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Issue Introduction

Containing essays ranging from the highly academic to the very personal, this issue of JCAS demonstrates the myriad ways that critical animal studies continues to develop. In “Analyzing Categories: Harvey Sacks and Critical Animal Studies,” Carmen Dell’Aversano seeks to develop her argument regarding the “animal queer,” a term she has coined and one which refers to “humans who, in their self-definition, question and cross barriers pertaining not to sex or gender but of species.” Working with linguist Harvey Sacks’s theory of “category-bound activities,” Dell’Aversano explores the all-too-familiar statement “I could never give up meat” as one reflective of these “‘category-bound activities’ that assume and reiterate the ‘naturalness’ and ‘normalcy’ of an exploitative relationship with ‘animals.’”

In “Behaving Like Animals: Shame and the Human-Animal Border in Milan Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*,” Daniella Cádiz Bedini engages theories of shame in the construction of the human and the animal. Drawing on various readings of shame in *Genesis*’ Garden of Eden, she then moves on to examine “the ways these two texts interpret the nebulous border between human and animal precisely via a preoccupation with shame and the body,” arguing that “both offer us an interpretation of shame and awareness that expands the narrow confines of the human and instead exposes shame as a form of public vulnerability—one that is not limited to the human, yet is predetermined by it.” Bedini ultimately claims that “these novels not only challenge the human-animal divide but also offer us a different practical model with which to engage with non-human animals, and with lives not considered normatively ‘human.’”

Our second literary analysis, Donelle Gadenne’s “Fishing in Fiction: A Human-Animal Studies Analysis of Fishing in Two Examples of Popular Fishing Literature,” dovetails with

Bedini's essay in its attention to the religious symbology of human exceptionalism. Examining two novels, Norman Maclean's *A River Runs Through It* and David James Duncan's *The River Why*, "Fishing in Fiction" discusses the ways these novels both perpetuate the supposed sacredness of fishing (one only need think, within Christianity, of how many disciples were fishermen or of Jesus' feeding the multitude) and, occasionally, resist such a naturalized violence. While animal slaughter—specifically, of quadrupeds—has a long history of sanctified sacrifice, this essay shows how fishing, though it has not traditionally been explicitly ritualized via sacrifice, also carries with it religious symbology that arguably condones violence.

Troy Martin's "'This Image Cannot Be Displayed': Critical Visual Pedagogy and Images from Factory Farms" is interested in what he calls the "ethical anxiety" that often results from viewing graphic images of abused animals. Martin explores the "pedagogical possibilities and limitations" of such images distributed by various animal rights and welfare organizations—and the ethics of their aesthetics. Considering the work of scholars such as Susan Sontag, Paolo Freire, and Shoshana Felman, Martin's essay movingly discusses the ways that a response of "ethical anxiety" and even crisis to these images may be productive—or stultifying. While the distribution of such materials "may elevate awareness of industry practice in public consciousness, there is no straight path between public awareness and social change...critical pedagogy, in both theory and practice, may help educators and activists navigate this quandary." While Dell'Aversano considers the ways categories of difference are constructed and maintained ("I could never give up meat"), Martin wrestles with responses of confusion and equivocation to images of animal suffering, considering a repeated statement of his own mother, who "often mentions that she *could* be a vegetarian." Martin describes how his mother, after viewing an ASPCA ad

sent the organization a donation with a note to express how upset she was with them for showing suffering animals on TV. She may align her sympathies with animals in factory farms but falls short of eliminating meat from her diet. She frequently orders chicken or fish, but not beef or pork, at restaurants. When meals arrive she sometimes remarks that my vegetarian dish looks and tastes better than hers. Is this performance for me? Do I remind her of her own rapprochement? My mother is neither wholly unaware of conditions in factory farms nor has she been fooled by the tidy appearances of packaged meat. Rather, I suspect she thinks about meat consumption from an emotional constellation of uncertainty.

Martin's piece beautifully and movingly explores the personal disappointment of such a response as he also tries to consider the possibilities for ethical action—and the pedagogical responsibilities—that lie in such a “constellation of uncertainty.”

Finally, in “Stray Philosophy: Human-Dog Observations on Language, Freedom, and Politics,” Eva Meijer explores her first three months living with Olli, a former Romanian shelter dog who came to live with her in the Netherlands. During this transition period the two worked together to create a common language, habits, and a certain level of freedom for Olli, thus constructing “a common world as well as a way to express that world, which changed both dog and human.”

Meijer pays particular attention to the politics of the leash, conceding its unfortunate legal necessity in Amsterdam at the same time that she explores how the leash potentially functions as a mutual tool of communication. While the leash can certainly become a weapon of oppression, it can also enable communication. The essay also considers Olli's “political agency as a former stray dog, both on the micro- and macro level. By emphasizing Olli's perspective and actions,

the paper also aims to explore ways to move beyond anthropocentrism in philosophy.” Meijer ultimately aims not only to illustrate the ways she and Olli came to know each other—and the pleasurable work involved in such communication—but also to raise awareness regarding shelter animal rescue transport in Europe.

Essays

Analyzing Categories: Harvey Sacks and Critical Animal Studies

Carmen Dell'Aversano*

Abstract: This paper is a development of my argument for animal queer and aims to conduct an analysis of some critical animal studies issues in queer terms. In order to do so it pursues queer's definitional concern with categories through Harvey Sacks's concept of "category-bound activities." Connecting CAS, queer and Sacks's work has the theoretical effect of making queer theory more general, more abstract and more rigorous, and the political effect of extending the scope of queer theory and politics to animal rights issues. The example I explore in the essay—the statement "I could never give up meat"—is of urgent political and theoretical relevance in animal advocacy, and therefore of interest to critical animal studies.

Keywords: Critical Animal studies, Membership Categorization Analysis, Queer studies

It is usually at the edges where the great tectonic plates of theory meet and shift that we find the most dramatic developments and upheavals.

– Val Plumwood

For efficient subordination, what's wanted is that the structure not only not appear to be a cultural artifact kept in place by human decision or custom, but that it appear natural—that it appear to be a quite direct consequence of the facts about the beast which are beyond the scope of human manipulation or revision. It must seem natural that individuals of the one category are dominated by individuals of the other and that as groups, the one dominates the other.

– Marilyn Frye

This paper presents a small but significant part of a much larger and more complex argument which I plan to develop fully in a book. Here I will be concerned with three issues: the first is the relevance of queer theory to critical animal studies, the second is the relevance of the

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work of American linguist Harvey Sacks to queer theory, and the third is the application of one of Sacks's most original theoretical concepts to one particularly important critical animal studies issue. I will address the first two issues very briefly, and concentrate on the third at greater length.

I suppose I had better state at the outset that I do not believe that animal studies are a good place to preach or practice “scientific neutrality.” Not only because no such thing exists since, as Humberto Maturana famously put it, “everything is said by an observer” (65) and no observer, since they occupy a definite place in the universe and can only make observations from that vantage point, can ever be neutral, but also, and most importantly, because what passes as “neutrality” is invariably compliance with, and complacency about, the status quo:

We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere. (Wiesel)

However, I find the insistence on “neutrality” (which, especially after the rise of critical animal studies, has become a staple of debates in the animal studies field), disturbing not only for ethical and political reasons but most of all for its gnoseological implications: the hallmark of an intellectual, and the most important tool of scholarly inquiry, is what Musil memorably called a “sense of possibility,”¹ “a constructive will and a conscious utopianism which does not shy away from reality but treats it as a task and as an invention.”² Appeals to “neutrality” (which are for some reason pervasively frequent in animal studies, but curiously absent in gender studies, race relation studies, subaltern studies and other fields which – like animal studies – explore relationships shaped by a structural imbalance of power) therefore demonstrate not only a depressing lack of moral courage but also (and this is far more alarming in an intellectual context) a crucial failure of philosophical imagination.

Historically, queer theory and queer studies have engaged primarily with issues relating to sex and gender, so much so indeed that the acronym LGBT (referring to lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans persons) is often expanded with Q for "queer." However, the meaning of queer cannot be linked to, or subsumed under, any single identity category or cluster of categories. This is because queer's theoretical mission is the questioning of categories as such and the denaturalization of the performances through which categories acquire social existence. Therefore any endeavour, theoretical, political or personal, through which prevalent categories are questioned, resisted and disrupted qualifies as queer.

In my own work in critical animal studies I have applied the category of queer to humans who, in their theoretical, political and personal stances, question, resist and disrupt prevalent categories not of sex and gender but of species. Some humans' most primitive instinct, deepest need and most heartfelt conviction is to identify primarily with non-humans, to form their most lasting and most vital bonds with non-humans and to empathize with, and support, non-humans in preference to humans. These people dare (or cannot help but) question the most entrenched and most pervasive social expectations regulating the performance of social roles, and the socially sanctioned flow of emotions; they cross the most basic and unquestioned identitarian barrier in human cultures, the one which divides humans from non-humans. By all definitions of the word, this makes them queer. Even though these people do not necessarily identify with any sexual minority, the ridicule, marginalization and oppression that they face is an apt and productive topic for a queer analysis. I have therefore coined the definition "animal queer" to refer to humans who, in their self-definition, question and cross barriers pertaining not to sex or gender but of species (Dell'Aversano).

After singling out, defining and describing animal queer I became interested in conducting a comprehensive and rigorous analysis of some key critical animal studies issues in queer terms. Because queer is fundamentally concerned with the questioning of categories and the denaturalization of performances, I started investigating original and productive approaches to issues of categorization and to the analysis of performances, and I came across the work of American sociologist and linguist Harvey Sacks.

In the Sixties, while he was laying the groundwork for what would eventually become conversation analysis, Sacks devoted a large share of his analytical acumen and of his theoretical creativity to analyzing the way members of a society are categorized and to the deconstruction of normalcy, which he defined not as a trait but as an activity, as “work” (Sacks 1984).³ I realized that this approach exactly parallels, over twenty years in advance, the denaturalization Butler would accomplish through the fortunate term “performance,”⁴ and that Sacks’s work on social categories could provide a rigorous and productive foundation for a queer analysis of the most diverse issues. Sacks’s work illuminates the way categories and performances work in general and in the abstract: his analytic tools and concepts can therefore help queer theory expand its focus beyond the categories and performances which queer analyses have customarily addressed so far, those pertaining to sex and gender.

My own work in particular aims at connecting queer theory, Sacks’s work on categories, and critical animal studies in two ways: first, by generalizing queer theory to an overall questioning of categories and performances through a systematic application of Sacks’s concepts; and second, by extending its scope to a radical questioning of the human-animal binary carried out by means of Sacks’s theoretical tools. The connection I envision between queer, Sacks and critical animal studies has therefore two different but complementary aims: one

theoretical and one political. The theoretical aim is making queer theory more general, more abstract and more rigorous through a systematic application of Sacks's work on categories; the political aim is to extend the scope of queer theory and politics to animal rights issues.

In this paper I will focus on a single issue and will explore it by means of a number of concepts and tools from Sacks's *Lectures on Conversation*, which will shed light on the foundations of the relationship between humans and nonhumans, and show the role that mastery of other species, speciesism, and, most particularly, the exploitation of animals for food, play in building and strengthening our identity as humans, the cohesion of human societies and the coherence of human cultures.

The example I have selected is of urgent political and theoretical relevance in animal advocacy, and therefore of momentous interest to critical animal studies: the statement "I could never give up meat."

"I could never give up meat." Animal rights activists are used to receiving this answer from the vast majority of omnivores whenever they attempt to confront them with the atrocities intrinsic to animal exploitation. The reasons behind this attitude are certainly numerous, and probably differ considerably from person to person. For all its linguistic and lexical simplicity, the statement "I could never give up meat" is a locus of baffling complexity, and consequently one that critical animal studies must confront with every methodological tool at its disposal if vegan advocacy is to prove effective.

I would like to contribute to this urgent discussion by analyzing the "I could never give up meat" response through the lens of one of the most important theoretical concepts in Sacks's work on categories, that of "category-bound activity."⁵

One major achievement of Sacks's analysis of categories is the insight that social knowledge is stored largely in terms of activities that are considered typical of given categories, which members of those categories can perform "naturally," with no need for justification or explanation, and which can consequently be used to identify members of those categories.⁶ If we connect Sacks's concept of category-bound activity with Butler's concept of performance, we can observe that category-bound activities play a major role in constituting and defining social subjects and in representing them as "natural": what Butler refers to as the performance of social identities takes place through what Sacks refers to as category-bound activities. Because of their differential distribution among different categories (adult/child, man/woman, human/animal...) category-bound activities have the function and the effect of representing as basic and natural the categories which are actually the outcome and the result of their repetition. Therefore category-bound activities are a basic component of the performance of the various socially recognized forms of identity, from age or profession to class, gender or species.

Like all other categories, "humanity" is made up of, and can be dissolved into, myriad multifarious, minute and all-encompassing activities whose ubiquitousness and pervasiveness guarantee at the same time their own naturalness and that of the performance they constitute and uphold. Their bewildering variety, which spans all history and all cultures, should not, however, lead us to overlook one basic fact. Social categories (like all concepts) are only defined through opposition; this means that, at the most fundamental level, the human is, and can only be, known, experienced and performed in its ever-present, though often tacit, opposition to the nonhuman. Our relationship to non-human animals therefore plays a crucial role in the construction of the fundamental part of our identity, our "humanity." Consequently, the activities through which our

relationship to nonhuman animals is performed make up the core of the category-bound activities which define humanity.

In all times and places, these activities entail, to a greater or lesser degree, the attitudes which ecofeminist theorist Val Plumwood subsumed under the seminal concept of “mastery.” Thus mastery, of the nonhuman in general and of animals in particular, turns out to be the activity bound to the category “human” at the most general and most fundamental level; always, in all times and places, mastery defines the human through its opposition to the “animal” and through the oppression of “animals.”

In her 1993 book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Plumwood specifies five conceptual and cultural devices which enable and define the performance of mastery:

- 1 Backgrounding (denial) (48-49)
- 2 Radical exclusion (hyperseparation) (49-52)
- 3 Incorporation (relational definition) (52)
- 4 Instrumentalism (objectification) (53)
5. Homogenisation or stereotyping (53-55)

These five features prove extremely useful in pinpointing the specific ways in which the relationship between humans and “animals” is shaped by the performance of a huge number and variety of mundane, sometimes scarcely perceptible, activities which, in all sorts of concrete contexts and real-life situations, make up and define the general and overarching, but also relatively abstract, category-bound activity of mastery. Plumwood’s analysis focuses on Western culture; in other cultures one or more of the five components of mastery may be less pervasive, or even absent. However, insofar as all human cultures posit an unbridgeable gap between humans and animals, routinely and unthinkingly use animals as means for human ends and

conceive of humanity as the ultimate form and source of value, the role of mastery as the category-bound activity which defines humanity is omnipresent and unquestioned. Far more than the prohibition of incest (which has known exceptions in various societies and circumstances), mastery is the true cultural universal spanning all human societies regardless of time and place, first and foremost, of course, that of the anthropologists, who have never noticed it because they too consider it absolutely natural and logically necessary.⁷

Plumwood's analysis of the five components of mastery allows us to perceive how mastery as an abstract and general attitude gives rise to concrete and particular category-bound activities. Today we will only have time to look very briefly at one of these five features, instrumentalism or objectification.

Instrumentalism defines the other as a means to the master's ends. Either the other's ends are not accorded equal consideration with those of the master, but are subordinated to the master's convenience, expediency or whims, or the other is assumed not to have interests and aims of her own and is defined simply as an instrument for the master, and evaluated purely in terms of the master's purposes. Her very existence is justified only by her usefulness to the master and is evaluated only on the master's terms: a wife, a slave or a horse are "good" or "bad" according to how well they serve and satisfy the master's needs; in the most extreme case, their life has no intrinsic value but is exclusively a resource for the master. As a consequence, the other is excluded from ethical consideration and her plight, however extreme, is not seen as a fit object for political action (Plumwood 53). Even though Plumwood does not show any particular interest in the plight of animals, their theoretical (even though unacknowledged) centrality in her argument is apparent in that only animals embody the extreme case of being "seen as outside morality altogether" (53), so much so indeed that their lives have no intrinsic value but are

exclusively resources for the master, to the point that those lives can be taken not as punishment (however arbitrary) or in self-defense (however imaginary), but simply as a necessary practical step to transform them into corpses which may be consumed.

This attitude builds the foundation of the category-bound activities which make up most of the relations between humans and animals. From farm animals to those who are imprisoned in research facilities, scores of billions of animals each year are bred only to be used by humans for their own ends, which are incompatible not only with a however minimal quality of life but with simple survival. The everyday life of all nonvegan humans is permeated by category-bound activities which assume and reiterate the “naturalness” and “normalcy” of an instrumentalist and exploitative relationship with “animals.”



At the core of this exploitation, and most important for its definitory function, is meat-eating. Eating meat normalizes the murderous oppression of other animals to the point of making it imperceptible. Because the vast majority participates in it directly and on a daily basis, and because the link between extreme violence against animals and thoughtless human enjoyment of its results is so unmistakable and straightforward, meat-eating powerfully reiterates human identity by joining all humans in a common front against animals. Meat-eating is the fundamental act which restates, with incontrovertible clarity and absolute generality, the most basic tenet of the shared worldview which holds our species together: its unconditional and undisputable superiority to all others, and consequently its right of life and death on them. Eating meat is indeed important, not for our health but for our identity.

The role of the cruelest and most violent, and at the same time most widespread and most mundane, consequence of instrumentalism as a category-bound activity which defines human identity also serves to explain a remarkable conceptual asymmetry. Animals who, no matter if just potentially or in theory, threaten the life of the animals we feed on (whether by breeding them or by hunting them) are considered dangerous predators, and exterminated; we, who kill those same animals in order to feed on them, and do so on an inconceivably larger scale, do not conceptualize ourselves as dangerous, or even simply as predators. The reason is to be sought in the way killing in order to feed on the corpses of victims is conceptualized as a category-bound activity: in our case, predation is a legitimate consequence of the instrumentalism deriving from our mastery of other animals, while in the case of animals it is an illegitimate appropriation of a category-bound activity which defines a different, and higher, category, and must therefore be sanctioned, usually with death. The stigma associated with this appropriation reaches a paroxysm of violence when the category-bound activity of predation is not only appropriated but subverted,

as happens whenever an animal attacks a human. This of course happens only accidentally and sporadically, and in a vanishingly small number of cases, especially compared to the number of animals killed purposely and by design by humans; but in matters of category definition quantitative details do not matter: the mere *possibility* of a subversion of the roles in the predator-prey relationship is intolerable, because it challenges a fundamental component of humanity. (It goes without saying that a rational consideration of the danger posed by “wild animals” plays no role in the hysterical reactions to the possibility of them attacking humans: the number of people killed in car crashes is immeasurably larger than that of those killed by animals, but nobody seriously suggests to deal with car crashes by eradicating motor vehicles.)

It is extremely interesting to note that the role of our murderous mastery of other animals as the category-bound activity which defines the category of humanity stands in stark contrast to the self-conceptualization of our species. Despite the inconceivable number of animals we kill for the most diverse and frivolous purposes, we do not think of ourselves as predators. Indeed, a large number of highly successful cultural artifacts, like *Jaws* or *Alien*, work by appealing to our ever-present disposition to conceptualize ourselves as *preys*. The self-concept of our species is thus revealed as the foundation and the prototypical case of false consciousness. By assuming the exploitation and murder of other animals as the category-bound activity of humanity we have divested it not only of any ethical questionability but of any ethical *meaning*, and of its very essence. Not only do we find it impossible to critically question our predatory activity: we find it impossible to *conceptualize* it as such. This allows us to divorce our self-representation as humans from any factual basis. We humans *are* predators but we *conceive of ourselves* as preys. Our humanity is defined simultaneously by the continuous and massive practice of predation and by the pervasive, absolute, often hysterical refusal to acknowledge it, and to face its moral

consequences; by our inconceivably huge and inexhaustibly inventive exploitation of our preys and by our non-negotiable refusal to accord them that status, and consequently to accept our identity and responsibility as predators. The category-bound activity which defines us as humans is therefore not simply predation, but a logical contradiction and ethical monstrosity we could ironically label “innocent predation.”

This is all the more meaningful since our species is the only one that, thanks to its complete emancipation from “the state of nature” and to the lucky evolutionary quirk that makes it possible for us to thrive on a vegan diet, could realistically choose to locate itself completely outside the predator/prey binary, and thus to make the violence on which this categorical opposition is based completely obsolete, at least as far as it was concerned. Instead, we have chosen to define ourselves very differently. On the one hand, our self-definition extols our ethical superiority to all other species (icastically embodied in the quintessentially question-begging adjective “humane”); in practice the definitory category-bound activity of mastery hinges on an unacknowledged practice of extreme and all-pervasive violence which escapes not only all limits and all controls but, most importantly, all notice.

In our self-concept we base our right to a status superior to that of other species on our cognitive abilities and ethical awareness; but the means through which we affirm that status contradict this justification: the category-bound activity which defines us as superior and as human is a predatory activity which transcends all boundaries of nature and of reason, having pushed innumerable other species on the brink of extinction and beyond, and having endangered not only a huge number and variety of ecosystems, but our own survival. Our self-image and the reality of our nature are therefore implacably at odds: what really defines us as humans in opposition to “animals” is not intelligence or compassion, but the unique and nefarious power to

turn *all* other species, without distinction, into prey, using our intelligence as an instrument of death, and ridiculing compassion whenever someone feels it. The deepest, most authentic and most misunderstood hallmark of human superiority is aptly described by Canetti in a memorable page of *Mass and Power*:

The instant of *survival* is the instant of power. The horror upon the sighting of death dissolves into satisfaction, since one is not oneself the dead. He lies, the survivor stands. It is as though a struggle had taken place and one had killed the dead oneself. In survival each is the enemy of the other [...].

The lowest form of survival is that of *killing*. Just as one has killed the animal one eats, just as it lies defenceless in front of one, and one can cut it into pieces and distribute it, as booty that he and his own will consume, so one also wants to kill the human who stands in one's way, who stands up against one, who stands against one as an enemy. One wants to lay him down in order to feel that one still exists, and he no longer does. (Canetti 249, my translation)

The category-bound activity of “innocent predation” is, however, only the most visible and most widespread example of a false consciousness which permeates and subtends all aspects of our relationship with other animals. Because of its foundational role in the definition of the category of humanity, this false consciousness is a central, though unacknowledged, feature of the human condition. In our idealized self-representation we define ourselves in opposition to other animals for our emotional and moral qualities, whose focal case is empathy towards the weak and innocent. However, in our real everyday actions, in all times and cultures, humanity manifests itself through category-bound activities which require the repression and ridiculing of empathy and the systematic, cold-blooded deploying of murderous violence on innocent weaker

beings. Therefore the general and idealized definition of “humanity” is starkly and inescapably contradicted by the particular concrete actions (the category-bound activities) through which our species has chosen to define itself in its actual relationships with the rest of the world, and with animals in particular, and through which humanity is performed, affirmed and reiterated.

We cannot have it both ways. The sooner we realize this, the better. For all concerned.

Notes

¹ “If there is a sense of reality, and nobody will doubt that its existence has its justification, then there must also exist something that one can call a sense of possibility.

Whoever possesses it does not say, for instance, "Here this or that happened, will happen, must happen," but invents ‘Here something could or should happen’; and when someone tells him about something, that it is so as it is, then he thinks, "Well, it could probably also be otherwise." So that the sense of possibility could be defined as the ability to think about whatever could also be the case, and not to take whatever is more seriously than what is not. It is plain to see that the consequences of such a creative attitude can be remarkable, and unfortunately it is not infrequent that they make what people admire appear false and what they prohibit as permitted or even both as indifferent.” (Musil 1930/32 Vol. I, p. 16, my translation).

² "Einen Bauwillen und bewußten Utopismus, der die Wirklichkeit nicht scheut, wohl aber als Aufgabe und Erfindung behandelt." (Musil 1930/32 Vol. I, p. 16).

³ The paper I am referring to here was put together after Sacks’s death by Gail Jefferson, Sack’s first and best student, from material in two of Sacks’s lectures, which Jefferson then went on to edit in their entirety: see Sacks 1992.

⁴ The critique of performances, of their enactment, of the violence underlying their social compulsoriness and of their identitarian consequences is a major theme in Butler’s work, from Butler 1990 onwards:

acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts that constitute its reality. (Butler 1990 p.185)

Performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that ‘performance’ is not a singular ‘act’ or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production [...]. (Butler 1993 p. 95)

There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; [...] identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results. (Butler 1990 p.25)

⁵ Sacks (who died in a car crash at forty having only published a dozen articles) never had a chance to develop his ideas on categories in an orderly and systematic fashion. His most important extant (or, at least, published) work, *Lectures on Conversation*, is a transcription of oral texts addressed to an audience of absolute beginners and spanning a period of nine years, during which Sacks’s interests and ideas altered their course under the influence of a range of factors which are now impossible to reconstruct; as a consequence they are marked by discontinuities, inconsistencies and repetitions. Therefore, his theory of categories must be reconstructed by means of a slow and painstaking work, comparing and linking a considerable number of different ideas and intuitions, whose connections are often far from apparent, scattered throughout the *Lectures*.

⁶ See, for instance, Sacks 1992 vol. I p.241.

⁷ I am well aware that, in a considerable number of non-Western societies and cultures, animals are at the center of a rich web of shared meanings and social exchanges and are sometimes idealized and even worshipped. However, in all these cultures animals are also invariably oppressed, exploited and murdered. Maintaining that the centrality of animals as symbols in a culture makes this culture less likely to oppress, exploit and murder actual, concrete animals is like claiming that in traditional Catholic cultures women are not oppressed because everybody worships the virgin Mary. The mere fact that the first position can be stated in academic debate with a straight face and with no adverse consequences while the second would get anyone laughed out of any seminar or conference room is not only disturbing evidence of the survival of the myth of the noble savage, but also shows how structurally invisible the cultural universal of human mastery is even to people whose professional credibility hinges on their supposed ability to acknowledge and to question their own assumptions.

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Behaving Like Animals: Shame and the Human-Animal Border in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and *Disgrace*.

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Abstract: Among the many qualities denied to the animal, including pain, self-awareness, mourning and language, shame is the one that has received the least academic scrutiny. The author draws on the biblical tale of Genesis to reach an understanding of shame and the construction of the human, while at the same time examining the repercussions that this thinking has on literary depictions of animals. Looking at a range of critical voices including Velleman, Derrida and Agamben, and more specifically at two contemporary novels, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984) by Milan Kundera and *Disgrace* (1999) by J.M. Coetzee, this paper seeks to challenge the dominant view that shame is the exclusive property of the human.

Keywords: animals, dogs, Kundera, Coetzee, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, *Disgrace*

Perhaps the woman stood frequently in front of the mirror observing her body, trying to peer through it into her soul, as Tereza had done since childhood. Surely she, too, had harbored the blissful hope of using her body as a poster for her soul. But what a monstrous soul it would have to be if it reflected that body, that rack of four pouches.
-Milan Kundera (*The Unbearable Lightness of Being* 137-8)

“The Church Fathers had a long debate about them, and decided they don’t have proper souls,” he observes. “Their souls are tied to their bodies and die with them.” Lucy shrugs. “I’m not sure that I have a soul. I wouldn’t know a soul if I saw one.”
- J.M. Coetzee (*Disgrace* 78-9)

On close inspection, all literature is probably a version of the apocalypse that seems to me rooted, no matter what its sociohistorical conditions might be, on the fragile border (borderline cases) where identities (subject/object, etc.) do not exist or only barely so—double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject.
- Julia Kristeva (*Powers of Horror* 207)

One of the earliest and most influential stories in western culture to deal with the body, or with shame, is *Genesis*; but to speak of shame, it seems, is to speak of something designated only to what we call “the human.” The topic has vexed critics for centuries and these debates have not swerved past the field of animal studies. The ecofeminist Carol Adams, for instance, interprets the

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Garden of Eden as a vegetarian paradise¹ and Jacques Derrida in other ways challenges an interpretation of *Genesis* as a tale of human consequence made up only of human protagonists. In this paper I want to argue that the biblical tale of *Genesis* forms a crucial backdrop for understanding how we read the two novels that I place in conversation here, Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984) and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999). Coetzee's novel makes various subtle references to *Genesis* (167-169), even in its title, and Kundera's novel contains longer, more detailed references to the Fall— specifically to the consequences on the treatment of animals (286-290). One of the elements that links the two novels is a preoccupation with the “human” and a persistent testing of the limits between human and animal. The title of this paper takes into account the many sexual acts and encounters that take place in these novels and thinks through some of the ways in which they complicate— rather than safeguard— a sense of what it means to be human, or to act humanely. These two texts interpret the nebulous border between human and animal precisely via a preoccupation with shame and the body, and both offer us an interpretation of shame and awareness that expands the narrow confines of the human and instead exposes shame as a form of public vulnerability— one that is not limited to the human, yet is predetermined by it. In so doing, these novels not only challenge the human-animal divide but also offer us a different practical model with which to engage with non-human animals, and with lives not considered normatively “human.”

The central protagonists of the *Unbearable Lightness of Being* are the promiscuous doctor, Tomas, his insecure wife, Tereza, and their sexually ambiguous dog, Karenin. Other important characters in the novel are Tomas' long-time lover, Sabina, and her other lover, Franz. There is also Mephisto, the pig that Karenin befriends on the farm towards the end of the novel. Like other of Kundera's works, this one comprises a series of interlocking narratives that in some ways

mirror each other and echo Nietzsche's philosophical idea of eternal return— introduced in the opening pages of the novel— that the ever-present narrator defines as either one in which “everything recurs as we once experienced it, and that the recurrence itself recurs ad infinitum” or one in which a life “which disappears once and for all, which does not return, is like a shadow, without weight, dead in advance, and whether it was horrible, beautiful, or sublime, its horror, sublimity and beauty mean nothing” (3). Against this background of repetition or erasure, the narrator weaves a series of opposites, “light/darkness, finesse/coarseness, warmth/cold, being/non-being” (5). Another fundamental pair of opposites that the novel explores is between the human and the animal: the distance between these two and the events that threaten to reduce the distinction to nothing.

