



Journal for Critical
Animal Studies

Journal for Critical Animal Studies

Continental Philosophical Perspectives on Non-Human Animals

Guest Editor: Chloë Taylor

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GUEST EDITORIAL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Painting the Prehuman: Bataille, Merleau-Ponty, and the Aesthetic Origins of Humanity

Brett Buchanan¹

“Nothing must be concealed: what is involved, finally, is a failure of humanity.”

--Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share II*: 14-15

In a lecture that Georges Bataille delivered on January 18, 1955, the birth and death of humanity came together in an unexpected way. The lecture that Bataille was to deliver would eventually recount his visitation of the Lascaux caves in France and the prehistoric paintings found therein, but the manner by which he opens his talk is slightly unorthodox:

It has become commonplace today to talk about the eventual extinction of human life. The latest atomic experiments made tangible the notion of radiation invading the atmosphere and creating conditions in which life in general could no longer thrive. Even without war, the experiments alone, if pursued with a little persistence, might themselves begin to create these conditions. I do not intend to talk to you about our eventual demise today. I would like, on the contrary, to talk to you about our birth. I am simply struck by the fact that light is being shed on our birth at the very moment when the notion of our death appears to us. (2005: 85).²

The moment of which Bataille speaks—the present moment, January of 1955, a night on which he delivers a talk titled only by its date and in which he identifies the discovery of our collective birth as September 12th, 1940—splits the future and past,

¹ Brett Buchanan is Assistant Professor in the Department of Philosophy at Laurentian University (Canada). His research interests include contemporary continental philosophy, environmental thought, and critical animal studies. His current projects include an investigation of the concepts of revolt, freedom, and violence in early environmental and existential thought, and animal ethology in continental philosophy. He is the author of *Onto-Ethologies: The Animal Environments of Uexküll, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Deleuze* (SUNY, 2008).

² Pagination in this essay will hereafter refer to this book, unless otherwise noted. Bataille's original book bore the title *Lascaux ou la naissance de l'art*. The English collection is a compilation of many essays and notes by Bataille on prehistoric art.

death and birth, through one long transition as the passage between animality and humanity. The birth occurs through the passage from animality to humanity, as discovered in art, whereas the death occurs, arguably and no doubt speculatively, through the passage from humanity to animality, as evinced by the sciences of experimentation and war. Through the transformation of humanity in its passion for destruction, self-effacement, and “the prospect of absolute death” (104), Bataille hints at a cataclysmic end already foretold within the cave paintings that are taken to be a trace of our beginning.

This presents an intriguing Bataillean dialectic between the birth and death of humanity wherein neither term is resolved but is left to waste in its indeterminacy. Rather than perceiving the birth of humanity in the Lascaux paintings, as many have done, I wish instead to play with the thesis that we see the impossibility of humanity. Inasmuch as a birth always foretells an eventual death, and that death is always already inherent within the birth, the sacrifices depicted in the Lascaux paintings may not be the sacrifices of animals, as is often thought, but the self-sacrifice of humanity in the erasure of its own image. The dawning consciousness of death—as these paintings of bison, reindeer, and horses are said to reveal—must have awakened the impossibility of being, which undoubtedly would have inspired a number of reactions, many of them suggested by Bataille himself: shame, laughter, religiosity, guilt, arousal. And what better way to express this impossibility than through the rendering visible of one’s own self-effacement? Is it not possible, then, that the passage from animality to humanity is either still underway, never to be completed, or, in what might be the same thing, was always doomed from the start to be a failed passage? Might not the transgression of the boundary separating humanity and animality be not against animality per se, but against the idea that animality had been left behind in the thought of our birth? If this is the case—and admittedly it is only a wild hypothesis—then the paintings in Lascaux depict the acknowledgement of being always already prehuman, or, put otherwise, that humanity is a condition that is never fully formed inasmuch as it is a process continually in the making. As a tentative conclusion, I will suggest that the impossibility of humanity rests on what Bataille calls the “formless”

in nature. The human never quite takes shape in these early self-referential depictions, always appearing deformed, altered, and/or disfigured.³

In order to better highlight this reading of Bataille and the prehuman (a term that I'll use as a placeholder for the animal-human passage), I'll turn to the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty on art in which he emphasizes a passage of a different kind between the prehuman and the human, one that rests not on a speciesist transition between animality and humanity but instead on a phenomenological register wherein the painter strives to express the prehuman condition. Merleau-Ponty thus provides further depth to our reading inasmuch as he describes the *act* of painting as an inherent passage or transition. Painting in-and-of-itself seeks to capture the formation of humanity and yet, in doing so, it necessarily betrays its own end as it comes up unfinished. As we shall see, this passage holds interesting parallels for how we might think of the rendering visible of the invisible in what he calls the continuous rebirth of humanity. Becoming-human is a continuous accomplishment, but one wherein the prehuman is never left behind. This paper has four sections: the discovery of Lascaux (and how animality is at its centre), the readings of Lascaux, the notion of a deformed humanity, and lastly an animal ontology of art.

The Discovery

Humanity, Bataille writes, "appeared on earth with art. And Lascaux is the first truly majestic sign of this appearance" (92). If it is the case that humanity and art are coincident, can art and the aesthetic ever truly be divorced from animality? Must not animality necessarily be implicated within this picture as art's archaic base and/or ground? That is, to confront art, one must always already address animality as its source and foundation. As it turns out, the confluence of Lascaux, art, and the birth of humanity has a rather curious injection of animality within it. As Bataille weaves his

³ Most commentators on the Lascaux paintings have appropriately emphasized the aesthetic and artistic qualities of the images, but it is also the case that the animals, as a question within the debates over the origin of art, have received attention as well. For further readings on this, see in particular: Steven Ungar (1990: 246-262); Howard Caygill (2002: 19-25); Akira Mizuta Lippit (2002: 18-29); Suzanne Guerlac (1996: 6-17); Suzanne Guerlac (2007: 97).

narratives, including his endeavour to retell the discovery of Lascaux, what emerges is a near literal enactment of the images contained within the cave, complete with an expulsion of animality and the transition from a childlike, prehuman wonder to the awareness of one's own maturity. In the case of the Lascaux cave in France, as well as the Altamira cave in Spain, we are informed that the discovery of each prehistoric landmark was made by a few curious children who, with their tiny little bodies, accessed the wealth of human origins by crawling into otherwise inaccessible spaces. Bataille stages a fairytale-like setting when he describes how a five-year-old girl innocently wandered into the Altamira cave in 1879 only to discover the marvelous frescos found therein. In a similar vein he describes how a few young boys discovered the Lascaux cave when they went searching for a lost dog that had fallen into a fissure in the earth's surface (59/95). In both cases, Bataille emphasizes the youth and childlike wonder that enabled the paintings to come to light, enacting a story of innocence that bore out the discovery of our own present-day humanity. The descriptions of these descents—"into a room of a thousand and one nights," as he puts it at one point—enact a dreamscape that will come to mirror the fantastical images contained within. The lost dog, as it turned out, was a journalistic extravagance in order to tell a better story. But, as told in an essay a few years later, even if Lascaux's discovery was not due to "the fall" of a dog (and what might begin to look like interesting biblical resonances), it was due to an animal nonetheless, namely a dead donkey.

Yes, a dead donkey lies at the origin of Bataille's story. And one hesitates to think that this is merely accidental. "I have been at pains," Bataille informs his audience on that night in 1955, "to get an intimate grasp of the truth of the discovery" (96). For some 15,000 years the Lascaux cave remained cut off from the world, free even, so we are told, from "the slugs themselves" (95). Its nearly perfect state, untouched, unseen, and therefore uncontaminated, was only unsettled in the mid 1920s when a storm uprooted a pine tree revealing a deep yet unexamined cavity. Shortly thereafter the hole was filled over with some sticks by a few local farmers in order to keep the sheep, who were grazing nearby, from falling in. Suffice it to say, these farmers were not curious enough to inquire within. The cave, by all appearances, had therefore been free from the presence of any live animal, be it a slug, dog, sheep, or prehistoric auroch. It was free from animality. If we are to imagine this space as the place of

humanity's birth, the presence of a live animal would presumably trespass upon the sanctity or sacredness of the cave. We enter the cave, therefore, as Suzanne Guerlac has well put, in search of a sacred moment.⁴ This is what makes the character of a dead donkey, as we are about to see, all the more fascinating.

Lascaux was discovered by four boys—Bataille repeatedly calls them “children” despite the fact that their ages were somewhere between 15-18 years old—who were told about the cave by a local woman who discovered the cavity when she removed the sticks in order to “put her dead donkey in the hole” (95). Led by the eldest boy, Marcel Ravidat, the four of them dropped the 7 meters into the hole, where, “next to the remains of the dead donkey,” they soon encountered the treasure of animal images (96). Already prior to the discovery of the images themselves, and the stories hidden within, the revelation of the birth of humanity coincides with the literal expulsion of animality, in this case the dead donkey that, as waste and refuse, was better hidden away than buried. The donkey was not expelled from the cave, of course, but from the daylight of human perception, expelled from sight in being pushed back into the darkness from out of which humanity emerged. It would be tempting to see the donkey as a sacrifice given to the idols of prehistoric art, but such a fanciful reading would not accord with Bataille's understanding of sacrifice even if it might with the sacred.⁵ In a passage from his *History of Eroticism*, the second volume of *The Accursed Share*, Bataille writes the following of the sacred animal:

In a basic sense, what is *sacred* is precisely what is *prohibited*. But if the *sacred*, the *prohibited*, is cast out of the sphere of profane life (inasmuch as it denotes a disruption of that life), it nevertheless has a greater value than this profane that excludes it. It is no longer the despised bestiality; often it has retained an animal form, but the latter has become *divine*. ... Thus, the *sacred* announces a new possibility: it is a leap into the unknown, with animality as its impetus (Bataille, 1994: 92-93).

4 I am influenced here by Suzanne Guerlac's (1996) wonderful essay “Bataille in Theory: Afterimages (Lascaux)”.

5 “Sacrifice restores to the sacred world that which servile use has degraded, rendered profane. ... It is not necessary that the sacrifice actually destroy the animal or plant of which man had to make a thing for his use. They must at least be destroyed as things, that is, insofar as they have become things. Destruction is the best means of negating a utilitarian relation between man and the animal or plant” (Bataille, 1991: 56). It is clear that the donkey was not ‘used’ as a sacrifice, though one could interpret that the donkey no longer served a function or use, and was sacrificed as such.

If not a sacrifice, then, at the very least a push into the unknown, as the donkey transforms from despised bestiality, irreverently cast out of a profane and mundane life, and into the depths of a waiting prehistoric temple. A dead donkey, then, unintentionally and yet somehow appropriately, ushers in the discovery of humanity's birth.

Prehistoric Art

Let us begin our look at the wonder of Lascaux with an equal bit of enchantment and excuses. Theodor Adorno, in his characteristically dour way, has said that attempts to derive an aesthetic from the origins of art "are inevitably disappointing" (Adorno, 1997: 325). Such disappointment, as recounted in his book *Aesthetic Theory*, is not a complete retraction from discourses on prehistoric art. One might instead say that there can only be disappointment if something is expected from the paintings and they subsequently fail to live up to them, in this case a thorough comprehension of the cave's purpose and uses. Against such standards, disappointments surely arise, and an indeterminacy of understanding would be perfectly legitimate. Adorno continues, "The earliest surviving manifestations of art are not the most authentic, nor do they in any way circumscribe art's range; and rather than best exemplifying what art is, they make it more obscure" (325). The question of the clarity of the paintings in Lascaux have never really been doubted, since in nearly every interpretative reading of them one finds apologetic clauses that suspend or distance the interpretations from the paintings themselves. Thus, along with Adorno, we find with Bataille that these paintings depict "an ungraspable reality" about which we will never know anything precise. Similarly, with Maurice Blanchot, who, in his review of Bataille's book on Lascaux, notes that the paintings disorient us in their "inescapable simplicity" and fill us with a "lacuna" despite being "images without enigma." Or again, with Merleau-Ponty, who describes these paintings as an "inarticulate cry" that is heard but poorly understood, like pure content without form, images without an ordering frame (Bataille, 1997: 64; Blanchot, 1997: 3; Merleau-Ponty, 1964b: 182). These cries resound for some 15,000 - 30,000 years, a temporal period that takes us back to an era often described as "prehistory" inasmuch as the continuity of time breaks, jags, and fragments with only brief and scattered images flashing here and there. And yet, in spite of such reservations, we nevertheless discover the attempts to understand these

artworks. One is almost compelled to engage with them. If they are inarticulate cries, they still call out for response. It is thus that Bataille can be found writing, that even though he “renounced the comprehension of this mystery” of the images, he still thinks it is “possible to shed some light” on them (171).

As shall become apparent, Bataille’s primary suggestion is that these paintings depict the dawning of humanity’s self-consciousness as both the same as *and* different from the rest of the animal world. However, tied in with this thesis is an older and more conventional interpretation, namely that the appearance of the animals along the cave walls can be attributed to a magical or religious dimension of prehistoric, prehuman peoples (I prefer to use the designation ‘prehuman’ to emphasize this idea of a transition or passage). With respect to Lascaux in particular, Abbé Henri Breuil, one of the first to see the paintings immediately following their discovery in the 1940s, reaffirmed a prevalent thesis that the images had a “magical character in relation to the hunt” (49). The images of the reindeer, bison, and aurochs, it is said, are suggestive of chases and killing. The animals are often seen running, fleeing, jumping, at some points over unseen cliffs, and in others impaled and dying. Let alone the quality of the movement depicted, what Adorno highlights as the great “indeterminacy” of these images (compare them, for instance, with the sometimes static images of Egyptian or Attic art), the presence of the animals have been read as indicative of magical conjurings. It seems clear, however, that the images were not intended to survive, either within their own time or down to our day. Bataille notes that the representations are not like the images found in a temple or church that seek a degree of permanence, and nor are they like “decorations” that one might use and keep for one’s own continued enjoyment. They are not, in other words, early signs of “art for art’s sake,” and the images themselves cannot be properly considered as “objects of art.” They were, as Walter Benjamin puts it in his celebrated essay on art, “first and foremost an instrument of magic which only later came to be recognized as a work of art” (Benjamin, 2002: 107).⁶ They have not survived as works of art—

6 Benjamin continues: “Prehistoric art made use of certain fixed notations in the service of magical practice. In some cases, these notations probably comprised actual performing of magical acts...; in others, they gave instructions for such procedures...; and in still others, they provided objects for magical contemplation....The subjects for these notations were humans and their environment, which were depicted according to the requirements of a society whose technology existed only in fusion with ritual” (107).

despite how we view them today—but as traces of something far less permanent and known. The fact that the images have survived at all appears to be entirely accidental, as evidenced in the “indifference” the painters paid to pre-existing images; the paintings and drawings often overlap one another with no clear attempt to erase or separate the images, thus demonstrating little attention to their continued preservation “as is.”

This is far from suggesting a lack of care, however. Instead of emphasizing their permanence as objects of art, the importance of these images was in their execution, in the sudden *apparition* of the animal as part of the ritual (76). In line with this thesis of magical conjurings, the evocation of the animals had to be “*rendered present* in the ritual” (50) as a form of idolatry. The apparition of the animal, rather than enacting a past conquest, more often signaled the preparation for a future still to come. Bataille imagines the scene in the cave as nothing less than a prehuman session of adrenaline-induced delirium for the big hunt upon which life and death will depend. And why not? Let us imagine the ritual with him:

an attentively executed drawing, extraordinarily true to life, though seen in the flickering light of the lamps, completed in a short time, the ritual, the drawing that provokes the apparition of the bison. This sudden creation had to have produced in the impassioned minds of the hunters an intense feeling of proximity of the inaccessible monster, a feeling of proximity, of profound harmony (51).

Bataille imagines the prehuman’s fear in not making it back alive from the hunt, of not coming home with anything to eat, but also a sympathy for the hunted who so closely resembles the hunter that the hunter and hunted could very well be interchangeable. Indeed they often were. This feeling of proximity and harmony, however, is ill-defined and nearly ungraspable, for the apparition of the idol (i.e., the animal) signals an incomprehensible beyond *with which* the prehuman supposedly identifies. That is, the feeling of proximity with the apparition can only come about if the prehuman is him/herself but an apparition or poorly formed idea. In his essay on “Prehistoric Religion,” Bataille notes:

the apparition of the animal was not, to the man who astonished himself by making it appear, the apparition of a definable object, like the apparition in our

day of beef at the butcher that we cut up and weigh. That which appeared had at first a significance that was scarcely accessible, *beyond* what could have been defined. Precisely this equivocal, indefinable meaning was religious (135).

This begins to address the magical, ritualistic interpretation of the paintings. The treatment of the animals (ibrexes, aurochs, horses, etc.) testify to a care and wonder in the execution of what is beyond, indeterminate, just as much as it unsettles the difference between the prehuman and the animal. And it is this point that I wish to emphasize here. The prehuman sees him/herself in the apparition of the animal, but inasmuch as the animal was inaccessible and impermanent, so too then is the prehuman within his/her own eyes. The prehuman, as we are calling this indeterminate being (*Homo floresiensis*, *Homo neanderthlensis*, *Homo rhodesiensis*, or even early *Homo sapiens* would likely be more scientific names), would have been by definition literally between a past animality and our present humanity (assuming, of course, that we abide by these conceptual categories). This passage, it goes without saying, was far from a precise moment in time, but rather a “slow change, a change of infinite discretion” (145). As enacted through these paintings, however, we witness the figurative mirroring of this passage. On the one hand, Bataille will note that the prehumans left us images of the animality that they had escaped, whereby they stopped being animal-like by *giving* the animal in an act just short of a sacrifice (60), while on the other hand he will also state that the “images they left us amply testify to a humanity that did not clearly and distinctly distinguish itself from animality, a humanity that had not transcended animality” (55).

I believe, therefore, that the interpretation of the paintings as religious ritual – what has been called a functional or utilitarian interpretation – already carries within it the more celebrated interpretation of what Akira Mizuta Lippit calls the “arche-epistemology of a primal scene – humanity’s eruption onto the surface of the earth.”⁷ All interpretations boil down to this ontological eruption.

⁷ Lippit, A. M. (2002), “Archetexts: Lascaux, Eros, and the Anamorphic Subject”, *Discourse* 24, 2, p. 19.

Deformed humanity

The only thing that might rival the hyperbole surrounding the sudden appearance of humanity upon the scene of prehistory is the pictorial representation of this emergence. As already hinted at earlier, we have yet to view a naturalistic representation of the prehuman within these prehistoric caves. Despite the detail captured in the wealth of animal imagery (e.g., consider the movement captured in the “Falling Cow”), at no point does this realism translate into human figures. They are almost *a priori* disfigured. The erasure and defacement of the human therefore threatens to steal the thunder from the bold claims of *Ecce homo*. Rather than beholding the magnificence of the human, we are left to behold the almost human who appear to “flee their humanity” (65). “In fact,” Bataille writes, “when he was ‘born,’ he did not prefer what he would eventually become, *that which he is*: the creator of a world of durable things. On the contrary, he effaced the aspects of this world of which his face is the sign. He had not yet prevailed, but he apologized” (80). And perhaps even blushed or laughed at his own immodesty and indecency, indeed even at his own ugliness in comparison to the beauty found in the bulls, horses, and bison (79).

The retreat from his/her own image may in fact be in response to a transgression depicted within and by these paintings. The step from prehuman to human enacts the transgression of a law, even if it is only an implied law, as the gesture of a “sovereign infraction” on the part of the artist (Blanchot, 1997: 5). Blanchot, in his essay “The Birth of Art,” notes two essential moments of prehistoric transgression: the first is what we might call a “natural transgression” when the prehuman stands erect, defies the laws of nature, and rises up almost in awe of himself and the refutation of his biological predisposition. The infraction is less of a conscious willing than a biological determination. The second transgression noted by Blanchot is that of art itself, that, likely for the first time, demonstrates the prehumans’ capability to “become master of everything” via the imitation of nature (6). By comparison, the former transgression is deemed insufficient as a break from the natural order; a transgression, yes, but a relatively minor one, whereas the latter opens up an entirely new realm by breaking with the natural as such. Yet the most significant feature of this second transgression is not so much the art itself—which is admittedly

extraordinary—but the specific artistic depiction of humanity. The striking feature is that with the mastery of the natural world, as evinced in the birth of art, the human is both omnipresent and, at one and the same time, precisely nowhere to be found. The transgression effects an overcoming of animality but one wherein the self-mastery is sorely lacking. At one point Bataille describes this as a paradox, but calling it a paradox seems too innocent a description. “The paradox of the Upper Paleolithic world,” he writes in an essay on “The Lespugne Venus,” “is that it gave animals the expressive value of the real, whereas its representations of humans, much more rare, are occasionally formless, even caricatural, occasionally deformed, sometimes disfigured by an animal mask, which eliminates their humanity” (107). The transgression occurs when the prehuman foregoes further identification with the animals that have been so evocatively realized, and in doing so witnesses his/her own breaking of solidarity with the natural order (e.g., with the Montespan bear), leading to the extreme point of self-effacement (Guerlac, 2007: 34). The unease with one’s own image may just as well be a sense of shame rendered in the absence of a reciprocating gaze; an embarrassed blush of reason in the refusal of self-identification.

We are beginning to get to the point where we might question what is really at stake in the supposed birth of humanity. It is starting to look like a fraught adventure inasmuch as the indeterminacy of the prehuman threatens the positive determination of a certain way of being called ‘human.’ In an essay on “Primitive Art” published some 20-30 years earlier than his Lascaux writings (and thus 10 years before Lascaux’s “discovery”), Bataille had already put his finger on the issue when he contrasted traditional European art with the

shocking duality at the beginning of figurative representation. Reindeer, bison, and horses are shown with a meticulousness so perfect that if we had similarly scrupulous pictures of men themselves, the remotest period of human development would cease to be the most inaccessible. But the drawings and sculptures that represent the Aurignacians are nearly all formless and *much less human* than those that represent animals (40).

Why is it that there are no corresponding images of those who painted these images and carved these figures? That the represented animals might be *more* human than the images of the prehumans, as Bataille notes, likely says more about the artists

themselves than the accuracy of the images. One reading would be to suggest the autoerotic nature of the prehuman figures. Following Claude Lévi-Strauss, Bataille argues that though animals have a sense of sexuality they do not have the more developed, cerebral aspect implied by eroticism (e.g., taking a stone carving *as* a sexual object). Thus the blossoming of sexual organs is often accentuated in the folds and extensions of flesh. And yet this is still at the expense of human figuration, in which the expression of individuality has been suppressed in the featureless, anonymous, and exaggerated bodies (112). Even if it is possible that these images and figures had an erotic meaning, Bataille himself admits that it is highly debatable given the lack of corroborative evidence. We would also have to question Bataille's implicit acceptance of the more erotic nature of humanity.

Another reading would be to highlight the *formless* itself, be it erotic or otherwise. The concept of the "formless" (*informe*) had already been canonized in the untraditional encyclopaedia Bataille had been working on in the late 1920s, around the same time as this last passage. As it is a key concept within his writings, and it recurs frequently throughout the Lascaux writings, I quote at length:

A dictionary begins when it no longer gives the meaning of words, but their tasks. Thus *formless* is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its form. What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm. In fact, for academic men to be happy, the universe would have to take shape. All of philosophy has no other goal: it is a matter of giving a frock coat to what is, a mathematical frock coat. On the other hand, affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only *formless* amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit (31).

Bataille repeatedly refers to prehistoric depictions of humans as formless, whether with the bird-man in Lascaux (to which I'll return in a moment), or the Venus of Willendorf, or the Lespugne Venus. Often these images are called "grotesque," "featureless" (112), "unfinished" (79), the "stupefying negation of man" (46), or more consistently, simply "deformed" (which carries a more pejorative sense, as in "loss of form," than the slightly more neutral "formless"). Of the few images of deformed

humanity, there is one in particular that captures Bataille's attention, just as it has captured the attention of many both before and since. It is the image of a bird-man found in the "Shaft" section of Lascaux, the deepest and most inaccessible part, where, in child-like form, the bird-man lies (wounded? dead? resting? in a trance? erect?) beside an impaled bison and a small bird. Concerning this scene, which Bataille calls "the holiest of holies," we discover "a measure of this world; it is even *the* measure of this world" (137).

When the art critics Rosalind Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois looked to offer a substantially new interpretation of modernist art in the twentieth century, they found their guiding principle in Bataille's notion of the formless inasmuch as it provided an avenue to counteract the entrenched binary between content and form. Bois explains in the "Introduction" to *Formless: A User's Guide*, "It is not so much a stable motif to which we can refer, a symbolizable theme, a given quality, as it is a term allowing one to operate a declassification, in the double sense of lowering and of taxonomic disorder. Nothing in-and-of-itself, the formless has only an operational existence...The formless is an operation" (1997: 18). Just as the cave paintings have been interpreted as rendering the animal present in the *act* of painting (where the final product is secondary to the apparition itself), the images of the formless prehumans can be read as active operations of self-negation, albeit where the images themselves enact the declassification operative in the act of painting. It is in this sense that Adorno, for instance, views the paintings as "a protest against reification" (327), almost as if the prehuman wished to mark a trace before vanishing back into the universe. In the end, this is what Blanchot took to be the bird-man's simplicity: "it seems to me," he writes, "that the meaning of this obscure drawing is nonetheless clear: it is the first signature of the first painting" (11), as if pronouncing "here I am," even if the 'I' in question is more than indeterminate. A signature of whom, then? Might we not take this to be the sublimity of "the holiest of the holies," the transgression at the heart of humanity's birth? Consider, for instance, how Kant (2007) describes the sublime as, by definition, formless. Compared to the form of beauty, "the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes, a representation of *limitlessness*, yet with a

super-added thought of totality” (244).⁸ Aren’t these formless prehumans, lacking the frockcoats of an ordering mind, just such a representation of limitlessness? Isn’t the sublimity of these prehuman images precisely to be found in the mind’s recognition of the impossibility of its own finished humanity?

A Vibration of Appearances

The limitlessness entailed by the absence of form is, from another perspective, the perpetual rebirth of humanity as accomplished through the simple act of vision. To perceive is none other than to give birth to oneself in the reciprocity of the world. Perceptual experience, as Merleau-Ponty will often note, is the precondition of humanity as a “nascent *logos*,” as the birth of knowledge making the sensible sensible (Merleau-Ponty, 1964:25). This rebirth of the human condition is accomplished, in an extraordinary way, through the act of painting, which works to render the invisible visible. At roughly the same time, then, that Bataille was composing his thoughts on prehistoric art, Merleau-Ponty formulated some of his most influential writings on art and nature, and in which, perhaps unsurprisingly, Lascaux emerges. In his 1952 essay on “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,” an essay dedicated to Jean-Paul Sartre but largely devoted to André Malraux (who had just published a large treatise on art entitled *The Voices of Silence*), Merleau-Ponty remarks that “The first sketches on the walls of caves set forth the world as ‘to be painted’ or ‘to be sketched’ and called for an indefinite future of painting, so that they speak to us and we answer them by metamorphoses in which they collaborate with us” (1964c: 60). Most intriguing in this passage is the reference to a “metamorphosis” through which we respond to the paintings. It is not entirely clear what Merleau-Ponty means here, other than that our relations with this archaic past calls for a continuous exchange wherein both past and present are hermeneutically revived and, through the exchange, ultimately transformed. But a metamorphosis also suggests something far more interesting and surreal. One imagines modern humanity emerging transformed from out of the atemporal cocoon of its prehuman larval stage, much like a butterfly that emerges

⁸ Kant precedes this passage by stating that “the beautiful in nature is a question of the form of the object” (75)

triumphant through its pupal transformation. In a later essay, “Eye and Mind,” Merleau-Ponty will similarly speak of the “metamorphosis of Being” by which objects (e.g., an animal, a mountain) *make* themselves visible to the eye. Either way, we have a reciprocal transition of form inaugurated by the primacy of perception.

Throughout his aesthetic writings, Merleau-Ponty will often indicate that artworks are evocative not only of metamorphoses, but also of magic, delirium, ghosts, strange possessions, hauntings, and oneiric universes, all in the name of the visible itself.⁹ It is through the act of perception that the perceiving subject is continuously reborn, and inasmuch as the painter plays directly with the realm of the visible, she brings a world to life. But it is not any old world, since the painted world is, by all accounts, a spectral one, lending shadows, light, reflections, and the like, a ghostly presence. A visual existence that is neither real nor unreal, neither nature itself nor its imitation, it holds a strange possession all of its own. It is in this sense that painting can be said to give “visible existence to what profane vision believes to be invisible” (1964b: 166). Compared with the profanity of perception, the painted image is always already haunted with the sacred and magical such that, for Merleau-Ponty, the very act of painting is congruent with a passage back and forth between the prehuman and the human. The indefinite future of painting plays upon this very transition, for without this process the act of painting may be at its end.

This is a departure, then, from Bataille’s thesis concerning the birth of humanity as discovered *in* prehistoric art. By contrast, the birth of humanity is for Merleau-Ponty omnipresent in *every* painting, be it 40,000 years ago or just last week. It is in this way that he can contend “In whatever civilization it is born, from whatever beliefs, motives, or thoughts, no matter what ceremonies surround it—and even when it appears devoted to something else—from Lascaux to our time, pure or impure, figurative or not, painting celebrates no other enigma but that of visibility” (165-66). While the emergence of being human carries for Bataille a quasi-evolutionary index, as evidenced in the rupture of the Lascaux paintings that mark past from present,

⁹ Merleau-Ponty writes (1964b), in his essay “Eye and Mind”: “Light, lighting, shadows, reflections, color, all the objects of his quest are not altogether real objects; like ghosts, they have only visual existence” (166).

animal from human, with Merleau-Ponty there is an abrupt abandonment of any historical register, inasmuch as the very accomplishment of painting *itself* is the ontological metamorphosis. It *is* the testament to perception, the sacred act of witnessing the invisible, the continuous rebirth of the human.¹⁰ “It can be said,” Merleau-Ponty writes in his essay “Eye and Mind,” “that a human is born at the instant when something that was only virtually visible...becomes at one and the same time visible for itself and for us. The painter’s vision is a continued birth. ...This prehuman way of seeing things is the painter’s way” (167-68).¹¹

If we follow Merleau-Ponty here, this would suggest that the paintings in Lascaux—including but not solely the therianthropic humans—can only ever be prehuman visions that are actualized as human. The passage between prehuman and human is accomplished in the act of painting. This would accord with the formless self-depictions, wherein the invisible is rendered visible, the prehuman made human, and yet the act is always unfinished due to the indeterminacy of the originating perception. Whereas the prehistoric caves hold for Bataille the mysteries that he calls the cradle of humanity, for Merleau-Ponty any and all paintings address “the vibration of appearances which is the cradle of things” (1964a: 18). To express the vibration of appearance is perhaps the best way to account for how these prehistoric paintings foretell and question humanity’s place in the world. Though they may elude full comprehension, there is little doubt they do so necessarily, since the figure of the prehuman haunts our existence with every dogged perception we have.¹²

10 We might think of this as analogous to the biological theory that maintains—we now know incorrectly—that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. As analogy it holds a certain resonance within the aesthetic domain. In bringing to expression the “inarticulate cry,” the painter renders visible the prehuman world in a similar way that, if the analogy holds, the prehistoric prehumans graduated to humanity.

11 To push this analogy further, we might look to how this metamorphosis is enacted within the art of children, as written on by both Merleau-Ponty and Bataille. “Besides,” Bataille notes, “what are children if not animals becoming human” (1991: 65).

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Hunting the Mammoth, Pleistocene to Postmodern

Matthew Chrulew¹

In the decades following the Second World War, Georges Bataille became fixated on that site of prehistoric becoming that his most prominent source, the Abbé Breuil, called “The Cradle of Humanity.” He devoted a number of essays and lectures to articulating the event of hominization that was increasingly being revealed by palaeo-archaeological evidence. In particular, he saw the cave art of Lascaux and other sites, with their sublime depictions of animals, as disclosing the advent of humanity. On a number of occasions he commented on the serendipity of these discoveries, on the weightiness of pondering *prehistory* in the period widely marked in Bataille’s philosophical milieu, following Kojève’s lectures on Hegel, as that of history’s *end*. In a 1955 lecture he remarked that:

It has become commonplace today to talk about the eventual extinction of human life. The latest atomic experiments made tangible the notion of radiation invading the atmosphere and creating conditions in which life in general could no longer thrive. ...I am simply struck by the fact that light is being shed on our birth at the very moment when the notion of our death appears to us. In fact, only recently have we begun to discern with a kind of clarity the earthly event that was the birth of man. (Bataille, 2005: 87)

¹ Matthew Chrulew is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Centre for Research on Social Inclusion at Macquarie University, Sydney. He is writing *Mammoth* for Reaktion Books, and editing (with Dinesh Wadiwel) the volume *Foucault and Animals*. His essays have appeared in *Humanimalia*, *The Bible and Critical Theory*, *Metamorphoses of the Zoo* (ed. Ralph Acampora) and elsewhere. He is a member of the Extinction Studies Working Group. <<http://extinctionstudies.org/>> Contact: <mchrulew@gmail.com>

In his essay “Unlivable Earth?”, Bataille returns to this thought, suggesting that “We might have a sublime idea of the animal now that we have ceased being certain that one day the nuclear bomb will not make the planet an unlivable place for man” (2005: 178). Thus Bataille ties together the possibility of the end of history in anthropogenic ecological apocalypse with the thought of the advent of “man,” and what is more makes clear that these beginnings and ends of man—with which his poststructuralist successors have been occupied in their own ways—are tightly tied to the question of the animal.

Indeed, much recent thought in Continental philosophy, critical theory and animal studies has interrogated the connection between posthumanism and the animal question. In *The Open*, Giorgio Agamben uses the concept of the “anthropological machine” to describe the interminable process—both conceptual and material, philosophical and political—by which the human is produced at the expense of the animal (2004: 37). Humanity’s idea of its own transcendence and uniqueness is articulated, from prehistoric cave art to modern science, via its fraught relationship to the nonhuman animal.

Today, our anticipation of the ecological end of humanity has both shifted and intensified. The nuclear threat that so troubled Bataille is but one part of that historical shift identified by Michel Foucault as the transformation to an age of biopolitics that strategically wagers the very life of the human species, as indeed—though Foucault did not say this—the lives of all those nonhuman species with which we share (or do not) the planet (Foucault, 1998: 139). While the Cold War might be behind us and the nuclear threat not quite so foregrounded, we are troubled today by other global ecological hazards that are constantly enumerated in reports of habitat destruction, pollution, extinctions of animal species, and escalating climate change that threatens to undo the human political and economic order. Bataille’s sense of the timely significance of our ideas of *prehistory* and of *the animal* ought to be undiminished, indeed heightened, by the ecological crises of today.

While ubiquitous and acute, these concerns seem often to be ciphered through one particular prehistoric animal: the mammoth. This extinct beast, whose demise coincides with our own ascent, is today a privileged figure in stories of environmental transgression, guilt and redemption. Through the analysis of a number of narratives of the mammoth hunt—fictional and philosophical, ethnographic and scientific—I will explore how prehistory is problematized and put to work as a primal scene for the anthropological machine and its production of man over against the animal and the natural world.

The extinct mammoth is prominent in contemporary stories of ecological domination and restoration. For W. J. T. Mitchell, “The dinosaur [was] the totem animal of modernity...a symbolic animal that comes into existence for the first time in the modern era” and that “epitomizes a modern time sense—both the geological ‘deep time’ of paleontology and the temporal cycles of innovation and obsolescence endemic to modern capitalism” (1998: 77). I want to argue that the mammoth is the totem animal of *postmodernity*, a symbolic animal that, like the dinosaur, appeared relatively recently in our cultural awareness and soon became exemplary of the fears and hopes of our age. Unlike the dinosaur, however, the mammoth epitomizes not deep time and the perpetual change of capitalism but, rather, the liminal transition from deep time to historical time that we find at the Pleistocene/Holocene border (“near time”), and today’s ecological *crisis* of ever-changing capitalism pushing the earth’s natural limits.

In terms of their cultural meaning we can distinguish, provisionally, three types of extinctions: evolutionary (such as the dinosaurs), prehistorical (such as the Pleistocene mammalian megafauna), and historical (such as the thylacine, dodo, and passenger pigeon). These differ not only in their temporal location but also in their proximal cause. While the first (the evolutionary extinctions) are seen as natural, the result perhaps of climatic changes brought on by events such as the Chicxulub asteroid that ended the Mesozoic reign of the dinosaurs, and the last (the historical extinctions) are the result of European colonialism and the capitalist practice of extracting profits as if natural resources were infinite, it is the middle group—the Pleistocene

megafauna extinctions—that prove so meaningful and contested today. And we seem to have elected the mammoth to represent the sabre-tooth cat, the mastodon, the giant sloth and other, less well-known, now defunct large mammals. If for Mitchell the “terrible lizards” are both obsolete and literally dreadful in their evolutionary sublimity, the woolly mammoth, while robust, is, as a herbivore, hardly menacing; and despite its extinction, there is a powerful sense in which these frozen carcasses are not yet done with.

The notion that the mammoth is central to our self-definition is borne out in the reading of a number of contemporary mammoth tales. Jeanne Willis’s (2008) children’s story *Mammoth Pie* presents us with a prehistoric encounter between an emerging humanity and this forbidding and alluring species. The “fat mammoth” is the object of desire for the hungry “thin caveman,” Og, who “was fed up with eating seeds” and “weeds.”

“Meat is what a caveman needs!” said Og.

“I’ll catch the mammoth and put him in a pie!”

Hardly up to the task of bringing down a mammoth alone, Og uses the promise of meat to enlist the help of fellow cavemen, the specialized labour of each contributing to the attempt, whether spear, trap, cart, pot or fire. Each selfishly asks what they will get in return, to which the answer is always: “A bite of Mammoth Pie!” And since their need for meat is axiomatic, the cavemen agree, singing together, “No more weeds! No more seeds! Meat is what a caveman needs!” But when it comes time to bring down the mammoth, their tools are not enough. The mammoth is joined by his family who stomp in to comprise an intimidating herd, and instead of a successful hunt we witness a comedic debacle as the outnumbered and emasculated Og, Ug, Gog, Bog, Nog, and Mog run fearfully away, breaking their tools, deprived once more of the meat they “need,” left rather with weeds and seeds.

This is a familiar narrative of becoming-human through the joining of forces in a social contract that binds together the prehumans and sets them against the natural world—here exemplified in the mammoth—the domination of

which is necessary for their progress beyond a rather pathetic state of nature. *Mammoth Pie* exemplifies what Derrida (1991) calls in some of his late work “carnophallogocentrism,” that is, the production of the privileged carnivorous, male, speaking subject through the sacrifice of the animal other. This children’s story of course plays with and mocks this idea of the human, replaying as farce the once momentous primal drama of hominization. Sick of his enforced vegetarianism, Og attempts to kill the mammoth, but is defeated by the superiority of the mammoth herd. Yet it is precisely the *failed* humans that are laughed at; for all the inability of these cavemen to become carnophallogocentric subjects, with the accompanying misanthropic or at least misandric humour, the reader is always implicitly aware that, in the end, the specialization and ingenuity of meat-desiring cavemen will pay off. Eventually, man will get his mammoth pie and grow fat and powerful. Unlike the pathetic cavemen, *we* are not foiled in our domination of nature but have rather triumphed in our search for the meat that we need.

It is not only in western children’s books that the mammoth figures as the animal in relation to which the carnivory and dominance of humankind is articulated and questioned. In his wonderful ethnography of Siberian reindeer herders, Piers Vitebsky recounts an intriguing campfire conversation in which his hosts comment on the difficulty he is having in adapting to their eating style:

Granny directed Masha as she ladled out large pieces of meat from one pan and a mixture of intestines and other inner organs from another. The herders and I pulled out the wooden-handled sheath knives from our belts and laid them on the table for everyone to use. We took it in turns to use the knives to reach in and stab at the meat, biting on the edge of a large hunk and slicing upward to separate the piece gripped between our teeth from the rest. I have never been comfortable with this way of eating, but do it all the same.

Suddenly Tolya asked, “Did you know that archaeologists have discovered a tribe of long-nosed Europeans who used to live here?”

Many natives read a lot of archaeology and anthropology, and Tolya read more than most. I must have paused gratifyingly, for he went on, “They became extinct because they kept cutting off their noses every time they tried to eat. It’s obvious from Darwin or Lamarck—you’ve got to adapt your nose or your eating habits. Only the flat-nosed Asiatic tribes survived!”

Granny chuckled and Emmie gave a shriek.

“That’s no guarantee,” said Ivan soberly. “Mammoths had long noses. They didn’t cut meat because they were vegetarian. But they died out all the same.”

Granny chortled again. (Vitebsky, 2005: 89)

I quote the initial description of their vigorous, carnivorous meal at such length because it provides the material frame for the mention of the mammoth. Tolya’s initial joke is a charming just-so story that ties the short-nosed facial features of his people to their seemingly hazardous table manners, contrasting their successful adaptation to the implicitly inferior whitefolk. But Ivan’s supplementary remark upsets the simple contrast. The mammoths, like the fictional defunct European tribe, died out in the area. But their extinction cannot be put down to a failure to amend their eating habits—at least, not in the same way; unlike the different kinds of human, the mammoth tribe does not eat meat, let alone wield knives to do so. What, then, led to their demise? Ivan’s implicit answer suffuses the entire exchange, and its alimentary context, with its disquieting sobriety: it was, of course, the carnivorous “eating habits” of the humans.

The “cradle of humanity” has long been a favored ideological playground, and not only for bedtime or campfire storytellers. The dramatist Robert Ardrey, influential author of *African Genesis*, *The Territorial Imperative*, and *The Social Contract*, narrated the violent origins of man in his concluding “personal inquiry” into human evolution, *The Hunting Hypothesis*. Criticising the romantic fallacy of humanity’s originary innocence, he argued that *Homo sapiens* are essentially predators, descended from killer apes. Central to his portrayal of prehistory was the “overkill hypothesis” of Pleistocene megafauna extinction. Ardrey narrates how, at the end of the ice age, newly sophisticated human hunters entered North America via the Bering land bridge and “within a thousand years after our arrival...exterminated the mammoth” (1976: 10). Lacking the long familiarity with this marauding primate that enabled other proboscideans to survive:

The mighty mammoth of North America died of innocence. It and the mastodon supported on their monumental legs about 25 percent of the continent’s meat. As they must surely have been as intelligent as their African cousin, they must surely have been as formidable. But what good is might when you have never encountered the most dangerous of animals, the human being? (1976: 10)

This new predator’s extraordinary combination of sophistication and ferocity condemned the megafauna to dwindle and vanish, the unfortunate casualty of the emergence of man the hunter.

Of course, Ardrey is only one among many anthropologists and palaeontologists, professional and amateur, to have made their own erudite contributions to the chronicles of carnivorous cavemen. Wiktor Stoczkowski has described how the hominization scenarios of nineteenth- and twentieth-century scientific paleo-anthropology or what he calls “conjectural history,” from Lamarck, Darwin and Engels, through Washburn, Ardrey and Leroi-Gourhan, to the late 1970s and beyond, betray a constant tendency to make use (without empirical backing) of folk or naïve anthropology as articulated

through more than two millennia of Western philosophical and commonsensical thought. Stoczkowski provides a detailed analysis of the types of causal relationships imagined and repeated throughout this tradition, the recipes for hominization comprised of familiar ingredients such as ecological change, bipedalism, hunting, fire, tool-use, art and language. He argues that these narratives are only superficially related to empirical developments; rather, they draw strongly on the conceptual matrix of Western anthropology (construed broadly), and are given particular ideological inflections based on the historical context and desires of their authors. Thus he delineates how, according to the Soviets, it was labour and collectivization that transformed ape into man; while according to Americans in the midst of the Cold War, early man was a violent hunter whose predatory instincts, when combined with nuclear technology, put modern society at risk; whereas according to the archaeological “herstories” of countercultural feminists of the 1970s, it was cooperation and food-sharing, led by the first women, that were the agents of hominization (Stoczkowski, 2002: 182-4).

Mart Cartmill gives more detail to the post-war American obsession with man the hunter embodied so vividly in Ardrey’s dramas. In such stories of anthropogenesis, hunting is the central means of the becoming-man of man. Cartmill argues that:

During the 1960s, the central propositions of the hunting hypothesis—that hunting and its selection pressures had made men and women out of our apelike ancestors, instilled a taste for violence in them, estranged them from the animal kingdom, and excluded them from the order of nature—became familiar themes of the national culture, and the picture of *Homo sapiens* as a mentally unbalanced predator threatening an otherwise harmonious natural realm became so pervasive that it ceased to provoke comment. These themes were disseminated not only through popular-science books but also through novels, cartoons, films, and television. (1996: 14)

And as he goes on to argue, this picture was so widely accepted for reasons that had more to do with mythological self-understanding than scientific evidence. The hunting hypothesis is a rationalized version of the Christian Fall narrative, with original sin consisting in man's anti-natural predation, and the possibility of redemption thus lying in a more harmonious relationship to nature. Cartmill concludes by arguing that the hunting hypothesis is

a fable. Its abrupt acceptance by science in the years after World War II had more to do with new conceptions of the animal-human boundary than it did with the facts about *Australopithecus africanus*. We should recognize it as an origin myth, dreamt up to justify the dubious distinction we draw between the human domain and the wild kingdom of nature. (1996: 226)

While Cartmill does not explicitly discuss the trope of the mammoth hunt, the mammoth has always been central to our scientific reconstruction of prehistoric human origins. As A. Bowdoin Van Riper (1993) describes, the discovery of mammoth fossils led to a shakeup of accepted beliefs about the origins of man and the static and unbreakable scale of nature, transforming Victorian science and opening up the very possibility of the pre-historical. It is the contemporaneity of man and mammoth which lies at the heart of our picture of lengthy human evolution that replaced religious ideas of human recency. Thus ideas of human origins and of extinction have, from the beginning, been explored through the vehicle of the mammoth. Yet if evolution undermined a certain notion of transcendence, embedding our species within the natural history of the earth, human uniqueness was soon reaffirmed as our capacity to unbalance the nature from which we emerged. The extinction of the mammoth is a signal that humanity was not simply a product of evolution, but had itself become an evolutionary force.

Central to many narratives of the human-mammoth encounter is the overkill hypothesis of Pleistocene megafauna extinction, which maintains that not climate change but unrestrained human hunting was responsible for the

demise of mammoths and other species at the end of the ice age. Advanced by Paul Martin (1967; 2005) and others since the 1960s, yet often contested on empirical and political grounds, this influential theory has offered its own distinctive fable of origins, contributing to the image of man the hunter, as advocated by the likes of Ardrey, and to successor scientific stories told today (Flannery, 2001). Too often this image of humanity as a species universally destructive of the environment obscures the historical intensification of such damage in modern colonialism and capitalism. Yet just such intensification seems only to strengthen this underlying theory of human nature. When articulated within contemporary ecological consciousness, the overkill hypothesis stages not only the violence of an exceptional primate, but also its widespread destruction, the enormous scale of the extinction that resulted from the spread of *Homo sapiens* around the world. It is this perception of human culpability for the mammoth's extinction that provokes the desire to simulate or even resurrect them today, in projects such as the rewilding of Pleistocene Parks and the venture to clone the mammoth (Chrulew, 2011).

