Introduction: Animism in a Planetary Frame

Philip Dickinson and Sam Durrant

I.

Animism as a term was first employed in a systematic way by the anthropologist E. B. Tylor to designate 'a belief in spiritual beings', a belief that for Tylor is common to all religions but which comes to be associated with 'primitive' religion and with the imputation of souls or spirits (*anima*) to nonhuman beings.[1] Most usages of the term inherit this basic definition of animism as the imputation of soul or spirit to nonhuman beings such as animals and plants, lakes and glaciers. But this very definition implies a kind of mistake: to speak of the 'imputation' of spirit is to insinuate that it isn't really there.[2] The very word animism, then, or at least its most familiar operative definition, suggests a reflex of (often disavowed) anthropological judgement, and risks reinscribing the onto-epistemological fracture that the entire apparatus of colonial anthropology sought to painstakingly assemble. Because nineteenth-century anthropology is irredeemably caught up within a colonial, racist temporality, in which animism is displaced by more sophisticated forms of religion and ultimately by science, the term ultimately negates the worldview that it designates, coming to signify a *mistaken* belief in spirits, a belief that fascinates but is neither shared by nor coeval with the colonial anthropologist.[3] In this sense, the crucial feature that distinguishes animism from non-animistic cosmologies is in fact a meta-feature, at root the presumption that animists *are wrong*. Indeed, the distinction between animism, understood as a comparative cosmology or a general category applicable to, and claimable by, a variety of peoples and communities in a wide range of locations and modes, and animists, defined as people historically subjugated in part by the very mobilisation of anthropological discourse, necessitates a degree of worry or critical vigilance in any endeavour to think or rethink animism.

In this light, the return to animism, and the emergence of a mode of ecological and post-human theorising sometimes dubbed 'new' or 'contemporary' animism, might seem surprising.[4] What is at stake in this body of work is, in part, the colonial history of anthropology itself: as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro puts it in his theory of multinatural perspectivism in Amazonia, the challenge is to turn this eminently colonial science into a vehicle for the 'permanent decolonisation of thought', by building into it a disorientating capacity to approach a radically multiperspectival or decentred world. There is no doubt that anthropology has to work hard to become such a vehicle -- for Viveiros de Castro, this involves approaching anthropology's reversed image, attending to its counter-description and counter-analysis within indigenous Amazonian knowledge practices.[5] This difficulty is amplified if animism is considered an ongoing practice of enacted relationality rather than a self-contained body of thought open to ethnographic description, if we speak, in short, not of animism but of 'animacy', indicating less an intellectual structure than a world prior to the differentiation of knowing and being that is foundational to western metaphysics.[6] Animism

is sometimes associated with new materialism, where the latter may be defined as the effort to articulate a commingling or allyship of the human and nonhuman, a shared and agential vibrancy or vitality that enmeshes all things. But if new materialism tends to sidestep (or divest itself of) its relation to 'old' historical materialism, new animism directly recalls a long and problematic discursive and material history, while seeking to correct the central anthropological mistake: for the new animism, we might say, the point of using this word is to recall the mistake not of the animists but of those who misrepresented them. New animism tries to recuperate animist cosmologies for the epoch of the anthropocene, but it is also troubled (though not always self-consciously) by the discursive violence of coloniality, with its catastrophic consequences for people and the planet.

