

Reclaiming Animism

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Do not ask me to define animism. Whatever their scholarship, the different definitions given to such a general category bear the stamps of their origins. The very name can hardly be disentangled from pejorative colonialist associations, also from associations with the idea of “stages,” a common (folk)lore shared by Sigmund Freud, James Frazer, and Edward Tylor. The mature (white) adult male, who has accepted the hard truth that he is alone in a mute, blind world, is then able to define the past as what leads toward him.

It is true that today some anthropologists endeavor to disentangle themselves from this evolutionist tale—a non-Darwinian one, by the way, since it turns the Darwinian adventure of life on earth, an open adventure, devoid of transcendent perspective, into an epic associated with a moral: “Thou shall not regress.” However, as long as they do so, as is the case with Philippe Descola, as part of their field’s ambition to bring from faraway worlds materials to produce an universal anthropology, they are part of our epic of progress. We may well distance ourselves from the Greek philosophers’ first “rational” definition of nature or from the monotheistic definition of man created in the image of God and given the whole creation to rule. But when scientists’ contradictory arguments thunder, we are just bystanders safely recognizing a familiar situation: they are entitled to decipher the demands of rationality and to rule over everybody else’s beliefs. Neuroscientists may freely deny the truth of what we are proud of, freedom or rationality. Anthropologists may freely affirm that our “naturalism” is just one of four human schemes organizing what we all deal with, human and nonhuman nature. We may certainly wonder whether the neuronal explanation is a case of “naturalism,” or whether our organizing schemes are to be explained in terms of some neuronal attractors. What we know is that “we,” who are not authorized scientists, cannot intervene in those fights any more than a mortal could intervene in the Olympian gods’ quarrels. Even philosophers, although descendants of Greek reason, and theologians, inheritors of the monotheistic creed, have no voice. Let us not speak of the old lady with a cat, claiming her cat understands her. Scientists may disagree on the way we are wrong, but they agree on the fact that we nevertheless are so. The epic is no longer about the “ascent of Man” but the ascent of the Scientist. How to avoid the question of animism, if it is taken seriously at all, being framed in terms that contribute to this ascent, that verify Science’s right to define it as an object of knowledge?

By refusing to define animism, I am thus refusing what would authorize me to define it. I will be authorized neither by the traditional claim that animism is what scientific rationality has separated us from nor by Descola’s claim that

Science, as the product of what we call rationality, would in fact verify that we are “naturalists” just as others are “animists.” This double refusal is not only a matter of leaving the quarreling gods alone. It stems first of all from my interest in what I would call scientific achievements, and my correlative disgust at the way such achievements have been mobilized into a great sad story about “Science disenchanting the world.” Second, it cannot be disentangled from the need to resist not only the kind of judgment passed on “others” but also what has devastated the relations we have to ourselves—be we philosophers, theologians, or old ladies with cats.

The adventure of sciences (in the plural and with a small *s*) is not about implementing some general rational right or verifying that nature uniformly obeys laws. Such a characterization is one that becomes adequate, rather, as soon as Science is defined at the cost of forgetting the demanding character of “scientific achievement,” when, that is, scientists achieve the creation of situations enabling what they question to put their questions at risk, to make the difference between relevant questions and unilaterally imposed ones. Such a creation is a very particular art, indeed, and a very selective one, because it means that what is addressed must be successfully enrolled as a “partner” in a very unusual entangled relation, a partner whose role in the relation would be not only to answer questions but also, and primordially so, to answer them in a way that tests the question itself.¹ And the answers that follow from such an achievement do not separate us from anything, because they always coincide with the creation of new questions, not with new authoritative answers to questions that would or should matter to everyone.