Such seemingly science fictional projects are often described or critiqued by reference to that familiar fable of human hubris and nature's revenge, *Jurassic Park*. Yet such comparisons overlook what is specific and unique to stories of prehistoric mammoths, which are located one twist further along the dialectic of humanity-in-nature than modern tales of the vengeance of terrible lizards against meddling scientists. While the "natural" extinction of Jurassic dinosaurs made possible the survival and evolution of Mammalia, the "man-made" extinction of Pleistocene mammoths did not unfurl but impoverished planetary life. Recreating this ice age giant and its habitat is not simply a perpetuation of our technological imperialism but rather an attempt to atone for it, a way of seeking redemption for our ecological sins, if once again through *techne*, the only way we know how. Postmodern mammoth tales recognize that we are already living through the vengeance of nature against human intervention; given that we can hardly keep ourselves from impacting on the natural world, the question instead becomes how best to intervene, and whether we might in fact act in ways that remediate previous, harmful ecological effects. Such is the burden of humanity in the Anthropocene.

For many, however, the further application of rationality and technology can only perpetuate human domination. For some thinkers of prehistory, man the hunter is not the original model of contemporary, destructive *Homo faber*, but rather stands opposed to our utilitarian universe in his primordial immersion in animal urges. The mammoth hunt is here not an original sin but the vital assertion of a lost aspect of humanity.

Jean M. Auel's popular *Earth's Children* series of alternate history novels follow Ayla, an orphaned Cro-Magnon raised by Neanderthals, and her partner Jondalar. This mix of romance and speculative fiction relies on detailed research on prehistoric lifeways. The third book in the series, *The Mammoth Hunters*, follows Ayla's encounter with the Mamutoi, a tribe of mammoth hunters based on the Aurignacian culture. Ayla spends much of the novel caught between Jondalar and another man, confused about her purpose in life. The climax of the novel is a mammoth hunt described by Auel in animated terms that meditate on the nature of these proto-human creatures, cooperative and violent, yet worshipful and respectful of nature:

[Ayla] had always wanted to hunt mammoth, and a chill of anticipation shot through her when she realised that she was actually about to participate in the first mammoth hunt of her life. Though there was something utterly ridiculous about it, when she stopped to consider it. How could creatures as small and weak as humans challenge the huge, shaggy, tusked beast, and hope to succeed? Yet here she was, ready to take on the largest animal that walked the land, with nothing more than a few mammoth spears. No, that wasn't entirely true. She also had the intelligence, experience, and cooperation of the other hunters. And Jondalar's spear-thrower. (Auel, 1980: 728-9)

As in other myths of human origins, cooperation and tool-use are the key to this weak species besting its obvious superior. The sacrifice of the powerful animal plays a central narrative, social and mythic role: in addition to

providing food it also helps resolve the existential and sexual crises of the characters. The fear of the mammoths, and killing them, provides Ayla a thrill, and the bloodlust of the massacre, an event both violent and sensual, ultimately results in bringing her and her love interest Jondalar back together.

They chase the mammoths with firesticks, spears and other phallic objects, setting them to stampede towards a trap, an enclosed canyon where they could kill them with impunity. Inside, “blaring screams of mammoths echoed off hard, icy walls, grating on the ears, and racking on the nerves. Ayla was filled with almost unbearable tension, part fear, part excitement” (Auel, 1980: 731). The kill scene depicts spears down throats and in bellies and an excess of red blood on white ice. Ayla takes on a bull by herself, and wounded, it charges and almost kills her. When Jondalar finally comes to her rescue, he is shaken at the thought of losing her:

his heart...pounding with fear for her. He'd almost lost her!
That mammoth nearly killed her! Her hood was thrown back
and her hair was in disarray. Her eyes were sparkling with
excitement. Her face was flushed and she was breathing hard.
She was beautiful in her excitement, and the effect was
immediate and overwhelming (Auel, 1980: 733)

He soon finds “the blood rush to his loins” at the hunt’s consummation: “He could have taken her that instant, right there on the cold, bloody floor of the ice canyon” (Auel, 1980: 734). Not only does the event of the mammoth hunt drive them together; it is in particular the sensual excitement of the closeness to death—killing and almost being killed by this honourable creature—that drives his desire.

The bloodlust of this primal scene, as well as its overall romanticization of the butchery, is in some ways reminiscent of Bataille’s primitivism. Bataille, in his opposition to the utilitarian horrors of industrialized modernity, offers a vision of prehistoric peoples (and, for that matter, of present-day Siberian “primitives”) who do not separate their godlike selves from animals, as we

moderns do, but rather efface the human image amid powerful figures of animals akin to divinity. Commenting on the cave art at Lascaux, he writes:

The reality that these paintings describe singularly exceeds the material search for food through the technical medium of magic. Prehistoric hunting has little to do with the rather innocuous modern pastime. It was the activity not of an individual or of a small number of individuals but of an entire population that sometimes confronted monsters. For the hunters using flimsy weapons, the pursuit of a mammoth undoubtedly had something prodigious in it, which had to have unleashed the passion, the frenzy of an entire group of men. (Bataille, 2005: 166)

Bataille's is a profound philosophical encounter with prehistoric art, a refined staging of the emergence of "man" through the representation of sacred animal images and the transgression of prohibitions tied to death, sexuality, and the overcoming of animality. The event of anthropogenesis is here not successful or resolved, but an act of erasure that effaces man as soon as he appears. The animal world, rather than the opaque sphere from which modern humans celebrate or mourn their difference, is here an open domain deserving of primeval solidarity.

For all their differences of genre and finesse, the primitivist fantasies of both Auel and Bataille portray mammoth bloodletting as an anti-modern communal ritual, a moment of sensual natural immersion that has been lost to civilization. Unlike many iterations of the hunting hypothesis, which posit a fundamental continuity between *Homo sapiens* as prehistoric predator and as capitalist consumer, between the extinctions of the mammoth and mastodon and those of the dodo and passenger pigeon, these prehistoric tales oppose our early vital continuity with the animal world to modern domination and transcendence and its attendant ecological crises, thereby linking the thought of prehistory and the prehuman with the end of history and its posthuman avatars.

For Ardrey, too, our prehistoric becoming is tied to the spectre of apocalypse. He paints the totality of agricultural civilizations as but the brief evolutionary interlude of “interglacial man,” imagining a near future of overpopulation and climate change triggering starvation and wholesale social collapse. And yet, as always, this dystopia contains within it a utopian kernel: “What I suspect is that the survivors of this glacial calamity that will befall us, decimate us, and through most appalling natural selection discard...[us]—will pool their collective genes into one more subspecies of *Homo sapiens* in a few tens of millennia, and take one more step away from the ape in the direction of the human being” (Ardrey, 1976: 219). Avoiding nostalgia and melancholy, Ardrey mourns the loss of the hunting life:

As an interglacial man, I feel no embarrassment, except for one thing—that we ended the hunting way. It had shaped us, given us—anatomically and socially—the way we are. But we killed off our fellow species in the natural world. The death of the hunter and the hunted must be the sin that interglacial man committed in the memories of his inheritors. How do you live when the tundra returns but not the reindeer, the aurochs, the extinct mammoth? (1976: 219)

In this science fictional scenario, when the ice encroaches once more and yet nature remains forever impoverished by our grasping hand, what remains for the mammoth and its extinct brethren is to inhabit our artworks, our science, our stories, as spectres, figures, fables—as the mortal creatures that they were. Ardrey writes, “I suspect that our Ice Age inheritors, whatever their literate capacities, will turn back to the villains and heroes of interglacial man for the lessons of what to do, and what not. It could be our greatest legacy” (1976: 219). There are certainly stories enough to fill this new ice age bestiary. Beyond those recounted here, our film and literature, philosophy and science, are filled with mammoths enduring, over and again, our predation and our projection (Chrulew, forthcoming). Mick Smith (2001) reminds us that ecological moralising about extinction events can compound the effacement

of the vanished animal itself. Indeed it is vital, in questioning and telling these stories, to do what we can to engage ethically with the parted, as other, precisely by moving on from the past. Yet within these mammoth stories, from the didactic to the transgressive, subsists precisely this desire to have the dead speak to us and to carry forth their wisdom, if not their life. As a legacy to our postapocalyptic successors, there is plenty in the archives of the mammoth that is worthy of the most refined posthuman moral reflection.

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Animal Affects: Spinoza and the Frontiers of the Human

Hasana Sharp¹

Introduction

Seventeenth-century philosophers are frequently reviled for their views of nonhuman animals. It is typical for literature on animal rights to locate the historical origin of our ghastly treatment of animals in the Cartesian worldview (e.g., Regan 1983).² Descartes and his followers receive dubious recognition for disenchanting the natural world and tearing humanity from the fabric of a more integrated relationship to the cosmic order.³ With early modernity, the gods were pulled from the heavens only to be allowed to tyrannize the earth under the banner of natural science and human progress. The familiar narrative maintains that the scientific worldview of the seventeenth century, with its mechanistic portrait of nature as a series of predictable but aimless causes and effects, gave birth to the now dominant commonsense that imagines nature as a spiritless field of resources to be exploited. It is a commonsense in which human creativity and authority are the final word and other beings exist only to serve our ends. As for nonhuman animals, we need not consult their own purposes and pleasures, for, as Descartes's student Malebranche remarks: "They eat without pleasure, cry without pain, grow without knowing it; they desire nothing, fear nothing, know nothing" (Malebranche, quoted in Harrison 1992: 219).

1 Hasana Sharp is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at McGill University (hasana.sharp@mcgill.ca). Hasana works on the history of political theory, early modern philosophy, Marxist and feminist theory. She is very interested in posthumanist challenges to ethics and politics and their effects in philosophy of race, animal studies, and feminism. Her first book *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization* is forthcoming from University of Chicago Press (2011). It develops the consequences of Spinoza's denial of human exceptionalism for contemporary politics.

2 See the Wikipedia entry on "animal rights," which discusses Descartes at length. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animal_rights> (accessed 3 February, 2011).

3 For a challenge to the view of Descartes as the father of moral indifference toward animals, see Cottingham (1978).

The celebrated voice of the “radical enlightenment” (Israel 2001), Benedict de Spinoza, although not the *locus classicus* of modern anti-animal sentiment, is likewise identified as an enemy of the four-footed kind. According to one commentator, Spinoza is much more hostile to nonhuman animals than Descartes (Wolloch, 2006: 43). Although he was less influential than Descartes, Spinoza stands accused of continuing and even amplifying the justification for the instrumental use of animals by humans. On a biographical note, in contrast to Descartes who was known to have lavished affection upon his canine companion (Vrooman, 1970: 194), Spinoza indulged in the “sadistic” pleasure of encouraging spiders to fight for his twisted amusement (Berman, 1982). In this paper, I argue that Spinoza exhibits ambivalence and anxiety about the human-animal boundary, and this is so precisely because it is within the context of the early modern paradigm shifts that such a boundary becomes all the more permeable. Thus, in contrast to the narrative that claims that the loss of spiritual continuity between animal and human life makes possible the early modern view of beasts as unfeeling machines, Spinoza’s case, we will see, suggests that the increasingly naturalistic worldview threatens to erode the distinction between human and nonhuman animal. It is precisely this erosion that puts philosophers on alert, as it were, and prompts them to assert artificial boundaries in order to preserve (or, fabricate, depending on your perspective) human dignity and distinctiveness.

Indeed, the more a naturalistic and evolutionary worldview took hold, to culminate in Darwinism, the more baroque philosophers’ accounts of human exceptionalism had to become. Such a tendency continues to operate today. Most contemporary philosophers share the Kantian compatibilist view of human freedom that maintains that, although our bodies and behaviors are determined by an entirely predictable chain of cause and effect, morality requires that we attribute to rational beings a free agency that can nowhere be observed except by the inward looking eye of reason (Kant 1999 [1781], A 448/ B 476 – A 452/ B 480). The mysterious moral imperative to attribute a “special cause” to human action, even when human behavior is entirely predictable and can be accounted for the same way as any other natural thing, is a vestige of the wishful thinking that aims to maintain that humans are, concomitantly, natural beings and absolutely distinct in kind from natural things. This antinomial logic – this view of ourselves as A(nimal) and not-A(nimal) – is visible even in Spinoza, whose system denies any absolute differences between finite existents.

In Spinoza's philosophy, God ceases to be a remote and benevolent ruler, analogous to a magistrate, and becomes an immanent principle, infusing each and every being from the "lowest" to the "highest." Thus, Albert Einstein (1929) thought that Spinoza's God might be none other than the lawfulness of the universe, the infinite energetic power that connects each being to every other in a stable and regular fashion. In contrast to the mainstream Enlightenment tradition, Spinoza did not bring God to earth only to relocate divinity in reason. Rather, with his famous formula *Deus sive Natura*, God disappears into nature and dissolves the elect status of humanity (Montag, 1989). Even though his metaphysical system demands it, Spinoza himself does not seem altogether comfortable with the consequences of his metaphysics for human distinctiveness. Thus, while the inevitable consequence of emerging natural science is that humans are a distinctive kind of animal, one of the most rigorously naturalist philosophers aims to insert a rigid boundary between humanity and what he calls "beasts." The importance of the distance between human and animal in the seventeenth century, as I suggested above, arises because it is precisely what can no longer be metaphysically sustained. That is, Spinoza exhibits profound anxiety about human and animal intimacy as he strives to establish the view that we obey a natural rather than a spiritual order. Perhaps the amplified "cruelty" some detect in Spinoza follows from his thoroughgoing naturalism, which tore down the wall between mind and body that Descartes erected, which distinguishes minded beings from the rest of nature.

Like any broad narrative about the history of ideas, this one involves a number of simplifications. My hope is that by taking a closer look Spinoza's notorious remarks on animals, we can understand better why it becomes especially urgent in this period – as well as our own – for philosophers to emphasize a distinction between human and nonhuman animals. In diagnosing the concerns that give rise to the desire to dismiss the independent purposes of animals, we may come to focus on a new aspect of what needs to change about contemporary thinking on species divisions. In what follows, I will bring out Spinoza's contradictory and ambivalent remarks pertaining to the specific differences between humans and animals. It is my suspicion that this ambivalence continues to plague us today. Like Spinoza, we want to say that humans are like and unlike animals. As a simply descriptive claim, it may be true and

innocuous. Yet, the way we affirm our proximity and distance from nonhuman animals requires careful attention. Spinoza viewed this proximity as a source of danger. We might do well to emphasize, with thinkers such as Donna Haraway (2003), how our proximity and difference are also sources of pleasure and power, both to be able to enjoy the affectionate bond that can often develop between humans and our animal companions but also to quell the anxiety that might encourage us to exploit and abuse them.

Animal Natures

Commentators are right to recognize that Spinoza exhibits no sympathy for nonhuman animals. He asserts our right to kill them, use them as suits our purposes, and expresses contempt for that “womanly” compassion that seeks to protect beasts from the excesses of man. He claims that animals have different “affects” and thus different “natures” from humans, and therefore we may use them as we see fit (E IVp37s1).⁴ Thus, in his remarks on animals he seems to insert a meaningful difference between both humans and nonhuman animals and between men and women. Women, according to Spinoza, tend to be overly compassionate toward animals, to feel with them, as the word implies, and thus fail to appreciate the difference in animal and human natures. Such feeling together of human and beast is inappropriate according to Spinoza, since it is not a fruitful exercise of right, which he identifies with power, understood as capacity (TTP 16.1). Spinoza maintains that it is to the detriment of our power, to our capacities as the kinds of beings that we are, to identify with the plight of animals and to consider their requirements to be on par with our own (cf. Montag, 2009). How does he support the claim that animals have different natures from humans? In this section, I will address this crucial question in effort to understand

⁴ All references to the *Ethics* are to *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. I. ed. and trans. E.M. Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). I adopt the following abbreviations for the *Ethics*: Roman numerals refer to parts; ‘p’ denotes proposition; ‘c’ denotes corollary; ‘def’ denotes definition; ‘d’ denotes demonstration; ‘s’ denotes scholium (e.g., ‘E IIp38c’ refers to *Ethics*, part II, proposition 38, corollary). All quotations from the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* [TTP] are taken from Jonathan Israel and Michael Silverthorne’s translation (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2007). All references to the *Tractatus Politicus* [TP] are to Shirley’s translation (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000). Citations of the TP and TTP refer to the chapters.sections (e.g., ‘11.4’ refers to chapter 11, section 4). All Latin passages refer to Spinoza Opera, ed. Carl Gebhardt, 4 vols. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925).

why he thinks their powers are incompatible with our own. In the following section, I will consider an unusual passage from Spinoza's masterwork, *Ethics*, which calls into question the rigid boundary he identifies between humans and animals. Moreover, in this same passage, he avoids suggesting that woman is destructively compassionate and thus inferior to man. So, while we will examine his claims for specific difference, we will see that he does not maintain them consistently. Such a finding implies that he glimpses the potential of his metaphysics to subvert the human-animal distinction, and yet shrinks from it whenever he sees fit to make an assertion about how we ought to regard our beastly cousins.

Although in contrast to Descartes, Spinoza does not deny that animals have sensations and feelings, he does justify preferring human interest as a general rule because "they do not agree in nature with us, and their affects are different in nature from human affects" (E IVp37s). Nevertheless, in his account of the fall from grace in the garden of Eden, he attributes Adam's loss of freedom to the fact that the first man began to imitate the affects of beasts rather than those of his partner, Eve (E IVp68s). We thus see that animal affects, whatever they are like for Spinoza, are not so different that we cannot be profoundly and perhaps irreversibly changed by them. While I will discuss Spinoza's peculiar version of the Fall in the next section, this point highlights the need to explain the character of human nature according to Spinoza.

Genevieve Lloyd has remarked that Spinoza's account of different "natures" belonging to humans and animals is "too imprecise" and does not help us to understand Spinoza's assertion of our rights over animals (Lloyd, 1980: 302). On a casual reading, he seems to claim that human nature is simply different in kind from bestial nature and thus we do not regard ourselves to be bound to them. Our affects, natures, and vital interests differ, and thus we have no moral or prudential reasons to preserve and enhance the lives of animals. Unlike Descartes and the idealist tradition that he inaugurates, however, this lack of imperative to care for animals does not follow from an absolute division between humans and animals. For Spinoza, there is no unbridgeable chasm between the conscious animal and the unconscious thing. Descartes, Kant, and Hegel frequently appeal to the infinite difference between humans and "things," a category that includes nonhuman animals, by virtue of an exclusive mental power to think, will, and represent our sensations. Yet, for Spinoza,

there are only differences of degree between humans, animals, machines, and rocks. Whereas Descartes maintains that beings have rational minds or they do not think at all, Spinoza asserts that all beings are, albeit to different degrees, animate (E IIp13s). We can see that Descartes's insistence on the universal rationality of humans was embraced by women and facilitated the dawn of humanism,⁵ in which each and every one is owed the respect of being called a "person." The flipside, of course, of claiming that mentality is all or nothing, is that it installs a stark opposition between minded and non-minded beings, and arouses debates that continue today about those putatively borderline figures – the cognitively disabled, the insane, the child, and the great ape – who clearly communicate but do not exhibit the acknowledged signs of reason and freedom of will. With the humanist tradition and its view of universal and equal dignity proper to all rational beings, it is absolutely wrong to use another person as a means to one's ends (Kant, 1997 [1788]). Nonhumans, however, ceased to belong to a spectrum of animate existence and became "things," the rightful means to the ends of persons. Arguments for a universal rational capacity proper to all humans and absent in all nonhumans, of course, coincided with the expansion of the slave trade and the millions of people who were used as tools were argued to belong to the category of things. The logic of humanism is Manichean: each being is or is not a person.

For Spinoza, in contrast, there is no ontological chasm between what has a mind and what does not. The foundations of reason exist as much in rocks, salamanders, and computers as they do in those beings we call "human" (cf. Melamed, 2011). Moreover, with the exception of the infinite mind of God, rationality is a matter of degree, and there is no one whose rationality is not "infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes" (E IVp3). Humanity, or personhood is not an absolute category and rationality is necessarily fragile and precarious in everyone (E IVappVII).

Rationality, for Spinoza, emerges out of the properties that bodies have in common. When bodies encounter one another, Spinoza claims that the mind cannot but perceive what they have in common, which results in certain ideas being adequate in "all men"

⁵ Harth (1992).

(E IIp38c). It is unclear why Spinoza only mentions that human minds perceive these common properties, but part II of his *Ethics* is expressly dedicated to explaining the nature and origin of the human mind. Without getting into the obscurity of his account of the “foundations of our reasoning” (called “common notions”), we can observe that reason depends upon our having sustained contact with those similar beings with whom we can, according to Spinoza, “agree in nature.” Nevertheless, Spinoza does not claim that humans automatically share a nature. There is no universal, overarching human essence that might tie all of us together. On his view, each being in nature – organic or inorganic – has a singular essence (or nature), a unique ratio of motion and rest and a distinctive striving to persevere in being (*conatus*) (E IIIp6). Desire is “the very essence of [a] man” (IIIp9s) and “the desire of each individual differs from the desire of another as much as the nature, or essence, of the one differs from the other” (IIIp57d). Spinoza notes the differences in nature between a human and a horse, but also between a drunk and a philosopher (let us not speak of the drunk philosopher, however!). When distinct desires come into contact with one another, they will “agree” more or less with one another, and thus be more or less productive of ideas that enable us to think and act more powerfully. Each being – a squirrel, a table, or an astronaut – aims to produce effects that enhance and preserve its nature, such that those with overlapping requirements tend to amplify each other’s power (Cf. Matheron, 2009). “Things which are said to agree in nature are understood to agree in power” (IVp32d). Adequate shelter and heat in Montréal during the winter, for example, preserves my being, along with that of my child, cats, electronics, and books. What maintains our being concurs to various extents. When Spinoza claims that “only insofar as men live according to the guidance of reason, must they always agree in nature,” he is making two claims: first, humans, by virtue of our humanity, do not always agree in nature; and, second, when we do those things that most preserve and enhance our being, we will also amplify the powers of those who share our needs.

When Spinoza claims that “the law against killing animals is based more on empty superstition and womanly compassion than sound reason” and urges us to “establish a bond with men, but not with brutes” (E IVp37s1; translation modified), he worries that feeling with and for nonhuman animals undermines the human bond that enables us to think and act in a way that best preserves and amplifies the distinctive powers of our bodies and minds. He insists that “they do not agree in nature with us, and their

affects are different in nature from human affects,” because he thinks that joining with brutes encourages irrational and “subhuman” behavior. In fact, as I discuss at much greater length elsewhere (Sharp, 2011: Ch. 6), every time Spinoza mentions humans and animals, it is in the context of decrying the desire among some to reject human community in favor of a wild freedom in association with animals. He despairs at the “satirists” and “melancholics” who “disdain men and admire the brutes” rather than helping their fellow man and “joining forces” against “the dangers which threaten on all sides” (E IVp35s). Although Spinoza claims that animal affects are simply different in nature from human affects, he urgently exhorts his readers toward human compassion and away from the animal compassion that he fears will lead us astray from “helping one another.” Thus, it is not that humans cannot feel with the animals, or that animals do not have feelings, but rather that humans and animals seem to Spinoza to be too close to one another, too similar, and too attractive to one another. As I argue elsewhere (Sharp, 2011: Ch. 6), he worries that human incivility, greatly in evidence in war-torn seventeenth-century Europe, will render “a life that is uncultivated and wild” increasingly appealing, and prompt “many, from too great an impatience of mind...[to prefer] to live among the brutes rather than among men” (E IVappXIII). However justified Spinoza’s paranoid fantasies were of a massive retreat from the labors of building a thriving human community, it is clear that he is concerned to erect a boundary between “man” and “beast” in order to promote a human solidarity that is in no way guaranteed by the objectively shared interests of “human nature.”

In particular, the profound fragility of rationality prompts Spinoza to erect a pragmatic, ethical boundary between humans and animals. Without “mutual help,” we can neither build an effective human society nor cultivate the powers of our minds and bodies, which are different in character but not in kind from those of other natural beings. It is the lack of a stable and given human power that makes it especially important to come together and produce those commonalities that might protect us from “the dangers which threaten on all sides” (E IVp35s). The irony, of course, is that those dangers are, first of all, one another. If man appeared to Hobbes, in Spinoza’s day, to be a wolf to man, it is due first and foremost to the spiritually inspired wars over the right to represent and honor God’s commands. For Spinoza, the absence of an invulnerable reservoir of rationality or an infinite power of volition as a

universal feature of human being causes him to differentiate between those who, like women, seem unable to command themselves sufficiently to rule or participate in the political process (TP 11.4), and to warn men against identifying with beasts, lest they become them.

Although, from a Spinozan point of view, humanists are wrong to ground ethics and politics on the absolute difference between “persons” and “things” (cf. Poole, 1996), the permeability of humanity is precisely what authorizes the domination and exploitation of nonhuman animals. Spinoza’s example shows that belief in the mutability of humanity and the permeability of the species frontier does not necessarily foster a pro-animal philosophy, and may even inflame anxiety about human affection for “beasts.” Nevertheless, I will suggest in my conclusion, from within a Spinozan framework, that the proximity of humanity and beastliness can be a source of power and pleasure. Still, we ought not presume that either the porosity of species boundaries or the resemblance between humans and many nonhuman animals suffices to engender an appreciation of nonhuman life. Spinoza is but one instance of a thinker for whom this intimacy is first and foremost a cause for concern. In the following section, I proceed to examine Spinoza’s account of affective contagion between beasts and the first man. I conclude with a brief discussion of how this principle of contagion and communication might be affirmed rather than feared, *pace* Spinoza.

Animal affects (and) the first man⁶

A parable for the human condition, the story of the expulsion from the garden of Eden is, of course, one of the most discussed stories in the Jewish and Christian traditions. It gives voice to a notion of human self-consciousness as that paradoxical grasp of ourselves as perfect and close to God, but also weak and alienated from the natural world. What dualism attributes to the difference between our spiritual and our corporeal natures, the Fall portrays in temporal terms. Our sense of immortality, infinite intelligence, and uniqueness is a primordial memory, which, by virtue of an

⁶ This section and some of the conclusion borrow from the analysis in my book (Sharp, 2011: Ch. 6).

original sin, was lost and through which we were condemned to be, in the words of Augustine, “mortal, ignorant, and enslaved to the flesh” (1993 [387-389], 105). To scan the history of philosophy and theology for interpretations of the story is to find innumerable accounts of what human perfection consists in, and what precipitates its loss. For Maimonides, an example surely well-known to Spinoza, Adam’s original perfection was his flawless intellectual grasp of truth and falsity, which, by virtue of an appetitive eruption, devolved into the lesser, practical knowledge of good and evil (1995 [12th century], Bk. I, Ch. 2). In contrast, as Nancy Levene points out, for Augustine prelapsarian perfection consists in a perfect will, which is imperfectly exercised by the first man (2006, 9). Original sin is then the paradoxical necessity of the entirely uncoerced will, which, in its total indetermination, can choose evil as easily as good.

Spinoza invokes the above story a number of times to illustrate aspects of the human condition (E IVp68s, TTP, 2.14, 4.9-11, TP, 2,14). Spinoza thereby participates in the tradition of treating Adam as an archetype of human existence, and puts his characteristic naturalist spin on the well-known tale. Adam serves, especially, as an example of our limitations, with which we must come to terms if we are to optimize our natural powers. Spinoza retells a rather peculiar version of the story in the *Ethics*, in which Adam’s imitation of the affects of beasts precipitates the Fall. In contrast to other philosophical glosses on the story, Spinoza’s Adam is not originally perfect in either intellect or will. He is, in mind and body, “like us...subject to affects” (TP 2.6). Although she barely appears in this retelling, the only intimation of perfection in Eden is the “wife, who agreed completely with [Adam’s] nature.” What was perfect, on Spinoza’s account, was not a particular human faculty or power, but the seamless suitability of the human pair, the fact that “there could be nothing in Nature more useful to him than she.” Yet Adam forsook the perfect communion (*convenientia*) he might have enjoyed with Eve “after he believed the beasts to be like himself” and “began to imitate their affects” (E IVp68s).

The lesson of paradise lost, on Spinoza’s naturalized rendition, is that the perfection of our power can only be had in the human bond. Spinoza’s account of “the fall,” we will see, reveals that even if he is sharply critical of the philosophical pillars maintaining *humanism*, he in no way advocates a turn away from humans. On the

contrary, although Spinoza staunchly denies human exceptionalism, he urges us to seek human unity above all else.

Let us consider more closely his account of “the first man.”

And so we are told that God prohibited a free man from eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and that as soon as he should eat of it, he would immediately fear death, rather than desiring to live. Then, man having found a mate who completely agreed with his nature, he knew that there could be nothing in Nature more useful to him than she; but that, believing that the beasts were similar to him (*bruta sibi similia esse credidit*), he soon began to imitate their affects (see IIIp27) and allowed his freedom to escape. (E IVp68s)

An unusual version of the story in which neither Eve nor a deceitful animal seems to do anything, Adam loses his freedom by virtue of a belief in his similarity to nonhuman animals, which prompts him to incorporate brutish affects. The “social psychology” of the *Ethics* describes an involuntary circulation of affect among those beings we imagine to be similar to us (IIIp27): we feel what those who appear to be similar to us seem to be feeling. There is a lot of room in terms of who or what is similar to us. Since it is an involuntary form of corporeal communication, I take Spinoza to be implying that we cannot but feel something similar to those around us in a crowd of people cheering exuberantly for their favorite football team (even if one, like this author, does not especially enjoy sports), but that we may not feel anything like what a bird feels when a flock of pigeons suddenly takes off toward a near rooftop (which is not to say that we do not feel anything upon noticing the coordinated flight of a bunch of feathered creatures). Yet, Adam felt with and like the neighboring beasts in the garden, which shows that nothing prevents us from communicating affectively with nonhuman beings – beings that, Spinoza maintains, have a “different nature” from ours. Whatever difference of nature exists between human and bestial bodies, it is not so profound that we are not susceptible to genuine transformations provoked by animal affect. Indeed, in this case, the contagion of animal affects explains what is traditionally represented as a dramatic transmogrification of human existence that accounts for pain, evil, shame, and the need for morality, among other things. The communication of affects between Adam and the beasts marks the dawn

of at least one narrative of human genesis and history. That is, on Spinoza's undeveloped account, involuntary communication with animal affects marks something important about the human condition itself.

As we observed above, humans do not enjoy a natural accord by virtue of our shared humanity. "Men can disagree in nature insofar as they are torn by ... passions" (E IVp33). Yet, insofar as two beings agree in power, they agree in nature (E IVp32d). Spinoza uses the word *convenientia* (from *convenio*) to indicate agreement, which implies a coming together rather than an identity. In contrast, when two natures do not accord with one another, they decompose one another's power. Warren Montag, in his reading of this passage, therefore suggests that "the inhuman" names for Spinoza all that threatens to decompose our power (Montag 2009), which is not safeguarded by stable species boundaries. It is, I suggest, the lack of ontologically grounded difference between man and beast that arouses Spinoza's concern about human-animal compassion and companionship. His claim about the incompatibility between our natures signals his concern that human agency is utterly fragile and that our attraction to nonhuman animals somehow threatens it. Why would Spinoza think that the human tendency to emulate animals is so great that he must regularly assert our difference from animals, a difference he has otherwise been at great pains to attenuate?

In the story of the garden of Eden, at least, we can observe that Adam had before him in the garden another human whose nature (essence) agreed perfectly with his own. Adam and Eve might have joined minds and bodies to engender great joy and lively ideas, and thereby enhance their perfection and agency. Had he turned toward Eve rather than undergoing the affects of beasts, Adam might have enjoyed the freedom that emerges when "two individuals of entirely the same nature are joined to one another," composing "an individual twice as powerful as each one" (E IVp18s). There was no other being in the garden with which he could have combined powers to better effect; nothing could have increased his power more than she. Yet, despite the fact that he "knew that there could be nothing in nature more useful to him than she," his feeling of kinship with the beasts disrupted the human bond that might have allowed him to live, like philosophers and gods, beyond good and evil (Ep 19).

Spinoza's odd recapitulation of the Fall follows the proposition that reads, "If men were born free, they would form no concept of good and evil so long as they remain free." The counterfactual in the proposition suggests that Spinoza does not, like other interpreters of the story, maintain that Adam was originally free, equipped with perfect knowledge. Indeed, he begins his account of the Fall elsewhere as follows:

Yet most people believe that the ignorant violate the order of Nature rather than conform to it; they think of men in Nature as a dominion within a dominion. They hold that the human mind is not produced by natural causes but is directly created by God and is so independent of other things that it has an absolute power [*potestatem*] to determine itself and use reason in a correct way. (TP 2.6)

Spinoza proceeds to meditate again on the Fall and concludes that "it must be admitted that it was not in the power of the first man to use reason aright, and that, like us, he was subject to affects" (TP 2.6). Adam shows us that, originally and irreducibly, the human condition is one of "intellectual vulnerability" (Ravven, 2001: 29). Our minds are vulnerable, moreover, not because they are entwined with our bodies, but because they are "produced by natural causes." Minds, no less than bodies, are bound in a community of cause and effect, necessarily affecting and affected by ambient forces, including nonhuman ones, like beasts.

Neither Adam nor any of us is born free and omniscient. Spinoza takes "as a foundation what everyone must acknowledge: that all men are born ignorant of causes" (E Iapp). As a result, we are compelled to look to a "model [*exemplar*] of human nature" and to form concepts of good and evil relative to this model. "I shall understand by good what we know certainly is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature we set before ourselves," and by evil "what we certainly know prevents us from becoming like that model" (E IVpref). Thus, like Maimonides and unlike many in the Christian tradition, knowledge of good and evil is not an index of our perfection. Shlomo Pines thus remarks that, for Spinoza and Maimonides, Adam did not illicitly taste knowledge of good and evil and thus receive punishment lest he become too powerful "like God," but that knowledge of good and evil, being an inferior mode of knowing, is itself the punishment for

transgression (Pines, 1983: 149)! Although I think it is not quite right to assert that knowledge of good and evil follows from the affective imitation, since, on Spinoza's telling, I think that Adam knew what was good – "he knew that there could be nothing in Nature" better for him than Eve – but his knowledge was overwhelmed by his feeling of similitude with respect to the animals. Pines is astute to note, however, that moral knowledge is a consequence of our finitude according to Spinoza. The human condition forces us to calculate the relative virtues of good and evil in a given situation to remain viable. Moreover, to have a moral sensibility means that we must, like Adam, act without awareness of what our decisions will yield. We reach out for the means of becoming more powerful, or we find ourselves attracted to what appear to be sources of vitality and pleasure – "So when the woman saw the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes..." (*Genesis* 3:6)⁷ – but there is never any guarantee that these ambient agencies will amplify our capacities, let alone in the ways anticipated.

Whether Spinoza tells the story as a decomposition provoked by toxic fruit or the affects of beasts, the Fall is a story of a finite, imperfect being, undermined by a disabling relationship. Adam loses freedom (power) because he does not know what kind of being he is, in multiple respects. Adam exhibits what might be called the "humanist problem": Adam believes that he is different in kind from other beings, elevated out of nature, unaffected by the sensual and affective operation of cause and effect. That is, he does not adequately appreciate that he is a part of nature, and therefore profoundly affected by his involvements with others, both human and nonhuman. The abstraction of the garden of Eden allows one to see a man in relationship to some of the greatest influences on his freedom and power: God/ nature, woman, and beast. These impact his power the most because they are potent features of his imaginary life, and fantasy matters. A lot. With Adam's tale, we observe the human tendency to imagine God as a legislator, his human mate as a danger rather than a helper, and beasts as worthy of emulation. Spinoza thinks that we go astray when we dream that we are God ruling over nature, or evade human solidarity, or

⁷ I am citing from the revised standard version, available online at < <http://www.bibleontheweb.com/>> (accessed 2 February, 2011).

imagine ourselves as beasts, for we estrange ourselves from those to whom we are, in actuality, most similar.

The tragedy of the Fall is a tragedy Spinoza observes everyday: it is the failure to regard the human bond as the most essential source of power and freedom. His entire philosophical project urges us to see in one another the greatest source of strength rather than predation (“man is a wolf to man”) or deceit (“beware the sirens’ song”). At least one moral of the story is that, despite his denial of a universal feature of humanity supplied by Cartesian rationality and will, Spinoza urges an ethical and political identification with fellow humans. Spinoza refers to our “desire to form an idea of man, as a model of human nature to which we may look,” and thereby warns us against striving to be other than we are. He notes that “a horse is destroyed as much if it is changed into a man as if it is changed into an insect” (E IVpref) to remind us that no being is liberated by transcending its nature.⁸ To become as free and powerful as we can hope to become, Spinoza maintains that “it is necessary to come to know both our nature’s power and its lack of power” (IVp17s). Adam, our archetype, reminds us that we will never enjoy a mind “so independent of other things that it has absolute power to determine itself and use reason in a correct way.” Indeed, “it is no more in our power to have a sound mind than a sound body” (TP 2.6). Yet Adam’s story is not such a tragic story, since the portal to freedom has not been closed. He, and perhaps we, need, first and foremost, to overcome our estrangement from Eve to amplify our powers. Yet, as finite beings, we will never cease feeling torn in different directions – toward and away from our fellow human beings – because we are still part of nature, mutating in response to our surroundings. Sometimes it is not so surprising that we might prefer beast to man.

Spinoza’s philosophical naturalism seeks to portray singular beings, especially “men,” as he says many times, as they are, and not as we would like them to be. But we cannot avoid erecting exemplars, or models, that give shape to our projected futures and the life we hope to build. Spinoza’s suspicion toward universal categories like species notwithstanding, he maintains the need for provisional boundaries to our idea

⁸ Spinoza is thus not a friend to “transhumanism,” a peculiar philosophical vision of technologically produced immortality. See Wolfe 2009: xv.

of “humanity.” He urges us to think of ourselves in a way that excludes other kinds of beings and warns against allowing our fantasies of other kinds of beings to govern our guiding fiction, the human ideal. Spinoza’s story of the fall suggests that Adam suffered because his self-ideal allowed him to blur himself with beasts and alienated himself from Eve. Despite Spinoza’s insistence elsewhere that women are naturally inferior to men (TP 11.4), it is significant that sexual difference does not diminish the perfect agreement between Adam and Eve. We might even detect, in the story about Adam’s mistaken identification with beasts, an obscure consciousness on Spinoza’s part of the barrier posed to human community by (male perception of) sexual difference. If Adam had been perfectly free, he would have acted on his clear and distinct perception of the perfect agreement between his body and Eve’s. Moreover, he would not have done so because he viewed himself and her to be equally human, equally worthy of personhood, but because he perceived their distinctive natures to be perfectly compatible with one another. Without perfect awareness of which bodies best agree with ours, Spinoza thinks we can lay down a general maxim that agency is most fortified by human community and friendship. Adam’s exemplarity reveals that, first and foremost, humans need compatible partners to enhance their minds and bodies. Moreover, in contrast to the Aristophanic ambition, Spinoza urges us to join ourselves to as many partners as possible. An enabling exemplar of humanity shows that paradise is regained when we “so agree in all things that the minds and bodies of all would compose, as it were, one mind and one body” and men “want nothing for themselves which they do not desire for other men” (E IVp18s; cf. IVp68s, the conclusion of the parable of the Fall).

Spinoza contra Spinoza

Spinoza invokes the adage “man is a God to man” to rebut Hobbes’s suggestion that humans have an irreducible lupine tendency that political organization must suppress, precariously and constantly. For Hobbes, one must not forget that “man is a wolf to man,” even if the sword can maintain godly relations among citizens (1998 [1642], epistle dedicatory). Humans can be political animals, but this possibility, for Hobbes, must be produced and then vigilantly maintained by the state’s monopoly on violence. Although I lack space to justify this claim now, Hobbes’s example points to the

possibility that an image of man as beast can motivate self-negation rather than the affirmation of our affinities with animals. Moreover, Spinoza may be thinking of Hobbes when he suggests that the perpetual fear of our fellow man as predator bars the discovery of those who might be standing beside us, in perfect agreement with our natures. In Hobbes' state of nature, the threat of the (imagined) wolf eclipses Eve, and arouses the admittedly present human susceptibility to imitate the affects of the ferocious and overly self-protective guardian and tear one another apart. Of course, in reality, wolves are much more peaceful toward their own kind than many humans, but these philosophers play with the image of the animal-man as the figure of aggression and bloodlust.

The threat of the animal-man is real in a certain sense, since Spinoza's naturalization of humanity is such that neither language nor volition nor reason distinguishes him finally from beasts. Thus, Spinoza may be even more vulnerable to the accusation, so often hurled at Hobbes by his contemporaries, of animalizing man (cf. Ashcraft, 1971). There is no clear boundary between species and no definite moment of anthropogenesis for Spinoza. Thus he inserts boundaries based on his preconceptions about what kinds of associations are best able to secure our power to think and act, in a world in which we cannot but be affected by the affects of beings like and unlike us.

If Spinoza's concern, however, was human finitude and the fragility of our thinking power, subject always to passions, he overlooked the enabling possibilities of beastly affective contagion. Thinkers such as Deleuze and Haraway suggest that an exclusionary paradigm of humanity that exiles dogs, plants, and robots from our sphere of primary concern may be a self-negation not unlike the one Spinoza worries about in his retelling of *Genesis*. Denying our affinities with animals may be a separation of ourselves from our own power, just as Adam's denial of his affinity with Eve cost him a powerful possibility for solidarity and communion. Posthumanist thinkers suggest that by disavowing that we only are who we are by virtue of the bacteria, nematodes, pace-makers, affections and labors of companion animals, and so many other involvements with nonhumans, we mutilate ourselves and the vital forces in our midst. It seems hard to deny that, just as Adam was weakened by forgetting his need for Eve, we are diminished if we disregard our need for animal affection. There is clear evidence that our minds no less than our bodies are enabled by relationships

with nonhuman animals. We are rendered powerful not just by instrumentalizing them as food or test subjects for pharmaceuticals, but by simple attentive co-presence, or companionship. Alzheimer's patients, for example, show improved memory upon friendly interaction with cats or dogs (Hines and Frederickson, 1997). Likewise, research reveals a "cardiovascular benefit" for males with dogs (perhaps Adam had a heart defect?). Children who have difficulty reading can be helped significantly by a canine audience, and mere pet presence improves arithmetic calculations, something Spinoza would surely appreciate (Garrity and Stallones, 1997). Although Spinoza does not offer reasons to proscribe human interest in favor of animal flourishing (as Genevieve Lloyd argues), his conception of agency as an effect of our involvement with ambient powers should furnish an appreciation of the many enabling aspects of the involuntary affective community between humans and animals. Indeed, in our epoch, it may be a sign of progress that young people are tempted to imagine romance with werewolves.

In this article, I have sought to make three points. First, Spinoza's case suggests that the early modern tendency to assert a rigid species boundary may not be a result of a mechanistic worldview that ceases to see nonhuman beings as part of a (hierarchically ordered) cosmic whole in which we are all embedded. Rather, mechanism, for Hobbes, Spinoza, and a number of philosophers influenced by their naturalism and materialism, can imply an increased proximity among humans and animals. This proximity, along with the permeability and plasticity of human nature suggested by early modern naturalists, threatens the distinctiveness of humanity. Indeed, the lack of metaphysical frontiers is precisely why Spinoza and others regularly insist on the difference between humans and animals. Thus, those who aim to defend animals by highlighting our similarities might take heed of the fact that humans have been historically threatened by these affinities, such that they seek to deny rather than acknowledge the aims and needs of nonhuman life.

Second, my interpretation of Spinoza is meant to show that he was not so much anxious to preserve a sense of human superiority over nonhuman nature (cf. E Iapp), but rather to affirm the human bond and its power to nourish our minds and bodies. For Spinoza, arguing on behalf of animals sounds like a threat to human solidarity. This feeling of the threat posed by compassion for beasts may or may not have been

paranoid, but the difficulty of producing durable forms of human solidarity was certainly palpable in his day, as it is in ours, albeit in different ways. I suspect similar fears are in evidence when people react so passionately to demands to curb our exploitation of animals. As someone who is horrified by our treatment of nonhuman animals, I seek to understand and respond constructively to the incredulity and fear provoked by animal activism. Perhaps it will help to take into account the way that compassion for animals is felt by many as a rejection of humanity.

Finally, I argued that, by denying the affective community we share with nonhuman animals, Spinoza overlooks the joyful and enabling features of our proximity to them. As many of us have occasion to experience the uplift and pleasure of simply being near nonhuman animals, we might seek to better appreciate the mysterious and involuntary corporeal communication that contributes so positively to the quality of our lives and to those of our animal companions. Although some animal rights activists oppose pet “ownership,” and it can certainly take many ugly forms, I doubt our anthropocentric psychology has even begun to glimpse the urgent affinity children feel with animals or the thrill a dog feels within her human pack. We long for even the most subtle contact with nonhuman animals, and the delight is only a hint of what we might be able to enjoy if we came increasingly to see their thriving and happiness as a condition of our own.

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The Status of Animality in Deleuze's Thought

Alain Beaulieu¹

“We love nature the less humanly it behaves,
and art when it is the artist's escape from man,
or the artist's mockery of man,
or the artist's mockery of himself.”
(F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §379)

“Animality is an exercise.”
(M. Foucault, *Le Courage de la vérité*, March 14 1984)

“We believe in the existence of very special becomings-animal
traversing human beings and sweeping them away,
affecting the animal no less than the human.”
(G. Deleuze & F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*: 237)

Introduction

Animals are omnipresent in Deleuze's work, and throughout Deleuze and Guattari's common body of work: the tick's world, the assemblage (*agencement*) of the wasp and orchid, the spider's prehension of the fly, the cat who knows better than the human how to die, the multiplicity of the wolf, the affects of Little Hans' horse, spiny lobsters' nomadism and bird-artists. Insects, mammals, crustaceans and birds are such an integral part of Deleuzian and Deleuzo-Guattarian thought that these thinkers even created a concept in these animals' honor: the becoming-animal.

¹ Alain Beaulieu is professor of philosophy at Laurentian University (Canada). He has a Doctorat de 3e cycle in philosophy from the Université de Paris 8 with a thesis on Gilles Deleuze et la phénoménologie (Sils Maria/Vrin, 2nd ed. 2006). He has (co)edited the following works: *Abécédaire de Martin Heidegger* (Sils Maria/Vrin, 2008), *Michel Foucault and Power Today* (Lexington Books, 2006), *Gilles Deleuze. Héritage philosophique* (PUF, 2005), and *Michel Foucault et le contrôle social* (PU Laval, 2nd ed. 2008). Email: abeaulieu@laurentian.ca

It is well known that this exploration of animality invites a de-anthropomorphization of the relationships between humans and animals in favor of an undomesticated type of relationship. Deleuze makes some very sarcastic remarks about domesticated animals, such as the dog whose barking warns her master of the approaching stranger or the “rubbing” of the cat who over-demonstrates his familiarity. Both Deleuze and Guattari seem to prefer wild animals. However, as we will see, it is not that simple.

“A” as in “Animal”

The *Abécédaire* (Deleuze 2004a) naturally begins with the letter A; in “A” as in “Animal” Claire Parinet questions Deleuze on his rather curious bestiary. Deleuze replies that he is sensitive to something in animals and cannot stand them when they become too familiar. He candidly admits to not liking “rubbers” (*frotteurs*) or the canine barking he considers “the shame of the animal kingdom.” He claims to better tolerate the wolf howling at the moon.

Deleuze goes on to say that pet lovers have human relationships with their animal companions, and considers it “frightening” (*effarant*) how people talk to their dogs as they walk down the street as if the animal were a child. What is most important, says Deleuze, is to have an “animal relationship with animals” (*une relation animale avec l’animal*). He holds psychoanalysis partly responsible for this symbolic reduction of the animal to a family member and shows a greater empathy for hunters who have a non-human (i.e., animal) relationship with their prey.

