

GUEST EDITORIAL

This Special Issue of the *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* brings together a series of articles from philosophers trained in the continental European tradition, and engaging with that tradition, in order to think critically about human relations with other animals.

The first two papers in this issue are analyses of hominization stories in modern and contemporary culture as these rely on interpretations of prehistoric depictions of animals or on prehistoric animals themselves. In “Painting the Prehuman: Bataille, Merleau-Ponty and the Aesthetic Origins of Humanity,” **Brett Buchanan** engages with Georges Bataille’s speciesist interpretation of the cave paintings at Lascaux as marking the birth of humanity. The cave art, for Bataille, allow us to bear witness to the moment when humans began to distinguish themselves from other animals, thereby transitioned from animality to humanity. The paintings, depicting the hunt by humans of other animals, reflect on the deaths of animals and thereby mark the moment when human beings became conscious of their own passage towards death, a characteristic that has often been alleged to distinguish humans from other animals. Buchanan suggests, however, that if the birth of humanity is to be understood, for Bataille, as the passage from animality to humanity, death, for humans, is conceived as a *return* to animality. Moreover, since birth always already entails an eventual death and thus contains such an animality within it, the birth of humanity necessarily involves a recognition of the impossibility of a humanity understood as other-than-animal or deathless. Thus it is not just serendipitous that Bataille reflects on the birth of humanity in the same essay in which he considers humanity’s impending extinction. In contrast to Bataille’s reading of the Lascaux paintings, Buchanan pursues the intriguing argument that what we witness in these images is not the birth of humanity but a recognition of its impossibility. This may be why, Buchanan speculates, prehistoric artists omitted or rendered formless images of the human. Drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s account of art as the attempt of humans to express the prehuman condition, Buchanan underscores his argument that the prehuman is always already contained within the human.

It is a few blocks from the Woolly Mammoth Child Care centre in Berkeley, California that I am summarizing **Matthew Chrulew**'s article, "Hunting the Mammoth, Pleistocene to Postmodern." In this fascinating piece, Chrulew explores a range of texts featuring the mammoth, from children's literature and adult fiction, to anthropological, paleontological, ethnographic and philosophical tracts, to rewilding projects and the desire to bring the Pleistocene creature back to life through cloning. Given the ubiquity of these investments in the mammoth, Chrulew argues that the mammoth is the "totem animal of postmodernity." Chrulew's article compellingly argues that what is at stake in our fascination for this extinct mega-fauna is our self-understanding, or our hopes and fears for the human. Already depleted and threatened by climate change, the mammoth is widely supposed to have been pushed over the edge into extinction by human hunting, although, as Chrulew notes, this version of events remains contested. Nevertheless, "Hunting the Mammoth" shows that speculative reconstructions of how the small and defenseless proto-human allegedly managed to hunt the massive (albeit herbivorous) mammoth into extinction represent male carnivorous desire, as exemplified by the mammoth hunt, as a key element of anthropogenesis. The desire for mammoth meat is suggested to have led prehistoric men to band together in order to slay the much larger fauna. In the process, intelligence, tool-construction and co-operation were cultivated—the very skills that, we tell ourselves, established humans as superior and unique among animals and were foundational of civilization. Taking up Derrida's phrase, Chrulew argues that it is a carnophallogocentric subject that features in many of these imaginative reconstructions of the mammoth. Other versions of the contemporary mammoth tale, however, are indicative of our guilt over the apocalyptic role of humans vis-à-vis the natural world, tracing continuities and contrasts between the proto-human mammoth hunter and the capitalist domination and exploitation of nature today. Whether guilt-ridden or carnophallogocentrically self-congratulatory, Chrulew's article shows that the mammoth is a privileged figure in our current stories of the making and unmaking of "man," as we continue to define humanity at the expense of other animals. Chrulew's contribution to this issue leads us to eagerly anticipate his forthcoming monograph, *Mammoth* (London: Reaktion books).