If the unifying thread of what we call Science had been the demanding, specific character of scientific achievement—the commitment to create situations that confer on what scientists deal with the power to make a crucial difference for what concerns the value of their questions—relevance and not authority or objectivity would have been the name of the game. Correlatively, the plurality of sciences would have reflected the utmost attention being paid to the demanding challenge of achieving relevance in each particular field. It certainly happens that such attention is paid, for instance, when some contemporary ethnologists learn to recognize the crucial difference between a bored or distressed animal, to which stultifying questions are imposed in the name of Science, and an “animated” one, “in its element,” interested by the situation proposed. Also, when an ethnologist, such as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, writes that anthropology demands a process of the “permanent decolonization of thought,” this is a testing process, as “others,” then, are not only those who “think”

¹ See Isabelle Stengers, *The Invention of Modern Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

differently but also those empowered to challenge the very meaning we associate with thinking.

We can only imagine what a scientific institution that accepted the challenge of addressing whatever it addresses only if the situation ensures that the addressee is enabled to “take a position” about the way it is addressed would have been. What we cannot imagine, however, is that science would then have verified animism. We may well think instead that the term itself would not exist. Only a “belief” can receive such a global name. Scientific practices being acknowledged in their specificity, nobody would have dreamed of giving to “Science” the role of addressing others in terms of the “beliefs” they would entertain about a “reality” that Science would have privileged access to. Instead of the hierarchical figure of a tree, with Science as its trunk, what we call progress would perhaps have had the allure of a Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizome,² connecting heterogeneous practices, concerns, and ways of having the inhabitants of this earth matter, with none being privileged, and any being liable to connect with any other. A figure of anarchy, one might object. Yes—but of an ecological anarchy, because while connections may be produced between any parts, they must be produced. Connections are not arbitrary happenings. They are events, like symbiosis, with consequences that matter for both parts, as when one practice learns how another may be of interest, for instance, and in so doing opens new possibilities for that other practice.

Gilles Deleuze wrote that thinking should be “by the milieu,”³ meaning both without reference to a ground or ideal aim, and never separating something from the milieu that it requires in order to exist. In order to resist the figure of the tree, we have first to consider that not everything can exist in scientific milieus, because not everything may have the role demanded by the creation of a “representation” in the particular scientific sense conferred on it, the role of putting to the test the way it is represented, made present by scientists. I once took the example of the Virgin Mary (not the theological figure but the intercessor whom pilgrims address): to imagine that she would make her existence known independently of the faith and trust of pilgrims, that is, play her due part in a situation committed to the question of how to represent her, is bad taste. Taking the pilgrimage as a practice the achievement of which is the transformative experience of pilgrims demands that we do not conclude that since she cannot “demonstrate” her existence, “she is only a fiction,” invoking the general categories of superstition, belief, or symbolic efficacy in order to explain away what they encounter. Rather, we may conclude that she requires a milieu that does not agree with scientific demands.

² See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), esp. “Introduction: Rhizome”, pp. 3–25.

³ Equally “by the middle,” as the French *milieu* can mean both.

However, pilgrims and the Virgin are weak examples for a rhizomatic perspective because today they are captured by the rather obscene alternative of “natural” and “supernatural” causation. Who is responsible for the healings that may occur: a miraculous intervention or some sort of “enhanced placebo effect”? This alternative authorizes the ugly scene, at Lourdes and other miracle sites, where, before announcing a miracle, the church hierarchy awaits the verdict of physicians empowered to decide whether a healing can be explained away in terms of hypothetical “natural causes.” In so doing, a disastrous definition of the “natural” is given: it is what Science should in some future explain. “Supernatural” is then—just as disastrously—whatever challenges any such “perspective.” In other words, the milieu, here, opposes any rhizomatic connections, pigeonholing the case in terms of belief—those who believe that “nature,” as the domain where Science rules alone, explains effects that fuel superstition, and those who accept this belief but add another one, in a power that transcends nature.