During the interview, Deleuze admits his fascination with spiders, ticks, and fleas; their environment is limited in terms of affects yet it constitutes *a* world. Most probably with Von Uexküll (1957) in mind, he reveals his fascination for the power (*puissance*) of these worlds confined to a small number of stimuli. Animal territories are another fascination for Deleuze. Claiming a territory, he says, is where art began. Staking it out is not just a matter of marking its boundaries, but also and foremost of defining a series of postures, colors and songs that Deleuze associates with the main determining characteristics of the arts: lines, colors, and refrain (*ritournelle*). This leads Deleuze to say that marking a territory is, in fact, “art in its pure state.”

Deleuze then uses the lexical of the territory (de- and re-territorialization) to link the animal world to the work of writers and philosophers, all of whom create refrains as they enter and leave their territories. These are translated into “barbaric” words or sounds which are a production of or a reaction to signs. According to Deleuze, these strange words, sounds, or signs necessarily correspond to the affects of leaving the territory (deterritorialization) and settling down elsewhere (reterritorialization). Deleuze connects animal life to the writers or philosophers who must always be “on the lookout” (*aux aguets*), never resting, sleeping with one eye open.

Referring to Artaud, Deleuze says one does not write for (*à l’attention de*) but rather in the place of (*à la place de*) readers. One does not write for “inferior” beings to help them progress, but rather in the place of the illiterates—via becoming-illiterate—or the so-called idiots—via becoming-idiots. Deleuze considers thinking and writing as if it were a private affair for a predefined public as simply shameful. Here Deleuze seems to imply that animals, who are pre-civilized, illiterate, and “idiots” according to human standards, intuitively have this capacity to express an impersonal life with its network of affects. On this matter, it would appear that Deleuze grants nonhuman animals a privilege over humans, or, at least, other animals can signal to humans how to enter into relationship with inorganic life. Thus, the task of writers and philosophers consists of tuning into the forces of an impersonal life similar to the actions and reactions of an animal in its environment. In doing so, writers and philosophers are able to push language to its limits, to becoming-other, and eventually to writing “in the place of” the animal.

Finally, Deleuze argues that it is not humans but animals who know how to die. This is because animals seek solitude to live out their last moments with dignity away from the group, on the edge of the territory, and with no expectation of posthumous celebration. One of the writer’s or philosopher’s tasks would then be to experience and describe this link between a dying human and a dying cat, and in doing so, experience the common border separating and yet also unifying humanity and animality.

Despite its relative brevity (about 3 minutes), this part of the *Abédédairé* provides some of the main ideas of Deleuze's conception of animals, namely:

- An anti-psychoanalytic perspective through the critique of familialism;
- An anti-humanistic approach for which the animal behavior becomes exemplary in its capacity to express the power (*puissance*) of an impersonal life;
- The connections between animal and human creations as they leave their territories and settle down elsewhere;
- The becoming-animal of the writer and philosopher.

The animal cannot lie on the psychoanalyst's couch

No privilege is granted to humans in the conceptuality of Deleuze and Guattari's books. Indeed, their main concepts (territory, molar/molecular, assemblage, smooth/striated, rhizome, sign refrain, line of flight, etc.) hold for the human, the animal, the social, politics and arts alike. By virtue of this original and subversive (should not every philosophy be subversive?) position, Deleuze and Guattari promote an anti-humanistic line of thought that favors the processes of desubjectivation, depersonalization, and differentiation that have the capacity to find and express the forces of an inorganic life in an unfamiliar environment. Thus art does not mark the beginning of humanity: bird-artists can create "ready-mades" by letting leaves drop and meticulously turning them to make a contrast between their interior face and the color of the earth. Their postures, colours, and refrains "sketch out a total work of art" (1994: 184).

It is no surprise then if psychoanalysis and its familialo-humanistic approach become some of the main targets of Deleuze and Guattari's conception of animality. Before going any further, let us first recall Freud's analysis of the Wolf Man's neurotic childhood dreams, the Rat Man's obsessive thoughts, and Little Hans' phobic relations to horses. For Freud, wolves, rats, and horses all have a familial and personal symbolic value as he identifies them with family members, the primal scene, and personal sexual drive. Furthermore, Freud is convinced that the recognition of these animal figures as familial characters is the first step towards accomplishing the goal of resolving Oedipal conflicts. A similar devaluation of the animal character can be

found in the writings of Jacques Lacan, who, in a very classical and traditional way, defines the animal by its lack of language thus impeding its experience of the mirror stage, the subject of signifier, etc. (Lacan, 2007: 75-81 and 671-702).

In sum, for Freud and Lacan, the animal must sit on the floor, not lie on the psychoanalyst's couch. The animal in psychoanalysis has an inferior status. Even for Jung, who partially de-oedipianized it, the animal remains an occurrence in the imagination (dream, fantasies, etc.) that does not reach concrete reality (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005: 235-238). Thus, psychoanalysis fails in truly conceiving of animality or of maintaining an "animal relationship with animals" that would allow the specificity of animality to be recognized. Instead, it favors a de-hierarchization of the connections between the realms of the living and sees this as a condition necessary for experiencing the becomings-animal.

What is this "becoming" exactly and, more specifically, what is the becoming-animal? Some sections of Deleuze's solo work are devoted to the animal (Sauvagnargues, 2004), but the notion of becoming-animal was introduced in chapter 4 of Deleuze and Guattari's book on Kafka. A more substantial development can be found in chapter 10 of *A Thousand Plateaus* entitled "Becoming-intense, becoming-animal, becoming-imperceptible..."

Becoming

Despite Deleuze's admiration for Spinoza's anti-subjectivist ethics, there is no room in Deleuzian philosophy for the *conatus* or the "endeavour" for everything to reach what constitutes its own substance (Spinoza, *Ethics*: Part 3, Prop. 6). This refusal that things endeavour to persist in their own being gives way to a promotion of becomings. These becomings have the opposite effect when compared to the *conatus* since they open up to the experimentation of common zones not only between various realms of the living (animal, mineral, human, vegetal, etc.), but also between living beings and haecceities or singularities ("five o'clock in the evening," a wound, a sunset, etc.). The Spinozist Nature where the mission of each living being and each entity is to find its substantial identity is radically different from Deleuze and Guattari's Nature,

where fixed identities give way to assemblages, alliances, passages and becomings between both beings and things.

Deleuze and Guattari often insist that becomings have nothing to do with imitation, history, and imagination. Negatively, becomings have nothing to imitate since *mimesis* implies some kind of positivism that would shift identity “A” to identity “B.” This Mimesis does not take into consideration what happens “in between” or in the “midst” (*au milieu*) of things, which is precisely what Deleuze and Guattari are interested in. Moreover, to say “I was a man and I’m becoming a bird by imitating a bird song, the beating of its wings, etc.” implies a type of becoming that can only be metaphorical. In this case, a distinct state pretends to be able to replace another without considering the “fold” between things and without experiencing disjunctive synthesis, a machinic assemblage or a process of differentiation.

Becomings do not deal with history either, since Deleuze (and Deleuze with Guattari) always associates history with dialectics and meaning. No historical law could explain becomings or reveal their complete meaning (“I become a bird first by learning bird songs, then by making wings, etc.”). Thus, history does not become. Instead, what becomes is timeless, escaping recognition, historical legislation, identification, the familiar, etc.

And, lastly, becomings are not associated with imagination. For Deleuze and Guattari, becomings are real in a very specific sense, according to which the traditional opposition between the actual and the virtual no longer stands. Becomings do not take place in an oniric, fantasmagoric world (“I dream that I am a bird”). Rather, they occur in concrete and material states-of-affairs that express impersonal forces in order to transform sensible forces that would otherwise remain insensible.

Thus, becomings are not related to resemblance, metaphor, analogy, personification, production of a new identity, historicism, evolutionism, etc. Rather, becomings aim at finding a “zone of proximity” between things. “To become,” writes Deleuze, “is not to attain a form (identification, imitation, Mimesis) but to find the zone of proximity, indiscernibility, or indifferentiation where one can no longer be distinguished from *a* woman, *an* animal, or *a* molecule—neither imprecise nor general, but unforeseen and

non-preexistent, singularized out of a population rather than determined in a form” (Deleuze, 1997: 1). Further, Deleuze illustrates this with Captain Ahab who becomes-whale by creating a machinic assemblage with Moby Dick: “It is no longer a question of Mimesis, but of becoming. Ahab does not imitate the whale, he becomes Moby Dick, he enters into a zone of proximity [*zone de voisinage*] where he can no longer be distinguished from Moby Dick, and strikes himself in striking the whale” (Deleuze, 1997: 78; see also Deleuze & Guattari, 2005: 304-305).

To become is the metaphysical experience of a process through which a zone of proximity made up of affects between entities is found. Throughout this process, impersonal forces are grasped and expressed through speaking, acting or writing “in the place of” whichever body (idiot, illiterate, animals, plants, haecceities, etc.). This metamorphosis implies no integral change of identity that would make it impossible to recognize the one experiencing the metamorphosis. Indeed, all becomings are molecular—that is to say, imperceptible—though they escape molecular perception.

Thus, if I were to say “I have decided to become a bird by putting on a costume, imitating a bird song, simulating the move of the wings, etc.,” then I am two degrees further away from becoming as Deleuze and Guattari understand it because, on the one hand, the becoming is not the effect of an intentional choice, of free will or of a voluntary act since it happens like an event and, on the other hand, its molecular character is such that the subtle picking up (*captation*) of affects passes under the radar of common perception.

We are now in a better position to understand the quasi-generic, but also circular, definition of the becoming: “Starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfills, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are *closest* to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005: 272). So, becoming implies a series of assemblages (*agencements*) between deterritorializing forces that are circulating on the edge, for instance, of the human and the non-human, in order to make them indiscernible. It is in such a zone of proximity, of uncertainty, or of indetermination that becomings occur.

Children seem to be particularly sensitive to becomings (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005: 273-274). Children who approach animals without fear or eat substances their organism was not made to digest are two examples that come to mind. Is it a mere question of unconsciousness when a child swallows a screw or bites into a clump of soil while plenty of food is available in the family kitchen? Probably in part, but there might also be some kind of Deleuzo-Guattarian becoming at play here, an attempt to create an assemblage and to find a zone of indiscernibility between the human and the non-human. Because becomings obey no predefinite rule, they happen like an event: “We can be thrown into a becoming by anything at all, by the most unexpected, most insignificant of things” (2005: 292).

Deleuze and Guattari’s idea about the relationship between various types of becomings is indeed very precise (2005: 291-292). First, there is no becoming-man as the male is the majoritarian standard and becomings can only be minoritarian. They add in a relatively enigmatic way that all becomings have to pass through a becoming-woman associated with the secret. The woman sometimes seems to tell everything, but she has this peculiar way of hiding what can be considered the most important aspect. Here, Deleuze and Guattari do not take into consideration the specific problem of the becomings between entities of non-human or non-gendered forms of life. However, we can say that they are referring to a “female energy” present in the whole universe. This privilege of woman in the world of becomings also means that she forms the most obvious minority (let us recall here that the minor has a positive and creative meaning for Deleuze and Guattari, and also that majority and minority are not understood in the numerical sense, but rather through their positions in power relations: minor works or discourses are the ones that seek not to perpetuate binary power relations by deterritorialising the codes that determine their position as minorities), and consequently the becoming-woman is potentially the most frequent or most easily accessible. Then comes the series of non-human becomings: becoming-animal, -plant, -child, -mineral, etc., which are themselves made of a becoming-imperceptible. The imperceptible is considered “the immanent end of becoming, its cosmic formula” (2005: 279). Thus, every becoming is mixed, while being assembled with the secret (woman) and metaphysical molecules (imperceptible). There is no recipe or guarantee of success attached to the experimentation of becomings. They can be “botched” (*ratés*) even if becomings seem to gravitate toward a common

immanent goal of imperceptibility, conceived as a sort of perfect fusion of inorganic life—or a con-fusion with this inorganic life, since the endpoint of becomings is combined with a loss of identity.

Deleuze and Guattari ascribe a political value to the experimentation of becomings. The latter always constitutes a deviation from the majoritarian power. Becomings always imply a deterritorialization out of the molar regime (Subject or State) that block the molar capacities to generate affect and to be affected in a great number of ways: “Becoming-minoritarian is a political affair” (2005: 292). Thus, minor artists, writers, and philosophers—the ones who find and express minoritarian-becomings—play a political role when, following a certain order of necessity according to Deleuze and Guattari, they announce a “people to come” and a “new earth” (1994: 109). However, our prime interest here will not be these political and esthetical values attached to becoming, but rather the question of the animal and becomings-animal.

Becoming-animal

Deleuze and Guattari insist that “becoming-animal is only one becoming among others” (2005: 272). However, becoming-animal is the type of becoming they wrote by far the most about. In order to grasp the specificity of the becomings-animal, let us first present the distinction Deleuze and Guattari established between three types of animals (240-241). First, there are the “Œdipal” animals with whom some individuals maintain a sentimental relationship by considering them members of the family. Second, there are the “State” animals that correspond to sacred or archetypal symbols stemming from mythology and spiritual or religious beliefs and fulfilling the role of authoritarian figures. Third, there are the “demonic” animals. Here, “demon” should not be understood as “mischievous spirit,” but rather in the Greek sense of *daïmon*: situated in between the world of the living (states-of-beings) and some kind of suprasensible world (immanent to the first world) that, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is made up of inorganic life, affects, and impersonal forces. Œdipal and State animals have a molar value (“my dog,” “the God Ganesh,” etc.), but demonic animals have a molecular character. It is thus in relation to demon animals that becomings-animal take place. To experience a becoming-animal means finding an

assemblage with animal molarity: “That is the essential point for us: you become-animal only if, by whatever means or elements, you emit corpuscles that enter the relation of movement and rest of the animal particles, or what amounts to the same thing, that enter the zone of proximity of the animal molecule” (274-275).

A solitary demonic animal can make up a pack while being filled with a multiplicity of affects. This is a source of real fascination for Deleuze and Guattari. The environment of the animal—like all non-human environments—is impersonal. The animal evolves in this setting without attempting its mastery or possession. Almost its entire life is dedicated to expressing affects and to being affected in various ways, to going in and out of its territory, to satisfying basic needs, etc. Moreover, each movement or behavior can potentially affect all other individuals of its species. Far from being a kingdom within a kingdom, the animal is a pack within a pack.

In Francis Bacon’s paintings, Deleuze saw the expression of the human being’s becomings-animal at play. It is well known that Bacon visited slaughterhouses and found inspiration in flesh by undoing faces to better express human shouts, postures, and actions at the edge of his own humanity. Deleuze says that in doing so “Bacon does not say, ‘Pity the beasts,’ but rather that every man who suffers is a piece of meat. Meat is the common zone of man and the beast, their zone of indiscernibility” (Deleuze, 2002: 21; see also chap. 4). Therefore, here it is not a question of sentimental identification, but rather one of becoming that expresses the affects the human and animal have in common.

The human has no privilege over becomings-animal, which find another illustration in the wasp and the orchid (e.g., Deleuze & Guattari, 2005: 293). Although the wasp and the orchid belong to quite different realms, the deterritorialization that they share allows them to find a common zone of proximity. It is well known that some orchids cunningly trick male wasps by emitting a chemical substance resembling female wasps’ pheromones and that their petals hold a physiological likeness to the female wasp. As a result, the male wasp has frequent intercourse with the orchid, thus promoting the pollination of yet other plants. In fact, the more often the orchid succeeds in bringing the wasp to orgasm, the better the pollination.

Deleuze and Guattari suggest a new way of seeing nature that does not classify by genus and species, and that does not define living bodies by their organs and functions. Indeed, for Deleuze and Guattari, the nature in which becomings take place is a synonym for a series of machinic assemblages. Humans participate in this inter-affective universe without, however, having any privilege in it. Moreover, just like any other becoming, non-human becomings of humans do not imply perfect symbiosis. After all, these becomings can always be “botched,” rendering possible what might be called “natural catastrophes” when, for instance, molecular signs are not well perceived or when the line of flight turns into a line of death.

In sum, Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of becoming introduces a new vision of nature. Within it, assemblages are taking place on the edge of the human, animal, vegetal, etc. worlds, and familiar entities, such as the sky, the earth, and the sea, can become haecceities. Each can be linked to the next by creating resonances on a plane of immanence filled with impersonal affects. It can be said that the notion of becoming solves the ancient question first asked and then left unanswered by Plato regarding the connection between the sensible world and the suprasensible world. It is precisely this point of contact or passage that interests Deleuze and Guattari. However, they give a non-idealistic, hybrid, and impure answer since the becomings have broken with the universe of transcendence: the immanent and inorganic life common to all living beings and to singularities “involute” in a series of trials, errors, and botchings during which some fruitful assemblages nonetheless take place.

Reception by contemporaries

The reception of the notion of becoming-animal is fragmented. In what follows, I present some examples of this critical reception by commentators, mainly Anglo-Americans. The selection of these authors is limited to those who built a dialogue with the notion of becoming-animal. It excludes other contemporary philosophers who showed some interest for the animal, in particular those from the phenomenological stream (Heidegger, 1995; Merleau-Ponty, 2003). Also, this selection of authors can be explained by the fact that the relationship between Deleuze and phenomenology regarding Nature and the animal has been studied in great detail

by secondary literature (Beaulieu, 2004 : 45-55; Beaulieu, 2005 : 352-353; Buchanan, 2008, and Memon, 2006), but very few have analysed the reception and uses of the notion of becoming-animal in contemporary thought.

A. Donna Haraway

Donna Haraway is well known for her post-humanist views (Haraway, 1991). Though, like Deleuze and Guattari, she questions the limits between human and animal, she remains very critical of the way they answer this question. In the introduction to her book *When Species Meet* (2008: 27-35), Haraway argues that Deleuze and Guattari's thinking is anthropocentric and unsuccessful at overcoming the great divide between human and animal. Their metaphysical standpoint on the animal keeps them from building a concrete relationship with the animal founded on curiosity, emotions, and the respect for differences. She asserts for instance that Deleuze and Guattari are unable to appreciate the elegant curves of the chow-chow's tail (*sic*), they do not have enough courage to look at the animal in the eyes, they defend the animal wildness in a non-rational way, their sarcastic remarks towards the little cat of the old lady show not only signs of latent misogyny but also a fear of aging (*re-sic*), they understand nothing of the emotional value of exchanges with companion animals, etc. In sum, Haraway counters "becoming-animal" with a "becoming with animals." This can occur, for instance, by inviting her pet to share a meal at the table, by exchanging emotions with it or by letting a chicken freely wander around the kitchen. For Haraway, to develop such a relationship with animals is not the sign of Œdipal regression but, on the contrary, an indication of our capacity to overcome anthropomorphism by learning how to live in a post-human environment.

Haraway's critiques of Deleuze and Guattari reveal an obvious and almost malicious misunderstanding. Contrary to what Haraway suggests, Deleuze and Guattari show true curiosity coupled with a certain fascination for animals. However, it is true that the animal remains above all conceptual for them. Refusing this metaphysical approach through which the existence of an inorganic and impersonal life is asserted makes it difficult—even impossible—to appreciate this conception of animal or becoming-animal. Haraway nevertheless shows obvious signs of bad faith when she sees a strict dualism in Deleuze and Guattari between the "wild wolf" and the

“domestic dog.” Deleuze and Guattari clearly state that “it is possible for any animal to be treated in the mode of the pack” (2005: 241). A house cat or a lap dog can produce as many affects as a dingo or a street cat. Thus, it is wrong to believe that Deleuze and Guattari are “against dogs and cats” just because these latter are the most common domesticated animals. Formulating the problem in terms of “for or against dogs and cats” misses the more fundamental question raised by Deleuze and Guattari, who examine the link between human and animal, a link that cannot logically be entirely human or totally animal.

Haraway misses the molecular links and, clearly, she fails to understand what is at stake in Deleuze and Guattari’s metaphysics. Whereas Deleuze and Guattari are experiencing assemblages through zones of proximity filled with impersonal affects, Haraway on her side personalises the encounter with animal species in order to generate a series of emotional exchanges between species that nonetheless remain heterogenous to each other. It seems difficult to reconcile the two perspectives, namely Deleuze and Guattari’s molecular animal as an expression of a power (*puissance*) of deterritorialisation and Haraway’s molar animal partially humanised. However, as Linda Williams (2009) argues, despite the deep divergences, Deleuze/Guattari and Haraway’s views can meet notably in their implicit common critique of the notorious Heideggerian’s thesis of the animal world’s poverty. One could say that they overturn this thesis in the context of the extinction of species where it is rather the human world that impoverishes by diminishing the possibilities of inter-species assemblages and encounters.

B. Steve Baker

Steve Baker demonstrates a better appreciation than Haraway of the becoming-animal (Baker, 1993; Baker, 2000: 99-134; Baker, 2002: 67-98). He is interested in contemporary artists who take the animal and the human/animal relationship as a theme for their work. Exploiting the notion of becoming-animal, Baker comments on the work of numerous artists (Joseph Beuys, Carolee Schneeman, Dennis Oppenheim, etc.). Baker takes an important aspect of Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis of becomings-animal a step further by studying its expression in the arts and literature. Deleuze (often with Guattari) had already analyzed the connections between art and

becomings-animal, particularly using the paintings of Bacon, the role of writers, and the bird-artist. It is perfectly relevant to highlight, as Baker and other do (Thompson, 2005), that animality is a major topic in contemporary art, and Deleuze and Guattari's concepts can indeed help us grasp this specific presence of the animal.

Throughout his analysis, Baker rightly states that, as opposed to a certain trend in post-humanistic writings, the dissolution of identities in the experience of becoming is not complete for Deleuze and Guattari. Indeed, assemblages only partially eliminate the identities of each of the becomings' parts: "Separate bodies enter into alliances *in order to do things*, but are not undone by it. The wasp and orchid, after their becoming, are still wasp and orchid" (Baker, 2000: 133). According to Baker, some contemporary art expresses this transitory character of becomings between animality and humanity, thus escaping the mere artistic production of monsters. Therefore, based on Deleuze's study of Bacon, one could say that becoming is a form of figural art, in the sense that the diagram should not completely invade the canvas.

C. Philosophy of the environment

The theses regarding Nature and the animal, including not only the writings of Deleuze and Guattari but extending to those of Guattari in his solo work as well (Guattari, 1984; Guattari, 1995; Guattari, 2008; Antonioli, 2003; Afeissa, 2009), have received widespread attention in the field of philosophy of environment (Chisholm, 2007; Goetz, 2007; Herzogenrath, 2008; Herzogenrath, 2009; Neimanis, 2007). My goal here is not to comment on all of these works, but rather to stress the incompatibilities between Deleuze and Guattari's environmentalist positions and the dominant political, juridical and moralistic discourses.

The Deleuzo-Guattarian approach to the environment is not primarily addressed to legislative powers and policy makers. The adoption of laws for the preservation of wild animal life has nothing to do with the intrinsic capacities of affectability between the human and the animal. In other words, the attention brought to the becoming-animal and other forms of becomings can change various practices and attitudes towards the environment, but this transformation remains independent of political regulation. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari's sensitivity to the environment is an attempt

to promote the opposite of political regulation. This Nietzschean idea that artists and writers are in a better place than professional politicians to do politics can be found throughout their work: Nietzsche's "Great politics" become a "micro-politics" of minoritarian becomings. By experiencing becomings-animal, artists and writers are expressing minoritarian becomings likely to create a "nomadic people to come." The most extraordinary is that these practices can happen without relying on political regulation, and thus can go without political activism and rights defence. So it is difficult to integrate the becoming-animal, for example, in the framework of the ethics of animal's liberation for which Peter Singer (1975) is the most famous standard bearer. We must note, however, that Guattari was a more committed political activist than Deleuze, as Guattari's membership in the Green Party illustrates. However, Guattari's "ecosophy" does not grant any privilege to the animal as an "ethical subject," since what matters to him consists primarily of thinking together without isolating the environmental, social and mental ecologies.

The Deleuzo-Guattarian approach neither implies a managing politics nor is it founded on a moral of the Good. There is no primordial natural harmony that would be perfectly realized in Deleuze and Guattari's chaomic universe since becomings always imply the risk of the machinic assemblages being "botched." Therefore, there is no need to subsume non-human becomings into a supreme Good linked to an environmental ethics. The question is not to defend the rights of animals or plants, pity the beasts, or experience deep feelings for plants. Rather, it is to be worthy when confronted with the joy or suffering that all beings face, and to forge alliances with non-human beings. If there is a Deleuzo-Guattarian ethics of the environment, it is not an ethics of compassion in the face of suffering but rather an ethics through which one becomes worthy of the zone of proximity that happens, an ethics of solidarity with affects that seem to be the furthest from those simply produced by humans. This ethics, or more precisely this ethology, asks us to be on the lookout (*aux aguets*) in order to grasp sign-affects common to both human and non-human beings.

The becoming-animal is not a response to a moral indignation in the face of animal suffering, and in particular the suffering caused to non-human animals by human animals. This moral view, on which many of the developments in contemporary animal ethics is founded, remains for Deleuze and Guattari too intimately linked to an

inferiorisation of the animal while it secretly assumes the animal's incapacity to grasp the moral stakes that governs its own existence. This does not mean that Deleuze and Guattari are encouraging (nor even do they remain indifferent to) violence against animals, since such a bestiality comes from a power of domination that has nothing to do with their reformulation of the relationship between living beings. Deleuze and Guattari's ethology neutralises these two approaches, namely the morality of feeling and the immoralism of cruelty, which finally merge into one single anthropomorphic perspective in which the human being maintains its position on top of creation. The becomings-animal of humans takes place beyond Good and Evil in order to better open up the way to the experience of the good and bad ways of sharing molecular affects within the zone of proximity where human and non-human identities dissolve.

Thinking and experiencing the environment and the other beings that inhabit it irrespective of juridical or moralistical dominant discourses is certainly one of the largest challenges of this timeless approach. Another challenge consists of seeing that the practice of minoritarian-becomings is the safest way to protect ecosystems (and even create new ones) as it is radically free from the wills of domination.

Conclusion: Toward future uses?

Though often attributed to Foucault, the invitation to use a theory as if it were a "tool box" was actually formulated originally by Deleuze (2004b: 208). In sync, Deleuze and Guattari suggest exporting the becomings-animal in the schizo-analysis field to study certain neurotic behaviors (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005: 543, note 58). This attempt has not yet been fruitful, though it is fair to guess that unsuspected uses of the becoming-animal are yet to come.

In the notion of becoming-animal, writers, artists, and philosophers might discover new potentialities that will become a source of inspiration or explanation for their own work. Of course, these anti-humanistic positions go against much of the human sciences and humanities, which traditionally emphasize the hierarchic distinction between the human and the animal rather than embracing a common zone of affectability. After all, claims that the animal world is as perfect as the human world

(and perhaps even more so given the purity of its affects), that animals know better than humans how to die, and that art is not exclusive to humanity, are the kinds of assertions that raise the eyebrows of the most classical thinkers. However, by considering the possible zone of indiscernibility between the human and the animal to be “vulgar” and, moreover, by refusing to glorify this zone, the followers of more traditional views reintroduce an imperialistic view of the world and of nature that is accompanied by a series of transcendent values—the very values Deleuze and Guattari seek to deconstruct. Let us note that Deleuze and Guattari are not promoting human bestiality. Rather, they are looking for a way to radically de-hierarchize the relationships between the realms of the living, and they do this by considering that the powers of domination are the lowest degree of affectability.

Natural sciences have yet to take position as to the use of Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of animal. However, it would seem that this conception contains unexplored scientific possibilities. Despite the important contributions of Von Uexküll, Lorenz, and other ethologists, decoding animal behavior remains a real challenge. The study and even the practices of becomings-animal could be a useful tool in this respect. Among other things, stressing metaphysical and “molecular” proximity with the animal, combined with “molar” observations, could contribute to increasing the predictions of the natural catastrophes that many animals perceive long before they happen. Indeed, although animals are known to be aware of imminent cataclysm, the warnings of micro-vibrations in the magnetic field go uncaptured by many scientific instruments. The scientific study of the becoming-animal could thus potentially imply a measurement of the energy, a quantification of the forces at play or, at the very least, a classification of their effects. This kind of analysis could also be useful for training animals for specific human needs or for zootherapies, as long as the bodies that create assemblages here are not defined by their organism but rather by their capacities of affectabilities. At the very least, it is certainly true to say that the experience of becomings-animal is not incompatible with the ethological science from which a large part of Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the animal is drawn. The danger here would be an instrumentalization of the animal to exploit its perceptions for human purposes. However, I believe that it is still possible to avoid this power dynamic grounded in anthropocentric domination (*potestas*) by conceiving of the scientification of the becoming-animal in terms of an immanent exchange of the

capacities of affectability (*potentia*), since what matters in becomings-animal is to unlearn physical and emotional habits in order to expand the world's experience. This would contribute to humans changing their perception of their relationships with themselves, with other bodies, and with their environment.

Notes

- A first version of this paper was presented at the conference *Rethinking the NonHuman*, University of Alberta (Canada), October 3, 2010.
- The word “animal” used in this paper refers to “non-human animal.”

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Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics as Extension or Becoming?

The Case of Becoming-Plant

Karen L. F. Houle¹

Part One: The Diagnostic: “The First Animal After Humans”

Our initial, wide-angle orienting claim is that Western philosophy has been dominated by the question of Being. That the question of Being dominates means the dominance of a particular subset of philosophical answerings. It demands the kinds of answers that tell us *what things are by nature* and *what things are not*, and subsequently how the answers to these two questions can be compared and arrayed in logical, conceptual, temporal and material series: in pairs and relations of resemblance and dissemblance, one to another. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call this conception of relationships “analogy of proportion” or “series”: “For natural history conceives of the relationships between two animals in two ways: series and structure. In the case of a series, I say *a* resembles *b*, *b* resembles *c*, etc.: all of these terms conform in varying degrees to a single, eminent term, perfection or quality as the principle behind the series” (1987: 234).

Mapping these relations (empirically, conceptually, logically) has become what is known as *knowing*. And this version of knowing dominates epistemology. Furthermore a preoccupation with the question of Being entails the dominance of a particular theory of value and selects a subset of normative principles: *functionality* and *teleology*. What *a thing* is good for, and whether it achieves the ends for which it was designed, intended or is capable, have become the chief modes *and* sources of value and meaningfulness. The current debate about pain in lower animals is a

¹ Karen Houle is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Guelph, in Canada. She would like to thank two JCAS anonymous reviewers for their comments on this article; the Non-Human Workshop (September 2010, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada); the Department of Philosophy at Trent University, Canada; Josh Mousie for research assistance; Adam Morton, Dan Harris, Casey Ford, Kelly Jones, Andrew Robinson, Suzanne McCullagh, Doug Halls and Tyler Barry for comments on earlier drafts.

beautiful example which showcases the dominance and mutual scaffolding of these very framing principles: What *is* a mollusc? Something above a sea cucumber but below a dolphin. How do we know a mollusc feels pain? By inference from our own pain states and pain behaviours + scrupulous empirical evidence. What is wrong with pain anyhow? It stops us, and presumably molluscs, from doing the kinds of things that make our (human, mollusc) lives worthwhile, i.e. working, philosophizing, *molluscking*.

A second claim approaches, obliquely.

In the course of the past thirty or so years, an enormous quantity of work in philosophy—especially ethics and philosophy of mind—has been devoted to remedying an ostensible lacuna in Western philosophy: the exclusion of the animal. While I have certainly participated in that labor, for the purposes of this paper, I strenuously resist taking it up again. I do so with an initial three-fold gesture.

First, thinking-the-animal is not, in fact, missing from but rather saturates Western philosophy. The tradition has certainly posited, and inserted, an abyssal difference (Bataille, 1992) between the human and the animal. One need only recall the polemical Cartesian claim in *Discourse on Method* that animals are mere clocks. But, what is much more interesting and subtle to notice is that the same tradition has created and sustained for animality a unique proximity to the human which is especially *non-abyssal*. From antiquity through to the present, the concept of “the animal” has played the lead and proximate role for marking, conceptually, what differentiates “the human” being from every other being. Consider this common refrain:

Dolphins have been declared the world’s second most intelligent creatures after humans, with scientists suggesting they are so bright that they should be treated as ‘non-human persons.’ Studies into dolphin behaviour have highlighted how similar their communications are to those of humans and that they are brighter than chimpanzees (Leake, 2010).

“The animal” has been perennially conceived and deployed in philosophy as what-we-are-not: *the* non-human. Efforts to conceive or to know or to express the animal through, or adjacent to the human, or, to conceive or know or express the human through, or right next to the animal—through the genius of analogy, resemblance and of teleology, through form and function—has produced a very stable, hierarchical scaffolding with *the animal*—like the ontological family pet—always there, right beside us, if a little lower. This is because Being and Animality are inseparable.

Perhaps this on-going privileged placement has been “good for animals”? In general, no. Not when one squares up to the facts of loss of habitat and species, of industrial meat or zoos and the lives of billions of lab animals. Sometimes an extraordinary member of a type gets noticed and receives a better life and some notoriety: Lassie or Kisi the grey parrot or Kanzi the Bonobo. But even here, the best these exemplars can do is place a strong second to us, as they also tend to do in “lifeboat ethics” scenarios favoured among moral philosophers. Even among some of the heroes of animal moral standing for animals we find this ranking happening. For instance, after a long and careful working out of the equal inherent value of all subjects-of-a-life, and the equal *prima facie* right of animals not to be harmed, Tom Regan states rather baldly, “Death for the dog, in short, though a harm, is not comparable to the harm that death would be for *any* of the humans” (Regan 1983: 324, added emphasis). He declares that this outcome is not in conflict with the principles he has worked hard to ground, and then goes on to do a fancy bit of utilitarian shell-gaming to make that ranking stick. Peter Singer practically guffaws at the attempt to level the moral playing field beyond subjects-of-consciousness, declaring outright: “...and we can pass silently by [Paul] Taylor’s even more extraordinary claim, that we should be ready not merely to respect every living thing, but that we should place the same value on the life of every living thing as we place on our own” (2002: 319). In making this gesture, I am hoping that what catches our attention for a change is not the strength or weakness of these arguments but the propensity of our “animal heroes” to deploy them. And, the fact

that humans come out on top even among those claiming the least degree of comfort with that very outcome and publically committed to changing it.²

Has this thought scaffolding been “good for other forms of life,” or could it be, if we keep trying to extend ethics in the direction of, say, invertebrates and green things, i.e. plants? No. Plants—just like the notion of “the environment”—have certainly been relegated to vague background roles or “milieu.” Except for Aristotle, they have rarely appeared in three millennia of thinking and writing Philosophy. We live out that gesture of our minds, in our imaginaries, in our everyday set-ups. Just think about your typical natural history museum visit: The giant *Equisetum spp.* (aka horsetail, snakegrass), the lush ferns and the freaky angiosperms are the hundred million year-old leafy props against which the drama of the dinosaurs and Stone-Age man, and then the Woolly Mammoth and its disappearance, plays out. And is being replayed. Both in the stories restoration biologists are telling about *which* moment in prehistory is the ecologically-correct one to “return to,” and in the mammoth (literally) fantasies about the time before-humans literally under construction by rich industrialists in the 21st century (Lovgren, 2005).³ Notice that the animal again, even in the historical misanthropic imaginary, sits right next to us. Notice that we are able to see, and are willing to be shown, that we humans start as alligator-like creatures crawling up out of the Devonian mud, from water to air, our musculatures and genes evolving, yet still trailing out behind us into the fan-shaped Kingdom *Animalia*, back through the reptiles and the birds and those great dinosaurs. That is what we are willing to see as our actuality. And though we know, intellectually, that we always have and always will live by grace of the oxygen produced by said plants, and are built from the very carbons of them, and run our entire global economy off the backs of that carbon, we are unable to think let alone live the novel and profound truths of *these* vegetal relations. This backgrounding of herbality—indeed of ecology—is directly linked to the foregrounding of animality. It is a gestalt operation (Zwicky, 2003).

² For a further exploration of this tension in contemporary art on animality, see my (2010) “Infinite, Indifferent Kinship.”

³ See also Matthew Chrulew’s article in this issue.

One final gesture, a confession: I don't really *love* animals. I love philosophy. My question is this: Have these efforts of thinking-the-animal been good for thinking? In general, no.

The animal-as-non-human does not belong to a sad, myopic and ameliorable moment of Western philosophy's past. It is central to, and constitutive of that past: thinking-the-animal plays a critical and an exclusive role in "onto-stabilizing"⁴ a certain version of human life, including what questions and answers humans come up with while thinking, and the overall style of that activity. And, it will likely dominate the character of thought's future, even in domains far from "animal philosophy" for we are speaking here not of the content of thought but of its very architecture. The saturation of Western philosophy by animality has worn a rut in occidental ethical and political thought, causing what I call a "mental-stereotypy": the repetitive, ritualistic-like acts of binary judgment and the extension of categories outward from a prototype.⁵ Thinking the animal seems to have not caused us to take up the difference that difference can, and should make, to "inherited thinking, its presuppositions and its dogma" (Derrida 2003: 122). Jacques Derrida is certainly right that,

...it is a matter...of taking that difference into account within the whole differentiated field of experience and of a world of life-forms. And that means refraining from reducing this differentiated and multiple difference, in a similarly massive and homogenizing manner, to one between the human subject, on the one hand, and the nonsubject that is the animal in general, on the other... (2003: 128)

But, he seems to have underestimated the difficulty of getting to that "whole world of life-forms." He himself got stuck on cats (2008) and meat (1991). In their remarkable eighty page plateau on "Becoming" in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari caution us that "[b]ecoming-animal is only one becoming among others" (1987: 272). One can, "in no preformed logical order" (251) apparently "encounter becomings-woman, becomings-child... taking it from animal, vegetable, and mineral becomings

⁴ I would like to thank my colleague, Doug Halls, for helping me to articulate this complex dynamic.

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stereotypy>

to becomings of bacteria, viruses, molecules and things imperceptible” (248). But, in truth, that plateau is overrun by dogs, wolves, birds, cats, horses, whales and tics. And they confess to believing “in the existence of very special becomings-animal traversing human beings and sweeping them away...” (1987: 237). Animal-thinking, even in radically unconventional thinkers, seems to block rather than enable “acts of understanding performed with *the maximum perspective possible*” (Naess, 1977, as cited in Hurley, 1988: iii). Why? Because animality has an assured berth deep within the very structures of thinking, imagining, feeling, desiring. What would it take to actually think-otherwise, to truly think *ecosophically*? Might we be able to think-the-plant and avoid (re)onto-stabilizing ourselves? Might some aspect of herbivory help us to have a new thought without our domesticating them, and thought, in turn?

Part Two: *Making Heads or Tails of* PLANT PHILOSOPHY

There are not many of us doing vegetable philosophy, either professionally or casually. What *could* philosophical botany be? Here is one possibility:

Richard Karban, a leader in the field of plant communication research, wrote in a comprehensive literature review in 2008. His philosophical position is that it is both empirically and conceptually incorrect to say plants “react” whereas animals “behave.” That, like humans, animals “behave” and do not simply “react” is, as we know, one of the key axes of extension that animal behaviour science has pursued in the past 30 years. This is what Karban writes in support of a further correction and extension of that concept, to plants:

Plant behaviours are defined as rapid morphological or physiological responses to events, relative to the lifetime of an individual. Since Darwin, biologists have been aware that plants behave but it has been an underappreciated phenomenon. The best studied plant behaviours involve foraging for light, nutrients, and water by placing organs where they can most efficiently harvest these resources. Plants also adjust many reproductive and defensive traits in response to environmental heterogeneity in space and time...Plant behaviours have been characterized as simpler than those of animals. Recent

findings challenge this notion by revealing high levels of sophistication previously thought to be within the sole domain of animal behaviour. (2009: 727)

There are other forays of this kind (Hall 2009; 2011; Stone 1974, 1985). While part of me applauds these efforts and takes a great interest in the power of the data and the arguments being launched, another part of me recalls the gestures I made above against extensionist efforts. Recalling those gestures, we already know that the project of bringing plant life into the existing philosophical conversation is exactly that: a project of engaging philosophy on its classical terms and subjecting “the plant” to those terms—terms of resemblance, difference as degrees from similarity of function, relevant functions and their relative value anchored by “the human” and of hoping, as was the case with the animal, to find a common ground and a “common logic between these two kingdoms” so that plants, now, too, can be *taken seriously* (McCourt, 2005). And we already know with a high degree of confidence what the conceptual and material outcomes are of this line of thinking will be: for the status of plants or other features of the natural world, in thought and in action (third place), for the status of *the human* or *person* by comparison (victorious) and for likelihood of the enriching of philosophy under the pressures of this herbivorous line of extension (weak). Since my overall concerns are *ecophilosophical*; that is a desire and a commitment to think and to exist beyond any particular kind of animal or thought or plant, to think and exist adequately (Spinoza, 2000) within the intactness, beauty and vitality of life, then we need to imagine another route for plant-thought.

2. Becoming, and Becoming-Plant?

Whence might another route lie? In principle, we would have to aggressively bracket the question of Being and try to orient toward concepts like *Becoming* and *Unbecoming*.

Serendipitously, one discovers the concept of *becoming-plant* in Deleuze and Guattari’s work, and finds it vastly underthought in Deleuzian studies. Crucially, the

concept isn't *about plants* but about becoming. Let's briefly outline what Deleuze and Guattari mean by the concept of becoming.

Two very helpful and concise statements they make are that, "becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own" & "becomings are another power" (239). A becoming is not a description of an actual or ideal property or feature of an entity so much as a description of an altered, scalar intensification—the taking on of certain relations of movement and rest" enabled as it enters "a particular zone of *proximity*" (273) with another, in a particular way. Crucially,

a becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between...the block of becoming that unites the wasp and the orchid produces a shared deterritorialization: of the wasp, in that it becomes a liberated piece of the orchid's reproductive system, but also of the orchid, in that it becomes the object of an orgasm in the wasp, also liberated from its own reproduction (293).

Becoming is the name for this provisional co-creative zone in which the "parties" and their "proper functions" are themselves effaced and augmented.

Deleuze and Guattari name different kinds of becomings. What is involved in these different types? They tend to explain becoming in general through the example of becoming-animal. Does it have anything to do with actual animals like North Atlantic Right Whales and Snakes? Are we to put on snouts and bark convincingly? No. Do we put on fins and learn to free dive? Perhaps. Whatever these becomings involve, according to Deleuze and Guattari, they do not involve or lead us back onto finding their proper relative morphological positions along the Great Chain of Being by way of likeness and unlikeness: "Do not look for a resemblance or analogy to the animal, for this is becoming-animal in action, the production of the molecular animal (whereas the "real" animal is trapped in its molar form and subjectivity)" (275). Neither do becomings involve imitation or even conceptual proximity:

An example: Do not imitate a dog, but make your organism enter into composition with *something else* in such a way that the particles emitted from the aggregate thus composed will be canine as a function of the relation of movement and rest or of molecular proximity, in

which they can enter. Clearly this something else can be quite varied, and be more or less directly related to the animal in question: it can be the animal's natural food (dirt and worm), or its exterior relations with other animals (you can become-dog with cats or become-monkey with a horse), or an apparatus or prosthesis to which a person subjects the animal (muzzle and reindeer, etc., or something that does not even have a localizable relation to the animal in question (274).

Neither does becoming mean functionality. It is not about accomplishing something types tend to accomplish *by nature* or hope for, like acting autonomously or making babies. The “production of the molecular animal” (275) means the intensifications of a *zone* or *bloc* of connectivity—proximities but not spatial, nor temporal nor even conceptual adjacencies—toward a particular configuration of movement and rest which *expresses* but does not *represent* a quality or qualities of animality, of animal-livings. This is crucial. Notice that the key features of extensionist moral thought discussed above—proximity as seriality and adjacency, analogy, resemblance and functionality—are antithetical to *becoming*.

And what, then, of *becoming-plant*?

In principle, *becoming-plant* would involve our extension and ideas entering into composition with *something else* in such a way that the particles emitted *from* the aggregate thus composed will *verb vegetally* as a function of the relation of movement and rest, or of molecular proximity, in which they can enter. Becoming-plant is the emission of particles from a heterogeneous alliance we make which expresses in action the unique qualities of plants or plant-lives. These qualities would, in principle, not be the same qualities as those of women or women-lives, nor of canines, nor of children and childhoods. Very little attention has been devoted to imagining what these unique expressions of plant-livings might actually be. This should strikes us as unfortunate if indeed different becomings are philosophically unique; that is to say, express unique logics, phenomenalties, conceptualities, imaginaries and values, and enable us to “enter into” proximity with a genuinely different range of thoughts and bodies.

In the final section of this paper I begin to try to articulate the unique bloc of *in-between* expressed by the phenomenon of plant communication. Besides plant communication, there are at least six non-superficial ways that plant-life differs from the lives of all other members of the kingdom animalia, whether “a snake or a codfish, or even a bee” (Midgley, 2004: 49): 1) in rhizomes alone, a capacity to form new growth at any point along its body; 2) extreme seasonality of viable reproduction; 3) the great distances in time and space, and the elemental forces of water, heat and wind that reproductive and nutritive parts must navigate to realize their teloi; 4) the immediate triggering of cell-death upon successful pollination; 5) the presence of four axes of symmetry: radial, left-right (bilateral); front-back (adaxial-abaxial) and up-down; 6) the presence of male and female parts on the same organism.

My work here is not intended to establish a truth about *plants in general*; about how the secret life of plants is cool; about how plant life is like or is not like human life, and to what degree; or even in the service of the concern that plants deserve moral standing. This work aims to make evident that these vegetal modalities express genuinely different, rather than nifty *vegetal-variation on*, our dominant modes of enacting communication and our dominant ways of thinking about what communication is and is in the service of. Ideally, we want becomings to resonate not just to be understood. My hope is that what is presented enters into composition with *something else*—perhaps inchoate but resonant *vegetality mental or somatic experiences*—and frees the powers of thought, even provisionally, from the bad habits it has developed through (over)thinking-the-animal, to another power.

3. Becoming-Plant-Communication

Research into plant communications (also called “plant signaling”) began in earnest in North America around 1983. Since then, there has been an explosion of research and peer-reviewed articles into the subject, appearing in every major scientific journal. All my sources for this paper are from work published in the past two years. The actual methods of collection of plant signaling data, and the subsequent discussions of the results, have been framed by a predictable set of expectations and a predictable

underlying ontology: teleology, functionalism and Being. Those ontological premises are revealed by these (typical) Q&As about plant signalling:

1. *What* actually happens? Plants have a “volative profile” (“VOC”) which is a kind of chemical fingerprint made up of possibly hundreds of different chemicals which it gives off in a resting state, and, when a plant is stressed (it is being eaten by bugs like aphids, or encroached upon by couch grass, or shaded or thirsty or even mechanically damaged) its volative profile changes.
2. *What is it?* A plant’s immune response, since the new volatile chemicals attract natural enemies to the bugs that are eating it or the weeds that are encroaching upon it.
3. *Why* would a plant “communicate”? In reaction to an alien invasion, as a protective mechanism. This chemical shift comes at an energy cost to the plant, so even if the individual plant is sacrificed, the mechanism serves to increase the reproductive fitness of its type: kin selection.
4. *Which direction* does signaling move? From the inside of individual plants, and outward according to the natural law that “requires it to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing” (Mill, 1956: 72).
5. *Where* does communication “happen”? On the surface of the leaf and flower cells by virtue of chemicals which have travelled through the air toward it.

