



Emilio Vavarella, *Animal Cinema*, 2017.  
HD video, 00:12:12, aspect ratio: 16:9, colors, sounds.  
Courtesy the artist and GALLERIAPIÙ, Bologna.

● (UN)COVER LETTER

● ESSAY

# ANIMAL CINEMA

For this second issue of PALM, “New Visions of the Living World”, I have invited a number of artists who have sought to escape anthropocentrism, to share their experiences and thoughts in the section (Un)cover Letter. We are here with Emilio Vavarella, who reveals behind-the-scenes and after-the-fact reflections on his video piece *Animal Cinema* (2017).

*Federica Chiocchetti / Photocaptionist*

*Animal Cinema* (2017) is my first film. It stems from my art practice and

expands my investigation of non-anthropocentric audiovisual experiences. I believe that a new regime of moving images is emerging in the tension between ideas of sensorial contact, encounter and closeness, and the presence of the unthought, the unsummonable, the inexplicable and undecidable. In what follows, I describe the thinking process behind the work and lay down the basis for my philosophical understanding of non-anthropocentric images. I created *Animal Cinema* through the montage of found footage that shows animals autonomously operating stolen GoPro cameras. These video materials, downloaded from YouTube between 2012 and 2017, are reorganized in *Animal Cinema* as a constant unfolding of non-human modes of being. Although the videos jump from one animal kingdom to another, bridging sandy beaches, underwater worlds, rocky mountains, forests, skies and urban environments, *Animal Cinema* tries to hide all cuts and all human editing. If Bernhard Siegert is right, and “the difference between humans and animals is one that depends on the mediation of a cultural technique”, we are witnessing the rise of techniques that remediate such a difference<sup>1</sup>. “Perhaps”, wrote Deleuze and Guattari in *What is Philosophy?*, “art begins with the animal”<sup>2</sup>. Or perhaps we have inadvertently moved beyond Pooja Rangan’s idea of “handing over the media apparatus” to non-humans in order to engender interactions that destabilize a traditional view of the subject<sup>3</sup>. *Animal Cinema*, in fact, could

demonstrate that the idea of “handing over” is unnecessary if non-human animals have the opportunity to take the initiative. “Non-human actors”, confirms Nigel Thrift, “are increasingly acting within the corral that used to be called human, making new materials [in this case videos] that are not one thing or the other but weave together elements of both”<sup>4</sup>.

My filmic approach is particularly inspired by the work of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, and builds upon the conclusion of his second volume on cinema, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, which ends by suggesting a fundamental link between cinema and intelligibility. I believe that we are experiencing a shift in the readability of cinematic images, a shift in their intensities, a shift in how these images come about and in how we relate to them. *Animal Cinema* expresses all these intuitions through its articulation of cinematic animality. To see the body of the animal in action is to learn something about it, moving closer to the non-human fabric of the world. “There is as much thought in the body as there is shock and violence in the brain”, said Deleuze<sup>5</sup>. Thus, *Animal Cinema* evokes the animality within our own thinking process, because, according to Deleuze and Guattari, “thought searches [...] less in the manner of someone who possesses a method than [in the manner] of a dog that seems to be making uncoordinated leaps”<sup>6</sup>. Yet, to watch is to think, and to think is “to learn

what a non-thinking body is capable of”<sup>7</sup>. The more we learn about non-human bodies, the more we understand them as sites of non-human thought.

Structurally, *Animal Cinema* is composed of long shots edited together through a montage that highlights continuity, proximity, sensorial contact and constant becoming. “What constitutes sensation is the becoming animal”, wrote Deleuze and Guattari<sup>8</sup>. And non-anthropocentric intensities seem to emerge from the unfolding of images of improbable encounters and sensorial proximity. In other words, these images seem to strive for a contact testified by the imprint of the creatures populating *Animal Cinema*. “Cinema,” says Deleuze, “can bring us close to things or take us away from them and revolve around them, [suppressing] both the anchoring of the subject and the horizon of the world”<sup>9</sup>. And in *Animal Cinema* we revolve so closely around the animal that we literally end up inside its mouth and enveloped by its tentacles.