One of the most discordant tales among this array is the one that tells the story of Stalin's son who “habitually left a foul mess” in the latrine of the German camp he was imprisoned in during World War II (243). He is unable to stand the humiliation that he, “the Son of God (because his father was revered like God),” defecates and after he is accused “of being dirty” (244) he commits suicide by running onto the electrified fence that surrounds the camp. “Stalin's son,” the narrator tells us, “laid down his life for shit” (245). What his death highlights, we are further told, is the “vertiginously close” relation between the “sublime” and the “paltry” (244), the desire for a link to the divine, and the reality of the physical body. The narrator goes on to trace this relation from different Gnostic and theological viewpoints (245-8). The death of Stalin's son is no trivial matter—it sheds light on a metaphysical question that casts its shadow over other characters in the novel. As Guy Scarpetta notes, Stalin's son's conundrum explores the duality of “the body and the soul, of the upper and lower, that of a humanity created ‘in the image of God’ but needing to shit every day” (114). In this way, Scarpetta sees defecation “in metonymic relation

to original sin, to the indelible stain of the species” (114). The word “stain” can here be figured as the one left from physical processes (which we share with other animals), and can be further thought of as the burden of shame. One of the founding texts of western modernity, which both Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and Coetzee’s *Disgrace* in different ways engage, is the Bible. It is here, in *Genesis*, that shame is related to the body, though ascribed only to the human.

Genesis tells us that in the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve “were both naked” and “were not ashamed” (Gn. 2:25). However, after eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, both their eyes “were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons” (Gn. 3:7). The question of what exactly Adam and Eve were made aware of has vexed readers for centuries. In an article titled “The Genesis of Shame,” David Velleman takes an original stance in his reading of this biblical tale. He suggests that the knowledge gained from eating the forbidden fruit had little to do with a discovery of the possibility of sexual encounter between Adam and Eve— which surely they knew from before given that they had already been commanded by God to “be fruitful and multiply”— and had cleaved to each other “and become one flesh” (Gn. 2:24). “The knowledge gained from the tree,” claims the writer,

was not physically extracted from the fruit itself...it was knowledge gained in the act of eating the fruit...[and] was gained in practice only after having been suggested in theory, by the serpent. What the serpent put into Eve's ear as a theory, which she and Adam went on to prove in practice, was the idea of disobedience: "You don't have to obey." (30)

Interestingly, Velleman views the challenge to obedience as lying in a negation of the godly command to “be fruitful and multiply.” He notes that Adam and Eve became ashamed only

when they realised that they had some control over the actions of their bodies, but that this could be overturned (and visibly so) by physical desire (31). This newfound knowledge brings forth “if not the idea of saying ‘no’ to sex, then at least the idea of saying ‘not here’ and ‘not now’” (30). In this way the writer traces the idea of shame into the domains of the public and the private. This requires a specific place and time in which to perform certain bodily acts, including sexual ones, and entails not only recognition of privacy and transgression but also an awareness of the role of the body (now refigured as culpability) in this transgression. In a way, observes Velleman, “the serpent’s message of disobedience did convey a piece of sexual knowledge, after all” (30).

For Velleman, then, the biblical quote about Adam and Eve’s eyes being opened hinges on the difference between looking and seeing. It is not that Adam and Eve were blind before eating the fruit, or that they were not naked, but that they became conscious of their nudity and the possibilities inherent in that. The denial to “be fruitful and multiply” is one of these. The difference between looking and seeing marks the conventional split between the animal and the human, the body and the mind, being and knowing. In line with this, Velleman states that privacy “is made possible by the ability to choose in opposition to inclination” (35). In other words, it is made possible only through a conscious negation of instincts. At this point, we can quibble with Velleman as he falls in line with “the old Churchfathers” (Coetzee 78) spoken of by Lurie in *Disgrace* when he states:

To a creature who does whatever its instincts demand, there is no space between impulse and action, and there is accordingly less space between inner and outer selves. Because a dog has relatively little control over its [sic] impulses, its impulses are legible in its behaviour. Whatever itches, it scratches (or licks or nips or drags along the ground),

and so its itches are always overt, always public. By contrast, our capacity to resist desires enables us to choose which desires our behaviour will express. (Velleman 35)

For the philosopher, the process of knowing what to do in public and what to leave for the private domain requires making “your noises and movements...interpretable, not merely as coherent speech and action, but also as intended to be interpretable as such” (Velleman 36). It means being able to wear a social mask that limits what is done in public and separates it from the private. But Velleman is careful to note that “self-presentation is not a dishonest activity” because there is nothing dishonest about choosing not to scratch wherever and whenever it itches. Although you don't make all of your itches overt, in the manner of a dog, you aren't falsely pretending to be less itchy than a dog. (37)

It comes down to knowing which itch to scratch, and where to scratch it. The failure to conform to this— either through inability, ignorance or defiance— signals a transgression that aligns the transgressor with animals. The “present-day moral” (50) of Velleman's observations, which he expounds via an explanation of the social articulations of homosexual desire and what he refers to as the “moralist's” (50-2) censure of this, is troubling:

To say that the homosexual should not, in the end, be flaunting his sexuality is not at all to suggest a return to the closet, since privacy is not the same as secrecy or denial. Everyone knows that most adults have sex with their dates or domestic partners (among others), and no reasonable norm of privacy would rule out discussion or display of who is dating or living with whom. But allowing people to know something should not be confused with presenting it to their view. There's a difference between “out of the closet” and “in your face,” and what makes the divergence is privacy. In short, Adam and Eve

were right to avail themselves of fig leaves. Although the term “fig leaf” is now a term of derision, I think that fig leaves are nothing to be ashamed of. (52)

In the end, for Velleman “our sense of privacy” becomes intricately woven with “an expression of our personhood” (52), which here animals are denied, and by implication so are ‘in-your-face’ homosexuals. To be fair, his is not an isolated idea. It echoes even the early work of Freud, who affirmed that “for all purposes in everyday life” a display of sexuality was “something that is improper and must be kept secret” (Freud 304). The meaning of Velleman’s assertions are clear— he is not saying that homosexuality is immoral or that it should be kept out of society’s attention because it is bad— but his call for it to remain private (and here, the notion of privacy seems to marry that of decency) silences the historically-determined potency and dimensions of queer politics. To be openly gay is as much a personal choice as a political move, and to silence the call and disruptions caused by a politics of gay pride— which in the face of political discrimination and social bias have been met often with cruelty and violence— is to muffle also the webs of connectivity that such politics can inspire. Against this background of shame, we see that Velleman’s assertions lead to a normative and anthropocentric vision of shame and of personhood.²

I do not mean to conflate the varying discourses of animal ethics, sexism, racism, and sexuality (as is often the case in animal rights activism) and to treat them as though they are all part of the same grand scheme.³ To do so erases the important individual characteristics of each, as well as the historical circumstances that shape them.⁴ This is akin to what Judith Butler discusses in *Bodies that Matter*:

It seems crucial to resist the model of power that would set up racism and homophobia and misogyny as parallel or analogical relations. The assertion of their

abstract or structural equivalence not only misses the specific histories of their construction and elaboration, but also delays the important work of thinking through the ways in which these vectors of power require and deploy each other for the purpose of their own articulation. (xxvi)

Velleman's analysis of shame, although riddled with an overt sense of what Richard Ryder in 1970 coined "speciesism" (1), sheds light on the role of the body in relation to shame. That is, shame entails an acute awareness of the body and its actions. Therefore, at least since *Genesis*, shame has been thought of as a human attribute. A denial of the body or its desires (whether it be scratching an itch, passing gas or fornicating) signals an ability to control the body and its urges—which supposedly safeguards against shame, and against comparison to animals. To control these urges is seen as an element of separation from the "animal kingdom" (which becomes characterised as lacking in shame, so having no need to cover up the body and its processes). In other words, shame can be said to belong to the descendants of the fallen, and accordingly as a factor that distinguishes them from animals. What is interesting is that the notion of privacy finds its origin in humanity's first consciousness and marks the split between an invisible interior realm (the mind, the soul) and our visible presence (the body). In the tale of *Genesis*, animals did not eat from the forbidden tree, so remained innocent of that transgression, and of the subsequent punishments related to that fall (including expulsion from Eden and the burden of shame). That they are relieved of blame, however, has initiated them into another type of fall: they are seen as different and separate from humans. This has been a form of punishment, and has led to subsequent punishments. In our colloquial use of the term, even calling someone "shameless" or "animal" has negative connotations.

Kundera's novel was published almost 20 years before Derrida's *The Animal that therefore I am*, and both texts take to heart the notion that animals, unlike Adam and Eve, were never expelled from Eden. The narrator of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* makes the incisive (and comic) observation that "of course, Genesis was written by a man, not a horse" (286). This gesture alone signals a change from reading *Genesis* as only a tale consisting of human protagonists and human consequence, and instead shifts the attention to the role of animals. The taken-for-granted supremacy of humans (and male humans at that) above other animals is explained as being so entrenched in human outlook, that to recognise it would be possible only from the point of view of "a third party [...] a Martian [...] a non-man" (286-7). The novel presents us with other avenues for empathy with animals— either a separation from society, as Tereza contemplates toward the end of the novel (281-303), or a removal "from the world of people" via insanity:

... Seeing a horse and a coachman beating it with a whip, Nietzsche went up to the horse and, before the coachman's very eyes, put his arms around the horse's neck and burst into tears. [...] I feel this gesture has broad implications: Nietzsche was trying to apologise to the horse for Descartes. His lunacy (that is, his final break with mankind) began at the very moment he burst into tears over the horse. And that is the Nietzsche I love, just as I love Tereza with the mortally ill dog resting his head on her lap. I see them one next to the other: both stepping down from the road along which mankind, "the master and proprietor of nature," marches onward. (290)

Velleman's astute description of the human as a "self-presenting creature" (37) is relevant to us as it discloses the human as one who makes absent, or hides, aspects of one's life. One way to do this is through language. As the word "hides" connotes, this can be a conscious decision,

and can have baleful or otherwise treacherous implications. The human fall from grace, after all, rests upon the deceit (or “subtle” words) spoken by the serpent (Gn. 2:25). There are constant references to the body, the invasion of privacy and the dislodgement of language in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.⁵ Kundera’s novel depicts various scenarios where language, or even simple conversations between friends, are used to create suspicion and are the origin of trickery, hypocrisy or deceit. The weekly radio show that broadcasts the “montage of private conversations recorded with the latest bugging devices by a Czech spy who had infiltrated the émigré community” (132) is an example of this. The horror that these shows inspire in the listening audience is not so much concerned with what is said (which is acknowledged as being the same things everyone else is saying) as with the fact that the private is made known publically. The dismantling of the boundaries between the private and the public is made more menacing by the inclusion of words and expressions that call forth an unseen animal cluster. Michael Henry Heim’s English translation of Kundera’s novel is especially adept at capturing these subtleties. In the passage from where this quote is taken, the description of the unaware speakers as having “their every step dogged,” and words and phrases such as “bugging devices,” the “strength and vitality of an ox” and “bugged” depict this (132-3). There is something decidedly un-human, inhumane, in making public news of private matters. What is threatened here is not only one’s privacy, but one’s sense of what it means to be human when living within a social body that routinely ignores the borders one has set up.

The issue of borders is, of course, an important aspect of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Borders are instrumental in guiding the events of the novel, which although published in 1984, is set during the Prague Spring of 1968—a time when Czechoslovakia’s own physical borders were invaded by the Soviet army. This invasion forms the basis for the transgression of a

number of other borders— some unseen, like the dismantling of the private domain that we saw in the discussion on the recorded conversations. Moreover, the novel was originally published in installments while Kundera was in exile, and at a time in which other notorious borders still divided the European continent. The Berlin Wall, for instance, would come down only in 1989, five years after the initial publication of Kundera’s novel. This division, made literal by walls, casts its shadow in the novel:

Since the days of the French Revolution, one half of Europe has been referred to as the left, the other half as the right. Yet to define one or the other by means of the theoretical principles it professes is all but impossible. And no wonder: political movements rest not so much on rational attitudes as on the fantasies, images, words, and archetypes that come together to make up this or that *political kitsch*. (257)

Despite the dismissive claims against “political kitsch,” geographical borders mark the life of various characters in the novel. Franz, for instance, in his search for “the fantasy of the Grand March” (257), initiates the fateful trip to the border between Cambodia and Thailand, only to not be allowed to cross, and is later killed (256-278). The crossing of borders has similarly negative consequences for Tomas and Tereza when they emigrate from Czechoslovakia to Switzerland. When Tereza unexpectedly returns to Prague, Tomas has the startling realisation that:

the borders between his country and the rest of the world were no longer open. No telegrams or telephone calls could bring her back. The authorities would never let her travel abroad. Her departure was staggeringly definitive. (29)

On his return to Czechoslovakia, Tomas is “welcomed by columns of Russian tanks” (33). The ironic reference to his homecoming signals a border (marked by a row of tanks that take half an hour to pass) that he will not be able to cross again. His return is also “staggeringly definitive”

and Tomas and Tereza live out the rest of their days in the countryside. Curiously, various critics writing about Kundera's novel have focused on (or formulated) other imaginary, or imagined borders in the novel. These borders have been used to separate characters into groups, which in fact mimics a move taken by the ever-present narrator of Kundera's novel, when for instance, he states that "we all need someone to look at us. We can be divided into four categories according to the kind of look we wish to live under..." (261-71). In her analysis of Kundera's oeuvre, Gurstein follows this pattern and signals "three kinds of characters or ideal types" (1262) in his work. These are "the vulgarian, the liberationist, and the modest person" (1262). She states that "whether from hubris or ignorance, characters like Tereza's mother, Tomas, Edwige, and Jan [in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*] are unable to recognize, as Tereza does, that there are definite limits to experience, lest one finds oneself trapped on the other side of 'the border'" (1275). But Gurstein never defines what she means by "the border." Similarly, the French writer and critic Guy Scarpetta, in his essay about sexuality in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, states that the novel "places in opposition romantic obsession, which seeks THE woman in every woman, and can only lead to disappointment, and the libertine obsession, whose donjuanism aims at the uniqueness of each woman, her 'formula'" (110). The initial distinction Scarpetta draws between romantic and sexual obsessions leads him to further divide the characters into groups. That Scarpetta first divides them on the basis of sexual difference: "On the masculine side...as for the women..." (110) seems inadequate given that the novel is particularly concerned with a careful dismantling of static notions of gender, stereotypical sexual roles (the passive woman and the dominant male) or even species lines. Karenin is, after all, a "female" dog named after a "male" literary figure and possesses a degree of sexuality normally denied to animals, including possible homosexuality (Kundera 23-4). We can usefully rework Scarpetta's analysis into a

division of those that are “inept at libertinage” (122), like Franz and Tereza, and those that thrive in the physicality of the body, like Tomas, Sabina and Tereza’s mother. There is some truth in Scarpetta’s naming of this latter group as those that “rehabilitate shit and wallow in it” (114). These divisions also form the backbone to the structure of the novel, specifically in the two separate chapters titled “Soul and Body.”

One way to articulate what is meant by “the border” that Gurstein and other critics hint at but do not explain, is to say that it relates to the complex (and somewhat equally imagined) boundaries between the human and the animal. That these boundaries cause unease in some characters, and that even critics of the novels struggle to define it, is telling. It hints, if not exactly at the non-existence of a border, then at least at what Giorgio Agamben has deemed “first of all [...] a mobile border” (15), one that is permeable to change and in that way is dependent on the social situation in which it exists. I want to maintain the links that critics have drawn between the transgression of purity and sin, shame and shamelessness, or have simply called the “border,” but I want to add that these divisions also hinge on the duality between the public and the private and the body and the soul, which the novel attempts to trace. These dualities also introduce an important division in the novel between animal and human, which the reader experiences through Tereza.

“The point where difference and identity undecidedly converge for Kundera,” writes Terry Eagleton, “is above all sexuality, linking as it does the unrepeatability of a particular love-relationship with the ceaselessly repetitive, tediously predictable character of the bodily drives” (29). Here, then, Eagleton presents us with a simple, but sophisticated, description of the “undecided convergence” of two fundamental aspects of the novel: the physical and the spiritual. The complex, and seemingly incongruous, relation between these two poles falls most heavily on

Tereza in the novel, whom we are told repeatedly by the narrator has since childhood “stood frequently in front of the mirror observing her body, trying to peer through it into her soul” (137). It is from her perspective, after all, that the idea of the body as the “seat of the soul” begins to be dismantled. Through her eyes, for instance, we see breasts that are not idealised but instead described as “quivering pouches” that do nothing more than spray “tiny drops of cold water right and left” when leaving the sauna (138). Similarly, her thoughts make us imagine the buttocks as “two enormous sacks” (137). There is something decidedly honest in the description of these two body parts, for in their shape and dimension, they may certainly resemble the roundness of a bag (“pouch” or “sack”). Here, Tereza does not know the woman whose body she is describing, so is able to look on her (her physical qualities) in a detached manner, without seeking out her “soul” (as she attempts to do with herself in front of the mirror). The language she uses is devoid of emotional touches that would “dress up” her descriptions. In a way then, her language is as naked as the woman is.⁶ This shows that if language has the capacity to adorn and beautify, it is equally able to dress down or expose. This same level of objectivity is used by the narrator to describe the human face, depicting it as “nothing but an instrument panel registering all the body mechanisms: digestion, sight, hearing, respiration, thought” (40). That thought would here be classified as a mechanism of the body is interesting because it diminishes a sense of it being attached to the mind, to rationality or other “higher functions.” Instead, it is brought down to the level of reflex. Gurstein observes that this way of seeing the body is an attempt “to do away with those artifices that embellish or disguise the potentially leveling aspects of bodily functions” (1266). What Gurstein does not explain, however, is what level these depictions supposedly come to. I want to argue that what these descriptions do is remind us of the physical urges and processes we share with other animals, and in so doing humble a view of the human as superior or as somehow more

enlightened than animals. “By concentrating on the body,” Gurstein notes, every experience is pulled “down to earth, turning spirit into flesh” (1266).

The description of bodies as “flesh” can be linked to Tomas’s own clinical language used elsewhere in the novel. His profession means he has consented, like other doctors, “to spend his life involved with human bodies and all that they entail” (Kundera 193). The emphasis on the body, however, does not diminish the sense that there may be more to the human than pure physicality:

Surgery takes the basic imperative of the medical profession to its outermost border, where the human makes contact with the divine. [. . .] God, it may be assumed, took murder into account; He did not take surgery into account. He never suspected that someone would dare to stick his hand into the mechanism He had invented, wrapped carefully in skin, and sealed away from human eyes. When Tomas first positioned his scalpel on the skin of a man asleep under anaesthetic, then breached the skin with a decisive incision, and finally cut it open with a precise and even stroke (as if it were a piece of fabric— a coat, a skirt, a curtain), he experienced a brief but intense feeling of blasphemy. (193-194)

Here, the body and soul hang together in an uneasy compromise, as they do throughout the novel. As Gurstein notes, the description of the “brief but intense feeling of blasphemy” that Tomas feels the first time he cuts the skin of the patient “compels us to notice how closely the realm of the body is connected to things sacred” (1261). Moreover, that the skin of the patient should be described parenthetically, “(as if it were a piece of fabric- a coat, a skirt, a curtain),” is telling, for all these objects are themselves meant to be a cover to the body or, like a curtain, to one’s privacy. We can see a link between Tomas (the “defiler of privacy”) and Tereza’s mother,

whom we are told liked to parade naked before strangers, only to have a sixteen year old Tereza try “to protect her mother’s modesty” by quickly closing “the curtains so that no one could see from across the street” (45). The underbelly of the “brief but intense feeling of blasphemy” (194) that Tomas experiences is here illustrated in the raucous laughter of Tereza’s mother and her friends:

“Tereza can't reconcile herself to the idea that the human body pisses and farts,” she said.

“What's so terrible about that?” and in answer to her own question she broke wind loudly.

All the women laughed again. (45)

Not surprisingly, we are told that Tereza grew up in a home where “there was no such thing as shame” (45). In the novel Tereza is frequently described as trying to escape, physically and mentally, from the “world of immodesty” (47) in which her mother lives and to which she has forced her to belong. Her mother’s behaviour includes farting in public, blowing her nose loudly, speaking about her sex life, loosening her teeth, walking around naked and not closing doors in the house (45-7). What horrifies Tereza about her mother is not only that she herself “can't reconcile [...] the idea that the human body pisses and farts” (45), but that her mother lets what Tereza regards as private into the domain of the public. In her desire to escape from this “world of crudity” (47) Tereza is in some ways not very different from Stalin’s son, who similarly cannot stand the incompatibility of the “sublime” and the “paltry” (244). Both are encumbered by a vision of the human that excludes, but cannot exist without, the body.

The tension between the holy and the quotidian casts its shadow over other parts of the novel. Notably, the duality between the purely physical and the ether-like spiritual substance that the soul represents is described as “that fundamental human experience” (40). This would suggest that animals, including Karenin in the novel, are exempt from this duality and so retain only their

physicality. I want to argue, however, that it is through Tereza that we gain an additional perspective on the animal in the novel. This is depicted through her close relation with Karenin, the various dream sequences of bodily vulnerability and the numerous comparisons of her to Saint Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals and the environment (49, 50, 53, 78, etc.). In the novel, Tereza has recurring nightmares about being cast only as a body without a soul. We can think back to the Cartesian divide which denies animals a soul, and read Tereza's horror as depicting explicitly the violence of this denial: to be forced to live as only animal is, among other things, to be vulnerable to harm. I want to argue that Tereza's suffering at the cost of being considered only a body renders the experience of being only "animal" explicit and legible. So while the narrative voice, especially the omniscient narrator, allows Karenin's thoughts to be perceptible (e.g. 74, 283-4) a further dimension of comprehensibility is made possible through Tereza— who clearly articulates the horror of being considered soulless. Tereza likens this to existing in a world which is "nothing but a vast concentration camp of bodies, one like the next, with souls invisible" (47). For her, this again harks back to her mother's world, where "all bodies were the same and marched behind one another in formation" (57). Tereza experiences a similar horror when she recognises that Tomas's affairs will not stop:

She had come to him to escape her mother's world, a world where all bodies were equal. She had come to him to make her body unique, irreplaceable. But he, too, had drawn an equal sign between her and the rest of them: he kissed them all alike, stroked them alike, made no, absolutely no distinction between Tereza's body and the other bodies. He had sent her back into the world she tried to escape, sent to march naked with the other naked women. (58)

In Kundera's novel, the emergence of the soul (which is never defined but is articulated as a non-physical substance) "rescues" the individual from a purely physical state. That Tereza yearns to form part of a spiritual, rather than physical, domain is made palpable in her desire for books and music, elements that she regards as "the emblems of a secret brotherhood [...] a single weapon against the world of crudity surrounding her" (47). Here, Tereza draws a bold line separating the world of "culture" from that of the body, which can in other words be described as the duality of the mind and the body, or forming part of the nature-culture divide. That a dog such as Karenin—who according to this logic is presumably steeped in the natural world—should be named after a highly regarded cultural product is of interest to us. It again draws attention to the complexity of his character and to the wider domain of meaning encompassed by his persona in the novel. His own death spans the final chapters (as opposed to Tomas' and Tereza's deaths, which we are told about in a single sentence early on in the novel) and the way he is treated before that becomes the ultimate definer of "true human goodness, in all its purity and freedom" because it comes "to the fore only when its recipient has no power" (289).

As I have mentioned, the duality of the body and soul remains an enduring (and unresolved) concern and emerges especially in scenes of physical encounter. The sexual encounters that take place in the novel are some of these. It is here that words lose "their magic power" (154) and more attention is lent to the body. Tereza's affair with the engineer (who may be a spy) is an example of this and presents us with a way in which the discourse surrounding the possession of a soul may be used to condone behaviour or evade a sense of wrongdoing (155). The image of Tereza's soul hovering above the bed while she is in the throes of passion with the engineer demonstrates this:

...the engineer's hand referred to her body, and she realised that she (her soul) was not at all involved, only her body, her body alone...she also knew that if the feeling of excitement was to continue, her soul's approval would have to keep mute...what made the soul so excited was that the body was acting against its will; the body was betraying it, and the soul was looking on. (154-5)

After Tereza has sex with the engineer, she enters his toilet and defecates. She regards this as:

in fact a desire to go to the extreme of humiliation, to become only and utterly a body, the body her mother used to say was good for nothing but digesting and excreting [...]
Nothing could be more miserable than her naked body perched on the enlarged end of a sewer pipe. (156-7)

Here, the description of the toilet as "the enlarged end of a sewer pipe" is another example of the ability to employ language as tool of embellishment or exposure, which is a recurring preoccupation in Kundera's novel. The narrator explains that toilets

in modern water closets rise up from the floor like white water lilies. The architect does all he can to make man ignore what happens to his intestinal wastes after the water from the tank flushes them down the drain...the sewer pipelines reach far into our houses with their tentacles, they are carefully hidden from view, and we are happily ignorant of the Venice of shit underlying our bathrooms, dance halls, and parliaments. (156)

This description reveals the "hypocritical" (156) construction of toilets that aim to disguise their function. Working class toilets, the narrator says, are less inclined to be as hypocritical and this is reflected in their modest (purely functional) design. Tereza's mother and her husband belong to this group, which may explain the lengths the narrator goes to in order to express the

general ease, if not exaltation, toward their coarseness and their “animal” side, and also the unveiled honesty with which they approach the body and physical processes. That the pipelines in the above quote are described as tentacles that stretch across a number of social settings is interesting because, once again, it depicts a shared aspect of physicality—despite hypocrisy, class or social situation— that “pulls every experience down to earth” (Gurstein 1266). Here, the aesthetic appeal of a toilet that resembles a water lily parallels the covering up we do with words.

The hypocrisy I have just discussed in terms of Tereza’s absent soul or the construction of toilets is visible also in the relationship between Franz and Sabina, for it is similarly burdened by shame. Tereza’s desire to separate the sublime from the physical is comparable to Franz’s desire, when having sex, to seek a darkness that calls for an erasure of the limits of the body: “the darkness was pure, perfect, thoughtless, visionless, that darkness was without end, without borders; that darkness was the infinite we carry within us” (95). Of course, this ideal state is difficult to achieve in material ways. For this to function, Franz establishes a strict set of borders that limits the time and place of his sexual rendezvous with Sabina. For him, love “was not an extension of public life but its antithesis” (83). His creation of a “restricted zone of purity” (82) that prohibits him from having sex with Sabina in certain places is emblematic of this and the “independent space” (82) he creates allows him to have sex without feeling he has disregarded the border of the zone of purity he has created. Comically, this limits “their lovemaking to foreign cities” (83). Franz’s attempts to demarcate a singular space, one that is outside of his own conjugal space, illustrates his need to separate his heart or head from what his body craves. The joke here is that he is an academic and that in spite of these self-imposed restrictions he continues his affair with Sabina. Moreover, Franz falls deeply in love with her and leaves his wife— only to be abandoned by Sabina before he has a chance to return to her.

The characters that remain furthest from a hypocritical account of their lives and actions are Tomas and Sabina. At the same time, they are the characters most at ease with the physical processes and urges of the body. Notably, Sabina has an orgasm at the thought of defecating in front of Tomas (247), and so inverts Theresa's previously discussed view of defecation as "the extreme of humiliation" (167). In various ways, Tomas and Sabina are the most animalistic and shameless of the characters. Another way to explore this is through the encounter between Tomas and another of his lovers, the stork-woman, whom he meets after he loses his job and becomes a window cleaner. This occupation allows to him to continue his inconspicuous sexual encounters with all types of women. The stork-woman is described in terms that mingle the animal and the human: "an odd combination of giraffe, stork, and sensitive young boy" (202). She initiates a "do as I do' kind of game" in which she mirrors every one of Tomas's strokes and caress (203). This both unsettles and fascinates him. On their second encounter she not only fails to comply with his "strip!" command (which has been, until now, an unfailing ploy of his) but actually counter-commands him to do the same thing (205). She follows his movements along his own body and reaches his anus, "mimicking his moves with the precision of a mirror" (205). Her own anus is described with words that suggest Tomas's own medical language and vantage point: "unusually prominent, evoking the long digestive tract that ended there with a slight protrusion" (205). Here, neither Tomas nor the stork-woman is preoccupied with souls. Equally, no attention is paid to beautiful bodies. What comes to the fore is an acceptance of the body's oddness, or what might otherwise be perceived as ugliness.

In line with this, the encounter with the stork-woman is replete with adjectives and nouns of strangeness and difference. These include "bizarre," "curiosities," "unusual," "odd," "asymmetry" and "originality" (202-4). The images of mirrors, glass and water (in many forms: in

the toilet, in the bucket, in urine, in wine and in sinks) also pervade this scene of sexual encounter. All these objects are able to reflect, which recalls the biblical myth founded on something that was seen, and also Tereza's constant looking in the mirror. Yet neither Tomas nor the stork-woman feel strange or ever catch a glimpse of themselves in them. Perhaps what is unusual is that in this scenario of intense sensual enjoyment and transgression (both are married to other people and he has been sent by his boss to clean her windows), both characters remain— perhaps even against the reader's judgement— free of shame. Here, the image of Tomas and the stork-woman standing above their garments naked and unashamed, coupled with the descriptions of water and wine, call to mind a quasi-religious interaction that is at odds with its highly sexualised nature.

Scarpetta notes that for characters “who are as far from puritanism as they are from pansexualism, from idealism as from naturalism, sexual pleasure *presupposes* the sense of sin” (115). For him this means they can acknowledge “that the consciousness of a stain is necessary, if only for the sake of transgressing that consciousness” (115). The prefix (‘pre’) in “presuppose” could be read to mean that the characters are in a state prior to this acknowledgement. Like Adam and Eve before the Fall, these characters are naked and not ashamed. We can read this scenario as “a typological return” (Smith 237) to a time before the Fall in the Garden of Eden, before shame was ever felt. There is in fact a fall of sorts in this one, too (Kundera 205-6). We can refigure these characters' lack of shame as linking them to Adam and Eve before sin, or to animals. What Tomas, Sabina and the stork-woman share is a mutual fascination with the hidden aspects of the body (internal organs, intercourse, cleansing or defecation). Unlike other characters in the novel, these characters celebrate rather than bemoan the permeability of the “border.”