If we stopped here those of us unfamiliar with this phenomenon might go away surprised and impressed by the fact that plants have a “self-defense system” (Karban and Shiojiri, 2009) and a capacity to communicate.

But, consider the following summary statement by two leading scientists in the field, Martin Heil and Richard Karban:

...there are theories at hand that could explain the evolution of emitting airborne signals but there is a lack of empirical data to test them. It is known empirically that plants can perceive VOCs but there are no theoretical models to understand the evolutionary origin of this capacity, neither is it known how volatiles are perceived and translated

into signals. Even after accepting plant–plant signaling via airborne cues as a physiological possibility, many researchers have doubted its ecological relevance... (2009: 142).

Clearly, there is more of a mystery afoot than the question-and-answer session above, suggests. In the next section I am going to walk us through six observations which contribute to Heil and Karban's view. I will identify the starting (ontological) premises and then state what I think is a more viable premise as is implied by the observation. Taken together, these facets express a quality of the unique becoming that is becoming-plant.

I. At the level of “the individual” plant, and communicating outward?

There are two pertinent observations which contest the view that plants are isolated types reacting outward to other plants.

First, it turns out that the chemical profile of a plant is often totally unique to *that individual plant*. There does not seem to be a simple or generic “chemical fingerprint” for, say, barley or corn in general. “All plants release volatile chemicals, and the chemical profile from different plants is different and can be specific to that plant” (Dewhirst and Pickett, 2010: 89). This observation complicates the basic assumption that, in signaling, a plant is acting as a genetic *type*.

Second, even a given individual plant's volative profile changes in different ways depending on what kind of stress it endures: if it is mechanically attacked it gives off a “wound signal;” if it is attacked by an insect, another type of signal; and if another kind of insect, yet another type of signal (Dewhirst and Pickett 2010: 90). This forces us to imagine not only that plants are individuals, but that these individuals are continuously co-evolving *with*, and *in*, varying environmental relations which themselves are evolving in complex ways. Plants are not in any meaningful way beings in isolation from an externality which is configurable as secondary or alien,

toward which they must move, and against which they need immunity.⁶ So-called generic types are real individuals, and those so-called individuals are always already *in* and with *fluid non-additive relations* (Cahill et al., 2010: 1657) with others. These observations put pressure on the possibility that individual plant organisms are embedded singularities or put otherwise, that the most real and basic indivisible unit (or body) of finite vegetal existence are what Spinoza called “modes,” “particular things that actually exist” (Spinoza, 2000: Part II: Proposition 9)—each with its own nature—rather than types or essences (Part II: Definition 1-7), and that these singularities are, by necessity, fully immersed in, constituted by, and constituting, a milieu. “The interplay between plant and environment is a mutual activity” (Willemse, 2009: 2397).

II. Communication among blood relations?

Across dozens of examples (Heil and Karban, 2009: 138) we see that *one kind of plant* (“plant A”) experiences one kind of stress (“stress X”), and its VOC signals to an *entirely different (genetically unrelated) kind of plant* (“plant B”) which enables the second plant to do something which improves its success: mount a defence against some further kind of stress (“Stress Y”), defences as spectacular as the augmentation or “inhibition of the germination or the development of plants” (137), including stem, leaf or root development (Preston, 2004: 912). Here is a typical example of the structure of such a mechanism: *Sagebrush plants are cut. They give off a volative chemical. This induces resistance in wild tobacco to grasshoppers and cutworms* (Heidel et al., 2010; Karban et al., 2000). Conceptually, we are already talking about communication between neighbors and not kin, not blood/sap relations. These inter- rather than intraspecies’ signaling mechanisms still go by the name “plant-plant signaling” but change the story we can tell radically. “Data from at least two systems...demonstrate that being related is *not a prerequisite for communication*” (Heil and Karban, 2009: 142, added emphasis).

⁶ One can see here that the major liberal trope of negative rights has been read into the dynamics of plant interaction.

III. *Between* Plants: Dyadic Mutualisms?

What I have just underlined about inter-plant relations is nothing new from an ecological perspective. Ecology does not begin with the presumption of individuals or isolated species but rather with sets of context-specific life forms that have co-evolved into a variety of partnerings: *predator-prey*; *mutualist*; *commensalist*, *opportunistic*. These name the various combinations and permutations of benefits and costs across a given non-related pair. Explanations for Plant A: Plant B-type interspecific signaling default to the presumption that these are mutualisms. Hossaert-McKey et al. weigh in: “As in many other interspecies interactions, chemical signals are suspected to be important in the functioning of these mutualisms” (2010: 75). Mutualisms are cooperative interactions between species, in which each partner benefits from the association (Bronstein et al., 2006).

Let us focus on the especially-beloved Deleuzian proposition *between* (Villani, 1999: 9) and the premise of *partnering* in the prototypical mutualistic case that Deleuze and Guattari describe: the orchid-wasp pairing. The flowering plant “offers” the insect a place to lay its eggs, and a ready-to-hand snack when the larvae hatch (the fruit, the seeds). The insect “offers” the plant dispersal of pollen, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly through further “parasites and predators associated with these mutualisms” (Hossaert-McKey et al., 2010: 75). Whatever the mechanism, it is said that “...each partner depends directly on the other for its reproduction” (75). In some cases “these mutualisms are quite specific: each partner depends exclusively, or at least partially, on the other for its reproduction, enforcing tight physiological co-adaptation...Plant and pollinator have evolved extraordinary reciprocal specificity, often approaching one-to-one obligate specificity” (76). What these assertions suggests is that, even though plants, insects and animals *are* parts of larger, complex and dynamic blocks of ecologic vitality, nevertheless within that larger whole there are tight (exclusive, monogamous, dyadic) couplings. Ultimately, here, the dyad is conceived *as if* it were an isolated individual, and the pairing itself *as if* having the most central and identifiable function within that whole: a pairing in perpetuity.

Again, delving into the details of these so-called *pairings* suggests that whatever is going on *between* plants is neither so *exclusive* nor so simple to sum-up. For how, exactly, are these ostensibly exclusive dyadic offerings even made to one another, and such couplings cemented?

By a third.

In many cases that third is a “flower volatile,” a chemical signal. A perfume! Studies of the chemical profiles of these signals reveal a mind-boggling array even in a controlled environment like a greenhouse where one manages only a few species, not entire natural ecosystems. A flower volatile is by no means a one-note info-spritz aimed directly at a single wasp but something almost unfathomably complex both in what it is and what it does. First, the “scent signal emitted by the host plant must be specific, to attract its specific and obligate partner” including a way of acting during “the appropriate phonological stage for pollinator visit” (Hossaert-McKey, 2010: 76). The *perfume* emitted by the host plant and perceived by the insect should contain not only information about the specific identity of the plant, but also on its developmental stage, particularly information about whether or not the plant is receptive, i.e. ready to be pollinated and thus has the right resources to offer. And, these so-called *partners* are not just hanging around the house waiting for the phone to ring: they are dispersed, and plenty of other possible suitors are nearby. The successful encounter of the host plant and its mutualist insect therefore also requires a very strong signal. And so, as a second requirement, “the signal emitted by the plant and the capacity of the insect to detect the message...must be strong and precise enough to extract “signal” from “noise” (Raguso 2003, as cited in Hossaert-McKey, 2010: 76). There appear to be hundreds of possible dimensions to the accomplishment of the coupling by the third. Scientists confess: “The transfer of information about resources opens up a large number of questions. How is specificity of the signal achieved? Moreover, once specificity is achieved, how do plant–pollinator relationships change, how do they diversify...as increasing numbers of associated species adapt to exploit the resources exchanged by mutualists, are mutualist pairs that are locked into a simple signal unable to shift, whereas those that use more complex signals can respond more easily to such pressures? Could it be that if they appear, simple-signal systems may

relatively quickly disappear, rather than leaving descendant lineages?” (Hossaert-McKey, 2010: 85).

What I think we learn here is that the default story of mutualisms as dyads underplays and oversimplifies the truths of the critical sophisticated and still-largely-not-understood agency of other elements, in this case an organic compound. Whatever is going on *between* two plant partners is neither so simple, nor so *between*. These simple perfumes “may be the ‘silk’ that holds together the complex web of interactions...” (85). The third qualifies, as much as the pair, as an *agent* or what Bruno Latour called an *actant* in a complex interaction—“*a parliament of things*” (Latour, 1993: 142) not merely as a vehicle for the interaction of a couple: “...as soon as we stop taking nonhumans as objects, as soon as we allow them to enter the collective in the form of new entities with uncertain boundaries, entities that hesitate, quake and induce perplexity, it is not hard to see that we can grant them the designation of actors” (Latour, 2004: 76).

IV. Still Other Others: Alliance, not Filiation

Our narrow view of so-called individuals and so-called dyadic mutualisms opens wide when we pay attention to the fact that, “...plants manage simultaneous interactions with diverse organisms” (Preston, 2004: 913): insects, fungi, animals, birds, single-celled organisms, other plants. Draw from hundreds of possible examples, here are four well known non-dyadic systems with alliances *across kingdoms*:

1. There is a beetle larva that eats maize. When attacked by these beetles the root systems of the maize emits a chemical which attracts a nematode. This nematode eats the maize rootworm (Hitpold et al., 2010).
2. There is an aggressive grass that induces defence in barley. When the roots of barley are stressed by the grass they emit a chemical which reduces the number of aphids that land on the barley (Dewhirst and Pickett, 2010; Glinwood, 2003).

3. There is an ant that attacks acacia. When attacked the acacia emits a chemical which attracts or increases the population of bacterial associates (Heil et al., 2010).
4. There is a bacteria on the tobacco plant that communicates with other bacteria by releasing a lactone (AHL). This lactone increases resistance of the tobacco to a certain caterpillar (Heidel et al., 2010).

In this fourth case, the authors conclude “Our results demonstrate that AHL can affect herbivore resistance, although it is *not clear whether this is a direct or an indirect effect*” (152).

What is happening? The story that plant signaling happens within or between two, implodes completely. The story, even, that the signaling or communication is initiated within the two creatures by virtue of some force or impulse contained within one of these beings, implodes. The story that these thirds are indirect, accidental and incidental, implodes. The inter-kingdom range and variability of these mechanisms shatters once and for all the hermetic seal of those dyads. Taken together, these destabilize the underlying narrativial axis upon which our confidence in explaining the phenomena even rests: that classical x and y-axes upon which the concepts of *direct versus indirect*, *origin versus outcome*, *organic versus inorganic*, *kin versus alien*, *self versus non-self*, *actor versus object*, and even *plant versus animal* were themselves stabilized and made-meaningful.

V. *Where? Above or Below? Territories or The Rhizosphere*

And where are we even *looking* for signaling? A further uprooting of our confidence occurs when we learn that, while “[m]ost initial studies concentrated on the role of above-ground volatiles” (Dicke et al., 2003: 403) plants, in fact, communicate intra- and inter-specially through other media than air and in different regions than the above-ground. Chemical, mechanical, and electrical signals travel underground. “[T]he connections of unrelated plants underground via mycorrhizal networks might be a major thoroughfare by which information is exchanged in plant-plant interactions” (403). A recent study designed to control for above-ground transmission

confirms the rhizosphere—the “narrow region of soil...immediately adjacent to roots...that is directly influenced by root secretions and associated soil microorganisms” (Wikipedia)—to be a major zone of signaling (Heidel et al., 2010).

Naturally we presumed that communication needs ears, human or canine, to pick up vibrations; and noses to pick up olfactory cues; and eagle eyes, or rods and cones, to receive light; and especially mouths, palates, tongues and uvulae to utter words or sound-signals. And naturally we presumed that if *real* communication happens it will be between and across beings with those body parts, and those living in the area of the biosphere we *communicators* inhabit: in air, above ground, out of water, in our ecological territories. Yet, plants enjoy the co-inhabitation of two distinct zones: the sky part and the earth part. Plants enjoy a relation to touch that we do not, by virtue of their straddling two elemental zones: the earth and the air, and growing slowly, into these. As air-breathers they can connect up with anything in that sphere. As earth-touchers, they can connect with anything in that sphere. Do plants enjoy qualities and freedoms of movements—passions even perhaps—not available on the surface? French philosopher Luce Irigaray writes, of the passions: “Touching is hidden away...beneath the earth...In the damp, soft warmth some contact would persist...If it does not die completely, it is because it remains still under the earth” (Irigaray, 1992: 33). In her major ethical treatise, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* where Irigaray works out what would be required of us, and a world, in order to live harmoniously and lovingly together among genuine difference, she admonishes:

We need to...remember or learn about the role of movement in the passions....all forms of passively experienced passions in which the subject is enclosed, constrained, deprived of its roots, whether vegetal and earthly or ideal and heavenly. Sap no longer circulates between the beginning and the end of its incarnation (Irigaray 1993, pp 72-3).

Plants *could* remind us of our passions because they express differently. And fish, living another range to emit and receive, within. And cormorants, air and water. Bacteria: every possible zone, in motion and rest. Fetuses: typically water and then air.

Signaling through any and all means, through any and all in-betweens, is wherever and whatever “emits” and receives chemical, mechanical, photovoltaic, kinetic “particles.” The elemental planes—earth, air, fire, water—are not merely background elements for other genuine organic communication to use in the service of real communication among genuine communicators. Rather, it seems that these, as well, are the agents of communication: “the Mechanosphere, or rhizosphere” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 74).

VI. Multiple, fine...but still therefore Beneficial?

We tried to keep *mutuality* contained to the couple, but could not.

What about that other forceful prong of function: the premise of *benefit* that “...each partner depends directly on the other for its reproduction”?

The strongest pushback against any straightforward mutualism premise is this: there seem to be *as many interspecies cases* where there are *no obvious positive fitness consequences to the “emitter” at all*, let alone a short stretch of benefits followed by down turn. There are many instances where “Attacked con-specifics ‘warn’ neighbors but do not themselves get anything “back” for it.... Airborne signals usually improve the resistance of the receiver, but without obvious benefits for the emitter, thus making the evolutionary explanation of this phenomenon problematic” (Heil and Karban, 2009: 137). What we seem to often have is a unidirectional inter- and intra-species and even intra-kingdom, signaling system. “Communication between plants can produce large effects in terms of induction of putative defensive chemicals as well as resistance to herbivores, although it is not clear at this time that either of the plant species tested benefit from this communication” (Karbon et al., 2000: 70). Recall the model case of the sagebrush and the tobacco. The tobacco experiences enhanced protection against a bug (herbivore) which does not even negatively affect the first plant, the sagebrush and was not the stress factor that precipitated the chemical emission by the sagebrush. We see this also in plant-insect ostensible mutualisms: “The purpose of this chemical communication from cotton plants to wasps is *presumed* to be to allow the predatory wasp to more easily obtain the location of its

preferred prey—one of two types of parasitic herbivores feeding on the cotton plants...[t]he communication system studied here *could* have evolved to save the wasp’s energy in finding the right plant to land on. However, the advantage to the cotton plant is less clear as the wasp does not destroy the herbivore immediately (using the herbivorous host for egg laying) so that the herbivores remain feeding on the cotton plant for some time after the chemical signaling” (Doyle 2009: 441). These cases certainly loosen the grip of the beneficiary-functionalist premise of mutualism, at least if we restrict our definition of “benefit” to reproductive purpose.

Besides the empirical question, however, there are a few relevant conceptual questions to ask:

First, how *do* we, or scientists, studying these so-called beneficial interactions, conceptualize, perceive and hence confirm, empirically, positive outcomes? In truth, a time-frame must be imposed before an “outcome” can be measured. In field studies, the time-frame imposed maps onto the funding time-line a project has. It is entirely possible that after 4 years of counting tobacco plant seeds in the neighborhood of sagebrush, and finding more in the fourth year than in the first year, we could publish an article giving evidence of an increase in number, thus arguing a beneficial outcome for tobacco in terms of reproductive capacity by virtue of sage. But, if we looked for longer, maybe we wouldn’t be able to give a linear, feel-good story about outcomes. This is true for many phenomena. Flood control embankments in Bangladesh created habitats for the flies that carried *leishmaniasis* (Minkin et al., 1996). Adjusting industrial practices to make meat protein affordable and widely available (poultry or beef) improved nutrition. But, the conditions of industrial agriculture made those very sites epicenters for zoonotic diseases including S.A.R.S. pandemic of 2002 and “Mad cow” disease (Waltner-Toews, 1999; 2007). Looking episodically at a time-slice experimental situation we do seem to see tobacco plants’ resistance to grasshoppers and cutworms improved, quite possibly by virtue of its friendly neighbor, the sagebrush. But,

“[o]ver five years of experiments, tobacco plants next to damaged sagebrush produced more flowers and seed-bearing capsules but were also more susceptible to frost damage compared with controls. However, there was a negative correlation between tobacco capsule production and distance from

sagebrush indicating that sagebrush has an overall detrimental effect on the fitness of tobacco plants” (Dicke et al. 2003: 403).

Second, how do we, or the scientists studying “plant communication,” conceive of the value of communication in general place such that we can locate its beneficiaries and its social site? It’s relevant for us to take note that a certain conceptual gesture is pervasive in the scientific literature: *if* the benefits to the emitter and receiver are not equal and not mutual, the description of the plant behaviour is downgraded from “communication” to “eavesdropping” (Preston, 2004: 912). If the signal flows to a third party this third party is called a “cheater.” We hear this worry: “Is the signal always ‘honest’...or can ‘cheating’ occur? Do species other than the two mutualists use this information exchange to exploit resources?” (Krebs and Davis, as cited in Hossaert-McKey et al., 2010: 76). These are the terms most commonly found: *eavesdropper*, *cheater*, *exploiter*. These are all perjoratives. What does this linguistic usage reveal? Among other things, it suggests that, by definition, *communication* must always flow two-ways, and privately, between strictly identified and identifiable, worthy *owners*—the beings—of that dialogical, reciprocal, symmetrical transaction: anything other than that is *illegitimate*, *theft*, *freeloading*, *perversion*, *failure*. We *could* choose other terms for the indirect, unintended elliptical givings and receivings that seem to happen. An alternative to an “illicit escapee” framing would be to frame these through a narrative of the actions of generosity and gift; to draw from a conceptual terrain wherein the spontaneous, non-meritocratic reception of an uncontainable excess—whether protective VOC signals, a smiling flash of recognition, or a blood transfusion—by an unspecified and uncountable other or others, from an unidentified non-proximate other or others, *as the epitome* of the Good. In fact, under a Derridean or a Levinasian conception of the ethical, these are the *very kinds of relations* which can, and do, testify to the fundamental fact of goodness, and are the well-spring of any ethical authentic imperative. Derrida writes: The “imperative” or ‘law’...may be a necessity that escapes the habitual regime of necessity...necessarily understood as natural law...” (2001: 110). Levinas’ entire oeuvre is devoted to distinguishing ethics, which he conceives as action, a becoming, something undergone or received from without, from ontology, or the science of Being. He says, “Ethics does not have an essence...its ‘identity’ is to undo identities. Its ‘being’ is not to be but to be *better than being*. Ethics occurs as the compassion of

being...The surplus of the Other...is the way ethics intrudes, disturbs, commands...Neither my consciousness nor my instincts are sufficient to the excessive demand the other places on me...yet...[this] relation is like no other...but signifies all the surplus or all the goodness of *original sociality*” (Levinas, 1985: 10-11, added emphasis). What I am signaling here is that the *original sociality* of which Levinas speaks means any and all relations in which *responsiveness* can and does occur.

Conclusion: Becoming-plant? Or are you too attached to yourself?

Let us assemble our lacks: a lack of evidence confirming that improved fitness is the “point” of communication; an inability to confirm once and for all that growth or reproductive functions are served by communication, or at least the growth and reproduction of individual beings or types and over the long-term; an inability to localize “the communication” to direct signals within a dyadic unit; the permanent and varied role of organic and inorganic thirds and fourths in every communication mechanism. There is also the fact that scientific study of plant signaling has to isolate and fix its samples (genetically, geographically, temporally), and to carry-on “as if in a common garden” (Hossaert-McKey, 2010: 85). What is lacking is the living matrix itself.

Through what plant communication *might not be* we can start to feel something else entirely *being expressed*. Certainly different verbs than being, evolving, communicating, reproducing, defending. What is expressed is *becoming*. In their plateau, “1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible...” Deleuze and Guattari write:

To become is not to progress or regress along a series...Becoming is not an evolution, at least not by descent and filiation...It concerns alliance...If evolution includes any veritable becomings, it is in the domain of symbioses that bring into play beings of totally different scales and kingdoms, with no possible filiation...” (1987: 238)

Thinking plant-thoughts shoves us in a *better* way than thinking animal-thoughts does, toward the truth that the “correct unit” of analysis is not the individual, nor the dyad, but “the assemblage.” The assemblage is not a unit in the sense of a stable physical entity with a particular form and having one or two particular components and one or two dominant functions, rather it is a description of the quality, or state, of a radical collectivity (or what Deleuze and Guattari cheekily call “unholy alliances”). An assemblage is less a thing than a transitory verb with a particular consistency, or a mobile state. And “[s]tates are made up not only of people but also of wood, field, gardens, animals, and commodities” (1987: 385). They write:

It is quite simple; everybody knows it, but it is discussed only in secret...Unnatural participations or nuptials are the true Nature spanning the kingdoms of Nature... involves terms that are entirely heterogeneous: for example, a human being, an animal, and a bacterium, a virus, a molecules, a microorganism. Or in the case of the truffle, a tree, a fly, and a pig. These combinations are neither genetic nor structural; they are interkingdoms, unnatural participations. These multiplicities with heterogeneous terms, cofunctioning by contagion, enter certain assemblages (241-242).

“All kinds of heterogeneous elements show up...not only the...materials, colors, odors, sounds, postures, etc...” (323). “We therefore call it the plane of Nature, although nature has nothing to do with it, since on this plane there is no distinction between the natural and the artificial” (266). The punchline is that the *telo* or “self-realization” of plant communication is neither strictly individual nor even species-specific but is accomplished in and through radical kinships, through a fantastically versatile and multi-directional capacity to harmonize a multiplicity of actions. Whatever plants are up to, it *is* complex being-together in the world, an *original sociality* going beyond any simple sense of *between*.

Such insights should shame us away from our floral-show stereotypy of “placing plants” in their correct position, ontologically, linguistically, morally. It should also uproot our habit of thinking that all this thought of ours is ultimately to help us to understand *what* they are. In its remarkable and singular power to thwart those very efforts becoming-plant *forces us* to think instead the complex ways that *plantness composes us*. “Deleuze opens us to the idea...that the elements of the different

individuals we compose may be nonhuman *within* us. What we are capable of may partake of the wolf, the river, the stone in the river” (Hurley, 1998: ii-iii). The idea of becoming-plant is an idea *within us*, composing us because becoming-plant happens. “No idea can exist unless the thing also exists,” but in turn “There is no thing of which there is not an idea in the thinking thing...” (Deleuze, 1992:116). Becoming-plant is a unique becoming, a unique field of forces *qua* idea and *qua* thing. “There are thus as many ideas as there are things, each thing being the object of an idea” (116). Thinking plant-becomings through the subject of plant signaling loosens the grip of the tyranny of form and function. It also loosens the tyranny of the narratives including the tendency to conceive of lower functions as if in the service of higher ones and the tendency to think of distant things as in the service of proximate ones.

One last confession: I don’t really *love* plants. I love philosophy. Thinking plant-becoming has massive political and ethical implications—at the level of new concepts and new actions—which I can only gesture to here obliquely, counting on the unholy power of the indirect. For one, plant-becoming opens up thinking about relations as transient alliances rather than strategies. It credits the accomplishment of identity and intimacy as a *radically collective achievement*, crossing faculties, bodies, phyla and even the most basic cut we so confidently declare: the organic and the inorganic. Plant-becoming also radically re-imagines Life as that which can be accomplished not within a successfully-managed organic encasement of what a thing is (its being, its teloi, its progeny) but, as that which can happen by virtue of *a certain unfaithful power of connectivity*.

Aristotle’s philosophical botany offers a very good tip. In *On the Generation of Animals* he advises, “...when it is necessary for [the animal] to accomplish in function of that which has life, it unites and copulates, becoming like a plant...” (1986: GA II C23 731b5). Vegetality expresses and supports the unthinkable complex web which holds together what things are, what they are trying to become, and what they need the support of all the rest to unbecome.⁷ What needs *unbecoming*? Among other

7 Though in various parts of his oeuvre Aristotle has argued for one or the other, or a priority among these capacities, there is textual proof that overall, Aristotle characterizes nutrition, growth & reproduction and decay as the three interrelated, non-sequential fundamental capacities of all living things as living things. These three functions are roughly in the service of the actualization of the states of Being, Becoming and Decay. Nutrition, or

things our terrible somatic and mental habits: our animality stereotypes. Becoming-plant as a labour of, and for, unbecoming a certain tendency in human thinking and human action, emits particles of that unfaithful, massive, power of connectivity.

Irigaray answers the circling canine interlocutors: “*How can I abandon my love of the vegetal? Would you become plant? Or are you too attached to yourself to become anything at all?*” (1992: 33).

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self-nourishment is necessary to “...maintain the being of what is fed, and that continues to be what it is so long as the process of nutrition continues.” (DA II C4, 416b 14-6); growth & reproduction are the goals “toward which all things strive, that for the sake of which they do whatsoever their nature renders possible” (DA II C4 a 11); “...grows qua growing from something into something. Into what does it grow? Not into that from which it arose but into that which it tends” (PH II, C1, 193b 16-18). Just as critically, though an individual’s telos realized in reproduction that individual must also realize its identity in a larger biological and temporal context where all other individuals—not just their kin and progeny—do, and will, share in the drive to actualize themselves. Individuals’ nature includes the capacity to achieve their decay—their unbecoming—so as to make room for the accomplishment of the individual at the universal level, and the achievement of life in general. I thank Doug Halls for pointing out the note in GA and working with me on this point.

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“Strange Kinship” and Ascidian Life: 13 Repetitions

Astrida Neimanis¹

*How else can one write but of those things which one doesn't know, or knows badly?
It is precisely there that we imagine having something to say. We write only at the
frontiers of our knowledge, at the border which separates our knowledge from our
ignorance and transforms the one into the other.”*

—Gilles Deleuze, Preface to the English Edition of *Difference and Repetition*

Part I: Animal Ethics and Affinity, at Sea

What might it mean to engage in ethical relations with other animals? What choreographies or constellations of affect, prohibition, connection, care, incorporation, facilitation, ignorance, conservation, curiosity, or other modes of interbeing might guide me, a distinctly human being, concerned with “living well” with other-than-human animals? Beginning with the whale, but moving to the sea squirt, in this article I suggest that while an animal ethics based on affinity might be an important starting point for cultivating such relations, it is unable to capture the complexity of the ways in which human and other animal bodies intersect. Instead, we might begin taking stock of these “strange kinships” by attending to the ways in which we *repeat one another, but differently*. But such inventories also require adequate ways of repeating these modes of interbeing in textual practice.

¹ Astrida Neimanis is a feminist writer and academic, whose work explores the vicissitudes of embodiment on an ecologically fraught and biotechnologized global landscape. Her most recent major project was entitled *Bodies of Water*—a phenomenology of transcorporeality from the perspective of every body's watery constitution. Astrida currently serves as Chair of the Editorial Board of *PhaenEx: Journal of Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture* (phaenex.uwindsor.ca) and is co-organizer of the Thinking with Water project (thinkingwithwater.net). From September 2011, she can be found at the Gender Institute of the London School of Economics (lse.ac.uk/genderInstitute).

Of Cetaceans and Sea Squirts

About half a century ago, French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty argued in his *Nature* lectures that “the relation between the human and animality is not a hierarchical relation, but lateral” (2003: 268). While Merleau-Ponty was most interested in describing what it means to be a human body, his deeply attentive phenomenological work quickly revealed the boundaries of the human as profoundly porous. Turning his attention to research emerging in the biological, and particularly evolutionary sciences, coupled with his own phenomenological research, Merleau-Ponty posited that even though the human animal has its own modes of being and embodiment, our bodies also share modes of living and modes of embodiment with other animals. We echo through one another. He called this an “interanimality” or an “intercorporeity in the biosphere with all animality” (268). Although for Merleau-Ponty there is something “properly human” about human embodiment in the context of animality more generally, this is “an overcoming that does not abolish kinship” (268). There is a *difference*, then, but one that does not amount to human exceptionalism.²

While human exceptionalism was then, and still is, a norm in the Continental philosophical tradition, it is precisely this notion of affinity and recognition between human and other animals—that is, a *kinship*—that has taken hold and now dominates more recent attempts to formulate some sort of animal ethics. Key texts in contemporary critical animal studies (e.g., Tyler and Rossini’s *Animal Encounters* and Haraway’s *Companion Species Manifesto* and *When Species Meet*) stress similarities and contiguities between human and non-human animals, while popular science texts such as Neil Shubin’s *Your Inner Fish* and Carl Zimmer’s *At the Water’s Edge* inform and support such analyses.³ In order to break through the philosophically fortified wall surrounding the human, it seems pertinent to stress the many ways in which we might not be all that special after all.

² Toadvine (2007) makes a strong argument against reading Merleau-Ponty as advocating human exceptionalism.

³ See Great Ape Project; D’Amato and Chopra (1991) and Cavalieri (2011).

In animal activist circles—particularly those concerned with “animal rights”—the idea that (some) animals are “like us” (distant cousins, thrice removed or something like that) is also a common rhetorical strategy: both great apes and cetaceans have been the focus of campaigns to extend the “right to life” beyond human animals, precisely because of the attributes or qualities these animals share with us humans. Positing “kinship” becomes a cornerstone of species protection and conservation programs. Indeed, if we compare whale bodies to our own, we discover that both cetaceans and humans have lungs that breathe air and giant brains. Peel back the blubber of a cetacean’s fin and you will see something not unlike our own human hands: five fingers, a wrist, an elbow, a shoulder. Whales make mammalian babies, and music, just like us. They have red beating hearts, like ours, just as susceptible to being broken.⁴

This affinity, as Merleau-Ponty observed more generally in the terms of interanimality, is in part morphological, but more importantly, it has to do with the ways in which these bodies guide our intentionality in the world. Not only do we have body parts in common, but modes of being in common: brains problem-solve, limbs propel us forward, hearts love. The special place that cetaceans hold in the human imagination could be understood as based on kinship as recognition. We engage with such creatures as we align our own morphologies, our own emotions, our own requisites for pleasure or survival with those of the other animal. In these constellations of engagement, difference-in-degree trumps difference-in-kind, as we might imagine ourselves, too, returning to the warm womb of the oceans, terrestrial life is not all it was cracked up to be. We are responsible to more-than-human creatures because of an affinity, or “fellow-feeling,” that persists, despite social, economic, political—and even philosophical—incentives to deny it.

But this sort of affinity has limits, too. While “fellow feeling” suggests a sort of empathy, it might actually be little more than human exceptionalism in whales’ clothing, so to speak. As Patrick Moore, formerly of Canada’s Greenpeace, once said, “To get [the general public] to save the whales you have to get them to believe the

⁴ See Zimmer (1998), Shubin (2008), and Lingis (2000).

whales are good”(quoted in Einarsson 80)—except that “good” often means “special”—that is, *special, like us*. Many of us believe whales should be neither eaten, nor slaughtered, nor held in captivity, but this belief is likely an extension of our repugnance towards the human as food, mass murder victim, and slave. So perhaps we have not overcome human exceptionalism, but rather extended its reach to include those enough like us to be “family.”

And, even if we do empathize with the whale *as whale*, how far can that empathy take us? On my last whale watch in the Bay of Fundy, while the thrill of spotting an endangered North Atlantic right whale was undeniable, so too was the eventual boredom I felt, waiting for another blow. The wind was cold, and the water looked even colder. I knew I should be elated—I *was witnessing one of our planet’s most vulnerable life forms, thriving in its natural habitat*—but my fingers were frozen, my neck stiff and my patience struggling. And, despite the longstanding romance attached to “swimming with cetaceans,” as I looked out into the choppy, freezing sea, I knew that just about the last place I wanted to be was in that water, with those whales. While they might be an awful lot like me, at that moment I did not feel an awful lot like them. I dropped the binoculars from my eyes, and the whales disappeared below the waves—back to a home that becomes for us humans increasingly unrecognizable and decreasingly hospitable, the deeper the whales dive. The grey streaks of cetacean back disappeared beneath the breaking waves, swallowed up by an oceanic habitat that is at once of me and within me, but always also beyond me, reaching depths *my* body cannot fathom. Such experiences point to more than restlessness on a cold starboard deck. Despite the many ways in which we do share affinities, in moments like this we are reminded that whale-being (and any other non-human animal being) will always remain, to some extent, beyond us. We can meet at certain (often exhilarating, sometimes uncomfortable) thresholds, but these “borders of the liveable”⁵ cannot be crossed. Probably not that day, but sometime shortly thereafter, the whales I spotted in the Basin would make their way out of the bay, hugging the U.S. Eastern seaboard as they travelled south to their winter calving grounds. And, just as they passed Cape Cod, these whales probably travelled directly over a benthic

⁵ Deleuze (1996: 118). These are thresholds “beyond which it would entail the death of any well-constituted subject.”

zone called Georges Bank—an elevated area of sea floor, known primarily for its productive fishery, but also, since the late 1970's, as a potentially fecund site for oil and gas drilling.⁶

And, as they glided over Georges Bank, these whales might have had an encounter of their own. “Killer Blobs threaten Canada’s Waters” read the headline in one of Canada’s national newspapers, *The Globe and Mail*.⁷ In 2005, Canada’s Maritime aquaculture and fisheries industries were put on high alert due to the aggressive and spreading colonization of the sea floor in Georges Bank by a blanket of fauna, described by scientists as a (collective) “slimy creature” with an “icky texture” resembling “porridge-like goop” (Auld, 2005b). “The Blob” had been steadily creeping across Georges Bank for several years, creating a thick barrier between fish and what fish feed on. This aquatic creep meant trouble, not only for the fish, but also for the human fishers, who rely on the Georges Bank fish stocks for their livelihood. “The Blob”—still there to this day—is in fact a colony of invasive decidedly non-human ascidiacea, otherwise known as tunicates, or sea squirts. Sea squirts are ubiquitous, vastly diverse, and under no threat of extinction. While at a stretch, we humans might feel “whale-like,” could this “fellow-feeling” ever extend to “The Blob”? What kind of kinships are these?

Somewhere in the benthos of the northwest Atlantic, then, various questions about ethics and affinity collide, and rise to the surface: what does it mean to say we share kinship with other creatures, and in what ways does this affinity obligate us to them? Must kinship begin with recognition—that is, with a recognition of my human heart, or flippered finger, in an animal other? What are the limits of affinity, and what are we to do when it slips from our grasp—like the right whale flukes beneath the breaking waves? While we may be able to follow this “fellow-feeling” for a distance, it eventually outswims it. And, if the bonds of “fellow-feeling” toward a creature whose cognitive, emotional, and social intelligence so closely reflects our own can be

⁶ The area has been protected from oil and gas development since the 1980s by moratoria by both the U.S. and Canada, although such moratoria are always precarious. The politics of oil engages in its own cycles of repetition...

⁷ See Auld (2005a) and (2005b).

so easily ruptured (out of boredom and discomfort, no less), should this signal to us that building a more extensive platform of animal ethics upon such a fickle foundation might be risky? That is, if kinship as affinity is the basis of animal ethics—and a shaky basis at that—how am I to respond to those creatures, such as that “slew of goopy and gross sea creatures” (Auld, 2005a)⁸ with whom I presumably feel no affinity at all? What constellations of relation might guide my engagement *then*?

What Repeats?

While an ethics of affinity may indeed be an important starting point for cultivating care and concern for non-human animals, it can only bring us so far. Recognition, as an operator of relation, is too limited and, to put it bluntly, too self-referential (and self-preserving?) to serve as an adequate basis for interaction with bodies of alterity. I therefore propose that repetition, in the sense elaborated by Continental thinker Gilles Deleuze, is a more encompassing operator of relation, which allows for a more complex choreography of relations with our animal kin.⁹ I am not suggesting that such repetitions are “ethics,” or that to repeat is to be ethical. As we shall see, a careful inventory of the ways in which animal bodies and ways of being repeat in, through and as our own reveals such repetitions to be complex and multiple: hidden and obvious; ironic and necessary; contradictory and complementary; dangerous and life-affirming; self-serving and self-effacing. From such an inventory, no easy ethical formulations can follow. But perhaps the work of problematizing our own human subjectivity within any formulation of animal ethics is an on-going project, and one more complex than gives us comfort. To undertake these inventories of repetitions, I suggest, can be a key element of this difficult self-reflexive work.

⁸ The rhetoric of this “objective journalism”—describing this particular fauna in entirely horror-genre oriented malevolent terms such as “menacing,” “fouling,” “threatening,” “icky” and “gross”—is worth a study unto itself.

⁹ I am indebted to my lively and extended conversations with Mielle Chandler for this proposition. It was through the intersection of her thinking about gestationality, developmental systems and the more-than-human, with my interest in Deleuzian difference and repetition in relation to water and the more-than-human, that this idea that other animals might “repeat, but differently” in us and as us, arose. While I take responsibility for the ways I have developed this idea in this paper, the inspiration was a joint endeavour.

Moreover, I do not wish to suggest that these repetitions are *not* a form of kinship. Merleau-Ponty did not necessarily get it wrong: our ways of being in the world do echo those of our animal kin and indeed all of the other life forms with whom we share a planetary intercorporeity. These echoes, however, are not always readily recognized by us. As they refract through our own bodies, experiences and contexts, these reverberations are distorted and made strange. We might not recognize them as affinity at all, and in some instances, we may even deliberately disavow them, refuse to see the connection. To call this mode of relation a repetition rather than a bare “affinity,” then, helps us escape the demand for straightforward resemblance upon which it is so tempting to build an animal ethics. More importantly, to focus on “what repeats” means that we—the *human*—are no longer the reference point, the ground zero, the control case, the original, against which all other modes of being and relating can be measured. We are but another complex node in a congeries of iterations—repeating and repeated, among other multitudinous forms of life. These repetitions *are*, in fact, kinships, but as Merleau-Ponty might say, humans and other animals are “strange kin” (2003: 271); these repetitions are uncanny, disturbing, unfamiliar—but also intimately recognizable. While Merleau-Ponty’s analysis heads in a different direction than my own (indeed, for Merleau-Ponty, the human body—“my body,” in fact—remains “the measurant of all” (2000: 249)), I would like to borrow his phrase “strange kinship” as an apt way of describing these relations of repetition in which we are imbricated—these cross-body choreographies that embed us in one another’s contexts of materiality, meaning and being, yet pose no demand for recognition of a self as a measure of relation.¹⁰

Deleuze and Repetition

Deleuze’s best-known pronouncements on the relation between human and other animals are connected to the concept of “becoming-animal,” which he develops (with Felix Guattari) in *A Thousand Plateaus*. According to this mode of engagement,

¹⁰ Kelly Oliver (2007) provides a helpful explication of Merleau-Ponty’s concept of interanimality and his term “strange kinship” (between humans and other animals).

which operates according to the logic of contagion, human and other animal bodies are continuously contacting and “co-mingling” with one another, and through such “transfections,” our bodies are always participating in the becoming of other animal bodies (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 232-309). The becoming of bodies is thus always in a relational mode, and we are literally invested in one another.¹¹ My suggestion in this paper, however, is that Deleuze’s concept of *repetition* offers us a differently nuanced mode of relation for understanding these imbrications with other animals. In putting forth a concept of repetition that radically challenges our commonsensical understanding thereof, Deleuze’s thought provides the impetus for charting our “strange kinships” with other animals. Most importantly for Deleuze, repetition unfolds as difference—to repeat is to reiterate, but differently. This focus on difference, I propose, opens the possibility to understand human-other animal relations simultaneously in terms of connection and relation (those modes that are so strongly highlighted in the notion of becoming-animal), but also in terms of an uncanny strangeness, which the notion of becoming may cover-up or elide. If “becoming-animal” emphasizes our contiguity with animals, “difference and repetition” emphasizes our strange reiterations across a *rupture*.

Deleuze’s (1994) concept of repetition is developed primarily in his book *Difference and Repetition*. One of his principal claims here is that repetition does not belong to generality. Repetition is not resemblance: to repeat is not simply to exchange some replaceable aspect of the original for something else, such that the copy is of the same general kind. “If repetition exists,” writes Deleuze, “it expresses at once a singularity opposed to the general...a distinctive opposed to the ordinary, an instantaneity opposed to variation” (2-3). What repeats, in other words, is pure difference. All that can truly repeat is difference—a force, a compulsion, a desire to differ from oneself. One repeats when one can throw off the shackles of identity, reject the need to reproduce the self-same, and return, instead, as difference. Repetition is not representation, but rather an affirmation and a selection: select from the potentiality that is, and reiterate across a rupture.

¹¹ See Neimanis (2007) for further description of becoming-animal as a mode of being not unrelated to Merleau-Ponty’s idea of intercorporeity.

Such repetitions have nothing, therefore, to do with teleology, whereby each repetition would be an “improvement” upon the previous instantiation. Deleuze explicitly denies such a view of progress (1994: 248-250). Repetitions rather work in complex and multiple cycles: circling back, gathering up, rhizomatically following always new lines of flight...There is no predetermined course of their expression. Yet, even while what repeats is difference, it is misleading to assume that a repetition could be entirely open-ended. A repetition can only select from a given field of potentiality. This means that an important relation nonetheless exists between iterations—just not one of resemblance. Perhaps the best way of describing this relation is as *haunted*: a body, an idea, an entity that carries the ghosts of both past and future iterations enfolded within. *Repeated, but differently*. If we do catch a glimpse of resemblance, it is uncanny—an ephemeral ghost that, rather than affirming resemblance, asks a question about the strange pathways of relation that sustain us.

So, although for Merleau-Ponty our kinships—no matter how strange—are still triangulated using one’s own body as “measurant,” I suggest that Deleuze’s repetition allows us to ply and productively disturb this foundation. Of course, as long as we remain embodied human subjects embarking upon the project of writing philosophy, this foundation will never be completely disrupted (nor should it be). We could never fully divest ourselves of a grounding in our own subjectivity, and our human subjectivity is what facilitates many of our very human projects. Yet, there is still much we can do to decentre this self-referentiality. Thinking through repetition, I suggest, is one such means.

If we return to the sea, then: what kinds of relations are inaugurated by thinking in terms of repetition? What kinds of engagement become possible? What if my “kinship” with the whale were not conditioned by a representation of my generality in her, recognizable to me as some variation of me, but rather a realization that I am a repetition of this “strange kin?” While I too may be nostalgic for a warm watery home, I know my life is dependent upon the open air and solid ground. As the whale slips beneath the waves, this might not be a failure to connect, but rather an acknowledgement of my existence as an iteration of hers: the whale, repeated differently. She left the sea, but then returned again. She is my could-have-been, my might-still-become.

But again, while I might readily understand myself as a repetition of cetacean life, what might it mean to understand myself as a repetition of ascidian life, too? How might my responsivity to the sea squirt be shaped by the ways that its body, its ways of being, repeat—but differently—as me? How do I in turn re-circulate these repetitions back to ascidian life—asking that it repeat my ways of being, living, becoming? What might the movements, the contours, the qualities of these repetitions teach me about my animal others, about myself, and about the always complex ways in which we relate? In the currents of these repetitions, the past is never really past, but always swept up into eddies of our present: present thought, present action, present bodies, present philosophy. And within these presents, ripples of the future are always circulating, too.

And, perhaps such an inventory demands a method, a practice, a way of writing these repetitions that can be attentive to their contradictions and complexity. This would be a writing that describes without fully knowing, a writing that cannot impose an ethics, but can clear space for ethical moments to emerge. In an article concerning the complexity of negotiating human and more-than-human intertwinings, actor-network theorist Stephen Muecke (2009) reminds us that such negotiation must begin with a “*description* of what is happening” (196). Muecke elaborates that in such endeavours, entrenched divisions between the sciences and the humanities must be overcome, so that we might “describe the interplay of real things in a situation” (200). (We might even be tempted to note the repetition here—a strange kinship between actor-network theory and Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology that “tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is” (2000: vii)?). But even if we concede, as Muecke does,¹² that description is never neutral, is such concession enough? How might we make ourselves even more alive to the power of textual containment, to the ways in which word and world, text and context, too, are always repeating differently, across time, space and rupture? How might we expose the fact that as critic, one can no longer

¹² As Muecke (2009) explains, “arguments and values do not come after the fact; they are there at the birth of facts, and of perception” (197).

claim to be the omniscient “hero,”¹³ but is instead always a scavenger fish, combing the seafloor of matter and meaning? Just as water makes parasites of us all, this writing might only survive by living off of (through, with, alongside) what we have already said and what we already claim to know, even as it pushes at the borders of what we do not. Description, yes. But also: para-citation.

We are bodies (words, water, flesh) necessarily bound up in each other: memory, potentiality, gift, debt. *Repeated, but differently.*

Part II: 13 Repetitions

Repetition 1: Larvae

A notable fact about sea squirts: they are chordates. In other words, despite our failures of affinity, ascidians share many characteristics with other chordates, such as humans. To be chordate means that at some point in your development, you will show off a hollow dorsal nerve chord, pharyngeal gill slits, a flexible notochord, a tail, a ventral heart. In most chordates, the notochord will eventually form a bony or cartilaginous spine—that is to say, one grows a backbone. These are the vertebrates.

In Deleuze’s discussions of embryogenesis and evolutionary biology, the larva hovers on the precipice between the virtual and the actual. As Deleuze expounds, the larva, or egg, holds an unknown latency, a potentiality for expression that may never be expressed. The larval subject, for Deleuze, is the potential subject, or subject-to-come, the subject who is yet to be differentiated (1994: 78, 119, 219). Deleuze suggests this notion of larval subjectivity as an implicit challenge to biologist Ernst Haeckel’s 1866

¹³ As Muecke writes, one of the key ways in which cultural studies must change in order to take on the question of the more-than-human, is to agree to “No more critic as hero. The critic may find himself [sic] less able to denounce others’ positions based on access to a transcendental philosophy. This should come as an immense relief to all concerned!” (200).

claims that “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny.”¹⁴ In this theory, which remained popular in evolutionary circles for decades, Haeckel asserted that in the growth of a human embryo, one could see a miniaturized mirroring of phylogeny, or the evolutionary history of species. Haeckel’s theory thus posited a teleological version of evolution, whereby development from amoeba, to invertebrate, eventually to tetrapod human was the destined course of progress, just as any embryo was destined to progress from a less-developed larva into a more complex, more “evolved” adult. But for Deleuze, evolution unfolds from virtuality—the larval subject, teeming with latent potentiality—to actuality. The embryo “lives the unliveable” (1994: 250) in Deleuze’s words, and “only the involuted evolve” (1994: 118). The larva, the embryo, holds all the potentiality that would rip an adult apart (1994: 215, 250; Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 47).

Unlike humans, ascidians are invertebrate chordates. They begin their lives as tadpole-like larva, with heads and tails, hearts and stomachs, and eyes. Their motile larvae freely swim about in search of a suitable place to settle down. At this point they reabsorb their spines, their tails, their eyes. (An *involution*?) They grow gonads, their siphons become more pronounced, and they spend the rest of their zooid, sessile existence, taking in water and squirting it out again.

Deleuze: To grow from larva to adult, the adult simply selects what it can withstand.

In a context of *fastercheapermore*, what might the sea squirt teach us about “progress?”

