

The Mimetic Crypt
On the Animality of the Cinematic Apparatus

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On January 4, 1903, a 10-foot tall domesticated circus elephant named Topsy consumed her last one-course meal of raw carrots sugar-coated with 460 grams of cyanide potassium. Employed by the Coney Island amusement park to carry heavy construction materials and give rides to children, Topsy, adorned with a brand new set of custom wooden sandals lined with copper electrodes, was escorted before an anxious crowd of 1500 spectators waiting eagerly to witness her execution via the ever-modern technique known as electrocution. The spectacle was one of Thomas Edison's many campaign tactics to demonstrate the dangers of the competing form of AC electricity in what historians called 'the War of the Currents.' Edison was in jeopardy of losing patent royalties for his invention of DC electricity as the consolidated standard for electric power distribution in the United States. Insistent that his DC electricity be publicly synonymous with industry and domestic technologies, Edison strategically campaigned to make AC electricity synonymous with death. During this campaign, Edison and his assistants regularly sacrificed animals to demonstrate the killing power of AC—so often in fact that “the local animal population of (stray) dogs and cats stood in danger of being decimated” (Lippit, 248). The short film entitled “Electrocuting an Elephant,” shot by Edison's then-novel invention of the kinoscope, documents Topsy's seemingly instantaneous passage from life to death, animate to inanimate, moving to still. With the flick of a switch, over 6000 volts of electric current was blasted through the beast's body. Newspapers the next day reported her death as ‘quick and painless,’ passing without a ‘trumpet or groan.’

This paper attempts to draw a theoretical link between the historical development of film and the figure of the animal within modernity. Edison's “Electrocuting an Elephant,” as both historical event and film document, resonates as an ideal image and launching point for issues of the bio-political, the man-animal ontological distinction, and the cinematographic method of

spatialized time. I propose that the philosophical reduction of the animal to nonconscious automata parallels films proto-cinematic origins of automata. By investigating the figure of the animal as both the site of man's alterity and thematic subject of the scientific deconstruction (and reconstitution) of space and time, I hope to articulate a philosophy of movement itself and demonstrate the mechanism by which man's trace of animality recedes into the mimetic crypt: the locus of animal movement that remains inaccessible to language and conceals the mimetic recapitulations of technological media.

Vis-à-vis the ever-increasing rhythm of industrialization, technology, and media based innovation, the turn of the 20th century ushered in a radically new subjectivity of mobility and visibility. Changes in industrial modes of production and transportation engendered a distinct restructuring of spatial and temporal relations (that is, distance and proximity, permanence and transitoriness). Human perception is thus hailed into adaptation as the mimetic faculties of man are dragged through the mud of historical development, because according to Benjamin these faculties too "have a history in both the phylogenetic and ontogenetic sense" (333). Moreover, Benjamin emphasizes that "this adaptation has an aesthetic counterpart in the formal procedures of technological media ... Film rehearses in the realm of reception what the conveyor belt imposes upon human beings" (qtd. from M. Hansen, 184). Although, the 20th century has been frequently deemed 'The Century of the Image', it was the inauguration of the automatization of both the image and productive machines—animating the inanimate—which ultimately restructured the spatio-temporal line of humanity, effecting social change through Benjamin's concept of "shock." It is not technology itself which has direct social and psychological effects, but rather it is technology's ability to find expression within certain social and economic relations and become widespread: when "automatism ceases to be a *rare technological*

combination and become a *general operational principle*” (Naville qtd. from Feher, 466).

Benjamin posits that the change engendered by the unprecedented perceptual acuity of technology has resulted in an increasing decay of the mimetic faculty, where the magical correspondences of ancient people recedes and a more scientific form of the mimetic faculty prevails. I argue however that it is humanity’s trace of animality which recedes and decays—the once direct mimetic correspondence of external movement and inner duration is pushed further and further into what I call *the mimetic crypt*.

Indeed, changes in productive means and social organization have marginalised and eradicated “the animal” from the modern environment. Electricity and the internal combustion engine have displaced the animal’s productive role in industry and transportation, giving the pink slip to the horse and the ox if you will. As the city expands, like a great plague of locusts, it consumes once self-sustained farming communities into suburban commuter feeding troughs, perpetually nudging the field animal further and further into the shadows. First enslaved to the model of the machine in the industrial revolution, animals in so-called post industrial society are reduced to manufactured commodities, bred as raw material, commercially exploited to the edge of extinction, and domesticated as zoophilous pets. Once a sign of nature’s diverse abundance, wildlife retreats into national parks, game reserves, and zoos—imprisoned within man’s artificial milieu. According to John Berger, “the zoo to which people go to meet animals, to observe them, to see them, is, in fact, a monument to their disappearance.” (19) In other words, the zoo is a place where mourning—the crucial feature of modernity—can be performed. But according to Akira Lippit: “animals never *entirely* vanish. Rather, they exist in a state of *perpetual vanishing*. Animals enter a new economy of being during the modern period, one that is no longer sacrificial in the traditional sense of the term but, considering modern technological media

generally and the cinema more specifically, spectral”(1). And it is the figure of the animal as a spectre—the animal trace—which continues to haunt man’s mimetic crypt.

