

Capturing Spectral Beasts: Marsupial Performances of the Cinematic Undead

Ben Dibley

THE 'DOUBLE MOVEMENT OF ANIMAL (DIS)APPEARANCE' HAS BEEN A LONG STANDING and defining trope of the critical literature on the exhibition of animals in zoos and cinema (McMahon and Lawrence 9). This movement rests on the paradox that modern technologies of vision and exhibition have spectacularly increased the visibility of animals in a period in which they have dramatically vanished from the wild and from everyday life. John Berger is no doubt the most well-known and influential critic to elaborate this paradox. For Berger, the proliferation of animal representations coincided with the advent of a modernity that not only increasingly encroached on wildlife but also disembedded agrarian populations, dislodging the everyday animal-human relations of rural life. In this context Berger contends: 'Public zoos came into existence at the beginning of the period which was to see the disappearance of animals' (Berger 30). Zoo animals, he continues, 'constitute the living monument to their own disappearance' (36).¹ Elaborating this proposition in ways that sidestep Berger's representational concerns, media theorist, Akira Mizuta Lippit argues:

¹ Berger's account has been contentious. See Burt in particular for a sustained critical engagement.

In its specular, zoological world, the modern animal evolved into a lost object that could then, in turn, be mourned. A new breed of animals now surround[ed] the human populace—a genus of vanishing animals, whose very being [was] constituted by that state of disappearing. (Lippit 3)

These vanishing animals had an affinity with the new recording technologies increasingly associated with the moving image. It was with these devices that ‘Animals have found a proper habitat or world’ (25). Lippit continues: ‘The capacities of the technological media in general and the photographic media in particular to record and recall served as a mnemonic supplement that allowed modern culture to preserve animals’ (25). If zoos and cinema provided monuments to the disappearance of animals and sites for memorialising their loss, cinema in particular, for Lippit, supplied the key habitat for this new genus of spectral beasts.² However, in identifying this new type, Lippit posits the double movement of animal (dis)appearance less as an effect of the paradoxical relations between representation and referent conditioned by industrial capitalism, as described by Berger, than as a movement constitutive of a new mode of being—one contingent on modern technologies of vision. It was the flickering milieu of the modern screen that vanishing animals came to inhabit.

Drawing on two films produced in the early 1930s located on the periphery of documentary film and at the intersections of the institutions of the zoo and the museum, this paper reviews cinematic performances of animal vanishing. The first, is David Fleay’s footage of the last thylacine at the Beaumaris Zoo, Hobart (1933); the second, the McDonagh sisters’ featurette, ‘The Trail of the Roo’ (1931), which documents the capturing of kangaroos for zoo and museum exhibition.³ While these films exemplify the ‘double movement of animal (dis)appearance’ as it has been analysed by Berger and Lippit, among others, it is not my intention to rehearse the diagnosis of this well-known movement, but

² However, the close development of nature film and the natural dioramas have been famously documented in Haraway’s account of the work of Carl Akeley (Haraway ch. 3). Akeley produced the hyper-real dioramas of the African Hall, American Museum of Nature History, New York, in which animals were presented in frozen motion as if captured by a still camera. Akeley was inventor of the motion camera which he developed in the research and preparation of these dioramas.

³ These two films might be read as Antipodean contributions to a tradition of ‘zoo films’ that by the turn of the twentieth century was already recognised as ‘a global phenomenon’ (Horak 462). As such, these films as modes of animal capture and display were attendant on various discourses and devices, technologies and techniques associated with the modern ‘exhibitionary complex’ (Bennett). The emergence of this complex was contingent on the rise of the natural sciences, the invention of photography and the moving image, the art of taxidermy and the diorama, together with the proliferation of their associated public institutions—the cinema, the zoological garden, and the natural history museum. Over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries these cultural institutions came to increasingly share ‘presentational configurations’ through which animals were publicly exhibited (Nessel 46. See also see Haraway, ch. 3).

rather to consider how these films' performances of spectral beasts foreground the ways in which the capacities of both animal and human bodies are indivisible from the technologies through which these practices are realised (Parikka).⁴ It is my contention that these two films, as practices of animal enclosure and exposure, assemble various techniques of capture that enrol human and animal bodies in cinematic performances of animal vanishing.

