

EXTENDED ESSAY

The Love Whose Name Cannot be Spoken: Queering the Human-Animal Bond¹

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To the animals who accepted my
love,
for their love,
with love.

My own suspicion is that the universe is not only queerer than we suppose,
but queerer than we *can* suppose.
J.B.S. Haldane

Abstract

The hermeneutic category of queer has established itself as a powerful tool of social criticism and political action. Questioning and crossing identitarian barriers, and drawing attention to the ways to which non-normative identities are repressed by mainstream culture is queer's central theoretical vocation. This paper aims to extend its application by considering the case of humans who cross the most entrenched identitarian barrier upheld by all human societies and in the whole course of history by identifying prioritarily with non-human animals. The paper starts with a critique of the language in which the oppressive relationship of our species to other ones is encoded, examines the consequences of this oppression for both human and animal identity, highlights its function as the hidden foundation of human intraspecific violence, and closes by showing the deep consonance between the two most radical proposals in the fields of queer and animal rights respectively, Edelman's critique of "reproductive futurism" and the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement.

1 The first part of the title is an allusion to "the love that dare not speak its name", the last line of the poem "Two Loves" by Lord Alfred Douglas, renowned - more than for its literary merits - for having been quoted during the trial of Oscar Wilde; the phrase has always been interpreted as a reference to same-sex love.

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1. Introduction

Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. (Halperin 1995 62)

What makes queer so productive as a hermeneutical category is its structural elasticity, its definitional indeterminacy:

Queer [...] does not designate a class of already objectified pathologies or perversions; rather, it describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance. (Halperin 1995 62)

Because of its fluid nature, of its being unaligned with any specific identity category, queer has the potential to subvert accepted ways of thinking on any issue. Subversion, as well as fluidity, is definitory of queer; indeed, its fluidity is not an end in itself, but simply the most effective and aesthetically fulfilling means to accomplish the political and metaphysical task of permanent and neverending subversion.

The main analytic and hermeneutic device queer uses in its subversive enterprise is denaturalization, a radical and ruthless ability and willingness to question all assumptions of individual and social identity: queer signifies “a resistance to regimes of the normal” (Warner 1993 xxvi), it “mark[s] a flexible space for the expression of all aspects of non- (anti-, contra-) straight cultural production and reception” (Doty 1993 3). And what makes it so politically, as well as intellectually, significant (and what I personally like most about it) is that “almost everything that can be called queer theory has been radically anticipatory, trying to bring a world into being” (Berlant & Warner 1995 344).

The aim of this paper is to present a radically anticipatory attempt at denaturalization, a systematic questioning of one of the most basic and most pervasive assumptions on which society, with all its potential for hegemony and repression, rests, and which is, indeed, basic to the very shape of our shared life on this planet: that of the “natural” divide between humans and animals.

Such an endeavour is not peripherally related to the central vocation of queer. Historically, queer's primary aim has been to draw attention to incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire, and to question the dominant model of heterosexuality, demonstrating the impossibility of any "natural" sexuality, and calling into question even such apparently unproblematic terms as "man" and "woman". Theoretically, though, it is vital to note that queer is about sex only incidentally: the real topic of its polymorphously transgressive reflections is identity; the fundamental – and most productive – idea in queer (from Butler 1990 onwards) is that identity is not an essence but a performance, exacted through a pervasive matrix of assumptions, inscriptions and expectations, and that subjects themselves, far from building the reassuringly solid foundation of a realist ontology, only come into being as products of performances. The central place of desire in queer reflection has much to do with the centrality of desire as a fundamental mode of relation, and consequently as a major way that identity is shaped, enacted and disciplined: to liberate desire means to liberate identity, to open it up to new possibilities of performance and to open the world up to their subversive implications: queer does not simply maintain that it is OK to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (this is a given of progressive common sense, about the least queer position imaginable...) but states that *any* construction of identity (including LGBT ones) is a performance constituting a subject which does not "exist" prior to it, and encourages to bring into being (both as objects of desire, of fantasy and of theoretical reflection and as concrete existential and political possibilities) alternative modes of performance; accordingly, the point of a queer critique of human-animal relations is not simply to assert animal rights (even though this is sacrosanct, and what matters most to me not only as a theoretician but as an activist and as a person), but to investigate the performative consequences of the human/animal binary in a vast array of identities, including those of oppressors.¹

A queer analysis of human-animal relations can easily point to incoherencies which question the stability of taken-for-granted relations between species, with the limits they impose on feelings (of proximity, affection, empathy...), on political consciousness (of the routine oppression of other species by our own) and, consequently, on action (above all on the refusal to further participate in this

oppression). In the case of animal queer, the dominant model to be questioned is of course the assumption of a “natural divide between species”. Just as heteronormativity grotesquely maintains that any member of the “opposite sex” is more appropriate, suitable and attractive as a sexual partner than any member of one’s own, humanormativity maintains that *all* members of one species (*homo sapiens*) have more in common with one another than any of them can have with any member of any other species. Demonstrating the fraudulent basis of the obligatory assumption of an aprioristic and unconditional “natural” similarity and solidarity among humans, and exposing the violent and manipulative means which are routinely employed to enforce it, a queer analysis of human-animal relations cannot but end up calling into question even such apparently unproblematic terms as “human” and “animal” and, consequently, subjecting the specular identities they engender, and the performances they exact, to a radical critique.

It is my conviction that a queer perspective on animal issues has the potential to show them to be considerably broader and more ramified (and therefore both more interesting intellectually and more relevant politically) than they are usually assumed to be, even by people sympathetic to, or engaged in, animal rights. Accordingly, the issues I will address in what follows, however diverse they might appear, are really parts of a single unitary argument; it might be useful to briefly sketch the shape that it will take here.

In section 2 (“Animal Queer”) the queering of the human-animal barrier in some humans’ identities and emotions builds the starting point for a connection between queer theory and animal issues.

Conceptualizing species identity as the product of a performance makes Butler’s analysis of gender immediately relevant to human-animal issues. Section 3 (“Performing mastery”) explores both the theoretical side of the issue (starting with a critique of the human/animal binary, and methodically highlighting the applicability of Butler’s seminal findings to animal queer), and one of its most far-reaching practical aspects: the performance of mastery as one of the foundational components of human identity, constituted in opposition to animal ones.

In the performance of human “identity”, animals are routinely used to bring into existence in every human society a space for a class of sentient beings to which no rights are ascribed, and for a form of murder which escapes both sanction and notice. Section 4 (“Performing ‘dehumanization’”) assesses the momentous implications of this fact by referring to Philip Zimbardo’s singling out of “dehumanization” as the core process of the psychological mechanism of violence. Human-animal relations are the training ground for dehumanization, and the practice of violence that humans, by virtue of the performance of human identity which is exacted from them, get in their relations with animals is a precondition for the possibility of every other form of violence.

The subversive vocation of animal queer hinges on its replacing sameness with otherness as the criterion of inclusion; because it is defined by love for the irreducible, unassimilable *other*, radicalism is a constitutive aspect of animal queer. Section 5 (“The anti-Child”) broadens the theoretical argument for animal queer by highlighting the deep consonance between one of the most radical proposals to come out of queer critique, Lee Edelman’s denouncing of heteronormativity’s narcissistic investment in the future, and on children as its symbols, and an equally radical vision of animal queer utopia, that of the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement.

The Conclusions (“Species Trouble”) focus on the potential of animal queer to resolve the dichotomy between a theory of utopian radicalism and a politics focused on the struggle for rights: affirming animal rights is only possible within a radical framework aiming to subvert the most entrenched assumptions of human culture.

2. Animal Queer

It is morning; slowly, I crawl back from sleep to consciousness. The perception which leads me back from dreams to the waking world is her smell, which has been enveloping and soothing me all through the night. I reach out to stroke her head, resting next to mine on the pillow, and extend my other arm to hug her. She is completely relaxed and trusting. Her small body yields to my touch, and she moves further against me, to nestle under my arm. I bury my face in her fur, gratefully breathe in her warmth and whisper “I love you.”

T'aimer dans la plus totale dérégulation, c'est éprouver soudain ton étrangeté absolue, je te désire car ton corps m'étonne, ses aspects les plus usuels me deviennent des météores lointains dont la configuration bouleverse. Je te convoite car nous n'avons rien de commun. (Bruckner & Finkielkraut 1977 244)ⁱⁱ

I will start by considering a fact which has so far inexplicably escaped the attention of queer theory. Some humans' most primitive instinct, deepest need and most heartfelt conviction is to identify prioritarily with non-human animals, to form their most lasting and most vital bonds with non-human animals and to empathize with and support non-human animals in preference to human ones. These people dare (or cannot help but) cross the most stable and most entrenched barrier regulating the flow of emotions towards socially sanctioned objects in all human cultures and societies and in the whole course of documented human history; by all definitions of the word, this makes them queer.ⁱⁱⁱ What makes them even queerer is the repression, abuse and oppression to which they, as humans who, in feeling, political consciousness and action, dare to cross the boundary separating their species from other ones, are ruthlessly and systematically subjected. Human love for animals is ridiculed, marginalized, despised and repressed with a violence that easily escalates to murder even more than same-sex love between humans in the most homophobic societies. Modes of political consciousness which question the legitimacy of the routine and murderous oppression of other species by our own are delegitimized as political positions and denied hearing in the political arena. Political action aimed at correcting, or at least at granting visibility to, the gratuitous cruelty of human behaviour towards animals is dismissed as extremist, extravagant, irrelevant or crazy.^{iv} In what follows I will use the term "animal queer" to refer to the cluster of perceptions, feelings, modes of consciousness, actions and theoretical orientations which are defined by a prioritary emotional and existential commitment to empathy with non-human animals; even though they may never have heard of queer, humans who identify prioritarily with non-humans, who make this identification the core of their perceptual, emotional, cognitive, philosophical and political identity, and who maintain it in the face of continuous and violent societal disapproval and sanction "font du queer sans le savoir"^v and, in so doing, show the category of queer to be productive, both

existentially and hermeneutically, far beyond what its original proponents ever envisioned.

It is probably unnecessary in this context to point out that in animal queer genital activity is not the point;^{vi} after all,

the point of queer critique is to develop critical frameworks that can disrupt and rewrite the countless ways the human potential for sensual pleasure is socially produced as sex [...]. (Hennessy 1994 106)

Much of what theorists of lesbian feminism have said about love between women is relevant to animal queer:

Love between women has been primarily a sexual phenomenon only in male fantasy literature. ‘Lesbian’ describes a relationship in which two women’s strongest emotions and affections are directed towards each other. Sexual contact may be a part of the relationship to a greater or lesser degree, or it may be entirely absent. By preference the two women spend most of their time together and share most aspects of their lives with each other. (Faderman 1985 17-18)

Like lesbian feminism, animal queer is about political choice and emotional preference much more than about what heteronormativity construes as “sex”.^{vii} Like lesbian feminism, animal queer, by the simple fact of its existence, can question and jeopardize the deepest foundations of society, can expose humanormativity and its multiple facets of more or less subtle or violent repressions for the fraud that it is. This is the reason why it must not and cannot be allowed to speak, to be acknowledged, to exist.