In other words, I propose that the spectral animal paces (perpetually and compulsively) at the liminal spaces between the thematic dualisms that have come to constitute and problematize modern subjectivity. These dualisms include but are not limited to accessibility/inaccessibility, exteriority/interiority, conscious/unconscious, visibility/invisibility, mobility/immobility, body/mind, subject/object, animate/inanimate, life/death. And although each dualism holds its own ontological stake, I suggest that a thematic separation of *light space and dark space* can serve as useful visual metaphor for the articulation of these overlapping oppositional constructs. As such, the spectral animal pacing within the liminal spaces of subjectivity, at the edge of the dark, inaccessible non-space of the mimetic crypt, necessarily evokes the image of the captive animal. It is the image of the animal as both moving and captive, guarding yet seeking to escape, which paradoxically fixes and demarcates while blurring and deterritorializing the (spurious) constitutional subjective split of dark and light space.

During the scientific revolution, Descartes set forth an epistemological dualism of object and subject—body and mind—bequeathing the body to the laws of physics while distinguishing the human capacity of consciousness and knowledge to the immaterial thing we call mind. In other words, the brain works and attends to physiological process of the body while the mind reflects and conveys subjectivity through language and speech. This traditional (and highly problematic) distinction in the philosophy is of course complicated by the figure of the animal. The animal is neither non-sentient like stones and plants nor self-conscious like human beings (Heidegger paraphrased from Lippit, 6). The fundamental argument for the ontological distinction between man and animal is that man has language and reason and the animal does

not. The animal is instead reduced to the model of the machine—the automaton—and subsumed to the enigmatic realm of instinct, lacking the capacity for intellection. It is this lack, the lack of mind and the concomitant lack of soul, which subjugates the animal and institutes man's dominion over the animal as unassailable and sacrosanct.

It is interesting, however, that in *Essay on the Origins of Languages*, Rousseau maintains that language itself began with metaphor and that it is not unreasonable to suppose that the first metaphor was animal (Berger, 7). Likewise, Benjamin attempts to resolve the rudiments of language with mankind's powerful drive to act mimetically, to make oneself similar and thus develop the gift to see and produce similarities. Although mimetic and magical in origin, it was the power to *read* similarities between man and the cosmos, between man and the Other, which changed the direction of his mimetic powers toward 'nonsensual similarities': signifiers of something other than themselves. And throughout humanity the figure of the animal resonates through mythic, fabulous, allegorical, and symbolic associations, such as the paintings of the Lascaux caves to the Zodiac signs of the cosmos. What distinguishes man from animal, this radical reservoir of alterity we call language, was paradoxically born of our relationship with them.

Benjamin insists on the importance of onomatopoeia as the imitative behaviour leading to the formation of language: "every word—and the whole of language ... is onomatopoeic." (334) From the Latin roots 'onoma' meaning 'to name' and 'poein' meaning 'to make', onomatopoeia—sounds that copy and imitate but also signify and codify—act as a lingering (phylogenetic) bridge between man's once sensual and magical contact with his milieu and the now disenchanted paradigm of a modernity. I suggest that the modern tendency toward demystification, understood as a symptom of the scientific and language based economy of

knowing, contends with a tactile, corporeal state of *being and becoming*. According to Benjamin the fundamental mode of mimesis is nothing other than the compulsion to *become* Other (335). It results from the magical effect of merging copy and contact with imitation and performance, combining the “urge ... to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction” (*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 238) with the “compulsion to become and behave like something else” (333). The effect can be understood as a visceral bond between subject and object, between the perceiver and the perceived, spanning across the fascinator divide of the gaze, imprinting itself directly (and continually) within the thickness of the body. Following George Frazer’s treatise on magic: “like produces like, or that effect resembles its cause; and things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed ... [T]he magician infers that he can produce any effect he desires merely by imitating it” (qtd. from Taussig, 47). My point here is to attempt to reify the gaze and redeem its mystification under the condition of mimesis; to remind us of the unmistakable mystery and wonder of sentience—to be sentient is to partake in magic. Through a reinvigoration of mimesis, the classical subject-object dualism predicated on a mediated (one-way, distanced, single perspectival) observation collapses and returns into a magical correspondence of contact and multiplicity. In other words, the establishment of the singular static position of the Enlightened subject (distinguished from object and environment) necessarily involves a disavowal of the mimetic (dynamic) animal body of man. The mimetic body is not effaced, but rather retreats into an inaccessible ‘dark’ crypt. The utterance of onomatopoeia—to ‘bark’ and ‘howl’—is not only a reminder man’s historical development toward ‘nonsensual similarities’, but its very performance summons the spectral animal that paces restlessly at the gate of the mimetic crypt.

