sensuous theory and multisensory media

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2. Animal Appetites, Animal Identifications

In a series of short, thrilling clips on the late-night TV ad for *Trials of Life,* the BBC, Turner Broadcasting, and Time-Life wildlife video series, a lion mauls a gazelle and tears its guts out. Wolves fight each other for the first chance to sink their teeth into a still-struggling deer. "Uncensored, shocking photography," promises the histrionic male announcer, concluding salaciously, "Order now, and find out why we call them animals!"

This tautological howler is, on second thought, profoundly puzzling. The documentary series clearly styles itself as pornography. The lascivious voice-over that accompanies these creatures doing what they do naturally acts as rhetorical black bars over their eyes. But why would footage of anything animals do be censored, assuming there are only animals involved? Animals aren't capable of obscenity, are they?

Animal documentaries used to be the staid fare of Disney and the Discovery Channel, but in recent years BBC et al. have hit upon a great way to sell them. The ads for this series exploit a particular form of human identification with animals. Projecting him/herself into the action onscreen, the home video viewer experiences the ordinary struggles of the wild kingdom as cruel, wanton, depraved, like the lowest of humans—indeed, *like animals.* (Clearly, the ad's rhetoric, including its use of "exotic" settings such as the Serengeti Plain, appeals as well to a racialized hierarchy that considers certain humans closer to, more like, animals.) If you think of the lineage of popular movies that feature animals as protagonists,

Frame enlargement from *Season of the Cheetah* (1989), by National Geographic Films.

movies like *Born Free, Flipper, Day of the Dolphin,* and, in the enduring dog-as-star genre, *Rin Tin Tin, Lassie, Benji, Beethoven,* and *My Dog Skip,* with few exceptions, feature animals as wise, selfless, and noble creatures, often to the disadvantage of merely human characters. Even though films in the tradition of *Jurassic Park* and *Jaws* show animals as the representative of a nature that is seen as cruel and wanton, generally it is good human qualities such as innocence, dignity, and industry that Western viewers like to attribute to creatures. Projected, these qualities reflect back on us. My point in the following is not to figure out how these cinematic animals are actually feeling but to stress that, whether noble or depraved, animals only have these qualities insofar as humans are invested in identifying with them. Anne Friedberg has termed this form of identification "petishism": a movement that allows us both to perceive good qualities in animals as reflections of our ideal selves, and to project the best human attributes onto animals. Or, in Donna Haraway's words, we "polish an animal mirror to look for ourselves."[1] The belief in radical alterity, that it is absolutely impossible to share the experience of an Other, be it a cultural or species Other, ironically leads to collapsing the difference between Us and Them. In disavowing any commonality between self and other, one renders the other a screen for

projection, whether it is to project noble-savage fantasies on other humans or bestial-animal fantasies on beasts. This essay will build an argument in favor of accepting commonality with other creatures that includes our common, little-O otherness. Such a view requires us to take into account the human populations that are pushed offscreen in the act of animal identification.

Mainstream nature documentaries like *Trials of Life* draw their authority and seeming objectivity from the natural sciences. However, as theorists such as Haraway have pointed out, most scientific research on animal societies is from its inception modeled on assumptions about human nature. The resulting "knowledge"—for example, the belief that species survival is dependent on domination and competition—is projected back on human societies. The human sciences of anthropology and sociology marshal animal societies "in the rationalization and naturalization of the oppressive orders of domination in the human body politic."[2]

Cinematic conventions have a lot to do with our powers of putting ourselves in the other's paws. In nature documentaries, shot–reverse shot structure creates a sense of narrative; quick editing makes for excitement; cutting gives a sense of simultaneous action; eyeline matches between animals and their prey establishes intentionality; and when the creatures gaze into the camera, their eyes seem to communicate with the depths of our souls. The overall effect is to allow the human viewer an identification with the nonhuman subjects, a way to get into their furry or feathered heads. A cheap way, to be sure. Movies that rely on reaction shots from dogs for their effect, such as the inane *As Good As It Gets* (1997), fall into a special circle of hell for their lethal combination of imbuing animals with human subjectivity and being unable to convince audiences of a scene's import without this last resort.