The repression of animal queer is even more thorough and systematic than the repression of other forms of queer. One important aspect of this repression should be dealt with at the outset, because of its relevance to the very possibility of a queer analysis of the human-animal relationship: the fact that language does not allow for the distinction between sex and gender to be translated into human-animal terms. An individual belonging to the human species is *assumed*, by the way language works, to identify primarily with the human species, to feel emotions and loyalties coherent with this identification, and to act accordingly. The possibility of queering the divide

between the sexes is often referred to, at least with terms of abuse; the possibility of queering the divide between our species and the others is not even acknowledged linguistically. I do not think queer theory has ever confronted a more entrenched and more hegemonic case of naturalization, which not only deproblematizes certain discourses, identities and lifestyles but makes alternative ones not simply dangerous or stigmatized but unthinkable: throughout human history social discourse about the human-animal bond has been so repressive that it has systematically failed to provide for the possibility of expressing a fracture between the equivalents of sex and gender in terms of species. As far as species is concerned, biology is automatically assumed to be destiny; not only in terms of genetics and anatomy but in terms of existential, ethical, political and emotional possibilities. What Butler writes about gender makes eminent sense in this context; one need only replace the word “gender” with “species”:

The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of “identities” cannot “exist” – that is those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which practices of desire do not “follow” from sex or gender. “Follow” in this context is a political relation of entailment instituted by the cultural laws that establish and regulate the shape and meaning of sexuality. (Butler 1990 24)

This is the same matrix which requires that certain kinds of political, ideological and emotional alignment which do not follow the lines separating the species cannot exist: compassion for human suffering can and should lead to political action; compassion for animal suffering must not; rape, as something that one does to another’s body without their consent, must be condemned and prosecuted; meat-eating, which can be defined in exactly the same terms,^{viii} must continue. One must not feel for any animal more than one feels for the even most distant or hateful “fellow human”. Everything which makes human society human and dictates what humans are and how they must live together conspires to make animal queer “the love which cannot speak its name”.

In order not to solve this problem (which, like all systemic problems, can only be solved by a shift in collective awareness and a corresponding momentous change in social practices), but to make it visible, and therefore accessible as a topic for discussion, I would like to propose that the terms “biological species” and “species identity” be used as analogues to “sex” and “gender” respectively in animal queer

discourse. Accordingly, my biological species is human, but my species identity leads me to identify with the species that the species I biologically belong to oppresses, tortures and murders, much like a human can be biologically male but identify with any of a number of different genders, and loathe and fight their oppression by normal heterosexual discourse and by some other humans with whom he may share his sex.

That the differentiation between biological species and species identity is far from specious, but offers a productive way to analyze phenomena that would otherwise defy awareness and description, is demonstrated by the fact that it can also be observed in nonhuman animals. The primates raised by human families in cross-fostering experiments on the acquisition of language identified with the human species and, when brought into contact with their biological conspecifics, often expressed – linguistically! – their disgust and dismay (Fouts 1997 122). It is interesting to note that many of these persons, who had not only developed an identification with our species and with many of the features of the culture in which they had been raised, but an impressive mastery of human language, were later sold to laboratories to be subjected to painful, invasive and ultimately deadly experiments.^{ix}

One of the assumptions of queer is that identification and desire can cross the societal boundaries separating sexes, genders and sexual definitions, and that, indeed, these boundaries have been set up largely to tame and to segregate love and empathy, to enforce a conformity of emotion resulting in a conformity of behaviour. Up to now, queer studies have neglected one fundamental boundary which is enforced in an even more totalitarian way than any with which queer critique has dealt with so far, but which is nevertheless crossed every day by currents of empathy, fondness and love: the boundary separating humans from animals.

The nature of the transgression reveals the nature of the boundary: both have to do primarily and fundamentally with emotion. What we now know about empathy and the neural structures underlying it^x makes it clear that we:

feel the feelings of other animals. [...] As I watch an animal, I'm not reaching for the closest word to describe behavior I see; I'm feeling the emotion directly, without words, or even a full, conscious understanding of the animal's actions. [...] My feelings actually know what's going on

inside the animal, and this emotional empathy seems to be innate.
(Bekoff & Goodall, 2007 128)

This is the experience that Derrida refers to when he writes

the response to the question "can they suffer?" leaves no doubt. In fact it has never left any room for doubt; that is why the experience that we have of it is not even indubitable; it precedes the indubitable, it is older than it. (Derrida 1999 p. 396)

From earliest infancy, we are taught to ignore, repress and ridicule this "experience [that] precedes the indubitable", this "direct[...]" "feeling", which is real and evident before and beyond consciousness and language, and as immediate and trustworthy as any we will ever have access to in our lives. From earliest infancy, we are taught to discount both our own feelings for animals and the feelings of animals themselves. Learning to eat what in most of the world is considered a "normal" diet implies being indoctrinated in an attitude of callousness towards physical and psychological torture, pain, fear and ultimately murder; it implies repressing feelings of empathy, of compassion, of justice and protectiveness for innocent and weaker beings.

Like transgressive feelings of same-sex love, transgressive feelings of empathy and affection towards animals are initially repressed through ridicule; but sometimes ridicule is not enough. The repression of "unnatural" feelings for animals and the enforcement of the "natural" divide separating the species which has the right to kill from those which exist to be killed^{xi} can take a form as extreme as any that have been devised in the plurimillenary history of repression of human-to-human queer love: that of having the transgressor participate in the ritual murder of the object of her "unnatural" affection. Innumerable children have been served their pet lamb or duck for dinner, or have been forced to abandon their puppy or kitten at the beginning of the holiday season. A few have reacted with permanent shock and horror;^{xii} most have yielded to societal pressure, and have learned to regard their most authentic and deepest emotions as nothing more than childish "squeamishness". In all its horror, this is, in the experience of many of us, the moment in which our identity is founded and constructed as "human" in contrast to the "non-human". And the "non-human", embodied in the corpse, maimed beyond recognition, of the being we loved the most,

is the locus of a multitude of meanings: it is the place where an absolute and capricious power may be wielded, where the suffering and the life of others do not count, where no other subjects can exist; it is the Sadean universe: a place of unconditional superiority which is inaccessible to discussion and does not need to be argued for or demonstrated, but which will be reaffirmed in the face of any kind or amount of contrary evidence, always through the same means: through violence and murder.

Both in literature and in personal reminiscences, I have repeatedly come across memories of this horrific initiation ritual into the primacy of the bond between humans and into the need to repress all feelings that threaten that bond by transgressing the boundary between species; one of its most popular embodiments is to be found in a text which enjoyed considerable popularity in the middle of the 20th century, *The Yearling*, a novel by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1939 and in 1946 was made into an MGM film which was distributed worldwide. It is the story of a Florida boy and his pet deer, whom he is forced to shoot when the deer grows up and threatens to eat the family's crop. The book's title refers not only to the murdered creature, but to his human companion; it is clear from the story that it is through the killing of his nonhuman friend that the protagonist makes the transition from "yearling" to full member of human society, defined by the willingness and ability to kill beings of other species to demonstrate his loyalty to his own. The way the murder is accomplished in the book is in itself telling: the protagonist's father commands him to kill his friend; when the boy does not comply, his mother is ordered to do so instead, but she, however willing, is not technically up to the task and only wounds the creature horribly; the boy finally ends what his mother had begun. The realignment of transgressive boundaries and the repression of "unnatural" emotions takes place under the auspices of the father, who sanctions and directs the use of violence; the recourse to violence itself is motivated and justified by the economic good of the group, and sharply differentiates between feminine and masculine roles: the mother is supposed to approve of the killing but should ideally not take part in it (and is shown to be incompetent when she does), while the young son must perform it himself to show, paradoxically, both his achievement of virile maturity and his willingness and ability to submit to his father's orders.

3. Performing mastery

[T]he human is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures, that are, strictly speaking, refused the possibility of cultural articulation. Hence, it is not enough to claim that human subjects are constructed, for the construction of the human is a differential operation that produces the more and the less “human”, the inhuman, the humanly unthinkable. These excluded sites come to bound the “human” as its constitutive outside, and to haunt those boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and rearticulation. (Butler 1993 8)

Traumatic experiences are not always necessary to make love and empathy towards non-human animals unthinkable and unfeeling. Social discourse on animals shapes them into the Jungian shadow of humans; this starts with names of other species used as terms of abuse, but actually permeates all facets and modes of human self-perception.^{xiii}

Men would be first and foremost those living creatures who have given themselves the word that enables them to speak of the animal with a single voice and to designate it as the single being that remains without a response, without a word with which to respond.

That wrong was committed long ago and with long-term consequences. It derives from this word or rather it comes together in this word *animal* that men have given themselves at the origin of humanity and that they have given themselves in order to identify themselves, in order to recognize themselves, with a view to being what they say they are, namely men, capable of replying and responding in the name of men. (Derrida 1999 400)

Identity is a process of identification both with and against: we recognize in ourselves what we want to identify with and disacknowledge whatever we do not want to identify with, projecting it onto the other. Just like gender identities, the respective identities of human and nonhuman animals are created, maintained and reinforced by a continuous and complex performance, equivalent, in its omnipresence as in its repressive power, to that which gives rise to gender:

[G]ender [is] the disciplinary production of the figures of fantasy through the play of presence and absence on the body's surface, the construction of the gendered body through a series of exclusion and denials, signifying absences. [...] The disciplinary production of gender effects a false stabilization of gender in the interest of the heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domain. The construction of coherence conceals the gender discontinuities that run rampant within [...], contexts in which gender does not necessarily follow from sex and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender – indeed, where none of these dimensions of significant corporeality express or reflect one another. (Butler 1990 184-185)

Species identity is socially produced and stabilized in the same way, and conceals and represses the same things. Innumerable cultural practices have as their purpose the production of the minds and bodies of animals in such a way as to reinforce zoophobic stereotypes: it is readily apparent that what we take to be the “nature” or “essence” of farm animals is the product of the systematic violence inherent in industrial agriculture and mass slaughtering,^{xiv} and that the “essence” of laboratory animals is produced through the mind- and body-destroying practices^{xv} of lifelong imprisonment and torture.^{xvi}

Claiming that species identity is, like gender, the product of a performance is not enough: the manner and mechanisms of the performance must be investigated. As in all queer analysis, in animal queer too one major issue is that of how language produces the basic fictitious constructions that bring into being and support regimes of power.

“This must be the wood,” she said thoughtfully to herself. “where things have no names. I wonder what’ll become of *my* name when I go in? [...] But then the fun would be, trying to find the creature that had got my old name! [...] –just fancy calling everything that you met ‘Alice’ till one of them answered! Only they wouldn’t answer at all, if they were wise.” [...]

Just then a Fawn came wandering by: it looked at Alice with its large gentle eyes, but didn’t seem at all frightened. “Here then! Here then!” Alice said, as she held out her hand and tried to stroke it; but it only started back a little, and then stood looking at her again.

“What do you call yourself?” the Fawn said at last. Such a soft sweet voice it had!

“I wish I knew!” thought poor Alice. She answered, rather sadly, “Nothing, just now.”
“Think again” it said: “that won’t do.”

Alice thought, but nothing came of it. “Please, would you tell me what *you* call yourself?” she said timidly. “I think that might help a little.”
“I’ll tell you if you come a little further on,” the Fawn said. “I can’t remember here.”

