Article:
Durrant, S orcid.org/0000-0002-9244-9715 (2021) Critical Spirits: New Animism As Historical Materialism. New Formations: a journal of culture/theory/politics, 104/105. pp. 50-76. ISSN 0950-2378

https://doi.org/10.3898/NewF:104-105.03.2021

Critical Spirits: New Animism as Historical Materialism

Abstract

This essay reads the so-called 'new animism' alongside the historical materialism of Benjamin, Horkheimer and Adorno. The aim is to draw out the political dimensions of the former and the ecological dimensions of the latter. New animism shares with historical materialism a critique of modernity and the alienation produced by the separation of the human sphere of culture from the nonhuman field of nature. Both theories are interested in animism as exemplary refusal of this separation and both seek a mimetic, non-objectifying, relation to the world. New animism operates to correct historical materialism's Eurocentric tendency to think of such 'naturecultures' as premodern and thus superceded, showing what can still be learnt from the example of specific indigenous peoples and their animistic engagement with the more than human world. But historical materialism's dialectical approach to history also helps to guard against the romanticisation of animism and dehistoricised models of animistic relations to 'nature'. Capitalist modernity is not simply the extirpation of animism, the turning of souls into things, but also itself a modified form of animism, the turning of things into magical commodities. Once we understand the mythic nature of capitalism, the critical task becomes not to reanimate the world but to *counter-animate* it. Both new animism and historical materialism are utopian in their investment in a spirited, more than human world, but the latter also seeks to promote what I call a *critical* spiritedness, an ironised, melancholic identification with our fellow beings, both human and nonhuman, as subject to history and thus, in Adorno's phrasing, 'damaged life'. In the final part of my essay, I consider the way in which art can channel this critical spirit through an exploration of Jim Jarmusch's 1995 film *Dead Man,* and its counter-animation of the cinematic tradition of the Western. The film is at once a melancholic critique of the deanimating, ecocidal and genocidal consequences of Western expansion and an attempt to respiritualise the cinematic gaze through a creaturely identification with damaged life.

Key words; new animism, historical materialism, mimesis, identification, enchantment, critique, counter-animation.

In its refusal of the Enlightenment distinction between nonhuman nature and human culture, its emphasis on social relations as encompassing the more than human world and its insistence on the agency of the nonhuman and the animacy of the seemingly inanimate, new animism would seem to have much in common with the posthumanist turn in the critical humanities, from Bruno Latour's actor network theory to the new materialism of Jane Bennett and company. However, such theories tend to be myopically Western in their orientation, arriving at quasi-animist positions without engaging with the actual animist practices and beliefs of the indigenous peoples that are the explicit focus of new animist anthropology. This essay instead places new animism alongside the historical materialism of the Frankfurt School, in which animism figures as a premodern, mimetic relation to the world that modernity both supercedes and replicates. Although historical materialism draws on the colonial anthropology that invents animism as the primitive other of Western civilisation, its dialectical approach serves to call into question distinctions between the savage and the civilised, the mythic and the rational. Bringing this dialectical approach to bear on new animism makes it clear that the critical task cannot simply be to reverse modernity, embrace indigenous practices and reanimate the world. What I dub a critical animist materialism guards against such romanticisation and instead seeks to generate forms of solidarity with both human and nonhuman life.

Graham Harvey coined the term 'new animism' in 2005 and has been instrumental in defining the field in *Animism: Respect for the Living World* (2005) and *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism* (2013).[1] The old, colonial anthropology defines animism as a belief in spirits, a belief that E B Tylor and later Frazer, operating within a racist evolutionary framework, understood to be a primitive form or religion and thus, from their enlightened, secular view, to be a *mistaken* belief. Contemporary anthropology attempts to undo the hierarchies of colonial anthropology by sidestepping the question of belief, instead characterising animism, as Harvey's title suggests, as a form of 'respect for the living world'. Respect structures both the anthropologist's relation to those who believe in spirits, and the animist's own relation to the spirited, more than human world. Drawing on Irving Hallowell's work with the Ojibwe in the 1960s, Harvey describes new animism as referring to 'ways of living that assume the world is a community of living persons, all deserving respect, and therefore to ways of inculcating good relations between persons of different species' (p5).

This characterisation of animism as an ethic of respect reads partly as an extension of liberal multicultural respect for the beliefs and practices of others and partly as an *identification* with those who practice 'animism', even a tacit sharing of the animist's belief in spirits, or what we might less kindly call vicarious animism, an animism held in check by the secular protocols of the social sciences. Thinkers such as Tim Ingold prefer to speak in quasi-objective terms of animacy rather than animism, understood not as a belief structure but rather as 'the transformative potential of the entire field of relations within which beings of all kinds . . . continually and reciprocally bring each other into existence.' [2] Ingold makes it clear that animacy is not a human projection onto the nonhumanworld but that which reciprocally generates or inter-animates life. This approach brings new animism closer to new materialism, which is also inclined to speak of the animacy of the nonhuman world.

However, the ontological approach of Ingold and the new materialists, in de-emphasising the role played by human action and belief, is necessarily limited as political critique. Harvey's ethics-based approach at least leads to an environmental politics, even to an implied critique of capitalism as a system of disrespect which fails to apprehend the personhood of nonhuman beings. But what I seek in this essay is a way to make new animism into a sharper and more precise critique of capitalism. Only one of the forty essays in Harvey's *Handbook* is explicitly Marxist. One reason for this pronounced aversion may well be the perception that historical materialism is irrevocably tied to an exclusively human conception of personhood and social relations. Another is clearly the perception that Marxism, as a rational, atheistic project of demystification, is inherently hostile to any belief in spirits. Indeed, for Alf Hornborg, the one Marxist contributor, Marxism is precisely this, a critique of capitalism as predicated on forms of magical thinking, or fetishization, which irrationally endow various forms of object with life. Narrowing animism to the logic of the fetish, animism can then be equated with capitalism as a form of mystification or illusion to be overcome: 'the fetishism of technology represents a specific mode of mystifying unequal exchange' (p258). Hornberg's essay sits uneasily within the collection as a result. His casual dismissal of 'New Age Spirituality' (p248) contrasts with Harvey's serious engagement with neo-paganism. More broadly, his scepticism is at odds with the sympathetic approach taken by the other contributions, most of which demand, in one

way or another, forms of *credence*, or what literary critics, following Samuel Taylor Coleridge, refer to as the willing suspension of disbelief.

Animist Materialism

Another way of parsing the relationship between new animism and historical materialism is possible. Aligning animism with capitalism as forms of mistaken belief or false consciousness reproduces Marxism as a rational science that somehow escapes ideology and has irrefutable access to what really exists. We need a historical materialism that instead of operating merely as ideology critique, explicitly avows its investment in the material, animate world. Historical materialism would thereby interrupt the abstracting logic of global capitalism, understood both as a *deanimating* force that turns souls into things and as a *falsely animating* force that turns things into fetishized commodities. This double critique of capitalist modernity is the central thrust of Horkheimer and Adorno's *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), which famously traces the ways in which 'Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology' (xviii), the way in which mythical thinking contains elements of rationality while the rational thinking of the European Enlightenment is self-mystifying. Modernity, understood as the 'disenchantment of the world' entails 'the extirpation of animism' (p2), but as itself a form of enchantment, modernity also entails the *disavowed repetition of animism*. 'One must see capitalism,' Walter Benjamin declared, 'as a religion', and the whole domain of political theology rests on similar assumptions about the ways in which supposedly secular modern states wield their power.[3]

The critical task thus cannot simply be to demystify the world, a project which risks collusion with modernity's project of deanimation. But neither can it simply be to reanimate the world, a project which risks collusion not only with capitalism's attribution of life to seemingly inanimate commodities (its insistence that, for instance, 'coke is life'), but also with capitalism's production of what Louise Green provocatively terms 'the nature industry.'[4] Adorno coined the term 'culture industry' to describe the way in which culture loses its capacity to critique the society by which it is produced, even while he claimed certain works of art retain a residue of critical autonomy. Green suggests that the same is now true of nature, that 'while nature has unquestionably

become subsumed within the instrumental logic of capitalist production,' sold to us by travel agents, game parks and town and country planners, nature 'is also now, in the light of the extent of the environmental crisis, subject to a certain haunting' (p9). New animist thought itself risks being subsumed within the nature industry in so far as it appears to offer ways out of, or beyond, modernity, exhorting its readers to recover a sensual or spiritual relation to the 'natural world' and dehistoricising our various relations with the environment in order to recirculate nature as spiritual encounter or lifestyle choice. The critical spirit that I seek to invoke consists in a double gesture: firstly, an affirmative belief in the animated or spirited nature of our more than human world, and secondly an auto-critical awareness of the pitfalls of romanticising this belief, a vigilance concerning the ways in which any desire to re-enchant the world is liable to co-optation by the nature industry. The task of a critical animist materialism is not simply to re-enchant the world but to distinguish between 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' modes of enchantment. Or, since capitalism is always liable to co-opt the language of authenticity, it might be better to say that the task of a critical animist materialism is to determine which modes of enchantment are practices of domination and which are truly liberatory.[5] Green's sense that nature is 'subject to a certain haunting' in an age of environmental crisis can be read to mean that nature returns to us as a critical spirit, a spectral presence constantly warning us of its, and thereby our own, destruction. New animism and historical materialism are thus constituted through a melancholy but *anti-nostalgic* identification with nature as damaged life.

