This essay argues that the critical project of bringing animals into representation encounters particular difficulties in the context of the international political impasse over global environmental and animal welfare concerns. Analyzing Louis Psihoyos’ 2009 Oscar-winning documentary film “The Cove”, the essay contends that attempts to establish ethical and affective claims for animal life encounter a familiar tension between local and global, particular and universal, that works to contain the film’s compelling critiques of nationalism’s authorization of transpecies violence. The essay suggests instead that a more elaborated critique of both species and nation, which would emphasize the radical interpenetration of species and the transnational character of ecological movements, is necessary to undo the normative humanization of cosmopolitan political projects including environmentalism.

Cosmopolitan figures of the planet narrated in rich countries, as Immanuel Wallerstein points out, often represent an ideal world in which the romance of difference supplants attention to violent forms of inequality (122-24). But the field of postcolonial studies, in which the assimilation of cosmopolitanist theory over the past decade has both been influential and fraught, has suggested a second vision of the cosmopolitical. The Cove (Psihoyos, Louis) (Motion picture)--Criticism and interpretation. Environmentalism--Political aspects. Animal welfare--Political aspects.