Part of our desire to protect animals can be traced to that centripetal identification that sees animals as "better," the other that affirms our own (lost) beauty and innocence. Friedberg offers a tongue-in-cheek analysis of human identification with dogs in film in her essay "The Four-Legged Other and Cinematic Projection."[3] Friedberg draws from Christian Metz's psychoanalytic account of filmic identification to argue that dogs are open to projection and fetishization in a way similar to the cinema screen. The screen is a space in which viewers can identify with an image that is *not* of them—the screen is not a mirror—but confirms their existence and reflects back on them.

Friedberg defines petishism as "a fetishism in which one overidentifies

The canine reaction shot: frame enlargement from *Lassie* (1994), by Daniel Petrie.

with animal Others and allows oneself to be fascinated by non-human Others." Petishism is built on a mechanism of disavowal similar to fetishism. A fetish is useful for its ability to distract from the anxiety-inducing scene at the origin of difference, in order simultaneously to affirm and to disavow it. Usually the scene in question provokes sexual difference and the fear of castration. In the present case the difference in question is species difference and the fear of animality. I would argue that the primal scene of petishism is the terror of finding that we are not, after all, so different from animals. Like sexual fetishism, petishism takes an ideologically troubling difference and represents it in terms of individuals.

Between Western, urban humans and the exotic animals of Africa, the Amazon, the Arctic, and elsewhere, there happen to live other humans who coexist with these animals. They do not have the luxury of distance that permits idealizing identification; rather they see humans as existing on a continuum with other species. Petishism works to disavow this continuum. Petishists believe that animals are both just like us and fundamentally other.

Our ability, as Western or urban viewers, to identify so unproblematically with the animals safely confined in the zoo or on *Wild Kingdom* rests in part on the colonial legacy of human hierarchies. Like the tourist

Joy Adamson opening her heart to Elsa the lion cub in *Born Free,* conservation groups appeal to a Western fantasy that our innate goodness will be confirmed through communication with the wild beast.[4] Many pro-animal movements participate in a global politics that valorizes the innocents of forest and plain over the much less photogenic human creatures who must fight them for survival. In the decades of their founding, the 1950s and 1960s, conservation organizations overtly championed threatened animals over the threatened human groups that lived among them. In a 1960 report, UNESCO recommended that Masai people be expelled from their traditional lands, where the grazing of their livestock infringed on wildlife reserves.[5] East and Central African organizers are still protesting the World Wildlife Federation's protection of jumbos and lions because the elephants destroy village crops, the lions attack their children.[6] Western environmental activists would prefer to protect the creatures of an Africa that is patently an illusion, the wild territory of the nineteenth-century explorers rather than a continent irrevocably scarred by colonization. They do not want to acknowledge that the global movements of capital and empire have swallowed the vestiges of "natural" life. There are some environmentalist groups, such as Cultural Survival, that hold a more holistic view that takes into account both the preservation of animal and plant life and the maintenance of traditional cultures. But the astonishing Western ability to value animals over the third-world humans who share resources with them reared its head after the U.S. war on Afghanistan, when hundreds of thousands of private American dollars were lavished on the forty surviving animals in the Kabul zoo—while many suffering Afghan humans starved.

To my amusement and dismay in writing this essay, I find that I am criticizing both environmentalism and vegetarianism, movements I sympathize with. But we need to be aware when these issues function as decoys from colonial human relations. As Paolo Fabbri writes, "la pitié est la distance la plus totale de toutes": pity is the ultimate form of othering.[7] To have selfless and altruistic attitudes toward others is to *affirm* their utter distance.

A small subgenre of recent independent video radically undercuts some of our most cherished projections onto animals, by documenting the literal destruction of the screen. I think of them as the dog-eating tapes. Three that I will discuss here critique the European/North American obsession with the humanity of dogs, suggesting in quite different ways that this passion veils a problematic ethnocentrism. This is not to say that they set up dog eating as an exemplary activity. Ken Feingold's

"Pets or meat": frame enlargement from *Roger and Me* (1989), by Michael Moore.