It is always possible, of course, that seemingly liberatory modes of enchantment turn out to be complicit with capitalism. This problem haunts the late Harry Garuba's groundbreaking essay, 'Explorations in Animist Materialism'.[6] Garuba coined the term 'animist materialism' as a way of describing the ways in which an African animist unconscious constantly reenchants the secular, scientific world of modernity (p267). Garuba's account of re-enchantment assumes the validity, at least for Western modernity, of Max Weber's secularisation thesis, and fails to consider the ways in which capitalist modernity is itself a form of enchantment. He opens his essay with a discussion of how the National Electric Power Authority of Nigeria headquarters is presided over by Sango, the Yoruba god of lightning, taking this as evidence of his retraditionalisation thesis, in which animism accommodates scientific modernity and Sango is said to have 'discovered' electricity. But surely the accommodation here is

mutual, with modernity co-opting animism just as much as animism co-opts modernity? The electricity company's deployment of Sango doesn't so much reanimate the world as render animism complicit with capitalism's mystificatory instrumentalisation of the world. A critical animist materialism needs to *disrupt*, rather than simply accommodate, the discursive operation of global capitalism.

Michael Taussig's seminal work *Mimesis and Alterity* (1993) also draws on the Frankfurt School's theorisation of mimesis in a meditation on the place of animism and magical thinking in both 'primitive' and 'modern' cultures.[7] Despite his extensive work on spirit possession, the subject of no less than seven essays in Harvey's *Handbook*, Taussig's research only merits a solitary reference in the volume. It is as if his work, despite its postcolonial emphasis on mimesis as an anti-colonial form of resistance, falls in some strange no-man's land between colonial anthropology and the new animism. Taussig memorably explores how various indigenous peoples mimic the forms of colonial modernity: the Cunae Indians make figurines out of white men in order to appropriate their magic, while the Songhay, as 'captured' in Jean Rouch's controversial ethnographic film *Les maîtres fous*, mimic and become possessed by various colonial figures of authority in order to recover their power and authority for themselves. Taussig brings out the ironic, critical dimensions of mimesis in both historical materialism and anticolonial animism and my essay can be read as a homage to the critical spirit that infuses his work. His ironising of his own position as Western anthropologist, which seemingly prevents him from being taken seriously as part of Harvey's account of new animism, is precisely what makes his work so central to my own account. However, his emphasis is on mimesis as a mode of empowerment; he is less interested, at least in *Mimesis and Alterity,* in the utopian dimension of mimesis as a non-dominating relation to the world, intimately connected to an ethics of self-relinquishment.[8] He switches between traditional and modern, colonial and anticolonial forms of enchantment, without attempting to distinguish between dominating and liberating forms of enchantment. In other words, despite its solidarity with anticolonial forms of animism, there is no explicitly *ecological* dimension , no attempt to pronounce on which forms of animation are in the interests of life itself, in all its 'more than human' dimensions.[9]

The ecological dimensions of historical materialism are most evident in Horkheimer and Adorno's understanding of how the domination of humans by other humans (the conventional object of Marxist critique) is grounded in humans' domination of both 'external' (non-human) and 'internal' (human) nature. The subject achieves sovereignty according to a logic of self-preservation that is paradoxically self-sacrificial:

> At the moment when human beings cut themselves off from the consciousness of themselves as nature, all the purposes for which they keep themselves alive . . . become void. [. . . .] The human being's mastery of itself, on which the self is founded, practically always involves the annihilation of the subject in whose service that mastery is maintained, because the substance which is mastered, suppressed, and disintegrated by self-preservation is nothing other than the living entity, of which the achievements of self-preservation can only be defined as functions—in other words, self-preservation destroys the very thing which is to be preserved. (p42-43)

Following in the wake of Freud as well as Marx, Horkheimer and Adorno count the cost of the imperial 'civilizational' process, a process of mastery that is simultaneously oppressive and repressive in its separation of (human) culture from (nonhuman) nature. By highlighting Marxism's commitment to the 'living entity' lost in the formation of the sovereign human subject, a relation emerges between the critical, macropolitical dimension of new animism and the ecological, even 'posthuman', dimensions of historical materialism.

Horkheimer and Adorno's reading of subjectivity as the severance of human being from nature builds on Benjamin's understanding of the mimetic faculty, 'the once powerful compulsion to become similar' (p720) shared by all living things. Recovering this mimetic faculty would thus seem (in a non-dialectical, nostalgic reading of Benjamin) to undo our severance from the natural world. Although he does not draw on Benjamin, this nostalgic desire to recover a mimetic, sensuous relation to the world is suggested by the titles of, for instance, David Abram's *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World* (1996) and *Becoming-Animal: An Earthly Cosmology* (2010). Historical materialism supplements the potential nostalgia of such endeavours with a melancholic recognition that our attempts at 'becoming-similar'

must ultimate end in a recognition of what Adorno terms our 'non-identity' with the external world. As Abram himself has recently pointed out, melancholia, or what he calls 'ecological despondency' also suffuses the environmental movement of which new animism is a part, which is why I position historical materialism as a supplement, rather than a corrective, to the new animist *zeitgeist*.[10] There can be no 'return' to nature precisely because we cannot undo the history of the human domination of nature. Our 'kinship' with nonhuman beings is based not only on a sense of the spirited nature of all life but also on a sense of our political solidarity as beings subject to history. This is the force of the term 'creaturely' in the work of Benjamin and Adorno, a term recently taken up by biopolitical commentators such as Cary Wolfe.[11] But whereas Wolf takes the term to refer to a specifically human experience of subjection, Beatrice Hanssen makes it clear that for Benjamin and Adorno the term points towards an 'ethico-political' relation between all life forms, signalling our common subjection and precarious co-dependency.[12] The creaturely identification at the heart of both historical materialism and new animism is thus not with the natural world as such, but with 'damaged life'. There is, to be sure, a redemptive impulse in this creaturely identification, but it is one that recognises that any reconnection with the more than human world must pass through, rather than bypass, history. In other words, while we might, as Abram, Ingold and others urge us, become alive to our entanglement in the more than human world *as individuals* (or even what Nurit Bird David, following Strathern, describes as 'dividuals'), this process needs to be as political as it is spiritual.[13] To state the obvious, a collective, creaturely shift in our relation to the more than human world can be only be realised through the defeat—or at least the 'jamming' or unworking—of global capitalism.

Following animism (and pausing)

Whereas for colonial anthropology animism was something to be superceded by religion and then rationality, new animism reverses the Eurocentric logic of modernity, often expressing itself as a desire to *follow* the animistic ways of indigenous peoples. Whereas the old anthropology operates via a distancing or othering gesture in which the anthropologist marks those who mistakenly believe in spirits as primitive, the new anthropology seeks to overcome this distance by bracketing the question of belief and taking the 'native informant' as exemplary guide not only to his/her (nature)culture, but

to life itself. Harvey writes that new animism is less concerned with knowing who or what is alive and more concerned with 'knowing how to behave appropriately towards persons, not all of whom are human.' [14] Who or what counts as a person here is, of course, intimately bound up with who you believe to be alive or in possession of spirit, but this question of ontology, of what exists, is bracketed in favour of a generalizable ethics of respect: 'new animism names worldviews and lifeways in which people seek to know how they might respectfully and properly engage with other persons' (pxx). Elsewhere, Harvey traces his interest in animism back to Irving Hallowell and what Hallowell himself learnt from the Ojibwe, but his definition of new animism elides the history of this troubled relation between native informant and anthropologist. The 'people' seeking to know how to engage with the world are presumably both animistic peoples and the anthropologists who study them. Indeed, given his capacious definition of 'people,' all life forms are putatively engaged in this ethical quest for right relations.

