood Freeman** is an assistant professor of Communication at Georgia State University in Atlanta. She is a critical/cultural studies media researcher in the areas of strategic communication for social change, media ethics, environmental communication, and critical animal studies, with a specialty in animal agribusiness and veganism. She is particularly interested in deconstructing the human/animal dualism and identifying the role of values and ideology in communication about animals and nature. See her writing at [http://works.bepress.com/carrie\\_freeman/](http://works.bepress.com/carrie_freeman/). In addition to a previous career in PR and HR, she has been active in the animal rights and vegetarian movements for two decades and served as a volunteer director for local grassroots groups in Florida, Georgia and Oregon. She currently serves as co-host of a weekly indie radio programme on animal protection (*Second Opinion Radio*) and a monthly host of an environmental programme (*In Tune to Nature*), both on WRFG.org 89.3FM Atlanta.



**Silke Panse** is Lecturer for Fine Art, Critical and Contextual Studies at the University for the Creative Arts in Canterbury, U.K. Her chapter 'The Judging Spectator in the Image' is published in the co-edited collection *A Critique of Judgment in Film and Television* (Palgrave, 2013). Her essay 'The Work of the Documentary Protagonist' will be published in the *Blackwell Companion for Contemporary Documentary* (Blackwell, 2014) for which she subedits the theme on work, and her text "'My Emotions Have Come Back Now. It's Disgusting": Affect, Alienation and Botox' is forthcoming in *Marx and the Moving Image: New Perspectives on History, Theory and Practice* (Palgrave, 2014). She has written on collective subjectivity in the GDR documentaries series *The Children of Golzow*, in *Rethinking Documentary* (Open University Press, 2008), object subjectivity in *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (I.B. Tauris, 2007), and documentary as painting in Alexandr Sokurov's *Elegy of a Voyage*. Her essay 'What Drawings Can Do That Films Can't' was published in the artist book *Blind Movies* (Ruskin School of Drawing, 2009). She has co-organised the symposium *Screening Nature: Flora, Fauna and the Moving Image* (2013) and curated its 'Flora' film programme, and organised the conference *Werner Herzog's Cinema: Between the Visionary and the Documentary* (2005) at the Goethe-Institut London.

**Anat Pick** lectures in Film Studies at Queen Mary, University of London. She is author of *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film* (Columbia University Press, 2011), and has published work on Simone Weil, Henry James and Emmanuel Levinas, independent cinema, continental philosophy, and ethical veganism. With Silke Panse, Anat co-curated *Screening Nature: Flora, Fauna and the Moving Image* at the Whitechapel Gallery, London (May 2013).

**Geoffrey Alan Rhodes** is a media artist, filmmaker, and writer. His works seek out new connections and experiences across the borders between the real and the virtual, the cinematic and the actual, fine art and popular experience. Rhodes' short films have screened and been installed at the International Film Festivals of Moscow, Mumbai, Sarajevo, Friesland, Göteborg, Cottbus, Split, Syracuse, and more. His installation works use multiple screens, projections, and live augmented video in explorations of auto-performance and the emergence of contemporary phantasmagoria. His works have been part of major exhibitions at Mediations Poznan Biennale Poland, the European Media Arts Festival, Microwave International Hong Kong, the International Society of Electronic Arts and the Abandon Normal Devices Festival (U.K.).

Rhodes is currently a member of the faculty of Visual Communication Design at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

**Scott Tulloch** (MA, University of Maine) is a doctoral student in the Department of Communication at Georgia State University. His research – located at interdisciplinary intersections of rhetorical and communication studies, critical geography and urban sociology – interrogates how contingent orders of space and imaginations of nature, wilderness, urban and rural, are constituted sites of contestation. He is currently working on a book-length project that maps historical discursive and rhetorical formations that have (re)shaped the contours of urban planning and renewal in the U.S.



# Index

- 3D, 24, 31, 33n6, 34n19, 187, 261, 267  
6 October 1976, Thailand, 96, 101, 104, 105  
*13 Lakes* (2004), 33n7, 37, 39, 42, 55, 56, 61  
*90° South* (1933), 12, 127, 129, 131–35, 138  
*2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), 99  
*2012* (2009), 182
- ABC (news channel), 195, 206n1  
activism, 213, 225  
    animal, 28, 33n15, 110–12, 121, 123, 125n4, 226  
    environmental, 15, 33n15, 213, 226  
activist film, 5, 10, 12, 21, 110–14, 121, 123, 124, 227  
activist gaze, 12, 116, 125n4  
Adamov, Grigorii, 166  
advocacy, 33n12, 118, 253, 260, 265–68  
Afghanistan, 163  
agency  
    animal, 117, 119–21  
    human, 41, 49, 50, 76  
    nature, 8, 12  
agriculture, 68, 110  
*ahimsa* (nonviolence), 14, 225  
*Airplanes II* (2006), 51–52  
*Alligator* (1980), 180  
American Conservation Film Festival (ACFF), 263, 264  
Amsterdam Film Festival, 263  
Amundsen, Roald, 128, 130, 139n2  
Anderson, Benedict, 149, 265  
*anima*, 91, 94, 98, 100, 107  
    *See also* animism
- animal  
    films, 76, 77, 79, 81, 113–17, 119–21, 124, 127, 129, 132, 179–81, 266  
    gaze, 120  
    industries, 12  
    liberation, 5, 9, 16n3, 110, 112, 125  
    liberation documentary, 12, 110–13  
    products, 3, 33n8, 112, 113, 122  
    protection, 25, 111, 112, 122, 138  
    rights, 4, 10, 14, 112, 115–19, 122, 123, 125n1, 261  
    voice, 117, 120, 121  
    welfare, 10, 111, 116, 118, 122  
    *See also* activism; agency  
Animal Defenders International (ADI), 33n15  
Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act, 33n15  
Animal Liberation Front (ALF), 112  
animals  
    as commodities, 10, 28, 112, 113, 117, 118, 122  
    as conscious agents, 119, 120  
    domestic, 28, 73, 74, 112, 117, 132, 133  
    domination of, 9, 13, 29, 112, 179, 186–88, 190, 191  
    as entertainment, 10, 28, 33n6, 112, 113, 117, 118, 133, 135, 181  
    exotic, 127, 129, 135  
    as food, 28, 30, 111, 112, 117–19, 129, 188  
    native, 12, 128, 129, 132–34, 136, 137  
    as raw material, 7, 112, 113, 117, 218