Before turning to these films directly it is useful to identify what is at stake in this notion of capture. While these films document captured animals and the capturing of animals in the sense of their physical restraint and confinement, film itself has long been understood as a mechanism of capture, not of constraining bodies, but of capturing particular moments in time, of capturing bodies in movement. Such animal realities are intensely mediated by these devices of capture—the cage and the camera—by which animal bodies are, respectively, constrained in space and arrested from the flow of time. However, this is not to suggest that the really real, the authentically real, is outside the cage or before the camera, in the sense that the zoo animal or the animal of wildlife film are merely representational, representative of a reality somehow 'out there'. This is a position that has troubled critiques of natural history film.⁵ As Anat Pick writes in her account of Bazin's realism: 'The world is not "out there" to be captured by mechanical means. Reality is always artificial, or virtual, insofar as it is crafted between subject and object, not an entity but a procedure: the creative process of "showing-forth" coauthored by subject and object' (224). In this paper, capture is understood in this procedural sense as constitutive of reality. It is used in a performative idiom (Hawkins and Dibley). Capture is that which incites reality.

The cultural theorist Rey Chow pithily sums this position when she writes: 'Capture is what activates reality, what makes reality happen' (166). This echoes Fabian Munisea's contention that 'reality is really real when it is provoked' (17). Capture is the mechanism by which realities come to be both triggered and trapped. It also has an affective dimension that solicits 'a state of emotive witnessing' (Lezaun et al. 12) and which Chow terms 'captivation'. For Chow, capture is closely aligned with captivation. Both are derived 'from the imposition of power on bodies and the attachment of bodies to power' (Chow 6). However, captivation is a containing that is more than somatic. Captivation evokes, Chow continues, 'the sense of being lured and held by means other than the purely physical, with an effect that is, nonetheless, lived and felt as embodied captivity' (48). Captivation in this embodied emotive sense of being captive, of being bound

⁴ This *dispositif* of animal capture was also an apparatus implicated in 'the anthropological machine', which worked to adjudicate on the (indistinct) boundary between the human and nonhuman animal (Agamben). In so doing, this complex was one that shared in techniques that solicited, or sought to activate, a particular disposition in their audiences—an ontological-political disposition that proceeded in the assurance of the human as sovereign.

⁵ Key texts include: Chris; Bousé; Burt; and Mittman.

to others, resonates with Jamie Lorimer's discussion of the cultural techniques of wildlife media. These techniques draw spectators into particular political strategies by acting on their 'affective logics', which are understood as 'a particular embodied disposition that establishes a habituated set of practices and feelings ... through which a person is oriented and makes sense of an encounter with human and nonhuman others' (122). These dispositions are biopolitical in as much as they are the targets for strategies that seek the cultivation of particular embodied sensibilities to the non-human world. Taking its cue from these formulations this paper considers how the spectral animals come to hail and haunt spectators in cinematic performances of animal vanishing. It examines how the capture of the animal and the captivation of the human become mutually constitutive in a double movement of animal (dis)appearance.

Scarred Bodies: The Last Thylacine, Beaumaris Zoo

Late in 1933 the Australian zoologist and naturalist, David Fleay, filmed an adult male thylacine at the Beaumaris Zoo, Hobart.⁶ The film was shot a few months after the animal was captured in the Florentine Valley in southern Tasmania. This famous footage shows the muscular marsupial pacing about its bare enclosure. It yawns demonstrating its massive gape, sniffs the air, scratches itself, lies down, before getting to its feet as if startled and paces again. Without sound, with minimal editing, the footage last for forty-five seconds.

Over the intervening years this vision has acquired especial historical significance as the first to capture the last of a species on celluloid.⁷ Writing in 1986, the year the species was officially declared extinct by the Tasmanian Government, and half a century after he filmed the Beaumaris Zoo's thylacine, Fleay recalled the experience. 'Not long captured and still wearing the springer snare brand about his right hind leg this long, lean, softly padding animal had an ethereal appearance' (cited in Sleightholme and Campbell 285). In writing of its ethereal qualities Fleay proceeded in the knowledge that the animal's image represented a species whose time had all but officially expired. In this he shared with his readers his sense that the thylacine that paced before his camera lens was somehow already a ghost. As he put it, the animal 'was extremely delicate and light in a way that seems not to be of this world'.⁸ Carrying the impossible

⁶ To view this footage see: <http://www.naturalworlds.org/thylacine/captivity/films/flv/film_5.htm>. The gender of the captive animal has been in dispute, and it was historically thought to have been a female. Museum zoologist Stephen Sleightholme, in a close reading of the Fleay footage, has confirmed that the animal was in fact male.

