

Slow aesthetics and deanthropomorphism as ecocritical strategies in David Claerbout's *The pure necessity* (2016)

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This paper analyses the portrayal of wildlife in *The pure necessity* (2016), an experimental video by Belgian artist David Claerbout that re-imagines Disney's famous animated film *The Jungle Book* (1967). Aesthetic features of the video will be contrasted with the depiction of wildlife in the Disney film and recent 'blue-chip' natural history documentaries. I will argue that the adoption of a slow aesthetic and a retreat from anthropomorphism in *The pure necessity* presents a stark contrast to modern anthropocentric attitudes embedded in contemporary wildlife documentaries and *The Jungle Book*. In this respect, Claerbout's video will be interpreted as a significant contribution to ecocritical thinking and art making.

Keywords: David Claerbout, video art, ecocriticism, wildlife documentaries, Disney's *The Jungle Book*

INTRODUCTION

David Claerbout's 60-minute experimental video *Die reine Notwendigkeit* or *The pure necessity* (2016) is a remake of *The Jungle Book*, Disney's animated classic for children released in 1967. Loosely based on Rudyard Kipling's children's stories set in British colonial India, the Disney film tells the tale of a young boy (Mowgli) abandoned in the jungle as an infant who lives among a cast of talking, singing and dancing wild animals. Claerbout's reimagining of the film dispenses with the lead character Mowgli, the anthropomorphised jungle creatures and the song and dance numbers of the Disney production. Instead, the same cast of animals is shown doing nothing much at all, at least nothing that lends itself to

human-centred narrative cinema. Unfolding at what feels like a glacial pace and devoid of high impact spectacle, *The pure necessity* has been described as profoundly soporific. Like much of Claerbout's art, the work's unhurried temporality negates the cult of speed that pervades contemporary life, and the related hyperactivity of neoliberal capitalism's relentless quest for surplus accumulation. This essay discusses *The pure necessity* through the prism of ecocriticism, arguing that it presents an alternative vision of wildlife to fictional films such as *The Jungle Book*, as well as recent 'blue chip' natural history documentaries of the sort fronted by David Attenborough. I will propose that the video invites us to reflect on how temporal and sonic rhythms, narrative arcs and anthropomorphism in most wildlife films entrench anthropocentric, colonising and proprietary attitudes towards the natural world. Such attitudes arguably contribute to a lack of urgent action on human generated environmental devastation, accelerated species loss and mass extinctions.

THE REPRESENTATION OF WILDLIFE IN RECENT 'BLUE CHIP' NATURE DOCUMENTARIES

As usual, the 2019 edition of the World Economic Forum at Davos gathered together the rich and powerful to debate the current state of the world. One much publicised event was a televised interview between Prince William, Duke of Cambridge and wildlife documentary eminence David Attenborough. During the interview Attenborough observed of humans: "we are now so numerous, so powerful, so all pervasive, the mechanisms we have for destruction are so wholesale and so frightening that we can exterminate whole ecosystems without even noticing" (The Sun 2019). Such tardy attention to the current scale of ecological devastation connects with what environmental humanities scholar Rob Nixon calls the "slow violence" of climate change and eco-system destruction (Nixon 2011). Nixon notes that violence is usually thought of as an event or action of temporal immediacy and explosive, spectacular visibility (Nixon 2011, p. 2). However, he recommends rethinking this idea of violence when applied to the often invisible, accumulative effects of climate change, deforestation, species loss and other environmental crises facing us today. He further observes that such slowly

unfolding processes offer poor gruel to a contemporary media culture hooked on the high drama of visually spectacular catastrophes and the ever-evolving capacity of new technologies to bring such events to public attention (Nixon 2011, p. 3)

It may seem churlish to implicate David Attenborough in the attitudes and behaviours of current media culture identified by Nixon. After all, the man who has been ordained the “voice of the natural world” (*Attenborough at 90* 2016) is widely regarded as a potent advocate for the survival of planet earth in documentaries he has narrated, and fervent public appeals such as Davos interview. One online response to this interview– “David Attenborough could say anything and I would believe him. His voice is God like lol” (*The Sun* 2019)–epitomises common perceptions of the broadcaster’s public authority, while also jokingly invoking ‘voice-of-God’ narration associated with documentary film tradition. Yet, scholars sceptical of the environmental credentials of current wildlife filmmaking suggest there is little evidence that the high impact aesthetic of documentaries Attenborough has become synonymous with has fostered ecologically aware, non-anthropocentric attitudes to the natural world. Back in 2000 wildlife film scholar Derek Bousé observed, “during the very period of wildlife films’ ascendancy on television . . . the state of wildlife and the natural world has, by most measures, worsened alarmingly” (Bousé 2000, p. xiv). More recently, in a critical essay on the BBC blockbuster *Planet Earth* (2006), narrated by Attenborough, Richard Beck asserts that “visual splendour is a poor index of the health of the Earth’s ecosystems” (Beck 2010, p. 66).