- animals (*cont.*)  
 and sentience, 2, 28, 29, 117, 118, 226  
 wild, 23, 27, 33n6, 79–81, 117, 119, 129, 130, 199, 268  
*See also* anthropocentrism;  
 anthropomorphism  
*The Animals Film* (1982), 28, 34n16, 125n1  
 animal studies (AS), 6–9, 16n3, 178  
*See also* critical animal studies (CAS); human-animal studies (HAS)  
 Animal Welfare Act, 111  
 animism, 91, 92  
*See also* *anima*  
 Antarctic, 12, 127–29, 131, 132, 135–38, 139nn1–2  
*See also* Antarctica  
 Antarctic Treaty System, 138  
 Antarctica, 130, 131, 250  
*See also* Antarctic  
 anthropocentrism, 9, 76, 77, 81, 111, 177  
*See also* anthropomorphism  
 anthropomorphism, 11, 28, 74, 76, 77, 79–82, 84, 86, 87, 133, 137  
*See also* anthropocentrism  
 anti-vivisectionism, 110  
 Antonioni, Michelangelo, 145, 154, 207n10, 221n1  
 Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 11, 12, 91, 92, 94, 97  
*Apocalypse Now* (1979), 185, 191n5  
 Araeen, Rasheed, 56n1  
 Arctic, 4, 172  
*Arctic Hunt* (1911), 127  
 Argentina, 146, 152, 153  
*Ariana* (2003), 208n13  
 art (arthouse) cinema, 91, 145, 172  
 Artaud, Antonin, 79  
 artist, 11, 31, 44, 46, 51, 55, 56n1, 66, 218, 219, 231  
 Attenborough, Sir David, 22, 261  
 Atwood, Margaret, 257, 268, 271n2  
 Aufderheide, Patricia, 199  
 Austin, James, 230  
 Australasian Antarctic Expedition (AAE), 135  
 Australia, 135, 140n13, 156, 264, 269  
 authenticity, low-tech, 114  
 avant-garde cinema, 44, 45, 79, 88n3, 163, 165, 220, 229  
*See also* experimental cinema;  
 underground film/video  
*Avatar* (2009), 13, 33n9, 178, 179, 182–91  
 Aztec pyramids, 195  
  
*Baby's Dinner* (1895). *See* *Repas de bébé*  
*Back to the Future* (1985), 173  
 Bae, Yong-kyun, 14, 225, 227–29, 236, 237  
 Bahrani, Ramin, 266  
 Balkans, 195  
*Banishment of the Ruler/Izgnaniye vladyki*, 166  
 Banlop Lomnoi, 99  
 Barnaud, Marie-Claire, 146, 147, 157n1  
 Bateson, Gregory, 225  
*Battle for Terra* (2007), 181  
 Bazin, André, 2, 3, 10, 11, 22, 30, 31, 34n19, 37, 49, 50–52, 54, 76, 218, 219, 222n14  
 BBC, 10, 21, 22, 23, 31, 32n2, 195, 199, 206n1, 245, 247, 261  
*Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012), 33n9  
 Bederman, Gail, 185  
*Behind the Mask* (2006), 110, 111, 112, 114, 118, 120, 121, 123  
 'being-in-the-world', 21, 22, 30  
*See also* Heidegger, Martin  
 Bell, David, 151  
 Bellour, Raymond, 6  
 Benjamin, Walter, 75, 213, 214, 222n2, 222n14  
 Bennett, Jane, 8  
 Benning, James, 10, 11, 33n7, 37, 38, 42–46, 48, 51–56, 56n3, 57nn6–9, 60–70, 204, 266  
 Beres, Stanisław, 169  
 Berger, John, 113

- Berlin Film Festival, 265  
*Le Bernard l'ermite* (1929), 77, 82–87  
 Best, Steven, 118  
 bestiality, 188  
 Beston, Henry, 120  
 Bierstadt, Albert, 197  
 biodiversity, 258  
 biomedical research, 110  
 biopolitics, 12  
*Blissfully Yours* (2002), 146, 148, 152, 157, 157n2  
 Blossfeldt, Karl, 214  
*The Blue Planet* (2001), 24  
 bodily fluids, 150, 157n2  
 The Body Shop, 258, 271n3  
 Bolshevism, 163  
 Boon, Timothy, 32n2  
*Borat* (2006), 201, 202, 207n10  
*Born to be Wild 3D* (2011), 33n6  
 Bosnia, 5, 13, 194–97, 201, 207n10  
*The Bosnian Pyramid of the Sun*, 194  
 Bosnian pyramids (Visoko pyramids), 13, 194–98, 200, 206nn2–3  
*Bosnian Valley of the Pyramids*, 206n2  
 Bosnian war, 195  
 Boucher, Geoff, 184  
*Bouquets* series (1994–2009, Lowder), 216, 217, 221, 222n10  
 Bourdet, Maurice, 78  
 Bousé, Derek, 6, 23, 127, 131–33, 138, 139n1, 267  
 Bozak, Nadia, 3, 4  
 Bradley, Raymond S., 247  
 Brah, Avtar, 151  
 Bristol, 261  
 Brown, Brian, 233  
 Brown, Harold, 121  
 Buddhism, 14, 146, 225, 226, 228, 238n2  
   *See also* Zen Buddhism  
 Buell, Lawrence, 15n2  
 Buhic, Avdija, 202, 205  
*Burden of Dreams* (1982), 33n11  
*Buried Land* (2010), 13, 194, 197–99, 200–206  
 Burkeman, Oliver, 247  
 Burroughs, Edgar Rice, 184, 185  
 Burt, Jonathan, 6  
 Butler, Judith, 147, 148, 151  
 Byrd, Richard, 128  
 Calarco, Matthew, 9  
 California, 60, 68, 69  
 California TrilogY (Benning), 42, 61, 69, 70  
   *See also* *El Valley Centro* (1999); *LOS* (2000); *Sogobi* (2001)  
 Callicott, J. Baird, 181, 182  
 Cambodia, 92, 94, 102  
 Cameron, James, 184, 185, 188, 189, 191n8  
 Canada, 259, 270  
 Cannes Film Festival, 265  
*Cannibal Holocaust* (1980), 180  
 capitalism, 1, 24, 26, 148, 177, 183, 214  
*Caprella and Pantopoda*. *See* *Caprelles et Pantopodes*  
*Caprelles et Pantopodes* (1930), 77  
 carbon footprint, 3, 257, 259–60  
 carbon tax, 264  
 carnality, 150  
 Carson, Rachel, 257  
 Cartesianism, 44, 77, 179, 180, 184  
   *See also* dualism  
*Casting a Glance* (2007), 55, 56  
*Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2010), 21, 26, 31  
 Center for Social Media (CSM), 199, 259, 260  
 centre/margin, 155  
   *See also* marginalisation  
 censorship, 163, 169, 171, 244  
*Challenger* expedition, 139n1  
 Chanan, Michael, 242  
 Chang, Sonu, 227  
 Chandra, Mridu, 199  
 Charcot, Jean-Baptiste, 128  
 Cheever, John, 39, 40, 41  
 Cherry-Garrard, Apsley, 132, 139n8  
*Chimpanzee* (2012), 33n6  
 China, 148, 207n10, 239n8  
 Cho, Francisca, 226, 228, 229, 231, 238n4

