



Knowing  
Animals

Edited by

Laurence Simmons and Philip Armstrong

Human  
Animal  
STUDIES



Brill

# Knowing Animals

# Human Animal Studies

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VOLUME 4

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Laurence Simmons and Philip Armstrong



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“...and already the knowing animals are  
aware that we are not really at home in our  
interpreted world.”  
—Rainer Maria Rilke, “Duino Elegies”



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## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Philip Armstrong teaches English and Cultural Studies at the University of Canterbury, Aotearoa New Zealand, and is the author of *Shakespeare's Visual Regime* (2000) and *Shakespeare in Psychoanalysis* (2001). More recently he has published articles (in *Society and Animals*, *ELH* and *Textual Practice*) on literary representations of animals, and his book on this topic (which includes studies of Defoe, Swift, Mary Shelley, Melville, Wells, Hemingway, Lawrence, Atwood and Coetzee) will be published by Routledge in 2007.

Brian Boyd, University Distinguished Professor in the Department of English, University of Auckland, though best known for his many award-winning books on and editions of Vladimir Nabokov, has published in eleven languages on American, English, Greek, Irish, New Zealand and Russian literature, from epics to comics. He has recently completed a book on evolution and fiction, *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition and Fiction* (Homer and Dr. Seuss) and (with Stanislav Shvabrin) an edition of Nabokov's verse translations, *Verse and Versions*.

Barbara Creed is Professor of Cinema Studies at the University of Melbourne. She is the author of *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993); the editor of *Body Trade: Captivity, Cannibalism and Colonialism* (2001), and most recently the author of *Phallic Panic: Film, Horror and the Primal Uncanny* (2005). She is currently writing a book on the influence of Darwinian theory on the cinema.

Rick De Vos lectures in the Postgraduate programme in the Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia. His research interests include extinction, performance and television.

Catharina Landström was awarded a PhD in Theory of Science from Göteborg University in 1998, after which she spent three years doing postdoctoral research on the relationships between biological control research and other aspects of Australian culture; her chapter in this volume emerges from this project.

Alphonso Lingis is Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at the Pennsylvania State University. During the 1990s he developed an extensive international reputation as a radical philosopher whose work is situated at the intersection of several disciplinary fields. Among his many books are *Deathbound Subjectivity* (1989), *Foreign Bodies* (1994), *The Imperative* (1998), *Dangerous Emotions* (1999), *Trust* (2004), and *Body Transformations* (2005).

Annie Potts teaches in the School of Culture, Literature and Society at the University of Canterbury, Aotearoa New Zealand. She is the author of *The Science Fiction of Sex: Feminist Deconstruction and the Vocabularies of Heterosex* (2002) and lead editor of *Sex and the Body* (2004). She is currently a principal investigator (with Philip Armstrong) on a three-year study entitled “Kararehe: The Animal in Culture in Aotearoa New Zealand”. Annie is also writing a book on the natural and cultural history of the chicken as part of the Reaktion *Animal Series*.

Tanja Schwalm is currently writing a doctoral thesis at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand. Her research examines literary representations of animals in postcolonial magic realist fiction. Her chapter here complements her article on “Circensian Animal Spaces,” recently published in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*.

Laurence Simmons is an Associate Professor in the Department of Film, Television and Media Studies at the University of Auckland. He has written widely on New Zealand film, has published a book on contemporary New Zealand painting and photography, *The image always has the last word* (2002), and has co-edited *Derrida Downunder* (2001), *Baudrillard West of the Dateline* (2003) and *From Ž to A: Žizek at the Antipodes* (2005). His latest book, *Freud's Italian Journey* (2006), discusses the importance of Italy for Freud's texts on the visual arts and literature and for the elaboration of psychoanalysis in general.

Allan Smith is a Senior Lecturer at Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland University. He has worked as a curator of contemporary art at City Gallery, Wellington and Auckland Art Gallery, and has written on a wide range of topics in contemporary art.

Helen Tiffin is best known as author of *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures* (1989; with Bill Ashcroft and Gareth

Griffiths), still regarded as a foundational text in postcolonial theory. She taught in the English Department of the University of Queensland for many years and was instrumental in making it a centre for postcolonial studies; since then she has taught at Queens University, Ontario, and now at the University of Tasmania in Hobart.

Ian Wedde, one of New Zealand's most respected writers, has been publishing poetry and prose in New Zealand since 1966 and was art critic for *The Evening Post* from 1983 until 1990. He was awarded the Burns Fellowship in 1972, and since then his grants include the Writers' Bursary 1974, the Scholarship in Letters 1980, 1989, the Victoria University writing fellowship 1984 and the Meridian Energy Katherine Mansfield Memorial Fellowship in 2005. Ian served from 1994–2004 as head of humanities and art and visual culture at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. His latest books are a collection of essays and talks, *Making Ends Meet* (2005), a poetry collection, *Three Regrets and a Hymn to Beauty* (2005) and a novel, *The Viewing Platform* (2006).





## BESTIARY: AN INTRODUCTION

Philip Armstrong and Laurence Simmons

Every so often there emerges a new intellectual paradigm that provokes a flurry of new knowledge. Over the last two decades the humanities and social sciences have been experiencing such an event: the ‘animal turn’, comparable in significance to the ‘linguistic turn’ that revolutionized humanities and social science disciplines from the mid-twentieth century onwards.<sup>1</sup> As well as flipping some familiar areas of knowledge on their heads, the inter- and multi-disciplinary field of ‘animal studies’ gives a new license to scholars in the humanities and social sciences to speak with authority about aspects of the so-called ‘natural world’.<sup>2</sup>

Researchers in animal studies examine the cultural, philosophical, economic and social means by which humans and animals interact.<sup>3</sup> Along with material practices—such as farming, hunting, science, pet-keeping and so on—significant modes of this interaction also occur at the levels of art, thought and popular culture. This is because the very idea of the human—the way we understand and experience ourselves as humans—is closely tied up with ideas about animals. Many of the concepts, dispositions and sensibilities that comprise ‘human nature’ rely upon perceived differences and similarities between ourselves and other animals: distinctions between nature and culture, reason and instinct,

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<sup>1</sup> We owe the phrase ‘animal turn’ to Sarah Franklin, who used it in conversation during the annual conference of the Cultural Studies Association of Australasia, in December 2003, the event that first gave rise to this volume and several of the papers included in it.

<sup>2</sup> In this respect animal studies obviously has much in common with socio-cultural forms of environmental studies and with ecocriticism, fields that have also gathered a powerful academic and scholarly momentum in recent decades. In many cases the origins, methods and aims of animal studies are shared with those of environmental and ecocritical studies, but ultimately the two paradigms should be considered simultaneously distinct and complementary, especially since each sometimes critiques the other’s methodologies, assumptions and findings.

<sup>3</sup> For fuller explanation of the field, and its development, see the inaugural editorial by Kenneth Shapiro in the journal *Society and Animals* (Shapiro 1993); see also the ten-year anniversary issue of the journal, which assesses the gains made by animal studies scholarship over its first decade (Shapiro 2002).

mind and body; commonly invoked traits such as humaneness, inhumanity, beastliness, compassion, sentiment. What makes animal studies fresh and challenging is that its practitioners consider humans as animals amongst other animals, while refusing to do so from an exclusively or necessarily biological point of view. (It is for this reason that the field is sometimes referred to as ‘Human-Animal Studies’).

Such approaches represent a breakdown of two powerful hegemonies: that of the life sciences, which had until recently ruled the animal kingdom as their sole domain, subject only to the laws of positivism; and that of humanism, which dictated that studies in culture, history, philosophy and society should focus exclusively on the human. Challenges to this ‘two cultures’ model of knowledge have come thick and fast over the last decade or so, from thinkers as diverse in their approaches as Bruno Latour (1993), Edward O. Wilson (1999) and Stephen Jay Gould (2003). Earlier, Michel Foucault anticipated this disassembly of Enlightenment categories of knowledge when he introduced his history of the modern order of things by citing Jorge Luis Borges’s pastiche of a “certain Chinese encyclopedia,” according to which

animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies. (Borges, cited in Foucault [1966] 1994, xv)

Like the pre-modern bestiary, Borges’s hoax reminds us of the artificiality of any mode of thought that seeks “to tame the wild profusion of existing things.” His catalogue insists that the relationship between human meanings and animal phenomena is inseparable, myriad, astonishing and unsettling. The creatures that occupy our taxonomies are never purely nonhuman. They are never free of us. Their bodies, habits and habitats are shaped by human designs; they are contaminated by, but also resistant to, our philosophies, theologies, representations, interests, intentions. On the other hand, and just as surely, our concepts and practices are never purely human in the first place. For we are not free of the animals either, although the tradition of humanism—whose ruins we inhabit—promised that we should be. Animality infests us, plagues us, goes feral on us, As Bruno Latour has suggested, if we are to speak of anthropomorphism in our view of animals, must we not also speak of zoomorphism in our perceptions of the human? (1993, 137)

The present volume, then, is kind of mixed human-animal habitat into which diverse species have been introduced, to intermingle and interbreed, appropriately or not. The essays collected here track the cultural organisms that result, whose flesh is (at least partly) conceptual and textual: paper tigers, beast fables, anthropomorphs, humanimals, l'animot. So it seems best to introduce this collection by emulating one of the oldest of textual assemblies designed for knowing animals: the bestiary.

*On Agents and Anthropomorphs*

During the heyday of modernity, anthropomorphism—finding human qualities in nonhuman beings—became an epistemological vice, a symptom of knowing animals mistakenly. As Brian Boyd puts it,

the positivists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries rejected ‘anthropomorphism’ in studying animal behavior, declaring unscientific our age-old tendency to read animals in mentalistic terms. Animal behavior would be measured in laboratories and explained not in ‘proximate’ terms but in ‘functional’ ones: not as the actions of agents, but as the passive products of evolution, as the workings of survival machines.  
(p. 232 this volume)



Despite the authority of this scientific positivism, however, anthropomorphs never became extinct. Rather they multiplied and mutated, especially in the arts and in popular culture. Now—as the rule of modernity decays—humanities scholars, social scientists, writers and artists have begun to coax these anthropomorphs out of hiding, to re-evaluate the mixed-breed byproducts of the modern attempt to separate (human) society from (nonhuman) nature.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For an excellent recent sampling of animal studies work on anthropomorphism see Daston and Mitman (2005).

Some of the essays in this volume examine the socio-cultural dimensions of scientific knowledges (see those by Landström, de Vos, and Armstrong). But animal studies can also bring the insights and methods of science to bear on human artistic and cultural production. Brian Boyd's chapter offers a magisterial survey of the potential implications of evolutionary theory for study of the arts, focusing particularly on the meaning and function of nonhuman animals in narrative fiction, from the Book of Genesis to *Moby-Dick*, from Shakespeare's Caliban to the cyborgs of science fiction, from the satire of *Gulliver's Travels* to the animal fables of contemporary cartoonists and graphic novelists. According to Boyd, the enduring power of anthropomorphism in our narratives suggests a mental structure with evolutionary origins and advantages, whose function is to allow children and adults to account for and respond to nonhuman events, causes and agents—including other animals—in a socially integrated and advantageous way.

In common with the majority of animal studies work, Boyd's pursuit of this thesis allows him to challenge many of the taken-for-granted distinctions between humans and other animals. For example he returns repeatedly to the issue of agency, thereby contributing a new perspective on some key questions raised by scholars in animal studies over the last decade: to what extent is our view of agency overdetermined by an Enlightenment model of rational calculation and conscious decisionmaking? What other kinds of agency—unconscious, instinctual, unpredictable—might be at work in any given situation? How can we understand agency as an effect arising from networks of action and causation, rather than a simple product of individual (human) choice?<sup>5</sup> For Boyd, fictional narrative offers an excellent opportunity to address these inquiries, for it is here that “we return, we have to return, to stories with people and with animals, too, as agents” (p. 237 this volume). He concludes that the innumerable animal actors in children's stories, ancient myths and (some) modern fiction represent the necessary persistence of a broader, less complacent view of the place of humans in the world than that propounded by twentieth-century positivism.

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<sup>5</sup> For an account of these debates see Armstrong (2005).

*Sur l'animot*

As well as re-awakening dialogue between the sciences and the arts, the ‘question of the animal’ has provoked—and benefited from—contributions by some of the contemporary world’s most innovative philosophers. *L’animot* is the offspring of such an intervention.



*L’animot* is not *an* animal, nor is it *the* animal. *L’animot* is first of all a word, and it contains embedded within it *mot*, the French word for word. The French term combines a singular article with an ending that sounds plural but cannot be. It is chimerical in that—like the classical Chimaera—it possesses a “monstrousness derived precisely from the multiplicity of animals” (Derrida 2002, 409). Jacques Derrida proposes the neologism of *l’animot* to problematize his objections to the singular hegemonic reference to the animal, rather than the multiplicity of nonhuman life forms, as well as the argument that nonhuman life forms are the site for questions of the (human) Other. Three elements exist in Derrida’s formulation *Ecce animot*: “the plural of animals [can be] heard in the singular”; the “suffix *mot* in *l’animot* should bring us back to the word”; and, finally, it is not a question of ‘giving speech back’ to animals (for this would simply be another instance of the anthropomorphic allegorization that we find in fables and literature) but

perhaps of acceding to a thinking, however fabulous and chimerical it might be, that thinks the absence of the name and of the word otherwise, as something other than privation. (2002, 415–16)

Laurence Simmons’s chapter in this volume introduces *l’animot* and uses Derrida’s critique of the institution of speciesism to explore the paradoxical nature of shame. He argues that the unwarranted shame of concentration camp survivors points toward an inherent, ontological shame in human consciousness. The only escape from this primordial shame might lie in an encounter with an animal: Emmanuel Levinas’s account of the dog Bobby, whose wagging tail and barking voice restored

the humanity and reversed the shame of the prisoners in Camp 1492, and Derrida's account of his cat, whose indifferent gaze at his naked body in the bathroom makes the philosopher rethink nakedness and shame from the point of view of the cat, who has no sense of his own nakedness nor of the peculiar symbolic value that humans attach to the genitals.

*On Bipedals*

Bipedality—walking, running, standing on two legs—is often casually cited as the prime evolutionary adaptation that distinguishes the human from other animals. But bipedality in general has a long and varied history among many animals: we need only think of the intermittent running style of lizards such as the basilisk, or even cockroaches;



the sprinting of birds such as the ostrich; the hopping of marsupials such as kangaroos and mammals such as springhares and jerboas; and at least two types of octopus are known to 'walk' bipedally. Furthermore, as circus trainers know, many animals that do not use biped locomotion in nature can be trained to walk on hind legs.

Despite the remoteness of their body morphology and their evolution, in his chapter Alphonso Lingis yokes together humans and birds as bipeds. This makes, he suggests, more intriguing "some of the feats of intelligence and ingenuity performed by birds; of all the mammals only humans are capable of anything remotely like them" (p. 43 this volume). There are nutcrackers who if they see another bird watching them while they cache food return later, alone, to hide the food again; pigeons who will pretend to have found a food source, lead other birds to it, and then sneak back to the true source; crows who wait at pedestrian crossings for the light to turn red and when the cars stop hop onto the pedestrian crossing, place walnuts from nearby trees on the road, hop back to the curb and wait for the light to change green and cars to run over the nuts; New Caledonian crows that use trimmed and sculptured hooked twigs for retrieving insects or make spears out of

barbed pandanus leaves to fossick on the ground; or nutcrackers who can hide over thirty thousand seeds and recover them under eighteen inches of snow up to six months later (see Emery 2006).

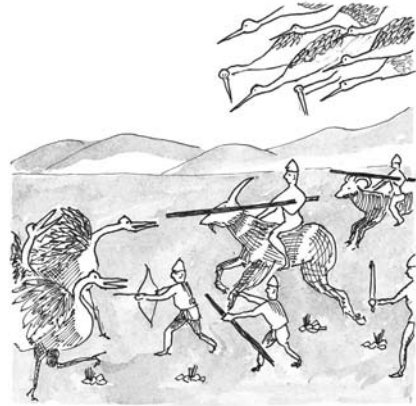
For Lingis such activities can be understood within the Kantian tradition which recognizes that “cognitive trial and error involves the ability to form abstract concepts or categories, which in turn presupposes the perception of space and time” (p. 47). For Kant, however, this intuition of space and time was distinctly human. But Lingis insists that birds are not merely involved in associative learning; they make the same kinds of internal connections as do mammalian brains, and intelligence arises from these connections. They display an avian intelligence: they understand rule versus rote learning; use transitive inference to make connections and predict outcomes; engage in problem solving; display numerical competence; mentally map their territories; create and use tools; and understand object permanence to keep track of objects that are out of sight. They have a self-conscious body image, as evidenced by the preening peacock or the bird of paradise, and an aesthetic sense (which for Kant presupposed a conceptual intelligence), confirmed by the performances of bowerbirds and bowerfish in magnificently constructed ‘theatres’ that caused Darwin to speculate that perhaps the females perceived ‘beauty’ in the male display. Archaeologists and paleontologists speak of hominid bipedalism and note that the fossil record of our lineage documents the primacy of our two-footedness over the development of the human brain by at least 2 million years. Nevertheless, as Lingis avers, something connects the foot and the brain, or two feet and the brain. Nearly everything written in anatomy textbooks about the brains of birds is wrong. So think again the next time you are tempted to use the insult ‘bird brain’.

### *On Boids*

A brood of hens, a charm of finches, a gaggle of geese, a knot of toads, a leap of leopards, a plague of locusts, a richness of martens, a school of fish, a string of ponies: these are just some of the ‘terms of venery’, the collective terms or nouns of multitude, which early hunters used to characterize their prey, and which we now use to characterize groups of animals—see the delightful *An Exaltation of Larks* by James Lipton (1968). Animals are never one but always ‘as one’; in fact we humans train animals to herd each other. We have produced



the ‘cutting horse’, derived from American cowboy culture, specifically trained to defeat cattle’s herding instinct allowing it to separate off (cut) one individual at a time, and herding dogs (stockdogs or sheepdogs) who help a shepherd contain and control a herd by using their understanding of the stock animals’ herding behavior to be able to move the whole group as a unit. Now there also exists an animal known as a



boid. A generic flocking or swarming creature, fish or fowl, created using a mathematical algorithm of  $O(n^2)$  by computer programmers in 1986 (Reynolds 1987). Sophisticated boids are later found in *Batman Returns* (1992), which contained computer-simulated bat swarms and penguin flocks, and also in the shifting shoals of fish of *Finding Nemo* (2003).

Flocking is a particularly evocative—think of watching the V-formations of migrating ducks and geese—example of ‘emergence’ where complex global behavior can arise from the interaction of simple local rules. But, as anyone who has watched Hitchcock’s *The Birds* (1963) knows, flocking may also become threatening; it may become what Allan Smith, following Deleuze and Guattari, describes as a condition

of acute intensity, of demonized volatility; of swarms, hordes and packs; of contagious transport of impersonal affects and teeming multiplicities; of uncontrolled edges and borders; of outsider groups, fringe groups, nomad armies, raiding parties, gangs, cabals, crime societies, and crowds as particles of anarchic energies. (p. 160 this volume)

In his chapter Smith recounts the experiences of the New Zealand painter Bill Hammond who

stayed for one month with a small group of artists, photographers and an archivist on the subantarctic Auckland Islands. Among other things on these bleak islands, Hammond was profoundly impressed by the sight of hundreds of big sea-birds lined up for hours at a time along the rocky foreshore, staring out to sea. (p. 168 this volume)

This scenario of innumerable watching birds being watched in turn by the artist becomes the source material for an entire painted ornithological oeuvre by Hammond. Hammond’s birds, notes Smith, have unusual patience. They gather in what novelist and sociologist, Elias

Canetti called “tranquil packs.” According to Canetti, writing in *Crowds and Power* (and yes, we human animals also flock!), “the *tranquil pack* is one of expectation. It is full of patience, a patience which is particularly striking when people are gathered together in this way” (Canetti, 1992, 115).

### *On Colonists*

Seabirds such as those observed by Hammond are sometimes said to live in colonies. Zoographers (*q.v.*) also use the term ‘colonist’ to describe species that take up residence in a new ecosystem of their own accord—thus for example the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds promises rambblers in Northwood Hill the chance to observe “almost 50 pairs of little egrets, a recent colonist” (RSPB, “Northward Hill”). In the language



of human society and history, the term ‘colonist’ is most often used of a particular kind of self-introduced species, namely human invaders and settlers, for example those who migrated from Europe to the Americas, South Asia, Africa, Australia and New Zealand from the sixteenth century onwards. These migrant flocks took with them a variety of other colonists, however: plant and animal species which they introduced—sometimes deliberately and sometimes inadvertently—in a process which Alfred Crosby has called “biological imperialism” (1986). A number of these nonhuman species functioned as agents (*q.v.*) of the colonial project pursued by their human introducers: for example the longhorn cattle driven onto the Great Plains of North America to displace the indigenous buffalo and the American Indian cultures who depended on them, or the innumerable sheep whose pastures have overridden the native title of aboriginal peoples and eaten away the natural ecosystems of Australia and New Zealand.

Philip Armstrong’s essay deals with some of these unwitting colonists—cows, sheep, chickens—while asking what it means for the animals themselves to be assigned this kind of agency, and exploring the impact upon them of the historical shift from an imperial to a globalized world. In particular, Armstrong examines the way the visual

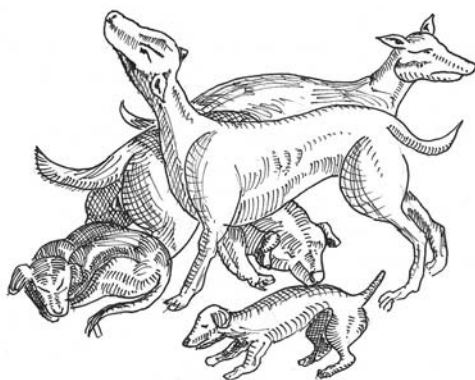
imagery of these beasts is farmed—domesticated, branded, milked, shorn, rendered, processed—by contemporary agribusiness interests and their antagonists, those advocating for animal welfare and rights. As he suggests, the result of these manipulations is a field of vision populated by new strains: singing cows, cartoon bovines, mammalian preparations, broilers, vivisectionists, activists.

The histories of biological imperialism and globalization can produce unexpected consequences, however. These include the inadvertent introduction of new species, the unanticipated results of deliberate introduction, and the surprising reactions of native animals to the new arrivals. At which point another category in the contemporary bestiary is invoked: that of the pest or feral species. As Rick de Vos points out in his chapter on the thylacine or Tasmanian tiger, colonial farmers sometimes cast a native animal in the role of pest, with lethal results for the species. But apparently promising colonists can go native too—like Conrad's Mister Kurtz—and become the most vilified life forms around; moreover sometimes the cure for this eventuality—the introduction of yet another colonist for biological control of the first one—becomes worse than the disease. New Zealand's government spends many millions of dollars annually trying to control the destructive impact upon the country's national bird, the Kiwi, of mustelids (weasels, stoats and ferrets) introduced in the late nineteenth century to limit the damage done to (introduced) sheep pastures by the exponentially-increasing population of rabbits, introduced several decades earlier to provide pelts for the fur trade and quarry for (introduced) huntsmen.

As Catharina Landström argues in her essay, as a consequence of these layered histories of colonization, the apparently scientific discourse of biological control finds itself inextricably caught up in significant areas of social discourse such as nationalism, with its intense debates over definitions of nativeness, the right to inhabitation, and belonging. Such interactions exemplify the operation of 'technoscience', that is, "the way in which modern society produces knowledge about nature," and in so doing "also produces culture" (p. 199 in this volume). As Landström goes on to describe, technoscientific narratives about humans, animals and the environment are one of the most authoritative ways in which modern societies know animals—and simultaneously come to know themselves.

*On Companion Species*

One of the most influential writers on technoscience culture, Donna Haraway, has recently reviewed her famous “Cyborg Manifesto,” concluding that “[b]y the end of the millennium, cyborgs could no longer do the work of a proper herding dog to gather up the threads needed for critical enquiry” (2003, 4). Hence she enlists



the help of companion species in exploring the technoscience societies of the postindustrial West, and in particular the lived ‘naturecultures’ inhabited by humans and their most intimate relationship with other animals. For Haraway, the typical companion animal is the domestic dog, *Canis familiaris*, a species defined not by its physiological, genetic or reproductive uniqueness, but by proximity to its significant other, *Homo sapiens*. The dog is “a species in obligatory, constitutive, historical, protean relationship with human beings” (Haraway 2003, 11–12). Certainly the dog (along with the domestic cat, as Laurence Simmons suggests in his chapter) is the creature closest to the human in literal terms: at our feet, on our beds, ahead of us on our walks, sneaking into the kitchen behind our backs. But Haraway also surveys recent studies in paleobiology, anthropology and archaeology which have focused on ways in which the ancient relationship between *canis* and *homo* has been one of co-evolution, whereby each species has shaped the other.

Thinking about dogs, then, entails worrying away at problematic borders and boundaries, at “the sharp divisions of nature and culture” and at the “distinction between artificial and natural selection” (Haraway 2003, 30). Ian Wedde’s essay, the last in this volume, also implies that dogs appear most at home when occupying thresholds: sitting at the door, on the steps, watching at the gate, patrolling the beach between “cold water and warm sun” (p. 266 this volume). Wedde trails the various kinds of “liminal wilderness” marked out by dogs. He describes a conceptual space where social and natural worlds merge, the meeting-place between history and the present. He whistles up the mythical canids who acted as guardians of the underworld, funeral

directors and guides to the world of the dead; he tracks down the ways dogginess has nosed its way into our languages and literatures. Like Haraway, Wedde's overriding interest lies in the specific histories of shared social evolution that have shaped canine and human bodies and societies simultaneously. From the dogmatic injunctions of Leviticus to the dogged cultures of Māori and European settlers in nineteenth-century New Zealand, Wedde traces a number of the ways we have made canids the agents (*q.v.*) of our agricultural and social enterprises, but also acknowledges the various ways in which "it is the dog that makes us human" (Garber 1997, 42). Finally, and most evocatively, by means of an elegiac narrative about his own much-missed companion Vincent, Wedde treads the threshold between human and canid perception, the time and space of a 'dog-walking' itinerary influenced by canine olfactory and auditory markers, rather than dominated by the human hunger for arrival at a fixed destination, or our appetite for scenic satisfaction.

*On the Disappeared*

Dead as the Dodo, Massacred like the Moa, Terminated as the Thylacine. It is estimated that more than 99.9 percent of all species that have ever lived are now extinct and 784 extinctions have been recorded since the year 1500. Alfred Russell Wallace, the co-founder of the theory of evolution by



natural selection, was forced to lament in the 1870s "we live in a zoologically impoverished world, from which all the hugest and fiercest, and strangest forms have recently disappeared" (cited in Flannery and Schouten 2001, xiii). Nevertheless, extinction, as Rick de Vos argues in his chapter, is a complex phenomenon. At the one end of the spectrum we have the notion of a population of organisms evolving into something else through a normal process of evolutionary life. The disappearance of the phenotype occurs through the natural turn-over of the generations (anagenesis) and this extinction of the parent species where a subspecies is still alive is labeled 'pseudo-extinction' by the

experts. In this light extinction becomes “a meta-commentary on the fate of all living things” (De Vos, p. 184 this volume); “as unavoidable as death and taxes” says Tim Flannery (Flannery and Schouten 2001, xiii). At the opposite end of the spectrum we have mass extinctions where huge numbers of the earth’s biota disappear simultaneously during geologically short intervals of intense species extinction. For these events, which are global and where extinction occurs on both land and sea, there appear to be three main causes: sea-level change; volcanism; and asteroid/comet impact.

Between these two extremes exists a range of possibilities. Human attempts to preserve critically endangered species have led to the creation of the conservation status ‘extinct in the wild’. But humans are also infamously responsible for extinctions which are exacerbated by the arrival of colonists (*q.v.*): the introduction of predators (in particular the rat on Pacific islands), the destruction of habitats, or simple human predation such as the clubbing of the great auk to death. Many biologists believe we are in the early stages of a human-caused mass extinction known as the Holocene extinction event; a period the paleoanthropologist Richard Leakey has christened the sixth age of extinction. They predict that 20 percent of all living species will become extinct within thirty years and that one half of the animal and plant species existing today will have vanished within the next one hundred years (Leakey and Lewin 1996). No wonder our bookshops are full of poignant stories that evocatively try and save, both visually and verbally, the wonders of a lost world (see Flannery and Schouten 2001; Paddle 2000; Richard Wolfe 2003).

According to de Vos, these stories of remembrance and recuperation are a means by which a narrative can ‘hold together’ an animal according to a double logic. De Vos links this logic to Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction of the Husserlian categories of ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ objects whereby

the notion of the last of the species, a notion which is established using historical evidence to identify a specific time, space and specimen, is merged with that of an ideal state such as ‘the thylacine’ as species, a category invoking an ontological or metaphysical presence. (p. 189)

Thus, de Vos concludes, stories of existence, which focus on the demise of the last remaining animal,

utilize evidence of an historical absence in realizing the presence of an ideal form. However, the temporal order of presentation inverts the historical order. . . . The last animal provides a singular body and a singular

moment... [and] is presented as both real and ideal in an enunciative present, one which is separated from both the past, a time of presence, and the future, a time of absence. (p. 190)

*On the Humanimal*

As the variety of species dwindles in the wild, another kind of wildness proliferates in our cities and the virtual habitats of human art and culture. The term ‘Humanimal’ has begun to appear in a variety of locations to describe this phenomenon. Allan Smith borrows the term from an Auckland-based experimental theatre troupe of the 1980s, who perhaps borrowed it in turn from a “cheesy” TV show mentioned by Cary Wolfe (2003, xiii). Smith’s humanimals, however, are the bird-folk who populate the work of New Zealand painter Bill Hammond (p. x this volume). Meanwhile, in her chapter on “The Mark of the Beast,” Annie Potts discusses other humanimals (so designated in a Discovery Channel programme of that name) whose extreme body modifications are designed to take on the appearance and qualities of nonhuman species. As Potts argues, the determination to break down the humanist dichotomy between humans and other animals—via performance, body modification or artistic and popular-cultural production—has been a notable feature of Western societies over recent decades. She charts the various odd beasts arising from this phenomenon—neoprimitives, misanthropes, biophiles, posthumanists, cyborgs—and focuses on a few whose lives have been literally reshaped by “the intersection of these various trends” (p. 139 in this volume). The result is series of provocative suggestions—some drawn from the work of fellow-contributor Alphonso Lingis—about ways in which supposedly human dispositions and emotions might find their sources in our relations, not only with other humans, but with other species as well.

Concluding that “we are always already animals too” (p. 152 in this volume), Potts sums up one of the central themes that unites this collection, and indeed animal studies more generally. Animals are and have always been crucial in both defining and experiencing human being—even if, for most of the modern period, this relation has operated most powerfully in the form of negation. Under the sign of humanism,



the positive of zoomorphic borrowings from animals that have helped constitute human nature have been obscured, while the overt strategy has been to define the human according to its difference from the animal. Replacing the term ‘human’ with the term ‘humanimal’ highlights the need to remind ourselves of the works of these relationships, and their consequences for us and for our animal others.

### *On Performers*

Dressed in a safari outfit, a man stands triumphantly on the back of a rhinoceros as he is forced to lumber around a circus track; a beautiful, blonde ‘tiger-whisperer’ stands face-to-face with a rare Siberian tiger, as if they are poised to kiss; a large elephant, its forequarters prodded repeatedly by an ankus, is made to rear up and walk



on its hind legs; a giraffe in a bridle and harness is ridden at a gallop around the circus ring. We have made these animals into performers.

John Simons has recently argued that “[a]nimals do not perform being animals” (2002, 9). On the other hand, we humans do perform: as Judith Butler has argued our gender and sexuality is all a matter of performance and masquerade (Butler 1990).

It is performance that defines and enables us, to some extent and on some occasions, to escape the seemingly overwhelming deterministic influences of history. . . . A human, then, is an animal that can perform[,]

writes Simons (2002, 9). However, as Alphonso Lingis describes in this volume, many animals *do* perform being animals. Male bowerbirds stage elaborate displays to attract a mate; lapwings act out injury to draw predators from their nests; many species from cats to butterflies put on or mimic displays of size, ferocity and scariness designed to face down rivals or predators.

Yet there is something different about the ways animals are made to perform for human benefit or entertainment; something unsettling. Perhaps the distinction is that in the latter case, an element of human desire or enterprise has been forced into the performance. Hence we train animals to do all manner of things, even to become like other



animals—a giraffe can be ridden like a horse, an elephant can ‘walk tall’ like a man. Imposing our own forms of performance on animals is one of the ways in which we transform them into human cultural products, whether it be in film, art, literature or at the circus.

Tanja Schwalm, in her chapter, examines the importance of this behavioral zone of performance for the history and transformation of the circus from the colonial politics of the early circus, a “showcase for colonial conquest” where indigenous peoples were exhibited alongside the animals they were associated with, to today’s virtual circus online. “From colonization to environmentalism and consumer capitalism,” she argues,

animal acts both mirror and reinforce the culturally ingrained values and beliefs of the spectator. . . . Thus, the portrayal of animals in circuses has shifted from a celebration of dominated and controlled objects of spectacle and intimidation to evoking the interactions between supposedly equal friends and partners. (pp. 99–100 this volume)

Other contributors also analyze the ways in which various forms of human-animal performativity are at work in contemporary cultures. Catharina Landström describes how Australian school children are trained to act out modern passion plays with introduced species unwittingly cast as the Vices. According to Landström, the function of these traveling eco-circuses is to disseminate a particular form of Australian nationalism, an environmentalist replay of the colonial determination to master the environment. At the same time, as Rick de Vos describes, other forms of Australian popular science are busy performing extinction scenarios, which function—like the ‘anti-conquest narrative’ described by Mary Louise Pratt (1992, 7)—to exonerate the settler culture from its role in the depredation of native species. Meanwhile Philip Armstrong observes how, across the Tasman, the debate over ethical farming plays out between animal advocates and agribusiness: here again the issue is one of performativity, either in the form of the media circus surrounding a conference on animals in research, or the displays of ‘welfare practices’ played out in response to consumer scrutiny.

### *On the Pigoon*

*Sus multiorganifer*, a breed of genetically-modified pig in Margaret Atwood’s novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003). Popularly known as pigoons because

of their balloon-like bodies, these animals live confined in the laboratories of the OrganInc corporation, whose scientists have exploited the genetic proximity between pigs and humans, augmenting it with human stem-cells to manufacture a species that grows multiple organs for harvest and use by ailing humans. As Helen Tiffin points



out in her chapter, Atwood's pigoons constitute a satire of technoscience culture, especially its complicity with consumer capitalism. They are also a kind of humanimal (*q.u.*) that challenges the boundary separating humans and animals—and in this case, the role of social and moral conventions according to which “[w]e are meant to be the flesh consumers, not the consumed” (Tiffin, p. 247 this volume). Tiffin suggests that cannibalism and meat-eating—respectively, prohibited and licensed forms of flesh-eating (in most Western cultures, that is)—actually work in conjunction to maintain what Cary Wolfe calls the “discourse of species,” which relies “upon the ethical acceptability of the systematic, institutionalized ‘noncriminal putting to death’ of animals based solely on their species” (Wolfe, cited in Tiffin, p. 249 this volume).

Surveying a range of literary and other narratives, Tiffin focuses on anxieties about cannibalism, unpicking the logic that distinguishes it from other forms of meat consumption. She works back from Atwood's porcine-human hybrids, noting the existing similarities between humans and pigs: the reputed similarity in the flavor if our two species' flesh, our shared vulnerability to sunburn, our shared tastes in food, our shared physiological, emotional and metabolic traits. For both Tiffin and Atwood, then, the pig seems all too human: pigoons simply make visible the contradictions that already exist in the relationship between humans and pigs—for example when Atwood remarks wryly that “to set the queasy at ease” OrganInc claims “that none of the defunct pigoons ended up as bacon and sausages: no one would want to eat an animal whose cells might be identical with at least some of their own” (2003, 23–4). The most disturbing characteristics of pigoons are really just traits already shared by pigs and humans, rather than the results of genetic meddling. Hence the novel's protagonist, Jimmy, remembers that as a child he found pigoons “slightly frightening, with their runny noses and tiny, white-lashed pink eyes. They glanced up at him as if they saw him, really saw him, and might have plans for him later” (Atwood

2003, 26). This anticipation of a threatening form of nonhuman agency (*q.v.*) becomes fulfilled in the novel's post-apocalyptic future, when the pigeons escape their laboratories and, having "acquired a degree of human-like intelligence, and the human desire to hunt prey," turn on the few remaining *Homo sapiens* (Tiffin, p. 258 this volume). This satirical twist completes the breakdown of the distinctions—between human and animal, between cannibalism and meat-eating—which are put to the test by Tiffin:

In *Oryx and Crake* it is the former pigs (now pigeons) who have in a sense become 'cannibalistic'—depending of course on the definition of 'cannibal' in a situation where its meaning has been radically destabilized. (Tiffin, p. 258 this volume)

### *On the Screen Beast*

What is it we imagine when we imagine a beast? In French the word *bête* is used of the familiar, domesticated animal whereas the word 'beast' in English has a generalizing (uncivilized, feral) quality. The trope of the beast, a philosopheme of the "more than human and animal," is central to Western artistic, literary and philosophical canons. But more often than not the seme of the beast has been a mere projection, little more than allegory of (human) fear and desire. Hardly more than a screen that masks our (human) anxieties.



However, the figure of the beast works to subvert the neatness and naturalization of such "animal symbolism" and, for Barbara Creed, the Screen Beast of cinema has the potential to

create a different order of the animal, one whose agency (desires, dreams) challenges the bases on which the differences between human and animal have historically and philosophically been founded. (p. 63 this volume)

Starting from Freud's provocative, but ultimately unanswered, speculation—"Do animals dream?"—Creed points to the ways in which the imagining of the beast 'on screen' negotiates the always tenuous and

problematic relationship between the cinematic text and the world, as well as that between human and nonhuman animals. This relation is heightened in the three *King Kong* films (1933, 1976, 2005) she takes as her examples by the self-reflexiveness of the central male (human) character's occupation as filmmaker. As Creed shows, in these different versions of the tale of Beauty and the Beast, Kong, the beast, is more than animal, for he is capable of the same calculated brutality a human can inflict, and more than human, in that he can sustain a credible and emotionally moving bond with another (in his case human) animal. And so we might read the empathetic relationship between woman and beast in *King Kong* as both providing several kinds of challenge: a critique of the greed and cruelty of the human animal; the offer of an escape from a masculine, unilateral picture of the world (that, say, of the film's central character Denham); and finally, as Creed suggests,

a Darwinian critique of the theory that desire is founded in language and that language distinguishes man from the animals. Kong is without language, yet he is not without desire. In Freudian terms, Kong is able to dream because he is an animal who desires. (p. 76 this volume)

Colloquially, *bête* also means 'stupid' in French and this is clearly what we humans have been as we have lost our own humanity in our relations with the animal world. Perhaps, through an undermining of the anthropocentric view of human society, the beast (on screen and elsewhere) represents a dream of (animal) beings in a process of liberation from this stupidity (*bêtise*).

### *On Zoographers*

A 'zoographer', according to the dictionary, is someone "who describes animals, their forms and habits" which means, of course, the editors and contributors of this volume. But as the diverse essays in this volume indicate, the human role as 'describer' and the animal position as 'the described' is never unambiguous



or clear-cut. In describing animals, in ‘knowing animals’, our contributors describe and ‘know’ themselves. As Giorgio Agamben points out, Linnaean taxonomy formalizes the modern humanist definition of ‘man’ as the animal who denies his own animality, but can only do so by reference to another animal, through description(s) of that animal:

*Homo sapiens*, then, is neither a clearly defined species nor a substance; it is, rather, a machine or device for producing the recognition of the human. . . . It is an optical machine constructed of a series of mirrors in which man, looking at himself, sees his own image always already deformed in the features of an ape. *Homo*. . . must recognize himself in a non-man in order to be human. (2004, 26–7)

This contradictory yet constitutive relation between humans and other animals has taken a multitude of forms, as Keith Thomas points out: the human has thus been described

as a political animal (Aristotle); a laughing animal (Thomas Willis); a tool-making animal (Benjamin Franklin); a religious animal (Edmund Burke); and a cooking animal (James Boswell, anticipating Lévi-Strauss). . . . as a featherless biped, an animal which forms opinions and an animal which carries a stick. What all such definitions have in common is that they assume a polarity between the categories ‘man’ and ‘animal’, and that they invariably regard the animal as the inferior. In practice, of course, the aim of such definitions has often been less to distinguish men from animals than to propound some ideal of human behaviour, as when Martin Luther in 1530 and Pope Leo XIII in 1891 each declared that the possession of private property was an essential difference between man and beasts. (Thomas 1984, 31)

To this list, we could add the following: Herman Melville’s description of man as “a money-making animal” ([1851] 2002, 321); the Cartesian emphasis on man as the talking animal; the Linnaean category of *Homo sapiens*, the animal that knows, or thinks, or knows it thinks, or thinks it knows.

All of these definitions of the human—the most over-defined of beasts—come under close scrutiny in the work collected in this volume, explicitly or implicitly. For as chapters by Lingis and Boyd demonstrate, each of these self-stylings retains authority only insofar as it can ignore the many languages, crafts, cultures, intelligences, intentions and agencies of nonhuman animals. And our contributors leave us, perhaps, with the choice about whether to accept some updated definitions of the human: on one hand, *Homo insapiens*, the animal that doesn’t know as much as it thinks, doesn’t even know it’s an animal, doesn’t know its

place; on the other hand, a whole bestiary of new taxonomies provided in the essays that follow.

Clearly, the essays collected here represent a multitude of species, and do so in a range of genres. They address many different questions in a wide variety of ways. But we suggest they share one motivation: to consider the benefits (and not only for humans) of attempting to know animals differently: more closely, less definitively, more carefully, less certainly.

*Supplement: A Note on Images*

The pictures accompanying our bestiary are variations, by Harry Kerr, of well-known images from Renaissance and Enlightenment books of beasts. The anthropomorphic Monk Fish (p. 3) is drawn from Conrad Gesner's *Icones Animalium* (1551–87). Such creatures demonstrated the medieval belief that all things on earth had a marine equivalent. The Chimera (p. 5), described by Homer as a lion in front, a dragon behind and a she-goat in the middle, remains to this day the idiomatic hybrid: our version is taken from Ulisse Aldrovandi's *Historia Monstrum* (1642). So is our portrait of the Harpy (p. 6), the insatiable woman/eagle hybrid sent to torment King Phineus. The next picture shows another classical confrontation between competing biped species: flocks of Cranes in pitched battle with Scythian Pygmies (p. 8), as described by Pliny.

The Vegetable Lamb of Tartary (p. 9) derives from the *Travels* of Sir John Mandeville (c. 1356), who found a plant bearing gourds which, when cut in two, revealed “a little beast, in flesh, in bone, and blood, as though it were a little lamb”. Similar crops of colonist sheep and pasture can be found covering hillsides and plains in many parts of what Alfred Crosby (1986) calls the ‘neo-Europes’ of Australia, New Zealand and the Americas today. Another dutiful colonist, the companion animal (p. 11), is illustrated by “The Dog in General” from Edward Topsell's *History of Four-Footed Beasts* (1607), while the disappeared Dodo (p. 12) is Roelant Savery's (1626), and the elephant-headed humanimal (p. 14) can be traced, again, to Mandeville.

Topsell provides the source for our next few images. Our performer (p. 15) is a version of the Mimick Dog, a type of canine “apt to imitate all things it seeth, for which cause some have thought that it was conceived by an Ape”. Topsell repeats Plutarch's account of watching a Mimick enact, before the Emperor in Rome, an entire dramatic

production containing many different characters. Elsewhere he describes the Manticora, a fearsome creature with a man's face, three rows of sharp teeth, a mouth that reaches both sides to its ears, a particular taste for human flesh, and the body of a lion: our Manticora, however, is a porcine-human splice, like Atwood's pigeons (p. 17). Topsell's curious Sphinx (p. 18) foreshadows Creed's account of the screen beast, especially since he classes it amongst the apes, adding that it possesses the "breasts of women, and their favour, or visage, much like them". Finally, our zoographer takes the form of a Mermaid (p. 19), holding her characteristic accessories, the comb and looking-glass. The mirror of this particular specimen, like those held up by the zoographers collected here, does not show a human face.

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PART ONE

THINKING ANIMALS



## CHAPTER ONE

### SHAME, LEVINAS'S DOG, DERRIDA'S CAT (AND SOME FISH)

Laurence Simmons

Ce que la honte découvre c'est l'être qui se découvre.  
[What shame reveals is being's self-revelation].  
—Emmanuel Levinas, *De l'évasion*

I am ashamed. I feel shame. I have felt ashamed, a growing shame about what I write here, for many years now. This is the first time I acknowledge it in public to you. This is the first time I confess my shame. Can one confess shame? Shame is a strange feeling. One should not need to, or be able to, confess shame. Perhaps, then, this is a testimony of or to shame. But can there be a testimony *of* shame? For it would seem that there is no testimony of shame apart from shame itself. Shame would be its own testimony. Should we say, then, that shame is itself testimony blushing. In this sense this chapter on the rethinking of the animal question, the connection between thinking about animals and my own self-understanding, is simply the blush on my own shame. I will seek to explore here an ontological shame that is prior to sexual shame or the shame of a bad conscience linked to particular transgressions. I shall also argue that the unwarranted shame of camp survivors points towards this inherent, ontological shame in human consciousness and suggest that the only escape from this shame might lie in the encounter with the animal.

Testimony is shame? Shame is its own testimony? But is it so obvious that testimony is the same as shame? Shame, Primo Levi was to acknowledge twenty years after his liberation from Auschwitz in *I sommersi e i salvati* (*The Drowned and the Saved*) (1989), became the intimate and dominant experience of the camp survivor. Levi explores the feeling of shame that coincided for camp survivors with reacquired freedom, in an attempt to respond to the fact that so many suicides occurred after (sometimes immediately after) liberation. He describes in detail a moment of his own shame which occurred before liberation when on

work detail during the dry August of 1944: tormented by thirst during the task of clearing dusty rubble from a cellar, he finds a hidden spigot dripping water and he secretly lay down to catch its falling drops. It is an act which he hides from his compatriot Daniele who, nevertheless, on the march back to camp comes to suspect the real meaning of Levi's supine position on the floor which he had previously observed from a distance. Levi shamefacedly admits: "[T]hat act of omission, that unshared glass of water, stood between us, transparent, not expressed, but perceptible and 'costly'" (1989, 61). As well as personal moments of shame, Levi also describes the collectivized shame associated with individual nakedness that was a condition of camp life. He writes:

One entered the Lager naked: indeed more than naked, deprived not only of clothes and shoes (which were confiscated) but of the hair of one's head and all other hairs... public and collective nudity was a recurrent condition, typical and laden with significance... Now a naked and barefoot man feels that all his nerves and tendons are severed: he is a helpless prey. Clothes, even the foul clothes which were distributed, even the crude clogs with their wooden soles, are a tenuous but indispensable defence. Anyone who does not have them no longer perceives himself as a human being, but rather as a worm: naked, slow, ignoble, prone on the ground. He knows that he can be crushed at any moment. (ibid., 90)

Here the extremes of violence and discrimination against humans become but a dimension of the violence and discrimination against animals (but are still, however, caught up in a version of 'speciesism' to which I will return later). Naked, the camp inmate is *like* a worm, that lowest of the animals, "naked, slow, ignoble, prone on the ground." Shame, as if taken on like a mantle, becomes the dominant sentiment of the camp survivors and Levi himself experiences it but resists it, refuses its consequences; he always seeks to lead it back to a sense of guilt. It opens up for him 'a can of worms'. Again and again, he asks himself the following question: "Are you ashamed because you are alive in place of another?" (ibid., 62)<sup>1</sup>

Giorgio Agamben in *The Remnants of Auschwitz* finds Levi's analysis unsatisfying and laments Levi's "incapacity to master shame" (1999, 88) perhaps because, in Agamben's terms, his subject Levi, like the *Muselmann* he writes about, really was the witness who bears witness to the impossibility of bearing witness. Agamben cites another example

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<sup>1</sup> See also Levi 1987, 581.

from camp survivor and writer Robert Antelme, an example that he feels confirms shame “has a different, darker and more difficult cause” (cited in Agamben 1999, 103). Towards the end of the war, as the Allies were approaching, the SS undertook a mad march to transfer prisoners from Buchenwald to Dachau. Those who were weak and would have slowed the march were routinely shot by the side of the road and at times the killings would seem to take place by chance, without reason. Antelme, in his volume significantly titled *The Human Race*, describes the fate of a young Italian as follows:

The SS continues. ‘*Du komme hier!*’ Another Italian steps out of the column, a student from Bologna. I know him. His face has turned pink. I look at him closely. I still have that pink before my eyes. He stands there at the side of the road. He doesn’t know what to do with his hands. . . . He turned pink after the SS man said to him, ‘*Du komme hier!*’ He must have glanced about him before he flushed; but yes it was he who had been picked, and when he doubted it no longer, he turned pink. The SS who was looking for a man, any man, to kill, had found him. And having found him, he looked no further. He didn’t ask himself: Why him, instead of someone else? And the Italian, having understood it was really him, accepted this chance selection. He didn’t wonder: Why me, instead of someone else? (Antelme 1992, 231–32)

The Italian student blushes. Blushes with shame. Why? Why should the student who dies by the side of the road without visible reason be ashamed? This is not the shame of the survivor, yet it *is* the shame which bears witness. As Agamben says, “the student is not ashamed for having survived. On the contrary, what survives him is shame” (1999, 104). The discreet and horrifying blush. A sort of pleonasm that says “Look, I am ashamed”; for in this case there is no ‘I’ except in shame. It would be necessary to inhabit that shame. “[T]hat flush,” says Agamben, “is like a mute apostrophe flying through time to reach us, to bear witness to him” (ibid.). That blush is the (still) living proof of the Italian student’s own senseless death. Shame makes testimony function as proof, but testimony, the probative value of testimony, does not attest for the facts. For, as Agamben writes, shame is a marker of time:

What lies before us now is a being beyond acceptance and refusal, beyond the eternal past and the eternal present—an event that returns eternally but that, precisely for this reason, is absolutely, eternally unassumable. Beyond good and evil lies not the innocence of becoming but, rather, a shame that is not only without guilt but even without time. (ibid., 102–103)

I need to speak these words that have left me naked, searching for words not clothed in habit or formula, words that are uncovered in their directness. I plan to speak here of nudity and offer a short history of the nude, or, more correctly, the nakedness of shame. To help clothe the issue of nakedness, and its relation to the question of the animal, I have waiting in the wings Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida. I am aware of following these thinkers in the sense of pursuing them only to find them always further on when one reaches a place where they have been. The sense of this is hard to follow. It is hard to follow, to think in their wake, to think in a way that does justice to their thought, precisely because it is so easy to follow them, to simply repeat. To follow in this sense is merely to re-deploy a machine that someone else has invented, a “machine for writing” as Derrida calls it (2002b, 71–160). But none of these thinkers ‘follow’ like this, even follow each other like this. They do not simply repeat what they have read. They invent. By means of an achronological logic they constitute invention as invention. Only if my intervention here achieves inventiveness in itself will it do justice to the inventiveness of their inventions. So I think my discussion here must also be about ‘following’, or how hard it is to follow, and I shall try to follow this up in a moment.

