

Jean-Luc Nancy  
**Oh the Animals  
of Language**

01/03

e-flux journal #65 SUPERCOMMUNITY — may–august 2015 [Jean-Luc Nancy](#)  
**Oh the Animals of Language**

Oh Tiger oh Alligator  
one another neither friends nor foes  
cruel indifferent sovereigns meeting by chance  
not through hunting or the whim of men  
zoo or domestic fantasy  
fantastical fantasy face to face in ignorance  
pure cruel innocents  
sawing jaws bony frame violent game  
long indolent torpor  
skin-deep sleep  
and sudden awakening  
as if called by a bugle  
a signal an alarm  
a cry a scent a rustle a breeze  
an insect or snake  
pulse of prey or threat  
pulsing death oh indifferent death  
sacrifice without idol  
*no altar no ritual*  
*sacrifice to ravenous life*  
*to the living gods of fertile devourings*  
*to the gods of older worlds*  
*tiger the vengeful god alligator the wrathful*  
*knowing neither vengeance nor anger*  
*oh such impeccable savagery save barbarity*  
*save war peace dilemma*  
*powers identical to themselves*  
*even not the same*  
*living outside their names*  
*outside the languages that name them*  
*these names that roar and gape*  
*these sharp-toothed names*  
*hot-throated maws*  
*claws and craws*  
*scales and stripes*  
all these animal words  
they have not learned  
nor understood or swallowed nor devoured  
or digested  
them in their names not in them their names  
names which flutter outside flags torches  
ideas images  
nothing to eat nothing to scratch nothing to bulge  
but growling snapping biting  
forms of fierceness called by name  
Tiger Alligator  
more than your truthful names  
following your hunger  
following what suits your ways  
unconcerned with proper splendors  
sumptuous coat scaly leather undreamt-of  
luxuries  
massive luxuriance radiating  
figures of an old mystery  
of living profusion  
a mystery of origins in the prolific profusion of  
geneses  
of genes of generations  
of crossings of selections of mutations  
of trials of errors of successes

02/03



Phillip Warnell, *Ming of Harlem: Twenty One Storeys in the Air*, 2014. Super 16mm film, 71 mins.

in families species and varieties  
through to rare specimens the great loners  
lords of forests and rivers  
born just for this lordly dominion  
Tiger Alligator  
sovereign by your allure alone  
by your stretches by your leaps  
by your sated sleep by your starts  
by your fury your courage your glory  
which our tongues  
try to form in roughened rhymes  
gnashing scratching roaring  
rumbling repetitions  
hoarse tongued torsions  
tongue behind words  
in your mouth which roars and which weeps  
groans moans howls  
cries from your tear-filled throat  
your throat tigrator your throat  
but no less mine no less  
deep in which these names you do not know  
make signs  
which celebrate you which honor you  
rituals prayers  
rhythms of adoration  
from throat to belly and into the lungs  
heart liver nerves and tendons  
spread the shiny splinters of your names  
Tiger Gator  
their savage invocations  
which make of you in me the gods  
the ancient the fearsome  
intimate with the impossible

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*“Oh the Animals of Language” was originally written for Ming of Harlem: Twenty-One Stories (2014), directed by Phillip Warnell and produced by Warnell and Madeleine Molyneaux. Copyright for the image and text is shared between the authors and Big Other Films. Both appear in e-flux journal courtesy of Jean-Luc Nancy and Phillip Warnell.*

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**On the Animals of Language**

[Jean-Luc Nancy](#) is a French philosopher. Since 1973 he has written more than twenty books and hundreds of contributions to volumes, catalogues, journals, and films, as well as writing for the theater and poetry.