
APICHATPONG WEERASETHAKUL'S UNCLE BOONMEE AND HEIDEGGER'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF ART*

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ABSTRACT

Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (*Lung Buymī ralyūk chāti*, 2010) is a quiet and mesmerizing film directed by Apichatpong Weerasethakul. This slow Thai cinema tells the story of Uncle Boonmee, who can recall his past lives. This article interprets *Uncle Boonmee* according to Martin Heidegger's phenomenology of art. In Heidegger's essay *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1935), he articulates that entombed in any artwork is the conflict between 'earth' and 'world'. Artwork, Heidegger argues, is truth setting to work as itself. Truth, in the context of Heidegger's vocabulary of Being, is the Greek term *alētheia*, which means 'unconcealment.' However, Heidegger's readings in his influential essay are limited to painting, poetry and architecture but not cinema. What can cinema tell us of truth, poetically and phenomenologically? Weerasethakul's *Uncle Boonmee*, with its slow, mysterious and meditative reflection on life, can perhaps give us an exemplary clue in furthering an understanding of Heidegger's 'conflict of the earth and the world' in a work of art.

Keywords: *Apichatpong Weerasethakul, cinema, aesthetics, Heidegger, phenomenology*

INTRODUCTION

Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (*Lung Buymī ralyūk chāti*, 2010), a Thailand film directed by Apichatpong Weerasethakul, tells the story of a dying man who is able to

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remember his many earlier lives. Past winner of Palme d'Or at 2010 Cannes Film Festival, the film offers quite a disjointed narrative in a languid pace – a style that Weerasethakul seems at ease if we look back to his previous films like *Mysterious Object at Noon* (*Dokfa nai meuman*, 2000) or *Tropical Malady* (*Sud Pralad*, 2004). *Uncle Boonmee* is a film of mysterious encounter, with mythical narratives that tells the story of monkey, ghost, ugly princess and talking catfish. In an interview, Weerasethakul states:

The film is about a memory of Thailand's north-east where I grew up. This Boonmee character is linked with Primitive project in a way that in that Nabua village, people try to forget their brutal past, while this guy can remember so much. He is an epitome of the region's recollection. However, while I was making the film, I tended not to focus on his past lives. I am more interested in the everyday life, the landscape. And gradually it has become about my memory of the cinema I remember enjoyed watching. It's become the stitches of narratives. The film has 6 reels, and in each reel if you care to notice it is in different style of filmmaking (Thirion, 2010).

For sure, the film itself does not display much of flashbacks or any apparatus that shows off Boonmee's recollection of his past lives. Rather, Apichatpong creates an eerie, dead atmosphere that somehow evokes the possibilities of mind's majestic power to reminisce and think. Apichatpong's "everyday life, the landscape" throws the viewers back to the lushness of a jungle, to the sound of cicadas as darkness falls away. There are times when we are perplexed and intrigued by Apichatpong's narrative strategy but his cinematographic beliefs are not fashioned to explain. He has too much respect for the intelligence of his viewers. Like his other contemporary arthouse filmmakers – Béla Tarr (Hungary), Šarūnas Bartas (Lithuania), Carlos Reygadas (Mexico), Tsai Ming-liang (Malaysia/Taiwan), Lav Diaz (Philippines), to name a few – the most immediate strategy is not to tell a direct plot but rather, to let the images stay stagnant to our imagination, a kind of saturated realism of imageries to provoke a ruminating mood in the viewer's soul. *Uncle Boonmee* demands *poetic thinking* from its viewers. This is why Apichatpong is keen with the excessive use of a technique known as 'long take' (or 'extended shot') in his films; to stretch the struggle between times and images so as to spark and nurture personal interpretive contemplation even further. The combinative use of long take, surreal narrative and the banality of everydayness in a rural Thailand create an encounter of what the film critic Sukhdev Sandhu (2010) says as "distinctive metaphysics far removed from that on display in most contemporary cinema." It is to this urging for reflection and interpretation that our essay builds its roots and from there, to understand the film from the ground of Heidegger's philosophy.