These elisions are, of course, troubling, but my point here is not simply critical. I want to take seriously the mimetic impulse to follow the example of another. Indigenous scholars are acutely aware of the long, ongoing history of cultural appropriation that has accompanied the theft of their lands and the genocide of indigenous peoples. The Chickasaw poet, novelist and scholar Linda Hogan was initially 'horrified' by renewed academic interest in animism, not least because 'we were killed in great numbers for being called Pagans and animists.'[15] However, she later realised that, in the face of environmental crisis, 'we need the new animists. We need change' (p.21). While new animism always risks what Yupiaq writer Oscar Kawagley describes as 'cognitive imperialism' (p19), the impulse to follow the teachings of another is a reversal of the Cartesian emphasis on self-certainty and the primacy of individual human thought. The Métis scholar and artist Warren Calliou writes that 'Indigenous philosophies of language and belonging reverse the trajectory of Western mimesis, starting with the land as source of not only sustenance but also of knowledge. If we follow the implications of this idea, it means that when we study Indigenous stories and literatures, we are in a way studying the land and trying to learn from it' (p341). Cariou himself 'follows' the example of sweetgrass, a sacred plant that 'works as a teacher, operating through its scent, texture, and literal rootedness to teach humans about their own connectedness to particular living places.'

By mimesis Cariou presumably has in mind the Platonic tradition in which art seeks to represent and thus control nature and not the dissident tradition invoked by Benjamin and Adorno, in which mimesis is a form of identification *with* nature, and with nature's own creative power. While the former leads to the separation of culture from nature, the human subject from the world, the latter works to fold culture back into nature. As Roger Caillois once argued in 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia' mimetic behaviour is a generalised impulse to become-similar, a drive that, like Freud's death-drive, is common to all life forms.[16] Understood outside the psychoanalytic emphasis on the individualised subject, the drive to become-similar is not the pathological experience of psychasthenia or depersonaliation, but rather an animist celebration of our 'dividual' or interconnected nature.

Many artists have long understood their practice not as a form of self-expression but as a process of following or ceding sovereignty to their material, whether that material be a piece of wood with its own particular grain, or fictional characters with their own idea of where the narrative is going. Cariou himself makes what he calls 'petrographs' out of the tar sands of the Athabascar region of Alberta, a process that allows the land a creative agency that it is denied by the petroleum industry. Derived in part from his own experience of following a score when playing the cello, Tim Ingold describes creativity as a process of being led.[17] Similarly inspired by music, Adorno speaks of mimesis as 'the imitation of the dynamic curve of the work being performed.'[18] As Weber Nicholsen notes, this mimetic element does not only apply to art forms which are performed by musicians or actors: 'every work of art can be seen as a dynamic totality that requires a kind of performance or re-enactment by the listener or viewer' (p149). If following is at the heart of the conception, performance, reception and interpretation of the artwork, then it would be perverse for a literary critic such as myself to censure anthropologists for seeking to follow the example of indigenous peoples who, as Cariou's relation both to sweetgrass and to tar sand makes clear, are themselves committed to a practice of following other 'persons'.

If new animism can be understood as a practice of following, I want to suggest that this following is also an act of pausing, a critical act of self-reflection. To put this another way, there is always a *ludic* aspect to following other beings, a playfulness that Rane Willerslev suggests is also at the heart of the indigenous animist's own belief in

spirits. In his provocative essay 'Laughing at the Spirits in North Siberia: Is Animism Being Taken Too Seriously?' [19] Willerslev argues that the new animists

> each in their own way seek to take animism seriously by upending the primacy of Western metaphysics over indigenous understandings and following the lead of the animists themselves in what they say about spirits, souls, and the like. By "taking seriously," I simply mean taking seriously what the indigenous people themselves take seriously, which the old studies of animism certainly did not.

Taking animist beliefs seriously (which is not *quite* the same as believing them) is, for Willerslev, what distinguishes the new from the old animism. However, his observation of the bear-hunting Yukaghirs of Siberia suggests that animists may not take their own beliefs as seriously as the new animists take them. Custom dictates that the Yukaghirs must poke out the eyes of the bear they have killed, in order to blind the bear's spirit as to who has killed it. But as they do this, Willerslev observes them joking and laughing, as if they are not taking their own hunting rituals seriously. He generalizes from this that 'underlying animistic cosmologies is a force of laughter, an ironic distance, a making fun of the spirits.' Taking animism seriously thus turns out to mean not taking animists *too* seriously: 'If the indigenous animists are not supposed to take their own animist rhetoric too seriously, perhaps anthropologists should follow their lead.' But what does it mean to follow the lead of animists here? To take seriously animists who do not take their own practices seriously would clearly be an error, an act of bad faith, a romanticisation of contemporary animist practices. Willerslev admits that he left out such moments of playfulness from his earlier accounts of the Yukaghirs. He goes on to suggest that the Yukaghirs do not *not* believe in the spirits. Via Slavoj Zizek on the workings of ideology (and, implicitly, Octave Mannoni on the logic of the fetish), he arrives at the following formulation: 'they know very well that in conducting their ritual activities they are following an illusion. Still, they do not renounce it.' Illusion seems to me a bit strong here, given that they still believe in the reality of the spirit world. Willerslev himself avers that the Yukahirs are no hapless victims of false consciousness. Instead it seems to me the Yukahir have a doubled relation to their own traditions, which makes it possible for them to both follow and laugh at their belief in spirits. If we are to follow animists, then, we must learn to follow them ironically, ludically, reflectively, alive to the way in which animism itself is never self-identical, that even for

'authentic' indigenous animists, there will always be an irreducible gap between (contemporary) practise and (ancestral) belief, an element of mimesis in the very notions of ancestry and inheritance. Animism is a following of ancestral customs, but there is always a performative, knowing, self-conscious element to this following. Following is never 'blind' repetition but always a reflective act of doubling.

A *mise en abyme* has opened up. New animists follow animists who are themselves engaged in multiple acts of following: they follow the lead of their ancestors, who have instructed them in the art of how to follow their prey while making sure not to become prey, not to be followed by the spirits of those they have killed. This ontological instability about precisely who is hunting whom is at the morphological heart of hunting. As Benjamin noted, to hunt a butterfly one must become a butterfly:

> The old law of the hunt plants itself between me and my prey: the more I try and obey the animal with all my being, the more I transform myself in body and soul into a butterfly. The nearer I get to fulfilling my hunter's desire, the more this butterfly gains in human form and volition.[20]

Or to put it another way, the authentic hunter-gatherer is constantly on the move, never quite him/herself, always thinking his way into the spirit of others (and they his, to follow Benjamin's two-way morphology). The act of recognizing the animal's spirit or personhood is predicated on a creaturely identification between the human animal (the hunter) and the animal human (the bear). A bear is never simply a bear. One must imagine the bear's own personhood or spirit before one scratches its eyes out and turns it into meat. Proceed with caution. The difference between sedentary Westernised meat-eaters and nomadic Siberians is that the latter know they are engaged in an act of disavowal and even perform it: *it wasn't me*, *honest*! Thus does magical thinking turn out not to be, as colonial anthropologists fondly imagined, naivety, but rather a sophisticated form of irony. Irony and belief turn out to be complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Everyone knows you can't really blind a spirit.

Planetary ironies

The Yukahirs relation to the bear lies outside the relations of global capitalism precisely because they do not disavow their responsibility: they know what/who they have killed

and they kill because they need to do so in order to live. They do not kill indiscriminately but take only what lives they need to live. Killing is personal, hence the need for subterfuge. Another time, the shoe might be on the other foot, the bear the predator and they the prey. In recognising (and attempting to blind) the bear's spirit, the hunters refuse the abstractions by which animals find their way into fridges as packages of meat. This refusal of abstraction is part of what Gayatri Spivak argues we must learn from what she only partially ironically refers to as 'precapitalist societies'. Although her references to actual animist practices are frustratingly scattered and oblique, in 'Imperative to re-imagine the planet,' Spivak speaks of 'reconstellating the responsibility-thinking of precapitalist societies into the abstractions of the democratic structures of civil society, to use the planetary . . . to control globalization *interruptively*'.[21] Unlike Garuba's example of Yoruban animism co-signing the authority of a state electricity company, animist materialism needs to be used to interrupt the ruses of global capital. The Yukahirs' singular, mimetic identification with the bears whom they eat is a planetary form of animist materialism in so far as it performatively disrupts the abstracting logic of globalization.