Hence the importance of looking at animals. It is literally *in* the animal's gaze that holds the complete story of man's ontology and the trace of his oldest mimetic and magical apparatuses, because as Berger puts it, it is through the animal gaze that "man becomes aware of himself returning the look."⁽³⁾ If sentience takes us outside of ourselves, the animal gaze takes us back in "across a narrow abyss of non-comprehension."⁽³⁾ The allegorical space of the 'narrow abyss', can be understood as the onomatopoeic gap between 'making' and 'naming', 'mimicking' and 'signifying'. It is the gap between multiple being and singular subjectivity. The animal look is familiar to man because he has inkling of the animal's own sentience, a similar albeit different form of sentience, and hence an awareness of man; however the animal look is also alien because it is adjacent but ultimately inaccessible to man. And it is this compounding of adjacency and inaccessibility that comes to elucidate the fundamentally isolated condition of man's own sentience and subjectivity. This isolation necessarily evokes a spatial relation since the very notion of the gaze is inextricably linked to the concept of a spatial position from which the gaze both emanates from and gravitates to. Berger contends that when man is "*being seen* by the animal, he is being seen as his surroundings are seen by him."⁽³⁾ Likewise, Roger Caillois posits that the operating mode of the mimicking self is fundamentally a temptation of space:

Space pursues [man], encircles [man], digests [man] in a gigantic *phagocytosis*. It ends by replacing [man]. Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. He tries to look at himself from any point whatever in space. He feels himself becoming space, dark space where things cannot be put. He is similar, not similar to something, but just similar. And he invents spaces of which he is the convulsive possession. (30)

As the mimicking self assimilates into his surroundings the subject-object split blurs. The subject's milieu (space and all its constitutive objects) holds as much agency as the subject him/herself. As such motility and mobility in space—the essence of animality—reverses as the

sentient being is *convulsively* manipulated by the dark space which engulfs and possesses him. Space, then is no longer a fixed Cartesian entity in which change, movement, and phenomena occurs. Instead, the traditional subordination of movement to space is upended in favour of space constituted by perpetual flux. The exercise is one of “absolute deterritorialization” where the thematic dualism of dark and light space is unhinged, providing a line of escape from the discourse that constitutes and thus binds the subject. Deleuze and Guattari refer to this absolute deterritorialization as *becoming-animal*.

To become animal is to participate in movement ... to the benefit of an unformed matter of deterritorialized flux, of nonsignifying signs ... There is no longer anything but movements, vibrations, thresholds in a deserted matter: animals, mice, dogs, apes, cockroaches are distinguished only by this or that threshold, this or that vibration, by the particular underground tunnel in the rhizome or the burrow.

Lippit contends that it is Deleuze and Guattari’s logic of rhizomatic space, composed of directions of motions rather than units of space, which “facilitates the entry of the animal into the phenomenal world not as a fixed entity but as a dynamic ... system that interacts with other systems.” (128). Deleuze and Guattari employ the figure of the animal as the embodiment of flux, as a being that moves between worlds, a being that is essentially multiple and never assumes the position of a fixed discursive subject.

Richard J. Bernstein speculates that “an entire history of philosophy could be written simply by tracking what philosophers have said about animals.” (qtd. from Lippit, 12) In what follows however, I will show that it is not only what they say about animals but the way in which the figure of the animal is employed and thematized through symbolic and allegorical forms. The figure of the animal is thus inextricable from a normative account of modern subjectivity because it paradoxically represents both the originary site of man’s ontology and man’s fundamental

point of departure from his mimetic origins. In other words, the figure of the spectral animal lingers two-fold at the edge of the mimetic crypt: (1) as both the metaphorical beginnings of language and the germinal site of man's alterity; and (2) as both the embodiment of rhizomatic flux and the locus of technology's effected decay on man's mimetic faculties.

Berger notes that it is perhaps within the treatment of animals that we find man's first existential dualism:

“Animals came from over the horizon. They belonged *there* and *here*. Likewise they were mortal and immortal. An animal's blood flowed like human blood, but its species was undying and each lion was Lion, each ox was Ox. They were subjected *and* worshipped, bred *and* sacrificed.” (4-5)

Emphasizing that the two statements are connected by an *and* not by a *but*, Berger demonstrates that the figure of the animal occupies a complicated locus of the bio-political. In other words, the animal is situated at “the very threshold where life becomes a matter of politics and politics comes to inform the very matter and materiality of life.” (Santner, 12) As such, what is truly at stake when we attempt to distinguish man from animal is not based on some metaphysical rupture of being but rather on the category of justice within being. Levinas maintains that “[a] being is something that is attached to being, to its own being... The being of animals is a struggle for life. A struggle for life without ethics” (qtd. from B. Hansen, 134). The figure of the animal is located both at the core of the bio-political and completely outside of its concerns.

Wittgenstein's “beetle in the box” analogy formulates a visual metaphor for the concept of the mind which addresses the distinctions of introspection and language—seeing and knowing—and is useful in articulating the source of man's legitimized violence toward animals. Wittgenstein asks us to imagine that everyone has a box and inside that box contains a beetle. The contents of the box however are accessible and “visible” only to the subject: that no one else

can look inside your box. Thus the signifier of the beetle used to describe the contents becomes irrelevant because the contents may indeed differ from box to box, subject to subject; that what we refer to as beetle, what we call the mind, is known only to the subject, even though we all share a singular construct. In turn, we all contain a private-language, a secret if you will, trapped inside a box, invisible and dark. Although the thought experiment illustrates the undeniable arbitrariness of the term “the beetle,” since it could refer and would most likely refer to something that is not of the figure of the beetle (that we perceive in nature), we are intentionally led toward the plight of the animal, trapped eternally within the box. It follows that although language offers to free us from our isolation, to transcend the animal, it is specifically the trace of animality that continues to haunt humanity. Or as Agamben so succinctly puts it, man as living being “has awakened *from* its own captivity *to* its own captivity” (qtd. from Santner, 12).