METHOD: HEIDEGGER, PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE ORIGIN OF THE WORK OF ART

The method to understand *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* is more or less phenomenological-ontology, influenced from Heidegger's groundbreaking essay on art 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (originally from lecture series presented in 1935 and 1937 in Zurich and Frankfurt as *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*). The English translation can be found in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2001). For the rest of this essay, we will be using PLT as the short form for *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), an original and controversial German thinker, is renowned for his study on *Sein* (*Being*) in his famous *Being and Time* (*Sein*

und Zeit, 1927/ 1962). The book is a tireless, dedicated pursuit toward the essence of Being that continues on to his later books. Heidegger argues that the access to *being* of entity can only happen through phenomenology as ontology.

What is phenomenology? Phenomenology is a philosophical movement that was started in German by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and was soon taken up by thinkers like Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, Hans-Georg Gadamer and many others. There are no clear-cut phenomenological methods amongst the phenomenologists since each has their own unique and different ways in attributing the 'how' and the 'way' a phenomenon can make itself manifested to perception. As a method, phenomenology commonly combines description and interpretation in understanding phenomena. The descriptive mode is rooted from Husserl's conception of phenomenological reduction whilst the later, interpretation or hermeneutics, are celebrated by Heidegger, Gadamer and Paul Ricœur. Heidegger's conception of 'phenomenon,' which has its etymology to the Greek '*phainomenon*,' means "that which shows itself in itself, the manifest" (1962, p. 51). According to Heidegger further, phenomenology formally means "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (1962, p. 58). To that, *ontology*, a term for the philosophy of the essence of being, is gathered into his analysis of phenomenology. Thus, Heidegger places a special weight on *language* as a path to understand – and thus, to unconceal – Being, and this emphasis grows exponentially over the course of his later works. It is from the play of language, our making home of it, that our hermeneutics toward its essence can be grasped. Phenomenological method is very personal since it is not the accrued data of variable surveys but the subjective reflection of the thinker himself as he adds in his own experience to understand the observable facts in his perception. Trapped within these observable facts is the essence of Being, and the right to grasp this essence is can only be best known through rigorous interpretation. The light which emanates in his perception marks its own truth as he only knows it true. To borrow Robert Sokolowski's words:

In phenomenological reflection, however, we turn our focus toward these disclosures themselves, toward the evidences that we have accomplished, and we think about what it is to be datives of manifestation and what it is for beings to be manifest. Phenomenology is the science that studies truth (2000, p. 185).

'Phenomenological-ontology' is Heidegger's hermeneutics of doing phenomenology; the science of *Being* of entities. (1962, p. 61). Man is termed as *Dasein*, the one who makes the question of being as its main issue. Accordingly, man is not above the 'where' he is from, he is in the world with the things around him; he is *being-in-the-world*. It must be noted that Heidegger's text and jargon are very dense: They can prove to be an obstacle just as much as *pathway* to open up language that has become barrier to the appearance of things and to the way we perceives them. As Herbert Spiegelberg writes, Heidegger "mostly points at the phenomena by means of new, provocative and, at times, stunning terms which keep even the native German groping his way toward a tentative understanding" (1982, p. 386).¹ To even understand his works, one must first have an appeal – a charity – to poetic thinking, to the appreciation of art as poetry, and poetry as the highest form of philosophy. This poetic thinking is essential in understanding how a work of art – in this case, *Uncle Boonmee* – presents to us and shares its meaningfulness in our experience.

The definitions above are to give contextual understanding on both Heidegger and the approach of our interpretive readings. Our essay here tries to exploit several key statements

from Heidegger's essay, *The Origin of the Work of Art*. Since there is not enough space to do justice to the whole essay we would like to concentrate instead on his idea of the strife between world and earth in an artwork. Heidegger sees art foremost as the fundamental origin of artist and artwork. He argues that art is the "becoming and happening of truth" – it is a "creative preserving of truth in the work" (PLT, p. 69).