⁷ In subsequent years Fleay, among others, staged an expedition (1945/46) in search of other specimens but to no avail. At the time he shot his footage, the once-persecuted species had likely already all but disappeared from its range (See Paddle).

⁸ The empirical details used in these paragraphs are drawn from: Guilier; Paddle; Sleightholme and Campbell; and Sleightholme 2011.

weight of being the last living representative of an extinct population, the ‘softly padding animal’ could for Fleay only walk among the undead. Fleay writes as if this zoo exhibit, as the last living trace of a species, was fading before the camera. Here it seems the materialities of the zoo exhibit and the filmed animal were collapsing into a single ghostly presence which captured the poignancy of the historical moment: the recording of a species on the cusp of extinction.

Nevertheless, the thylacine’s reality as spectral was as much to do with the ontology of the apparatuses that contained it, as it was with the existential predicament of the animal as the last of its species. The spectral has long been postulated as a condition endemic to film in general, and cinematic animals in particular. As Lippit has argued, with the emergence of modern technological media, animals ‘enter a new economy of being’—they come to ‘exist in a state of *perpetual vanishing* ... linger[ing] in the world *undead*’ (1, emphasis in original). In her reading of Bazin’s and Barthes’ accounts of the photographic image, Laura Mulvey provides elegant insight into this world of the filmic undead. The reality of the photographic image, she contends, is born of the paradox between the index and the uncanny. The index is an objective ‘incontrovertible fact, a material trace that can be left without human intervention, [it] is a property of the camera machine and the chemical impact of light on film’ (55). The uncanny concerns the subjective experience of dis-ease, of unsettlement, that is ‘aroused by confusion between the animate and the inanimate, most particularly ... associated with death and the return of the dead’ (60). For Mulvey it is the photographic image’s capacity to suspend time, conflate life and death, and blur the distinction between the animate and the inanimate, that generates ‘a sense of disquiet that is aggravated rather than calmed by the photograph’s mechanical, chemical and indifferent nature’ (61). In this sense the photographic image is a haunting produced in the intertwining of the index and the uncanny. It provokes an affective dissonance in its viewer through which its reality unfolds. The photographic image is in this sense both a mode of capture and captivation.

The ethereal presence that Fleay attributed to the Beaumaris thylacine is an element of the reality provoked by his footage, which rests on a disposition to be affected by the pathos of the representational burden of this thylacine as the last of its kind. In part no doubt this is a quality of film as index, of the photochemical trace that insists on what must have been, as it is of the unsettling, disquiet that the footage solicits. Fleay’s film is testimony to the light that once played on the thylacine’s coat that served to burn the animal’s likeness on the film-stock. And yet there is a fragility, a vulnerability to such filmic insistence. The cinematic moment of capture is simultaneously the moment the referent disappears. The ontology of film is inescapably one of loss, of disappearance, of death. The slipperiness between sign and referent that the indexicality of film would seem to resolve with the materiality of the photochemical trace, reasserts itself in the

presence of a referent always on the cusp of vanishing. In the case of Fleay's film what is contained is the play of light on the animal's body, what is provoked is a particular pattern of photochemical reactions, a trace that would not be, had not the thylacine paced before his camera. What is lost is the referent in this moment of registration. What is provocatively contained is the spectre of the last thylacine: an uncanny presence that is at once, bounded and separated from the world, contained within the lightness of its cinematic being; and, framed and projected back into the world in its ethereal image, captivating its viewers with the weight of species lost. It is an unhomely filmic intensity in which viewers, as Belinda Smail, contends, 'constantly grapple with the play of absence and presence' (150).