So they walked on together through the wood, Alice with her arms clasped lovingly around the soft neck of the Fawn, till they came out into another open field, and there the Fawn gave a sudden bound into the air, and shook itself free from Alice’s arm. “I’m a Fawn!” it cried in a voice of delight. “And dear me! you’re a human child!” A sudden look of alarm came into its beautiful brown eyes, and in another moment it had darted away at full speed.

Alice stood looking after it, almost ready to cry with vexation at having lost her dear little fellow-traveller so suddenly. “However, I know my name now.” she said: “that’s *some* comfort. Alice–Alice–I won’t forget it again. [...] (Carroll 1871, chapter 3)

This excerpt from a children’s book from almost 150 years ago says it all: the dependence of humans on animals for their self-definition (“Please, would you tell me what *you* call yourself? [...] I think that might help a little”), the suffering which this definition inflicts on humans, as well as animals (“just fancy calling everything that you met ‘Alice’ till one of them answered! Only they wouldn’t answer at all, if they were wise”), the frustration and despair of humans at the impossibility of forging authentic bonds with “animals” (“Alice stood looking after it, almost ready to cry with vexation at having lost her dear little fellow-traveller so suddenly”), and the way language offers an empty consolation, which we feel compelled to hang on to nevertheless (“However, I know my name now [...] that’s *some* comfort. Alice – Alice – I won’t forget it again. [...])”, even though it makes a more meaningful, fuller life impossible.^{xvii}

Carroll’s fleeting but haunting portrayal of life and love in the “wood where things have no name” leads us to investigate what things are like in the rest of the world, where things do have names. More specifically, it leads us to an analysis of the words “human” and “animal”, of the way they work and of the harm they do.

We should start with a simple observation. The claustrophobic limitation to the number of genders which the mainstream discourse on sexuality can admit of has some flimsy appearance of legitimacy in the binary distinction between the sexes; no such excuse exists for the binary division between “humans” and “animals”. We routinely refer to “animals” without stopping to consider why the label “animal” is considered appropriate for a given being, through what means and to what ends it is used, and whether indeed it means anything at all.

[A]nimal, what a word! Animal is a word that men have given themselves the right to give. These humans are found giving it to themselves, this word, but as if they had received it as an inheritance. They have given themselves the word in order to corral a large number of living beings within a single concept: “the Animal”, they say. And they have given themselves this word, at the same time according themselves, reserving for them, for humans, the right to the word, the name, the verb, the attribute, to a language of words, in short to the very thing that the others in question would be deprived of, those that are corralled within the grand territory of the beasts: the Animal. (Derrida 1999 400)

I am obviously not claiming that there are no boundaries among different animal species. A human is not a dog; a dog is not a shrimp; a shrimp is not a bat; a bat is not an oyster; an oyster is not a chimpanzee. But that dogs, shrimps, bats, oysters and chimpanzees should be lumped together on one side of a line dividing them from humans is untenable by everything we today know about physiology, neurology, ethology and psychology.^{xviii} Analogously, there are differences between most males and most females of our species; but we can – and should – question why just those differences are socially and politically so important, and get to be the traits that humans are defined by.

[O]ne will never have the right to take animals to be the species of a kind that would be named the Animal, or animal in general. Whenever “one” says, “the Animal”, each time a philosopher, or anyone else says, “the Animal” in the singular and without further ado, claiming thus to designate every living thing that is held not to be man (man as rational animal, man as political animal, speaking animal, zoon logon echon, man who says “I” and takes himself to be the subject of a statement that he proffers on the subject of the said animal, and so on), each time the subject of that statement, this “one”, this “I” does that he utters an asinarity [bêtise]. (Derrida 1999, 399)

There is no animal in the general singular, separated from man by a single indivisible limit. We have to envisage the existence of "living creatures" whose plurality cannot be assembled within the single figure of an

animality that is simply opposed to humanity. [...] Among nonhumans and separate from nonhumans there is an immense multiplicity of other living things that cannot in any way be homogenized, except by means of violence and willful ignorance, within the category of what is called the animal or animality in general. (Derrida 1999 415-416)

Biological differences are not – are never – the point: the point are the discursive and institutional conditions under which some biological differences become social and political differences which are used to establish boundaries, to exclude, to oppress, to maim, torture and murder.^{xix} When people bring up the differences between humans and so-called animals they are not really referring to what the discourse of science has ascertained about animals over the last couple of hundred years; they are pointing to social institutions whose sole purpose is to discursively enforce a repressive norm. Why respectively the biological sex of the body and the species an individual belongs to should be so salient and primary are the questions a queer perspective on gender and on species should be asking. The human/animal category is the instrument for the imposition of a norm, not a neutral description of biological facts.

Speciesism is made unthinkingly compulsory and naturalized by regulating species as a binary relation in which the only two really meaningful and consequential terms are “human” and “non-human”; just as in normative heterosexuality the differentiation between male and female is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire, which provides it with an indispensable pragmatic, emotional and political foundation, the practices regulating human-animal relations within the framework of speciesism are the foundation of the fraudulent and untenable binary differentiation between humans and “animals”. This act of differentiation results in a hypostatizing of each term, in a seemingly unshakeable coherence of biological data, cultural constructions and emotions, feelings and attitudes analogous to the “internal coherence of sex, gender and desire” (Butler 1990 31) in naturalized heterosexuality.

The human-animal norm defines an identity for both humans and animals. It defines what we as humans can and should be, do, feel and think; it defines the kinds of relationships we can and cannot have with other humans and with “animals”. As such, even though countless billions of animals are murdered every year because of its effects, it oppresses humans as well as animals.

As Foucault points out (Foucault 1975), systems of power *produce* the subjects they subsequently come to represent. This process of production is in no way neutral: it has legitimating and exclusionary aims, but most of all its end is to make these aims impossible to acknowledge by anyone residing and thinking *within* the system. In order to be unfailingly effective, both legitimation and exclusion have to be naturalized and to become inaccessible not so much to criticism as to simple recognition. By relegating the conceptual, emotional, social and political operations which establish the binary frame of “human vs. animal” in the prediscursive domain, the stability of this frame, and of the system of oppression which it helps found, is maintained. Just as the “production of sex as the prediscursive ought to be understood as the effect of the apparatus of cultural construction designated by *gender*” (Butler 1990 10), the production of biological species as the prediscursive ought to be understood as a major, and pernicious, effect of the cultural construction we have chosen to designate as *species identity*.

In the construction of gender through the performance of the gendered body,

coherence is desired, wished for, idealized, and [...] this idealization is the effect of a corporeal signification. [...] 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 185)

We can witness the operations of the same process in the construction of an animal identity through the performances which are violently enforced on animal bodies. But what is most interesting to an audience biased towards humans and their rights are the “punitive consequences” that haunt the performance of *human* species identity, as well as gender, “as a strategy of survival within compulsory systems”: just as “[d]iscrete genders are part of what ‘humanizes’ individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right” (Butler 1990 190) we punish ruthlessly and savagely those humans who fail to convincingly perform the right species identity: just as “gender is a kind of persistent impersonation which passes as the real” (Butler 1990 XXXI); the “persistent impersonation” which

we call being “human” (as opposed to “animal”) permeates every facet of our being, but its most devastating consequences, as well as the most serious punishments for transgressions, have to do with emotional, ethical and political attitudes. As any vegetarian who ever tried to dine in the company of meat-eating acquaintances can attest, humans objecting to the murder of animals are labelled as “squeamish”, “childish” or “weird”; the minimal existing legislation on animal welfare is routinely disregarded, and pressure groups trying to ensure that it be enforced are ridiculed and marginalized;^{xx} and even the most private and least threatening forms of the human-animal bond are pushed firmly beyond the limit of social acceptance: anyone who lost a companion animal knows that the grief is made more bitter and unbearable by the need to maintain an unobjectionable public façade, since its emotional impact cannot be shared with anyone who is not herself an animal queer.^{xxi}

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 95)

As we have just seen, at the heart of the performance through which human subjects are constituted are prohibitions and taboos regarding the most positive emotions, and the most enlightened ethical attitudes: compassion, empathy, protection, altruistic justice, love. All of these are radically repressed “with the threat of ostracism and even death” when they are felt for objects which fall outside the boundaries of the social circulation of emotion, and thus implicitly question and threaten those boundaries. And the reason is that, like all forms of identity, our human species identity is flimsy and precarious but must *appear* to be the solid foundation of a stable order, and therefore the continuous and painstaking work on the performance needed to establish it must be hidden from thought and sight:

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: 25)

Our “humanity”, as well as the “animality” of animals, is a performance forced on unwilling actors, kept up by what we as humans do to differentiate ourselves from animals, and by what we compel animals to do in order to keep them as radically separate as we can from us. That the animals are unwilling is evident from the physical means of coercion, and the violence up to and including murder, that are used to exact the performance from them; but we humans are no less unwilling. Most of us have simply forgotten what we felt.^{xxii} getting back in touch with our own emotions is the first step towards deconstruction of the binary model of species relationship and towards a change in the relations between our species and other ones.

What Butler writes about the suspect naturalness of sex and gender is just as true of what most of us take to be most natural about ourselves: our prized “humanity”:

a sedimentation of gender norms produces the peculiar phenomenon of a “natural sex” or a “real woman” or any number of prevalent social fictions, and [...] this is a sedimentation that over time has produced a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form, appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes existing in a binary relationship to one another. [...] As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and a reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. (Butler 1990 191).

Once we start looking at things this way, the “animality” of animals and our own “humanity” crumble beneath our feet:

If gender [species identity] attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured. (Butler 1990 192).

Species identity too, as well as gender,

ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender [species identity] is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender [species identity] is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered [possessing a species identity] self. This formulation moves the conception of gender [species identity] off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender [species identity] as a constituted *social temporality*. (Butler 1990 190)

And it takes only the willingness to become conscious of the cumulative effects of innumerable, daily acts of repression, of the “gestures, movements and styles of various kinds” which from the day of our birth have been disfiguring not only our “bodies” but our minds, emotions and souls, shaping our way of performing our humanity so as to appear as different as possible from animals, to realize that humanity, “is also a norm than can never be fully internalized; the ‘internal’ is a surface signification, and gender norms are finally phantasmatic, impossible to embody” (Butler 192). The reality of species identity, like that of gender, “is created through sustained social performances”:

the very notions of an essential sex and of a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender’s performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality” (Butler 1990 192-3).

And what Butler writes of gender is just as true of species identity, and of its relationship to the compulsory humannormativity from which the core script of our performances is determined, and which, accordingly, most of us would not, and cannot, think of questioning.

An enlightening contribution towards a genealogical critique of the human-animal identity category, investigating the political stakes in designating as an *origin* and

cause those identity categories that are in fact the *effects* of institutions, practices, discourses with definite and discernible aims, is offered by Plumwood's *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Plumwood's ecofeminist analysis of the relationship between humans and nature provides a detailed and useful description of the means and techniques employed to keep up this performance and is therefore profoundly relevant to animal queer. At the root of ecofeminism is the understanding that the many systems of oppression are mutually reinforcing. Building on the socialist feminist insight that racism, classism, and sexism are interconnected, ecofeminism recognizes additional similarities between those forms of human oppression and the oppressive structures of human "mastery of nature", which Plumwood defines as "seeing the other as radically separate and inferior, the background to the self as foreground, as one whose existence is secondary, derivative or peripheral to that of the self or center, and whose agency is denied or minimized" (Plumwood 1993 9). But the very possibility of this relationship depends on a complex performance, through which both the master and his "other" are compelled to adopt opposite and complementary identities which create, shape and reinforce it.