- Choin, George, 234, 235  
 Chris, Cynthia, 6, 267  
*Chung Kuo – Cina* (1972), 207n10, 221n1  
 Church, Frederick Edwin, 197  
 cinematic *dispositif*, 11, 92  
   *See also* Martin, Adrian  
 cityscape, 69, 164, 165  
 civilisation, 27, 119, 122, 162, 167, 169, 171, 174, 175n1, 185, 195, 225  
 climate change, 3, 5, 15, 147, 181, 241, 242, 247, 249, 250, 253, 257, 258, 262, 263, 264  
   *See also* global warming  
 climate change scepticism, 15, 242, 244, 247, 248  
*Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), 203  
*Close Up* (1990), 206n7  
 CNN, 195  
 Cold War, 94, 95, 96, 104, 105, 166  
 Colebrook, Claire, 43  
 colonialism, 11, 13, 94, 148, 178, 184–87, 195, 197, 198  
 colonial literature, 178, 184, 185, 187  
 communism, 13, 96, 101, 104, 155, 162, 164, 169, 172  
 communist insurgency (Thailand), 96, 97, 106  
 Communist Party of Thailand, 96  
 Compagnie Generale des Eaux, 153  
*The Conquerors of the Interior/Pobedyeli nedr* (1937), 166  
 Conrad, Joseph, 184, 185  
 constructivism, 8, 164, 165  
 consumerism, 177, 238, 262  
 Coppola, Francis Ford, 185  
 Cornea, Christine, 185  
 Corner, John, 245  
 corporeality, 150, 162  
*The Cove* (2009), 12, 111, 113, 114, 117, 118, 120, 121, 123, 268  
*Crabes* (1930), 77  
*Crabs*. *See* *Crabes*  
*Crevettes* (1930), 77  
 critical animal studies (CAS), 6, 9, 16n3  
   *See also* animal studies (AS); human-animal studies (HAS); Institute for Critical Animal Studies  
 critical rhetoric, 112, 121, 122, 124  
 Crowther, Barbara, 267  
 Cubitt, Sean, 6, 23, 25  
 Cudworth, Erika, 16n6  
*Dances with Wolves* (1990), 184  
*The Daphnia*. *See* *La Daphnie*  
*La Daphnie* (1929), 77  
 Daston, Lorraine, 74  
*The Day after Tomorrow* (2004), 181, 226  
*Day of the Animals* (1977), 180  
*Day of Wrath/Den gneva* (1985), 170  
 Dayan, Colin, 29  
*The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008), 182  
*The Dead Mountaineer's Hotel/Otel u pogipshogo alpinista* (1979), 170  
*Dealing Dogs* (2006), 12, 111, 113, 115  
 deep ecology, 27, 225  
 defamiliarisation, 76, 219, 220, 221  
 Deleuze, Gilles, 38, 40–45, 47, 48, 52, 53, 55, 56, 56n2  
 DeLuca, Kevin Michael, 113, 121, 122  
 Derrida, Jacques, 114, 117  
 Dessler, Andrew E., 248, 249  
 'd'hommestiques', 73  
   *See also* Lacan, Jacques  
 difference  
   ability, 148, 178  
   age, 146, 148, 178  
   class, 4, 7, 9, 60, 146, 148, 152, 154  
   gender, 4, 7, 148, 178  
   race, 4, 7, 9, 28  
   sexuality, 4, 9, 28  
 digital  
   filmmaking, 2, 3, 33n8, 37, 48, 57n6, 61–62, 155, 261, 267  
   media, 2, 61  
 Dimmock, Stuart, 250  
 Dindo, Richard, 67, 68

- discrimination, 28, 112, 117  
*See also* speciesism
- Doane, Mary Ann, 92
- documentary, 10, 14, 26, 27, 33n6,  
 33n6, 34n17, 44, 48–50, 52, 53, 55,  
 56n1, 66, 76, 78, 80, 81, 110, 111,  
 117, 118, 123, 131, 155, 198, 199,  
 200–206, 207nn10–12,  
 241–43, 245, 249, 252–54, 263
- Donbas, 172
- Dorsky, Nathaniel, 228, 229, 232
- Doyle, Arthur Conan, 93
- dualism  
 culture/nature, 7, 14, 155  
 human/animal, 112, 113, 116–18,  
 124, 178, 179  
 human/nonhuman, 12  
 life/death, 147  
 mind/body, 150, 180, 185  
*See also* Cartesianism
- Duisburg Documentary Film  
 Festival, 46, 60
- Dunaway, Finis, 139n3, 267
- dwelling, 21, 82, 219  
*See also* Heidegger, Martin
- Dyer, Richard, 185
- dystopia, 33n9
- Earth, 10, 22, 24, 25, 28, 29, 32, 55, 67,  
 168, 189, 208n13, 220, 241, 249  
*See also* Spaceship Earth
- Earth Vision, 262
- Earthflight* (2011), 24
- Earthlings* (2005), 10, 12, 21, 22, 27–30,  
 32, 32nn3–4, 111, 112, 117–20,  
 123, 124, 125n2, 125n5  
*See also* Monson, Shaun
- Eastwood, Steven, 194, 202, 207n8,  
 207n10
- eco-aesthetics, 11, 37, 44, 45, 51, 52,  
 54, 56, 56n1
- eco-awareness, 171, 172
- ecocentrism, 5
- ecocinema, 5, 15, 44, 45, 217, 222n4,  
 222n15, 225, 241
- ecocriticism, 6, 7, 8, 9, 15n2, 225, 261
- eco-documentary, 45, 55
- ecofeminism, 16n6, 157, 225
- 'eco-logic', 56n1
- ecological consciousness, 14, 227, 230
- ecology, 1, 4, 5, 7, 9, 15, 15n2, 37, 148,  
 150, 152, 213, 226, 237, 269  
*See also* deep ecology, social  
 ecology, Zen ecology
- 'ecomimesis', 22, 32n1
- Ecomove International, 262
- economic migrants/migration, 145
- ecophilosophy, 10, 56n1  
*See also* environmental philosophy
- ecopoiesis, 14
- eco-politics, 10, 12
- eco-praxis, 10, 14
- 'eco-sophy', 56n1
- 'ecstatic truth', 21
- Edelstein, David, 246
- Edwards, Penny, 94, 102
- Efremov, Ivan, 162, 167–69
- Egyptian pyramids, 195
- Ekofilm, 260, 271n17
- Elsaesser, Thomas, 91
- El Valley Centro* (1999), 64, 69, 70  
*See also* California Trilogy
- embodiment, 14, 157, 181, 183, 253
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 52, 54
- Empire of the Ants* (1977), 180
- Encounters at the End of the World*  
 (2007), 33n10
- Encounters in the Natural World* DVD  
 box set, 33n10
- Endurance Expedition. See* Imperial  
 Trans-Antarctic Expedition
- Enlightenment, 15, 150, 155, 253
- enlightenment (Buddhist), 227–31,  
 233, 234, 235, 236, 238n3, 239n8
- '*en mal d'homme*', 73  
*See also* Lacan, Jacques
- entertainment industries, 113
- Envirofilm Festival, 271n17
- environmental  
 documentary, 14  
 film festivals, 15, 257–70, 270n1  
 philosophy, 225
- Environmental Media Association,  
 181

- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), 180
- environmentalism/environmentalist, 6, 9, 10, 15n1, 26, 45, 156, 180, 189, 214, 217, 226, 236
- Epstein, Jean, 73, 92
- Ernesto Che Guevara, The Bolivian Diary* (1994), 67  
See also Dindo, Richard
- ESCAP (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific), 152
- estrangement, 28, 44, 83, 213
- ethics, 7, 8, 9, 124, 125, 162, 198
- animal, 4, 13
- environmental, 13, 225
- plant, 34n18
- Evan Almighty* (2007), 181
- expedition film, 128, 131, 139n8
- experimental cinema, 10, 37, 38, 44, 51, 55, 214, 220, 221, 222n6, 222n15, 266  
See also avant-garde cinema; underground film/video
- exploration film, 12, 127, 129
- The Fabulous Story of Poop – In the Name of the Throne* (2008), 260
- family
- bourgeois, 146, 152, 153
- nuclear, 16n4, 148  
See also heteronormativity
- Fanderl, Helga, 51, 52
- fantastic, the, 11, 97, 99
- Fata Morgana* (1972), 21, 33n10
- Fay, Jennifer, 22, 88n2, 222n14
- Federation Rhône-Alpes of Nature Conservation (FRAPNA), 260
- Feldman, Allen, 267
- feminism, 7, 16n3
- Fern Gully* (1992), 33n9, 181
- Festival International du Film d'Environnement, 261
- film as religious experience, 228, 229  
See also *kōan* film/cinema
- Film Festival Research Network (FFRN), 270n1
- Filter Beds* (1990–1998), 51
- Final Destination* franchise, 49
- First Blood* (1982), 180
- Flaherty, Robert, 4, 199
- Flaming Creatures* (1963), 146
- folk tales, 94, 95
- forest, 76, 94–96, 102, 106, 149, 152, 157, 179, 180, 182, 183, 186, 189  
See also rainforest
- Fortier, Anne-Marie, 151
- fossil fuels, 3
- Foucault, Michel, 114, 115, 163, 175n1
- Foulk, T. Griffith, 230
- Four Corners* (1997), 67, 68
- Fowl Play* (2009), 12, 111, 113, 114, 117, 118
- France, 77, 78, 88n3
- Frank, Robert, 66
- Freud, Sigmund, 11, 23, 74–76, 147
- Frogs* (1972), 180
- Frozen Planet* (2011), 24
- Full Metal Jacket* (1987), 180
- Furry Vengeance* (2010), 181
- Gansovsky, Sever, 171
- Garrard, Greg, 24, 25, 32
- The Gateless Gate*, 229
- gender, 1, 4, 7, 12, 13, 133, 138, 146, 148, 177–79, 183, 184, 187, 190
- Germany, 173
- Geyrhalter, Nikolaus, 266
- Gibbons, Euell, 257
- Gibson, Graeme, 257
- Gillard, Julia, 264
- global warming, 1, 3, 15, 241, 242, 244–47, 248–54, 269  
See also climate change
- globalisation, 96, 227, 266
- 'going native' narrative, 178, 179, 184, 185
- Gomel, Elana, 13, 175n2
- Gore, Al, 15, 214, 241–46, 248–51, 253, 254
- Graef, Ven. Sunyana, 225
- Grandville, J. J., 82
- The Great Global Warming Swindle*, 253
- The Great White Silence* (1924), 131



- The Great White South* (1921), 132  
 Greek Ecocinema International Film Festival, 266  
 green cultural studies, 225  
 'green fatigue', 264  
*Green is the New Red*, 33–34n15  
 Green Lifestyle Film Festival, 261  
 Green Vision Film Festival, 271n17  
 Greenaway, Peter, 42  
 Gregory, Jane, 253  
 Grenoble International Nature and Environmental Film Festival, 260  
 Griffith, David Wark, 49  
*Grizzly Man* (2005), 10, 21, 26, 27, 33nn11–12  
*Groundhog Day* (1993), 173, 226  
 Groys, Boris, 165  
 Gruen, Lori, 33n6  
 Guattari, Félix, 43, 44, 56, 56n1  
 Gulag, 171, 172  
 Gunning, Tom, 30–32
- habitat, 4, 119, 130, 182, 217  
 Haggard, H. Rider, 172  
 Hains, Brigid, 129, 135  
 Hajer, Maarten, 243, 244, 252, 253  
 Hamon, Geneviève, 11, 77, 78, 82–84, 86, 88n5  
 Hansen, James E., 249  
*The Happening* (2008), 49  
*Happy Feet* (2006), 12, 138, 181  
 Haraway, Donna, 6, 150  
 Harper, Graeme, 6  
 Harrabin, Roger, 247, 251  
 Hasch, Anton, 197  
 Haslam, Mark, 263, 264, 265, 266  
 Hayles, Katherine, 8  
*The Headless Woman* (2009), 146, 153, 154, 158n5  
*Heart of Darkness*, 185  
 Heidegger, Martin, 10, 21, 30, 32, 219, 220  
 Henkeman, Snoek, 246  
*The Hermit Crab*. See *Le Bernard l'ermite*  
 'Heroic Era' of Antarctic exploration, 128
- Herzog, Werner, 10, 16n5, 21, 22, 26, 27, 31, 32, 33nn10–13, 34n19, 207n12, 267  
 heteronormativity, 12, 146, 148, 150  
 See also family  
 heterosexism, 150  
 Heumann, Joseph K., 6  
 Higgins, Bill, 246  
 high-definition video, 48  
*L'Hippocampe* (1935), 78, 88n4  
 Hoberman, James, 165  
 Hobsbawm, Eric, 206n4  
*The Hole* (1998), 146, 151  
*The Holiday* (2006), 49  
 Hollywood, 13, 23, 38, 40, 41, 45, 177, 191n5, 227, 268  
*The Holy Girl/La niña santa* (2004), 146  
*Home Improvements* (1985), 66  
*homme-sick*, 11, 73, 74, 77, 86, 87  
 See also Lacan, Jacques  
 homosexuality, 157n4  
 See also queer sexuality  
*Honest Truths: Documentary Filmmakers on Ethical Challenges in Their Work*, 199  
*Hoot* (2006), 226  
 Horner, Christopher, 244, 245, 248  
 Hot Docs, 263  
 Houghton, John T., 244, 247, 250  
*The Hour of the Bull* (1968), 162  
*How the Steel was Tempered*, 164  
 Hughes, Malcolm K., 247  
 Hugonnier, Marine, 208n13  
 Huhndorf, Shari M., 185  
 Hulme, Mike, 249, 253  
 human  
 chauvinism, 82  
 domination, 5, 9, 13, 29, 32, 112, 121, 166, 179, 186, 190, 191n7, 225  
 exceptionalism, 5, 6  
 rights, 123, 258  
 human-animal relations, 12, 22, 138, 178, 188  
 human-animal studies (HAS), 16n3, 261  
 See also animal studies (AS); critical animal studies (CAS)  
 humanism, 12, 112, 169