This particular cinematic capture however is contingent on another device of containment—the cage, the presence of which is clearly visible in its grim austerity in Fleay's footage. The logic of the zoo exhibition is not strictly indexical. In its corporeal form the animal is powerfully present, but remains ontologically precarious. Not in this case as a photochemical trace, but rather as a zoological remainder torn from its milieu and isolated in its enclosure. The pathos of the zoo animal is not that of the uncanny born of the temporal disjuncture of the mechanical image. Rather it is the unsettlement produced by a spatial displacement maintained by the cage, by a nagging sense that the animal should be elsewhere, that it is literally not at home, but belongs to some indeterminable elsewhere out there 'in the wild' to which its return is impossible. Contained in its bare isolation, the Beaumaris Zoo's thylacine was to stage a singular performance: representing its species *ex-situ* by becoming a specimen. As a zoo exhibit, the thylacine is a zoological remainder that insists, like the cinematic trace, on what must have been. The caged animal served as a diminished vestige of the wild lives (once) lived elsewhere. And, like the photochemical trace, the zoo remanent shares in the logic of animal disappearance, activating a disposition of pathos, of loss in those that the spectral animal both hails and haunts. Reduced to (a tragic) harmless trace of what once was (elsewhere), the Beaumaris Zoo's thylacine becomes a monument by which to mourn the species' passing.

However, as Catherine Simpson notes: 'As he paces his cage, the ghostly anguished presence of the soon-to-be-extinct [thylacine] ... belies the animal's status as a predatory carnivorous marsupial' (50). Given the interval between Fleay's account cited above and the shooting of the footage, the ethereal qualities Fleay attributed to the Beaumaris Zoo's thylacine were more the affect of his encounter with his own film than with the thylacine itself as it paced before his lens. To capture the animal on film involved entering the zoo animal's enclosure. And, with this, Fleay confronted, not the affectively powerful, physically harmless trace of the once-was, but rather a very lively agent of the present. Fleay's

encounter was no doubt motivated by a desire to realise the potential of the camera as a scientific device for recording the real and so generate a lasting document of what was increasingly recognised as a very rare specimen. Nevertheless, it was an encounter whose intensities were as far from cool scientific objectivity as they were from the chill of the ethereal. By all accounts the encounter ran hot.

When Fleay and head keeper Arthur Reid entered the enclosure to film and photograph the thylacine, the adrenaline of the men and of the marsupial, it is easy to imagine, was surging. The thylacine is visibly stressed by the presence of the two men with their unwieldy camera gear in its enclosure. The animal's wide gape, captured on the film footage, is testimony to its displeasure. Prudently, Fleay and Reid had come prepared in the event of their captive's aggression. Fleay was not to leave unscathed. Reporting on the encounter, Fleay would write: 'The big fellow in the zoo was not a safe companion inside his enclosure, and while photographs were being taken Mr Reid had to ward him off continually with a paling' (cited in Sleightholme 953). Reid's efforts to defend the naturalist as he worked beneath the curtain of his camera were not a total success. Following two warning 'yawns', the animal broke through Reid's defenses and Fleay was bitten. With the clamping of its large jaws the full force of the thylacine's resistive agency bore down upon the zoologist's buttocks. The injuries, it turned out, were superficial. Nevertheless, the attack was to leave Fleay with a scar—a further indexical record of the (career making) encounter. It was later reported that Fleay wore this cicatrix as a mark of distinction (though on what occasions he revealed it go unremarked). The wound nevertheless endowed him with a form of corporeal capital that added to his accumulating zoological capital, to which the Beaumaris Zoo film was to prove a lasting contribution.⁹

Three years after Fleay filmed his footage, Benjamin, as the doomed thylacine was popularly known, was dead. Locked out of his shelter overnight the animal died of exposure. With the zoo unable to afford adequate staffing, the neglected marsupial had become a casualty of the Depression, perishing on a cold September evening in 1936. Benjamin's corpse was taken to the Hobart Museum. With its skin in condition too poor to warrant preservation, his body was abandoned on a municipal rubbish dump to decay among the city's refuse.

⁹ Fleay's other great zoological achievement was in 1943, with the first successful captive breeding of platypus in Healesville, Victoria.