While some of the work cited here exhibits a dizzying theoretical intensity -- Viveiros de Castro's *Cannibal Metaphysics* is a case in point -- much of the work that lays a more direct claim to the label 'animist' avows a pragmatic focus. For Graham Harvey, editor of *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism* (2013), new animism circumnavigates the ontological question of whether or not (non-human) spirits exist in favour of a more practical, epistemological emphasis on how we might come to know and relate to 'other-than-human' beings.[7] For Harvey, the new animism 'refers 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 (*Handbook* p5). The concept of personhood works overtime in this formulation, moving out from a familiar, multicultural notion of respect for other human persons and cultures towards a more radical or 'posthuman' notion of respect for the 'personhood' of animals, bodies of water, trees, mountains, glaciers. A belief in other-than-human souls is re-articulated as a respect for other-than-human persons, which implies a movement from a religious or epistemological register to an ethical and ethico-political one, from a language that to some might sound wooly and new agey to a more engaged and activist language of rights and sovereignty. The potential pay-offs here are reflected in campaigns to have legal rights of personhood assigned to non-human beings. Discussing the Lake Erie Ecosystem Bill of Rights, Robert Macfarlane explores the significance of the shift from considering Lake Erie as a 'bundle of ecosystem services' to understanding it as a living being: the lake has both liveliness and vulnerability 'reassigned' to it, displacing its 'instrumentalised roles as sump and source'.[8] In such campaigns, often advanced by coalitions of indigenous peoples, the category of legal personhood may *approximate* ideas of nonhuman personhood inherent in many indigenous cosmologies.[9] This does not necessarily mean treating lakes and forests as if they were human (though it might, depending on what 'the human' means). Rather than achieving human rights, lakes would have lake rights, forests forest rights, and so on. But personhood has also always been, within the Western tradition, an exclusionary category, a designation of privilege and racialised sovereignty, bound up with property logics and involving the granting of lesser rights to less than men.[10] In this sense, the assignation of 'lake rights' to lakes risks further codifying the anthropocene as a hierarchical relation of beings. There is a tension between personhood as a radically inclusive category based on the potentially ensouled life of all forms of matter and personhood as a marker of distinction and privilege that shores up human supremacy.

Notwithstanding this complexity, Bruno Latour has declared that what is surprising today is not that people 'still believe in animism' but rather that they continue to harbour the truly naive belief in a deanimated cosmos, 'just at the moment when they themselves multiply the agencies with which they are more deeply entangled every day'.[11] While this is something of an off-hand remark, it suggests the potential need for some version of animistic thinking in the effort to apprehend the planetary predicament of the anthropocene. The fantasy of the de-animated cosmos -- and, its corollary, the singularly animated figure of Man -- must be jettisoned in pursuit of a truer and more enabling understanding of distributed agencies. In this sense, the critical return to animism, not only within but also beyond anthropology, as evidenced by recent special issues of *e-flux*, *Performance Research* and *Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, relates in part to a number of contemporary, broadly post-humanist projects that bear at least superficial (and sometimes substantial) affinities with it, such as actor-network-theory, new materialism, object-oriented ontology, speculative realism and thing theory. If these labels are forms of intellectual 'branding', it is worth observing that they are comparatively baggage-free, as if they announce a genuinely novel approach. The same cannot be said of animism. This becomes a productive fact for the essays that comprise this special issue. As a rule, the essays that follow open up a critical distance from the discourse of 'animism' (new or old), while exploring what new avenues or productive obstacles might be presented by foregrounding the notably 'thick' concept of animism in particular.[12] While some versions of new animism risk a naive co-optation, or aim to supplement the basically EuroWestern academic project of new materialism with the overlooked epistemological resources of indigenous communities, the task might instead be to ensure that animism is thought *with and through* the ongoing histories of imperial domination and ecological damage, as part and parcel of the modernity/coloniality nexus.[13]

It is this inevitable movement from a religious to a politico-historical discourse that makes animism into a topic befitting of a special issue of *New Formations*. To understand the world as a transspecies 'community of living persons' is to radically reconceive the *polis* and thus the laws (*nomos*) that govern the *polis*. But in the spirit of leftist critique that underwrites *New Formations*, this special issue also seeks to put pressure on the liberal, relativistic notion of respect that underpins Harvey's definition of new animism by insisting on the relations of power that continue to inhere between different human persons (not least the Western anthropologist and the native informant), as well as between persons and nonpersons, people and things.

II.

The cover image to this issue of *New Formations* shows a 'petrograph' by Warren Cariou, a Métis scholar and creative practioner, showing strip mines in the distance and, in the foreground, a tailings pond, containing the toxic run-off from surface mining operations. This is a scene from the Athabasca tar sands of Alberta, Canada, one of the most destructively mined regions of the planet, containing one of the largest known reservoirs of crude bitumen globally.[14] The Alberta tar sands (which the provincial and national governments have sought

to rebrand more benignly as 'oil sands') are an environmental catastrophe, not only because the sheer size of the reserves means that their extraction is incompatible with the future habitability of the planet, but also because the particular form and distribution of the bitumen (much of which lies under ancient boreal forests) demands seriously destructive innovations in the techniques of extractivism.