Un Chien Délicieux (1991), as the title's play on Dalí and Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* suggests, pushes the iconoclastic premises of Surrealism. This tape purports to record the first-person story of Burmese peasant Lo Me Akha, who was brought to Paris in the '40s by anthropologists and spent a year hanging out at cafés with André Breton and his crew. He was then sent back to Burma, where he apparently stayed in his village until the videomaker came along and recorded his story. The engaging, wizened man holds a stick, up and down which two cockatoos march for the duration of the interview, which is translated in voice-over. His story, a sort of reverse ethnography of Westerners by their purported object of study, undermines any vestigial Western illusion of the separateness of the East. He tells how the anthropologists came scrambling through the jungle, adding offhandedly, "I guess nobody told them about the road." He notes the strange habits of the Surrealists, such as their fascination with his dreams and how Breton was always writing them down. He is amused at the Europeans' dependence on money. In particular, he finds it bizarre how much the Parisians dote on their dogs. He tells what an effort it was for him to find a dog to cook as a festive meal for his friends on the eve of his departure, and then to convince them to take part. The Surrealists, who prided themselves on their ability to explore that which is taboo,

could not stomach this dinner. The tape cuts to a black-and-white snapshot of a group of people sitting around a dinner table. Lo Me Akha says that these are Breton and his friends, who have just eaten the meal of dog he has prepared. He concludes his story by saying to the camera, "And now, since you are an honored guest in our village, we will cook a dog for you." In the second half of the tape, some of the villagers kill and cook a dog. The video camera watches the process obediently, from clubbing to skinning and evisceration to slow roasting on a rotating spit.

The viewer may or may not realize that the first part of the tape, the delightful story about the anthropologists and Breton, is all made up. The second part, though, definitely happened. Audiences tend to be outraged when they find the artist has deceived them in this way.[8] The tape's superior, *épater le bourgeois* attitude makes Feingold's critique hard to countenance. Nevertheless, it deftly questions the Western hierarchy that thinks nothing of uprooting a person from his home and bringing him across the world to study, but reacts with horror to the notion that man's best friend also makes a good main course.

Another dog-as-dinner tape takes on these issues from a quite different perspective. Michael Cho's *Animal Appetites* (1991) documents the

Still from *Un Chien Délicieux* (1991), by Ken Feingold. Courtesy of Electronic Arts Intermix.

legal persecution of Southeast Asian immigrants living in Los Angeles whose diets include dog meat, focusing on the trial of two Cambodian men. Cho reaps a wealth of ironies from simple juxtapositions. The trial's allegations that the dog had been killed in a "cruel and inhumane" manner are read over gory shots of acceptable meat-animals being slaughtered. Statistics about the population of dogs and cats in shelters that end up being destroyed and the use of dogs in scientific experiments are followed by shots of pet cemeteries, with headstones memorializing "Our dear Fluffie," and so on. Quoting public responses to the trial, Cho shows that assimilationism blurs quickly into racism: "Americans don't eat dogs"; "The more we accept of their barbaric ways, the more ground they gain."

In a third tape in this quirky subgenre, *The Search for Peking Dog* (John Choi, 1995), a German American housewife attempts to prepare the delicacy of the title for her Chinese American husband. At the pet store, she is turned away after she reveals that the cute puppy is intended not for lifelong companionship but for dinner. Finally she convinces a homeless man to sell her his dog. Her husband arrives home to find her chasing the mutt around the house with a meat cleaver. Light is shed when he pronounces the dish of his dreams more carefully, Peking *Duck*. The eager-to-please wife's misunderstanding is merely a function of

Still from *Animal Appetites* (1991), by Michael Cho.

Western attitudes toward Chinese "omnivorousness." They eat dogs, don't they?