Disaggregated Bodies: 'The Trail of the Roo'

'The Trail of the Roo' (1931) was an early documentary featurette and 'talkie' made by the McDonagh sisters, key figures in Australia's early motion picture industry (Cook).¹⁰ One of several short documentaries they produced with Standardtone Sound Recording Studios, an early specialist in sound films, the featurette documented a kangaroo hunt in the Riverina, New South Wales. Promotional material described the film in prosaic terms: 'an interesting film showing how the kangaroo is hunted, captured and transported to the city for show purposes'.¹¹

The vision shows scenes in which panic-stricken animals are driven *en masse* down a narrowing race, where it was reported sixty persons and thirty motorcars took part in the drive.¹² Footage includes men with the corralled 'roos—one animal is kicked; another is restrained and paraded before the camera. The captured animals are subjected to a selection process. A number are shot and skinned for museum collections. Others dragged by their tails and packed live into wooden crates destined for zoos.¹³ Juxtaposed to the explicit violence of these scenes, subsequent sequences take a tranquil turn, focusing on a group of 'roos in an urban zoological garden.

A voiceover accompanied the footage, which was scripted (though not spoken) by poet and journalist, Kenneth Slessor (O'Regan and Walmsley-Evans). This informal commentary is a curious mix of light-hearted humour, with ceaseless hopping puns, and an anthropomorphising of the 'roos which unequivocally acknowledges their suffering. The 'roos are variously described: as 'victims' (after being skinned in the name of science); as 'chaps' and 'prisoners' (when put into crates for transportation). In ascribing to the animals' subject positions that slip between the ordinary ('chaps'), the captive ('prisoners') and the suffering ('victims') to describe the 'roos predicament, the voiceover opens the possibility of the audience's sympathy with the animals' suffering. It is however an emotive recognition which is always disrupted by the next hopping gag. In this there is an unsettling doubling performed by the voiceover, which at once is a humorous making-light of the footage and an acknowledgment of the injury portrayed. The narrative takes the viewer some way towards an affinity with the animals' predicament, only to pull back from it with the repetition of levity.

¹⁰ 'The Trail of the 'Roo' (1931), dir. Paulette McDonagh, MCD Productions. A clip from this film can be viewed at: <<http://aso.gov.au/titles/documentaries/the-trail-of-the-roo/>>.

¹¹ *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, 6 January 1933, 2. Screening in the country's capital cities in 1933, 'The Trail of the Roo' was included in the newsreels distributed by Cinesound and Fox news services, where it was featured in a daily program.

¹² 'On The Trail of the 'Roo', *The Sun*, Sydney, 9 April 1926, 11.

¹³ It was stated that 70 'roos were taken to the Melbourne Zoo and another 45 to the zoo in Sydney (*The Sun*, Sydney, NSW, 9 April 1926, 11). Presumably it was from these centres that the animals were exported to foreign zoos.

Interestingly, it appears that the 1933 screening was not the first time the footage was exhibited. A silent captioned film, 'On the Trail of the 'Roo', was released by Conrad Hellmrich and screened in Sydney and Melbourne between 1926 and 1927. According to newspaper reports this film recorded a 'roo hunt shot in the same locations as the 1931 film, namely Widgiewa and Lake Cowal Stations. These articles also detail a number of scenes that are shared with 1931 film.¹⁴ Following the advent of sound technology it appears likely this footage was repurposed by Standardtone and released as a 'talkie'.

Significantly, when this footage was first screened in 1927 it caused controversy over scenes of animal cruelty. *The Argus* reported:

It is claimed that scenes involving distressing cruelty to Kangaroos mar what is otherwise an interesting and entertaining production ... Certainly a picture of this nature would not be calculated to encourage a love for animals among those who witness the terrified animals as they are corralled in an area enclosed with wire netting. Here they are to be seen rushing blindly at the fences in their efforts to escape their pursuers. Kangaroos maimed by rifleshot and stricken with pain and terror make a pitiful sight ... Subsequently the animals are herded into another pen, where they continue to be harassed, and unedifying scenes are witnessed.¹⁵

These objections saw the film modified, with a scene cut in which several kangaroos were shot. To the consternation of the film's defenders the controversy also demonstrated the provocative power of the caption titles. One writer to the editor sought to clarify that some content to which there were objections were not part of the vision, but rather alluded to by captions: 'Complaint is made about kangaroos being shown throwing their "joeys" away and being shot. There was never such a scene ... but there is a sub-title to th[is] effect'.¹⁶ Nevertheless, in association with the vision of the distress of the drive and the carnage of the cull, the caption provoked for some an animal reality that exceeded what was screened; one that, not in its depiction, but in its suggestion, registered a situation of unspeakable cruelty.