Spivak's way of describing the mimetic, creaturely solidarity with other living beings is to speak of a 'planetary' identification that cuts across the relations produced by global capitalism. Her desire to learn from 'precapitalist societies' parallels Willerslev's account of new animism's desire to 'follow' the practices of indigenous animists. At the same time, Spivak, like Willerslev, urges us to proceed with caution. She is wary of romanticising indigenous practices, cryptically confessing in the preface to the preceding essay that 'my convictions had been fed by an artificially preserved "authentic" tribal group in the interests of feudalist benevolence' (p316). In other words, she has been guilty of romanticizing the indigenous tribal denominations on behalf of whose interests her interlocutor, Mahasweta Devi, writes and advocates. Her awareness of the pitfalls of revolutionary politics that presume to speak on behalf of others extends to her use of the term planetary: 'The "planet" is, here, as perhaps always, a catachresis for inscribing collective responsibility as right. Its alterity, determining experience, is mysterious and discontinuous—an experience of the impossible' (p341). In other words, to speak of a planetary sense of community or responsibility is deliberately to misspeak (catachresis), for there is no single or unified planetary perspective, just as we cannot abstract a unified mode of 'responsibility

thinking' from different indigenous practices. Such catachresis is a necessary form of magical thinking, a magical thinking that is mandated precisely by the imperative to re-imagine the planet.

And this is where the particular role that Spivak ascribes to aesthetic education comes to the fore, for aesthetic education is another form of magical thinking, driven by an analogous imperative, 'at all costs to enter another's text' (p6). This is the cosmopolitan injunction that the West inherits from Schiller and Romanticism, but we inherit it with a similar sense of irony or double-bind to that which Spivak ascribes to planetary thinking: we must imagine our way into other lives despite knowing the impossibility of ever fully exiting our own. Aesthetic experience allows us 'to experience the impossible', to have an impossible experience *as if* we had entered another's text, as if it were possible to animate, and be animated by, an other. The analogical 'as if' structure allows us simultaneously to follow others and to pause, to reflect on the impossibility of becoming-other even as we learn how to 'reconstellate' our experience of the world.

Animism and Mimesis

Spivak conjoins the imperative to reimagine the planet with the need for an aesthetic education by means of a deconstructive return, what she describes as a 'perverse misreading', of German Romanticism. But she is also perverse in her refusal to engage, the fleeting reference to reconstellation aside, with the Frankfurt School. Like her, they seek a Marxist reformulation of what constitutes aesthetic experience, and like her, they turn to the example of 'precapitalist societies' in order to formulate the ecological or 'planetary' import of aesthetics. While Spivak wrestles with the Romantics' elitist, humanist idea of an aesthetic 'education' and how this might lead to a 'planet-thought that opens up to embrace an inexhaustible taxonomy of names including but not identical to animism' (p339), Horkheimer and Adorno tie the liberatory power of modern aesthetics directly to its ability to reactivate a repressed, 'shamanistic' mode of relation.

One can see why Spivak doesn't go there. In tracing mimesis 'back' to the shamanism of 'primitive' peoples, Horkheimer and Adorno work within a Eurocentric,

monotemporal sense of history in which animism figures as a prehistorical phase in humanity's relation to the natural world, rather than as a historical relation to the world practiced by a wide variety of contemporary peoples entangled in modernity to greater or lesser degrees. In this sense their analysis is more commensurate with the old, colonial approach to animism than with new animism. However, the dialectic nature of their framing has the virtue of bringing animism into an inextricable, if unstable relation with modernity: their insistence that 'Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology' not only anticipates Bruno Latour's thesis that we have never been modern but also suggests that true enlightenment is bound up with some sort of recovery of an animistic relation to the world. Like Spivak, they are on their guard against romanticising animist cultures: magic, they admit, is 'bloody untruth' and the shaman's identification with natural forces is an 'early' attempt at control that prefigures later, scientific attempts to control nature. But what they value in shamanism is precisely what new animism values in animism: the possibility of a subject-subject relation to the world, the refusal to reduce the world to an object of knowledge: 'Magic like science is concerned with ends, but it pursues them through mimesis, not through an increasing distance from the object'. They elaborate:

> The rites of the shaman were directed at the wind, the rain, the snake outside or the demon inside the sick person, not at materials or specimens. The spirit which practiced magic was not single or identical; it changed with the cult masks which represented the multiplicity of spirits. Magic is bloody untruth, but in it domination is not yet disclaimed by transforming itself into a pure truth underlying the world which it enslaves.. (p6)

At stake here is a critique of the human assumption of sovereignty, conferred first in monotheism's claim that 'man' alone amongst God's creatures was created in the image of God, and then repeated in the Enlightenment's various claims concerning the uniqueness of human consciousness and rationality: 'In their mastery of nature, the creative God and the ordering mind are alike. Man's likeness to God consists in sovereignty over existence, in the lordly gaze, in the command' (p6). This claim of a transcendent likeness to God disenchants the world by reducing everything that is less than human to meaninglessness, whereas animism and historical materialism work in the other direction, through immanence rather than transcendence, establishing our

likeness or kinship with a material world invested with a multiplicity of spiritual meanings.

Critical allegories: From homo economicus to homo ecologicus

In the 'first excursus' of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno read *The Odyssey* as an allegory of the emergence of *homo economicus*, the sovereign subject of modernity that progressively learns to dominate both (external) nature and his own (internal) nature. However, their gloomy reading of Homer's epic also constitutes a negative image of the conditions for a reconciliation with (our own) nature. The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* can also be read as a search for *homo ecologicus*, an alternative trajectory for the human in which our entanglement in nature is affirmed rather than disavowed. But this trajectory is not simply a regression back into some natural, prehistorical, unreflective phase of existence. Odysseus is driven to abjure the various temptations to reside in and become part of nature in favour of re-establishing the lordly form of sovereignty that Odysseus thinks of as his birth-right. Horkheimer and Adorno make clear that his yearning for his 'homeland' is precisely the source of his alienation: 'the fixed order of property implicit in settlement is the source of human alienation' (p60). However, neither should we submit to the unreflective existence of the lotus-eaters or Circe's swine. Historical materialism is above all a form of critical reflection or reflexiveness that undoes the myth of human exceptionality while retaining a certain kind of historical self-awareness. This distinction between non-reflective nature and historical self-consciousness is potentially at odds with (new) animism's attribution of various forms of consciousness to nonhuman life. But this moment of anthropocentrism is, I would argue, a necessary supplement to new animism as a *political* movement, especially when held in dialectical tension with their assertion that this self-consciousness can only come about through an *embrace* of the human's embeddedness in nature. In the final chapter, they argue that the disavowal of our embeddedness in nature leads to anti-semitism and other forms of racism, understood as forms of 'reverse' mimesis in which we project our disavowed animality onto others. *Homo ecologicus* is not some prior, pre-civilisational state of human being, but something to be worked towards:

> By conquering the sickness of the mind which flourishes on the rich soil of self-assertion unhampered by reflection, humanity would cease to be the universal antirace and become the species which, as nature, is more than mere nature, in that it is aware of its own image. (p165)

To become *homo ecologicus* we must replace the 'sickness of mind' that thinks of humanity (or certain humans) as transcending nature (as 'the universal anti-race') with an acceptance of humans as one species among others, as part of nature. But this very acceptance induces a new form of reflectiveness generated by becoming aware of our own image. *The very act of becoming-similar induces a new kind of reflective understanding*.

Having followed me thus far, readers uninterested in the political force of aesthetic experience are very welcome to skip to the concluding section! For those that remain, I now want to highlight the ways in which a work of art can produce this reflective understanding or critical spirit in the very act of following, how it can counter-animate the colonial gaze of both the Western and Western expansionism and thereby generate forms of ecological consciousness and creaturely solidarity.