In Western culture, male oppression of women, colonialist oppression of native peoples and human oppression of nature are justified on the same basis: the construction of the dominant human male as a self fundamentally defined by the property of reason, and the construction of reason as definitionally opposed to nature and all that is associated with nature, including women and native peoples, the body, emotions, and reproduction. Plumwood's argument, which was originally formulated about nature in general, is evidently applicable to animals; in particular, her description of the conceptual and cultural devices that make mastery possible are especially enlightening:

1. *Backgrounding*: the master's dependency on the other is denied and made imperceptible;
2. *Radical exclusion*: differences between the master and the other are highlighted and magnified while shared qualities are minimized; value judgments are passed on all differences: all qualities possessed by the master are positive, while all qualities possessed by the other are either negative or not acknowledged;

3. *Incorporation*: the master embodies the norm against which the other is to be measured; the other is defined in terms of how well she approximates the master;
4. *Instrumentalism*: the other is an instrument for the master, does not have ends or interests of her own; her existence is justified by her being a resource for the master;
5. *Homogenization*: the class of the others is represented and perceived as homogeneous: all differences among various groups and individuals are neglected in favour of the only significant difference, that between the master and the other. By reinforcing the separation between the category of master and the category of other, this turns the two categories into natural categories. (Plumwood 1993 42-56).

4. Performing “dehumanization”

Der Augenblick des *Überlebens* ist der Augenblick der Macht. Der Schrecken über den Anblick des Todes löst sich in Befriedigung auf, denn man ist nicht selbst der Tote. Dieser liegt, der Überlebende steht. Es ist so, als wäre ein Kampf vorausgegangen und als hätte man den Toten selbst gefällt. Im Überleben ist jeder des anderen Feind [...]. [...]

Die niedrigste Form des Überlebens ist die des *Tötens*. So wie man das Tier getötet hat, von dem man sich nährt, so wie es vor einem wehrlos daliegt, und man kann es in Stücke schneiden und verteilen, als Beute, die man sich und den Seinen einverleibt, so will man auch den Menschen Töten, der einem im Wege ist, der sich einem entgegenstellt, der aufrecht als Feind vor einem dasteht. Man will ihn fällen, um zu fühlen, daß man noch da ist und er nicht mehr. (Canetti 1960 249)^{xxiii}

Plumwood’s analysis of the discursive production of mastery shows how the ostensibly “natural” and “neutral” facts of mainstream discourse about animals are produced, with flimsy support from various scientific discourses, to serve very definite political and social interests. The “scientific” “facts” routinely invoked in

zoophobic arguments have the function of allowing the discourse of mastery to present itself as though it had no source and no bias, while it is clear that it can actually be ascribed to a definite, and definitely biased, source. In this too, the results of an animal queer analysis have an exact parallel in previous analyses of other forms of oppression: Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* famously questioned the neutrality, and consequently exposed the illegitimacy, of male discourse on women, by acknowledging that men cannot hope to settle the question of women, because they would be acting as both judges and parties to the affair. It should be self-evident (but to most humans it is not) that the same holds true of the discourses of our species about other ones. Just as in Beauvoir's analysis the "universal subject" in all the discourses of the West, whether scientific, political, philosophical, or religious, is always implicitly masculine, and just as implicitly defined by difference from a feminine "shadow", which must bear the weight of all the ills excluded by his definition (irrationality, materiality, sensuality, particularity, immanence...), this same subject is just as clearly defined by its opposition to, and distancing from, the "animal", which is seen in much the same light as the female "other".

The analogy between the positions of animals and women can be fleshed out more fully by referring to Irigaray. In Irigaray's theory of sexual difference (Irigaray 1977), women can never take up the position of a "subject" because they are the excluded in relation to which anything which is representable defines itself by difference; animals serve exactly the same purpose. One major way in which the human-animal divide parallels that between man and woman is in the assumption that mind is the exclusive prerogative of male humans; the "act of negation and disavowal" through which "the masculine pose[s] as a disembodied universality and the feminine get[s] constructed as a disavowed corporeality" (Butler 1990 16) is the same that constitutes the human as a disembodied universality and the animal as pure body, "living matter" used for production and reproduction. The repressive identification of the feminine with the bodily which has a long and inglorious history in Western science and philosophy is only topped by the frankly grotesque denial of the evidence for complex cognition in animals. Everything that we can do and animals cannot is considered evidence of complex cognition; everything that animals can do and we cannot is considered an "instinct", having nothing whatsoever to do with intelligence, even though it should be clear even to a human that "given a long-lived creature that exists in a complex

socio-ecological system, that creature has likely been selected for high-level intelligence and cognition” (Pepperberg 2003) or – if we want to translate this into plain English – that surviving in an environment as complex and as challenging as that in which most animals thrive in the wild, with no police to scare off potential murderers and no supermarkets where to shop for food, requires considerably more intelligence than is needed to vegetate in front of a TV set.

This should make plain that the role of “hard facts” and “scientific evidence” and, ultimately, of the materiality of the body, in differentiating humans from “animals”, just as in differentiating between human males and females, is vastly overestimated: “what constitutes the limits of the body is never merely material, but [...] the surface, the skin, is systemically signified by taboos and anticipated transgressions; indeed, the boundaries of the body become [in Douglas 1969] the limits of the social *per se*” (Butler 1990 179). Butler further quotes Douglas as suggesting that

all social systems are vulnerable at their margins, and [...] all margins are accordingly considered dangerous. If the body is synechdochical for the social system *per se* or a site in which open systems converge, then any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment. (Butler 1990 180)

The examples of oral and anal sex between men (which Douglas quotes) are obviously relevant, but so is the myth of “animal” filth and pollution, which gives rise to innumerable irrational taboos concerning imaginary health scares.

The boundary of the body as well as the distinction between internal and external is established through the ejection and transvaluation of something originally part of identity into a defiling otherness. [...] the operation of repulsion can consolidate “identities” founded on the instituting of the Other or of a set of Others through exclusion and domination. (Butler 1990 181-182)

This expulsion-repulsion dynamic is nowhere more evident than in the zoophobic fantasy of “dirty” animals, in contrast to which the identity of the human is established as something constantly needing to be protected from pollution. And the irrationality of our obsession with the dirtiness of animals as a foil to emphasize our

own cleanliness is particularly evident if contrasted with our habit of feeding on animal carcasses, which are of course really unsanitary not because they are animal but because they are carcasses, and decaying flesh, “animal” or human, is just about the dirtiest thing there is. But this seeming incoherence is reconciled on a different level: we need to believe that animals are filthy, repulsive and mindless in order to feel morally justified in killing them; and we need to believe that eating their corpses is good for us in order to feel practically justified in killing them: it is the killing, not the (contradictory, and ultimately irrational) beliefs which are used to justify it, that is the point, because it is the contrast between the impunity of the murder of beings of other species and the sanctions attending the murder of beings of our own which consolidates the boundaries of the group we belong to and establishes our identity as human. And, conversely, our oppression of non-human animals carves out a space in every human society for a class of sentient beings to whom no rights are ascribed and for a form of murder which goes unnoticed and unsanctioned.^{xxiv}

And it is just this, the unproblematic, “natural” establishment and continued existence of such a space as a structural feature of all forms of human society (and not any satisfaction of merely rational or utilitarian needs), which is the most important social function served by the oppression of animals which has been a hallmark of human civilization in all cultures and since the beginning of history.^{xxv}

The reasons why such a space, where callousness, cruelty and violence can be exercised without fear of social sanctions, is not only thinkable and possible but necessary in all human societies are explained by the work of the prominent social psychologist Philip Zimbardo, who, after spending over thirty years investigating the psychological mechanisms of violence, isolated as its root one key process, “dehumanization”:

One of the worst things we can do to our fellow human beings is deprive them of their humanity, render them worthless by exercising the psychological process of dehumanization. This occurs when the “others” are thought not to possess the same feelings, thoughts, values and purposes in life that we do. Any human qualities that these “others” share with us are diminished or erased from our awareness. [...] The misperception of some others as subhuman, bad humans, infrahuman,

dispensable or “animals” is facilitated by means of labels, stereotypes, slogans and propaganda images. (Zimbardo 2007 222-223)

It is clear from Zimbardo’s own description, and from a multitude of examples he quotes, that the focal case of “dehumanization” is to be found in the human treatment of nonhuman animals. Continuous and systematic cruelty to “animals” offers members of all human societies a constant exercise in the practice of violence that can be turned on any other object at a moment’s notice. The way animals are routinely, unthinkingly and unfeelingly treated provides the performative apparatus (the language, the techniques, the feelings and emotions, the metaphors and justifications) for the oppression of *any* category of sentient beings; and in any human society that apparatus is always already in place, ready to be deployed on the next victim, whether “human” or “animal”.

A final point on the consequences of adopting a dehumanized conception of selected others is the unthinkable things we are willing to do to them once they are officially declared different. (Zimbardo 2007 313)

But of course the point is precisely that these things are not at all “unthinkable”, because they are routinely done to nonhuman animals, which are used as practice targets for the “dehumanization” of human victims. This key point completely escapes Zimbardo who, from his speciesist perspective, is unable to fathom the real meaning of his own evidence. His confusion is clearly demonstrated by one revealing statement: “[d]ehumanization takes away the humanity of the potential victims, rendering them as animals, or as nothing” (Zimbardo 2007 295); this simplistic and misleading identification of “animals” and “nothing” gets seriously in the way of a real understanding of the process of dehumanization, and of violence in general. “Animals” (or other sentient beings) are as different as possible from “nothing”, and “nothing” is not a possible object of violence, since the essence of violence is the reduction of a *subject* to object status. This theme is of course particularly prominent in Sade, but it runs through, and unifies, all the history of violence: the point of violence is that it should be *felt* by its victim, who must therefore retain her perceptions, emotions, feelings and cognition while being stripped of the other qualities which would make her too similar to the perpetrator. And, of course, if the

victim were not similar to the perpetrator in most vital ways to begin with, the perpetrator would not need violence to widen the gap between them as much as possible. Canetti's analysis of the primal form of violence as the "moment of survival", in which a living being triumphs over a dead one, is particularly relevant here (Canetti 1960 249-312).