The repurposing of the footage as a 'talkie' responded to this controversy as the film's producers tried to lighten-up the footage as entertainment, but also to

¹⁴ See 'On The Trail of The 'Roo', *The Sydney Morning Herald* 9 April 1926, 7.

¹⁵ 'Kangaroo Drive: Objections to Film: Scenes Suggesting Cruelty', *The Argus*, Melbourne, 18 October 1927, 17.

¹⁶ 'To the Editor of The Argus: Kangaroo Film.' *The Argus*, Melbourne, 5 November 1927, 29.

make it more edifying, by opening it to sympathy for the 'roos.¹⁷ In this vein, the framing of the closing scenes at the zoological gardens serve as a redemption of the violence the 'roos have endured. The voiceover credited the kangaroos' relocation to the zoo as a form of embourgeoisement: 'shanghaied and taken far from home ... they become the centre of admiring crowds. No more bounding about the plains ... but the life of steady respectable suburb comfort'. The horrors and injustices of the bush were thus redeemed by a charmed life in leafy suburbs—well, suburban zoos in Parkville, Melbourne, or Sydney's Mosman.

In documenting the act of collection, of the gathering of those that are to become zoological specimens, the film offers a forthright optic on the violence of these collecting practices. 'The Trail of the Roo' however was no *exposé* in the contemporary sense involving an intention to provoke moral outrage, uncovering the violence of making the zoological exhibit, revealing what is concealed in the practices of making animals public. The hunting, the maltreatment, the death, were still largely spectacle. They were not offered as a source of moral indignation, but as entertainment.

What is interesting about this film is the sense in which it is a 'behind the scenes' foray into how a zoological specimen is made, how the animal begins to be formatted as zoological exhibit. These scenes offer no particular insight into the animal's way of life. These are not invitations into the *umwelt* of the 'roo, these scenes do not take the viewer into the lives of animal others—the gesture of 'zoomorphic realism' that arguably distinguishes creaturely cinema (Pick; Pick and Narraway). Rather the film documents the formatting of the animal's body in preparation for exhibition while itself being complicit in that apparatus. In this, the scenes are exercises in the animal's negation as it is prepared for its display *ex-situ*, as it is readied for its second-life as public exhibit—as trace, as remainder, as remnant. The film is not only testimony to the disappearance of wildlife as the 'roos are deleted from the landscape. ('No more bounding about the plains' was rural policy in NSW). It is also an active agent in the 'roo's emergence as *the undead* of the exhibitionary complex.

In this connection the performance of the corporeality of the animal is particularly significant. What the film documents is the processing of the animal body as it rendered a zoological specimen, as it is corralled into a race for selection, skinned in preparation for the museum's taxidermy, or packed in crates in anticipation of the zoo's exhibition. These performances of the animal's body as provoked by the camera—dead and flayed, alive and caged—become exercises in a cinematic biopolitics: a provoked reality that enacts the bare life of

¹⁷ As one columnist noted at the time that the footage was first screened, this was sympathy that the captioned footage did not seek, though it did solicit, as the ensuing controversy attests. *The Argus*, Melbourne, 18 October 1927, 17.

that which is becoming a zoological specimen. The language of victimhood and suffering, of the prisoner, of the shanghaied, no doubt signals the 'roos enrolment in a carceral archipelago in which their selection for execution or for imprisonment finds their corporeality directed to the various institutions of exhibition—to the museum as preserved remains or to the zoo as living remainder, or to the cinema as photographic trace. The cinematic apparatus in making a spectacle of the processing of the 'roos' bodies as they circulate from the field to centres of calculation and collection, the zoo and the museum, foreshadows the animal's body as valued not only as zoological specimen, but also as public entertainment. In so presenting the animal's body, the veracity of its zoological worth becomes the currency of its value as spectacle.