Eleanor Louson has addressed the proliferation in recent decades of ‘blue chip’ wildlife programming for television, which has attracted enormous audiences globally. She identifies the BBC Natural History Unit’s *Planet Earth*, co-produced with the Discovery Channel, Japan’s NHK and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, as a landmark event in this respect. The eleven-episode series was then the most expensive BBC documentary series ever made, was the first to be largely filmed in high-definition (HD), and proved to be a massive commercial success. The series’ large budget and heightened visual spectacle set the tone for

natural history programs that followed, including the productions of Disney Nature, an independent film unit within the Disney empire set up in 2008 (Louson 2018, p. 16).

Louson also examines how generous budgets for extended filming on location and an arsenal of new technologies have enabled wildlife programs to maximise the depiction of nature as an awe-inspiring visual feast. Among these technical developments are the crisp resolution and vivid colour of HD camera technology (coincident with rising consumer uptake of high-definition LCD televisions), Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI), and refinements of earlier technologies such as infrared cameras for night filming and time lapse and microphotography. Louson makes special mention of the advent of the heligimbal camera mount that facilitates lengthy and relatively unobtrusive aerial filming of natural environments and animal life (Louson 2018 pp. 21-23).

Another feature of the current crop of big budget natural history programs is the increased airing of behind-the-scenes material shown at the end of series' episodes or as stand-alone packages. These 'making of' supplements dramatise the challenges intrepid filmmakers face when revealing the natural world to audiences in previously unexplored and exciting ways, while providing details of technological advances mobilised to achieve this (Ivakhiv 2013, p. 212; Louson 2018, p. 32). Assigning so much weight to the technical prowess on display in natural history documentaries endorses an anthropocentric vision of the natural world as subject to ever greater human mastery through technological knowhow.

An optimistic attitude to the nexus of contemporary wildlife filmmaking and technological progress presides over *Attenborough at 90: Behind the Lens* (2016), a television program celebrating Attenborough's achievements in his 90th year. Portraying the nonagenarian as anything but an old fogey resistant to change, the program repeatedly stresses Attenborough's embrace of technologies that provide "new ways to tell natural history stories." The following sample of quotes is indicative of the program's overall tone. Attenborough is described by the narrator as "riding on the edge of technology", he is said by a BBC producer to be "very driven by trying to take people to the natural history world in different ways" and

“technology is one of the ways of doing that”, and finally, “He loves being on the cutting edge, it just excites him” (*Attenborough at 90* 2016).

Advertising the technological hardware and software that goes into making blue-chip nature programs is partly a marketing ploy to impress audiences with their dollar value. Beck makes this point in his criticism of the “the nearly autistic pursuit of visual spectacle” in *Planet Earth* (Beck 2010, p. 64). Referring to the particular kind of beauty displayed in the series, he writes: “Its aerial shots, camera tricks, and extremist colour palette belong to an aesthetic that signifies—in and of itself—a large cost. *Planet Earth* brings the plight of nature to its audience’s attention through—both literally and figuratively—expensive lenses” (Beck 2010, p. 66). Beck sees a contradiction in the alignment of aesthetic features of such programs with the values of capitalist enterprise, since for many ecologists industrial capitalism, and, I would add, information age capital is thought to be the “single greatest cause of the environment’s decline” (Beck 2010, p. 66).

While amped up marketing of the high-tech means used in natural history filmmaking is a relatively recent phenomenon, twenty-first-century productions recycle many longstanding staples of the genre that evolved throughout the twentieth century. These include celebrating the visual splendour of pristine nature stripped of human intrusion, narratives of animal *families* and other forms of anthropomorphism, and drama-filled storylines focussed on predation and other high intensity moments of animal activity such as mating rituals and gladiatorial skirmishes within and between species. An absolute prerequisite for most wildlife documentaries is an ample supply of moments of heightened action, conflict and energy expected of any dramatic tale. In Bousé’s summation, contemporary “wildlife film and television depict nature close-up, speeded-up, and set to music, with reality’s most exciting moments highlighted, and its ‘boring’ bits cut out” (Bousé 2000, p. 3).