Crucially, the “right to shame” (57) that Tereza's mother denies her becomes a potent element in the safeguarding of human identity and guides the attitude and actions taken in

Disgrace by David Lurie and his daughter, Lucy. An important distinction is that Coetzee's novel carefully derails the idea of shame as pertaining only to humans. The image of the dog Katy "glancing around shiftily as if ashamed to be watched" while defecating demonstrates this (68). Equally, we are told that before dying, the dogs at the clinic "flatten their ears, [...and] droop their tails, as if they too feel the disgrace of dying" (143). The animals in *Disgrace* not only feel shame, they can also identify it: "If, more often than not, the dog fails to be charmed, it is because of his presence: he gives off the wrong smell (*They can smell your thoughts*), the smell of shame" (142). By granting animals the right to shame, the novel sets up implicit links with the human characters, and in doing so enlarges the scope of consideration regarding the capabilities and emotional lives of animals. The recurrent use of the word "disgrace" creates an implicit link between the dogs and Lurie, who has elsewhere described himself as being "in what I suppose one would call disgrace" (85). Like Tomas in Kundera's novel, David Lurie in this novel is sexually promiscuous, but his "fall from grace" occurs after his affair with a much-younger student, Melanie, is made public.

Both novels are set in a secular time, and although Coetzee's *Disgrace* also relies to some degree on a theological vision of transgression and sin, it is not so much God's word that functions as a delineator of transgression, as the laws that demarcate one's behaviour in society. The acts that guide this process are imagined in detail by Lurie on the day he receives the memorandum "notifying him that a complaint has been lodged against him under article 3.1 of the university's code of conduct" (38, 39-40). His transgression has been to mingle the private and the public. That is, in his relations with Melanie, Lurie shifts a public relationship (the teacher-pupil relation) to the domain of the private (sexual intercourse). As a transgressor of these limits he is made to feel the implications of this transgression in his expulsion from the university. Lurie, moreover, seems to have a knack for making the private public and for retaining his calm in these

awkward moments.⁷ The conscious encroachment of Elaine Winter (“chair of his onetime department”) at the supermarket is an example of this: she has “a trolleyful of purchases, he a mere handbasket,” yet he obliges her to go before him (179-80). In the end, he relishes at her acute awareness and embarrassment that her private life is being exposed by way of the objects she is purchasing— which he “takes some pleasure” in watching her unload (179-80).

At the committee of enquiry set up to investigate Lurie’s behaviour with his student, Lurie’s refusal to seek forgiveness using “words [...] from his heart” (54) speaks back to his own knowledge of words as being capable of deceit. Words, we have already been told, can be used like whisky in one’s coffee “to lubricate” the listener (16, 168). This makes the decision not to “speak from his heart” at the enquiry but later to attempt to do so in front of Melanie’s father, Isaacs, interesting (165). The problem is that the language Lurie uses to explain his actions is anything but “naked” in the Derridean sense (1); it is riddled with otherworldly allusions that take the listener “in circles” (Coetzee 49, 53). This, I want to suggest, is done to distance him from the event itself, and his complicity in it. Lurie expresses his own rising desire as emerging “from the quiver of Aphrodite, goddess of the foaming waves” (25) and describes his violation of Melanie first as “not rape, not quite that”(25), then vaguely as an inappropriate desire (43) and, finally, as having been the work of Eros (52, 89). Although he does not make a recognisable connection between his violation of Melanie and his daughter’s own gang rape, which occurs some time later on her farm, this is something that other voices in the novel put pressure on. Lucy’s assertion that “you are a man, you ought to know” highlights the proximity of these two separate events (158).

Like Cooper in her paper “Metamorphosis and Sexuality,” I am interested in “the deployment of sexuality in the framework of allusion and under the aegis of myth” (23). For Cooper, the “dense allusiveness and intricate play with mythic possibilities” this opens up implies

that “Coetzee’s fascination with sexuality in *Disgrace* is deeply shaped by language and the various symbolic forms it gives to instinct and desire” (23). In her analysis Cooper is concerned with the manner in which these allusions create an “interplay of desire with scholarship and knowledge” that (because they deal with “imported ideas”) frames the “unresolved destiny of Anglo-European traditions, conventions, and epistemological structures in South Africa” (24). I want to move from Cooper’s arguments to suggest that the allusions created by Lurie in his descriptions are at once an attempt to denounce shame, and are conducive to a demarcation between the human and the animal. But reference to Lurie’s own “urgencies of passion” (Coetzee 164) belie this boundary-making, as do the animalized descriptions of sex and rape that are used in the novel.

We can think this along what Cooper has deemed a “narrative derailing” (36), that is, the disjuncture between an event and its retelling. Here, the teller of the story is displaced when there is a separation between the event and how the teller views himself within it. This is a concern in Coetzee’s novel and can be seen in Lurie’s retelling of his involvement with Melanie, and in Lucy’s silence concerning her own rape. That is, even as Lurie uses mythical allusions to describe his violation of Melanie (a tactic that can be seen to distance him from his actions), the recurrent image of Eros also alters “the terms of exchange between spirit and flesh, divine and human” (34). This means that Lurie’s version of sexual intercourse displaces a purely “human” account of events in that it mingles “both the divine and the bestial” and in its mythic conception “dislocates the human” as the sole agent of the event (34). We can quibble with Cooper’s strict separation of “the divine and the bestial” as it paints the two as existent and as polar opposites— not only implying that the two have no shared aspects but that the latter is monstrous and base in comparison. We can usefully employ the notion of this mingling of human and animal qualities

(and maintain that they are both, like myths, more imagined than fact) to reveal the impulsive, rather than rational, nature of Lurie's affair. This harks back to our earlier discussion of *Genesis*, specifically the insistence on a lack of control over the body (its functions and desires) as being linked to shame. While we may read, then, Lurie's words in the novel as attempting a degree of separation from the event and from himself as animal, the narrative nonetheless derails this vision by associating his image with the other-than-human aspects he describes. In this vein, a critic recently made the astute observation:

The beginning and middle of the novel are characterized by a double standard concerning Eros on Lurie's behalf. He denigrates libido as animalistic but appeals to the concept when it helps him justify his behaviour. When Lurie has sex with Melanie [...], he imagines the event to be motivated purely by instinct and thus to be removed from the responsibility of the involved parties, just as animals are not responsible for their behavior. (Wiegandt 123)

The writer then brings forth the crucial question: "Is it possible that the same god that made him seduce Melanie acts through the rapists, the same god that dignifies even dogs by his presence, as he explained to Lucy only minutes ago?" (126). The difficulty of answering this question ties into Lurie's and Lucy's different approaches to these transformative events. Lucy refers to her rape as "a purely private matter" which her father interprets as rooted in "some form of private salvation" (112). Later, Bev reiterates Lucy's position of privacy when she tells Lurie "you weren't there [...] You weren't" (140), which echoes Lucy's earlier "*you don't know what happened*" (134). This outrages Lurie because he is "being treated like an outsider" (141). This is precisely the point. Lucy refuses to "come out before these strangers" (132) because they are strangers to her experience and to her pain. In her silence, she exercises her "right not to be put on

trial [...] not to have to justify” herself (133). In this way, she is not unlike her father in his own “trial”— both are holding fast to a vision of themselves that is contradicted, or derailed, by the events. Both silences are a mask: “Lucy’s secret, his disgrace” (109).

In contrast, Elleke Boehmer has read Lucy’s silence as embedding “in herself, her body, the stereotype of the wronged and muted woman, the abused and to-be-again-abused of history: she becomes, in a phrase, the figure of a double silence” (349). Boehmer’s reading of *Disgrace* critiques the implications of Lucy’s silence as implying “as ever” the idea that women are required “the generic pose of suffering in silence” (350). This view echoes the novel’s own narration:

Bev responds only with a terse shake of the head. Not your business, she seems to be saying. Menstruation, childbirth, violation and its aftermath: blood-matters, a woman’s burden, women’s preserve. (104)

But we can also read Lucy’s need for silence as tied into her own conception of herself, and not, as Boehmer’s paper suggests, as an allegorical representation of Melanie or of all women. After all, Melanie did lodge a complaint and we are told she appeared before the committee of enquiry the day before Lurie (48). Lucy’s silence is distinct from Melanie’s silence. Rather than become another statistic, it offers Lucy a means to safeguard her own individual identity, and to keep her private identity separate from the public domain. The manner of her rape, commencing as it did with an invasion of her private space (her home), and by numerous men means that the event, her body and her persona have been rendered public on numerous levels. To amplify this, she later comes into contact with one of the men in public at Petrus’s party, further intensifying the degree to which her private pain has become a public matter. Lucy attempts to safeguard, and perhaps recuperate, her dignity by treating her rape as private. In this

way she is implicitly *not* “taking on this doglike status” (348) or “becoming reconciled to the point of conventional object” (349), as Boehmer suggests, but rather retains her own subjective story and separates herself from a sexual act that has otherwise been described in animalistic terms:

“You think they will come back?”

“I think I am their territory. They have marked me. They will come back for me.” [...]

“They spur each other on. That’s probably why they do it together. Like dogs in a pack.”

(Coetzee 158-9)

And:

They were not raping, they were mating. It was not the pleasure principle that ran the show but the testicles, sacs bulging with seed aching to perfect itself. (199)

As I stated previously, the mixing of mythic and animal elements in the retelling of events is not flattering to human agency or to ideas about the scope of what is perceived typically as “human.” All the previous examples are alike in that they highlight the animal within. That these negative descriptions come up in times of violence or suffering is telling. When Lurie finds one of the rapists, Pollux,⁸ spying from a window on Lucy who is in the shower, the insult he screams repeatedly is “*You swine!* [...] *You filthy swine!*” (206). He later refers to him as being “like a jackal sniffing around, looking for mischief” (208). When Lucy’s wrapper slips loose to reveal her breasts, Pollux looks on “unashamedly” (207). His lack of shame here is linked to something being “wrong with him, wrong in his head” (207). Denied a position as a thinking, rational individual, he is instead relegated to the domain of animals: he can feel when he is hurt and react—“Ya, ya, ya, ya, ya” he shouts in pain” (207)—but his mental deficiency recasts him, too, as “morally deficient” (209). In this way, he is seen as less-than-human. Lucy’s protection of him

is equally incomprehensible to her father and he links it implicitly to a dysfunctional mental state: “more and more she has begun to look like one of those women who shuffle around the corridors of nursing homes whispering to themselves” (205). The grotesque results of human and animal mingling finds its culmination in Lurie’s dismayed avowal that “like a weed he [Pollux] has been allowed to tangle his roots with Lucy and Lucy’s existence” (209).

It is not only Lucy’s rapists that are described as “animalized humanity.” Lurie’s own desires, for instance, are also linked to animals. His own analogy between the “excited and unmanageable” golden retriever and himself is an example (90). He, too, is berated for not “learning his lesson” and is told by Melanie’s boyfriend to “stay with your own kind” (194). In fact, Lurie’s desire for Melanie, which is described as “the seed of generation, driven to perfect itself, driving deep into the woman’s body, driving to bring the future into being” (194) is a precursor to his thoughts about the rapists “mating” with his daughter (199). The distinction here is that Lurie embellishes his desire in lofty quotations: “sooner murder an infant than nurse unacted desires” (69). These may veil, but do not diminish, his sense of shame.

We can view shame in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and in *Disgrace* as singularly attached to the body, its functions and to the exposure that it is bound to by merely being a body. Here, I am thinking specifically of Judith Butler’s conception of the body as that which shatters the boundaries between an inside (the private) and the outside (the public): “this disposition of ourselves outside ourselves [which] seems to follow from bodily life, from its vulnerability and its exposure” (25). Fundamentally, language (in bodily descriptions, Lurie’s embellishment, or Lucy’s silence) becomes a constituent of the body and of the safeguarding against shame. Both novels mark the public arena as a threatening locale; it is here that one’s shame is exposed. The infringement of one’s private persona threatens not only one’s privacy, but one’s own sense of

being “human.” I have argued that more than threatening this recognisable, yet difficult-to-explain border between the human and the animal, this web depicts its porosity, its constructed nature, and also its flexibility. This sheds light on the artificiality of the vision du monde in which the animal and the human are separate and disconnected entities. The links between the body, sex and shame also threaten a conception of the human, and in so doing exposes animal traces within its domain. The fact that it can be threatened shows that it is not static or stable, and importantly, that debunking myths about what it means to be human has political implications. These can alter not only interactions between those considered normatively human, but also our connections and relations with animals as well. One way to acknowledge this connection is to do so via the body, because if humans can feel shame (or joy, friendship, pain, fear, loss), so can animals. This acknowledgement requires a change in action, which can also be thought of in bodily terms if we consider the implications of eating meat and our quotidian use of animal products. Both novels show us that the sounds, acts and thoughts that bridge the divide between humans and animals are often misread (by characters in the novels and by critics of the novels), or otherwise read in predominantly negative terms. Those that speak only in the vocabulary of humans are deaf to the language of animals— which we, too, possess.

Notes

¹ In *The Sexual Politics of Meat* Adams claims that *Genesis* is set in the “meatless Garden of Eden” and that eating meat— that is, the killing of animals for food— can be read “as the cause of the Fall” (Adams, 1990, p. 125).

² He is, of course, not alone in this view. Elspeth Probyn’s *Blush: Faces of Shame* (2005), a wonderful and sensitively-written account of shame in different social and emotional spheres, acknowledges that perhaps humans are not the only beings to feel shame (2005, pp. 3, 163-164 n.3), but relegates the possibility of shame in animals to a footnote and views it ultimately as one among other “interesting” ideas (2005:13). In the end, she too shares the opinion that shame “is a fact of human life” and “is an important resource in thinking about what it means to be human” (2005, p. xiii). She makes the important point that “we miss a great deal when we disregard our human similarities [...] we are much more alike than we are different—whatever the measure of

difference: gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and so on” and that we “must use shame to re-evaluate how we are positioned in relation to the past and to rethink how we wish to live in proximity to others” (2005, pp. xiii-xiv), but does not move on to think about how shame can be used to situate the animal and the human in closer proximity and to see how it can be used to acknowledge that our relationship to animals is exploitative, oppressive and violent.

³ I am thinking here specifically of the following type of comments: “Just as people of colour do not exist as resources for whites, or women for men, so other animals do not exist as resources for human beings” and “By analogy, why think that permitting ‘gentler’ rape or ‘more humane’ slavery would lead to the absolute prohibition against rape and the total abolition of slavery?” both from Tom Regan and Gary Francione’s “The Animal Rights Movement Must Reject Animal Welfarism” in *Animal Rights: Opposing Viewpoints* (1996, pp. 195, 196).

⁴ For an exciting and invigorating array of essays devoted to the links between queer and critical animal studies see, for instance, Volume 10, issue 3 (2012) of JCAS.

⁵ The concern with privacy and the individual is also discussed by Kundera in *Testaments Betrayed* (see especially 259-261). Here, Kundera articulates shame as “one of the key notions of the modern era” (1996, p. 259).

⁶ I am thinking here of Derrida’s description of “naked” words, implying honest ones, from *The Animal that therefore I Am*.

⁷ See, for instance, pages 47, 165, 179.

⁸ His name also bears significant mythical roots. See Cooper (2005, pp. 32-35).

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Fishing in Fiction: A Critical Animal Studies Analysis of Fishing in Two Examples of Popular Fishing Literature

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Abstract: Fishing is a powerful social and psychological signifier in modern Western society. Fishing literature is a popular genre that often incorporates depictions of fish and fishing in association with explorations of the human condition, including ideas about religion, masculinity and nature as therapy. This paper explores the ways that such associations often neglect to acknowledge the fish as representative of embodied animals with the capacity to feel pain and suffer.

Keywords: Fly fishing, fishing literature, fish welfare, literary animal representations

Introduction

Fishing is a powerful social and psychological signifier in modern Western society. Fish are associated with symbol and sanctity, motif and myth, food and festivity, pet and pastime. Depictions of fish and fishing also appear frequently in print, suffusing the genres of fiction, nonfiction, autobiography, instructional literature, and sports literature. Many autobiographical and semi-autobiographical texts about fishing share one important trait in addition to positioning fish and their capture as a key focus. They suggest, often in their titles, that fishing is linked with the search for the meaning of life. Examples include John Gierach's *Sex, Death and Fly-Fishing* (1990), Jeremy Paxton's *Fish, Fishing and the Meaning of Life* (1995), Dan Keating's *Angling Life: A Fisherman Reflects on Success, Failure and the Ultimate Catch* (2011), and *Fly-Fishing – The Sacred Art: Casting a Fly as a Spiritual Practice* (2012), written by Rabbi Eric Eisenkramer and Reverend Michael Attas. These narratives, along with a number of fictional texts that have emerged in the last few decades, belong to a subgenre of narrative fiction that

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might be called “fishing literature.”

Certainly, fishing is a pastime that seems to offer more than just a way to gain a meal, or, as David James Duncan phrases it, to “feed not just the bodies but the souls of fly fishers” (302). For those who do not catch fish, fishing literature provides a way for the uninitiated to participate in the existential journey through others. However, fishing literature also highlights the complex set of cultural meanings that attach to fishing – the way this practice relates to ideas about humanity, animality, modernity, culture, and nature. Adrian Franklin explains that national discourses determine why fishing and hunting occur in different countries, though there are common themes (359-63). One such theme is fishing as an escape of modern life and a reconnection with nature; another theme involves the relationship between fishing and masculinity.

While fishing is a prolific endeavor worldwide that takes on various forms, my focus is fly fishing, that is, recreational fishing with a line, hook, and artificial lure in place of live bait.¹ Fly fishing is a style of sport fishing in which the focus is on skill, pleasure, and recreation rather than hunting fish for the purpose of trade or subsistence.² While the term “fishing literature” encompasses non-fiction and autobiographical works, I have chosen to analyze depictions of fishing in two acclaimed novels situated within the subgenre of fishing literature: Norman Maclean’s *A River Runs Through It* (1976) and David James Duncan’s *The River Why* (1983). It is important to study novels because they are a popular form of cultural narrative and thus are linked to history and culture. As Philip Armstrong states, “Literary texts testify to the shared emotions, moods and thoughts of people in specific historical moments and places, as they are influenced by – and as they influence – the surrounding socio-cultural forces and systems” (4). This means that depictions of animals in fiction have the power to impact the way that a society

considers and treats animals in reality. Therefore, after outlining how these novels are based around themes relating to Christianity, nature therapy, escapism, atavism, fraternity, and masculinity, I adopt a Critical Animal Studies perspective to argue that the fish depicted in these narratives have become so imbued with meaning that we are obstructed from considering the animal beneath.

Fishing and Christianity

A River Runs Through It is a semi-autobiographical novella that follows the life of two brothers, Paul and Norman, who are raised in Montana, fishing the Blackfoot River. The majority of the story takes place around 1937 when Norman and Paul are in their thirties. Growing up, the boys are close and practice catechisms, fly fishing, and fist fighting together. As they mature they grow apart, and Paul leads a dual existence: he is a respected journalist, loving son, gifted fisherman, and Norman's younger brother, but also a compulsive gambler, heavy drinker, and pugilist. Norman and his father use fishing as a way to connect with Paul and reunite the family through their shared devotion to fly fishing. When Paul is murdered in 1939, Norman reflects on their fishing trips. He is haunted by the inadequacy of his efforts to help Paul, yet finds comfort in the memories of fishing the Blackfoot River.

Maclean opens with the line: "In our family, there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing" (1). Sons of a Scottish minister, Norman and Paul spent a comparable number of hours learning about fishing as they did studying religion. The relationship between Christianity and fishing is strong in this novella, just as it is in Western culture. Indeed, fishing and Christianity have a history of being coupled (Kroupi 107). Significantly, the acrostic symbol associated with the ancient Greek word *ichthys* (fish) has long been used as a signifier for Jesus

Christ. Biblical references to fishing lead Peter Hathaway Capstick to surmise, “It’s pretty clear that God held fishermen in quite high esteem; or maybe it was just their patience. In any case, an awful lot of Disciples fished full time” (144), and one cannot overlook the “fishbasher,” a gruesome weapon also known as a “priest,” in reference to Catholicism and the delivering of last rites.

The link between fishing and Christianity is also reinforced in *The River Why* when the protagonist, Gus Orviston, declares “moral condemnation of fish killing doesn’t get far before it runs smack up against Jesus himself, who fed fish to the multitudes” (Duncan 133). Set in Portland, Oregon, Duncan’s novel follows the life of Gus, the son of fishing-fanatical parents Henning Hale-Orviston and Carolina Carper Henley. Gus finds himself caught between the relentless competitive banter between his mother – a staunch bait fisher – and his father, who is a devout fly fisherman. Tired of the bickering, Gus leaves home to live in a cabin near a river he calls the “Tamanawis.” Here he spends his days in relative isolation, fishing while contemplating the meaning of life. Gus’s idyllic existence soon changes as he experiences insomnia and depression. When he discovers a corpse in the river he begins to question God and obsess over his own mortality. The many people Gus encounters while fishing the Tamanawis each teach him something about what it means to be human, but it is only when he finds love with Eddy, a gifted fisherwoman, that he feels genuinely fulfilled.

In addition to reinforcing the link between fishing and Christianity, these narratives allude to the influence of Isaak Walton’s *The Compleat Angler*. Walton’s 1653 treatise comprises instructional fishing passages, pastoral drama, verses, biblical proverbs, and social-political commentary, and is credited as being the most influential published work on fly fishing. Walton’s text was the first to present angling as “equally a philosophical as much as a physical

pursuit,” which led to its being credited with “the historical development of angling” in England (MacGregor 308). Mark Browning states that Walton’s text was a “coded message to Anglicans, with Anglers serving as a not-too-subtle metaphor for his fellow-believers”; thus, just as “the early Christians used the sign of the... [fish] to camouflage their activities, so does Walton some fifteen centuries later use fish to camouflage his Anglican spirituality” (25, 26). This constructs Walton as a kind of piscatorial priest and his anglers as members of a covert priesthood. In Walton’s own words, “*God never did make a more calm, quiet, innocent recreation than Angling,*” and he privileges angling over other forms of hunting because “*water is the eldest daughter of the Creation, the Element upon which the Spirit of God did first move*” (262, 185). Allusions to Christianity and *The Compleat Angler* underpin the sentiment that recreational fishing is a means to heal the wounds and ease the stresses caused by modern life in these examples of fishing literature.

Fishing and Nature Worship

As well as Christianity, there is another form of worship present in Duncan’s novel. “Nature religion” is a loosely constructed covenant largely associated with the 19th century transcendental movement. The transcendental movement, led by Ralph Waldo Emerson, was largely responsible for the idealization of nature as a place where transcendental experiences were most likely to occur. The sacralization of nature saw the wilderness replace the church for many people, including American Transcendentalist writer, Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau’s *Walden*, published in 1854, is one of the most celebrated literary nature treatises, and has been strongly associated with spiritual approaches to nature ever since. In *Walden*, Thoreau records his experience living for two years in a small cabin in the woods a mile from his hometown of

Concord, Massachusetts. Thoreau presents his sojourn in nature as an experiment to illustrate that aspects of civilization are harmful to humanity, and show nature as the best place for humans to live an authentic life and experience transcendence. Similarly, in *The River Why*, Gus leaves home to live alone in a cabin by a river. He states that his aim is to escape his urban woes and seek answers to the meaning of life in nature (Duncan 55). Familiar with *The Compleat Angler*, he asks, “Who is this ‘God of Nature’” that Isaak Walton constructs in his treatise, and he wonders why in all his time fishing he has never encountered Him (Duncan 37). There are multiple allusions to *Walden* in *The River Why*; for example, Duncan borrows Thoreau’s chapter title, “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For.” This indicates that Duncan is comparing Gus’s sabbatical to Thoreau’s nature experiment. Both Thoreau and Gus abandon urban environments to sojourn alone in nature, and this constructs immersion in nature as a mode of escapism.

The Transcendentalists believe nature is the place to experience transcendence, and Gus Orviston does indeed have a transcendental experience in nature. After some time fishing the Tamanawis alone, Gus encounters a fisherwoman named Eddy. The two enter into a romantic relationship, and when Eddy reveals that she must leave Gus for a brief trip to Portland, Gus feels dejected. On the day of her departure, Eddy and Gus are fishing and they hook a Chinook salmon. Eddy tells Gus to “play” the fish and then leaves him beside the river. Gus decides to fulfill Eddy’s parting wish and remembers that Eddy said to “play” the fish and did not say to “catch” it (Duncan 269). He keeps the fish hooked but not reeled in for many hours and is transported some distance down the Tamanawis. Through this extended connection with the Chinook via the fishing line, Gus feels reconnected to the power of nature, as if he and the fish are one entity. Gus enters the water and approaches the exhausted fish feeling “[m]oved and shamed by the animals’ [*sic*] trust” (Duncan 275). This is a significant passage in Duncan’s

novel because it demonstrates how depictions of fishing are linked with Christian ideology. The location here is highly symbolic. Samuel Snyder explains:

Water is just such a physical structure, into which baptism not only offers opportunities for purification, but also a more embodied connection to the physical reality of the divine...[F]ly fishers elevate water as the most holy symbol next to the fish itself, equating wading into rivers to a form of self-induced baptism. (905)

Gus leans in to touch the fish and narrates, “My face entered the river; I felt my ears fill; the water poured in at the neck of my coat and ran freezing down my chest” (Duncan 277). Deeply moved by the encounter, Gus walks home through the mist along a deserted road. Having been “reborn,” Gus now experiences transcendence. He feels a sharp pain, which he likens to a hook being placed in his heart, and visualizes a thread connecting his body to the earth and sky. He falls to his knees as a hand rests “like sunlight” on his head (Duncan 278). Gus refers to a “nameless presence,” an “Ancient One,” and although it is unclear who or what this manifestation is, to Gus it is Divine. This passage demonstrates how fishing literature often suggests that escaping from civilization into nature and engaging in the act of recreational fishing can lead one to achieve spiritual and emotional rebirth.

Fishing as Therapy

Viewing nature as a remedy has long been considered a reaction to modernity. Bull writes that the “sense of escape from the hectic existence of life or modernity into the calmness sedateness, peacefulness of angling is an important facet of the angling experience” (456). Kimmel and Kaufman suggest that in response to the pressures of industrialized civilization “more and more men sought the tonic freshness of the outdoors to offset the daily routine of

‘brain work’” (13).³ Furthermore, Ortega y Gasset claims that hunting results in happiness because it brings a rare pleasure that daily chores and mundane tasks, which are an “annihilation of our real existence,” frequently steal away (36).

A River Runs Through It spans thirty years, during which time many significant events took place, such as the end of the First World War, the Prohibition era, the Great Depression, the rise of technology, and the industrial revolution. Consequently, the first half of the 20th century included periods of displacement, unemployment, and economic hardship for many working-class families. Norman considers the Blackfoot River as a refuge from civilization. He says, “I took my time walking down the trail, trying with each step to leave the world behind” (Maclean 37). In these narratives, the Blackfoot River and the Tamanawis are the antitheses of the modern industrialized world. Norman and Gus seek the peace and calmness afforded by nature, and view fishing on their rivers as a way to escape from the struggles associated with their complicated modern lives.

Angling as a way to heal psychological problems is a recurrent theme in *A River Runs Through It*. Norman states that his two default methods of helping someone are to offer them money or take them fishing (55). When discussing Norman’s brother-in-law Neal, Paul asks, “Do you think you should help him?” to which Norman replies that he is helping “By taking him fishing” (47). Norman invites Paul fishing in the hope that spending time together fishing the Blackfoot River will facilitate a discussion about Paul’s gambling and drinking problems, two subjects that Norman finds difficult to broach since Paul is evasive and defensive. Then, in a passage where Norman collects Paul from the police station after Paul is incarcerated for assaulting a publican, the sergeant warns Norman that his brother’s addiction to stud poker will land him in trouble. He tells Norman that he helps his own troubled brother by taking him fishing

(24). Patrick Dooley observes that the poignancy of *A River Runs Through It* stems from the fact that “in a family that conflated sporting activities with spiritual ones, the family’s proscribed remedy for helping someone — ‘take them fishing’ — was tragically inept” (165). Despite the “remedial” fishing expeditions, Paul’s troubles escalate and his problems result in his murder.

Fishing and Masculinity

The relationship between hunting and masculinity is a well-researched aspect of culture and sociology. Jacob Bull identifies the importance of “success” as a common masculine theme associated with angling. He observes that in many angling stories, themes about “heroic duals with nature abound” (450). Certainly, heroics, crusades, and tales of triumph pervade the factual and fictional accounts of anglers. Epic battles between man and marine creatures appear in fishing literature spanning centuries. Consider Herman Melville’s 1851 *Moby-Dick* and Ernest Hemingway’s 1952 tale, *The Old Man and the Sea*. The modern battlefield in *A River Runs Through It* is the Blackfoot River and the fly fisher’s opponent is the Eastern Brook Trout. Big rivers are the best, and the mighty Blackfoot is certainly a formidable river. In the novel, Norman boasts that the Blackfoot “is the most powerful, and per pound, so are its fish” (Maclean 12). The river “roars” and is “no place for small fish or small fishermen” (15). The bigger the river, the bigger the fish, which facilitates the type of epic battle the heroic angler seeks in order to conquer nature and reinforce masculine identity. Conquering big fish as a way to reinforce masculine identity is an idea present in many examples of fishing literature. In *A River Runs Through It*, Norman and Reverend Maclean watch Paul casting out. Norman narrates, “Everything was going into one big cast for one last big fish” (97). Shortly thereafter, Paul hauls

in a fish so enormous that had “Romans been watching they would have thought that what was dangling had a helmet on it” (99-100).