The half-forgotten case of magnetism offers an interesting contrast. The passionate interest it generated during the nineteenth century blurred any boundary between natural and supernatural. Nature was made mysterious, and supernature was populated by messengers bringing news from elsewhere to mediums in magnetic trance—a very disordered situation, which understandably provoked the hostility of both scientific and church institutions. It has even been proposed that psychoanalysis was not the subversive “plague” that Freud boasted about, rather a restoration of order, because it provided the means to explain away mysterious cures, magnetic “lucidity,” and other demonic manifestations, now pigeonholed as purely human and bearing witness to a new universal cause deciphered by Science. The Freudian unconscious was indeed “scientific” in the sense that it authorized the deriding of those who marveled, and the acclaiming of the sad, hard truth behind specious appearances. It verified the great sad epic Freud himself popularized: he was coming after Copernicus and Darwin, inflicting a final wound on our narcissistic “beliefs.”

A distinct operation was attempted by the surrealist poet André Breton, who claimed that the strange magnetic effects should be taken out of the hands of scientists and physicians. The point was not to verify what magnetized clairvoyants see or to understand enigmatic healings, but to cultivate lucid trances (automatism) in the milieu that really needed them in order to escape the shackles of normal, representational perception. The milieu of art was to learn and cultivate the demanding exploration of the means to “recuperate our psychical force.”

Breton's proposition is interesting, as the milieu of art could indeed have been a supportive one for the unsettling effects associated with magnetism, which have, in the name of Science, been mutilated through polemical verifications dominated by the suspicion of quackery, self-delusion, or deliberate cheating. Such a milieu would perhaps have been able to produce its own practical knowledge about trances, a knowledge applying to effects, indifferent to the confrontation between "natural" (demystifying) causes and mysterious ones.

However, Breton's proposition was less a practical one than an appropriative one, marked by a typically modernist triumphalism. To him, art was supreme, not a craft among other crafts, but the final advent of the "surreal," finally purified of superstitious beliefs... those of animism, for instance. He would not envisage the creation of rhizomatic connections with other practices that also explore a relation with the world that has nothing to do with representation, but rather with metamorphic engagement. He would not break with the perspective that still dominates so many "interdisciplinary" encounters, where the "subjectivity" of the artistic standpoint is contrasted with the "objectivity" of Science. As if a contrast could be produced between two banners in a devastated landscape, both mobilizing, both empty as they stand for subjugating, commanding words that agree on one thing: there will be no going back for "us." We have to trample on what then appears as a cradle we are both able and have the imperious duty to leave.

Who is "us"? This is the active, transformative, not reflexive question I will associate with yet another operation, that of "reclaiming." Again it will be a question of thinking by the milieu, but this time a milieu that is a dangerous, insalubrious one, one that entices us to feel that we bear the high responsibility to determine what is entitled to "really" exist and what is not entitled to do so and, as a consequence, to identify rationality and the power of judgmental critique. Scientists are infected, of course, as well as all those who accept their authority concerning what objectively exists. But those who would claim to be animists if they affirm that rocks "really" have souls or intentions, as we have, might be infected, too. It is the "really" that matters here, an emphasis that marks the polemical power associated with truth. Coming back for a moment to Descola's classification, I would guess that those he names animists have no word for "really," for insisting that they are right and others are victims of illusions. Reclaiming begins with recognizing the infective power of this milieu, a power that is not defeated in the slightest when the sad relativity of all truth is affirmed. Quite the contrary, in fact, since the sad—because monotonous—refrain of the relativist is then that our truths do not "really" have the authority they claim.

Reclaiming means recovering what we have been separated from, but not in the sense that we would just get it back. It means recovering, or recuperating, from the very separation, regenerating what it has poisoned. The need to struggle and the need to cure us of what threatens to make us resemble those we have to struggle against are thus irreducibly allied. A poisoned soil must be reclaimed, and so must many of our words, those that—like “animism” and “magic,” for instance—carry with them the power to take us hostage: do you “really” believe in...?