That animals are really the focal case of "dehumanization" is shown by the effectiveness of animal names as trigger words for its onset. Zimbardo lists an impressive amount of evidence confirming this: a study on "Experimental Dehumanization: Animalizing College Students" (Zimbardo 2007 308), in which hearing the other group of students being described as "like animals" led the subjects to administer the highest possible levels of electric shock ("Imagining them [the other group of college students] as animals switches off any sense of compassion you might have for them, and [...] you begin to shock them with ever-increasing levels of intensity"; Zimbardo 2007 18); "trophy photos" of abusers with their victims mimicking the poses of big game hunters (Zimbardo 2007 19, 364); the behaviour and statements of the guards in the Stanford Prison Experiment, ("Go back to your *cage*", Zimbardo 2007 114; "I practically considered the prisoners 'cattle'" Zimbardo 2007 187); evidence from the doctors involved in the Mock Psychiatric Ward Experience ("I used to look at the patients as if they were a bunch of animals; I never knew what they were going through before" Zimbardo 2007 251); the disturbing T-shirts worn by the "commandos of the New York Police Department", that read "There is no hunting like the hunting of men" (Zimbardo 2007 291), and, of course, "the Nazi genocide of the Jews [which] began by first creating [...] a national perception of these fellow human beings as inferior forms of animal life" (Zimbardo 2007 307) and the evidence from the Abu Ghraib trials, where soldiers said about prisoners "They're nothing but dogs" (Zimbardo 2007 352), and instructors explained to interrogators that "You have to treat the prisoners like dogs. If [...] they believe they're any different than dogs, you've effectively lost control of your interrogation from the very start. [...] And it works." (Zimbardo 2007 414).

The reason why "it works" is that all humans, by virtue of their being human, have received decades of training in how to oppress, brutalize, torture, break and murder other sentient beings, and that they can start applying what they have learned to new

and unsuspecting victims simply by labelling them in the appropriate way. I do not think I am the only one to believe that if nobody ever learned anything of the kind the world would be a much better place.

In my most naively hopeful moments I imagine it will be the queer community – the oxymoronic community of difference – that might be able to teach the world how to get along. (Sloan 1991)

A real “oxymoronic community of difference”, embracing not only all possible variants of “gender trouble” but also the queering of the human-animal barrier, would not need to teach anybody anything, because it would have made violence unthinkable, since the human oppression of non-human animals is not a peripheral case of no political relevance but, as *Zimbardo’s* own analysis of “dehumanization” shows, the archetype, model and training ground of all forms of oppression and injustice.^{xxvi} In this respect animal queer, more than any form of queer, radically threatens the very foundations of human society as we know it, since taking it seriously, not simply as another interesting category for academic analysis but as an ethical and political imperative, implies doing everything we can to dismantle the linguistic, conceptual and performative apparatus which makes all kinds of violence and oppression possible.

In animal queer the dichotomy between liberation theory and civil right politics, which has been discussed at length in queer literature,^{xxvii} has no substance: crossing the line dividing our species from the other ones means eradicating the very categories of thought needed to conceive of inequality and injustice. If the definition of queer politics is radical opposition to the established social order as such, and the measure of success of queer political action is the extent to which it smashes the system, then animal rights activism is the queerest possible form of political action, because it is structurally incompatible with continuing to live the way the system expects us to.

The reason why animal queer is structurally and intrinsically subversive, and why it is perceived as radically threatening, and is, accordingly, ruthlessly marginalized, by all forms of cultural and political discourse, is that it replaces sameness with otherness as the criterion of emotional, social and political inclusion: whoever supports animals,

fights for animals, loves an animal loves, supports and fights not for the self but for the other (“the wholly other that they call animal [...]Yes, the wholly other, more other than any other, that they call an animal”, as Derrida 1999 380 would put it), and knows in advance that no middle ground will ever be found, no assimilation will ever be possible, that in one, one hundred or one million years animals will be just as puzzling, as foreign, as alien to all that we can be and understand as they are now. If true love is felt not for the self but for the Other, and if “[a]imer l’autre, c’est préserver son étrangeté, reconnaître qu’il existe à côté de moi, loin de moi, non avec moi”^{xxviii} (Bruckner & Finkielkraut 1977 256), then love in its animal queer form is indeed the purest, most coherent and most radical form of love, and as such it has the potential not to reform society or to facilitate social “progress” but to replace it with the unthinkable, with something radically contradicting all assumptions, expectations and definitions, to create the possibility of a happiness we can’t even imagine, because to fathom it we would already have to be different from what we are, to have moved beyond ourselves.

5. The anti-Child

As the death drive dissolves those congealments of identity that permit us to know and survive as ourselves, so the queer must insist on disturbing, on queering, social organization as such – on disturbing, therefore, and on queering ourselves and our investment in such organization. For queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one. [...] the burden of queerness is to be located less in the assertion of an oppositional political identity than in opposition to politics. (Edelman 2004 17)

The most radical definition of queer’s attitude towards society as such is probably to be found in Edelman’s *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. I believe it to be no coincidence that Edelman’s theory resonates in deep, systematic and serious ways with modes of thought and feeling which have long been commonplace in the animal rights movement, among people who have never heard of queer, but who have been *living* it as a consequence of their most heartfelt feelings and commitments.

To empathize with animals, to affirm animal rights, to fight for animals, to love an animal means to align oneself with a way of being in the world that can never, by any stretch of the imagination, be compared or assimilated with our own: whatever we do for animals, we know we are only doing what we think is best, and by definition not what the animals really need, since there is no way we can ever know what it feels like to be them (Nagel 1974). Consequently, we do not anticipate gratitude, we do not long for acknowledgement, we do not expect anything back. Both because of the radical unknowability of animals, of the impossibility to construct a convincing model of their radically other minds and selves, and of the evident harm our species has been inflicting on theirs, and on the environment without which they cannot survive, we cannot help but realize that the best we could ever do for animals is to leave them alone; and that the best and safest way this could be accomplished is by freeing the planet of our kind for good. Thus animal queer directly leads us to envision the vanishing point of any truly queer critique of identity, which is generally hidden from sight in “tamer” versions of queer: the shaping of the self through, indeed the yielding of the self to, the radically other, the “dissol[ution of] those congealments of identity that permit us to know and survive as ourselves”. A serious and sustained engagement with animals cannot but permanently call into question our own identity, not only problematizing or destabilizing it theoretically but declaring it irrelevant and obsolete through our actions; in this sense, animal rights activism marks, in a way so absolute and radical as to have resisted theorization so far, the entrance of the death drive into political discourse.

This places the animal in sharp contrast with another object of affection, as normative and compulsory as the animal is queer and repressed: the Child. The human-animal bond transports us outside of ourselves, and alerts us to the ultimate equivalence of all beings as objects of love: one does not love “one’s” animal because it is one’s own, but chooses, generally at random, an individual animal to love because one loves animals in general; on the contrary, the parent-child bond cements us into our own identity by handing us a mirror which promises to confirm it in a time which will last well beyond our life span: a parent does not love all children and then chooses, more or less at random, a single one to love, he loves *his* child because it is *his*:

The Child marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity; an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism. (Edelman 2004: 21)

The one embodied in the love of animals is a quintessentially queer attitude to identity. What is queer about queer is its critical distance from identity politics, its suspension of identity as a fixed, coherent and natural category. What best describes queer is not its affinity with some forms of identity (gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender) but its anti-normative positioning towards forms of sexual identity in particular and, more generally, its problematizing, through denaturalization, of the very concept of identity. Queer does not aim at consolidating or stabilizing any identity, least of all its own, but has as its ultimate purpose a *critique* of identity, which should not lead to the hegemony of a new or alternative identity, but to the demise of the category of identity as such, by making conscious and calling into question the performance that makes us and others what we “are”, which in animal queer means “humans” and “animals” respectively. Acknowledging, honouring and becoming fully alive to one’s love for an animal permanently subverts one’s perception of self, of the other and of the world, bringing it out of alignment with humanormativity’s priorities, values and performances.

One major object of this subversive perception is time. The animal is indeed the embodiment of Edelman’s “No Future”: in our relationship with an animal, all there ever is is Right Now: this moment of play, the soft feel of fur against my chest and under my hands, the warm smell I love. There is no room for plans or expectations, there are no investments on which returns are awaited. Unlike the parent-child bond, which is defined by teleology, the human-animal bond is not teleological: it does not sagely postpone gratification, it does not project anything into, or onto, the future. Unlike the child, the animal will not develop into a more mature and accomplished version of itself which will show the marks of our good parenting: whatever the particular gifts and specific qualities of an individual animal, she was born with them, and most of them do not make sense in a human perspective anyway. Unlike the child, the animal has no hold on the future, and does not see the meaning of progress; unlike the child, upon whom we can project our frustrated hopes of a distant Utopia, an

animal will not see a better world, both because our notions of the good are profoundly foreign to her and because she will not survive her human companion: by loving an animal we accept a devastating mutilation of our future, which in all likelihood will hold a time when we still are, and the person we love the most, even if she was much younger than we to begin with, will no longer be; by loving an animal we embrace, and not in the abstract, “the fate of the queer [which] is to figure the fate that cuts the thread of futurity” (Edelman 2004 30). Whoever loves an animal necessarily finds herself, simply by virtue of this love, deeply alienated from the “logic of repetition that fixes identity through identification with the future of the social order” “enact[ed]” by “the Child” (Edelman 2004 25), and occupying “the *structural position* of queerness [...] imagining an oppositional political stance exempt from [...] the politics of reproduction” (Edelman 2004 27).

To someone who loves an animal, the future holds no promise but that of the cruel and definitive dissolution of her love. While children make death less salient and less omnipresent because their life span is equal to our own and their lives start later, animals make the presence of death much more intensely and frequently perceptible: to love an animal means to allow death into one’s life, and to do so by conscious choice and in full awareness, realizing (maybe for the first time) that “love is as hard as death” (*Song of Songs* 8:6), no less and no more. However tenderly protective our love for an animal, we know that no selfish hope of survival, no narcissistic dream of continuity can be associated to our bond with her. Unlike children, animals do not attenuate but emphasize our own impermanence by contracting our life expectancy even further. Because of our love and through our love we cannot but identify with “the queerness [Edelman] propose[s, which] in Hocquenghem’s words,

is unaware of the passing of generations as stages on the road to better living. It knows nothing about ‘sacrifice now for the sake of future generations’ [...]. And so what is queerest about us, queerest within us, and queerest despite us is this willingness to insist intransitively – to insist that the future stop here.(Edelman 2004: 31)

This opposition between animal and child, as the embodiments respectively of Right Now and the Other and of Future and the Self, and the identity of the animal as the

anti-Child, is evident in their opposite locations and functions in the social discourse of normativity:

In its coercive universalization, [...] the image of the Child [...] serves to regulate political discourse – to prescribe what will *count* as political discourse – by compelling such discourse to accede in advance to the reality of a collective future whose figurative status we are never permitted to acknowledge or address. (Edelman 2004: 11)

And reciprocally, everything that concerns animals, however well-founded and urgent, *by definition* cannot make its way into political discourse. If the child is “the prop of the secular theology on which our social reality rests: the secular theology that shapes at once the meaning of our collective narratives and our collective narratives of meaning” (Edelman 12), the animal, as the prop for the performance of “dehumanization”, is the locus of the permanent denial of all meaning and relevance. If, as Edelman writes,

queerness names the side of those *not* ‘fighting for the children’, the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism. [...] [while] *queerness*, by contrast, figures [...] the place of the social order’s death drive [...] *queerness* attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it accedes to that place, accepting its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social (Edelman 2004: 3)

nothing could be queerer than the love for animals, which, by its very nature, which entails a serious and irrevocable commitment to the dismantling of the performances and devices on which social order as such rests, “marks the ‘other’ side of politics: [...] the side outside all political sides, committed as they are, on every side, to futurism’s unquestioned good” (Edelman 2004: 7).