Size matters in *The River Why*. As Gus Orviston claims, “Statistics are a tool upon which anglers rely so heavily that a fish story lacking numbers is just that: a Fish Story” (Duncan 15). Indeed, fish are described according to their dimensions throughout Duncan’s novel. They are called “ten-pounder,” “seven pounds, eleven ounces,” “a beautiful 3½-pound cutthroat” and “seventeen-inch fish” (Duncan 17, 61, 84, 210). Maclean’s characters fixate on the dimensions of fish. This is evident in statements such as “nice-sized but not big – fourteen inches or so” (61). Bull explains that this is because “the angler is searching for a particular fish, a fish that success and masculinity can be measured against” (451). This is certainly the case in Hemingway’s tale, as Santiago fantasizes, “My big fish must be somewhere” (35), and in regard to *Moby-Dick*, one could hardly choose a larger opponent than an unusually large whale.

The significance of catching big fish in Maclean’s and Duncan’s novels seems related to ideas of primordial virility. Marti Kheel states that many hunters claim that “the primeval, animal-like aspect of hunting is experienced as an instinctive urge, which, like the sexual drive, cannot and should not be repressed” (“License to Kill” 89). Thus, it is perceived that man’s primal, intrinsic compulsion towards competition and aggression requires an outlet. Michael S. Kimmel and Michael Kaufman discuss the claim that hunting is natural and necessary so that masculine impulses can be exercised in a manner that is not harmful to humans or human society (5). The idea that channeling aggressive energy towards fish through fishing is a more preferable outlet for settling male grievances than by violence between men is reflected in *A River Runs Through It* when Paul, who is a masterful fisherman, draws on his talent at fly fishing rather than his boxing prowess to dominate other males. Whenever confronted or challenged by a rival,

Paul's standard response is "I'd like to get that bastard on the Blackfoot for a day, with a bet on the side" (6). Citing Paul Shepard, American environmentalist and author of *The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game* (1973), Kheel explains how hunters often claim that hunting is in their biology; that they are, according to author Paul Shepard, "genetically programmed to pursue, attack and kill for food. To the extent that men do not do so they are not fully human" (Shepard, cited in Kheel, "License to Kill" 90). According to Spanish Philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, author of *Meditations on Hunting* (1972), the constitution of hunting has not only been constant but has barely changed over time: "The only difference is in the weapon, which then was the bow and arrow, while now it is the rifle" (58); or in regard to angling, it was once twine and a hook carved from bone, and now it is an "ultralight six-foot flyrod, tied on a barbless #28 Midge" (Duncan 73).

Critiquing these kinds of essentialist claims, Kheel explains that "sport hunting imaginatively recaptures a time when it is believed that men had to hunt for reasons of survival" ("The Killing Game" 33). It is a long-held stereotype that men must hunt to provide food for their family; thus, women are genetically wired to seek men who hunt well. Robin Shelton, whose book *The Incomplete Angler* explores his personal experiences as an angler, claims that once he embarks on a fishing expedition the integrity of his manhood no longer depends upon his car, cash balance, or sexual aptitude, but rather upon how many fish he catches (90). He measures his success as a male against the size of his catch when he states a "two-pound pollack wasn't going to lure anyone back to my cave" (90). In *A River Runs Through It*, Norman also touches on this stereotype when he claims that "[t]o women who do not fish, men who come home without their limit are failures in life" (46). The Maclean boys look "with contempt upon the husbands of wives who have to say, 'We like the little ones – they make the best eating'"

(12). In *The River Why*, Henning Hale-Orviston, upon returning from a cancelled fishing trip empty-handed, feels emasculated by Carolina, who in three hours manages to haul home “55 pounds of prime meat” and slap a three pound slab of salmon on his dinner plate, which he is said to eye “like it was a turd” (Duncan 59). In each of these examples, success as a man is dependent upon the ability to catch fish, preferably big fish, as this is a measure of one’s masculinity.

Kimmel and Kaufman discuss some reasons why twentieth-century men might have used angling to reinforce masculine identity. The effects of the Industrial Revolution increased the time men spent working in urban environments, and this proved problematic because it was commonly thought that modern culture was feminizing them by “turning the heroic warrior into a desk-bound nerd” (Kimmel and Kaufman 12). Turning to nature in order to re-masculinize is also employed by adult males through the “mythopoetic men’s movement.” Bull states that this term denotes the increasing number of men who sought to create “a tribal scenario” in which urbane males sought to dominate nature and connect “to a timeless, animalistic order” (448). Masculine congregation in the wilderness, performing activities away from females and feminized spaces, facilitates the validation of masculine identity, which must necessarily occur outside of the home in the presence of other males because, as Kimmel and Kaufman state, men “must be validated by other men; women cannot validate manhood” (4-5).

Angling often involves not only groups of adult males but also fathers and sons. During the Industrial Revolution, young boys were supposedly at risk because while fathers were away working, sons were left dangerously exposed to the female-dominated, domestic domain. Kheel writes of the belief that boys, “in order to identify as male... must deny all that is female within themselves, as well as their involvement with allof the female world” (“License to Kill” 105).

Thus, as Bull explains, in the masculine doctrine of angling, it is characteristic that the “adult male [takes] the boy away from the feminised space of the home to be immersed in nature and pass on masculine knowledges” (451). To counteract what Kimmel and Kaufman term “destructive effeminacy,” when men of the Industrial Revolution were at home, they felt the need to fortify their sons’ masculinity by taking them fishing (14).

In all these ways, then, the two novels under discussion here show angling functioning as a kind of fraternity, involving adult males as well as fathers and sons. Certainly, the idea of fishing as a fraternity was espoused by Isaak Walton, the creator of perhaps the best-known treatise on recreational fishing. Much like the fish in fishing literature, however, Walton’s treatise is infused with layers of meaning. In addition to being a book about fishing, Paula Loscocco explains, “the *Angler* not only entertained royalist readers living in internal exile during the Cromwellian 1650s, but also conveyed to those readers what it understood to be England’s religious and cultural traditions” (501). While *The Compleat Angler* is shot through with words and phrases possessing double meaning, those unaware of, or unconcerned with, the psalmic underpinnings, or who are not reading the treatise as a polemical text, might just read it as a book about the importance of fishing and fraternity to men’s physical and psychological wellbeing. When Walton has Piscator declare “I am (Sir) a brother of the *Angle*” (175), the brotherhood in the first instance is a reference to the Church of England (Loscocco 503). Nevertheless, Walton’s use of the term brotherhood also reinforces the idea of fraternity, which unites certain people with shared beliefs and excludes others. For example, Walton’s brotherhood is united in its hatred of otters, who steal fish who would otherwise be caught by the angler (175). Walton also identifies those who scoff at the art of angling as outsiders; such people Piscator says are “enemies to me, and to all that love vertue and Angling”: they are “an

abomination to mankind” (176). In *A River Runs Through It*, the Maclean family fishing fraternity also has its members and its outcasts. Even the legendary Isaak Walton sits outside of the Maclean fishing fraternity, as Reverend Maclean declares him a farce, an “Episcopalian and a bait fisherman,” thus simultaneously a traitor to Christianity *and* fly fishing (5). When Neal arrives in town, Paul declares, “I won’t fish with him. He comes from the West Coast and he fishes with worms” (9). Neal exists outside of the fly fishing fraternity, and therefore, must necessarily be situated outside of the Maclean family fraternity because in this narrative, the two are inseparable. Since these traditional forms of fraternity – religious and hunting – are easily recognizable as domains where men typically bond over a shared interest, the aspects familiar to each one is readily interchangeable with aspects of the other.

Reading Fishing Literature from a Critical Animal Studies Perspective

As detailed above, there are numerous associations in fishing literature that connect recreational angling to the spiritual and psychological experience of being human. However, whether or not recreational fishing has significant therapeutic, spiritual, or social properties, as Harold F. Blaisdell states, “All the romance of trout fishing exists in the mind of the angler and is in no way shared by the fish” (53). The narratives examined here demonstrate vividly some of the ways in which fish and fishing become imbued with social, cultural, and spiritual meanings through associations with religion and ideas about psychological remediation and reinforcement of gender identity. Beneath these meanings, however, is the reality of recreational fishing practices. While the fish in fictional narratives are not real living animals but are rather depictions of fish, these novels accurately represent an activity that is, in reality, no less brutal than other hunting methods, which employ rifles, shotguns, spears, knives, or crossbows. In fact,

these other hunting weapons have the capacity to kill relatively quickly, so by comparison, fishing with a line and hook, which to a greater or lesser extent derives sport from the extended duration of “playing” the fish, is arguably *more* brutal. It is with this in mind that I now proceed to examine Maclean and Duncan’s narratives, adopting an animal-standpoint perspective.

Authors of fishing literature often allocate pages of text to descriptions of the pursuit of fish, while dealings with the killing of them are often brisk or omitted. This is because the death of the fish is secondary to the themes dependent upon the pursuit, anticipation, excitement, ritual, and skill involved in fishing, and because the killing is not essential to reinforcing how this blood sport supposedly facilitates the human-nature reconnection. There is little, if any, acknowledgment of how the hunt for fish concludes, perhaps because where realistic depictions do appear they are violent and unpleasant. In *A River Runs Through It* the deaths of fish are generally omitted; however, on one rare occasion, Norman places a captured fish on a sand bar. When it begins to thrash he perfunctorily explains, “I managed to open the large blade to my knife which several times slid off his skull before it went through his brain” (19). Often, the captured fish are not killed immediately and are instead put in the basket while still alive. This is evident by the mention of Norman’s basket “thumping on the rocks and falling on its side” (88). This narrative disregards the negative experience of fish through being hunted and treats the killing of fish superficially. There is no discernible moral tension in regard to the welfare of the fish being hunted for sport, therapy, or as a way to reinforce one’s male gender identity.

In *The River Why*, the activity of “playing” the fish, that is, the period of time from when the fish is hooked to when it is reeled in, is often described in poetical, humorous, or idealized ways. For example, Gus explains:

...a big blueback went flying across the rivertop in a noble but whimsical attempt to escape its plight by transforming itself into a bird: it entered the air over a dozen times, but each flight was shorter, the longed-for-wings remained fins, and at last I hauled it ashore. (Duncan 84)

Admittedly, Gus is an amusing character, but this example illustrates how the brutal nature of angling is often trivialized in fishing literature. By making the comparison to graceful bird flight, this passage becomes a dismissive rendering of an animal's struggle for survival as the fish's traumatic experience is belittled. In a similar example from *A River Runs Through It*, Maclean writes, "The fish made three such long runs before another act in the performance began. Although the act involved a big man and a big fish, it looked more like children playing" (98-9). Here, "playing" the fish is likened to theatre and a playground scene. Then there is the passage where Norman reminisces about the last time he went fishing with Paul: "This was the last fish we were ever to see Paul catch...we never saw the fish but only the artistry of the fisherman" (100). In this example, Norman remembers Paul's final "catch" but not the fish or its undeniably traumatic experience and death. The fish is an *aesthetic* object – it is admired and treated as an object of art. It is merely a testament to Paul's skill and mastery so that "the fish" as *a fish* disappears.

Although fish are not always considerably represented in *The River Why*, there is certainly more attention paid to their experiences than in *A River Runs Through It*. Gus often acknowledges the brutal nature of fishing, and there are multiple examples that reveal Gus feels guilt over fishing practices. The evening before he departs for the Tamanawis, Gus dines with his family. Carolina pesters him to tell the story about the time he caught a gigantic, record-breaking bass. He initially refuses, but relents, and explains that the fish was well known to locals, who

had named him “Garbage Gut” because he was often seen picking over human garbage floating in the lake. When Garbage Gut gorges Gus’s hook, Gus observes how the fish seems to just give up: “like he couldn’t believe what I had done to him, like I’d betrayed him” (Duncan 64). Gus says, “I dragged him in like a toy boat on a rope. And I saw what a helpless little thing he was.” Then, Gus explains that “the bass started thrashing because the hook was tearing through his insides” (64). Once reeled in, Garbage Gut is killed by a third party who cusses him all the while taking his life. When the fish is publically gutted, a plethora of human rubbish is found in his stomach, a fact the gathering crowd finds hilarious. Gus states he was appalled by the way the people lampooned the fish, who had been assisting them by cleaning up the lake they had polluted. As they had all laughed, Gus had wanted to cry. When Henning suggests Garbage Gut’s death was a blessing because the fish was a disgrace to the “game” and that Gus did everyone a favor by preventing his presence from fouling up the lake, Gus is furious. He calls his father a “fishing Fascist... a flyrod Nazi,” and says “every fish but trout or salmon and everybody but flyfishermen are niggers and Jews, and wetbacks to you!” (66). Gus’s story and his reaction to the deplorable way Garbage Gut was treated demonstrates that he is aware of the brutality of fishing practices, and also of the inherent value of the individual nonhuman animal’s life.

There are further instances in the novel where Gus expresses guilt over catching and killing fish. For example, when he catches a cutthroat he states, “Soon as I had it in my clutches I found myself pitying it... Despising myself, disobeying myself, I grabbed driftwood and killed it” (84). Moreover, when he accidentally throws pellets in his aquarium with trout blood on his hands, “Alfred the Great,” a three-inch steelhead smolt whom Gus took from the river and a natural prey species of the trout, makes a frenzied attempt to escape and in the process is so severely injured, he dies. This distresses Gus and he gets drunk. He says, “Then Alfred, Garbage-Gut, all the fish

I'd ever killed began to haunt me" (86). Despite his remorse over Alfred's death, Gus continues fishing, which is what he is doing when he discovers the body of a local man, named Abe, floating in the river. While dragging Abe's corpse back to civilization, Gus remarks how the dead man's face shared the "same astonished expression" that he had "seen on the faces of a million spent fish," which disturbs him (95). Contemplating Abe's death forces Gus to confront his own morals and mortality. He states, "Suddenly it hit me what a pathetic lot we fishermen were. We sneaked, pursued, teased, deceived, tormented and often murdered the objects of our obscure lust; we compounded our crimes by gloating over them" (109). Gus's realization is quite remarkable, and he goes on to state something similar:

...let me remember myself down there fishing, maiming and murdering trout like enemies in wartime, ticking them off my Log by the thousand, robbing them of all dignity at death by stuffing them, still thrashing, into my creel, or tallying them like downed bowling pins before flinging them back into the water pierced and bleeding from my hooks, weakened by my clutching hands, stunned by the too-rare air. And never a thought about the suffering they endured for my amusement. (132)

Then, through what he deems "de-fished" eyes, Gus feels compelled to release the two-inch minnow he calls "Sigrid the Small," also captured from the wild, for his aquarium. The story about Garbage Gut, Alfred the Great's death, and the epiphany that ensues from discovering Abe, each illustrate Gus's moral ambiguity over angling practices. However, the moral tension in *The River Why* is transient, as despite the many occasions leading us to believe that Gus comes to view recreational fishing as a morally reprehensible activity, he goes on to tutor children in fishing, to manufacture fly fishing equipment, and to marry a fisherwoman with whom he continues to hunt fish.

The way that this novel deals with Gus's recognition of the brutality of angling practices is through a correlation being drawn between human and fish life cycles and the realities of life and death. Gus explains that life is a continuous ritualistic cycle: "...a human child at birth undergoes a ritual almost identical to that inflicted upon trophy trout at death...the fish is whacked on the head, thus putting it out of its misery; the infant is whacked on the behind, thus initiating it into its misery (15). Mortality is a major theme in this novel as Gus undergoes an epiphany that sees him cease dwelling on his own inevitable death and the deaths of those he loves, and instead, appreciate the wonders of life and accept his mortality. When Abe's facial expression reminds Gus of all the fish he has killed, he is reminded how little control humans have over their mortality (112). Accepting this makes it easier for him to rationalize killing fish because all living things must die eventually, and whereas anglers may not control the circumstances of their own death, they do have power over whether fish live or die. To exercise this control, however, the angler cannot be sentimental. Gus admonishes himself for naming and caring for the fish in his aquarium (87). This rejection of sentimentality may explain the most disturbing passage in the novel, where Gus teaches six local children how to catch fish. Initially, the children are filled with innocent wonder and ask Gus what fish are. Then, when a boy aptly dubbed "Hemingway" hooks a fish, Gus explains that the fish must be "put out of its misery."⁴ The children squabble over who gets to club the fish, and Gus says, "I found a priest myself, handed it to Hemingway, and he adroitly dispatched his prize then cradled and cuddled and cooed it like a babe in his arms" (206). The passing of the priest to the uninitiated male child illustrates the ritual of learning about life and death. As Kheel explains, "Hunting and killing animals is a standard rite of passage out of the world of women and nature into the masculine realm" ("License to Kill" 106). Certainly, the way that Hemingway nurtures the fish after

violently killing that fish demonstrates his naivety and is a final glimpse of innocence before his initiation into “manhood” puts an end to any developing sentimentality.⁵

Fishing Literature and Critical Animal Studies

Fish do not attract as much attention as do birds and mammals when it comes to matters of animal welfare, and there are various explanations for this. To begin with, hunting fish is not typically called hunting; it is called “fishing” or “catching”; therefore, pursuing and killing fish is not often thought of as hunting, despite shared traits between angling and game-hunting practices. This means that anti-hunting sentiments do not always extend to include fish and fishing. Furthermore, fish are more difficult to anthropomorphize than are mammals owing to their “alien” appearance. Victoria Braithwaite, author of *Do Fish Feel Pain?* says that “being part of a subaquatic world that we can only temporarily visit makes it difficult for us to relate to fish” (137). Pet fish live in ponds, tanks, and bowls and this inhibits intimacy as fish cannot offer human beings the same degree of physical affection as can warm-blooded, terrestrial pet species. As Gus Orviston says, a fish is not “the kind of pet you can ride, take on walks, set on your lap, dress in a sweater, take pheasant hunting or cuddle; it is not likely to lick your face” (Duncan 74). Frans de Waal explains that it is identification and familiarity that enhances the empathic response in humans (213); thus, when humans find it difficult to identify with fish because they seem so unfamiliar, then empathetic responses towards fish are unlikely to occur.

On the other hand, empathizing with fish might seem problematic to many people who suggest that to do so constitutes anthropomorphism. James D. Rose argues that when humans do anthropomorphize fish, they confuse “unconscious nociception from conscious pain and unconscious emotions from conscious feelings” (152).⁶ In his opinion, fish are not conscious

beings, and therefore they cannot experience pain; however, he does believe that they are vulnerable to “indices like physiological stress or disturbed reproduction or maladaptive behaviour” (Rose 152). Nevertheless, rather than rule out the possibility of fish pain altogether, he states that it is “*unlikely* that fishes could have consciousness or a capacity for pain or suffering meaningfully resembling what we know” (148, emphasis added). Despite their divergences, Rose and Braithwaite agree that we may never fully realize the degree unto which fish feel pain and suffer. However, I tend to agree with Braithwaite, who suggests that at this stage it is unwise to deny fish consideration simply because we cannot know what it feels like to be a fish, or because we can never directly experience what they experience (9).

Literary depictions of fish and fishing warrant close and ongoing study for the same reasons as many Critical Animal Studies scholars explore representations of other animal species in Western culture. Nik Taylor states that Critical Animal Studies scholars aim to “keep real, embodied animals at the forefront” and to do this “necessitates political action on their behalf” (158). Margo DeMello explains that a task of Animal Studies scholars is “to *deconstruct* [social] constructions: to unpack the various layers of meaning that we have imposed onto animal bodies and try to see the animal within” (16). Critical Animal Studies scholars have identified numerous examples in Western culture where certain groups of animals are bestowed with culturally constructed meanings that often hinder us from recognizing animal abuse. Carol J. Adams, for example, argues that animals called “livestock” are “absent referents” in slaughterhouse discourses (303-4). Lynda Birke discusses how laboratory rats and mice become invisible when cast as “potent symbols of scientific endeavour” in scientific discourses (211). Similarly, I maintain that fish become absent referents when depictions of recreational fishing serve to reinforce ideas about humans bonding with nature or present fishing as a means to ease the

worries and stresses caused by modern life. The only real difference is that Adam's "livestock" and Birke's "laboratory mice" are actual animals, whereas the fish in fishing literature are depictions of real animals. Nevertheless, in each case, the nonhuman animal is effectively subsumed by the meaning imposed. Whether the situation involves slaughterhouse sheep, laboratory mice, or the depictions of fish caught for enjoyment in fishing literature, the animal is being used as a means to an anthropocentric end.

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Notes

¹ Many recreational anglers practice catch and release fishing. This form of fishing is not discussed in this essay because the anglers in the focal novels are not identified as catch and release anglers. Contrary to popular belief, catch and release fishing is not unproblematic where fish welfare is concerned. See Braithwaite (169-171) and A. Dionys de Leeuw (1996).

² Subsistence fishing involves catching, killing, and consuming fish as an essential food source. In this essay, where fish are caught primarily for recreation, with consumption being a secondary motivation, it is not considered to be subsistence fishing.

³ Today, many women also practice recreational angling (Crowder 2002).

⁴ Hemingway in this passage, of course, is a reference to author Ernest Hemingway, who was an avid proponent of hunting.

⁵ In *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity*, Philip Armstrong discusses how "emotionally laden relationships between humans and animals" were increasingly viewed as "immature and unrealistic" by modernists during the early-mid twentieth century (134). Sentimentality was thought best confined "to the socially disempowered spheres of feminine domesticity, maternity and child-rearing" (Armstrong 134).

⁶ Nociception is the term used to describe the body's unconscious "detection or perception" of noxious stimuli (Braithwaite 32).

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“This Image Cannot be Displayed”: Critical Visual Pedagogy and Images from Factory Farms

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Abstract: In the context of recently proposed “ag-gag” legislation, this paper treats images of farm animals in modern agriculture as contested sites of education. Images of factory farming are distributed in efforts to illuminate disturbing and violent practices behind the walls of farms, hatcheries and slaughter plants. These images are intended to evoke critical consciousness and questions of ethics among the food-consuming public. Scholarship in critical and visual pedagogies, difficult knowledge (Britzman), traumatic education (Felman), a “politics of sight” (Pachirat) and political aesthetics (Rancière) may help educators and activists develop critical reflection about how they use images of factory-farmed animals. By bringing these and other scholars into conversation about representations of factory-farmed animals, the author explores the political and educational limitations and possibilities of deploying such images. Pedagogies that address common responses to disturbing images -- such as avoidance, resistance, sympathy, uncertainty, and anxiety – provide theoretical foundations and insight for educators and activists who want to educate food consumers and change the practices of factory farming. Whereas fixed ideology diminishes ground for new meaning-making, ethical anxiety denotes instability and opens space for possibility, education and change.

Keywords: factory farms, visual pedagogy, critical pedagogy, difficult knowledge

Disturbing images of farm animals are distributed by organizations to lift the closed walls of the meat and dairy industries for public view. To document and expose animal cruelty in modern farming, organizations, filmmakers and activists capture and distribute images that may stir, shock, or repulse the consumer public. Classroom educators also take up these images as texts and invite critical analysis in courses as diverse as ethics, food politics, psychology, cultural studies and women’s studies. Factory farm images, typically filmed through undercover investigation, are intended to supply missing information about everyday practices in modern agriculture. They are shown to disclose a troubling reality, to rupture everyday food routines of production and consumption and to open the possibility of ethical revelation. In this paper I

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theorize images from factory farms as sites of education. As sites of education, images from factory farms should not only be understood politically but also aesthetically and pedagogically. A politics of sight and public opinion must reckon with resistance to difficult knowledge without lapsing into spectacle. Viewing images of farm animal suffering suggests a subjective confluence of learning and refusing to learn, anxiety, ideology and ethics. I connect a field of scholarship in visual pedagogy, which experienced a resurgence following the widely viewed images of prisoner abuse in the Abu Ghraib jail, with educational foundations in critical pedagogy and “difficult knowledge” (Britzman 100). In this paper, I do *not* provide a semiotic analysis of images from factory farms. Indeed, semiotic analysis would add useful specificity to this theoretical and pedagogical study. Rather, I explore pedagogical possibilities and limitations within uses of disturbing visuals and ponder the ethical aesthetics of images that are routinely distributed by animal rights and welfare organizations. To conclude, I describe progressive aspects of difficult knowledge and visual pedagogy that may be useful to activists and educators who use disturbing images of factory-farmed animals.

Images from Factory Farms as Contested Sites of Education

Images from factory farms are sites of education, in part, because they disclose the material conditions and social relations of food production that are actively concealed from public view. They are sites of education because they call us to witness non-human others living in states of pain, torture, confinement and misery. As such, they challenge us to consider the standpoint of the non-human other. For both reasons, these images are *contested* sites of education. They are contested on the production side because the agricultural industry leverages its power to keep them hidden. They are contested as subjects of study because bringing down

the walls of the factory farm is *not* the same as bringing down the walls and operations of speciesist ideology. It is also *not* the same as healing or reconnecting the sense of loss or anxiety that such images may evoke. Images from factory farms are contested sites of education, as well, because they challenge the “cultural hegemony of meat,” which encompasses an “ethos of commercial consumer culture that aggressively endorses meat eating” (Rowe 3).

“Ag-gag” Legislation, Visual Blackouts, and Information Outages

Just as the consumer public has come to expect direct access to information about food products, “ag-gag” legislation pushes a capitalist, police-state technique by attempting to criminalize activities that “threaten” to provide the information that the public expects. Through the model Animal Ecological Terrorism Act and subsequent state animal use protection statutes, collectively referred to as “ag-gag” legislation, legislatures weigh economic interests of agribusiness against public interests concerned with making informed decisions about purchases. In a consumerist democracy one’s purchase power has been elevated to the right of free expression, but that doesn’t stop corporate lobbyists. Anti-whistleblower laws have been written into state statutes in order to block public knowledge about routine cruelties in slaughterhouses, hatcheries and modern farms (American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals). In a review of state animal use protection statutes, Girgen explains that they are designed to shield designated animal uses and industries (e.g. animal research and animal agriculture) from actions that target them. Under the Animal Ecological Terrorism Act criminal actions could include “the taking of photographs, documentary footage, or other media for the purpose of exposure” (Clark 333). Due to so-called defamation protections, these images could be prohibited regardless of content or manner of distribution (Clark).

The legal structure for ag-gag legislation is built upon the “property status” of animals. As chattel, farm animals are only seen in the eyes of the law in terms of relational injury to their human owners (Clark). As well, farm animals are not included in most state animal cruelty statutes. California’s 2012 ban on the sale of products derived from force fed birds is a promising exception and an outcome of increased public awareness about force-feeding practices in the production of foie gras. Currently, the ethical question of farm animal suffering has few legal avenues. Legal proceedings would, in the least, shed public light on the conditions that agribusiness imposes on animals. Those practices now remain relatively hidden (Clark).

As with other social-change movements, legal code tends to catch up to popular thought on civil issues *after* persistent struggle and mounting public outcry. Clark highlights powerful visual elements in the civil rights movement:

Without the capacity to publish these acts of violence against animals, the propensity for success through civil disobedience is critically undermined. ... Had the black and white television sets of the 1960s America shown only marching civil rights activists in the thousands without the violent display their peaceable assembly was met with, people would not have recognized the need for change as quickly. (340-1)

Ag-gag legislation aims to impede that process. Pachirat explains, “... [A]n assumption of ‘power through transparency’ also motivates those who fight to keep the slaughterhouse and related repugnant practices quarantined and sequestered from sight” (247). Agribusiness defends more stringent “animal use protection statutes” by claiming that their entire industry has been targeted by “people who are opposed to using animals for food under any circumstance” (National Chicken Council). State Senator David Hinkins, who sponsored Utah’s ag-gag

legislation, said it was aimed at the “vegetarian people who are trying to kill the animal industry” (Legal Monitor Worldwide). Public advocate and author Jim Hightower criticizes industry politicians for protecting food giants like Tyson Foods, Smithfield and Borden. He remarks, “Their abusive industrial system is so disgusting that America’s consumers would gag at the sight of it” (A17).

In 2013 increased efforts to prevent distribution of visual information about meat production occurred through the introduction of fifteen “ag-gag” bills in state legislative bodies; none passed (Barclay). Nonetheless, the majority of U.S. states have some form of animal use protection law to address “animal enterprise/industry/research interference” (Animal Legal and Historical Center; Girgen). While public discomfort over disturbing images is not new, efforts to criminalize the documentation and distribution of such images point us closer to capitalist totalitarianism in which corporate profit justifies legal enforcement of strategic information outages and visual blackouts.

As crafted by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) in 2002, the strategy behind the Animal Ecological Terrorism Act duplicates George W. Bush’s administration’s response to images of tortured Iraqi prisoners. Focusing on the damaging criticisms that these images brought to the war on terrorism and their “unpatriotic” (Sontag, 2004, para. 21) distribution, the administration tried to redirect the public’s attention away from possible meaning in these photos (ie. practices of torture and imperialistic U.S. foreign policy). As Susan Sontag observes, they approached it as if the problem “lay in the images, rather than what they depict” (para. 2). By way of comparison, the purposively named “Animal and Ecological Terrorism Act” attempts to criminalize the distribution of factory farm images as a breach of security, as a “terrorist threat.” It is only concerned with the *intentions* of the photographer (i.e.

vegetarians who oppose using animals as food) and fails to address the photograph or the photographed.

Visual blackouts and information outages are ongoing and interlocking, meaning they are deployed from various, unrelated cultural institutions and bodies. For example, the “cultural hegemony of meat” (Rowe) is reproduced through different institutional bases of power. In North Carolina the Humane Society of the United States sued the Raleigh Transit Authority when ads depicting images of pigs in gestation crates were not allowed on city buses, because they were “too negative” (Campbell). This illustrates how the transportation authority lends its power in support of modern agriculture. Additionally, media industries have routinely refused to accept paid advertising that visually (or verbally) describes meat production on the grounds of not meeting “standards” (PETA, 2009).

“A Politics of Sight”

Seeing through the walls that conceal the operations of modern farming accesses a social reality for the consumer public, who is already sympathetic to concerns about animal welfare and treatment. While photography and video are no longer thought of as unquestionable representations of reality (due to increased understanding of the photographer’s perspectival choices and the possibilities of digital manipulation), they can initiate ethical anxiety and critical education.