Bousé has detailed how conventions of mainstream narrative cinema have become central to wildlife filmmaking, so much so that today the genre is dominated by storytelling demands more than input from scientific or ecological discourses (Bousé 2000, p. 156, 188). He also

argues that portraying the behaviour of wild animals according to classic narrative logic involves a range of well tested conventions to gain audience attention and emotional identification. These conventions typically involve varying degrees of anthropomorphism, including the projection of moral values, psychological states, and the “family romance” of classical Hollywood cinema onto the lives of non-human animals (Bousé 2000, pp. 152-153).

The foreword David Attenborough wrote for a book companion to the BBC television series *Dynasties: The Rise and Fall of Animal Families* (2018) illustrates how ingrained are the aforementioned conventions of wildlife filmmaking. Attenborough does warn readers that the ethologists (animal sociologists) consulted in the making of *Dynasties* consider anthropomorphism to be a “cardinal sin” (Attenborough 2018, p. 6). Yet, despite this reflexive nod to scientific squeamishness about anthropomorphising wild animals, most of Attenborough’s commentary adopts profoundly anthropomorphic rhetoric. For example, he opens with a teaser about the animal family soap operas *Dynasties* brings to the screen: “Families have quarrels. Sometimes, they even have bust ups, and as a consequence split forever” (Attenborough 2018, p. 6). He goes on to explain that when preparing the series, the producers asked ethologists what animal groups they were studying were approaching “crises” of dynastic succession or survival, and what sort of “dramas” were likely to overtake them (Attenborough 2018, p. 7). This suggests that the selection of five animal groups (penguin, lion, tiger, chimpanzee, painted wolf) filmed for the program was based on how readily their behaviours could be translated into dramatic action for the screen.

As Louson explains, a principle aim of the visual and dramatic spectacle of nature documentaries is to encourage audiences to feel awe and wonder for the breathtaking beauty of the natural world. This is typically combined with educational scripting voiced by narrators such as Attenborough (Louson 2018, p. 31). She argues that this mix of educational and entertainment imperatives has long been characteristic of wildlife documentaries and should not be so swiftly disdained by critics who accuse them of presenting a distorted view of animal lives or of understating negative human impacts on the natural world (Louson 2018, p. 19). Afterall, some commentators claim that fostering reverence for the awesome

spectacle of nature could transmute into greater care for the environment and a concomitant concern about ecological destruction and its negative consequences for wildlife (Ivakhiv 2013, p. 211).

However, as I have outlined, excessive anthropomorphising, visual and dramatic spectacle, and an obsession with new technologies in current wildlife filmmaking reinforces a sense of human dominion over nature, which is treated as though it were an unlimited resource for the production of media consumables. For many eco-scholars a modern belief system where the material advancement of human civilization depends on the wholesale control and exploitation of nature has contributed to the precarious state of the Earth's ecosystems. For example, philosopher Simon Lumsden argues that the philosophical underpinnings and cultural habituations of Western modernity, spread world-wide through colonisation and globalization, are now patently "out of alignment with a self-sustaining natural world upon which human life and ecology depend" (Lumsden 2018, p. 383). Lumsden draws on G.W.F Hegel's analysis of the shape of spirit (animating beliefs) that informed European modernity, which for Hegel is expressed in modern subjectivity, the legal, political and economic institutions of modern life, and the customs and habits that have become second nature in this phase of history. According to Lumsden, Hegel clarified how Enlightenment thinkers Descartes and Kant reconceived human subjects as free and self-determining, thereby breaking with pre-modern cosmologies where human life was determined by external authorities such as God or nature. As Lumsden puts it, such thinkers formulated this "power of [human] self-determination as unending and explicitly linked this infinite capacity for infinite self-transformation to the control of nature" (Lumsden 2018, p. 373).

A related feature of the self-understanding of modernity for Hegel is the assumption built into its customs and institutions that any threat to its survival can be met, overcome and incorporated into the trajectory of historical progress. Lumsden writes that for Hegel:

What distinguishes modernity is that this capacity for change (the negative) is its selfconscious principle. The internalization of the force of the negative is where

modernity's dynamism comes from; it is self-correcting and it *knows* this capacity for self-transformation is its animating idea (Lumsden 2018, p. 377).