With **Hasana Sharp**'s article, "Animal Affects: Spinoza and the Frontiers of the Human," we move from the prehistoric to the early modern. As Sharp notes, it is René

Descartes, with his disenchantment of the natural world and his infamous view of nonhuman animals as nonsentient automata, who is most often singled out for critique with respect to philosophies of the nonhuman in this period. Severing ensouled mind from dis-spirited matter, Descartes argued that mind and body were substances with nothing in common. Placing nature, including nonhuman animals, in the category of matter, devoid of soul, Descartes drew an unequivocal line between humans and the natural world, with humans alone possessing mind or soul and hence reason and sentience. Given that Baruch Spinoza provides a radically contrary although contemporary metaphysics, in which mind and body are one substance, we might have expected similarly opposed and hence less pernicious consequences for Spinoza's philosophical views about other animals. On the contrary, however, Sharp observes that Spinoza has been deemed *worse* than Descartes in this regard, extending the instrumental view of nature even as he engaged in sadistic practices involving spiders. As Sharp writes, "Even though his metaphysical system demands it, Spinoza himself does not seem altogether comfortable with the consequences of his metaphysics for human distinctiveness." While this may be surprising, Sharp suggests that it is the anxiety raised by the lack of metaphysical boundaries between humans and other animals—and by the natural scientific world view more generally—that resulted in Spinoza's attitude towards other animals. As Sharp argues: "The importance of the distance between human and animal in the seventeenth century... arises because it is precisely what can no longer be metaphysically sustained." The mechanistic view of nature has given rise to increasingly adamant claims about human exceptionalism and correspondingly draconian attitudes towards other animals, not because this view demonstrated the human/animal divide, but rather because it undermined it. In a fascinating illustration of this thesis, "Animal Affects" discusses Spinoza's curious interpretation of the Genesis story, rewritten so that it is not Eve but the affects of other animals that represent a dangerous temptation for Adam. Significantly, Sharp argues that the same defensive need to bolster the belief in human exceptionalism is pervasive today: as the human/animal divide is further eroded, it continues to be affirmed—not paradoxically but consequently—more adamantly than ever. Thus Sharp writes, "Spinoza's example shows that belief in the mutability of humanity and the permeability of the species frontier does not necessarily foster a pro-animal philosophy, and may even inflame anxiety about human affection for 'beasts'." As Sharp suggests, this can help to explain the incredulity and defensive

fear that animal activism and its attempts to undermine the human/animal distinction provoke. Consequently, a lesson to be learned from Sharp's presentation of Spinoza is that "we ought not presume that either the porosity of species boundaries or the resemblance between humans and many nonhuman animals suffices to engender an appreciation of nonhuman life." In her final section, "Spinoza contra Spinoza," Sharp takes up Spinoza's work in order to theorize how we might be mutually enabled rather than endangered by the contagion of interspecies affect.

Alain Beaulieu's article, "The Status of Animality in Deleuze's Thought," is the first of three articles to engage with the philosophical writings of Gilles Deleuze as well as his collaborative works with Félix Guattari. The writings of Deleuze and Guattari have received extensive attention within continental approaches to animal studies because, as Beaulieu notes, animals—spiders, ticks, fleas, crustaceans, cats, dogs, wolves and birds, to name a few—are pervasively present in their corpus, and their notion of "becoming animal" has drawn particular interest. Beaulieu's contribution to this issue provides a clear and concise introduction to the primary sources of Deleuze's, and Deleuze and Guattari's, contributions to animal studies. While the task of summarizing and responding to all the secondary literature that Deleuze and Guattari's writing on animals have inspired would be impossible in a single article, Beaulieu highlights and responds critically to a few significant moments in this body of critical response, notably that of Donna Haraway. Finally, "The Status of Animality in Deleuze's Thought" concludes with some reflections on future uses of Deleuzo-Guattarian thought for animal studies.

Karen Houle's article, "Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics as Extension or Becoming? The case of *Becoming-Plant*" resists the argument that the animal has been neglected in Western philosophy, or that the "animal question" needs to be brought to light. In fact, Houle argues, the animal has been omnipresent in Western philosophy, precisely because it is always the foil that defines what humans are not. The animal question is intimately linked to the question of Being, Houle suggests, and this has done little good for either animals or thought. On the contrary, thinking through animality has got us stuck thinking in terms of analogies, resemblances, teleology and functionality. In foregrounding animality, moreover, Houle notes that herbality has been relegated to the background. There has been truly little effort to