In framing a “politics of sight,” Pachirat imagines a world that is “organized around the *removal*, rather than the creation, of physical, social, linguistic, and methodological distances” (240). He conjures a superpower – the ability to see through walls and view what has been concealed behind them. In discussing a “politics of sight,” he shares evidence that the routine

concealment of disturbing content is actually a symbiotic part of a relationship that yields our shock and repugnance upon seeing that which had been withheld. Without concealment, he suggests, representations of suffering and pain lose their intensity and capacity to affect people through shock (253). For example, in response to viewing video testimony of the Holocaust¹ in a graduate seminar at Yale, one student remarked, “Viewing the Holocaust testimony was not for me initially catastrophic – so much of the historical coverage of it functions to empty it from its horror” (Felman 55). In other words, the ethical reflex of sight diminishes with increased exposure. In an information-rich, consumer society the cultural saturation of images and mass consumption of the spectacular contribute to moving relations in a politics of sight.

Despite the “impulse to link sight” or illumination with political and ethical response, Pachirat describes a symbiotic relation between sight and concealment. He argues that the “frontiers of repugnance” and generation of pity (through shock and disgust) expand due to “the operations of distance and concealment that we have recognized as the primary mechanisms of the civilizing process” (251). From Pachirat’s perspective, dismantling the walls of factory farming by displaying disturbing images of farmed animals does not *directly* lead to learning or transformation. Nonetheless, after working in a slaughterhouse for five and a half months, Pachirat demonstrates the problem of continued distance and concealment. He concludes by suggesting “... a context-sensitive politics of sight that recognizes both the possibilities and pitfalls of organized, concerted attempts to make visible what is hidden and to breach, literally or figuratively, zones of confinement in order to bring about social and political transformation” (255). Pachirat acknowledges the complications of visual representation. While large-scale dissemination of factory farm video may elevate awareness of industry practice in public consciousness, there is no straight path between public awareness and social change. I believe

that critical pedagogy, in both theory and practice, may help educators and activists navigate this quandary.

Among a growing number of academics and activists, critical pedagogies have been extended beyond human struggles to enkindle change in the lives and conditions of factory-farmed animals, who clearly suffer and have few legal protections. Sometimes taken up under “critical animal studies,” pedagogical questions include: How might visual information of animal suffering (e.g. video footage of animals in factory farms) be used effectively in a project of critical consciousness? How do both constructed separations (e.g. hierarchical distinctions of intelligence) and irreducible differences between humans and non-human animals reconfigure liberation pedagogies? In this paper, I focus on the former question and understand critical visual pedagogy as a tool for reflectively thinking through how images from factory farms are deployed as liberatory, educational strategies.

In the next section of this paper, I engage pedagogical and psychoanalytic insights on difficult knowledge, trauma and testimony to trace anxiety relations in the psychic dimensions of learning. I also explore embedded ideology in visual texts in light of Rancière’s writing on ethics, aesthetics and politics. In the final section, I describe progressive aspects of difficult knowledge and visual pedagogy that may be useful to activists and educators who use disturbing images of factory-farmed animals.

Difficult Knowledge, Ideology, and “Infinite Justice”

How do consumers of products from factory farms view and understand slaughterhouse images such as the ones that appear in disturbing films like *Farm to Fridge* (Mercy for Animals), *Peaceable Kingdom: The Journey Home* (Laveck & Stein) or *Glass Walls* (PETA, 2010)? After

covering eyes and mouths with pained expressions, what happens next? Some have said that if hatcheries and slaughterhouses had glass walls, we'd all be vegetarian. This suggests that the brutality of a concealed practice, once revealed, induces individual ethical response. However, not all people who see disturbing representations from factory farming become vegetarian or vegan. Some, perhaps many, are aware of what takes place behind the closed walls and do not (or cannot) discuss it or deal with it in meaningful ways. How do we handle exposure to photo or video representations of a painful reality? How do ideological and psychic frameworks interact with the "difficult knowledge" of animals in modern agriculture?

Physical response to viewing slaughterhouse images may include covering one's eyes or mouth, looking away, crying, feeling nauseous and other forms of embodied disgust. These responses may resonate with how some view photographs from the Abu Ghraib prison -- but not necessarily so. Contrary to being troubled or moved by brutal images of war and abuse, Heybach describes her students' reactions as "immediate dismissal and hostility" (24). After visiting an art exhibit, *Globalization and War: Its Aftermath*, with works by Chicano artist Malaquias Montoya, her students questioned the artist's legal status in the U.S. and suggested that he go back to where he came from (24). Rather than dealing with possible meaning in Montoya's art, Heybach's students reacted from an ideological register by attacking the artist. Discussing images of prisoner abuse from Abu Ghraib, Kear describes images as "fixed ideologically" in a "figuration of a resilient national identity" (115). He describes the "ideological instrumentalization" of the image in the context of a "theatrical economy" that privileges "the production of affect over the attribution of meaningfulness" (115).

The ideology of a visual text (e.g. photograph) can operate to shut down the possibility of learning through reductive self-validation of pre-existing attitudes and beliefs. Garoian and

Gaudelius explain how images produce contradictory social effects. “As visual pronouncements, images are ideological; they teach us what and how to see and think” (24). Internalized as one-dimensional identity, ideology has strong mediating-effects on how one reads an image. I will offer a personal example that is directly related to the display of gruesome images. When I see images of mangled, unborn fetuses in advertising space (e.g. billboards, print magazines, the internet or public transportation), I am not open to consider these images for what they are, but, rather, I immediately figure them within an ideology and politics of groups like National Right to Life.² In doing so, I am refusing that which is before me (the image) and only know it through an internalization of its ideopolitical landscape. As such, the fetus image evokes a prefigured response. Whether I resist or embrace the ideopolitics of the image does not matter, because the encounter has been vacated of potential for education and transformation.

Rancière’s framing of a contemporary ethical turn describes the overdevelopment of ideological constraints and the collapse of ethics. He says, “On the one hand, the instance of judgment, which evaluates and decides, finds itself humbled by the compelling power of the law” (110). In this case, the law supports the property status of animals and allows few protections for farm animals. Thus, the law supports an ideological norm of speciesism. Rancière continues, “On the other, the radicality of this law, which leaves no alternative, equates to the simple constraint of an order of things” (110). In effect, to approach ethical possibility within the visuals of farm animal images, the viewer must develop distinctions between fact and law. Critical visual pedagogy may deepen consciousness of distinctions between fact and law. “The growing indistinction between fact and law,” Rancière warns, “gives way to an unprecedented dramaturgy of infinite evil, justice and reparation” (110).

To draw Rancière and Kear together, politics tend to divide us by fixed ideology, while ethics dissolve into indistinction. So, the viewer's viewing of a disturbing image is filtered and flattened through ideopolitical constructs. The viewing renders a *response*, which differs from a meaningful *interpretation* of what the image depicts and short-circuits possibilities for ethical meaning or revelation. I question if video footage of animals in factory farms has reached ideopolitical symbolism, like the unborn fetus has? Does the representation of suffering disappear once it saturates social space and becomes mere symbolism in a political agenda?

While the suffering of a non-human animal can register in our consciousness as concern, pain or outrage, it must work its way through speciesist hierarchies, which determine how we evaluate and draw distinctions in given situations. When canine or feline members of our families are shown to be suffering, our concern may register differently than when faced with confined chickens in a hatchery. As well, the wretched conditions of chicken production may concern us differently than seeing crickets farmed, roasted and ground into flour meal as a sustainable source of protein. In other words, hierarchical speciesist ideology provides a constant frame from which to distinguish and gauge response. The pinnacle of a hierarchical pyramid is an impossible place to have a mutual encounter with a non-human animal other.

Regardless of whether one believes that farmed animals are sentient beings deserving of lives free from confinement and misery or one believes that their lives only have value as raw material for human consumption, images have the capacity to disrupt belief and ideology. Organizations that seek to prevent cruelty to farmed animals want to disrupt the dominant speciesist ideology that supports passive acceptance of farm animal suffering. The primary tactic for doing so involves illuminating scenes of animals from inside the walls of factory farms and distributing those scenes to disturb the public. Barthes describes the photograph's capacity to

“prick” or “wound” the viewer (Fried 542), and Sontag (2003,103) adds that such pricking may supply an initial spark. To disrupt everyday ways of seeing that are fixed in ideology and to realize the pedagogical potential of disturbing slaughterhouse images beyond the spectacle, what must happen?

First, the actual images (not their ideopolitical symbolism) must enter the viewer’s consciousness. The capacity to disturb a viewer into sympathy, pity, anxiety or action only exists when everyday passivity is moved to conscious engagement. Preconscious avoidance that blocks the image isn’t an act of resistance or ideological dissonance. Rather, it’s a subconscious turning off and shutting down. Market researchers make a living by understanding approach/avoidance. They describe some images as causing a viewer to “lean in” and learn more. According to a market researcher with fifteen years of experience, Elma Winters³ (personal communication, March 27, 2014), these kinds of images (e.g. babies or baby animals) trigger a “hardwired” protective response. Other images (e.g. suffering animals) trigger an “avoid” response. While discussing recent advertisements from the American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), Winters remarked that viewers may not be able to engage the message through images of neglected animals. She said, “So, they watch it and somewhere in the process of watching it, they subconsciously stop listening to it because it’s overwhelming, and their subconscious is really going into that avoid mindset” (personal communication, March 27, 2014).

Market researchers and educators, alike, don’t want to prompt outright avoidance when providing subject matter for viewers. However, similarities between advertising and educating are tenuous at best. While paid advertising generally tries to influence consumer behavior in a specific way within a thirty to sixty second window, meaningful education involves a lengthy

process of engaging subject matter (including oneself), holding uncertainty and integrating or rejecting new knowledge. The curtain of mass advertising reflects and obfuscates in deceptive ways. Education is directed at raising and unraveling deception, even when the process is painful.

Building scholarship on disturbing education, Deborah Britzman centers uncertainty within a pedagogical, psychoanalytic circuit. According to Britzman, “within the imaginary of learning ... uncertainty is what education feels like” (98). With this in mind, it is clear that quick, precise answers deployed to resolve uncertainty and delivered through pleasing imagery have limited relation to education. Nonetheless, the neurology of avoiding disturbing images is worth noting for organizations that choose to use advertising practices, such as television commercials, for social messaging.

Treating slaughterhouse images as a site of education, as a disturbing visual pedagogy, is not a comfortable education. Britzman challenges the notion of knowledge as “experience without frustration: a thing waiting to be picked up or delivered” (104). To the contrary, she joins other scholars, like Shoshana Felman, and posits a relationship between crisis and education (109). Britzman and Felman’s focus on a psychoanalytic pedagogy of “difficult knowledge” helps us to understand how resistance and anxiety operate at the location of images of factory-farmed animals.

When looking at photographs of human pain or farm animal pain, we are asked to make meaning from the “ravages of human induced suffering” (Britzman 100). This is a form of witnessing. Britzman theorizes through a frame of rapprochement and alienation. Rapprochement involves our attempts to reconcile emotional uncertainties. We feel “both the fatigue of limit and the excitement of potential” (101). We feel the nausea of disgust as well as

the pangs of awareness that call us to learn more. We're horrified, and we cannot turn away. With hands covering our mouths, we stare at footage of pigs who are unable to stand or move within the tight confines of their crates. Perhaps, we, too, feel unable to move.

One possible outcome from rapprochement is that we settle uncertainty with sympathy or pity. Sympathy allows us to break down emotional uncertainty by situating ourselves as uninvolved bystanders. In her seminal text *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag states, "So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence ..." (2003, 102). Innocent distance maintains the separation that Debord describes as essential to the spectacle. Hence, a sympathetic response to farm animal images may work to maintain separation between meat production and consumption. Sympathy and pity help settle emotional uncertainty; we eschew additional engagement with the subject matter; further action is not immanent; change is not realized.

I think of my mom – a person with deep love for animals, especially the dogs and cats who share her home. Growing up we always had a stray dog that my mom had invited home. She also received recognition as volunteer of the year at her local animal shelter. She regularly expresses sympathy for mistreated or neglected dogs. She often mentions that she *could* be a vegetarian. However, she says that she cannot deal with images of suffering animals and refuses to view them. After seeing the previously mentioned ASPCA ads, she sent the organization a donation with a note to express how upset she was with them for showing suffering animals on TV. She may align her sympathies with animals in factory farms but falls short of eliminating meat from her diet. She frequently orders chicken or fish, but not beef or pork, at restaurants. When meals arrive she sometimes remarks that my vegetarian dish looks and tastes better than hers. Is this performance for me? Do I remind her of her own rapprochement? My mother is

neither wholly unaware of conditions in factory farms nor has she been fooled by the tidy appearances of packaged meat. Rather, I suspect she thinks about meat consumption from an emotional constellation of uncertainty.

Within an emotional constellation of uncertainty, Britzman explains that two variations of uncertainty compete: “uncertainty over the value and valence of receiving new ideas and uncertainty that signifies the anticipation of loss of love.” She describes the idea of love as “our passionate attachment to others, ideals and roles” (103). Feeling ill by new ideas and knowledge (e.g. a photo from within the walls of a factory farm) is, thus, psychically rooted in loss – the loss of our former selves, the loss of certain relations, the loss of meaning that routine and habit provides. Still thinking about my mother, I wonder how objects of love are symbolized and how slaughterhouse images threaten those symbols. My mom repeatedly remarks, “I could be a vegetarian *if it weren't for your father.*” What does that mean? Perhaps her traditional role as wife, nurturer and maker-of-meals is threatened by the possibility of changing food and cooking habits. To work through various fragments – her love and concern for suffering animals, her role as wife, her awareness of factory farming, her decisions about food consumption – demands emotional work and a “revolt of affect” (104).

I recently retold the above description of my mom's ambivalence towards eating animals at a conference. One audience member flatly responded, “Your mom is a murderer.” While taken aback by the statement at the time, I share it here to connect Ranciè's “dramaturgy of infinite evil, justice and reparation” (110) with the limitations of absolutism or fundamentalism in the context of educational purposes. “Infinite justice” takes “shape as the necessary violence required to exorcise trauma in order to maintain the order of the community” (113). “Infinite justice” fundamentally requires the counter-forces of injustice and uses violence to crush

perceived wrongs. “Infinite justice” requires “infinite evil.” If the “evils” of modern agriculture are fought primarily with a contra-flow of violence (symbolic violence, secondary trauma and accusations of murder), then the window for ethics and education becomes impossibly narrow. Absolute certainty shuts all openings for learning. In contrast, uncertainty holds potential energy and the possibility of meaningful learning.

The Spectacle and Critical Visual Pedagogy

Images of war and Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse flooded the media and circulated widely during post-9/11 U.S. military action. Since 2004 scholars of visual and media literacy have written extensively about the Abu Ghraib prisoner images as “public pedagogy” (Adelman; Heybach; Garoian & Gaudelius; Giroux; Sontag, 2004). The substance of this body of literature presses down on tensions between passive consumption of spectacle photography and educational possibilities of engaging viewers in meaningful, active and transformational ways.

Highlighting visual and media literacies, Garoian and Gaudelius attempt to reclaim space for “critical spectators” (25). They suggest that the spectacle pedagogy of visual culture can occur in two opposing ways:

... [F]irst, as ubiquitous form of representation, which constitutes the pedagogical objectives of mass mediated culture and corporate capitalism to manufacture our desires and determine our choices; and second, as a democratic form of practice that enables a critical examination of visual cultural codes and ideologies to resist social injustice. (24)

By protecting the visual representations of meat (clean, cut, packaged and often already prepared into cooked meals), agribusiness produces spectacle in the first way. They regulate images to

maintain markets for meat consumption. I suggest that educators and activists develop critical visual pedagogies in the second way. Critical examination of a cultural hegemony of meat and speciesist ideology can occur visually *without* images of animals in factory farms. For example, on two pages within Safran Foer's *Eating Animals* (2009), a 67 square inch rectangle has been printed within the margins of the book to illustrate the size of a "typical cage for egg-laying hens" (79). This provides a visual/spatial representation of hen confinement without an actual photograph.

If photo or film representations of meat production are chosen for educational purposes, the photographed, the photographer and the photos are subject to critical reflection and democratic practice. Without critical examination of photo images, we subjugate reality to an ocularcentric gaze. The singularity of the Other (e.g. the individual farm animal) is subsumed within blinding illumination. All farm animals are like this; all farm animals are supposed to be like this – caged and confined, grown and consumed. Critiquing modern ocularcentric ways of knowing, Nietzsche sought an "illuminating vision that flickers between presence and absence, concealment and disclosure" (Lalvani 2). The flicker of uncertainty moves within and between the photographed, the photographer and the photo. It traces relations and gaps, which seek ongoing attention. In the remainder of this paper, I describe progressive aspects of difficult knowledge and visual pedagogy that may be useful to activists and educators who use disturbing images of factory-farmed animals.

1. Separation in Mediated Relations

Social relations that are mediated through photography and video are always subject to spectatorship. Debord claims, "Separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle" (13). U.S.

citizens can view digital images from Abu Ghraib instantly, but the photographed and the viewer simultaneously exist in vast separation and distance. By comparison, images of animals in factory farms are deployed to bridge the gaps and distances between eating animals and producing meat. Debord notes, “The forces that were able to grow by separating from each other have not yet been *reunited*” (14). In a critical visual pedagogy of factory-farmed animals, the relationship between the photographed and the viewer, a secondary witness to trauma, demands attention. Distant relations are inconsequential; embodied, present, aesthetic relations matter.

Without pedagogical intention, the passivity and separation that characterize spectator-spectacle society has an anesthetic effect. Considering an environment filled with “spectacles of terror and horror,” Heybach describes an anesthetic effect where images “lull citizens to sleep with tragedy” and foster “a deep sense of powerlessness in the face of so much disorder” (23). Heybach positions “critical aesthetic pedagogy” against anesthetic spectacle and explores educational possibilities for transforming consciousness and democratic sensibilities (25). She refers to Marcuse’s work on imagination and Freire’s “conscientization”⁴ to assemble a foundation for critical aesthetic pedagogy. Visual imagery offers sense data, which according to Marcuse, can be transformed through imagination. Heybach explains, “... [T]he promise of freedom exists in the human faculty of imagination rather than the ability to reason” (25). Thus, the complex phenomenon of viewing an image taps individual capacity for imagination in different ways than formal reasoning (e.g. animal rights philosophy). This affirms the place of imagination in critical pedagogies to facilitate the possibility of change.

2. Testimony from Disturbing Images

Referring to her experience with teaching a graduate level course on testimony and the Holocaust, Shoshana Felman argues that teaching is not an act of passively transmitting

knowledge but, rather, teaching is making something happen through performative crisis. Just as the subject of psychoanalysis acts out crisis with an analyst, teaching for social justice often engages crisis to enable change. Felman writes, “Both this kind of teaching and psychoanalysis are interested not merely in new information, but, primarily, in the capacity of their recipients to *transform themselves* in function of the newness of that information” (53). She continues, “The question for the teacher is, then, on the one hand, how to access, how not to *foreclose* the crisis, and, on the other hand, how to *contain it*, how much crisis can the class sustain” (54). Similarly, when viewers watch factory-farmed animals through video footage, they are learners who are fully implicated in a crisis of witnessing. As Felman indicates, the teacher’s task is to “reintegrate the crisis in a *transformed* frame of meaning” (54)

In her reflection of teaching through testimony and witness, Felman identifies three aspects of testimony:

1. Healing – Testimony is a way to heal from traumatic events.
2. Concealment – Testimony refers to something hidden with a political dimension of oppression.
3. Access to truth – Testimony is not a mode of “*statement of,*” but rather a “mode of *access to.*” (16)

If I am to bring Felman’s work on education and crisis into conversation with the experience of viewing images from factory farms, I must align Felman’s use of testimony and witness with testimony produced through a camera lens aimed at factory-farmed animals. Witnessed by viewers, what are these images a testament of? Pictures of factory farming function as testimony insofar as they reference the concealed operations of factory farms and establish access to common, disturbing practice. As to Felman’s first aspect of testimony, if representations of farm

animals are providing testimony, how is healing involved? While the photographed may not experience healing and has no input in her own representation (by being filmed, distributed and viewed), the potential for healing might exist as a larger, incremental process of reunifying food production and food consumption. Reunification deters passive consumption and unwitting violence and supports cultural healing. The absence of such healing is noticeable and consequential.

3. Ethical Anxiety

We should expect that viewing disturbing slaughterhouse images will be countered with avoidance, negation and resistance. Self-protective strategies attempt to block new knowledge from breaking existing webs of meaning. The pleasure principle demands the gratification of immediate satisfaction while diminishing the pain and destruction of education (Britzman 109). In the sense that “all learning is destructive,” we will “criticize, raise questions about it and doubt it, and if the knowledge can survive this attack, it can be turned toward the self” (Britzman 204).

Britzman describes difficult knowledge as “the anxiety made from encountering broken meaning” (109). “Alienation,” then, involves the work of connecting and reassembling fragmenting things (112). Bringing disparate things into new relations of significance and working through them attends to the pleasure principle as “an area of desire and the imagination needed for thinking and experimenting with knowledge, experience and authority” (109). As noted earlier, imagination holds space for freedom and liberation. Britzman reminds us that the possibility of liberation follows anxiety and alienation.

Adrian Kear explores our anxieties about disturbing images. According to Kear, anxiety “... creates the opportunity for a disruptively *ethical* experience of responsibility to emerge in

place of the sentiment of pity” (108). Kear’s discussion of the “ambivalence of anxiety” and Britzman’s attention to the “emotional constellation of uncertainty” describe the conditions under which a powerful crisis of education can occur. Within anxiety, we might expect an oscillation between illumination and concealment, looking and turning away (Parsons). Anxiety and uncertainty open possibilities for change and transformation. If this is true, the encounter with disturbing factory farm images *does* hold the potential to initiate ethical revelation and responsibility.

Describing Heidegger’s work on the “*stimmung* of anxiety,” Kear says, “it is the demonstration of a subjective ‘attunement’ to indeterminateness, a feeling of being ‘ill-at-ease’ [*unheimlich*] in the world as such” (111). For those who persistently work through resistance, negation and sympathy, “ill-at-ease” may best describe the haunting knowledge of 24/7 farm animal suffering. Separation has been reduced, at least for the conscious moment. The slaughterhouse image recurs in the continual present – it is now and now, again and again. The knowledge of ceaseless suffering, coupled with our habits and daily routines of food consumption, heightens our indeterminateness. It forces a crisis of our ethical responsibilities.

Drawing from Levinas, Kear concludes, “*Ethical* anxiety therefore acts as a reminder of responsibility: responsibility for the other – and the world – in their materiality” (113). It does this, however, against loss, disconnection and alienation, which often follow witnessing trauma (Felman). At this intersection of responsibility and loss, educators are responsible for attending to students with care and compassion. Because reintegration requires time and presence, educators and activists should be mindful of the importance of debriefing and processing responses to disturbing images. As well, due to a significant number of people who have

personal experience with violence, students should be cautioned and given choices about viewing such images.

To conclude, I want to return to the scene of the factory farm. Do those who see inside the factory farm witness countless testimonies -- not through language, but through the contorted bodies of pigs in gestation crates or the pained faces of chickens undergoing debeaking? When we poke holes through the thick walls of the modern slaughterhouse and invite others to look inside, what kind of education are we inviting? The theorists and educators that I've included suggest that we're inviting a difficult one -- a disturbing and traumatic education. Animal liberation education must consider pedagogy that anticipates multiple responses to difficult knowledge. We must expect responses that are complicated by the terrains of subjective psyches and fixed ideologies. As noted in this paper, these responses may include preconscious avoidance, aggressive resistance, passive sympathy, ideological fixation and ethical anxiety. Among these, anxiety holds possibility for ethical response and transformation. Ethical anxiety denotes instability, in contrast to fixed ideology and identity, and opens space for creative ethical possibilities. Critical visual pedagogy must maintain space where ethical anxieties can be held and extended. As pedagogy, images of factory-farmed animals must be configured and reconfigured in creative ways to hold the social reality of factory-farmed animals in public awareness and, ultimately, to encourage critical consciousness and action.

Notes

¹ Throughout this paper I draw from pedagogical scholarship on the Holocaust that addresses how visual artifacts are used to learn about it. While some may object to comparisons between the Holocaust and factory farming, I refer to Corinne Painter's (2014) defense of the analogy.

² Although not the focus of this paper, it would be remiss not to acknowledge similar uses of disturbing photos by anti-abortion groups and animal rights groups. As well, legal restrictions

and prohibitions on displaying such images have recently challenged both groups' freedom of expression. In 2012 a Colorado Court of Appeals ruled on *Scott vs. Saint John's Church in the Wilderness* and determined that there is a "compelling government interest in protecting children from disturbing images" of mutilated fetuses or dead bodies (Liptak, para. 7).

³ Elma Winters is a pseudonym. My contact requested anonymity. She works for Proctor and Gamble, a company that has a contentious history with animal rights organizations.

⁴ Darder, Baltodano and Torres (2003) describe Freire's concept of "conscientization" as a process of "deepening awareness of the social realities which shape their lives" and the discovery of "their own capacities to recreate them" (14).

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Stray Philosophy: Human-Dog Observations on Language, Freedom and Politics

Eva Meijer*

Abstract: The paper draws on the author's personal experiences with stray dog Olli to explore philosophical concepts around three themes: language, freedom, and politics. The paper focuses on the first three months with Olli, in which a common language and habits were created and a certain level of freedom for Olli was established. The first section shows how this language and these habits came into existence and argues this created a common world as well as a way to express that world, which changed both dog and human. The second section discusses learning to walk on the leash in relation to freedom and oppression in interspecies communities. The last section focuses on Olli's political agency as a former stray dog, both on the micro- and macro level. By emphasizing Olli's perspective and actions, the paper also aims to explore ways to move beyond anthropocentrism in philosophy.

Keywords: animal languages, human-animal intersubjectivity, political animal agency, political animal voice, animal freedom

Introduction

In the early evening of November 17, 2013, Olli arrived at Schiphol Airport. By that time he had been travelling for over twenty-four hours. He had left Pascani in the North of Romania on Saturday afternoon, arrived in Bucharest early Sunday morning, waited at the airport for several hours and then flew to the Netherlands, where I was waiting for him. I was not the only nervous person at Arrivals. Olli was one of ten dogs who travelled to The Netherlands that evening, accompanied by two volunteers of a small Dutch animal welfare organization, "Dierenhulp Orfa".¹ My aunt had offered to drive us home and she chatted cheerfully to the other waiting humans while I was watching the door.

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The first dogs who arrived were young and very good-looking, with long hair and fluffy ears. Olli was the last dog to come out of the door and I recognized his black and white fur immediately. Before I saw him, I had already heard him wagging his tail to the sides of his crate loudly. The volunteers put the crate down in front of me and I sat down on the floor to speak to Olli. He was panting because he was nervous, his eyes were red and he smelled really bad, but above all he was extremely enthusiastic about all this human attention. He was also quite a bit larger than I expected. One of the volunteers opened the door of his crate and put a collar and a harness on him. She gave me two leashes and Olli stepped out of the crate. Overwhelmed by lights and people, he lay down on the floor instantly. I sat down next to him and told him how happy I was that he was here. He stood up, greeted some of the other dogs, then lay down again, still wagging his tail.

When most of the other dogs had left, I told Olli we were going home. He refused to get up. My aunt's car was parked in front of the airport and we needed to cross the main hall to get there. I tried to seduce Olli with food, but he was far too nervous to eat. So I picked him up, waved to the humans and off we went. Olli was not only quite a bit larger than expected, he was also rather heavy; I had to put him down a few times, where he again made himself as flat and small as possible (all the time still wagging his tail as if his life depended on it). It took us about fifteen minutes to get to the car. By the time we got there, we had already both decided to trust the other, because we needed to.

This paper is a philosophical exploration of the experiences Olli and I had in the first three months we spent together. In this time period, we created the beginnings of a common language, we developed habits and we established a certain degree of freedom for Olli, who learned to deal with living in a city. Both of us put a lot of effort into this; although I am the one

who writes down what happened, Olli's voice is as important as mine. The paper is divided in three sections: language and habits, freedom and walking on the leash, and politics. I could have also written about other things (love, belonging, play, fear) but these were the topics we discussed most explicitly. I end with some remarks about Olli's influence on me, and about how these experiences can shed light on new forms of living together.



Olli at the Airport (Photos by Eva Meijer)

1. Language and habits

Olli joined a small multispecies household, existing of one human, an eleven-year-old former stray dog from Greece, Pika, and an eight-year-old cat from Lebanon, Putih. In the five years of his life Olli had never lived in a house, walked on the leash, or had a close relationship with a human. He spent his first two or three years as a stray dog, until he was caught by dog catchers who brought him to the new municipal shelter. In this shelter the dogs were treated badly; within the first year of the shelter's existence, over a third of the dogs died, of malnutrition and fights.² After about a year Olli was rescued by an animal welfare organization and brought to a private shelter, where circumstances were slightly better. Although there is no information available about his parents, Olli is probably a child of generations of stray dogs; in behavior and looks, he is quite different from the domesticated dogs that live here. He is very fit

and strong. He can run for hours, jump on a 1.8m high wall without a run-up, and he uses his paws and mouth to open doors, as well as boxes and plastic bags that contain food.

Olli was neutered in the week before he came and the vet did not perform the operation correctly; the wound was large and infected. In addition to being very tired, he was ill and he had to deal with hormonal changes. In his first days here, he slept much in the daytime, and at nights he was alert. I kept the radio on to filter out sounds but we still woke up every few hours. After a couple of days he understood the house was a safe place and he has slept well since.

The biggest challenge in the first days was going outside and walking on the leash. He was scared of walking out of the door (he still does not like doors), of traffic and of walking on the leash. Dog treats helped, but he often lay down on the street and refused to walk further. He mostly did this when too much happened at the same time: for example, when we crossed the street and traffic came from all sides, or when bicycles and humans and other dogs passed us by as we walked on the sidewalk, or when there were loud noises in different places. Usually he plucked up his courage after a while, sometimes I had to carry him home (or to the other side of the road).