This idea of modernity's infinite capacity for self-correction is manifested in common responses to climate change. Business people, economists and politicians often acknowledge that resource-intensive market capitalism has caused climate change, while insisting that capitalism's capacity for technological innovation can solve the problem (Elliot 2018). Lumsden, however, points to the attitudinal shortcomings of such claims. Addressing the now popular doctrine of sustainable development, he notes that while it recognises that patterns of modern life have endangered the Earth's survival, it still adheres to a deeply modern presumption: "that the conditions of existence can be controlled and the future redirected from its current course not by fundamentally challenging the way we think of the natural world and our relation to it, *but by managing it such that its finitude will not be exhausted by human economic development*" (Lumsden 2018, pp. 384-385).

The subtraction of dramatic action, humanised wildlife and commodified time from *The Jungle Book* in *The pure necessity* David Claerbout's video does not address the aforementioned issues directly, but it does invite critical reflection on how inveterate habits of narrative cinema (point of view, narrative causality, character, dramatic action, sound design) conspire to represent wildlife from modern anthropocentric perspectives, which have resulted in the comprehensive control and transformation of the natural world to serve human ends. The immediate object of critical scrutiny in *The pure necessity* is what David Whitley describes as the "rampant anthropomorphising" of "wild nature" in Disney animations such as *The Jungle Book* (Whitley 2012, p.3). As I argue in the following, Claerbout's video also raises questions about anthropomorphising habits in natural history documentaries.

The pure necessity is a single channel video projection of 2D colour animation with stereo sound, and has been exhibited in numerous, mostly gallery contexts since 2016, although I first saw it screened at the Sydney Film Festival in 2018. The work took three and a half years to make because Claerbout worked with up to fifteen professional animators to manually redraw multiple frames of *The Jungle Book* movie. If one looks closely, the

resulting images are not exactly the same as those of the Disney film. However, on first impression they recall the vivid colour, Arcadian landscapes and cartoon animals in *The Jungle Book*, all of which would be rooted in the memories of generations of viewers.



Figure 1- David Claerbout, *The pure necessity*, 2016 (still). Courtesy the artist.

Claerbout has said that in re-imagining the Disney film he wanted to drain the energy and liveliness that made it so memorable as a musical comedy for children (Vanduffel 2017). Directed by Wolfgang Reitherman, *The Jungle Book* was the last film overseen by Walt Disney before his death in 1966. It tells a maturation tale of the lead character Mowgli, an adolescent boy who has lived among jungle animals since infancy. Mowgli's adventures are largely comprised of being either nurtured or menaced by a cast of talking, singing and dancing wild animals. His animal helpers include a pack of wolves, Bagheera the black panther, Baloo the bear, and a committee of floppy fringed vultures with Mancunian accents who speak like members of The Beatles. Humanised animal villains that pose a threat to

Mowgli include Kaa the python, Shere Kahn the tiger (with aristocratic English accent) and a tribe of monkeys ruled by King Louie, self-described as “king of the swingers”.

The Jungle Book is famous for its memorable songs interspersed with Mowgli’s adventures as he moves along the road to realising at the film’s conclusion that he must leave behind his animal friends and join a human community in the “man-village”. One of the film’s most famous songs is *The bare necessities of life* sung by Baloo the carefree, comedic bear who regales Mowgli with the joys of living simply off the plentiful larder of nature. Lyrics from the song include:

Look for the bare necessities...
Old Mother Nature’s recipes
That bring the bare necessities of life.

Wherever I wander, wherever I roam,
I couldn’t be fonder of my big home;
The bees are buzzing in the trees
To make honey just for me,
When you look under rocks and plants
And take a glance at the fancy ants
Then maybe–try a few!...
The bare necessities of life will come to you...

According to Whitley the sentiments of the song and the film more broadly present an idealised vision of nature “in its golden age of innocence as a cornucopia”, and thus as a premodern, non-urbanised world where harmony between humans and nature prevails (Whitley 2012, pp. 9, 110).

The title of *The pure necessity* references Baloo’s homage to nature figured in its prelapsarian golden age. Claerbout has explained that the change of wording from *bare necessities* to *pure*

necessity reflects a nineteen sixties German translation of the memorable song from the Disney film (Schaulager Lorenz Foundation 2017). However, one could also interpret the title as signalling the stripping out of human behaviours and storytelling functions from the cartoon animals in *The pure necessity*. Almost all plot elements, the lead character of Mowgli, and the personified wildlife of the Disney film are dispensed with. Instead of acting as ciphers for a tale of Mowgli's progress towards self-realisation as a creature of human civilisation, landscape settings and non-human animals become the focus of attention. Notably, however, animals that look like the cast from *The Jungle Book* do nothing that coincides with narrative cinema staples of dramatic action and psychologically motivated characterisation. Instead we witness extended sequences of animals doing what for documentary wildlife filmmaking and for animated fictions such as *The Jungle Book*, would be considered uneventful or boring activities. We see wolves scratching, looking at nothing in particular, and sleeping. Vultures flap their wings, groom, shed their feathers and sleep. A panther roams the jungle, laps water, yawns and sleeps



(Fig. 2). Figure 2- David Claerbout, *The pure necessity*, 2016 (still). Courtesy the artist.