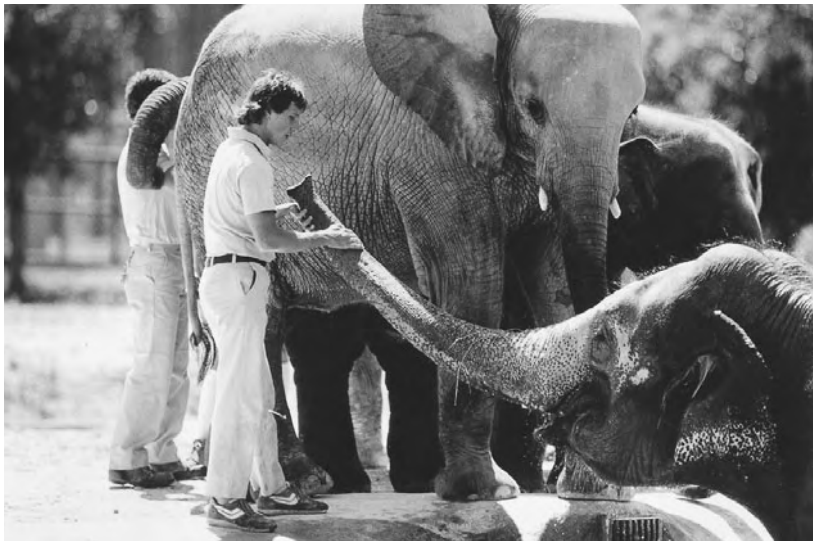
All these works suggest that the status Westerners ascribe to dogs is far higher than that they apply to certain third-world people. The reason, I argue, is that dogs—so understanding, and so conveniently mute!—are much more conducive to projected fellow-feeling than are humans who speak an alien language, practice strange customs, and, well, eat dogs.

Projection transacts differently on domesticated animals and so-called wild animals. What sort of identification is at work in a hybrid of these relationships, the experience of visiting a zoo? Zoos are in some ways already constituted in terms of how they invite viewer identification. The textual aids to zoo visitors that encourage certain readings of the zoo experience, the orchestration of the zoo-going event as an entertainment complete with popcorn and soft drinks, all encourage a movie-like experience. But more significantly, the proscenium space in which the captive animals exist encourages a sort of one-way viewing relationship in which the animal, rendered a visual spectacle by the cues the zoo provides, is available for identification. Also, zoos are maps of post-colonial relations, in that they depend on the intercontinental traffic in animals, as well as fantasy reenactments of colonial relations.

Frederick Wiseman's documentary film *Zoo* (1993) is interesting to look at in light of the issue of human identification with animals, as it both highlights the process of identification and disrupts it. *Zoo* documents a few days in the life of the Miami Zoo, in its public spaces and behind the scenes. It has the seemingly dispassionate style, observing events without verbal comment, that is Wiseman's trademark.

Zoo prompts at least three ways to identify with animals. First is a seemingly "unmediated" look at animals in the zoo. This look puts us in position of zoo visitor, by showing animals alone, without human intercessors. So as well as making us observe the behavior of human visitors to zoos, Wiseman pushes us to have that same identification ourselves. Typical camera activity in these scenes is a long shot that brackets out fences and other signs of captivity. The zoo animals seem to be living in the wild, and this encourages the viewer to imagine these animals as completely separate from human existence. Oddly, the creatures that are most often observed in this way are birds. Birds are relatively unsympathetic creatures, difficult to hang an identification on. Wiseman seems to have found them mysterious for that reason, and thus to have filmed them in a way that stresses their alterity.

Second, in many scenes the camera pulls back to look over the shoulders



Frame enlargement from *Zoo* (1993), by Fred Wiseman. Courtesy of Zipporah Films. Photograph by Miami Metrozoo. Copyright 1993 Zoo Films.

of zoo visitors and share their interactions with the animals. Many of these scenes are predicated on complete identification. People laugh at the monkeys; children corner deer in the petting zoo; a burly man beats his chest as though to communicate with gorillas. Wiseman allows us to watch these visitors identifying, in a way that makes us reflect on our own ways of looking at animals. As most of us tend to do at zoos, people in the film take the opportunity to marvel at the strangeness, indeed uncanniness, of animals. They comfort themselves from the fact of this strangeness by concentrating on the animals' seeming similarity to humans.

Uncanniness, of course, is what fetishism seeks to keep at bay. The uncanny is when the other, the absolutely alter, erupts into your space. An uncanny moment in *Zoo* begins with a scene in which the person in charge of the animals' meals is preparing a vat of food: canned fruit salad, raw ground meat, crumbled boiled eggs, which he mixes with his hands. I saw this film at the Margaret Mead Film Festival, whose audiences typically subscribe to documentary film's discourse of sobriety. The audience I was in withheld our reactions during this scene, in proper documentary-viewing fashion. Our reaction did not come until a later scene: an outdoor evening banquet, with lots of people in fancy dress. When the camera focused on a big bowl of Caesar salad that a server is mixing up, the audience broke into moans of disgust. I think what was

happening in that reaction was the uncanny eruption of the other, represented by unappetizing animal food, into the places we keep cordoned off for ourselves. Suddenly our eating habits were like those of animals, and all the distinctions that had been carefully built up between us and them became involuted.