Emilio Vavarella, *Animal Cinema*, 2017.  
HD video, 00:12:12, aspect ratio: 16:9, colors, sounds.  
Courtesy the artist and GALLERIAPIÙ, Bologna.

I chose this form for *Animal Cinema* because I consider its images as paradigmatic examples of the shift toward non-anthropocentrism that I've noticed within contemporary moving image regimes. This is certainly brought about by structural transformations, capitalist accelerations, cultural reformulations, aesthetic reconfigurations, technological innovations, and new material and conceptual possibilities. According to Deleuze, cinema responds to its crisis first and foremost by turning on itself: with apparently “no more stories to tell, it would take itself as object and would be able to tell only its own story”<sup>10</sup>. Deleuze's intuition of an increasingly more automated “cinema about cinema” seems to prefigure a contemporary cinema in which the human is neither at the center nor necessary. We may no longer be in a world that, following Jean-Luc Godard's vision, was “making cinema for itself”<sup>11</sup>. Rather, we may be in a

world that keeps remaking and remixing the film of its own modes of being - human and non-human - all together and simultaneously.

We can feel non-anthropocentric images. But how can we analyze them? One possibility is that of using Deleuze's typology of images. His work on cinema revolves around the concepts of *movement-image* and *time-image*. These concepts were produced in strict dialogue with the classification of images and signs of American logician Charles Sanders Peirce, and with the support of the philosophy of Henry Bergson. To begin discussing the *movement-image*, we first need to clarify what we mean by movement. In Deleuze's work movement depends on something that happens in time, and that extends and unfolds itself in time through movement. Movement is understood as something that takes place, that requires placement, and that modifies and activates space. Deleuze commented on Bergson's first thesis on movement, originally presented in *L'évolution créatrice*, as follows: "Movement is distinct from the space covered. Space covered is past, movement is present, the act of covering. The space covered is divisible, indeed infinitely divisible whilst movement is indivisible, or cannot be divided without changing qualitatively each time it is divided"<sup>12</sup>.

For Deleuze, cinema is not experienced as a "movement with positions in

space or instants in time”<sup>13</sup>. Rather, cinema “immediately gives us a *movement-image*”, which is one of the main types of images we see not only in a movie theater, but also all around us<sup>14</sup>. I’ve looked closely at the three main types of *movement-images* conceptualized by Deleuze: the *perception-image*, the *action-image* and the *affection-image*. All three always exist in relation to a subject (what he calls a “center of indetermination”) - and all three produce an indirect image of time. The first of these images is the *perception-image*.

According to Deleuze, perception is divided between an “objective perception that is indistinguishable from the thing”<sup>15</sup> and a subjective perception, in which “we perceive the thing, minus that which does not interest us as a function of our need”<sup>16</sup>. Deleuze also says that there’s obviously perception in all kinds of images, therefore whenever we mention the *movement-image* we imply a perception of movement. The *perception-image* is the perception of perception, a ground zero that, in Peircian terms, comes before all other types of images. But what kind of *perception-images* can we find in *Animal Cinema*? *Animal Cinema* opens up a window on forms of non-human perception that would be naturally foreclosed to us. It asks us to relate to the animal, but it does not explain



how. It requires a constant shift in perceptive registers, which need to quickly readapt to non-human perspectives in order to stay with the animal. , especially at the beginning, cinema was “forced to imitate natural perception”<sup>17</sup>. But as the *perception-images* show, that does not seem to be the case anymore. Nowadays, it is more likely that the human is forced to imitate artificial or non-human perception modes.

Thus, almost “imperceptibly,” we move “from perception to action”<sup>18</sup>.