Cariou's petrographs refract the ecocides of the anthropocene that the 'new' animism is in part a response to. They are also themselves an aesthetic response to the tar sands which engage materially with their worrying animacy. Petrography is petroleum photography: it uses the heavy crude substance of Athabasca bitumen, gathered from the banks of the Athabasca river near Cariou's home, to create a series of images that depict the landscapes of tar sands development. Cariou describes this as a work of re-mediation, understood not in the senses of remedy and repair but in the more modest registers of diverting and repurposing: some of the bitumen that might otherwise have been bound for petrochemical extraction is instead put to a new use, generating these mirror-like images less of light and shade than sheen and buff. In one sense, petrography seems to be its own kind of extractivist activity, as the river's oil deposits must be mixed and processed in specific (and polluting) ways to make them photosensitive, but Cariou, who wrote his PhD on William Blake, describes a Blakean relationship of struggle against and collaboration with his chosen, toxic material.[15] Insofar as the bitumen itself is a participant in the production of these images, there is an animism to Cariou's work: the agencies of the subject and object (to dwell within these constructs for now) participate in this shared project, as the bitumen, and the sunlight, and even a fly caught on the surface of one of the petrographs, become entangled in an aleatory creative process that is less than fully intentional. But petrography is also a creative contestation of fossil modernity's appropriation of the animacy of carbon, the beginnings of some alternative process that carefully transfigures rather than combusts its material, as if in pursuit of a counter-animation of this substance that would also imbue it with a (literally) reflective and critical spirit, with a historical 'memory' of the destruction of nature, imaged on the very surface of the oil.

As an entry point into the question of animism, Cariou's petrographs are suggestive of some of the distinctive preoccupations of this special issue. The essays that follow insistently read animism in relation to the toxicities of modernity. Rather than imagining animism only as an umbrella term for a set of non-modern beliefs found in a variety of locations, 'animism' becomes a more dynamic term intimately bound up with and within modernity as material and spiritual project.

III

We open with an article that mobilises animism in a way that interrupts the normalisation of post-humanist thought as a form of 'ethical piety'. In '"We're all vermin": tactical predation, interspecies media arts and perspectivism', Bogna Konior demonstrates that animism is profoundly relational, but this relationality reflects less a domain of mutual care than the structuring conditions of interspecies animosity. Konior draws on the perspectivism of

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Rane Willerslev in order to theorise the 'tactical' predation of the Japanese art collective, Chim↑Pom. What emerges is an animism of predation and antagonism transposed to the contemporary megacity, one that disrupts the cosy identification between Tokyo teenagers and the cute, commodified rodent in Pokemon by exposing the alternative (truer) relation between the teenagers and the actual super rats that share their Big Macs. Konior evokes a 'crooked' interspecies coexistence or 'damned comradeship', where the anthropocene appears as a shared state of verminhood, in a world of waste and territorial conflict. Notwithstanding the avowed cynicism of Chim↑Pom, there is a challenging ethics at stake here, where 'respect' is 'respect for the enemy', grounded in a material antagonism that is the basis for a process of personalisation radically at odds with the commodification of animal lives under late capitalism.

Jason Allen-Paisant's 'Animist Time and the White Anthropocene' is a more affirmative articulation of the possibilities of animism, juxtaposing the anthropocentric time of capitalism, in which time becomes an expendable resource, with the deep time of animist cultures. The advent of the anthropocene has forced us all to question our models of time, but Allen-Paisant argues that we still have much to learn from those humans who have never ceased facing the threat of extinction, and thus already possess an acute planetary awareness of human vulnerability and interspecies dependency. The négritude movement, and above all the work of Aimé Césaire, argued for the value of primitive thought not as the mark of those who lack culture but as the reaction of those who have been deprived, through slavery and colonialism, of a vital relation to nature. Shucking the colonial baggage that the term primitive has acquired in English, Césaire returns the word to the Old French root, *primitif*, meaning primary, to indicate the necessity of a direct, vital engagement with the cosmos. Spiritual practices such as Haitian vodou, and the poetry inspired by such practices, can be considered animist in so far as they constitute 'dwelling practices oriented towards intersubjectivity, rather than extraction', practices that energetically resist the commodification and separation of the human and the nonhuman. For Césaire, this primary relation to the world is precisely what Western culture has abandoned following Plato's attempt to separate art from ritual, to redefine mimesis not as ecstatic rite of identification but as the quasi-rational task of accurate representation. His poetry activates a primal, shamanic capacity latent within all humans, what Benjamin described as the mimetic faculty to become-similar and what Césaire himself describes as 'penetrating the universe'.