- human/nonhuman boundary, 16n3
- hunting, 4, 93, 103, 127, 130, 187, 189, 226
- Hurley, Frank, 127, 129, 135–38, 139n8, 139n10, 140n13
- Hyas and Stenorhynchus, Marine Crustaceans*. See *Hyas et Sténorinques, crustacés marins*
- Hyas et Sténorinques, crustacés marins* (1929), 77
- I Don't Want to Sleep Alone* (2006), 147, 150
- I Hate Nature*, 22–23, 24, 26, 31, 33n5
- Ice Age: The Meltdown* (2006), 181
- ideology, 1, 4, 7, 12, 112, 115, 117, 119, 121, 168, 190, 238n4, 264
- Ilya, Ilf, 164
- Im, Kwon T'aek, 227, 228
- immanence, 11, 37, 44, 45, 47, 49, 51, 52, 54
- Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition, 127, 135, 139n8
- Impromptu* (1989), 217
- In the Wake of the Flood* (2010), 257
- An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), 14, 15, 214, 226, 241–54, 264, 269
- independent filmmaking, 78, 88n3, 220, 222n, 264
- indigenous people, 145, 149, 156, 186, 190, 191n5
- industrialisation, 165
- Ingram, David, 4, 6, 14, 15, 45, 182, 189, 222n3, 268, 269
- Institute for Critical Animal Studies (ICAS), 16n3
- See also critical animal studies (CAS)
- interconnectedness, 5, 7, 8, 183, 188, 189, 190, 232
- interdependence, 5, 7, 147, 177, 190
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 244, 247–51
- International Whaling Commission, 114
- interrelations
- human-environment, 148, 183
  - human-nonhuman, 1, 6, 14, 217, 218
- intersectionality, 7, 178
- interspecies relations, 4
- Into the Abyss* (2011), 26
- Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), 171
- Iofan, Boris, 164
- Iordanova, Dina, 259
- Isaan, 12, 96, 97, 103
- Isshii, Satoshi, 238n3
- Jackson, John B., 196, 197
- James, Diana, 150, 156
- Jarman, Derek, 145
- Jaszi, Peter, 199
- Jaubert, Maurice, 77, 82
- The Jazz Singer* (1927), 88n3
- Jeong, Seung-hoon, 27, 88n2
- jungle, 11, 93, 95, 96, 99–103, 179–86, 191n5
- Kaganovsky, Lilya, 164, 175n2
- Kalvar, Richard, 27, 28
- Kapetanović, Emir, 201–5
- Kazakhstan, 201, 207n10
- Keiller, Patrick, 204
- Kerridge, Richard, 223n16
- Kestner, Joseph, 185
- Khao Yai National Park, 148–50, 152, 155
- Kheel, Marti, 189, 190
- Kiarostami, Abbas, 206n7, 207–8n12
- King, Sallie, 238n2
- King Solomon's Mines*, 172
- kinship, 28, 29, 117, 118
- Kipling, Rudyard, 184
- kōan* film/cinema, 14, 227, 229–31, 237–38
- See also film as religious experience
- kōan* practice, 14, 225, 226, 227, 229, 230, 237
- Kotkin, Stephen, 164
- Kracauer, Siegfried, 2, 3
- Kuala Lumpur, 151, 152
- Kuhn, Thomas, 251
- Kuleshov effect, 204
- Kuo-an Shi-yuan, 239n8

- laboratories (labs), 28, 82, 110–12, 120, 121, 171
- labour, 3, 48, 60, 68, 69, 133, 166, 263
- Lacan, Jacques, 11, 40, 41, 73–75, 167
- Lake Baikal, 147, 155–56
- Lama, Eddie, 111, 114, 119, 120
- land, 37, 38, 52–56, 56n1, 60–62, 66, 68, 69, 128, 129, 135, 149, 156, 172, 177, 184, 197, 198  
*See also* landscape
- land film, 38, 55  
*See also* landscape film
- Landecker, Hannah, 267
- landscape, 8, 14, 37, 38, 52–54, 56, 60–63, 65–67, 69, 96, 99, 148, 156, 157, 162, 164–70, 172–74, 180, 181, 183–86, 194–98, 200, 201, 203, 204, 206, 208n13, 216–18, 226  
*See also* land
- Landscape and Power*, 198
- landscape film, 38, 54, 60, 61  
*See also* land film
- Landscape Suicide* (1986), 60
- Lapham, Lewis, 263, 268
- Last Chance for Animals, 111
- Latour, Bruno, 251–53
- Lawrence, Michael, 6
- Lee, Hyangjin, 227
- Lefebvre, Henri, 165
- Lefebvre, Martin, 8, 53
- Lem, Stanislaw, 169
- Lenin, Vladimir, 164
- Leopold, Aldo, 181
- Lessons of Darkness* (1992), 21, 33n10
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 41, 42
- LGBTQ, 16n3
- Life, And Nothing More* (1991), 207n12
- Life on Earth* (1979), 24
- de Lima, Lucas, 150
- Lippit, Akira Mizuta, 6, 120
- Loist, Skadi, 270n1
- long take, 47–51, 145, 218
- Long phrai*, 93
- LOS* (2000), 69, 70  
*See also* California Trilogy
- Los Angeles, 69, 70
- The Lost World*, 93
- Louisville Film Festival, 263
- low-impact filmmaking, 14, 15n1, 215
- Lowder, Rose, 14, 15n, 214–21, 222nn5–6, 222nn10–11, 222n13, 223nn16–17, 266
- Luntz, Frank, 246, 247, 251
- Lush Cosmetics, 257, 258
- Lussier, Mark, 230
- Lutts, Ralph H., 268
- Lyman, Howard, 119, 123
- Lyotard, Jean-François, 251, 252, 253
- MacDonald, Scott, 6, 45, 81, 214, 216, 218, 221, 222n4, 222n15, 223n17
- Macy, Joanna, 225
- Madagascar* (2005), 33n9
- magical realism, 204
- Magnitogorsk, 165
- Malnick, Edward, 206n6
- Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), 221n1
- Man Push Cart* (2005), 266
- Mandala* (1981), 227, 228
- Mann, Michael E., 247, 250, 251
- Mann, Ron, 257
- March of the Penguins* (2005), 12, 138
- Marchetti, Gina, 146, 148
- marginalisation, 9, 74, 77, 113, 116, 121, 151
- Margolit, Evgenii, 163, 166, 167
- Margolius, Sarah, 259, 265, 270
- Marsh, Rosalind, 167
- Martel, Lucrecia, 12, 145–47, 152, 154, 155, 158n5
- Martin, Adrian, 11, 92  
*See also* cinematic *dispositif*
- Martin, Stephen, 128, 134, 140n12
- Marxism, 24
- Marxism-Leninism, 163
- masculine hegemony, 179, 180, 183, 184, 187, 189, 190
- masculinity/masculine identity, 181, 183, 184, 185, 189, 190
- The Matrix* (1999), 226
- matter/materiality, 2–6, 8, 11, 22, 38, 39, 40–45, 48, 51, 53, 54, 92, 98, 112, 113, 125, 154, 162, 163, 176, 197, 218