Whereas the *perception-image* relates movement to bodies and to space, action relates to acts and to time through the operations of the *action-image*. The abundance of this type of images in *Animal Cinema* is what makes it a cinema of behaviors. Then, in the interstice between the perceptive and the active (the interstice occupied by the subject), Deleuze situates the affective, which “surges in the center of indetermination,” between perception and action<sup>19</sup>. Whereas for Deleuze and Guattari “the affect is [...] man’s non-human becoming”,<sup>20</sup> the *affection-image* is “both a type of image and a component of all images” that is best expressed in the close-up<sup>21</sup>. The close-ups in *Animal Cinema* reveal the affects of salivating mouths, disquieting teeth and humid tongues: the “feeling-thing” of the entity that Jean Epstein remarked upon<sup>22</sup>. Here, we temporarily stop wondering about the origin of such images: were they uploaded on YouTube? By whom? When? All questions fade into the background when

we are faced with the open jaws of a bear or a lion<sup>23</sup>. As Deleuze puts it, “the event itself, the affective, the effect, goes beyond its own causes”<sup>24</sup> and is abstracted “from all spatio-temporal coordinates”<sup>25</sup>. *Animal Cinema* reverts Robert Bresson’s idea that the beast represented the perfect example of an enabler of pure affects: “possessing the innocence of him who does not have to choose [and] only knows the effect of the non-choices or choices of man”<sup>26</sup>. Here, instead, the human cannot choose, and can only be affected by the animal. The human, here, is the one who can only know the effect of the choices (and of the non-choices) of the beasts. And when, as in the final shot of *Animal Cinema*, we are confronted with the image of a flipped landscape, shot by a GoPro operated by an eagle, we move beyond the sensory-motor schema of the *movement-image* and we enter the space of the *time-image*.

Deleuze recognizes *time-images* as symptomatic of a specific regime of images that emerged at the end of World War II. According to him, something subtle yet fundamental changed in that historical phase. More precisely, images started referring to situations that were increasingly more dispersive, as if the “fiber of the universe which prolonged events into one another”<sup>27</sup> had definitively broken, and time was “no longer the measure of

movement but movement [had become] the perspective of time”<sup>28</sup>.

Whereas time in classic cinema was a sub-product of movement, post-war images largely gave rise to a direct representation of time: a *time-image*. The symptom indicative of the *time-image* refers to its ability to alter our sensory-motor capacities.

In *Animal Cinema*, this happens mostly through its montage, structured as an “organic composition of relative movement”<sup>29</sup>. In it, we are led to experience a continuous and organic sensorial representation - which includes licking, touching, gripping and clawing - resulting in “a pure sensory image, [...] a pure touching”<sup>30</sup>. Organic montage, for Deleuze, is associated with organic descriptions in which “the real that is assumed is recognizable [...] even if it is interrupted”<sup>31</sup>. *Animal Cinema* is characterized by a naturalist point of view and an organic montage whose “time as primary matter” produces *time-images*<sup>32</sup>. It operates a “correlation between a non-human matter,” (such as the animal and the internet), “and a superhuman eye” (such as the cameras and YouTube’s algorithms), while showing how non-anthropocentric image regimes can be characterized by very different kinds of images and montage<sup>33</sup>.





Emilio Vavarella, *Animal Cinema*, 2017.  
HD video, 00:12:12, aspect ratio: 16:9, colors, sounds.  
Courtesy the artist and GALLERIAPIÙ, Bologna.