The “beetle in the box” is critical in the discussion of pain and issues of the bio-political. One can assert absolutely the condition of one’s own pain, that is, that one *has* pain, but following the beetle analogy, the pain of another cannot be known but rather inferred through the behaviour and utterance of the other. Applied to animals, the question of whether an animal experiences pain becomes complicated by their incapacity to speak, their inability to convey their subjective condition. Issues surrounding animal rights rest heavily on this question. Following Jeremy Bentham: “the question is not, Can they reason?, nor Can they talk?, but, Can they suffer?”(50) Likewise, the issue of suffering is inextricable from the capacity to experience death. Traditionally held beyond a simple mechanism of self-preservation, the concept of death—the capacity to name the disappearance from the world—foregrounds a capacity to

understand causality, the concept of being as a being *in time*. The classic Heideggerian position on mortality is that “only man dies. The animal perishes” (qtd. from Lippit, 92).

The operating mode of the conscious mind can be understood as sentience predicated on the conception of causality. As posited earlier within the discussion of the spatial gaze, the subject looking outward finds his milieu looking back with equal agency. Thus the subjective being reciprocates between exteriority and interiority through visuality: looking out manifests looking in. Likewise, the conscious subject necessarily exists within the causal lines of temporality. Again, the analogy of vision can be applied. Call it memory and anticipation, hindsight and foresight, the constructs of past and future teeter on the active conscious position of the subject. It could be said that consciousness is pulled along the temporal lines of causality, which is to say that one can only be conscious at a singular point within the temporal line. In other words, one cannot be conscious then *and* now, only now. I propose an inversion of this logic, which is to negate the singularity of consciousness. I suggest that the conscious mind *moves* and that temporality is simply the manifestation of that movement. Following the Heideggerian logic, the animal does not move through time or with time. The animal being is an atemporal, acausal being and its movements—its motility and mobility—are pure incarnations of movement, intrinsic to the rhizomatic flux.

As such the figure of the spectral animal lingers within the psychic apparatus of man, scratching at the liminal edges of the conscious mind. The enlightened subject suppresses the animal spirit of an atemporal being in favour of the mastery of the causal space—a narrative space—which comes to subordinate pure movement. However, the discovery of the unconscious marked the appearance of an inaccessible space of the split subject: “a topology in which ideas, desires, and drives can circulate in the world without being made manifest in language” (Lippit,

103). Lippit points out that Breuer and Freud's writing on unconscious ideas greatly resemble the animal world. This affinity to the animal is illuminated with the *perpetual vitality* endowed to the unconscious and the animal being alike. Furthermore, Breuer employs the condition of the captive animal—"its restrictedness, its pent-up energy"—as synonymous with the tensile charges that roam the unconscious. Breuer attests that the animal pacing backwards and forwards before feeding time in the zoo is a residue of the obsolesced performed motor activity of looking for food. Likewise, the abnormal behavioural phenomena of stereotypy of captive animals, such as mice obsessively grooming themselves and in some cases engaging in self-mutilation, could be attributed to a necessary release of the this inner tension. Similarly to the adjacency of the unconscious to the conscious mind, the mimetic crypt lies adjacent to bodily movements of intentionality, and contains stored, pent-up memories of the body's mimetic origins. The unconscious and the mimetic crypt is thus animal in character, not solely as some enigmatic drive center of the self, but rather (as relevant to this text) in terms of its alternate dimension, alternate to the causal temporal line impinged upon the conscious intentional state. Instead, the unconscious and the mimetic crypt is animal in character because it possesses a movement that synchronizes with nothing outside of itself. In other words, the animal center is paradoxically decentered, unfixed, in constant flux with a homogenous inertia, a movement without relativity.

However, by employing the animal as fundamentally plural, as the embodiment of a non-singular, non-subjective position, I can allegorize the animal figure under a collective vitality but I run the risk of lumping the animal as species under a problematic singular term. Derrida insists that "the violence done to the animal begins with the pseudo-concept of "the animal," with the use of the word in the singular, as though all animals from the earth-worm to the chimpanzee constituted a homogenous set to which '(the hu)man' would be radically opposed." (10) This

process of othering, demarcating the bounds of exclusion through the usage of the term “the animal” is what soothes us into a normalized slumber of legitimized dominance. The animal perishes, and proceeds into a state of perpetually vanishing, because the animal as pseudo-concept disavows materiality and remains trapped within an artificial economy.