think plants in Western philosophy, Houle observes, “And though we know, intellectually, that we always have and always will live by grace of the oxygen produced by said plants, and are built from the very carbons of them, and run our entire global economy off the backs of that carbon, we are unable to think let alone live the novel and profound truths of *these* vegetal relations.” Some cases in point: while Derrida argues that we need to consider “the whole world of lifeforms,” he himself “got stuck on cats, and meat”; Deleuze and Guattari theorized not only becoming-animal, but becoming-mineral and becoming-plant, and yet they spilled by far the most ink on becoming-animal. Why is it so hard for us to think, not the animal question, but the plant question? And, even more importantly, might thinking herbality be better for animals, for ecology, and for thought itself than thinking animality has been? It is the task of exploring these questions, and of cultivating a “vegetable philosophy,” that Houle devotes her original and provocative essay. To this end, Houle takes up and expands upon Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of becoming plant in the hopes that developing a “philosophical botany” might free “the powers of thought, even provisionally, from the bad habits it has developed through (over)thinking-the-animal.” Ultimately, Houle will argue that “Thinking plant-thoughts shoves us in a *better* way than thinking animal-thoughts does, toward the truth that the “correct unit” of analysis is not the individual, nor the dyad, but ‘the assemblage.’” Thinking plant, Houle contends, helps us to “re-imagine Life” in terms of radical kinships rather than resemblances, and this, she concludes, has “massive political and ethical implications.”

Astrida Neimanis’ article, “Strange Kinship and Ascidian Life: 13 Repetitions,” is the last of three papers included in this issue that is primarily inspired by the writings of Deleuze and Guattari, and the first of two papers devoted to oceanic life. Like Houle, Neimanis notes that the usual ways of thinking about animals, and animal ethics, can only take us so far. While traditionally humans and other animals have been compared and contrasted to stress difference and human exceptionalism, critical animal theorists such as Haraway continue to compare and contrast human and nonhuman fauna, but now to highlight affinities, resemblances and kinships. While this strategy may occasionally result in increased compassion for exemplary members of specific species—Neimanis discusses cetaceans, with their mammalian babies, their music-making, and their “red beating hearts, like ours, just as susceptible to

being broken”—it ultimately does little more than to extend human exceptionalism to a few other species (Neimanis invokes “human exceptionalism in whales’ clothing”), and does not even begin to capture the complexity of interspecies relations. While Houle consequently turns from animal thoughts to thinking plant, Neimanis tarries with the animal but strives, through the Merleau-Pontyian notion of “interanimality” and the Deleuzian concept of repetition, to think animality otherwise. Deleuzian repetition is not resemblance, but involves echoes and iterations that may be so distorted and refracted that we are disturbed at recognizing ourselves in them. The concept of repetition thus allows us to simultaneously see our relations with other animals and to make these relations strange, entailing both connectedness and difference. The ways we repeat other animals, Neimanis argues, establish kinship, as Merleau-Ponty would suggest, but strange kinships. Seeing the ways that we repeat other animals is also notable in that it displaces the human as the reference point of comparison. Neimanis takes human-sea squirt repetitions as her sustained example. Unlike the whale—or the ape, the dog, the lactating cow—ascidiacea are not creatures with whom we feel a ready kinship or an easy ethics of affinity, and yet through the thirteen repetitions which make up the second half of her paper, Neimanis establishes a complex web of echoes between ascidian life and our own. As Neimanis notes, “From such an inventory, no easy ethical formulations can follow. But perhaps the work of problematizing our own human subjectivity within any formulation of animal ethics is an on-going project, and one more complex than gives us comfort.”

It has sometimes been suggested that continental philosophy lagged behind anglo-American philosophy in theorizing the nonhuman because both phenomenology and post-structuralism are irremediably about the human. In the case of phenomenology, the methodological privileging of the first person perspective of the philosopher appears to require an anthropocentric outlook. It is precisely this claim that **Jennifer McWeeny** challenges in her article, “Sounding Depth with the North Atlantic Right Whale and Merleau-Ponty.” As McWeeny argues, “If it is the fact of having a system of relating to the world—a body—that allows for the possibility of intersubjectivity, then the right whale body-subject is potentially just as worthy of our phenomenological gaze as human-body subjects like Schneider, the war veteran with brain damage whom Merleau-Ponty returns to again and again in the *Phenomenology of Perception*.” In this piece, McWeeny expands upon the work of Merleau-Ponty in