In 1935 Emmanuel Levinas published a short seminal essay entitled *On Escape (De l'évasion)*, which affirmed a fundamental insufficiency in the human condition and the necessity of an escape from being, from the ontological obsession of the Western tradition. *On Escape* announces the issue with which all of Levinas’s philosophical writings will be preoccupied: the issue of *the* issue from ontology. The issue we might say of the genesis, the genealogy, of ethics. What the title of Levinas’s essay refers to is the need to escape existence as such, to escape the elementary and, as he also describes it, brutal truth that there is being, *il y a de l'être*.<sup>2</sup> Levinas has recourse to the word *excence*, that which would be the exit from existence, turning the senselessness of death into sense.<sup>3</sup> He attributes to the self-identity of the human being a certain duality that will be other than that of self-reference, tradition-

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<sup>2</sup> In this sense Levinas’s later concept of ‘otherwise-than-being’ and his relationship to Heidegger, whose name is never mentioned in *On Escape* but whose influence can be felt throughout, is forged here.

<sup>3</sup> Levinas’s word is modeled upon ‘trans-scendence’ adding the prefix ‘ex’ or ‘out’ to the Latin *scandere*, ‘to climb’.

ally attributed to the identity of the self since Descartes. This duality takes on a dramatic form. Levinas writes:

Existence is an absolute that affirms itself without referring itself to anything other. It is identity. But in this reference to himself man distinguishes a kind of duality. His identity with himself loses that character of a logical or tautological form: it takes on, as we shall go on to show, a dramatic form. In the identity of the ego [*moi*], the identity of being reveals its nature as enchainment because it appears in the form of suffering and it is an invitation to evasion. So evasion is the need of going out of itself [*le besoin de sortir de soi-même*], that is to say, to break the most radical, most irremissible enchainment, the fact that the ego is itself. (2003, 73)

Being is suffered as imprisonment, as being enchained. However, experienced as suffering, being is already an invitation to escape. The very identity of 'the oneself' incorporates the need of being quit of oneself. One's self is from the start the need to leave oneself. The unity of the self labors in the pain of a need to be outside itself. Levinas's own discourse is dramatic in the sense that it is a performance of evasion itself.

It is crucial to his argument that Levinas's analysis includes an exploration of shame. Shame, according to Levinas, does not derive from the consciousness of a lack, or an imperfection in our being. On the contrary, shame, in Agamben's gloss,

is grounded in our being's incapacity to move away and break from itself. If we experience shame in nudity, it is because we cannot hide what we would like to remove from the field of vision; it is because the unrestrainable impulse to flee from oneself is confronted by an equally certain impossibility of evasion. (1999, 104–105)<sup>4</sup>

Levinas undresses shame of its moral character that up until now has been the only characteristic of shame studied and has relegated it to an ethical-moral dimension. Levinas poses shame as the conscience of the human in front of him or herself, his or her existence, his or her *Dasein*. Levinas shifts the accent from the social to the intimate and helps us understand that the drama of this emotion is not to be found in a disillusion with an ideal self, or ideality of the self, but rather in an awareness of the presence of ourselves.

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<sup>4</sup> According to Levinas shame depends on "the very being of our being, on its incapacity to break with itself. Shame is founded upon the solidarity of our being, which obliges us to claim responsibility for ourselves" (2003, 63).



Let me see if I can unpick a little further the details of Levinas's analysis. To be ashamed is not the result of something external, rather it originates in our own intimacy; what could be more intimate to us than our physiological life? Levinas argues that, in its very nature as affect, pleasure is always a deceit. At the moment of breaking the promise that it appeared about to keep pleasure is swallowed up in shame. One is ashamed not simply of an immoral or other misdeed. The lacerating (*déchirant* is Levinas's adjective) nature of shame derives from a conjunction of not being able to understand how one could have done such a thing and not being able to deny that one did it. One is ashamed of one's self because one is ashamed of oneself. One has no power to break away from oneself. The origin of original shame, and therefore of shame over what is regarded simply as a lapse, is the impossibility of concealing from oneself one's nakedness. Either original shame does not depend on original sin, or the origin of original sin is that one is riveted to oneself, incapable of evasion. Adam was naked and he hid himself, but even if he could hide himself from Eve or from God, he could not hide his nakedness from himself. He could not hide his self from himself. Thus an original shameful self-consciousness does not depend on the gaze of others. Seeing oneself from the outside is a way of clothing oneself, like Hans Andersen's Emperor, with one's uncloddedness. Nakedness is not being unclodded. Nakedness is not motivated by the sense of having done something wrong; it is not conditioned by one's being finite. It is the condition of one's being.<sup>5</sup> This state is both paradoxical and insufficient. While recognizing that it is "our intimacy, that is, our presence to ourselves, that is shameful" and that it "reveals not our nothingness but rather the totality of our existence," Levinas is forced to acknowledge that shame "is, in the last analysis, an existence that seeks excuses" (2003, 65), that it always affirms the necessity of an effort to 'go out of oneself', of an escape from being.

In 1975 Levinas published an essay entitled "*Nom d'un chien ou droit naturel*" ("The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights") which was later reprinted in his collection *Difficile Liberté* (Difficult Freedom) (1976). In

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<sup>5</sup> The question of nakedness will be taken up by Derrida in a seminar at Cerisy-La-Salle, *L'Animal autobiographique* (see Mallet 1999), where he rethinks nakedness and shame from the point of view of the animal who has no sense of its own nakedness nor of the peculiar symbolic value that humans attach to the genitals (see the discussion in Part III of my chapter). *L'Animal autobiographique* includes a section on the animal according to Levinas.

this essay, which refines and promises to resolve the question of ontological shame, Levinas proposes an analogy between “the unspeakable human holocaust and the unspoken animal one” (Llewelyn 1991, 235) and he retells the story of a dog that strayed into the German camp for Jewish prisoners where Levinas and his companions had become accustomed to being treated “like dogs,” subject to a gaze that, as he chillingly remarks, “stripped us of our human skin” and made him and his companions into “a quasi-humanity [*une quasi-humanité*], a gang of apes” (Levinas 1990, 153, translation modified). Levinas recounts the story as follows:

[A]bout halfway through our long captivity, for a few short weeks, before the sentinels chased him away, a wandering dog entered our lives. One day he came to meet this rabble as we returned under guard from work. He survived in some wild patch in the region of the camp. But we called him Bobby, an exotic name, as one does with a cherished dog. He would appear at morning assembly and was waiting for us as we returned, jumping up and down and barking in delight. For him, there was no doubt that we were men. (1990, 153)

Bobby evokes an important contradiction: on the one hand, to be animal is to be without freedom and dignity, it is to be of inferior status, but, on the other, to be human in Camp 1492 is not constituted by the gaze of “[t]he other men, called free,” (ibid.) but the ‘humanity’ of the gaze of an animal, Bobby. For it is his wagging tail and barking voice that restores the humanity and reverses the shame of the prisoners of Camp 1492. For Levinas the line between animal and human is at once broken but then re-instated as he is reluctant “to exalt the animal to the moral rank of the human (as he understands these terms), or, conversely, to disparage human beings by considering them little more than animals” (Atterton 2004, 56). The situation is made more paradoxical when Levinas then goes on to declare that “[t]his dog was the last Kantian in Nazi Germany” (ibid.). This is a strange and enigmatic statement which gives us much to think about. *On the one hand*, it is a sentimentalizing anthropomorphism: for in recognizing the prisoners as human, not the ‘animals’ the Nazis had made them, Bobby becomes a ‘Kantian’ philosopher. Elsewhere in his essay Levinas will declare of the anthropomorphical gesture: “But enough of allegories! We have read too many fables and we are still taking the name of a dog in the figurative sense” (1990, 152). *On the other hand*, it represents a serious reading of the Kantian categorical imperative: Bobby’s affection is a testament to the moral life of the imperative: “Act in such a way that you

always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end” (Kant 1966, 91).<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, although Bobby might represent the last stand of (human) goodness, he can never really be ‘Kantian’ because for Kant “animals are not morally relevant creatures as such, since they lack reason” (Clark 1997, 188) and Bobby remains, Levinas hastens to add, “without the brain needed to universalize maxims” (1990, 153). Thus what is given and appreciated at an affective level must be denied intellectually and “the dog is granted the power to be more than itself only insofar as it rigorously remains itself” (Clark 1997, 192). It will take the meditations of one of Levinas’s pupils to advance from this double-bind and tease out the full implications of Bobby’s gaze.

One Paris morning, while naked in his bathroom about to take a shower, Jacques Derrida observes his cat observing him. Observe is not quite the right word here; this ‘looking’ of the cat is more directed, more intentional, and more disturbing because of this. He was, Derrida says, “faced with the cat’s eyes looking at me [*qui me regarde*] as it were from head to toe, just to see [*pour voir*], not hesitating to concentrate its vision [*sa vue*]—in order to see, with a view to seeing—in the direction of my sex” (2002a, 373, emphasis omitted). “Caught naked, in silence, by the gaze [*le regard*] of an animal” (ibid., 372), Derrida has difficulty overcoming his embarrassment. Why, he asks, does he “have trouble repressing a reflex dictated by immodesty”? Why is he disturbed by “the impropriety that comes of finding oneself naked, one’s sex exposed, stark naked before a cat that looks at you without moving”? He gives this old experience, the impropriety that comes “from appearing in truth naked, in front of the insistent gaze of the animal, a benevolent or pitiless gaze, surprised or cognizant,” a new name—*animal-séance*—derived from the French for impropriety (*malséance*). “It is as if,” Derrida continues, “I were ashamed... naked in front of this cat, but also ashamed for being ashamed” (ibid.). So what he experiences is a mirrored shame ashamed of itself, a sort of *mise en abyme* of shame with the incomparable experience of nudity at its center. Nudity is paradoxically proper to humans yet foreign to animals; it is doubly

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<sup>6</sup> Kant argued that moral law originates in pure reason and is enunciated by an *a priori* synthetical judgement which he called the ‘categorical imperative’ (see Kant 1966).

paradoxical for despite the fact that they are naked—while seemingly covered in fur, feathers or scales, etc.—animals do not appear aware that they are so. This is, says Derrida,

the property unique to animals and what in the final analysis distinguishes them from man, is their being naked without knowing it. Not being naked therefore, not having knowledge of their nudity, in short without consciousness of good and evil. (ibid., 373)

Animals aren't naked because they *are* naked and, as Derrida points out, “no animal has ever thought to dress itself” (ibid.). We, of course, in our anthropomorphization of them do dress them up; we desperately cover their fur with our furcoats, putting Mr Toad in tweed jackets and Miss Piggy in a tutu. Derrida continues:

There is no nudity ‘in nature’. There is only the sentiment, the effect, the (conscious or unconscious) experience of existing in nakedness. Because it *is* naked, without *existing* in nakedness, the animal neither feels nor sees itself naked. (ibid., 374, original emphasis)

Human beings are the only animals to have invented a garment to cover their sex. They are human to the extent that they are able to be naked, able that is to be ashamed, to know a sense of shame because they are no longer naked. What we have, says Derrida, is “a state of two *nudities without nudity*” (ibid., original emphasis). The animal exists in a state of non-nudity because it *is* nude and the human being in a state of nudity because he or she is *no longer* nude. He asks:

Before the cat that looks at me naked, would I be ashamed *like* an animal that no longer has the sense of nudity? Or on the contrary, *like* a man who retains his sense of nudity? Who am I therefore? (ibid., original emphasis)

Derrida in his bathroom no longer knows what to do or what direction to “throw himself” (his words) (ibid., 379). Will he chase the cat away or simply hurry to “cover the obscenity of the event” (his words again); in short, must he hurry to cover himself? Caught in the indecision between these two moves, true philosopher that he is, he begins to wonder what ‘responding’ to the animal, an animal, means. (One hopes his bathroom was heated!) He asks, first of all, if an animal can ever reply in its own name and he remembers the passage from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* where Alice observes that it is impossible to have a conversation with cats because, whatever you say to

them, kittens only purr, rather than purring for ‘yes’ and meowing for ‘no’ (ibid., 377).

In Derrida’s essay where these events are recounted, “The Animal that Therefore I Am,” first presented at Cerisy in a conference entitled “The Autobiographical Animal” (Mallet 1999), the malaise of this scene in the bathroom plays out over a crossing of borders between human and animal. “The animal looks at us, and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins there” suggests Derrida (ibid., 397). Indeed, Derrida goes back to the beginnings and Genesis, when “Man called all the animals by their names” (ibid., 284)<sup>7</sup> and this naming marked his ascendancy and domination over them. There is, notes Derrida, a sense of vertigo, “the dizziness one feels before the abyss” (ibid., 387), with the act of an all-powerful God who lets man do the naming of animals of his own accord, in order to see what might happen, “to see what he would call them” (Gen. 2:19), without knowing what was going to end up happening, that is, “a God who sees something coming without seeing it coming” (Derrida 2002a, 387). It is the same feeling of vertigo which takes hold of Derrida when he runs away from an animal that looks at him naked. He is forced to acknowledge:

For so long now it is as if the cat had been recalling itself and recalling that, recalling me and reminding me of this awful tale of Genesis, without breathing a word. Who was born first, before the names? Which one saw the other come to this place so long ago? Who will have been the first occupant, and thus the master? Who the subject? Who has remained the despot, for so long now? (ibid., 387)

Derrida then moves on to recount the presumed distinctions made by the philosophical tradition (Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, Levinas and Lacan) between human and animal, distinctions that are based on knowledge of nakedness (and thus good and evil), rationality, language, priority. He plays on the French homonym *je suis*, which means both ‘I am’ and ‘I follow’, to reverse and displace the hierarchical relation that has consistently relegated the animal to second place, and, with a rapidly accelerating pace beginning about two centuries ago, led to the management of animals raised for human consumption. The scandal of that relation begins with the enormous presumption of an

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<sup>7</sup> Citing Dhormes’ translation of Genesis 2:20. See translator David Wills’ footnote (in Derrida 2002a, 384, n. 14).

opposition between a single species ('man') and millions of other living species reduced to a single denomination (the animal). Thus the animal that, in Descartes, and his successors' terms, I, as a thinking human, am therefore not—*je pense donc je (ne) suis (pas un animal)*—becomes for Derrida both the animal that he recognizes himself to be and that which, in an anagrammatical reordering of the philosophical tradition, he recognizes himself as following or coming after. *L'animal que donc je suis* here means "the animal that therefore I am (following)." From this point of view the animal exists in the abyss of a particularly differential otherness. Different from the sameness of another human, yet also different from the incommensurability of an inanimate object. The gaze of Derrida's cat serves to undermine the ontological security of the human animal that so confidently distinguishes itself from it. "Crossing borders or the ends of man I come or surrender to the animal—to the animal in itself, to the animal in me and the animal at unease with itself," writes Derrida (2002a, 372). This involves a recasting of the Genesis myth whereby it is an animal that brings man to consciousness of his nakedness, and of good and evil, rather than being the case (via woman) of his fall. In these moments of nakedness, suggests Derrida, "as with the eyes of the other, the gaze called animal offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or ahuman [*l'anhumain*], the ends of man" (ibid., 381).

There is another Derridean moment that involves a retelling of the dynamics of the animal gaze. In the documentary film *D'ailleurs, Derrida (Derrida's Elsewhere)* directed by Safaa Fathy (1999) there is a sequence with Derrida standing in front of the large glass windows of the tropical aquarium at the Palais de la Porte Dorée which at the time of filming was found underneath the Musée National des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie. Derrida declares that he feels like a fish in being looked at by, and made subject to, the camera in the same way that fish in the tanks are under the view and the surveillance of visitors to the museum; and above all in being made to wait during the process of filming. He speaks of

what I think is the patience and impatience of these fish here. They have been inspected, imprisoned and surrounded by glass but they are of the same species. I feel like a fish here forced to appear in front of the glass, behind the glass stared at I am made to wait the time it takes. (Cited in *D'ailleurs, Derrida* 1999)

He also feels, he says, uncomfortably the ‘untranslatability’ of the relation to time experienced by different species, something which strikes him whenever he sees an animal looking at him, and which he implicitly relates to the temporal disjunction inherent in photography:

Every time I am confronted with an animal that looks at me one of the first questions I ask myself about both the proximity and the infinite distance that separates us concerns time. We live in the same instant, and yet they have an experience of time that is absolutely untranslatable into my own. (Cited in *D’ailleurs*, Derrida 1999)

What sort of proximity or being-with can one talk about in relation to the animal?, Derrida asks in “The Animal That Therefore I Am.” The “being-pressed, the being-with as being strictly attached, bound, enchained, being-under-pressure, compressed, impressed, repressed, pressed against” (Derrida 2002a, 380) all point this relation to a ‘being-after-it’, with both senses of hunting or taming and succession or inheritance. “The animal is there before me, there close to me, there in front of me—I who am (following) after it” (ibid.). For unlike Levinas, who ultimately dismisses Bobby as an allegory, Derrida is willing to follow/be the animal.

Any conclusion to my short itinerary of shame here must be unsatisfactory to the extent that Primo Levi’s chapter on shame remained so. This is partially so because we are dealing with the depth of an emotion, an affect, that up until now has been either ignored (because talking about it is proof of one’s own weakness), or feared (because it is held to belong to a tradition tied to Christian morality). Nevertheless, shame, as we have seen, fascinates us because we discover in it the opportunity, albeit painful, to confront the ego and rediscover the self in its very intimacy, and to lift oneself beyond (to ‘evade’) the self. The questions posed by the question of shame in each of the texts I have examined cannot be answered or resolved easily, if only because they uncover or lay bare one of the most complex characteristics of shame: the capacity to actualize the opportunity to the authenticity of the self, to alter sin into an expedient form whereby recognition of one’s guilt is not exhausted in repentance but finds its expiation in the conquest of the self.

Let me bring my discussion back to where I began with words which I hoped were uncovered in their directness. Let me try to speak naked, in or with full nakedness. Let me display the shame I somewhat hesitantly confessed to you at the beginning. There would seem to be

no single discipline that would properly and exhaustively confront the problem of the animal, or animal problem. Rather it appears that the various discourses of which humans are, and have been, capable at once indicate the distance of the human animal from other animals, and constitute the possibility for the human to turn back reflectively to the other-than-human animal, to bridge such a rift. It is out of its discursive distance or difference from the animal, and hence from itself as animal, that the human can reflect and effect a reflective self-return. It is exquisitely human to be capable of this openness through shame to the other-than-human, indeed to *be* such an openness. Throughout much of the history of metaphysics the essence of the human has been repeatedly determined in opposition to the animal where the former is understood to be in possession of a certain capacity or trait (language, reason, spirit, subjectivity) the latter lacks. In the sense that it implies a necessary relatedness mediated by shame, rather than a singularity determined by essence, this state of 'openness' differs from other kinds of (discredited) essentialist opposition between human and animal. To signal this human capacity for 'openness' in relation to animality, Derrida's proposal is that in place of the concept 'the animal' we use the (French) portmanteau neologism '*l'animot*', a combination of the word for animal and the word for 'word', and a homonym of the French plural *les animaux* (animals). *L'animot* denotes a singular, living being that cannot be subsumed under any species concept, and, as Derrida's translator notes, "[w]ith its singular article and plural-sounding ending, it jars in oral French" (2002a, 405).

In a recent interview Derrida declared that:

The question of animality is not one question among others... I have long considered it to be decisive... in itself and for its strategic value; and that's because, while it is difficult and enigmatic in itself, it also represents the limit upon which all great questions are formed and determined. (Cited in Derrida and Roudinesco 2004, 62–3)

He has explicitly linked the question of the animal to his exploration elsewhere of the gift, hospitality, friendship, human rights and forgiveness. It is the issue of shame that opens out the question of the human as the *only* 'animal' capable of forgiveness. Derrida remarks: "I am sure you have seen shameful animals, animals giving all the signs of 'feeling guilty', thus of remorse and regret, and animals fearing judgment or punishment, animals hiding or exposing themselves to reproach or chastisement" (2001b, 47). In two essays "On Forgiveness" (2001a) and



“To Forgive: the Unforgivable and the Imprescriptible” (2001b), he explores the aporia that there is forgiveness even, and especially, if the other has done something unforgivable—as, of course, we ‘humans’ have repeatedly done to animals including the ‘human animal’. There is forgiveness just when forgiveness is impossible, when it makes no sense to grant or expect forgiveness, just when forgiveness is not only not owed to the offender but when it is unimaginable. Forgiveness, like the gift (*par/don, for/give*), begins by (*par*) the impossible. The unforgivable is the only possible correlate of forgiveness and the only way for forgiveness to be a gift. This raises the question of whether forgiveness must pass through words or whether it must pass beyond words. “Can one only forgive or ask forgiveness when speaking or sharing the language of the other. . . . Must one refuse the experience of forgiveness to whoever does not speak? Or, on the contrary, must one make silence the very element of forgiveness. . . .?” (2001b, 47). These questions are ones that would seem to exclude the animal. Yet Derrida writes:

It would be very imprudent to deny all animality access to forms of sociality in which guilt, and therefore procedures of reparation, even of mercy—begged or granted—are implicated in a very differentiated way. There is no doubt an animal thank you or mercy. You know that certain animals are just as capable of manifesting what can be interpreted as an act of war, an aggressive accusation, as they are capable of manifesting guilt, shame, discomfort, regret, anxiety in the face of punishment, and so forth. . . . one cannot deny this possibility, even this necessity of extra-verbal forgiveness, even un-human [*an-humain*] forgiveness. (47–48)

Like *l’animot*, Derrida’s French neologism *an-humain*, is a homophone, this time for *inhumain* (inhuman/inhumane); but one that inscribes in a process of reflexive othering the first two letters of *an-imal* (or even *an-imot*) as its negativizing prefix, and contains inscribed within it the *main*, or hand of man/animal. As Derrida has shown in a body of texts from *Of Grammatology* (1974) to *Le toucher: Jean-Luc Nancy* (1999), wherever the motif of the ‘hand of man’ appears, the ‘question of the animal’ is opened up once again.<sup>8</sup> To posit the un-human or ahuman [*an-humain*] is to suggest that beyond “the edge of the *so-called* human” lies

. . . a heterogeneous multiplicity of the living. . . relations of organization or lack of organization among realms that are more and more difficult

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<sup>8</sup> See in particular his discussion of Heidegger’s distinction between the human hand and the ape’s ‘paw’ (Derrida 1987).

to dissociate by means of the figures of the organic and the inorganic, of life and/or death. These relations are at once close and abyssal, and they can never be totally objectified. (Derrida 2002a, 399)

In a later sequence of Safaa Fathy's film we view a fragment of Derrida's Paris seminar on "*Pardon et Parjure*" ("Forgiveness and Perjury") and we learn that it is on the basis of a wound, something that leaves a scar within "living tissue," that the possibility of forgiveness arises:

Even if 'wound' is a biological figure that refers to psychological or moral pain or spiritual suffering... there is only a meaning to pardon, to reconciliation there where the wound has left a memory, a trace, a scar to be healed or soothed or dressed. (Cited in *D'ailleurs*, Derrida 1999)

The subject in this way is constituted by an unforgiven and unforgivable wounding, which perhaps means that in asking forgiveness of the other, *l'animot* in this case, or in responding to the request for forgiveness of the other (and animals, as we have seen Derrida argue, may exhibit 'an-human forgiveness'), one is always already required to ask forgiveness of oneself, asking it of the other within oneself.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### UNDERSTANDING AVIAN INTELLIGENCE

Alphonso Lingis

No situation appears more tragic, more offensive for the heart and the mind—despite the ink clouds projected by the Judeo-Christian tradition to mask it—than that of a humanity that coexists with other species of life on Earth which they share in enjoying, but with whom it cannot communicate. It is understandable that the myths refuse to take this flaw in creation as original, that they see in its apparition the inaugural event of the human condition and its infirmity.

—Claude Lévi-Strauss and Didier Eribon, *De près et de loin*.

How different are these two kinds of bipeds, humans and birds, whose bodies and evolution are so remote from each other! The more intriguing then some of the feats of intelligence and ingenuity performed by birds; of all the mammals only humans are capable of anything remotely like them. Birds born in the spring that autumn fly by night thousands of miles south to return the following spring to the very backyard in which they were born. Who was the first human to think of unraveling the cocoons of moths to make clothing? Is it the upright posture and the reversed thumb that led to the hand-eye correlation in the human primate, and, also lost in the mists of prehistory, made possible the weaving of fibers into containers and clothing? Sociable Weaverbirds employ some ten different movements to cross weave and knot fibers into nests, where they fashion inverted entrances and also false entrances to deceive predators. Hardly any mammals sing, but song is the most important cultural activity in most known human cultures and generational subcultures. Some paleoanthropologists suggest that humans must have picked it up from birds. Many species of birds incorporate extensive mimicry of other species, including humans and inanimate sounds, into their songs. In courtship birds parade their ornamentation, sing and dance; bowerbirds construct stages, theaters,

and gardens for their performances and collect decorative objects for them (Barber 1993, 46–57).

The astonishing advances made in microbiology, genetics, and biochemistry in recent decades have brought new understanding to the internal constituents of living organisms and their evolution. The behavior of protein molecules, DNA, chromosomes, enzymes, and the processes that distribute nutrients to cells have become intelligible. Intelligible not simply in the sense that the constituents and interactions of inert matter are intelligible; they are understood also to be intelligent: adapted to the constitution, maintenance, survival, and reproduction of these living organisms. To be sure, there is a huge factor of waste: a fetus conceived is the product of the accidental joining of one sperm out of millions with one egg out of hundreds, the outcome of one chance out of three billion which misfire. The estimated ten to one hundred million species of living organisms have evolved as a result of mutations, occurring once in some ten billion replications of the DNA molecules, and of horizontal gene transfer, that of transposons, genes which are able to cut themselves out of one chromosome and splice themselves into another, jumping from organism to organism, species to species. The immense majority of these mutations are malfunctional and maladapted to survive. But this process results in the unending variety of species and individual organisms adapted to survive and reproduce in the unending variety of material and biological environments.

Simple organisms and non-independent organisms such as spermatozoa do not simply react to their environments but are sensitive to them. Sperms and eggs are not free swimmers in the uterine fluids; the ovarian follicle secretes a fluid for which the sperm has olfactory receptors, and the egg rejects sperm of another species (Spehr et al. 2003). Simple plants extend their growth in the direction of light and air. Complex animate organisms are not only sensitive to their environment, but perceive, that is, their motor adaptations are responses to the way their sense organs focus upon and organize the details of the visible, audible, olfactory, and tangible field. A spider selectively responds to vibrations of a certain range; it will not respond to a dead fly put on its web, but will to a tuning fork vibrating at a certain frequency (Boys 1880). Ethologists exhibit the intelligibility of animal perceptions and behaviors by showing how they are intelligent: means of adapting to the environment individuals find themselves in, adapted to the constitution, maintenance, survival, and reproduction of these living organisms. The eight thousand species of birds show the most extreme variation

of any phyla—from ostriches to hummingbirds, vultures to birds of paradise, flamingos to penguins—but ornithologists do not report on morphological and behavioral traits without showing their adaptation to environmental conditions. The sizes and shapes of beaks, the claws of cockatoos, the stomach acids of vultures, are shown to be adapted for specific foods; the color and number of eggs laid, the monogamous or promiscuous or cooperative mating and breeding behaviors are shown to be adapted for food availability, protection against predators, and specific climatic conditions. Nothing appears arbitrary (Barber 1993).

Biologists avoid speaking of the animals being intelligent. They are leery of anthropomorphism, for intelligence has from the first beginnings of science in Greek antiquity been taken to be distinctively human. With the full launching of empirical sciences in modern times, philosophy reserved to itself the analysis of the human, intelligent, mind. The perception of an intelligent mind would involve more than focusing successively upon one figure, perceiving the rest as background; it involves mapping the outlying space, recalling and foreseeing its extension. It involves cognitive trial and error, that is, the comparison of the presently mapped out sector with sectors recalled and foreseen. The intelligent mind is also self-conscious; its responses are not simply intelligent in the sense that biologists show that the responses of a spider are adapted for its survival and reproduction: the intelligent mind perceives its own mappings and comparisons and directs its responses accordingly. Its intellectual, imaginative or conceptual productions can be independent of utilitarian purposes, responses serving for the satisfaction of its biological needs and the reproduction of the species; they could be produced for aesthetic satisfaction, the disinterested valuation of beauty.

The first philosophers in Greek antiquity focused their attention on operations of informative and logical language explicated through reflection; intelligence came to mean paradigmatically linguistically formed knowledge and self-conscious reflection. Self-consciousness itself was understood as an explicit formulation of one's own mental operations, and as operation of language upon language. But even as dominant philosophies of the twentieth century contracted the philosophy of mind into a philosophy of language, empirical disciplines were integrating this linguistic and logical intelligence with what precedes it and makes it possible. Developmental psychology and psychoanalysis mapped out how stages in the acquisition of language—the shift from infantile babbling to words used in the absence of things, the acquisition of

the set of personal pronouns, of verb tenses and narrative order—are correlated with different kinds of conflicts with others and emotional complexes. Clinical and cognitive psychology and phenomenology considerably broadened the sphere of the human mind, studying the visual, auditory, and tactile discrimination of figure from ground and its perceptual location, the inner sense of posture, the kinesthetic sense of the location of one's organs and limbs, the way memories are explicitly recalled or latent, and the ways memories and imagination shape the perceived field.

Evolutionary biology has broken down the separation between human behavior and that of other animal species, and cognitive ecology, integrating evolutionary ecology and cognitive science, is breaking down the separation between human intelligence and the cognitive abilities of other animal species (see Friedman 1996 and Dukas 1998). These developments render obsolete the behaviorism of the founders of ethology, Karl von Frisch, Nikolas Tinbergen, and Konrad Lorenz, for which there is no empirical access to the mental processes of another human, still less those of other species. Cognitive ecology opens the possibility of understanding not only the intelligibility of the perception and behavioral responses of other species, but their intelligence. It also opens the possibility of new understanding of human intelligence.

We can predict that the ways the philosophy of mind has conceptualized the perception of space and time, cognitive trial and error, categorizing intelligence and self-consciousness will be transformed by these developments. But we also think that the phenomenological philosophy elaborated in the last century has much to offer to cognitive ecology. This philosophy had already broken the construction which the modern philosophy of mind had given to human intelligence, through scrupulous phenomenological description of the field of natural perception, the relationship between perceptions and behavioral responses, and the self-awareness that is not or not yet formulated in linguistic reports of one's sensations, images, and concepts. There can be no question of such a phenomenological understanding closing in on itself; as the psychology of perception, exploring the way visual, auditory, and tactile perception isolates a figure from a ground, integrates with the biochemistry and neurology of the sense organs, so the study of the intelligence of other species modeled after the study of human pre- or sub-linguistic intelligence will be integrated with the new paradigms of biochemistry, neurology, and genetics.

*I. Perception of Space and Time and the Formation of Categories*

The philosophy of mind since Immanuel Kant has recognized that cognitive trial and error involves the ability to form abstract concepts or categories, which in turn presupposes the perception of space and time. Kant argued that the ability not simply to be conscious of sensations in the mind but to perceive spatially extended objects presupposes an *a priori* intuition of space. He noted that the first science to be constituted, geometry, formulates the unlimited extension of space and the possible forms of space. He took it that the human mind is innately endowed with an immediate intuition of the space Euclidean geometry describes. Similarly the human mind would be endowed with an immediate intuition of the infinite dimension of time in which moments irreversibly succeed one another. The intuition of space and time make it possible to form abstract concepts or categories, to recognize patterns of sensation to recur at successive moments of time and in different sites in space. This intuition of space and time as such would be distinctively human (Kant [1781] 1978).

We now understand that when the other animals are territorial, they do not only stake out a territory through a range of movements and actions; they form a ‘mental map’ of it. Mental mapping is recalling and combining separate perceptions of spatially extended things and sites such that their positions relative to one another are grasped. It has been empirically established that bees, rats, and birds form mental maps of this kind; they do not simply find their way back to the home base by remembering a succession of landmarks, like Hansel and Gretel looking at a trail of breadcrumbs. Birds do locate their nests by noting nearby landmarks; if a flagpole or doghouse near a nest is moved, the returning bird first looks for its nest near that flagpole or doghouse, before searching the environment for it. But once it has located it, it readily finds it from any number of different directions, as it locates a food source again by any number of different routes (Hauser 2001).

Migratory birds extend these powers over often enormous distances. Arctic Terns fly the whole extent of the globe, a round trip of 25–34,000 kilometers, seasonally moving from the Arctic to the Antarctic, enjoying more sunlight than any other biological species. Bristle-Thighed Curlews fly 10,000 kilometers from Alaska to Polynesia, their longest nonstop flight over Pacific waters being 3,200 kilometers. Lesser Golden-Plovers migrate in an ellipse, going from northern Canada south by way of the



eastern United States to South America, returning by way of Mexico and the western United States. Ruby-Throated Hummingbirds, doubling their weight from one tenth to one fifth of an ounce in preparation, fly nonstop 900 kilometers over the Caribbean. Birds cross these distances often at night, when sometimes clouds obscure both Earth's surfaces and the stars. Adolescent birds leave the first autumn of their lives, and return to the very place where they were born. It has been established that birds do follow ancestral migratory paths and follow rivers and mountain ranges and note other topographical features. This however is not simply a sequential memory but a genuine mapping; birds blown off course, even hundreds of kilometers, regularly adjust their flight to rejoin the route and arrive at their destination.

Classical philosophy of mind took our conceptual and categorizing ability to presuppose a distinctively human intuition of pure space and time, but is our natural perception of space and time indeed radically different from that of birds? The phenomenology of perception noted that in natural perception we do not locate things on Cartesian coordinates but relative to spatially extended things; they are located as in front of or behind, to the right or to the left, above or below our bodies (see Merleau-Ponty 2003). And they are located relative to spatial things or zones taken to be the center: our home base, the territory we stake out. Our territory is segregated into a zone of supports, sustenance, and implements within reach—our home territory; an outlying zone of paths, obstacles, sustenance, and implements accessible—our life space; and an outer zone of uncharted distances, horizons, sky, sun and moon. As we stake out our territory, we make a mental map of it such that we view sites relative to one another, approachable from various routes. We can often see these maps, as when we take our bearings in the landscape from heights where we can get a 'bird's eye view' of the territory, and we can thus depict our territory with the conventions of mapmakers. A pure intuition of Euclidean space then does not make possible the perception of spatially extended objects; instead this mental mapping of the territory we inhabit and manage made possible the conceptual construction of Euclidean space.

But the powers of location of birds exceeds those of our natural perception. In Sweden a species of Nutcracker, a large jay-like bird, gathers nuts from lowlands, then flies three or four miles to higher ground to bury them in up to thirty thousand locations. In winter the Nutcracker digs them up through up to eighteen inches of snow; Nutcrackers have been observed to locate the hiding places under the

snow in 86 percent of their attempts. Most humans would lose track after a dozen caches. The Nutcracker's performance presupposes a mapping ability of extraordinary precision, an ability to cast that map over a landscape most of whose detailed features are obliterated by snow, and a detailed long-term memory (Barber 1993, 10).

None of us could, like many migratory birds, travel thousands of miles and, relying only on our mental map and memory, find our way back to our starting point. Still less find our way back without having seen and remembered landmarks. White-Crowned Sparrows captured in Boston, Massachusetts were shipped to Baton Rouge, Louisiana; when winter came they flew directly to their wintering grounds in San José, California. Once again they were captured and this time shipped to Maryland, and again they were found in San José at the appropriate time. A Manx Shearwater was taken from its home in Wales in the British Isles, put on an airplane, and released in Boston, Massachusetts; it had returned to its home in Wales twelve and a half days later. Homing pigeons carried in closed boxes in airplanes or trains across continents return to find the yard of the town from which they were taken (Barber 1993).

Birds do follow traditional migratory routes, following mountain ranges and rivers, shorelines and forests, and, it has recently been shown for pigeons, manmade highways. Adélie Penguins taken from their coastal breeding grounds to the interior of Antarctica wandered about confusedly on overcast days, but headed north-northeast back to their breeding grounds when the sun came out. To navigate consistently in one direction, it has been shown that birds have an ability to gauge the position of the sun relative to the earth at successive times of day. Studying the restlessness of confined birds during the migratory season and their collective orientations, and projecting overhead images of the stars which can be rotated has established that birds do orient themselves by the night sky—as do the Tuareg of the Sahara, leading their camel caravans by night, orienting themselves by the stars. The Polynesian “Argonauts of the Pacific” were able to navigate the vast expanses of the ocean by keen observation of, and remembering, ocean and wind currents—and watching the movements of sea birds (Lewis 1994). Recent research has brought to light in birds a sensitivity to Earth's magnetic field, which can supplement the other navigational procedures when weather conditions curtail them. Minute magnetite crystals in the heads of pigeons sensitive to magnetism have been identified.

Humans have had to devise prostheses—compasses, gyroscopes, and radar—to navigate vast spaces as birds do.

## II. *Self-Consciousness*

The philosophy of mind defined self-consciousness as a reflective movement of the mind by which it becomes the object of observation for itself. But we also speak of self-conscious behavior, behavior in which we, in pride or embarrassment, become aware of how we look to others, or deliberately contrive our posture and gestures out of this awareness. Consider the display behavior of birds. It is most striking in lekking birds—birds of paradise, hummingbirds, grouse, ruffs, snipes, woodcocks, honeyguides, cotingids, manakins, flycatchers, sharpbills, greenbuls, weaverfinches, Argus pheasants and Kakapo parrots—at least ninety-seven species in fourteen different families. In these species, the males typically have intensely colored and patterned plumage, often with ornamental tails, extravagant secondary wing feathers, ruffs, crests, wattles, and inflatable sonorous air sacks, and are often of significantly greater size than the females, whose plumage is dominantly camouflage. The males position themselves in arenas (leks, from the Swedish *leka*, to play) or in display branches or ground areas they clear of vegetation, and display their extended plumage in dances or aerial acrobatics accompanied with songs sometimes incorporating extensive mimicry of other species. They compete with one another, engaging in mock and sometimes real combats. The females visit these arenas and typically most of them mate with only one or other of the males displaying, then leave to build a nest and rear the young; the males take no part in the protection or rearing of the young. The males are thus selected not for territory and nutrients they control or offer but exclusively for their display characteristics. Lekking birds were for Darwin the core example of sexual selection independent of natural selection of the fittest. (Lek mating exists also in insect species, especially butterflies, bees, and wasps; fish such as Cichlids; toads and treefrogs; in salamanders and newts; in marine iguanas; and in mammals such as some deer and antelope species, an African bat, an Australian marsupial, and at least one population of dugongs.) (Kaplan and Rogers 2001).

How can we understand such behavior? The males of lekking species are for us among the most striking and beautiful of birds—birds of paradise, peafowl, Argus pheasants, hummingbirds—but could

one attribute to birds an aesthetic sense? Are not birds, as all species, instinctually driven to seek the best genes for their offspring—mates that are strong, healthy, able to escape predators? Could it be that the females confound size and ostentatiousness with strength and biological and reproductive vigor? Or could it be, as Amotz and Avishag Zahavi have proposed, that they see in the males they select, because handicapped with impractical and excess plumage and ostentatious colors, a supplementary vigor able to survive the predators they attract? (Zahavi and Zahavi 1997). But field research has established that the mortality rate for the gaudy and noisy males is not greater than that for the camouflaged females. Some researchers have conceded that they do not know what traits trigger selection by the females; it has even been proposed that the ‘selection’ is passive. But it is known that birds that form stable mating bonds are always able to identify their mate though we are at loss to identify individual birds, and that they especially focus on the face and voice print; penguins and sea birds that nest in colonies identify and care for their own offspring out of thousands.

And what kind of intelligence is there in these males? The layman would be tempted to say they know they are gorgeous. It is objected that they do not see themselves and would not recognize themselves in a mirror. Are then their display, their dances and aerial acrobatics, and their songs programmed instinctually and triggered by some perhaps hormonal automatism?

Mirror recognition has been taken since Jacques Lacan as the essential stage in the construction of self-consciousness; the correct use of the personal pronoun ‘I’ would follow it (before the “mirror stage” the child says “candy!”; then in parallel to others: “Mummy has . . . , Daddy has . . . , Johnny wants . . .”) (Lacan [1949] 2002). The mirror image would be the original signifier for oneself as a publicly designatable whole. But, separate and at a distance from one’s motor diagrams and feelings, it would also split the subject and develop into an ideal image of oneself. The phenomenology of perception has brought to light a more fundamental self-consciousness in our bodies. In integrating his limbs the infant contracts a postural axis, which more and more integrates his perceptual organs and body parts and orients it toward external objects and objectives. This postural diagram produces an internal kinesthetic sense of itself within the space in which our body functions. As we sit we have an internal, postural sense of the position of our legs under the table and do not have to look; as we reach to pound a nail on a high spot on the wall, our body maintains its balance by a systematic shift

in the positions and tensions of our legs. When we put on eyeglasses or walk with a cane, or when we adorn ourselves with a plumed hat and a cape, our internal sense of our body volume extends through these prostheses or these adornments, and we pass through a room filled with furniture in the same way that we sense passageways broad enough for our naked bodies. We are internally conscious of how we are walking—clumsily, rigidly, buoyantly, gracefully—and alter our gait, without having to observe ourselves in a mirror (where the observation will inevitably segment our movement).

This postural schema of itself doubles up into a ‘body image’, a somewhat misleading term for what is a quasi-visual sense of how our body looks from a viewing distance where it would be seen as a whole. When we enter an empty room, we have a sense of being a visible object too there, and quasi-see ourselves filling a good deal of the visible room or forming only a small outcrop in it. Though we have never actually seen our gait from a distance, we can pick out which is us from a projection of a file of people walking filmed in silhouette.

This reflexivity internal to our bodies enables us to remove some of the enigma of a self-conscious mind. The explicit self-consciousness that philosophers ascribed to intelligence, the I know that I am reasoning, doubting, perceiving, remembering, they tended to conceive as an internal observation, an internal reorientation of the focus of consciousness upon itself to observe its own sensations, mental images, concepts, and operations. Yet philosophers of mind since Hume and Kant recognized that there is no internal vision of an object that would be the self. The ego is not something I find in an immaterial mental sphere; the I that knows I am reasoning, discoursing, perceiving, remembering is where my body feels and acts, and it is in positioning myself and shifting my gaze that I locate myself in the visible field which extends ahead continuously from the field just passed by and where things retained or imagined focus and direct my attention to things now visible. It is in saying “I” that I locate my words in the rumble of things and the words of others. In speaking and gesticulating, in positioning, focusing, and shifting my gaze my body postural schema generates a quasi-visual image of myself such that I quasi-see where I am in the material environment and in the course of passing things and words.

We watch a bird of paradise or an Argus pheasant performing his display, his dance, his song, and we murmur “He knows he’s gorgeous!” Like we know how we look through an internal sense of our postural

schema our body generates when it integrates and orients its parts and organs, which in turn produces a 'body image'.

### III. *Non-utilitarian Values*

Darwin proposed that the extravagant colors and ornamental plumage of these birds evolved because females select them, and recent experimentation on some species has demonstrated that females regularly select the most extravagant: cut off the tail ends of some male Jackson's Widowbirds and glue them to prolong further the tails of others, and the females will choose the ones with the unnaturally ultralong tails; paint over some of the eyes of the tails of peacocks and the peahens choose the one with the most eyes (Pryke and Andersson 2005). Male bowerbirds dance, perform acrobatics, and sing in veritable theaters they construct, clearing the forest floor and then covering it with woven mats of leaves, carpets of moss, or gardens of flowers, and then erecting parallel walls they regularly paint with juices of berries, or domed pavilions up to five feet high. In front they assemble extensive collections of objects of specific colors, varying with the species and also the individual: a Satin Bowerbird first covers the display area with bright yellow leaves and flowers, and then on top arranges bright blue objects—feathers, flowers, butterflies, berries, beetles, pieces of blue glass—one I observed on a university campus in New South Wales had a gleaming collection of bright blue plastic bottle caps and drinking straws. The bird strips the branches above of leaves such that beams of sunlight illuminate his collection. Satin Bowerbirds have been extensively observed—fifty-four bowers observed, with video cameras fixed on some of them, over ten years in the Beauray State Forest Reserve—and the researchers have determined that females visit a number of bowers before selecting a mate, and they select mates who incorporate the most extensive mimicry in their songs and whose bowers are best constructed and have the rarest display objects (Loffredo and Borgia 1986; Collis and Borgia 1992).

Male bowerbirds have nothing to do with the construction of nests, which the females will build on their own, and there are no edible objects in their display collections. Each male vigorously defends his bower, for other males do try to destroy it and steal its display objects, but does not defend a territory where the female will build her nest (see Firth and Firth 2004).

(There is also a bower fish: the *Cyrtocara eucinostomus*. The ten-centimeter-long males build bowers of sand some two meters from one another; females prefer males with tall bowers. The bowers are designed so that eggs roll to the center of a crater at the top of the bower for fertilization. Females carry the fertilized eggs away and brood them in their mouths.)

Charles Darwin could only wonder whether females perceive 'beauty' in the display of the males. But to suggest that will inevitably seem to ethologists faithful to the scientific ambitions of founders von Frisch, Tinbergen, and Lawrence the most blatant anthropomorphism.

Art was separated from its religious, political, and pedagogical uses by the Enlightenment, and aesthetics constituted as a distinct discipline. For Immanuel Kant, the aesthetic sense presupposes a conceptual intelligence able to abstract from all practical nutrient or instrumental features of an object, and to compare within categories. The Romantics recognized art to be the highest activity of culture. Although the aesthetic sense was taken to be distinctively and universally human, nothing in human cultures changes more across history and varies more from culture to culture. In the West the canons of taste the Renaissance and Enlightenment established have for the most dedicated artists lost their authority. Today the theory of aesthetic taste is in disarray; the Kantian conception that beauty and sublimity are the defining values of the aesthetic no longer holds for painters, sculptors, poets, fiction writers, or musicians.

Social scientists, clinical psychologists, neurologists, and geneticists have been able to determine a few correlations. The physiology of the eye explains why peoples in all cultures distinguish the same colors in the continuum of the spectrum as primary, and see the same colors as contrasting. Clinical psychologists have offered explanations for the preference for certain kinds of order; social scientists have made correlations of architectural and plastic forms with certain kinds of ecological and socio-political systems. Ethnobiologists have offered explanations why a certain cast of the face is seen as attractive across cultures, and as eliciting sexual desire. Freud believed that the aesthetic is a sublimation of the sexually attractive, but it is not the genitals themselves that are usually first seen and that trigger intense emotional attachment, but the youth, health, vigor, and also social and productive skills and social rank of the preferred partner. Reproductive ability, security, and wealth are also involved.

But courtship and seduction among humans give rise to the unending elaboration of the erotic: teasing and infantile and private speech; courtship games, ceremonies, and rituals; glamorous and impractical garb, cosmetics and coiffures; amulets, potions, and jewelry; dances, jousts, and competitions, including deadly competitions. If we have not been able to understand how the system of leks and the constructions of bowerbirds evolved, nor even how the extreme variations in extravagance of the forty-two species of birds of paradise on New Guinea evolved, we have also not been able to explain the extreme differences in glamour, erotic ritual, and erotic music among medieval European knights and medieval Japanese geishas, tattooed and cicatrized Africans of the sub-Sahara and pre-Colombian Mayas, Victorian courtesans and contemporary celebrities or subcults. If aesthetic taste is a yet higher elaboration in the mind presupposing conceptual intelligence, those of us who are compulsively drawn to certain elaborations of erotic glamour cannot by self-conscious reflection produce an account of how and why.

Immanuel Kant did note that humans first began to ornament themselves with body parts borrowed from other species: plumes, furs, tusks, shells, flowers. Some anthropologists have suggested that since so few mammals sing at all, humans must have learned it from birds. Indeed many dances in dispersed cultures are taken from the courtship dances of Cranes, Bustards, Ruffs. The extraordinary similarity between the adornments and display dances and rituals of lekking birds and the erotic adornments, rituals, and dances of humans, and between the display objects prized by Bowerbirds and *objets d'art* prized by humans, suggests to us that, if we give up the Enlightenment conceit that the aesthetic is the highest human cultural activity, we may make progress by first constructing concepts and paradigms for the sense display birds have of themselves and for the kind of perception exercised by the females who select, and by then returning to the human realm of erotic glamour.

The pair of long, highly decorative feathers of the King-of-Saxony bird of paradise are valued as decorations both by bowerbirds and by Papuan people. The selection process by which these feathers evolved was carried out by female birds of paradise, not by humans or bowerbirds—but all three species find them attractive. (Ligon 1999, 223)



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PART TWO

ANIMALS INCORPORATED



## CHAPTER THREE

### WHAT DO ANIMALS DREAM OF? OR *KING KONG* AS DARWINIAN SCREEN ANIMAL<sup>1</sup>

Barbara Creed

All the philosophers... all of them say the same thing: the animal is without language.  
—Jacques Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)”

What do animals dream of? Freud raised this question in *The Interpretation of Dreams* but in an unfamiliar gesture (for one so curious) he chose not to explore it any further. “I do not myself know what animals dream of,” he says (1982, 211).