Zoo contrasts the adoring attitude of zoo visitors with the instrumental attitude of zoo workers. Here the third sort of identification comes into play. The zoo workers get to know animals intimately, and they use human expressions with them. But their jobs require that they not simply see themselves reflected in the animals. They have to feed fresh-killed ducklings to the iguanas, castrate wolves, and do other things behind the scenes of this live museum. Zoo workers have to make the transition from seeing the animals as pets to seeing them as meat (compare the jarring contrast of the two suggested uses of rabbits for sale at a roadside stand in Michael Moore's *Roger and Me*).

One of the most striking sequences in *Zoo,* which spans all these identifications, concerns the birth of a hippopotamus. We learn that the female hippo had been shipped to Philadelphia to get inseminated by a bull hippo. The whole process of negotiation had taken two and a half years, so this kid was eagerly awaited. Wiseman films the last minutes of the female's labor, a scene that is only tense because of the urgent whispered

Frame enlargement from *Zoo* (1993), by Fred Wiseman. Courtesy of Zipporah Films. Photograph by Evan Eames. Copyright 1993 Zoo Films.

comments of the zoo staff. The baby is stillborn, and the heroic efforts of the zoo veterinarian cannot resuscitate it. Quite a while later in the film we witness the necropsy on the dead baby hippo. What would have been extremely cute and endearing, a real crowd-pleaser, in live form is now a carcass being taken from cold storage and dumped on the pavement that serves as dissection table. The same veterinarian who tried to revive the kid cuts it open to take tissue samples for various labs. She cuts off its head and sets it up like a strange trophy for the photographer to record, who also records its splayed, bloody carcass from several angles. Finally the vet and her assistant sling the remains into an outdoor furnace to be cremated. This is decidedly not a scene of mourning. The contrast between this bundle of meat and the hopes for a hippo family could not be greater, as the animal has been torn from its relation of identification to a relation of indifference.

This scene makes clear the utter instrumentality of the relation between humans and animals in this environment. The death of the hippo kid is sad because it is a failed investment, as is made clear by the distress at a board meeting later. The animals are useful only as spectacle, and the zoo pays dearly to keep them in shape for that reason. So even the empathic relation between the zoo workers and the animals is not enough to qualify the animals' existence as commodities. A film cannot set up a different kind of relation between humans and animals unless the local ecosystem encourages it in some way. In *Zoo* it is an all-or-nothing relation: animals are mirrors, or they are meat.

There exist counterexamples of identification that might yield a less all-or-nothing relationship between human and animals. For example, many works by First Nations film- and videomakers suggest a relation to animals that asserts their *difference* from human beings. This may sound contradictory, since it's a common cliché that aboriginal peoples respect animals, communicate with animals, exist on a continuum with animals. But it is a different kind of respect to attempt to communicate with animals across a distance, instead of to assume one already knows what they're thinking!

Video artist Mike MacDonald takes an urgent yet sardonic tone toward the conservation of animal life. MacDonald, having been raised/assimilated in Nova Scotia and only later identifying with his heritage as Micmac and Beothuk, worked to educate himself about First Nations issues. He now lives in British Columbia, where he has made works dealing with the land claims of the Gitksan Wet'suwet'en nation. MacDonald's video installation *Seven Sisters* (1989) documents the beauty and majesty

of the eponymous B.C. mountain range, using video monitors to create a portrait of each peak. Long shots of mountain tops wreathed in cloud, taken from a helicopter, suggest a timeless grandeur. However, each of the seven meditations concludes with shots of clear-cut forests and macabre dioramas of indigenous wildlife from a natural history museum.