¹⁴ In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze makes this allusion in reference to von Baer’s discovery that “an embryo does not reproduce ancestral adult forms belonging to other species, but rather experiences or undergoes states and undertakes movements which are not viable for the species but go beyond the limits of the species, genus, order or class, and can be sustained only by the embryo itself, under the conditions of embryonic life” (Deleuze 1994: 249). In *A Thousand Plateaus* the reference is more direct (“You can never draw conclusions about phylogenesis on the basis of embryogenesis” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 47)).

Repetition 2: Globalization

“The Blob” on Georges Bank is not a solitary phenomenon. Ascidians are ubiquitous, and rather promiscuous. They populate major bodies of water in all regions of the globe. And, “[r]ecent surveys of invertebrates in many coastal areas demonstrate ever-increasing populations of non-indigenous ascidians” (Lambert, 2001: 250).

Invasive species are non-native species that disrupt and adversely affect, economically, environmentally, and/or ecologically, a particular habitat through domination and colonization.

***Herdmania spp:** Several species of Herdmania were described from the Pacific, then lumped under H. Momus with numerous records worldwide in the tropics. It is now apparent that there are several distinct species (Lambert, 2001: 252).*

***Microcosmus exasperatus:** This large stolidobranch is common in the Mediterranean, Hawaii, Guam, Australia and throughout the Indo-Pacific. Its origin will probably never be known. (253).*

***Symplegma brakenhielmi:** Known worldwide under its former name of S. Oceania, it was long recognized as a successful invader in many parts of the world. It is probable, however, that the many records for this species really refer to several species; they are difficult to distinguish (254).*

(“‘There are so many bad guys coming across—bandits and smugglers,’ said one concerned citizen. So, the Arizona legislature is about to pass the toughest law against illegal immigrants in the country” (Whitaker, 2010: n.p.).)

Ascidians are also known as “marine pests,” “foulers,” and more recently, as a “biosecurity challenge” (Hodge, 2010).

(“(The law’s) intended to be the toughest,” said Arizona State Senator Russell Pearce. “They’re illegal,” Pearce said. “This is not harsh” (Whitaker, 2010: n.p.).)

“There are now numerous documented instances of successful and apparently permanent establishment.” (Lambert, 2001: 250)

“Many of the most significant factors leading to invasive-species settlement are anthropogenic. Aquaculture, that is, the artificial substrates that hold huge monocultures of mussels and other bivalves with their vast amount of shell surface are ideal habitats for ascidian settlement.” (Lambert, 2001: 250)

Repetition, not only of bodies, but ways of being.

Repetition 3: Biomagnification

Ascidiacea are exceptional filter feeders: a single zooid may be capable of filtering up to 100 gallons of water each day (Hanley, 2010). As such, adult sea squirts accumulate pollutants and toxins that can be harmful to their larvae and impede enzyme function in adult tissues. “This property has made some species sensitive indicators of pollution” (Wikipedia, “Ascidiacea”).

Evolutionary biologists call it matrotrophy: eating one's mother. As Derrida says, “*Il faut bien manger.*”¹⁵ But the ingredients of human breast milk would go something like this: fat, vitamins A, C, E and K, lactose, essential minerals, growth hormones, proteins, enzymes and antibodies, DDT, PCB's, dioxin, trichloroethylene, perchlorate, mercury, lead, benzene, arsenic, paint thinner, dry-cleaning fluid, toilet deodorizers, Teflon, rocket fuel, termite poison, fungicides and flame retardant (Williams, 2005). Indeed, nursing one's young may be the ultimate detox: “Scientists believe that mothers siphon off to their baby a significant amount of their lifelong store of chemicals in the course of breast-feeding” (Williams, 2005: n.p.).

¹⁵This is the French title of an interview with Derrida known in English as “Eating Well, or the Calculation of the Subject” (1995). In this interview, Derrida contends that whether or not we eat animals is not the ethical question, but rather: how do we eat them.

Thanks to cold temperatures and little sunlight, toxins break down slowly in the Arctic. A thumb-sized piece of maktaaq, a staple in the Inuit diet, contains more than Health Canada's maximum recommended intake of PCBs for an entire week (Duffy). "This property has made some species sensitive indicators of pollution" (Wikipedia, "Ascidiacea").

"Signs of Danger," writes Peter van Wyck: "The point is that threat—as threat—has the status of paradoxical event. On one hand, it is something that is in advance of the accident, something in advance of that which befalls. But on the other, to be under threat is for something to already have taken place" (Van Wyck, 2004: xix)

What has already taken place? What bodies of ascidian life, what bodily fluids, are repeating? Belugas were known to whalers as "sea canaries" because of the bird-like chirps, whistles and squeals they emit. But there are other canaries of the sea now, too: the coal mine is flooding, and sea squirts are swimming for their lives.

Repetition 4: Sociality

Sea mammals and sea squirts are colliding in the coastal waters of North Florida, too. The endangered Florida manatee spends six to eight hours a day feeding on sea grasses. Watercraft collisions are responsible for most manatee deaths, but anthropogenic habitat destruction is another leading factor (Van Meter, 1989).

Periodic red tide blooms have also been associated with a number of manatee deaths. Sea squirts, those exceptional filter-feeders, accumulate brevetoxins from red tide phytoplankton. While the brevetoxin-concentrated sea squirts adhere to the sea grasses, these grasses are also the manatee's primary source of food.

"It is unclear what causes red tides, but the frequency and severity of algal blooms in many parts of the world have been linked to increased nutrient loading from human activities" as in agricultural run-off. Moreover, "[c]oastal water pollution produced by humans and systematic increase in sea water temperature have also been implicated... in red tides" (Florida Red Tide Solutions, 2011: n.p.). And still, as listed

in one comprehensive information booklet on the manatee, for the manatee to die from “red tide” is to die from “natural causes” (Van Meter, 1989).

But “biology is relentlessly historical, all the way down.” Donna Haraway has noted, “There is no border where... culture rules and nature submits, or vice versa... Every being that matters is a congeries of its formative histories” (2004: 3).

The repetition of another’s body in and as one’s own holds no guarantees.

Donna Haraway also asks: “Who cleans up the shit in a companion species relation?” (2004: 317)

Repetition 5: Sex

Almost all ascidians are hermaphrodites, where each animal has one testis and one ovary, and produces both ova and sperm. But in ascidian sex life, there really is no “norm.” In some colony-forming species, fertilization takes place inside an individual squirt, but development takes place in the chamber the system shares. In other colonial ascidians, reproduction is asexual: buds develop and grow to full size on an adult, then break off as new individuals (“Sea Squirts: Ascidiacea-Behavior And Reproduction”).

Joan Roughgarden (2004), in her work on animal sexuality, notes that according to common biology, “male” dolphins and whales are described as having no external genitals, no scrotum, but rather a pair of testes located within their body cavity. The penis is found in a “genital slit” and (unless erect) is covered by flaps (40). Biologists are quick to point out the good reasons behind this bodily architecture, namely hydrodynamic streamlining (Zimmer, 1998: 123). Roughgarden notes, however, that this genital architecture, although “normal” in unambiguously male dolphins, would be considered a very exceptional intersex morphology in humans. She wonders if “perhaps cetaceans are on their evolutionary way to the state that hermaphroditic fish have already attained” (2004: 41).

Charles Darwin in a letter to Thomas Huxley: “Our ancestor was an animal which breathed water, had a swim bladder, a great swimming tail, an imperfect skull, and undoubtedly was an hermaphrodite! Here is a pleasant genealogy for mankind” (quoted in Zimmer, 1998: n.p.).

Repetition 6: Food for thought

As I nibble at your ear, or lick the salt from your skin, I wonder: isn’t sex a mostly gustatory pleasure?

Sea squirt bibimbap is a specialty of Geojae-do island, not far from Masan, in Korea, while in Greece sea squirts are eaten raw with lemon, olive oil and parsley. Sometimes known as sea pork, the French call certain ascidians as *les figues de mer* (Wikipedia, “Ascidiacea”).

Gustatory incorporation; a Derridean “eating well.”

As one environmental blogger notes, “saving our lakes and oceans from their apparently inexorable slide back to the Archean Eon” may well depend on developing a taste for invasive species (Grescoe, 2008: n.p.).

Bottom-dwelling fish, skates, and sharks like to eat living Sea Pork (Mitchell, 2008).

“Il faut bien manger.”

Repetition 7: Indigestion

But tell that to the manatee.

Repetition 8: Ontogeny Recapitulates Phylogeny, or This Watery Womb

We know now that Ernst Haeckl was wrong—ontogeny does not, as a rule, recapitulate phylogeny. The humble sea squirt, whose vertebrate larva misplaced its rocky spine somewhere along the path to maturity, is the best disclaimer of that once-held truism.

Yet what expectant human mother has not at some point imagined her fetus as a tadpole, all fish eyes and fins, pre-amphibious, somersaulting its way through her amniotic seas? Our bodies: the archives of our evolutions. Her pasts literally well up inside her, time a crumpled up tissue, now responding to the swell. Something is remembered... a tail reabsorbed, an aorta hooked. This is not “memory,” if memory, as Deleuze says, is the active synthesis of moments required to create a subject (1994: 70-128).

But if there is no teleological tending towards subjectivity, who, or what, remembers? Sandor Ferenczi, student and pen pal of Sigmund Freud, suggested that dreams of water recall not only the trauma of birth, as we are expelled from our mothers’ wombs, but also the phylogenetic “catastrophe of the recession of oceans” (Ferenczi, 2005: 102), a loss we tetrapods have shouldered for millennia. Our traumas are personal, but they are geological as well, Ferenczi says. Desire, loss and relationality are biological phenomena, as much as they are cultural. Our organs—that is “mere biological matter” thinks, problem-solves, remembers. Ferenczi (perhaps also remembering a future still-to-come) called this a matter of the biological unconscious. Freud, apparently, was not impressed.

Sea squirts, I repeat, are widely manifest as invasive species.

My body was invaded, recolonized three times.

But while the gestational body remembers (thinks, problem-solves), how are we to understand the sea squirt’s forgetting—the forgetting of a vertebrate future that for this creature quickly slips away as a morphogenetic past, the brain and the tail

consumed, eaten by the developing self? Autotrophy? In a manner of speaking. Chordate futurity digesting in the body, waiting to be selected.

Past and future, collide and switch. Like those rarest of rivers, repetition flows both ways.

Repetition 9: Reproduction

Lately, ascidians have garnered particular attention: they harbour an antigen-producing microbe that can treat cancer. Far more potent than traditional chemotherapy, “a mere 11 pounds of the drug would satisfy world demand for a year” (Cromie, 2002: n.p.).

Sea squirt derived antigens were initially tested on patients with breast, ovarian and connective tissue tumors. It is unclear why certain highly gendered cancers are particularly responsive to sea-squirt derivatives. I wonder: What assemblages are forming that specifically link oceanic life to the repair of organic communication¹⁶ breakdown within women’s gestational zones? The rhythm of a sea creature, echoing through the womb.

But if there is no original, no point, no body, no beginning of beginnings from which it all started, then womb, too, is already a repetition, a becoming, an unfolding. Womb and water; water and womb. Watery life gestating possibilities for other watery life yet-to-come, for life that might-not-have-been.¹⁷

Repetition 10: Water/Milieu

“Evolution,” Deleuze reminds us, “does not take place in the open air” (1994: 118).

¹⁶ See Elizabeth A. Wilson (2008) on organic communication.

¹⁷ See Chandler and Neimanis (forthcoming).

As researcher Matthew Fletcher notes, "The marine environment is a realm of biological and chemical diversity, and marine organisms... are a rich source of intriguing and unusual molecules with the potential to become powerful drugs" (BBC, 2005).

Musing again on hermaphroditic fish, Roughgarden wonders why it is that oceanic environments, unlike life on land, that seem to be so accommodating—and even facilitative of—diverse sexuality (31). What repeats?

An exterior milieu, now folded inside. Not only the sea, but a congeries of bodies, of species, each the evolutionary gestational milieu for an other. We are all watery bodies, constantly selecting, reinventing, repeating one another, from precipitation to primordial soup.

Repetition 11: Oikos

The anti-cancer drugs derived from sea squirt compounds inaugurate flows of power between ascidian life, specific bodies in pain, and multinational pharmaceutical companies. To whose advantage are sea squirt bodies being commandeered?

"*Oikos* is Greek for "dwelling" and becomes the prefix "eco" that is common to both ecology (the logic of dwelling) and economy (the management of dwelling)" (Chen, 2010). So why is it, asks Cecilia Chen, that we treat these as separate considerations?

The sea-squirt derived antigens were synthesized by a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard, named David Gin, in the lab of Nobel Prize winning chemist Elias J. Corey (Cromie, 2000). Gin, a native Vancouverite, now works at the Sloan-Kettering Institute in Chicago, having left Corey's lab to build a superstar career in molecular biology. Ownership of the patent remained Harvard University's, while the commercial license of the cancer-treating drug is owned by Portuguese pharmaceutical company, PharmaMar. Meanwhile, 0.25 mg (about 5 doses) of Yondelis—the antigen's trade name retails for about 1000 Euros.

(In a context of globalization, is sovereignty an invasive species? Capitalism?)¹⁸

Ecofeminist Susan Hawthorne (2007) has analyzed the key confluences of bioprospecting: on the one hand, animal and plant life is prospected from the rivers and oceans, while on the other, biological data and matter is prospected from the bodies of women, isolated and indigenous peoples, and people with disabilities and chronic disease. All of these bodies are reduced to “resources” to bring profit to the globally powerful, who then sell their “discoveries” back to those very same resource-bodies who have been “prospected.” Not only *how* is the sea squirt repeating, then, but: *for whom*?

On May 14, 2010, I attended the funeral of Barbara Godard and her cancer-addled gestational zones. I still experience the immediate grief of losing that singular, irreplaceable body.

“Repetition,” writes Deleuze, in the opening sentence of *Difference and Repetition*, “is not generality.... If exchange is the criterion of generality, theft and gift are those of repetition. There is, therefore, an *economic* difference between the two” (1994: 1).

Repetition 12: Memory

Or, what might it mean to say that the sea squirt remembers?

“Analyses of tissue transplantation... have shown that many invertebrates, including tunicates [also known as sea squirts], possess a precise capacity to recognize and reject foreign tissue...” That is to say, they “exhibit immunological memory” (Cooper and Parrinello, 2001: 385).

When exposed to light stimuli, ascidian larvae exhibit a photophobic response, and begin swimming faster. “Preliminary work showed ascidian larvae can storage this memory for one minute” (Tsuda et. al., 2001:156).

¹⁸ See Chandler (2007).

Science—or is it philosophy?—makes ascidians remember.

In May 2010, biologists Michael Virata and Robert Zeller reported a breakthrough in Alzheimers Disease research: scientists can use expressly bred transgenic ascidian larva as a useful homolog to studying Alzheimer's disease in human patients. After identifying and manipulating certain gene structures in the sea squirt larva, scientists can observe patterns of certain plaque formations that provide valuable information about the development of Alzheimers and its treatment (Virata and Zeller, 2010).

The suitability of sea squirts to this task is in part based on our evolutionary affinity: "Ascidians are likely to share a larger number of genes with humans that are not present in other invertebrates," explain Virata and Zeller. "To our knowledge, this is the first invertebrate model system in which orthologs for all the genes implicated in APP processing have been identified."

"Mice have [also] been used extensively as Alzheimers' animal models owing to the similarity with the human brain anatomy..." (n.p.) they continue. But "Transgenic mice models take, on average, eight months to display any observable plaque phenotype...Because of their rapid development, the use of invertebrate model systems, such as worms and flies, has reduced the time for plaque formation down to several weeks. Our results in the ascidian demonstrate that this time... can be reduced to less than a day" (n.p.). Virata and Zeller add: "Generating transgenic mice is not only time intensive but also costly" (n.p.).

That is to say, in the name of money and speed, sea squirts are losing their minds.

"I do not repeat because I repress. I repress because I repeat, I forget because I repeat. I repress, because I can live certain things or certain experiences only in the mode of repetition" (Deleuze 1994: 18).

So what might it mean to say that the sea squirt remembers?

Repetition 13: Biomimicry/Guilt by Association

Dr Eric Schmidt notes: "Coral reefs and other ocean environments are like rainforests—full of natural chemicals to potentially treat human disease. Unfortunately, it's difficult to supply pharmaceuticals from these delicate environments. We have solved this by synthesizing the compounds in a lab" (BBC, 2005). Alternatively, Dominic Mendola, owner of an aquaculture company called CalBioMarine, says that aquaculture could satisfy the United States' demand for cancer-fighting sea-squirt derived antigens. "We would likely need 50,000 kg of sea squirts a year," he says. "It would be difficult. But we could do it" (BBC, 1999).

Meanwhile, recently in Fort Meyers, "several black jelly-like balls are confusing some beach go-ers. Many people were concerned these black blobs known as 'sea pork' were possible tar balls from the oil spill" (NBC2 RSW Florida, 2010: n.p.).

"That's the issue, people are seeing anything right now that perhaps (is) black and has any substance at all to it. They're thinking it's a tar ball. It's not a tar ball," said John Albion of the Fort Myers Beach Chamber of Commerce. Officials want to stress not only are these blobs natural to the Gulf, in some cases they actually work to keep the water clean.

The shores were clear from most of the sea pork the next Saturday afternoon." (NBC2 RSW Florida, 2010: n.p.).

Meanwhile, in a fish market in Peru, dolphin meat labelled as 'sea pork' is selling for 40 cents a pound. Beef costs a dollar eighty-five (Hall, 2003). Would a sow by any other name still taste as sweet?

"Repetition," writes Deleuze, "belongs to... irony" (1994: 5).

* * *

Repetitions, attempting to communicate: *at the border which separates our knowledge from our ignorance and transforms the one into the other.*

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Sounding Depth with the North Atlantic Right Whale and Merleau-Ponty: An Exercise in Comparative Phenomenology

Jen McWeeny¹

The North Atlantic right whale is an endangered species whose current population size is estimated to be between 350 and 400 individual animals.² North Atlantic right whales are primarily found off the coasts of the North Eastern United States and Eastern Canada for the majority of the year, but in the winter they migrate south to the waters off of Florida and Georgia to give birth. Their dangerously small population size is a direct result of the whaling industry, which hunted the right whale almost to extinction until an international ban was instituted against harvesting them in 1935 (Kraus and Rolland, 2007: 5). The industry also gave the species, whose scientific name is *Eubalaena glacialis*, its common name; it was well-known among hunters that these animals were “the right whale to kill” due to their high concentrations of blubber, their slow swimming speed relative to other whales, and the fact that right whale bodies float when dead.

The North Atlantic right whale population has been slow to rebound from its decimation for several reasons, including the animal’s reproductive biology and low levels of genetic variation within the remaining members of the species. Female right

1 Jennifer McWeeny is Associate Professor of Philosophy at John Carroll University where she regularly teaches courses in epistemology, Continental philosophy, feminist philosophy, early modern philosophy, and Asian and comparative philosophy. She received her Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Oregon in 2005 and her M.A. in Philosophy from the University of Hawai’i at Manoa in 2000. Her research interests are in the areas of phenomenology, epistemology, embodiment, feminist comparative philosophy, and environmental philosophy. McWeeny’s articles have appeared in *Hypatia* and *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, among other venues. Her current projects include co-editing *Liberating Traditions: Essays in Feminist Comparative Philosophy* and writing articles on intersectionality theory and the emotions, respectively.

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whales do not reach sexual maturity until they are about ten years of age, after which they will only reproduce once every three to five years with gestation periods of approximately twelve months (Kraus et al., 2007: 179-184). At birth, right whale calves are between four to five meters (13-16 feet) long and weigh up to one ton (Kraus et al. 2007: 178). They will soon grow to lengths of eleven to eighteen meters (36-59 feet) and weigh between 36 and 72 tons (Kraus and Rolland, 2007: 14). Like most large cetaceans, full-grown right whales have no known predators except humans, although calves are sometimes preyed upon by pods of killer whales.

Another factor in the slow recovery of the species is an increasing number of right whale mortalities caused by ship-strikes and entanglements.³ Pregnant females and females with calves are especially in danger of ship-strikes because they are slower-moving than other individuals in their species and more likely to stay close to the shore. Indeed, the lives of North Atlantic right whales are so affected by ship-strikes and entanglements that they have recently been dubbed “the urban whale” by scientists Scott D. Kraus and Rosalind M. Rolland in their book of that title (2007). As these researchers write,

Between shipping, fishing, ocean noise, pollution (including sewage effluent and agricultural and industrial runoff), the coastal zone of Eastern North America is one of the most urbanized pieces of ocean in the world. And right whales, many of which live within that zone for most of their lives, are thus a new phenomenon in the marine world—a truly urban whale. (2007: 4)

Kraus and Rolland argue that the North Atlantic right whale is afflicted with what they call “the urban whale syndrome,” the symptoms of which are increased mortality from human activities, decreased reproduction, poor body condition including scars and skin lesions, and habitat loss (490). North Atlantic right whales are not the only cetaceans manifesting symptoms of this syndrome. Kraus and Rolland also cite inland killer whales in the Pacific Northwest, Beluga whales of the St. Lawrence River, and

³ For overviews of the problems of entanglements and ship-strikes in regard to the North Atlantic right whale population see respectively Johnson et al. (2007) and Knowlton and Brown (2007).

the Indo-Pacific humpbacked dolphin as populations that are showing signs of decline due to their proximity to human industry (498-501). The insight behind Kraus and Rolland's moniker for the North Atlantic right whale is that just as the health and survival of humans have been shown to diminish when they live in urban areas for prolonged periods of time, so too with nonhuman animals whose habitat has become thoroughly and in some cases irrevocably urbanized.

My philosophical interest in the North Atlantic right whale has to do primarily with what the lived whale body can teach us about a phenomenology of depth. As those already familiar with phenomenological literature will likely be aware, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's analysis of depth in *The Phenomenology of Perception* constitutes a crucial moment in the formation of his ontology. Most importantly, Merleau-Ponty's articulation of depth as "the most 'existential' of all dimensions" (1945/1962: 298) provides us with a way to conceptualize our involvement in the world without the Cartesian frames that separate subject from object, mind from body, and human from nature. As such, Merleau-Ponty's notion of depth is an apparent precursor to his famous description of "the flesh of the world" in his final work, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964/1968). By thinking embodied whale experience together with Merleau-Ponty's early discussion of depth, I hope to generate a description of that phenomenon that is richer than that which could be developed in the absence of this juxtaposition. Focusing on the lived bodies of North Atlantic right whales can help to enhance our understanding of Merleau-Ponty's claim that depth is a relational phenomenon of mutual envelopment that is tied to an organism's practical orientation toward the world. Centering the endangered bodies of North Atlantic right whales in our study of depth also encourages us to envision an environmentalist future that is grounded in our recognition of the sensuous cartography of human/nonhuman relations in which we are always already positioned participants.

I. Depth as an "Existential Tide"

When we begin to consider how depth is present in our everyday experience, we often conceive of depth as a corollary dimension to height and width. According to this standard view, depth is both a way to measure one "side" of an object and a property

of that object. For example, a book seen straight on can appear flat and two-dimensional, but the same book seen from an angle has “depth”—a third way of extending in space, a thickness that stands out against flat surfaces. In Bishop George Berkeley’s analysis, which parallels the standard view, depth is a series of points lined up end to end and seen straight on. For this reason, Berkeley believes that depth is invisible; we see objects in the world but we never see depth unless we look at it from the side.

In the “Space” chapter of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty criticizes Berkeley’s conception of depth for failing to accommodate our actual experiences of depth and for falsely equating depth with “breadth seen from the side.” In contrast to Berkeley’s approach, Merleau-Ponty aims to describe depth phenomenologically—not as the object of abstract thought and calculation, but as it is experienced by a lived body. To this end, Merleau-Ponty writes that “whereas breadth can, at first sight, pass for a relationship between things themselves in which the perceiving subject is not implied” (1945/1962: 298), depth “announces a certain indissoluble link between things and myself by which I am placed in front of them” (298). Depth is thus a relational phenomenon that becomes visible whenever a body is put into contact with a world. We do not participate in the dimension of depth only as observers and measurers, but our experiences of depth instead implicate our whole being and our inescapable involvement with the world. Merleau-Ponty tells us that

More directly than the other dimensions of space, depth forces us to reject the preconceived notion of the world and rediscover the primordial experience from which it springs: it is, so to speak, the most ‘existential’ of all dimensions, because (and here Berkeley’s argument is right) it is not impressed upon the object itself, it quite clearly belongs to the perspective and not to things. (298)

Depth emerges in experience out of our concrete relationships with the world; it is not a property that inheres in the object and would stay the same regardless of who perceives that object. When we encounter depth, we can no longer maintain that the world exists independent of my relations with it; insofar as my orientation toward the world changes, then so does my experience of depth.

Merleau-Ponty explains that those self-world relationships that are contained within our experiences of depth are not those of mere juxtaposition (1945/1962: 308). Whereas breadth and height measure distances between two objects, depth “is the dimension in which things or elements of things envelop each other” (308). The envelopment that Merleau-Ponty speaks of is one in which a person’s gaze “takes hold” of objects in the world and experiences their thickness, density, and size in relation to himself. When I peer over the edge of the Grand Canyon, I am enveloped by the void below at the same time as my stare attempts to embrace the void. For Merleau-Ponty, determinate experience emerges out of a person’s practical, existential orientation toward the world, an idea that is succinctly captured in his famous phrase that “consciousness is in the first place not a matter of ‘I think that,’ but of ‘I can’” (159). An experience of depth is thus an awareness of how well we can hold an aspect of the world “in our grip.” In Merleau-Ponty’s words,

When we say that an object is huge or tiny, nearby or far away, it is often without any comparison, even implicit, with any other object, or even with the size and objective position of our own body, but merely in relation to a certain ‘scope’ of our gestures, a certain ‘hold’ of the phenomenal body on its surroundings. (311)

Depth is our implicit recognition of our proximity and distance to that with which we are in relation; “depth immediately reveals the link between the subject and space” (311).

Throughout his analysis, Merleau-Ponty encourages us to construe depth, not as a property of objects, but as that originary orientation that makes our experience of objects possible. As such, depth is “primordial” in the sense that we experience depth before we perceive objects and distances such as height and breadth. Primordial depth is “the thickness of a medium devoid of any thing” (1945/1962: 310). Our sense of depth is thus as acutely attuned to our emotional and existential possibilities as it is to our physiological and structural capacities:

The bird which hovers, falls, and becomes a handful of ash [in my dream], does not hover and fall in physical space; it rises and falls with the existential tide running through it, or again it is the pulse of my existence, its systole and diastole. The level of this tide at each moment conditions a space peopled with phantasms, just as, in waking life, our dealings with the world which is offered to us condition a space peopled with realities. There is a determining of up and down, and in general of place, which precedes ‘perception.’ (332)

In this passage, Merleau-Ponty suggests that we are always already oriented by our bodies and by the relationships that we create in virtue of being situated in a particular environment, even before we have perceived aspects of this environment as definitive objects and have articulated and measured the contours of them. Depth is this “existential tide” that contracts and releases at regular intervals in proportion to our proximities and distances to various aspects of the world. When we perceive depth, we are perceiving that sensuous cartography of dynamic relationships that is the mutual envelopment of self and world.

Up until this point we have been speaking of depth only as a marker of one’s *spatial* location, but we must remember that Merleau-Ponty also claims that experiencing depth necessarily involves a temporal dimension. He writes, “perception provides me with a ‘field of presence’ in the broad sense, extending in two dimensions: the here-there dimension and the past-present-future dimension” (1945/1962: 309). Both of these temporal dimensions are experienced in terms of proximity and distance; some memories feel “far away” while others feel as if their contents are happening anew. Like two beings moving in relation to one another, the passing of one instant to the next involves mutual envelopment, as the “thickness” of each temporal moment engulfs the thickness of the moment before (309). According to this analysis, each experience of depth will be nested by its successor so that concrete relationships spread out in time as well as in space. More accurately, Merleau-Ponty would say that spatial proximity is a function of temporal proximity. He writes, “Things co-exist in space because they are present to the same perceiving subject and enveloped in one and the same temporal wave” (321).

Although I agree with Merleau-Ponty's critique of the standard view of depth and with his idea that our experiences of depth rest on the co-implication of self and world, I believe that his description could be further developed. Despite the sound logic of Merleau-Ponty's analysis, it is often difficult for us to immediately find the elements of depth that he ascribes to it in our everyday experiences. Human experience is so replete with levels of abstraction and sedimentation that the task of returning to what Nietzsche called "the fiery liquid" of experience (1873/1979), that is, experience that has yet to be categorized and petrified into words and objects, can feel foreign and counter-intuitive. For example, I experience the lamp on my desk as an object separate from me that has an existence independent of mine whose properties could be measured by me. The lamp can be more or less in my reach, but I am not consciously aware of our mutual envelopment in any direct way, nor am I necessarily aware of my complete immersion in an irrevocably relational milieu. Put differently, I must undertake significant amounts of philosophical reflection in order to see how it is that my practical orientation participates in my experiences of determinate objects and depth. Merleau-Ponty does offer plausible explanations of how we come to experience this kind of objectivity in spite of the fundamental ambiguity, liquidity, and thickness of the world.⁴ However, I am left to wonder whether there is a way to describe primordial depth so that its characteristics are grasped with more immediacy than they are in Merleau-Ponty's discussion. It is my contention that this enhancement to Merleau-Ponty's theory presents itself when we shift the subject of his phenomenological analysis from a human body to a whale body, and specifically to an endangered whale body that is in precarious relationship with its environment.

II. Sounding Depth

Before attending to the ways that North Atlantic right whales experience depth, allow me to say a few words about how this move from human body to whale body, which at first glance appears to be a radical departure from the phenomenological method, could actually be consistent with Merleau-Ponty's embodied phenomenology.

⁴ See especially Merleau-Ponty's essay "The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences" (1947/1964).

Merleau-Ponty's predecessors, Franz Brentano and Edmund Husserl, focused their phenomenological studies on attributes such as intentionality, consciousness, and thought in the hopes of expanding our knowledge about the structures of the human mind. Brentano's interest in intentionality, for example, was largely due to his thesis that such directedness toward objects was "the mark of the mental" (1873/1974: 88). Insofar as nonhuman animals were thought to lack these attributes, it made sense to look to human experience to generate rich phenomenological descriptions. However, Merleau-Ponty's insistence that mental phenomena are derivative of bodily experience and not the other way around provides an opening for undertaking phenomenologies of nonhuman animal bodies.

Merleau-Ponty's account of intersubjectivity in *Phenomenology of Perception* is especially useful for theorizing the mutual suitability of humans and nonhuman animals for being the subjects of phenomenology. Here, Merleau-Ponty does not equate subjectivity with having the capacity for reflective thought, language, or self-consciousness. Instead, Merleau-Ponty believes that being a subject is coincident with being a body, as is evidenced by his repeated use of the phrase "body-subject" to describe beings that put their practical, operative intentions in contact with the world. According to this view, "intersubjectivity," or the shared experiences between two beings, is not a matter of having the same ideas, possessing the same capabilities, seeing the same things, or being simultaneously affected by the same stimuli in the same manner. Instead, *intersubjectivity is intercorporeality*; it is about being in proximity and at a distance to another body that is not identical to my own, but is similar enough so that I *pre-reflectively* recognize it as a body like my own. As Merleau-Ponty writes,

Just as my body, as the system of all my holds on the world, founds the unit of the objects which I perceive, in the same way the body of the other—as the bearer of symbolic behaviors and of the behavior of true reality—tears itself away from being one of my phenomena, offers me the task of a true communication, and confers on my objects the new dimension of intersubjective being or, in other words, of objectivity. (1947/1964: 18)

Although Merleau-Ponty is explicitly referring to intersubjectivity between two human beings in this passage and although communicative speech figures centrally in their interaction, the ways that this analysis could be extended to include human-animal relations are clear. The body of the right whale is the system of all of her holds on the world just as Merleau-Ponty's body is the system of his. However, since right whales do not have hands and fingers, we would do well replace the primate-centric language of "holding" and "grasping" with "sounding," which is a word that is applicable to a wider variety of species and that evokes activities of diving, measuring, and investigating. If it is the fact of having a system of relating to the world—a body—that allows for the possibility of intersubjectivity, then the right whale body-subject is potentially just as worthy of our phenomenological gaze as human-body subjects like Schneider, the war veteran with brain damage whom Merleau-Ponty returns to again and again in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. Let us see if this suspicion gains credence as we position the right whale body at the center of our descriptions of depth.

When we begin to think depth through the right whale body, we first notice that whereas humans most often navigate depth forward and backward through the horizontal movement of bipedal land experience, the right whale experiences another kind of depth in the verticality of the water column. In one study of North Atlantic right whales in the Bay of Fundy, the median dive depth for right whales was calculated to be roughly 120 meters (394 feet) and the median dive duration was approximately twelve and a half minutes (Baumgartner and Mate, 2003: 128). The Bay of Fundy, a body of water between Maine and Nova Scotia where large numbers of right whales can often be found in the summer and fall, is one of the deepest known feeding habitats for right whales with maximum depths estimated to be about 213 meters or 700 feet.⁵ Researchers in the Bay of Fundy and elsewhere report that right whales will frequently surface from a dive with their heads covered in mud from the bottom of the ocean (Kraus and Rolland, 2007: 508), although there is much speculation as to what right whales are doing on the ocean floor since their food sources often aggregate several meters above those depths. Right whale diving

⁵ Personal correspondence with right whale scientist Amy R. Knowlton, April 11, 2011.

behavior is tracked using an instrument called a “time-depth recorder,” which is attached to the whale at the surface with a suction cup and then measures the various depths that the whale is frequenting over a period time, at the end of which the suction cup releases and the recorder floats to the surface for retrieval.⁶ When time-depth recorders are attached to whales, they produce graphs that provide visual depictions of a whale’s diving behavior over periods of time.⁷ Such graphs indicate that the rhythmic vertical movement from the surface of the water to great depths and back again is a characteristic feature of the right whale’s experience. As mammals, right whales are tied to the surface because they must breathe at regular intervals. And, as cetaceans with anatomical structures highly adapted to swimming and diving, right whales have the ability to explore the bottom of the ocean and all of the points in between.

Experiencing depth within the water column, rather than on land, involves living through significant changes in atmospheric pressure. At a depth of ten meters (32 feet) the ambient pressure is twice as great as it is on the surface. Beyond ten meters below the surface, the ambient pressure doubles every time that the depth doubles (Nowacek et al., 2001: 1813). At 120 meters down, the ambient pressure is roughly 176 pounds per square inch or twelve atmospheres. This means that at this depth there would be more than 25,000 pounds bearing down on each square foot of the whale’s body.⁸ The air in the whale’s lungs collapses to half its original size every time the ambient pressure doubles (Nowacek et al., 2001: 1813), indicating great pliability in the whale’s rib cage and lungs. Rising to the surface after a dive, the right whale again experiences a considerable change in atmospheric pressure, whereupon the air in the whale’s lungs expands until it is exhaled through the blow hole when the whale surfaces. In contrast to other large cetaceans like blue whales and fin whales, right whales are positively buoyant near the surface of the ocean partly due to their thick

6 As a phenomenologist, I am drawn to the surrealist vision of humans being fitted with “time-depth” recorders that are appropriate to their anatomy and activities. Such recorders could measure the varying distances that a person occupies vis-à-vis particular objects over time and, if we really wanted to push the surrealist, science-fiction reverie, the emotional proximities and distance that a person has with other beings and objects over time.

7 For examples of such studies, see Baumgartner and Mate (2003) and Nowacek et al. (2001).

8 This calculation was inspired by a discussion of the diving capabilities of sperm whales on the website “The Flying Turtle: Ask Dr. Galapagos,” <http://www.ftexploring.com/askdrg/askdrgalapagos2.html>.

stores of blubber. This means that right whales must expend more energy than other large whales to reach depth and they expend less energy than those whales coming to the surface (Nowacek et al., 2001: 1811). The positive buoyancy of right whales likely makes them more susceptible to “the urban whale syndrome” because it may take them longer to dive to avoid ship-strikes and other urban activities that occur on the surface of the water (Nowacek et al., 2001).

In general, the larger an animal is, the longer it should be able to dive because larger animals have greater oxygen stores and lower mass-specific metabolic rates than smaller animals (Croll et al., 2001: 798). However, researchers have hypothesized that the unique feeding behavior of right whales allows them to stay at depth longer than even larger cetaceans, such as fin whales and blue whales, whose feeding habits expend more energy and require greater oxygen stores in the muscles. As Mark F. Baumgartner, Charles A. Mayo, and Robert D. Kenney tell us, “right whales are carnivores that feed without manipulating their prey or their environment in any way. Right whales simply open their mouths, swim forward, and feed on whatever happens to fall in. They rely utterly on the environment to organize their prey into mouth-sized aggregations of millions to billions of organisms” (2007: 140). A species of zooplankton which measures about two to three millimeters long and is called *Calanus finmarchicus* is the primary prey of North Atlantic right whales. An individual right whale must eat approximately one billion of these copepods per day to sustain its body weight (Baumgartner et al., 2007: 165). Because right whales are filter feeders, rather than lunge feeders like blue whales, fin whales, and humpback whales, they must find places where ocean tides have amassed large quantities of their prey, who are generally weak swimmers and therefore unable to overcome strong currents. Such high densities of organisms can be distributed anywhere in the vertical water column, not just near the surface. Scientists are still unsure of how and why right whales are so skilled at finding these aggregations. Baumgartner and Mate believe that right whales detect their prey without opening their mouths and without recourse to vision, both because of the lack of light at depth and because *C. finmarchicus* do not bioluminesce as do some other species of copepods (2001: 133). Instead, right whales find their prey by relying on indications from the environment, such as experiencing changes in velocity, temperature, turbulence, or salinity during their dives (2001: 133).

In addition to locating prey in their immediate vicinity, right whales are also capable of finding prey aggregations from up to thousands of kilometers away (Baumgartner et al, 2007: 166). Maternal teaching, memory, and instinct are possible explanations for this capacity. Researchers have found that right whales display remarkable site fidelity to feeding grounds where their mothers brought them as calves (Frasier et al., 2007: 209). If a mother-calf pair is sighted in the Bay of Fundy, it is highly likely that the calf will bring her offspring there when she reaches maturity. An interesting twist on site fidelity is evidenced in the case of Porter (Eg #1133), a North Atlantic right whale who was sighted in the Norwegian bay of LoppHAVet in 1999 (Kraus and Rolland, 2007: 488-490). Whaling records indicate that there were large numbers of right whales in LoppHAVet in the 1600's, but none had been seen there for hundreds of years until Porter showed up. As Kraus and Rolland write, "It seems unbelievable that there is a cultural memory of LoppHAVet that was passed on to [Porter], and yet, there he was, in a location where his ancestors over thirty generations ago went and were killed by our ancestors" (2007: 489).

Porter's ability to find LoppHAVet suggests that North Atlantic right whale bodies congeal memories of the ways that those bodies interact with their environment on multiple levels. In contrast to the pristine bodies of their sister species, the Southern right whale, the bodies of North Atlantic rights whales are covered with scars and scrapes that are the residue of entanglements and propeller collisions in their urban environment. The bodily memories that are implicated in a whale's site fidelity and scars encourage us to consider depth's temporal dimension in a way that is inextricably bound up with its spatial aspects. A particularly poignant example of the temporal dimension that right whale bodies entails is found in the story of a whale by the name of Eg #1045, whose story is described in Kraus and Rolland's *The Urban Whale* (2007: 1-3). In March of 1935, Eg #1045 was feeding her newly born calf in right whale calving grounds off the coast of St. Augustine, Florida. A group of men who were sportfishing for tuna spotted the mother-calf pair and decided to hunt the calf. They harpooned the calf and shot at it with high powered rifles. After six hours of pursuit, the calf finally died. Eg #1045 would not leave her calf during this time and so the men shot more than 100 rounds of bullets into her flesh. Only after her calf was dead did she flee the scene. A *New York Herald Tribune* reporter was present that

day and documented the event in its entirety. This was the last right whale “intentionally” killed in the United States. Later in 1959, researchers at the Wood’s Hole Oceanographic Institute took photographs of a solitary right whale in Cape Cod Bay for a study that they were conducting. By matching photographs in the *Herald Tribune* with these photographs taken in 1959, scientist Amy Knowlton discovered that the whale seen in Cape Cod Bay was Eg #1045. Eg #1045 was sighted again in 1980 in Cape Cod Bay and then a few more times after that off the coast of New England, but never with a calf, which indicates to researchers that her reproductive capabilities were damaged during the 1935 attack. Eg #1045’s last sighting was in August of 1995 when she was seen with a massive propeller wound on one side of her head. She has never been seen again. Even though it is probable that right whales can live to more than a hundred years of age as do bowhead whales (Kraus and Rolland, 2007: 22), this longevity is severely compromised by the facticity of urban whale life—a facticity that is inscribed and embedded in the bodies of these animals. The way that the longevity and endangered nature of a right whale body holds time and place indicates that the whale’s own practical possibilities are bound up with their experience of depth.

III. A Comparative Phenomenology of Depth

After having opened ourselves to thinking the ways that North Atlantic right whales experience depth, we are now in a position to ask how placing these nonhuman bodies at the center of our analysis furthers and enhances Merleau-Ponty’s theory of depth. What do right whales teach us about depth that we may not have found had we only considered human bodies and experiences?

In the first place, the right whale’s liquid habitat evokes an experience of depth that begins, quite literally, in the mutual envelopment of self and world. The watery world surrounds the whale and presses down on her body and is the medium by which she relates to other beings. The whale-subject is always already implicated in the experience of depth in this liquid milieu because the other beings and features present in the environment are known to her by changes in her own body. The bodily movements of the whale likewise reverberate throughout the ocean and affect other

beings therein even if they are not in close enough proximity for direct contact. Humans who have ever been caught in a current or been close to marine animals while swimming will likely be able to relate to this phenomenon. For example, when I was in college, I had the good fortune of swimming with a whale shark that was about nine meters in length off the coast of Western Australia. Although I was at least twenty feet away from the whale shark in the water, I would get sucked in toward the animal and then pushed out somewhat violently every time that it moved its tail. In my experience, the water played the role of a connective tissue, linking my experience of my own body to the movements of my enormous swimming companion even though we never touched. Sounding depth alongside the right whale body thus beckons us to conceive of depth as a complete immersion in a thoroughly relational milieu in a way that Merleau-Ponty's theory does not. Without considerable analysis, it is difficult to picture the objects in my life as the other end of those intentional threads that emanate from my desires and orientations. But the right whale's relationality with the other aspects of her environment is immediately obvious.

The different kind of involvement that the right whale has with his environment is emphasized by the inadequacy of the activities of vision and grasping to explicate a whale's experience of depth. According to Merleau-Ponty, the kind of relationship between self and world that depth indicates is one "by which I am placed in front of them" (1945/1962: 298). Thus construed, the self is implicated in our experiences of depth by our ability to see and capacity to grasp. As Merleau-Ponty writes, "depth is born beneath my gaze because the latter tries to see *something*" (306, original emphasis). He tells us further that the distance that we experience in depth is "the situation of the object in relation to our power of grasping it" (305). The diving and foraging behaviors of right whales suggest that they navigate and come to know their environment, not so much through vision or lunging (a kind of taking "hold" of their prey), but by being attentive to subtle changes in their own relationships with their surroundings such as variations in swimming speed, pressure, and water temperature. There is a sense in which the right whale knows where he is in the ocean because of how he feels there, whereas a human being is more likely to search out visual cues

and landmarks to glean her location.⁹ Merleau-Ponty's reliance on vision and grasping to illuminate primordial depth exacerbates our tendencies to think depth in terms of the separation between self and world since both activities necessarily involve our being at a distance from what is at the end of our gaze or grasp. In other words, Merleau-Ponty's illustration of depth through vision and grasping emphasizes the ebbing of the existential tide—the separation of self and world—at the very moment when his theory is pointing to its flow, that is, to the mutual envelopment of self and world. In Merleau-Ponty's later work, the relationship between touching and the tangible begins to replace that of seeing and the visible as the primary example of a relational ontology for precisely this reason (1964/1968: 133).

The mutual envelopment of the right whale and her or his environment helps us to better understand how experiencing the spatiality of depth is connected to the practical orientations of the body-subject. Merleau-Ponty tells us that “[t]he perception of space is not a particular class of ‘states of consciousness’ or acts. Its modalities are always an expression of the total life of the subject, the energy with which he tends towards a future through his body and his world” (1945/1962: 330). For the right whale, depth is not a measurement of distance from the surface of the ocean, but a felt awareness of the presence of food, other animals, safety, play, communication, and the lack of these things. Thus understood, the changes in atmospheric pressure that right whales experience in their bodies during their dives are possibilities for familiar and different ways of being. In a similar vein, humans experience pressure in relation to depth in the context of emotional encounters. For example, depression is often experienced as a weight that is pressing down on one or as a kind of drowning—an inability to get to the surface. By contrast, elation is often described as a “lightness of step” that enables freedom of movement. Like the severely entangled right whale who cannot dive, the depressed person experiences spatiality as narrow, enclosed, and hindering. In both cases, different depths and pressures designate varying practical possibilities. Since it is difficult to imagine a whale treating depth as an objective measure, shifting our focus from human to whale bodies demands that we think depth as “lived depth” (1945/1962: 300), namely,

⁹ I am grateful to my colleague, Ian Carlstrom, for pointing this out to me.

something that belongs to the perspective itself and emerges out of a being's practical possibilities in relation to her or his environment.

The bodies of North Atlantic right whales not only enhance our conception of depth in virtue of their ocean habitat and their unique physiological structures, but also due to their status as endangered. The species' small population size, slow and arduous reproductive capacities, lack of predators, and susceptibility to ship-strikes and entanglements highlights its tenuous relationship with the world more so than would our consideration of non-endangered bodies. Moreover, that right whale bodies are endangered is immediately evident when you see their scars, propeller wounds, lesions, and markings from the trails of rope and fishing gear. The palpable vulnerability of the right whale body spurs us to think about the self-world relation in more intimate terms and to visualize how bodies hold their temporal and spatial possibilities within them. Right whales bodies quite literally manifest "the differentiations that produce and are produced by the materiality of the urban, that is, by urban flesh" (Weiss, 2006: 149). It is not unsurprising then that we gain an immediate sense of the relationality and temporality of depth when we engage their experience.

IV. De-Centering the Human Subject

It is not uncommon in the field of environmental philosophy to treat Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology as an apt resource for rethinking human-nonhuman relationships. In particular, philosophers such as David Abram, Monika Langer, and Ted Toadvine argue that Merleau-Ponty's later notion of "reversible flesh" reveals an ontology where human and nonhuman, nature and culture, organism and environment are not separate from one another, but inextricably intertwined (Abram, 1988, 1996; Langer, 1990; Toadvine, 2007). In other words, these environmental philosophers believe that Merleau-Ponty's ontology can show us how to relate to the more-than-human world without attitudes of domination and exploitation.¹⁰ Although I am in wholehearted agreement with the idea that non-dualistic ontological presuppositions and

¹⁰ The phrase "more-than-human world" is David Abram's.

environmentalism go hand in hand, the comparative phenomenology of depth that I present here juxtaposes Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology with nonhuman experience from the opposite direction. Rather than rely on Merleau-Ponty's ontology to elucidate and articulate our relationships with the nonhuman, I rely on the North Atlantic right whale to explicate a notion that is crucial to the development of Merleau-Ponty's ontology. This reversal challenges many of our assumptions about what does and does not constitute a proper subject for phenomenology and the limits of phenomenological philosophy, more generally.