But a proverb, to which my attention was drawn by one of my students, does claim to know. “What,” asks the proverb, “do geese dream of?” And it replies: “Of maize.” The whole theory that dreams are wish-fulfillments is contained in these two phrases. (1982, 211–212)

Nicholas Royle comments on Freud’s evasiveness:

Doesn’t the whole of *The Interpretation of Dreams* tremble here, in this question of animals’ dreams, in this edgy configuration of ignorance (“I do not [myself] know what animals dream of”) and desire (Freud’s theory, “the whole theory that dreams are wish fulfillments”)? Is Freud not an animal? (Royle 2003, 242)

Significantly, Freud concludes the chapter with a popular saying to demonstrate how strongly we see dreams as ‘wish fulfillments:’ “I should never have imagined such a thing even in my wildest dreams” (1982, 213). What did Freud imagine in his “wildest dreams”? That animals do dream? That the human and animal may share similar dreams?

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<sup>1</sup> In *Beasts of the Modern Imagination*, Margaret Norris argues that some writers such as Kafka, and artists such as Max Ernst, strove to “create *as* the animal” in order to critique human culture (1985, 1). My concept of the screen animal of popular film is indebted to Margaret Norris’s argument.

Darwin certainly accepted the view that animals dream: “[A]ll the higher animals, even birds have vivid dreams, and this is shewn by their movements and the sounds uttered” (2004, 95–6). Quoting the poet Jean Paul Richter, who said that “[t]he dream is an involuntary art of poetry,” Darwin asserted that, insofar as animals did dream, they also possessed “imagination” (2004, 96). If the latter were true then we would have to completely re-think the relationship between animal and human. Yet this is what the cinema, through the figure of the screen animal, proposes.

### *The Screen Animal*

The question of the animal, or, in Derrida’s words, the “massively unavoidable” question of the animal, is central to the history of the cinema (1994, 85). Since its beginnings, the cinema has developed a unique relationship with the animal. It has not only represented the animal in genres from fantasy to horror, but, as Jonathan Burt (2002) shows, it has also drawn upon images of animals in motion as a basis for developments in film technology. The cinema has rapidly emerged as one of the most technically innovative aesthetic forms of all times. The history of special effects in film includes stop-motion model animation, front and rear projection, the traveling matte, the Steadicam, blue screens, latex prosthetics, pneumatic body forms, and now CGI animation. In venturing into the terrain of the animal, the cinema has filmed real animals, even starred them as lead characters in films such as *Black Beauty* (1946, 1971, 1994), *The Bear* (1989) and *The Horse Whisperer* (1988) but it has also created a fictional animal—this is a ‘screen animal’ as the star of films as diverse as *King Kong* (1933, 1976, 2005), *Moby Dick* (1930, 1956), *Bambi* (1942), *The Lion King* (1994), *The Thing* (1982) and *Max Mon Amour* (1986). The cinematic construction of the screen animal is conceived outside a Cartesian epistemology that regarded the animal as an irrational machine. With its vast array of complex special effects technologies, the cinema is able to approach the creation of the animal as a Darwinian being, a creature with the power to feel and to communicate:

By expanding the definition of community to include animals, Darwin’s work precipitated the subsequent search for modes of communication between animals and human beings. (Lippit 76–77)

The screen animal has the potential to collapse the dualistic or dichotomous thinking of Western philosophy that has separated human from animal, mind from body, and civilization from nature. As such the screen animal can also be viewed as a Deleuzian “body without organs”, that is, as a body of becoming, freed from its habituated modes of being and free from conventional expectations as to how it should behave and act (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 149–66). Western civilization has rendered the animal inferior, even abject, by means of essentialist and formulaic notions that the animal is without language or feelings. If we think of the body of the screen animal as potentially “a body without organs” we can disinvest it of humanist and philosophical fantasies about the animal as other. The screen animal is an artifice, a construct that some films deploy in order to challenge the anthropocentric basis of modern society and culture. The story of the screen animal—its past and future—is only just being told.

Insofar as the screen animal is a technological figure, its significance is different from that of an actual animal—it signifies far more than the ‘world of nature’ or feelings of sympathy or protectiveness toward the animal. The filmmaker can use the screen animal to foreground questions about the anthropocentric nature of human society. In his study, *Animals in Film*, Jonathan Burt argues that “animal imagery is not seen in quite the same way as other forms of representation” (2002, 161). Burt discusses the fact that viewers react in very different ways to scenes that depict animal suffering even when it is clear that the animal is not being harmed in any way. He argues that the “refusal to read the animal image purely as an image” has important consequences for how we see the role of the animal in film. “This split within the animal image—the artificial image that never can quite be read as artificial—is one that ruptures all readings of it” (Burt 2002, 162–163). In other words the animal image can be read in different but related ways—for its humane as well as its philosophical and ethical meanings. The screen animal is also a Darwinian creature, endowed with all of the qualities that Darwin argued animals possess—intelligence, emotions and the ability to feel pain and pleasure, happiness and misery, love and hate, shame and dread (2004, 100). And of course the screen animal dreams. In Darwin’s view “there is no fundamental difference between man and the higher mammals in their mental faculties” (86). He argued that some animals, such as dogs, also possess a sense of humor. Darwin’s defense of the animal has rarely, if at all, been discussed in relation to film. Yet the cinema is very Darwinian: many films draw on the screen

animal to endorse the Darwinian view of the animal, which undermines humanity's anthropocentric view of the world. Thus the screen animal is primarily designed to become an actor in a fiction, but it also signifies meanings beyond itself, drawing attention to wider issues.

Insofar as the screen animal is portrayed as possessing mental faculties and expressing emotions, it does not follow that this should be dismissed as an act of anthropomorphism. This latter concept has been employed all too often to establish and maintain a spurious dividing line between human and animal, making it clear that 'human' characteristics of intelligence and emotions have been wrongly attributed to the 'non-human' creature. The figure of the screen animal—particularly in the horror film—challenges this view by collapsing the boundary between 'human' and 'nonhuman' and replacing it with a continuum. "Man in his arrogance thinks himself a great work[,] worthy the interposition of a deity... [It is] more humble & I believe true to consider him created from animals" (Darwin 2004, xvi).

As James Twitchell has pointed out, the animals of the horror film constitute a "modern bestiary" (1985, 258–301). This catalogue includes a range of anonymous creatures such as werewolves, vampires, apes, sharks, birds, crocodiles, dinosaurs, and other assorted birds and beasts. In many films, the monstrous animal is also an identity, often a sympathetic figure with a name or recognizable face: King Kong, the Wolf Man, the Creature from the Black Lagoon, the Beast (Beauty's partner), Max Mon Amour, the Fly, Cujo, Godzilla, Mothra and Mother Alien. A major reason why human culture needs the animal monster is that the latter not only reminds us of our debt to nature, but also serves to critique human society. The horror film thus offers much more than the pleasure of vicarious thrills: *King Kong* presents a critique of civilization, animal captivity, zoos and exhibition; *The Fly* of science and animal experimentation; *Wolfen* of hunting and species extinction; *Aliens* of the immoral behavior of science and the military; and *Alien Resurrection* of the human animal itself.

In the majority of horror films, the portrayal of the screen animal fulfils the main condition of the uncanny: it is both familiar yet unfamiliar on at least two counts. It is doubly doubled—a double of its referent in the real and a double of the human animal. Thus the screen animal belongs to the realm of the uncanny and can evoke in the spectator a sense of unease, of *déjà vu*, of having experienced something before, which evades conscious memory (Royle 2003, 172–186). This 'something', this 'trace' of another event is the human experi-

ence both of being an animal and of becoming animal. In Darwinian terms the screen animal signifies the collapse of boundaries between human and animal; in Freudian terms the zoocentric or screen animal signifies repressed human desire; in Deleuzian terms, it is an animal in the process of ‘becoming’ something other; and in Derridean terms it presents a ‘trace’ of something else, a trace that gives rise to different questions about the human-animal relation.

I am thus suggesting that the cinema has created a different order of the animal, one whose agency (desires, dreams) challenges the bases on which the differences between human and animal have historically and philosophically been founded. The screen animal subverts cultural notions of what constitutes the ‘human’ by giving rise to fantasies that violate the taboos that uphold the social fabric. These include the taboos on murder, cannibalism and bestiality—taboos that Western cultures have conventionally thought of as being central to civilization. A number of horror films depict the screen animal in such a way that the viewer is compelled to raise questions about the anthropocentric nature of human society. This is true of the three versions of *Kīng Kōng* made in 1933, 1976 and 2005. One way to approach the issues raised in these films is through the metaphor of the dream—the question with which I opened this discussion. What do animals dream of? What does Kong dream of?

Various writers have pointed to the fact that *King Kong* can be interpreted as a dream—the filmmaker’s dream, the woman’s dream, the film as a dreamwork. This chapter argues that equally *Kīng Kōng* can be interpreted as the dream of the animal, of Kong himself. The *Kīng Kōng* films represent the screen animal’s dream—a dream of inter-species love and loss, desire and death. But of course this recurring and changing dream is ultimately the dream of the culture that has produced the film in the first place. The culture dreams of the animal dreaming . . . beset by nightmares, even.

*King Kong (Merian Cooper & Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1933)*

*King Kong* is the first of the great screen animals—a construction or assemblage designed to thrill and move the audience with the mystery of its construction. The surrealists lauded the technological elements of the film. Jean Ferry drew attention to the fact that Kong was an automaton and that much of the film’s pleasure derived from watching



Kong move on screen. He describes Kong's movements and the "acute sensation of *unheimlich* with which the presence of automata and trickery imbues the whole film" as deeply "poetic" (Ferry [1934] 1978, 107).

*King Kong* tells the story of a party of explorers, led by Carl Denham, a filmmaker and showman, searching for an uncharted island known to sailors as "Skull Island" and the monstrous beast said to inhabit the island. In the hope of finding the Beast, Denham has brought along a young woman, Ann Darrow (Fay Wray), to play the role of Beauty. He plans to film her terrified reactions on first sighting the monster. After landing on the fog-drenched island, the travelers encounter a primitive world—a savage tribe, human sacrifice, the monstrous ape Kong, and a vast wall designed to keep human and animal apart. After a series of mishaps, the islanders seize Ann and present her to Kong as a human sacrifice. Having never seen a white woman, a curious Kong seizes Ann and takes her to his mountainous cavern where he falls in love. After a series of perilous adventures, the group rescues Ann and captures Kong who Denham imprisons in the hold of the ship. "He's always been King of his world," says Denham cruelly, "but we'll teach him fear!" Back in New York, Denham puts King Kong on display at a Broadway theatre where he delivers a speech to the expectant audience:

Look at Kong! He was a King and a God in the world he knew, but now he comes to civilization merely a captive, a show to gratify your curiosity. Ladies and Gentlemen, look at Kong!

The curtain rises to reveal the once-magnificent Kong, his arms outstretched and chained above his head. When he sees Ann with her lover, Jack, Kong becomes enraged. Blinded by camera flashlights, Kong bursts his chains and charges amongst the horrified audience. Causing havoc in the streets of New York, Kong finds Ann and carries her to the top of the Empire State building where he tries to defend himself against the hail of bullets from four fighter planes. Mortally wounded, Kong lifts Ann from the ledge, where he has placed her, for one last look. The God of Skull Island tries to ward off the bullets, but to no avail. Kong falls from the spire and hurtles to the ground where he dies. Standing over Kong, Denham states: "It wasn't the airplanes. It was Beauty killed the Beast!"

*King Kong's Dream*

In the 1933 classic by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, Kong's desire is clearly sexual. The repeated use of the subjective camera in the cave sequence not only encourages us to identify with Kong but also to interpret events from Kong's point of view, even to see the sequence as a projection of Kong's desire, his dream. Holding her limp body in one giant paw, Kong lifts up his hard-won prize and, overcome with curiosity, gently peels off strips of her clothing. With the other paw, he holds up her torn clothing to his nostrils and sniffs her perfume. Again, we watch Ann from Kong's subjective gaze as Ann opens her eyes, looks at Kong in horror, but stifles a desire to scream. The music becomes softer, even lyrical. In a playful mood, Kong begins to tickle Ann who utters an indignant cry.

Ann's face conveys a 'what next?' expression as Kong refuses to let her go. This shot cuts again to wide angle as Kong then proceeds to tickle her bare skin. Half naked, Ann cries out as she struggles to prise herself free from Kong's hairy paw. Kong tickles her again and again. And then Kong sniffs her body scent, which lingers on his fingers. The scene is playful and sexual at the same time. This sexually charged interaction is cut short when Kong, hearing a rock fall in the cavern, is forced to halt his play and lumber off to investigate.

This famous scene upset the censors and was cut from prints shortly after the film's release; it has only been recently restored, mainly to theatrical prints. No doubt today the scene has lost some of its power to shock. Writing in 1986, David Hogan argued that the scene is not "especially titillating": "The scene is benign, utterly charming, and a masterpiece of special effects technique" (98). Others have had quite different responses. In 1934 the surrealist Jean Ferry applauded *King Kong* for its poetic qualities, which include its special effects, violent dream-like qualities and its "monstrous eroticism" by which he meant "the monster's unbridled love for the woman, cannibalism, human sacrifice" (1978, 107). I agree with Ferry: the erotic charge of the cave scene is very powerful. The scene does not literally portray a sexual encounter but relies on symbols of and allusions to sexual desire as well as playing with the erotics of touch and scent. Sexuality is present in the capture, the dark cavern, animal cries, fur brushing against smooth skin, primitive dangers.

A most important characteristic of the screen animal is that we are encouraged to see through animal eyes—to identify with its desires,

pleasures and pains. King Kong also encourages us to feel through the animal's body, to experience its enormous power, energy and otherness. Kong's encounter with Ann is dominated by touch and scent and it is through these sensations that Ann and Kong's bodies are linked. Kong is a Darwinian creature in that he brings human and animal together, reminding us "of the great cleft produced in our human being by the repression of the animal and living body" (Norris 1985, 3) *King Kong* is concerned, not so much with the limits of identification between human and animal, but with its possibilities, which are made much easier because the ape, more than any other creature, shares so much in common with the human. The more we are encouraged to identify with Kong, the more the filmmaker is able to undermine or shift the boundary between human and animal. As Burt argues, "identification between human and animal does not automatically imply anthropomorphism, or even its opposite, the bestialization of man" (2002, 69). Although Kong is a projection of the human imaginary, there are moments in the text, gaps and contradictions, in which Kong is given a 'voice', a point of view that offers a critique of the human. Darwin's belief that "all animals and plants have descended from some one prototype... from some one primordial form" (2003, 909) finally eroded what had been a relatively fixed boundary between human and animal. The idea that humankind was one animal species among many and that civilized human beings might still bear 'the mark of the beast' challenged a belief in human perfection. This gave rise to the fear of devolution—a fear that reverberates throughout *King Kong*. The idea that the human race might 'slip back' into primitive barbarism, or worse still, a form of bestiality, is voiced in the film by Denham when he describes the vast wall on Skull Island designed to protect the inhabitants from the great Ape. He says the wall was "built so long ago the people who live there have *slipped back*, forgotten the higher civilization that built it" (my emphasis). *King Kong* powerfully illustrates a modernist fantasy of what the world might look like if human kind began to devolve, to 'slip back' into a more primitive state. In its critique of modern civilization, the film also argues that human kind has devolved in a moral and philosophical sense. New York is represented as a modern urban jungle in which greed is the ruling principle.

Merian C. Cooper always said that a dream provided the inspiration for Kong. He claimed to have had a dream of a giant ape rampaging through New York City destroying everything in his wake. From its very beginning, the film emphasizes the importance of the dream. When

Denham attempts to persuade Ann to accept his offer, he emphasizes how the voyage will fulfill all of her dreams: “It’s money, adventure and fame. It’s the thrill of a lifetime.” For Denham the voyage represents the pinnacle of his career, the fulfillment of his greatest dream: “I’m going to make the greatest picture in the world. Something no one has seen or even heard of.” Many critics have drawn attention to the film’s use of dream imagery. Noel Carroll discusses the way in which the film uses the image of the encroaching, dense fog: “Imagery of fog or mist recurs throughout the rest of the film with grey-miasmic connotations of obscurity, primordialness, fantasy, dream-likeness, and ghostly presence” (1984, 129). Jean Ferry interpreted the entire film, with its “violent, oneiric power” (1978, 107) as a dream work in which the dreamer is “pursued by a too pressing danger,” an animal or thing who keeps approaching, from whom there is no escape (*ibid.*, 106). *King Kong* represents an *unheimliches* nightmare. Carroll sees the film as exploring the “threshold, and the unseen/unthinkable thing beyond it” (1984, 129). Given the film’s intense investment in the trope of dreaming, it is important to ask how the activity of dreaming affects the other main character of the film—Kong himself.

What does Kong dream of? Like the classic *Beauty and the Beast* tale, Kong dreams of finding a mate, an exotic ‘other’ who is very different from himself—a tiny, white, helpless, smooth-skinned creature who arouses in him feelings of protectiveness, playfulness and desire. Having found the object of his desire, Kong’s dream is to keep her. Perhaps he also entertains a nightmare in which he is a captive, lost in a strange, hostile place where he will be sacrificed to a different kind of monster. This becomes Kong’s ‘threshold’, the ‘unthinkable thing’ that will destroy him. Once worshipped by primitive people as a deity, Kong is sacrificed by the civilized world to a god beyond his comprehension. Kong’s fall from deity to demon parallels the journey of the animal and its role in human history—an important theme of the 1976 remake of *King Kong*.

### *Bestiality and the Box Office*

The 1933 *King Kong* draws on the theme of bestiality to explore the possibilities of devolution. If man is capable of ‘slipping back’, might not it be possible for ape and human to mate? Although Kong is portrayed as a terrifying monster, he nonetheless is a hugely sympathetic

figure—a Darwinian animal possessing intelligence and emotions. King Kong posed the terrifying possibility that the two species were not as different as many believed. In the 1930s Darwin's ideas continued to create controversy in the Western world. Eight years earlier America had been rocked by the Scopes monkey trial, in which a school teacher was arrested and charged with teaching Darwin's theory of evolution. There had been a censorship controversy over *Ingagi* (1930) which purported to show scenes of bestiality between tribal women and gorillas. In 1932 Paramount filmed *The Island of Lost Souls* based on H. G. Wells's novel *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, in which a ruthless doctor, influenced by Darwinian ideas, attempts to create human beings from animals. In the film, the hero finds himself attracted to a beautiful woman, unaware of her true origins as one of the "beast-people," in whom the "stubborn beast flesh" continues to grow back. The film was banned in many countries as well as in parts of the United States.

The Bible forbids bestiality, which erodes the boundary between human and animal. "Neither shalt thou lie with any beast to defile thyself therewith: neither shall any woman stand before a beast to lie down thereto; it is confusion" (Leviticus 18:23). It was the writings of Charles Darwin that challenged the classical attempt to maintain definite boundaries between human and animal. Although Darwin himself did not write about bestiality, his writings undermined the religious and cultural taboos that prohibited such discussions and encouraged the 'confusion' that the Bible warned against. Darwinian ideas collapsed the traditional boundaries between the human and animal worlds in recent Western cultures and eroded man's view of himself as the centre of the universe. Although the censorship codes of the day forbade the depiction of anything that suggested bestiality or miscegenation, the 1933 *King Kong* nonetheless played on this trope. Ironically, it is Kong's desire for Ann, with which we are encouraged to identify, that is central to the Beast's sympathetic appeal. It was not that bestiality was box-office poison—on the contrary, the lure of bestiality ensured that a film would enjoy box-office success. In her important study, *Tracking King Kong* (1998), Cynthia Erb has documented the promotional strategies employed to ensure the success of *King Kong*. Erb argues that because the animal film had passed its heyday by the early thirties, RKO distributors urged exhibitors to promote the film as a romance. Although the film's sexual theme is portrayed only indirectly through symbolism and inference, the intention is clear enough. Not everyone at the time was disturbed by *King Kong's* play with sexuality. In 1934, the surreal-

ist, Jean Ferry, lauded *King Kong* because of its erotic depiction of the theme of bestiality and *l'amour fou*. In listing the evidence for the fact that *King Kong* is a love story, Ferry wrote:

[I]n the last analysis why does King Kong carry off this white woman instead of devouring her, why does he tear off her clothes then sniff their perfume, why does he defend her against the other monsters, why does he pursue her when she is ravished by him... why does he let himself be gunned down by aeroplanes to keep her? As one of my neighbours said: "In any case he can't do anything with her." That remains to be seen. (1978, 107)

Although it centers upon a huge phallic monster, the film's eroticism is conveyed not through the threat of penetration but through 'animal erotics'—touch, scent and the primitive. As Midas Dekkers argues, the eroticism of the film "relies not on open sex, but precisely on symbols and allusions" (1994, 163).

Since the discovery of the great apes, human kind has been obsessed with the relationship between ape and man, an obsession that was fuelled in 1859 by Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. Although gorillas (as Dian Fossey revealed in the 1970s) are gentle, herbivorous animals, they have been widely portrayed as savage meat-eaters and sexual monsters with a proclivity for the female of the human species. Stories about "the ardent desire" of male apes for white women were known in Europe well before the nineteenth century (Dekkers 1994, 44). Ted Gott (2005) has traced the influence of the popular belief that the gorilla desired the human female on art and popular culture. He focuses on the great French gorilla-sculptor, Emmanuel Frémiet, and his famous and controversial works. The first, "Gorilla carrying off a Negress" (1859), depicts a female ape with a dead black woman under her arm. The second, "Gorilla carrying off a woman" (1887) was even more controversial than the first sculpture because the latter depicts a male, not a female gorilla, and its captive is a white woman who unlike her 1859 predecessor is very much alive. Gott's paper accompanied a fascinating exhibition, *Kiss of the Beast: from Paris Salon to King Kong*, that explored the image of the gorilla and other beasts, in science, art, literature, film and popular culture from the late nineteenth century to the present.

The exhibition argued for a profound connection between the great apes and the human animal. Gott argues that various classic works of European art, such as the landscape paintings of the Swiss symbolist Arnold Böcklin and the "moody engravings" of French illustrator

Gustave Doré, influenced King Kong. But the dominant influence was Frémiet:

Central to most of the posters issued on the release of *King Kong* in 1933 is the film's most enduring leitmotif—the fair maiden, helpless in the clutches of the monstrous, aggressive gorilla—an image that bears an uncanny ancestral resemblance to Frémiet's celebrated sculpture. It goes without saying that the confrontation between Kong and Fay Wray is what makes the movie. (Gott 2005, 53)

Like Frémiet, the directors of the 1933 *King Kong* also “shared many of the same cultural influences including a passion for anthropology and prehistory” (ibid., 50). In discussing Frémiet's “Gorilla carrying off a woman,” Gott points out that “[r]ather than being an innocent victim, the woman wears part of a gorilla's jawbone as a hair adornment, indicating her status as a Stone Age predator” (ibid., 42). The 1933 *King Kong* certainly plays on the popular myth of the gorilla as a savage sexual monster, but Kong is also portrayed as gentle, intelligent, communicative and courageous. The two remakes of *King Kong* also emphasize these qualities, but if anything the films, no doubt influenced by changing attitudes to the ape world, are even more sympathetic to Kong than the original.

#### King Kong (*John Guillermin, 1976*)

John Guillermin's 1976 remake of *King Kong* creates a different kind of screen animal from the original version. Fans of the original film were outraged that the remake had eschewed Willis O'Brien's method of stop-motion animation to create the mighty ape and instead use an actor, Rick Baker, in an ape suit. They argued that the latter represented a failure of imagination and contributed to the film's lack of poetry. Nonetheless, Rick Baker's performance conveys a wide range of actions and emotions in order to present Kong as a screen animal with a range of communicative powers. Although the film was a box-office success, some critics attacked it for taking the fairytale magic out of the original and concentrating instead on offering a critique of seventies greed. Others found its self-aware campiness charming, and its attempt not simply to copy the original, refreshing. The remake deals explicitly with the implied sexual themes of the original film and by extension the clear collapse of boundaries between human and animal. It uses humor to make its theme more acceptable.

The 1976 *King Kong* was made in a very different social climate from the 1930s, when apes were still considered aggressive and dangerous. By the seventies traditional distinctions between ape and human were being more decisively eroded. The general public was aware of the findings of researchers such as Jane Goodall, who studied the social learning, thinking and culture of the wild chimpanzee, and Dian Fossey, who worked and lived in close contact with a group of mountain gorillas in Africa for thirteen years. Her revolutionary approach made it clear that it was possible for intimate contact between human and gorillas in the wild. Changing attitudes rapidly found their way into the cinema. 1968 saw the release of *Planet of The Apes*. Based on Pierre Boulle's 1963 novel, it not only collapses the distinction between human and ape but reverses the history of evolution. Here a group of astronauts enter a world in which the apes have evolved and the humans have devolved—the former are the rulers, the latter their slaves. *Planet of the Apes* rapidly became a classic and was followed by four sequels which also represent a number of the ape characters as more sympathetic than the humans. Changing attitudes no doubt influenced Guillermin's film, which represents Kong as highly intelligent, self aware and communicative. The seventies also saw a renewed interest in the theories of Charles Darwin, as exemplified by publication of the Norton Critical Editions of Darwin.

Guillermin's film presents the theme of bestiality as a way of opening up the debate about the border between human and animal in a direct and confronting manner. The controversial sex scene in the 1933 *King Kong* is portrayed very differently in Guillermin's version. This difference stems from the characterization of Ann's counterpart—renamed Dwan—played by Jessica Lange. She is a somewhat lively party girl, a product of the hippie seventies, who talks too much when nervous. She is also portrayed as a feisty feminist who asserts her own needs and desires. Throughout the scene of their first encounter, we are encouraged to identify with Kong who clearly desires this exotic creature, semi-clad in sacrificial jungle garb, beads and a half-moon necklet. First Dwan attempts to escape but Kong bars her way. Dwan's fearful expression soon fades as she realizes that Kong means her no harm. However, when Kong picks her up in his paw, she becomes hysterical. "You, put me down!" she yells, screaming that she is afraid of heights. Kong's furrowed brow reveals his confusion. Next she pounds his nostrils, calling him a "chauvinist pig" and challenging him to eat her. "I didn't mean that" she hastily adds. "Sometimes, I get too physical.



It's a sign of insecurity, you know. Like when you knock down trees." "Such a nice ape," she says, stroking his paw. "You know we're going to be great friends. I'm a Libra. What sign are you? . . . I bet you are an Aries." Her silly chatter is designed to mask the scene's overt sexuality. When Kong lowers her to the ground she runs away, falling flat in the mud. Again Kong imprisons her in his giant paw.

The remake is famous for what some critics have referred to as the soft porn sequence. Kong carries a mud-spattered Dwan to a waterfall where he sits her in his giant leathery paw and lets her wash herself clean. As Dwan realizes that Kong is infatuated with her, she relaxes and begins to enjoy herself. Sensitive to Dwan's every need, Kong, the romantic simian lover, takes huge puffs of breath and gently blows her dry. We watch Dwan from Kong's viewpoint as she swoons with pleasure. Kong is obsessed with the tiny figure in his paw—she is like an elf or strange fairy, spirited into the primitive world of colossal monsters. "Oh, come on Kong," she says. "Forget about me. This thing is never going to work!" Compared to her 1933 counterpart, Jessica Lange, nearly fifty years later, is allowed to *know* what it is that Kong desires and dreams about. Like his predecessor, Kong wants the woman, but now she does not reject him. In contrast to the original, the 1976 version does not focus on devolution and the human-animal boundary; here woman takes the side of the animal. The impossibly idyllic scenes between Dwan and Kong (even their names are in harmony) point to an Arcadian desire. Kong gently prods Dwan with his fingers as he begins to remove her clothing. Just as the scene verges on becoming too sexually explicit, a giant Freudian reptile slithers into view to ruin this primitive Eden. Symbolically, the film points to a time when human and animal, woman and beast, may well have lived together in a state of harmony.

In Guillermin's remake the true serpent is man himself—represented by the leader of the expedition, Fred Wilson (Charles Grodin), an avaricious, nasty oil executive who destroys Kong's primitive paradise and eventually Kong himself. Jack Prescott (Jeff Bridges), an anthropologist in love with Dwan, is fully aware of Kong's religious significance. When Wilson says that the islanders will be better off without Kong, he replies:

No, you're dead wrong. He was the terror and mystery of their lives, and the magic. A year from now they'll be an island of burnt-out drunks. When we took Kong we kidnapped their God.

In contrast to the original, the final sequence does not include Denham's famous lines where he proclaims, over Kong's dead body, that it was Beauty who killed the Beast. Instead the camera pulls back to show a vast crowd of onlookers gathering around the body of Kong. It is man's greed that has killed the Beast. Kong's death scene is also more bloody and brutal. Standing at the top of the World Trade Centre, Kong is attacked by flamethrowers as well as biplanes spurring bullets. As he lies dying we see his body is covered in bloody wounds, his eyes fill with blood instead of tears. In contrast to Ann, Dwan tries to save Kong's life and weeps when he dies.

### King Kong (*Peter Jackson, 2005*)

Peter Jackson's Kong is a very different creation from his two forebears and no doubt the changes have been influenced by new research findings into the ape world over the intervening thirty years since the first re-make. Recent research reveals that gorillas use tools, have their own language, and demonstrate self-awareness. Genetic findings also reveal that chimpanzees and the earliest hominids engaged in sexual relations and gene swapping for at least 1.2 million years before the two species went their separate ways. Recent findings in genetic research have revealed that the chimpanzee shares enough DNA with us (99 percent) that it would be possible for a human and ape to bear offspring (Cauchi 2005, 8). In response to the Great Ape Project (GAP) based in Seattle, the government of Spain, in a world first, has just introduced a bill into parliament that gives "chimpanzees, gorillas, orang-utans and other great apes some of the fundamental rights granted to human beings" (Rennie 2006, 10). No doubt influenced by the most recent genetic findings about the closeness of human and ape, Jackson makes Kong a screen character in his own right with a distinct personality. Kong's face reveals a myriad of complex emotions—his eyes convey a sense of intelligence, pride and valor—but it is the suggestion of craftiness that is most captivating. The relationship between Kong and Ann (Naomi Watts) has again changed. In Jackson's film, Kong's feelings for the woman are distinguished less by eroticism and more by the yearning for a companion. Kong's dream is for a friend with whom he might play and share the beauty of his island. Jackson's version is essentially about making friends—love, play, performance, dancing. (Given new findings about the closeness of human and ape, it is possible that any

suggestion of bestiality would have been too confronting for contemporary audiences.) Jackson uses the symbolic significance of play to present an argument about the disappearance of nature and the animal world. As in the 1976 remake, Jackson's film also portrays Ann as in sympathy with Kong—a friend who attempts to protect and save him from his terrible fate.

The controversial sexual scene is very different in Jackson's film. Kong takes Ann to his cave where he pretends not to notice her futile attempts to escape. Point of view shots that alternate between Ann's perspective and that of Kong encourage us to identify with both woman and animal. We look at Ann from Kong's eyes as he snarls ferociously in an attempt to cower her. Independent and fiery, Ann returns his angry stare. She soon realizes that underneath Kong is nothing but a big softy. Suddenly Ann breaks into a vaudeville routine. Kong beats his chest; he is greatly amused and wants more. Ann twirls, juggles, and leaps through the air. Pretending to be unimpressed, Kong, repeatedly knocks her over, grunting with pleasure at her loss of balance and composure. "Stop!" "No!" she yells. "That's all there is. There isn't any more!" Furious that the performance is over, Kong hurls rocks and pounds his chest. Then, like a sulky child, he swings around the rock face and disappears. Kong, it seems, wants more than anything a friend.

When Ann is attacked by a series of jaw-snapping prehistoric creatures, Kong comes to the rescue. When the last brute is dispatched, Kong stalks off, still annoyed by her earlier behavior. "Wait!" she cries. This is all Kong needs to hear. He picks Ann up and slings her over his massive shoulder. From this moment the two form an unlikely couple. Kong takes his tiny friend back to his cave. Ann juggles and performs for him and together they watch the sun rise. "It's beautiful," she says. Then looking up at Kong, she repeats the words, "Beautiful!" In an enchanting moment, Woman and Beast are united—companions and friends. In contrast to the two earlier versions their feelings for each other are expressed at a more abstract level through the rhythms of time and nature. This moment is revisited later in New York when Kong and Ann find each other and, oblivious to the impending tragedy, slide playfully together across the ice in Central Park.

Their emotional bond is made painfully clear in the final sequence when Ann and Kong hold each other's gaze in a moment of deep empathy. The final sequence focuses on love and loss—loss of a beloved, loss of innocence, the end of the human-animal bond, the destruction of the animal world. When Kong climbs to the top of the spire,

Ann follows. When Ann falls, Kong risks his life to rescue her. When the planes circle Kong, Ann desperately tries to ward off the attack. As Kong, mortally wounded, loses his grasp and falls to his death, Anne weeps. Jackson's Kong is a brilliant creation, a screen animal who holds our sympathies throughout the film. The portrayal of his feelings for Ann is credible and emotionally moving, suggesting that postmodern audiences have accepted the screen animal as an actor in its own right. One of the most devastating scenes occurs when the camera focuses on Kong's look of despair as he is exhibited in chains before an incredulous audience on Broadway. The desolation we read in his eyes is a testament to the power of the screen animal to evoke an emotional response from the spectator. It also recalls the look of countless caged animals put on public display in the zoos of the world (and especially the starving zoo animals that Jackson includes among the images of depression-era New York that open the film). By emphasizing Kong's loneliness and his desire for a friend, rather than the theme of bestiality, the film offers a less poetic and primal version of the *Beauty and the Beast* fairy tale. Instead, however, Jackson is able to emphasize the crucial need for new bonds to be established between the human and animal worlds. *King Kong* as a twenty-first-century fairy tale is not about the traditional question of finding a prince for Beauty; rather it focuses on the tragedy of the animal.

### *King Kong and the Animal Question*

It would be easy to dismiss Kong's story as an expression of cinematic appropriation—a 'humanized' animal with no voice of its own, but *King Kong* is much more than this. The film belongs to a zoocentric tradition in film that seeks to represent the narrative from the point of view of the animal in order to present a critique of man and the phallogocentric basis of modern culture. As Margot Norris argues, it is possible for the author and artist to create with his or her own "animality", to "create as the animal" (1985, 1). Norris argues that the origins of the biocentric tradition in literature and art can be traced to Darwin.

The creators of *King Kong*, from Willis O'Brien to Peter Jackson, have all attempted to think as Kong, to give him a point of view, particularly through the film's subjective camera work. All three films explore the animal question but from different perspectives: the 1933 version focuses on Darwinian themes of devolution and desire; the 1976 remake on

human greed and the end of nature; and Peter Jackson's film on the need for the unification of human and ape through community and mutual respect. All three King Kong films create a space in which the animal is able to dream. Kong's dream is not a simple one in which desire is paramount; rather Kong's dream involves a critique of the human animal—his greed and cruelty—as well as the end of human civilization, symbolized by Kong's destructive rampage through New York. In the end, the nightmare is out of control; the beast must be killed. Kong's dream of a union with woman is replaced by the nightmare of his own death.

As Noel Carroll points out in his important article on *King Kong*, the film invites numerous interpretations:

These come in many shapes and sizes—Kong as Christ, Kong as Black, Kong as commodity, Kong as rapist, Kong enraptured by *l'amour fou*, Kong as Third World, Kong as dream, Kong as myth, Kong according to Freud, according to Jung, and even according to Lacan. (1984, 15–16)

Carroll's observation reveals the extent to which the animal has become a shifting signifier, a sign capable of embracing a range of complex meanings that refer primarily to the human journey. Most critical articles have neglected to speak about the fact that the film is also first and foremost about the animal. Kong is an animal—a fantastic, larger-than-life, monstrous animal that elicits both fear and sympathy. Kong's status as a screen animal, an assemblage, a constructed creature, has enabled filmmakers over the decades to draw on Kong's sympathetic appeal to cinema audiences in order to raise a number of key questions about the philosophical relationship between human and animal.

*King Kong* presents a Darwinian critique of the theory that desire is founded in language and that language distinguishes man from the animals. Kong is without language, yet he is not without desire. In Freudian terms, Kong is able to dream because he is an animal who desires. In all three versions, he communicates to woman through gesture, sounds, and most importantly, touch. *King Kong* questions the structural bases upon which the differences between human and animal have traditionally been founded. Working outside language of the symbolic order, the 1976 and 2005 remakes argue that woman and animal are nonetheless able to communicate, primarily through touch, gesture and body language. In the recent version, Kong desires a pact, not with man, but with woman, who is able to communicate with him through the body, to 'speak' without language. It might be argued that this represents an idealized vision of human-animal relationships, but

at the same time *King Kong* constantly undermines the anthropocentric view of human society. The challenge posed by all three versions of the film to traditional ways of defining the human/animal relationship is made clear when we learn that on Skull Island the human is sacrificed to appease the animal and not the animal to appease the human. The narrative struggles to readjust this dynamic, to bring the animal down. Although the human animal murders Kong the animal god, the repercussions of this monstrous act are clear. Humanity has lost its humanity.

In a study of the animal in modern culture, Akira Lippit argues that although species are threatened with extinction, modernity holds to the view that “animals never *entirely* vanish. Rather, they exist in a state of *perpetual vanishing*” (2000, 1, emphasis in original). Peter Jackson makes this point in the opening sequences of *King Kong* in which he displays animals in the zoo. “Public zoos came into existence,” John Berger argues, “at the beginning of the period which was to see the disappearance of animals from daily life” (1980, 3). Hence King Kong, the great ape marooned in time on Skull Island, is paradoxically both an ancient animal in evolutionary terms and a very modern one in technological terms, caught by the camera in a “state of perpetual vanishing.” In a sense, Kong never dies, but is reanimated, with subtle differences, in a series of remakes for new generations of human spectators. King Kong is both a god and an uncanny screen monster, a creature designed to question the ascendancy of the human at the expense of nature and the animal world.

### *Afterthought*

Freud was particularly fond of referring to the classic human/animal hybrid par excellence—the Sphinx, the creature with the body of a lion, wings of an eagle and face of a woman. The Sphinx proposed riddles and killed those who could not answer them. Appearing silent and inscrutable, she was quintessentially an animal. I have always thought that the answer Oedipus gave to the riddle of the Sphinx was not the only answer. The Sphinx asked: “What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon and three in the evening?” Oedipus answered “Man” because he first crawls, then walks upright and as an old man walks with a stick. The other answer of course is the ‘Human/Animal Hybrid,’ who walks on all fours in nature, two in civilization, and three in riddles.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### “NO CIRCUS WITHOUT ANIMALS”?: ANIMAL ACTS AND IDEOLOGY IN THE VIRTUAL CIRCUS

Tanja Schwalm

If, as John Berger states, “animals have always been central to the process by which men [*sic*] form an image of themselves” (Berger 1971, 1042), then the circus must be seen as part of that process. What is the attraction of watching a captive, often exotic, animal<sup>1</sup> perform tricks? As a form of institutionalized animal entertainment, the circus is an integral part of mainstream Western culture. In consumer capitalist economies where animal practices are highly industrialized, such as the USA, Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand, it is still, in general, legally and socially acceptable to use performing animals, and circuses and circus lobby groups portray their human-animal relations as positively as possible. Some, such as the German Circus Krone, even go so far as to claim that the circus exists “primarily for its animals” (Circus Krone, “Animal Keeping at Circus Krone”).

However, increasingly, the circus is subject to criticism directed not only at instances of animal abuse, but also at the principle that permits the use of animals for entertainment. By focusing on websites from the USA, Germany, Switzerland and New Zealand, I will illustrate the controversy over ‘exotic’ animal acts in particular, and examine its influence on the self-portrayal and marketing rhetoric of circuses, as well as on their representations of animals and animal performances. This chapter aims to show how this imagery is challenged by animal rights and welfare groups, such as the global animal advocacy organization PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) and the New Zealand organization SAFE (Save Animals From Exploitation). I propose that images of circus animals provided by animal advocacy organizations

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<sup>1</sup> As the ideological distinction between ‘humans’ and ‘animals’ is fundamental to the use of nonhuman animals in circuses, and the usage of those terms widespread and common in the debate surrounding this practice, I will retain those terms to denote ‘human animals’ and ‘nonhuman animals’ respectively.



are no different from what the audiences actually see, especially when they visit the menagerie backstage. However, animal advocacy groups and circuses construct alternative ways of looking at these animals. Finally, I will consider whether this debate contributes to a perceptible shift in cultural attitudes towards human-animal relations.

*The Colonial Showcase*

Once, circuses provided the only opportunity to see exotic animals. However, in an age of television, affordable long-distance travel, and the internet, where information and images of every kind of animal are readily available, keeping such animals as part of a traveling circus show may appear anachronistic. Now, paradoxically, the Internet in particular is used to keep the animal circus in business. Circus home-pages, some very elaborate, command a considerable presence on the world wide web. A ‘virtual circus,’ with circus music, animated images, a carnival atmosphere and behind-the-scenes snapshots is created to attract audiences to the real circus’s next show. But alongside those circuses that use only human performers, such as the Australian Circus Oz,<sup>2</sup> are those that proclaim that exotic animals are an essential ingredient, indeed the trademark, of the circus experience. As a member of Australia’s Ashton’s Circus, Jan Rodriguez insists, “there’s no circus without animals” (cited in Henke, “Meet Australia’s Oldest Circus Family”). This is a sentiment echoed by other animal circuses, such as the Circus Carl Busch in Germany<sup>3</sup> or Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey. Closer to home, New Zealand’s Whirling Brothers circus announced on a promotional flyer in 2001 that “this show is the only REAL CIRCUS touring NZ—Lions—Ponies—Donkeys—Dogs and even an Elephant” (original emphasis).

The circus as we know it today has emerged from what was essentially a showcase for colonial conquest. Imperial expansion not only made the large-scale capture of exotic animals possible, but also increased the demand for such displays. Both Mary Louise Pratt and James Ryan point out the popularity of explorer narratives during the nineteenth

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<sup>2</sup> Circus Oz “features animals that are 100% human” (*Circus Oz*, “Tickets and Show Info”). Additionally, PETA provides a detailed list of animal-free circuses (“Animal Free Circuses”).

<sup>3</sup> “For us, animals are and always will be an essential part of the classic circus” (Circus Carl Busch, “Legende,” my translation).

century, and their importance in legitimating the colonial project to the population at home. As Ryan states:

An interest in pursuing zoological ‘specimens’ for private and national collections was fostered by both the dramatic upsurge in the popularity of natural history and the proliferation of popular literature and images of hunting in Britain, which frequently pictured the hunter as a manly adventurer and hero of Empire. (2000, 204)

Pratt writes that

journalism and narrative travel accounts...were essential mediators between the scientific network and a larger European public. They were central agents in legitimating scientific authority and its global project alongside Europe’s other ways of knowing the world, and being in it. (1992, 29)

Adrian Franklin identifies several themes in “the colonial big game hunter stories,” which were “ostensibly for children and teenagers” (Franklin 1999, 43). These were “the naturalization and dominance of Europeans in places such as Africa and India; the aggressiveness and danger of wild animals; the heroism of the hunter” (ibid.). He describes the implications in connection with the zoo, which not only shares its roots with the circus, but also has much in common with it in terms of the demonstration of particular human-animal relations. He writes:

Contemporary zoos housed these animals as dangerous captives (cages emphasized prison bars); like prisoners of war, they were put on public display for the entertainment of the victorious. (ibid.)

But circus acts took up and perpetuated the imagery of colonial travel narratives more vividly. The “manly adventurers and heroes of Empire” depicted in travelers’ tales came alive in the circus arena, particularly in performances involving big cats.

Thus, the role of the traveling circus was essentially to provide a space where these adventure stories and travel accounts could be brought to life. Accordingly, William Johnson’s analysis of the history of animal entertainment, *The Rose-Tinted Menagerie* (1990), describes one very vivid performance by the famous nineteenth-century lion tamer Isaac Van Amburgh:

Dressed in jungle fatigues, and wielding a whip and firing blanks from his pistol, he would stride into the cage, deliberately baiting and taunting the animals to bring out as much ferocity and jungle savagery as he could, whereupon he would proceed to bully them into submission. His *pièce de résistance* was forcing the lions to approach and lick his boots as

the ultimate sign of his conquest and the animals' abject subservience. (Johnson 1990, ch. 1.3)

Harriet Ritvo, referring to the zoo, suggests that "the most powerful visual expression of the human domination of nature was the sight of large carnivores in cages" (1996, 47), and James Ryan illustrates the role of big cats in nineteenth-century photography. He discusses a picture of Lord Curzon, who, standing "at the head of the slumped tiger, clutching his gun," assumes "the conventional stance of the victorious huntsman and landowner" (Ryan 1997, 103). Ryan points out that Curzon's "confident pose symbolized British authority over India at the moment when Britain's Empire was at its zenith" (*ibid.*) and illustrates that big cats, especially lions and tigers, were popular symbols for the colonies from which they were taken.

Correspondingly, the symbolic meaning of Van Amburgh's submission of the lion, conventionally known as "The King of Beasts" and "the symbol of Africa" even today,<sup>4</sup> would not have escaped the attention of nineteenth-century audiences. In line with imperialist ideology, the circus appropriated nature to reflect imperial geopolitics and affirm social values and attitudes. Animal acts fulfilled a triple function in this regard: first, they symbolized political control of the colonies; second, they allegorized the supposed social and evolutionary superiority of white Europeans over indigenous colonized peoples; and third, they embodied human mastery over animals and legitimated the colonization of nature. Janet Davis writes that some early twentieth-century animal acts were in fact very explicitly linked to colonial politics:

Trainers likened animals from tropical zones to people of color from nonindustrial societies over which Europe and the United States held financial, military, and strategic control. (2002, 159)

In the same vein, Carl Hagenbeck, circus owner, zoo founder, animal trainer and "the leading supplier of wild animals to zoological gardens and circuses" (Mullan and Marvin 1999, 85), exhibited indigenous people and "the animals with which they were associated" together, "because there seemed to be a natural affinity between the two" (*ibid.*, 86). His *Völkerschauen*, exhibitions of so-called "nature peoples" (*ibid.*, 85) were a "huge commercial success" (*ibid.*, 87).

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<sup>4</sup> Information sign at the lion enclosure, Orana Wildlife Park, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2002.

As Davis argues, “[t]his juxtaposition of the human and animal made the trope of the white man’s burden visually complete” (2002, 160). As the biological link between humans and animals was thought to be closer when it came to so-called ‘primitive’ peoples, audiences fascinated with Darwin’s theories, which “relaxed the boundary between humans and animals” (Ham 1996, 145), were particularly interested in both simians and indigenous people from the colonies. A. H. Saxon shows an advert for one of P. T. Barnum’s hoaxes, allegedly a creature captured in “Central Africa.” “What is it?” the poster asks, “Is it a lower order of MAN? Or is it a higher order of MONKEY?” catering for the audiences desire to see, as Saxon’s caption says, “the missing link” (1989, n.p., original capitalization). Thus, by portraying the dominion over nature, exotic animals, and the colonies not only as a natural relationship, but also as innocent fun, the circus legitimated and celebrated colonial power structures and politics.<sup>5</sup>

In today’s circuses, growling and menacing big cats are still an essential part of the repertoire. The 1997 documentary, *Fast, Cheap and Out of Control*, which includes footage of the US Clyde Beatty Cole Brothers Circus’s animal trainer Dave Hoover, demonstrates that big cat acts based on intimidation with whips, sticks and gunshots are familiar circus imagery even today, and circus websites and fan sites emphasize the dangerous and menacing character of the big cats. According to Circus Krone, for example, the performer Martin Lacey “emphasizes the danger of their majesties and lets them hiss and menace in a spectacular fashion” (“Martin Lacey JR.,” my translation). Similarly, one circus fan site described Gerd Simoneit-Barum in 2002 as “rel[ying] wholly on the majestic and menacing aura of these rare big cats” (Circusmaxx). Likewise, Circus Barum’s rhino act, in which Sandro Montez, dressed in a safari outfit, stands on the back of a rhinoceros in a triumphant pose (Circus Barum), draws explicitly on the legacy of nineteenth-century colonial imagery that demonstrates dominance and control. The question, then, arises as to why this kind of imagery retains its attractiveness in the twenty-first century, and why it is not perceived as unattractively anachronistic. The rhinoceros in Sandro Montez’s act, a member of a highly endangered species, suggests that

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<sup>5</sup> See also Poignant, who documents Barnum’s request to “several hundred American consulates” for “any specimens of . . . uncivilized peoples” (2004, 58), the removal of two groups of Aborigines from Australia by an agent for Barnum, and their subsequent exhibition in Europe.

one answer to this question lies in the way this kind of animal act is promoted to contemporary audiences.

*“Noah’s Ark”*

Decolonization and the advent of television have rendered the circus’s role as a colonial showcase obsolete, and social changes and environmental discourse mean that animal acts based on dominance and control lack much of the authority and appeal they might have had a century ago, unless they can be legitimated and explained in different ways, especially when using endangered species such as tigers and rhinos.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, ‘conservation’ is the key word in the promotion of circuses. The image of the circus as a ‘Noah’s Ark’ is immensely popular. It appears on the websites of large, commercially successful circus enterprises such as the German circuses Krone<sup>7</sup> and Sarrasani,<sup>8</sup> and the US Carson and Barnes Circus (“Help the Ark, Help the Animals”), as well as Siegfried and Roy’s Las Vegas tiger act (Siegfried and Roy 2003). Feld Entertainment, the corporation which owns Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey and produces Siegfried and Roy’s show amongst others, emphasizes the idea of “stewardship” (Ringling Bros., “Animal Care”), and René Strickler from Switzerland, whose operation is a mixture between zoo and circus, also stresses his conservation efforts.

Strickler sees himself as a protector of exotic animal species, asserting that “there is no area in our world that has not lost its paradisaic innocence through so-called civilizing influences” (Strickler, “Tierlehrer”).<sup>9</sup> Therefore, he argues that “today’s situation requires a better integration of animals in human care, as well as animals living in the wild, into human concepts of life,” which “means better systems of animal-keeping in zoos and circuses, but also the protection and creation of exclusive zones for reservations as a natural habitat for wild animals.” He sees “mankind, which is still busily multiplying” as the “fiercest competitor” of many mammals, who “have had to adjust to changed

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<sup>6</sup> Ernest Albrecht devotes a chapter to discussing the impact of these changes on animal entertainment in the circus (1995, 201–23).