*Time-images* need montage just as much as *movement-images* do. In fact, the perception of time depends on montage. But time also represents a unity that is larger than anything else: a whole, an “unalterable form filled by change” and filled by the operations of montage<sup>34</sup>. I believe that non-anthropocentric intensities are characterized by a montage that is constantly referring to an opening, to a whole beyond our grasping ability. Even though all films are products of this world and mostly point to it, they also often find their internal cohesion in a limit that separates them from the world. Non-anthropocentric regimes, instead, are characterized by the automatic overcoming of such limit, in such a way that their images are in a closer and deeper relation with the Open. For Deleuze, the only thing that

coincides with the Open is what he calls “the whole”, because “everything which is closed is artificially closed”<sup>35</sup>. For Bergson, the whole is “an indivisible continuity,” [37] and Deleuze agrees, opposing the Open-whole to the closed set<sup>37</sup>. A set presents informatic content and is organized by framing: “the closed system determined by the frame can be considered in relation to the data that it communicates”<sup>38</sup>. Sets are inescapable, and no image regimes can function without the framing mechanism of a set.

*Animal Cinema* is built upon a series of closed sets. We could consider as a set the 11 videos selected to produce the work, or my 72 computer folders containing all the videos downloaded from YouTube from which those 11 were chosen. Slightly larger sets are constituted by the approximately 200 videos I found on YouTube, between 2012 and 2017, that showed animals stealing cameras. But what happens if we count, instead, all 2.268.000.000 videos on YouTube, with YouTube being the main set of *Animal Cinema*? YouTube consists of 46.000 years of watchable content, growing, as of 2017, at the rate of 300 hours every minute. Certainly, its temporal dimension matters, as it points toward an avatar of the Open (the future), but I am skeptical that playing with numbers can reveal something about images that we do not already know. We must consider *Animal Cinema* for what it is: it has a given length (12 minutes and 12 seconds), was produced in 2017 in relation to a given set of around two billion available videos, and is

characterized by a montage that organizes footage taken from 11 discreet videos.

Montage is, once again, crucial. In *Animal Cinema* it produces false continuity by hiding, as much as possible, all cuts and editing between the animal videos. “False continuity”, as Deleuze puts it, “is in its own right a dimension of the Open, which escapes sets and their parts”<sup>39</sup>. The Open is approachable “by means of continuities [and] cutting”<sup>40</sup> that are “deduced from movement-images and their relationships”<sup>41</sup>. Fragmentation is inescapable: “the transformations or new distributions of a continuum consistently end in a fragmentation”<sup>42</sup>. But it is through this fragmentation that we can think of a continuum that extends beyond our reach and thus releases “the consciousness or thought with which [the images] were loaded”<sup>43</sup>. Moreover, the title and the final credits seem to firmly reintroduce the work within an anthropocentric dimension, but, by “interrupting” its flow, they also reinforce the sense of spontaneity in the videos produced by the animals. In so doing, the only elements that clearly show human intervention allow the rest of the images to flow one after the other reiterating their fundamental non-anthropocentric qualities.

Finally, montage is a fundamental part of our analysis because “if from the point of view of the human eye, montage is undoubtedly a construction”, says Deleuze, “from the point of view of another eye, it ceases to be one; it is the pure vision of a non-human universal interaction”<sup>44</sup>. There is in montage something that approximates a non-human perception, something “that we have to construct [...] since it is given only to the eye which we do not have” [46]. Dziga Vertov’s concept of the non-human eye (the *Kino-Eye*), for example, offers a way of thinking about montage as that which carries “perception into things”<sup>46</sup>. This *Kino-Eye*, says Deleuze, is not necessarily “the eye of the fly or of an eagle [or] the eye of another animal”, as it happens in *Animal Cinema*. But it is always “the eye of matter, the eye in matter, [...] a machine-assemblage of movement-images”<sup>47</sup>.