The project of human/nonhuman comparative phenomenology is likely to elicit three primary objections. First, insofar as phenomenology must necessarily begin in first-person experience, it seems that "comparative phenomenology" is a contradiction in terms. According to this line of thinking, any attempt to engage the experience of nonhuman animals would entail a rejection or substantive revision of the phenomenological method. Second, the lived experience of nonhuman animals is *de facto* inaccessible to humans. Endeavoring to think this lived experience therefore invites projection, second-hand observation, and ungrounded speculation. Finally, since humans are philosophers, the practice of phenomenology necessarily implies a human subject. As a result, even philosophical considerations of other species will be irretrievably self-referential, that is, entirely about humans after all. Although a complete defense of human/nonhuman comparative phenomenology is beyond the scope of the present study, allow me to say a few words in the hopes of allaying and/or complicating these concerns.

One reply to the objection that phenomenology must necessarily begin in first-person experience is that human/nonhuman comparative phenomenology is a useful technique for enhancing our awareness of our own first-person experiences. In asking what depth is for the right whale, our own experience of depth comes into greater relief than it would have had we considered it in isolation through the process of identifying similarities and differences between human and nonhuman experiences. Another response is that if phenomenological philosophy necessarily begins in first-person experience, then any phenomenology that considers experiences other than those of the philosopher himself is subject to the same criticisms as comparative phenomenology. For example, on what grounds can we say that Merleau-Ponty has

greater access to the experience of Schneider or the participants in Stratton's inverted vision experiment than he could have of that of the right whale? In both cases, the philosopher is gaining insight into the structures of experience using scientific data gathered through his own or another's observation.¹¹ If we condone one but not the other then we are allowing speciesist interests to guide our inquiries without having good reason for doing so.

This observation leads to the questions of whether we can access the lived experiences of nonhuman animals at all and of whether we can access the lived experiences of other humans better than those of nonhuman animals. What is our basis for thinking that the bodies of all individuals in a species are more similar to each other than the bodies of individuals across species? Moreover, what is our basis for believing that two humans are sufficiently similar to be able to access each other's viewpoints? The most obvious answer to these questions involves recourse to anatomical structure; those bodies that are judged by scientists and other humans to be anatomically alike are better able to access each other's experiences than those that are not. But, this answer begs the question of whether and how one gains access to another's lived experience because it claims that insofar as objective bodies are similar then so are the phenomenal bodies to which they refer. By pointing us to the lived body—the body as it is lived and experienced by the being whose body it is—Merleau-Ponty's philosophy opens upon the possibility that lines of similarity and difference between beings may be more a function of the body schema, or of what is possible for two organisms, than anatomical structure. If intersubjectivity is intercorporeality then we must at least admit of the possibility that I may have better access to my dog's lived experience than to the experience of a human whom I have never met. And, we must likewise admit of the possibility that the experiences of other humans (especially those from different cultures and social locations) may be just as inaccessible to me as the whale's experience. In a separate but related point, we should also note that our access to the meaning behind other's reports of their

¹¹ Emerging fields in phenomenology such as embodied cognition theory and neurophenomenology that rely heavily on data about human-subjects from the cognitive sciences are open to the charge of unwarranted anthropocentrism as well.

experiences and our access to our own perspectives for that matter may not always be as unencumbered as we think they are.

The third objection about the inescapably self-referential nature of phenomenology does not seem to ward against undertaking comparative phenomenological projects. If we stopped ourselves from engaging in any inquiry that was potentially self-referential we would never create any philosophy at all. What the specters of self-referentiality and anthropocentrism do seem to demand is a rigorous comparative methodology that is cognizant of the epistemological dangers of assimilating, exoticizing, and ignoring nonhuman subjects.

The methodological considerations that are illuminated by human/nonhuman comparative projects give us pause to ask which bodies are the proper subjects of phenomenology and why. The answer that lurks in the phenomenology of depth presented above is that we should not posit our subjects in advance of our inquiry according to general, assumptive rules about which kinds of experience can be accessed by the phenomenologist, but rather we should choose our subjects according to the content of our inquiry and make the justification of our choice central to our methodology. Such a practice would not only provide an opening for us to reach beyond our anthropocentric experiences to that of other species, but also to consider kinds of human experience that have often been marginalized in the history of philosophy such as that of women, people of color, non-heterosexuals, and differently-abled people. In this way, a rigorous phenomenology that does not make assumptions about the universality of experience may necessarily be a comparative phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty tells us that philosophy must “install itself...in experiences that have not yet been ‘worked over,’ that offer us all at once, pell-mell, both ‘subject’ and ‘object,’ both existence and essences, and hence give philosophy resources to define them” (1964/1968: 130). By de-centering ourselves from our inquiries thereby leaving our tendencies to categorize and solidify off-balance, we may be better able to explore the pell-mell, liquid ambiguity of experience. In thinking depth through the nonhuman, endangered bodies of right whales, we may be better positioned to realize that “experience gives us access to being and should not be treated as a by-product of being” (1945/1962: 301).

V. Endangered Bodies, Waves of Flesh

I would like to conclude with a brief allusion to Merleau-Ponty's concept of reversible flesh in order to illustrate our precarious relationship with the North Atlantic right whale, both in terms of treating the whale as a subject for phenomenology and in terms of our co-habitation of this world. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty describes "flesh" not as a substance or a thing itself, but as a connective "tissue" that exists between things, nourishes and sustains them, and lines their insides and their outsides (1964/1968: 132-33). Flesh is a relationship, a "possibility," and a "latency" (1964/1968: 133); it is "the formative medium of the object and the subject" and an incarnation of a deeply relational "manner of being" (1964/1968: 147). Flesh is not only that which is coincident with individual bodies; flesh also inhabits the spaces between bodies and makes their experiencing of one another possible. For Merleau-Ponty, reversible flesh is not Spinoza's "Nature"—a grand unified substance that merely appears to be differentiated but is in actuality "one." In flesh the differentiation between two beings is real; it is given in the impossibility of one being transcending its body and inhabiting another, which is also the impossibility of experiencing flesh from the side that is other to the one we are on. However, in Merleau-Ponty's view, this real differentiation does not limit connections between beings, but rather constitutes the very ground from which their relations are possible.

Current research on the decline of North Atlantic right whales estimates that if their reproductive and mortality rates continue as they are that this species will be extinct in fewer than 200 years (Caswell et al., 1999; Fujiwara and Caswell, 2001). What will we lose, ontologically speaking, when the right whale's style of being enfleshed no longer participates in the flesh of the world? The possibility of extinction beckons the image of a stark future where there is nothing for the seer to see, the listener to hear, and the toucher to touch—where the nonhuman aspects of the flesh of the world have been thinned to oblivion and the human sides flounder in an opaque thickness of self-referential sensibility. Although we cannot know a whale's experience perspective in the sense of knowing what it is like to transcend our own bodies and perceive the

world from a body of a different kind, we can know right whales because we are always already in relationship with them as shared inhabitants of the environment and the possibility that is the flesh of the world. Just as the right whale detects her prey by experiencing changes in her own swimming speed and temperature, we can find the experience of the right whale within and in excess of our own bodily experience. Only in affirming the depth of our relationships with other beings and our dynamic position in the swelling and receding existential tide that is the world's flesh, will we be able to envision a different future where the continued existence of the North Atlantic right whales is a consciously desired reality.

Attending to the bodies of North Atlantic right whales calls us from our sedimented styles of being to the fluidity of existence. The North Atlantic right whale enhances Merleau-Ponty's analysis of depth by emphasizing the relational aspects of existence that are often latent in human experience: the subject's immersion in a relational medium, the way depth is organism/environment relationships, and depth's temporal dimension. Most importantly, the fact that right whale bodies are endangered—and specifically that they are endangered *by us*—brings into stark relief the relational nature of all of our existences. By heightening the visibility of these endangered bodies, this human/nonhuman comparative phenomenology asks us to change our anthropocentric orientations so that North Atlantic right whales will continue to sound the depths of the world's existential tide long into the future.

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Infancy, Animality and the Limits of Language in the Work of Giorgio Agamben

Sarah Hansen¹

Introduction: A Strange Amphibian

While it may seem strange to identify classics in a field as new as critical animal studies, for Giorgio Agamben's *The Open: Man and Animal* the label seems appropriate. Since its English translation in 2004, *The Open*'s central concept—the “anthropological machine”—has found countless applications as a marker of the logic of “inclusive exclusion” that distinguishes human and non-human animals (see especially Calarco, 2008; Oliver, 2009; and Jones, 2007). According to Agamben, the anthropological machine describes the human as a “zone of indeterminacy” in which “the outside is nothing but the exclusion of an inside and the inside is in turn only the inclusion of an outside” (2004: 37). In *The Open*, the humanized animal and the animalized human are pre-modern and modern figures of this ambiguous unstable fracture. They also share its hidden truth: language is not a natural given but a historical production. In the anthropological machine, the human is a “ceaselessly updated decision” on what constitutes language, a site “in which the caesurae and their re-articulation are always dislocated and displaced anew” (2004: 38). If relations between human and non-human animals are to take on a new form, if neither are to be reduced to “bare life,” then the machine must be “rendered inoperative.”

Many researchers in critical animal studies share Agamben's goal of transforming the relationship between human and non-human animals but few have a clear sense of what lies beyond the anthropological machine. At the conclusion of *The Open*, Agamben offers only ellipses. To render the machine inoperative, he says, is to

¹ Sarah Hansen a Lecturer in the department of Philosophy at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee (sarah.k.hansen@vanderbilt.edu). Sarah's research interests lie in Continental Philosophy and Feminist Theory. Her most recent research focuses on theories of biopower and the work of Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, and Julia Kristeva.

witness “the central emptiness, the hiatus that—within man—separates man and animal, and to risk ourselves in that emptiness: the suspension of the suspension, Shabbat of both animal and man” (93). In other texts and especially alongside his notion of “infancy,” Agamben provides clues to the content of this Shabbat. Developed across *Infancy and History* (1978), *Language and Death* (1982), *The Idea of Prose* (1985) and *Remnants of Auschwitz* (1998), “infancy” describes an experience of language beyond the logic of inclusive exclusion, an experience of potentiality rather than violent exposure. Agamben’s recurrent figure of infantile potentiality is the *axolotl*, or “Mexican walking fish,” an amphibian that retains juvenile characteristics (gills) even after the development of adult traits (lungs and reproductive organs). With this figure of an “eternal child,” Agamben suggests that a new relation between human and non-human animals might emerge via a new childlike experience of language.

While the *axolotl* is a curious and clarifying figure, in this essay, I argue that the amphibian betrays the limitations of infancy for any Shabbat of animal and man beyond the anthropological machine. On my reading of the *axolotl*, Agamben conflates infantile potentiality with infantile *independence* and, in this way, abstracts early experiences of language from important experiences of dependence (like the relation of children to their mothers). While Agamben would like to disconnect the constitution of language from its dependence on violence (against non-human animals), his attempt to locate language in a radical independence bears a violence of its own. Instead of jamming the anthropological machine, infancy re-functions it. If Agamben is to provide more than critical offerings for the field of critical animal studies, I argue that he must more thoroughly “risk [himself] in the emptiness” of a Shabbat both animal and man. To transform relations between human and non-human animals Agamben must attend to the vulnerable, dependent, *risky* relations-with-others that condition experiences of language.

From the Anthropological Machine to Infantile Potentiality

The Open begins with a mysterious image found in a Hebrew Bible in Milan’s Ambrosian Library. The image depicts “the messianic banquet of the righteous on the

last day” but instead of human faces, the righteous are represented with animal heads—“the eagle’s fierce beak, the red head of the ox and the lion’s head.” For Agamben, this image stands as a promise that, “on the last day, relations between animals and men will take on a new form, and that man himself will be reconciled with his animal nature” (2004: 2-3). In effect, the righteous symbolize the end of the anthropological machine and its logic of inclusive exclusion; according to this violent machinating logic, “the speaking man places his own muteness outside himself, as already and not yet human,” and conserves the animal other in the heart of the human (35). Much of *The Open* proceeds, then, as a critique of philosophies that assign language to man over and against the animal. In its most accessible discussion, Agamben analyzes evolutionary theories of language and their anxiety over a pre-linguistic stage of human evolution. In its most extended and complicated engagement, Agamben focuses on *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* and Heidegger’s attempt to define the world-relation of humans and animals. According to Agamben, Heidegger’s Dasein retains an anthropological gesture, conserving, by suspending, a relation to “animal captivity.” Agamben’s reading of Heidegger elucidates his notion of infancy as a “suspension of suspension.”

Because each involves the uncovering of an inclusive exclusion, Agamben’s critique of Heidegger is analogous to his critique of evolutionary theory. In the latter, he finds and follows an anxiety over the human being that cannot speak—the “ape-man.” Demonstrating the contradictions that the “ape-man” presents to Darwin’s readers, Agamben quotes evolutionary linguist Heymann Steinthal:

We have invented a stage of man that precedes language. But of course this is only a fiction; for language is so necessary and natural for the human being, that without it man can neither truly exist nor be thought of as existing. Either man has language, or he simply is not. On the other hand—and this justifies the fiction—language nevertheless cannot be regarded as already inherent in the human soul ... it is a stage of the soul’s development and requires a deduction from the preceding stages. But why the human soul alone builds this bridge, why man alone and not the animal progresses through language from animality to humanity[?] (Agamben, 2004: 36)

According to Agamben (and in the admission of Steinthal several years later), evolutionary theory is unable to answer the question it poses itself regarding the relation between the animal and the “animal-man.” That is, evolutionary theorists fail to explain why the capacity of speech follows from the evolution of *homo sapiens* but not from the evolution of other animals. The distinctively human nature of the bridge from a pre-linguistic to a linguistic stage of existence is a working “fiction” that takes the shape of an inclusive exclusion. “What distinguishes man from animal is language, but this is not a natural given inherent in the psychophysical structure of man; it is, rather, a historical production which as such, can be properly assigned neither to man nor to animal” (Agamben, 2004: 36). In evolutionary texts, the anthropological machine improperly assigns language to man only by pre-supposing the identity between the origin of language and the origin of man.

Agamben identifies an analogous bridge between the animal and Dasein in Heidegger’s attempt to break from anthropological modes of thought via fundamental ontology. As is well known, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* presents the animal as “poor in world” in a manner distinct from both Dasein and non-living material objects. Whereas Dasein is “world-forming” and the stone is fundamentally “without world,” Heidegger argues that the animal is “poor in world” in the sense of deprivation, that is, in the sense of possible, yet denied, access to being (Heidegger, 1995: 177). Specifically, the animal’s mode of relation is a “captivation” with its environment wherein the animal is paradoxically and respectively open and closed to beings and being-as-such; while animal captivation is an intense form of openness riveted to beings, the captivated animal cannot “disconceal its disinhibitor” and is closed being-as-such. By contrast, Heidegger argues that Dasein can suspend the relation of environmental captivation and open onto being and world.

On Agamben’s reading, the account of profound boredom in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* reveals the close proximity, rather than abyssal distance, of Dasein and the animal. In profound boredom, Dasein is riveted to “something that refuses itself” in a manner analogous to the animal captivated by something unrevealed. For Heidegger, this refusal refers to “possibilities that lie inactive,” possibilities that, as unutilized, “leave us in the lurch” of boredom. By being delivered over to inactive

possibilities in boredom, Dasein is compelled to break towards the distinctively human experience of pure possibility (Heidegger, 1995: 144). Agamben makes much of the “being-compelled”/“being held in limbo”/“being held in suspense” that characterizes this second stage of profound boredom. To be compelled towards pure possibility is simply to suspend the captivation with inactive possibilities. In this way, boredom is effectively a passage from animal captivation to human world. “Profound boredom appears as the metaphysical operator in which the passage from poverty in world to world, from animal environment to human world, is realized” (Agamben, 2004: 68).

As a bridge from one to the other, boredom betrays not only the proximity but also the anthropological machination of Dasein and animal. Instead of a radical abyss between the human and the animal (in which “the open” opens “beyond the limits of the animal environment, and unrelated to it”) boredom marks a close proximity of man and animal (in which “the open” opens “*by means of* a suspension of the animal relation with the disinhibitor”) (Agamben, 2004: 68). In a profoundly anthropogenetic (and un-Heideggerian) turn of phrase, Agamben defines profound boredom as the “becoming Da-sein of the living man”. Boredom is a metaphysico-anthropological operator in which the question of openness to world and being is folded into the differentiation of human and animal. Thus, when Agamben remarks of Dasein that “the jewel set at the center of the human world and its clearing is nothing but animal captivation,” he reveals an “inclusive exclusion” in the Heideggerian text, one that—via boredom—conceals the animal other in the heart of Dasein (68).

Having linked Dasein to the violence of anthropology, Agamben’s notion of infancy dares to complete Heidegger’s radical break with machinating modes of thought. Only present in the ellipses of *The Open*, Agamben develops the notion of infancy most explicitly in *Infancy and History* (1978), *Language and Death* (1982), *The Idea of Prose* (1985) and the recent *Homo Sacer* series (1998-). An alternative “double negativity,” for Agamben, infancy is an experience of language that does not rely on inclusive exclusion. To evaluate its potential to “render inoperative” the anthropological machine, infancy must be considered through Agamben’s dramatic account of potentiality.

In his characteristic play with etymology, Agamben roots infancy in an archaic Latin term *in-fans* meaning “to be unable or unwilling to speak, to be silent or speechless.” Although tied to the figure of the infant child as one who cannot speak, Agamben is careful to emphasize that “in-fancy is not a simple given whose chronological site might be isolated, nor is it like an age or psychosomatic state which a psychology or a paleo-anthropology could construct as a human fact independent of language” (1993: 4). The archaic meaning of infancy points beyond the term’s indication of a developmental stage and toward its revelation of the contingent character of human speech. Unlike the “natural voice” of non-human animals, human infants do not have a given voice. According to Agamben, “animals are not in fact denied language; on the contrary, they are always and totally language. In them *la voix sacrée de la terre ingénue* (the sacred voice of the unknowing earth) ... knows no breaks or interruptions. Animals do not enter language, they are already inside it” (1993: 59). By contrast, the human “wordless” experience of infancy is an ontological break or interruption that conditions the possibility of speech. Coexisting with a language that appropriates it “in each instance to produce the individual as subject,” infancy is a mute undergoing constitutive of the (human) speaking subject (55). To speak is to be appropriated by language and alienated from infancy, not as a developmental trauma but as an ontological condition carried within every act of speech (Mills, 2005: 23).

If infancy is a kind of muteness internal to the act of speaking, Agamben is careful to distinguish it from a muteness exclusively excluded from the act of speaking. In order to counter the movement of machination, Agamben emphasizes that infancy is a kind of “not not speaking” that “touches” the “thing itself” of language. Speechless but not without relation to language, infancy reflects a “pure” experience of language itself without speech. Here Agamben maintains that *langue* has an anonymous and pre-suppositional character with respect to *parole*; speech presupposes that there is language and language is presupposed in everything that is said. As Daniel Heller-Roazen puts it, “preceding and exceeding every proposition is not something unsayable and ineffable but, rather, an event presupposed in every utterance, a *factum linguae* to which all actual speech necessarily bears witness” (Heller-Roazen, 1999: 4). When infancy “touches” the “thing itself” of language it touches not an ineffable or removed thing behind *langue*. For Agamben, “the thing itself is not a thing; it is the very sayability, the very openness at issue in language, which, in language, we always

presuppose and forget” (1999: 35). To touch or engage the thing itself is not to encounter the site of an inclusive exclusion but rather the site of potentiality as sayability.

Agamben’s account of potentiality is central to his claim that “not not speaking” opens infancy unto pure potentiality rather than violent indeterminacy. Drawn from an idiosyncratic reading of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, for Agamben, the essence of potentiality is maintained in relation to privation. “To be potential means: to be one’s own lack, *to be in relation to one’s own incapacity*. Beings that exist in the mode of potentiality *are capable of their own impotentiality*; and only in this way do they become potential. They can be because they are in relation to their own non-Being” (Agamben, 1999: 183). If potentiality is maintained in relation to impotentiality, the capacity of speech maintains itself in relation to the incapacity of speech. So described, potentiality provides the metaphysical structure for Agamben’s claim that every act of speaking maintains a relation to time without speech (infancy) and vice versa. In effect, the double negation “not not speaking” defines infancy through the thought of the persistent relation of potential and impotential. With respect to actuality, then, Agamben claims that potentiality “does not disappear in actuality; on the contrary, it preserves itself as such in actuality ... potentiality, so to speak, survives actuality and, in this way, *gives itself to itself*” (1999: 184). Where traditional metaphysics introduces the negative, the threat of nullification between actuality and potentiality, Agamben finds a persistent relation. Daniel Heller-Roazen describes the “gift of itself to itself” in terms that emphasize, again, a double negation

at this point, actuality reveals itself to be simply a potential not to be (or do) turned back upon itself, capable of *not* not being and, in this way, of granting the existence of what is actuality ... in the movement of the ‘gift of itself to itself,’ potentiality and actuality, what is capable and what is actual, what is possible and what is real, can no longer strictly be distinguished. (Heller-Roazen, 1998: 18)

Potentiality is not exhausted or extinguished in actuality. Understood as a potentiality “turned back on itself,” actuality maintains a relation to potentiality that “survives” and “preserves itself.” Agamben’s account of infancy extends this thought in order to

disengage the potential to speak from inclusive exclusion to affirm sayability instead of ineffability. Infancy is not exhausted in speaking but rather speaking is infancy “giving itself to itself.”

Supported by this account of potentiality, infancy describes an experience of language that is persistently related to sayability rather than silencing. Instead of “placing muteness outside itself” and conserving a mute animal other in its heart, the logic of infancy maintains a relation to a muteness or “not not speaking” *as* potentiality. However, if Agamben suggests that infantile experiences of language take place beyond the logic of the anthropological machine, it is noteworthy that these experiences appear strikingly self-relational. The relations of potentiality enumerated above are in each case relations of “one’s own”—“beings that exist in the mode of potentiality are capable of *their own* impotentiality,” potentiality “preserves *itself* in actuality” “giving itself to itself,” “turning back on itself” (1999: 182-183). The figure of the *axolotl* also embodies the infancy’s auto-relational dimensions. When held in contrast with other theories of infantile dependency and embodied vulnerability, the *axolotl* marks Agamben’s strange disconnection of potentiality from relations-with-others, in particular maternal and non-human animal others.

The Axolotl: Infancy and In/dependence

Agamben takes a recurrent interest in the *axolotl*, an amphibian native to the freshwater lakes of Mexico, because of its “stubborn infantilism” or neoteny (1995: 95). While other amphibians lose juvenile traits in order to develop adult traits, the *axolotl* maintains juvenile gills throughout its maturation. According to Agamben, insights drawn from the life of the *axolotl* have helped revise understandings of human evolution. Humans are now said to evolve, not from individual adult primates but from a young primate with premature reproductive capacities (Agamben, 1995). Thus, “traits that are transitory in primates have in humans become definitive, somehow bringing to pass, in flesh and bone, the type of the eternal child” (Agamben, 1995: 96). Drawing on the *axolotl*’s stubborn infantilism, Agamben proceeds to imagine this eternal child as “abandoned to its own state of infancy, and so little specialized and so totipotent that it rejects any specific destiny and any determined

environment in order to hold onto its immaturity and helplessness” (1995, 96). Unbound from and undetermined by any destiny or environ, the neotenic child is thrown into “the pre-eminent setting of the possible [*possibile*] and of the potential [*potenziale*] ... What characterizes the infant is that it is its own potentiality [*potenza*], it lives its own possibility [*possibilità*]” (2001: 121). *Axolotl*-inspired infancy is shot through with a potentiality that it gives to itself, being and living its own *potenza* and *possibilita*.

While the child is a common figure of dependency on others, Agamben’s eternal-child appears, in a hyperbolic self-relational fashion, to be independent. As a contrast, the relationality of infancy might be considered alongside Judith Butler and Julia Kristeva’s recent writings on “vulnerability.” Introduced in her important text *Precarious Life*, Butler’s notion of “primary vulnerability” describes the infantile “condition of being laid bare from the start,” of being “given over to the touch of the other” (Butler, 2004: 31-32). For Butler, primary vulnerability is an experience of exposure that reflects and conditions social attachments; “without seeing how this primary condition is exploited and exploitable, thwarted and denied ... it would be difficult, if not impossible, to understand how humans suffer from oppression” (Butler, 2004: 32). In *La haine et le pardon*, Kristeva outlines an alternative relational vulnerability, one that is sited in the specifically *speaking* body (Kristeva, 2005). According to Kristeva, vulnerability lies in the “crossroad” of “biology/language” and is “integral to the identity of the human species and the singularity of the speaking subject” (113). Failing to acknowledge the vulnerable junction of bodies and words encourages “rejections caused by race, social origin or religious differences [that have] taken over the place once occupied by charity” (114-116). Kristeva claims that vulnerability is the absent fourth term of Enlightenment humanism, that it “inflects” liberty, equality, and fraternity “towards a concern for sharing.”

Agamben’s auto-relational *independent* infancy appears to be an inversion of Butler and Kristeva’s accounts of relational dependent vulnerability. In denying or thwarting that condition, Agamben performs exclusions that both Butler and Kristeva link to its disavowal. Abstracted from exposure to others, the *axolotl*-inspired eternal child is disconnected from the social attachments and losses of others. In fact Agamben’s only mention of infantile relations-with-others is a reference to the “vain” misguided

project of parenting. There Agamben claims that, because the child “risks its whole life” in play, “it is in vain that grown-ups attempt to check this immediate coincidence of the child’s life and possibility, confining it to limited times and places: the nursery, codified games, playtime, and fairy-tales” (1996). More dramatically, Agamben maintains that the child “escapes” vulnerable exposure and the threat of violence because

it adheres so closely to its physiological life that it becomes indiscernible from it. (This is the true sense of the experiment on the possible that we mentioned earlier.) Similar in this respect to a woman’s life, the life of a child is ungraspable, not because it transcends toward an other world, but because it adheres to this world and to its body in a way that adults find intolerable. (Agamben, 1996)

A disturbing reduction of children and women to physiological life, Agamben’s comments illustrate the violence of figuring infancy as auto-relational and *independent*. By figuring the child as in a certain sense its own mother, Agamben obscures the child’s dependent relation to others yet reveals its dependence on maternal sacrifice. In effect, his remarks make clear how the reduction of relations to auto-relations supports the reduction of woman and child to ungraspable physiology *and vice versa*.

Following Agamben’s own conflations, we might wonder what would happen if the figure of the child were read systematically as the figure of the woman, if infancy were, in each case, substituted with maternity. Maternity is involved in language development; early maternal relations support the development of symbolic capacities and are preserved in the act of speaking. Further, giving birth involves a movement of potentiality. For instance, while Agamben describes the infant’s potentiality as “totipotent,” actual totipotent cells develop only in the maternal body, after cell fertilization and before the development of the zygote into specialized multi- or pluri-potent cells; in a process that can be described as maternity “giving itself to itself,” totipotent cells produce not only the fetus but also placental and other extra-embryonic cells. Such translations of infancy into maternity are simple if not straightforward because, in Agamben’s text, the child is already a mother-child and

the mother already a child-mother. Part of the ontological and evolutionary story of Agamben's infancy, the *axolotl* is an eternal child that can also give birth, the animal coincidence of mother and infant that challenges attempts to fully distinguish one from the other. Given the kind of indeterminacy easily set into motion between woman and child, it seems that maternity is included in Agamben's concept of infancy by way of exclusion, the very operation that the infantile experience of language was to overcome. The *independence* and auto-relational character of infancy emerges (and unravels) only by the child's dependent relation to the mother's mute inclusive exclusion.

Having already read infancy as maternity we might also wonder what would happen if infancy were read as *animality*, the child as the *animal*. This reading involves a consideration of the *axolotl*'s simultaneous status as a real animal and as a metaphor of infancy. An eternal child and a non-human animal, the *axolotl*, contradictorily, does "not not speak" and yet it is "always already inside language." Taken as a real amphibian, the *axolotl* is exposed to the violence of the anthropological machine even in Agamben's own texts. Agamben's (*axolotl*-inspired) evolutionary hypothesis claims that humans developed from young primates with premature reproductive capacities. For Agamben, the hypothesis supports his account of infancy not only as an approach to language but also as an approach to the "entire sphere of the exosomatic tradition which, more than any genetic imprint, characterizes *homo sapiens*" (Agamben, 1995: 96). Linking the somatic to "genetic prescription and the exosomatic to totipotent potentiality, he proceeds to claim that "animals are not concerned with possibilities of their soma that are not inscribed in the germen ... they pay no attention to that which is mortal ... and they develop only the infinitely repeatable possibilities fixed in the genetic code" (96).

In light of the machinations of Agamben's false dichotomies (soma/exosoma, genetic determinism and totipotent potentiality) and the violence they inflict on the *axolotl*, it appears that infancy inclusively excludes animality as well as maternity. In general, one should be wary of any picture of *homo sapiens* so wholly detached from the

somatic sphere and genetic imprints.² Whether supported by crude dichotomies or more insidious procedures, auto-relational infancy appears to drive rather than jam the anthropological machine. According to Agamben, “only on the day when the original infantile openness is truly, dizzyingly taken up as such ... will men be able finally to construct a history and language which are universal and no longer deferrable, and stop their wandering through traditions” (1995: 98). But the multiplying voices of infancy’s inclusive exclusion—child-mothers, animal-mothers, animal-children—suggest only a deferral that is itself dizzying.

Conclusion: Agamben and the Question of the Animal

Agamben’s notion of infancy is rarely read alongside his theory of the anthropological machine, yet these analyses would appear, at first glance, to bring readers to a familiar place: a simple recognition of Agamben’s (long acknowledged) anthrocentrism and (less acknowledged) androcentrism. In a widely read article, Matthew Calarco has criticized Agamben for modeling his radical politics on human figures alone (Calarco, 2000). Gesturing to the *Language and Death* as well as *The Open*, Calarco queries after Agamben’s anthrocentrism:

If one accepts Agamben’s argument that man’s essence is not to be found in his experience of language and death as such, then does not the displacement of man’s essence simultaneously work to disrupt the strict binary that excludes the animal from man’s essence? ... if man’s proper essence and the ground for human community can no longer be found in an experience of language and death *as such*, then how can a

² To be sure, in *Infancy and History* Agamben draws on Chomsky, Lenneberg and Jakobsen to offer a more sophisticated account of the “complex interrelation” of endosomatic and esosomatic inheritance in order supports his hypothesis that animals are “always already in language” whereas humans lack language and must “receive it from the outside.” However, this hypothesis, by further twists and turns, also operates through the work of inclusive exclusion. Not only does Agamben cite and disregard important exceptions to it—for instance, the existence of certain birds that, deprived of hearing a song of their species, can only produce the normal song in partial form—but the search for a “mediating element” between endosoma and esosoma returns him, via phonemes, to the “engine” of human infancy (Agamben, 1995: 65).

thought of another coming community not lead to a rethinking of the place of animals in community? (Calarco, 2000: 96)

Agamben's withdrawal from the "question of the animal" is, for Calarco, a missed opportunity to rethink the place of animals in community beyond violent logics of mute inclusion/exclusion. However, in light of the dizzying reading of infancy and its others provided above, a stronger reproach of Agamben is in order. As a new figure and experience of language, infancy does not simply forego the "question of the animal" as much as it renders a more expansive and non-violent response to that question more difficult to achieve.

Understood as a dependent and relational foil to Agamben's infancy, Butler and Kristeva's notion of vulnerability would seem apt resources for alternatives to infancy; vulnerability marks the exposure of the (speaking) body, a condition ineluctably given over to, rather than inclusively exclusive of, others. Careful not to collapse vulnerability and maternity, both authors discuss the dependence of infants on maternal others and early caregivers. Butler writes of newborns "abandoned" to "primary others" in virtue of "bodily requirements" and, throughout her work, Kristeva emphasizes maternal support of symbolic development; the *chora* (where Agamben anchors phonemic passage to the human child) is, in the Kristevan text, linked to maternal semiotic conditions of language. However, while the relational character of vulnerability extends to maternal others, it does not extend, for either theorist, to non-human animal others. In her recent text *Animal Lessons*, Kelly Oliver challenges Butler and Kristeva's failure to consider non-human animals as embodied, mortal beings capable of being wounded or wounding others. In a query that runs parallel to Calarco's critique of Agamben, Oliver asks:

Once we take bodily vulnerability—which is to say the fact that we are mortal and can be wounded—as our starting point, are we delineating what constitutes humanity? Or are we setting out what constitutes all living creatures? And if we are relational, dependent beings by virtue of having bodies, then isn't this also true of animals? Moreover, if we extend the notion of dependence in the way that Butler and Kristeva do to make it a cornerstone of ethics and politics, then aren't we also

obligated to consider the (material and conceptual) interdependence of humans and animals? (Oliver, 2009: 44)

Like Agamben's account of infancy, Butler and Kristeva's theories of vulnerability invite but do not require that we rethink the place of animals in community. Failing to "extend the notion of dependence" beyond the borders of the human, Butler and Kristeva "derealize" the shared embodiment of non-human animal others (Taylor, 2008).

Following Calarco and Oliver's comments and in light of Agamben's *experimentum linguae*, what comes of the deferral of voices and questions, animal and otherwise? In the case of Agamben, resources seem to lie in reflexive rather than jamming capacities of his thought. Calarco's commitment that "the critical promise of Agamben's thought is to be found in its ability to disrupt classical notions of human community" is substantiated by Agamben's critique of the anthropological machine (Calarco, 2000: 96). While infancy falters in its pursuit of "a language and a history which are universal," it nevertheless reflects the disruptive and radical thesis that language is "fabricated in piecemeal fashion from alien forms." To carry out its critical promise, Agamben's disruptive thesis must be engaged *and* returned to his own texts. The reading of infancy above models such a reflexive critique. By pursuing the operation of inclusive exclusion and uncovering the mute inclusion of maternal and animal voices in the *axolotl*, Agamben's own resources bring his thought to a limit he is unable to overcome. There, dizzying deferrals are, each time, opportunities to rethink and the limits of language and the production of the distinction between man and animal.

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The Vulnerability of Other Animals

Stephen Thierman¹

Human beings are vulnerable animals, naked, needy and weak...

- Martha Nussbaum, "Political Animals"

The animal looks at us, and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins here.

- Jacques Derrida, "The Animal that Therefore I Am (Following)"

The idea of vulnerability is not often directly addressed in mainstream ethics and political philosophy. Alasdair MacIntyre believes that the failure to explore the meaning of human vulnerability and dependence is rooted in the Western philosophical tradition's reluctance to attend adequately to the "animal" dimension of human life (MacIntyre, 1999). Philosophers have often been "forgetful of our bodies" (MacIntyre, 1999: 5) and, thus, they have remained inattentive to the rhythms and precariousities of embodied life. In contrast, MacIntyre (and others) argue that we must acknowledge the moral importance of our vulnerabilities, afflictions and consequent dependencies.² I agree with the thrust of this critical assessment and believe that it can be developed further. More specifically, I hold that embodiment and vulnerability are also important conceptual tools for thinking about the moral status of other animals.³

¹ Stephen Thierman is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Toronto. His research interests include Social and Political Philosophy, Bioethics, and Critical Animal Studies. He is currently interested in exploring how the work of Michel Foucault can help us to think about human interactions/relations with other animals. A portion of this research has been published as, "Apparatuses of Animality: Foucault Goes to a Slaughterhouse," in *Foucault Studies* (2010), 9: 89-100.

² MacIntyre is certainly not the only philosopher who criticizes the philosophical tradition in this fashion – many feminist theorists have also faulted this particular oversight. See *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader* (Price and Shildrick, 1999) for a diverse selection of essays that theorize the body from a feminist perspective.

³ In doing so, I join others who have begun to make similar arguments. Chloë Taylor's, "The Precarious Lives of Animals: Butler, Coetzee, and Animal Ethics" (Taylor, 2008) works in this direction via a very insightful critique
(Footnote continued on page 183)

Unfortunately, while a number of theorists have recognized the importance of deploying the concept of vulnerability in the service of ethical thought, there has been a reluctance to acknowledge that it might also be relevant for thinking about other animals. In this paper, I engage with three such cases in order to obtain some clarity on what vulnerability might mean, and on how it can be legitimately, and informatively, applied when it comes time to think about other creatures.

I proceed as follows. First, I begin with some remarks on how the notion of vulnerability might be situated in our thinking about other animals and I engage in some preliminary analysis of the concept itself. In the next three sections, I look critically at three authors—Michael Kottow, Margrit Shildrik, and Bryan Turner—who explicitly draw on the idea of vulnerability in their respective (bio)ethical work, but who also fail to appreciate that this term can be conceptualized in a way that encompasses other animals. I focus on these three theorists primarily because they represent a relatively broad spectrum of positions (a biomedical principlism, a deconstructive approach, and a rights theory, respectively), and because they act as good foils for the positive position that I aim to develop. None of these authors has focused on other animals, but important steps in their respective arguments invoke the idea that there is sharp line to be drawn between humans and other forms of animate life. In doing so, they make a general move that is all too familiar to the history of philosophy. It is this moment, playing itself out in particular discussions of vulnerability, that I want to focus on and call into question. Finally, I end by briefly endorsing the work of Ralph Acampora. He represents a fruitful development for those concerned with both (i) acknowledging the importance of the body in moral philosophy and (ii) ensuring that that philosophy takes a transspecific form.

of recent work by Judith Butler. Ani Satz's "Animals as Vulnerable Subjects: Beyond Interest-Convergence, Hierarchy, and Property" (2009), appeals to Martha Fineman's work (Fineman 2008) and capability theory in order to develop a critique of legal frameworks that presently affect nonhuman animals in the United States. Satz notes that vulnerability is a constant/universal condition shared between humans and other animals, and that it is intimately connected to the idea of dependence, but her analysis of the concept is quite brief (which is understandable, given her primary quarry) and she acknowledges that a "theory of animals as vulnerable subjects warrants development elsewhere" (Satz, 2009: 80). I hope to contribute to the development of that theory here. Whereas Fineman and Satz have political and legal critique as their primary objectives, my own is to contribute to the development of a "fundamental ontology," to borrow a Heideggerian turn of phrase, that makes room for nonhuman forms of animate life.

I should indicate, at the outset, that focusing on the concept of vulnerability is not necessarily intended to fully supplant other arguments that have been mounted on behalf of animals in more traditional approaches to moral philosophy, such as Peter Singer's utilitarianism (Singer, 1975) or Tom Regan's appeal to rights (Regan, 1983). Rather, it is meant to buttress these arguments by investigating the same topic from a slightly different perspective and by invoking a different idiom.

Vulnerability

Traditionally, arguments calling for changes to the ways nonhuman animals are conceived of, or treated, attempt to specify some capacity, or ability, the possession of which justifies affording those animals some form of standing in our (human) moral and/or political communities. Consciousness, intelligence, self-awareness, rationality, the ability to make generalizations and abstractions, or the use of language and tools, are just some of the characteristics that have been seen as relevant when it comes to deciding what it is about other animals that should make them "count" in our ethical deliberations and decision making.

My investigation will take a different tack. I am not concerned so much with exploring a particular ability/power, in virtue of which we can say that certain animals are owed moral consideration. I take it for granted that many other animals possess a wide variety of different capacities and that they are often expressed along spectrums that admit of gradations of degree rather than clear differences of kind. At the very least, we must bear in mind that we are in a state of infancy when it comes to our knowledge about the lives of other animals. We are, as of yet, largely ignorant as to how their unique forms of intelligence and their unique abilities are best conceptualized.⁴ Philosophers, in particular, have often been much too quick (and

⁴ Some qualifications are perhaps in order here. When I say "we," I am thinking primarily of contemporary, city dwelling individuals who don't have much direct contact with live non-human animals, and whose ignorance/infancy may be intimately connected to historical processes of urbanization and industrialization. People in other times and places may have (had) access to forms of knowledge that have been largely forgotten (or occluded). For a very interesting discussion of some of the ways that modern, "rational" farming practices work to replace an intimate knowledge of chickens with a form of deskilled ignorance, see, "Chicken Auguries" (Squier, 2006). By "ignorance" and "infancy," I also mean to invoke a failure to try to see, and understand, other animals of their own terms, apart from any instrumental utility they might possess with respect to human aims and desires. I believe that attentive, respectful ethological research is one means for addressing these lacunae.

(Footnote continued on page 185)

dogmatic) when looking at, thinking about, and making proclamations with regards to the capacities, behaviors, and moral standing of other “animate zoomorphs.”⁵

As opposed to a consideration of important abilities animals might possess, I am more interested in looking at a particular *inability*, namely, the vulnerability that is characteristic of animal existence (in both its human and nonhuman forms). I want to explore a certain powerlessness that I think is a more fundamental place for beginning to spell out the common ground that is inhabited by humans and other animals. This shift in focus gets closer, I believe, to the heart of what motivates people to think, write, and care about other animal life.

What do I mean when I call vulnerability an inability, or a form of powerlessness? A brief look at recent work by Jacques Derrida can help to flesh out this idea further (Derrida, 2008). In his own exploration of animality, Derrida is intrigued by the shift in focus that is occasioned by Jeremy Bentham’s famous (and oft quoted) challenge to the traditional, anthropocentric way of thinking about the moral standing of other animals (Bentham, 1939). The simple fact of aligning his thought with Bentham is surprising, given Derrida’s general hostility towards utilitarian approaches to moral philosophy. Bentham, as is well known amongst animal ethicists, suggests that the question, when we are trying to trace the boundaries of the moral community, is not, “Can they *reason*? nor Can they *talk*? but, *Can they suffer*?” (Bentham, 1939: 847) Derrida, for his part, notes that the “can” in the last question is importantly different as compared to the other two. Whereas the “can” in the first two questions asks after a capacity or power, that is, an ability to do something, the “can” in the new question looks to a certain receptivity, or inability. As Derrida puts it, the “question is disturbed by a certain *passivity*” (Derrida, 2008: 27, Derrida’s emphasis). This passivity points to a certain lack of control, a nakedness, which resides at the core of creaturely existence.

See Donald R. Griffin’s book *Animal Minds: Beyond Cognition to Consciousness* (Griffin, 2001) for an excellent overview of some recent research and theorizing.

⁵ I borrow this term from Ralph Acampora, whom I discuss in more detail below.

It is this passivity, understood as a vulnerability that is an essential facet of embodied life, that I want to explore in this paper. It is a shared vulnerability, and not any one active capacity, which I think ultimately opens a space for an ethical recognition of nonhuman others.⁶ In Derrida's words, mortality (which is certainly an important aspect of human vulnerability) is "the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life... to the possibility of sharing the possibility of this nonpower" (Derrida, 2008: 28).⁷ I contend that it is this non-power that should be taken as the starting point from which to begin thinking about the possibility of an expanded ethical consciousness.

The term "vulnerability" comes to us by way of the Latin word *vulnus* or "wound" and it is, no doubt, usually deployed with negative inflections. It often refers to a state of being weak—or, of not being well defended—as when we say of a particular person, place, or thing that they are vulnerable to attack or aggression. It often denotes a physical (or emotional) susceptibility to being assailable in one way or another. We often say, for example, that deep emotional attachments, like love, leave us vulnerable to being hurt, or that a weakened immune system makes us vulnerable to particular diseases. Being vulnerable is often conceived as a type of exposure, again, whether physical or emotional, to something that is potentially harmful. It might also refer to instabilities caused by social, environmental, or economic factors and may refer not just to individuals, but also to groups of people or even geographical areas. Thus, we might say that a class of people (women, say) are made vulnerable by a particular social arrangement (by having unequal status in a legal system, for example). Or, we might declare that a particular region is vulnerable to drought (or flooding) because of certain environmental factors and/or human activities.

⁶ It is likely that my discussion will resonate with approaches that privilege sentience as a criterion for moral considerability (e.g. Singer, 1975). Sentience, understood as a capacity to experience pain and pleasure, is not easily categorized as a simple, active capacity – it also involves a receptivity, or openness, to the world, that is, a capacity to be inflicted. An attentiveness to suffering, as a dimension of animal vulnerability, is definitely something I would like to include in my sketch here, thus I am happy to embrace this resonance. Perhaps one way to think of my argument is as a contribution to the development of an enriched account of certain elements of sentience.

⁷ For an in-depth engagement with Derrida's thought on the subject of animality, see Leonard Lawlor's *This is Not Sufficient* (Lawlor, 2007).

Weakness, susceptibility, exposure, openness, instability... these are all included in the cluster of notions that we typically associate with the idea of vulnerability. Furthermore, in all of these cases, vulnerability is often thought to be a bad thing. It is a state that we generally want to avoid and that we work to protect against. Ultimately, vulnerable is something that you do not want to be.

Vulnerability is also closely connected with the idea of dependence.⁸ Being dependent often means being reliant on something (or someone) for support—it implies that one thing (or state of affairs) is contingent on something else. We know, to provide one clear example, that human infants are absolutely dependent on their caregivers. They rely on older persons to provide the resources that are necessary for their survival (food, shelter, emotional nurturance, etc.) and their continued existence is contingent on receiving this type of support. Infants and children are often included on the list of those who are especially vulnerable. And the perception of this high degree of vulnerability is related, I think, to the fact that young humans are highly dependent on others and that these other, older individuals wield considerable power when it comes to determining the course of their lives. Thus, dependence, contingency, and powerlessness can be seen as further concepts that substantiate our understanding of vulnerability.

All these terms that I've associated with vulnerability (weakness, dependence, contingency, powerlessness, etc.) are usually cast in a negative light. Conversely, their antonyms (strength, independence, stability, fortification, etc.) are often thought of in positive terms. And to be sure, the capacity to display autonomy and independence is very often something to be prized, while dependence, or exposure to contingencies, is certainly often something to be mitigated. Still, I do not think that vulnerability must be necessarily thought of only in this negative way.

Rather than thinking of vulnerability as an intrinsically negative designation, I would suggest that it might also be useful to think of it more broadly, as what I'll call—

⁸ MacIntyre (1999) also emphasizes this connection. His work is noteworthy because he highlights the “animal” dimension of human vulnerability and argues for the inclusion of certain other animals (dolphins, most specifically) within the sphere of dependent, rational animals.

following Margrit Shildrik—an “existential state.” Understood in this way, we can see vulnerability as a term that highlights a fundamental (and inexorable) feature of human ontology. From this vantage point, the idea of vulnerability can be situated at the very core of what it means to be a human being and—as I will show—an animal.

Vulnerability as *Conditio Humana* (or, Other Animals are not Vulnerable)

In his commentary on the four principles that have been highlighted as foundational in European bioethics (autonomy, dignity, integrity, and vulnerability), Michael Kottow (2004) calls vulnerability a *conditio humana*. He argues that it is best understood as a descriptive/anthropological fact of human existence. Being vulnerable is not just something that we are sometimes, in some places, in virtue of certain contingent relations or factors; rather, it is something that we are at all times, in every place – an inescapable feature of our temporal and fleshy lives. Omnipotent, immortal beings, by way of contrast, are not vulnerable. Human beings live lives that can go better or worse, and which can fair ill or well. We are open and exposed to the ecstasy of delectable pleasure and to the sorrow of horrific suffering. Our mortal, embodied existence is always already characterized by a deep vulnerability. We can (and do) respond to this vulnerability in a variety of ways (we buy insurance, we build walls, we lift weights, we search for the fountain of youth, we form political coalitions, we look for salvation, etc.), but it can never be left behind (or, at least it can’t be left behind yet); it stalks us, in a sense, from the moment of birth until our last breath. In Kottow’s words, “it describes a constitutive condition of individuality” (Kottow, 2004: 282) and, thus, a deep feature of the human condition.