<sup>7</sup> Circus Krone “maybe [sic] called a kind of modern ‘Noah’s Ark’” (Circus Krone, “Noah’s Ark”).

<sup>8</sup> Their 1992 program was called “Arche Noah—Arche Nova” (Circus Sarrasani, “Biographie”).

<sup>9</sup> All citations from Strickler’s website are my translations.

living conditions.” However, he particularly highlights the destruction of the environment in Asia, as he explains that:

The number of free-ranging Siberian tigers, for example, is today estimated at only about two hundred, and still there has been no success in effectively stopping rampant poaching. It is only a question of time when these animals will become victims of the myth, which is inherent predominantly in Asiatic peoples, that their bones, intestines, and genitals enhance health and virility. Today, there are already more Siberian tigers in human care than in the wild. (ibid.)

Strickler, whose circus big cats apparently live in a kind of zoo for most of the time, gives the reassuring impression that the Western world looks after and saves wild animals, while other, non-European countries are either unwilling, unable, or too uncivilized to do so. Barbara Pflughaupt, spokesperson for Ringling Bros., mirrors this view by commenting on Ringling’s Asian elephants: “They’re safer with us” (MacDonald 2003, 14).<sup>10</sup> Underpinning such an approach to wilderness management is the belief that one’s own animal practices are ‘civilized’ and fully acceptable, whereas other peoples’ practices are not. As Elder, Wolch, and Emel argue:

Humans define the boundary between themselves and other animals, in part, on the basis of their treatment of animals. Specific human-animal interactions that are legitimized and rationalized over time, become accepted as civilized behavior. Those who do not stay within this repertoire, however, fall over the human-animal boundary into the netherworld of savagery. (1998)

This notion is not new, as Ritvo points out. She comments about the nineteenth-century British zoo:

Even the scientific side of the zoo testified to the superior competence of Britons, who were able to maintain so many exotic species in confinement and to manipulate and study them, so that they were better understood and appreciated than by the peoples who had lived among them for millennia. (Ritvo 1987, 230)

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<sup>10</sup> Reports of poaching leading to a reduction in tigers, supposedly protected by India’s “Project Tiger”, seem to validate these claims (BBC 2005, “Where Have All The Tigers Gone?”). Yet, this alone does not answer the questions whether the failure of one, albeit high-profile, project justifies the use of exotic animals for entertainment, or whether the construction of a ‘habitat’ consisting of circus cages, or even zoo-style enclosures, in the West is an adequate and appropriate response to the problem of native habitat destruction.

Marthe Kiley-Worthington, an animal behavioral scientist, attests to the “scientific side” of the circus, as she argues for the circus as a space for conservation. She suggests:

There is no reason why circuses as well as zoos should not contribute to conservation aims and breeding of endangered species. Circuses can and do breed various endangered species and a relatively high percentage of all their animals. They also can offer a chance to life to animals surfeit to zoo requirements. It would seem that zoos and circuses should work more closely together and make better use of each other’s knowledge and skills to improve along appropriate lines. (Kiley-Worthington 1990, 178)

This corresponds with the viewpoint put forward by Strickler, all of whose animals were born in zoos (Schule Hagen, “Interview mit René Strickler”). He points out that some of his big cats would have been euthanatized had he not taken them in and sees his work as “active contribution to the...protection of animals” (Strickler, “Tierlehrer”). He says he is

convinced that people can only become aware of the meaning of the loss of these animals to our world, if they have the opportunity to experience them close up. Good zoos and circuses that are excellently equipped for animals can offer unique opportunities that would complement each other. (ibid.)

However, apart from providing a ‘safe haven’ in the ‘First World’ for endangered species from so-called ‘Third World’ countries, circuses purport to do more than simply keeping the animals safe from poaching and extinction. In line with the arguments currently brought forward by the circus animal industry, Kiley-Worthington, comparing circuses to other forms of animal-keeping, voices her opinion that “not only would many human lives...be substantially impoverished,” but that “the animals’ lives may well be impoverished equally because they have no contact with human beings” (Kiley-Worthington 1990, 221). Thus, beyond the idea of keeping wildlife for so-called ‘protection’, the latest development in circus rhetoric is the depiction of animals as equal partners to humans.

### *Loving Tigers*

Contemporary circuses promote the idea that they represent a suspension of the ‘natural’ hierarchy between humans and animals, as defined in natural historical taxonomies and popular belief in an ‘evolution-

ary ladder’. Circus Krone proclaims on their webpages dedicated to the circus animals: “They are our partners, our friends and of course they do belong to our huge Circus-Krone-family” (“Noah’s Ark”). The implication is that humans and animals are “colleagues” (Kiley-Worthington 1990, 11) working for the same objective. Circus Krone’s statement that the animals must be rewarded because, as they say, “no artist works without a salary” (“Freunde und Partner des Tierlehrers,” my translation), reinforces this suggestion. Such sentiments echo those of Carl Hagenbeck, who invented and developed the so-called ‘tame dressage’ in nineteenth-century Germany.<sup>11</sup> He maintained that “the animals demanded their fair share of food. . . . It was only fair, then, that they should work for it” (Cited in Bose and Brinkmann 1978, 150, my translation).

Depicting animals as ‘colleagues’ and ‘partners’, and adopting a change in terminology from ‘lion tamer’ to “animal teacher” (Strickler, “Meine Philosophie”), the circuses’ online self-promotion attempts to redefine the lens through which the audience regards the performance, and thus casts its animal practices in a favorable light. This reflects, at least in part, the notion of a harmonious, equal relationship between humans and nature. Accordingly, Ringling Bros. describe Gunther Gebel-Williams’ performances in terms of a “partnership between humans and animals” and say that “Gunther demonstrated to all that humans and animals could work, live and thrive together in harmony and should respect one another, thus forever banishing the outdated notion of ‘man versus beast’” (“A Legend in His Own Time”).

Corresponding online imagery can be found in promotions of the now popular big cat acts such as Strickler’s from Switzerland, Gerd Simoneit-Barum’s from Germany (Circus Barum), or that of Sara Houcke, the so-called “Tiger Whisperer” of Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey. Pictures on the Ringling Bros. website show Houcke, face to face with tigers, evidently poised to kiss them (“Sara Houcke”). The imagery is seductive and convincing, as the tiger looks more like a domestic house cat than a dangerous animal. The sensuous and

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<sup>11</sup> *Zahme Dressur*, or ‘soft dressage’, is based on the idea that animals can be trained with “kindness’, substituting praise and rewards for successfully accomplished tricks instead of beatings and other punishment for failures”. However, this idea is frequently criticized, since, as Johnson puts it, “the reward—mostly food—can soon become a punishment when deliberately withheld from a misbehaving or noncompliant animal” (Johnson 2005, ch. 1.3).



emotional aspect of Sara Houcke's relationship with the animals is emphasized in Ringling Bros' advertisement for the act. They call her "the living embodiment of the indelible bond that forms between animal and human," and she is described as "loving, maternal, and elegant" (Ringling Bros., "Explore the Shows: 132nd Edition"). Furthermore, Houcke has been described as having learned to "speak tiger" (Chin and Meadows 2000), which blurs the boundaries between humanity and animality, as she attempts to be on an equal footing with the animals. Concurrently, the tigers, previously regarded as ferocious, untamable, uncivilized beasts, become more 'humanized' through the interaction with, and training by, humans.<sup>12</sup> Such performances give the impression that the "classless society" of the circus, as Helen Stoddard calls it (2000, 169), extends to animals as well.

*Invisible Cages: Mythmaking in the Circus*

Clearly, the commercial advantage of promoting the circus as a conservation exercise, and as a space where human and animal "partners" happily work together, is not to be underestimated. Employing conservation as an alleged higher motive for the existence of the circus can be seen as an attempt to benefit from the current reputation of zoos. As Franklin, referring to the zoo, points out,

the mood of entertainment and spectacle shifted [in recent decades] to one of empathy and moral support; the visitors paid large entry money in order to support worthy causes such as breeding and restocking programmes. An aura of dignified moral imperative prevailed. (1999, 49)

However, unlike the zoo where, as Franklin points out, the exhibition spaces were getting bigger all the time (*ibid.*), the small cages of the circus did not disappear. It is in this regard that circuses are less than convincing in their alleged conservation efforts and displays of ostensible human-animal equality, as these appear to be little more than rhetoric employed to justify their animal practices.

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<sup>12</sup> This is at odds with Albrecht's suggestion that the controversy over circus animals arises out of an "essentially... anthropomorphic view of animal behavior" by animal rights advocates on one side, and "purely pragmatic" considerations on the other, with little consensus in between (1995, 203). Evidently, anthropomorphism also plays an important role in the presentation and reception of animal acts.

Kay Anderson points out that “the practice of bringing wildness into the human domus has been underpinned by impulses not only of fear and control, but also of care and curiosity—by affection as well as domination” (1998). While this is undoubtedly true, many people’s feelings of care, empathy, and affection do not, however, induce them to question the practice of keeping animals for entertainment. Despite mounting evidence of mistreatment of animals in circuses, the Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Circus, for example, still remains one of the most popular circuses in the USA,<sup>13</sup> as does Circus Krone in Germany, reputedly the largest circus in Europe. Although it seems incongruous that people who think of themselves as animal lovers enjoy a practice that leaves animals vulnerable to ill-treatment and exploitation, this can, in part, be explained by Philo and Wilbert’s comment about the zoo:

A staple ingredient in Western imaginings relating to animals has thus become the zoo as a space . . . specifically put aside for wild animals no longer “in the wild,” thereby leading many people to “naturalise” the zoo in the sense of accepting it unproblematically as an appropriate location for many animals. (2000, 13)

The circus is equally seen as an “appropriate” animal space, defined and controlled by humans. This unproblematic acceptance was perhaps nowhere more conspicuous than in a joint publicity exercise between Circus Krone and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), which saw circus elephants used to raise funds to “rescue forest elephants in central Africa” (Circus Krone, “Dicke Paten,” my translation). Apparently, none of the parties and celebrities involved saw any irony in the fact that the Krone elephants were made to pose with billboards demanding “Give me back my forest!” (ibid., my translation).

Thus, circuses make a point of promoting themselves as legitimate, even ‘natural’ spaces for wild animals. However, any visitor to a circus menagerie is aware, at least to some extent, of cages, chains, and other constraints, as most of them are clearly visible. Why, then, do circus spectators accept that the ‘stars’ of the show are reduced to pacing up and down in small cages, or to being chained by their feet, once the

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<sup>13</sup> PETA provides a long list of documented animal abuse in the Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey circus (“Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Circus Factsheet”).

show is over? After all, even Sara Houcke's Bengal tigers must return to their cages after the performance, unlike their human so-called "partners" and "friends." Steve Baker, quoting Roland Barthes, provides an explanation for the way society looks at animals:

Calling the workings of everyday culture "myth," [Barthes] writes: "Myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion." What it distorts and inflects is the historical and the cultural, so that they appear entirely natural. But what is most useful here is the idea that *nothing is actually hidden*, it's just that the culture typically deflects our attention from these things, and makes them seem unworthy of analysis. (1993, 8, original emphasis)

Equally, cages, chains and whips are perceived as part and parcel of the circus enterprise, and thus as "entirely natural." They are practically invisible within the consciousness of circus audiences.<sup>14</sup>

An explanation is that the workings of myth lead to what Mary Midgley describes as "relative dismissal" on the part of the circus visitor. Midgley explains that it is now common opinion that "animals, since they are conscious, are entitled to *some* consideration, but must come at the end of the queue, after all human needs have been met" (Midgley 1983, 13, original emphasis).<sup>15</sup> The "human need," in this case, is for entertainment,<sup>16</sup> and, since the sight of cages, chains, and bullhooks

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<sup>14</sup> *The San Francisco Chronicle* of 19 August 2002, however, notes the discrepancy between representation, perception and reality in Houcke's tiger act: "She whispers, but in case they don't hear her, she still cracks a whip" (cited in PETA, "The State of the Circus Industry Factsheet").

<sup>15</sup> This belief, according to Albrecht, is at the heart of "Putting People First" (PPF), a "response to PETA...from the private sector" (1995, 210). Albrecht writes, with reference to "The Animal Enterprise Protection Act," signed by George W. Bush, that "PPF's ongoing efforts to curtail the other side's use of terrorism was finally victorious" (211) and that "PPF has proven something can indeed be done to fight back" (212). The ease with which Albrecht moves from PPF's assertion that animal rights activists are "terrorists" (210) to appropriating the rhetoric of Bush's "War on Terrorism" himself is highly problematic.

<sup>16</sup> Franklin suggest that "affluence" and increased leisure time led to the "[i]ncreased interest in animals arising from hobbies and outdoor leisure," which "stimulated the demand for mass media representations of animals" in cartoons, children's stories, films and novels (1999, 38–9). Whilst animals portrayed as "moral identit[ies]" appealed to a wide audience and were "used by reformers to broaden the popular support for sentimental attitudes, anti-hunting, conservation and protection" (Franklin 1999, 39), the creation of 'animal celebrities', combined with their promotion as readily available commodities, simultaneously contributed, and continues to contribute, to consumer demand for circus imagery. Children are particular targets of campaigns to market such imagery and its associated merchandise, by distributing discounted tickets through schools, or providing free 'teaching resources' online (Ringling Bros., "Educational

and their effect on the animals are distorted and inflected to appear ‘entirely natural’, they are given “a very low priority” and are dismissed as unimportant, or as an acceptable, or necessary, price to pay (ibid.).

Elder et al. provide one explanation of the mechanisms that determine what is considered “low priority” and deemed an acceptable use of animals, and what is considered unacceptable abuse. They argue that:

Harmful practices are normalized to reduce the guilt or ambivalence associated with inflicting animal pain or death and justify such actions as defensible. Norms of animal practice are not consistent or universal. Codes for harmful animal practices are heavily dependent on immediate context. The critical dimensions of context include animal species, human actor(s), rationale for and methods of harm, and site of action involved in the practice. (Elder et al. 1998)

This provides a reason why practices that would not be acceptable in today’s zoos and frowned upon as forms of ‘pet’-keeping, such as confining animals to small cages and moving them frequently about, are normal and legal practice in the circus. Furthermore, the decision about just which practices are treated with “relative dismissal” is influenced by the politics, culture, and economics of any given society.

“Dismissal” is, of course, different from ignorance (in the sense of ‘not knowing’); “dismissal” is a decision to disregard what is clearly known. Thus, in accordance with Barthes’s, as well as Baker’s, definition of myth, circuses do not hide the small and confined spaces of the animals, but, on the contrary, even exhibit them. However, one way the “distortions” of myth are achieved is by giving the impression that the provisions are more than sufficient. Circus Krone, for instance, describes their tiger enclosure thus:

The three wild animal carriages have a length of 12 metres and a width of 2.50 metres each. In addition there is mounted a veranda [sic] of 2.50 metres width on each side. Room enough for Bali, Bandor, Mister T or Shirkan. (“Our Tigers”)

The accompanying picture, however, indicates quite the opposite of sufficient space. Another example is perhaps even more obvious: Circus Krone’s picture of their giraffe Juma might as well have been taken

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Fun”; Cole Bros. Circus, “When the Circus Comes to Town”), children’s webpages (such as Circus Krone Kinderclub website), or selling children’s toys (Circus Krone, “King Tonga in Plüsch”).

from an animal rights website, as the giraffe, a roaming, social animal, is quite clearly shown to be kept solitary in a small and limiting space. As the circus emphasizes the “large” outdoor enclosure and the custom-made wagon (Circus Krone, “Giraffe ‘Juma’”), the “distortions” of myth are achieved by giving the impression that Juma is more than sufficiently provided for.

### *The Commodified Animal*

While the way we look at these pictures is shaped and limited by the accompanying text, it is also consumer capitalist ideology that defines our view of animals as consumable objects. Circus visitors are, after all, paying for the spectacle. The spatial separation between viewers and animals reinforces the underlying structure of a consuming, and paying, subject and a consumed object, a hierarchy that is taken for granted by the audience. This relationship is constantly enacted through the circus’s animal imagery. Since the arbitrary creation of ‘human subjects’ and ‘animal objects’ is regarded as a ‘natural’ distinction, the underlying discourse and the conventional nature of circus imagery add to the entertainment value of animal performances, as these can be consumed with ease and familiarity. The imagery is effective because, as Barthes argues:

Mythical speech is made of a material which has *already* been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication: it is because all the materials of myth (whether pictorial or written) presuppose a signifying consciousness, that one can reason about them while discounting their substance. This substance is not unimportant. (1973, 119, original emphasis)

In this case, of course, the “substance” consists of a large number of animals, who, whilst they are the commodified objects of spectacles, are negatively affected by the constraints of circus life, as increasing evidence from numerous sources around the globe suggests.<sup>17</sup> Baker brings the discrepancy between ‘ideas’ of objectified animals and “real” animals to a point. He says:

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<sup>17</sup> According to SAFE, for instance, “[m]ethods known to be used overseas include hitting animals with sticks, whips and clubs, use of electric prods, tight collars, confinement, and deprivation of food and water. The animals may also be drugged, frightened, and shouted at or otherwise intimidated” (Terry and Petersen 2003, 13).

Culture does not allow unmediated access to animals themselves. Our attitudes, our prejudices and indeed our sympathies are all filtered through or clogged up in this thick but transparent mesh (or mess) of history, culture, public opinion, received ideas. Animals themselves, living animals, “real” animals: where are they in all this? (Baker 1993, 10)

Animal rights and welfare organizations campaigning against circuses focus much of their efforts on drawing attention to the ‘real living animals’ behind the scenes. PETA Deutschland, for example, displays pictures of circus animals on their website designed to alert the public to the inadequate environment that circuses provide for them (“Fotos”). One photo shows a group of elephants who are evidently being mistreated with a bullhook by a handler (“Elephant Image”). A close look at their head-dress reveals that these are in fact the famous Circus Krone elephants; the very elephants about whom trainer Jana Mandana comments: “Coercing these playful and intelligent animals won’t achieve anything at all” (Circus Krone, “Jana Mandana,” my translation). Similarly, SAFE, New Zealand’s largest animal rights organization, responds to the self-promotion of circuses as ‘happy’ spaces of fun and entertainment with images that clearly show the confinement of animals. One of these shows Jumbo, the last remaining circus elephant in New Zealand, pulling at the chain around her foot; another image depicts a Whirling Bros. lion gazing through the bars of a small trailer (SAFE, “Gallery”). These images convey the animals’ lack of freedom very strongly and show that these animals are tethered, caged and isolated from their own species.<sup>18</sup> This directly contradicts the circus industry’s claims of equal partnerships between humans and animals.

Furthermore, a look behind the seductive facade of circus webpages reveals that, despite their public promotion as a ‘Noah’s Ark’, the sponsoring of alleged conservation projects by circuses is extremely sparse, and appears to be no more than a token gesture to address public concerns. Thus, Tom Dillon, conservation biologist and “director of the Species Conservation Program” for the WWF, criticizes Ringling

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<sup>18</sup> Recent video footage filmed by former Whirling Bros. employees shows a distressed monkey in a very small cage, who, the former staff say, had not been released from the cage for four weeks or been given enough water, and had been injured by a chafing chain around the neck. Shortly after the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries had supposedly investigated the abuse, another monkey died of heat exhaustion (*Campbell Live* 2006). Another former circus employee commented on Whirling Bros.’ animals: “They were sleeping in faeces, their own urine, rotten food. The cages were full of flies... Shocking conditions... a prisoner gets kept better than they do” (*TV3 News* 2006).



Fig. 4.1 “Circus Krone Elephants and Handler with Bullhook” (Photo: PETA.de.)



Fig. 4.2 Jumbo Tethered (Photo: SAFE New Zealand Inc.)



Bros.’ ‘conservation efforts’ (MacDonald 2003, 14–5). He comments: “It’s nice they’ve put money into Thailand’s captive elephant program, but putting the money into conservation of wild elephants would be a better use of the funds” (cited in MacDonald 2003, 16). Ringling Bros.’ spokesperson Pflughaupt, when confronted with the question why Ringling Bros. does not “redirect its efforts from breeding elephants [in Florida] to habitat conservation,” responds: “Habitat is another thing. We’re not a conservation organization. We’re a circus responsible for the care of our animals” (ibid.).

Yet the most obvious example is perhaps that of the Garden Brothers Circus in the USA, who proclaim their commitment to “preserving and protecting all animals,” which evidently manifests itself in nothing more than the suggestion that their commercial use of an endangered species for entertainment may “inspire just one person at every performance to protect and preserve wildlife” (Garden Brothers Circus). Albrecht echoes this line of reasoning in connection with Circus Flora, which, he asserts,

is able to call attention to the plight of endangered species, like the elephant, by introducing one particularly endearing member of that species to the public. . . . Audiences are within touching distance of Flora the elephant. Such involvement serves to make audiences more receptive to the materials printed in the show’s souvenir booklets and informational pamphlets. (1995, 213–4)

According to Albrecht, it is the circus’ founder Ivor David Balding’s “concern” over Flora that demonstrates a “social conscience” (1995, 112). However, by the circus’s own admission, Flora was, in fact, taken from the wild. The website informs us that the circus “was named after Flora, the orphaned baby African elephant Balding had rescued. . . . when ivory poachers in Africa killed her mother” (Circus Flora, “History”). Furthermore, on the circus’s 2006 website, and in its mission statement, there is no mention of any contribution to species conservation.

In New Zealand, the purported connection between circuses and conservation does not appear to be a much publicized issue at all, since the only circus that still uses exotic animals, Whirling Brothers, is a small circus that does not command the large budgets for promotion and marketing that the commercially more successful circuses overseas have available. There is neither a homepage nor a fan website. Ironically, the only significant internet presence of the Whirling Brothers Circus is within the webpages of SAFE. But rather than just directing the circus

visitors’ gaze towards those aspects of the show audiences tend to ignore, SAFE’s campaign material complements pictures exposing abuse with images of chimpanzees in their natural habitat. These are the result of SAFE’s very successful campaign to free Buddy and Sonny, two circus chimpanzees, who now live in an animal sanctuary in Zambia as part of a larger group of chimps. Such images contrast strongly with the idea that circuses are ‘natural’, even ‘better’, spaces for wild animals, and clash with the circuses’ assertions that all animal acts are based on natural behavior. Circuses do, in fact, very little to substantiate these claims. Ringling Bros. makes attempts to validate their argument by showing a series of photographs of captive elephants in various strange poses, such as headstands (“At Play and In Performance”). In this case, however, it is the *absence* of certain images that is telling: circus websites do not show pictures of free-ranging wild animals. This is not surprising: such images simply would not verify the circuses’ claims. Wild elephants do not do headstands.

While circuses convey the message that consumption equals conservation in regard to animal acts, the mainstream public is increasingly attracted to the proposition that wild animals should live their lives as naturally as possible,<sup>19</sup> and that exotic animals are not consumable objects. This view is supported by scientists in the field, such as those at the Amboseli Elephant Research Project. By their own description, their “combined experience represents over 200 years of work with free-ranging, wild African elephants,” and the scientists involved are “the acknowledged leading experts in the field” (Amboseli Elephant Research Project). In their “Circus Position Statement,” they write:

It is our considered opinion that elephants should not be used in circuses. Elephants in the wild roam over large areas and move considerable distances each day. They are intelligent, highly social animals with a complex system of communication. No captive situation can provide elephants with the space they need for movement or with the kind of social stimulation and complexity that they would experience in the wild. . . . Elephants in circuses are confined and chained for hours, are bought and sold,

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<sup>19</sup> This is patently different from Albrecht’s assertion that “animal rights activists, many of whom belong to [PETA] . . . insist that the only proper way to handle animals is to allow them to return to their natural state at once” (1995, 204). On the contrary, organizations such as PETA and SAFE recognize that circus animals can never be released back into ‘the wild’, their “natural state,” but, instead, should at least be allowed to live the rest of their lives in appropriate sanctuaries.

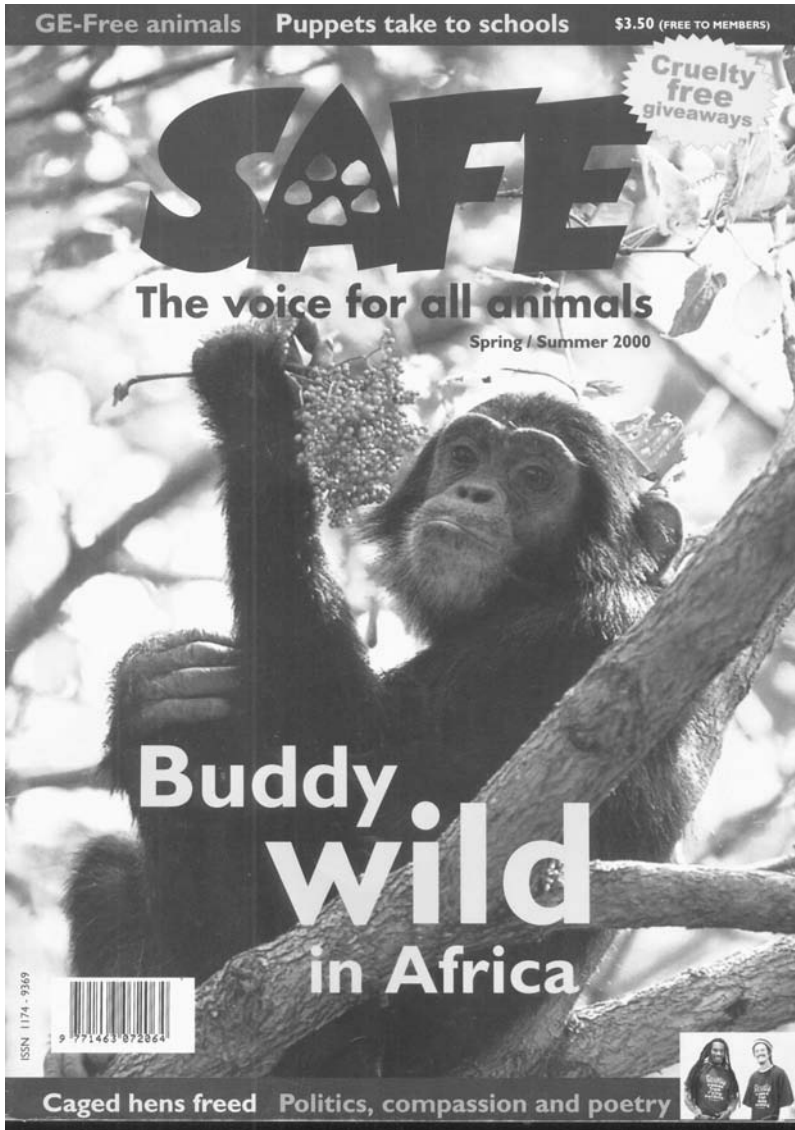


Fig. 4.3 “Buddy Wild in Africa” (Photo: SAFE New Zealand Inc.)

separated from companions, and frequently moved about. In short they are treated as objects of entertainment for humans. We believe that such intelligent, socially complex and long-lived animals should be treated with respect and empathy. An elephant's place is in the wild with its relatives and companions. The totally unnatural existence for captive elephants in a circus is a travesty and to allow this practice to continue is unjustified and unethical. (Amboseli Elephant Research Project)

Since images such as those evoked by this statement appeal increasingly to the mainstream public, it is also not surprising that the campaign to free New Zealand circus chimps Buddy and Sonny coincided with the highest public profile and most successful year of income for the sponsoring organization, SAFE. Furthermore, the 2003 campaign to ban exotic animals in New Zealand circuses has met with an overwhelmingly positive public response,<sup>20</sup> and the global campaign to outlaw the use of animals in circuses has proved successful in an increasing number of nations, such as Sweden, Finland, Costa Rica, Singapore, India, and most recently Austria. Even in Germany, which has a large number of traveling circuses, and where the circus commands a considerable media presence, the Federal Council recommended to parliament that the use of wild animals in entertainment be banned (Bundesrat Press Release, 17 October 2003). Thus, as international legislation begins to change slowly but surely in the wake of shifting cultural attitudes, there is a strong indication that the future of circus entertainment lies in the skills and artistry of human performers.<sup>21</sup>

The changing nature of animal entertainment in the circus reflects the different ideologies that are projected onto the performing animal at the centre of the spectacle. From colonization to environmentalism and consumer capitalism, animal acts both mirror and reinforce the culturally ingrained values and beliefs of the spectator, as they naturalize and legitimate prevalent power structures and discourses. Thus, the portrayal of animals in circuses has shifted from a celebration of dominated and controlled objects of spectacle and intimidation to

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<sup>20</sup> As campaign director Hans Kriek informed me, SAFE's petition was submitted to parliament carrying 18,000 signatures. Furthermore, after completing the project on which this paper is based, I decided to join SAFE and was able to experience the typically positive public reaction first hand as a volunteer in the street.

<sup>21</sup> For New Zealand, this may come true in the near future if the owner of the Whirling Brothers Circus follows through with his recently announced plans to retire. See *The Press*, 6 February 2006, for example.

evoking the interactions between supposedly equal friends and partners. In this context, the internet is used as a particularly effective tool both by circuses, which respond to the changing tastes of the mainstream public, as well as animal rights organizations, which challenge the idea of the circus as a 'natural' space for animals, and focus, with increasing success, on the suffering, commodification and confinement of circus animals. The questions that remain, however, are concerned with the special nature of looking at exotic animals: tigers in cages will gain more public support than sows in crates, or hens in batteries, for example. It appears that what is important in the end is perhaps not, after all, the suffering animal body, in this case the "substance" of myth, but the way the animal practice surrounding it is constructed: as a natural necessity, as an expendable luxury, or as innocent fun.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> A recent court case brought by PETA against Kenneth Feld, owner of Ringling Bros., has shown just how much representation matters. Allegedly, Feld "covertly funded" PPF (PETA 2004, 8), and ordered "wiretaps," "theft of documents" (ibid., 1), and other illegal activities against PETA, as well as other prominent animal advocacy organizations such as PAWS. Jeff Stein cites an affidavit by ex-CIA operative Clair George, employed by Feld, which "suggested Feld had set up a special unit . . . to destroy anyone who threatened the image of the circus as wholesome fun for the whole family, not to mention a conscientious custodian of animals and circus children" (2001). Despite "extensive evidence," the court jury did not uphold PETA's complaint (PETA 2006); a similar lawsuit by writer Jan Pottker against Feld was ongoing in November 2005 (Leiby 2005).

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<sup>23</sup> Due to the ephemeral nature of the Internet, some online sources and imagery referred to here will have changed or become unavailable by the time this chapter reaches the reader. I am confident, however, that at least within the foreseeable future, similar examples can easily be found.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### FARMING IMAGES: ANIMAL RIGHTS AND AGRIBUSINESS IN THE FIELD OF VISION

Philip Armstrong

#### *Media Circus*

On the first day the protestors gather at 10 am, a block from the hotel. They carry placards and megaphones, and they wear neck-warmers that have been specially made to stretch over their heads, as part of a performance to be held for the TV cameras at the protest site. Since the winter sunlight doesn't raise the temperature much, some combine the neck-warmer with a beanie, leaving only their eyes showing, like a balaclava: the effect is "very ALF," as one young woman tells her friend admiringly.

At 10.30 am, accompanied by drumbeats, the line of protestors approaches the conference venue, a top-range hotel. At 11 am, in a carefully choreographed moment, twelve hooded protestors spit out the plastic baby comforters they have been holding between their teeth, to coincide with the press release prepared by the organizers: "Anti-Vivisection Protestors Spit the Dummy!" At the same moment, the Coalition Against Vivisection releases a long-prepared report into animal experimentation to the gathered media, accompanied by speeches from a sympathetic scientific researcher and a well-known Green Party Member of Parliament. On the TV news that night, images of chanting protestors, hooded faces, and sound-bites from the Coalition's spokespeople are accompanied by archival images of overseas animal experiments. The cameras also show the feet of conference delegates walking back and forth inside the venue—the only shots they are permitted to take inside the meeting itself.

The rest of the week follows a schedule that is familiar, by now, from such events worldwide. On the second day a polished spokesperson for the conference organizers emerges with a prepared response for the cameras. The media are satisfied—"Scientists Answer Animal Concerns"—but the protesters have heard similar assurances before. Wednesday is a rest day for the conference-goers; however the protestors

gather anyway, chanting and blaring recorded animal noises up at the hotel windows. On Thursday a dozen hooded protestors stage a blockade, sitting across train tracks. The train-ride to take delegates on a wine-tasting expedition has to be abandoned. Protestors also lie under buses, and use bicycle locks to attach themselves to the roof of the hotel as delegates are leaving. By the final day, despite a large and elaborate vigil to conclude the week's actions, the mainstream news media have lost interest, and no more stories or images from the protest are seen on national television or in the press.<sup>1</sup>

### *Vanishing Act*

Confrontations and debates over animal experimentation have been a familiar feature of radical social action in industrialized societies for well over a century. Participants tend to draw upon rhetorical markers and strategies established during key historical instantiations, from the Old Brown Dog riots of 1907 in Battersea, London, to the flurry of animal liberation actions in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>2</sup> Throughout this history, though, the most powerful rhetoric has always been visual in nature: actual images, word images and the language of visuality.

One reason for animal advocates' reliance upon visual communication is that "animals cannot speak up for themselves, so the message is in greater need of visual reinforcement than, presumably, for issues of human rights" (Burt 2002, 168–9). Burt goes on to note that the most effective animal rights campaigns have always been those that

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<sup>1</sup> The events described here took place in the week of 18–22 August 2003, when delegates of several of the leading animal advocacy groups in Australasia converged in Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand, to confront the meeting of ANZCCART, the Australian and New Zealand body whose main function is to organize an annual conference of scientists engaged in live animal experimentation. Participants in the protest included those from radical grassroots activist groups (which coalesced for the occasion under the heading of the "Animal Rights Alliance"), the Wellington-based National Anti-Vivisection Coalition, the Animal Rights Legal Advocacy Network, and SAFE (Save Animals From Exploitation), New Zealand's largest and longest-standing animal rights group. For an insightful history and analysis of grassroots animal activism in Aotearoa New Zealand, including some background on the wider context of animal welfare and rights movements, see Beynon (2003).

<sup>2</sup> For discussion of the Old Brown Dog riots see Lansbury (1985) and Kean (1998); for an account of animal liberation activism in Britain during the late twentieth century, see Baker (2001); for accounts of action against animal experimentation in the United States see Jasper (1987).

achieve the most striking visual impact: his example is the campaign against foxhunting in Britain, an issue that from both sides produces an elaborate spectacularism. A comparable example from Australasia would be the campaign during the late 1990s by SAFE (Save Animals from Exploitation) against the use of exotic animals in circuses, which entailed negotiating the renunciation of this tradition by a prominent local circus, in combination with the release of two chimpanzees, Sonny and Buddy, and their relocation to the Chimfunshi Wildlife Orphanage in Zambia (SAFE 2000). This triumph coincided, not accidentally, with the apogee of SAFE's national profile, and its highest-ever levels of income and memberships.<sup>3</sup> As James Jasper suggests, visibly charismatic animals of this kind provide "condensing symbols" that are crucial to what he calls the "art of moral protest," because they bring together meanings appropriate to different levels of debate and various kinds of audience (Jasper 1997, 160–7). On the other hand, amongst those involved in the use of animals—whether in science, medicine or farming and its support industries—the development of an urban-centered commodity capitalism has demanded that images of animal suffering be removed from public visibility.

No wonder, then, that the fruits of struggles between these two sides of the animal use debate have often been attempts to regulate the power and impact of the seen and the unseen. The nineteenth- and early twentieth-century legislation that emerged from early animal advocacy struggles, although ostensibly designed to improve the treatment of animals, also concentrated on limiting the visibility of their suffering: an 1857 Bill in Britain "proposed that children under fourteen should not witness killing in a slaughterhouse," later legislation included the 1876 banning of public lectures involving the demonstration of vivisection, and a 1911 law against children under sixteen witnessing the cutting up of carcasses (Burt 2002, 36–7).

These manipulations of the field of vision recall John Berger's assertion, often discussed within contemporary animal studies, that the 'real' animal, and the possibility of an authentic relation between human and animal, 'vanishes' in modern cultures as a result of capitalism, urbanization and industrialization. This vanishing is both demonstrated and effected, Berger argues, by the proliferation of certain kinds of animal images: pets, toys, zoo animals, storybook animals, Disney

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<sup>3</sup> See Tanja Schwalm's chapter in this volume for further discussion of this event.

animals, all conspire to replace the animal *as animal* with the animal as spectacle (Berger 1971; 1977a, b and c). We might ask, then, whether the struggles between animal advocates and their opponents for control over animal imagery constitute another such disappearance of the animal via spectacle.

Inevitably, in the media-saturated cultures of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, attempts to engage in a struggle for visual representation require animal advocates to show considerable virtuosity in their dealings with the media—a capacity necessitated by the unpopularity and complexity of their message, and the slenderness of their resource base (Sabloff 2001, 131). The organizers of protest events therefore tend to combine noisy marches, street theatre, blockades and lockdowns to cater for the tastes of the more radical participants. At the same time, they also try to introduce more lasting images via news and information networks hungry for sensational conflict and spectacular stereotypes. The increasing reliance upon visual media means that, over recent decades, the release of photographic or video evidence of the animal experimentation practices occurring ‘behind closed doors’ has become more and more significant for anti-vivisection movements worldwide. Thus, “Alex Pacheco’s secret photography of abuse of primates at the Silver Spring laboratory [was] crucial to the rise of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA),” now the world’s largest animal rights organization (Burt 2002, 168–9). Similarly, the impact of the animal liberation movement in Britain depends largely upon infiltrations of companies like Huntingdon Life Sciences, and the public release of photos and video footage, such as the famous sequences of researchers beating and shaking the beagle dogs that comprise their standard “mammalian preparations” (SHAC, “HLS Exposed”). Baker remarks that the primary effectiveness of such imagery lies in its ability to represent a vast imaginary unseen; he glosses the viewer’s response as follows: “[I]f this scrap of documentary evidence has been... ‘stolen’ from the realm of what we are not permitted to see, how much more remains unseen?” (Baker 2001, 221).

Again, those on the opposing side of the debate are far from ignorant of the power of such imagery: as a veteran journalist told one conference of animal experimenters a few years ago,

Animals, especially their welfare, make great news stories... Editors are delighted by the combination of sentiment, anthropomorphism, indignation, commonality, highly graphic horror or cuteness and often, major economic significance, that is wrapped up in many animal stories. (Johnstone, in Mellor, Fisher and Sutherland 2000, 119)

This kind of realization results, inevitably, in a corresponding investment in image management by those involved in animal experimentation. Jasper describes how, after initial successes by anti-vivisection groups targeting Cornell Medical school in Manhattan in 1987, NYU initiated a tactic that would become standard practice throughout the US:

Around the country, slick PR officials replaced scientists as spokespersons, accompanied by normal Americans (especially children) who had been helped by biomedical research. (1997, 312–13)

### *Mammalian Preparations*

NYU's lessons appear to have been well learnt by ANZCCART, the body hosting the conference referred to at the start of this chapter. The acronym stands for Australian and New Zealand Council for the Care of Animals in Research and Teaching—a name indicative of the kind of image-making that is this organization's primary objective. A significant proportion of each of its annual meetings addresses the public perception of animal industries and research in today's social climate.

During the 2003 ANZCCART Conference, then, the real struggle was over minutes on the TV news and columns in the newspapers. The conference title and theme—"Lifting the Veil: Finding Common Ground"—announced the intention of its organizers to regain the initiative over public representation of their work, and to do so by means of the language of visibility and transparency. To this end, presentations were included in the schedule that directly criticized animal experimentation, both from an ethical and a scientific viewpoint (Kedgley, in Cragg et al. 2004, 27–32; Morris, in Cragg et al. 2004, 137–44). So too was an "open session" (that is, open to registered conference delegates) during which small groups discussed various means by which "the legitimate demands of citizens for transparency" could be met (Cragg et al. 2004, 134). Eight recommendations were produced in order pursue this goal, which became the basis for the conference spokespeople's reply to the media on the second day of the conference. These strategies for increased visibility were, of course, quite carefully qualified: for example,

1. *Balanced information* on the value and need for animal research and testing must be made readily available to the public at all levels (particularly schools)... [R]eliable sources need to be established that can provide authoritative information on animal research, in a proactive fashion. (Cragg et al. 2004, 134, original emphasis)

The emphasis on *balance*, *reliability* and *authoritativeness* invokes the conventional rebuttals of anti-vivisection claims—that they are biased, irrational, inaccurate and non-authoritative—but it also suggests the delegates’ sense of how much jurisdiction and initiative have been lost to the anti-vivisection movement.

The proceedings of the conference demonstrate other tactics learnt by Australasian scientists in the aftermath of the anti-vivisection coups of the 1980s. As in the case of the NYU counter-response, the selection and arrangement of published papers emphasizes the benefits to human health of animal research. Thus one of the first papers advocates the use of animal models in the study of biochemical and molecular processes leading to heart disease, and in the development of new diagnostic and therapeutic procedures for that condition (Cameron, in Cragg et al. 2004, 21–4). Considering New Zealand’s unusually high rates of coronary heart disease, assigning prominence to such research seems effective, although in another way this paper sits ironically beside those concerned with attempts to increase dairy and meat yields in farmed animals—especially since, as Cameron herself concedes in her introductory comments, “[t]he recognized lifestyle factors that contribute to risk of heart disease include...fatty diet, ...being overweight and diabetes” (in Cragg et al. 2004, 21). Indeed, opponents of animal research frequently allege that it absorbs a disproportionate amount of funding, reducing the amount available for potentially more productive epidemiological research into disease prevention (Morris, in Cragg et al. 2004, 142).

In other ways, too, the attempt to justify current rates of research use of animals by citing advances in treatment of human illness proves unpersuasive in New Zealand, where the government’s published statistics show that each year a mere ten percent of experiments that use animals are medical in nature (NAEAC 2004). To offset this PR disadvantage, the ANZCCART papers often imply positive outcomes for human medicine from agricultural and commercial research projects. Thus, one paper promotes the use of livestock in the study of infection:

[D]omestic ruminants...are readily accessible and provide excellent natural models to study many diseases of major importance to the farming sector and some of which have direct relevance in human medicine. (Griffin, in Cragg et al. 2004, 17)

These claims can be fairly tenuous, however, as in this case, where the study in question uses deer to investigate tuberculosis, a disease that

(in New Zealand) has long been contained amongst the human population, while retaining an economically significant presence amongst livestock.

The most extreme form of image-farming on offer at the 2003 ANZCCART conference is provided by a speaker from the U.S.-based Charles River Laboratories—said to be the largest supplier of laboratory animals in the world—who describes the “Humane Care Initiative” in operation at this matrix of animal research institutions. Humane care, she asserts, is enshrined as one of the “seven core corporate values,” displayed on posters at each of the company’s sites and included in the employee handbook. Furthermore, a visible—indeed a flamboyant—commitment to this principle is regulated and expressed by various corporate rituals. Employees must attend annual compulsory training sessions on ethics and animal welfare and sign “a statement of commitment to the humane care of animals” each year. There are awards granted for excellence in animal care. Finally, and most remarkably, some Charles River sites hold a formal ceremony of tribute to “acknowledge the contribution that animals give to the efforts to improve both animal and human life” (Brown, in Cragg et al. 2004, 163–5).

For John Berger, of course, such approaches would serve as an exorbitant instance of the disappearance of human-animal relations behind a display of animal-themed capitalist spectacle. And, indeed, Brown’s paper offers no unequivocal reference to any specific practice in the treatment of the animals themselves; instead she describes a tissue of transparency-effects so multilayered that it becomes another kind of veil. Just as the discourse of laboratory science conventionally replaces the emotional and physical messiness of “day-to-day-science” with the “analytic animal”—that is, “the animal transformed into data” (Lynch, cited in Birke 1994, 63–4)—the Charles River Humane Care Initiative transforms the interactions of laboratory workers and animals into a new hybrid species, a kind of ‘welfare animal’, constructed from quality-control processes and the kind of management liturgies designed to incite worker ‘buy-in’ to corporate values.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In a related argument, Jonathan Burt has analyzed the ways in which the meat industry turns to its own advantage the notion of “humane slaughter” by translating injunctions to reduce animal suffering into issues of speed: “[T]he emphasis in these arguments becomes centered on time: the potentially measurable rapidity of the loss of consciousness and the efficient rapidity of the dispatch of the animal. In that sense the notion of the humane maps neatly onto the logic of efficiency” (Burt 2006, 142).



While the ANZCCART delegates farmed their animal images in the warmth and comfort of their hotel, the protestors outside were preparing their own experimental animal culture, hoping to spawn images that would stay in the public eye for longer than a three-minute news item. To achieve visibility and authority for their message, the Coalition Against Vivisection accompanied protest theatre with the release of their lengthy and detailed report into animal experimentation in Aotearoa New Zealand. This document (compiled over several years, and running to seventy-odd pages) alleges shortcomings in legislation responsible for preventing unnecessary suffering of animals in research, obstruction from universities and crown research institutes in providing information on their use of animals, and culpable ineffectiveness and evasiveness in the work of animal ethics committees. But even as they provided this extended policy and institutional analysis, anticipating the news media's preference for imagery over textual engagement, the authors adopted two strategies to make their findings easy to assimilate into popular visual culture. First, the report insistently asserts agency over the language of visibility and invisibility introduced by the scientists. Its title—*Lifting the Veil of Secrecy on Live Animal Experiments*—refers directly to the conference theme, and its organizing principle is a thematic of hiddenness, emphasized by subheadings such as “A Culture of Secrecy” and “Behind Closed Doors.” This rhetoric of revelation is accompanied by a repeated demand for greater transparency:

We believe the public will be shocked by the experiments described here, and will support our call for a full and open debate about vivisection in this country. (Coalition Against Vivisection 2003, 4–5)

The report's second appeal to visibility depends upon its inclusion of a file of photographs of current animal experiments, among the first publicly disseminated images of such procedures taking place locally. Certainly, this claim fits with the imagery of the Coalition's report, which states that

Animal research in this country is shrouded in secrecy. Although most of the research is funded with public money, very few details are ever released. . . . [T]he information in this report is undoubtedly only the tip of the iceberg. (Coalition Against Vivisection 2003, 4–5)

In another way, however, these images differ radically from anti-vivisection scoops overseas and thus demonstrate the local specificities that characterize the economy of animal imagery in Australasia. The photos in the report are of farm animals—fistulated cows or sheep with indwell-

ing endoscopic equipment—rather than vivisected primates, dogs or cats. This emphasis is certainly a defining feature of the New Zealand anti-vivisection movement, which aims primarily to inform the public that such experimentation here has little to do with curing human disease and plenty to do with advances in agribusiness (Coalition Against Vivisection 2003, 4). *Lifting the Veil of Secrecy* goes on to detail examples of such agricultural “manipulations,” some of which are pictured, including GE and cloning experiments on sheep and cattle; “cut and paste” experiments at AgResearch wherein sections of intestine in live sheep are separated from the rest of the gut so that investigations into internal parasites can be conducted; electric shock and burn experiments on sheep at HortResearch Ruakura; fistulated cattle at Massey University (Coalition Against Vivisection 2003, 40–2).

Despite these attempts to achieve a lasting hold on the public visual imagination, the fate of this report and its accompanying photographic archive exemplifies the ways in which mainstream news media tend to process animal advocacy issues. In television and print media during August 2003, the content of the report received brief attention, the photographs none at all. One reason why these pictures could not gain the same attraction as comparable ‘scoops’ from Britain and the US, of course, is the species of animals involved. Obviously, sheep and cows are perceived as much less visibly charismatic subjects than dogs, cats or simians: faced with such images, which they could not assign to any familiar or recognizable news slot, the TV cameras turned instead to the human animals on display. Media coverage during the conference turned back to the visibility or invisibility, not of animal experiments, but of protestors and scientists: much attention was paid to the claims of those organizing the conference that the secrecy surrounding their work—the determination to keep it *out* of visibility—was not because they feared public condemnation, but because they were vulnerable to attacks by animal rights terrorists. Hence the ban on showing footage of any ANZCCART attendees except from the knee down.

And of course appropriate images were available to signify this terrorist threat: in particular, that of the balaclava-clad protestor. Steve Baker has analyzed in detail the production of this image during the Animal Liberation Front controversies of the 1980s in the UK (Baker 2001, 195–211). The adoption of the same image by protestors at ANZCCART, as well as its appropriation by the scientists and media, was a very deliberate importation of stereotype from the UK to the local scene: participants praised each other for their adoption of a kind

of ALF chic.<sup>5</sup> This image embodies the contradictions and ambiguities of the struggle about visibility and its meanings: it is itself an image signifying *hiddenness* (anonymity of the activist, secrecy of the scientific work being exposed); it is an image that both sides are using to manipulate visibility. Ironically, however, even at its most visible, such activism converts into a (media) circus: stereotyped characters, ritual conflict, clichéd responses.

*Animal Images at Large*

A more complex picture emerges, however, if the engagement between animal advocates, scientists and agriculturalists is considered in a wider context. As I have described above, the proceedings of ANZCCART over recent years demonstrate a pervasive awareness that representation of the experimental animal in visual culture is crucial to the future of animal science. The overlap between animal experimentation and agriculture, however, means that the voice heard most clearly by the conference delegates, despite the shouts of the anti-vivisectionists outside their hotel windows, is that of the consuming public. In particular, and repeatedly, ANZCCART papers have focused upon “concerns about animal welfare” as a major factor influencing consumer choice in overseas markets (Mellor, Fisher and Sutherland 2000). In response to their identification of this tendency as a key challenge facing New Zealand agribusiness, they call insistently for a re-branding of New Zealand animal produce as not just clean and green, but as “not-mean,” that is to say, as cruelty-free: as one delegate put it a few years ago,

concern in some countries as well as in Australia and New Zealand about the way animals are farmed will offer marketing opportunities to provide new products which meet the ethical concerns of the moderate majority who would still like to eat animal products of humanely reared animals. (Hemsworth, in Mellor, Fisher and Sutherland 2000, 16)

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<sup>5</sup> The image of the balaclava-clad figure with the megaphone was used by Christchurch’s largest newspaper, *The Press*, to accompany an article on the protest in its online edition (the article and picture have now been removed from the web); the hardcopy paper used images of the ‘lockdown’ instead.