- Mawson, Douglas, 128, 135, 139n8  
 McIntyre, Steve, 248, 249  
 McKernan, Luke, 127, 128, 130, 131, 135, 136, 137, 139n5, 140n13  
 McKerrow, Raymie, 121, 124  
 McKittrick, Ross, 248  
 McLean, Iain, 226  
 McMahan, Kevin, 263–65, 268, 270, 271n16, 271n19, 271n24  
 McMahan, Laura, 6  
 McMillan, Alistair, 226  
 meat, 118, 120, 122, 123, 134, 136  
 Medieval Warming Period, 245, 247  
 meditation, 14, 225–27, 230, 231, 233  
 mediumship, 92  
 Mekong, 145, 148  
 Mellor, Felicity, 242  
 Mendick, Robert, 206n6  
 Mercy for Animals (MFA), 28, 33n15, 111  
 Mexico, 68  
 microcinematography, 78, 83, 267  
*Microcosmos* (1996), 267  
 Mies, Maria, 149, 157  
 migration (human), 147, 149, 152  
 Miller, Steve, 253  
 Mills, Sara, 184, 185  
 mimesis, 30, 31  
   *See also* 'ecomimesis'  
 Minster, Mark, 241, 242  
*Mirror for the Hero / Zerkalo dlya geroya* (1987), 172, 174  
 Mitchell, William J. T., 54, 198, 206  
 Mitman, Gregg, 6, 74, 268  
 modernism, 45, 164, 165, 213  
 modernity, 92, 228  
 Mohani, Salma, 6  
 Molloy, Claire, 10, 13, 23, 24  
 Monson, Shaun, 27, 28, 34n17  
   *See also* Earthlings  
 moral development/progress, 111, 112, 120, 122, 123  
 more-than-human, 15n1, 22, 30  
 Morton, Timothy, 1, 4, 21, 22, 27, 32, 32n1, 34n18  
 Moscow, 155, 156, 173  
 Mt Kilimanjaro, 242, 245  
 Mullen, Kathleen, 258, 261, 270  
 Murray, Robin L., 6  
*The Mysterious Wall/Tainstvennaya stena* (1969), 170  
*The Mystery of Two Oceans/Taina dvuch okeanov* (1939), 166  
 Naess, Arne, 56n1  
*Nanook of the North* (1922), 4, 199, 206n5  
 narrative film, 45, 76, 156  
 National Geographic, 203, 261  
 nationalism, 94, 96, 97, 101, 103–5, 172  
 natural history film, 10, 21, 23, 25, 26, 138  
 nature  
   and agency/as actant, 8, 12, 49, 181  
   changeability of, 43, 67  
   colonisation of, 169, 178, 179  
   conservation, 25, 261, 268  
   cultivated, 94  
   as hostile/adversary, 162, 166, 170, 171, 177, 180, 181, 182, 183, 185, 186  
   human domination of, 5, 9, 155, 163, 164–67, 169, 171–73, 178, 179, 183, 214, 225  
   human transcendence of, 38, 43, 50  
   as indifferent, 8, 16n5, 164  
   mutability of, 43  
   representation of, 2, 4, 8, 13, 15, 16n, 21–25, 28, 31, 32, 33n6, 39–41, 43, 45, 49, 54, 56, 148, 156, 163, 168–70, 174, 175, 177–84, 190, 213, 214, 217–21, 222n10, 222n13, 232, 267, 268  
   wild, 23, 94, 96, 128, 167  
 nature films, 4, 10, 26, 38, 137, 156, 267  
 nature-spaces, 178, 179, 182–87, 190  
 'Natuschöne' (Kant), 221  
 Nelson, M., 182  
 neoliberalism, 13, 25  
 neorealism, 49, 50, 202  
 New Jersey Film Festival, 263  
 new materialism, 45  
 'new New Queer Cinema', 145, 147  
 New York, 28, 181, 250

- New Zealand, 261, 262, 269  
 Nichols, Bill, 203, 243, 245  
*Night of the Lepus* (1972), 180  
 Nimrod expedition, 128  
 Nixon, Richard, 180  
 Noi Inthanon, 93, 95  
 nondualism, 14, 226, 230  
 nonhuman communication, 120  
 non-speciesism, 28, 117, 119, 125n3  
 Nordhaus, Ted, 45  
*North on Evers* (1991), 67, 68  
 nostalgia, 101, 169, 170, 172, 173, 185
- Obama, Barack, 270  
 O'Barry, Ric, 111, 113, 114, 118, 121  
 Oberhausen International Short Film Festival, 266  
 Obruchev, Vladimir, 172  
*The Octopus*. See *La Pieuvre*  
 O'Looney, Katie, 222n13  
 L'Oréal, 271n3  
 Osmanagich, Semir, 194–97, 206nn1–2, 207n10  
 Ostrovsky, Nikolai, 164  
 the Other/otherness, 29, 30, 49, 75, 95, 116, 169, 170, 174, 178, 179, 185, 188, 190, 203, 206, 227, 233, 235  
*Our Daily Bread* (2005), 266  
*Les Oursins* (1929), 77
- Painlevé, Jean, 11, 77–84, 86, 88nn4–8  
 Palmer, Chris, 206n6  
*Pandorapedia*, 188, 189, 191n8  
 Parson, Edward A., 248, 249  
*Passage to Buddha* (1993), 227  
*The Passion of the Christ* (2004), 228  
 pastoral, 162, 166, 168–70, 174, 217, 221, 234, 235  
*Paul J. Rainey's African Hunt* (1912), 127  
*Peaceable Kingdom* (2004), 12, 111, 114, 117, 119, 121, 123  
*Peeping Tom* (1960), 221n1  
 People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), 28  
 perception, 46, 55, 63, 67, 75, 91, 122, 128, 138, 221, 222n14
- Perestroika* (2009), 147, 155, 156  
 performative realism, 92, 97  
 Petrov, Evgeni, 164  
 pets, 28, 110, 112  
 Phoenix, Joaquin, 28, 32n4, 112, 117, 118, 125n5  
 photographic image, 2, 3, 50, 76, 79, 104, 213, 218  
 photography, 78, 84, 85, 125n4, 129, 195, 198, 213, 214, 217, 218, 219, 221n1, 222n2, 258  
 Pick, Anat, 4, 6, 10, 33n13, 88n2, 125n2, 238, 238n6  
*Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), 203  
*La Pieuvre* (1928), 77, 88n7  
*Les Pigeons du square* (1982), 82  
*Pigeons of the Square*. See *Les Pigeons du square*  
 place, 5, 21, 32, 38, 46, 49, 87, 88n9, 216, 219, 220  
*Planet Earth* (2006), 21, 22, 24, 28, 32  
 Planet in Focus (PIF), 15, 257–59, 260, 261, 262, 270, 271n6  
 Plantinga, Carl, 252, 253  
*Plastic Bag* (2009), 266, 267, 269, 270  
*Platoon* (1986), 180  
 Plumwood, Val, 178, 179  
*Polar Bear Hunt* (1907), 127  
*The Politically Incorrect Guide to Global Warming*, 244  
 pollution, 12, 43, 145–47, 150–56, 157nn2–3, 180, 217, 225, 257, 263  
 Pomerance, Murray, 234, 235, 239n9  
 Ponting, Herbert, 127, 129–38, 139n5, 139n7, 140n12  
 postcolonialism, 12, 28, 147, 148, 184, 191n2  
 posthumanism, 9, 125n3, 253  
   posthumanist cinema, 6, 10, 12, 112, 113, 116, 124  
   posthumanist ethics, 124, 125  
*The Postmodern Condition*, 251  
 postmodernism, 25, 232  
 poststructuralism, 38, 252  
*Predator* (1987), 180, 185  
 Prediger, Jennifer, 269, 270  
 pre-modern, 94, 101, 225, 233