Artwork, "opens up a world and at the same time sets this world back again on earth" (PLT, p. 41). In the space of the artwork, two beings arise and meet: the world and the earth. 'World' here means the totality of our relation to other beings in the world, the way we organize our thinking and body with the equipment we find in everyday usage. 'Earth' to Heidegger, is the grounds where man stands, walks, sits and dwells. It is a place "that whence the arising brings back and shelters everything that arises without violation" (PLT, p. 41). The meeting – the clash – of the world and earth is the *establishment of truth*. Heidegger's notion of truth is not about 'correctness' or 'assertion'; by employing the Greek term *alétheia* he refers truth as '*unconcealment*' ('uncovering' of an obstacle that impede our perception towards its essence). The clash of both world and earth is both a breach and a unity at the same time; both cannot live without each other since they balance each other out. Heidegger strongly states: "*All art, as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of what is, is, as such, essentially poetry*" (PLT, p. 70). This is the crux of Heidegger's main phenomenological seeing in the interplay of art and truth. Since Heidegger believes that thinking and writing in the search of essence must be done in the *respect* and the *nearness* of poetry, the style of my writings here *attempts* to echo its disposition.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL READINGS OF UNCLE BOONMEE

The film starts with a carefully placed statement: "Facing the jungle, the hills and vales, My past lives as an animal and other beings rise up before me." This is a very important note to understand the theme of *Uncle Boonmee*. The first scene of *Uncle Boonmee* starts with images of a restless buffalo in a jungle in semi-darkness. Please see Figure 1. The buffalo, in the closing light of day, is like a gloomy silhouette in a landscape of darkening green and blue. As the camera soon shows, the buffalo is attempting to run away from the tree it is tied to, as if there is an unseen plea which calls its name to make way and haste to a certain, unknown destination. The buffalo eventually manages to escape, but is soon caught up by its owner. Its plight back home is witnessed by a mysterious creature with shining red eyes, which will be known in the story as Monkey Ghost. Hence, an atmosphere of mystery unfolds in Weerasethakul's lands, a mystery which will soon be extended, and by the end of the credits, never fully explained. It is to this enigma that perhaps, we can endeavour, not to explain in clear structure of words of what *really* happens, but to place its emergence in a phenomenological understanding of its *essencing*.

Weerasethakul's statement below, released in a press kit will help us to fathom better the motivation behind his films.

I believe in the transmigration of souls between humans, plants, animals, and ghosts. Uncle Boonmee's story shows the relationship between man and animal and at the same time destroys the line dividing them. When the events are represented through cinema, they become shared memories of the crew, the cast, and the public. A new layer of (simulated) memory is augmented in the audience's experience. In this regard, filmmaking is not unlike creating synthetic past lives. I am interested

in exploring the innards of this time machine. (Director's Statement, Press kit of *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*).



Figure 1. The silhouette of a restless buffalo. *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010). Dir: Apichatpong Weerasethakul.

Is the image of a buffalo a sign that points to one of Boonmee's past lives? We have to understand that Buddha's teachings play an important impact on Thailand's society at large. This affects the way Weerasethakul conceptualizes his characters' way of looking at life. In Buddhism, there is a wide belief that human will be reincarnated after death. What he or she will be reincarnated into depends on the way he or she leads her life. Buddha's famous words can assist us here as a beam to appreciate Weerasethakul's atmosphere: "Through many a birth wandered I, seeking the builder of this house. Sorrow full indeed is birth again and again." We will speak again of this 'sorrow' later on.

One of the most interesting scenes in the film comes when Uncle Boonmee, Auntie Jen and Tong try to have a simple dinner outside the house's verandah (see Figure 2). While having a conversation, suddenly a woman ghost appears beside Tong, and continues to sit beside him. The woman ghost, as it will be found out, is the departed wife of Boonmee, Huay. Soon after, a man-beast with glowing, red eyes – Monkey Ghost – makes an entrance at the staircase leading to the verandah. He too proceeds to sit at the table. We find out later that the Monkey Ghost is Boonmee's long lost son, Boonsong. Now, what is astounding is not that there exist supernatural occurrences in Weerasethakul's film. What is astounding is the remarkable resource these real people have to act nonchalantly in the face of the supernatural. Uncle Boonmee is... indifferent to the mystifying visitors. In fact, he seems to welcome his visitors to the point of *yearning* to be with them. No doubt that he knew these two people personally. It must be established here that Boonmee has acute kidney problems and is very sick. Like the character Uxbal (played by Javier Bardem in Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Biutiful*) who has mystical power to talk to the dead, *Boonmee knows he is going to die*. After not seeing his wife for fourteen years, Boonmee is full of yearning to be with her, and asks what happen after death.



Figure 2. The conversation around table. *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010). Dir: Apichatpong Weerasethakul.