A bear sniffs the air, swims in a river, sits and paws the earth (Fig. 1). Monkeys are shown suspended from trees, eating, yawning, grooming and picking their nails. It should be acknowledged that *The Jungle Book* contains some scenes of indolent animal activity such as sleeping. For example, Bagheera the black panther is shown snoozing in a tree at night, a sequence that was redrawn for *The pure necessity* (Fig. 2). As David Surman has observed, *The Jungle Book* brackets “periods of hyperactivity with self-satisfied slumber” (Surman 2017). However, in Claerbout’s video the occasional soporific atmosphere of *The Jungle Book* permeates most depictions of wildlife, ensuring that the far from lively jungle creatures seem to passively resist the “rampant anthropomorphism” and temporal rhythms of the Disney film.

Accompanying the portrayal of uneventful animal behaviour in Claerbout’s video is a sonic landscape made of ambient nature sounds, which supplant the synching of speech, music and song with story in the Disney film. Instead of human voices we hear frogs, crickets and other buzzing insects, bird song, wolves howling, flowing water, wind, thunder and rain. The sound design and visual sequences are also notably devoid of cause-effect coherence central to continuity editing in narrative cinema. A bear ceases its languid wandering to look at or listen to something off screen, but what invites the animal’s attention is never revealed. Point of view shots that would normally divulge why four lethargic vultures perched on a branch occasionally swivel their eyes towards off screen space are also withheld. Enhancing a sense of leisurely, distended time throughout are regular landscape scenes held in suspension as though some dramatic event is about to occur. However, all we see next are single animals wandering into and out of frame to once again leave the environment vacant of motile life. As Claerbout has explained, his works draw attention to background settings or “anything other than human beings” that narrative cinema treats as secondary to making “humankind the centre of any image” (Claerbout 2018). The aforementioned features of *The pure necessity* expose the deep imbrication of anthropocentric perspectives within typical conventions of filmic storytelling.

The final sequence of the video continues this laying bare of routine stratagems of audience identification in *The Jungle Book*'s depiction of wild nature. Here Claerbout reprised a single fragment of human presence from the Disney film. In the penultimate scene of *The Jungle Book* a young girl from the "man village" is shown gathering water from a stream. Her sweetvoiced song *My Own Home* carries through the jungle and attracts Mowgli's attention. Upon spying her the adolescent boy miraculously reaches puberty in an instant, realising that he must leave his life among the jungle animals for a new home in the human world. As one would expect of a nineteen sixties Disney film for children, the narrative is neatly resolved with the promise that Mowgli will get together with the cute girl to form a nuclear family, complete with conventional division of labour between the sexes. This expectation is expressed in the lyrics of *My Own Home*: "father's hunting in the forest, mother's cooking in the home...when I'm grown I'll have a daughter fetching water, and I will be cooking in the home". Redrawn images of the girl and a music track of her song occur in the closing sequence of *The pure necessity*, but unlike the Disney film where a bewitched Mowgli trails after the girl into the man village, the video concludes with the girl passing through the village gate and disappearing from sight as bird calls supplant the fading notes of her song. This retention of a fragment of *The Jungle Book*'s narrative with a human character at its centre contrasts starkly with the absence of narrative vitality, musical numbers, and human presence in the rest of the video. It is as though Claerbout sought to highlight how much his re-imagining of *The Jungle Book* departs from the original's human-centred story. Detached from *The Jungle Book* plot, the girl's saccharine sweetness and her song of an ideal home line up with critical accounts of Disney animations as presenting sentimental, morally charged visions of nature and animal lives in order to impose ideologies of middle-class America onto the natural world (Ivakhiv 2013, p. 216).