It is thus no coincidence that the fetish of the Child should be omnipresent in the many-sided polemic against animal rights. In public debates, anti-vivisection activists are routinely asked by experimenters whether they would rather kill a mouse or a child (the answer is, of course, neither); and every time the subject of animal rights is brought up not merely as a topic of academic discussion but in appeals for practical or

financial support, the most common form of refusal invariably brings up starving children as the more appropriate recipients of concern and aid. That the people who give this kind of answers do nothing whatsoever to relieve the plight of children in need does not matter rhetorically: what does matter is that the appeal for children “is impossible to refuse [...] this issue, like an ideological Möbius strip, only *permit[s]* one side” (Edelman 2004 2).. And any animal queer human can, from systematic and bitter personal experience, agree with Edelman that this is “oppressively political [...] insofar as the fantasy subtending the image of the Child invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought” (Edelman 2004 2). The emotions, feelings, thoughts and actions which make up the fabric of life for an animal queer person decentre the human and humanity from their positions as the taken-for granted subjects, and implicitly but powerfully question reproductive futurism. What Edelman calls the

ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity, by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of human relations (Edelman 2004: 2)

is shattered by an animal queer perspective. In its animal incarnation, more than in any other of its innumerable avatars, “[t]he queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance [...] to every social structure or form” (Edelman 2004 4)”. And the real reason why liberalism grants a place to “the queer” in its LGBT incarnation but marginalizes, ridicules, represses and murders animal queer is that the denial and repression of “the queerness of resistance to futurism and thus the queerness of the queer” (Edelman 2004 27) are perfectly compatible with a civil rights perspective on same-sex love, but utterly incompatible with animal rights. An animal queer perspective is indeed

[i]ntent on the end, not the ends, of the social, [...] insists that the drive toward that end, which liberalism refuses to imagine, can never be excluded from the structuring fantasy of the social order itself. (Edelman 2004: 28)

The “deliberate[...] severing of us from ourselves” that Edelman (5) mentions as the hallmark of queer is implicit in the love for an animal. Animal queer severs us from

ourselves because it decentres our perspective: suddenly, other values, other interests, other feelings, though incommensurable and unimaginable, become equivalent to our own. The queerest expression of this attitude in the animal rights field (or, for that matter, anywhere, at least as far as I know...) is VHEMT, the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement, which unwittingly but appropriately takes up Edelman's challenge that "Queerness *should* and *must* redefine such notions as "civil order" through a rupturing of our foundational faith in the reproduction of futurity" (Edelman 2004 16-17) and embodies

the only oppositional status to which our queerness could ever lead [which] would depend on us taking seriously the place of the death drive [...] and insisting [...] that we do not intend a new politics, a better society, a brighter tomorrow, since all of those fantasies reproduce the past, through displacement, in the form of the future. (Edelman 2004 31)

The Voluntary Human Extinction Movement Motto: "*May we live long and die out*"

VHEMT (pronounced vehement) is a movement not an organization. It's a movement advanced by people who care about life on planet Earth. [...]

As VHEMT Volunteers know, the hopeful alternative to the extinction of millions of species of plants and animals is the voluntary extinction of one species: Homo sapiens... us.[...]

When every human chooses to stop breeding, Earth's biosphere will be allowed to return to its former glory, and all remaining creatures will be free to live, die, evolve (if they believe in evolution), and will perhaps pass away, as so many of Nature's "experiments" have done throughout the eons.

It's going to take all of us going.

At first glance, some people assume that VHEMT Volunteers and Supporters must hate people and that we want everyone to commit suicide or become victims of mass murder. It's easy to forget that another way to bring about a reduction in our numbers is to simply stop making more of us. Making babies seems to be a blind spot in our outlooks on life. (<http://www.vhemt.org/>)

Instead of worshipping the Child as the guarantee of our own eternity in a future where progress will always confirm we were right, VHEMT calls for a voluntary and lucid renunciation of the Child both as a symbol and as a reality, and for restoring the beauty, glory and holiness of the planet by returning it to its rightful, non-human,

owners, the ones who kept it for half a billion years without making a mess of it. The mission of VHEMT actualizes what Edelman wrote about: “the death drive names what the queer, in the order of the social, is called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability” (Edelman 2004 9). In envisioning a world where no opposition to the social will be necessary, because the social will no longer be a possibility, VHEMT radically

refuses this mandate by which our political institutions compel the collective reproduction of the Child [and therefore] must appear as a threat not only to the organization of a given social order but also, and far more ominously, to social order as such, insofar as it threatens the order of futurism on which meaning always depends. (Edelman 2004: 11)

Because of its refusal of any “identification both of and with the Child as the pre-eminent emblem of the motivating end, though one endlessly postponed, of every political vision as a *vision of futurity*”, VHEMT is the most coherent and most radical incarnation of “a queer oppositional politics” (Edelman 2004: 13).

And VHEMT also offers the most vivid and convincing image I have ever come across of the paradoxical but vital ambiguity that Edelman places at the heart of queerness:

Queerness, therefore, is never a matter of being or becoming, but, rather, of *embodying* the remainder of the Real internal to the Symbolic order. One name for this unnameable remainder, as Lacan describes it, is *jouissance*, sometimes translated as “enjoyment”; a movement beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the distinctions of pleasure and pain, a violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, and law. (Edelman 2004: 25)

The vision of VHEMT utopia is certainly “beyond the distinctions of pleasure and pain, [...] beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, and law” but also, and more poignantly and memorably, beyond joy and sadness, beyond triumph and defeat, and certainly beyond all that being human has ever meant to any of us:

Gradual extinction of the human race will result if zygotes of *Homo sapiens* never again begin cell division.[...]

Individuals' lives could change profoundly, but all for the good. Starving people would begin finding enough to eat and resources would become more plentiful. New housing would be unnecessary.

All human technology would be scaled back but could still advance. Nuclear power plants could begin to be safely decommissioned. Dams could be removed. Technology could focus on dealing with unsolved problems such as radioactive and other toxic wastes. Healing the wounds of past exploitations could become a priority, reversing the expanding deserts and shrinking forests. Some of our influences, such as global warming, may be impossible to stop and reverse at this point, but we could ameliorate the effects somewhat. [...]

Domestic plants and animals could be phased out as farms and ranches are converted to ecosystems supporting wildlife and natural vegetation. The last humans could enjoy their final sunsets peacefully, knowing they have returned the planet to as close to the garden of Eden as possible under the circumstances.

The last one out could turn off the lights.

(<http://www.vhemt.org/>)



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6. Conclusions: Species Trouble

[A] lot of the more exciting work around “queer” spins the term outward along dimensions that can’t be subsumed under gender or sexuality at all. [...] Queer’s denaturalising impulse may well find an articulation within precisely those contexts to which it has been judged indifferent. [...] By refusing to crystallise in any specific form, queer maintains a relation of resistance to whatever constitutes the normal. (Sedgwick 1994 9)

In the vision of its most enlightened and original theorists, queer is another word for Trotsky’s permanent revolution: its refusal to define itself except as a method of radical subversion means that it must constantly look for new intellectual and political territories in which to carry out its subversive mission. Queer can never be tame or predictable; the moment it becomes respectable, it will have betrayed itself and sold its soul to academic irrelevance. The reason why queer was born of homosexual critique is not because of any exclusive affinity with same-sex desire, but because initially gay liberation and lesbian feminism advocated a wholesale sexual revolution; it was only later that they consolidated themselves as civil rights movements, intent on securing equality for marginalised minority groups. In my opinion one of the most profound reasons for the pertinence of the category of queer to a radical rethinking of human-animal relations is that no such compromise is, nor ever will be, possible for animal queer, since an animal rights movement *entails* a wholesale revolution, starting from the most mundane and pervasive everyday habits (what are you going to have for dinner?) and moving to the most intimate feelings and emotions, because the very fact of having one’s deepest affective bond with an animal calls into question the foundations of human society as it has been defined since its inception.

The ultimate point of queer is a radical and uncompromising critique of the very notion of the natural, the obvious and the taken-for-granted.

The appeal to so-called ‘common sense’ reinforces the hypostatization of the ‘natural’ upon which homophobia relies and thus partakes of an ideological labour complicit with heterosexual supremacy. (Edelman 1994 xviii)

Of course, the very same appeal to “so-called ‘common sense’” is the foundation of another, even more insidious, form of “ideological labour”, that which hypostatizes a “natural” which takes for granted the slavery, torture and murder of billions of other sentient beings.

The philosophically, politically and ethically pertinent response to the ideological labour which founds heterosexual supremacy is “gender trouble”, the subversive proliferation of genders calling into question naturalized categories of identity and their patterning of possibilities and impossibilities. Analogously, the philosophically, politically and ethically pertinent response to the ideological labour on which speciesism and humanormativity rest is “species trouble”, the mobilization of emotional, pragmatic and political alternatives which are not contemplated by the hegemonic discourse on the relations between species with a view not only to fighting violence and oppression but to making violence and oppression unthinkable, by questioning their foundations in an obsolete and fraudulent model of interspecies relations. In this light, it is far from being a coincidence that, of the five epigraphs to the first chapter of *Gender Trouble*, which mark the intellectual genealogy of Butler’s enterprise, four are self-evidently relevant to its development into animal queer.

“*One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one*” (Simone de Beauvoir) points to the *constructedness* of our human identity through an ever-present and never acknowledged distancing and repression of our bond with animals.

“*Strictly speaking, ‘women’ cannot be said to exist*” (Julia Kristeva) acknowledges the fraudulent essentialism implicit in the dominant discourse about humans and animals.

“*The deployment of sexuality [...] established this notion of sex*” (Michel Foucault) shows how the practices and performances through which we establish our relationship with non-human animals are the actual foundation of the human-animal divide.

“*The category of sex is the political category that founds society as heterosexual*” (Monique Wittig) unmasks the human-animal construct as the ontological, ethical and political foundation of speciesism.

Just as “if desire could liberate itself, it would have nothing to do with the preliminary marking by sexes” (Wittig 1979 114), if love could liberate itself, it would have nothing to do with species distinctions. As every being who ever felt love intuitively knows, love is an intrinsically revolutionary force because it refuses to follow established lines of loyalty and carves out queer and unpredictable ones on the basis of attraction, empathy and desire. In and of itself, love is intrinsically queer. And the coherent and radical acceptance of the love of animals, of animal queer, with all that it entails in emotional, ethical, political, identitarian and ontological terms, is the next step towards the asymptotic goal of direct experience of a world of which the only thing we can know for sure is that it is indeed, as Haldane put it, “queerer than we can suppose”.

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i This will be the subject of sections 3 and 4.

ii To love you with the most total abandon is to feel suddenly your absolute strangeness, I desire you because your body astonishes me, its most usual features become for me faraway meteors whose configuration upsets. I yearn for you because we have nothing in common.

iii The radical questioning of identity which is implicit in animal queer is so widespread as to hardly warrant a mention among people who do volunteer work with animals, to whom I owe most of my lived awareness of the issue and of its infinite ramifications, and who have done as much for my development as all of my formal education, and all of my professional activity in academia. (I prefer not call them “animal rights activists” because some of the best of them lack the theoretical sophistication necessary to make sense of the label; most of them would not be able to read this article – even in translation – and even those who would – including some of the colleagues I most admire and cherish – would probably find it beside the point – “Is this what you have been busy doing instead of trapping strays for spaying?”; I have tried hard not to think of their reactions while writing this; the attempt has not generally been successful, and this is hardly surprising, since I know in my heart that they are right.)