Counter-animating America

Jarmusch's cinematic oeuvre might be described as a series of critical, counter-animating gazes, each film working to counter-animate America's narcissistic, Hollywood-generated view of itself.[22] His breakout film, shot, like *Dead Man* in black and white, was pointedly entitled *Stranger than Paradise* (1984). It takes up the viewpoint of a recently arrived Hungarian immigrant and, like his later films, views America through the outsider lens of French New Wave cinema. These films are shot not from the identitarian perspective of discrete minorities, but rather from a perspective that, following Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of Kafka's relation to the German language, we might describe as minoritarian. In other words, they are designed to interrupt the cinematic 'language' through which America apprehends itself. *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* (1999), the film that follows *Dead Man*, makes this estranging, minoritarian identification explicit. Gary Farmer, a Cayuga Indian both in actuality and in the film, has a cameo as a pigeon-fancier, threatened by Italian American mobsters for

'resembling' an African-American pigeon fancier: 'Puerto Rican, Indian, nigger … same thing. I think we should waste him anyway.' Finessing Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis of racism as reverse mimeticism, the mobsters seek to 'waste' him not only because he has been discursively abjected from the transcendent realm of the human (the 'universal anti-race' is, of course, white) but also because he actively *refuses to disavow his relationship to nature.* Unafraid of their guns, he cradles a pigeon in his hands, calmly *imaging* his mimetic affinity with vulnerable, damaged life. The mobsters waste another pigeon instead.[23]

Counter-animation thus involves a reversal of the dominant cinematic gaze, a sympathy with damaged life that allows the 'object' of the gaze to image, even speak for, itself. The possibility of a critical, animist materialist cinema thus emerges in which a solidarity is established between non-white, or 'non-transcendent', humans, and nonhumans, between those bodies, both human and nonhuman, that have been deemed less than fully in possession of souls. In *Ghost Dog*, this solidarity is drawn between non-white Americans and the pigeon (as well as black bears and, of course, dogs). In *Dead Man*, a similar historical contiguity is drawn between Native Americans and the American bison, which, like the passenger pigeon, was hunted to the brink of extinction in late nineteenth century America.[24]

As its title suggests, *Dead Man* allegorises the deathly, auto-destructive trajectory of *homo economicus* by placing the genocide of Native Americans alongside the ecocidal destruction of their food-source. But beyond the allegorisation of this necropolitical drive, the film also describes another, postsovereign trajectory in which life might be sustained, or reanimated, precisely by relinquishing the myth of human apartness or exceptionality and embracing an alternative drive towards kinship or similarity. It is through this mimetic embrace of the nonhuman world that *Dead Man* is then able to overcome the racist structure of the Western and establish a kinship between 'white man' and 'Indian,' a similarity that still leaves considerable room for irony and the recognition of non-identity.

The Hollywood Western is a genre that, like classical epic, naturalises the violence of conquest. Its imperial gaze naturalises the ideology of might as right, or more specifically, of whiteness as inalienable property right. However, as Mary

Katherine Hall points out, the genre periodically claims to have ruptured its own traditions:

> There is a long history of Westerns positioning themselves against previous Westerns, claiming to present a newly sympathetic and realistic view of Indian culture and a new condemnation of white conquest, only to find themselves a generation or two later the traditional Westerns against which new ones are positioned.[25]

Hall's article attempts to show that Jarmusch's film cannot free itself from the stereotypes it inherits from previous Westerns, missing the way in which the film is precisely not an attempt to produce a 'realistic view of Indian culture.' Hall's mode of critique is itself caught up in the Platonic tradition of mimesis as accurate or authentic representation, a tradition which, as Matthew Potolosky points out, is itself peculiarly 'Western': 'Few cultures outside the West have regarded realism as an important goal. . . Art in these cultures is closely intertwined with ritual and daily life, much as it seems to have been in archaic Greek culture before Plato's intervention.'[26] My target here is not Hall herself but the Western fetishisation of verisimilitude and the resulting taboo on representing somebody else's culture. This is precisely where Benjamin and Adorno make their decisive intervention, in recuperating an alternative, pre-Platonic understanding of mimesis as a rite of identification. *Dead Man* clearly stages itself as transformative ritual rather than realistic representation or more specifically as a *rite of ancestralisation or making-kin*. This is a grandiose claim to make, but the film simultaneously ironises its own pretensions, taking itself both seriously and playfully in the self-conscious staginess of its staging, its ironic awareness of its own inevitable participation in the tradition of the Western. Not for nothing does its Native American lead go by the name of Nobody. The film operates as a critique of the very logic of authenticity and cultural difference that critics such as Hall unquestioningly adopt. Rather than offering a naturalistic representation of real Native American culture, it interrupts the very process by which certain representations are naturalised.

In so far as *Dead Man* cannot wholly divorce itself from the history of Western art and the logic of representation, in so far as it cannot wholly realise itself as ritual, the film must interrupt *itself*, internalising the history of rupture that Hall rightly ascribes to the tradition of the Western, positioning itself not against earlier Westerns but against

its own inevitable complicity with the Western tradition. This self-interruption is what licenses my reading of the film as allegory. Because the film allegorises its own act of animation, it also allegorises the critical spirit with which, I argue, new animism ought to follow animism, installing a pause in the very act of following.

Following animism, becoming *homo ecologicus*, must also contain within its allegorical trajectory a time for pausing, even, as we shall see, a pausing of time. This is precisely the (auto-)critical force of *Dead Man* as an aesthetic experience: on the one hand, it enacts a becoming-indigenous in which we become sensuously immersed, newly alive to a more than human world. On the other, each camera angle is self-consciously aware of its own act of technological animation, its reproduction of the world as image. Each shot is so carefully composed that it feels like a still. In slowing down or even pausing time, Jarmusch's film estranges the very process by which the Western animates and deanimates the world, thereby making room for an alternative history of animation, an alternative history of life itself.

To describe *Dead Man* as an act of counter-animation is thus to say not only that it counters the inauthentic or dominating form of animation deployed by the Hollywood Western, but also that it auto-critically counters its own act of animation. As slow cinema, the film might allow us to enter into a euphoric relation of similarity with the world it depicts, into a mystical sense of *correspondence*. However, given the vulnerability of native Americans and their ever-shrinking naturecultures to the predations of global capitalism, this sense of correspondence has a melancholic charge, a creaturely identification with an ever-more irrevocably damaged world.

Re-ancestralising *homo economicus*.

In *Ghost Dog*, Gary Farmer is only afforded a cameo. In *Dead Man*, he is one of the two central characters, the film's lead in more ways than one. It is his perspective, his indigenous sense of relation or correspondence, that the film seeks to follow. More precisely, the film follows Farmer's co-star, Johnny Depp, an accountant named Bill Blake, as he learns to follow the perspective of Nobody, as *homo economicus* is reancestralised as *homo ecologicus*.

Nobody is descended from two different First Peoples, the Blood and the Blackfoot, a mixture that we learn was not respected by either. Captured by white men while trying to demonstrate to his 'elk relatives' (the Blackfoot) his prowess as an elk hunter, he was exhibited across the US and Britain, then released and educated in 'white man's schools,' where he has a spiritual, animistic encounter with the poetry of William Blake: his 'powerful words . . . spoke to me'. On his return, he is disbelieved by his own people and given the name Exaybachay, 'He Who Talks Loud, Saying Nothing'. Embracing his estrangement, he prefers to go by the name 'Nobody'. Nobody's name is a sign that he is playing, and spoofing, the generic 'Indian' of the Western (Nobody in fact speaks different native languages to different Native Americans rather than the gibberish usually assigned to such figures), but his name also recalls the name that Odysseus gives himself in order to trick the Cyclops and violently overcome the mythic world that would prevent him returning to his homeland. Whereas Odysseus only pretends to abandon his patronymic sovereignty precisely in order to reclaim it on his return to Ithaca, Nobody embraces his anonymity in order to act as spirit medium, to restore Blake to the world of the ancestors. While Odysseus secures his own trajectory as *homo economicus* by insisting on his own lordly sovereignty, Nobody draws Blake into the anti-sovereign trajectory of *homo ecologicus*, in which *homo* submits to his own death precisely in order to become part of a spiritualised nature. Nobody's estranged status avoids any naïve romanticisation of native Americans *as homo ecologicus*, while allowing him to perform the depersonalised, shamanic function of a spirit medium.

Bill Blake starts out as a particularly hapless incarnation of *homo economicus*, an accountant from Cleveland travelling to the lawless frontier town of Machine to take up a position that, by the time he arrives, has already been filled. Vulnerable and absurd in his fussy checked suit and glasses, he is soon fatally wounded in a shoot-out and comes to adopt the film's titular perspective: that of a dead man. The film's title references both the fact that Blake is mortally wounded (the bullet lies too close to his heart to be extracted) and the fact that he is being pursued by bounty hunters for shooting a wealthy industrialist's son. Both of these facts have the effect not simply of rendering his death inevitable, but of stretching out the time of his dying, so that he is afforded the time to see the world from the perspective of death itself. But there is a third sense in which Blake takes on the perspective of a dead man. Nobody insists that he is also the reincarnation of William Blake, the Romantic poet. We do not know exactly why Blake's

'powerful words' 'spoke' to Nobody, but Blake's spiritually-inflected critique of the 'charter'd streets' of industrial capitalism renders him a critical-spiritual ally of Native Americans in their attempt to survive the death-driven machine of US expansionism. To see life from the perspective of a dead man is thus to see things from the underside of the industrial revolution, from the perspective of irrevocably damaged life.