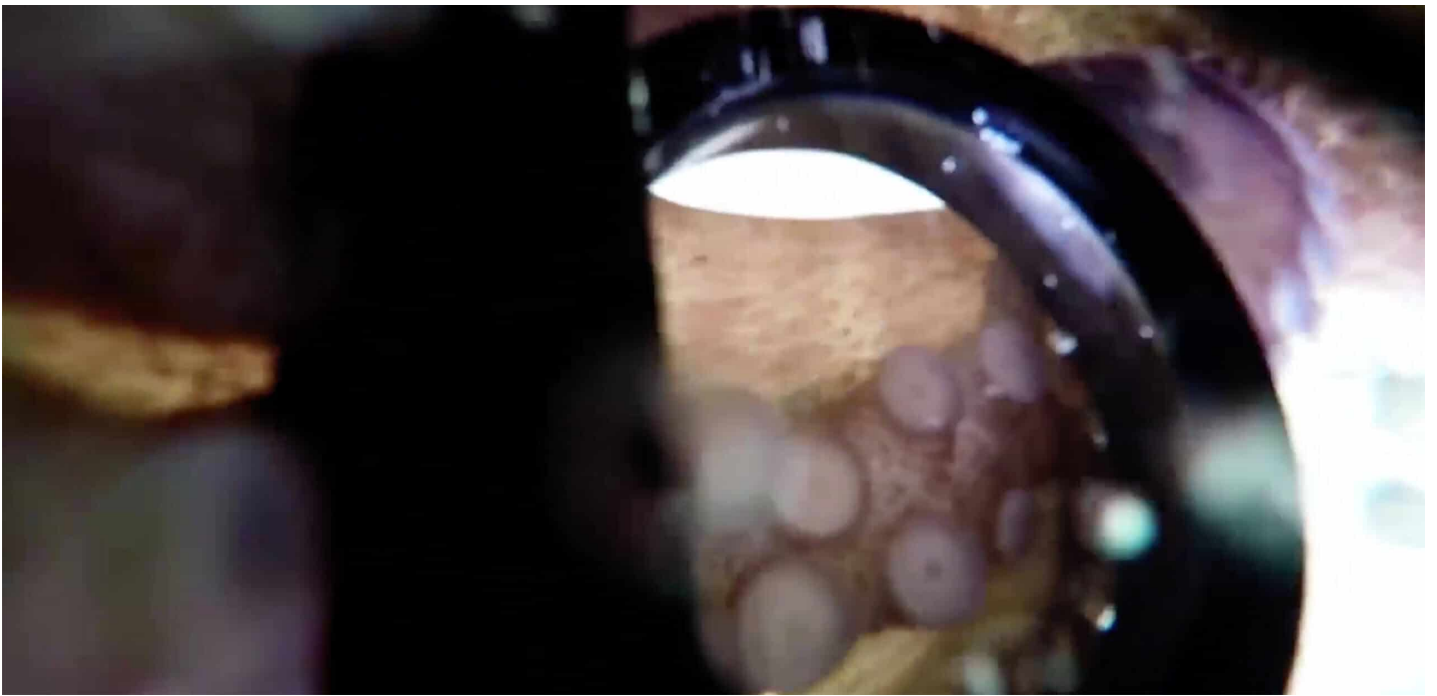
Thus, non-anthropocentric image regimes are often characterized by the way they challenge human perception and point to a non-human dimension; all qualities embodied by *Animal Cinema*. In other words, non-anthropocentric images always defy the cliché. A cliché “is a sensory-motor image of the thing”, and, as Deleuze has explained in detail, cinema’s images always tend to sink to the state of cliché<sup>48</sup>. This is why he highlights, in *Cinema 2*, that for Bergson we never perceive images in their entirety:

“we always perceive less of it [...] by virtue of our economic interests, ideological beliefs and psychological demands”<sup>49</sup>. “But if our sensory-motor schemata jam or break”, as in the case of *Animal Cinema*, “then a different type of image can appear: a pure optical image without metaphor, [which] brings out the thing in itself, literally, in its excess of horror or beauty”<sup>50</sup>. The non-human animal becomes the companion of the network, producing “art beyond knowledge”, or according to Deleuze, “creation beyond information”<sup>51</sup>. As humans, we can fully experience *Animal Cinema*. And I suppose that an engaged and repeated view of the work will produce either a sense of sublime ecstasy or of boredom, a feeling of sensorial alienation or of nausea. These are, and not by chance, feelings and experiences close to accounts of mystical experiences and drug experimentations. And, once again, it is no coincidence that the non-anthropocentric idea of reaching an aesthetic, communicative or phenomenological dimension beyond that of common human perception has its deepest roots in the practices and theories of mystics and visionaries across many cultures and times. We can agree with Deleuze and Guattari in saying that “one does not think without becoming something else, [...] an animal”<sup>52</sup>. Or by becoming something smaller, such as “a molecule” or “a particle”<sup>53</sup>. Or by becoming something bigger: an angel, a god, a devil...



To say it with Deleuze, the images produced by the animals of *Animal Cinema* replace “the eyes of nature” through unexpected framings of *movement-images*<sup>54</sup>. In its use of organic descriptions and false continuity, *Animal Cinema* produces a special kind of *time-images*. It configures its images as a documentative flux whose protagonists are not simply characters that have renounced theatricality and have “entered life” (as Jean Renoir wished) – but are “life” that unfolds itself under the accidental hyper-realist gaze of a camera<sup>55</sup>. For Deleuze, realism is constituted by “milieux and modes of behavior, milieux which actualize and modes of behavior which embody”<sup>56</sup>. And *Animal Cinema* presents a constant modulation of an embodied milieu that connects human and non-human layers of the world through sensorial presence. *Animal Cinema* presents us with a space that may be visible and visitable, but not fully livable. That is, a space built for animal perspectives, a space knowable through animal senses that we do not (yet) have. Moreover, *Animal Cinema* requires a subject dominated by a flux of images in a febrile acceleration. This sensorial overload is fundamental, since it allows us to approach the “unthinkable worlds” of non-human agency and alien matter that until now have been primarily investigated by demonology, occultism and mysticism.





Emilio Vavarella, *Animal Cinema*, 2017.  
HD video, 00:12:12, aspect ratio: 16:9, colors, sounds.  
Courtesy the artist and GALLLERIAPIÙ, Bologna.

To conclude, in his recent speculation on the horror of philosophy, Eugene Thacker wrote that in ancient Greece, humans came to terms with the unthinkable through mythological interpretations; that Medieval and early modern Christian thinking used a theological framework to come to terms with the unknowable; and that modernity is characterized by an existential epistemological approach. “When the non-human world manifests itself to us”, Thacker wrote, “our response is to recuperate [it] into whatever the dominant, human-centric worldview is at the time”<sup>57</sup>. Thus, I believe that our dominant models of cinematic images and electronic automatisms have not only produced powerful manifestations of non-anthropocentric

intensities, but have also provided us with clues about their presence and operations. Which is exactly what *Animal Cinema* offers: a new conception of thought itself, which, through an audiovisual and sensorial approach, casts light on the contemporary regime of non-anthropocentric moving images that constitutes the very fabric of our time.

Emilio Vavarella

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *What is Philosophy?* Translated by Hugh Tomlison and Graham Burchell. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, (10th ed.) 2013.

Deleuze, Gilles. *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. Translated by Tom

Conley. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Hansen, Mark B. N., "Algorithmic Sensibility: Reflections on the Post-Perceptual Image" in Denson, Shane and Julia Leyda (eds.), *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film*, Falmer: REFRAME Books, 2016.

Rangan, Pooja. "Humane-itarian Interventions" in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, Volume 24, Number 1, 2013, p. 123.

Siegert, Bernhard. *From Cultural Techniques to Cybernetic Machines*.

Translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2015.

Thacker, Eugene. *In The Dust of This Planet: Horror of Philosophy Vol.1*,

Alersford, Hants, UK: Zero Books, 2011.

Thrift, Nigel. "Beyond Mediation: Three New Material Registers and Their Consequences" in *Materiality* (ed. Daniel Miller), Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005.