The pure necessity offers a very different viewing experience to depictions of wildlife in recent natural history documentaries or *The Jungle Book*. Claerbout eschews the buoyant rhythms of both to create a moving image animation no longer centred on characters or dramatic action, but on rendering palpable the imperturbable flow of time. Watching the

video as I did in a cinema context, I became intensely aware of the time the viewing experience was taking precisely because there was no narrative thread to follow nor any obvious payoff in representational content. This refusal to instrumentalise time according to narrative precepts informs many of the artist's works, which he conceives against the hyperactivity of contemporary capitalist societies with their imperatives of non-stop work, relentless consumerism, and information overload in the digital age. In a recent public lecture Claerbout commented: "speed is presented as something entirely natural in our time" (Claerbout 2018), implying that his work seeks to question unthinking acceptance of this state of affairs. And although the artist regularly employs new media technologies, aesthetic features of his works contradict the marketing of such technologies as able to transmit information to consumers with ever-increasing speed, efficiency and sensorial impact.

Claerbout has also mentioned his preoccupation with a deepening conflict in the contemporary world between "the time of man" and the "time of nature". For him the "time of man" is typically conceived in economic terms, where time is atomised into "small market-like shares" (Manganaro 2010, p. 52). This remark invokes the specific temporal regime of modernity where the chronometric measurement time and of human activity has worked hand in glove with the modern imperative of *productivity*. Historically this has meant harnessing science, technology and management systems of every kind to achieve maximum efficiency and outputs from the means of production. One expression of the modern ethos of productivity has been the intensification of human domination and exploitation of nature to an unprecedented degree. Claerbout's remarks imply that a thinking of time as synonymous with economic enterprise dominates the temporal co-ordinates of everyday life and human attitudes to the natural world more than ever before.

In his polemical text, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* Jonathan Crary details various malignant effects of the economic logic Claerbout associates with the "time of man". Crary speaks of a neoliberal assault on times of repose, sleeping, daydreaming, or just doing nothing, where, he writes, "time itself has become monetized and the individual

redefined as a fulltime economic agent” (Crary 2013, pp.70-71). In similar vein, he asserts: “billions of dollars are spent every year...researching how to eliminate the useless time of reflection and contemplation”, and “the form of contemporary progress [is] the relentless capture and control of time and experience” (Crary 2013, p. 40). The slow aesthetic of *The pure necessity*, like many of Claerbout’s works, presents an alternative to the frenetic tempo of globalisation by distending narratively empty time, thereby opening up space for contemplation and reflection on both socially dominant and marginalised temporal frameworks.

Additionally, Claerbout aligns the “time of man” with myth making, storytelling, ideological interests, and a prevailing anthropocentrism within cultural forms, where, for example, wild animals are assigned human characteristics and motivations. Alternatively, as indicated by *The pure necessity*, Claerbout equates what he calls the “time of nature” or “biological time” with rhythms of undirected durational existence, unmoored from chronometric time or any concern with serving human ends. In *The pure necessity* the temporality of nature dilates slowly and uneventfully, without any narrative purpose or advantage to human characters. This is contrary to the usual temporal progression of narrative cinema, the movement of which typically forges towards a human-centred culmination of its process. Writing on Claerbout’s art, and drawing on the thought of Gilles Deleuze, Timothy S. Barker observes that the artist represents natural time as “a slow and relentless viscous flow” unleavened by dramatic events (Barker 2010, p. 299). Echoing such claims, Claerbout states that he thinks of the time of nature as “a big broad witness, generously killing all petty narrative and myths. Which is why I like to work with the language of film and photography—so full of narrative and myths” (Manganaro 2010, p. 52).

By folding the “time of nature” into his reimagining of *The Jungle Book*, a film thoroughly imbued with “time of man” values, Claerbout amplifies the tenacity of modern anthropocentric perspectives in mainstream film portrayals of nature, no matter how environmentally aware they may claim to be. *The pure necessity* also gives us pause to reflect on the negative consequences of the 24/7 tempo of contemporary capitalism as second nature

in our time. Anything considered out of step with the cult of speed and infinite economic growth is too often cast as anachronistic, a waste of time, or simply expendable. For those who continue to promote unlimited capitalist accumulation and humanity's capacity to endlessly transcend the finitude of the natural world, accelerated species loss and mass extinctions of animal and plant life lie in the expendable category.

Lumsden's Hegelian interpretation of the spirit of modernity and the forms of life aligned with it brings into relief the continuing and widely held belief that human self-determination and freedom should take precedence over any natural limits, and how such thinking is incompatible with the long-term survival of the Earth's ecologies. Focussing more narrowly on habitual media representations of wildlife and the natural world, Claerbout's *The pure necessity* presents an alternative vision to one that casts both as nothing more than ciphers of human enterprise.

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