This critical-spiritual kinship between Romantic and Native American perspectives is partly an ironic conceit, at first seemingly based only on the coincidence of naming. During his extensive research for the film, Jarmusch immersed himself in Native American literature. As a form of relief from this immersion, Jarmusch picked up a copy of William Blake's poetry, only to discover that Blake's aphoristic poetry 'sounded' very similar to the oracular style of much Native American literature.[27] This found similarity operates in some ways purely as *sound* similarity: Nobody speaks in aphorisms that sound like Native American speech but might equally be Blake's poetry. Nobody tells Blake that 'The round stones beneath the earth have spoken through the fire. Things which are alike, in nature, grow to look alike, and the speaking stones have lain a long time looking at the sun.' These lines resemble a Blakean proverb but are in fact drawn from the words of a Lakota medicine man, Brave Buffalo, as recorded by the anthropologist Frances Densmore.[28] Conversely, after discovering that they are being followed by the bounty hunters, Blake asks 'What should we do?' Nobody replies with a piece of 'native wisdom' that is in fact a quotation from Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: 'The eagle never lost so much time as when he submitted to the crow.' The ironies in play here are multiple. Nobody is satirising the ways in which 'wise' Indians are portrayed in the Western, offering an enigmatic piece of practical wisdom that is completely lost on Blake, who finds poetry and 'this Indian mularkey' alike only in their impenetrability: 'I haven't understood one single word you've said since I met you, not one single word.' This lack of understanding, however, doesn't prevent the accountant becoming a poet: later in the film he asks his pursuers if they know his poetry before shooting them, directing at their corpses the same poetry that Nobody once directed at him: 'Some are born to endless night.' Submitting to the 'dumb' logic of the Western, Blake enacts a form of poetic justice that simultaneously enacts and parodies Blake's vision of hell on earth, divine retribution and redemption. As Nobody tells him, 'your weapon will replace your tongue. You will learn to speak through it and your poetry will now be written in blood.' Blake's becoming-gunman is a recognition that Jarmusch's

'acid Western'[29] cannot escape the law of genre even while it ultimately aims at a depersonalised, de-heroised form of redemption.

Despite—or perhaps even through—these ironies, the film nevertheless succeeds in channelling the spirit of William Blake's revolutionary poetry. Blake becomes, in his dying, not only the 'living legend' of the Western revenge plot but also the poetic figure of Blakean redemption. This is achieved through the film's mimetic doubling of the plot-time of the Western. On the one hand the plot is driven by the conventional time of the chase, with the bounty hunters forever on the verge of catching up; on the other its slow, lingering camerawork and episodic, lyrical structure is serenely unconcerned with time. As Blake's eagle submits to Nobody's crow, the film begins to inhabit a form of lost time, a redemptive time stolen from the historical time of the Western, a 'messianic' time in which Nobody is able to prepare Blake not only for his death but for his spiritualisation. For Nobody's self-appointed task is to return Blake to the place 'where his spirit belongs', variously referred to as 'the bridge made of waters' and the 'mirror at the place where the sea meets the sky'. This redemptive time remains just ahead of the time of the chase. The film ends with Blake floating out towards the horizon in a canoe, looking back to land as the last of the bounty hunters shoots, and is shot by, Nobody. The slow, reflective, time of Blake's ancestralisation miraculously eludes the autodestructive time of the Western.

Nobody describes the place to which he is returning Blake as a mirror, a place where the sea and sky become one another's image. But the 'bridge made of waters' also has a more geographical reference, I would submit, to the Bering Land Bridge between Siberia and Alaska, that ice-bridge between continents which archaeologists believe was once inhabited by a people who travelled from Asia and were later to become the ancestors of all Native Americans.[30] Nobody thus ancestralises Blake by returning him to *the vanishing point of ancestry itself*, so that ancestralisation, far from being an exercise in ethnic or even human bloodlines, becomes an experience of creaturely relationality, underwritten by a shared sense of the catastrophic consequences of capitalist modernity.

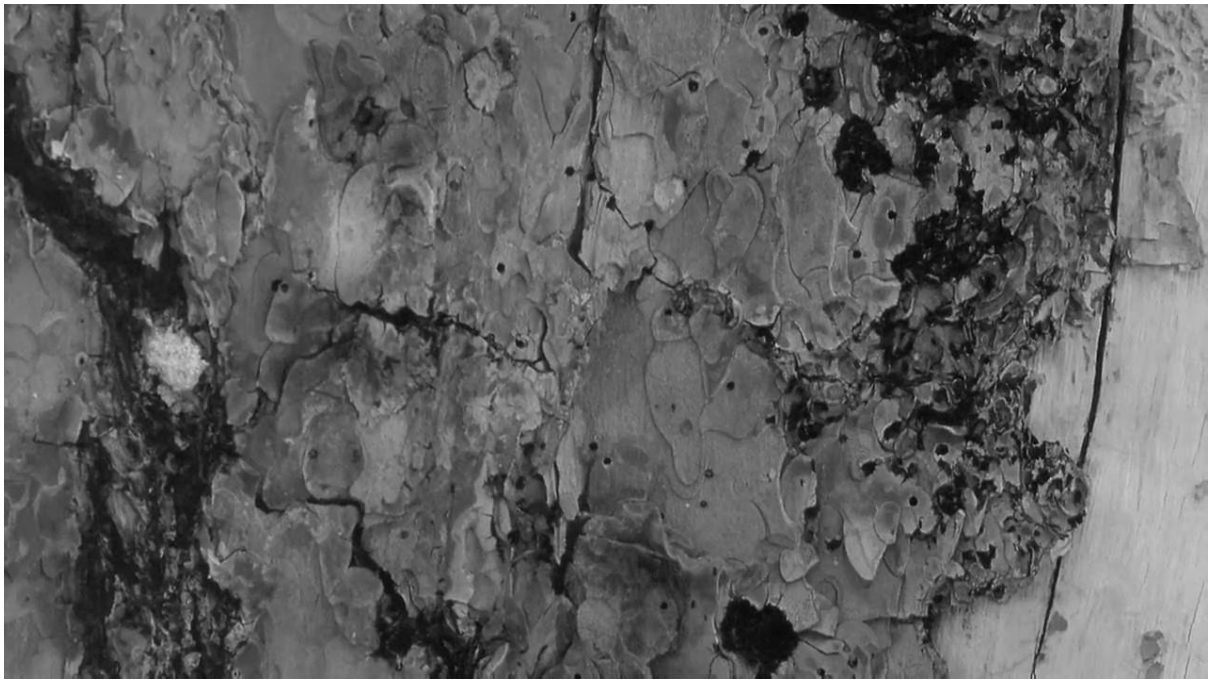
Becoming-similar

Another way of thinking about Blake's destination is to say that he is being returned to (or, in a more utopian register, projected towards) Benjamin's 'world in a state of resemblance', that his becoming-similar involves the apprehension of 'occult resemblances'. Beyond the coincidence of William Blake's naming, Nobody's care for Blake's body is also in a profound sense a care for any body injured by 'white man's metal,' by the techno-industrial Machine of Western capitalism. Nobody's care for Blake is an act of resacralisation, but it is also an act of depersonalisation, a paradoxically generalised or planetary act of ancestral reclamation. Mindful of Spivak's warning that planetarity is a catachresis, an impossible form of community, we might say that, rather than appropriating the poetry of William Blake or the cultural traditions of the Makah, the film asserts a planetary connection between them, a point at which ancestry demarcates not identity but similarity.

Nobody, the man without a tribe, is the fitting agent of this process of becoming-similar, and is himself doubled by the stoker of the train which carries Blake West at the start of the film. A white man whose face is blacked up by soot, the stoker comes to sit opposite Bill and asks 'doesn't this remind you of when you were in the boat?' as if Blake has already seen the end of the film, as if his journey will become indistinguishable from all the journeys towards death that preceded it.[31] The stoker then names the end of the line as 'hell' thus hinting at his own intermediary role as Virgilian guide to Bill's Dante. In turn, we might read the stoker as the double of Jarmusch himself, our auteur guide both to and through the hell of Westward expansionism. This intertextual and metatextual reference is knowingly ironic, but also serious. As in *The Divine Comedy*, it opens up the possibility of authorship as a form of spirit-guidance or shamanism and art as a form of spiritual *accompaniment*: *Dead Man* accompanies the death-bound trajectory of Western history precisely in order to open up a space for critique and reconstellation, to find a way through and beyond that history.[32]