This is demonstrated in several scenes that format the 'roo body as zoological exhibit, provoking an animal reality always on the edge of disappearance, always on the cusp of vanishing. In the first of these scenes a kangaroo is wrestled to be paraded before the camera, restrained with a man either side holding a front limb, a hat placed atop the 'roo's head. At once anthropomorphised and humiliated by the hat, the animal's status as wildlife is diminished to that of a prop for human amusement. And in so doing the scene establishes the animal's body as a body to be done to: a body to be abducted, to be destroyed, to be disaggregated, to be disappeared from the landscape—on which subsequent scenes make good. In a later scene, hunters gather around a hide hanging from a tree. Dismembered and flayed, the roo's body is disaggregated in anticipation of its preparation as museum specimen. The animal is destroyed so that its pelt might have a second life as a museum exhibit. In the final scene a 'roo in the zoo is hand-fed by a man in a suit. Ostensibly, this is a scene of benevolent domestication and a counterpoint to the brutality and humiliation the animals endured as they were hunted and harassed. In contrast to earlier scenes, it offers an apparent moment of inter-species reconciliation. A rapprochement achieved cinematically by the tentative acceptance of food by the captive 'roo, but one that nevertheless continues human mastery over the 'roo's body. This is a body singled out not for destruction but for domination in a regime of care through which the 'roo is becoming a zoo exhibit.

There is no pretence of the camera as objective observer in these scenes. In the presence of the camera something must be done. The presence of the camera explicitly provoked these performances. They are actions performed for it, performed for the assumed amusement of imagined viewers. The performers enact a provocation in which the animal, the animal's body, is captured and contained so that it might (dis)appear. These scenes then share in the activation of the kangaroo's body as a zoological specimen for exhibition. Thus, the film demonstrates a certain continuity between the institutions of the cinema, the zoo

and the museum, which together enframe the 'roo's body—as trace, as remainder, as remanent—as a vanishing body.

Conclusion

As testimonies to cinema's spectral beasts, Fleay's footage of the Beaumaris Zoo's thylacine and the McDonaghs' 'The Trail of the Roo' exemplify, in different ways, the mechanisms through which animals come to inhabit film in a perpetual play of absence and presence. While both films capture a double movement of animal (dis)appearance, these marsupial performances of the cinematic undead are located in different regimes of value. The singularity of Fleay's thylacine presents an economy of excruciating scarcity, while the McDonagh's multitude of 'roo's, an abundance to be suppressed. This differentiated economy of spectral beasts is consequential for the affective logics that they come to captivate. Fleay's footage draws out the affinity between the ontology of cinema and extinction in the melancholy of loss, which is captured by the photo-chemical trace of the animal's body: this passing moment, this passing species, that will never be captured again. The McDonaghs' film highlights the agency of the camera in provoking the reformatting of the animal's body so it might have an after-life as spectacle. Sympathy for the suffering of the vanishing body is retro-fitted in audio form, ameliorating the violence of the mediation of 'roo as wildlife and its exhibitionary afterlife. Loss and sympathy serve as devices of capture/captivation, hailing and haunting spectators in cinematic performances of animal vanishing.

However, it is important to signal a specificity to these examples of animal (dis)appearance. They are informed by a cultural logic that diverges from the social disembedding of industrial capitalism that informs Berger's account of the memorialising of animal loss. These are presentations of marsupial vanishing, of forms of animal life endemic to south-eastern Australia, which have been displaced by the logic of settler colonialism and the demands of the pastoral economy. In this sense these films capture the marsupial spectres that haunted the road of national progress. However, marsupial bodies here are those of scientific curiosity and entertainment, not ones of conservation. In this sense they are without 'the environment' as it was to emerge in subsequent decades as a matter of public concern and was to figure prominently in subsequent Australian wild-film (Dibley and Hawkins).

BEN DIBLEY is a researcher and writer based in Sydney currently working at the Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University. He has research

interests in social and cultural theory, particularly around questions of environment, colonialism, and cultural institutions.

Funding Note. This work was supported by the Australian Research Council [LP130100465].