- presence ('nowness'), 228, 232  
*Primitive art project*, 94, 106  
*Prophecy* (1979), 180  
 pseudorealism, 31, 32  
 Psihoyos, Louie, 268  
 Puar, Jasbir K., 147  
 Puchalski Film Festival, 271n17  
 pure film, 37, 38, 44, 45, 48, 50, 52–53, 79  
 Pyramid of the Sun Foundation, 195, 197–202, 204–6, 206n3, 206n8
- queer  
 cinema, 145–48, 150, 154  
 desire, 146, 147, 151, 152, 154  
 sexuality, 146, 151  
 theory, 7  
 writing, 150  
 queerness, 148  
*Quiproquo* (1992), 217, 218, 222n13
- race, 1, 4, 7, 9, 13, 16n3, 152, 178, 184, 190, 207n9  
*Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), 180  
 rainforest, 177, 179, 181, 182–85, 187, 189  
   *See also forest*  
 Rainforest Foundation, 181  
 Ranger, Terence, 206n4  
 Rastovich, Dave, 120  
 Rayner, Jonathan, 6  
 Rayns, Tony, 146, 157n2, 230  
 Reagan, Ronald, 180  
 realism, 2, 11, 22, 31, 49, 53, 91, 267  
   *See also magical realism;*  
   neorealism; performative  
   realism; pseudorealism; realist;  
   socialist realism  
 realist, 2, 3, 40, 52, 91  
   *See also realism*  
 Reel Earth, 261  
 Regan, Tom, 2, 117  
*La Région Centrale* (1971), 38, 39, 54  
 religion  
   Buddhism, 14, 146, 225–228, 238n2  
   Christianity, 172  
   Islam, 65  
   Zen Buddhism, 14, 225–38, 238n1, 238n7, 239n8  
 Renger-Patzsch, Albert, 222n2  
*Repas de bébé* (1895), 48  
 Repts, Paul, 239n8  
 reverse panopticon, 12, 112, 115, 116, 124  
 Revkin, Andrew, 243  
 rhetorical tactics  
   antagonism, 112, 121–24  
   (dis)identification, 122, 124  
 Rhodes, Geoffrey Alan, 13, 194, 201–3, 207n8, 207n10  
 Rhim Hye-kyung, 231, 238n5  
 Rigby, Kate, 219, 220  
*The River* (1997), 146, 148, 151  
*The Road* (2009), 33n9  
 Roberts, David, 246  
*Robinson in Space* (1997), 204  
 Rokke, Michelle, 121  
 Rossellini, Roberto, 204, 207n12  
 Rothman, William, 206n5  
 Rouch, Jean, 202  
 RR (2007), 63, 64  
*Rue des Teinturiers* (1979), 215, 216, 222n8  
*Ruhr* (2009), 33n7, 37, 45–48, 52, 60–62, 65  
 Ruskin, John, 43, 53  
 Rust, Stephen, 6, 241  
 Rybas, S., 172
- safari films, 127, 131  
 Said, Edward, 207n9  
 St. Lawrence Seaway, 270  
 Salta, northern Argentina, 152, 153, 155, 158n6  
 salvation/redemption, 111, 182, 226  
*Sannikov's Land/Zemlya Sannikova* (1973), 172  
 Schmidt, Gavin, 250, 251  
 Schrödinger, Edwin, 200  
 science fiction (SF), 13, 16n7, 25, 26, 33n9, 95, 98, 102, 162–64, 166–72, 174, 184, 249  
 scientific cinema, 15, 78, 79, 81, 83, 267

- Science in Action*, 251
- Scott, Robert F., 127, 128, 129, 130,  
131, 132, 134, 135
- The Sea Horse*. See *L'Hippocampe*
- Sea Urchins*. See *Les Oursins*
- Seattle Film Festival, 263
- Second World War, 168
- Sekida, Katsuki, 235
- Senzaki, Nyogen, 239n8
- sex acts, 151
- sexuality, 1, 4, 7, 9, 147, 148, 150  
female, 146  
lesbian and gay, 147  
queer, 146  
See also homosexuality
- Shackleton, Ernest, 127, 128, 135, 136,  
137, 139n9, 140n13
- She*, 172
- Shellenberger, Michael, 45
- Sherwin, Guy, 51
- Shirase, Nobu, 128
- Shiva, Vandana, 149, 157
- shot duration, 37, 43, 51, 65, 98,  
204
- Shrimp*. See *Crevettes*
- Shukin, Nicole, 33n8
- Siam, 93, 95, 96, 101–4, 107, 107n2  
See also Thailand
- Siberia, 147, 155, 170
- silent cinema, 77, 78, 79, 80, 88n3, 131,  
164, 215
- Silent Running* (1972), 33n9
- Singer, Isaac Bashevis, 119
- Singer, Peter, 117
- Sitney, P. Adams, 37, 38–39, 46
- Skoll, Jeff, 249
- slaughterhouses, 28, 29, 111, 119
- Smith, Neil, 182
- Smithson, Robert, 55, 56
- Snow, Michael, 38, 39, 54
- social ecology, 225
- socialist realism, 13, 162, 165
- society  
emancipatory social  
transformation, 124  
humane self-image, 112, 114, 122,  
124
- Sogobi* (2001), 69, 70  
See also California Trilogy
- Solaris* (1972), 169–70
- Sondrio – International Documentary  
Film Festival on Parks, 271n17
- Sontag, Susan, 157n2, 213, 221n1
- soteriology, 14, 225–27, 238n3
- La Soufrière* (1977), 21, 33n10
- sound  
in film, 24, 30, 31, 46, 56, 79, 80,  
84, 88n3, 88nn5–6, 131, 146, 150,  
222nn12–13, 231, 234, 235, 239n9,  
243, 261  
introduction of in cinema, 77–79
- South* (1919), 12, 127, 135–38, 140n13
- South America, 68, 194, 204, 262
- South East Asia, 94, 95, 101, 150
- South Korea, 227, 228
- Soviet cinema, 13, 162–64, 166, 167,  
169, 171, 172, 174, 175
- Soviet New Man, 162, 164, 167, 168,  
172, 174, 175, 175n2
- Soviet Union, 5, 13, 155, 166–69,  
170–73, 175, 175n1
- Soviet utopianism, 13, 162–65,  
167–69, 172–74
- Soylent Green* (1973), 33n9
- Space Flight/Kosmicheckiy reis* (1935),  
164
- Spaceship Earth, 25, 28, 30  
See also Earth
- spatiotemporality, 215, 219
- species, 7, 9, 29, 30, 83, 110–12,  
117–19, 125n3, 146, 181, 225  
native, 12, 128, 131, 269
- speciesism, 9, 28, 117, 119  
See also discrimination
- Spielberg, Steven, 203
- Spiral Jetty* (1970), 55, 67
- spirit possession, 91–92
- spirituality, 49, 66, 148, 169, 177, 179,  
182, 187, 189, 225, 226, 227, 229,  
233, 237
- Stalin, Joseph, 163
- Stalinism, 24, 164, 165, 167, 172, 173
- Stalker* (1979), 201
- Stare, Dalibor, 200