Now, why would these supernatural beings come over to the house, at this particular time and at this particular spot? They gather since they can sense their dearest one Boonmee is dying and will be dead soon. In dying, Boonmee's essence calls up a securing sound which only ghosts can hear out, and receive its calling. In the verandah, in the warmth of familial bonding and familiar guilt, suddenly a pathway opens for the dead and the living to come together. The darkness that envelops the familial tidings in the verandah is also the same darkness that keeps the entire family safe in the bonding of concern. Without the black night, these ghosts would not dare return back to their original home.

Sometimes, Weerasethakul, as if troubled by the depiction of the paranormal, point his camera elsewhere, usually towards the landscape around his characters, or to the sky. One of the cases is shown in Figure 3. It is the moment when Boonsong narrates his story to his father, of how he meets with the elusive Monkey Ghost, mates with one of them and begins metamorphosing into one, and so – disappears forever from the sight of men. Please take a note again of the director's statement above: "I believe in the transmigration of souls between humans, plants, animals, and ghosts." While Weerasethakul trusts in the transference and wandering of the souls of the living and non-living, he is not however, interested in illustrating the transformation. So when Boonsong – dark in his monkey-like façade – starts to reminisce his transformation into Monkey Ghost, the camera surreptitiously moves away from his face to the darkening sky above. In this shot, the shadowy leaves around the setting obscure the dimming sun. The voice of Boonsong is heard: "I couldn't have experienced this, if I hadn't mated with a Monkey Ghost. My hair...was growing longer. My pupils... were slowly dilating." The dimming sky might look like "pupils... were slowly dilating"; but what it really means is *how* the landscape comes to offer its essence to join together to witness the physical transformation of Boonsong. The land stands by and lets the transformation occur and *be*. It gives birth to the seeing that went by unrealized. In the shroud of the overbearing trees, dusky sky and scattered leaves, we sense Boonsong's longing for the earth; to be unseen

again (from man's eyes) but still as part of man's land. The shot of the darkening sky points indirectly to a certain shyness displayed in Monkey Ghost's nature.



Figure 3. The darkening sky. *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010). Dir: Apichatpong Weerasethakul.

In Buddhist teaching, 'rebirth' or 'reincarnation' is a transformation from one life to the next. In Sanskrit it is called *punarbhava*. The wholesome and most universal view of this process is termed *samsāra*. *Samsāra* is a Buddhist concept in Sanskrit which means 'circle of existence.' According to Thanissaro Bhikkhu (2002), *Samsāra* also means 'wandering on.' This idea of 'wandering on' is an existential concept whereby one moves on from one world to the next, continuing to creating another world since the world before has collapsed. Thanissaro says, "The worlds we create feed off the worlds of others, just as theirs feed off ours" (2002). However, in the molding of the world, one meets with other kindred spirits like itself, and in meeting one continues to cause suffering to others. This is the grieving circle of 'wandering on' which can be escapable to a select few who have attained acute awareness of his or her conditioning as a human. This *samsāra* is epitomized prominently in *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*. The humans and the ghosts here exist to wander on without (essentially and existentially) realizing why they submit to this wandering. The suffering and wanderings of one to another can be seen in the light of 'anxiety' in Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1962, p. 228-235).

Anxiety or *dread* is an underlying phenomenon that is very hard to define but still bothers us. "In anxiety one feels *uncanny*" (1962, p. 233). We feel uncanny because we are not at *home* with our being. It is a realization of how finite we are in this world and how limited our lifespan is in this world. It is an existential 'sorrow' that we cannot put our finger on, but it is the kind of sorrow in the face of 'dying' and 'rebirth.' Here, we cannot think of film as mere technological product. We must think of film as an artwork. "To be a work," says Heidegger "means to set up a world" (PLT, p. 43). *Uncle Boonmee* is clearly a work that promotes its

own world, its own logical sense of what world is. As a world, we find people living inside it, breathing its air, working on its earth and dwells the welcoming hold of the earth.



Figure 4. Huay and Jen accompany Boonmee as he is ready to leave the world. *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010). Dir: Apichatpong Weerasethakul.