Works Cited

- Agamben, Giorgio. *The Open: Man and Animal*. Redwood City: Stanford UP, 2004.
- Bennett, Tony. *The Birth of the Museum*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Berger, John. *Why Looking at Animals?* London: Penguin, 2009 [1980].
- Bousé, Derck. *Wildlife Films*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2000.
- Burt, Jonathan. *Animals in Film*. London: Reaktion Books, 2002.
- Chow, Rey. *Entanglements, or Transmedial Thinking about Capture*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2012.
- Chris, Cynthia. *Watching Wildlife*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2006.
- Cook, Ann-Marie. 'Re-assessing the Demise of the McDonagh Sisters.' *Screening the Past*, 2015. <<http://www.screeningthepast.com/2015/08/reassessing-the-demise-of-the-mcdonagh-sisters/>>.
- Dibley, Ben and Gay Hawkins. 'Making Animals Public: Early Wildlife Television and the Emergence of Environmental Nationalism on the ABC.' *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 33.6 (2019): 744-58. <<https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2019.1669533>>.
- Guiler, Eric. 'The Beaumaris Zoo in Hobart.' *Papers and Proceedings of the Tasmanian Historical Research Association* 33.4 (1986): 121-71.
- Haraway, Donna. *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Hawkins, Gay, and Ben Dibley. 2020. 'Provoking Animal Realities on TV: exploring the affinities between STS and Screen Studies.' *Science, Technology, & Human Values*. 4 August 2020. <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243920945381>>.
- Horak, Jan-Christopher. 'Wildlife Documentaries: From Classical Forms to Reality TV film.' *History: An International Journal* 18.4 (2006): 459-75.
- Lezaun, Javier, Fabian Muniesa and Signe Vikkelsø. 'Provocative Containment and the Drift of Social-Scientific Realism.' *Journal of Cultural Economy* 6.3 (2013): 278-93.
- Lippit, Akira Mizuta. *Electric Animals: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000.
- Lorimer, Jamie. *Wildlife in the Anthropocene: Conservation After Nature*. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2015.

- McMahon, Laura, and Michael Lawrence. 'Introduction: Animal Life and the Moving Image.' *Animal Life and the Moving Image*. Ed. Michael Lawrence and Laura McMahon. Bloomsbury, 2015. 1-18.
- Mitman, Gregg. *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009.
- Mulvey, Laura. *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*. London: Reaktion Books, 2006.
- Muniesa, Fabian. *The Provoked Economy: Economic Reality and the Performative Turn*. London: Routledge, 2014.
- Nessel, Sabine. 'The Media Animal: On the Mise-en-scène of Animals in the Zoo and Cinema.' *Animals and the Cinema: Classifications, Cinephiliias, Philosophies*. Ed. Sabine Nessel, Winifried Pauleit, Christine Ruffert, Karl-Heinz Schmid and Alfred Tews. Berlin: Bertz and Fischer, 2012.
- O'Regan, Tom, and Huw Walmsley-Evans. 'The Film Reviewing of Kenneth Slessor: A Cine-aesthetics of the Sound Cinema.' *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 10.2 (2016): 211-22.
- Paddle, Robert. *The Last Tasmanian Tiger: The History and Extinction of the Thylacine*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Parikka, Jussi. 'Insects and Canaries: Medianatures and Aesthetics of the Invisible.' *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 18.1 (2013): 107-19.
- Pick, Anat. *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film*. New York: Columbia UP, 2011.
- Pick, Anat, and Guinevere Narraway, eds. *Screening Nature: Cinema Beyond the Human*. New York: Berghahn, 2013.
- Simpson, Catherine. 'Australian Eco-horror and Gaia's Revenge: Animals, Eco-nationalism and the "New Nature."' *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 4.1 (2010): 43-54.
- Sleightholme, Stephen. 'Confirmation of the Gender of the Last Captive Thylacine.' *Australian Zoologist* 35.4 (2011): 953-6.
- Sleightholme, Stephen, and Cameron Campbell. 'The Earliest Motion Picture Footage of the Last Captive Thylacine?' *Australian Zoologist* 37.3 (2015): 282-7.
- Smaill, Belinda. 'Tasmanian Tigers and Polar Bears: The Documentary Moving Image and (Species) Loss.' *NECSUS: European Journal of Media Studies* 4.1 (2015): 145-62.