I argue that this artificial economy results from the illusion that all living beings exist within a singular spatio-temporal world. Jakob von Uexküll denies this illusion and posits the notion of the *Umwelt*: “the environment-world that is constituted by more or less broad series of elements that he calls “carriers of significance” or of “marks”, which are the only things that interest the animal” (Agamben, 40). In other words, every living being has its own subjective spatio-temporal world constituted by a harmonious and isolated relation between the animal’s sensory faculties and the ‘mark’ to which it is finely tuned. As human beings we witness the other moving animal being only within our own subjective *Umwelt* and we mistake that observation as objective and singular: a truth. Kenneth Gross, following Wittgenstein, reminds us that “imagining others as bodies whose surmised *interior* states are finally (and, one might add, satisfyingly) private, ultimately inaccessible, hence a limit and an effective affront to our desire to master all sites of knowledge”(201). In other words, the very notion of the other and the inherent promiscuity of others (including animals) having thoughts, remains as a fundamental barrier to the inquiries of knowledge. Thus the foundations of Enlightenment, built upon the empiricism of vision and rationality, remains haunted by the figure of the animal as the locus of inaccessible worlds which lie adjacent to ours; the summation of which *could* equal truth. Instead, Enlightenment unfortunately resolves into an account, a singular appearance of truth, a verisimilitude.

Film and photography, of course, offered to supplant the hallmarks of subjective observation with an unmediated indexical representation, an indisputable optical copy of reality. Dziga Vertov, an important pioneer of cinema, champions the mobility of the film camera and provides unprecedented accessibility to the inaccessible world: the embodiment of a horse, a soldier, and an aeroplane alike.

I am the camera's eye. I am the machine which shows you the world as I alone see it. Starting from today, I am forever free of human immobility. I am in *perpetual movement*. Approach and draw away from things-I crawl under them-I climb on them-I am on the head of a galloping horse- I burst at full speed into a crowd- I run before running soldiers- I throw myself down on my back-I rise up with aeroplanes-I fall and I fly at one with the bodies falling or rising through the air. (qtd. from Taussig, 27, emphasis added)

Vertov unwittingly enters into a mode of reciprocal auteurism, where the apparatus of the film, its moving parts, come to determine the performed actions of the physical body as a recapitulation of early mimetic forms. The extended eye, however, which seeks a scientific extension of observation, disavows the world as plural and undermines the ordinary magical, corporeal correspondences of man and animal. What follows is explication of how film's capacity for verisimilitude and singularity inadvertently betrays man's own sense of animality, as movement—the perceptual token of life—is converted into the illusion of spatialized time and repressed into the mimetic crypt. However, I suggest that this repression is met by a necessary *recapitulation* of the mimetic origins of language. By extending what Benjamin proposed as a phylogenetic and ontogenetic history of the mimetic faculty into the modern assimilation of man with technological space, it may be possible to articulate a mechanism of recapitulation inherent to both conscious and unconscious associations of the filmic medium. Gertrude Koch suggests that film stimulates a latent fluidity of the psychic apparatus and achieves its perceptual effect through “a smooth symbiotic sense of blending together, of dissolution into images and their

movement,” repeating “crucial motor experiences related to those first laborious efforts that every human being makes when learning to walk upright rather than crawl” (qtd. from Taussig, 35). I argue that this effect—the deepest level of filmic enterprise—results from a collusion of a mimetic recapitulation and an imposed *synchronicity* of consciousness, vision, and causality infused onto the body.

Returning to Edison’s film “Electrocuting an Elephant,” we witness an expressive collision of the interface electricity and life, the verisimilitude of film and the bio-politics of man and animal. On one hand, it appears that the dominion of man and the pursuit of modern progress have colluded to justify the sacrifice of Topsy. On the other hand, is it a matter of concern that Topsy was condemned to death because she killed three men earlier that year? And that the method of electrocution, although sensational in its depiction, was simply the most humane way to put her down? Is our empathy toward the plight of this beast simply a projection of our own subjectivity? An anthropomorphic distillation of collective guilt? Moreover, is it specifically the medium of film and its indexical nature what solicits an emotive sensationalism? Or would the sensation be denied had the event not been caught on film? Nonetheless, to depict suffering and pain, the medium of film necessarily embarks on the enterprise of causal synchronicity, where the gears of consciousness and temporality mesh at a rate of 24 frames per second.

The 20th century witnessed an explosive boom in technological media. The moving image, film, video, cinema, movies—whatever you choose to call it—has infiltrated all corners of the public sphere and has opened the *optical unconscious*, constructing a new modern subject, emblemized by its speed and fragmentation. Inaugurated as the paradigmatic vision machine, the cinematic apparatus is the optical mimetic device par excellence. Susan Buck-Morss states that film and the apparatus of film provides a new schooling for our mimetic powers: “Within the

enlargement, space is stretched out, within slow motion, movement expands,” revealing “entirely new structural formations of matter” (267). Likewise, Benjamin insists that film has rewritten the spatio-temporal relations, and that its advent held the promise of a spatial liberation.

“Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of a tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling.” (*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 236)

It is relevant to note a reoccurring thematization of imprisonment and captivity within the origins of film apparatus. Robert Barker, inspired by the effect of light projecting through a grate in the ceiling of his confined prison cell illuminating the letter he was trying to read, conceived of the idea of “light flung from above upon pictures of large dimensions” (qtd. From Friedberg, 396) and invented the panorama, the precursor of the film apparatus. Edison’s first film studio (which he himself called ‘the doghouse’) was nicknamed the Black Maria due to its cramped black-walled conditions which mimicked the experience inside police black marias (a.k.a. paddy wagons). It seems as though the divisions of dark and light space, established by the pragmatics of the filmic apparatus—capture and display—have come to inform the very nature of its singularity. In other words, the singularity of the pinhole in conjunction with the dark chamber of the camera and the corresponding single point lamp projecting in a dark space, necessarily emphasizes the singular vantage point. The cropping of both space and time mimics vision through isolation, thus denying the plurality of pure being, pure movement, and pure illumination in pursuit of verisimilitude. As I suggest, the filmic apparatus, with all its promise of liberation and escape, opened the optical unconscious with a pinhole prick but at the expense of the plurality of being and the mimetic assimilation of space.

Considering film and cinema's current ubiquity and undeniable capital prowess, it is interesting that Edison himself did not foresee a bright future for his kinetoscope. Instead, he saw it only as a momentary novelty within a long line of optical and protocinematic devices of the 19th century. From the phantasmagoria of magic lantern shows and shadow performances, to the 360 degree panorama paintings and diorama mechanical devices, inventors were simply pushing the limits of the static image, creating spectacles to excite but more notably to trick and spook. Phantoms and spectres dominated the subjected matter of much of these spectacles as perhaps a chance to recover the receding magical correspondences of humanity. Magic tricks, sleight of hand, stereoscopes, and zoetropes came into popularity exposing what could be seen as the mechanical fallibility of human perception—that vision was reducible to a machine.

The reducibility of the body, or rather the question of the reducibility of the body to the mechanical machine, was ever-present in the work of mechanics of the 18th century who fabricated lifelike automata: “miracles of technical ingenuity imitating the movements of living creatures”(Taussig, 213). Jessica Riskin maintains that Vaucanson's defecating duck of 1738, which, as the name suggests, “swallowed corn and grain, and after a pregnant pause relieved itself of an authentic-looking burden,” inaugurated and “set in motion a dynamic that has characterized the subsequent history of artificial life” (599). Moreover, the duck dramatized not only the potentially complete reducibility of physiology to machines—animals to machines—but also the problem of where the machine ended and the animal began. The mimetic gesture of the mechanics, to imitate life through verisimilitude, to manifest the uncanny, both asserted a materialist theory of animal life and further illustrated the inability of this theory to explain the core phenomenon of animal life: sentience (Riskin, 606). The defecating duck was exhibited alongside two of Vaucanson's human automata or android musicians: a flute player and pipe and

tablar player. Through the form of the automaton and the practice of machine design, shitting and playing music are made equal. It is of particular importance that the approach of reproducing music was to create a machine that played the flute—that mimicked the flute player. Edison's phonograph (from 150 years after the painting "His Master's Voice," the eventual logo of the RCA Victor) alternatively records and reproduces sound with the absence of visual simulacra, hence the dog's confused look because his master is not present, only his voice. As Taussig notes "the setting up of a contrast between (the then new) technology and the animal, between the machine and the primitive, has the curious result of moving the primitive into the machine to wrest the mimetic faculty from a bunch of wires and grooves"(225). In other words, the phonograph both mimics the android and the original flute player, but does so only through a mode of recapitulation: the phonograph literally plays the flute from inside its mimetic crypt.

Mechanicians of the 18th century had a curious obsession with the pursuit of the perpetual motion machines. Life and the enigmatic spontaneous drive that characterized life were manifested in the automaton through the spectation of the mysterious source of their perpetual movement. In 1786 when scientist Luigi Galvani serendipitously discovered what he called 'animal electricity' by accidentally touching a dissected frog leg's sciatic nerve with a metal scalpel that had picked up a static charge. The frog leg kicked as if it were still alive. It could be asserted that at this historical moment, when inanimate flesh was *galvanized* into the appearance of life, technology began its reciprocal parasitization of the natural animal body. Since that moment, electrical stimulation has migrated to the frontiers of the conscious mind, threatening the very notion of subjectivity, condemning it to the model of a computer. Here I call attention to the experiments of Jose Delgado's in 1965 in which his stimoeiver electrode implanted in the brain of a bull provided the effective capacity to turn on and off the bull's aggressive instinct.