Blake's body, as that which the film accompanies on its passage towards death, thus undergoes a process of depersonalisation or allegorisation. Depp's own enigmatic status as both iconic celebrity and morphological series of depthless masks contributes to the sense in which Blake's body is radically open to suggestion, radically open to being *directed by others*. Depp's acting style is mimetic not in the realist sense of

accurate representations of real people but in the sense that his performances are 'chameleon-like'.[33] Acting for him is an erasure of personality: it is not a question of becoming similar to someone else, but an act of depersonalisation, a generalised process of becoming-similar. In *Dead Man*, this process of shape-shifting is itself allegorised, or slowed down, as we watch Depp in the process of becoming-native. Nobody begins this transformation by consuming 'the food of the Great Spirit and Father Peyote' and then painting Depp's face. He then leaves Blake to prepare himself for his journey through fasting, taking with him Blake's glasses. Although Nobody refuses to share the peyote, the camera angles intimate that Blake has indeed ingested it, entering into a dream state in which he begins to see the landscape anew. Like a new animist, or indeed a new materialist, he beings to see the *texture* of his surroundings. As he relieves himself against a tree, the camera zooms in on the patterns made by the bark:



And then, in a particularly stunning sequence, the film itself starts to become-similar, as the twin trajectories of *homo economicus* and *homo ecologicus* are drawn into proximity. Blake starts seeing warlike 'Indians' in the undergrowth and cocks his gun, only for the Indians to disappear, their place taken by a racoon. The camera then shifts to the perspective of the last of the bounty hunters as he too senses a certain hostility in the landscape. Unlike Blake, he receives an arrow in his chest and then shoots out randomly

with his rifle. In the next scene, Depp comes across a shot fawn. The sequencing suggests that the fawn is the arbitrary victim of the bounty hunter's rifle, both recalling and prefiguring Depp's own death. Blake inserts his finger first into the fawn's wound and then into his own, fingering his fleshy relatedness. He then uses his bloody finger to paint a line down his face, completing the ritualised process of marking out his own body for death that Nobody began. Depp then curls up beside the fawn, at the foot of the tree. The camera adopts Depp's angle of vision, as he gazes at the tree in a rhapsodic, newly-awakened fashion. The treetop spins and the camera angle shifts to an aerial, tree-top shot of Depp and the fawn curled up together in the dappled light of the tree, resolving into an image of not only Blake's mute affinity with damaged life but also of the camera's own desire to touch or cradle, its desire to overcome the distance of optical relations in favour of what Laura Marks has famously described as haptic visuality.[34]

Animation, Aura and Irony

Griel Marcus writes of *Dead Man* that 'There is no hint in director Jim Jarmusch's previous work that he was interested in anything but irony, and this movie has no irony.'[35] Marcus's statement, delivered as a set of numbered provocations, is itself knowingly ironic, opening up another *mise en abyme*. What he wants to gesture towards is the directly political nature of the film, the film's serious, sustained and pointed critique of American expansionism. Even before we arrive at Machine, we see burnt out

Indian settlements as well as abandoned wagons as the train carries Blake Westwards. Most memorably, when buffalo are sighted, Blake's fellow-passengers fire volley after volley of bullets out of the windows in a scene reminiscent of the pilgrims "squirting lead" into the forest from the windows of the river steamer in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The train's stoker explains to Depp that the passengers are shooting in accordance with a government directive to kill off the Indians' food source: 'killed a million of 'em last year alone.' As in Conrad, the political critique is saturated with a melancholy awareness of the barbaric violence of Western 'civilisation'. To draw out Marcus's gnomic statement, the seriousness of Jarmusch's critique emerges from a fundamentally ironic apprehension of history. The dialogue itself is full of irony, much of it derived from Nobody's repeated response to such barbarity: 'stupid fucking white man', a line he reprises in *Ghost Man* when the mobsters shoot one of his pigeons. Blake himself, ignorant not only of the fact that he is the reincarnation of William Blake but also of poetry in general, starts out as the target of Nobody's irony. But part of his becoming-similar is also about entering into Nobody's ironised view of the world. By the end of the film, he has almost learnt how to respond to Nobody's question as to whether he has any tobacco. For many native Americans, as for other indigenous peoples, tobacco is a sacred substance used in various rituals and not the lifestyle choice that Blake takes it to be in responding: 'I don't smoke!' Noting that the canoe that will carry him to the "next level" contains some tobacco, he still protests that he doesn't smoke, but now with a hint of knowingness, as if he has finally cottoned on to the ritual nature of his voyage.

The film thus walks a tightrope between irony and seriousness, not least as an act of mythopoesis, as a serio-comic attempt to restore Blake to the spirit world and reaffirm a cosmic, planetary order. Almost every scene of the film is shot through with a self-conscious, ironised lyricism. Eschewing the epic grandeur of the Western, the camera literally turns it back on the grand panoramic sweep-shots of mountains and deserts.[36] The black and white photography takes us back not only to early cinema but to the photograph, to the highly self-conscious act of composing a picture. In one sense, the whole movie seems to culminate in the arresting shot of Depp and the dead fawn, but then we see that the whole movie is constantly threatening to return to *nature morte*, to the vanishing point of animacy itself, *were it not for the camera's own act of animation*. In one shot, a marshall's head falls into a hearth of radially arranged sticks,

and the bounty hunter comments: 'If that there Blake fella keeps on shootin' marshals, I'll wind up likin' the bastard. Looks like a goddamn religious icon.' Even the most depraved of characters seems here to apprehend the sanctity of life, even as the commonality he affirms with Blake is based on admiration for his destructive powers and his contempt for the Law. Again we return to a kind of irony, a very Benjaminian irony concerning the capacity of the camera to confer aura at the very same time as hollowing it out.

Of the many explications of Benjamin's analysis of aura and what happens to the work of art in an era of mechanical reproduction, I will cite here only Rey Chow's: 'We have thus arrived at what I suggest as the allegorical relationship between the aura and its decline. If . . . the camera's gaze is what destroys the aura . . . then it is the camera's gaze, too, which produces precisely what Benjamin perceptively calls the optical unconscious (*das Optisch-Unbewusste*).' (71). In other words, the image captured by photography or film is not auratic *per se*, but gains a kind of ironic, dialectical aura in allegorising the decline of the aura.

The constant threat of a fall into *nature morte* or inanimacy—and a kind of rebound effect by which the inanimate resonates with a kind of animacy—is amplified by the way in which Jarmusch deploys blackouts between scenes so that each, as Rosenbaum notes, 'exists in isolation from the next'. Rosenbaum likens these blackouts

to the 'empty spaces between stanzas in epic poems'. I would go further and suggest that the blackouts function to disrupt, or lyricise, the epic *telos* of the Western in so far as they give us time to pause and reflect. Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis of *The Odyssey* ends with Odysseus' brutal homecoming, and the excessive violence that mandates not only the death of Penelope's suitors but also that of the handmaidens: 'The fate of the hanged victims is expressionlessly compared to the death of birds in a trap and, as of the numb pause surrounding the narration at this point, it can truly be said that the rest of all speech is silence.' The simile has the unintended effect of establishing a creaturely affinity between the birds and the women, which in turn causes us to question the justice of Odysseus' actions: mimesis here generates not only similarity but self-reflection:

> It is not in the content of the deeds reported that civilization transcends [barbarity]. It is in the self-reflection which causes violence to pause at the moment of narrating such deeds. When speech pauses, the caesura allows the events to flash up a semblance of freedom that civilisation has been wholly unable to extinguish ever since.

In *The Odyssey*, this pause for reflection is involuntary in so far as epic carries within its form a justification for empire, the violence of sovereignty, might as right. But in *Dead Man*, it as if the whole film takes place within this moment when speech pauses, this caesura in which objects become *objets trouvés*, discover their hidden resemblances and transform themselves into what Benjamin described as a dialectical image, an image that in flashing up injustice also points towards the possibility of a just world.

Finally, the extraordinary Neil Young soundtrack is a vital part of the film's act of accompaniment, its affirmation of creaturely relation. The music consists mostly of a broken, extended guitar solo recorded live as Young responded to the rough cut of the film. Marcus notes the way in which 'the music, as you listen, separates from the movie even as it frames scenes, banter, recitals' while Ruth Buchanan speaks of an 'affect driven improvisational feedback loop . . . a creative affinity between Jarmusch's images and Young's sounds'.[37] Both Marcus and Buchanan point towards the similarity and the difference between images and music, their elective affinity but ultimate non-identity. Weber famously uses the term 'elective affinity' to describe the affinity between Protestantism and capitalism. The affinity between Jarmusch's images and Young's

music is generated by an affective relation to the *casualties* of this alliance between Protestantism and capitalism. This is clear from the ragged opening riffs that Young lets off as Blake sees burnt out tepees and wagons from the window of the train, even if his guitar-playing originally seems to derive its locomotive force, its power, from the close ups of the steam-train's wheels as they, like the music, propel Blake West. Young's music both follows Blake's journey and anticipates it, teaching Blake about the nature of his mimetic journey, reflecting (on) Blake's own process of becoming-kin. Camera and guitar both lead Blake inexorably on towards, and through, his death, shaping his melancholic affinity with damaged life, preparing him for his depersonalised ancestralisation, his vanishing 'at the place where the sea meets the sky.' And this is where the camera's gaze precisely cannot be Depp's gaze, cannot accompany him. The final shot of the film is a distant one, as Blake floats off towards the horizon, accompanied only by cedar boughs and a roll of tobacco. This final, distant shot is a reminder that we cannot know, ultimately, whether or not Blake is, in fact, ancestralised: the desire of the artwork to realise itself as spirit-work remains ironised or suspended as Blake's body disappears over the horizon, towards that landbridge where ancestry reaches its own vanishing point and spirits begin to resemble one another.