This connection between animism and mimesis is also at the heart of Sam Durrant's 'Critical Spirits: New Animism as Historical Materialism', where mimesis once more stands not for realist representation but for the impulse to become similar. This impulse is at work on several levels, not only in the relationships between human and nonhuman beings within animist cosmologies but also between the new animists and the indigenous worlds and knowledge practices they approach. New animism may thus on first blush evince a familiar ethos of liberal multicultural respect while also tacitly operating as identification, as if new animism were ultimately about *following* animism, even *becoming* animist. While new animism is often read alongside new materialism, Durrant suggests that new animism is more productively read alongside the 'old' (i.e. historical) materialism, and in particular the

Frankfurt School's investment in animism as an alternative to the objectifying relations of capitalist modernity. But their dialectical recognition that capitalism is also a form of animism, and animism itself an 'early' mode of domination, is a salutory antidote to the nostalgia implicit in some versions of new animism. A properly critical animist materialism needs to avow its investment in the animate world without succumbing to romanticisation. Its aim is to generate an identification not with the 'natural world' but with a fully historicised nature, an anticapitalist alliance with other forms of damaged life, both human and nonhuman. The crucial role of the aesthetic here, and in particular its power both to allegorise and ironise its own investments, is explored through a reading of Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man*, a film which 'counteranimates' the genocidal and ecocidal traditions of the Hollywood Western , in order to generate both inter-human and inter-species forms of solidarity.

From a biopolitical perspective, both nonmodern and modern cultures are exercises in power and possession, practices that produce different distributions of the animate, different accounts of who or what counts as life. In 'Dispossessing Animism: *Zong!* and Spiritual Baptism' Philip Dickinson turns to the poetry of Marlene NourbeSe Philip in order to explore the possibility of an non-distributive, 'dispossessive' animism. Philip's poem draws on both the juridical language of slavery, which understands slaves as possessions that can be legally thrown overboard, and the language of Spiritual Baptism, which involves a form of spirit possession. It would be tempting to valourise the latter mode of possession over the former and present Spiritual Baptism as a mode of reanimating the deanimated body/soul of the slave, reclaiming personhood or restoring voice. But Dickinson shows how Philip's poem is a search for another language, a language that would not seek to possess anyone or anything, an 'animism that would dispossess itself' by renouncing 'the distributive power of system itself'. More precisely, the poem is in search not so much of a *language*, which would inevitably become another system, but of a *sound*. Here Dickinson draws on Fred Moten's interest in the 'phonic materiality' of sound as a dispossessive force, a resistance of the object that becomes an affective resource for objectified black bodies. In this reading, sound becomes the expression of a singularity that, rather than reclaiming humanity, refuses to participate in the discursive construction of Man. Philip's highly ritualised performances of her poem break down words into sounds, becoming a disclosure of the process by which animism might renounce its own systematising power. What we are left with is a kind of zero degree animism, an animism that affirms life while refusing to distribute it.