order to argue that by placing the experience of the endangered North Atlantic right whale at the centre of a study of depth, we gain a richer understanding of the experience of depth—which Merleau-Ponty considered the “primordial” orientation—and intercorporeality, than we would have if we were restricted to human experience. As McWeeny contends, “The North Atlantic right whale enhances Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of depth by emphasizing the relational aspects of existence that are often latent in human experience: the subject’s immersion in a relational medium, the way depth is organism/environment relationships, and depth’s temporal dimension. Most importantly, the fact that right whale bodies are endangered—and specifically that they are endangered *by us*—brings into stark relief the relational nature of all of our existences.” In so arguing, McWeeny does not follow other scholars in using Merleau-Ponty’s thought to elucidate our relation to the nonhuman environment, but, in a reverse move, draws on the nonhuman—and the North Atlantic right whale in particular—in order to elucidate key concepts in Merleau-Ponty’s ontology. This phenomenology of depth via the North Atlantic right whale is not merely of importance in understanding Merleau-Ponty, moreover, and nor is it distinct from the ethical questions raised by McWeeny’s discussion of the North Atlantic right whale’s current situation. On the contrary, McWeeny persuasively argues that “Centering the endangered bodies of North Atlantic right whales in our study of depth also encourages us to envision an environmentalist future that is grounded in our recognition of the sensuous cartography of human/nonhuman relations in which we are always already positioned participants.”

With **Sarah Hansen**’s article, “Infancy, Animality, and the Limits of Language in the Work of Giorgio Agamben,” we move from oceanic to amphibian life, and the first of two papers to pursue the theme of vulnerability. As Hansen observes, “Agamben’s recurrent figure of infantile potentiality” is the *axolotl*, or the “‘Mexican walking fish,’ an amphibian that retains juvenile characteristics (gills) even after the development of adult traits (lungs and reproductive organs). With this figure of an “eternal child,” Agamben suggests that a new relation between human and non-human animals might emerge via a new childlike experience of language.” Via the figure of the *axolotl*, Hansen’s paper entails a study not only of Giorgio Agamben’s *The Open*—a text which, she notes, has already become a classic in critical animal studies—but, more unusually, a reading of this text alongside Agamben’s writings on

infancy in works such as *Infancy and History*, *Language and Death*, *The Idea of Prose* and the *Homo Sacer* series. Hansen contrasts Agamben's discussion of the infantile with Judith Butler's and Julia Kristeva's work on vulnerability in so far as Agamben's idea of the *axolotl* is of a curiously independent infantilism, denying relations of dependency on maternal bodies that the work of these feminist scholars highlight. Like Kristeva and Butler, however, Agamben's notion of infancy also denies relations of dependency with other animals. Hansen thus critiques Agamben, arguing that "To transform relations between human and non-human animals Agamben must attend to the vulnerable, dependent, *risky* relations-with-others that condition experiences of language." While Agamben has frequently been criticized for his anthropocentrism, Hansen also observes his androcentrism, and argues that "a stronger reproach of Agamben is in order. As a new figure and experience of language, infancy does not simply forego the "question of the animal" as much as it renders a more expansive and non-violent response to that question more difficult to achieve."

Stephen Thierman's article, "The Vulnerability of Other Animals," starts with the argument that, in contrast to rationality and autonomy, vulnerability has been a neglected concept in moral philosophy precisely because philosophers have been reluctant to explore the "animal" dimensions of human existence. It is ironic, therefore, that the few philosophers who have made vulnerability central to their moral theorizing in recent years have, for the most part, either neglected to consider vulnerability as a shared condition amongst animal (and perhaps not only animal) species (Judith Butler), or, as in the cases that Thierman explores, have explicitly or implicitly denied that non-human animals are vulnerable in the same ways that humans are (Michael Kottow, Margrit Shildrik, and Bryan Turner). For Kottow, nonhuman animals are only vulnerable in the sense that they may die, but only humans are vulnerable because their pursuit of the good and their life projects may be prevented from being realized. According to Kottow, this distinction in kinds of vulnerability limits our ethical responsibilities towards nonhuman animals. For Shildrik, nonhuman animals are entirely other and thus do not invoke in us a sense of our vulnerability in the way that monsters (such as human-animal hybrids) do. Conceived as absolute difference, the animal not only falls outside the sphere of vulnerability, but possibly also of ethics on Shildrik's view. While Brian Turner attempts to ground human rights in a shared corporeal vulnerability that characterizes