This questioning is, however, conspicuously absent from quite a few instances of (would-be) theoretical engagement with animal issues; one example (which I feel compelled to mention only because of its prominent position in animal studies discourse), is that of Donna Haraway. Even though her *Companion Species Manifesto* heavily capitalizes on the transgressive value of the opening image of the author and her dog kissing (Haraway 2003 1), one would look in vain for instances of more substantial – theoretical – transgression both in the *Manifesto* and in its much more verbose and narcissistic sequel *When Species Meet*, where the reader is treated to a number of insufferably lengthy forays into the technicalities of the genetics of Australian shepherd dogs (Haraway 2008 95-143) and of agility (Haraway 2008 205-246) (as well as into Haraway’s father’s biography, Haraway 2008 161-179), which lack any conceivable justification other than that Haraway (in addition to loving her father) is a passionate practitioner of agility, and that the dog she uses to indulge her passion is an Australian shepherd. Haraway’s self-indulgent egocentricism as an author would hardly warrant a mention if it were not for the fact that this painfully obvious inability to decentre herself (which reaches grotesque proportions in the unforgettable scene of her “play[ing] videos of the USDAA (United States Dog Agility Association) Nationals” to her terminally ill father “wild with pain and hallucinating on opiates”, Haraway 2008 176) shapes both her whole relationship to animals (including her beloved agility champion, who needs regular chiropractic adjustments in order to keep performing, Haraway 2008 51), and her theoretical stance on animal issues: when she became interested in agility she started looking for a dog designed to excel in the activity (“a high-drive, purpose-bred puppy athlete” Haraway 2008 96), much as a tennis player would start shopping for the best racket or footwear; and her inability

to conceive of an ethical stance which would make it problematic for her to indulge in her tastes, from agility to hamburgers (Haraway 2003 40) to scientific experiments, and her consequent self-serving need to manufacture “theoretical” justifications for the world as it is (that is, as she likes it – and as the animals don’t), is reflected in the frankly offensive language with which she refers to the most repulsive forms of animal exploitation: “meat- and hide- [...] producing working animals” (Haraway 2008 319) and “[animals] labor[ing] as research models” “in laboratories” (Haraway 2008 58), who of course (just in case anybody was naïve enough to think that supporters of animal rights were the ones most prone to commit the heinous intellectual sin of anthropomorphism...) come complete with “working hours” (Haraway 2008 69). These Orwellian formulations are an extreme (both typologically and – one would like to hope – chronologically) example of the kind of brazen word-mongering which should have become impresentable, if not after the publication of “Politics and the English Language”, then at least after Adams exposed it first cursorily (“To justify meat-eating, we refer to animals wanting to die, desiring to become meat. [...] One of the mythologies of rape is that women not only ask for rape, they also enjoy it; that they are continually seeking out the butcher’s knife. Similarly, advertisements and popular culture tell us that animals like Charlie the Tuna and Al Capp Shmoo wish to be eaten. The implication is that women and animals willingly participate in the process that renders them absent.” Adams 1990-2000 p.66), and then systematically, in *The Pornography of Meat* and in her *Sexual Politics of Meat Slide Show*, which denounce anthropornography (the term was coined by Amie Hamlin), the depiction of non-humans as prostitute-animals who desire to be eaten. Whatever Haraway would like (us) to think, animals murdered for food do not “work in meat production” and animal tortured to death in experiments do not “work in laboratories” any more than rape victims are “sex workers”. That this last instance of Doublespeak would not be tolerated by any reader, no matter what her political or theoretical orientation, while the other two (among many others) have not made a dent in Haraway’s reputation as a theorist “to be reckoned with” in animal studies is, to my mind, depressing evidence of the problematic state of both social and theoretical discourse on animal issues.

iv That some humans love animals (not “their” “pets” but animals in general, with no regard for the speciesistic categories of “domestic”, “farm” or “wild”) is obvious; that society is unwilling to grant this fundamental aspect of their identity social existence, except insofar as it can be conveniently subsumed under the hegemonic identity of “consumer”, is just as obvious: I am free to purchase for the animals in my care both extravagant objects of consumption manufactured by the burgeoning “pet industry” (which won’t make any difference to their well-being) and state-of-the-art medical care (which might); but the law does not afford to their lives (again, with no distinction between “categories”) anything like the protection it affords to inanimate items of property (it is much more expedient to harm a disliked human by killing her companion animals than by damaging her property, since this is very likely to lead to a police investigation, while any attempt to interest the police in the violent death of an animal is sure to be met by condescendingly raised highbrows, or worse): throughout the world animals (of any “category”) are poisoned, shot, trapped, run over; some of these animals have humans who love them, who anxiously wait for them to come back, who grieve for them:

that love, that anxiety, that grief has no place in social discourse except as an object of ridicule. And, of course, that someone should display shock and outrage at the violent death of an animal with whom she was unacquainted like she would for a human is simply inconceivable. To me, one point of affirming animal queer is to provide some form of recognition and support to the innumerable humans who feel completely alienated and alone in a society which does not grant their most heartfelt values and emotions any recognition.

It is just as relevant, both politically and theoretically, that, even when some animals' needs are given precedence over those of some humans (some companion animals undoubtedly have access to better nutrition and medical care than most of the human population in the Third World), it is always humans who decide this, and their decision is always both arbitrary and final: of three puppies or kittens from the same litter, one might grow up to be the cherished companion of an affluent animal-rights activist, one to be tortured to death in a research facility, and one to be "euthanized" in a "shelter". Because animal queer is not about the narcissistic investment in one "pet" but about identification with, and love for, animals in general, this state of things is incompatible with animal queer.

v "Are queer without realizing it" (the reference is to M. Jourdain, Molière's character in *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* who had always spoken in prose without realizing it).

vi The sexual aspect of animal-human relations has been the object of a frankly disproportionate amount of attention (see, among others, Dekker 1992, Beirne 1997, Singer 2001, Miletski 2002, Levy 2003, Beetz 2004, Podberscek & Beetz 2005) which has had the effect (and probably the purpose) of focusing the debate on an extreme and unrepresentative aspect of human love for other animals, deviating it from the less evidently controversial, but potentially much more radical (and therefore more threatening) issue of the emotional, ideological and political identification with animals independent of any sexual interest.

While (to the dismay of those whose interest in the topic is primarily prurient) "sex" is entirely absent from these relationships, attraction is a fundamental and much valued component; we all know people who, while shying away from physical contact with other humans, even in social situations, cannot pass a cat or dog in the street without stopping to pet her and play with her, and whose interest is enthusiastically reciprocated by the most aloof and intractable animals, even though they have never met before. I am one of these people: to someone like me, the world looks different from what it does to other humans: the direction and order of my gaze is shaped by the emotional primacy of nonhuman individuals and needs. In public places, I may look more or less idly at people of either sex whom I find attractive, but the moment an animal enters my perceptual field she becomes the sole focus of my attention; my eyes follow her about, always taking care not to make her feel overwhelmed; I try to gradually reduce the distance between us; if she too comes towards me, sooner or later we will touch. Depending on her mood and tastes, this may inaugurate a session of gentle fondling or of wild play, or

a more distant acquaintanceship that she will lead as far as it feels comfortable to her, and will interrupt when she will.

vii And which is in dire need of reconstruction anyway. An additional reason of interest of animal queer is that the feelings, habits and practices which coagulate around it resonate in unforeseen but profound ways with the critiques of heteronormativity and genitocentricity proposed by some French authors of the Seventies, whose cosmogonic radicality has not been matched in any subsequent analysis that I know of. I am thinking of Monique Wittig, who envisions an economy of pleasures, alternative to genitally organized sexuality, in which “polymorphously perverse” features and practices play a central role as a way to enact and experience a form of sexuality chronologically and ontologically prior to the binary dichotomy of sex (Wittig 1973), and of the even more rigorous and radical critique of genitality in its emotional, perceptual, ontological, narrative and political aspects envisioned by Bruckner and Finkielkraut in *Le nouveau désordre amoureux*, whose most visionary pronouncements read like a faithful description of the kind of tactile rapture which makes up such a large part of a happy relationship with an animal: “Le corps est à la fois entièrement dégenitalisé et totalement érotisé, sexué partout parce que ayant noyé l’acuité proprement sexuelle dans une masse de sensations affluentes” (“The body is at once entirely degenitalized and totally erotized, sexed overall as a consequence of having drowned sexual acuity proper in a mass of inflowing sensations” Bruckner & Finkielkraut 1977 265); and, even more poignantly, and more to the point: “nous voulons joyeusement le non-sens, la maladresse, l’incongruité de nos amours. De vos voluptés surgelées, harmonisées, savonnées, nous nous détacherons comme de toutes les autres croyances” (“We joyously desire the senselessness, the awkwardness, the incongruity of our loves. From your deep-frozen, harmonized, soaped-up enjoyments we will detach ourselves as from all other beliefs.” Bruckner & Finkielkraut 1977 259).

viii The enlightening and productive definition of meat-eating as “something you do to someone else’s body without their consent” is attributed to Patrice Jones of the Eastern Shore Chicken Sanctuary (<http://www.bravebirds.org/>). The locus classicus of the analysis of the relationship between the oppression of animals and that of women is of course Adams 1990-2000, particularly Chapter 2, “The Rape of Animals, the Butchering of Women”.

ix Fouts 1997 tells their story in heartbreaking detail.

x I am of course referring to mirror neurons. An impressive amount of specialist literature can be downloaded from the websites of the two discoverers, Giacomo Rizzolatti (<http://www.unipr.it/arpa/mirror/english/staff/rizzolat.htm>) and Vittorio Gallese (<http://www.unipr.it/arpa/mirror/english/staff/gallese.htm>); Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia 2006 offers a useful introduction for the lay reader.

xi The role of killing and, in general, of “danger” in the discourse of speciesism exactly parallels its use in racist discourse. Just as the ethnicity of minority criminals is prominently displayed in the media while the much more serious and numerous aggressions which victimize minorities are granted little or no visibility, a great many animal species are represented as fierce or dangerous even though the number and seriousness of their attacks on humans bear no comparison to those of human attacks against them, as should be clear at least from the fact that all these species are now on the brink of extinction while ours is multiplying beyond reason. The point is, of course, that in racist or speciesist discourse minorities and animals respectively are “natural victims”; therefore, their victimization is not newsworthy but is, quite simply, the way things should work, while their, no matter how rare and reasonable, attempts at retaliation or self-defense must be savagely stigmatized, and used to justify further victimization. The social function of animals in this capacity will be explored in greater depth in section 4 below.

xii “As a child, I had a duck that seemed to think I was its mother. It followed me everywhere. When we went on vacation, a neighbor offered to care for it. On our return, I eagerly asked how my duck was and he replied, “Delicious.” I became a vegetarian that day. I still cannot bear to eat anything with eyes. The reproach is too deep” (Masson 1996:13).