When Heidegger analyzes Van Gogh's painting, *A Pair of Shoes* (1886), in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, he is not interested in the nature of form, color, psychological process or the historical background of the painting. What interest him most are the utility and the mode of being of the things that are made apparent in the art of painting. "Usefulness is the basic feature from which this entity regards us, that is flashes at us and thereby is present and thus is this entity" (PLT, p. 28). In the case of shoes, he is interested in the *equipmentality* of the shoes; who uses the shoes, whose world does the shoes belongs, what type of world does the owner of the shoes live in? These readings are existential probing to the readiness of art as a site and opening to truthfulness. Through the questioning of usefulness of equipment, Heidegger interprets the kind of life the person who puts the shoes lead. However, in the case of Boonmee, the kind of lives he leads is a bit complex. It is not that he has multiple personality or any schizophrenic traits but strange things happen to the grounds he stands. His past lives, through the nuances of Weerasethakul's camera, unfold the nearness of his body with the objects that surround him. Such is his recollections that "other beings rise up before me" (See Weerasethakul's directorial statement earlier). To understand Boonmee's lives (or to a certain extent, his kin and friends), is to see neither his occupation nor the kind of house he lives; but to feel the closeness of the landscape that surrounds him. These landscapes and objects tell us more about his past worlds, and gives clue to the next world he will go to. He is the water buffalo, the tree that binds the water buffalo, the Monkey Ghost, the blind fish in the cave. He too is the Princess of the jungle, the catfish that drinks the Princess' vagina and the guard who falls for his Princess. The greenish landscape is rich with his personalities of possible worlds. In Weerasethakul's *Uncle Boonmee*, the characters

tread in the environment of jungle and vales, live not only to serve the land but in serving, welcoming the supernatural with open hand and open heart.

This is why when Boonmee finally decides he wants to die, he goes into the jungle at night, into a cave, with accompaniment of his family (See Figure 4). We ask: What does a cave at night can offer to a dying man? Uncle Boonmee's words are thus: "This cave. It's like a womb, isn't it? I was born here in a life I can't recall." He goes to the darkness of cave, to settle into the earth, to remember again his previous lives that he cannot exactly recall. The cave is his mother's womb. The cave opens up a hole within its hallowed body and in its opening, swallows Boonmee and his kin into the darkness, just as much as the cave rise up and shelters these people from the sky, the cold wind of the night and the mysterious red-eyed creatures that surrounds the cave.



Figure 5. The possibilities of lives. *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010). Dir: Apichatpong Weerasethakul.

In *What is Cinema?* André Bazin argues that "the aesthetic qualities of photography are to be sought in its power to lay bare the realities" (2005, p. 15). Yet, what Bazin meant is paradoxically altered by Weerasethakul when Weerasethakul bares the realities to its unreal properties. An instance of this can be shown in Figure 5. It is a puzzling and one of the humorous scenes in the film. After the temperament of the film's narrative and the sorrow of departed Boonmee, the ending scene suddenly forks out different possibility of lives. This forking out is not done chaotically, but in the most peaceful, deadpan manner. "Now," one can hear a chortle from Apichatpong "what do you make of *this*?" It is remarkable how the dullness in our lives can elicit a puzzling effect when teased in a different composition.

Let us go back to the water buffalo we mentioned earlier in Figure 1. The buffalo is in the mood of restlessness. It wants to get away and get out from the place where it is tied to. But to where would it go? Assuming that the buffalo is a metaphor to the image of Boonmee, is it possible that the buffalo too, wants to go back to where, it thinks, gave birth to it? To the cave like Boonmee? This is an intriguing possibility. To understand a mysterious work

like *Uncle Boonmee*, we must see and experience it as poetry. “Art,” says Heidegger “as the setting-into-work of truth, is poetry” (PLT, p. 72). To do that we first must open ourselves to its irrationality, its quirk and its creative demands to our thinking. What are we when we ourselves do not have any poetic substance in our being? We would be what Albert Hofstadter calls as “vicious automata of self-will” (PLT, p. xv). Cinema is no mere cultural product nor social record; we must think cinema as a thinking landscape. Works like Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* is an indispensable breath of nature that should be welcomed to our mode of thinking.