And more recently, to the experiments of Miguel Nicolelis in which a chimpanzee outfitted with neural activity monitors, began manipulating a remote robotic arm without the use of its own body. As Nicolelis stated so optimistically, “the brain did not need the body anymore” (qtd. from van der Pool). Nonetheless, the vivisection of the animal within the history of science rehearses the fundamental stake of technologies claim on life and the origins of its unending pursuits. Lippit makes the claim that “animals brought technology to life—the animal spirits that entered into the technological body turned technology into a species. Machines might fail, suffer, experience the breakdowns and exhaustion and confusion, but animated machinery as a *technogeny* would survive the demise of the individual apparatuses”(184). Thus the study of film, cinema, and the moving image, necessarily involves the philosophical discourses of life. The capacity of film to animate with unprecedented perceptual acuity brings the medium into an uncanny proximity with the living. And with a technogenetic lineage we find traces to very animality it seemingly seeks to undermine. As Buck-Morss reminds us “[n]owhere was the restorative impulse more evident than in the forms taken by the new technologies themselves, which imitated precisely the old forms they were destined to overcome.” The automaton within the technogeny of the cinematic apparatus, recapitulates the originary animality of film: its mimetic impetus.

Much of the 19th century “lived in a sort of frenzy of the visible” (Comoli qtd. from Friedberg, 395). Johnathan Crary, states that the hallmarks of visual culture in the 19th century engendered a collapse of the subject-object duality by instituting “sensory activity which severed perception from any necessary relationship to an exterior world” (44). Crary suggests that the technologies of the industrial revolution, specifically the optical devices, came to relocate visual perception as fully embodied, paving the way for “the historical emergence of autonomous

vision understood as a corporealization of sensation” (44). In other words, optical technology not only opened the optical unconscious, it poured the concrete over the mimetic body, inaugurating the subordination of corporeal mimicry under a new paradigm of vision. It was this economy of vision, visibility, and mobility coupled with an insatiable fetishism for the new that provided the ideal conditions for the reception of the moving image. Much of early film consisted of one technology marvelling at the other, an exposé of the pace of modernity and its technological proficiencies. The narrative cinema of passive spectatorship that we know today was many years away. Instead, early film became a showcase for scientific rationality and the fascination of movement. In other words, the subject matter was not narrative drama, but the depiction of motion itself. The film apparatus was typically on display, attracting as much attention as the moving image. As Jean Epstein points out film’s fusion of static and moving, discontinuous and continuous, seemed to fly in the face of nature: “a transformation as amazing as the generation of life from inanimate things”(qtd. from Mulvey, 183). Early film spectatorship was an active spectatorship, one which sought to interrogate the source of this fascinating illusion—the puzzling quandary of how it worked. And arguably the visible mechanism, moving parts and spinning wheels, were understandable corporeally—at the scale of the human anatomical registry—and effected throughout the mimetic faculty.

The technogenic relationship of automata to film, not only provides the basis for its adhesion to the hallmarks of verisimilitude and perceptual motion, but it demonstrates the mechanism by which the threads of reproductive movement retreat into the mimetic crypt. Laura Mulvey shows us that film interwove the 19th century photograph with the 18th century automaton:

To translate the stilled image into movement is to see the uncanny nature of the photograph transformed out of one emotional and aesthetic paradigm into another. The uncanny of the indexical inscription of life, as in the photograph, merges with the uncanny of mechanized human movement that belongs to the long line of replicas and automata. However interwoven these phenomena may be, the index is a reminder that at the heart of the medium these celluloid images are not replicas but are an actual, literal inscription of the figure's living movements. (175)

Film, unlike automata, regards itself purely in surface appearances. To represent movement, film need only trick the eye through a spatialized sequence of light. Wittgenstein writes, “[it] is as if we had imagined that the essential thing about a living man was the outward form. Then we made a lump of wood in that form, and were abashed to see the stupid block, which hadn't even any similarity to a living being” (qtd. from Gross, 202). Although celluloid may indeed hold an actual literal inscription of the figure, celluloid fails to hold an index of actual movement and actual duration. Instead, I argue that it is the recapitulatory function of the moving image which summons the ghost of the automaton, not as a specific technological device, but as the source of the mimetic method of inscribing motion. Furthermore, what is revealed to us in the pursuit of inscriptive movement is not so much the desire to invite inanimate things into the space of the living beings but an exposition of the underlying anxiety for the forces which push the human into the realm of the inanimate, into death.

Eadweard Muybridge, an essential pioneer of the medium of film, created an extensive library of motion studies, the majority of which featured the study of locomotion of animals. His obsession with the animal figure seems to indicate that the figure of the animal was the quintessential symbol of movement itself. More importantly, the machines that were displacing the animal in modernity were side by side the subject matter of the moving image. Lippit suggests that “Muybridge was racing against the imminent disappearance of animals from the

new urban environment ... technology and ultimately cinema came to determine a vast mausoleum for the animal being.” (Lippit, 187) Watching animations of Muybridge’s work today, one-second motions repeated over and over in a loop, these animal bodies seem to demonstrate behavioural stereotypy rather than animal motility and mobility. The framed animal, confined to the edges of the shot, performs within a Sisyphusean closed eternity. The plural, atemporal animal is made captive and subordinated to the singular space of causal-conscious synchronization. When the animal enters the technological body, it *un*becomes animal. The spectre of the indexical body—the ghost of the once living animal—transforms into an automaton through repetition. Driven not by the intentionality of sentience but by the mechanics and electrical impulses of the apparatus, the filmic animal recapitulates the mimetic origins of both the technology and the species itself, in an uncanny artificial synchronicity.