The same perception pervades the ruminations of those in the world of dairy-farming: ten years ago, writing in *Dairyfarming Annual*, Kevin Stafford of Massey University's Department of Veterinary Clinical Sciences cited a prediction by the Chairman of the British National Consumer Council that "[t]he main determinant of consumer behavior has shifted from price to quality and is now changing again to conscience" (Stafford 1993, 34). Five years on, an industry group manager reported in the same publication that

a number of the major English supermarkets . . . now require the comprehensive details about . . . the farm management practices (like drenching and dipping) that were applied to the individual animal. The possibility of having to supply that type of background information to milk production in this country is frightening. (Bodecker 1998, 68)

Consumer consciousness of animal welfare arises, according to these observers, from a peculiar torsion in the visual field produced by globalization, whereby the very invisibility of farmed animals in Europe heightens the sensitivities of visitors to this country. Again, speakers at ANZCCART conferences have highlighted this anxiety very acutely:

To the feedlotting and restricted farming regimes of Europe, the unconstrained free-grazing environment of a typical New Zealand farm can be construed as absolute cruelty, exposing animals to the elements, leaving them to fend for themselves. (Christie, in Mellor, Fisher and Sutherland 2000, 45)

Similarly, the worried dairy group manager suggests that

The growing tourist trade, especially from wealthier European countries, provides a window on our industry. Tourists in double-decker buses increasingly observe our farming practices very closely across the country. They must wonder—as they swoop down the road at 2.00 pm on the winter's afternoon—why large mobs of cows without tails and smaller than they perceive the cows in their own countries to be, stand huddled together on a muddy raceway while there is green grass in the next paddock. They must challenge previously held views of New Zealand when they see the bloated carcass of a dead cow at the roadside, legs held upright as a beacon for the dead cow truck and could not really understand why (around the gateways of New Zealand dairy farms) there are number[ed] cages periodically housing calves. One of the greatest animal rights issues in Europe is the transport and subsequent farming of calves for the veal industry. (Bodecker 1998, 69)

These comments represent both a growing awareness of the contradictions endemic to the place of animals in a changing globalized visual

image-bank, and a corresponding uncertainty about how to respond.<sup>6</sup> The writer is perplexed that the visual stereotype that once emblemized New Zealand's claim to the preservation of a rural idyll sadly lost to more industrialized countries—the sight of actual animals in real pastures—now provides spectacular evidence of exploitative practices. He goes on to suggest that “perhaps all we need to do is to have all stock both dead and alive collected inside the farm.”

This response recalls how often, over their century-and-a-half history, animal welfare campaigns have turned out to be reducible to a “middle-class desire *not to be able to see cruelty*” (Fudge 2002, 12; see also Kean 1998, 58–64). Ironically, industrialization and urbanization in this respect collaborate with the demands of an urban compassionate sensibility, insofar as they remove the suffering animal from the sensitized gaze of the civic bourgeoisie. In the late twentieth century, as global tourism and in particular the post-industrial hunger for nature began to drive these middle class urbanites out of their cities, in search of a supposedly lost and purportedly redemptive nonhuman world, the rural incidence of animal suffering and death began to pose a problem of visual representation for those animal industries still occupying the countryside in places like Aotearoa New Zealand.

At the same time, the post-industrial valorization of the natural also demands a revision of the appearance presented by the products of animal industries within the cities themselves, for example on supermarket shelves and in freezers. Globally, industry responses to the visual challenge of attracting the consumer with a taste for welfare are currently forcing a transformation in marketing and advertising strategies.

Earlier advertising of animal products often involved a branding regime that appropriated the romantic idyll of agrarian and pastoralist communion with nature. The power of this tactic cannot be easily dismissed, even now, since of course it mobilizes that very same suspicion of industrial and consumer capitalism which motivates critics of modernity, from proponents of organic agriculture to (some) cultural analysts—for example, the same idealization of pre-modern rural life can be found at the heart of John Berger's elegy for a lost authenticity

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<sup>6</sup> In a comparable way, a *New Zealand Herald* article in May 2003, responding to recent high-profile cases of neglect by farmers of the welfare of their stock, voiced concern about the potential damage to New Zealand's global brands if tourists visiting the country perceive animal suffering: the instance cited was that of farm homestay visitors complaining about emaciated farm dogs (MacLennan 2003).

in human-animal relations (Baker 2001, 12).<sup>7</sup> It is self-evident how many recent advertising campaigns play on this nostalgia. A notorious example is provided by the Anchor Butter commercial that screened in the UK in the early 1990s, which portrayed cows dancing about on green fields, singing “We are lucky cows . . . / . . . year-round grass makes butter great” (cited in Baker 2001, 22). Here, the year-long free-grazing typical of New Zealand farming was specifically used as a point of brand differentiation from European and British dairy products; but as the industry concerns about tourism cited above suggest, the shelf-life of this approach depends upon cattle on actual New Zealand farms remaining out of sight of the British public.

One result of the renewed stridency of animal advocacy in the late twentieth century has been to force this older mode of visual representation largely out of production. The gap between the imagery of the rural idyll and the material conditions of an increasing proportion of farmed animals has become too widely recognized for such strategies to work. In the case of Anchor Butter, it is notable that the dancing cows have been replaced by an elaborate website and TV advertising campaign featuring cartoon bovines in a virtual town called “Anchorville,” embodying a range of New Zealand stereotypes, from the “All Bulls” rugby team to the “Mega Bull” at the milk bar (Anchor, “Anchorville”). In advertising, footage of actual animals—even the thoroughly manipulated images of the dancing cows—has largely been deemed unfit for public consumption. ANZCCART’s marketing experts register this increasing disparity between visible branding and invisible practices:

At present there is a tension between the romantic-like image of farming (the chickens ranging free in the farmyard), and the economic business of farming (intensive or industrial systems). We remain loyal to the former yet committed to the latter. . . . This tension is noted in food labels that portray a pastoral or romantic image of food produced in an industrial-type setting. (Fisher, in Mellor, Fisher and Sutherland 2000, 71)

To the extent that animal production remains in transition between traditional open farming and mass intensification, a growing dissonance continues to emerge between the way agribusiness marketing idealizes

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<sup>7</sup> Steve Baker highlights Berger’s idealization of the rural (2001, 12), which is clearly in evidence when Berger fervently describes the intimate relation between the “peasant” and his pig prior to the industrial revolution (1977a, 504). See also Jonathan Burt’s close reading of Berger’s work on animals (2005).

rural life on one hand, and technological improvements to production (scientific and industrial) on the other.<sup>8</sup> In New Zealand, this conflict emphatically destabilizes the current cultural process of traditionalizing a settler pioneer mythology that can be mobilized, among other things, as a visible brand in the global tourist market. This is precisely the tension exploited by anti-vivisectionists in the photos of experimental farm animals published in the 2003 report of the Coalition Against Vivisection. The constrictive cages that confine the sheep imply a collaboration between the procedures of science and the technologies of factory farming; the porthole shape cut into the cow's side emblemizes a mode of scientific manipulation that reaches into the very body of the animal, easily linking to consumer fears about other kinds of obscure scientific manipulation of food products, including hormone and antibiotic additives, and of course genetic engineering. The picture in which the unsettling image of the fistulated cow is set against a misty rolling pastureland highlights most vividly the sense of a dissonance in the visual field of animal representation.<sup>9</sup>

Given the increasing potential for such challenges to the visual tradition of the rural idyll, a second visual strategy has emerged in recent years, by which agribusiness seeks to cater more carefully for the ethical consumer. This involves the replacement of images of the live animal with non-visual assurances about its treatment. Certain practices identified as cruel or inhumane—ones dispensable to the farmer, for example mulesing and tail-docking in sheep (Hynd, in Baker, Fisher and Hemsworth 2001, 82), beak-trimming in chickens (Gregory 1995), castration, induction and dehorning in cattle (Stafford 1993)—are modified or discontinued, enabling the product to be re-imagined as welfare-friendly.

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<sup>8</sup> One area in which the rural idyll has remained potent as a branding image is of course in the promotion of organic, small-business and family-farmed products, often accompanied by an implied or explicit critique of intensive farming. Franklin, however, suggests that such moves function more to obscure than to elucidate the conditions of most farmed animals in contemporary agricultural systems: “[T]he mythic farmyard of children’s books is replayed in the proliferation of hobby farms, backyard menageries and city farms, and through the purchase of free-range eggs, hormone-free beef and ‘stress-free’ meats of all kinds,” while at the same time, “the public has been carefully screened from other forms of food production systems and, as a result, has continued to accept intensification uncritically” (Franklin 1999, 127).

<sup>9</sup> The photos of the experimental sheep and cows are from the Appendices to *Lifting the Veil of Secrecy* (Coalition Against Vivisection 2003).



Fig. 5.1 “Fistulated Cow” (Photo: SAFE New Zealand Inc.)



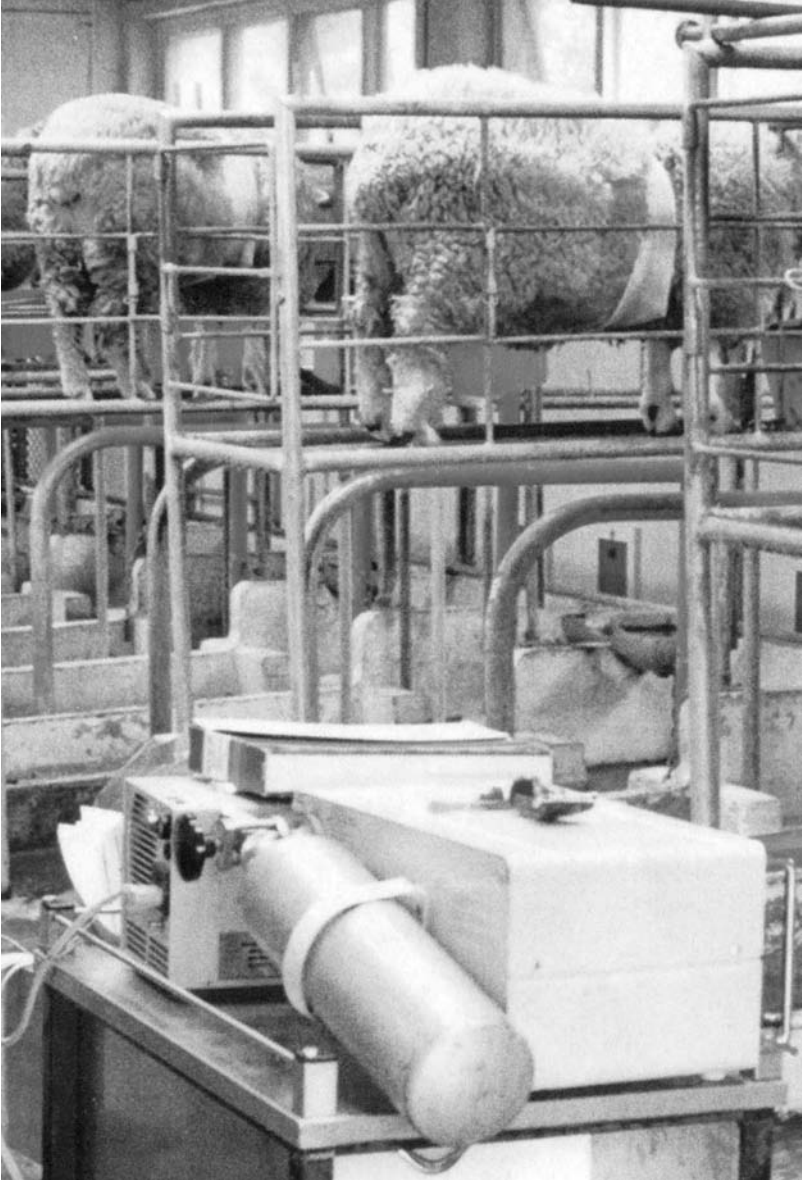


Fig. 5.2 “Sheep Housing” (Photo: SAFE New Zealand Inc.)

The website and marketing of KFC worldwide, for example, invariably excludes images of live chickens, showing instead the familiar, kindly face of Colonel Harper Sanders amongst his pots and pans. Indeed, KFC posts a disclaimer, repeated on various pages on the site, that seeks to distance its brand from the live animal altogether:

KFC does not own or operate any poultry farms or processing facilities. Instead, it purchases chickens from, at any given time, approximately 16 different suppliers who collectively operate up to 52 facilities around the country. (KFC, "About KFC")

In place of these distant and invisible animals, KFC's website offers welfare-related assurances that display the generous latitude characteristic of such codes of practice, with all the weight placed on terms amply open to subjective interpretation: "Birds... must be treated in a humane manner... Suppliers must provide adequate space... [and] should formulate feed in order to deliver proper nutrition" (KFC, "About KFC").

Such tactics again evoke the banishment of the animal to a non-visual realm far distant from the viewing consumer. Even while displaying the industry's apparent response to (a selection of) animal advocates' demands, welfare-friendly branding reifies animals as products more completely than ever before. Each reassurance of partial good practice rhetorically contributes to the animal's representation as no more than a series of cuts and processes, reducing it—even prior to slaughter—into a collection of body parts and husbandry practices. Just as in scientific writing, where "the living animal becomes coded as an assemblage of parts" (Birke 1994, 7), KFC's Poultry Welfare Guidelines are described under headings such as "Breeding," "Raising," "Comfort and Shelter," "Catching," "Handling," "Transport," "Stunning," "Humane Slaughter" (KFC, "About KFC"). The animal is no longer even "what meat was before it was meat" (Berger 1971, 1042); rather, it is always already meat.

### *A Taste of History*

Actually, there is a name for what these birds were before they were meat. The ubiquitous but unseen animals frying around the globe in the outlets of Colonel Sanders's franchisers are usually termed 'broiler chickens', or even less euphemistically, 'meat chicks'. These are also the birds whose bodies fill the frozen chicken sections of supermarket

iceboxes. They thus have the dubious honor of being at the same time the rarest of beasts to be seen live on camera, and yet the most prolifically visible in death.

The same few strains of broiler are used everywhere chickens are intensively farmed, and are the great success story of collaboration between intensified farm systems and selective breeding programs. From 1960 to 1990, such techniques produced a bird that could reach slaughter weight at six weeks instead of twelve. Meanwhile, average slaughter weight was increased from 1.4 kg to 1.9 kg, and the feed conversion ratio decreased from 2.9 kg to 1.9 kg of feed/kg gain in live weight. Obviously, such a marked increase in rapidity of growth and weight gain has been accompanied by a proportionate increase in the prevalence of diseases associated with rapid metabolism: ascites, chronic heart failure, ventricular fibrillation, cardiac arrhythmias, and most commonly, “leg weakness” due to vastly accelerated weight gain: “In a survey of commercial broilers in the UK, fully 90 percent by the age of six to seven weeks had a detectable gait abnormality,” while according to the most conservative estimates, 26 percent of birds suffer chronic leg pain or complete collapse (Pope, in Baker, Fisher and Hemsworth 2001, 123). These physiological effects are compounded by the environmental treatment of broilers: they are confined to sheds housing usually fifteen to twenty-five thousand birds, subject to constant artificial light and to very rough handling during collection: in many countries, weak regulations allow poorly-trained and low-paid handlers to pick up four birds per hand, which are then tumbled live into crates for transport, to say nothing of a range of potential shortcomings in the slaughtering procedures.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the evident acuteness of these welfare issues, broilers prove unusually difficult to render visible. There are several reasons for this, which are best illustrated by comparison with the animal advocacy campaign against battery farming of layer hens. The widespread and growing public feeling against battery eggs is attributable in large part to the amenability of the advocates’ message to immediate visual representation. A snapshot of three or four featherless hens in a cramped cage provides a potent “condensing symbol” that immediately embodies the key elements of the case against battery farming (Jasper 1997, 161):

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<sup>10</sup> For a compelling account of the development of the broiler industry post-World War 2 see Watts (2000).

that extreme confinement and sensory deprivation cannot but degrade the birds' physical and behavioral wellbeing.

Even in the absence of visual images, the plight of the battery hen is easily conveyed by other strategies familiar to animal advocates, for example that of theriomorphism: asking the human viewer to imagine themselves in the animal's place (Baker 2001, 232). A classic instance of this tactic is provided by a recent cinema advertisement shown in New Zealand cinemas in 2002. The advertisement asked viewers if they were "sitting comfortably" before inviting them to "imagine that the area you are sitting in is a wire cage," and so on (SAFE 2002). This commentary was accompanied by a visual sequence showing only abstract representations of wire, eggs, and feathers: indeed, the condition for acceptance of this advertisement by cinemas was that it should not contain any actual footage of animals *at all*. This, then, is the obvious advantage of theriomorphism: it offers a way of visualizing the invisible.

The situation of the broiler chicken, however, is hard to visualize either by means of the emotive snapshot image, or via the imaginative effects of theriomorphism. A photograph taken from inside a broiler chicken shed simply does not look that bad. Broilers are usually well-feathered; they are by definition plump; they are not kept in cages but in huge flocks; they are amply provided with food and are housed under dim lighting and in warm conditions. To the uninformed eye—that is, that of the average consumer, systematically screened from detailed information about meat production methods—they look both comfortable and healthy (especially by comparison with their scrawny, featherless, mad-eyed, imprisoned relatives in battery sheds).

Establishment of a theriomorphic identification between human and broiler chicken proves equally problematic. As Franklin puts it, in animal rights and welfare literature,

the language used to describe the broilers is, unintentionally no doubt, less humanized. . . . [T]he sympathy of the readers for such animals is blurred by the language of human deviance imputed to the birds: "Selective breeding for 'greedy' birds, and the addition of growth-promoters to the feed, have ensured an end-product twice as heavy at seven weeks as *chickens should be*—and were, before the poultry and *drug* industries *moved* in. The result? PROFITS for producers and SUFFERING for the *sick* and *deformed* birds" . . . . Drug-crazed and greedy, deformed and unnatural in genetic make-up, practice and body, this highly manufactured animal accrues the aberrant qualities that derive from its origins in the wicked manipulation of nature. So far removed from true nature, humans can react to it with

the same moral indifference as other manufactured “products.” (Franklin 1999, 139, his emphasis)

Unable to rely on immediacy—the instant shock or sympathy generated by a snapshot or theriomorphic image—animal advocates have to find other strategies in their attempt to bring the issue of the broiler chicken into public view. Most importantly, they must attempt the return to visibility of that most easily obscured and unpalatable of knowledges—that of history.

This mission to restore a diachronic dimension to the public view of intensive farming is apparent in various current advocacy venues. For example, PETA’s “KFC Cruelty” campaign gained considerable impetus in October 2004 with the release of secretly-filmed footage from a poultry slaughter plant run by Perdue Farms Incorporated, one of KFC’s main suppliers in the U.S.A. The sequence, available online as a downloadable MPEG file, shows live birds being thrown against walls, dumped on the floor, kicked and hit with evident disregard for any suffering being caused. It is accompanied by a report from the investigator who obtained the footage while working in the plant undercover, describing the volume of sound made by the distressed birds, and detailing instances of inexperienced shackling on the conveyor belt, which would result in ineffective slaughter so that some birds would remain fully conscious when they reached the scalding tanks (designed to remove feathers from dead carcasses) (PETA, “Cruelty at a Perdue Plant in Showell, Maryland”). Such footage addresses KFC’s representation of its welfare processes head on, since it focuses the public eye on each stage of the industrial processing sequence—the micro-history that turns animal into meat.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the British RSPCA uses the internet’s unprecedented reach and versatility to intervene in the global visual archive in a different but compatible way. The webpage on factory farmed chickens centers upon a striking GIF image, which shows a sequence of snapshots in the growth of a meat chick, compared with that of an egg-layer: both are shown at three days of age, eleven days, three weeks, four weeks, and finally six weeks—slaughter age for the meat chick. The impact here is diachronic rather than synchronic: a single-image comparison would merely reveal a big bird next to a smaller one, neither showing evident signs of ill-health or distress, but the time-lapse comparison conveys both the gross acceleration of the

meat chick's metabolism, and the drastic foreshortening of its lifespan (RSPCA, "Campaigns: Chicken Farming").

The global panic about avian influenza suggests that opening this kind of production history to public view may be as urgent as it is difficult. So far, the visual representation of the scare in the mainstream news media has concentrated on health inspectors in white suits decontaminating sheds, footage of birds consigned to bonfires, dead or alive, and lines of airline travelers wearing face masks. Meanwhile, health and food authorities in many places have begun to administer the removal indoors of free-range flocks. But a very different picture—and along with it, different preventive strategies—would appear if authorities and media were to undertake a rigorous and publicly-visible examination of the history of intensive poultry farming practices, and in particular the ways in which they produce the perfect conditions for rapid evolution of new bacterial and viral agents: extreme overcrowding, low standards of hygiene and care, severe physiological and metabolic stress, careless use of antibiotics (Greger 2006).

I am suggesting, then, that the visual interventions of animal advocates—exemplified by the footage on the PETA site and the animation on the RSPCA one—attempt something like a reversal of Berger's disappearance of the authentic animal behind a display of spectacle.<sup>11</sup> Rather than reducing a particular image of the animal to a "condensing symbol," as animal advocates are often forced to do, these images refuse to be confined to any kind of static image, or any performative spectacle. Indeed, these moving pictures do not actually seek to visualize the animal as an 'authentic' animal in Berger's sense at all—that is, they envisage it neither as a 'natural' living thing, nor as a co-agent in a human world of idealized, authentic labor. Rather, they seek to bring into view the industrial, genetic and biological histories by which a particular breed of living creature has been constructed for human consumption and profit. They do so with the aim of restoring to visibility not only actual animals, but also history itself, in several important senses: a life history of the individual animal, prior to its conversion into packets of chilled meat; a species history that reveals

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<sup>11</sup> My argument in this respect constitutes a working out, in relation to particular examples, of a point made by Jonathan Burt, namely that Berger's hugely influential article treats modern visual representation of animals too reductively, too unambiguously, and too ahistorically (Burt 2005).

the physiological and environmental requirements of farmed and captive animals; a genetic history describing the human manipulation of particular breeds; and an industrial history of the development and procedures of intensive production systems.<sup>12</sup> And the conglomeration of these interlinked and obscured memories, I would suggest, should not be considered insignificant, if for no other reason than its function as a metonym for the larger biography of modernity itself, or at least for the visibility of that memory in the context of increasingly globalized everyday cultural practices.

*Note*

Along with documentary research, this paper relies upon observations gained during my own active participation in the activities of SAFE, and conversations with its Director, Anthony Terry, to whom I am extremely grateful. I am also appreciative of the research and editorial assistance provided by Emily Wall.

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<sup>12</sup> Another strikingly successful internet intervention, *The Meatrix* (Free Range Graphics and GRACE 2003), attempts a similar historicization, using an animated parody of *The Matrix* films to describe the development of factory farming and corporate agribusiness in the United States.

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PART THREE

THE FACE OF THE ANIMAL



## CHAPTER SIX

### THE MARK OF THE BEAST: INSCRIBING 'ANIMALITY' THROUGH EXTREME BODY MODIFICATION

Annie Potts

Over the past decade, plastic surgery has become an increasingly acceptable choice but now people are pushing the boundaries of body modification. We take you up close and personal into the everyday lives and minds of a *whole new species*, humans who transform themselves into animals. Are they animal magic, or are they just animal tragic?

—*Animal Tragic*

The documentary *Animal Tragic* (Stebbing 2002) profiles the lives of Lizard Man, Katzen, Cat Man and others who are undergoing various forms of extreme physical modification in order to appear more animal-like. Those who deliberately select animal styles of body transformation have not been studied in depth in the vast theoretical and empirical literature on body modification. Likewise, to date, the emerging field of human-animal studies has yet to analyze the desire of some humans to be (re-)marked as beasts. Through an examination of the perspectives and experiences of those appearing in *Animal Tragic*, this chapter thus attempts to bring literature on body modification into conversation with human-animal studies.

To begin this endeavor, it is important to contextualize the contemporary popularity of body art and body modification, as well as establish some of the key ways in which Western modes of body modification have changed over the past few centuries. An introduction to late/post modern trends in human-animal relations is also necessary.<sup>1</sup> In providing this background, links between the recent increased interest in body

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term 'late/post modern' here because the question of whether the cultural phenomenon I discuss in this chapter represents the continuation of modernity, or its abandonment, is a matter for debate.

modification and enhanced human fascination and contact with animals and the natural world will be considered. The chapter then moves into an examination of inventive post-human forms being generated at the borders of the human and the animal. Particular attention is paid to the ways the transformations featured in *Animal Tragic* reinforce and/or challenge conventional ideas about humanity, animality, human-animal relations, and notions of the natural.

### *Body Alteration in Western Cultures*

The term 'body modification' incorporates a variety of temporary and permanent mainstream and non-mainstream modes of transforming one's appearance (Sanders 1989). Conventional examples include dieting, body-building, hair styling, use of make-up, ear piercing, orthodox dental alterations, and accepted forms of cosmetic surgery. More radical forms of body modification, which tend to be permanent, involve tattooing, less common piercings, scarification, branding, burning, as well as unusual surgical procedures such as the trans-dermic insertion of horns, or self-demand amputations (Sanders 1989; Myers 1992).

Tattooing, recognized as "the most ancient and widely employed mode of permanent body alteration" (Sanders 1989, 9), deserves some special consideration in this chapter, especially as all the subjects of *Animal Tragic* are extensively tattooed with the stripes or scales of their chosen creatures. The history of tattooing in the West has been associated with the colonization of Polynesia and the Americas, and the appropriation of cultural practices related to indigenous peoples (De Mello 2000). Captain James Cook, whose voyage to the South Pacific in the late eighteenth century is generally credited with having initiated the "modern wave of western tattooing" (Pitts 2003, 5), described "lines, stars and other geometric designs, as well as figures of animals and humans" on the skins of native men and women he encountered during his travels (De Mello 2000, 45). In turn, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century seamen arrived back in Europe sporting new look Polynesian tattoos; they also brought back tattooed human specimens for exhibition, a practice that reinforced colonialist ideas about non-Western peoples being uncivilized and primitive (De Mello 2000). In the United Kingdom and North America, tattooed men and women, of both non-Western and Western heritage, were popular attractions at nineteenth-century circuses and 'freak shows', which made the

“anomalous other” readily available for the voyeuristic pleasures of Western audiences (Thomson 1996).

In Cook’s day, the practice of acquiring tattoos was the personal pleasure of the upper and lower classes, popular among sailors, military men, and members of the aristocracy alike (Sanders 1989). In America, however, it did not take long for the exotic style of tattoos captured from the Pacific to be replaced by a more patriotic tattoo depicting more local interests (De Mello 2000), and for tattooing to become unfashionable among privileged society (Sanders 1989). During the first half of the twentieth century, tattooing increasingly became a disreputable practice in the West, one connected with marginalized or counter-cultural groups (such as bikers and gangs), the “underside of society” (Rosenblatt 1997).

Since the 1960s, the tattoo has enjoyed a comeback of sorts (as have other forms of body modification such as piercing). The ‘tattoo renaissance’ (Sanders 1989; Campenhausen 1997) is associated with the repositioning of tattooing as a valuable *art form*, and the recognition of the tattooist as an artist in his or her own right (Hewitt 1997). This revival is also connected with the ascent of ‘neo-primitivism’ around the same time (also known as modern or urban primitivism). Neo-primitivism as a sub-culture rejects Western capitalist lifestyles (including consumer culture) in favor of traditional cultures and so-called tribal styles. Neo-primitivists actively promote the practice of radical body decoration and manipulation as an important means of protest, self-expression and personal experimentation (Atkinson and Young 2001; Pitts 2003). This involves the public display of tattoo designs and other modes of adornment derived from tribal cultures including Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand and Haida of North America.

Rosenblatt contends that neo-primitivists are searching for “other truths, other modes of knowing the world” than the dominant received Western worldviews, and are “marking difference by acting on the body” (1997, 311). By making one’s body unusual, it is anticipated that some kind of escape from industrialized society to an assumed more ‘authentic’ lifestyle will be accomplished. Pitts (2003) proposes that neo-primitivism is an effect of the globalization of post-modern culture. She argues that modern primitives employ a notion of the primitive in order to imagine a different social order than late capitalism, which nevertheless ultimately relies on colonialist assumptions about civilization, savagery, and ‘foreign bodies’, and which also subscribes to a particularly Western version of the ‘self’ and of self-expression (Pitts 2003). The primitive

in this context is constructed as simpler, more holistic, less alienated and more ethical than the civilized or the modern.

*Primitivism and Animality*

The idea of the primitive is already linked to assumptions about ‘animality’. In accordance with a certain prevalent version of the human (typically Western, white and masculinist), the idea of the animal (and of course ‘the animal’ within the human—or the beast within) comes to signify the inferior, devalued qualities of human nature. This occurs in much the same way the primitive is disparaged in industrialized societies: humanity is associated with modern, civilized, intelligent (dominant) man and animality with the primitive, wild (colonized) savage (Armstrong 2002; Noske 1997). Animality has also come to signify an undesirable connection to the body and the feminine (Birke 2002). Such negative constructions of animality are largely inherited from Descartes’ influential assertion in the seventeenth century of a strict division between humans and animals. Crediting humans with minds and souls, Descartes argued that animals were merely ‘beast-machines’; they lacked the capacity to reason and feel, and acted only on instinct (Thomas 1983). Based on this assumption, animals were considered important only to the extent that they could be exploited to improve the existence of humans (Fudge 2002).

Despite the inferior status of the animal in the West, inscriptions of animality on the human body are not a recent phenomenon. For example, in the early 1900s, a white man by the name of Great Omi asked British tattooist George Burchett to turn him into a ‘human zebra’: “His entire face and head and most of his body were ultimately covered with a heavy black curvilinear design, his earlobes were pierced and stretched, he filed his teeth to sharp points, and he had an ivory tusk inserted into his nose” (De Mello 2000, 56). While some of Great Omi’s modifications fail to comply with a strict zebra-like appearance, they nevertheless express the same metropolitan fascination with the supposedly primitive, exotic and animalistic cultures of the colonial world that also pervaded zoological gardens, circuses and fairs during the zenith of European imperialism. Contemporary neo-primitivist styles, as my argument will show, draw both explicitly and implicitly on this tradition of taste for the exotic, animalized human.

*Theories of Body Modification*

Theoretical perspectives on body modification basically fall into one of two categories: those that invest in an essentialist notion of the body and/or self (associated with medical and psychological discourses); and those following a more critical, usually post-essentialist, view on embodiment and subjectivity (often linked to a post-structuralist approach to language and culture).

Belonging to the first category, medicine and psychology have tended to pathologize those whose appearances do not conform to accepted societal norms, despite the increasing popularity (and mainstreaming) of tattoos and piercings in the past twenty or so years.<sup>2</sup> The heavily modified body has been classified by these “dermal diagnosticians” (Sullivan 2001, 184) as delinquent or criminal, a sign of social disaffection and maladjustment, and therefore a threat to ‘civilized’ society. Consistent with a liberal humanist version of the self reliant on the notion of a mind/body split (Descartes’ legacy), these disciplines may read the tattooed body, for example, as expressing an underlying hostility towards the demands and expectations of normal society. Because the procedures involved in physical transformations are often painful—involving invasion of the skin (without anesthetic)—and the altered appearance of the person does not conform to Western standards of ‘beauty’, body modifiers may also be labeled “self-mutilative” (a term being reclaimed by some modifiers themselves) (Pitts 2003, 24).<sup>3</sup>

Sociologists have tended to step back from any straightforward pathologization of body modifiers. Like medical and psychological paradigms, they may subscribe to a liberal humanist notion of self and of identity; however, they broaden their analyses through greater emphasis on social and cultural influences. They are also more likely to take note of how those who undergo body modifications make sense of their practices and transformed bodies *themselves*. In particular, sociological studies have focused on how the body operates in contemporary society as a vehicle for self-construction and expression. The ‘individual

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Favazza (1996).

<sup>3</sup> This is a double-standard on the part of medicine, since conventional forms of cosmetic surgery, which are equally as invasive, but which aim to ‘improve’ a nose or chin etc., are not considered self-mutilative (as they are adjusting appearance towards a standard concept of normality).



body project' of the neo-primitive, for example, may be deciphered as the externalization of some inner 'truth' about the self and identity (namely, a rejection of orthodox Western values). In accordance with this approach, Hewitt (1997) describes the process of permanent body modification as a form of *self-evolution*, a kind of rite of passage which may require the experience of pain as well as an appreciative audience to witness this act of identity construction.

De Mello (2000) has linked such a desire to develop 'self-awareness' through painful body art procedures to recent middle-class understandings of 'self-actualization' derived from New Age, therapeutic and popular psychology discourses. Kleese (2000) contends that modern body projects are rendered more meaningful as an effect of the increasing individualization of the body in Western culture, as well as technological and medical advancements. He also draws attention to how the body as a source of identity is linked to consumer culture: "[T]he 'display' and 'performance' of bodily properties and styles has not only become an option, it is *increasingly expected*" (Kleese 2000, 21, original emphasis). Importantly, therefore, while neo-primitives may desire to challenge the expectations and demands of consumer culture, they do not wholly escape it, but rather produce new kinds of commodities and services.

Post-essentialist views of body modification eschew any idea of a universal or essential body (or self), positing instead that our understandings of ourselves and others, and our experiences, are historically, culturally and socially shaped, with post-structuralist theorists paying close attention to the impact of language and discourse. Rather than viewing the body as the limited yet necessary casing for the all-important mind and self (as in medical and psychological models), post-essentialists are likely to view our ideas and our practices related to bodies as important cultural constructions influenced by Western dualistic thinking. The assumed split between mind and body is challenged through focusing on the *interrelationship* between bodies and subjectivities; that is, the ways in which the body and self are co-implicated rather than existing as separate entities. The subordinate position of the knowable and predictable *natural* 'body' of bio-scientific discourse (that is, in relation to the superior 'mind') is contested through a re-valuation of corporeality, and a celebration of the open potentialities and possibilities of bodies, subjectivities, and modes of *embodiment* (Grosz 1994; Potts 2002; Pitts 2003).

Emphasis is placed on the *cultural meanings* of body modifications. For example, philosopher Alphonso Lingis (1983) argues that body alterations and adornments signify different things when practiced in non-Western versus neo-primitivist contexts. Even those contemporary modes of body transformation in the West whose styles and practices appear to be derived from so-called primitive cultures, diverge fundamentally in social significance from the forms they emulate. Traditional body inscriptions do not represent the outer expression of a deeper authentic self residing in the body, but rather infer a certain relation to the community or society. They are symbolically important on a collective level—indicating, for example, social status—rather than personally designed to announce an individual’s desires or identity (Lingis 1983).

On the other hand, focusing on contemporary tattoo culture in the West, post-structuralist Nikki Sullivan (2001) proposes that, rather than showing us some ‘truth’ regarding the identity of the modified person, tattooing—as well as other forms of physical alteration—tell us more about the kinds of discourses (e.g. medical, liberal humanist, post-modern) and cultural practices that influence us as we make sense of ourselves and our bodies in the West. Hence, Sullivan suggests that while the tattooed body as a text “does not express an innate essence,” it does function as “a *figure* for the understanding of understanding” (2001, 183, original emphasis). For example, she explains that while tattoos are pictures that tell stories, these stories are not to be interpreted as ‘truths’:

Tattooed [and other modified] bodies are *symptomatic*: they tell of the ways in which identity and difference are morphologically produced in culturally and historically specific ways. (Sullivan 2001, 185, emphasis added)

Sullivan’s claims are particularly relevant for the topic of this chapter’s investigation. Her analysis indicates that the appearances, perspectives and experiences of those who seek to radically modify their bodies in order to look more beast-like tell us as much about the ways in which Western culture currently constructs differences between the human and the nonhuman as they tell us about the ways we make sense of body modification per se.

*The Animal Renaissance*

In fact, at the same time the tattoo renaissance and neo-primitivist groups were emerging, profound changes were also taking place in human attitudes and engagements with nonhuman animals in the West. Sociologist Adrian Franklin (1999) identifies a revived interest in nature towards the end of the twentieth century: animals who had previously figured only in so far as they were useful resources for humans (a feature consistent with the modern belief in the improvement and progress of *humanity*) became increasingly understood as important in their own right, and recognized for the valuable experiences they could offer a disaffected late/post modern populace whose sanguine view of humanity was challenged by recent wars, the threat of nuclear technology, environmental destruction and other concerns (Franklin 1999; Serpell 1996).

The counter-cultures and political movements of the 1970s, including environmentalist and animal rights groups, raised new issues and values, often in contrast to those of modernity. A more misanthropic perspective of humankind emerged, with humans increasingly viewed as a destructive species—out of control, damaging the natural environment, as well as other humans and nonhumans. At the same time, nonhuman animals became progressively portrayed as essentially good, balanced and sane—‘in touch with nature’—unlike humans who had lost contact with the ‘positive’ influences of the natural world around them. In association with this shift in attitude, and the revitalized appeal of nature, Western cultures witnessed a profound rise in activities related to animals, including greater numbers of domesticated animals in homes, more visits to zoos and contact with wild animals via ecotourism and wildlife parks. The renewed interest in nature and nonhuman worlds has been analyzed, like the growth of neo-primitivism and tribal styles, as part of a broader disaffection with features of late capitalism such as hyper-consumption, increasing technologization, and the infiltration into everyday life of the ‘artificial’ or unnatural (Franklin 1999).

The post-1960s era has also been linked to the ascent of ‘post-humanism’. The term post-human is used to connote anything that appears to challenge, or go beyond, the dominant notion of the human (as distinct from and superior to other forms, animate and inanimate), which is central to liberal humanist ideology (Wolfe 2003). Today, when human bodies are connected to machines to maintain viability, or have artificial contraptions or materials inserted to restore or enhance function—and when animal organs are transferred to human bodies,

and animal-derived compounds are ingested or transmitted into our bodies—the borders of the human and other are no longer intact, if they ever really were.<sup>4</sup> Theorists of post-humanism argue that we now live in a *cyborg culture* (Haraway 1991; Braidotti 2002), where dualistic constructions of the natural/artificial and human/nonhuman are constantly transgressed.

### *Beastly Desires in Animal Tragic*

The documentary *Animal Tragic* provides an opportunity to investigate the intersection of these various trends: the contemporary reevaluation of the animal, the increased interest in body modification (and associated reification of non-Western ‘primitive’ worlds), and the manifestation of new post-human figures and subjectivities.

The key creatures in the documentary all share a desire to appear more animal-like. However, their motivations for such transgressive physical conversions are quite varied, as are their attitudes towards nonhumans and human-animal relations, and their perspectives on body modification per se. For each person in *Animal Tragic*, the viewer is given some background information on childhood and upbringing (presumably in order to suggest what led these humans to go astray); and, as is the case with many documentaries or television talk-shows focusing on unusual persons—which Gamson (1998) argues function largely like modern day versions of the freak-show—invited medical and psychological experts offer perfunctory explanations for the peculiarities of those featured. Three of the participants in this program are introduced below.<sup>5</sup>

### *Lizard Man: ‘Animal Art’*

In America, they always have to take things one-step further... Lizard Man graduated with a degree in philosophy and was set to become an academic—instead he decided to become a lizard. (Commentary, *AT*)

We first glimpse thirty year old Lizard Man displayed in a pet shop window in his hometown of Austin, Texas. We are informed he has

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<sup>4</sup> The practice of humans eating other animals has for centuries, of course, already blurred any neat distinction between human and animal bodies.

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all accounts conveyed here are derived from the transcript of this documentary and appear followed by the letters *AT* (*Animal Tragic*).

been transforming his appearance for a decade; this has involved over six hundred hours of tattooing, as well as multiple body piercings, the insertion of Teflon implants over both his eyes (conveying a raised, bumpy texture to the skin), and the filing down of his teeth to sharp points. His tongue has been split in half (forked), and his entire body is tattooed, including his face, using designs resembling reptilian scales. The pattern on his face is mainly green in color; the rest of his body is multi-colored (with green and black hues predominating). He has the word 'FREAK' tattooed in large letters across his chest.

Lizard Man views his modified body as artwork:

It's what I do as an artist. This is my piece. . . . The initial idea was just generally transformation as an idea . . . so I had to create this thing that I was going to turn into. I had to create Lizard Man. (AT)

While holding an actual lizard in his hands at the pet shop, he explains:

I have no interest in figuring out what goes through the peanut size brain of a lizard. I mean, you know, they're an out-step of cockroaches mentally. I like the way he looks and so I have modeled myself to look similarly. It's not a matter of I feel some sort of kinship with him . . . He is a lizard, I am still genetically a human being. (AT)

This account indicates a superficial attraction to the lizard; one based on its aesthetic appeal, its specific lizard appearance, rather than any deeper interest in, affinity with or concern for this animal. Indeed, for Lizard Man, the creature he impersonates is merely a 'dumb animal' (a very Cartesian view), and, as a former philosophy student, he is mindful to distance himself from its assumed failed intelligence. Instead he discusses how his appearance is the outcome of a brainwave to manifest the *idea* of transformation. He also reinforces his allegiance with a superior intellect through his use of science and his claim to *genetic* identity as a human being.

We are told he enjoys being an exhibitionist, the center of attention at various mainstream and sub-cultural events. At one point in the documentary, Lizard man is shown drilling into his nostril while entertaining an audience at a fetish night party. He comments:

Everything I am doing is, if not centuries, thousands of years old. I am very much a part of a long running tradition. . . . To me freak is a title, I have worked very, very hard to be a freak. (AT)

This remark strikes a chord with definitions of neo-primitivist discourse, in particular the desire to be different in ways consistent with (and nostalgic for) pre-modern cultures and customs. His identity as an artist, performer and exhibitionist is what matters most in relation to his transformation, and he enjoys the ‘shock appeal’ of being so visually different. In this regard his body project is self-focused and human-directed. However, while he may view his project in very anthropocentric terms, his choice of look has still been influenced by the form of the lizard; and his façade—to the extent that it challenges a typical human likeness—might be considered symptomatic of a post-humanist impulse, at least in aesthetic terms.

*Katzen: Subverting Femininity Through ‘Monstrous Beauty’*

The ‘body journey’ of Katzen (also known by her stage name, Katzen the Incomparable Amazing Human Tigress) is quite different. Born in 1974, she moved around America during her childhood, always accompanied by a menagerie of animal companions. The commentator tells us: “[I]n the end, she decided to become one herself and endured 400 hours of tattooing to turn into a feline.” At the time of the documentary, Katzen is a qualified tattoo artist and performer (contortionist, fire eater and juggler), also living in Austin, Texas. Her body is extensively tattooed in a consistent tiger-like pattern, and she claims to be “the first woman in history to ever have a *full body theme* tattoo” (Katzen, “The Enigma of the Total Tattoo,” emphasis added). Her face is also designed to mimic a tiger’s, complete with multiple piercings between her nose and mouth where longer faux whiskers are sometimes inserted.

Unlike Lizard Man, Katzen communicates that her sense of identity (as a strong and beautiful person) is connected to her special animal, the cat. She is careful, however, to divorce herself from any full identification with cats, explaining that her tattoos originate from her dreams, which she feels are in tune with a more primitive, unconscious, or instinctive element.

My dreams at the beginning were my source of inspiration. I saw myself in dreams with markings on my body. It started really young—before I was five years old.... I didn’t know about tattoos then.... I felt strong, independent and happy. (Katzen 1999)



Fig. 6.1 “Katzen”

In *Animal Tragic* Katzen describes how she maintains a sense of her humanness at all times; she does not live like or adopt any of the habits of cats, although she is familiar with and admires the quality of ‘sensuality’ she associates with feline nature.

There’s a certain amount of animal instinct that comes into play when you’re having dream imagery inspire you. . . . However, I don’t take on the day to day mannerisms of a cat; I prefer a toilet to a litter box. I believe that being a sensual person like I am, that is the cat in me. (*AT*)

In this respect, Katzen’s inscribed catness assumes a more embodied quality than the surface reptilian simulation of Lizard Man; she *is* cat

via her sensuality. However, the cat she refers to—who uses a litter box—is a domestic cat, and not the wild cat her body is designed more closely to mimic.

Katzen's life is very much focused on tattooing as an experience, and as an art form. Like others engaged in neo-primitivist sub-cultures, she describes the process of undergoing extensive, painful tattooing as an intensely personal and spiritual experience:

I think that tattooing is one of the ways people can get to self-knowledge. I think that there are several ways to get to spiritual knowledge by delving and internalizing, and pain and pleasure are definitely keys to it. . . . A person who goes in for a lot of tattooing and especially facial tattooing has to have a very strong sense of self. (Katzen, "The Enigma of the Total Tattoo")

Although she realizes that pain is part of the process of becoming a tigress, Katzen does not desire this pain (this contrasts with the importance placed by some neo-primitivists on the experience of pain during tattoo rituals). She uses it, however, to achieve the animal appearance she does desire. While undergoing tattooing on her scalp in the program, she admits:

I don't want the pain, I just want the beauty. I feel that I live for these tattoos day to day. I *live* with that animal inside of me. Everyone you know has that to some extent. It is just that I definitely exude it a little bit more than some maybe. (AT)

Katzen's perspective moves beyond Lizard Man's superficial approach to animality (conveyed through his insistence on his inner humanness and its associated genetic and intellectual superiority): she eschews any rigid hierarchical distinction between the inside (mind) and outside (body), or the human and nonhuman. She is inspired to transform by her instinctive dreams (animal unconscious); her life purpose is to re-mark her body via tattoos ("I live *for* these tattoos"); these animal inscriptions, in turn, appear to seep into her so she experiences animality within ("I live with that *animal inside of me*"); and this animal-ness emanates out of her again ("I definitely *exude it* a little bit more than some"). Thus, the location of Katzen's animality is not specific; rather, it resides both externally and internally, crosses back and forth between—like a kind of human-feline Möbius strip—and in the process sutures together those locations which Cartesian humanism thinks of as opposites.

For Katzen it is important that her appearance also disrupts conventional ideas about feminine beauty and challenges the perception by



others of her body as traditionally attractive. The viewer is shown a series of photos depicting Katzen as a child and young woman, prior to her process of becoming a human tigress, the purpose of which is to demonstrate her former conventional good looks, but Katzen explains her preference for her reinvented image:

I feel more beautiful this way, you know. When I was just like a cute girl people would say “oh you’re kind of cute” or something. I didn’t feel beautiful and now I feel more beautiful. (*AT*)

The tattooed woman in Western culture clearly challenges normative ideas about gender, staging what Christine Braunberger claims is “an aesthetic revolution in ‘feminine’ beauty” (2000, 1). Typically, she symbolizes bodily excess, and is often viewed as threatening, sexually deviant, abnormally aggressive and unstable. She represents “the female grotesque” (Russo 1995; Bakhtin 1984), subverting conventional images of femininity, as well as disturbing the assumed boundaries of the body; and, in Katzen’s case, interrupting the borders of natural and unnatural, human and nonhuman. Her markings incite a confused response from the viewer—at once both animal-like and human-like, compelling and monstrous, same and other. Katzen embodies this ‘monster beauty’ quite deliberately and provocatively, choosing to copycat the independent man-eating tigress, and thus supplanting conventional ‘docile’ femininity with a form of powerful animality—an *active felinity*.

### *Cat Man: Totem Transformations*

While Lizard Man desires a skin-deep connection to the lizard, and Katzen strives to emulate the sensual beauty of the cat without taking on feline nature in a more mundane way, Cat Man feels he already exists as a cat quite literally. Consequently, he desires to change his human form to match how he predominantly understands and experiences his life. Cat Man (also known as Stalking Tiger, Tiger Man and Cat) provides the most profound example of human-to-animal body transformation.

Described in *Animal Tragic* as “perhaps the most modified man on the planet,” Cat Man, who resides in Southern California, is striking in appearance. Commencing his process of transformation over twenty years ago, he has endured extensive tattooing and piercing, as well as repeated plastic surgery to create his tiger image. His face and body are tattooed in black and orange, creating a realistic striped pattern. His



Fig. 6.2 “Cat Man”

nose has been restructured, and his upper lip has been split to produce the effect of a feline lip. He has silicone implants in his forehead, cheeks and above his lips; and his teeth have been removed and replaced with ‘cat dentures’. He has ear elongations, eighteen piercings above his split lip through which he inserts nylon whiskers, and long claw-like nails attached to each finger.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See [www.stalkingcat.net](http://www.stalkingcat.net)

Currently he is saving up to have transdermal implants on his forehead which will allow more tiger-like ears (personal communication, December 2004). He also seeks an easier techno-tail (to replace the attachable bionic and electronic versions he has at present).

For Cat Man, shape-shifting to the form of a cat—his spirit or totem animal—is integral to his Native American (Huron and Lakota) heritage and identity:

I have always been aware of my people having transformed themselves into closer appearances to their totems, but it goes far more than that for me. I relate to cats but I relate to cats on an entirely different level than most people, and I react like a cat does. I see things like a cat does. It affects every aspect about me. (*AT*)

Cat Man identifies with a so-called primitive culture through his ancestry; he also identifies strongly as animal. For as long as he can remember, Cat Man has experienced a special affinity for cats and the feline world; he describes this as having manifested on all levels: physical, emotional, psychological, and sensual—and in ways beyond these which he finds hard to describe, and he feels sure other humans would not understand:

I do relate to cats on an emotional level, on a telepathic level. I know what they want, I know what they need. (*AT*)

I've always had a very strong connection to cats... Every aspect of all my memories are something I directly relate to from a cat point of view. (Personal communication, December 2004)

Nevertheless, in many ways Cat Man is still confined to the physical realities of a very human world—for example, having to find employment, pay taxes, use public transport, eat out in public (the latter is shown in *Animal Tragic*)—but he also always incorporates a more feline approach and sensibility to his everyday life. He explains, for instance, that, like cats, he is very much a carnivore, eating meat almost exclusively, sometimes hunting his own food, and preferring his meat as bloody as possible: “I do [eat raw meat] at times when I’m at home because it’s hard to get anything that rare at a restaurant. I love meat” (personal communication, December 2004).