When *Uncle Boonmee* depicts the sometimes hazy, sometimes clear jungle landscape, Weerasethakul is not simply interested to *just* capture these moments, but more, he is engrossed to let the jungle into his camera, into his world. Heidegger writes, “*The work lets the earth be an earth*” (PLT, p. 45). This might sound too simplistic, but Weerasethakul’s film fits Heidegger’s description; the earth is released into its essence as a sheltering, enveloping being that is *the earth*. The darkness of the night when the otherworld things move restlessly in the thick forest is Weerasethakul’s consuming idea regarding the essence of earth. Personally, the realism of the jungle in Thailand, with the humming of *cengkerik* (cicada) is easily identifiable to the authors’ cultural background, since clearly the Malaysian jungle is like Thai’s. So, when Weerasethakul shows the images of Thailand’s *kampong* (local dialect that means ‘countryside’ in English), they trigger in our mind and our heart to the imaginings of the wooden *kampong* that the authors have known, stayed and slept inside. In the recalling of this personal memory, the beauty of the cinematography is made more obvious. The stretch of time of the extended shot – a long take – moves us to brood in the richness of images, the mistiness of their color – as they washed us over in their deadening slowness. *Uncle Boonmee*, for all said and done, is a thing of uncanny splendor to our perception. Did not Heidegger have something to say about beauty? “*Beauty is one way in which truth occurs as unconcealedness*” (PLT, p. 54). By imagining and producing the beings as such, Weerasethakul was pointing a film-site where beauty grows as its own truthfulness. In the *Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger quotes the famous German painter, Albrecht Dürer: “For in truth, art lies hidden within nature; he who can wrest it from her, has it” (PLT, p. 68). Looking back into the over-abundance of trees, hills, cave and shrubs by Weerasethakul in his cinema – all perfectly calculated as ‘placement strategies’ in the composition of shots – one finally grasp a beautiful and staggering idea; it is to build a path, in such a way, that he (and we) can attune and contemplate the truth of being in artwork. “Art lies hidden within nature.” The groupings of plants, jungle, and earth not only bring forth truth, but in their collective gatherings, “other beings rise up before me”: The supernatural, the unseen things that haunt the Thailand’s’ folklore, the Monkey Ghost, the *samsāra*.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It must be stressed that Heidegger believes that artwork would not be artwork of truth unless one is willing to stop, listen and hear to the respond of the call of *Being*. Weerasethakul’s *Uncle Boonmee*, in its aesthetic depiction of the lives of the common people in the face of the supernatural, is an opening – a clearing space – where beauty and poetry reside. Weerasethakul’s cinematic language offers a further extension to the Heidegger’s strife of ‘world’ and ‘earth’ in the opening of truth in an artwork. There is another dimension to this strife, which sits ascetically to the side of the world. It is of the ‘otherworld.’

This otherworld is not a new concept – it occurs in the narrative of Homer, in *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, in the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, in *Ogor-Ogor Nyepi* celebration in Bali, in Katsuhiko Otomo's comics *Domu*, but is suppressed in Heidegger's depiction of the realness of being-in-the-world. This otherworld consists of the things that we cannot see; the supernatural, the occult beings, the strange creatures, talking catfish in the river, ghost and spirits of the forest. Perhaps, this otherworld manifest instead as 'divinities' in Heidegger's fourfold concept (earth, sky, divinities, mortals) in his other powerful essay, '*Building Dwelling Thinking*' (a lecture given in 1951).³ But in the lecture, he was speaking of the way we dwell on the earth, and not the dwelling in artwork. In *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, the otherworld and the world *combine* together as a partner to strife with the earth, the land and soil that is brought in the film. In this encounter – a discord, fight, battle, *polemos* – both otherworld and the world raise together not to beat the earth like a man against another man, but to battle out in a harmonious way that they both balance out each other. The world is the strangeness and the dullness of meetings between the supernatural and the human beings; the earth is the site where this supernatural beings come back for shelter and comfort. The meetings of otherworld, world and earth are a necessary encounter that moderates each others since each ones need the others, without which, they cannot become a clearing whereby artwork – Weerasethakul's cinema – can lay claim to the happening of truth.

NOTE

¹ Even his corpus of writings and collected lectures can be daunting. Just to get an idea of his philosophical outputs, there are currently about 104 volumes of collected (and some waiting to be published) works grouped under *Heidegger Gesamtausgabe*, published by Vittorio Klostermann.

² All images from *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* are copyright of Kick the Machine Films, Illuminations Films Past Lives, Anna Sanders Films, The Match Factory, Eddie Saeta, S.A. (2010).

³ Which can be accessed in Heidegger, (2001), *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by A. Hofstadter, New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics.

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