It is pertinent to note that Muybridge’s impetus for studying the locomotion of animals came specifically from the scientific investigation to determine whether all four hooves of the horse left the ground during a trot. Muybridge did not seek out the moving image. Rather his approach was arguably opposite in intent. His method was to deconstruct movement, to fracture it using many sequenced photographs to isolate a single moment within a duration. Using this method to prove undeniably, outside of real-time perception or naked eye observation, that the four hooves did indeed leave the ground at the same time marks an important moment in scientific experimentation, arguably a paradigmatic shift in scientific knowledge. Likewise, Edison’s “Electrocuting an Elephant” acted as a scientific document to prove the dangers of AC electricity, although there is a significant disconnect between what is seen in the film and the proof it protests. The apparatus of modern science today has simply become a glorified camera. The Large Hadron Collider (LHC), for instance, which seeks to recreate the conditions of the big

bang, is effectively a 75 billion dollar camera—an apparatus to extend the vision of man, to slow down reality and isolate complex phenomena into finite digital bits.

This cinematic method of dividing space and time into bits can be dated back to Zeno of Elea (circa 490BC) who set forth a set of paradoxes to support the Parmenidian claim that “all is one” and that plurality, change, and motion were simply illusions. The most famous paradox involves Achilles and a tortoise in a race. The paradox, which arguably remains irrefutable, states that Achilles can never overtake the tortoise because he must first reach the point the tortoise first started, in which the time the tortoise has moved further. The paradox results from the assumption that time and space, duration and extension, are infinitely divisible. The film apparatus, tricking the eye with its fragmentation rate of 24 fps, creates a convincing illusion of motion. However, when slowed down we become confronted by its illusion and digital mechanism of its artificial flow. If we are to watch Edison’s film with frame rate slowed, the pragmatics of film might suggest that we can isolate the precise interstice of Topsy’s transition from life to death, the frame at the end of life and the frame at the beginning of death. This spurious exercise could perhaps support Parmenides claim, however this would also arguably assert the impossibility of death and, moreover, the impossibility of the beginning of life.

The cinematic fragmentation or digitization or quantumization is also applied to the infamous paradox of Schrodinger’s Cat. Simplified, the thought experiment presents a cat inside a closed “black box”. There is exactly a 50/50 chance the cat is dead or alive depending on an earlier random event. The puzzling theory of quantum mechanics suggests that before the observer peers in to determine the state of the cat, the cat exists as simultaneously both dead and alive, not a mixture of dead and alive. Thus, inside the box the cat must endure a sort of “suspended animation, until either dispatched from its purgatory or resurrected to a full life by

the obliging curiosity of the observer” (Lippit, 249). The nature of causality is thus implanted onto the singular position of the conscious, intentional mind.

The thematization of the animal within analogies and thought experiments of space and time rehearses the age-old subjugation of the animal and its spurious reducibility to nonconscious machine. Likewise, when the spectral body of the animal enters technology and the filmic forms of animation, the modern illusion of spatialized time trumps man’s initial ecological forms of perception. In other words, the structure of film parasitizes and infects our perception and our modes of understanding movement, in its most physical and directly mimetic sense. Thus the mimetic faculty decays into the scientific forms of Zeno and Schrodinger, while man sacrifices his attachments to inner duration. It is within cinema and its flow of abstract time that we find a full recapitulation of early automata, at once summoned from and captured within the mimetic crypt. Moreover, the enigmatic “eternal, unmoved, prime mover” of Aristotelian physics alongside the magical source of the Golem’s animation are now concealed and forever trapped within the digital circuitry of modern cinema. The realms of dark and light space divided within the logic of the Enlightened subject, continue to open the narrow abyss between man and animal. The atemporal, plural animal recedes into the darkness, as the verisimilitude of indexical representation colludes with the synchronicity of causality and consciousness, leaving the body and pure movement pacing at the gates of the mimetic crypt.

Issues of the bio-political, specifically ethical and medical debates regarding the clinical definition of death perhaps are situated outside the silly pragmatics of thought experiments and filmic representation. However, Edison’s film of the electrocution of Topsy the elephant, foregrounded as scientific document, remains today as an indexical trace of an event, an invaluable historical document of humanity and modernity, as one the first instances of killing on

film. Arguably the inauguration of the film genre of Mondo films and a seed for the cultural phenomenon of snuff films, the execution of Topsy resonates within the history of the moving image as her spectral figure repeats her last moments over and over before our eyes, through the anti-entropic, infinitely repeatable medium of film. A certain poetic irony is transferred through this moving image. Generally regarded as the medium which celebrates movement, summoning a spontaneous motility to the inert, endowing a virtual life to the inanimate, Topsy moves forward in reverse as a paradox of early film, from moving to still, animate to inanimate, life to death. The spectral figure of Topsy forever haunts the mimetic crypt as man's mimetic faculties further decay and erase all traces of the once prevalent magical correspondences between man and animal. Embodied within the concealed mechanisms of the contemporary cinematic apparatus, the ghost of Topsy is re-enchanted, forever reanimated by the very AC electricity that took her life over 100 years ago.

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