At one point in the documentary, as we witness Cat Man at the airport preparing to board a flight to visit his sister elsewhere in America, we are advised that “traveling exposes Cat to new dangers; he says he feels less like a person as animal instincts take control.” The accompa-

nying imagery portrays him looking apprehensive as people move past him in the bustling terminal. Cat Man explains:

I react very much like a cat or a tiger would react. I look at things more a matter of whether or not it is a threat to me rather than what somebody else's social status is or whatever. Very few things have that much meaning to me. Humans are more caught up in what other people will think, what their status is, how much money they have, what kind of car they drive. Totally superficial things that only impress other people or themselves. Actually I am looking for the best cross between the two, both human and cats. There are distinct benefits to both that I want to get to the point to where I have the best of both species, the best of both worlds. (AT)

This narrative illustrates Cat Man's feline and human means of experiencing the world: the feline operates on a more instinctual level, concerned about the dangers of the moment, while humans are preoccupied with shallow desires and concerns. Cats are conveyed as living in a simpler, more natural or authentic way, unfettered by the anxieties associated with human endeavors such as the accumulation of money, material possessions, and social status. Cat Man's misanthropic description of humankind is consistent with Franklin's (1999) identification of an estrangement from capitalist culture in late modernity. It is also compatible with a noted decline of some forms of anthropocentrism (connected to earlier ideas of human superiority and dominance over nature and nonhumans) in favor of a closer and more generous relation to nonhuman others (Fudge 2002). Indeed, Cat Man admits that he does not have much in common with humans other than "being stuck in this body" (personal communication, December 2004).

Cat Man describes his affinity with cats as operating on a "much deeper level" than other humans experience, as a kind of "telepathy," the connection of 'like minds' via the non-verbal world of the animal. He states that he reacts like a cat, constantly on alert for anything threatening in his environment. This description resonates with some of Alphonso Lingis's (1997; 1999) writing on human-animal relations. In "Animal Body, Inhuman Face," Lingis (1997) considers how various kinds of human perception, emotion, response, and sensibility are 'learnt' from animals. He asks: "Is it not animal emotions that make our feelings intelligible?... Is not the force of our emotions that of the other animals?" (Lingis 1997, 116). Steve Baker interprets Lingis as proposing an "embodied awareness" of the continuity between humans and nonhumans (2001, xxiii). Despite the cultural influences that have

operated to mask and regulate such a continuity, humans are inevitably affected by animality (and may, of course, take pleasure in it). Cat Man, too, recognizes the trappings and limitations of human culture and obviously delights in the animal sensibility he feels akin to.

Whether or not Cat Man can be viewed as subscribing to a Western sense of self and identity is equivocal. Certainly he has alternative non-Western understandings and experiences available through his Huron and Lakota heritage. Further, he *feels* essentially *cat-like*, claiming to experience his world principally in feline ways. Ultimately, however, as a cat-man he is in a complicated position regarding language. It could be argued that his sense of self is always inescapably reliant on his very human access to language, and to some extent, at least, Western modes of self-construction. For example, it is liberal humanist discourse espousing the value of personal choice and self-expression (the right to *be* 'who' you *are*) that makes his extreme form of human-to-cat transformation (via self-elected surgery) a possibility. Similarly, it might be argued that he has a cat-like sense of self derived from and reliant on our very *human* assumptions about what cats are like, and what it might be like to experience being a cat. However, significantly, it is not easy for him to explain to other humans what this really does feel like; when he attempts to articulate his alternative familiarity with the world of the cat (in *Animal Tragic* and elsewhere), he seems to grapple for ways to accurately convey this, appearing to find human language ill-equipped for such a description. This suggests an experience *beyond words* perhaps, a different perspective that is entirely unmentionable.

### *The New Techno Humanimal*

At the time of Great Omi, *born* 'freaks' were considered anomalies of nature and *made* freaks viewed as created aberrations; and visually different bodies were received with a kind of awe and fascination by those ordinary people who came to view them. Rosemary Garland Thomson (1996) argues, however, that late modernity moved the freak from an *embodiment of wonder* to an *embodiment of error*, reconstructing unusual bodies in terms of deviance, threat, danger and risk (in accordance with the increased authority and influence of the scientific model and modern medicine). Nowadays, Cat Man (and probably Lizard Man and Katzen too) would likely receive a label from those in the field of psychological medicine signaling a dysfunctional self (e.g. Body Dysmorphic Disorder

or another type of personality disorder) (APA 1994). This conjecture is more pronounced when the desire to be different is deliberately enacted by inscribing otherness in an overtly provocative way on an otherwise 'normal' body; and perhaps more so when the inscription moves the body away from a conventional human appearance towards a distinctly nonhuman, beast-like, and therefore decidedly 'freaky', form.

Indeed, 'freak discourse' has relied heavily on an assumed natural boundary between human and nonhuman, a boundary that really only exists through careful construction and manipulation of what constitutes the human and 'his' other. Ironically, the very historical changes that shifted understandings of the 'monster' from the status of a natural marvel to that of an unnatural deviant (and which now position Cat Man in a negative light, as a risk to Western culture and humanity) actually also make it possible for him to become this transformed entity. The authoritative scientific model, with its emphasis on predictability and normality—has produced the very means by which he can more radically—and more permanently—reshape his body *away from* the confines of a predictable, mundane human form. In striving to define and contain the human, the medical model has also produced new post-human forms of so-called aberration.

The cyborg, who/which may be considered just such an aberrant form, is, as mentioned earlier, an important figure in post-humanist theorizing on the body and body modification. Originally conceived mainly in terms of human-machine recombinations (Haraway 1991), cyborgs are now increasingly recognized as human-animal configurations as well (Haraway 1997, 2003). Cyborg hybrids readily confuse the boundaries between the natural and artificial, flesh and synthetic, human and nonhuman. In this respect, all body modifiers are cyborgs, whether through the dyes imbedded in their skin, the metal in their flesh, the scars they bear from branding or burning and so on.

Cat Man, in particular, may also be understood as a self-designed human-animal *and* human-machine cyborg. He is a liminal creature, living in a 'cross-species' state, as both cat and man. His journey of physical transformation is part of a process to materialize into what he experiences as a more *natural* form for him, one that fits the ways in which he senses his body lives and responds already. He achieves this modification through the use of human-made technologies, as well as a range of prosthetic implants, contraptions and accessories. When asked whether he is concerned that the transformation to his totem animal involves less natural processes than his ancestors would have

employed to shape-shift (for example, plastic surgery and the use of electronic devices), he remarks that he is happy to exploit these newer non-traditional mechanisms as they allow him to go further than his predecessors could have dreamed (personal communication, December 2004). He does not view their use as defiling his purpose or its outcome; rather it is a rational way to progress towards his goal of naturally becoming cat. Thus, Cat Man's notion of the natural is not reliant on the genes he was born with; he is happy to exploit the very unnatural world of surgery and machines to achieve this. He represents a new post-human figure, a willing techno 'humanimal'.

*Brute Fashion (Or, Outing The Beast Within)*

The opening to *Animal Tragic* asks whether human-to-animal body modifications are "animal magic" or "animal tragic." Ultimately, the documentary's response to this question is ambivalent. Having recruited mainstream health professionals to provide expert advice on the impulses of (and repercussions for) those featured, we hear first the pessimistic views of a cosmetic surgeon and a male psychologist, but are left with a more sympathetic female psychologist commenting that Lizard Man is "well-balanced and adjusted to what he has done." It is perhaps regrettable that the central creatures of the show are not permitted to have the last word themselves: in placing more importance on the findings of the dermal diagnosticians, *Animal Tragic* overlooks the ways in which each human-to-animal modifier seems to *celebrate* and gain great pleasure from her or his new animalistic image.

Visual theorist Steve Baker, who has studied animal imagery from Disney to fine art, argues that "the animal [can] only be considered, and understood, through its representations" (2001, xvi). In other words, we are always already confined by the various discourses and modes of representing the animal, animality, and human-animal relations, whenever we attempt to construct—and interpret—animal designs.<sup>7</sup> There is no access to an unmediated *real* animal, according to Baker. All representations are necessarily anthropocentric, to some extent or other. Nevertheless, the appeal of animal designs in body modification denotes a desire for animality that is consistent with a late/post modern revival

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<sup>7</sup> The disruption of human/animal and natural/unnatural binaries is also occurring in virtual space. See the Code Zebra website for an example of how the virtual and natural are being linked.

of interest in the natural world and the lives of nonhuman others. In *Animal Tragic* this trend manifests in different ways: as a surface fashion for Lizard Man, who voices little interest in lizards other than how they look, and whose reptilian-styled body is designed for the attention it will attract from other humans; as a performative work of art, statement against conventional gender stereotypes, and embodied experience for Katzen; and at an intensive experiential level for Cat Man.

Lizard Man's version of animal body modification is arguably the most commodified of the three. As well as investing in a notion of 'art' (which he presumably hopes will prove a good investment), he also employs the circus tradition of selling 'freakish' amusements and spectacles as a performative strategy. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that at the commencement of *Animal Tragic*, he compares his new reptilian image to that of a pet shop lizard, another product of commodified animality. Katzen also uses these two major traditions of animal commodification—the circus and the pet—but she subverts both somewhat by also identifying with (and embodying) the sensibility of the cat. The link to the animal for Katzen and Lizard Man is thus always already mediated by these particular kinds of human-animal relations, both practices with historic and economic links to the kind of animality they align themselves with (circus animals and pets have modified bodies too—via leashes, harnesses, disciplining, castration or spaying; notably, however, the bodies of these animals are changed in directions which render them more amenable to their places in a very *human* world).

Identifying foremost with cats, the human/animal dichotomy is opposed most strongly in Cat Man's case; it is contested not merely by his chaotic appearance, but by his absolute dedication to and preference for all things feline. He expresses a misanthropic view of humanity and a desire to be other, to 'out' the beast within.<sup>8</sup> Cat Man's body is inscribed thoroughly with this otherness in a radical move away

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<sup>8</sup> Another human-to-animal modifier in *Animal Tragic* provides perhaps the most far-reaching form of misanthropy of those featured. Leopard Man, who lives on the Isle of Skye, is described as "a shy creature"; tattooed from head to toe in the pattern of leopard skin, he is a recluse who avoids the company of humans. As such, he does not appear much in the documentary, although we view him making a weekly voyage to get supplies from the local grocery store. He speaks only once—briefly—about his voluntary celibacy. Leopard Man resists commodification; he is largely non-communicative and does not seek to exhibit his extraordinary appearance or lifestyle. In this way, his solitary animality shuns human meaning (that is, until it is captured in some sense by others).



from human form. He is human/animal, an amalgam produced in part through medicine and biotechnology (although resistant to the discourses associated with medical notions of normal/abnormal); a self-determined wondrously roaring monstrous body.

The stories of these modern day shift-shapers—this “whole new species”—demonstrate that animal styles in contemporary Western culture are taking on new forms—and are influenced by alternative values—beyond the dead fur, feathers and leather of the fashion industry and its devotees. In these cases, the animal is no longer worn on top of the skin (as clothing and accessories) but *in* and *under* the skin (via tattoos, horns, forked tongues, claws and whiskers). There is a desire to dispense with normal human appearance—*permanently*—and in highly visible ways, through emulating the designs and forms of nonhumans. This new ‘brute fashion’ inscribes the animal on the human at the same time as it ‘freaks out’ the establishment, disrupting our ideas about humanity, disturbing the border between natural and unnatural, reversing the maxim that human is superior, and drawing attention to the plasticity of the human body and the beauty of the other. The animal ‘magic’ of those who transform themselves breeches the boundary between human bodies and animal bodies—not in the directly raw and visceral way that xeno-transplantation might—but at the level of imagery, representation, subjectivity and embodiment. Importantly, it may remind us that we *all* are ‘beast’ within; we are always already animals too.

#### *Note*

As he avoids publicity, a photo of Leopard Man is not included here.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### BILL HAMMOND'S PARLIAMENT OF FOULES

Allan Smith

I can find no rest. My head is filled with horrible images. I can't say I actually see them, it's more that I feel them. It seems that my mouth is full of birds which I crunch between my teeth. Their feathers, their blood and broken bones are choking me. I carry on my work as a secretary.

—Caryl Churchill and David Lan,  
“A Mouthful of Birds”

Mission moves through a black tunnel, which opens onto a series of dioramas: The last deer lemur falls to a hunter's arrow. Passenger pigeons rain from the trees to salvos of gunfire and plump down on the plates of fat bankers and politicians with their gold watch chains and gold fillings. The humans belch out the last passenger pigeons. The last Tasmanian wolf limps through a blue twilight, one leg shattered by a hunter's bullet.

—William Burroughs, *Ghost of Chance*

Alcyone . . . found herself flying, beating the air with wings newly-formed. Changed into a sorrowing bird, she skimmed the surface of the waves. As she flew, a plaintive sound, like the lament of someone stricken with grief, came harshly from the slender beak that was her mouth.

—Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

Near Ship Cove, Cook's men blasted 30 birds out of their trees in one day, including 12 kererū, four South Island Kokako, two red-coloured parakeets, four saddlebacks and one falcon. Virtually all are today close to extinction or extremely rare.

—Geoff Park, *Nga Uruora*

Some art produced over the last decade or so looks almost tailor-made for audiences attentive to meditations and disquisitions on the conflicted relations between humans and animals. Such art seems eagerly to anticipate response from readers of the *Society and Animals* journal for instance, or books like Steve Baker's *The Postmodern Animal* (2000). There is also much extraordinary work today that resists our

theorizations as powerfully as it calls them forth; work that seems so deeply the product of a vision in which the fates of humanity and animality coincide, that we are confronted not with a program but nothing less than a new creaturely imaginary. The art of New Zealand painter Bill Hammond falls into this latter category.

We can enter Bill Hammond's world via the space between his thumb and forefinger. This space, when not occupied by the painter's brush or pen, offers a passage through from one side of the hand to the other, perhaps from the open and more public exterior of the hand to a cupped and partially hidden interior. Thumbs and forefingers can also form convenient viewfinders. As with all such narrow openings, Hammond's ready viewfinder, serving as loupe or improvised spyglass, facilitates a cropping out of the immediate environment and a peering through into another world entirely. Legend has it that when once asked by a tradesman where he got his ideas from for his paintings, Hammond replied that he painted everything carried on the air that passed between his finger and thumb as he walked along. No doubt the answer gave that tradesman pause for thought. Think of a teeming host of unseen beings filling the air like winged dust mites and animalcules, funneling through a space about two inches square. Perhaps Hammond had been plucking the ectoplasmic strings and streaks of light that have been streaming around the harbor and hills of Lyttelton ever since Peter Jackson gave them a filmic body in his 1996 horror movie *The Frighteners*, set in this same port town.<sup>1</sup> What Hammond actually intended is hard to say, but what an apt alibi for a painter of aerial visions that contract and expand between the miniaturizations of petite decorative friezes and the epic scale of panoramic prospects. Hammond's cryptic analogy is also a way of affirming an implicit assumption of his art: that the fantastic is always close at hand, and that whimsical metaphors are endemic.

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hammond lives and works in the port town of Lyttelton, in New Zealand's South Island. The art writer Gwyneth Porter has suggested that Hammond's location in Lyttelton, living, and until recently, painting, in his large old house on the hill set among the trees, parallels the example of W. B. Yeats, "a fellow archaic with a strong belief in the invisible world around him." Porter comments: "It is easy to imagine that Hammond's present output might belong to . . . a Yeatsian tradition without even taking into account that Yeats, like Hammond, chose to live in a small, castle-like house away from the city and its dialogue. Surely the inexplicable, timeless worlds that Hammond now paints must be easier to see when one looks out, as Lyttelton does, from the dark side of the rim of a vast, ancient and apparently extinct volcano, upon the vast, ancient Banks Peninsula landscape" (Kraus et al. 1999, 20).

Unsurprisingly, commentators frequently talk about Hammond's "world" and the moniker "Hammondland" is well established.<sup>2</sup> Accessing the kingdom of Hammond via the artist-nominated narrow way, bottleneck of the ideas and images that pour into his ever dilating visionary space, I would expect to find myself high above a populous plain that stretched to airy distances and tiny snow-capped mountain ranges on its rim. The elevated vista of plenitude is key. Writers have noted that Hammond has very often favored a high vantage point for the construction of his map-like pictorial space; his almost bird's-eye views are often sliced into horizontal sections, and scored with alternating diagonals. The impression is of a 'cut and paste' space seen from the side and above, over which the artist-inventor presides like some obsessive *magister ludi*, directing operations of his fictional world. Analogous scenarios come to mind: a World War Two command centre with wall-sized maps, model ships, tiny flags, cardboard symbols and colored elastic bands plotting Atlantic convoy routes; an intricate map of archaic lands to support a huge fantasy novel's necessary suspension of disbelief; a club-room of interconnected trestle tables on which massed formations of 25 mm mounted troops and foot soldiers deploy to restage an encounter from history.

Equally to the point would be a comparison between Hammond's habitable pictorial reality and what literary critic Tom Le Clair refers to as the "ecosystemic plenitude" which characterizes the contemporary systems novel. In its expansive, inclusive, globalist purview, the systems novel incorporates the intricacies of natural and artificial informational systems and organizational processes which can tend toward an entropic, chaotic, runaway condition, and, simultaneously, to negentropic, transformative conditions of dynamic complexity. What Le Clair says the systems novelist is acutely aware of, and is always making adjustments among, are the complex relations of interdependence that characterize a system, a living system. For our current purposes we could substitute Hammond's project for Don DeLillo's in Le Clair's summary of the systems novelist's invented world:

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<sup>2</sup> "Hammondland" was the title of a talk given at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery by Justin Paton in September 1999; elsewhere Paton talks about Hammond's desire to "reveal 'another world... in this one'," (Kraus et al. 1999, 11); in the same publication Priscilla Pitts refers to "Hammond's birdland," (Kraus et al. 1999, 17); art critic for *The New Zealand Herald*, T. J. McNamara summarizes the contents of "Hammond's world" in "Paradise is a world of contradictions" (2005).

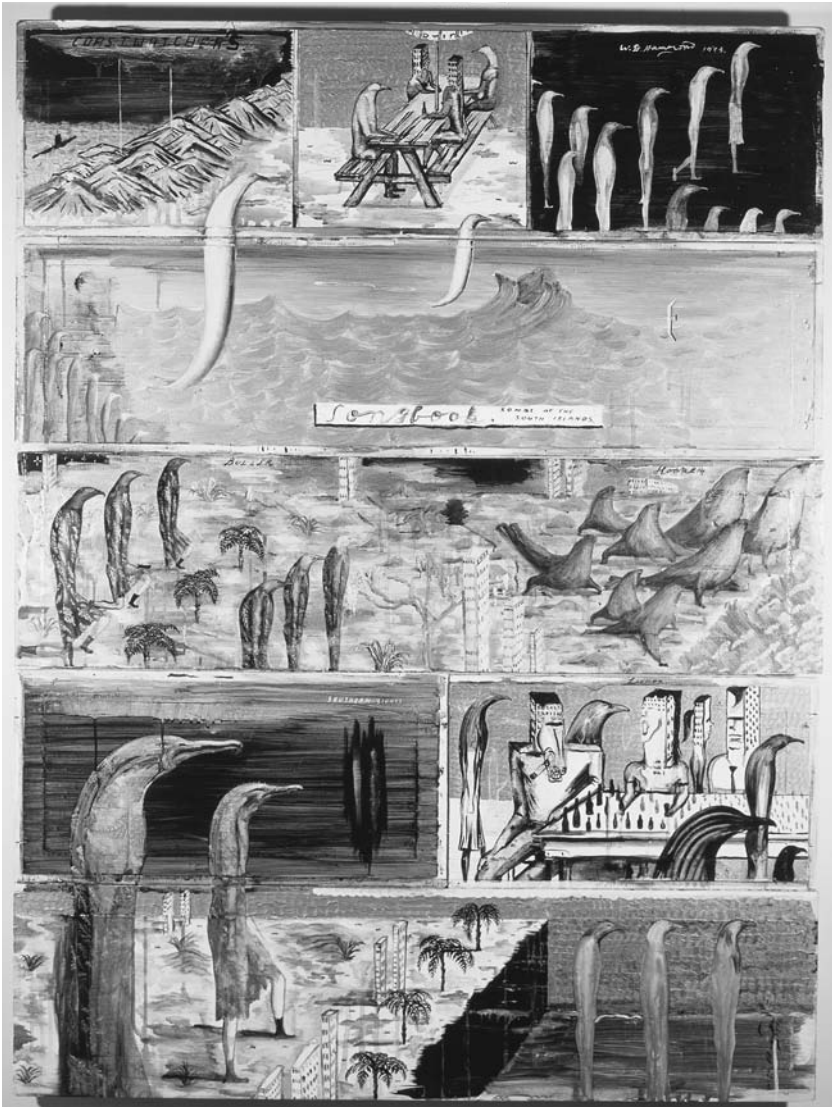


Fig. 7.1 Bill Hammond, "Coastwatcher's Songbook" (1994)

[Bill Hammond's paintings] form a fictional system, a dynamic whole modelling the qualities of living systems: circularity, reciprocity, openness, complexity, formal relationships, flexibility and equifinality. (Le Clair 1987, 234)

“The ecosystem, that encompassing reciprocal loop... is [Hammond's] fundamental model of value” (ibid.). And, particularly pertinently for Hammond's work, I suggest, it was exactly such a network of connections, of ecosystemic plenitude and mutuality that was torn apart by the relentless deforestation, deliberate and inadvertent species depletion, and the aggressive agricultural program that characterized the first century of European settlement in New Zealand.

Before we fully engage with the multitudinous spaces of Hammond's art I suggest a pause to take in the view of Earth that Don DeLillo's astronaut (a persona for the author, says LeClair) enjoys in the story “Human Movements in World War III.” Like the crystalline globe of the freshly formed earth suspended in space that Hieronymous Bosch painted on the closed panels of his triptych *The Garden of Delights* (1503–4), both the astronaut's floating planet and Hammond's floating world are complex living systems, intricate in design and vast in their promise of information, event, and sympathy for animals.

The view is endlessly fulfilling. It is like the answer to a lifetime of questions and vague cravings. It satisfies every childlike curiosity, every muted desire, whatever there is in him of the scientist, the poet, the primitive seer, the watcher of fire and shooting stars, whatever obsessions eat at the night side of his mind, whatever sweet and dreamy yearning he has ever felt for nameless places faraway, whatever earth sense he possesses, the neural pulse of some wilder awareness, a sympathy for beasts, whatever belief in an immanent vital force, ... whatever remnants of his boyish longing to fly, his dreams of strange spaces and eerie heights, his fantasies of happy death, whatever indolent and sybaritic leanings, ...—all these are satisfied, all collected and massed in that living body, the sight he sees from the window. (DeLillo, cited in LeClair 1987, 1)

Down on the ground in Hammond's art my interpretive journey begins with his paintings of desperate rock-and-roll performers and angst-ridden ‘humanimals’<sup>3</sup> and moves through his fevered visions of

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<sup>3</sup> The Humanimals were a 1980s Auckland-based experimental theatre troupe. Without going outside of New Zealand, one could also list numerous rock bands that have been named after assorted forms of animal life: Suburban Reptiles, The Muttonbirds, Headless Chickens, Dragon, Moana and the Moahunters, Crocodiles,



bird spirits holding solemn convocation on branches high above the forest floor, on cliff tops and in dark Victorian interiors. My journey ends by returning to the heights, to the “luminous and lofty” arena of Hammond’s current paintings of angelic birds posed in the weightless suspension of an aerial limbo.

Singing or composing, painting, writing have no other aim: to unleash these becomings. . . . Instrumentation and orchestration are permeated by becomings-animal, above all becomings-bird. . . . the birds find expression in gruppetti, appoggiaturas, staccato notes that transform them into so many souls. . . . Suppose a painter ‘represents’ a bird; this is in fact a becoming-bird that can occur only to the extent that the bird itself is in the process of becoming something else. . . . The painter and musician do not imitate the animal, they become-animal at the same time as the animal becomes what they willed, at the deepest level of their concord with Nature. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 272, 304, 305)

Becomings-animal, becomings-bird—Deleuze and Guattari are talking about conditions of acute intensity, of demonized volatility; of swarms, hordes and packs; of contagious transport of impersonal affects and teeming multiplicities; of uncontrolled edges and borders; of outsider groups, fringe groups, nomad armies, raiding parties, gangs, cabals, crime societies, and crowds as particles of anarchic energies. They are mapping what they refer to as “the dark energies which stir what is deepest within us” (ibid.). Deleuze and Guattari’s theory is complex, intricate and rampant—and though I use it selectively for my own purposes, and apart from one other source, I have not come across any writing more pertinent to the formal languages and iconologies of Bill Hammond’s art. My companion source for thinking about Hammond is Elias Canetti’s *Crowds and Power* ([1960] 1992). Canetti’s archaically pagan, bristling text delves into the mania and hysteria of crowd behaviors, the constant search for ever-fresh transformations, the pathological and elemental appetite for all forms of growth and increase, for “the monstrous flux.”

Stirring what is deepest within us: by giving the initiative to all forces and forms of disruption that our society of orderly, self-contained subjects needs to keep at bay to maintain its decorum, based on everything knowing and being in its place. The human/animal divide, as an

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The Bats, Everything That Flies, Zoo, Wide Mouthed Frogs, The Tigers, Fur Patrol, Tadpole, Turborats, Purr, Weta, and Birdnest Roys.

enduring topos of the Western philosophical tradition, is a crucial target for Deleuze and Guattari's anti-essentialist, anti-metaphysical project. Becoming animal, as Deleuze and Guattari invoke this condition of quickened responsiveness to change, means that 'knowing animals', knowing animality, shifts from being a means to ground the human through expulsion of anarchic ferality, to being an assertive return of priority to the anarchic and transformative within the human animal and the nonhuman animal; a disruptive assertion of interdependence, of reciprocal exchanges between affective energies and formal traits. This is not imitation in a classical sense, based on one part in the equation remaining static; but this reciprocity can appear, as Bill Hammond frequently demonstrates, where mimicry becomes obsessive and intensely insistent to the point of producing volatile mutuality. The individual subject, the individual being, is redrawn as subject to the many, carried away by the pack: "Every animal is fundamentally a band, a pack. . . . [I]t has pack modes rather than characteristics." And, "becoming-animal always involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short a multiplicity" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 239).

Such engulfment by the multiple operates in Hammond's fretful scenarios of manic urban systems as much as it is the way of things among his deep-forested or floating birds. It is the improvisational and inventive energies of his art practice that enact responsiveness to animality as much as the art's motival content. Steve Baker explains the significance of art practice in a universe of becoming:

For Deleuze and Guattari, *what becoming-animal does is close to what art does*. In becoming-animal, certain things happen to the human: becomings-animal may be thought of as "traversing human beings and sweeping them away" . . . . This being swept up, swept away, . . . with which the human nevertheless goes along, as if willingly, resembles some of what Deleuze and Guattari say about art. . . . Art is a means of getting to the animal, . . . Art, it seems, consists in letting fearsome things fly. (Baker 2000, 138, emphasis in original)

And, it would seem, for our philosophers as well as for Hammond, in letting flying things hold sway. Birds flock, hover, sing, shriek, trill, pipe and boom;<sup>4</sup> their movements, their grouping and their shared sounds

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<sup>4</sup> In Anna Jackson's poem "Kakapo," we learn that "once the kakapo / filled the bush, / their booming calls / the heartbeat / of a bird-rich island" (Jackson 2001, 34). Apart from the endangered kakapo, takahe and kokako, Jackson's 2001 collection

whether made of sustained notes, small clusters of notes or piercing rapid notes, embellish space by pointillist minutiae, chromatic chords and perforations of the air. In their natural environment birds themselves are continually transformed into participants in fields of expressions and events, and in networks of biodiversity. In art, as is the case with Max Ernst's images of his bird alter-ego, Loplop, with the gun-toting birds in Michael Oatman's collages (Thompson 2005), and with Bill Hammond's strangely attired bird figures, birds may adopt human traits. So too their human observers and sympathizers must undergo a similar participation in bird space, in the distributive properties of the avian world.

Between 1985 and 1988 Hammond's paintings are most often occupied by isolated figures or small groups of figures striking poses of manic and paranoid hyperactivity. Some of these maniacally grinning figures are self-hypnotized through the home-gym machine's rhythm of strain and swing, others grip the joy-stick control of video games as their double-headed bodies shriek out some inchoate mystery to equally schizoid companions. Crazy rocksters and sad crooners fill their clammy worlds with sound, guitar solos wail across river beds and over miniature mountain ranges. Tuned to their own music, frenetic types strut like body-builders at show-time and dance singly or in clusters to tempos of mechanized aggression. Bodies lunge, twist, stretch and variously string themselves out along contradictory axes. Figures and animated objects are as restless as pacing zoo animals at feeding-time; suffering from "the remembered clamour" of a half-remembered freedom preceding their "traumatic incarceration" (Lippit 2000, 117). As Perry Meisel (1999) puts it, the melancholy of the dandy and the rage of the cowboy were joined in rock-and-roll.

The figures in these early works, with the accoutrements of domestic or musical technology that surround them, exist in ambiguous interior/exterior spaces. Like their occupants, these spaces are malleable, responsive to every rapid shift of focus or alteration of mood. Pulled and stretched into narrow tunnels of hyperbolic perspective; dissolved by sweaty streaks of paint; collapsed by tiers of stylized waves or pierced by impossible formations of geometricized birds, they are as compelling

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also laments the extinct huia, and moa. The male kakapo emits a low sonic booming call from its inflated thoracic air sac. Jackson's booming bush kakapo recalls Chaucer's alliterative bittern that "bombleth in the myre" in "The Wife of Bath's Tale."

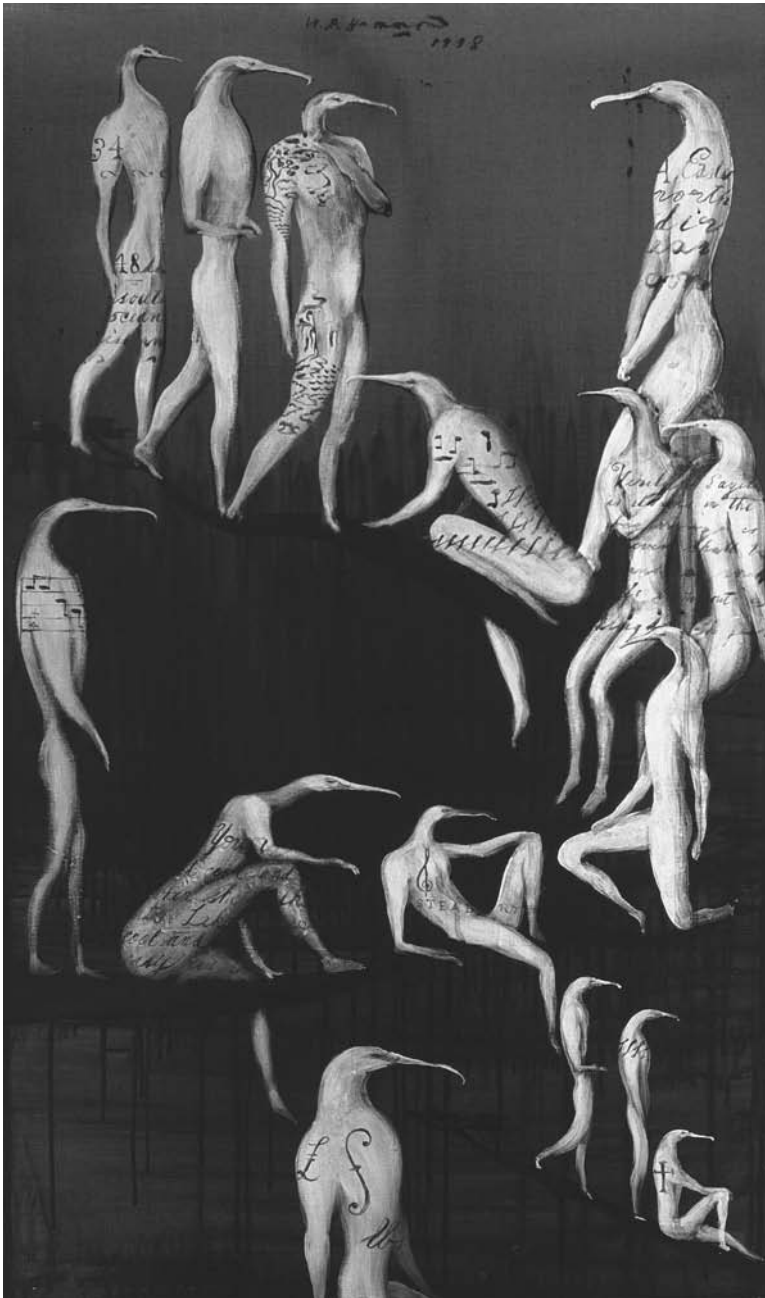


Fig. 7.2 Bill Hammond, "Untitled Bird Study" (1998)

and unstable as wallpaper patterns stirred by hallucination. The biting mouths, the rows of keyboard teeth, the flights of birds, the animal heads, the swiveling limbs are active, repeating bodily terms that are scored as mobile elements across equally mobile textured grounds.

As Hammond's style progresses, he finds more ways of fusing figures and surrounding space. An acute textural agitation and overwrought permeability figures in the numerous examples of the flayed body, which appear from early on. Skin is peeled from heads or isolated limbs to reveal blood vessels, or at least a graphic tangle which reads as such. Coverings are torn off furniture or landscape in patches to reveal gridded and plaited underlays. Sometimes figures swap surfaces with landscapes; serried ridges cling to faces and mountain tops acquire portrait heads.

Runs of resemblance jump across mountain streams, braided rivers, networks of blood vessels, spinal cords and electrical cables. Accentuated patterns on dresses, sections of brick patternings and different modes of shaggy hatching lines mimic each other and run through the works like obsessive refrains establishing links between disjunctive things. When these modes of mimicry become particularly insistent, everything seems susceptible to what Roger Caillois calls "temptation by space," that is, the psychaesthetic disturbance between the organism and its surroundings, as animate and inanimate continually swallow each other up (1987, 69). Caillois cites the spectacle of uncontrollable mimicry which overwhelms Flaubert's St. Anthony:

[P]lants are no longer distinguished from animals. . . . Insects identical with rose petals adorn a bush. . . . And then plants are confused with stones. Rocks look like brains, stalactites like breasts, veins of iron like tapestries adorned with figures. (Flaubert, cited in Caillois 1987, 72)

I take 1989 as the year when Hammond fully achieved what was to be, with modifications, his mature mode of working—with pieces such as *Stir Frys*, *Cold Kicking*, *Organ Donor—Swappa Crate* and *5 Day Week*. From this date until around 1993, when the Buller's Birds thematic provokes a rewriting of priorities, Hammond is preoccupied with an infested two-dimensionality. His scriptographic landscapes with figures, which are much more densely and tightly structured than those that preceded them, are full of what Deleuze and Guattari call "transversal communications between heterogeneous populations," the pack effects of "bands that transform themselves into one another . . . cross over into one another," full of that condition which is linear yet contains

the multiple—"flat multiplicities," excessive capacities to affect and be affected, linking the "howling of animals to the wailing of elements and particles" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 9–11, 248–9).

Hammond's mature graphic language of "flat multiplicities" creates a type of 'planiverse',<sup>5</sup> a planimetric field of events, energies and mobile assemblages. These loaded graphic fields combine the effects of a range of different two-dimensional languages systems as if a wiring diagram for electronic circuitry, a program for a Space Invader-type video game, a design for a Turkish carpet, the layout of pin-ball machine, and a page of a graphic novel had all been superimposed. Forming and reforming protean micro-narratives, every figural, landscape or textural motif inhabits its two-dimensionality with the maximum intensity. There is a maximum libidinal investment in the density of information, switches of rhythm and quickening of iconic configuration. Through parodic repetition, swift changes of direction and scale, and a virtual *mise en abyme* of pictures within pictures and shape next to shape, a conspiratorial field of interdependence is set up: each component detail is caught up in a thick web of associations with everything else in the graphic field. Hammondland teems with events: iconic, narrative, topological and morphological. This eventful world is formed through rehearsed improvisations, through the part-by-part accumulation of clustered incidents, and with the myopic intensity of the untutored doodler; the introverted schoolboy drawing detailed hotrods with pipes and flames, or camouflage schemes of jet-fighters. It is a process of working which feigns ignorance of the next moves as it dips into a rich stock of motifs and graphic shorthand that clip on anywhere.

Discussing the most appropriate way of constructing imaginative worlds at the end of the millennium, novelist Italo Calvino suggests the model of an "open encyclopedia" (1996, 116). Open, because at this point in history totality can only be thought in terms of potentiality, conjecture and multiplicity. In this light Calvino considers exemplary the work of encyclopedian novelist Carlo Gadda:

As a neurotic, Gadda throws the whole of himself onto the page he is writing, with all his anxieties and obsessions, so that often the outline is lost while the details proliferate and fill up the whole picture. . . . The least thing is seen as the centre of a network of relationships that the writer

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<sup>5</sup> *The Planiverse* (1984) is a novel by A. K. Dewdney which explores the fiction of life in a computer generated, completely two-dimensional world.

cannot restrain himself from following, multiplying the details so that his descriptions and digressions become infinite. (Calvino 1996, 106)

By the early 1990s, when Hammond gets to work on his sardonic critique of a Victorian cult of bird killing and collecting in New Zealand, he has demonstrated a strongly collectionist, encyclopedist mentality of his own. His work is driven by a passion for series, partial sets, for identification charts, for details in choreographed formations, or loose groupings. Comparisons are invited between varieties of textural information: digitized letters and numbers, mottled fern patternings, wallpaper designs, willow-pattern painted china, rows of tiny windows, perforated metal sheets, hollow-block concrete walls, rows of wind-groomed shrubs, floorboards, brick walls, blood vessels, veils of guano-like dripped paint, ranks of tiny, precisely cresting waves. In this crepitating visual field all narrative incidents—submarines patrolling coastal waters, whales turning in dark oceans, wrecked ships disappearing beneath the waves, guitarists fording swollen rivers—are petrified into collectable, quotable graphic signs.

The restless commotion of Hammond's major pictorial mode obeys the laws of contagion and mimicry, and the insatiable appetite for innumerability that Canetti attributes to the formation, disintegration and re-formation of crowds. In numerous paintings and works on paper in the late 1990s, Hammond created packed fields of variously scaled portrait heads, perhaps his most literal depiction of the human crowd, tending to an effect of unaccountability and space-sharing equality. The incessant activity of Hammond's miniature, silhouetted figures, animals or objects, stirs the fear Canetti says tiny insects provoke when seen en masse and mobile. Pullulating packs of small things dominate many forms of delirium and psychic collapse, as a "numberless host of tiny aggressors" (Canetti 1992, 419), figuring a primitive sense of the body's internal, microscopic worlds in collision, tears at the isolate subject's confidence in the security of its boundaries. It is probably fair to assume that since Canetti's day, our media-enhanced ability to visualize various forms of microbiological, environmental, ecological and viral endgame scenarios has greatly enhanced our propensity to fear globalization as the royal road to all forms of personal and planetary contagion.

Graphic stylizations of natural phenomena constantly repeat in Hammond's oeuvre and chime in accord with other figurative or abstract notational content. Marching folds of mountain ridges, the combed multiplicity of ocean waves, and the virtual rain of fluid pig-

ment and the proliferation of ferns, vines, and delicate tree trunks, connoting bush or forest in many of the Buller Bird's works, all operate as do Canetti's list of environmental collectivities that symbolize human crowds: corn, fire, forest, rain, wind, stone heaps, sand and the sea (Canetti 1992, 87–105).

In his often-rancorous novel *Ghost of Chance* (1995), William Burroughs describes brief exchanges of tenderness between the protagonist Captain Mission and a Lemur called Ghost whom he finds in the Museum of Lost Species in the forests of Madagascar. Burroughs informs the reader that lemurs face extinction in the near future as 90 percent of Madagascar's original forests, the lemur's natural habitat, has been destroyed by slash and burn deforestation. A similar mixture of tenderness and indignation seems to lie behind the Buller Bird's paintings, which Hammond has been working on fairly consistently since 1993.

In Geoff Park's exquisitely detailed study of the ecosystems of New Zealand's coastal plains before and after both Māori and European arrival, he offers haunting evocations of vanished forests and swamplands dominated by the noisy traffic of birds in teeming abundance.

New Zealanders with an affection for nature never have their minds far from the fabled land of birds into whose estuaries the first humans brought their canoes. The evidence is that it was one of the most extraordinary ecosystems in the world: a forested land whose big animals were virtually all birds. Some 70 species of them found nowhere else, . . . many occupied the essentially ground-dwelling niches for which, in continental ecosystems, mammals evolved; 40 per cent were fated to vanish soon after the first people—and the Asian rat that had travelled the Pacific with them—came ashore. (Park 1995, 285)

A few centuries later even more predatory rats came ashore from European vessels. But vastly more catastrophic for the co-existence of all indigenous communities—plant, animal, human—was the arrival of a set of European aspirations and values that saw all local ecosystems virtually solely in terms of infinite exploitable resource, or as forms of savage strangeness to be cleared and fenced off. What Park calls the “campaign against nature” (Park 1995, 306) took most dramatic form in the felling, burning and milling of vast tracts of coastal and inland forests to make way for colonial towns and housing estates, but above all to make way for dairy farms to serve the growing agricultural economy in this outpost of Empire, dependent on trade with Great Britain.

Deforestation on this scale means immeasurable loss of biota, the destruction of a “vast genetic library” which had taken millennia to



accumulate (Park 1995, 309). The forest's "delicately interdependent networks" between species, processes and changeable climatic conditions can only be restored in tiny isolated pockets of surviving bio-diversity, or through imaginative, historical reconstruction (112). Once, our "coastal flats were alive with birds because that's where their preferred food plants were—when agriculture took away the mosaic of forest edges and swamps, the whole country fell silent" (258).

Birds, singly or in small formations, appeared in his work as early as the mid-eighties, but it was through the expansive series of Buller Bird paintings that Hammond established his populous and eccentric avian universe. In 1989 the artist stayed for one month with a small group of artists, photographers and an archivist on the subantarctic Auckland Islands. Among other things on these bleak islands, Hammond was profoundly impressed by the sight of hundreds of big sea-birds lined up for hours at a time along the rocky foreshore, staring out to sea. This scenario of innumerable watching birds being watched in turn by the artist becomes Hammond's source for years of continuous invention and variations on a set of related themes.

Most of the birds in these works are anthropomorphized to a greater or lesser degree; their hybrid forms suggesting surreal disguises, transformations, metamorphoses. In their distinctive and uncanny self-containment, they seem to embody ancient wisdom and a sad omniscience. Their beauty has a tragic cast. A delicate and nervous intelligence is quickened through a fearful expectancy. Looking out from a deep past, they perch on the brink of change. The birds embody the same desire for metamorphosis, for becomings-intense, becomings-bird which we identified in the restless interbreeding of Hammond's earlier visual language, but the overall mood has undergone a shift in tone to something more haunting and melancholy. In the *Watching for Buller* (1994) paintings, shags, keas, gulls and terns in fern- or cigarette-patterned smocks look into the darkness, across the water from serrated cliff tops. These cliff tops, jagged littoral borders, are signs and sites of change. They dramatize the state of marginality, of in-betweenness which the clothed birds represent. And they sum up the importance of all the volatile edges, splits, cracks and abyssal fissures which delineated change in the nervy morphologies of the earlier work. In other compositions, figures gather in rows on branches, bathed in a turquoise green light that filters through the canopy layer, like outlaw bands gathered in forest clearings or the Māori sheltering in Arcadian splendor as nine-

teenth-century artist Blomfield painted them. Conducting mock business meetings in Rabelaisian boardrooms; eternally replaying a *High Noon* suspense in some ghost bar on the west coast of New Zealand; leaning, crouching, showing off and grooming themselves like teenage groups in malls. While the earlier work was full of desperate figures wrenching themselves through rites of transformation, these birds wait; rather than hectic and anxious poses, they attain a form of deceptive, eerie poise.

Like mariners aloft on spars and rigging of mythical ships looking for landfall in unknown seas; romantic heroes on rocky promontories gazing into the significant distance; like families of meerkats lined up in rows searching the horizon for territorial intruders, Hammond's birds have unusual patience. They gather in what Canetti called "tranquil packs." According to Canetti, "the *tranquil* pack is one of expectation. It is full of patience, a patience which is particularly striking when people are gathered together in this way" (Canetti 1992, 115). Such tranquil, or expectation packs, conduct all sorts of chants, exorcisms or sacrificial activities while waiting for something of great significance in the future, and this prolonged waiting imposes an impressive patience and concentrated stillness. As a type of relief from, or socialized embroidery on this sustained passivity, a number of Hammond's birds show an equal inclination for fooling around and acting up, for parodying themselves and striking absurd poses. Killing time as they wait, such antics and joking about are innocent diversions from dread or high-serious colloquy, making light of weighty matters to be considered when their assembly is fully gathered.

The image of birds conducting bird-business in a big tree is an old one. We may think of the twelfth century allegorical poem *The Conference of the Birds* by Persian Sufi poet Farid ud-Din Attar. In Attar's poem Wagtail, Parrot, Partridge, Pigeon, Hawk and others all gather under the leadership of the Hoopoe to discuss different paths to enlightenment and union with the great King bird, a symbol of God. Or Chaucer's dream vision, *The Parlement of Foulys*, in which a large company of birds in noisy disputation, presided over by the goddess Nature, vigorously expound the ways of love to one another.<sup>6</sup> Or Christ's comparison in

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<sup>6</sup> "Rarely before the fourteenth century do we find these assemblies of birds of all sorts in one single manuscript or poem" (Bennett 1957, 21). Bennett places Chaucer's

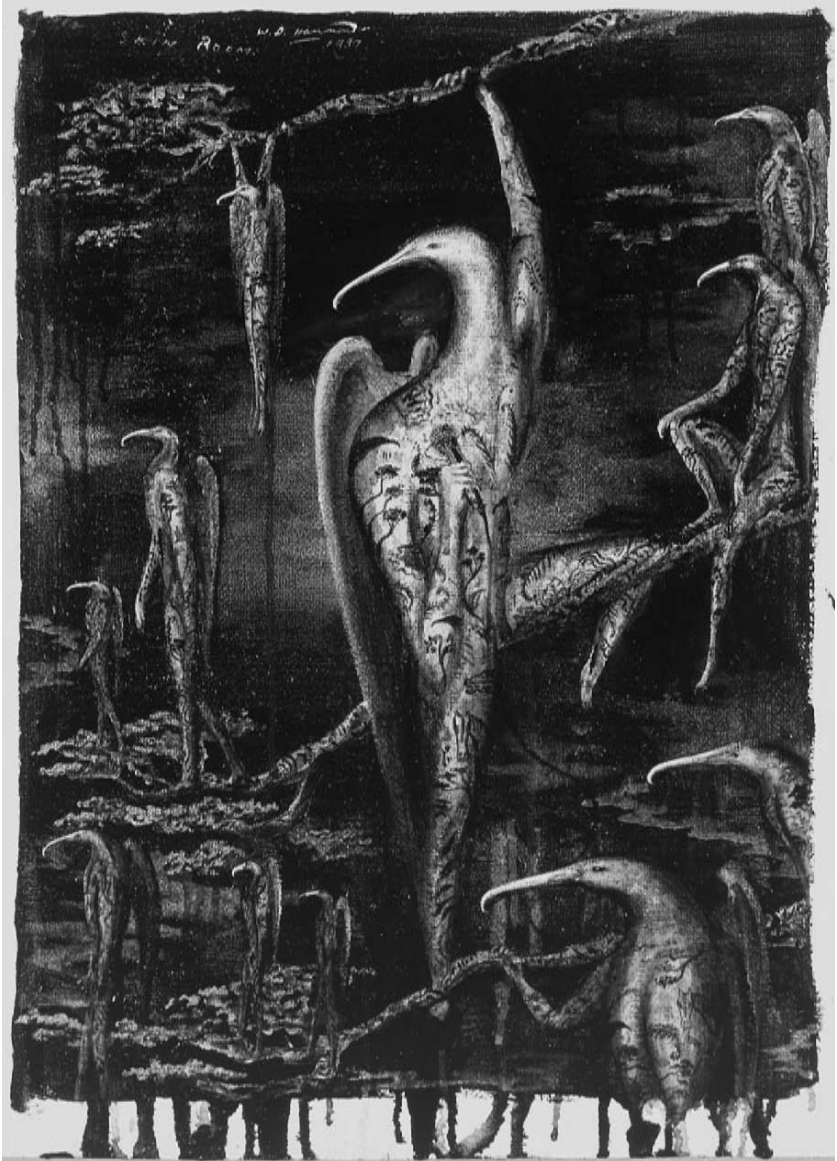


Fig. 7.3 Bill Hammond, "Skin Room" (1997)

the New Testament of the Kingdom of Heaven with a large tree where the birds of the air come to perch in its branches (Matthew 13:31, 32). A compelling example from the recent past would be Mark Dion's sculptural installation, *Library for the Birds of Antwerp* (1993), which uses a large dead tree festooned with books, bird cages, birds nests, pictorial representations of birds, bird traps, tools and various other objects, to accommodate eighteen live African finches.

So what, or who, are Hammond's birds waiting for? As numerous titles attest, they are waiting for "Buller" and in the process turn waiting into an art form in itself. Apart from his work for the New Zealand government in the Native Department, and as a magistrate, Sir Walter Lawry Buller was a highly successful, and typical, nineteenth-century ornithologist. In an era when the 'plume trade' meant pigeon skins might be sold in lots of a thousand to satisfy a demand for feathers in English women's fashions, Buller commissioned collectors to obtain skins for his own collection and for his research toward the sumptuous opus *A History of the Birds of New Zealand* ([1873] 1888).<sup>7</sup> To one writer in *The Spectator* Buller's book gave a window on "a land of exquisite

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assembled birds in a context that includes medieval books such as the Pepys sketchbook and the Sherbourne Missal, Uccello's images of birds and animals, the twelfth century poem of a debate between owl and nightingale, and the depiction of birds in medieval stained glass (see Bennett 1957, 17–22).