Kottow thinks it is important to distinguish between, on the one hand, vulnerability understood as a descriptive feature of human existence and, on the other hand, those “accidental anomalies like a physical defect, disease or some sort of deprivation as befalls the life of many human beings” (Kottow, 2004: 283). This is the (negative) sense in which the term vulnerability is usually used. He uses the term “susceptible” to try to capture this particular way of understanding vulnerability. While “vulnerability” is reserved to characterize an essential feature of human being, “susceptibility” is used to name “a specific and accidental condition to be diagnosed

and treated” (Kottow, 2004: 284). So, while all human beings are vulnerable, in virtue of being human, not all human beings are susceptible in the same ways, in virtue of the fact that we find ourselves in different types of circumstances at different times in our lives. For example, while elderly populations are just as vulnerable, in the “existential” sense, as younger populations, they may be more susceptible to the harms of particular ailments (influenza, say). Similarly, while men and women are equally vulnerable *qua* their humanity, women may be more susceptible (to violence, poverty, etc.) in virtue of particular social/economic contingencies. Following Onora O’Neil, Kottow thinks that these two forms of vulnerability must be addressed in different ways. He holds that “deep” vulnerability elicits an “obligation of basic justice that rejects injury and defends from it,” while susceptibility “creates obligations of social virtue that reject indifference and neglect in the wake of harm, increasing awareness when harm has occurred, and recognizing when it needs to be treated” (Kottow, 2004: 284).

Given my own concerns, it is important to ask how (or whether) the concept of vulnerability can be extended to other animals. Kottow, for his part, denies that it can be usefully employed to describe an existential state that is shared between humans and other animals. Kottow responds to the suggestion that vulnerability creates the foundation for an ethical response to nonhuman animals in the following passage:

It becomes difficult to understand that vulnerability should “appeal to protection of both animals and the teleological auto-organisation of the world,” for the nature of human vulnerability differs from other living beings in that humans are vulnerable to defeat in the complex process of becoming, whereas nonhumans are vulnerable to the more simple and radical dichotomy of being or ceasing to be. (Kottow, 2004: 283)

Kottow simply asserts that there is a difference in kind between the way that human beings are vulnerable and any way that other animals could be said to be vulnerable. For him, human vulnerability is grounded in our relation to a “complex process of becoming.” Invoking many philosophical authorities (e.g. Hobbes, Heidegger, Levinas, etc.), he sketches a picture of human vulnerability as somehow intimately intertwined with our pursuit of the good, to the planning and realization of life

projects, and to the fact that we are/become practical reasoners. Humans are vulnerable because our pursuit of the good is precarious and fraught with difficulty. Our life projects can be frustrated (by a variety of external and internal factors) and the development of our practical reasoning skills cannot be taken for granted (that is, they must be fostered and cultivated). By way of contrast, other animals are presented as not being vulnerable in these uniquely human ways. Their lives are not complex processes of becoming. Rather, those lives are simply a question of “being or ceasing to be.” Human vulnerability is expressed in the fact that our lives can be better or worse, that we must confront and navigate around a variety of obstacles, and that we must always negotiate the inescapable fact of our own mortality. Mere animal vulnerability, on the other hand, is limited to the question of life or death—to being or not being.

My first criticism of this passage is that Kottow’s treatment is much too flattening and homogenizing—a proclamation about the vulnerability of *all* nonhumans strikes me as dogmatic.⁹ Given the wide variety of animals that inhabit this category, it would seem prudent that we allow room for more finely graded distinctions. While it might make sense to see a bivalve (such as an oyster or a mussel) as having their vulnerability encapsulated in the radical dichotomy of life or death (and even this is likely too flattening), is this as plausible once we get to the echidna or the otter? What about the dogs and cats that accompany us along that complex road of becoming that we travel, or our closest phylogenetic neighbours (chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans)? Are all of these creatures only vulnerable in the sense that they can either be or not be? I would push us towards a negative response to this question—the lives of many other animals can “matter” in more nuanced and complex ways than Kottow’s brief assertion wants to allow.

Kottow has touched on the way that we might characterize the vulnerability of a nonliving physical object, that is, as something that can merely be altered, damaged, or destroyed. It seems as though the vulnerability of a vase (to being broken, say) is

⁹ In making this type of claim, Kottow follows in the footsteps of many other thinkers in the history of philosophy. As Derrida observes, there has been a strong tendency amongst philosophers to treat other animals as a homogenous mass that can be lumped together under, and be represented by, the general term “animal” (Derrida, 2008: 40).

best captured in the radical dichotomy of being or ceasing to be. But I do not think that this is an adequate understanding of the vulnerability that is displayed by other animate forms of life. We might say that a particular physical structure is vulnerable to earthquakes, for example, in that a seismic tremor can reduce it to rubble, but other animals are not only vulnerable in this very basic sense.

To be “vulnerable” in a morally weighted sense, is to be open to suffering and to having one’s engagement with the world frustrated. Other animals are centers of “needs, value and striving on [their] own account” (Plumwood, 1993: 60); that is, they are beings whose life trajectories take them through various stages of development, and which involve the negotiation of a variety of obstacles and contingencies in order to ensure self-preservation. Many animals—most certainly the domesticated animals with which we interact most frequently—are creatures with a welfare, that is, they are beings whose lives can go ill or well in a very subjective way (subjective in a way that the “welfare” of a building, or a vase, cannot be an embodied experience). And this is not just a “physical” welfare, beginning and ending with the health, or continued functioning, of a body. We need only consider the anxiety and boredom that are experienced by a variety of animals when kept in captivity to realize that animal well-being involves something more than just persisting in existence. It seems clear that other animals are involved in their own complex processes of becoming and that these processes can, and often are, frustrated.

I believe that the perception of a wide gap between the way human and animal vulnerability should be conceptualized is the result of a hermeneutic lens that attends primarily to the temporal and narrative dimensions of human existence and which, at the same time, backgrounds a serious consideration of our fleshy locatedness. Our awareness of the fact that our lives are a procession towards death, and the way in which this knowledge is thought to motivate and structure our activity, is often thought to be a uniquely human form of relationship to the self. It is this orientation (which Kottow is clearly supporting) that led Martin Heidegger to assert that only *Dasein* actually dies (Heidegger, 1996: 229). In contrast, according to Heidegger, other animals simply perish. It is the care and concern that we can direct at our own lives and our own histories that are thought to mark the uniqueness of human vulnerability. It seems to me that there is a problematic mind/body dualism at work in this strand of

thought. Human vulnerability is seen as minded in a way that makes it a “complex process,” whereas animals are thought to be captivated in the dumb, mute vulnerability of their physical bodies. The human being is “world-forming,” whereas the animal is assumed to be “poor-in-world” (Heidegger, 1995: 185-200).

Two observations can help to narrow the chasm that Kottow (and Heidegger) attempt to establish between humans and other animals.¹⁰ First, it may very well be the case that some other animals are aware of their own “being-unto-death.” Some may have an awareness of death which structures their activities, behaviors and relations with others. It is possible that certain animals might also relate to their own finitude and, thus, that they too could be said to be vulnerable in a more complex way than Kottow wants to allow. Elephant and chimpanzee rituals surrounding death are two possible examples.¹¹ Second, if we bring the situated, embodied aspects of human vulnerability into sharper relief, then we set the stage for a recognition of the way in which humans and other animals share in a precarious and vulnerable existence. The vicissitudes of the flesh, the arc of ageing that we follow from birth to death and decay, the experience of pain and suffering, our dependence on the world for nutrition and shelter, the joys of the sun on our skins and the other textures of perception—these are all ways in which the fragility of human becoming can be understood as fundamentally an “animal” vulnerability. The point is to allow, on the one hand, for the possibility that other animal lives are more temporal, narratively mediated, and self-aware than we generally allow and to acknowledge, on the other hand, that human life is more “animal” in its lived manifestations than we generally recognize. These observations narrow the gap between the vulnerability of humans and other animals, and consequently, lay the groundwork for a less segregated understanding of the world we inhabit, and share, with other forms of life.

¹⁰ Complimenting my brief remarks here, Derrida offers further insightful critique of Heidegger’s attempts to institute a sharp division between human beings and other animals. He focuses centrally on Heidegger’s insistence that other animals do not have access to things “as such” (i.e. that a dog lacks the conceptual capacities to encounter stairs *as* stairs). See especially the fourth chapter of *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (Derrida, 2008: 141-160). MacIntyre and Acampora also criticize Heidegger on this front. See the fifth chapter of MacIntyre’s *Dependent Rational Animals* (MacIntyre, 1999) and the first chapter of Acampora’s *Corporal Compassion* (Acampora, 2006). For an extensive commentary on Derrida’s critique of Heidegger, see (Lawlor, 2007: 45-70).

¹¹ For an interesting piece, which proposes that chimpanzees’ awareness of death has been underestimated, see “Pan Thanatology” (Anderson, Gillies, and Lock, 2010). For some discussion of elephants and death, see *Elephants on the Edge* (Bradshaw, 2009: 10-14).

Notice that I just said, “narrow the gap,” and not, “obliterate it.” Many will still want to insist that there is something unique about human vulnerability and about the awareness of death that our species displays. And I want to be clear that I am not saying that all other animals are exactly the same as human beings.¹² But, I do believe that, despite important differences, there is also a significant existential commonality, namely, our vulnerable, corporeal being.

A much more nuanced development of a Heideggerian style of approach can be found in the work of Maxine Sheets-Johnstone. She acknowledges that our primary vulnerability is corporeal, and that this basic vulnerability is shared by all forms of animate life. But she also believes that human vulnerability is unique in certain ways. She follows Heidegger (and Kottow) in asserting that other animals lack a conceptual awareness of death, but, for her, this awareness of death is “not lacking because there is no awareness of, and no feelings about, the disappearance or permanent inanimation of a friend, for example, or a baby [she cites Jane Goodall’s research on chimpanzees here]” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2008: 38). Thus, we see that she acknowledges that other animals are aware, and that they have feelings, which takes us happily beyond Kottow’s radical dichotomy of being or not-being.

The concept of death is lacking in other animals, in Sheets-Johnstone’s view, because “it is contingent on the objectification of one’s own body and because nonhuman animals do not have physical bodies *as such*” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2008: 38). What she means by not being able to objectify, or have a physical body “as such,” is that other animals lack the conceptual ability to abstract away from the immediate experience of the lived body and to perceive bodies (their own and those of others) as entities that are comprised of many different, distinguishable components. She believes that other animals experience the world “dynamically and physiognomically” and that they do not experience a “material body abstractly separated or analytically separable from the animate and animated body that the individual is” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2008: 38). Still, she does believe that there is a certain sense of vulnerability that other animals

¹² As Derrida puts it, to insist on this kind of homogeneity “would be worse than sleepwalking, it would simply be too asinine [*bête*]” (Derrida, 2008: 30).

have with respect to their own bodies (and to those of others), but that this is experienced/enacted “in a wholly living, here-now context” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2008: 299). An example of what she is describing might be found when I (lovingly!) tussle with my cat and he nibbles at me in a way that clearly shows restraint. He is playing with me and his actions display an awareness of my corporeal vulnerability in the immediate context of our interactions.

Nonetheless, Sheets-Johnstone holds that the concept of death, and the fear of death, are absent in my cat and that, as a consequence, his sense of vulnerability is not as expansive as my own. In essence, she believes that humans are unique because we know ourselves to be vulnerable and we can consider our vulnerability from an abstracted, conceptual distance. For example, I know that my body will age, that these eyes I use to see might one day fail me, and that this heart, which I feel beating in my chest as I type with these fingers, will one day fall silent.

For the moment, I am happy to acknowledge that there may be important differences in the ways that humans and other animals can relate to their bodily vulnerability, but I do not believe that these differences amount to much when we are thinking about the contours of the moral community. There is a basic, embodied vulnerability that human beings share with other animate life thanks to our corporeal nature. In so far as she acknowledges this, I count Sheets-Johnstone as an ally.

Returning to Kottow’s remarks, I would now like to criticize the implications he immediately draws from the difference he perceives between human and animal vulnerability:

This difference implies that human vulnerability requires active protection against negative forces and prevention from harm, whereas the biosphere merits respect and support for its continued being, and is best served by non-interference or, to be less drastic, it is required that only morally sustainable interference be allowed. (Kottow, 2004: 283)

Here, Kottow derives some normative prescriptions from the (supposed) fact that the vulnerability of humans and other animals is fundamentally different. On the one

hand, the complex process of human becoming, with its unique form of vulnerability, calls for protection and the prevention of harm. On the other hand—and here nonhuman animals have been further flattened by being equated with “the biosphere”—a more brute form of vulnerability calls only for respect, support, and non-interference. Respect, support, and non-interference may very well be important virtues to enact in relation to other animals and the environment more generally, but this dichotomization is problematic once we recognize that animal vulnerability may not be so different from its human counterpart. A less anthropocentric rendering of the idea of vulnerability, *pace* Kottow, enjoins us to see both protection and the prevention of harm as virtues to be developed in our interactions with other animals. At the very least, a better understanding of the vulnerabilities shared by humans and other animals will seriously challenge the argument Kottow is seeking to develop.

Encounters with Vulnerability

In the context of Margrit Shildrick’s deconstructive approach to (bio)ethics, the project of developing an “ontology of human being” is closely connected to her attempts to reposition the body as a central category, and to revalue the concept of vulnerability (Shildrick, 2002). Shildrick, in a way that echoes Kottow’s usage, privileges the idea of “becoming,” a term that is meant to capture the always dynamic and evolving character of our embodied subjectivity, as opposed to relying on the term “being,” which she thinks carries more static resonances. Asserting the importance of embodiment is meant to displace more “logocentric” ontologies—namely, those accounts which privilege rationality over and above our corporeal nature—and it is meant to show that the body is “not incidental to the ontological and ethical processes on the self, but intrinsic to their operation” (Shildrick, 2002: 1).

Shildrick challenges these traditional conceptions because she believes that approaches that privilege reason, and which deny or denigrate the body, have also often supported sexist and racist ontologies that value certain groups (men, whites, etc.) and degrade others (women, non-whites, etc.). She also focuses on embodiment in her work in order to explore the ways that certain normative conceptions of the body have been deployed to mark and exclude not just those who embody sexual and

racial difference, but also “those who are physically disabled or whose bodies radically disrupt morphological expectations” (Shildrick, 2002: 2).

It is with these goals in mind that Shildrick explicates the notion of monstrosity. She thinks that reflection on what we consider monstrous provides an occasion for rethinking the nature of embodiment itself. Monstrous bodies, for her, include all those bodies that are feared, or which cause reactions of anxiety, because of their gross failure to approximate dominant corporeal norms. Amongst these bodies, she includes hybrid creatures (chimeras), conjoined twins, human clones, and cyborgs. The normative conception of embodiment that Shildrick has in mind is one that imagines the individual to be an autonomous, bounded, and relatively stable entity whose sex/gender is easily determinable and whose body parts conform to certain expectations. The monstrous shatters this conception in so far as it “disrupts the notions of separation and distinction that underlie such claims” (Shildrick, 2002: 2). She thinks that because monstrous beings can be recognized as like the self in some important way (they are not wholly “other”), and because they reflect back aspects of ourselves that are repressed (our own vulnerability, for example), they can become deeply disturbing.

Shildrick believes this disturbance can occasion the insight that it is not just some “other” bodies that fail to conform to certain norms, while “our” bodies can be seen as normal, but that in a certain sense all bodies are involved in a perpetual, anxiety-ridden process of attempting, and always failing, to approximate an impossible ideal. Closely tied to this valorization of the monstrous is her revaluation of the notion of vulnerability. An ethical and ontological orientation that embraces the ambiguity and unpredictability of “an openness towards the monstrous other” is one that also “acknowledges both vulnerability to the other, and the vulnerability of the self” (Shildrick, 2002: 3). Recognizing this vulnerability means recognizing that our existence as human beings often involves contingencies and dependence, that the boundaries of the body are permeable, and that we must constantly deal with the possibility of instability and uncertainty. Thus, it is clear that in Shildrick’s ontology of human being, the interrelated concepts of body, monstrosity, and vulnerability, are all given foundational roles to play.

I would like to begin to sketch out my own preliminary “ontology of human being” by way of a critique of Shildrick’s discussion. I agree with Shildrick that the body and its always already vulnerable nature must be central in any conception of human existence, and I agree that it is also very important (in ethics and ontology) to acknowledge/recognize our own vulnerability and the vulnerability of others. Where I want to expand on Shildrick’s position is by also suggesting that we need an expanded sense of those others who might be vulnerable. Shildrick sees herself as directly critiquing the assumptions and values of liberal humanism, but the others she is concerned with seem always to be “all too human.” An adequate human ontology will have to give the body a place of central importance, but it will also have to recognize that humans are not the only embodied beings. It must recognize that human beings exist in complex and dynamic interactions with a variety of nonhuman others.

Let me expand on this criticism by looking at a particular passage. While discussing the anxiety that can be induced by monsters (which mirror some aspect of the self), Shildrick writes: “So long as the monstrous remains the absolute other in its corporeal difference it poses few problems; in other words it is so distanced in its difference that it can clearly be put into the oppositional category of not-me” (Shildrick, 2002: 3). Thus, it is something *familiar* about the monster that is supposed to make us anxious, that is, there is a recognition that unsettles us. If there is nothing recognizable, then the monster does not incite any fear or trembling, or at least it does not occasion the ethical self-reflection that Shildrick thinks is possible/necessary. It is clearly “not-me.” Later, she goes on to write:

Although the purely animal monster might also be an object of curiosity or fear, and has a similar history of heralding events to come, of providing a material marker of divine affect, or later of signifying evolutionary diversity, it does not thereby unsettle the security of human being. The animal is the other in the comforting guise of absolute difference, but its lack of humanity cannot appeal directly to the heart of our own being. Those monsters that are at least in an ambivalent relationship to our humanity, however, are always too close for comfort. They invoke vulnerability. (Shildrick, 2002: 20)

Here, “the animal” is presented as not unsettling the “security of human being.”¹³ It is conceived as an absolute difference, as an entity that does not reflect anything recognizable back towards the human spectator, that is, as something utterly unfamiliar. Some form of recognition is needed, according to Shildrick, in order to lay bare both our own vulnerability and the vulnerability of the other. The (purported) unfamiliarity of the purely animal other cannot occasion an awareness of our own vulnerable, embodied becoming. A troubling implication of this passage is that, due to their failure to invoke vulnerability (or to speak “directly to the heart of our own being”) animals might also fall outside of the ethical domain that the appeal to vulnerability was meant to establish. I contend that an ontology focused on the body and the vulnerable nature of human becoming must recognize the world-bound nature of that becoming as well as the fact that human lives unfold in an “environment” of becoming that is home to a variety of different types of bodies, including nonhuman bodies, that might be understood as vulnerable in their own ways. To claim that “the animal” cannot unsettle the security of human being is to engender the very type of closure that Shildrick’s deconstructive approach seeks to hold in perpetual abeyance. Thus, if this is her position with regards to animal others, then it must be seen as deeply problematic from the perspective of her overall project.

Vulnerability and Human Rights

In his work on human rights, Brian Turner challenges the relativism and the positivism of the human sciences (i.e. sociology and anthropology), by appealing to the related notions of embodiment and human vulnerability (Turner, 2006). He believes that human rights (i.e. rights enjoyed by individuals in virtue of being human) can “be defined as universal principles, because human beings share a common ontology that is grounded in a shared vulnerability” (Turner, 2006: 6). Turner acknowledges that human groups display many cultural differences, and that “human

¹³ Obviously, many thinkers, and I include myself amongst them, do believe that the security of human being can be unsettled by encounters with other creatures. With respect to his interactions with his cat, and their effects on his thinking about the otherness of the other, Derrida declares that “nothing will have ever done more to make me think through this absolute alterity of the neighbor than these moments when I see myself naked under the gaze of a cat” (Derrida, 2008: 11). Donna Haraway is another notable theorist who highlights how human being is shot through with the non-human, declaring that “[t]o be one [i.e. a self or individual] is always *to become* with many [i.e. “companion species”]” (Haraway, 2008: 4).

happiness is diverse,” but he also believes that we are bound together by the “risks and perturbations” that arise from our shared vulnerability and that our human miseries are often “common and uniform” (Turner, 2006: 9).

Turner is primarily interested in how human vulnerability is related to the creation (and perpetuation) of various social and political institutions. He does not spend a lot of time defining the notion of vulnerability, nor does he have much to say about other animals (with an important exception that I will discuss below), though an implicit characterization can be discerned. In what appears to be an inversion of the value-laden terminology employed by Heidegger, Turner embraces an understanding of human vulnerability which pictures it as a kind of poverty—an “instinctual deprivation”—which forces us into the situation where we must build various institutions (i.e. religion, the family, etc.) in order to compensate for the lack of “ready-made instinctual responses” (Turner, 2006: 28). In his account, the “world openness” of human being is purchased at a cost of not being adequately instinctively equipped for a specific environment. Turner implicitly endorses the idea that the human’s world is “open” (read: the nonhuman animal’s world is “closed”), and that other animals function primarily based on “instincts.” As I have suggested, these positions, which assume a difference in kind between humans and other animals, need to be called into question. This calling into question needs to happen not because we must deny that human life is unique or different in many interesting ways, nor because we must assert that other animals are exactly the same as humans, but, rather, it must be done to recognize a particular layer of commonality that we share with other animals with respect to our vulnerable natures.

Turner does discuss other animals briefly when he considers some possible objections to his thesis, namely, that vulnerability is the best basis for developing a theory of human rights. The imagined interlocutor holds that by using the notion of embodied vulnerability to ground the ascription of rights we make it impossible to distinguish between human rights and the rights that will be possessed by other embodied creatures: “a critic might complain reasonably that one cannot distinguish between animal rights and human rights” (Turner, 2006: 37). Turner’s response is short and not fully developed, but he seems to suggest two possible responses to this line of criticism.

On the one hand, he seems to meet the objection by suggesting that there is a relevant difference between humans and other animals that would block the ascription of the same set of rights to members in each group. This difference appears to boil down to a lack of moral agency—“unlike humans, animals cannot exercise these rights directly without our intervention. Animals cannot represent themselves” (Turner, 2006: 38). Turner allows that we may protect certain animals, but that this protection will be part of the human endeavor to protect the natural environment and that “animal rights” must be seen as an aspect of an environmental politics which sees “protecting animals as important for protecting human beings” (Turner, 2006: 38). On this response, other animals are embodied and vulnerable, but not in a way that can matter intrinsically; at most, other animals warrant protection for instrumental reasons stemming from human concerns. This answer risks shifting Turner’s focus away from embodied vulnerability as the basis for the ascription of rights and redirecting it towards the ability to “exercise” rights and “represent” oneself as the most relevant determining factors. These particular abilities are reminiscent of a more disembodied (i.e. Kantian) approach to the ascription of moral worth which may run counter to the course Turner wants to chart. He would do better, I think, to expand upon and enrich his understanding of the vulnerability of other animals.

On the other hand, Turner’s second response does seem to gesture in this other direction. He suggests that ascribing rights to other animals may not undermine his vulnerability argument because animal rights may be similar to the rights that are enjoyed by human beings who are not full moral agents (e.g. children, brain-dead patients, etc.) and who cannot fully exercise those rights, nor represent themselves. In what is essentially a “marginal cases” style of argument, Turner appears to be indicating that we can extend certain rights to other animals who lack various capacities because we already extend rights to many human beings who lack those same capacities. Possession of those particular abilities, it turns out, may not be necessary for the ascription of rights, and, thus, it may be possible to get other animals into the community of rights bearers’ on other grounds (say, because they are vulnerable, sentient beings). But Turner does not pursue this line of thought very far. He is content to conclude by putting the problem aside, suggesting that the question of

animal rights “might therefore turn out to be part of a more complex philosophical problem about agency” (Turner, 2006: 38).

At this point, I should note that I am not sure that the language of “rights” is the best conceptual framework for understanding the moral entitlements of other animals. But I do think that it makes sense to think of them as beings that are vulnerable in morally significant ways and that an expanded understanding of the notion of vulnerability can help to expand the perimeters of the moral community. It is interesting that Turner connects his vulnerability argument to the development of a cosmopolitan virtue ethic. This ethic is founded on the idea that our human frailty can be taken as the basis for developing a sense of common “humanity” or a wider sense of shared community. One of the components of this ethic, as Turner develops it, is a duty to care, both for particular others and for other cultures. As far as my argument is concerned, I would say that a cosmopolitan ethic based on shared vulnerability can go further, and that the duty to care must also be extended to other creatures.¹⁴

To summarize, it is not so much that I disagree with the directions taken by Kottow, Shildrick, and Turner, in their respective analyses. I think that their attention to vulnerability, and to the importance of the body, are important developments in ethical thought. However, I think that each of them is too quick when it comes to a consideration of how other animals will fit (or will fail to fit) into their frameworks. In line with Shildrick, Kottow and Turner, any adequate ethical framework will have to attend to vulnerability and to the body, however, *pace* Shildrick, Kottow and Turner, it will also have to spend more time considering how other animals will be conceived of and accommodated in its conceptual space.

¹⁴ Obviously, I am not alone in calling for this type of extension. Over the last couple of decades, a growing body of literature has been concerned to bring the feminist care tradition to bear on debates in animal ethics. *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics* (Donovan and Adams 2007) and *Beyond Animal Rights: A Feminist Caring Ethic for the Treatment of Animals* (Donovan and Adams 1996) are two excellent sources for tracking these developments.

A “Symphysics” of Transpecific Morality

I would like to end by briefly presenting the work of Ralph Acampora as one example of how such a framework might be developed. For his part, Acampora engages with the phenomenological tradition in his recent work on animal ethics (Acampora 1995 and 2006). He works insightfully, and critically, with the thought of Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and many others, to “describe, explain, and interpret” what he calls a “transhuman morality” (Acampora, 2006: 1). As Acampora presents it, a transhuman moral theory is one that rejects the anthropocentric norms that have been dominant in traditional approaches to ethics and political philosophy, and which attempts to enable an expanded understanding of the moral community. He develops his own position by critically situating it with respect to the dominant forms that transhuman moral theories have taken thus far. He sees utilitarian appeals to sentience (found in Singer’s work, for example) and deontological definitions of subjectivity (found in Regan’s animal rights argument, for example) stipulating standards of moral significance by appealing to human exemplars of consciousness. These theories work to “elevate” other animals into spheres of moral concern by appealing to “higher” mental capacities that are constitutive of human mental life. In contrast, Acampora favors an approach that sheds “anthropocentric hierarchy altogether... and [which] place[s] our moral thought and political activity behind the truly post-humanist task of reappreciating bodily animacy as such” (Acampora, 1995: 25).¹⁵ For my part, I am interested in how this project of reappreciating bodily animacy connects with my discussion of vulnerability.

Acampora believes that we can extend the range of caring regard in the “very gesture” of recognizing that we (humans, that is) are also “animate zoomorphs.” His idea seems to be that rather than trying to bring other animals “up” to a particular level by appealing to the “higher” human-like capacities that they might possess—a level where they can begin to be valued as subjects of moral concern—we should instead try to bring human beings “down,” so to speak, to the level of other animals. The question becomes not, how do we get other animals into the moral community, but

¹⁵ I am not entirely convinced that appeals to sentience, or Regan’s subject-of-a-life criterion, are not themselves important attempts to reappreciate bodily animacy, but at this point, I put that criticism to the side.

rather, how did they get excluded from it in the first place, given that human beings are also animals with their own receptive capacities and vulnerabilities? For Acampora, where we begin our ethical thinking and deliberations “is always already caught up in the experience of being a live body thoroughly involved in a plethora of ecological and social interrelationships with other living bodies and people,” thus it is the “movement toward dissociation and nonaffiliation [with other animals] that needs to be justified against a background of relatedness and interconnectivity” (Acampora 2006: 5). If we interpret phenomenal embodiment along these lines—that is, if we acknowledge the vulnerability and locatedness inherent in human existence—then we enable a mode of philosophizing that is conducive to constructing a transhuman ethic. In Acampora’s words, “the live body is the primary locus of existential commonality between human animals and other organisms, and the appreciation of commonality undergirding differentiation enables the growth of moral relationships” (Acampora 1995: 26).

Acampora believes that an appreciation of the carnal vulnerability that is shared between humans and other animals can be the basis for the extension of moral compassion to other forms of animate life. The experience of compassionate concern that he is interested in describing is based on sensing one’s bodily vulnerability to be similar to another’s. This experience of a lived carnal vulnerability is held to provide the “experientially primordial basis of what we sometimes refer to as the ‘moral sense’” (Acampora 1995: 27). For Acampora, “moral sense” signifies a more physically oriented pattern than does the more psychic notions, such as sympathy, that were referred to by early moral sense theorists, such as David Hume. This is an important point: Acampora contends that moral life (especially the transspecific) is primarily rooted—“as a matter of phenomenal fact”—“in corporal symphysis rather than in mental maneuvers in the direction of sympathy” (Acampora 1995: 27). Acampora’s neologism—symphysis—is intended to connote a more dense, physically grounded notion than “sympathy.” It designates the felt sense of sharing with somebody else, “a live nexus as experienced in a somatic setting of direct or systemic (inter)relationship” (Acampora 1995: 27). An experience of symphysis, then, is not based on any attempt to imagine what another is going through, but rather it is felt in the body as an awareness of the vulnerability that I share with an embodied other.

Acampora describes an encounter with squirrels in a park, and of the distress he feels at seeing that their tails have been docked, to flesh out the phenomenal character (and progression) of the symphysical experience he is trying to capture. For him, observing the molting of the squirrels' fur bespeaks a sense of shared climatic and environmental horizons; listening to their calls countenances a shared auditory world; simultaneous eating indicates similar needs for sustenance; while the sight of a squirrel, who has been harmed by human hands, causes Acampora to recoil in a visceral recognition of shared susceptibilities to pain and wounding. Similar experiences of symphysis might also be possible with the animal companions who reside in our homes. My ethical concern for the well-being of my cat is based less in any attempt to mentally imagine what life might be like for him—that is, in an attempt to sympathize—and more in the embodied life we share together. The warmth of his body next to mine, the rhythmic rise and fall of his breathing, his soft wheeze as he sleeps—these things help to shape the embodied, world-bound texture of our sphere of interaction. It is his vulnerability that I feel compelled to respect and which guides my actions.

Acampora opens the door for moral considerability not by appealing to mental powers and human-like capacities, but by describing a (proto-ethical) feeling based in the experience of a shared vulnerability. We discover what we owe to other animals by recognizing the vulnerabilities that are constitutive of a shared world of flesh and we become aware of this sensitivity by recognizing that we are also bodily participants as animals ourselves in the carnal life-world. What Acampora seems to be suggesting is that we do not need a metaphysics of morals, that is, we do not need a transcendent system that would underwrite and specify our obligations, duties, rights, etc., with respect to other animals. Instead, we need to foreground the body in our ethical thinking, to recognize that we are vulnerable, animate beings. Ethics is not a matter of metaphysical justification, rather it is a field of symphysical openness, of recognizing the shared vulnerability of humans and other creatures.

Conclusion

A number of philosophers have recognized the importance of discussing vulnerability in moral and political philosophy. Still, a number of those thinkers—I have discussed three—try to understand the vulnerability of human beings by differentiating it from the vulnerability of other animals in an absolute way. Kottow, Shildrick, and Turner all seem to endorse a position that presents the vulnerability of other animals as vastly different from the vulnerability that is characteristic of human existence. I have suggested that this tack is misguided. While their attentiveness to the importance of the body is laudable, these theorists all display an inadequate understanding of “the animal” and they effectively reinstall problematic assumptions about speciated difference that we would do better to actively question. Acampora helps us to get a sense of the direction we will be led to by this questioning. His analysis acknowledges the importance of thinking about vulnerability (and the body) while also insisting that this acknowledgement has implications for how we are going to think about other animals. This, I have argued, is the right way to proceed.

This essay does not advance any specific prescriptions with respect to the treatment of other animals, nor does it offer any specific directives for future activism. My primary goals have been critique and an expansion of the moral imagination. As far as my understanding of critique is concerned, I will invoke the words of Michel Foucault, who claimed that “[t]o do criticism is to make harder those acts which are now too easy” (Foucault 2000: 456). The act I would like to make harder is the philosophical move that aims to have something important turn on the presumption of a sharp division between humans and other animals. As evidenced by the theorists I have considered in this discussion of vulnerability, this is still a move that is all too easy to make. With respect to an expansion of the moral imagination, I believe that this is a crucial prelude to prescriptions and directives. Fostering a sense of kinship with other animals is an essential springboard for transformations of the self and of the institutions that permeate our social lives. To echo Sheets-Johnstone, I would assert that a “rationally unadorned and unadornable existential awareness of oneself and other living beings as exposed and open to pain, suffering, and death, as quintessentially vulnerable by the mere fact of being alive, of being first and foremost

a physical body” is extremely important, and that this awareness holds within it the “possibility of opening upon ever deepening understandings of the vast world of Nature and awakening the attitudinal affect of caring” (Sheets-Johnstone 2008: 299). The readers of this journal may not need to be convinced, or reminded, of these facts. But they cannot be taken for granted and, thus, we must continue to encourage their promulgation.

In order to advance ethical theories that will adequately respond to the “multiplicity of embodied difference” (to use Shildrick’s words) manifested in our worlds we need to focus on the propensities and possibilities of those different bodies. Theories that rely too heavily on the possession of particular (human) mental powers for the ascription of moral status, or personhood, will be inadequate for accommodating concerns about other animals and the natural environment more generally. We must emphasize the embodied/world-bound existence that humans share with a variety of other animals and organisms, and recognize that all of these different bodies develop in rich, complex, and mutually constitutive ways. Human beings are not the only vulnerable beings that inhabit the world. Recognizing this is essential for sustaining a continued critique of a variety of human values and practices.¹⁶

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¹⁶ A substantial portion of this paper was presented at the *Animal and Animality Across the Humanities and Social Sciences* conference at Queen’s University in June, 2010. I would like to thank members of the audience for their questions and feedback. I would also like to thank the two anonymous readers who reviewed my work prior to publication. Their comments and suggestions were very insightful and helpful.

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“Veil of Shame”: Derrida, Sarah Bartmann and Animality

Rebecca Tuvel¹

Introduction

Sarah Bartmann, famously known as the “Hottentot Venus,” was a South African Khoisan woman who was paraded around nineteenth-century England and France (sometimes in a cage) because of her striking appearance.² Significantly, descriptions of Bartmann abound with references to her similarity to animals. As racial theorist T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting notes, most people “did not view her as a person or even a human” (1999: 17). In 1839, Samuel Morton, the father of scientific racism, described Bartmann and the Khoisans as “the nearest approximation to the lower animals” (Washington 2006: 83).³ In being connected to animality, Bartmann’s body was variously employed by the nineteenth-century scientific community in the service of human (read: white, male, European) self-conceptions.

Alongside a reading of Derrida’s “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” I maintain that the way Sarah Bartmann’s raced, sexed and colonial treatment was *animalized* concretely illustrates Derrida’s claim that the animal-human binary is perhaps the most central for theory.⁴ In his text, Derrida argues that the animal-human binary we have constructed goes all the way back to a time before time, indeed to the “very genesis *of* time” (2008: 17, my emphasis). But despite the fact that

1 Rebecca Tuvel is a Ph.D. candidate and graduate instructor in Philosophy at Vanderbilt University. Rebecca works primarily on 20th-century continental philosophy, feminism, critical animal studies and theories of oppression more generally. She is especially interested in feminist animal studies and its resources for exploring the system that sees both women and animals as consumable objects. Her article “Exposing the Breast: The Animal and the Abject in American Attitudes Towards Breastfeeding” will appear in a forthcoming volume on pregnancy, motherhood and childbirth.

2 The term “Hottentot apron,” the name ascribed to Bartmann’s supposedly “overdeveloped” labia stands for “sinus pudoris” in Latin, meaning “veil of shame” (Derrida, 2008: 83).

3 Harriet Washington explains that “Hottentot,” was a derogatory name for the Khoisan people, apparently meant to imitate the clicking sounds of their language (2006: 84).

4 See Calarco (2008: 103) on this.

the animal-human divide has been lurking in the background since time began, theorists of oppression have yet to appreciate its enduring centrality. I maintain that if the animal-human divide persists in the background of both our theory and practice, it remains the generative site for the deployment of ever new and mutating strategies of oppression. Accordingly, I propose that critical gender, sex and race theory *must* register the animal-human dichotomy as a *fundamental driving mechanism* inherent in raced, sexed and colonial oppression, and therefore one that must be rigorously challenged if we wish to combat varying modes of persecution.⁵

“The One-Woman Spectacle”⁶

Sarah Bartmann was born in the Cape Colony of South Africa, which later came under Dutch colonial rule (Sharpley-Whiting 1999: 17). Before her departure for Europe, Bartmann worked as a servant for a colonist named Peter Cesar, although there is speculation that she was his slave (Washington 2006: 82). In 1810, Bartmann entered into a contract with a surgeon who promised to take her to England and pay her at the end of five years’ service for her exhibition (Sharpley-Whiting, 1999: 18). Most people came to see her for her unusually large buttocks and small frame. During the course of her observation, Bartmann’s body was soon compared to that of an animal. In a famous picture depicting Sarah Bartmann and four people gawking at her body, one of the captions reads “Oh goddamn, what roast beef!,” drawing an explicit parallel to the buttocks of an animal carcass taken for food (Sharpley-Whiting, 1999: 21). Such a picture captures both the visual and edible modes of consuming Bartmann’s body, as if she were an animal in a zoo as well as an animal on our plates. In one of his observations, the famous French naturalist Georges Cuvier describes Bartmann as having a “way of pouting her lips exactly like... we have observed in the Orang-Outang... her ear was like that of many apes... These are animal characters”

⁵ My argument is in line with feminist thinkers like Kelly Oliver and Cathryn Bailey who likewise recognize the centrality of the animal-human divide in all forms of oppression (see Bailey, 2004 and Oliver, 2009; 2010). As Oliver states, “The man-animal binary is not just any opposition; it is the one used most often to justify violence, not just to animals, but also man’s violence to other people deemed to be like animals” (2009: 304).

⁶Sharpley-Whiting (1999: 18).

(Washington, 2006: 85). Author Harriet Washington further explains that Bartmann was often “displayed nude or bedecked in animal skins” and that “she was made to stand naked at parties of the wealthy and to impersonate a chained animal in garish Piccadilly, where the mob paid a shilling a head to gape and shout vulgarities” (84-5). In sum, there was little distinction between Sarah’s exhibition as a “one-woman spectacle” and that of animals in a zoo, especially considering that her French guardian was an exhibitor of wild animals who displayed her in a cage and told her to act “like a wild beast” (1999: 19, 18; 2006: 85). Bartmann eventually turned to alcohol and succumbed to an early death in 1815, at the age of twenty-seven (2006: 85). To add final insult to Bartmann’s long life of injury, Cuvier “preserved her brain, vulva, and anus in glass jars, then stripped the flesh from her skeleton and hung it on display in Paris’s Musée de l’Homme,” not unlike one would do with an exotic animal one has conquered (2006: 85).

Given that Sarah’s body was associated with animality, a shift of interest in her from object of entertainment to object of scientific inquiry soon took place. At that time, very little distinction obtained between primates and blacks in the popular imagination (Washington, 2006: 24). It was thus that, “For the scientific community, she provided the missing link in the ‘great chain of being,’ the crucial step between humanity, that is Europeans, and animals” (Washington, 2006: 17). In 1815, Bartmann’s body was examined by a group of researchers (zoologists among them) for a three-day period in order to determine whether her body could help account for the evolutionary gap between humans and animals. The scientific community, troubled at the time by this “blind spot” in its vision, turned to Bartmann for their answer since she was a “highly developed animal” (Washington, 2006: 22). During the course of her three-day observation, Bartmann was asked to bare all for the observers. Cuvier explained,

Our drawings present each animal in a simple state and always in a profile because it is in this position that one can best seize the totality of the form and physiognomy; and we have taken care to provide a frontal drawing where necessary in order to better see and judge the animals (Washington, 2006: 23).

Here, we learn how Bartmann (and animal bodies more generally) were read as texts of scientific data. The researchers literally imposed their visual tools on the body to “see” the knowledge that lay there. Throughout his text, Derrida repeatedly invokes the phrase the “naked truth” to flag the commonly held belief that the truth must be laid *bare* in order to be seen. In line with this belief, it makes sense that the researchers felt they could ascertain the truth of bodies only if they too were revealed in *their* nakedness. So, in trying to figure out the “naked truth” of Sarah’s body, they requested that she be naked.⁷ But what did the researchers think they were able to read on Sarah’s body? Derrida probes, “Why would it belong to the essence of truth to be due, and nude...that is to say, owed to veracity” (2008: 21)? And why did they think they could look at Sarah’s body and see *her* truth (only to be later compared to *their* bodies, for *their* benefit)? What do we see when we look at the Other’s body, aside from our own projections? Perhaps Sarah’s, as well as the animal’s, body functions more as a reflective device, what Derrida calls a *psyché*, rather than a neutral text. Derrida asks, “But cannot this cat also be, deep within her eyes, my primary mirror?” (2008: 51)⁸

At this point, we might be wondering why Bartmann’s body was linked to *animality* of all things. Was it not enough to label her a “freak,” or a “monster” to account for her unusual appearance? How did the animal become such a central figure of reference here, as it has been historically in the oppression of so many, including slaves and women? A turn to Derrida will be instructive.

⁷ Sarah did not strip everything, but kept her genitals covered while on display. It was only after her death that researchers analyzed this part of her body. I discuss this later in the paper.

⁸ In his famous piece, “What is it like to be a bat?” Thomas Nagel further asks what it is even *possible* for us to know about the Other from our own vantage point. He criticizes the tendency to think we can know something about the experience of the animal Other outside of the human standards and tools we use to measure. Nagel states “I want to know what it is like for a *bat* to be a bat. Yet if I try to imagine this, I am restricted by the resources of my own mind, and those resources are inadequate to the task” (1979: 169). Similarly, Montaigne asks of man, “How does he know, by the force of his intelligence, the secret internal stirrings of animals? By what comparison between them and us does he infer the stupidity he attributes to them?” (as cited in Derrida, 2008: 6)

The Animal That Therefore I Am

Derrida begins by asking a question, “Since so long ago, can we say that the animal has been looking at us?” (2008: 3) This question has more than one sense for Derrida. First, he is speaking in the context of his writing, and how the question of the animal has always been of concern to him, both implicitly and explicitly. But his question also urges us to consider whether or not the animal has been just as important to human history as it has been to the history of Derrida’s writings. Has the animal been following us all along, just as it has followed Derrida (*est-ce que l’animal nous suit toujours*)? Has it been there not only explicitly, as our literal resource, but also implicitly, as our symbolic reference point? Do our conceptions of humanity *depend* on an originary invocation of the animal?

Stressing this question, Derrida famously describes his daily encounter with his little female cat, and the feeling of shame that arises in him at the moment he discovers himself naked in front of the animal’s gaze. Derrida elaborates on his experience with his cat by reference to the biblical story in Genesis. We can recall that before Eve eats from the tree of knowledge, it is an animal, a serpent to be exact, who provokes her to do so. The serpent encourages Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge by telling her that “in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). Having eaten from the tree, Eve then encourages Adam to do the same. Immediately both their “eyes... were opened” (3:7). Significantly, the moment they attain knowledge (and therefore the knowledge that they *are* naked), they feel ashamed of their nudity and cover themselves up with fig leaves (3:7). Indeed, Adam is so ashamed of his nudity that he hides himself so that God will not discover him in his nudity (3:11). But God recognizes that in order for Adam to *know* he is naked, he must have eaten from the tree of knowledge. God then banishes both Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden, but not before making them “coats of skins” to clothe them (3:21).⁹

⁹ The story of Cain and Abel is also instructive here. We can recall that Cain was a farmer and Abel was a shepherd. When the brothers came to God with sacrifices, God preferred Abel’s animal sacrifice to Cain’s crop sacrifice. Indeed, it was for this reason that Cain was jealous of Abel and thus ended up killing him. For God, the “appropriate” sacrifice was that of the animal body. Similarly, we can say that our “appropriate” sacrifice (required for us to relegate humanity to the heights of divine purity)

We can readily discern that Adam and Eve's knowledge, shame and nakedness coincide in the story of Genesis just as they do in Derrida's encounter with his cat. Derrida becomes aware of his nakedness in front of the gaze of an animal much like Adam and Eve become ashamed of their nudity in front of God. We can note that Derrida, like Adam, is "overseen, under surveillance, under the gaze of Jehovah," where God and the cat are paralleled (2008: 16). Adding to this what we have learned from the Genesis story, we might suppose that Derrida is really only *ever* ashamed of his nudity "in front" of the animal, because the animal presents the very conditions under which we conceive of ourselves as naked in the first place. In other words, since the serpent provided the very temptation that brought Eve to the knowledge of her nudity, the Biblical story can be taken to teach us that if it were not for the animal, humans would not experience shame about their nakedness at all. That is, it is the gaze of the animal that permits humans to see themselves as naked, and subsequently to feel ashamed. But "Ashamed of what and naked before whom?" (2008: 4) Derrida states,

I often ask myself, just to see, *who I am*-and who I am (following) at the moment when, caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal, for example, the eyes of a cat, I have trouble, yes, a bad time overcoming my embarrassment.

Whence this malaise? (2008: 3-4).

Why *would* Derrida feel ashamed of his nakedness in front of an animal? As Derrida is well aware, "It is generally thought... that the property unique to animals... is their being naked without knowing it" (2008: 4-5). Animals should theoretically be the very beings in front of whom our naked selves should feel *least* ashamed, freeing us to run around shamelessly naked in front of our pets. As feminist philosopher Lisa Guenther puts the question, "What is there to be ashamed of before a cat who seems impervious to shame, oblivious to the distinction between naked and clothed?" (2009: 152). So "whence this malaise" indeed (2009: 4)? Derrida asks, "Before the cat that

similarly depends upon and exploits the figure of the animal, who consequently absorbs all that we do not want to associate with ourselves (Genesis 4:2-5).

looks at me naked, would I be ashamed *like* a beast that no longer has the sense of its nudity? Or, on the contrary, *like* a man who retains the sense of his nudity? Who am I, therefore? Who is it that I am (following)?" (2008: 5-6)

Derrida seems to suggest that he is ashamed in at least one of two ways. First, Derrida's humanity is supposed to prove that he is more than "just" an animal, and the human ability to clothe oneself is taken to be evidence of this. As Derrida notes, "In principle, with the exception of man, no animal has ever thought to dress itself," or so the story goes (2008: 5). On this first version of shame, then, Derrida would feel embarrassed precisely because he is *not* an animal, and therefore should be clothed like a human, not "naked as a beast" (4). On the second version though, Derrida is "ashamed of being ashamed" (21). Here, Derrida realizes how much he resembles an animal in its pure nakedness, *despite* what he has been told about the stark differentiation between animals and humans. The animal then, in seeing Derrida naked, exposes his animality, and the realization that Derrida too is a body more animal than human. Under the animal's gaze, then, the veneer of humanity is troubled.