Inside the house we also encountered problems. Olli did like human attention, but close contact with me was difficult for him. It made him nervous to have me near him all the time and he and I did not understand each other well. In his first weeks here, Pika was Olli's main guide. She accepted him immediately and from the first moment they got along well. Both inside and outside the house, he stayed close to her. If we crossed the street he often walked so close to her that the sides of their bodies touched. Inside the house, he copied her actions, such as when trying out new food; if Pika ate a piece of food that was new to him, he also ate it.³ He needed a lot of physical contact, and Pika did not mind if he lied very close to her; she always remained

calm when he was nervous. I followed her example; his nervousness sometimes made me nervous or worried about the future and Pika helped both of us to calm down.⁴ In The Netherlands, there are fireworks in the week around New Year's Eve. Because he had been shot at in the shelter, by a group of hunters, just weeks before he came here, the loud noises frightened Olli so much he did not dare to go outside at all anymore. I was afraid we wouldn't make it, afraid Olli would not get used to life here. Pika helped him regain his confidence, and she helped me deal with Olli's panic.

1.1 Words and bodies

From the first moment, Olli and I tried to understand each other. We both had some idea of the other: Olli had met many humans, good and bad, and I had experience with dogs and other animals. Barbara Smuts writes about her experiences after adopting dog Safi from a shelter, who had "an inherent sense of appropriate behavior." This was not the case with Olli. His behavior was aimed at surviving: he was all the time looking to escape, steal food and please humans so that they would give him food. He for instance jumped on the counter to eat the cat food (Olli is not a small dog) and on the table to eat my food; he jumped over the fence in my neighbor's garden to escape and he chased Putih around the house.

Many of the movements I made frightened him and it seemed as if he could not predict my movements –in walking past the other in the house, usually both creatures adjust so that they can pass each other without bumping into each other. Olli clearly lacked the experience to navigate this type of space and he could not read human bodies well. Although he was eager to respond in the right manner, he often did not understand my questions and I did not know how to frame them in a way he could understand. We both did try hard to convince the other we meant

well. I spoke to him with a friendly voice and touched his body in ways he appreciated; he wagged his tail all the time and kept offering me his paw. I held his paw a lot.⁵

We started with the word “no,” mostly for intuitive reasons. I needed to make clear that Olli could not chase or bite Putih, jump on the counter or over the fence. The word “no” never gained the meaning “stop this.” It does tell Olli that I would like him to stop doing what he does; it gives him information about my position, which clarifies situations for him. If I need him to stop doing something immediately, I need to offer him an alternative, a toy or something to eat, or I can give him a hug.

Olli is an exceptionally fast learner, and within a few days we developed a simple language, including the use of words as: no, here, dog bed, food, cookies, yes, go, wait and sorry. These words were tools we worked with to get to know each other, and they helped me show Olli the way. In addition to using simple words as tools, I spoke to him in full sentences, as I do to Pika, and he soon started to understand these as well. He also understands words can have different meanings in different situations. As our vocabulary grew, Olli’s confidence grew. He is especially fond of words that describe his behavior in a positive way, such as “good” and “sweet.”

The most important word was of course “Olli.” Olli very much enjoys having a name. He likes it when neighbors in the park call him by his name, he likes it when I do so. It makes him feel appreciated, which is part of belonging here. Humans use it to show they see him and appreciate him being here. It is also an important instrument between us: I can ask for his attention and he can choose to respond; because he likes to respond to his name I could let him off the leash later.

In addition to words, Olli had to learn to read my gestures and bodily movements. He expressed a strong desire to have physical contact, but in the first weeks he could not relax when he was close to me, which resulted in him standing next to me as I sat on the couch, his body stiff and uneasy. We spent a lot of time on the couch together. Olli showed me how he liked to be touched and by responding to him I could show him that I meant well. After standing next to me he sat down, then after a week or so he lay down next to me. If I made a wrong move, he jumped up. Paradoxically, touching him also helped him relax, especially softly stroking his neck. He now lies on his back all the time and forces me to rub his tummy, and if I don't respond fast enough he growls or barks.

Moving together helped us to get to know each other and gain trust. Because Olli was nervous and wanted to run, I took him with me as I went running. This helped him to get used to the city and to my body. In the beginning, he walked from left to right in front of me, so I often had to stop, jump to the side or over him. We did not run long distances; we ran for a few minutes, stood still because Olli picked up a scent or was afraid, and then moved again. I followed what made him most comfortable. Running was more comfortable for him than walking; if we walked he had too much time to get nervous and see things around him. It also made him tired, which helped him relax inside the house.

I had to learn to read Olli as well. Some actions were quite clear from the beginning: if he wants me to pet him, he takes my hand in his hands. But I did not automatically understand what he meant when he growled (this usually means he is bored but it sometimes meant my head is too close to his) or barks (this can be an invitation to play or a strong expression of the desire to go outside). Wagging his tail was a way to communicate he meant well, more than expressing

joy (as it is often perceived). He now wags his tail much less than in these first months, although he is happier now.

After a few weeks, Olli started to make eye contact with me in our house; after a few months he started to do so outside.⁶ His posture changed. He first held his tail and ears low, in the house and outside, and I thought this was the default position of his body. But after over two months, his tail went up in a curl and he walks around proudly now. He was afraid of humans and masked his fear by acting very friendly: wagging his tail, holding his body and ears low. He now approaches humans differently and feels confident enough to ignore them in the park. His attitude towards me changed as well; he stopped asking for attention and comfort all the time. He does make small gestures, such as touching the inside of my hand with his nose, to make contact during the day.



A New Dog (for contrast see <http://www.dierenhulpforfa.nl>; Photos by Eva Meijer)

Misunderstandings helped to create understanding (see also Pepperberg 1991, Despret 2006). I once accidentally kicked Olli in his face with my foot because he tried to eat something from the street on our first walk of the day; I was still sleepy and responded too slowly when he walked in front of me. This scared him, but I immediately told him I was sorry and comforted him. In the beginning he was also afraid of me dropping plates and pans, but he learned that this was not directed to him and that I am a clumsy human who means well.

Although Pika and Olli got along immediately, he had some trouble communicating with other dogs. This was partly caused by walking on the leash, which made him uncomfortable and therefore defensive. He was not used to meeting so many new dogs all the time, many of whom had to be ignored or who did not act in accordance with their position in the hierarchy. When he was used to walking on the leash, and could play off leash in the park, there were still miscommunications. Olli uses his voice a lot as he plays (he growls loudly), and he likes to play rough, something that scares the smaller and shyer dogs. We usually go to a park where there are more rescue dogs, and Olli gets along with them fine. He is learning to play with the shyer dogs and they learn they do not have to be afraid of him. Some of them even invite him to play on their terms and he follows. There is, for example, one young female dog who likes to play slowly with a lot of touching. She was afraid of Olli's rough manners at first, but when she got to know him better, she started inviting him to play in the way she likes. Olli understands this and is more careful with her than with the others.



First Day (Photo by Eva Meijer)

1.2 New languages

Language is not something extra or outside of this common world. Heidegger argues discourse⁷ is constitutive for Dasein's existence. For Heidegger, "being-attuned" to others (172) is a fundamental characteristic of the structure of being in the world. This being-attuned is made explicit in discourse, of which hearing (listening⁸) and keeping silent are an important part. Discourse communicates, and this constitutes the articulation of Being with one another. The relation between language and world is for Heidegger twofold; language shapes our way of being in the world and we shape language. In discourse, humans and other animals bring forward their memories and histories and relate those to new experiences. Discourse is the "articulation of intelligibility" that underlies interpretation and is what creates meaning.

Iveson (2010, 2012) argues language in this sense also plays a role in the lives of nonhuman animals. For Heidegger, Dasein is constituted within "infinitely entangled structures of meaning" that Dasein can only see when it is thrown out of it in a state of Angst or boredom. In boredom and Angst, Dasein moves from concealment to an authentic existential experience. According to Heidegger, the animal cannot experience this because she lacks language. But, Iveson shows, nonhuman animals are also thrown into a world that exists of meaning-giving structures. They are constituted by and constitute these structures, and language is primordial with this.

"Language" is here understood not as one true language (see also Glendinning 1998) in which words have one objective meaning, but rather as a collection of constructed, artificial languages. In *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Derrida (2011, 8) asks what beasts and men have in common. He gives three answers, which he admits are possibly incompatible. Beasts and man inhabit the same objective world, but they do not inhabit the same world, since the world of men

is never completely the same as the world of beasts, and third, in spite of this identity and difference, individual humans and animals never inhabit the same world – “(t)here is no world, there are only islands.” He then states: “(T)he community of world is always constructed, simulated by a set of stabilizing apparatuses, more or less stable, then, and never natural, language in the broad sense, codes of traces being designed, among all living beings, to construct a unity of world that is always deconstructible, nowhere and never given in nature (2011, 8-9).”

Through creating a common language, Olli and I created a frame of reference. We expressed ourselves through language, understood in a broad sense (see Meijer 2013 for my view of language, following Wittgenstein 1958), and this functioned as a bridge to cross the distance between us. It created a common world and a way to express understanding of this world. We did so together; the content was not given beforehand. Both Olli and I brought our histories and ways of giving meaning; through interacting, we created something new that changed both of us. As Donna Haraway puts it: “Beings do not pre-exist their relatings” (2006, 6; see also Smuts 2006).

1.3 Habits

Our second tool in creating a common world was repetition. Doing the same thing at the same time of the day everyday gave us something to hold onto. Understanding the habits of the house and engaging in daily rituals made Olli feel more secure. It also gave us something to refer to: after he had learned the routine, we could change it. We always take our long walk in the morning, but because Olli know this, we can go in the afternoon; I can tell him we take the long walk later. We have many habits, concerning when and where to sleep, when and where to walk, when and what to eat. Pika and Olli both exercise agency in this. Before Olli came, Pika and I

took the long walk in the afternoon. In the first months, Olli had much energy after sleeping through the night and he expressed a strong interest in walking (by growling and barking), so we moved the long afternoon walk to the morning. He is much calmer now, but by now we are all used to walking in the morning, so we keep the routine. Olli prefers to sleep a bit on a chair in the front room of the house after his breakfast, while Pika and I are in the living room. After the long walk, Olli chews his bone on the bed while Pika is on the couch; in the evening they are both on the couch until Pika goes to bed. If Olli gets bored in the morning he comes to the living room where he greets me before moving to the couch with Pika.

Merleau-Ponty (143; see also Weiss 2006) argues that not consciousness but the body acts in habitual projects. The body understands what happens and acts unintentionally. Instead of narrowing our scope of actions, habits expand the meaning and range of our experiences and widen our access to the world. They offer “a different way of inscribing ourselves in the world and of inscribing the world in our body” (Weiss 236).⁹ The body is seen as “an open system of dynamic exchanges with the world, exchanges that, in their habituality, ground the body ever more firmly within the world, and, in the process, offer us new ways of engaging and transforming it” (Weiss 2006:236). Each subject has a unique way of being in the world and negotiating experiences. Interaction with others adds a new meaning giving structure, which, if repeated, is added to the repertoire of the body. For both Olli and me, habits structured experiences, added new layers of meaning to our lives together.

After a few weeks, I taught Olli to walk next to the bicycle. Pika and I usually travel to our favorite park with a cargo bike because it is too far for her to walk; we have small parks nearby but we do not like them so much. Olli soon learned to run next to the cargo bike, while Pika sat in it. This bike is quite heavy, especially with Pika in it, and Olli was still learning to

walk on the leash and afraid of the city, so going to the park like this was quite a challenge for Olli and me. Going to the same park every day, walking next to the bicycle and taking the same route soon became familiar, making life more familiar. Creating habits like these made Olli more at home in his new life. This particular habit gives us freedom to travel. Through moving with Olli and learning about his responses, I gained insight in his way of navigating the environment and his view on his surroundings. I learned to see through his eyes. I can reflect on my responses and switch between our perspectives, but when we bike to the park and encounter something that frightens Olli, my response is physical and immediate in the way Merleau-Ponty describes.¹⁰ I act because there is not just me now, there is us.

2. Learning to walk on the leash

2.1 The shape of freedom

In his first weeks, Olli was very eager to escape. One afternoon, he chewed on the leash when I spoke to a neighbor; it took him less than a minute to break it (luckily he wore a collar and a harness). Later that week he jumped over a 1.6m fence in the neighbor's garden. There's a high brick wall between my garden and the street so there was no real risk of him running away, but the message was clear. He was very eager to run away: the city made him nervous and he wanted to get out of it; he also had a strong desire to scavenge for food. Being with me made him nervous: he had to watch me all the time to make sure I would not hurt him. After a while he started to relax inside the house, but outside he was still nervous and did not make much contact with me, although he did watch Pika. When something frightened him, he did not turn to me for help or comfort (as Pika does), but he retreated even more in his own world. Walking on the leash made him extra insecure: he felt handicapped by it. Looking at his behavior, one could say

Olli understood freedom in a negative sense; he wanted to be free from external restraints. He felt very passionate about enlarging this freedom.

Olli's desire to escape was of course connected to past experiences. He had lived in a cage of about eight square meters, with one or two other dogs, for over a year. Someone came to feed the dogs once a day, and once or twice a week a volunteer visited the dogs, but most of their attention went to the dogs that had health problems. In the municipal shelter where he lived before, he shared one large space with many dogs who were not given enough food. Many dogs died, and escape was high on their list. Before that, Olli lived on the streets. He was free in the sense that he could decide where to go, what to eat and who to be with, but there are many dangers for stray dogs in Romania and he had to be on guard constantly. Olli has clearly had bad experiences with humans, and fear also restrains freedom.

And finally, Olli has a strong will. Making his own choices, concerning where to go, who to be with and what to eat, is important to him. I wanted to respect this and treat him as an equal, but I was tied to the circumstances; I had to make him walk on the leash. Dogs are legally obliged to walk on a leash, except in certain designated areas (such as parts of beaches and dog parks), and there is a lot of traffic in this part of the country.

For reasons of safety, in the first weeks I made Olli wear both a collar and harness outside. He slowly became used to the neighborhood and our routines, which enabled me to take off the collar. If we did something difficult, such as running next to the bicycle or taking the tram, I also made him wear his collar as well. After about a month, I felt secure enough to take him and Pika to our favorite (off-leash, unfenced) park. This park is large, relatively quiet and visited by friendly dogs. I bought a lunge line so that Olli could play with the other dogs and behave more naturally. Although he felt more and more at ease, he still really wanted to run and

did not pay much attention to me outside the house – he came when I offered him food, but he did not make eye contact and his stress level was quite high. This was the most difficult period in terms of freedom. Olli was still nervous, yet eager to move and to play with the other dogs. I wanted to let him off the leash, but could not, because our relationship was too fragile and there was too much traffic nearby. It was physically difficult for both of us as well: Olli is a strong dog, and it hurt (his body and my hand) if he ran to the end of the leash and pulled it. It was hard for him to behave normally towards other dogs; he felt handicapped by the physical restraints. This made him more defensive and sometimes a bit agitated. Although he did not seem to hold it against me, I felt sorry for being the one who restrained his freedom. I wanted him to be as happy as possible – I knew running and playing with other dogs would make him happy – and I only made things more difficult for him.

In February he started to make eye contact with me in the park. We always go to the park around the same time, so Olli got to know the dogs and the humans that come there well and they know him, which makes him feel safe and connected. In that time, he always came to me when I called him, also when other dogs distracted him. I decided to take the next step and I sometimes let go off the long leash for a while, then picked it up again. After that, I left a short leash on the harness, and then I completely took the leash off. This process spiralled in the right direction: I could start it because he was more at ease, and it made him more at ease because he could use his body freely. This improved his relationships with the other dogs in the park and helped him relax, which also changed his attitude towards me.



Olli and Pika (Photos by Eva Meijer)

2.2 Discipline and deliberation

Between Olli and me, the leash had multiple meanings. On the one hand, it constrained Olli's freedom of movement and expression. On the other hand, it was a tool between us (similar to words), an instrument for what Driessen calls "interspecies deliberation" and as such is helpful in his education.

I first want to make a distinction between the process of learning to walk on the leash and the leash as an institute. As an institute, leashes very clearly restrict the freedom of dogs. The leash can be seen as an instrument to control the bodies of nonhuman animals, to tame or train them and make them internalize power: to discipline them (Foucault 2010). Many humans in Western societies have strict ideas about their dog's behavior and even use instruments such as shock collars, in which fear for pain is the main learning mechanism, to control their bodies and behavior. Would I have had a choice, I would have chosen not to use a leash because it represents my power over Olli,¹¹ symbolically and literally. It reinforced his fear of humans and his low self-esteem, and it made it harder for him to behave as he thought best in a situation that was already difficult. Olli is now used to it, but he does not like to walk on the leash. He does not make a big deal of it, but if he would have a choice he would choose not to. Unfortunately, we had and have no choice, for the reasons I already mentioned. I am forced, on legal grounds, to keep my dogs on the leash and Olli really wanted to escape and there was a risk of him being hurt or even killed. Both aspects, the legal obligation to keep dogs on the leash and threats to safety, are expressions of an anthropocentric society.¹²

Some authors (Haraway 2003, 2006; Hearne 2007) view learning processes (such as walking on the leash, learning to fetch, practicing for sports) as training. Vicki Hearne describes how through training (for sports or games), words gain meaning, language-games come into

being and understanding is made possible. The world of nonhuman animals expands if they are taught words and commands, which enriches their lives. Haraway (2003) describes something similar when she discusses her training for agility with dog Cayenne Pepper. She stresses the mutuality of this process and argues both of them changed during the process. Olli and I both changed, but our experiences were different from the processes of “training” Haraway and Hearne describe. We had no common ground to start from and our communication was aimed at living together on a basic level, not sport or games. Second, for Hearne, the human trains the animal, sometimes using harsh methods, and this was not the case with Olli and me – I asked him things and taught him things, and he asked things from me. Both Hearne and Haraway ask the animal to obey commands the human gives completely. I do not ask this kind of attitude from Olli and I do not think complete obedience is necessary for a strong connection, or preferable. As Pika and Putih, Olli is extremely attentive, although he has his own preferences and views.

The process might be better understood as education. In the political theory of animal rights they put forward in *Zoopolis* (2011), Donaldson and Kymlicka mention the right to be educated in multispecies societies, for domesticated animals and humans. I taught Olli things, Pika taught him many things as well, and he educated himself by paying close attention to his surroundings (for example, the behavior of other dogs in the park). He was eager to learn; in the shelter he was one of the dogs who expressed his desire for contact with humans constantly and clearly. He enjoys learning new skills and displaying them. Learning to walk on the leash was education, and the leash was a tool in further education; walking on the leash helped him to learn to take the tram and the train (although trains still frighten him), to ignore dogs when walking on the leash next to the bicycle, to ignore (to some extent) humans who eat food on the street, and so on. In this process I sometimes had to keep him from doing what he wanted, but the process

was not one of unlimited restriction: there were clear goals and because Olli learned very fast, many of the problems we encountered were temporary.

However, as I mentioned before, the leash also made things more difficult and we did not need it to come to understanding – Olli would have learned these things also without the leash, although the tempo in which he learned them might have been different. Still, the communication we had because of the leash did provide us with extra information. Driessen argues for an account of animal deliberation in which material interventions can stir dialogue between human and nonhuman animals. He discusses the situation in which cows learn to use a milk machine. Confronted with this new machine, cows adapt their views and behavior, and in response to them, farmers do as well. The relationship with the machine enables the cows to display new behavior and the farmers to see them differently. The leash can also be regarded in this way. Because of how Olli responded, I learned about him and vice versa. This is a dynamic process.¹³ The precise meaning of the leash was not given beforehand. Olli likes going out, and he has started to associate the leash with nice things such as dog biscuits and going to the park. He often asks for biscuits as we walk and I often give them to him (sometimes without thinking, sometimes to reward him). I mostly notice the leash if we have different ideas about where to go. If this happens, we negotiate. Because we return to it often, we have time to adjust our opinions, to give the other reasons and think it over. I watch his behavior and adjust mine as much as I can, he watches me and responds to what I ask.¹⁴

The leash did not just function as an instrument of repression.¹⁵ As our understanding grew, Olli started to flourish. His body changed: some muscles in his hind legs disappeared, others became stronger; his neck was very thick when he came, now it is of normal size. As I mentioned before, when he arrived, he held his tail and the back of his body low. Photographs of

him in the shelter show the same posture. After three months, a curl appeared in his tail. His walk became steady, calm and proud. His attitude towards humans changed as well. In the beginning, he greeted all humans; after three months he no longer felt he needed to ask everyone for reassurance and started to ignore humans we met in the streets and in the park.¹⁶



On Our Way to the Park (Photo by Eva Meijer)

3. Stray Politics

Dog-human relations can be political in different ways. Both of the topics I discussed above have a political side to them. “Language” is usually understood as solely human and is in the philosophical tradition used as a demarcation between human and nonhuman animals (see Derrida 2008, 2009, 2011 for an analysis of this mechanism). This leads to problems such as anthropocentrism in laws, discourse and practices. Language and politics are interrelated on various levels. In political philosophy, speaking is usually considered to be a necessary condition for being a political actor. How language is defined, and by whom, is a political issue. Calling all nonhuman animals “animal” has political consequences. In many of these situations, nonhuman

animals exercise political agency. In this final section I focus on some aspects of Olli's political agency. I first discuss Olli's agency in relation to the public image of Romanian stray dogs. I then turn to political agency more generally, on the micro and the macro level.

3.1 Being a stray dog from Romania

Following the death of a four-year-old boy, allegedly killed by stray dogs,¹⁷ in September 2013 Romania's top court ruled in favor of killing thousands of stray dogs. A new law made it possible to euthanize dogs who had been in shelters for fourteen days, or sooner, in cases where there was not enough food to feed the dogs in the shelters. Euthanasia is often performed with coolant. Shooting, electrocuting and gassing the dogs are also forms of euthanasia. Sometimes dogs are left in cages without food and water, to starve. In some towns, capturing and killing a dog, euphemistically called "dog management" pays 200 euros per dog, while animal welfare organizations receive 25 euros for capturing and neutering dogs, although neutering dogs is the only effective way of reducing populations.¹⁸ Dogs with the ear tags of animal welfare organizations, showing they are neutered, are also captured and killed. In addition to the killings of hundreds of dogs a day by companies that work for the government, dogs are beaten to death on the streets, poisoned and burned alive¹⁹ by angry citizens.

My decision to adopt a stray dog from Romania was influenced by this political situation; in addition to offering Olli a home, I decided to use my work to create awareness about the situation. I did so by writing about, drawing and photographing Olli, as well as by writing about the situation in Romania. The work was published on my website and Olli was mentioned in interviews.²⁰ While Olli had no say in when it came to moving to the Netherlands, he did

influence my work, directly through his actions and indirectly because my perspective changed through our interaction.

Olli exercises agency in more ways. In Romania, he invented a little dance for humans in order to ask for food, attention and sympathy (I still sometimes see him do this when we meet strangers, especially with male humans). Through this behavior, he challenged stereotypes about stray dogs. Iris Young writes about the role of stereotypes in what she calls “cultural imperialism,” the situation in which the dominant group (in this case, humans) sets the standards for socially acceptable behavior. She points attention to the fact that the “other” is in the same movement singled out and rendered invisible. We see this with stray dogs. On the one hand, they are voiceless, and humans are indifferent towards them: they are part of the city but faceless, worthless. On the other hand, they are seen as dangerous, dirty and bad. Belonging to the category “stray dog” renders one invisible as an individual, and because one is invisible, it is easy to project characteristics on that person. Olli challenged this by being visible in a gentle way. Over here, the attitude towards dogs is different; humans are generally friendly. But here he also challenged stereotypes, regarding, for example, the learning abilities of older dogs and more generally, the subjecthood of animals. Because he is so friendly and open, many strangers we encounter on the street want to pet him or say something to him. I tell them he is from Romania and inform them about the situation over there.

3.2 From micro practices to macro agency

Taking other animals seriously as subjects and treating them as equals can challenge anthropocentrism. Irvine proposes to see play between humans and cats or dogs as a site for political resistance. She argues that in play, humans and dogs or cats challenge the current

construction of the human-animal divide. According to Irvine, play acknowledges nonhuman animals' subjectivity and communication skills. It thereby challenges "human disregard for non-human life" (1) and creates interconnection between members of different species. Irvine discusses different aspects of play, such as resisting "the notion of otherness" and "trends to dominate other species." Drawing on the work of Foucault, she sees micro-practices, common everyday practices, as spaces in which power hierarchies and conflicts are shown, and in which common views about human-animal hierarchies are challenged.

Honoring animal agency and subjecthood can indeed function as a basis for new forms of living together; it is also important to acknowledge that animals already exercise agency in many ways and thereby influence our understanding of the world around us. However, as the story of Olli shows, not everything can be fixed on the individual level. A focus on individual relationships leaves intact the frame in which animals can exercise agency, as we saw with walking on the leash and having to navigate city traffic. Donaldson and Kymlicka (2012) make a distinction between micro- and macro agency. Some authors (Haraway 2006, Hearne 2007) focus solely on animal agency in personal relationships, in which the human ultimately decides the scope of the animals' choices. This obscures certain problems and can even legitimate violence because the larger framework of exploitation of nonhuman animals is not addressed (see for example Weisberg's [2006] critique of Haraway). Donaldson and Kymlicka show that it is often assumed that humans have a wide scope of agency, where the macro frame of domesticated animals is "fixed by their evolutionary history and/or species nature, pre-determining a life of rigid dependence on humans and human society." Instead, Donaldson and Kymlicka argue, humans should provide animals with options to expand their macro framework, such as being able to exit the human-animal community they are part of. In practice, this would

mean that although domesticated animals have a right to be socialized into human-animal communities, they also have a right to leave, to go and live in communities with members of their own species, or spend only part of their time with humans. This would require new spatial arrangements and a very different attitude towards the preferences of nonhuman animals. Taking macro-agency into account does not mean that nonhuman animals can do whatever they want and can be completely free in what they choose. There are always constraints on the scope of agency, as there are for humans, since some dimensions of life are unalterable, where others are open to alteration.

Although I am committed to creating as much space for Olli as possible, the scope of his agency is determined by the limits of a human-centered society. This is unfortunate, because he has a strong spirit and enlarging the scope of his decision-making would enrich his life. The situation now is patronizing; Olli is forced to walk on a leash, to follow one human and so on, while he is an autonomous adult who is very happy with a warm bed, central heating, food at fixed times and cuddles, but who would also like to spend time outside, roam the streets on his own, create friendships with individuals of different species, and maybe be part of a larger group of dogs.



Olli Has a Bird on His Back (Eva Meijer)

Concluding remarks

Olli has adapted well to his new life. Remarkably well, considering he is a five-year-old dog who never lived in this type of situation before. When he arrived, he preferred dog company to human company and would have chosen the former over the latter (although he would seek out contact with humans, he is especially fond of children). As we get to know each other better and build a stronger connection, I am not sure about that anymore. He enjoys having a place where he belongs, and it is important for him to belong to a group. He is much happier than he was before, much more relaxed and more present.²¹

Olli was not the only one who changed in the months after he came here. I also changed.²² The physical process was and is rather intense; we spend much time outside (walking, running, in rain and wind, through muddy fields), and we have much physical contact, both outside and inside the house. Pika and I often touch, but mostly in passing, small gestures. We like to sit next to each other quietly, she sometimes places her head on my lap. Olli needs more intense interaction. In *The parrot who owns me*, Joanna Burger writes about the preening rituals of parrot Tiko: “As he cared for my body, I felt myself transported into a much more physically attentive kind of life than we’re used to in this society” (107). Although Olli does not preen or groom me (he sometimes licks my foot), I experience something similar because touch is so important to him. He often asks me to rub his tummy – by lying next to me on his back and growling or barking – or just to pet him – by sitting next to me and taking my hand in his paws. This way of interacting connects me to him; being together is important to him and what he asks from me in that regard makes me feel more connected to the world around us. The connections I

have with Pika and Putih are clear and strong; we belong to each other. Olli wants to belong and connect, but the precise meaning of this is still in question, and still growing.

On a more general level the perspective Olli offered me on our society reminded me of certain aspects of our society and human-animal relations, things I knew but that I experienced in a different way. His views on, for example, dog leashes, the amount of dogs in this city, cars, large machines, humans and houses made me experience these in a different way. Olli has very clear preferences regarding food, other dogs, when to walk, where to walk, when to cuddle, where to sleep and so on, and our discussions about these things help shape our life together. These experiences can function as the starting point for envisioning new ways of interacting and arranging public spaces.

In animal rights theories, there is a strong tendency to view animal freedom solely as negative freedom, as freedom from humans (see Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011 for an analysis). Although some animals of course prefer to have as little contact with humans as possible, Olli shows it is possible for a stray dog to change, to gain confidence and adapt to – or even embrace – new circumstances in such a way that freedom is gained. Not just freedom of movement in an anthropocentric world, also freedom in interaction with others, with the possibility of starting to love a human being. And he is not the only one affected: contact with animals of other species enriches my life. Olli and the others teach me not only about animals, they teach me about all things that really matter.



Olli's First Time at the Beach (Photo by Eva Meijer)

Notes

¹ <http://www.dierenhulpforfa.nl>

² <http://dierenhulpforfa.nl/Pascani.html>

³ Later on, I could also play that role for him. I once gave him a piece of cucumber and he refused to eat it until I took a bite.

⁴ After Olli arrived, the relationship between Pika and me also changed. We became partners. My attitude towards her has always been respectful, and I let her make her own decisions when possible, but now I simply trusted her to do the right thing; for example, in the park, she now walks off leash and I can't watch her because I keep my eyes on Olli. I also noticed how very attuned we are to each other. Pika can read my mind, or, more probably, she can read the smallest movements of my body. We do not touch as much as Olli and I do, but we often look into each other's eyes and there are many small gestures in which we connect throughout the day. Pika became more active since Olli came, he challenges her to walk more and we spend more time outside. With him she feels more secure in the evening (her sight is deteriorating and she was a bit insecure when it was dark outside). They sometimes play together in the park, very roughly, which shows their mutual trust. I have not seen Pika play with another dog with that intensity for years.