MacDonald sets up a melancholy contrast between two sorts of stationary-camera shots: those of living mountains, where the movements of cloud and shadow gradually alter the face of the slope, and those of the dead, stuffed creatures gradually gathering dust in the museum. Perversely, the dioramas are as chock-full of "human" qualities as stills from a 1950s TV sitcom. Family groups of deer or of foxes pose in perpetuity, with dad at the head of the patriarchal pyramid; a single tableau captures bears, geese, and mountain goats in mid-activity like so many Saturday-morning shoppers; the dead animals' glass eyes gleam with intelligence.

Some wildlife, however, is alive and kicking in MacDonald's work. *Rat Art* (1990) focuses on one of the creatures with which we feel least compelled to identify, because our interactions with it show humans in an unflattering light. Like *Seven Sisters, Rat Art* exploits the meditative quality of the stationary camera, this time to engage a rat in a work of performance art. For ten all too real-time minutes we stare at a mousetrap in a trash-strewn corner, which a rat tentatively approaches again and again. An odd sort of sympathy begins to flow as the rat gets bolder and begins to take food from the spring-loaded mechanism. You cheer the rat on, believing that it may outsmart the trap, only to have your hopes dashed as abruptly as the rodent is dashed against the wall and the piece ends. In combination with *Seven Sisters,* this tape offers a cynical take on environmental awareness and the human role in destroying and creating the conditions for animal life. MacDonald's work is directly involved in the conservationist movement, but he identifies as a conservationist only as part of the movement for First Nations land claims. "If we're going to have forests and wildlife and fish in the future, then the people who live with these resources are going to have to have more of the control of harvesting and conservation than is now the case. This is what land claims are all about—regional resource control. If we win land claims for native people, everybody wins."[9]

MacDonald pointedly critiques the adoring attitude toward nature evinced by some environmentalist movements: "I have a lot of problems with what I call sob-sister ecology. If my ancestors hadn't eaten seals I wouldn't be here."[10] Some of the shows produced by Inuit independent

producers and by the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation (IBC) take a similarly nonhumanist attitude toward animals, one that argues for negotiated coexistence. The children's program *Takuginai,* produced by Leetia Ineak for IBC and broadcast on the Aboriginal People's Television Network, borrows *Sesame Street*'s combination of skits, lessons, and conversations between human and puppet hosts. However, in designing the wonderfully appealing puppets, *Takuginai*'s producers make a point of not endowing certain animals with human-friendly qualities. "We don't want to depict animals as cute and cuddly," early producer Blandina Makkik explains, because Inuit people are dependent on seals for food, and polar bears pose a real danger.[11] For Inuit children to learn that the animals that form the subsistence base of Inuit society are humanlike would be to alienate them from their own culture. Therefore the show's producers chose animals whose meanings are fairly neutral in Inuit tradition, such as Tulu the Raven and Johnny the Lemming. Now broadcast on the Aboriginal People's Television Network, the show has been on the air since 1987.

The IBC's hunting show, *Igliniit,* is illuminating to look at for the difference between its attitude toward animal representation and mainstream animal documentaries. Produced by Philip Joamie and now discontinued, the show followed hunters of seal, bear, narwhale, and other useful animals. While this Inuit program shares some of the look of a nature documentary, it is actually a how-to show. Its format is a dialogue between a woman in the television studio and a man, presumably speaking over short-wave radio, narrating the progress of the hunt. Like *Takuginai,* it borrows some of the forms of conventional North American broadcasting, but its purpose is quite different. *Igliniit*'s slow pans of the landscape are not the caressing gaze of Discovery Channel documentaries. These long, attentive pans mimic the hunter scanning for prey. When the camera is still, focusing on a school of narwhale close to the edge of an ice floe, the camera operator's motionless shadow tips us off that this is not the reverential stillness in the face of the wonders of nature but the quiet hunter's caution. Unlike conventional animal documentaries, the action is quite slow, and there is little use made of cross-cutting or close-ups on the animals. *Igliniit* is not concerned with creating any identification with the animals as subjects; quite the opposite.