In wondering about the various reasons for which he might feel ashamed, we soon realize that Derrida's experience with his cat is the very thing meant to challenge the assumption that the animal has less knowledge than the human. This is because his experience reveals an ability to feel ashamed in front of the animal *despite* the judgments and arguments humanity has made regarding who can and cannot feel ashamed. If animals cannot have knowledge the way humans do, if they have not eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then presumably Derrida would not think the cat could *know* he is naked. Yet, he still feels ashamed and wants to cover up—and this assumes the animal *does* have knowledge about his nakedness. So, if Derrida feels ashamed, perhaps his classifications are mistaken. If an animal can know Derrida is naked, do animals really lack knowledge after all? The demarcation between human and animal intelligence is suddenly on shaky ground. In being surprised by his feeling of shame in front of the "unknowing" animal, then, Derrida has presented us with an event that shatters the strict categories we try to use to understand humans and animals. As Derrida explains, this experience takes place in a *contretemps*, a time before time that disrupts the normal course of events and that challenges the strict groupings according to which we understand humans and animals.

“This contretemps has only just begun giving us trouble or doing us harm in the area of the knowledge of good and evil” (2008: 5).

In rattling the concepts we have used to pigeon-hole so-called animals and humans into identity categories, Derrida’s experience with his cat raises a series of perplexing questions. Who has knowledge and who does not? Who knows about their nakedness? And what does it mean for humans to be naked if they are naked only at the moment they become ashamed of this nudity in front of an Other, and have a concomitant desire to cover themselves up? Perhaps we are talking about “two *nudities without nudity*” in both cases here (2008: 5). The first case is that in which the animal is not truly naked because it does not know it is naked. The second is that in which the *human* is not truly naked because it only becomes aware of its nakedness in relation to a feeling of shame, according to which it immediately desires to cover itself up. Either way, it is no longer clear who counts as naked in this scene. Human? Animal? Do these concepts make sense anymore? Guenther captures the point well,

Precisely because they are naked without knowing it, other animals are not naked in the same sense as human beings; their nakedness does not refer to a scandalous or improper lack of clothing, but rather to their proper way of being. ‘The animal, therefore, is not naked because it is naked’ (Derrida, 2002: 374), in other words, because it is merely naked, without an explicit awareness of this nakedness. ‘At least that is what is thought’. Human beings would seem to be distinctively aware of their nakedness; and yet, Derrida argues that this awareness turns on a feeling of shame which already covers the human body with cultural techniques that modify nakedness and mediate it in innumerable ways. ‘Man . . . would only be a man to the extent that he was able to be naked, that is to say to be ashamed, to know himself to be ashamed because he is no longer naked’ (Derrida, 2002: 374). Man only becomes aware of his nakedness at the moment when he feels the need for clothing that shame provokes, and so—like the other animals, if for different reasons—man is not naked even when he is naked (2009: 152-153).

In covering ourselves up with various “cultural techniques” the moment we become aware of our nakedness, we too cannot claim to be properly naked. So by “deconstructing the opposition between naked and clothed,” Derrida has effectively opened up a locus for the rupture of the categories human and animal (Guenther, 2009: 152). In challenging the idea that humans are clothed and animals are naked, he has pushed the limit of humanity, both conceptually and subjectively. The animal exposes this limit, undressing the category of the human to the point where it is destabilized. Derrida states, “the gaze called ‘animal’ offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say, the bordercrossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself” (2008: 12).

Following Derrida in his meditation on the cat, then, we can restate the following question: Can I be naked all on my own? Or, relatedly, can I be human without the animal, the subjugated Other *par excellence*? Derrida explains that in relegating the human to a distinct, superior realm of difference from the animal, we have come to think that humans are the only animals that can be truly naked at all. This is because this feeling of shame reveals that we have knowledge of ourselves (as naked and otherwise), ostensibly unlike other animals. But we forget that this “knowledge” arose *only in connection to and by invocation of the animal*. And it is for this very reason that Derrida is able to deconstruct the opposition between naked animals and clothed humans and show how little essential truth lies therein. But, as Derrida puts it, almost all major philosophers have conveniently forgotten that the cat is always watching, “before me... behind me,” “I who am (following) after it” (2008: 11). As he states, “Descartes forgets the serpent... that is to say, the behind. The serpent... is the animal’s behind...” (46). A turn back to the title of Derrida’s piece, “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)” (*L’animal que donc je suis*), will be illuminating. The French *je suis* denotes both the first-person constructions “I am” and “I follow,” stemming from the relevant verbs *être* and *suivre* (to be and to follow). In playing with the ambiguity of this verb formation, Derrida implicitly suggests that perhaps we cannot distinguish “I am” from “I follow” statements as readily as we might suppose. Indeed, he seems to suggest that *I am* only as *I follow* the animal, or that I exist only *after*, and thus in relation to, the animal. So Derrida, in playing on the equivocation between *suis* and *suis* (to be and to follow) seeks to challenge the dominant metaphysical tradition by suggesting that “to follow” cannot be understood without

“to be,” since it is not the case that we simply *are, simpliciter*, as if we do not *follow* (or literally come out of) and relate to relevant others.

The importance of the sense in which the animal is “behind” us cannot be overstated in this discussion. The animal has been there since the genesis of time, and has accordingly had a defining background presence. As the Bible makes clear, the animals were created *before* man. In having been there all along, they have thus been able to serve as a ready and fast point of differentiation from which man was able to invent his self-conception. This is why it is the *snake* in Genesis that brings Adam and Eve to knowledge of their nudity, because without the animal, the notion of human nakedness would never have gained its purchase. As Kelly Oliver puts it, “An animal, the snake ‘teaches’ man that he is distinct from other animals... This knowledge of his difference ushers in everything that we associate with humanity, from clothing and culture to time itself” (2009: 143).

“The Black Venus”

A turn back to the time of Sarah Bartmann reveals that her sexed and raced treatment likewise exposes an implied reliance on the figure of the animal, the animal that has been behind us, following us, since the time of Genesis, “the very genesis of time” (Derrida: 2008, 17). Sharpley-Whiting explains, “by the nineteenth century, the ape, the monkey, and orangutan had become the interchangeable counterparts, the next of kin, to blacks in pseudoscientific and literary texts” (1999: 24). Accordingly, Cuvier and his researchers made a direct link between Bartmann’s “animal-like features” and her race. During this time, the “light of white maleness” was thought to be able to “illuminate the dark continent” (1999: 24). In her paper “States of Undress: Nakedness and the Colonial Imagination,” Philippa Levine notes that the features Cuvier discovers on Bartmann remind him of the monkey, thus fating black Africans to a “state of barbarity” (2008: 26). Feminist and animal theorist Carol Adams likewise explains how black bodies were considered more animal-like and primitive than whites in the nineteenth century. Ironically, Adams explains that because black bodies were considered more animal-like, it was argued that they could survive without animal bodies (because they already had enough “animal body” in them?)

(1990: 40). Why could “savages” survive on a diet without animal food in contrast to Europeans? Quoting nineteenth-century doctor George Beard, Adams explains it was because “savages” were considered,

...little removed from the common animal stock from which they are derived. They are much nearer to the forms of life from which they feed than are the highly civilized brain-workers, and can therefore subsist on forms of life which would be most poisonous to us. Secondly, savages who feed on poor food are poor savages, and intellectually far inferior to the beef-eaters of any race (1990: 41).

Because black bodies were considered more animal than human, the way in which they were considered naked was defined accordingly. Levine explains that colonized people who did not wear clothing were understood in terms of primitive savagery. She explains that Europeans expected them to be totally shameless, and that “their lack of shame was in large measure definitional of the primitive” (2008: 197). The logic was that since these colonized people seemed to have no desire to cover up, they must be just as shameless and “as naked as a beast” (Derrida, 2008: 4). “To be primitive was to be in a state of nature, unschooled, unselfconscious, lacking in shame and propriety—and nothing better signified the primitive than nakedness” (Levine, 2008: 192).

This assumption of shameless animal-like nakedness carried over to discussions about colonized people who *did* wear clothing (Levine, 2008: 189). Levine explains that when Europeans requested photographs of undressed colonial bodies, part of the reason they thought they could get such pictures so easily was because colonial people, in their proximity to animals, were assumed to lack shame for their nakedness (2008: 193). However this was *in spite* of the fact that many colonial people refused to undress for the camera and clearly *did* experience discomfort and shame about their nudity. Levine explains that this fact was virtually ignored in favour of the view that people like Bartmann were like animals, shamelessly naked, and with a mental capacity more “simian-like” than human (probably lacking a full knowledge or understanding of their nakedness). As in Genesis, colonial people did not eat from the tree of knowledge. And just like animals, then, they were not ashamed of their own

nakedness. How could they be, since they knew as little as a monkey knows about its “nakedness” (as the story would have it)? Furthermore, Levine explains that when colonized people were shown clothed in pictures, the fact that they did not properly *understand* how to dress themselves was also highlighted (194). This further emphasizes the connection between knowledge (or a lack thereof), nakedness and animality in our discussion.

But how did Europeans account for the fact that they too were naked at times? Levine explains that Westerners erected a dichotomy “based centrally (if not exclusively) around a distinction between nakedness and nudity” (2008: 190). When Europeans were naked in pictures, they were *nude*, connoting a dignified and tasteful form of *human* nakedness. When colonized people were naked, however, they were anything but regal, much closer to the ground like an animal than the sky like a god. The fact that nakedness in the case of the colonized meant savagery (*even* in the instance of those who wore clothing), but in the case of the Europeans, it meant dignity or “nudity,” reveals the arbitrary character and racist undertones of nineteenth-century “scientific” readings of the body. Quoting two nineteenth-century anthropologists, Levine notes that “the study of difference... was directed towards the creation of hierarchy” (208). Coming to their research with convictions about the primitiveness and savagery of native bodies, scientists were anything but objective, reading naked bodies in their own bedrooms in a manner completely different from naked bodies in the “wild.”

The interpretations of naked colonial bodies as *animal* bodies cannot be overstated in this discussion. As has been shown, the figure of the animal became a central device in European colonists’ attempts to objectify and denigrate the colonized people. We need only turn to the time of slavery to see how the links between colonial bodies and animals become even more acute. These comparisons have been well-documented. As intersectional theorist Cathryn Bailey explains, “The very *genesis* of race in the United States occurred, in part, because of arguments that certain groups of humans were closer to animals in some evolutionary sense” (my emphasis, 2007: 44). Importantly, Bailey explains that the animal did not simply serve a supplementary role in accounting for the oppression of Africans. Rather, the use of the animal helped *generate* the correlative traits that were then accorded to both Europeans and Africans.

“It is not simply that the ‘animalization’ of Africans and Native Americans justified their mistreatment, but that notions of whiteness and civility were created in contrast to it. This is especially evident in the racist anthropological pseudosciences that produced such images as the profiles of the chimpanzee, ‘negro,’ and ‘Greek’” (44). The figure of the animal, then, has not only been haunting the history of scientific racism since it began, but has been contributing to the very identity *formations* of both oppressed and oppressor.

Bartmann’s supposed “untamed wildness” was also connected to a state of rampant, bestial sexuality linked to native people more generally in the nineteenth century. Lacking dignity and dress, the associations between raced people’s “state of nature and a potent sexuality were both long-standing and deep. To be a native was to be monstrously and overly sexual,” as wild as a beast (Levine, 2008: 193). Washington elaborates,

Khoi women’s dramatically endowed figures and especially their large, fleshy buttocks (medically termed *steatopygia*) were seen as markers for their sexual prowess... Most scientists agreed that the hot, damp tropical climate created a licentiousness and sexual profligacy in African women that was unknown among European women (2006: 83).

Baartmann [sic] embodied not only the boundary between man and animal but also the lure of the bestial, the base, and grotesquely hypersexual (84).

Although some people reportedly viewed Bartmann as a beautiful anomaly, it was in the context of fascination and exoticism, often coupled with jest (Sharpley-Whiting, 1999: 35). Sharpley-Whiting argues that any appreciation of Bartmann’s body as an exotic beauty was undercut by the “comedic verbiage” that was paired with it, and the reduction of her body to the “‘enormous butt’ of a joke” (1999: 34). Any reference to Bartmann’s sexual attractiveness was likewise undermined by an admission that she was “ultimately sexually undesirable” to the male Europeans (39). If Bartmann’s sexed oppression was animalized, then presumably sexual attraction to her would be more akin to bestiality than anything else.

Aside from the savage-like sexuality invoked here, people like Bartmann were also *anatomically* dissected with a research eye oriented specifically towards race. Upon her death, Cuvier “immediately unveiled Bartmann” in the name of science to reveal the most exciting “truth” of all about her race (Sharpley-Whiting, 1999: 27). Sharpley-Whiting (1999) explains,

Bartmann’s “monstrous” steatopygia was quickly superseded by the treasure Cuvier discovered between her thighs (218): “We did not at all perceive the more remarkable particularity of her organization; she held her apron (‘tablier’) carefully hidden, it was between her thighs, and it was not until after her death that we knew she had it” (215-16). The famous “Hottentot apron” is a hypertrophy, or overdevelopment, of the labia minora or nymphae (27).

Upon Bartmann’s death in 1815, Cuvier and his medical team were able to pull open her legs, which she apparently kept closed while on display. What they discovered was a so-called abnormally large set of inner labia, which they named an “apron.” This too was connected to Sarah’s supposed animality. “Was Sara [sic] of ‘the last race of the human species, or the negro race and the first of the apes’ just above the orangutan?” (Crais and Skully, 2009: 135). According to authors Clifton Crais and Pamela Skully, “Cuvier thought a key part of the answer lay in Sara’s [sic] genitals” (135). In fact, it was on the basis of these supposedly “overdeveloped” genitals that the Khoisan people were imagined to be a “divergent branch of humanity” in the first place, labelled “*Homo monstrosus monorchidei*” by zoologist Carl Linnaeus (Washington, 2006: 83). It was thus that Cuvier was not interested in seeing the “Hottentot apron” in any manner other than as confirmation of Bartmann’s primitive animality.

The term ascribed to Bartmann’s genitals, the “Hottentot apron,” is ironically suitable. What truth did Cuvier think this apron revealed that Bartmann’s legs covered over? Are not the concepts that Cuvier and his researchers used to describe Bartmann’s “overdevelopment” just as much aprons themselves, coverings that supposedly reveal the truth, but really do more to obscure than anything? Do we learn about Bartmann’s

“animality” when looking at her genitals, her “monstrous” sexuality? Or is this not simply another historical moment in which, as Nietzsche would say, the powerful define the powerless in line with their own agendas, and employ the animal as that which “stands in for what we cannot think and what we cannot accept about ourselves” (as cited in Oliver, 2010: 279)?

In discussing Bartmann’s sex and sexuality, it looks like the serpent has again reared its ugly head. Not only was Bartmann’s “savage-like sexuality” connected to wild animal urges, but her genitals were also taken to be further “evidence” of her animal-like status. If the animal did not exist, would Sarah’s oppression have played itself out the way it did? Would she have been paraded around as a spectacle in a cage, considered bestial in her sexuality, and ape-like anatomically? The answer is clearly no. In fact, the animal played such a central role in Bartmann’s oppression that, without it, her story would be so different we could no longer characterize it. Animality shaped Bartmann’s racial body, her status as part of the “savage,” colonial world versus the “civilized” world, and her sexuality all at once. To undermine the centrality of the animal figure in her oppression would be, as Derrida states, “simply too asinine [*bête*]” (2008: 30).

Varied Oppressions

One worry with Levine’s excellent piece on states of undress in colonial times concerns her lack of an interrogation of the strict (and, as I have been arguing, overriding) binary between animality and humanity that is invoked by Cuvier and his fellow researchers. In defense of the colonized, she states that “colonials were not always as shameless about nudity as Europeans seemed to expect them to be” and the “belief that lack of shame was in large measure definitional of the primitive was not always consonant with facts” (2008: 197). But although attempts to show that colonized people defied the stereotype of shamelessness raises the natives back up to the status of humanity, I worry that it does so only at the *expense* of the animal, and, ultimately, at the expense of all oppressed others whose identity and treatment have been so tightly linked to animality. As feminist and race theorists have variously argued, efforts to prove that oppressed persons can and do meet the norms of the

dominant (“rational”-white-male-human) class simply reasserts the power of the oppressor and, even more dangerously, validates the idea that these norms *should* be met in order for the oppressed to earn the treatment they seek. As legal theorist Catharine MacKinnon has noted, the “‘like-us’ model of sameness... misses animals on their own terms, just as it has missed women on theirs” (2004: 264). Attempts to bring animals or animal-like humans back up to the status of humanity only maintain the very binary that helped generate oppression in its myriad forms in the first place. Derrida’s discussion of the deeply entrenched animal-human divide should make us especially wary, then, of all attempts to rescue oppressed victims by saying they are unlike animals, since, as has been shown, the animal-human divide has been at work in the history of oppression since the beginning, with a presence both insidious and tenacious.

The question now becomes—how might we challenge this deep-seated animal-human binary that has been so central to the history of oppression? We can recall that Derrida’s discussion about his feeling of shame in front of the animal led to a series of questions, none of which could be definitively answered. Who is Derrida in this moment? Is his shame human, or animal? Why feel shame in front of the being who supposedly does not know? The questions dizzy the mind. “Who comes before and who is after whom? I no longer know which end my head is. Madness” (2008: 10). In this moment, in this *contretemps*, Derrida is calling our attention to his experience with the cat, “before” identity is named, “before” the concepts we have used to pigeon-hole so-called animals and humans. The notions encounter a slippage. Who is naked here, and who is not? The moment is thoroughly disruptive. My “humanity” and the cat’s “animality” are destabilized. He asks, “Who was born first, before the names?” (18) We are no longer sure. The concepts are not static; they are not reliable. In fact, the only thing on the horizon is pure possibility. “God’s exposure to surprise, to the event of what is going to occur between man and animal, this time before time has always made me dizzy. As if someone said, in the form of a promise or a threat: ‘You’ll see what you will see,’ without knowing what was going to end up happening” (17). It is interesting to note that, in this vertiginous moment, the one who is supposed to be subordinate is the one troubling (threatening) the concepts, and thus challenging our thoughts about who has the sovereign right to name. Adam strips the

power of naming the animal away from God, who will “see what [he] will see,” the same way Derrida’s cat strips the power of naming himself human away from Derrida.

However in calling our attention to the *contretemps*, this disruptive time “before” naming, Derrida is not trying to suggest that there is an experience we can *chronologically* access before names. This would be a rather anti-Derridean move, supporting a disjunction between the name and the thing. Rather, Derrida’s point is simply to note that there are experiences that *resist* conceptualization, that open up fields of possibility and that always challenge us to rework the identities and names we use. These are experiences that point us beyond names, to a time “before” that can no longer be reached. He is pointing us to the absolute *impossibility* of clean categorization. He is noting that our names and concepts *always* defy the complexity and singularity of the individuals and the experiences they attempt to capture:

If I say “it is a real cat” that sees me naked, this is in order to mark its unsubstitutable singularity. When it responds in its name... it doesn’t do so as the exemplar of a species called “cat,” even less so of an “animal” genus or kingdom. It is true that I identify it as a male or female cat. But even before this identification, it comes to me as *this* irreplaceable living being that one day enters my space, into this place where it can encounter me, see me, even see me naked. Nothing can ever rob me of the certainty that what we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualized [*rebelle à tout concept*] (2008: 9).¹⁰

If Derrida is calling our attention to experiences that resist conceptualization, what does he make of our use of the concepts “human” and “animal”? Ought we to redefine these groupings, or perhaps abandon the human-animal divide altogether? Derrida’s thoughts on this have been debated among several commentators. Matthew Calarco has stated that Derrida’s claim that “There is no interest to be found in debating something like a discontinuity, rupture, or even abyss between those who call themselves men and what [they] call the animal” is “one of the most dogmatic and

¹⁰ To my mind, the French “rebelle” connotes resistance or unwillingness more than refusal. A more appropriate translation would thus perhaps be “...here is an existence that resists conceptualization.”

puzzling moments in all of his writings” (Calarco, 2008: 145-6; Derrida 2008: 30). Indeed, why *would* Derrida insist on maintaining an abyss between humans and animals, when the very thing he seems to be doing is dismantling the supposed content of these categories?

However in his paper, “Life Beyond Biologism,” Ted Toadvine rightly explains that Derrida is more complicated than Calarco appreciates. Derrida does not simply want to maintain the animal-human abyss in order to deny any crossover. Rather, “At stake in Derrida’s approach is the very logic of the limits between the human and the animal, which must be confronted obliquely in order to destabilize the biologism-humanism alternative. This points us toward an abyssal logic that thickens and multiplies differences, eliminating any hierarchy between humans and animals” (2010: 247). In multiplying the abysses, we soon find that there is no obvious way in which we can cleanly maintain the human-animal dichotomy, since abysses now surround us to the point where we cannot see clearly. Derrida states,

The discussion becomes interesting once, instead of asking whether or not there is a limit that produces a discontinuity, one attempts to think what a limit becomes once it is abyss, once the frontier no longer forms a single indivisible line but more than one internally divided line; once, as a result, it can no longer be traced, objectified, or counted as single and indivisible (2008: 30-31).

A multiplication of abysses results in what Toadvine calls an “abyssal logic” that is more complex than a Darwinist continuism that challenges the human-animal binary in a different yet still problematic way (the latter of which Calarco seems to want to endorse) (2010: 251). As we have seen in the case of Sarah Bartmann, evolutionary logic does not necessarily imply the lack of a hierarchy. To the contrary, such a “breaking down” of the abyss between humans and animals in this regard has often resulted in even *more* oppression, and still vertical forms of exclusionary logic. Toadvine further acknowledges that subsuming the human within the category of “animality” does nothing to interrogate the idea of some unified group of “Animals” within which an infinite number of wholly different beings can be grouped (251). It is such that “Derrida’s own rejection of biologism seeks to avoid a correlative

humanism precisely by ‘thickening’ and ‘multiplying’ the differences, subjecting the logic of the abyss to an abyssal logic of limits” (251).

Conclusion

Bartmann’s story has hopefully served to highlight the centrality of the animal-human divide in dominant forms of oppression like racism, colonialism and sexism. In so doing, I hope to have shown that we must rigorously attend to the animal-human divide in our theorizing if we wish to combat oppressions of all varieties. It is crucial to recognize that the ways male, white humanness were defined in the European colonists’ imaginary were inextricably wound up with the figure of the debased animal. Since Genesis, “proper” humanity has been defined in opposition to the animal body, the latter of which went on to be derogatorily applied to myriad inferiorized others. This practice is still very much at work today, as indicated by the language of dehumanization and animalization on the contemporary U.S. political landscape (especially as it is applied in wartime and regarding the treatment of prisoners) (see Guenther, forthcoming in *JCAS* on this).

In thinking about how to battle oppression, gender and race theorist Georgia Warnke suggests that we must “imagine a life beyond sex and beyond race...” (2001: 135). But, as we have seen, Sarah Bartmann’s story proves that the strict dividing lines between femaleness and maleness, blackness and whiteness, colonizer and colonized are all caught up within networks of power that exploit and rely on the animal-human divide. Correlatively, they all work together to form a general notion of the “proper human.” Given the centrality of the animal-human binary I have been discussing in both raced and sexed oppression then, it is going to be crucial for us to expand Warnke’s imaginative scheme by thinking beyond humanity as well. It should be noted that this proposal is not meant to simply name a neglected form of oppression and argue that it ought to be considered. Of course, it is impossible to attend to all forms of oppression all the time. But, as I have argued, disrupting the animal-human will cause a *foundational* element inherent in these other forms of oppression to

crumble.¹¹ It is in this sense that proposals like that of Warnke, which purport to combat raced and sexed oppression, are seriously short-sighted. If the liberatory goals we strive for *depend* on attending to the figure of the animal alongside other forms of oppression, then we must think within, beyond and between not only race, sex and gender binaries, but, crucially, the animal-human binary as well.¹² A Derridean approach that multiplies differences and limits wherever possible can help illuminate the fabricated nature of claims about these so-called essential facts of our identities. Derrida introduces a new term, “animot,” intended to summon the multiple differences of all living creatures, covered over by the singular, ostensibly inclusive category “Animal.” He states, “*Ecce Animot*. Neither a species nor a gender nor an individual, it is an irreducible living multiplicity of mortals... a sort of monstrous hybrid”; it is “a multiplicity of heterogeneous structures and limits” (41, 48). Perhaps thinking beyond, between and within the animal-human binary can begin here.¹³

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¹¹ Of course, disrupting the animal-human binary will also have huge implications for the oppression of animals themselves. A full exploration of the importance of this implication is beyond the scope of this paper, but is nonetheless crucial to point out.

¹² Derrida makes a similar move with respect to sex difference. In his text, Derrida points to animal bodies that defy the male/female sexed body divide. He states that the silkworm, for instance, is an animal “welcomed on the threshold of sexual difference... beyond any sexual difference or rather any duality of the sexes” (2008: 36). Kelly Oliver (2010) makes this point in her book.

¹³ Many thanks to Chris Wells for his indispensable help with this paper.

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Beast and the Sovereign volume 1

by Jacques Derrida (2009)

Reviewed by Matt Applegate¹

Volume one of *The Beast and the Sovereign* offers the first of two seminars given by Jacques Derrida from 2001-2003 on the relation between animality and sovereignty. As such, it also offers insight into Derrida's intellectual trajectory and body of published work: *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, *The Work of Mourning*, *Acts of Religion*, and *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* are just some of the works published during the period in which the lectures were given. Derrida also refers back to *The Beast and the Sovereign* lectures in *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, published in 2004, where he performs an interrogation of sovereignty in an inverse fashion to that featured in lectures, briefly focusing on the relation of the werewolf to the outlaw, of the animal to the *voyou* in its communal and political formation, what he terms the *voyoucracy* (69). Arguably, however, *The Beast and the Sovereign* lectures are not merely supplementary materials to the published works or minor inquiries within Derrida's corpus into sovereign formation. Rather, arguments posed in volume one of *The Beast and the Sovereign* can be located at the heart of dominant themes in Derrida's later work including, but not limited to, a democracy to come, conditional and unconditional hospitality, calculability and incalculability, and the relation shared between state sovereignty, terrorism, and rogue states. Moreover, *The Beast and the Sovereign* lectures complicate these themes as Derrida locates the relation between animality and sovereignty as central to a deconstruction of the nation-state and central to a

¹ Matt Applegate is currently pursuing a PhD. at Binghamton University in Comparative Literature (Philosophy, Literature, and the Theory of Criticism). The focus of his work rests on several, intersecting sites of inquiry, primarily: Globalization and Literary Theory, Twentieth Century Literature, Cosmopolitanism, legacies of Deconstruction, Anarchist Studies, and the Manifesto. Matt can be contacted at: mapplega@gmail.com

deconstruction of the logic by which it persists. In the third session of the lectures, Derrida states this intention explicitly:

What I am seeking, elsewhere but in particular in this seminar, is a prudent deconstruction . . . of the dominant, classical concept of nation-state sovereignty (which is Schmitt's reference), without ending up with a depoliticization, a neutralization of the political (*Entpolitisierung*), but with another politicization, a repoliticization that does not fall in the same ruts of 'dishonest fiction'—while what an 'honest fiction' can be, and on which concept of fiction one is relying, remains to be found out. (75)

Derrida would echo and reformulate this sentiment three years later in *Rogues*, citing the process of deconstruction to be simultaneously the recreation of rationality, of its conditions of possibility, and thus the methods by which it would operate:

Can we not and *must* we not distinguish, even when this appears impossible, between, on the one hand, the compulsion or aut positioning of sovereignty . . . and, on the other hand, this postulation of unconditionality, which can be found in the critical exigency as well as the (forgive the expression) deconstructive exigency of reason? In the name of reason? For deconstruction, if something of the sort exists, would remain above all, in my view, an unconditional rationalism that never renounces . . . the possibility of suspending in an argued, deliberated, rational fashion, all conditions, hypotheses, conventions, and presuppositions, and of criticizing unconditionally all conditionalities, including those that still found the critical idea, namely, those of the *krinein*, of the *krisis*, of the binary or dialectical decision or judgment. (142).

It is then clear that Derrida's inquiry into the relation of sovereignty and animality is a radical philosophical inquiry positioned against and beyond state sovereignty. It is also clear that Derrida characterizes the *logos* and nation-state sovereignty to be intertwined, material constructs, contingent, and thus deconstructable. But in what ways does a consideration of the animal inform processes of deconstruction? How is a consideration of the animal central to a deconstruction of the *logos* as reason and to the sovereignty of the state?

While Derrida covers much in the thirteen sessions comprising the first seminar, two sections in particular address the problems and questions established above. In session two, Derrida announces the importance of a political dissymmetry expressed in the phrase “the sovereign *like a God, like a beast*” (57). On Derrida’s view, the formation of sovereign power and the methods by which it operates have historically been assumed to be both ‘proper to man’ and positioned in-between two figures: God, a figure of absolute sovereignty above the law, and the beast or the animal, a figure below the law, without recourse to sovereign power or right. The relation between the beast and the sovereign thus rests on the operation of sovereign power as a relation of force. And it is from this sovereign formation, the sovereign *like a God*, the sovereign *like a beast*, that the relation between sovereignty and reason, between arguments posed in *The Beast and the Sovereign* and, later, in *Rogues*, become enmeshed. In this eighth seminar, Derrida writes:

The word “reason,” *on the one hand*, the reason given, alleged presumed by the stronger, whether or not he be right [*avoir raison*], whether or not this reason be rational or not . . . and “reason,” *on the other hand*, can name the right that he has [*la raison qu’il a*], the good and just reason he has to exercise his force and make it predominate, his greater and higher power, his sovereign power, his all-power, his superlative power, his sovereignty. Whence the third means or third implication of the idiomatic use the word “reason,” namely that the sovereign . . . acts as if he had reason to judge and legitimate the reason he gives because he is the strongest . . . (208).

Here, we are witness to the ongoing coproduction of rationality and sovereign power, to the coproduction of the law and to the material conditions of possibility for rationality itself. However, within Derrida’s schema, the coproduction of the law and of rationality concomitantly produces sovereignty as both the reason of the stronger and an irrational and ambiguous figure. One is unable to discern between the sovereign beyond the law as God, as the individual with the right not to respond to the law, to suspend the law, and to stand beyond the law in silence, or as the beast, the form of life that the law does not recognize, is not allowed to accept, and thus forcefully positioned outside of it in silence.

The work of sovereign power is at once twofold. On the one hand, Derrida provides a description of the ways in which sovereign power understood as the reason of the stronger operates. On the other hand, Derrida provides a description of the formation of sovereign power as the reason of the stronger that reveals the beast or the animal to constitutive of it, and thus internal to it. Here, we are reminded of the figure of the Other in *The Other Heading*, the figure of the enemy in *Politics of Friendship*, or the figure of the foreigner in *Of Hospitality*. It is accordingly the function of sovereign power, its actual operation, that provides the conditions for its deconstruction and, as Derrida will argue, provides the conditions for the deconstruction of what is thought to be ‘proper to man.’ Thus, the animal emerges in the seminar as something more than a trope or a figure against which sovereign power is established.

As the lectures move toward their conclusion, an interrogation of the material existence of sovereign power and its philosophical construction with and against God and the animal, calls what is ‘proper to man’ into question. The twelfth seminar, largely dedicated to a critique of Giorgio Agamben’s formulation of *bios* and *zoe* in *Homo Sacer* and *State of Exception*, lays the groundwork for a deconstruction of ‘what is proper to man,’ a deconstruction of sovereign power as the reason of the stronger, and thus the logic by which it persists, in and through a critique of Martin Heidegger. On Derrida’s account, Heidegger’s task in the *Introduction to Metaphysics* is to “rethink in an original way the relation between *logos* and *physis*,” between what we can roughly call reason and nature and one’s ethical obligation to nature (317). Further, this project leads Heidegger to question how “*logos*, as reason and understanding, [came] to reign . . . over Being at the beginning of Greek philosophy” (318). These tasks operate in and through a double movement that, on the one hand, attempt to liberate Being from the violently imposed sovereignty of *logos* as reason, but, on the other hand, establish a line of demarcation between the human and the animal that reserves ethics for the human as the human is distinguished from the animal absolutely. Here, Derrida identifies two projects in Heidegger’s *Letter on Humanism* that provide the basis for his critique.

1. *First stage*. Heidegger wants first of all to show that the determination of man as a *rational animal* is insufficiently humanist, as it were, that it misses the humanity of man, what is proper to man. And what thus misses the essence of man is metaphysics. 2. *Second stage*. Heidegger denounces the biologism, the biologicistic reduction of this definition of man. And that means that the metaphysics of classical humanism, the metaphysics that is not humanistic enough, is deep down, the ally of, accomplice of biologism and zoologism. (322)

It is thus, for Derrida, the relation of biologism and zoologism, *bios* and *zoe*, that prefigures the relation shared between sovereignty and reason.

It is precisely in the relation of biologism and zoologism, what others have termed bio-power, that, following Heidegger, works to establish 'what is proper to man,' that attempts to liberate the 'humanity of man' from its relation to the irrational, the inhuman, the unclean, the animal, and return it to its pure Being. However, the intervention that much of the lectures works toward is precisely that in the relation of biologism and zoologism another politicization, a repoliticization against the nation-state, against 'what is proper to man,' against sovereignty as the reason of the stronger, can be fomented. And it is through the relation of biologism and zoologism in favor of politicization against and beyond the state that the question of the animal is established as central to processes of deconstruction. *The Beast and the Sovereign* lectures thus provide a fertile complex of philosophical and political relations that works to position the question of the animal centrally within philosophical discourse itself and necessitates a consideration of the animal within radical or anti-statist philosophical and political projects. Finally, *The Beast and the Sovereign* lectures complicate both the formation and operation of bio-power and bio-politics, illustrating that a consideration of biologism and zoologism without concomitantly thinking the relation of animality and sovereignty lacks a critical insight into the operation of bio-power and into possible positive projects for bio-politics. In this way, Derrida positions his later philosophical work in conversation with Agamben, Michel Foucault, and Antonio Negri while laying a clear path of inquiry for the second seminar.

What is Posthumanism?

by Cary Wolfe (2009)

Reviewed by Greg Pollock¹

As I prepared to read Cary Wolfe's latest book, *What is Posthumanism?*, I wondered how much hermeneutic effort would be required to answer the titular question. To my pleasure, Wolfe gives a clear definition of what he means by “posthumanism,” and how it contrasts with others' usage, in the first few pages. For Wolfe, posthumanism is the set of questions confronting us, and way of dealing with those questions, when we can no longer rely on “the human” as an autonomous, rational being who provides an Archimedean point for knowing about the world (in contrast to “humanism,” which uses such a figure to ground further claims).

Wolfe's posthumanism should be taken as “after humanism” rather than the-ism form of a substantive being called “the posthuman.” Both traditional humanism and the techno-ecstasy of “the posthuman” or “transhuman,” he argues, lead to “an *intensification* of humanism” because they retain the fundamental gesture of leaving behind constraint in liberating their real selves (xv). All humanisms share some conception of freedom—autonomy, agency, intention, and rationality are popular ones—that secures exceptional ontological value for humans through nonhuman lack. In addition to distinguishing his position from humanism and transhumanism, Wolfe points out that there are also real and valuable differences even among those who share his basic coordinates, like Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour and Judith Butler.

Those allied figures are largely absent from *What is Posthumanism?*, in which Jacques Derrida and Niklas Luhmann do the lion's share of the theoretical labor (and as a result, one's opinion of the book will depend largely on one's feelings about those two and Wolfe's reading of them). Wolfe's combination of different intellectual traditions is refreshing: though Derrida is only obliquely challenged (over

¹Greg Pollack can be contacted at: pollockgf@gmail.com

vegetarianism, more about which later), Wolfe's juxtaposition of Derridean deconstruction (widely disseminated in US literature departments) with similar moves in second-order systems theory (largely neglected by US literature departments) recovers what was radical and invigorating about Derrida in the first place.

Glossing Dietrich Schwanitz, Wolfe notes how deconstruction and systems theory mirror each other around the relation between impossibility and possibility:

the starting point for systems theory is the question of what makes order possible and how highly organized complexity, which is highly improbable, comes into being at all. Deconstruction, on the other hand, begins with taken-for-granted intransigent structures of logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence that are already ensconced in textual and institutional form, and then asks how the subversion of those structures by their own elements can be revealed. (13-4)

Deconstruction and second-order systems theory start from opposite questions—how can we show incoherence? how can we understand coherence?—but proceed, Wolfe suggests, through essentially the same maneuvers.

For Luhmann, a system engages with its environment precisely because it is closed to it; “openness from closure” is something of a mantra for *What is Posthumanism?* (15). All references by a system to other beings in the environment are really references to designations originating from the system's own structure. Wolfe cites the example of the legal system: “legal” and “illegal” is the fundamental distinction of the juridical world, but both designations originate from the “legal” half (15). This, of course, is the problematic Kant laid out for modern philosophy, from which Hegelian dialectics was supposed to supply escape. The Hegelian response is not specifically taken up in *What is Posthumanism?*, though one of its more popular forms, Žižek's Lacanian Marxism, is discussed with regard to *Dancer in the Dark* in chapter 7, where Wolfe argues that Žižek conserves a metaphysics of voice to provide coherence for the subject. In short, the dialectical way out of Kant's “settlement with skepticism,” to use Cavell's frequently cited formulation, is either too local and unable to address the

second-order complexity of the system/environment relation, or makes ontological generalizations by re-importing substance by another name (70).

Where Kant concedes that self-reference is inescapable but finds solace in the power of reason to recognize its formal limits—most notably in the sublime experience, which Wolfe revisits in chapters 8 and 9—Luhmann refuses any sleight of hand to surmount Kant’s original insight that systems are self referential. But—and here’s why Luhmann is so important to Wolfe’s posthumanism—by insisting on this closure, Luhmann is also able to accept the paradox that, because this border is not permeable, self-reference is simultaneously hetero-reference. To continue with the juridical example, the legal system builds up internal complexity (the different kinds of courts, for example) by reference to its fundamental self-instituted distinction (legal/illegal), and at the same time that internal complexity constitutes an ongoing response to the complexity of its environment. And whereas the dialectical solution to Kant’s impasse revolved around “the subject”—*The German Ideology* makes that critique as well as any text, and, as Derrida argues in *Specters of Marx*, marks the spectrality of the Marxian “subject”—Luhmann’s account of the simultaneity of self- and hetero-reference works for any system because it is not founded, like the Kantian or Hegelian solutions, on the humanist assumption that there is a thing called “the subject” that centers or escapes from or redeems an otherwise constrained world.

Without the humanist baggage, Luhmann’s second-order systems theory departs from its more programmatic first-order incarnations (associated with the likes of Norbert Weiner and Gregory Bateson) in a movement paralleling that from structuralism to poststructuralism. In each case, the application of powerful explanatory mechanisms to the emergence of the discourse itself (as in Derrida’s “White Mythology”) reveals and undercuts (“deconstructs”) the hidden, exceptional position conserved in the theorist-as-subject. Wolfe’s close comparison of their procedures and conclusions shows that the humanist hypothesis has been rigorously devalued by both its scientific and philosophical/aesthetic (institutionally, “the humanities”) achievements.

Wolfe’s theorization of posthumanism is not a wildly new creation—and I don’t think he claims it to be—so much as a synthesis of two of the most important and comprehensive schools of contemporary thought. His glosses of Derrida’s and

Luhmann's demanding texts are as clear as humanly possible, and he is consistently crisp in his criticisms of vestigial humanist habits in purportedly posthumanist projects. In chapter 4 Wolfe maps the permutations of humanism and posthumanism as a useful reference for positioning himself (and Haraway, Butler, Latour, etc.) vis-a-vis, on the one hand, anti-foundationalists like Žižek and Richard Rorty who nevertheless reconstruct a world where humans are special and on top, and on the other hand, animal rights philosophers like Tom Regan and Peter Singer who argue that nonhumans are ethically equal to humans but do so through traditional humanist categories.

Over against humanist posthumanism and posthumanist humanism, Wolfe argues we need to “find a mode of thought adequate” to the demands of posthumanist posthumanism (xviii). Thus the site of intervention for *What is Posthumanism?* is decisively that of philosophy and thought:

when we talk about posthumanism, we are not just talking about a thematics of the decentering of the human in relation to either evolutionary, ecological, or technological coordinates...rather, I will insist that we are also talking about *how* thinking confronts that thematics, what thought has to become in the face of those challenges. (xvi)

The commitment to the problematic of “thought” is consistent with Wolfe's application of the principle of “openness from closure” in the domain of academic disciplinarity. The posthumanities, he argues, should not be an interdisciplinary muddle that renders the academic palette gray, but a set of heterogeneous disciplines enriching each other by knowing their own material the best—as he demonstrates convincingly in chapter 2, applying Derrida's work to Daniel Dennett's slippery use of “language.”

At the same time, the emphasis on “thought” displaces attention to actual nonhuman beings in *What is Posthumanism?*. This is not to say that Wolfe's conception of “thought” is a side door for a uniquely human capability—it isn't. It just has the effect of making actual nonhumans less relevant to the conversation. This is the complication Haraway has raised regarding Derrida's essay “The Animal that

Therefore I am (More to Follow).” Even when Derrida speaks of seeing “a real cat, truly, believe me, a *little cat*. It isn’t the figure of a cat,” he still turns the encounter with the cat into a site to reflect on the “textual canon of Western philosophy and literature” rather than “become curious about what the cat might actually be doing, feeling, thinking.” (Derrida 374; Haraway 19-20). Wolfe’s discussion of representationalism in activist art and architecture in chapters 6 and 8, respectively, is just as apt as Derrida’s rejection of “imperializing” ways of seeing animals, but likewise remains more curious about human artifacts than actually existing nonhumans.

Linked to this, the discussion of ethics remains at the level of Derrida’s studied refusal to commit to rules that could provide a shoehorn for the calculability of the other. There is “an essential tension in Derrida’s work on ethics between his insistence that we pay vigilant attention to the particular instance of decision...without letting formulae or maxims do the work for us, and a general law or economy of iterability that would render such decisions nonuniversalizable” (96). In concluding his excellent survey of different modalities of humanism in the ethical consideration of nonhumans in chapter 3, Wolfe writes that:

Derrida is of little use in enabling us to formulate new guidelines about particular surgical or experimental procedures...But he is of immense use in forcing us to live with the fact that no matter how such policies are drawn, the distinction between human and animal should be of no use in drawing them. (98)

Ethics is split between a “pragmatically determined” instance of the singular decision and the yet-to-come structure of “the ethical” that deconstructs the generalization of any actual law. Vegetarian or vegan commitments, which would appear like a justified response to the particular procedures of factory farming, are ethically suspect because they reintroduce rules not determined by the singularity of the occasion. The deconstructive vegan would therefore be pushed into some form of ethical occasionalism to say that never eating meat (because its production as “meat” is only conceivable within the horizon of “the distinction between human and animal”) is, on each discontinuous occasion, a pragmatic determination based on the particular slaughter of the being whose flesh is on offer, rather than because the meat-making

industry is brutally humanist and then some. Such ethical occasionalism wouldn't be a terrible attitude to have about flesh-eating, but it seems more complicated and less honest than it could be.

Rather, the second-order systems theory running throughout *What is Posthumanism?* provides a vocabulary for articulating sumptuary and deconstructive commitments together. The Derridean commitment to non-commitment isn't uncertainty—it is really the foundational ethical gesture toward “the ethical” itself. But the object of ethics, as acknowledged in its “pragmatic” moment, is not just “the ethical” but the actual beings outside of that system. Thus the self-reference of the ethical, its accrual of internal complexity, is absolutely cut off from actual other systems *and* therefore subject to them at the same time. The ethical attitude toward “the ethical” must “re-enter” (one of Wolfe's favorite terms) ontic determinations, and should do so on the basis of the deconstruction of the human/animal distinction. This would yield an iterative commitment more like the oath sworn on the not-present specter in *Specters of Marx* than the rule criticized by Derrida in “Eating Well.”

As is often the case in *What is Posthumanism?*, there is not space here to pursue this line of thought fully. Wolfe does not dispatch the question of posthumanism but clarify it as the meta-framework for future research agendas in the erstwhile humanities. *What is Posthumanism?* is not beyond critique, but relevant objections will still inhabit the philosophical world that Wolfe has mapped in this book.

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JCAS: AUTHOR GUIDELINES

Editorial Objectives

The **Journal for Critical Animal Studies** is open to all scholars and activists. The journal was established for the purpose of fostering academic study of critical animal issues in contemporary society. While animal studies are increasingly becoming a field of importance in the academy, much work being done under this moniker take a reformist or depoliticized approach that fails to mount more serious critique of underlying issues of political economy and speciesist philosophy.

JCAS is an interdisciplinary journal with an emphasis on animal liberation philosophy and policy issues. This journal was designed to build up the common activist's knowledge of animal liberation while at the same time appealing to academic specialists to address the important topic of animal liberation. We encourage and actively pursue a diversity of viewpoints of contributors from the frontlines of activism to academics. We have created the journal for the purpose of facilitating communication between the many diverse perspectives of the animal rights movement. Thus, we especially encourage submissions that seek to create new syntheses between differing disputing parties and to explore paradigms not currently examined.

Suggested Topics

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

The reviewing process

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

Manuscript requirements

The manuscript should be in MS WORD format, in 1.5 line spacing and 12 point Times New Roman. Good electronic copies of all figures and tables should also be provided. All manuscripts should be run through an American English spell check prior to submission.

As a guide, we ask that **Regular Essays** are between 2000-8000 words, and have limited endnotes. In exceptional circumstances JCAS will consider publishing **extended essays** (up to 15,000 words). Authors should supply a brief **abstract** of the paper (of no more than 200 words). **Book Reviews** are normally between 2000-3000 words long.

A brief **autobiographical** note should be supplied which includes full names, affiliation, e-mail address, and full contact details.

References to other publications must be in Harvard style and be carefully checked for completeness, accuracy and consistency.

You should cite publications in the text: using the first named author's name (Best, 2006) or citing both names of two (Best and Nocella, 2006) or when there are three or more authors (Best et al., 2006). At the end of the paper a reference list in alphabetical order should be supplied:

For books: Surname, Initials (year), Title of Book, Publisher, Place of publication. e.g. Gray, J. (2002), *Straw Dogs*, Granta Books: London

For book chapters: Surname, Initials (year), "Chapter title", Editor's Surname, Initials (Ed.), Title of Book, Publisher, Place of publication, pages. E.g. Greenbrier, T. (2006) "Against Civilization, For Reconnection to Life!", in Best, S. and Nocella, A.J. (Eds) *Igniting a Revolution: Voices in Defense of the Earth*, AK Press, Oakland, pp. 198-203.

For journals: Surname, Initials (year), "Title of article", Journal Name, volume, number, pages. e.g. Cudworth, E. (2008), "'Most Farmers Prefer Blondes': The dynamics of anthroparchy in Animas' becoming meat", *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, pp. 32-45.

For published conference proceedings: Surname, Initials (year of publication), "Title of paper", in Surname, Initials (Ed.), Title of published proceeding which may include place and date(s) held, Publisher, Place of publication, Page numbers.

For unpublished conference proceedings: Surname, Initials (year), "Title of paper", paper presented at Name of Conference, date of conference, place of conference, available at: URL if freely available on the internet (accessed date).

For working papers: Surname, Initials (year), "Title of article", working paper [number if available], Institution or organization, Place of organization, date.

For encyclopedia entries (with no author or editor): Title of Encyclopedia (year) "Title of entry", volume, edition, Title of Encyclopedia, Publisher, Place of publication, pages.

For newspaper articles (authored): Surname, Initials (year), "Article title", Newspaper, date, pages.

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