all humans, when pushed to extend these rights to include other animals, he argues that other animals do not have the same rights because they are not moral agents or cannot represent themselves. As Thierman points out, Turner thus makes agency and self-representation more fundamental to his theory of rights than vulnerability, thus undermining what he has ostensibly set out to do. As Thierman argues, Turner would have done better to expand his ethics to include other animals, rather than to delimit it via an argument that contradicts the basic features of his own moral position. Offering persuasive refutations of not only Turner's but also Shildrik's and Kottow's exclusions of nonhuman animals from their accounts of vulnerability (to which he is otherwise sympathetic), Thierman draws on Jacques Derrida's late work in order to describe vulnerability as a form of passivity that characterizes all animals. Despite Jeremy Bentham's famous argument that what matters is whether an animal "*can* suffer" (as opposed to reason or talk), vulnerability is in fact the condition in which one *cannot not* suffer should suffering be inflicted on one. This powerlessness to avoid suffering is characteristic of all animal species, Thierman argues, even if some are more vulnerable than others both within the human species and across species. Despite this status as a non-power or an inability, Thierman insists that vulnerability not be seen in an entirely negative light, but that it be seen as an aspect of the animal condition that may be a resource for ethical response. Thierman concludes his article with an account and endorsement of Ralph Acampora's work on symphysics. Symphysics, Thierman explains, "is felt in the body as an awareness of the vulnerability that I share with an embodied other." With this notion, Thierman suggests that Acampora has developed an ethics of corporeal vulnerability that—unlike those of Kottow, Shildrik and Turner—accounts for our embodied recognition of the vulnerability of other animals.

Like Thierman, **Rebecca Tuvel** takes inspiration from Derrida's "The Animal that Therefore I am (More to Follow)" in her contribution to this issue. In "'Veil of Shame': Derrida, Sarah Bartmann and Animality," Tuvel deftly weaves the themes of nakedness and shame through a sophisticated analysis of animality and oppression: Jacques Derrida's shame as he stands naked before the gaze of his cat, the shame of Adam and Eve over their nakedness in the Garden of Eden, the supposed shamelessness of both naked nonhuman animals and naked non-European humans, and the self-serving truths that a white, masculine science seeks in their undress.

Working through these narratives, Tuvel takes up Derrida's argument that the human-animal binary is fundamental and pervasive, preceding us, and that our status as followers of the animal defines our self-understandings, our ontologies of our selves (hence Derrida's play on "je suis"). Combining Derrida's insights with those of feminist critical race and critical animal theorists, Tuvel argues that not only does the animal precede and constitute us, but so also does the oppression of other animals precede and shape the various forms of human oppression. The human-animal divide and speciesist oppression are thus not just another dichotomy that we need to deconstruct or another form of oppression to which we must be attuned, but, in Tuvel's words, are "the generative site for the deployment of ever new and mutating strategies of oppression." Consequently, Tuvel argues that "critical gender, sex and race theory *must* register the animal-human dichotomy as a *fundamental driving mechanism* inherent in raced, sexed and colonial oppression, and therefore one that must be rigorously challenged if we wish to combat varying modes of persecution." Tuvel illustrates these claims through her sustained analysis of the case of Sarah Bartmann, the so-called "Hottentot Venus." The obviously racist and sexist oppression of Sarah Bartmann was, Tuvel convincingly shows, inextricably bound up with and reliant upon oppressive views of animality and speciesist forms of thought. Animalization was not just one of the ways in which Bartmann was oppressed, Tuvel demonstrates, but "shaped Bartmann's racial body, her status as part of the 'savage,' colonial world versus the 'civilized' world, and her sexuality all at once." Much as philosopher Ladelle McWhorter has recently argued that sexual oppression in the U.S. *is* racist oppression, so Tuvel shows that sexual and racial oppression *are* speciesist oppressions. Tuvel thus concludes that resistance to all forms of oppression must entail our thinking "beyond, between and within" the human-animal binary—which seems like an excellent last word for the article section of this special issue.

Two thought-provoking Book Reviews complete this Special Issue. The first of these is written by **Matt Applegate** and addresses Derrida's *The Beast and the Sovereign Volume 1*. The second review is provided by **Greg Pollack** and focuses on Cary Wolfe's 2009 book *What is Posthumanism?*