xiii Much of what constitutes us as humans has the hidden but fundamental function of differentiating us from animals, and this need for differentiation sometimes appears to reach so deep as to question the boundaries between culture and physiology. An example that, however far-fetched it may appear, I personally find deeply intriguing is that of bipedism: feral children, who grow up outside human society, invariably evolve a form of locomotion which makes use of all four limbs (Singh and Zingg 1942) but which – despite being highly functional – is not paralleled in any human culture; I cannot help wondering whether one major reason behind the exclusive diffusion of bipedism in all human societies might not be the purely cultural need to stress and deepen the divide separating humans from animals. In his book *Children who Run on all Fours and Other Animal-Like Behaviors in the Human Child* (1931), physical anthropologist Ales Hrdlicka documents that this form of locomotion may be present in children reared in normal conditions, and persist – or even appear – after the children have learned to walk upright, and even in adult life; Hrdlicka believes that the phenomenon would be extremely common if parents did not systematically attempt to suppress it and to train the child in other forms of locomotion.

xiv Extensively and memorably documented in both written and visual form; at least Singer 1975 chapter 3 and PETA 2003 should be consulted.

xv Which are of course harder to document, but which have been exposed by several impressive undercover investigations. The most accessible source is the website of the SHAC (Stop Huntingdon

Animal Cruelty) campaign, from which a number of reports can be downloaded (<http://www.shac.net/HLS/exposed.html>). Singer 1975 chapter 2 is a useful primer.

xvi It is less apparent but no less true that even the “natures” of animals belonging to species which manage to precariously survive in the wild are produced by practices of enslavement which take place in zoos and circuses, but which are supported and justified (and, indeed, made thinkable) by a discourse that reduces the bewildering social, perceptual, ecological, cognitive and emotional complexity of a sentient being’s relationship to its natural environment to the satisfaction of a small number of basic physiological needs: in popular representation of life in the wild like the major BBC production *Planet Earth* (Fothergill 2006) animals are invariably shown either looking for food or trying to escape predators, and this crude and simplistic representation yields “documentary” support to the thesis that, if wild animals are provided with sufficient food and kept safe from harm (as is doubtless the case in zoos), all their needs will have been met.

xvii It is meaningful and revealing that the discovery of its own “name” “delights” the Fawn, just as clearly as the discovery of Alice’s “alarms” it. It is impossible not to see in an animal who is not disfigured and maimed by human-imposed slavery a delight in its own being which is very rare in humans, and this goes a long way in explaining human cruelty towards them: just as (as Simone de Beauvoir wrote) “women have been burnt as witches simply because they were beautiful”, one major reason animals are imprisoned, tortured and murdered is simply because we envy them.

xviii “A critical uneasiness will persist [...] aimed in the first place [...] at the usage, in the singular, of a notion as general as “the Animal”, as if all nonhuman living things could be grouped without the common sense of this “commonplace”, the Animal, whatever the abyssal differences and structural limits that separate, in the very essence of their being, all “animals”, a name that we would therefore be advised, to begin with, to keep within quotation marks. Confined within this catch-all concept, within this vast encampment of the animal, in this general singular, within the strict enclosure of this definite article (“the Animal” and not “animals”), as in a virgin forest, a zoo, a hunting or fishing ground, a paddock or an abattoir, a space of domestication, are all the living things that man does not recognize as his fellows, his neighbors, or his brothers. And that is so in spite of the infinite space that separates the lizard from the dog, the protozoon from the dolphin, the shark from the lamb, the parrot from the chimpanzee, the camel from the eagle, the squirrel from the tiger or the elephant from the cat, the ant from the silkworm or the hedgehog from the echidna. I interrupt my nomenclature and call Noah to insure that no one gets left on the ark.” (Derrida 1999 402)

xix This is shown in the most extreme and unmistakable way in a forgotten chapter in the history of biological taxonomy, the monogenism-polygenism debate. While monogenism maintained a common origin for all mankind, polygenism contradicted the Biblical account and claimed that the various

human “races” were actually different biological species, and that only whites could properly be considered human, while the various non-white groups were “animals” of different kinds (a reliable and detailed history of this highly interesting controversy is to be found in Stanton 1960). On the other hand, for some two decades now leading primatologists have been supporting the inclusion of bonobos and chimpanzees in the same genus as humans: “there are not one but three species of genus *Homo* on Earth today: the common chimpanzee, *Homo troglodytes*; the pygmy chimpanzee, *Homo paniscus*; and the third chimpanzee or human chimpanzee, *Homo sapiens*” (Diamond 1991:21).

xx One example among many: Italy has had a law regulating animal experiments since 1992; even though transgressions are explicitly sanctioned, none have ever been documented, and no jurisprudence involving that law exists to this day.

xxi In the US this has given rise to a new helping profession, that of “animal grief counselor”: one professional’s website (<http://www.petloss.org/petloss.htm>) reassures prospective clients that “If you are grieving over an animal that is sick, one that is dying, or one that has died, **YOU ARE NOT ALONE**. Some people grieve more over the loss of an animal than the loss of a human. [...] Many of my clients tell me that they grieve alone because they have no one to talk to, and some are afraid that people will think that they are stupid or crazy. These people suffer in silence. They go through the grief stages alone, even though **IT IS NORMAL TO BE SAD AND SHOW GRIEF** over the loss of an animal” (capitals in the original); but it should be evident that what the bereaved need is not reassurance about the normalcy of their grief from a paid stranger but spontaneous empathy and emotional support from their existing social network.

xxii This “forgetting” is considerably facilitated by the veil of secrecy and concealment which shrouds the violent practices which constitute animal identities and ensure the enslavement of animals; insensitivity to the suffering of others is achieved at considerable neurological and psychological cost, and can never be complete: just as the Nazis, because of the devastating impact the systematic killings of civilians were having on the morale of their troops, had to settle for a system of mass murder in which the psychologically most stressful tasks were executed by prisoners, so today we can maintain the system of animal exploitation and murder on which we subsist only by “farming out” the most violent and most repulsive tasks to a class of disenfranchised and exploited marginals who, like the Nazi *Sonderkommandos*, are in no position to rebel; Eisnitz 2006 is one of the few places in which their voices, and their unique perspective on their grueling situation, can be heard.

xxiii “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."

xxiv Haraway's specious distinction between killing and "making killable" (Haraway 2008 80-81 and 105-106) shows itself to be particularly untenable in this context; unless a class of beings is "made killable", killing is not only attended by grave sanctions but is performed only for reasons which are perceived (however misguided) to be serious: if humans (including Burger King patron Haraway) did not implicitly and unproblematically consider animals "killable" it would not occur to them to kill them purely in order to consume their corpses any more than it occurs to them to kill other humans in order to consume their corpses. This issue can be illuminated by observing that the systematic spoliation of corpses in order to obtain raw materials is a far from negligible part of the horror we feel for the mass murders in Nazi concentration camps, and the reason is that this act, because of its instrumentality and ultimate frivolity, redefines murder as killing, and its victims as *killable*, that is, as non-human. All the dead are not equally dead. The dead who have been murdered by having been first designed as killable are vastly more dead than others, since their peculiar fate is to become, in Carol Adams' words, "absent referents":

Behind every meal of meat is an absence: the death of the animal whose place the meat takes. The "absent referent" is that which separates the meat eater from the animal and the animal from the end product. The function of the absent referent is to keep our "meat" separated from any idea that she or he was once an animal, [...] to keep *something* from being seen as having been *someone*. Once the existence of meat is disconnected from the existence of an animal who was killed to become that "meat", meat becomes unanchored by its original referent (the animal), becoming instead a free-floating image [...]. (Adams 1990-2000 14)

Butchering is the quintessential enabling act for meat eating. It enacts a literal dismemberment upon animals while proclaiming our intellectual and emotional separation from the animals' desire to live. [...] Through butchering, animals become absent referents. Animals in name and body are made absent as *animals* for meat to exist. If animals are alive they cannot be meat. Thus a dead body replaces the live animal. Without animals there would be no meat eating, yet they are absent from the act of eating meat because they have been transformed into food. (Adams 1990-2000 51)

It is extremely telling that Günther Anders should make exactly this same point in his discussion of the dead of Auschwitz, who are only still present in the *things* to which their *personhood* has been reduced:

“Und dabei haben wir doch keinen einzigen Toten gesehen”, flüsterte sie.

“Eben”, flüsterte ich zurück, “So tot sind sie.”

“Wie meinst Du das?”

“Daß ja sogar Tote irgendwie noch da sind. Aber was wir gesehen haben, ist bloß ihr Nichtdasein. Freilich in der Form von Dingen, die noch da sind. In Form ihrer Koffer, ihrer Berge von Koffern, ihrer Brillen, ihrer Berge von Brillen, ihrer Haare, ihrer Berge von Haaren, ihrer Schuhe, ihrer Berge von Schuhen. Gesehen haben wir also, daß unsere Dinge, wenn sie noch verwendet werden können, begnadigt werden, wir dagegen nicht. Und das gesehen zu haben, ist viel schlimmer, als wenn du Leichname gesehen hättest.” (Anders 1967 7-8)

(“And yet we did not see a single dead”, whispered she.

“Exactly”, I whispered back, “So dead are they.”

“What do you mean?”

“That even the dead somehow still exist. But what we have seen is only their non-existence. Of course in the form of things which still exist. In the form of their luggage, of their mountains of luggage, of their eyeglasses, of their mountains of eyeglasses, of their hair, of their mountains of hair, of their shoes, of their mountains of shoes. What we have seen is that that our things, if they can still be used, are spared, while we are not. And to have seen this is a lot worse than to have seen corpses.”)

xxv Even human cultures which idealize animals in theory (as do, for instance, all those in which shamanism is practiced, where the encounter with one's “power animal” is the core event of initiation) routinely exploit, torture and kill real animals. In all cultures, violence against a human exposes the wrongdoer to risks of retaliation, or to weighty social sanctions; violence against animals hardly ever even registers as violence. To illustrate this point analytically with an amount of evidence commensurate with its generality would take a book-long foray into the anthropological literature which would ultimately only laboriously and eruditely restate the obvious.

xxvi It is far from coincidental that the use of animals as instruments of production and reproduction can easily be recognized as the paradigm for the two crucial forms of intraspecific oppression, slavery and the abuse of women. This disturbing connection reveals the human-animal construct as the archetype of two other constructs which have been at the centre of queer analysis, those of sex and race. So far, relatively few individual examples have been researched in depth: Patterson 2002 offers a fascinating analysis of the historical relationship between the techniques of mass murder in Nazi

concentration camps and the slaughtering and processing practices of the American meatpacking industry in the early 20th century.

xxvii Seidman's account (Seidman 1993) is useful in its clear differentiation between "liberation theory" and the subsequent emphasis on "civil rights": "Liberation theory presupposed a notion of an innate polymorphous, androgynous human nature. Liberation theory aimed at freeing individuals from the constraints of a sex/gender system that locked them into mutually exclusive homo/hetero and feminine/masculine roles" (Seidman 1993:110); "From a broadly conceived sexual and gender liberation movement, the dominant agenda of the male-dominated gay culture became community building and winning civil rights. [This] found a parallel in the lesbian feminist culture, with its emphasis on unique female values and building a womans-culture" (Seidman 1993:117).

xxviii "To love the other is to preserve his strangeness, to recognize that he exists beside me, far from me, not with me."