Arthur Rose begins his fascinating essay on 'Asbestos Animacy; or Salamander Cotton' by citing Walter Benjamin's famous observations in 'The Storyteller' about the crisis of narratable experience produced by technological advances which leave the 'tiny fragile human body' assailed by the ungraspable forces of capitalist modernity. Asbestos, as modern industrial technology, is a good example of one such malevolent force that has unleashed a material history of harm. In order to tell the story of this harm, asbestos itself is often attributed an agency, a liveliness that variously functions both to occlude and to expose the agency of the asbestos industry. Rose engages with Mel Chen's concept of linguistic animacy to explore what is at stake in seemingly banal statements such as 'Asbestos still kills around

5000 workers a year' as well as poems by survivors of mesothelioma in which asbestos is personified and granted malevolent agency. Ultimately, he argues for a critically reflexive mode of linguistic animacy that allows us to recognize both our own linguistic agency in granting agency to others and 'the shaping force of capitalism'; in short what Rose describes as our *interanimation*. While remaining cognisant of the dangers of aesthetisation which Benjamin associates with Fascism, Rose nevertheless follows Benjamin's conviction that storytelling remains the only way we have of working through the contradictions of modernity. He turns, by way of *analogy,* to poetry about the salamander, mythically associated with asbestos' ability to resist fire. At the level of content, the poems function to trouble the conventional hierarchies of animacy by which we routinely distinguish between the animal, the vegetal and the mineral. But their linguistic animacy consists in the way in which they both deploy and critically reflect on our propensity for magical thinking, our very need to analogise our conflicted experience of the world. Instead of turning to discourses such as new materialism that bracket human subjectivity in order to wax lyrical about the agency of the nonhuman world, Rose demonstrates the political importance of understanding the world as interanimated. Indeed, to recall, as Rose does, Benjamin's interest in the creaturely, our interanimation might also be parsed as our inter*subjection*. As in Durrant's essay, historical materialism remains a crucial resource for holding capitalism–and corporations–to account even when, or rather precisely when, agency, intention and thus culpability, remain complex and contested.

Like Rose, Brendon Nicholls explores the animistic resources of language in the face of environmental catastrophe, taking as his archive the Bleek and Lloyd transcriptions of /Xam poetry. Nicholls argues that the /Xam language allows for metamorphic 'conversions between species and lifespans' that allow the /Xam to outwit their own extinction. If land theft, genocide, drought and famine leave the /Xam as facing a 'deprivation of ground' that Bruno Latour argues is now our common fate, then language becomes a crucial site for a form of spiritual regrounding, an eminently practical magic. Drawing on Tim Ingold's understanding of animacy as the ways in which we 'reciprocally bring one another into existence' Nicholls shows how this principle of 'reciprocal co-genesis' is embodied in the morphological grammar of /Xam itself. He focuses on the problem of how to translate a fragment transcribed and translated under incarceration that seemingly elegises the death of a rain-maker, shot by a Boer farmer while travelling in the form of a lion. Rather than reading the 'poem' as simply elegising the loss of the one who could bring rain and thus as presaging the extinction of the /Xam, Nicholls reads it as a complex signature game, a 'template of transmutation' in which the speaker secures his survival by literally sounding his intimate relation with the land, signalling the homonymic relation between the rainmaker's name and that of the lions, maidens and snakes involved in the cosmological process of making rain. Drawing on Lewis-Williams' reading of San cave paintings as evidence of shaman's therioanthropic transmutations into animals, Nicholls suggests that /Xam is itself therionymic, performatively naming into being the transformations that the shaman enacts, or more precisely 'theriosonic', given the phonetic near equivalence of the /Xam names for lion and man, maiden, snake and whirlwind. Although Nicholls does not put it this way, it as if the /Xam engineered a language that mimetically affirms a world that is itself in a radical 'state of

resemblances, the domain of the correspondences', but without any of the traces of nostalgia, melancholia or self-pity that often accompany such formulations.[16]

Colonial anthropology keeps animism at arm's length by defining it as an erroneous belief in spirits. In his seminal *Magical Criticism: The Recourse of Savage Philosophy (2007)*, Christopher Bracken deconstructs this distinction between primitive belief and empirical science, by showing how a range of putatively modern thinkers turn out to be closet believers or savage philosophers. Bracken's contribution to this issue, 'The Animism of Belief: How to Merge with Others', extends this deconstructive enterprise by looking at the ways in which aesthetic experience – films, poems, anything that engages in vivid description – has an animating force, an affective energy that demands of its audience a form of belief. The question for Bracken is not do we believe in animism, but what is it that compels one to believe, even while disavowing that belief and inventing credulous others as 'props', as the true (which is to say, mistaken) believers? The prop or proxy allows us to deny the belief without in fact giving it up, a doublethink similar to that which structures every artistic, fictional encounter: I know that this is fiction, nevertheless I am animated (or rather, *it* animates *me*) as if it were real. Rather than a belief in animism there is then an inescapable animism involved in believing – even in non-believing, denial, disavowal: belief continues to animate us even when we think we know the belief to be false, whether the 'us' involved here is a Hopi man donning a spirit mask or an ethnographer claiming not to believe in the primitive beliefs he studies. Merging with others, it turns out, is not so much an intentional choice, something which one sets out to do or not to do, as our ineluctable destiny.