Dead Man thus follows Spivak's twin imperatives for a planetary aesthetics: it learns from 'pre-capitalist societies, and it 'enters, at all costs, the text of another'. And this is precisely why it will remain so troublesome for identitarians such as Hall, for whom aesthetics can have no planetary dimension and remains stuck with the strictly non-morphological project of self-representation. As Wendy Brown has shown, contemporary identitarianism takes the form of a wound culture in which different sections of society (especially but not exclusively in the US) competitively testify to their woundedness.[38] If we are to learn anything from the ecological movement of which new animism is a vital part, it would be how we might build solidarities based on the planetary, depersonalised, even cosmological recognition that it is life itself that is wounded in all our various (and variously distributed) woundings.[39]

Conclusion

The difference between new animism and animism can now be reformulated: animism is a belief-structure imputed to another culture, the Western, rationalist name for a belief-structure imputed to a non-Western, primitive culture. New animism is the attempt to learn from or 'follow' animist cultures, to turn animism into a form of planetary consciousness that interrupts the deanimating, or falsely animating, forces of modernity and global capitalism. Such a definition suggests that it is Western rationalism which is 'mistaken' in its belief-structures, and it defines new animism not as an ethics of respect but as a political movement, as a 'spirited' critique of capitalism. This critical spirit only emerges if new animism pauses in the act of becoming-animist, if it attends to animists' own practice as reflective, playful, mobile, never quite self-identical.

One undoubted pitfall of my approach to animism is that the differences between different forms of animism, as practised by particular indigenous (and non-indigenous) groups, is elided. The gain is that it allows for critical reflection on what is at stake in the academic return to animism. In place of colonial anthropology's desire to compare different forms of primitivism, new animism becomes a theorisation, a critical *mobilisation*, of our contemporary, putatively postcolonial, desire for animism.

At the risk of sounding over-dogmatic, and rather more serious and less playful than is perhaps appropriate, I will conclude by turning the claims that I have made over the course of this essay into a series of aphorisms.

1. If animism is a name not just for the belief system of certain indigenous cultures but also for that which modernity disavows, then animism presents itself as the horizon of our collective political emancipation.

2. A properly critical animist materialism, which conjoins the impulses of both new animism with historical materialism, brings this emancipatory horizon into view.

3. Critical animist materialism seeks not simply to re-enchant the world but to distinguish between different forms of enchantment and disenchantment.

4. The role of art in modernity may be best understood not simply as the reanimation of a disenchanted world but also as the counter-animation of a falsely animated world.

5. Critical animist materialism mobilises new animism as a critique rather than an expansion of sovereignty, emphasising the experience of self-relinquishment as much as the ascription of personhood.
6. Understanding animism as a morphological ontology rather than a relational epistemology moves us beyond a potentially static ethics of respect for other beings towards a transubjective dynamic in which we actively seek to follow others and become-similar.
7. If racism is a process of reverse mimesis, the disavowal of similarity and the projection of creatureliness onto others, then the mimetic impulse works to undo racism.
8. The impulse towards similarity needs to be doubled by an auto-critical, self-reflective, ironic awareness of non-identity.
9. The elation involved in becoming-other and becoming-animated by others needs to be doubled by a melancholic awareness of historical processes of othering and deanimation.
10. There can be no recovery of 'nature' outside of history; critical animist materialism seeks to promote an affinity with damaged or creaturely life, with a fully historicised nature.

[1] Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World*, London, Hurst, 2005 and ed. *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism*, London, Routledge, 2014,
[2] *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*, London, Routledge, 2011, p68.
[3] 'Capitalism as Religion' (1921). *Gesammelte Schriften*, Volume VI, ed. Ralph Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985.
[4] Louise Green, *Fragments from the History of Loss: The Nature Industry and the Postcolony*, Penn State University Press, 2021.
[5] See Alison Stone's 'Adorno and the disenchantment of nature' *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 32,2, 2006, pp231-253.
[6] 'Explorations in Animist Materialism: Notes on Reading/Writing African Literature, Culture, and Society' *Public Culture* 15,2, 2003, pp261–286.
[7] For a critique of Taussig's reading of the Frankfurt School see Martin Jay, 'Unsympathetic Magic', *Visual Anthropology Review* 9, 2, 1993 pp79-82.
[8] John Caruana argues that 'two concepts lie at the heart of Adorno's ethics: self-relinquishment (*Entäußerung*) and mimesis (a letting be of the object)', 'Mourning and Mimesis; The Freudian Ethics of Adorno' *Canadian Journal of Psychoanalysis* 4,1, 1996, pp89-108, p89.
[9] Later works such as *My Cocaine Museum* (2004) are much more explicitly ecological.
[10] David Abram, 'Magic and the Machine' *Emergence Magazine* 2020. https://emergencemagazine.org/story/magic-and-the-machine/
[11] *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2006.
[12] Hanssen, Beatrice. *Walter Benjamin's Other History: Of Stones, Animals, Human Beings and Angels*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998
[13] Nurit Bird David 'Animism Revisited: Personhood, Environment and Relational Epistemology' *Current Anthropology* 40. S1, 1999, pp67-90.
[14] Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World*, London, Hurst, 2005, p xvii.[15] Linda Hogan 'We Call it Tradition' *Handbook of Contemporary Animism*, p21.
[16] *Minatoure*, 7,1935. Trans John Shepley, *October* 31, 1984, pp16-32.
[17] 'The Creativity of Undergoing' *Pragmatics & Cognition* 22, 1, 2014, pp124–139, p124.
[18] Quoted in Shierry Weber Nicholsen, *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno's Aesthetics*, Cambridge, MIT, 1997, p149.
[19] *E-flux*, 26, 2012 n.p.
[20] *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2006, p51.
[21] *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, Cambridge, Harvard, 2012, p348. My italics.
[22] Later films such as *Paterson* (2016), staring a bus-driver who writes poems in the manner of William Carlos Williams, suggest a certain accommodation with the rhythms of American capitalism.
[23] I am indebted to Ian Calliou for pointing me towards Farmer's cameo in *Ghost Dog*.
[24] Ghost Dog's domesticated homing pigeons are erroneously identified by a mobster as passenger pigeons, a wild, migratory species endemic to North America, both eaten and considered sacred by many Native American peoples for 15,000 years before being hunted to extinction by European settlers. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passenger_pigeon
[25] 'Now you are a Killer of White Men: Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man* and Traditions of Revisionism in the Western. *Journal of Film and Video* 52, 4, 2001, pp3-14, p3.
[26] *Mimesis*, London, Routledge, 2004, pp93-4.

[27] Q and A following screening of *Dead Man* at the Lincoln Centre. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcUwxcbhtdQ&ab_channel=FilmatLincolnCenter accessed 12/12/19.
[28] Julian Rice, *The Jarmusch Way: Spirituality and Imagination in Dead Man, Ghost Dog and The Limits of Control*. Lanham, Toronto, Plymouth, The Scarecrow Press, 2012, p64.
[29] Rosenbaum's term.
[30] Laura Geigel 'Humans Crossed the Bering Land Bridge to People the Americas' *Live Science* Feb 15, 2019, https://www.livescience.com/64786-beringia-map-during-ice-age.html
[31] He then links to my reading of Abani as accompanist to a dead soldier's journey through hell in *Song for Night*]
[32] I explore this idea of art as shamanistic accompaniment further in 'Creaturely Mimesis: Life after Necropolitics in Chris Abani's *Song for Life', Research in African Literature* 9, 3, 2018, pp178-206.
[33] Barry Keith Grant, *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology*, London and NY, Wallflower, 2007. Depp plays an actual chameleon in *Rango* (dir. Gore Verbinski 2011).
[34]*The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.
[35] *Salon* Dec 2 1999. https://www.salon.com/1999/12/02/deadman/
[36] Lincoln Centre Q and A.
[38] *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).
[39] Together with Ryan Topper, I explore this anti-identitarian understanding of wounding in 'Cosmological Trauma and Postcolonial Modernity', *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, Routledge, 2020, pp187-201.