Among the thirteen episodes of the television series *Nunavut* (Our Land) (1995) by Zacharias Kunuk and Igloolik Isuma Productions, nine are devoted to the hunt of animals in season: caribou, seal, fish, walrus. Each episode of this costume drama set in 1946 emphasizes that hunting

is necessary for survival, and that when the hunters return empty-handed, people go hungry. Cinematographer Norman Cohn apprenticed himself to Kunuk in order to learn the cinematographic style appropriate to documenting the hunt: as in *Igliniit,* it is a slow, attentive pan of the landscape, not admiring it for its beauty but searching it for signs of edible life. Victor Masayesva includes this kind of long take in his survey of indigenous aesthetics: "this skill of patient observation is essential to the success of any hunter."[12] In episode nine, *Aiviaq* (Walrus), the hunters are jubilant when they manage to harpoon one of the heavy but alert animals and pull it in. After clubbing it they immediately fall to, carefully incising the skin and peeling it back to reveal the freshly bleeding flesh. *Martha Stewart Living* this is not, but the shots of hunters enjoying the fresh morsels of walrus flesh and still-warm liver and licking their knives definitely have a gourmet-show character. Darrell Varga points out that in Inuit hunting shows, "the animal is not constructed as an absent referent, it is named and its death is directly connected with consumption. There is no mediation of the commodity-fetish."[13] That is, unlike the standard Western practice of representing food as utterly distinct from the mass-processed animals it came from, to the point that smiling chickens can advertise the Quebec chain St. Hubert's Barbecue, Inuit video connects food with the animals whose lives were taken to feed the people.

Instead of assimilating animals to human likenesses, the Inuit works encourage a sort of creative coexistence. Inserted in the narwhale-hunting episode of *Igliniit* is an animated hunting tale that stresses the intermingling of Inuit human and animal life. As the graphic style indicates—smooth forms in black and white with incised details that evoke Inuit lithography—the story is drawn from traditional Inuit tales.

In the tale bears, seals, and giant geese by turns menace, are menaced by, and converse with an Inuit family, composed of a woman, a man, a child, and a dog. I am not in a position to explain this story. But to give you an idea, picture two human-sized geese appearing to the man as he sleeps in his igloo. In gestures ambivalently threatening or protective, the birds dress him and, one on either side of him like cops, walk him to the water's edge. Then, with their great wings, they knock him into the black water—not once, but twice. Yet despite this cavalier treatment, there seems to be no animosity among the three of them when he finally struggles back onto the land. When he returns home, in another event similarly opaque to a southern viewer like me, the woman refuses to feed him. So he prepares to go hunting, fashioning a spear (which the animators render in diagramlike detail), which he ties to the woman's waist. So when

Still from *Aiviaq (Walrus)* (1995), from *Nunavut* by Zacharias Kunuk. Courtesy of V Tape.

he spears a seal, it swims off with her! It is not clear whether the woman was meant to provide ballast for the spear, or the man is acting in revenge, or he has been somehow enchanted by his encounter with the geese. From this impasse (or resolution), the show cuts to a scene of actual humans spearfishing.

One thing is clear from this story (besides that there seem to be a number of trickster figures around): it is not a humanist tale. Animals in these aboriginal works are protectors and predators, mischief makers and dinner. They are capable of exchange with humans, but on their own terms. Even when they have supernatural powers, they are not inherently noble, innocent, or wise. While these animals have a lot a humanlike qualities, they are not necessarily the set of qualities that Western humans like to project onto animals.

Identification with animals, at least of the sort that nature documentaries encourage, is predicated on an exploitative relation of Western postindustrial nations with "developing" nations. In this relation's implicit hierarchy, the sympathetic beasts of the wild and the hearth come below the Western viewers but above many other people. Ecological and cultural survival demands that we reconsider the order of this chain, indeed its very necessity.

In conclusion, let me raise the possibility not of identifying across a chasm but establishing communication along a continuum. We must dispense with some of the cherished myths we hold about animals in order to preserve human ways of life. In the process we may learn to respect animals in their *difference*, as well as their commonality with humans. I suggest that we call this relationship *empathic nonunderstanding*. This is a relationship that gives up the self's need for constant affirmation. If the primal scene of petishism is the fear of finding that we are not so different from animals, then to overcome this perversion would entail respecting the opacity of other creatures. Unable to make assumptions about these furry and feathery others, we may be pulled into a more material understanding of our connection with them. We would do well to extend this relationship to other human beings as well.[14]

尊重其他生物的非透明性