Betti Marenko's 'Hybrid Animism: The Sensing Surfaces of Planetary Computation', explores sense-making modes that bypass the dualism of the rational/irrational, modern/nonmodern in the context of planetary computation. Marenko opens up the animistic dimensions of computation's impact on the human-nonhuman sensorium. The aim is to champion an affirmative account of 'hybrid animism' that can enable a better understanding of the different paths of subjectification that are possible, while eschewing both techno-euphoria and techno-dystopia and resisting the impulse to uncritically re-enchant the world. In extending, among an impressively diverse range of interlocutors, Felix Guattari's interest in Japanese technoanimism, Marenko explores how our experiences of digital technologies generate an experiential shift from mediation to immediation, which in turn challenges the centrality of human cognition: as we swipe and scroll we are 'swiped and scrolled' ourselves. Through a concluding thought experiment that engages the octopus whose camouflaging represents a kind of non-representational language, and whose skin, rather than enclosing a self-identical individual instead is itself a decentred technology of empathic communication, Marenko displays the stakes of an undivided and entangled form of human/nonhuman (or indifferently 'inhuman') relationality, bringing into focus the world of hybrid vibrancies that is our contemporary milieu.

The imperative to think relational entanglement rather than constitutional separation is also at stake in Russell West-Pavlov's 'From the Analysis of Animism to the Practice of Animacy as Politics'. West-Pavlov interrogates the residual traces of what he terms 'separative' thinking in the humanities, even in a context of increasingly automatic assertions of the

interconnectedness of social and ecological, human and nonhuman lives and networks. Even the impulse to integrate animism into a politicised version of the humanities can, ironically, suffer from the same separative tendency, segregating knowing and doing, analysis and practice. At the heart of West-Pavlov's essay is an extended dialogue with the work of the late Harry Garuba, through which he makes the case for an 'affirmative animacy' with no outside, where the task is not to supplement politics with animacy but rather to apprehend their prior inseparability.

If West-Pavlov opens up the question of the still under-realised political potential of a practice of animism, this special issue's concluding essay places a different kind of critical pressure on the return to animism. James Burton's 'Manimism: Worrying about the Relationship between Rationality and Animism', brings the special issue back to the 'worries' with which we began this introduction, reflecting upon the putatively decolonising impetus of new animism and associated post-humanist modes. While a renewed critical attention to indigenous cosmologies may from one vantage point contribute to the imagining of more ecumenical versions of the human, one might also worry at the timing of this return, insofar as it coincides with ongoing efforts to 'reform' Western thought in the wake of poststructuralism. Through a meticulous reading of Sylvia Wynter among others, Burton interrogates the historical endurance of the figure of modern/rational Man, explaining the senses in which Man has always been (M)animistic and exploring the dangers of the 'reform and resurgence' of Man in a reconstructed and newly self-critical guise. The danger is that by talking about animism, western thought is less decolonising itself than doing the same thing that it has always done: immunising itself against challenges to Man and his parochial mode of rationality.