I received this word, “reclaiming,” as a gift from neo-pagan contemporary witches and other US activists. I also received as a shock the cry of neo-pagan Starhawk: “The smoke of the burned witches still hangs in our nostrils.”⁴ Certainly the witch hunters are no longer among us, and we no longer take seriously the accusation of devil worshipping that witches were the victims of. Rather, our milieu is defined by the modern pride that we are now able to interpret witch hunting as a matter of social, linguistic, cultural, or political construction or beliefs. What this pride leaves aside, however, is that sharp critical analysis may contribute to anesthesia in our own situation as the heirs of an operation of cultural and social eradication—the forerunner of what was committed elsewhere in the name of civilization and reason. Anything that contributes to classifying the memory of such operations as part of an irreversibly destroyed past is part of their own success. In this first sense, our pride in our critical power to “know better” makes us the heirs of the witch hunters.

The point is obviously not to feel guilty. It is rather to open up what William James, in his “The Will to Believe,” called a genuine, effective option, complicating the “us” question, demanding that we situate ourselves. And here comes the true efficacy of Starhawk’s cry. Reclaiming the past is not a matter of resurrecting it as it was, of dreaming to make some “true,” “authentic” tradition come alive. It is rather a matter of reactivating it, and first of all of feeling the smoke in our nostrils, the smoke that I feel, for instance, when I hurriedly emphasize that, no, I did not “believe” that one could resurrect the past. Learning to feel the smoke is to activate memory and imagination regarding the way we have learned the codes of our respective milieus: derisive remarks, knowing smiles, offhand judgments, often about somebody else, but gifted with the power to pervade and infect—to shape us as those who will be among those who sneer and not among those who are sneered at.

However, we can understand everything about the way the past did shape us—but understanding is not reclaiming because it is not recovering. Indeed, this was

⁴ Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark* (1982; new ed., Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), p. 219.

the anguished question of David Abram, a question that we will not avoid just by invoking capitalism or human greed: how can a culture as educated as ours be so oblivious, so reckless, in its relations to the animate earth?⁵ Abram was in a bookshop, where all sacred traditions and resources of moral wisdom of the present and the past were gathered, when the answer hit him: “No wonder! No wonder that our sophisticated civilizations, brimming with the accumulated knowledge of so many traditions, continue to flatten and dismember every part of the breathing earth... *For we have written all of these wisdoms down on the page*, effectively divorcing these many teachings from the living land that once held and embodied these teachings. Once inscribed on the page, all this wisdom seemed to have an exclusively human provenance. Illumination once offered by the moon’s dance in and out of the clouds, or by the dazzle of the sunlight on the wind-rippled surface of mountain tarn, was now set down in an unchanging form.”⁶

David Abram nevertheless writes, and passionately so. Writing (not writing down) creates the same kind of crucial indeterminacy as the dancing moon—no “either... or” alternative dismembering experience between the moon “really” offering illumination, as an intentional subject would do, and the moon just triggering what would “really” be of human provenance. Writing is an experience of metamorphic transformation. It makes one feel that ideas are not the author’s, that they demand some kind of cerebral, that is, bodily, contortion (making us larvae, wrote Deleuze) whereby any preformed intention is defeated. It could even be said that writing is what gave to transformative forces the mode of existence that we call “ideas.” For Alfred North Whitehead, Plato’s proposition that ideas are what erotically lure the human soul, or, we could say, “animate” humans, was the inaugural definition of both philosophy and the (Greek) human soul as “the enjoyment of its creative function, arising from its entertaining of ideas.”⁷ In Deleuze’s words, this enjoyment is described as following a witch’s flight.⁸ For Etienne Souriau, no creation bringing something new into existence is of human provenance alone, the human agent being instead the prey of the unrelenting imperative—“Guess!”—stemming from the work to be done.⁹

However, when the text is written *down*, in an “unchanging form,” it may well impose itself as of human provenance—even inducing the impression that it can be the vehicle to get access to the intentions of the writer, to what he “meant to communicate” and is ours to “understand.” Correlatively, the Platonic soul may

⁵ David Abram, *Becoming Animal* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), pp. 180–81.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

⁷ Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas* (New York: Free Press, 1967), p. 148.

⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 41.

⁹ Etienne Souriau, *Les différents modes d'existence* (1943; repr., Paris: PUF, 2009).

become a definition divorced from experience, something we have that “nature” does not. After *The Symposium*, where Plato discusses the erotic power of ideas, wrote Whitehead, he should have written another dialogue, called *The Furies*, which would deal with the horror lurking “within imperfect realization.” The danger of imperfect realization is present whenever transformative, metamorphic forces make themselves felt, but it is inherent in ideas, the realization of which implies being “written down,” enticing us with the temptation to define the text as self-contained, generally available to understanding, severing the experience of reading from that of writing. All the more so in a world that is now saturated by texts and signs that are vehicles for information and consigns addressed to “anyone”—separating us from the “more than human” world¹⁰ to which ideas nevertheless belong.

Reclaiming animism is not reclaiming the “idea” of animism, even if for people like me it may start with the realization that my experience of writing is an animist experience, attesting to a “more than human” world. It is rather a matter of recovering the capacity to honor experience, any experience we care for, as “not ours” but rather as “animating” us, making us witness to what is not us. Such a recovery, again, is not an idea, but it can be helped (protected from being “demystified” as some fetishistic¹¹ illusion) by the Deleuzo-Guattarian idea of “assemblage.”

An assemblage, for Deleuze and Guattari, is the coming together of heterogeneous components, and such a coming together is the first and last word of existence. I do not exist and enter into assemblages; my existence is my very participation in assemblages—I am not the same writing and wondering about the efficacy of the text when it will be written down. I am not gifted with agency, the possessor of intentions or initiative. Animation, agency, or what Deleuze and Guattari called “desire” belongs to the assemblage as such, including those very particular assemblages, so-called reflexive ones, which produce an experience of detachment, the enjoyment of critically testing previous experience in order to determine what is “really” responsible for what. It was certainly a very crucial assemblage for our survival well before it became synonymous with intellectual life, but still one assemblage among others, not the withdrawing “beyond” that would permit the free examination of what has lured me into thinking, feeling, or imagining.

Relating animism to the efficacy of “assemblages” is not an innocuous move, however. It opens up an easy way out for the reader, whom I am perfectly

¹⁰ See David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).

¹¹ For our furious “antifetishism,” see Bruno Latour’s work over the past fifteen years. His inaugural “coming out” as an anti-antifetishist, in 1996, is now translated: *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

unable to deter from concluding that I am offering a Deleuzo-Guattarian interpretation, one that is not uninteresting, perhaps, but not necessary in the least. I am no more able to deter the reader from wondering whether Derrida's deconstructions or Foucault's power/knowledge would not be equally or even more relevant for questioning the modern epic. We, as readers, are used to freely questioning without experiencing the existential consequences of our questions, to understanding assemblages, for instance, as an interesting concept that we could apply, as one among others, that is, without feeling our intentional stance threatened by its demand, and also without fearing the suspicious gaze of the inquisitors, without feeling the smoke in our nostrils... We are protected by the references we quote.

This is why it may be better to revive more compromising words, dead and buried, so as to have metaphoric use only. "Magic" is such a word, as we freely speak of the magic of an event, of a landscape, of a musical moment... Protected by the metaphor, we may then express the experience of an agency that does not belong to us even if it includes us, but as lured into feeling. It may be that we need to forfeit this protection in order to heal ourselves of the sad, monotonous little critical voice that whispers that we should not accept being mystified, a voice that relays that of the inquisitors and may become a loud, public cry invoking the frightening possibilities that would follow if we gave up critique, the only defense we have against fanaticism and the rule of illusions.