⁵ The only thing they taught him in the shelter was to sit and give his paw and in the first weeks he did this all the time, to show he meant well.

⁶ He also started to yawn when I yawn and to sigh when I sigh deeply.

⁷ Discourse is expressed in language and is existentially language (1962:162).

⁸ Olli and I also had to learn to listen to each other in both senses: we had to learn to hear the other and to follow the other.

⁹ “To get used to a hat, a car or a stick is to be transplanted into them, or conversely, to incorporate them into the bulk of our own body.” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 143).

¹⁰ Something similar happened with my horse Joy when I was younger. She was always slightly nervous in traffic, and I internalized her responses so that when I rode my bicycle, plastic bags also scared me.

¹¹ Ideally, I would have left all choice of participation in our household with him. It took him only a few days to start to appreciate having a house, both in terms of safety and food, so I suspect he would have chosen to live with me (at least over his former situation).

¹² Small acts of violence towards dogs are completely accepted in our society: almost every day I see humans drag dogs along (with collars that almost choke them), yell at them or even hit or kick them.

¹³ For Foucault, power is not simply oppression: power produces and is mutual; there is always the possibility of a reversal of power. This is literally true for the leash as instrument: we are both on a side exercising pressure, with the leash between us as a topic for discussion. The power relations between us are not fixed; I often follow him and use no force. The leash can of course also be a tool for oppression, depending on the human and dog and the training strategies involved.

¹⁴ He does not simply follow and if I would pull the leash, he only pulls on the other side. I need to convince him (we are going home now).

¹⁵ The leash makes some dogs feel more confident. Small dogs often feel confident knowing their human is on the other side of the leash, something they express by barking loudly to dogs twice or three times their size.

¹⁶ In Olli’s profile on their website, Dierenhulp Orfa described him as a very happy dog. Much of his “happy” behavior is actually an act to try to get attention and food. When he became more relaxed, he stopped acting in the ways he previously did. He still wags his tail, but not all the time; he can lie somewhere without watching me all the time now and I sometimes get to see a really happy face (for example when I come home with groceries) – like a smile.

¹⁷ <http://www.savethedogs.eu/romania-il-parlamento-reintroduce-l'eutanasia-come-strumento-per-la-gestione-del-randagismo/lang-pref/en/>

¹⁸ <http://www.vetwork.org.uk/abc.htm>

¹⁹ <http://www.four-paws.org.uk/projects/stray-animals/romania/overview-of-the-stray-dogs-situation-in-romania-2013-/>

²⁰ I had just published a new novel on the topic of animal rights, so there was some attention for my work and persona in newspapers and magazines.

²¹ He makes Pika happy. He is very sweet, playful and joyful and likes to make jokes. With a joke I mean an act that is meant to amuse me or to draw my attention to something in a joyful, playful way. Jokes are similar to games but they refer to something outside of the situation. Pika and he also make jokes together. They like to roll in the dirt and sniff each other afterwards, wagging their tail as if they give the other a high five for smelling bad. And they form a team if they want to put pressure on me to give them food.

²² Although Olli and Pika understood each other well from the beginning, their contact deepens. In the beginning, Olli lied next to Pika on the couch and the bed. Pika accepted this but was slightly indifferent. Later on, she also sought out his company. They often greet the other during the day, kissing and wagging their tails. They also team up to pressure me for food.

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Film Reviews

The Raw, the Cooked, and the Scavenged

Review: *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012), Dir. Ben Zeitlin, Cinereach/Journeyman Pictures, 93 mins.

Lucinda Cole*

Abstract: This article examines the 2012 film *Beasts of the Southern Wild* in the light of intersectional feminism, specifically in terms of how scavenging, a key biological process, complicates the traditional concerns of environmentalism, critical race studies, feminism, and food politics. Using bell hooks' reading of the film as a point of engagement, it advocates for more attention to scavenging in the conjoined discourses of contemporary ecocriticism and social justice movements.

Keywords: scavenging, animality, ecofeminism, intersectional feminisms, wetlands, Louisiana, critical race studies, Claude-Levi Strauss

The 2012 film *Beasts of the Southern Wild* contains a scene that has generated much commentary, along with occasional charges of racism. In it Hushpuppy, played by Quvenzhané Wallis, is at a crab boil with her father and other residents of the Bathtub, a wetlands community based on the Isle de Jean Charles in Louisiana's Terrebonne Parish. A man at the table begins to show Hushpuppy how to eat a crab—by opening the apron with a knife—when her father interrupts, commanding her to “Beast it.” She does. Rejecting the tool, she grabs the crab with both hands and tears it apart, using her teeth, rather than her fingers or a fork, to rip out the crab meat, while growling.

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bell hooks singles out this scene as one of the film's "most disturbing," arguing that it demonstrates the brutality of Wink, her father; he shows affection towards his daughter "as a reward for her enactment of meaningless violence," writes hooks, "especially when she mimics the behavior of a raging patriarchal male" (hooks). Finding it "a major mystery" that "moviegoers adore the film," hooks concludes that its "pornographies of violence" are "hidden behind romantic evocations of mythic union and reunion with nature" (hooks). Her reading of the film as a conservative Gaiaesque celebration of capital N "Nature" is understandable, given Hushpuppy's repeated references to herself as "a little piece of a big, big universe," even without Zeitlin's contention that his heroine "evolves" to understand nature as a "complete" and "flowing system, something in which everything has its place and everything plays its part" (Berlin).

The question of whether the environmentalism of the film is intrinsically, or accidentally, at odds with the anti-racist and feminist vision that hooks, among others, would prefer it convey, is worth considering. In contrast to hooks, I want to start by taking seriously the role of food in this film because both subjectivity and sustainability are mediated and even made possible through feeding practices and scenes of consumption. Catching, cooking, eating, feeding—as animal studies scholars from Carol Adams to Cary Wolfe have claimed—these are all gendered phenomena through which both gender roles and species distinctions are marked (Adams, Wolfe).

The "Beast it" episode is one of several feasts or famines that help to structure the film. *Beasts of the Southern Wild* opens with Hushpuppy feeding a baby bird, chickens, and pigs, followed by a crawfish boil, in which her teacher Bathsheeba announces what is in many ways one of the film's crucial concerns: "Meat...meat...meat...every animal is made out of meat, everything's part of the buffet of the universe." Through her teacher's words, Hushpuppy is

interpellated into a worldview typical of a fragile food web. “Any day now,” says her teacher, “the fabric of the universe is coming unraveled. The water’s gonna melt. Y’all better learn how to survive.” “Survival,” according to Hushpuppy’s father, means learning how to pull fish out of the water with one’s bare hands, rather than using a pole; tearing crab with one’s teeth, and never losing sight of one’s position as part of a threatened herd. “Strong animals,” says Hushpuppy, “know when their hearts are weak. That makes them hungry, and they start coming.” If one adopts Wink’s perspective, the perspective of the film is similar to that of most post-Enlightenment maroon narratives, from *Robinson Crusoe* to *Lord Jim*: survival requires violence, and violence is masculine. “Show me them guns!” yells Wink, as they face the impending storm. When Hushpuppy displays violence, he promotes her a little way up the great chain of being: “You the man!” Only “babies” and “pussies,” he keeps reminding her, are afraid of the water.

If we move away from the stories the characters tell about themselves and focus instead on how the director, Benh Zeitlin, stages the scenes, we see a more nuanced perspective emerge. *Beasts of the Southern Wild* operates through an explicit series of contrasts, often conveyed in striking shots. Very early in the film, for example, before a word is spoken, we see Wink grab a raw chicken from the cooler and throw it on the grill. Juxtaposed to this scene is Hushpuppy’s own cooking practices, which require more complex mediations—the pots and pans that she inherited from her mother. For Levi-Strauss, this contrast between roasting and boiling is a structuring difference within many cultures, corresponding to “masculine” and “feminine” forms of food preparation. That Zeitlin’s filmic semiotics evoke Levi-Strauss is worth noting, particularly given his background. His parents, Steve Zeitlin and Amanda Dargan, are urban folklorists with advanced degrees in anthropology, founders of the highly respected City Lore

organization in NYC. *Smithsonian Magazine* reports that the “exuberant crayfish boils” in the *Beasts of the Southern Wild* may be traced back to the feeding rituals known as the Summer and Winter games in Dargan’s rural South Carolina, home to the pig roasts and chicken chases that were the subject of Zeitlin’s college entrance essay (*Smithsonian*). Throughout the film, feeding practices shape identity, and in case we miss that point Zeitlin introduces us to an eccentric boat captain who, having eaten a fast-food chicken biscuit every single day, is surrounded by a mountain of wrappers whose “smell,” he explains, makes him “feel cohesive.” It is probably not a stretch, then, to conclude that the race and gender politics of a film based on a play “Juicy and Delicious” and featuring a child named after a fried food will be connected to a food economy, its food politics interacting with gender, race, and species in complex ways.

The nature of this economy and the ethical problems it presents become most apparent after the flood. An active agent in this film, water resembles the volcano in Werner Herzog’s *La Soufriere*, which Zeitlin said influenced him (Berlin). The post-Katrina *Beasts* is organized around a storm and the apocalyptic threat it poses to the freshwater ecosystem of the Bathtub. The director draws on his knowledge of Louisiana’s wetlands, which face erosion, silting, and ultimate destruction from many sources: climate change, saltwater intrusion, pollution run-off from the oil industries, coast damage from wide-scale dredging, growing nutria populations, and a general loss of animal habitat. The film figures these threats largely through a landscape strewn with industrial waste and ominous smokestacks in the distance; they are personified, however, by Hushpuppy’s vision of the oncoming aurochs, released from their icy graves by melting polar ice caps.

These mythical creatures—actually Vietnamese pot-bellied pigs wrapped in nutria fur and endowed with prosthetic horns—lead the film into the realm of magical realism, as products

of the child's imagination. Their release, journey, hunger, and illness allow Hushpuppy the opportunity to reflect on her own nature. "Strong animals," she claims, after discovering her father's hospitalization, "know when their hearts are weak. That makes them hungry, and they start coming." While clearly the aurochs represent Hushpuppy's fear of Wink's impending death—"my "blood," he tells her, "is eating itself"—her translation of his disease into generalizations about "strong animals" lends the film an ontological and ethical weight that it otherwise might not have. After the storm, for example, the remaining residents are confounded by an influx of saltwater that quickly kills the fish and eventually the mammals they had hoped to eat until the water receded. Within two weeks, then, the flooded wetlands are filled with the floating carcasses of goats, chickens, and nutria. At this point, the trudging auroch herd appears in the Bathtub, some of them falling and being set upon by others, eating their own to stay alive. "Strong animals got no mercy," says Hushpuppy. "They're the type of animals who eat their own mammas and daddys." What she's describing through the aurochs is a scavenging rather than predatory society; most scavengers do not kill the animals they eat but, in the words of one research team, "rely on animal deaths due to malnutrition, disease, exposure, parasites, and accidents" (DeVault, et al. 226). Indeed, before hunting and domesticating live animals for food, humans competed with them for the carcasses of dead ones (Moleon, et al.).

I want to stay with this image of the scavenging Aurochs for a moment. We tend to think of Levi-Strauss' food politics in terms of the "raw" and the "cooked," but in the text by that name Levi Strauss makes the sometimes overlooked claim that while differences between the raw and the cooked structure one axis of presumably universal myths, those between the fresh and the decayed constitutes another (Levi-Strauss 3). And *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, set in Louisiana's wetlands, derives much of its ethos and energy from images of decay--most notably

the dead fish and goat carcasses that demonstrate the fragility of a wetlands ecosystem. Precisely because of this fragility, many wetland animals are scavengers. Blue crabs, for example, are omnivores and, while roaming the sea or marsh bottom, they eat plants and scavenge from carrion; if food becomes scarce, moreover, they, like the aurochs, quickly resort to cannibalism. Indeed, nearly all vertebrate predators are also scavengers to some extent: otters, herons, woodpeckers, ring-necked pheasants, and hippopotami all occasionally eat carrion (DeVault, et al. 225). From a scientific perspective, then, both “carrion” and “carrion eater” are highly unstable categories, intimately related to environmental stresses and conditions of food scarcity. The boundary between “scavenger” and “predator” is so unstable that even turkey buzzards have been known to turn predator under periods of environmental stress, when few animal carcasses are available for consumption.

We might reasonably expect scavenging to be a sensibility congenial to the residents of the Bathtub, with its marsh trawlers created from pick-up truck beds floating atop empty oil drums and driven by abandoned lawn mower engines. “We made the movie,” explains Zeitlin, “as if it were a collage or a junk sculpture. We invited chaos into the process.” This aesthetic, or politics, of *bricolage*—working with discarded objects that happen to be available—does not, tellingly, extend to feeding practices. While a hungry Hushpuppy is willing to eat leaves hanging from nearby trees, neither she nor her father ever considers plucking drowned creatures from the water and throwing them on the fire. Their unwillingness to do so points to the existence of implicit food rules, rules that the characters—if not their critics—seem to recognize and embrace. On the one hand, Hushpuppy rejects the feeding practices of the dryland, where “they got fish stuck in plastic wrappers and their babies stuck in carriages.” On the other hand, she refuses to eat carcasses in what she perceives as a state of decay, even though these animals may

have been dead no longer than the steaming crabs piled high on the table. The attitude of the film towards carrion differs little, in one respect, from that of *Heart of Darkness*, where Marlowe's European sensibility is reflected in his nauseated reaction to what he regards as the rotting hippo meat the Africans brought on ship. Uneaten carrion qualifies Bathsheeba's earlier pronouncement that everywhere you turn is "meat," that "everything's part of the buffet of the universe." Instead, carrion-eating is displaced onto the aurochs who, true scavengers, eat what they find.

That Hushpuppy both befriends and, in the end, dominates these ancient beasts, compelling them to bow down before her in a Disneyesque show of supplication, calls into question hooks' contention that *Beasts of the Southern Wild* fails to exhibit an "us-against-them mentality when it comes to humans and nature." hooks argues that the people in the Bathtub share a "complete celebration of their feral animal nature [that] binds everyone in a sacred contract: they are to resist domestication and civilization at all costs." But Hushpuppy's relationship to the animals around her, real and imaginary, cannot be characterized apart from the food web that mediates her experience of "nature" and "culture"; her Odyssean journey ends, finally, with an awareness of her position at the top of a fragile food chain. "You're my friend, kind of," she says in a sentimentalizing gesture to the aurochs; they back away, as she goes with her fried catfish to help her father die. Like the women she meets on the riverboat, she counters his raw with her cooked, his violence with an act of mercy. At this point, she sheds the hypermasculinization that her father tries to inculcate in her. The formerly androgynous wild child comes into a "civilized" gendered identity, represented by the dangerous archaic creatures bowing outside her dying father's door.

bell hooks may right that *Beasts of the Southern Wild* is indeed a relatively conservative film. Its conservativism, though, exists not only in its replication of strictly gendered beings, but in its depiction of “meat” as either something one kills or something one buys. In a film whose characters are so clearly devoted to the question of survival, and whose central character fries up cat food, the refusal to scavenge food must be regarded as a choice. This choice marks the limits of the “animal” in this film or, more precisely, demarcates a clear species boundary, even if that boundary is expressed primarily in negative form: *humans are the species that will not scavenge*. This assumption is patently false, although scavenging studies have not received the same attention as those devoted to predation and agriculture. Far from being a “curiosity” of animal behavior, scavenging, scientists now realize, is a “key ecological process that must be accounted for” (DeVault, et al. 225). Thwarting any easy division between “culture” and “nature,” scavenging forces us to look more critically at our understandings of self and other, to confront more honestly our collective participation in an unsustainable and unethical food web dominated by the “raw” and the “cooked,” by \$200 juicers, macrobiotic diets, organic beef farms, and endless exposure to food porn. Taking seriously the relationship between taste and waste means rethinking not only the human and the animal but the axis between the fresh and the decayed, between meat and carrion, between the edible and the inedible in ways that *Beasts of the Southern Wild* raises, but then consigns to an archaic past.

From an ecocritical perspective, we are all *in some sense* still citizens of the Bathtub, living in proximity to the trash, leftovers, discards, and the flotsam of culture—some 236 million tons produced annually in the United States alone—and struggling to determine what is, or should be, edible. In industrialized countries, wealthy people have moved garbage from the outskirts of towns, to landfills located in slums, and to towering mountains of trash shipped by

barge to countries in the developing world. Given the polluting effects of so-called civilization, it is not surprising that a branch of environmentalism seeks to shift Levi-Strauss' culinary triangle so that the people of North America reconsider their largely irrational responses to the "rotten," a category no less historically conditioned than any other. Sandor Ellix Katz, of Tennessee's Radical Faerie Community, joins other neo-punk food collectives in the world of fermentation, roadkill, carrion, and found meat (Katz). Freegans in particular advocate a scavenging lifestyle, largely in the form of dumpster-diving, rescuing and consuming barely expired food products from trash containers. While freegans are not necessarily vegan or even vegetarian, and may or may not be self-consciously feminist, their very existence exposes a blind spot in ecofeminism, which has long lead the way in arguing for an intrinsic relationship among food practices and broader conceptions of social justice. While ecofeminism might begin to consider the necessary, shifting, and unstable role of the "rotten" in our foodways, it has—for understandable reasons—focused almost exclusively on "moral veganism," critiques of factory farming, anti-predation, and farm to table cuisine.¹ This collective preoccupation with the raw and the cooked is part of a social agreement by which "culture" is associated with increasing levels of food preparation. As blogger Sarah Davis writes, "Our social agreements generally dictate that things (food, people, ideas) that are raw are also incomplete, and things that are rotten must be discarded." Yet the triangle with culture and the cooked at its apex might be inverted, or turned on its side. "But suppose," Davis asks, "you don't agree with the elevation of culture to the top of this hierarchy? Suppose you consider modern society to have a polluting rather than civilizing effect?"

Beasts of the Southern Wild offers a glimpse into this third point on Levi-Strauss' culinary triangle, but only a glimpse. It is usefully paired with Zai Batmanglij's 2013 eco-thriller, *The East*—also filmed in South Louisiana—that features veganish anarchists of several races

banded to combat international corporate violence against the land and people. Both films, albeit in completely different ways, begin from the position of environmental stress, if not near-apocalypse, and explore more or less radical ways of humans challenging the limits of acculturation, perhaps even going feral. While neither deals directly with the question of animal rights, both throw us into a liminal moral space and raise hard questions: if being “cultured” means leaving behind us mountains of bones and rivers of chemicals, stinking signs of civilization, how can we live? How can we eat in ways that let us sleep? bell hooks rightly argues that we need feminism. Developing a nose for the rotten, however, may also help us get out of here alive.

Note

¹ Richard Twine identifies several “positions” that have emerged in the literature: a “moral veganism” associated with Carol Adams and Deane Curtain, among others; Val Plumwood’s semi-vegetarianism deriving from a critique of factory farming; Clair Jean Kim’s arguments for an anti-cruelty diet; and Marti Kheel’s “invitation approach” to veganism, which denies that meat-eating is a compulsory feature of the human diet (205).

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Review: *Maximum Tolerated Dose* (2012), Dir. Karol Orzechowski, Decipher Films, 88 mins.

Justin Kay*

Keywords: Maximum Tolerated Dose, vivisection, animal research, panopticon, Foucault, biopower, animal bodies, carceral system

Maximum Tolerated Dose is a 2012 documentary by Decipher Films that attempts to explore the culture of animal-modeled medical research from the perspective of the individuals most involved: the researchers, technicians, and the animals themselves. With interviews from medical doctors, former researchers, former research assistants, and undercover investigators, *Maximum Tolerated Dose* focuses its attention on the experiences inside the cell, the construction of space inside the labs, and the relations of power that derive from the production of knowledge from the animal body.

Unlike most attempts to deal with particular industries or institutions that use animal bodies, Orzechowski's film does not indulge itself in the very real gore of animal suffering. Nor does the film lose itself in questionably founded diatribes on scientific methodologies or the anthropocentric critique of animal-based medical research. Instead, it focuses on the evolving phenomenon of animal-based medical research as a relation of power that produces trauma as reality and relates the invoked subjectivity of those involved. The thematic focuses are those subjective experiences, those stories and existential and moral crises, which culminate into intolerance: intolerance of chemical dosages, intolerance of working conditions, intolerance of captivity, intolerance of complicity, but most importantly, the intolerance of the power relations

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that manifest in the lives of the animals and those that encounter them in the Panopticon of the laboratory.

In his directorial debut, Karol Orzechowski weaves a story of a contentious phenomenon that is conventionally depicted as a dialectic between the pious community of science, research, and so-called progress and the ill-informed, impulsive, and haphazard community of animal rights. Navigating between these two extremes, Orzechowski attempts to shed light on the real and traumatic experiences that persist behind closed doors and that transcend the banalities of the “animal testing drama”:

the debate about vivisection in the mainstream media is essentially ossified into two caricatured positions: on the one side, you have evil scientists who hate animals and will perform cruel experiments on them at their whim; on the other side, you have naive bleeding heart protestors who don't understand science and want everyone with diabetes to stop taking insulin and die. But those aren't the only people concerned about the issue, and hey, what about the animals as well?
(quoted in Powell)

The film introduces these narratives from the beginning. The discourse begins with an almost forlorn recounting of experiences that brought our storytellers to the lab. Rachel Weiss, a former lab technician at Yerkes Primate Research Center, tells us that she sought work in animal labs as refuge from working in restaurants while in college. Dr. John Pippin relates his naivety as a young research doctor whose decision to enter into animal research was dictated by his seizing of a 5-year grant from the American Heart Association. Dr. Ned Buyukmichi stresses that his involvement in animal research was led by his sincere belief that “this was an appropriate way to resolve biological questions.” In contrast to the characterization of those involved in research as

malign, insidious, or concerned only with career propagation and grant funding, these introductory narratives allow us to shed these biased misconceptions from the start.

Orzechowski allows the viewer to move beyond the archetypal and dichotomous framework of the animal research question that pits science against morality, rationality against sentimentality, the researcher against the animal advocate, society against the individual, or “good” against “evil.” It opens us to empathize and sympathize with the too-often forgotten components of the complex of medical research that are the most traumatized and subjectified: the workers themselves, whether the primary researcher or the lab technician, and the animals in use. Foucault (“The Subject and Power”) defines such a subject in two ways: “subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to” (331).

The focus of the film, the stories of the animals, the former researchers, and former assistants, deals with these “subjects.” Throughout, the cast shares their common thread of naive idealism, growing cognitive dissonance, and alienation. A former technician, “Isabelle,” tells us “animal death doesn’t do anything to me. I thought it was better that the animals die than stay there. I told myself that would be freedom for them.” Dr. Buyukmichi, a member of the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) at his institution, felt isolated from the rest of his cohorts because he was alone in advocating for minimal animal care. Eric Thomas Bachli, another former research assistant, used phrases such as “for the greater good” and “necessary” in an attempt to cope with his encroaching feelings of alienation and guilt. He asks, “How do you deal?” Dr. Pippin succinctly characterizes the problems that these workers face: “when you compartmentalize it you can keep cognitive dissonance at arm’s length.” But eventually, as he narrates, it becomes a losing battle.

The stories of the animals further reveal a realm of alienation and subjectification. Rachel Weiss repeatedly references a chimp named “Jerome” whom she worked with and cared for at Yerkes. She did not want to remember Jerome, though, and she took no photos of him, because his story was too much for her to bear. Jerome was one of the first chimps to develop AIDS as a consequence of being injected with HIV. She asks, “Have you seen a chimp cry?” Jerome deteriorated towards his death. Along the way, he began to lose visitors and caretakers because he was too intense of a sight to handle, except for Rachel. As Rachel describes it, Jerome’s became a story of “data and deadlines.”

Gloria Glow of Fauna Sanctuary is brought into the film to tell the story of “Darla,” a 17-year old, highly traumatized macaque. She has two sets of tattoos, indicating she was used in at least two separate institutions. The only paper work that Gloria was able to obtain regarding her past suggests that she was used in separate studies regarding menstruation and anorexia. Upon her transfer to the sanctuary she lost the only primate relationships she had and her mental state made it difficult for her to integrate into the population.

The film uniquely moves beyond the walls of the laboratory and into the jungles of Cambodia surrounding the ancient city of Angkor Wat. There, wild primates can be seen in the trees surrounding the city, as what can only be assumed to be poachers approach. The poachers then capture the primates and stuff them into bags as they begin their long journey in the illicit primate trade. The footage here is possibly the most intense in the entire film, as the viewer watches the swift and discrete transition of a life of freedom to a life of captivity and imprisonment. The viewer then follows the captured primates to a holding facility in rural Lao PDR before they are to be distributed among the various markets that demand them. These are the first moments of structural and spatial separation and deprivation along a lifetime of animal

research. By taking us to this initial point of individualization and subjectification, Orzechowski can emphasize the power relations of animal research that are more than “evil” scientists or tortured animals.

In a contrast to the somber tales of lab animals who either were killed or had their spirits killed, Orzechowski takes us on a trip to Spain to follow the work of Igualdad Animal. He takes the viewer into a beagle rescue that occurred in 2011. What follows is footage of beagles that have found reprieve from the “deprivation” of the cage. An activist from Igualdad Animal relates the story of one beagle in particular whom he described as a former “inmate.” The theme repeats itself as he characterizes her state at the time of the rescue as a state of “deprivation,” an incomplete, traumatized being. After rehabilitation with the activists, she is now “complete” in his words.

The cast’s personal narratives and the accounts of the animals’ lives can be considered instances of power struggles. The roles of these central players are constructed by the very power relations that define them. Dr. Lynda Birke, author of *The Sacrifice: How Scientific Experiments Transform Animals and People*, narrates much of the film. She describes the common elements of animal research as it has evolved over the last century as increasing standardization, simplification, decreasing diversity, and separation. These elements are the very same that characterize the disciplinary society. The standardization of space within labs, the standardization of species, and the standardization of breeds alludes to a certain Panopticism that induces in the animal “a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 201). In the lab, the construction and standardization of space subjects the workers and the animals to their roles, “born mechanically from a fictitious relation” (202). In reference to the Panopticon, but applicable here as well,

Foucault describes as one of the only necessities for the proper functioning of power to be the proper arrangement and separation of space. In the film, Birke makes a reference to the “analytic” and the “naturalistic” animal, so characterized by sociologist Michael Lynch. Lynch asserts that the construction of space, of species, and the whole phenomenology of the laboratory and medicine are the processes that transform the “naturalistic” animal into the “analytic” animal. Birke elaborates on this notion, “[c]onstructing lab animals – both literally and discursively as fundamentally necessary to the pursuit of medical knowledge – is an important facet of disciplinary power, part of wider systems of medical/scientific surveillance” (170). It is both the lab animals and the people who must work with them that become individualized in this subjugated way. Orzechowski illuminates this with woven narratives of control, alienation, regret, cognitive dissonance, helplessness, and suffering.

Perhaps the most notable shortcoming of the film is its tendency to only trace a rough sketch of the sweeping relationships of power that characterize the entire medical industry. The film’s visuals reveal to the viewer all of the elements of an industrial complex. Throughout the film, the imagery shifts from models wearing cosmetic products, to pharmaceuticals, to incoming shipping freights (perhaps of live animals, cosmetics, or medicine), to the jungles of Southeast Asia, to the graduation of what can be assumed to be medical students. The film navigates the scenes of consumption, production, exploitation, and captivity as allusions to structural and systematic embeddedness of animal research. Yet this analysis appears a vestige as the array of images ends. These modalities of power that constitute a whole complex of relationships—global, economic, social, ecological—are only hinted at in the film. There lacks a total and explicit synthesis of the themes and concepts strewn throughout. As the film closes on the concept of “letting go,” the viewer is told, “something needs to change,” but is left with only

frayed ends of a systematic problem. Without a concrete look at the underpinning structures and functions of the phenomena, beyond the stories, it is difficult to walk away with a sense of purpose; we finish with only a taste of the problem. But perhaps because of limitations and the film's scope Orzechowski cannot delve deeper.

Overall, there are certain aspects that leave the viewer wanting more. One example would be the role of governments and academia in constructing the "necessity" of animal research. Industry-front groups, lobbying, legislation, grant-funding and writing, and job security all reinforce the phenomenon of animal research (Greek & Greek). Another example would be the dynamics of the illicit wildlife trade in Southeast Asia. What drives the poachers to become subjected to the medical-industrial complex? A study by TRAFFIC, a wildlife trade watch-group, indicates that most poachers in Southeast Asia are in poverty and are driven to the trade out of rural desperation in a rapidly modernizing global economy. These dynamics are also too-often left out of the discourse surrounding animal research and its global reach. These marginalized voices deserve a platform to reach a Western audience in order to construct a more full understanding of the medical-industrial complex. Because of the film's thematic focus, these perspectives serve only a transitory function. Perhaps it opens doors for Orzechowski's future work.

Considered in its entirety, *Maximum Tolerated Dose* is a film about sacrifice. It is a film that examines a certain set of circumstances and conditions under which animals become incorporated into society. It is a film that examines the factors involved in becoming involved in medicine and science. These are sacrifices, dosages that must be tolerated in the power relations of the bio-political strategy:

I don't think that we should consider the "modern state" as an entity that developed above individuals, ignoring what they are and even their very existence, but, on the contrary, as a very sophisticated structure in which individuals can be integrated, under one condition: that this individuality would be shaped in a new form, and submitted to a set of very specific patterns.

(Foucault, "The Subject and Power" 334)

Animal-based research is spun as a tale that leads to salvation, salvation from suffering, from disease, or even from death. These are the stories that the cast chronicles repeatedly throughout the film. "Necessary," "For the greater good," "Necessary evil," "Progress"; these are the facades that the researchers, assistances, and technicians construct above an undertow of growing intolerance. In the end, they all reach their tolerance, and so do we.