- Stein, Jenny, 111  
 Stites, Richard, 164  
 Stonehenge, 198  
 Stringer, Julian, 260, 262, 265, 266  
*Stromboli* (1950), 204  
 structural film, 10, 37–40, 42–46, 53, 54, 66, 215  
 structuralism, 37, 38, 40–43  
 structures of domination, 9, 178  
 Strugatsky, Arkadii and Boris, 167  
 Sturgeon, Noël, 16n4  
 subjectivity, 1, 7, 31, 45, 46, 50, 51, 61, 105, 114, 165, 198, 203, 232  
 Sundance Film Festival, 263, 269  
 surrealism, 78, 205  
 surveillance, 96, 107, 112, 115, 116  
 sustainability, 3, 156, 259, 262  
 Suzuki, David, 57n5  
*The Swamp* (2001), 146, 158n5  
 'The Swimmer', 39, 40, 41  
*The Swimmer* (1968), 38, 39–41  
 Sydney Film Festival, 263  
*Syndromes and a Century* (2006), 150
- Tarkovskii, Andrei, 169, 170, 174, 201  
*Tarzan* (1932), 185  
*Taste of Cherry* (1997), 207n12  
 Tathātā/'thus-ness', 228  
 Tati, Jacques, 234  
 Taubin, Amy, 152, 153, 154  
 technology, 25, 26, 164, 179, 183, 213, 214, 218  
 Tedesco, Frank, 227, 231  
 Telluride Film Festival, 266  
 temporality, 41, 76, 97, 150, 198  
*Ten Skies* (2004), 33n7, 37, 39, 43  
 the Terror (Soviet Union), 163, 166, 171  
 Thai monarchy, 95  
 Thailand, 5, 96, 148, 149, 152  
   *See also* Siam  
 the Thaw (Soviet Union), 163, 166, 167, 170  
 Thompson, Anne, 249  
 Thompson, Ashley, 91  
 Thongchai Winichakul, 95, 101, 104  
 Thoreau, Henry David, 257
- Through the Olive Trees* (1994), 207n12  
 topography, 92, 94, 96, 100  
 Toronto Film Festival, 265  
 total cinema, 30, 31, 32  
*Touch of Evil* (1958), 50  
 Toulmin, Stephen, 252  
*Les Tournesols* (1982), 219  
*Toxic Soup* (2010), 263  
*Trafic* (1971), 234–36  
*Tropical Malady / Sat pralaat!* (2004), 91, 93, 94, 97, 99, 101, 102, 150  
 Tsai Ming-liang, 12, 145–48, 150–52  
 Tsiolkovsky, Konstantin, 164  
 Turner, Sarah, 12, 145, 147, 155, 156  
 Twain, Mark, 119  
 Twin Cities Film Festival, 263  
 Twine, Richard, 7, 178  
 Tyler, Tom, 7
- Uexküll, Jakob von, 29, 34n18  
 uncanny, 11, 74  
   *See also* *Das Unheimliche* (1919)  
*Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives/Lung Boonmee raleuk chat* (2010), 91, 93–95, 97–99, 101–7, 145, 146, 149, 157n3  
 undercover footage, 28, 33n15, 111–16, 121, 124  
 underground film/video, 34n16, 220  
   *See also* avant-garde cinema;  
   experimental cinema  
*Das Unheimliche* (1919), 11, 74–76  
   *See also* uncanny  
 United Nations, 181, 260  
 United States, 13, 16n4, 68, 95, 111, 171, 241, 246, 250, 254, 262–64  
*Urformen der Kunst / Prototypes of Art* (1931), 214  
 utopia, 13, 107, 125, 148, 162–64, 167–69, 172, 173–74, 196  
*Utopia* (1998), 67–69
- de Valck, Marijke, 270n1  
 Varda, Agnès, 207n12  
 Varela, Francisco J., 230  
 Vaughan, Dai, 48  
 Vaughn, Jacqueline, 180



- veganism, 9, 16, 34n17, 111, 117, 123  
 vegetarianism, 123, 258  
*Vegucated* (2010), 34n17  
 Venice International Film Festival, 266  
*Vertical Features Remake* (1978), 42  
 Vietnam war, 148, 180, 191n5  
 violence, 16n4, 22, 29, 30, 86, 96, 102, 104, 105, 114, 124, 168, 188, 222n8, 233  
 'violent hierarchy' (Derrida), 114, 117, 124  
 Virilio, Paul, 25, 26  
 Visociča, 195, 197, 198, 200, 201, 203, 206n8  
 Visoko, 13, 194, 195, 197, 198, 200, 201, 203, 206, 207n10  
 vivisection, 83, 110, 171
- Wall-E* (2008), 33n9, 182  
 Walton, Douglas, 243, 245, 246, 253  
 Washington, D.C. Environmental Film Festival, 269, 270  
 waste, 14, 167, 215, 217, 222n6, 226, 260  
*Watching Wildlife*, 6, 267  
 water, 12, 13, 39, 40, 42, 43, 54, 62–65, 69, 70, 98, 132, 146–57, 158nn5–6, 180, 230, 232, 233, 236, 250, 262, 263, 270  
 Watkins, Carleton, 197  
 Watkins, Gregory, 228, 229  
 Watts, Alan W., 238n7  
*Wavelength* (1967), 39  
 Webber, Mark, 221  
 Weber, Samuel, 75  
 Weil, Simone, 24, 26, 30, 31  
 Welkos, Robert W., 246  
 Welsby, Chris, 38  
*Die Welt ist Schön/The World is Beautiful*, 222n2  
*Where is the Friend's House?* (1987), 207n12
- Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the East?* (1989), 14, 227–234, 236–38, 238n5  
*Why We Disagree About Climate Change*, 253  
*The Wild Blue Yonder* (2005), 21, 26, 33n10  
 wilderness, 26, 27, 96, 127, 138, 168, 170, 171, 181, 182  
 wildlife, 12, 77, 78, 119, 129, 136, 137, 139n8, 258, 260  
 film/cinema, 5, 12, 21, 23–26, 33n6, 77–81, 84, 119, 131–33, 138, 198, 261, 267, 268  
 photography, 130  
 television, 23, 24, 26, 199, 261  
 wildness, 74  
 Wildscreen Film Festival, 261, 265  
 Willoquet-Maricondi, Paula, 6, 44, 222n4  
*The Witness* (2004), 12, 110, 111, 113, 114, 117, 119, 120, 123  
 Wollen, Peter, 45, 50  
 Woodward, Colin, 194  
 work of art, 50, 165, 213, 214, 220  
 World Bank, 153  
 world cinema, 92  
 World Environmental Day, 260  
 World Wildlife Foundation, 261  
 worldhood (*Weltlichkeit*), 10, 21, 22, 26–30, 32
- Yacowar, Maurice, 180  
*The Year of the Flood*, 257
- Zen ecology, 227, 238  
 Zen meditation, 14, 225–27, 230, 231, 233  
*Zen Noir* (2004), 226  
 Žižek, Slavoj, 268, 269, 270  
 zoological cinema, 81  
 zoomorphism, 5  
 zoos, 113, 128, 135, 181