This cry has the power of the epic story of mankind leaving the cradle and then trampling it underfoot. We would admit many daring propositions as long as—like Breton's—they reflect a version of the epic, as long as they warrant that only selected types (artists, philosophers...) are authorized to explore what mystifies others. But magic undercuts any such version of the epic. And it is precisely one of the reasons why neo-pagan witches call their own craft "magic"—naming it so is, in itself, an act of magic because experiencing the discomfort it creates, we may feel the smoke in our nostrils. Worse, they have learned to cast circles and invoke the Goddess, She who, the witches say, "returns," She to whom thanks will be given for the event that makes each and all together capable of "doing the work of the Goddess," as they say. They put us to the test: we will not accept regression, or conversion to supernatural beliefs!

The point, however, is not to wonder whether "we" have to accept the Goddess that contemporary witches invoke in their rituals. If one said to them, "But your Goddess is only a fiction," they would doubtless smile and ask us whether we are among those who believe that fiction is powerless. What the witches challenge us to accept is to give up criteria that transcend assemblages, and comfort, again and again, the epic of critical reason. What they cultivate, as part of their craft (as it is a part of any craft), is an art of immanent attention, an

empirical art about what is good or toxic, which our addiction for the truth that defeats illusion has too often despised as mere superstitions. They are pragmatic, radically pragmatic, experimenting with effects and consequences of a “realization” that is never innocuous, that, they know, involves care, protections, and experience.

The witches’ ritual chant—“She changes everything She touches, and everything She touches changes”¹²—could surely be commented on in terms of assemblages because it resists the dismembering attribution of agency. Does change belong to the Goddess as “agent” or to the one who changes when touched? The efficacy of the refrain is not to attribute the power of changing to Her, but rather to not attribute it to our own selves. It is to honor change as a creation, instead of making it something “natural.” And to resist judgment in order to discern what the change both demands and makes possible. We can certainly comment on that, but the assemblage has now lost its capacity to protect against the suspicious gaze. The refrain must be chanted; it is part and parcel of the practice of worship.

Can the proposition that magic designates both a craft of assemblages and their particular transformative efficacy help us to reclaim it against both the safety of the metaphoric and the stigma of the supernatural? Can it help us to feel instead that nothing is “natural” in nature? Moreover, can it induce us to consider new transversalities, not reductive ones like this sad term, “natural,” which in fact means “no trespassing: available for scientific explanation only,” or like “the symbolic,” which covers everything else? As always, when reclaiming is concerned, it must start with a compromising step. We, who are not witches, may, for instance, experiment with the (nonmetaphoric) use of the term “magic” to designate the craft of illusionists, who make us perceive and accept what we know to be impossible.

Cognitive neuroscientists are now interested in this craft. Magicians, they discover, have put to use remarkable versions of what they themselves set up in their laboratories in order to exhibit the active construction that we call “perception.” Whatever the interest of this first effectively rhizomatic connection,¹³ it is not sufficient, however, to make scientists resist the usual sad story, “We believe that we perceive a world, while what we perceive is only a

¹² Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. 226.

¹³ See Stephen Macknik and Susana Martinez-Conde with Sandra Blakeslee, *Sleights of Mind* (London: Profile Books, 2011). In this case, scientists have come to admire a “nonscientific craft,” recognizing the mastery of illusionists and even learning their tricks. Indeed, magicians’ tricks must succeed in a robust way, with people who are “in their element,” who know they are being tricked and would be very proud to discover the trick. Even other magicians, who know the trick, irresistibly “see” the coin vanishing in the air.

construction.” Instead of honoring this construction as giving testimony for a world and the kind of attention our very survival in this world depends on, they will then do their appointed job in our infected and infectious milieu, using the fact that we may be lured in order to demystify our illusions of being rational subjects contemplating the world as it is.