<sup>7</sup> Buller's contribution to the plumage trade needs to be seen in the context of various sporting or sartorial ends to which birds could callously be subjected in nineteenth-century England and Europe. In his spirited history of cruelty and compassion to animals in England, E. S. Turner devotes a chapter of *All Heaven in a Rage*, "Rights for Birds" (172–200), to the plight of birds in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Turner catalogues different forms of bird shooting which left hundreds of birds dead or damaged and were the order of the day. He cites the Duke of Windsor's infamous 1913 'Burnham shoot', where the Duke bagged one thousand of the four thousand pheasants killed in a day. For pigeon shooting from traps, which became a 'national institution' in Victorian times, it was not uncommon for birds to be maimed in advance to make them easier to target for sportsmen intent on notching up competitive scores. Methods of maiming included "wrenching out tail feathers, touching the raw flesh with pepper or turpentine, and sticking pins in the bird's rumps." One or both of a bird's eyes might also be put out by pin or finger nail, and a surreptitious squeeze could almost crush the bird before its release, giving the gunmen, at least, a sporting chance (Turner 1964, 184). Extraordinary numbers also provide evidence for the voraciousness of contemporary appetites for feathers. "The *Field* reported in 1890 that a London dealer received in a single consignment 32,000 dead humming-birds, 80,000 aquatic birds and 800,000 miscellaneous pairs of wings. . . . [T]he Rev. H. C. Ricketts, quoted the American Council of Ornithology: 'England alone imports twenty-five million slaughtered birds a year; Europe as a whole takes 300 million and all are made into articles of personal adornment. A single London dealer receives annually 400,000 humming-birds'" (Turner 1964, 190).

beauty, once inhabited only by the fairest and brightest of creatures and in which dwelt no hateful or hurtful thing” (cited in Galbreath 1989, 108). As Ross Galbreath puts it:

Buller saw no irony in encouraging the large scale destruction of the birds on which his own success was based. It was in fact their imminent disappearance, the romance of the dying race, that gave them and Buller’s book their particular attraction. (Galbreath 1989, 108)<sup>8</sup>

As numerous paintings titled *Waiting for Buller* suggest, it’s payback time. Whether they represent the demonic intransigence of a lynch mob, or last resort of the weak banding together for strength from numbers, Hammond’s birds look ready to take justice into their own hands. For several years Hammond built up a complex sense of dread, of a return of the repressed with these brooding congregations.

In Hammond’s images of uncanny bird figures there is a terrible convergence between the social Darwinism of Buller, who saw himself as recording for posterity samples of birds, which were vanishing just like the ‘doomed’ Māori race, before “the necessities of practical settlement” (Buller, cited in Park 1995, 174), and the spectral status Akira Lippit ascribes to animals in the modern world. Animals “exist in a state of *perpetual vanishing*. . . . [I]n supernatural terms, modernity finds animals lingering in the world *undead*” (Lippit 2000, 1, emphases in original). The animal’s most telling appearance now is as phantasm; animality is only accessible through the language of animation, the phenomenal voice remains as a technological effect. As Lippit goes on to say, following Jung, the absence of animals from the human world shrivels and depletes that world (Lippit 2000, 17, 18, 19).<sup>9</sup>

In a recent interview, as William Burroughs discusses his new writing and despairs about the destruction of the rain forests, he talks of the need for “some sort of basic change, biological change, mutations” (cited in Zurbrugg 1994, 68–73). Change or at least disturbance at a profound level is what Hammond’s bird paintings seem to contemplate. I believe Hammond’s bird-people are people on the way to becoming birds, not vice versa. However what really matters is that we feel strangely connected to these avian spirits, as well as decidedly alienated from

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<sup>8</sup> See also Galbreath, “Buller, Walter Lawry 1838–1906.”

<sup>9</sup> Ralph R. Acampora acknowledges in his review of Lippit’s book that it is “grief that grounds his work” (Acampora, 2001). The same could be said in regard to much of Hammond’s oeuvre.

them. They have an uncanny presence, seeming to speak to us from a shrouded history and disconcerting depths within us. Their flocking, their crowding, their watching, their waiting, their prescience, all signify a resistance, and an otherness to everything Buller represented. The birds are threshold figures, gatekeepers, marginal spirits who preside over unheard of rites of passage.

Works such as *Living Large #5* (1995), *Shag Pile* (1994) and *Buller's Table Cloth* (1994) read like a colonial taxidermist's nightmare: bird spirits look set to pass judgment and deal out an avian *utu* on Buller in his own living room. Woven into a loose graphic netting of shaggy

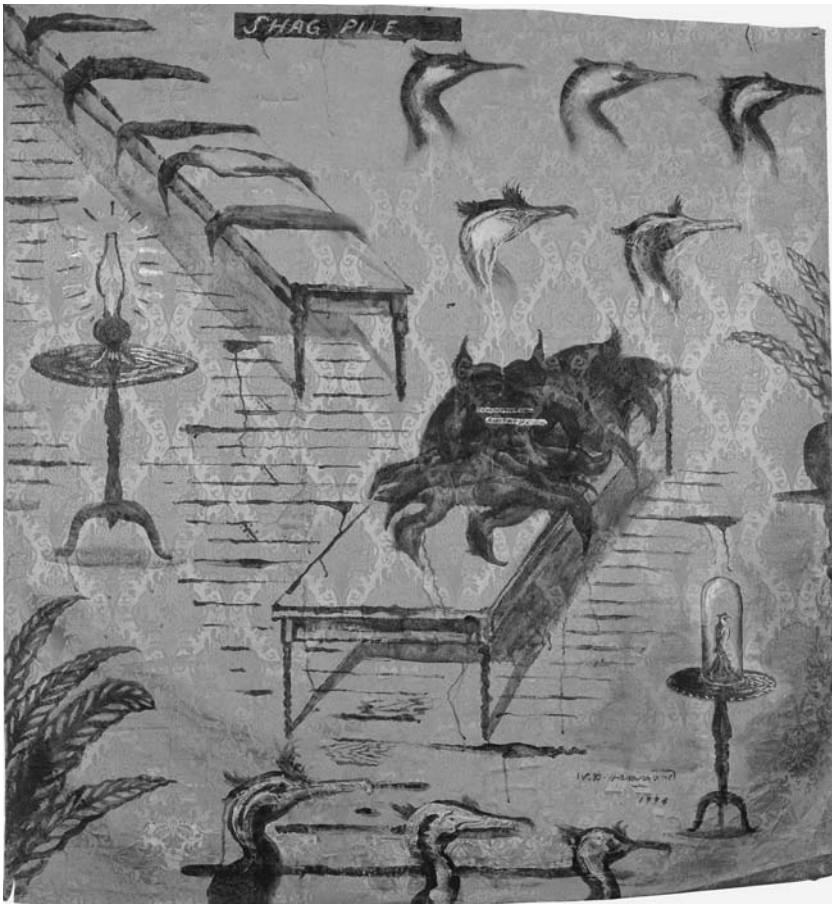


Fig. 7.4 Bill Hammond, "Shag Pile" (1994)

foliage, skinny branches, twisty roots and tendrils, Hammond's visionary bush and forests conjure primeval luxuriance and rococo Chinoiserie fantasy. Taking up sinuous poses in almost mannerist groupings, many of the bird-people in this troubled Arcadia are written across with lines of text and musical scores. Approaching a form of translucency, these bird-spirit bodies are like the camouflaged fish described by Deleuze and Guattari. Through the assemblage of abstract fragments and lines, say the philosophers, one can make "a world that can overlay the first one, like a transparency" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 208).

Animal elegance, the camouflage fish, the clandestine: this fish crisscrossed by abstract lines that resemble nothing, that do not even follow its organic divisions; but thus disorganised, disarticulated, it worlds with the lines of rock, sand, and plants, becoming imperceptible. (ibid.)

The linear tracery of Hammond's textual and musical inscription mimics the calligraphy of ferns and branches and partially dematerializes the inscribed bodies of this avian parliament; it also fills the picture space with voices and ripples of sound. The musical notations and the ambiguities of camouflage effects chime with the decorative levity and frivolous posturing by which some birds overwrite and playfully qualify the high seriousness of their infinite patience, their alertness to impending threat or imminent vindication.

*All Along the Heaphy Highway* (1998) immediately summons up scenarios we think we know well—classic set-pieces from Westerns, war comics, Renaissance paintings and theatre—but the more we study this grandly compelling painting the more odd and unsettling it becomes. The painting's highly charged atmosphere suggests the classic tension of an ambush about to happen at the same time as it relays the bustling and preening of a royal court, settling itself in, ready to conduct the weighty business of state as the world looks on. The lofty vantage point of the gathered bird people on the right-hand side of Hammond's painting indicates supreme tactical advantage, as any travelers on the road below are seen and anticipated with predatory delight a long time before they actually reach the shadowed grove, which they must pass through.

Hammond has done a great deal to seek out and populate the dark forest of myth in the New Zealand psyche. One easily thinks of Altdorfer's shaggy medieval forests; the archaic English and damp Northern European woods that Tolkien recreated in Mirkwood, Fangorn and Chetwood Forests, home to elves, ents, and giant spiders (the later two forests being superimposed in Peter Jackson's recent film



Fig. 7.5 Bill Hammond, "All Along the Heaphy Highway" (1998)



trilogy onto beech forests in the Milford Sounds and dense bush in the Nelson area); Shakespeare's woods in which magical transformations of appearance and identity frequently occur; or the cruel magic of Robert Holdstock's Mythago Wood in which the fears and desires of the collective unconscious are projected as real phantoms. It is not hard to understand why Peter Jackson has been credited with saying that Bill Hammond is his favorite New Zealand artist. And how wrong Hammond has shown critic A. R. D. Fairburn to be in his declaration in 1934 that "there is no golden mist in the air, no Merlin in our woods".<sup>10</sup> For starters, what did Fairburn think had happened to the spirit inhabitants of the woods that Māori mythology told stories about? Hammond's populous spirit-world is, on one level, an indirect acknowledgement of the uncanny return of this repressed mythology, and on another, an acknowledgement of the ecological environment in which it flourished.

At the turn of the last century Hammond's watching and waiting flocks migrated en masse to a higher altitude, somewhere well above the tree tops of the humid forest. Even when rock shelves and other geological props are employed now, the quality of light and the general effect of expansiveness and elevation signal a different locale, shifts in mood and subtle modifications of being. The strange dreaminess of these paintings is aerial and ethereal, full of a luminosity and remoteness tinted by gold and tinged with the palest sky blue and turquoise. They recall the ambiguous watercolor spaces of Chinese landscapes, paintings on silk and Tiepolo.

Titles such as *Limbo Ledge* (2001) and *Limbo Bay* (2002) indicate that Hammond understands this new setting as a type of in-between place, another place of incessant waiting. In earlier works the bird figures occasionally sported angels' wings; in the more recent work they are common. This is an angelic realm. More and more over the last few years, the paintings seem caught within a pause between the infinite rustle and beating of innumerable wings. The angel birds seem more at ease, more readily distracted by a new sense of brio and a near ludicrous sense of playfulness. They are often found floating mid-air, suspended upside-down from clouds, or held upright by the grace of their own sinuous graphics, and displaying a serenity of bearing and slow dignity of stylized play that is so rarefied and astral that the emo-

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<sup>10</sup> Thanks to Jane Sayle for suggesting this irony to me.



Fig. 7.6 Bill Hammond, "Limbo Ledge and Timeball" (2002)

tional weather of any storm of history is left far behind, and far below. The birds' watching may now be less intense, but when you do catch them looking at you, or past you, as they sometimes do, it is clear they have not lost any of their acutely prophetic and haughty cast of mind. Hammond's glassy palettes hint towards a fragile microcosm, a newborn world signifying the continually renewable power of the pictorial imagination to inscribe detailed and fragile maps of utopian possibility, of new ways to be more human by becoming more avian.

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PART FOUR

THE PLACE OF THE ANIMAL



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### EXTINCTION STORIES: PERFORMING ABSENCE(S)

Ricardo De Vos

The [great auk's] last stronghold was known as the Geirfulasker for the 'geirfugl' or great auks that nested there. This rocky stack off the Iceland coast was a fuming volcano. In 1830 the Geirfulasker, in a paroxysm of activity, sank beneath the waves. The few surviving birds had just one refuge left, the nearby island of Eldey. There, on 3 June 1844, a party of sailors landed, having been sent by a collector to check if any great auks remained. They spotted a pair, standing head and shoulders above the masses of smaller seabirds. Legend has it that the female was brooding an egg, a last hope for the future of the magnificent birds. The great auks made a desperate attempt to reach the safety of the water, but one was trapped between some rocks, while the other was seized just a few metres from the edge of the sea. Both were clubbed to death. The egg, it is believed, was crushed beneath a sailor's boot. Some eighty skins and seventy-five eggs held in museum collections of the world are all that remain of the great auk today.

—Tim Flannery and Peter Schouten, *A Gap in Nature*

The last thylacine to walk the earth was a female kept in Beaumaris Zoo near Hobart. Personnel problems developed at the zoo during 1935–36, which meant that the animals were neglected during the winter. The thylacine was "left exposed both night and day in the open, wire-topped cage, with no access to its sheltered den." September brought extreme and unseasonal weather to Hobart. Night-time temperatures dropped to below zero at the beginning of the month, while a little later they soared above 38 degrees celsius. On the night of 7 September the stress became too much for the last thylacine and, unattended by her keepers, she closed her eyes on the world for the last time.

—Tim Flannery and Peter Schouten, *A Gap in Nature*

Our current notions of extinction are shaped both by the knowledge that more than 99 percent of all known animal and plant species are now extinct, and that we are currently living in a time of mass extinction argued to have commenced with the spreading out of humans from the African continent 50,000 years ago (Leakey and Lewin 1996, 31). Since the end of the Ice Age, Europe and Asia have lost a third of their land animal species, North and South America have lost three-quarters



of theirs and Australia and New Zealand have lost nearly all of theirs: about 95 percent (Flannery and Schouten 2001, xv). While extinction is considered inevitable for all animal and plant species, a normal part of evolutionary life and even of the process of biodiversification, the suggestion presented is that extinction occurs gradually, over millions of years. However, more dramatic periods of mass extinction have also occurred during which an overwhelming number of animal and plant species have disappeared in the course of a few thousand years. For instance, there is geological evidence that a meteorite crashed into Earth 65 million years ago, toward the end of the Cretaceous Period, causing a period of mass extinction during which the dinosaurs disappeared (Leakey and Lewin 1996, 51).

Since the beginning of the sixteenth century European imperialist ventures into the rest of the world have exacerbated the current pattern of mass extinction, and by the end of the nineteenth century, even the islands most remote from Europe had been subjected to the effects of sailors, scientists and settlers. The paleoanthropologists Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin have claimed that one half of the animal and plant species existing today will have vanished in the next one hundred years (1996, 233). The growth of the human population is having a direct effect on this rapidly accelerating rate of extinction. While there is an ever-increasing amount of scientific research being produced about the effects of human activities on the survival of all animals, including humans, widespread complacency characterizes much of the way such information is received. This can perhaps in part be explained by the history of scientific activity conducted in imperial contexts. While scientific discourse constructed upon the discovery, recording, collection, observation, testing, dissection and hypothesizing of samples has enabled our current conceptions of extinction through the taxonomic classification of all known animals and plants, it is ironic that these very practices have also contributed to the extinction of so many plants and animals.

Extinction is sometimes presented as a natural process, removed from human agency, while at other times it is presented as a social and cultural process involving strategic and tactical practices and representations. As a natural process, extinction is afforded a position removed from the requirements of historical and cultural contextualization, existing as a meta-commentary on the fate of all living things. As a social and cultural process, in which individual species or habitats are examined, extinction calls into question notions of agency and responsibility. Historical

discourse is invoked both in the defense of official and commercial practices involving interaction with endangered animal and plant species and in arguing for the cessation of these same practices.

Official histories of Australia since European colonization run parallel with scientific and popular accounts of the disappearance of indigenous Australian flora and fauna. Among the common factors in accounts of the extinction of many animals are the destruction of habitat through agricultural and industrial activity, the introduction of predators and competitors such as cats, dogs, foxes and black and brown rats, and the loss of critical population numbers necessary to continue an established way of life. Other factors include the alteration and cessation of periodic burning by indigenous people and the introduction of new strains of diseases. However, there are also human cultural factors specific to certain groups of animals in certain areas at certain times.

The disappearance of the thylacine, or Tasmanian tiger, in Tasmania in the early twentieth century provides a salient example of how cultural representations have both influenced and responded to changing social attitudes regarding extinction. Research scientist and Director of the South Australian Museum Tim Flannery states that thylacines were the largest marsupial predators to have survived into historic times (Flannery and Schouten 2001, 146). They were widespread throughout the Australian mainland and further north until the introduction of the dingo approximately four thousand years ago. Fossil remains of thylacines have been found in Western Australia, South Australia, and Victoria, in Papua New Guinea as well as in Tasmania (Paddle 2000, 17). The animal behaviorist and science historian Robert Paddle lists environmental destruction through agriculture, the destruction of native prey, human predation (for sport and for the protection of game species and sheep), nonhuman predation (competition from introduced predators) and introduced disease micro-organisms as the principal factors causing the extinction of the thylacine. He provides evidence to suggest that rural politicians in Tasmania used the thylacine as a scapegoat to protect local agricultural enterprises from the consequences of mismanagement.

Paddle argues that since the thylacine's extinction, there has been a shifting of emphasis, interpretation and responsibility in both popular and scientific constructions of the animal, especially in the light of evidence that colonial depictions of the thylacine and reports of human-thylacine interaction were plainly involved in the thylacine's deliberate extinction (Paddle 2000, 236). Despite the recording of sightings and

the sporadic collecting of evidence of thylacines in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, it was not until the early nineteenth century that a scientific description of the thylacine was recorded. Paddle criticizes Australian scientists working today for accepting classification nomenclature and criteria which culturally label marsupials as having an inferior status to placental mammals. He suggests that this demonstrates a blindness to cultural assumptions about Australia and Australian scientific practice, and claims such classification reflects a Eurocentric attitude towards Australian biodiversity.

Scientific cultures are not independent from general academic culture or contemporary popular culture. The real operation of scientific culture reflects these other contemporary realities. 'Ideal' scientific processes are regularly compromised through the intellectual culture in ascendancy at specific points in time, including, in an Australian context, the acceptance of imperialistic assumptions of our scientific inferiority. (Paddle 2000, 14)

While it is generally considered reasonable to favor the most recent analyses and publications on a species over earlier studies, oral histories, visual images and photographs, Paddle argues that by the start of the twentieth century thylacines were already under severe psychological stress, and that their social behavior would have displayed modifications and disruptions. Abnormal behavior was much more likely to be recorded. For example, most twentieth century observations of adult thylacines were of isolated individuals, thus generating the assumption that the species was solitary. Earlier reports had referred to thylacines as 'solitary' in the sense of their being shy, rather than living singularly. Nineteenth-century reports more typically observed thylacines as socially orientated, living in small family groups, which facilitated hunting (Paddle 2000, 10).

Through the nineteenth century thylacines gained a reputation amongst settlers for being a significant predator on sheep despite the fact that few reports of attacks involved actual sightings of thylacines and even fewer were able to furnish evidence of their presence. A greater number of attacks at the time provided sightings and evidence of wild dogs. Paddle argues that shepherds were more likely to blame these attacks on thylacines than on dogs as this cast less suspicion on them and their own dogs. This in turn led to increased fear within the community, emphasizing the need for shepherds. He suggests that the depletion of livestock experienced by pastoral companies in Tasmania in the nineteenth century were, mistakenly or not, blamed on thylacine

predation rather than on bad or unsuitable farming practices. Private bounty schemes established between 1830 and 1850 paid farmers and hunters for the pelts of thylacines. In the 1880s four stock protection agencies were formed, levying local sheep farmers for protection by extermination of thylacines. A private member's bill, introduced by a pastoralist in the Tasmanian Parliament in 1886 using what turned out to be grossly exaggerated statistics both on local sheep numbers and on attacks, made provision for a bounty to be paid for thylacines killed on Crown Land. The bounty ran between 1888 and 1909 and over two thousand bounties were paid (Paddle 2000, 166–167). By this time thylacines were rarely sighted in the wild, and concern over their dwindling numbers had been voiced by zoological and animal protection societies. Calls to establish organized protection of thylacines by museums and zoological gardens were met with continued resistance from the rural lobby in Tasmania. The killing of a tiger by a farmer, Wilf Batty, in 1930 and the death of the last thylacine in captivity in 1936 marked the last time thylacines were conclusively sighted.

What farmer Batty didn't know was that he had just shot the last Tasmanian tiger ever seen in the wild. At this moment the tiger passed from reality into myth. (*Extinct* 2001)

It is this juxtaposition of real and mythic representations of extinct animals that raises questions about human agency. Notions of extinction are associated with a loss of time, a loss of space and a loss of physicality. What is it, then, that remains? Is it the primordial origin of the thylacine or other extinct creature, that is, its ontological existence, or is it a set of instances, factual evidence of the thylacine's existence? The thylacine's extinction affords it a particular cultural value: an emotive, descriptive representation. However, the thylacine also possesses a scientific value: an empirical, taxonomic classification, a truth value. In presenting an authoritative representation of the thylacine, scientific accounts must extricate themselves from cultural histories and popular anecdotes and representations. The construction of objectivity is addressed by the removal of human agency, to varying degrees, from scientific representations of the thylacine and from stories of its existence. Scientists are removed from the space and category of the general population. Robert Paddle takes issue with the implication of "scientific innocence" coloring research on the thylacine and its extinction, identifying questionable assumptions about the ability of marsupials to adapt to environmental changes, the rarity of scientists in

Tasmania, the lack of public interest in the thylacine, an unawareness of the severity of the threat of extinction until too late and the thylacine's inability to breed in captivity (Paddle 2000, 204). The construction of objectivity, perhaps, also disposes of the possibility of blame.

Rather than a time in which animals pass from reality into myth I would argue that extinction time, that is, the way time and space are connected in stories of the demise of the 'last of the species', is a means by which narrative can hold together an animal according to two types of logic. Edmund Husserl's writings on ideality and form and its relation to *a priori* knowledge, and Jacques Derrida's critique of Husserl's methodology, highlight the spatial and temporal gap existing between scientific narratives of species and accounts of identified specimens and suggest how such stories may become conflated. Husserl developed a method of philosophical enquiry that sought to isolate and examine the essence of ideas, actions or things without recourse to an empiricist or historical reconstruction. Rather, he sought to identify and describe the contexts in which objective or self-evident truths were reasoned and utilized without a direct connection to previous acts of reasoning. This phenomenological method of enquiry, Husserl argued, could liberate philosophical thinking from the notions of cause and consequence. In "The Origin of Geometry" he makes the distinction between 'real' objects, which occupy concrete time and space, and 'ideal' objects, which are not embodied but which already exist in an ideal form, such as the Pythagorean Theorem (Husserl 1978, 67). Real objects constitute the object of physical or ontic thinking, while ideal objects constitute the object of metaphysical or *a priori* thinking. Husserl includes "all scientific constructions" amongst what he defines as ideal objects, citing them as products of philosophical thought. As a technical practice, scientific research is able to adopt a specific objectivity in its production. However, such a notion of objectivity does not rely upon the reader of the work, but rather exists metaphysically, beyond question or refutation.

Derrida sees Husserl as attempting to straddle two mutually exclusive ways of theorizing meaning.

There are layers of meaning which appear as systems, or complexes, or static configurations, within which...are possible a movement and a genesis which must obey both the legality proper to and the functional significance of the structure under consideration. Other layers, sometimes more profound, sometimes more superficial, are given in the essential mode of creation and movement, that is, in the modes of primordial

origin, of becoming, or of tradition; and these require that in speaking of them one uses the language of genesis, supposing that there is one, or that there is only one. (Derrida 1978b, 155)

Derrida identifies a conflation of two contradictory modes of logic in Husserl's description of ideal objects. On one hand Husserl presents this ideal state as possessing a systematic structure incorporating every example of objective, scientific thought, and on the other hand he presents the argument that such a state exists in a form that must be accessed intuitively. Derrida views Husserl's methodology as attempting to unite a historically traceable notion of a deducible origin with an intuitively reasoned idea of the genesis of a state of ideal objectivity. For instance, the notion of the last of the species, a notion which is established using historical evidence to identify a specific time, space and specimen, is merged with that of an ideal state such as 'the thylacine' as species, a category invoking an ontological or metaphysical presence. The logic of the specimen works to suggest that specific conditions, specific groups of people and specific practices led to the deaths of specific animals. However, when conflated with the logic of the species such evidence is 'returned' as objective, removed from specific instances. Such a maneuver is achieved by recourse to written and spoken language. Derrida argues that for ideas or meanings to become objective, language must be able to inscribe such ideas and meanings in time and space without the requirement of the presence of those involved in the specific act of communication.

To be absolutely ideal, the object must...be freed of every tie with an actually present subjectivity in general... The possibility of writing will assure the absolute traditionalisation of the object, its absolute ideal Objectivity—i.e., the purity of its relation to a universal transcendental subjectivity. Writing will do this by emancipating sense from its actually present evidence for a real subject and from its present circulation within a determined community. (Derrida 1978a, 87)

Derrida's formulation of writing includes all practices seeking to inscribe an object or event, such as graphic art, photography, cinematography, modeling and genetic coding. Each of these practices constitutes a field of indeterminate traces and retentions that resist the idea of a spatially and temporally present perspective. Each practice attempts to produce an inscription that captures the essence or objectively represents its object. However such inscriptions occur in a space and time 'after' the object or event while invoking a sense of presence spatially

and temporally anterior to the object. For instance, DNA is presented not as samples taken from specific specimens but rather as an essential inscription of the genetic characteristics of a species. Derrida argues that all writing is both spatially and temporally removed from its object, and provides the possibility of any subject's absence from the object in question. This calls into question the process by which an essential notion of truth is reached. While the metaphysical notion of truth exists because of language, its constitution in the form of specific examples within the process of language will always produce slippages in meaning. In order for *a priori* truth to exist, it must be preceded by an *a priori* notion of writing, a first notion of writing spatially and temporally removed from specific acts of writing. Reference to 'real' examples or recourse to a self-present subject immediately invalidates any case for objectivity.

This becomes the point of contention for Derrida in reading Husserl. The notion of *a priori* thinking Husserl presents in "The Origin of Geometry" relies on the use of the Pythagorean Theorem to exemplify his argument. In doing so Husserl has utilized examples of real occurrences to put forward a theory of an ideal state. However, as Derrida argues, ideal objects can only be realized, that is, intuitively reasoned, in the absence of real objects. While such an argument challenges those attempting to represent metaphysical thinking, it also raises the question of how such writing benefits the writer. Derrida states that the structure of writing, because of its spatial and temporal removal from its object, always constitutes the subject as absent as well. I would argue that such an act of reconstitution also removes the writer from blame.

Stories of existence which focus on the demise of the last remaining animal utilize evidence of an historical absence in realizing the presence of an ideal form. However, the temporal order of presentation inverts the historical order. Extinction stories move toward an absolute origin imagined as objective. The last animal provides a singular body and a singular moment. The animal is presented as both real and ideal in an enunciative present, one which is separated from both the past, a time of presence, and the future, a time of absence. The space and time of inscribing the moment/act of extinction is removed from the space and time of the animal's presence. The death and subsequent absence of the last specimen requires the absence of the inscribing subject. The reader is connected with the idea of the animal rather than its 'reality'. A first notion of the extinct animal is produced from a theory of last instances.

However, in embodying the absence of the narrator, the extinct animal and the reader, extinction stories exonerate the narrator, who is removed from an historical connection or from direct contact with the last remaining member of the group. Direct contact is erased in the historical enunciation. How can the encounter between humans and thylacines be translated? Such an encounter is buried amidst two stories of survival, that of the thylacines in an environment which had become both threatened and threatening, and that of the European settlers attempting to establish themselves in the Australian colony. Neither story affords thylacines agency in adapting to a suddenly hostile environment. The thylacine, in its ideal form, is cast as unable to adapt to change, a victim of evolution and marsupial inferiority/innocence, helpless in the face of progress.

Homi Bhabha argues that resistant political inquiry should account for the translation of the terms and conditions constituent of colonial encounters, as well as recognize the differential structure of such encounters (Bhabha 1994, 253–254). He argues that the meaning of such encounters occurs in a ‘time-lag’, the gap between an enunciated sign’s actual occurrence and its discursive appearance as a symbol of colonial authority. Such symbols are not merely the effect of political dictates: they also answer cultural demands. The social relations of colonial encounters are transgressed by factors such as migration from the colonial mainland, displacement and relocation, experiences that foreground such encounters as practices of survival. As such, they are not necessarily closed or resolved encounters privileged by a dominant version of history. This suggests that stories of the last of a species are open to translation ‘outside’ the narrative of extinction, within the disruptive temporality of the time-lag. Just as apparently acquiescent colonial responses to imperial dictates can be read within a time-lag as tactical, as a way of avoiding or averting surveillance, representations of the behavior of endangered or extinct species, including disappearances and absences from specific spaces at specific times, can be read as representing the possibility of survival, as the possibility of evading surveillance.

The moment that the thylacine “passed from reality into myth” is a moment that conceals the historical conditions of its production. The spatial, temporal and physical conditions in which thylacines live are denied in this cultural act. The sign of the extinct or absent species is returned as resolved. The farmer is vilified, the scientist lauded and applauded, and the thylacine exiled to the realm of memory. However,



the temporality involved in such a passing is open to question from the perspective of the time-lag. While criteria for announcing the extinction of specific species varies, amongst the commonly agreed upon factors are the established taxonomy of the animal or plant inasmuch as it constitutes a single species and not a sub-species or smaller grouping, and a minimum period of time having elapsed since the animal or plant was conclusively sighted. The enunciation of extinction is contingent upon the animal or plant being historically recorded, discursively articulated, scientifically significant and subjectified within a social hierarchy and a formal system of classification. Such an enunciation is processual: it must be repeated in each new circumstance in order to maintain an absence. The singularity thus produced resolves two states of existence, presenting it as an expression of closure.

However, such contingencies suggest that the possibility exists for new stories, based on different but specific understandings of space, times and bodies, to translate and displace extinction stories, re-claiming the past as accessible and contestable. Outside the modernist boundaries of specimen and species the chance for new perspectives to be articulated is kept alive.

The many hundreds of sightings of thylacines recorded anecdotally over the past seventy years have been routinely dismissed largely because the descriptions of the animals sighted failed to conform to official descriptions of the species and because no specimen could be produced. Anecdotes reporting the possible presence of thylacines evidenced by the behavior of other animals in the area, such as dogs, sheep or poultry are also denied serious attention. However, the question is then begged of anecdotes of sightings of thylacines made in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when thylacines were known to be living both in and out of captivity. Many nineteenth-century accounts of sightings by lay people, as indicated by Paddle, would have been discounted by scientific and historical authorities for their lack of credibility. The two sets of anecdotes are separated by the referential date 7 September 1936, and the force it carries in marking out an historical boundary between a time of surviving and a time of extinction. To consider the two sets of anecdotes as part of a larger set of stories and experiences is to open up the possibility that beyond the systems of surveillance producing valid scientific data, and outside the borders of official historical accounts, specific interactions between thylacines and humans might have produced knowledge of each other suggesting the possibility of mutual rather than exclusive survival. Connecting

stories of sightings in the past seventy years with stories of sightings from the nineteenth century provides a way of imagining the perspectives of those not recognized as scientifically or historically authoritative or significant and of questioning the way the past was constructed as history. Such stories would not produce a referential notion of the thylacine, but rather a recognizable multiplicity of thylacines and of relationships between thylacines and humans.

The fate of the great auk, a large (adults grew to about seventy-five centimeters or thirty inches in height), flightless bird living around a small number of islands in the North Atlantic, provides another example of how cultural representations have both influenced and responded to changing social attitudes regarding extinction. Great auks were social birds that bred in colonies. Like the thylacine, most nineteenth-century accounts of sightings of great auks, however, describe lost or isolated birds. Well before the last recorded sighting in 1844, a fascination with the bird throughout Europe had seen the publication and reproduction of many sketches and paintings of the great auk, and the bird described in literature as well as scientific writing. Where once great auks were hunted for their meat, oil and feathers, now stuffed specimens, skins and eggs were relentlessly pursued in auctions, private galleries and the drawing rooms of collectors. As sightings became scarce and the possibility of the bird's extinction loomed larger, great auks emerged in the realms of art and popular culture, appearing on cigarette cards and postage stamps (Fuller 1999, 88). Great auk eggs changed hands for exorbitant sums, and the bird became the subject of decorative and souvenir items, such as the great auk replica by Carl Faberge that resides in Queen Elizabeth II's private art collection (Fuller 1999, 88).

Each of these images and reproductions pays tribute to a notion of the great auk as a singular bird imbued with certain qualities, for example both stately and vulnerable. These meanings operate in the absence of great auks, the social birds breeding in colonies and traveling between a finite group of islands in the North Atlantic. The present specimen erases the absent species, the multiplicity replaced by a singularity, extinction as defined by the demise of the last of the species.

However, the states of existence of great auks are not reducible to the states of existence of thylacines or of any other animals homogeneously narrated as extinct, as no longer present. Like the singularity produced in the enunciation of extinction, a multiplicity is not simply a numerical expression but an ongoing process. Multiplicities are spatial, temporal and physical, inflected toward the future as well as the past.

Outside the discursive boundaries of an official version of extinction with its dependence on a rigid understanding of the category of species to maintain an imperial surveillance, possibilities exist to consider how packs of apparently absent animals have adapted to their loss of space in ways other than yielding their time.

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## CHAPTER NINE

### AUSTRALIA IMAGINED IN BIOLOGICAL CONTROL

Catharina Landström

This chapter takes biological control research as its object of investigation, analyzing the ways in which such research is entwined with Australian culture, and taking issue with a traditional view that considers science to be positioned outside of culture. Instead, drawing on perspectives provided by cultural studies of science, I will argue that the detachment of science from culture is more ideological than actual.<sup>1</sup> In following this emerging field, this chapter focuses particularly on the ways in which biological control research is narrated and performed in communication with the non-scientist.

Biological control is an international scientific discourse and practice that aims to reduce the impact of species perceived as pests, by means of the introduction of ‘natural enemies’ of various kinds. These natural enemies are often animal species, for example arthropods that attack weeds. In some cases, both pest and enemy are animals: for instance in Queensland, Australia the Cane Toad was introduced during the 1930s in an attempt to control the Grey Back Beetle affecting sugar cane plantations.

As a global scientific discourse that presents facts and theories about the dynamics of different species in natural environments, biological control can be viewed as disconnected from national culture. In international scientific publications, mathematical models and generalized principles play the most prominent part. However, biological control research must occur in particular locations, and moreover also produces knowledge about specific local environments and control organisms—that is, new biological technologies for intervention in particular habitats. These local activities underpin the international discourse. In order to succeed in specific locales, biological control researchers have to find support among a diverse field of actors, some of whom may

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<sup>1</sup> See Reid and Traweek (2000).

not primarily be interested in science, or particularly concerned with pest control. The researchers have to secure funds, access locations for empirical investigations and experiments, and convince local communities to support their activities. One aspect of making biological control research important to such a variety of social actors is to imbue it with a cultural rationale, to make it 'make cultural sense'. Research that does not make cultural sense in the communities it addresses is likely to fail in changing people's practices and beliefs in the ways necessary to bring the project to fruition. Representations of research—of its problems, objectives and procedures—that are intended for audiences outside of the scientific community are crucial to the cultural articulation of biological control. Such communication has to draw on material outside of the scientific and technical domains. In the process of anchoring their activities in culture, therefore, biological control researchers can be seen to use, reproduce and contribute to commonly held, non-scientific ideas about nature and society. It is this traffic between biological control and general culture that makes it a particularly interesting subject for cultural analysis.

It is important to point out that saying that biological control research is culturally ensconced does not imply that it does not produce reliable knowledge or effective technical artifacts. It is a common misunderstanding that claims about the entwinement of research with culture automatically disqualify it as a producer of reliable knowledge about the world. This misapprehension follows from an epistemological orthodoxy that insists that any mixing of scientific activities and other cultural processes results in a contamination that invalidates all claims to create knowledge.

### *Technoscience*

From a cultural studies perspective it is fruitful to consider biological control a 'technoscience'. Bruno Latour (1987) used this term "to describe all the elements tied to the scientific contents no matter how dirty, unexpected or foreign they seem" (Latour 1987, 174). This definition of research rejects the separation of process and product, a separation intrinsic to the detachment of science from culture enacted by positivist ideologies of science. Instead, Latour recognizes that all scientific research has to take place somewhere. What he refers to as "dirty," "unexpected" and "foreign" elements are the contingencies

that occur in every empirical research project: they may be material, social or cultural. To the cultural analyst these particular circumstances matter, because without them the product, scientific facts and explanations, might have been different. This is a radically different approach from traditional philosophy of science, which regards the contingent circumstances of research as ‘noise’, irrelevant to the outcome of the research process.

The term ‘technoscience’ also captures the entwining of epistemic and technical elements.<sup>2</sup> Latour continues to put “the expression ‘*science and technology*’, in quotation marks, to designate *what is kept of technoscience* once all the trials of responsibility have been settled” (Latour 1987, 174, original emphasis). This identifies “science” and “technology” as effects, as the outcome of heterogeneous processes, not as their cause. This definition also resists the distinction between ‘research’ and ‘application’ commonly policed by positivist ideologues of science. It implies that the world changes when research is being done, that it does not wait for its ‘application’. This has particular relevance for biological control.

In biological control research in Australia, creation of a natural enemy for an exotic pest and knowledge about the way nature works are inseparable, not only in practice but in principle. It is impossible to know how an introduced species will affect a particular habitat until it has been released and had time to establish. It does not matter how many theoretical extrapolations from the known biological properties and physical behavior of a control organism scientists produce; when it is released into an environment in which it did not previously exist, unexpected events may follow. Doing and knowing are inseparable in biological control.

‘Technoscience’ is thus not a neutral term; it conveys the enunciator’s skepticism regarding ‘epistemological orthodoxy’—that is, the kind of orthodoxy that views non-scientific ‘culture’ as a threat that will inevitably pollute and degrade science. To speak of ‘technoscience’ is to imply that science is always also cultural, that its meanings are anchored in the cultures in which it takes place. Hence this concept has proved useful in constructivist discourse on science, which highlights the complexity of research processes and the relationships between science

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<sup>2</sup> The adjective ‘epistemic’ is used to characterize a relationship or a practice created with the objective of creating knowledge. The more familiar noun, ‘epistemology’, refers to the philosophical theory of knowledge.

and other social and cultural activities. Although many have used the term, Latour's definition remains the most specific: it defines scientific research as inseparable from social relationships, even though it is a unique aspect of contemporary culture.

### *Technoscience and Culture*

Technoscience is the way in which modern society produces knowledge about nature; this means that it also produces culture. Our dominant understandings of material reality are produced through technoscience. It is technoscience that provides us with origin stories, explanations of existing phenomena and visions of the future. It tells us where we came from, who we are and where we are heading. Modern societies can, to a large extent, be considered technoscience cultures.

The cultural production of technoscience is analyzed by the emerging field of cultural studies of science, which poses a challenge to the traditional academic "division of labor." As Reid and Traweek put it,

humanities researchers are critics who write commentaries on art and ideas, while scientists, engineers, and physicians find out facts about the real world and fix real problems. More succinctly, the humanities are for reflection and the sciences are for investigation. Trouble occurs when people trained to do one job try to do the other. New departures in social sciences further muddy the picture. In other words, cultural studies of science, technology, and medicine violate this division of labor and violate our conventions of expertise. (2000, 7)

In the history of science studies, social scientists first opened out the field by looking beyond the published scientific text. They paid attention to practices, to laboratory experiments and social interactions between scientists. Cultural studies of science have since widened the scope of such approaches, by looking at communication and representation of science in wider society. This extension of what is judged to be appropriate material for science studies can be offensive to established fields of study. Reid and Traweek note that one of their collaborators (an anthropologist)

was told that analyzing publicity posters made by a major research lab does not constitute studying science; another that the only site of science studies that counts is the lab and the funding and publishing networks that connect them. (2000, 9)



In my discussion of biological control research I look at many different kinds of textual output, ranging from articles published in scientific journals to media releases archived on websites.<sup>3</sup> My analysis of this material focuses on the work undertaken by biological control researchers in order to make their knowledge efficacious in Australian culture.

Biological control research is a technoscience that produces knowledge about pests and ways to deal with them. It also transforms natural organisms from one habitat into biological technologies for deliberate use in other environments. In this process novel cultural meanings are produced. Biological control research also creates representations that link observable phenomena in the environment with theories accepted in the international scientific community. These representations are circulated within and outside of the scientific community and they become accepted as ways to explain how nature works; they become part of culture. The success or failure of biological control is determined neither by the knowledge it produces, nor by the introduction of a control organism, but by the way it is culturally perceived. This is because in the first place, knowledge—which is judged as scientific within international discourse—results whether or not a control organism can be produced. In the second place, it can take many years from the introduction of a control organism to the time when it starts to have any measurable impact, if it ever does.

There are a few examples of biological control projects in Australia that have become historically established as clear successes or failures. In the first category we find the introduction of the cactoblastis moth to fight the prickly pear (a noxious introduced weed species) and the introduction of the myxoma virus, which effectively reduced the number of feral rabbits in the 1950s.<sup>4</sup> These projects led to immediate changes in the environment, perceived as beneficial by local communities and the majority of Australians. In the second category, the introduction of Cane Toads (*Bufo marinus*) in Queensland in the 1930s stands out.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Note that the websites referred to in this paper were accessed at particular times over a few years and they may have changed or moved since then.

<sup>4</sup> The introductions of cactoblastis and myxomatosis are documented in numerous sources and often retold as examples of successful biological control projects. Tim Low's (2001) history of invasive pests provides an accessible account of these projects in historical and environmental contexts.

<sup>5</sup> The cane toad has been an object of extensive academic study, environmental history (see Low 2001) and a video documentary, *Cane Toads*, directed by Mark Lewis (1987). The Global Invasive Species Database lists it as one of the worst one hundred invasive

The Cane Toads, native to South and Central America, were imported from Hawaii, where they were used as a biological control for cane pests, in order to reduce the population of Grey Back Beetles, a serious sugar cane pest. The toads did not impact on the beetles but propagated profusely and poisoned indigenous predators. Today they pose a major threat to sensitive environments in Queensland and the Northern Territory.

However, most biological control projects do not have such immediate and obvious effects. After the conclusion of the research and the release of a control organism it may take many years until any effects are perceptible. This means that in order to retain public support for this costly research, it is important to represent it in ways that make it appear to be both valuable and worthwhile, without being able to point to results. One of the means to do this is to tell stories that make ongoing projects culturally viable. From a cultural studies of science perspective, this kind of storytelling cannot be conceived as taking place in isolation from the research process itself.

### *Storytelling*

The way we come to share an understanding of how things work is by telling stories about them. Everybody tells stories about their experiences: while many of these experiences are shared by all humans (or at least we think so), others are the result of particular, expert activities. Technoscience is an expert activity that tells stories that relate humans as a species to nonhuman organisms, as well as to inorganic elements. As cultural historian of science Donna Haraway suggests,

[s]cientific practice may be considered a kind of story-telling practice—a rule-governed, constrained, historically changing craft of narrating the history of nature. Scientific practice and scientific theories produce and are embedded in particular kinds of stories. Any scientific statement about the world depends intimately upon language, upon metaphor. The metaphors may be mathematical or they may be culinary; in any case, they structure scientific vision. Scientific practice is above all a story-telling practice in the sense of historically specific practices of interpretation and testimony. (Haraway 1989, 4)

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pests. For the history and the current status of cane toads in Queensland one source is the website of the Queensland Government Environmental Protection Agency.

Haraway states very clearly that for a story to be regarded as scientific—that is, as conveying accurate knowledge about nature—it has to be generated in a manner that agrees with the norms and rules of the relevant community of experts. Her notion of “story-telling” captures the way in which science tells stories that account for natural phenomena, but also insists that this process exceeds the naming and description of facts.

This idea can be linked to philosophies of language which maintain that the meaning of words depends on the conventions of the community using them.<sup>6</sup> As long as scientists speak only with other scientists, who work with the same elements, within the same semantic community, they can develop a language with fairly stable reference-points and something close to a singularity of meaning. However, were they to talk only among themselves, this would quite rapidly move such a community from the realm of science to that of obscure cult. Technoscience has to talk to everybody. If it does not, it cannot exist as technoscience. When communicating outside of the scientific community, technoscience therefore has to speak in ways that make sense to a wider audience; in doing this, it draws on conventions, metaphors and stories that have their origin in other discourses than the scientific.

In the stories told by biological control researchers, recognizable elements—animals, plants and humans—are brought together in new ways. To make cultural sense, these new stories have to link with already known stories about phenomena that can be encountered in everyday life. Such widely told stories, which provide meaning and direction to otherwise unrelated and incomprehensible aspects of the material environment, can be called “cultural narratives.”<sup>7</sup> Biological control stories may agree with these cultural narratives or run counter to them, but either way they have to engage with them.

### *Retelling the Australian Rabbit Story*

One occasion when biological control research storytelling in Australia interacted with a very well defined cultural narrative was in the Rabbit Calicivirus Disease Programme (RCDP). In this case, the research

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<sup>6</sup> See Wittgenstein (1967).

<sup>7</sup> The term “cultural narrative” was used by Sarah Maza (1996) in a discussion of historical writing, but it is useful far beyond that particular context.

network latched onto, reinvigorated and repeated the Australian rabbit story.

‘The Australian rabbit story’ is a particular cultural narrative with a clearly formulated plot and well defined actors: it recounts the origin, spread and threat of feral European rabbits in Australia. It begins with the arrival of rabbits in Australia in 1859 through the efforts of Thomas Austin who wanted to recreate the type of small game hunting established in the English countryside. According to the story, the rabbits bred rapidly, overran his estate, and spread across the country. At this point a war metaphor enters the story as it is told in mainstream environmental history.<sup>8</sup> As a devastating invading alien army, the rabbits ate every green leaf they came across and laid the conquered land bare. Despite eager attempts to control them, humans did not get the upper hand in this war until the introduction of a disease, myxomatosis, which proved to be devastating for rabbit populations and brought their numbers down radically during the 1950s. The introduction of myxomatosis was also the first example of an effective biological control for an introduced vertebrate. However, as might be expected, over time rabbits developed resistance and the efficacy of myxomatosis decreased. At the time rabbit calicivirus disease was being promoted, the effect of myxomatosis had worn off and the only thing standing between rabbits and vulnerable Australian nature was technoscience—at least in the stories told by the RCDP researchers in a number of forums.

The RCDP acted under the auspices of the Commonwealth Scientific and Research Organisation (CSIRO), a national body with branches all over Australia, engaging in many technoscientific fields. From the commencement of the RCDP, in the late 1980s, researchers working with the idea of bringing to Australia a new rabbit disease (recently discovered in China) were aware of the importance of cultural acceptance. In the studies undertaken before the program was launched, the general cultural appreciation of rabbits was investigated and discussed (Landström 2001). One outcome of this work was to identify the Easter Bunny as a problem: hence the RCDP came to support the Easter Bilby campaign:

The Easter Bilby should take over from the Easter Bunny to highlight Australia’s commitment to conserving our native wildlife, according to Mr William Morgan, Executive Officer of the Anti-Rabbit Research

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Rolls (1969).

Foundation of Australia (ARRFA). CSIRO supports the ARRFA's campaign to conserve our native wildlife as it appears more and more Australians are doing. (CSIRO, "Bilbies not bunnies: CSIRO supports campaign")<sup>9</sup>

The Greater Bilby (*Macrotis lagotis*) is one of the native animals marginalized by the fecund rabbits. With its long ears, sensitive nose and strong back legs, the threatened bilby can be perceived as resembling the rabbit.<sup>10</sup> The Easter Bilby campaign produced and promoted chocolate bilbies to replace chocolate bunnies. It also commissioned children's stories explaining how the Easter bunny handed the job of distributing eggs to Australian children to the bilby. Switching to a rather different mode when the virus unexpectedly escaped from the quarantined field trials, the RCDP communication unit mobilized the war metaphor to present the virus as the best ally Australia could have in the fight against the foreign invader.<sup>11</sup> The escape of the virus could, against this backdrop, be pitched as a good thing.

The rabbit calicivirus currently being tested as a biological control agent on Wardang Island, has successfully spread between warrens in the pens. It has also spread beyond the quarantine area to other nearby locations and this necessitated invoking contingency plans, required under quarantine regulations. This appears to be good news for farmers and conservation groups who recognize the urgent need for additional control methods for rabbits. (CSIRO, "Rabbit calicivirus on Wardang Island")

To kill the rabbit was, in RCDP storytelling, equated with saving Australia. Hence, it did not matter much if a quarantined field experiment lost integrity:

Mr Newland said that RCD offered great potential for Australia to deal with its biggest environmental problem. The premature release of the virus meant that control plans had to be rushed but it was well established that the virus posed no threat to human health or other animal species. (CSIRO, "RCD discovered in Yunta, national release plans brought forward")

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<sup>9</sup> The Easter Bilby campaign is interestingly discussed by John Morton and Nicholas Thomas (1999) in their cultural critique of an Australian trend of romanticizing the indigenous in search of a unique national identity.

<sup>10</sup> The Australian Bilby Appreciation Society (<http://members.optusnet.com.au/bilbies>) carries some nice pictures of bilbies. It also tells the story about it and the various efforts, cultural and others, to save it.

<sup>11</sup> Stephanie Lavau's masters thesis (1997) was written at the time and it documents the events of the RCDP as they unfold.

The reproduction of the Australian rabbit story by the RCDP contributed to a particular image of Australian nature. It located the cause of the problem in history, more precisely in colonial history; strictly speaking it was the English who brought the rabbit to Australia, more exactly one man aspiring to reproduce an upper class privilege. It also located agency in nature, or rather in un-natural nature. The rabbit was pictured as an autonomous agent acting against humanity and against native Australian animals and plants. In this story, the intervention by biological control research was presented as the only hope for Australian agriculture and indigenous nature: without it, the rabbits would “eat the heart out of the country,” a phrase echoed in many stories about the rabbit since the late nineteenth century (see Rolls 1969).

The RCDP told a story in which present day human activities were figured as not being responsible for the rabbit problem. When the virus escaped, this could be narrated as a positive occurrence rather than as a technoscientific failure because every possibility of diminishing the rabbit problem was to be considered beneficial. Despite everything, the escape brought about a possibility of providing the Australian rabbit story with a happy ending. The RCDP is today regarded as a successful biological control project, both by technoscience actors and the public.