IV

This special issue is bookended by essays that are sceptical, even cynical, about animism and its theoretical return. If the colonial approach to animism is defined by keeping the beliefs of others at a certain distance, then the new animism announces a certain rapprochement, a tacit aligning of belief structures, a good faith that replaces the bad faith of colonial anthropology. More simply, colonial condescension is replaced by multicultural (even multispecies) respect. As these essays have shown, however, one cannot simply overturn the Enlightenment and move (back) from scepticism to belief. The challenge, instead, is to keep alive the spirit of critique and to cultivate an openness to forms of speculative and magical thinking, doing and knowing. In this sense animism becomes something like a tactic, less a nonmodern way of life than a response to the twin genocidal and ecocidal drivers of colonial modernity. While anthropomorphism may function to enlarge our conception of what constitutes personhood or ensoulment, it can also function as a tactic of *enclosure* or *incorporation* in which a commodified nature is simply annexed as part of modernity's cultural imaginary, even while parts of the nonhuman world are rendered uninhabitable or extinct.

This last irony is what has motivated us, as the title of our special issue suggests, to place animism within a planetary frame. The term has acquired considerable momentum in the past

twenty years or so, most clearly as a term for indicating the perils of the anthropocene, the truly planetary nature of the predicament we find ourselves in. Other terms -- capitalocene, plantationocene -- are already conceptually vying with the anthropocene as the specific impacts of these historical formations become less and less deniable, but the planetary remains a useful designation both of what precisely is endangered and of the kinds of interhuman and ultimately interspecies identifications, solidarities and consciousnesses that need to be engendered. And this last term is why our special issue finds its place in *New Formations* and also perhaps why it will remain a misfit 'special' issue: how precisely do we move from class consciousness to planetary consciousness? Do notions of animism help us theorise the sovereignty and rights of nonhuman beings or does it bring rhetorics of rights and sovereignty into crisis? How does a reconsideration of who or what is animated and deanimated in late modernity force us into a reconsideration of how we do politics? What, precisely, is the new ground of the *polis*? If animism is above all a radical rethinking of what we have in common (*anima*, spiritedness, animacy, life) then how do the questions asked of animism in this issue inflect our understanding of the commons?

1 Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, London, John Murray, 1871, Vol 1 p383.

2 See James Burton's contribution to this issue.

3 Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1983.

4 Graham Harvey (ed.), *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2013.

5 Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, trans. Peter Skafish, Minneapolis, Univocal, 2014, p78.

6 Tim Ingold, 'Rethinking the animate, re-animating thought', *Ethnos*, 71, 1 (2006), 10.

7 Irving A. Hallowell, 'Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View', in Stanley Diamond (ed.), *Culture in History: Essays in Honor of Paul Radin*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1960, pp19-52.

8 Robert Macfarlane, 'Should this tree have the same rights as you?', *The Guardian*, 2 Nov 2019.

9 See, for example, Philippe Descola's discussion of Maurice Leenhardt's *De Kamo*, according to which full or true humanity in Amazonia is translatable as 'personage', a 'principle of existence clothed in a variety of appearances' distinct from humans as a species, rather than a privileged and clearly circumscribed self and body (Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, trans. Janet Lloyd, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2013, p25). Viveiros de Castro similarly describes human personhood as distinct from more familiar western ideas of the human and the person: 'human designates a relation, not a substance', and more than anything signifies the capacity to 'occupy a point of view' (*Cannibal Metaphysics*, pp58-59). In another context, see Graham Harvey's recent re-appraisal of Irving Hallowell's conversation with an Anishinaabe elder in his widely cited 'Ojibwa Ontology' ('If Not all Stones Are Alive. . . : Radical Relationality in Animism Studies, *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, 11, 4 (2017), 481–497.

10 Brenna Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property: Law, Land and Racial Regimes of Ownership*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2018; Charles Wills, 'Revisionist Ontologies: Theorizing White Supremacy', *Social and Economic Studies*, 43, 3 (1994), 105-134.

11 Bruno Latour, 'Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene', *New Literary History*, 45, 1 (2014), 7.

12 See Betti Marenko's contribution to this issue.

13 Aníbal Quijano, 'Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality', *Cultural Studies*, 21, 2 (2007), 168-178. For the former tendency, see for example Matthew Hall, *Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany*, where the task is to 'survey' human cultures to find the best ways of thinking about the environment (Albany NY, SUNY Press, p3).

14 See www.aer.ca.

15 Warren Cariou, 'Petrography', www.warrencariou.com/petrography.

16 Walter Benjamin, 'The Image of Proust', *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections,* trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt, New York, Schocken Books, 1968, p211.