Magic, the witches say, is a craft. They would not be shocked by a transversal connection with the craft of performing magicians if this connection was a reclaiming one, that is, if the craft of performing magicians was addressed as what survived when magic became a matter of illusion and manipulative deception in the hands of quacks, or left to the mercenary hands of those who know the many ways we can be lured into desiring, trusting, buying. And this is precisely what David Abram, himself a sleight-of-hand magician, proposes. He does not discuss illusory construction, but rather “the way the senses themselves have of throwing themselves beyond what is immediately given, in order to make tentative contact with the other sides of things that we do not sense directly, with the hidden or invisible aspects of the sensible.”¹⁴ What “illusionists” artfully exploit is the very creativity of the senses as they “respond to suggestions offered by the sensible itself.”¹⁵ And exploitation, here, tells us about the art, not about the persons, as the suggestions here are offered not only by the magician’s explicit words and gestures but also by subtle bodily shifts that express that he himself participates in, is lured by, the very magic he is performing. Our senses are not for detached cognition but for participation, a nontheoretical (theory: detached contemplation) awareness that shares the metamorphic capacity of things that lure us or recede into inert availability as our manner of participation shifts—but never vanishes: we never step outside the “flux of participation,”¹⁶ or of assemblages.

When magic is reclaimed as an art of assemblage, assemblages, inversely, become a matter of empirical and pragmatic concern about effects and consequences, not of general consideration or textual dissertation. Alluring, suggesting, specious, inducing, capturing, mesmerizing—all our words express the ambivalence of lure, that whatever lures us or animates us may also devour us, all the more so if it is taken for granted. Scientific experimental crafts, which dramatically exemplify the metamorphic efficacy of assemblage conferring on things the power of “animating” the scientist into feeling, thinking, imagining, are also a dramatic example of what Whitehead called “imperfect realization” when, captured by the epic story, they downgrade their achievements into mere manifestation of objective rationality. But the question of how to honor (neither taking it for granted nor endowing it with supernatural grandiosity) the

¹⁴ Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, p. 58.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 59.

metamorphic efficacy of assemblages is a matter of concern for all “magic” crafts, and more especially so in our insalubrious, infectious milieu. And it is because that concern may be common but can receive no general answer that reclaiming magic can only be a rhizomatic operation.

A rhizome rejects any generality.¹⁷ Connections do not manifest some truth here that would be common beyond its heterogeneous multiplicity, beyond the multiplicity of distinct pragmatic significations that “magic” takes in domains where “animation” is related to what we call politics, healing, education, arts, philosophy, sciences, agriculture, or any craft that requires and depends on conferring on what we deal with the capacity to lure us into relevant attention. The only generality here is about our milieu and its compulsion to categorize and judge—spiritualism is here a probable judgment—or to negate whatever would point to the metamorphic dimension of what is to be achieved: learning mathematics is “normal.” But as events, rhizomatic connections tell us about non-indifference: each “magic” craft needs connections with others in order to resist infection by the milieu, but also to heal and to learn. When the dangerous art of animating in order to be animated is concerned, any practical learning, each way of enacting the needed immanent (critical) attention, may be relevant elsewhere, but never as a model, always as a pragmatic reinvention. Such a non-indifference must also be honored in order to resist the dividing power of social judgment, to feel the smoke that demands we decide whether we are heirs to the witches or the witch hunters. Animism may be such a name.

Reclaiming animism does not mean, then, that we have ever been animist—nobody has ever been animist because one is never animist “in general,” always in the terms of an assemblage that produces or enhances metamorphic (magic) transformation in our capacity to affect and be affected—that is also to feel, think, and imagine. Animism may, however, be a name for reclaiming these assemblages because it lures us into feeling that their efficacy is not ours to claim. Against the insistent poisoned passion of dismembering and demystifying, it affirms what it is they all require in order not to devour us—that we are not alone in the world.

¹⁷ In contrast with a “paradigm,” the rather dangerous term Félix Guattari used when calling for a new “aesthetic paradigm” to replace the “objectivist one”—correlatively privileging “art” at the risk of revitalizing an epic perspective.