In spite of its analytical limitations, *Maximum Tolerate Dose* stands as one of the most novel and complete documentaries in the field of critical animal studies. Taking the viewer beyond the hype of the animal research drama, Orzechowski focuses his attention on the subjectified and individualized interplay between the animal and the researcher. By doing so, the totality of power relations intrinsic to medicine specifically and our socio-ecological order broadly can begin to be outlined. The intense and stunning visuals sewn throughout reinforce this dynamic. Balancing words with visuals, narratives with factual information, and emotion with reason, Karol Orzechowski brings us a film that escalates our intolerance as well. In a sense, we are left wanting in the best way possible, wanting understanding and wanting resolution.

In this central and centralized humanity, the effect and instrument of complex power relations, bodies and forces subjected by multiple mechanisms of "incarceration,"

objects for discourse that are in themselves elements for this strategy, we must hear the distant roar of battle. (Foucault *Discipline and Punish*)

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Book Reviews

Review: *Perspectives on Human-Animal Communication: Internatural Communication* (2013), Ed. Emily Plec, Routledge.

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Keywords: animal rhetoric, human-animal communication, adaptive rhetoric, animal signaling

As critical animal studies in general, and animal rhetorics in particular, continue to develop as thriving interdisciplinary fields of study, scholars will more frequently make explicit connections between the persuasive strategies of human and nonhuman animals. Emily Plec's collection of essays on human-animal communication presents a variety of views on the borderlands where species meet and interact, and how humans communicate on behalf of animals, about animals, and sometimes with animals. These interactions present a rich tapestry of persuasive efforts – some performed by agents, others by mediators for those perceived as voiceless in the mainstream of human communications theory.

The collection is organized thematically, in three parts: complicity, implication, and coherence. The section on complicity offers readings of various texts, or moments of human and nonhuman animal interaction, that facilitate the critique of a human/animal duality and the consequent subordination of the animal within that relationship. The section on implication attempts to overcome the hierarchical nature of this relationship by presenting essays that stress the interrelatedness of human and nonhuman animals. Finally, the section on coherence features essays seeking to place human communication alongside, rather than above, the communication strategies of other animals.

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The trajectory of this collection makes for a successful transit between outmoded views of animals as lesser beasts on the Great Chain of Being, and the more current ideas shared by most ethologists (if not communication scholars and rhetoricians) who hold that differences between humans and other animals are a matter of degree, not a matter of kind, and that the study of those differences is not always as fruitful as the study of similarities between species. In fact, the most damning criticism of this collection is that the editor was too modest in reaping the success of her volume – she could have extended her argument for continuity in a less restrained manner. Indeed, it would not be difficult to take the trajectory of this collection one step further and place human communicative efforts within the framework of animal signaling theory. This would help us to acknowledge the important idea that our persuasive efforts are merely one type among many forms of animal rhetoric that are all worthy of our attention (Parrish).

This is, perhaps, the logical conclusion of a research program inspired by such varied figures as the semiotician/philosopher Charles S. Peirce, the rhetorician George Kennedy, and the zoosemiotician Thomas Sebeok. By defining “internatural communication” as a sharing of information or an attempt at manipulation that transcends species borders, Plec makes a parallel between the potential benefits of cross-species study with the already well-known benefits of cross-cultural study in the field of communication (4). Scholars would do well to pay attention to the important anthropological and zoological data germane to communication scholarship, which will allow us to overcome common assumptions about the superiority – or even the exclusivity – of human intentional communication.

Despite some previous criticism regarding perceived hierarchies of complexity in Kennedy’s *Comparative Rhetoric*, Plec adopts Kennedy’s conception of rhetoric as a pre-verbal energy, but rightly insists on calling her central concept of internatural communication an

“exchange of intentional energy between humans and other animals” (6). While the current debate about animal intentionality is one that is fraught with assumptions on both sides, evidence is mounting that indicates some level of intent motivates the complex behaviors of at least the most intelligent primates, cetaceans, and birds. Significant study of these arguments has in the last few decades helped to shape the thriving field of cognitive ethology (Griffin).

While the idea of animal intent is controversial to some, another approach to understanding animal communication is gaining some traction across disciplines. That is a sensory approach, which Plec claims will help to “expand our understanding of internatural communication by rethinking our anthropocentric grip on the symbolic and becoming students of corporeal rhetorics of scent, sound, sight, touch, proximity, position and so much more” (7). Such scholarship, being performed by a small group of individuals, is building a bridge from the better-established fields of embodied rhetorics (which take as a starting point the idea that persuasive behaviors are inspired and constrained by the body producing them) or material rhetorics (which are generally concerned with the physicality or material nature of what is rhetorical) to the nascent field of adaptive rhetoric (which takes a biocultural approach to rhetorical theory, allowing for not only cross-cultural, but also cross-species approaches to understanding persuasive communication).

Other connections to embodied rhetoric exist in the chapters describing mediated communication, wherein human agents attempt to speak, not only *on behalf of*, but as the *translator for* animal subjects, providing them with something closer to a human voice of their own. This closely resembles Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson’s concept of “mediated rhetoricity” in the closely-related fields of embodied rhetoric and disability studies (161). Nick Trujillo’s fabulous hybrid essay in Plec’s volume skillfully interweaves explorations of communication theory

applied to human-canine relationships with his own (heart-wrenching) personal narrative about the loss of three beloved dogs and his wife of many years. While Trujillo attempts to give the canines a voice in his narrative, he also hints at ways dogs mediate on our behalf, as well. He uses uncertainty reduction theory to explain one widely-acknowledged benefit of pet guardianship, which is their ability to act as a social lubricant for human interactions. When humans meet, they seek to reduce their uncertainty about one another; for dog lovers, the sight of other people with dogs allows for quicker relief of that uncertainty, as well as a common interest to break the ice (119).

But mediation in either direction has its dangers. In Tema Milstein's essay about an incident between a zoo gorilla named Akenji and a group of young children who had been verbally taunting him in his enclosure, Milstein describes how the zoo guide potentially misrepresents the actions of a frustrated animal in order to provide a "soft" explanation for a very sad situation, one suspects in order to shelter children from the harsh realities of animal captivity and to put a happy face on zoo life. As Akenji banged violently on the glass of his enclosure, the guide asked the children why they thought he was doing that. The children provided a few explanations, before the guide offered them the "correct" interpretation of the gorilla's outburst – that he was merely showing off for them (176). This interpretation is dubious at best, and the guide is forced to employ the full power of her ethos as adult and teacher to pacify the children who are (rightly) dissatisfied with her answer. What this demonstrates is not so much mediation as a bulldozing over the communicative act of another creature, in order to maintain the fantasy of the ideal zoo, populated entirely by happy and willing animal performers, whose lives are enhanced and prolonged by their captivity.

As one might expect in a collection of essays on human and nonhuman animal communication, some of the articles are (necessarily) anthropocentric. Part of this stems from the fact that we only understand the language or general thought processes (as self-reported, linguistically) of other humans. Another reason is that some situations are created by humans to make human meaning, in spite of the potentially very different meanings other animals might take away from the same situations. If we take, for instance, Leigh Bernacchi's essay on bird-human ritual communication, it is really a piece about human-human communication *about* birds, not about human communication *with* birds. An example of this approach is her explanation of how birds communicate in both life and death, referring especially to the use of canaries as disposable tools for the detection of poisonous levels of methane or carbon dioxide in coal mines (143). The death of these birds is meaningful as a warning to humans only – the birds themselves had no part in creating the indexical relationship between the concepts [dead canary] and [poisonous gas]. The message they might take from such interactions (in the brief moments before their deaths) is both stark and out of their control.

The anthropocentric is expected in human essays on animal communication, and the limitations of these approaches must be duly acknowledged. Moreover, there is a point at which the reader asks “Why are we reading about nonhuman animals at all, if this is merely another case of humans using animals to make human meanings?” This is an especially important question in a small minority of essays that seem somewhat alien to the theme of the collection. Carrie Packwood Freeman's piece on the “go veg” movement, while a wonderful article, is somewhat vexing, as the connection with the rest of the volume is a tenuous one at best. The essay describes five animal rights campaigns with the goal of turning people vegetarian, and how the construction of vegetarian values serves “the motivation and identity function of the social

movement framing process” (93). Sadly, this has nothing to do with nonhuman animal communication, and the inclusion feels somewhat forced. Nonetheless, the essay might be of considerable interest to readers of this journal, as it has a stronger connection to animal studies than to animal communication.

Despite some minor criticism about the loose connection to theme, the sheer variety of approaches to internatural communication also represents the collection’s greatest strength. Where the volume really shines is in presenting new avenues of study, or new ways of envisioning old questions in terms of animal studies. Susannah Bunny LeBaron’s essay on acknowledging difference without creating hierarchy channels Derrida’s later work on the human animal and brings it to bear on the emergent re-questioning of the human/animal dichotomy (Derrida and Mallet). Rightly, she insists that if we make such a distinction between what is human and what is animal, it is in increasingly arbitrary terms that we, occupying the privileged side of the binary, define ourselves into. She asks “by what pretense of objectivity or rationality have we determined that those differences make us better than those we have categorized by *our criteria*” (249)?

Such questions signal the present state of affairs in the fields of communication and rhetoric and composition: most people still tacitly assume that human linguistic communication is the best, most complex, or only form of symbolic communication, and that it is the only form worthy of study. However, evidence from the last few decades of ethological study has shown that we might not even be the best at symbolic communication, let alone the only symbol-using species. A slow shift toward cross-species study has begun in isolated corners of these disciplines, but a sea change is necessary. For, understanding the great variety of ways beings communicate in nature is essential to understanding the evolution of our own persuasive tools.

Moreover, animal rhetorics are interesting and worthy of study in their own right. We should take a cue from rare volumes like Plec's, and realize that we humans are limited in our ability to detect communicative efforts even within the narrow range of five senses we traditionally recognize, let alone in the "extrasensory" realms of ant pheromones, the electric fields of Amazon River fishes, or the echolocation of dolphins. To then assume that we provide the best example of communication, or the most sophisticated, is to make an argument from extreme ignorance. Until we can even begin to decipher the supposedly simple languages of other animals, we have no basis for true comparison. With increased study of human and nonhuman animal communication, it may be possible to change this, but there is much work to be done.

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Review: *On Their Own Terms* (2010), Lee Hall, Nectar Bat Press.

Anastasia Yarbrough*

Keywords: animal sovereignty, habitat conservation, free-living animal, purpose-bred animal, reproductive freedom, the vegan ideal

On Their Own Terms by Lee Hall is an engaging read that makes the theoretical subject of animal rights accessible to a wide audience. It also raises critical questions about the vision and goals of the movement. I must say that this book is the most exhilarating animal rights book I have a read in a long time. I certainly hope that the conversation will continue in the animal rights community.

The main premise of this book is to urge animal rights activists to reassess how we use the term “animal rights” and re-direct our efforts to advance it. Rather than devote ourselves almost exclusively to the groups Hall labels as “purpose-bred animals,” we should focus on advancing rights to the animal group that, Lee argues, could actually benefit from rights—free-living animals.

If animal rights means the right to live on your own terms, not on the terms of the people who have subjugated you, then a true step in its direction could manifest itself in the work to preserve the autonomy of a free-living community of animals, while presenting the argument for conscientious objection to the use of animals as products or entertainment attractions. (112)

In fact, Hall reiterates throughout the book that domesticated animals, or purpose-bred animals, can never truly have what rights protect—autonomy. Therefore, according to Lee, using a feminist care ethic is more appropriate with domesticated animals and the best we can

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strive for in a path to animal rights is to end the breeding of purpose-bred animals, for they are occupying precious space that free-living animals need. As Hall states, “every bigger cage and every cleared pasture, on a finite planet, means less untamed spaces; and it’s in those space that animal rights will be found” (121).

The author spends the entire book discussing what animal advocacy should be doing, what it should be striving for, and what the movement should not be doing. It is as much a treatise on animal ethics as it is a manifesto. Hall highlights the ethical pitfalls of theoretical and institutional developments in the animal rights movement since the 1970s. Without naming them directly, Hall targets large animal advocacy organizations that have made controversial decisions that have roused turbulence in the movement and muddied the public perception and understanding of animal rights. As one step to address this problem, the author urges activist readers to reclaim the word “welfare” away from its current commercialized, sell-out connotation.

Activists need to know that genuine animal-welfare work supports the movement and should be supported in return. The animal-rights proposal appreciates the efforts of one who traps domesticated cats in feral colonies, then returns them, neutered, to their areas and continues to feed and care for them and offer them as much shelter and comfort as possible...During times of enslavement, such protective ownership has been a fact of life. (43)

In this vein, Hall encourages activists to envision our work as promoting the welfare of individual animals (those who must rely on our care) and promoting a movement that respects free-living animals’ autonomy.

At the end of the book, Hall calls for a much-needed alliance between the animal rights and environmental movements to address the lack of ecological attention in the animal rights movement and the lack of wild animal rights in environmental rhetoric. The author believes that the joining of these two movements would advance a unified movement that would allow for animals to live truly *on their own terms*. However, the simplicity presented throughout the book from start to finish is both inspiring and disheartening. If our problems were simply a matter of sticking to principle, then the dilemmas we face in the struggle for animal rights would just require a solution of re-evaluation and sticking to integrity. The on-going struggle for animal rights activists is to receive the continual feedback that their integrity is actually making a difference for real animals and future generations of animals. Hall instead focuses on the principles rather than the outcomes.

Human and Wildlife Conflict

In the first chapter, Hall calls for rescue and rehabilitation projects “to challenge the whole idea that all other animals’ fates should hinge on our needs and our decisions” (p. 44). Otherwise, the work can begin to look like a hobby farm or a petting zoo. This is where the emphasis on principle and purpose is most important. The author reiterates that the animal rights movement should not strive “to make a Garden of Eden for other animals within our society but rather to change society so we respect their own ways of being” (48). However, this stance applies only to those groups Hall refers to as “free-living animals”; treating domesticated animals as refugees of a cruel, industrial society can still be in alignment with the proposed goal. The responsible refuge, as Hall presents it, works steadfastly toward the animal rights ideal and

at the same time encourages a cultivation of “respect for free-living animals’ interest in having their habitats unmolested,” (49). Hall mentioned Emberwood Lane Refuge as an example.

I can’t help but wonder where human habitat exists in this vision of upholding other animals’ interest in “having their habitats unmolested.” Where does interspecies community come into play? How can we think of “humanity as contributors in an interconnected biocommunity” and “leave their habitats unmolested” at the same time? Though the book encourages animal rights activists to incorporate ecological consideration into our theory and praxis, the presented solution to “leave free-living animals alone” and their habitats “unmolested” is not entirely ecological; it is romantic. Leaving animals alone by not trafficking them alive and dead around the world is one thing; ending fracking or stopping the construction of dams that flood and displace entire interspecies communities is another thing: leaving “their habitats unmolested” is impossible.

Because this book is written from a white middle-class American perspective, a major pitfall in this stance is that it assumes that the only animals who deserve and need to subsist off the land (and water) are nonhuman. Unfortunately, capitalism, colonialism, and ecological imperialism are forces that are pushing humans further and further away from living and subsiding directly in place. Hall provides a perfect example of US imperialism at work and its impact on free-living animals:

Evidently, zoo experts in the United States—the world’s largest importer and consumer of wood products—believe training orangutans to relinquish their own knowledge, habits and traditions is preferred over training humans to stop usurping their habitat for ourselves and all the animals we breed into our service. (169)

As domestic animal agriculture and monocrop plantations continue to engulf land all around the world under the guise of sustainable economic development, conflicts arise between rural humans trying to improve their quality of life and free-living animals trying to survive in an ever-shrinking world. Common “solutions” to these conflicts often come at the expense of the animals, through dislocation, hazing, and often good old-fashioned poisoning and shooting.

Suppose animal rights, as Hall proposes, were a major consideration in human-wildlife conflict management. The difficult choice for the managers would remain the same: “I understand that these free-living animals have to eat, but the people have to eat too.” How the people eat is being shaped by capitalism and imperialism, and thus becoming more difficult to control. Killing and displacing wild animals is an easier answer, albeit undesirable for the managers, but capitalism and weak governments provide good incentive to take the easier road. As more managers face this difficult choice, it is not surprising to find more (formerly) free-living animals dead and in captivity. Therefore, I do not think it serves real animal rights activists now or real animals now to advance the “leave animals and their habitats alone” mantra because as long as humans exist, animals will always play an integral role in humans’ lives and livelihoods. Our challenge is coexisting with and negotiating with free-living animals without trying to control them. Hall’s emphasis on sticking to principle does have merit. In fact, returning to principle is crucial when the goals seem so big and disconnected from our daily grind for animal rights:

Advocacy means speaking with people in the language of justice. Our goals should never be hidden; our message must be clear and consistent for every audience. If animal sanctuaries need help, let’s support them. But let’s also cultivate the kind of thinking and discussions that will stop making these refuges necessary. (50)

Nonhuman Animal Ethics

In chapters two through five, Hall explores the theoretical foundation of the mainstream animal rights movement, particularly the theories that have resulted in the schism between welfare and rights and the vegan principle. Chapter Two focuses on presenting and critiquing Peter Singer's utilitarian animal ethic. Hall begins by questioning the negative connotation pain has in Singer's theory and his emphasis on the right not to suffer: "If we consider the interest in life worth defending, we must acknowledge that pain has a role in that theory, for *pain promotes our ability to survive and thrive*" (55, original emphasis).

Basically, ending animal suffering would mean ending conscious life as we know it (55). Hall refers to the example of two Pakistani children born with genetic mutations that did not allow them to feel pain which led both of them to severe self-mutilation and eventually death. The author goes on to criticize the consequences of applying Singer's theory to animal advocacy for it has turned animal advocacy organizations into animal handling and animal killing consultants for the animal exploitation industries in their crusade to minimize the amount of net suffering—as if suffering can be quantified.

As an alternative to this, Hall presents the vegan principle: we should reject all animal industry practices on principle and opt out of any kind of participation. Hall uses this same stance in Chapter Four's summary and critique of Tom Regan and Gary Francione. Hall challenges the ableist premises of Regan's analysis of "the value of the lives lived" as well as the theory's inability to empower activists to handle real conflict between the particular human interest and the animal other interest, where Hall stresses "rights matter most."

Once lives are differently valued, oppressive results are unlikely to wait for rare emergencies. After all, if less aesthetic, scientific, and sacramental interests means [sic.]

expendability in an exceptional case, the way is open for the claim that overriding another being's interests on an ordinary day could be ethical (82-3)

Of all the theories presented, Hall is most aligned with Francione's abolitionist approach but still draws criticisms. In response to both Regan's and Francione's work, Hall laments: "Abolitionist animal-rights theory has largely neglected the immensely important point that wolves (like apes, deer, and all free-living animals), as long as they and their habitats exist, could genuinely benefit from legal rights; dogs could not" (85). Hall also criticizes Francione's reliance on the sentience rhetoric for the deciding line of moral consideration of animals and suggests that the vegan platform as presented by Donald Watson's vegan society in 1944 has the answer: reject the use of all animal products and all forms of exploitation of and cruelty to the animal sphere.

While abolition addresses what other animals will not be, and this is indeed important, what's essential is what and who they are, and how we come to grips with that. This all depends on what and who we strive to become. Are we willing to relinquish our authority, our control? (93)

Veganism as the Answer

Chapters Four and Five are devoted entirely to the vegan ideal. Hall spends half of the introduction to veganism as a contradiction to Francione's *Introduction to Animal Rights* and *Rain Without Thunder*. Hall champions veganism as the paradigm to address all the theoretical problems of mainstream animal rights; it just needs to be redefined. Hall relies on Donald Watson's initial definition as the basis. The position is considered perfect. If a reader were basing her analysis of veganism on this book alone, she would have to conclude that veganism is the answer to all of our problems, at least where nonhuman animals are concerned, but also,

according to Hall, where the planet is concerned. “For surely there is no better, more straightforward advocacy for animals used in industries than to opt out of using them—by becoming vegan” (108).

Vegan organic (or veganic) agriculture is presented as a perfect alternative to current conventional and organic agriculture. Fortunately, humans around the world have been practicing semblances of veganic agriculture long before Rosa Dalziell O’Brien, Kenneth Dalziel O’Brien, and May Bruce came up with the system or the name. Native peoples of Central America prior to European colonialism managed to build civilizations on what we could consider vegan organic agriculture. However, even veganic agriculture did not protect them against soil erosion and the population’s carrying capacity, which eventually made the system unsustainable. Because veganic agriculture relies on the production of green manure and compost and the input of herbivorous human wastes for soil fertility, it is not a system that can be duplicated sustainably on as large a scale as conventional agriculture. And perhaps that is exactly the point. Veganic agriculture is most effective at the community level, rather than the national or global levels.

Veganism is presented as the ultimate answer to advancing animal rights by 1) ending the breeding of domesticated animals and 2) freeing up land for free-living animals. At our current population levels and inability to distinguish between what we need and want, how can we expect that vegan consumption will free up land so long as the machinations of capitalism, colonialism, and ecological imperialism are at work? How can veganism allow us to opt out of tropical rainforest destruction or dependency on fossil fuels? And what of the humans whose bodies do not respond well to a vegan diet? What happens to them? In this sense, Hall presents the tautology of veganism: the vegan ideal becomes what we need it to be in this particular

approach to and vision for animal rights. And the vegan ideal Hall presents is inspiring: “being mindful of animals’ connections with their activities and communities...humans’ cultivating respect for their interests in the climate, nutrients, and landscape, the land, water, and air they require to experience autonomy...supporting animals’ rights to be let alone” (121-3). But this book is also meant to be a thinking ground for “what a serious theory of animal rights means for the real world.” This requires real challenges to veganism that we often disregard and that the author did not address.

Enduring Freedom

Lee Hall is one of the few authors who has emphasized the importance of free-living wild animals and ecosystems to animal rights and the importance of animal rights to environmental concerns. Though it is a less uncommon bridge in ecofeminist literature (for example, Marti Kheel’s analysis of hunting and wildlife management rhetoric), in mainstream animal rights literature, free-living wild animals are virtually non-existent. In redefining animal rights from its mainstream conception, Hall explains that:

Animal rights involves freedom from, rather than equality within, a global human society. This means theoretical work is needed to distinguish groups of animals whose existence results from selective breeding (those...who must rely on the care ethic as long as they are here) and those who could flourish on their own terms. (166)

In Chapter Six, Hall references feminist analyses of the logic of domination without actually referring to this theory or Karen Warren, the ecofeminist philosopher most attributed to the theory. Hall draws comparisons between women and animals, black women and animals, and in particular, references Zora Neale Hurston’s analysis of the “pet Negro” system where

white elites of the southern United States customarily singled out select black workers for gifts and privileges, thereby complicating the systemic racial inequality and violence.

The potential of the animal rights movement hinges on our motivation to visit the deep level at which all oppressions connect, from whence they spawn social injustice, environmental injustice, and the degradation of the ecology and living beings. (166)

Fascinatingly, Hall encourages readers to contemplate a black feminist approach to understanding injustice: intersectionality. Hall does this without referring to the term or any of the thinkers associated with it. Yet, when Hall concludes again and again throughout the book, that autonomy is neither possible nor relevant for domestic animals, I can't help but recall similar arguments made by slavery apologetics concerning black people in America—that black people could not survive beyond the confines of the institutions we were bred and traded to labor in. However, Hall's argument for purpose-bred animals never having use for rights is worth examining.

In response to a law student's blog post re-conceptualizing rights of companion animals as likened to the rights of children, Hall argued that the comparison does not work.

Children are not bred to be commodities; children are rarely locked in or chained to a house. Most of those who endure maltreatment, thank goodness, have a chance of being heard and helped by teachers or others in the community. Eventually, children grow out of dependency on their caregivers. (187)

Hall has a valid point. While unwanted children are born all the time in unsustainable conditions and the plight of children not born "citizens" tends to be less visible to the legal protection system, for the most part, child abuse is met with the strictest and harshest of punishments. The most powerful point Hall made was that "children eventually grow out of dependency on their

caregivers.” That is the key distinction. Hall argues that purpose-bred animals are bred and conditioned to be forever dependent on their human owners. Through neoteny, they essentially never grow up. Dogs, in particular, are selectively bred all the time to exude submissiveness and dependency. Assertive dogs and dogs not interested in humans are “weeded out.” But what about when domestic animals regain their reproductive freedom and become genuinely feral? That suggests purpose-bred animals, when given the space, time, and opportunity, can reclaim their lives and advance what we would consider animal rights. The ecological consequences, however, can be devastating, and in turn, their reproductive freedom and feralness become interpreted as extensions of human destruction and ecological imperialism (e.g., Alfred Crosby’s *Ecological Imperialism*).

Hall challenges the caring pragmatist approach regarding the birth control of free-living animals but simultaneously says it is within the sphere of animal rights to phase out the breeding of domesticated animals—whether it’s on their own terms or not. So basically, Hall argues for the reproductive freedom of wild animals and the reproductive control of domestic animals.

What about reproductive freedom of “domestic” animals?

The author also refers to examples such as “feral” cat populations in urban centers and how they depend on humans to feed them and rely on human infrastructure for shelter and rearing. However, I think this argument is misleading and oversimplifies the reality of becoming feral. While it is true that many “feral” cat colonies are supported directly by local human populations, smaller but real numbers of cat colonies consist of individuals who subsist in the sewers and ditches of urban environments almost exclusively on undomesticated “domestic” animals such as house mice, brown rats, and Norway rats. Over the past thirty years, studies of feral cat diets in both North America and Oceania showed that the bulk of their diet consists of

small mammals (Coman and Brunner 1974; Zavaleta, Hobbs, and Mooney 2001; Nogales et al 2004). Unfortunately, they obtained this information through state-sanctioned lethal management by trapping, killing, and looking at the contents of the cats' stomachs. The researchers found that the cats also subsisted on rabbits, chipmunks, shrews, squirrels, lizards, and songbirds to a lesser degree—the latter group being of great concern to ornithologists and conservationists (as well as the author), who campaign against free-roaming domestic cats.

Since the major theme of this book is to offer pressing questions that challenge us to envision animals beyond the status quo, I offer this question: why is it impossible for domesticated animals to experience collective self-reliance? The author is convinced that domesticated animals uniformly have no chance of benefiting from rights because they will forever be dependent on humans, that the only place for domesticated animals is as cogs in the wheels of industry and society. What's missing from this book is the importance of reproductive freedom to animal rights. It takes generations of reproductive freedom to begin to overcome centuries of institutionalized slavery. Now imagine overcoming thousands of years. The easy answer is to give up and conclude the best solution is that they all disappear. But this is just another "solution" of reproductive control.

Respecting other living beings' reproductive freedom is not easy for most human cultures, so it is not surprising that animal advocates may consider reproductive freedom for traditionally domesticated animals impossible. VINE Sanctuary, an ecofeminist animal liberation sanctuary in Vermont, explores daily the possibilities of reproductive freedom and the impact it has on animals living on their own terms. The work is not easy, but they are a living example that it's not impossible either and that this, like any cultural-ecological shift, is a process. What happens to a population when they are able to exercise reproductive freedom

within the axioms of ecology? They find their way or die trying. In the last two hundred years, we have examples that show domesticated animals finding their way and becoming feral. Rock pigeons are a popular example. Feral pigs and feral goats on islands in the Pacific. Feral horses in the southwest United States. These are all examples of domesticated animals finding their way. They may not be examples of native wild animals living in ecological harmony, but we have to also admit to ourselves that in a globalized society, the boundaries of native and nonnative are getting murky and ecosystems are changing to accommodate that. So I challenge us to see beyond the stand that would have us believe that feral animals are impossible. They are not impossible. They are not easy to live with or control. Their freedom even offers immediate ecological consequences. But so does human existence.

On Their Own Terms challenges us to re-think “animal rights” and really meet head-on these problems which shake our theoretical foundations, our understanding of the animals for whom we advocate, and our community solidarity. I applaud Hall’s efforts to initiate this conversation, and I hope that collectively we have the motivation, the discipline, and the courage to continue this deeply difficult topic.

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Editorial Objectives

The journal for Critical Animal Studies is open to all scholars and activists. The journal was established for the purpose of fostering academic study of critical animal issues in contemporary society. While animal studies is increasingly becoming a field of importance in the academy, much work being done under this moniker takes a reformist or depoliticized approach that fails to mount a more serious critique of underlying issues of political economy and speciesist philosophy. JCAS is an interdisciplinary journal with an emphasis on animal liberation philosophy and policy issues. The journal was designed to build up the common activist's knowledge of animal liberation while at the same time appealing to academic specialists. We encourage and actively pursue a diversity of viewpoints of contributors from the frontlines of activism to academics. We have created the journal for the purpose of facilitating communication between the many diverse perspectives of the animal liberation movement. Thus, we especially encourage submissions that seek to create new syntheses between differing disputing parties and to explore paradigms not currently examined.

Suggested Topics

Papers are welcomed on any area of animal liberation philosophy from any discipline, and presenters are encouraged to share theses or dissertation chapters. Because a major goal of the Institute for Critical Animal Studies is to foster philosophical, critical, and analytical thinking about animal liberation, papers that contribute to this project will be given priority (especially papers that address critical theory, political philosophy, social movement analysis, tactical analysis, feminism, activism and academia, Continental philosophy, or post-colonial perspectives). We especially encourage contributions that engage animal liberation in disciplines and debates that have received little previous attention.

Review Process

Each paper submitted is initially reviewed for general suitability for publication; suitable submissions will be read by at least two members of the journal's editorial board.

Manuscript Requirements

The manuscript should be in MS Word format and follow MLA guidelines. All submissions should be double-spaced and in 12 point Times New Roman. Good quality electronic copies of all figures and tables should also be provided. All manuscripts should conform to American spelling.

As a guide, we ask that regular essays and reviews be between 2000-8000 words and have limited endnotes. In exceptional circumstances, JCAS will consider publishing extended essays. Authors should supply a brief abstract of the paper (of no more than 250 words). A brief

autobiographical note should be supplied which includes full names, affiliation, email address, and full contact details.

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