Deleuze, Gilles et Félix Guattari. *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie ?*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1991/2005.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinéma 1 : L'Image-mouvement*. Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1983.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinéma 2 : L'Image-temps*. Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Le Pli - Leibnitz et le baroque*. Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1988.

- Hansen, Mark B. N., « Algorithmic Sensibility : Reflections on the Post-Perceptual Image », in Denson, Shane et Julia Leyda (dir.), *Post-Cinema : Theorizing 21st-Century Film*, Falmer : REFRAME Books, 2016.
- Rangan, Pooja. « Humane-itarian Interventions », in *Differences : A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, Volume 24, Numéro 1, 2013, p. 123.
- Siegert, Bernhard. *From Cultural Techniques to Cybernetic Machines*. Traduit par Geoffrey Winthrop-Young. New York, NY : Fordham University Press, 2015.
- Thacker, Eugene. *In The Dust of This Planet : Horror of Philosophy vol. 1*, Alersford, Hants, Royaume-Uni : Zero Books, 2011.
- Thrift, Nigel. « Beyond Mediation : Three New Material Registers and Their Consequences » in *Materiality* (dir. Daniel Miller), Durham et London : Duke University Press, 2005.

## ENDNOTES

1 Siegert, p.193

2 *What is Philosophy?*, p. 183.

3 Rangan, p. 123.

4 Thrift, p. 233.

5 *Cinema 2*, p. 205.

6 *What is Philosophy?*, p. 55.

7 *Cinema 2* p. 189.

8 *What is Philosophy?* p. 179.

9 *Cinema 1* p. 57.

10 *Cinema 2* p. 76.

11 *Cinema 2* p. 171.

12 *Cinema 1* p. 1.

13 lvi.

14 *Cinema 1* p. 2.

15 *Cinema 1* p. 64.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

17 *Cinema 1* p. 3.

18 *Cinema 1* p. 65.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

20 *What is Philosophy?* p. 170.

21 *Cinema 1* p. 87.

22 *Cinema 1* p. 96.

23 *Cinema 1* p.110.

24 *Cinema 1* p. 106.

25 *Cinema 1* p. 96.

26 *Cinema 1* p. 116.

27 *Cinema 1* p. 207.

28 *Cinema 2* p. 22.

29 *Cinema 2* p. 40.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127

32 *Ibid.*, p. 115.

33 *Cinema 1* p. 40.

34 *Cinema 2* p. 17.

35 *Cinéma 1* p. 10.

36 *Cinema 1* p. 10.

37 *Cinema 1* p. 10.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

39 *Cinema 1* p. 28.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

41 *Cinema 1* p. 29.

42 *Cinema 2* p. 120.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

44 *Cinema 1* p. 81.

45 *Ivi.*

46 *Ivi.*

47 *Ivi.*

48 *Cinema 2* pp. 20-21.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

50 *Ivi.*

51 *Cinema 2*, p. 270.

52 *What is Philosophy?*, p. 42.

53 *Ivi.*

54 *Cinema 2* p. 265.

55 *Cinema 2* p. 86

56 *Cinema 1*, p. 141.

57 Thacker, p. 4.



# LIENS



## ARTICLES LIÉS



### F/EEL

Sheng-Wen Lo & Yi-Fei Chen

Posted on May 10 2022



● FOREWORD

# “SCHOOLS, BANDS, HERDS”: THE BECOMING-FLOCK OF HUMANS

Dork Zabunyan

Posted on May 10 2022

## SUBSCRIBE!

Get email updates

Last name

---

First name

---

By checking this box, I agree to receive information by email

Email

---

Submit

● JEU DE PAUME  
AMIS

JAEGER-LECOULTRE

 **Neuflize OBC**  
ABN AMRO

Soutenu par  
  
MINISTÈRE  
DE LA CULTURE  
Liberté  
Égalité  
Fraternité



© 2022, JEU DE PAUME • [LEGAL NOTICES](#)