The rabbit story is an extreme example; most biological control projects do not have such a vivid and coherent cultural narrative to work with. They have to make do with tropes that link with already available narratives.

### *Tropes That Link*

The use of tropes, or figures of speech, in scientific texts has been an object for science studies investigation for quite some time. The ways in which metaphors provide new ways of investigating the world have been researched,<sup>12</sup> and there are studies of the way metaphors organize research fields (Haraway 1976). Feminist scholars have investigated the use of sexual metaphors in influential texts as one of the ways in which the feminine has been symbolically subordinated (Martin 1991). In the cultural study of science the focus is on the trade between that which counts as scientific and that which is regarded as fictional.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Mirowski (1989).

<sup>13</sup> N. Katherine Hayles's detailed study of the exchange of metaphors between cybernetics and science fiction is an important work in the area (1999).

Biological control stories appropriate many different tropes from various cultural narratives. In the following I focus on two of them, ‘progress’ and ‘environment’, which are particularly interesting because they are often positioned as opposites. In many instances, progress, in the form of increased productivity and economic growth, is identified as a major threat to biodiversity and the preservation of natural environments.<sup>14</sup> In other discourses, talk about ‘the environment’ is viewed as a romantic and irrational rejection of the technologies and processes that are needed in order to improve living conditions for many humans. However, in biological control research storytelling, progress and environment are brought together in harmony.

As a technoscientific pursuit, biological control research is part and parcel of the modern wish to control and exploit natural resources. It shares the presumption that the purpose of knowledge is to acquire power over nature with all of modern science and technology. Biological control research writes itself into a narrative premised upon the steady progression of society and technology towards a brighter future—in this case, one in which Australia’s primary industries increase their yield by millions of dollars annually because the losses caused by foreign pests have been significantly reduced.

Progress is the trope underpinning the major players in the network sustaining biological control research in Australia. At the centre we find the CSIRO which has a genealogy that stretches back to the early twentieth century.<sup>15</sup> The CSIRO is actively communicating with the public, and on its extensive website its purpose is described as follows:

- To serve the Australian community through outcomes which provide:
- benefit to Australia’s industry and economy
  - environmental benefit to Australia
  - social benefit to Australians
  - support to Australian national and international objectives through excellence in science and technology and in the provision of advice and services. (CSIRO, “About CSIRO”)

This is a purpose statement fully in agreement with the status of the organization as a national institution that receives public funds, and it

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<sup>14</sup> The conflict over genetically modified organisms in Europe illustrates the use of the two tropes as opposites. See, for example, Levidow (2001), and Lash, Szerszynski, and Wynne (1996).

<sup>15</sup> For a history of the CSIRO written from a science studies perspective, see Ewer (1995).

is echoed throughout its various branches. CSIRO Entomology, one of the largest of the subunits that work with biological control, follows the same model in its purpose statement:

CSIRO Entomology aims to generate economic, social and environmental benefits for all Australians through research into insects and their management by:

- understanding the role of insects and other invertebrates in the natural, urban and rural environments,
- developing safe and sustainable methods of pest and weed management, and
- using insects as models to understand fundamental biological processes. (CSIRO Entomology, "About us")

This purpose statement touches on the way in which progress is reconciled with environment, by indirectly defining biological control (as a method for pest and weed management) as "safe and sustainable." Elaborating on this, CSIRO Entomology says: "Much of our research is applied towards the development of ecologically sustainable strategies for the management of insect pests and noxious weeds" (CSIRO Entomology, "About us").

By emphasizing environmentally friendly pest control alternatives over chemical options, biological control researchers become able to tell stories about the goals they share with environmentalists. In addressing so-called "environmental pests," as well as agricultural ones, they include the environment as an important element in this research. Biological control research promises to solve the problems of agriculture without having any negative effects on indigenous nature; in this way, biological control research is presented as an ally of nature. Biological control research storytelling thus aligns the tropes of progress and environment in a way that makes advances in the field appear to entail environmental restoration. Paralleling the distribution of agency produced in the communication of the RCDP, which placed the blame on unnatural nature, agriculture is not depicted to be in any way responsible for the degradation of native environments. Agriculture and nature are both represented as victims of historical mistakes and powerful pest organisms. By turning on a common enemy—the alien invader—tricky issues of how to reconcile modern agriculture with preservation of natural environments can be avoided. Agriculture and conservation can, therefore, get along well within the framework of biological control.

Biological control draws on these and other tropes to tell stories in which the research becomes a concern, not only for scientists and



primary industries, but for all Australians. This research is represented as a viable measure for restoration and protection of nature in stories that make sense to an audience familiar with existing cultural narratives about Australian nature and agriculture.

### *Performing Biological Control*

Telling stories helps biological control make cultural sense, but by themselves they are not sufficient to get people to change their ways. For change to occur more interaction is required, for example via direct demonstration and public participation. Biological control researchers go out to local communities to display both the problems and their solutions. One opportunity for researchers in Australia to do this is Weedbuster Week, an annual, nationwide event aiming to involve the community in the fight against weeds (many of which are exotic species). It is a collaborative effort that involves political agencies, foundations, volunteer organizations and the Weeds CRC, a unit in which the CSIRO and CSIRO Entomology play leading roles.

I find it illuminating to approach the manner in which this takes place through the notion of 'performance'. During Weedbuster Week biological control research is presented in terms of doing, behaving and showing, three aspects that theatre scholars recognize as central for understanding something as performance (Schechner 2002). Weed recognition and control are undertaken by all involved volunteers, fact sheets and guidelines instruct all Australians on how to behave in relation to the natural environment to minimize weed problems, and the output from biological control research is shown. In these performances biological control is not only represented, it is also enacted. The knowledge it has produced about pests, pest control, nature and society is articulated in demonstrations and instructions to the Australian public. The aims of Weedbuster Week are:

- to raise awareness and increase public understanding about the problems weeds cause
- help the public make the connection between their gardening, farming or grazing habits and potential land and environmental degradation
- provide the public with the information and skills required to play a responsible role in the sustaining use of the land and water resource and ultimately make the necessary changes in behaviour to help the environment

- foster community ownership of problems resulting in acceptance and support for weed management projects. (Weedbuster Week, “All about Weedbuster Week”)

The event combines information and entertainment in different ways: one example is the character “Woody Weed,” who is employed to target the younger segment of the public. Woody Weed makes visits on request; he is described as a

rogue who spreads himself around the countryside (like any successful weed!), scaring children and harassing wildlife. Dressed in bright purple and green he makes an intimidating sight. (Weedbuster Week, “Who is Woody Weed?”)

The attention-grabbing, playful performances of Woody Weed are backed up by fact kits and weed clearing activities aimed at both children and adults.

For the children, there is also a coloring-in book competition with two age groups, from three years to seven and eight and over. The winning contributions are displayed on the website, as are photos from Weedbuster Week activities in different parts of the country. During Weedbuster Week a number of activities are aimed at schools, and researchers produce information packages for different age groups. Weed removal is one activity for children during Weedbuster Week; it is organized by schools, and the teachers are provided with guidelines produced by technoscience actors.

A curriculum guide by the Weeds CRC called “Alien Invaders” aims to “stimulate student creative thinking about weed issues” (Weedbuster Week, “Alien Invaders”). It lists the items that the teacher will need to produce for this performance: a “pretty weed,” an “outdoor grassy area,” “a tape recorder” and a “review of safety issues.” Equipped with these props, teachers are given directions to sit themselves and the students down in a circle, set the tape recorder and present the students with the “pretty weed.” When the cast is in position, the guide tells the teacher to explain to the students that the pretty plant “is actually an alien invader,” that “it has been caught hiding in someone’s garden,” and that it “is making itself ready to take over Australia.” Next, the script has the teacher passing the plant over to the next person, who is asked to continue the story with a couple of sentences, then to pass it onto the next person and so on until every student in the circle “has made a contribution.” The guide advises teachers on how to

prompt students who “get stuck” and points out that students are free to “invent ‘facts’ about the alien.” When everybody has contributed, the script directs the teacher to tell the students that the plant is “a real alien invader,” a weed that comes from overseas or from another part of Australia. Finally, the guidelines advise the teacher to tell the students that part of the invented story which approximated the truth, as defined by technoscience.

The “Alien Invaders” curriculum guide exemplifies one way in which the Weeds CRC executes its mission to educate and create cultural awareness of weeds. It also contributes to a specific understanding of Australian nature as under threat from foreign species. These foreigners are envisaged as operating autonomously; there is no mention of human activities that may contribute to the spread of weeds. The guide produces a performance around the trope of alien invasion. This is a trope figuring in many different stories in the political realm, as well in popular culture.<sup>16</sup> In this instance, it is enrolled to make the problem of exotic weeds real and tangible to young Australians. This story and its performance make the audience participate in the production of an Australia wherein biological control research becomes the only viable and effective means to address exotic pests.

The focus in Weedbuster Week is on community participation and the semiotics of weeds, but there is room for concretization of biological control. In a press release the Weeds CRC tells about its participation in a local Weedbuster Week event with the presentation of two biological control agents. The heading reads: “Weedbuster Week’s Weedy Warriors take to the Mall.” The event is a celebration in Rundle Mall in Adelaide, at which children from a local primary school will sing against a background of artwork. Arranged by weed officers from Mt Lofty Ranges Animal and Plant Control Board, PIRSA, Rural Solutions and the Weeds CRC, the objective is to be both entertaining and practical. The children are not the only performers:

Also on show will be live examples of biological control agents—insects and pathogens that are used to help control weeds. Gorse and bridal creeper, two invasive weeds in Adelaide’s bushland, and both on the list of Australia’s twenty Weeds of National Significance, are currently part

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<sup>16</sup> For example, the trope was mobilized in Australian politics around the turn of the millennium in 2000, in relation to ‘illegal immigrants’ and ‘boat refugees’. In popular culture it is a familiar theme in science fiction, horror and bordering genres, with examples such as the US TV serial the *X-files*.

of a biological control program. (Weedbuster Week, “Weedbuster Week’s Weedy Warriors take to the Mall”)

The gorse spider mite, one of the actors in this show, is described as being “smaller than a pinhead.” It forms colonies that feed off the gorse plant, thereby reducing its growth and vigor. Bridal creeper is assailed by a rust fungus that spreads in the wet winter months. Scientists are said to be satisfied with its activity so far. At the event, hosted by a “known MC from the ABC,” “[t]he rust and its host will be on display and the children will be demonstrating how the fungus can be transferred to new bridal creeper infestations” (Weedbuster Week, “Weedbuster Week’s Weedy Warriors take to the Mall”). This event involves non-scientists in a staged performance designed to display something that is too small to be seen without expert knowledge and enhancing technology.

From a cultural studies of science perspective Weedbuster Week is not to be seen as a separate public relations stunt, isolated from biological control research proper. The involvement of research units in such activities costs money and requires considerable work; obviously it serves an objective beyond entertaining children. It is one way in which the Weeds CRC fulfils its objective to play “a vital role in the community, fostering involvement and implementation through education, training, communication and adoption strategies” (Weeds CRC, “About us”).

### *Biological Control and Australia*

In the telling of stories that link to the cultural narratives available, biological control research activities are configured and presented in ways that make cultural sense. In local performances biological control research is displayed as the best way to address commonly recognized problems with exotic pests.

In its cultural representations, biological control research articulates the relationship between humans and animals in particular ways. Foreign animals get to do most of the work, materially as well as semiotically. They figure as exotic pests (for example rabbits), common enemies that all Australians, human and nonhuman, can unite to fight against. In the role of control organisms (such as the gorse spider mite), they become allies with great power. Native animals appear as threatened and in need of human care and protection, while foreign animals are cast as autonomous agents of invasion. In contrast, human practices are backgrounded and conflicts made to disappear in the struggle against a foreign nature that

threatens to corrupt Australia. In all of their different roles in biological control stories animals serve to articulate Australian nature as a primary cultural value in a way that produces the nation as unified.

To approach biological control research as a cultural activity draws attention to the ways in which it contributes to the idea of the nation. In terms of furthering Australia's interests, biological control research can be understood to do this in a way slightly different from that signaled by the CSIRO's purpose statement. Biological control research does not produce much perceptible change, but its production of cultural meaning can be understood to contribute to Australia as a nation in the sense of an "imagined community," as discussed by Benedict Anderson (1991). Anderson talks about how nations become cultural realities through the consumption of mass media communication about issues considered relevant to all people who share a geographical location—people spread out across an area large enough that most of them never meet face to face or know each other personally. This is also what biological control research storytelling does when it reworks cultural narratives and tropes into new stories about what it means to be Australian. In its contribution to culture, biological control research represents things that are relevant for the perception of what Australia is and what is of importance to all Australians. In so doing, this technoscience takes part in constructing Australia as an imagined community. It links the episteme of modern science to postcolonial settler nationhood in a way that figures technoscience as the mediator of change towards what is envisioned as a more authentic Australia.

Epistemological orthodoxy claims that communication with the public is irrelevant to the pursuit of knowledge, but a cultural studies of science perspective argues that community appreciation and involvement is the key to successful research and intervention. Without public approval, research will not change the world. Nor will it continue to attract financial support. Biological control research is a technoscience that aims to change both nature and culture, and without the involvement of many different publics this will certainly not happen. It is precisely because technoscience aims to change the world that it should be subjected to cultural analysis; its work is much too important to be left only to scientists. Cultural analysis illuminates aspects of research that are not brought into focus by other approaches. It aims to show how technoscience activities, concepts and objects are made meaningful in realities shared by all of us.

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PART FIVE

ANIMAL TALES





## CHAPTER TEN

### TAILS WITHIN TALES

Brian Boyd

We have an immemorial urge to tell stories involving characters who behave in human ways but are not human: gods, spirits, monsters, satyrs, vampires, zombies, superheroes, androids and gynecoids, animals, and even, in children's stories, fire engines and the like. Animal eyes glowing just beyond primeval campfires no doubt initiated this anthropomorphic line-up, but why are we still, even in the modern West, fascinated by tails within tales?

The earliest art we know of was obsessed with animals. They dominated the walls of Chauvet cave, thirty thousand years ago, twice as far back as Lascaux and Altamira, and even the twentieth century's most celebrated artist endlessly painted, drew and sculpted bulls and minotaurs. Cave paintings are not narratives, but if cave dust turned out to be fossilized speech that we could decode and carbon-date, we would find that animal stories long precede even Chauvet. Where the records *do* survive, stories leaving tracks along the border between humans and other animals range from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the *Mahabharata* to this morning's comic strips.

What many people think the greatest strip of all time, George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*, began as a human story, *The Dingbats*, in June 1910. By July, the family cat and a mouse that loved to throw things at its head occupied a tiny space at the bottom of each panel. As the human family became obsessed with their neighbors on the floor above, the strip changed its name in August 1910 to *The Family Upstairs*, and the cat-and-mouse story occupied a separate row of shallow panels underneath, as a kind of basement to the main family below the Family Upstairs. But the human story was drearily pedestrian, the endlessly repeated gag of the family's misfortunes at the hands of the unseen neighbors. By October 1913 *Krazy Kat* broke away to become its own strip, with its own animal cast: especially Krazy, Ignatz the Mouse, who has a compulsion to throw bricks at Krazy's head, which Krazy interprets as a sign of love, and the canine policeman, Offissa Pupp,



Fig. 10.1 *The Family Upstairs* (© George Herrman, c. 1913)

who tries but fails to prevent Ignatz from beaming Krazy. As the animals moved up from the basement to the main story, Herriman's strip changed from plodding human realism to a wildly surreal and poetic series of scratchy non-sequiturs (Harvey 1994, 172–5). It is an animal liberation story: a story of animals liberating the imagination.

For a more august example, consider the shifting position of animals and humankind in the two versions of the creation story in Genesis. The first—Priestly<sup>1</sup>—version shows a strict logical progression, with God successively calling into existence time, space, matter, plants, animals and finally, as the summit of creation, humankind. Even before humankind is created, its definition and place are clear: we are in God's image, and in control over animals. God tells himself:

“Let us make a human in our image, by our likeness, to hold sway over the fish of the sea and the fowl of the heavens, and the cattle and the wild beasts and all the crawling things that crawl upon the earth!”  
And God created the human in his image,  
in the image of God He created him,  
male and female He created them. (Gen. 1: 26–27)<sup>2</sup>

The human family occupies the top story, and there is only heaven above them.

But in the second, Jahwistic, version of creation, which immediately follows, God makes Adam *before* the plants and animals, *then* creates plants, *then* sets him in the garden of Eden, *then* realizes:

‘It is not good for the human to be alone, I shall make him a sustainer beside him.’ And the LORD God fashioned from the soil each beast of the field and each fowl of the heavens. (Gen. 2: 18–19)

Adam names all the creatures, “but for the human no sustainer beside him was found” (Gen. 2: 20), so God *then* puts him to sleep and extracts a rib to fashion Eve. But even before Eve has spoken, or been spoken to by God or man, the snake speaks to her, seduces her from obedience to God and has her try the forbidden fruit.

The first version offers a rationalist's account in which humankind, both man and woman, are logically the summit of creation, below only the creator Himself; the second a much more earthy world, where

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<sup>1</sup> According to the standard scholarly division of Genesis into four compositional strands, Priestly, Jahwistic, Elohist and Deuteronomic.

<sup>2</sup> This translation and all subsequent citations from Genesis are from Robert Alter's excellent *Genesis* (1996).

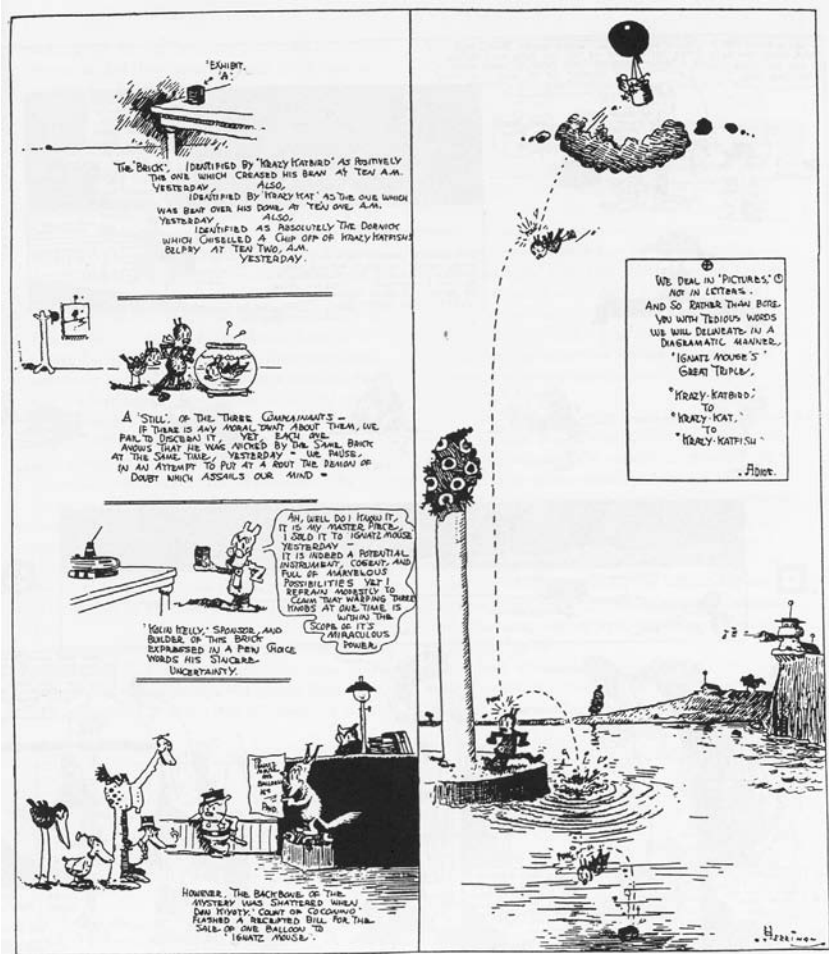


Fig. 10.2 *Krazy Kat* (© George Herrman, c. 1913)

animals are fashioned to provide companionship for man, and where—as if God has suddenly realized “Oh! animals don’t quite satisfy *all* man’s needs”—woman is a kind of afterthought and appendage, and somehow close to the dangerous animality of the snake. In this version the animals are not down in the basement but all around Adam and Eve, and in fact it is the humans who seem prone to tumbling downstairs.<sup>3</sup>

Since our fascination with animals in word, image and story stretches such a long way back, an evolutionary psychology seems likely to provide the most comprehensive explanation.<sup>4</sup> All animals are biologically programmed to recognize other animals, especially possible predators or prey, and to interpret at least the apparent direction of their motion and attention (Tooby and Cosmides 1995, xiv; Masson and McCarthy 1996, 61). But because humans are part of an especially social branch of the evolutionary tree—even if we do not, like our fellow primates, spend hours each day in mutual grooming<sup>5</sup>—we are more exclusively attuned to our own kind than most species are.

But that rough propensity to read other kinds of animals remains, even if it became blunted once language began to offer us powerful new ways of reading our own species.<sup>6</sup> We are especially programmed, as part of a rapid first-warning response, to interpret self-propelled motion as agency (Baron-Cohen 1995, 33–5; Mandler 1992). In fact, “if anything,” as Simon Baron-Cohen writes in his study of autism, *Mindblindness*, we

will over-attribute agency (and therefore goals and desires) to anything that just might be an agent. . . . In evolutionary terms, it is better to spot a potential agent, and start checking its desires and goals, than to ignore it. (1995, 35)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Alter (1981, 141–47) for a superb discussion of the reasons for the redactors’ retaining the two distinct versions of the creation story.

<sup>4</sup> For the explanatory context evolution and evolutionary psychology can provide for literature, see Joseph Carroll (1995; 2004), Robert Storey (1996), Brian Boyd (1998; 2001), and Jon Gottschall and David Sloan Wilson’s *The Literary Animal: Evolution and the Nature of Narrative* (2005).

<sup>5</sup> Robin Dunbar (1996), however, suggests that language is an outgrowth of primate grooming.

<sup>6</sup> Because other animals have to rely on their senses—whether visual, olfactory or haptic—they often appear to have greater ability to read us and other species than we do them: see Vicky Hearne (1987, 5–6); Masson and McCarthy (1986, 36); Stephen Clark (1991, 117).

<sup>7</sup> See also Barret, Richert, et al. (2001).

That deep-rooted tendency shows itself even in sophisticated subjects. A classic psychological study performed in 1944 by Fritz Heidler and Marianne Simmel exposed students to a silent film in which geometric shapes moved around the screen, and then asked them to describe what they had seen. Only one did so in geometrical terms (“A large solid triangle is shown entering a rectangle. It enters and comes out of this rectangle,” etc.); the rest anthropomorphized the shapes, assigning aims and moods:

A man has planned to meet a girl, and the girl comes along with another man. The first man tells the second to go; the second tells the first, and he shakes his head”. (Heidler and Simmel 1944, 246–47)<sup>8</sup>

As Baron-Cohen comments,

[t]he fact that similar results have been obtained with children as viewers... suggests that we spontaneously interpret a wide variety of moving shapes as agents driven by mental states. (1995, 38)<sup>9</sup>

Because our own agency and that of others is such a key to the way we apprehend and react to our world, we have been fascinated by stories presumably since our species could talk. Because we are such social animals, our stories are mostly about our own kind, but generously populated with other sorts of agents, animals, gods, demons, monsters, witches, fairies. Because agency has provided us with our basic model of causality (Sperber, Premack and Premack, 1995),<sup>10</sup> we have sought to explain unseen causes by agents with powers unlike our own, at least as different from ours as those of animals. Increasingly, as science weans us away from agential explanations, we need supernatural actors less and less in our stories. And, increasingly, as animals impinge on us less and less in cities, we focus on them less in our stories than did the cave-dwellers of the Aurignacian Age.

But how natural a part animals and other nonhuman agents play in our minds we can see in children’s stories, where ontogeny does recapitulate phylogeny, the individual replays the species. Every summer children are lured to the movies not only by humans or dinosaurs, but by films featuring whales or dolphins, chimps, pigs or dogs, live, animated, or muppified.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Baron-Cohen (1995, 35–37).

<sup>9</sup> Referring to Dassauer, Ulbaek, and Premack (1989).

<sup>10</sup> Esp. Premack and Premack (1995, 652–53).

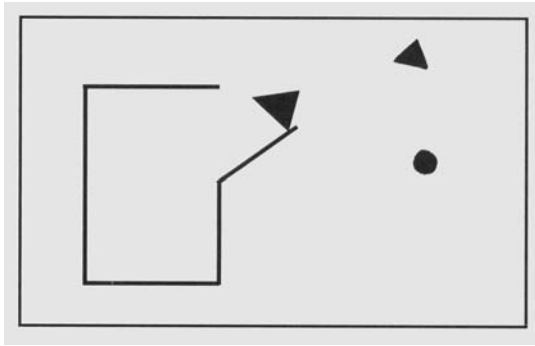


Fig. 10.3 Fritz Heidler and Marianne Simmel, *Geometric Shapes* (1944)

Young children are interested in movement, especially in their own and in what they can *make* move, and that is reflected in the ‘stories’ they tell. About the earliest that stories can be elicited from children is between the ages of two and a half and three. Typically they first seem more a series of variations on a theme than a story. Here is an example Brian Sutton-Smith recorded in a developmental study:

The monkeys  
 They went up sky  
 They fall down  
 Choo choo train in the sky  
 The train fell down in the sky  
 I fell down in the sky in the water  
 I got on my boat and my legs hurt  
 Daddy fall down in the sky.  
 (cited in Sutton-Smith 1986, 73)

Whether human, animal or inanimate, the monkeys, the train, the boy himself and his father are all treated as agents, all made subjects of the same action.

Normal children form what developmental psychologists call the “Theory of Mind Mechanism” between eighteen and forty-eight months (Baron-Cohen 1995, 56); they are able to pretend and recognize the pretense of others from about eighteen to twenty-four months, and for the next three years they spend most of their playtime in pretend play (Parker and Milbrath 1994, 111), trying out various roles for themselves and people or things around them that can be pressed into the make-believe game. Children with autism fail to develop the “Theory of Mind Mechanism”; they are incapable of pretending, and they will



not play with cuddly toys (Baron-Cohen 1995, 62). Normal children, by contrast, play pretend games with their toys *because* they can see agents behind actions and are fascinated with the boundary between human and animal, animate and inanimate, and between real and unreal; as unreal as Dr Seuss's ad hoc Screeches, Skrinkis, Schlottzes and Biffer-Baum Birds.

Children find animals so engrossing that, as Raymond Tallis remarks,

[t]he growing child acquiring a more or less coherent picture of the world encounters stories about zebras before it learns the word for custard, knows more about dinosaurs than cooks. (1995a, 233–34)

Any kind of animal can engage children's attention, the familiar and cuddly or the remote and fearsome, the puppy or the tyrannosaur, presumably because there was once an imperative need for human infants to distinguish the animals around them.<sup>11</sup> Infants naturally identify with animals—find them a natural metaphor for themselves—in that they are less equipped with language than the adult human world. They lavish love especially on animals actually or depicted like humans, and especially if they have an upright posture and childish proportions, a large head, short legs, an unsteady gait (de Waal 1996, 81).<sup>12</sup> Real bears are among the most fearsome of terrestrial carnivores, but because, like infants, they can stand on two legs or sit upright or crawl, because they have large heads and relatively short limbs and two forelegs that look like arms open for an embrace, *notional* bears remain the unrivalled animal toy. Stephen Jay Gould, who has stressed that human evolution is neotenous, that we are born as if at an earlier stage of development than other animals and retain even as adults youthful characteristics like relatively large head size, curiosity and the urge to play, has also shown how Mickey Mouse, who at first looked like an adult rat, rapidly evolved during the 1930s into a more and more neotenous, more and more childlike, creation.<sup>13</sup>

Children are fascinated with the boundaries between humans and other animals, and between animate and inanimate, not because they have serious problems distinguishing one from another—in this as in

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<sup>11</sup> Steven Pinker argues for a “biology” module in the mind (1995, 420–26), as do Scott Atran (1990) and Pascal Boyer (2001).

<sup>12</sup> The observation derives from Konrad Lorenz. Teletubbies fit the formula perfectly.

<sup>13</sup> “A Biological Homage to Mickey Mouse” in Gould (1983); see also “The Child as Man's Real Father” in Gould (1980). Francis Masse (1991) in turn pays a tribute to Gould's observations in comic form.

much else Piaget proves wrong, for very young children can discriminate between animate and inanimate in sophisticated ways (Gelman, R. 1990; Gelman, Spelke and Meck 1993)—but because they seek the pleasure of the *as if*. If what we find pleasing reflects something that once conferred an evolutionary advantage, like sweetness or sex,<sup>14</sup> we can assume that there is an evolutionary advantage in children's playfully over-attributing animacy, and in their delight in exercising their capacity to imagine different sets of roles, powers and purposes that different kinds of beings might have in different situations.

Anthropologist Pascal Boyer (1994) explains the naturalness of religious ideas, the sense of the religious that our species has found in beings with powers other than our own—whether Olympian deities or the elephant-headed Hindu god Ganesha, angels and devils or Fang *bekong*—in terms of the interaction between on the one hand our common understanding of the physical world (the persistence of objects, the visibility of bodies, etc.), without which we simply could not negotiate our environment, and on the other hand our need to violate for the attention-getting effect (the *saliency*, in Boyer's terms) of the things that transgress these rules and can therefore suggest an explanation for the not-yet-explained. Religion requires the counterintuitive, the unknown that can explain the known, that would eventually prove invaluable for the scientific imagination that evolved out of mythmaking.<sup>15</sup> But where storytelling involves play rather than explanation, particularly in children's storytelling and pretend play, and especially in such exuberant pretense as in Dr. Seuss, we can enjoy that saliency, that awareness of transgressing the boundaries, as we imagine improbable new creatures with improbable shapes and sizes and names for the sheer pleasure of the surprise, of seeing that there *could* be other ways to be. Yet when a menagerie of absurdly different species speak to one another, in Dr. Seuss or Dr. Dolittle, children also accept that as in one sense perfectly natural, since they can see that animals *do* have to take account of the purposes of other creatures around them. And at the same time as they

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<sup>14</sup> See John Tooby and Leda Cosmides (1990); Ellen Dissanayake (1988; 1995) stresses the need to explain *aesthetic* pleasure in terms of evolutionary advantage.

<sup>15</sup> Philosopher of science Karl Popper finds the beginnings of science “in poetical and religious myths, in human fantasy that tries to give an explanation of ourselves and of our world. Science develops from myth, under the challenge of rational criticism”; “what is common to art, myth, science and even pseudo-science is that they all belong to something like a creative phase which allows us to see things in a new light, and seeks to explain the everyday world by reference to hidden worlds” (1992, 226, 54).

enjoy both the unnaturalness and the naturalness of these speaking animals, children realize that these play creatures allow them to try out new situations in flexible, concentrated and memorable fashion.

The phylogenetic and ontogenetic predisposition to read not only other humans but other animals and in fact anything that moves—even plain triangles and circles—as potential agents with motives and moods similar to our own, seems to be something that narrative theory takes far too little into account. Because narratology has arisen from structuralist semiotics, from Barthes and his misreading of Saussure,<sup>16</sup> it has tended to stress literary character as a system of signs and to make it problematic that we should respond to character as if real. As William Gass puts it, discovering that the people in stories are

made of words, and merely words, is shocking, really. It's as though you had discovered that your wife were made of rubber: the bliss of all those years, the fears...from sponge. (1971, 27)

But back to Barthes: as usual in the structuralist and poststructuralist traditions, the problem is that if you begin with the premise that there is nothing prior to the conventions of the sign system, it is impossible to explain the system itself; if thought does not precede language, then the origin of language itself becomes inexplicable.<sup>17</sup> But as cognitive ethology has been showing over the last fifteen or twenty years, animals—and not just primates—can think, count, calculate even without language, as our once-derided ‘folk psychology’ has intuited all along.<sup>18</sup> And because we live in a world where many different kinds of creatures have ends and means that impinge on ours, we had to evolve to be able to take them into account.

Character in fiction arises from character in fact, in everyday language, in gossip—gossip, the mother of news, and the grandmother of history—and gossip in turn arises from character in pre-verbal life.<sup>19</sup> (Chimpanzees, for instance, clearly respond to other individual chimpanzees according to their past assessment of them as generous or

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<sup>16</sup> For Barthes's misreading of Saussure, see for instance Raymond Tallis (1995b), and Brian Vickers (1993).

<sup>17</sup> See Pinker (1995, 58 and *passim*).

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, Masson and McCarthy (1996); Rollin (1989); Griffin (2001); Hauser (2001); Bekoff, Allen, and Burghardt (2002).

<sup>19</sup> Richard J. Gerrig (1993) makes a strong case, based on psychological experiments, for the continuity of response between ordinary real-life situations and our emotional response to fiction.

selfish [de Waal, 1996, 152–53, and *passim*].) What is interesting about character in fiction is not that it is hard to explain, but that it is hard to limit, or as an academic might say, not that it is epistemologically problematic, but that it is ontologically prolific: from gods, demigods and supermutants, ghosts, mermaids, werewolves and selkies, to animals, aliens and robots.

But why do animals still play a part in serious modern adult fiction? Animals are similar to us in form and behavior (limbs and locomotion, actions and reactions, aggression and defenses) for all their difference *from us* (especially in their speechlessness) and *from each other*. They have played and still play the roles of foe, food, slave, helper, performer, friend.<sup>20</sup> They evoke awe, fear, admiration, gratitude, love, exasperation. The awe increases the more we learn, both about their differences and their similarities: we know now not just about the lion's strength and the eagle's eye but about the wolf's civility and the bat's sonar; we feel something uncanny when we hear that a female chimp can leaf through *Playgirl* to masturbate over the pictures (Hearne 1987, 35, citing Maurice Temerlin), or that an elephant in the wild can return for months and months to the site of her mother's death to caress her mother's skull,<sup>21</sup> or that a dog can have a nervous breakdown out of guilt (de Waal 1996, 106). When cultural relativism ruled anthropology, romantic love was thought to be a Western commodity; over the last decades it has been rediscovered not only through all known human cultures but through animals as different from us as Konrad Lorenz's geese or Mattie Sue Athan's cockatoos (Masson and McCarthy 1996, 115).<sup>22</sup>

Because we recognize that animals are agents as much as we are, but with powers and purposes often unlike ours, and because they remain without language, unable to explain themselves, we have attributed to them a whole range of properties. For many peoples they have become gods, for others fellow-souls, whether in zoototemism or metempsychosis, and for still others they have become *sub*-souls.

This latter option has been a major Western tradition since Heraclitus (Hayes 1994, 2), Plato (*Republic*, IX, 571c) and especially Descartes (1953, 165–66).<sup>23</sup> Living under a monotheistic and anthropocentric religion and

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<sup>20</sup> James Serpell (1996) and Manning and Serpell (1994) provide surveys of these changing roles. See also Bekoff (2002).

<sup>21</sup> The elephant Agatha, in Amboseli National Park, Kenya. See Vines (1966, 41).

<sup>22</sup> See also Marcus Nordlund (forthcoming), and Fisher (2004).

<sup>23</sup> *Discours de la méthode*, pt. 5.

in cities where we rely on mechanical rather than biological sources of power, Westerners have tended more and more to stress the *distinction* between human and animal, to define “humane” as opposed to “bestial” (Midgley 1973, 1978), and even—and in the twentieth century, too!—to despise ‘savages’ for their reverence toward animals.<sup>24</sup>

But because animals are mute, we can *project* ourselves onto them, and read our purposes in them. We can humanize them or moralize them, as in the fable and bestiary traditions (the industrious ant, the idle grasshopper). We turn them into metaphors, or nature does, because the gap of interspecies difference allows the charge of surprise at similarity that vivid metaphor requires. Mary Midgley aptly suggests the imaginative power of that difference. Cave painters depicted other animals more than humans, she proposes, because

imagery drawn from those other creatures was, for some reason, an easier and stronger language for saying what they wanted to say about their own lives than direct self-portraiture. . . . Each of us learns to speak about other people before becoming able to discuss ourselves, and when we do discuss our own inner lives, we do it largely in metaphorical terms drawn from aspects of the public, physical world. . . . Just so, it seems, when we want to say something about power, even about power in a human context, our imaginations much more readily come up with a lion or a bull than with a direct description of powerful human activity. (Cited in Manning and Serpell 1994, 191)

Because animals are agents, yet do not articulate their actions in ways that we can understand, we can allow them to stand for us all, and yet appeal to the imagination by their difference from us all. In the trains of the Paris metro a sign by the doors, a picture of an upright rabbit figure in overalls, warns that “you risk being pinched hard” if you get your fingers jammed in the door. The image catches our eye by its difference from any of us, yet because it has no obvious age, sex or race, it refers to us all.

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<sup>24</sup> A 1908 article on “Animals” in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* intones: “In the lower stages of culture, whether they be found in races which are, as a whole, below the European level, or in the uncultured portion of civilized communities, the distinction between men and animals is not adequately, if at all, recognized. . . . The savage. . . attributes to the animal a vastly more complex set of thoughts and feelings, and a much greater range of knowledge and power, than it actually possesses. . . . It is therefore small wonder that his attitude towards the animal creation is one of reverence rather than superiority” (Cited in Manning and Serpell 1994, 188–89). Contrast this with E. O. Wilson: “Only in the last moment of human history has the delusion arisen that people can flourish apart from the rest of the living world” (1992, 349); and see also Wilson’s theory of biophilia (1984), and Kellert and Wilson (1993).

Most of the time in the West our stories, like our lives, are now anthropocentric. In fiction, nowhere more so than in Jane Austen: she focuses exclusively on the interaction of human minds and mouths, leaving out as much as she can even the world of human bodies, let alone the world of animals.<sup>25</sup> Yet one of the greatest nineteenth-century novels has for its eponymous hero the largest of all animal characters. *Moby Dick* even has special chapters on whales, to stress their sheer difference from us, at the same time as it also stresses the power of human projection onto the animal world, the urgent need to read animal motives, and the difficulty of doing so. *Anna Karenina*, the greatest of all nineteenth-century novels, with the subtlest picture of human interaction, violates the canons of high nineteenth-century realism by showing an animal mind at length and in depth from within, in its extraordinarily convincing picture of Lyovin's dog Laska on a hunt with its master.

Now that our carriages have become horseless and our cities endless, we would expect the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to be even less accommodating to animal fiction than the nineteenth. Over the three thousand pages of *In Search of Lost Time*, unless I am forgetting things past, Marcel Proust pays scarcely more attention to the animal world than Austen, yet more or less simultaneously Rudyard Kipling and Jack London were taking the animal story to new heights of popularity. Perhaps because he had a corner of his mind's eye trained on the *Odyssey*, Joyce includes a dream-panther in the first chapter of *Ulysses*, real off-stage cattle in the second, an on-stage dog in the third, and introduces in the fourth the most complex of human protagonists, Leopold Bloom, in marvelous dialogue, as it were, with his cat, in a way that shows his humaneness perhaps better than anything else could—before, in the depths of the night, Bloom and Stephen Dedalus are themselves transformed into beasts in the dream-world of “Circe.” E. M. Forster in *A Passage to India* deliberately tries to open up the anthropocentric and Eurocentric world of the Western novel by encountering the otherness not only of human India but of its animal population, from a memorable elephant to an even more unforgettable wasp.

Yet outside Kipling, who was writing for children, the animals in these stories do not speak. Children's stories of course continue as

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<sup>25</sup> For that very reason, I used her as a test case to show the applicability of a Darwinian or rather evolutionary-psychology explanation of literature in “Jane, Meet Charles: Literature, Evolution and Human Nature” (1998).

much as ever to include talking animals, ogres, animated engines. *Mister Ed*, aimed as much at undemanding adults as children, could allow an animal character to talk, so long as the very point of the show was the incongruity of a dumb brute talking and thinking better than its human owners. Comics aimed even more at adults than at children—Robert Crumb’s ostrich women, Bill Watterson’s *Calvin and Hobbes*, Gary Larson’s *The Far Side*—could play with this incongruity, not only because of their comic intent but because of their ‘comics’ form: because the schematic nature of comic drawing reflects our schematic first perception of other creatures, by shape, size, posture, orientation, eyes, and voice, and invites us to project life onto these schemata.

If comics allow one kind of return of the repressed, another occurs in science fiction, where aliens and androids take the place of animals as creatures to raise eyebrows and questions. A third has recently featured in fiction written deliberately to turn the Western novel against the Western mindset and allow a place for the irrational, the magical, for spirits and animals. (It seems no accident that the man who wrote *Moby Dick* had first written, in *Typee* and *Omoo*, some of the earliest ‘pre-post-colonial’ fiction.)

Within the Western tradition, adult comics can feature animals because we are so sure of our difference from the animal, because the very idea of crossing that boundary seems so absurd. The smugness of that conviction pervades Larson’s *Far Side*. Watterson, in *Calvin and Hobbes*, played with more nerve on the mine-strewn boundaries separating adult and child, human and animal, animate and inanimate, real and imagined. Within a single frame, Peter Blegvad’s thoroughly postmodern *Leviathan* transgresses those boundaries as well as the human and the superhuman, while adding echoes of the animal tradition in comics from *Mickey Mouse* to *Calvin and Hobbes* and in human metaphor from time immemorial to today.

To know what we are, to know what it means to be human, we need to know what we are not and what others are. In Larson’s comic view, the very idea of animals being like us can only be grotesque. Science fiction explores more seriously zones between human and superhuman, human and alien, animate and inanimate, but in ways that mostly seem to presuppose that our present relations with animals on this planet are no longer problematic. In the world of fact, that is not the case, as recent science and philosophy show. In the words of primatologist Frans de Waal, “[t]here is no need to launch probes into space in order



Fig. 10.4 *Leviathan* © Peter Blegvad, 1994)



to compare ourselves with other intelligent life: there is plenty of intelligent life down here” (de Waal 1996, 66).

If Darwin threw our relation to the rest of the animal kingdom into question, we rapidly revised his findings to redraw the straggly bush of evolution as a towering fir, tapering to a peak, or a ladder with us at the top.<sup>26</sup> Darwin’s book *The Descent of Man* evolved into the British television series *The Ascent of Man*. In the same spirit of confidence in human achievement, in science and technology, the positivists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries rejected ‘anthropomorphism’ in studying animal behavior, declaring unscientific our age-old tendency to read animals in mentalistic terms (White 2005, 60–1). Animal behavior would be measured in laboratories and explained not in ‘proximate’ terms but in ‘functional’ ones: not as the actions of agents, but as the passive products of evolution, as the workings of survival machines.

Slowly over the last forty years, but with gathering momentum, science has begun to question its refusal to treat animals as if they could feel or think. The work of field naturalists like Jane Goodall (1988; 1986) and Cynthia Moss (1988), the animal language movement (chimpanzees, orangutans and gorillas have all been taught simple forms of language), and the internal contradictions and cruelties of behaviorist animal experimentation have led to the recent rise of cognitive ethology. Scientists, along with philosophers like Peter Singer (Singer [1990]; Regan and Singer [1999]; Cavalieri and Singer [1993]), Mary Midgley (1973; 1978; 1983; 1994) and Bernard Rollin (1989; 1992), have spurred the animal rights movement’s protests against heartless laboratory experiment and factory farming, the Great Ape project’s declaration of the rights of all primates (Cavalieri and Singer 1993), and the impending taxonomic reclassification of chimpanzees and gorillas as part of the genus *homo* (reported in *The New Zealand Herald*, 4 May 1996).

In one of the most celebrated philosophical pieces of the last quarter-century, Thomas Nagel asked in 1974 “What Is It Like To Be A Bat?” and concluded that we could never know.<sup>27</sup> The discovery of bat sonar was then new, but Donald Griffin, its discoverer, would two years later publish *The Question of Animal Awareness: Evolutionary Continuity*

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<sup>26</sup> See Gould, “Bushes and Ladders in Human Evolution,” in *Ever Since Darwin* (1980).

<sup>27</sup> Ch. 12 of Nagel (1979).

of *Mental Experience* (1981) and help to change the attitude that animal consciousness was inexistent or inaccessible. Like the English-speaker abroad, we humans as a species had tended to expect everybody to speak our language, and in the days of Aesop and Physiologus, we interpreted animals as if they did. As a result we often interpreted them badly, but the opponents of anthropomorphism who treated animals as if they had no minds because they had no human languages had hideously over-corrected. Yet even English-speakers, apparently, can learn other languages, and because we humans have the language instinct, we can to some extent learn the proto-language of other species, as Karl von Frisch did with bees, Konrad Lorenz with geese, Jane Goodall with chimpanzees, Dian Fossey with gorillas and Monty Roberts with horses.<sup>28</sup>

Fiction of the past and present, sensing the uncertainty of our relation to other animals, has often used that uncertainty to ask us how we define ourselves.<sup>29</sup> It seems no accident that it was not long after the late seventeenth century, when Descartes made his complacent and absolute distinction between humans and 'languageless', 'soulless' animals that Jonathan Swift, early in the eighteenth century, invented his Yahoos and Houyhnhnms, his grunting, 'bestial' humans and eloquently rational horses. In the nineteenth century H. G. Wells in *The Island of Dr Moreau* simultaneously questioned animal experimentation and asked what is the relation between human and animal and between evolution and design. In the twentieth century no one has challenged our sense of purpose and definition more deeply than Kafka, in stories like *The Metamorphosis*, *Investigations of a Dog*, and *The Burrow*, and since Kafka the theme has been kept alive by writers like George Orwell, Jean Cocteau, Eugène Ionesco, Julio Cortázar, Russell Hoban, and Angela Carter; right up to, in recent years, John Hawkes's *The Frog*, Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*, Will Self's *Great Apes*, and Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*.

Perhaps the most interesting narratives to explore the human-animal border are those which question the way we habitually define

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<sup>28</sup> For Roberts, see the television documentary *Monty Roberts: A Real Horse Whisperer* (1997) and Monty Roberts, Lawrence Scanlan and Lucy Grealey, *The Man Who Listens to Horses* (1997).

<sup>29</sup> Marina Warner writes that the various versions of "The Beauty and the Beast" enclose "a microscopic history of re-evaluated relations between humanity and animals, and different answers to the question, who is the beast, who is the brute?" (1994, xxi).

ourselves by excluding others on the basis of, say, gender, race, class or creed. Shakespeare in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and Art Spiegelman in the late twentieth century offer some of the finest examples.

Shakespeare treats the theme in a comic vein in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595). Ovid has his tongue in his cheek when he shows the gods intervening to metamorphose his human figures into animals. Shakespeare, an avid Ovidian, parodies the Greeks much more radically. In place of Zeus-as-animal copulating with a woman, he turns Bottom into an ass and has him loved by the Queen of the Fairies. But he inverts things still more fundamentally. Bottom is a workman, pointedly at the bottom of the social hierarchy. When he is degraded even further into an ass, and becomes the gross, hairy lover of the ethereal fairy queen, against all expectation he proves to have more sense, less blind desire and more natural delicacy than the noble young lovers of whom we presumed he would be only a crasser parody. In this respect he may derive from the Bible story of Balaam's ass (Num. 22: 22–23 AV), the lowly image of folly who turns out to be wiser than his master and can not only talk with but see angels.

The most explosively suggestive of all literary explorations of the way we represent and demarcate our kind is Caliban. Ever since it was written, *The Tempest* (1611–12) has posed the question “What is Caliban like?”—and much more recently we have also realized Shakespeare has also been asking all along “What is it like to be a Caliban?”

Prospero's first reference to Caliban could not be clearer about his status, and yet it could not be more misleading: he is human, but it sounds as if he is not:

Then was this island—  
Save for the son that she did litter here,  
A freckled whelp, hag-born—not honour'd with  
A human shape. (1.2.281–84)

No human shape on the island, *except for* Caliban: on the one hand, by unmistakable inference, Caliban is human; yet on the other he is “littered,” he is a “whelp,” and “hag-born,” and the speech ends, after introducing him, with the phrase “not honour'd with/A human shape,” so that it is almost as likely that we will mishear the final words as qualifying Caliban rather than hear them correctly as describing the island. Prospero first addresses him as “slave! Caliban! Thou earth, thou!... thou tortoise” (1.2.315–318), and he will be repeatedly called

“fish” and “monster” (2.2.25–35). He has been represented on stage and in art as all these things. He has been played as half-man, half-fish. He has been played by an actor made up as black when seen in one profile and white from the others. He has been a man and a sub-human monster.

Shakespeare creates Caliban as the Other to everyone in the play, savage to Prospero’s sage, earth to Ariel’s airiness, unwilling pupil to Miranda’s willing one, rapist to Ferdinand’s swift but seemingly wooer, and so on. He defines being human by his place at the margin: he cannot seriously be denied humanity, but he cannot be assimilated easily into any human order. How can we allow him his place and allow him his difference? Where and how do we draw the line of what we include as fully human, of what we acknowledge ours?

Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* (1986; 1991b) tells the story of his parents’ survival of Auschwitz in comic-book form, and presents Jews as mice, Germans as cats, Poles as pigs, and the few Americans as dogs, French as frogs, Swedes as reindeers. As his epigraph, he quotes Hitler’s “The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human.” In part, *Maus* is an entirely successful attempt to have comics as a mode treated seriously, and its initial impetus was Spiegelman’s noticing the similarity between Mickey Mouse’s face and Al Jolson in blackface for *The Jazz Singer* (1927). He wanted to turn that idea into a comic that would comment on American racism against blacks, but realized he lived too far from the black world. On the other hand his own parents’ background was more than close enough: his mother had committed suicide when he was in his twenties, and that in turn had led to his own suicide attempt. Remembering that the Zyklon B deployed in the gas chambers was a pesticide used on mice, he hit on a different kind of mouse metaphor for race.

But it took him a long time to settle on his style. In a first three-page version of the story, drawn in 1973, the mice were detailed, individualized, not plumply neotenous like Mickey Mouse, but still almost sentimental in their soulfulness. In his final version the mice are all uniformly thin, frail, vulnerable and almost featureless and identical, as if seen through German eyes, yet Spiegelman subtly ensures that we never confuse one of his large cast of Jews with another, even when there are fourteen in the action in the one scene. In an interview Spiegelman commented that “using animals allows you to defamiliarize the events, to reinhabit them in a fresh way because they are coming to you in language you are not used to hearing” (1993, 54).

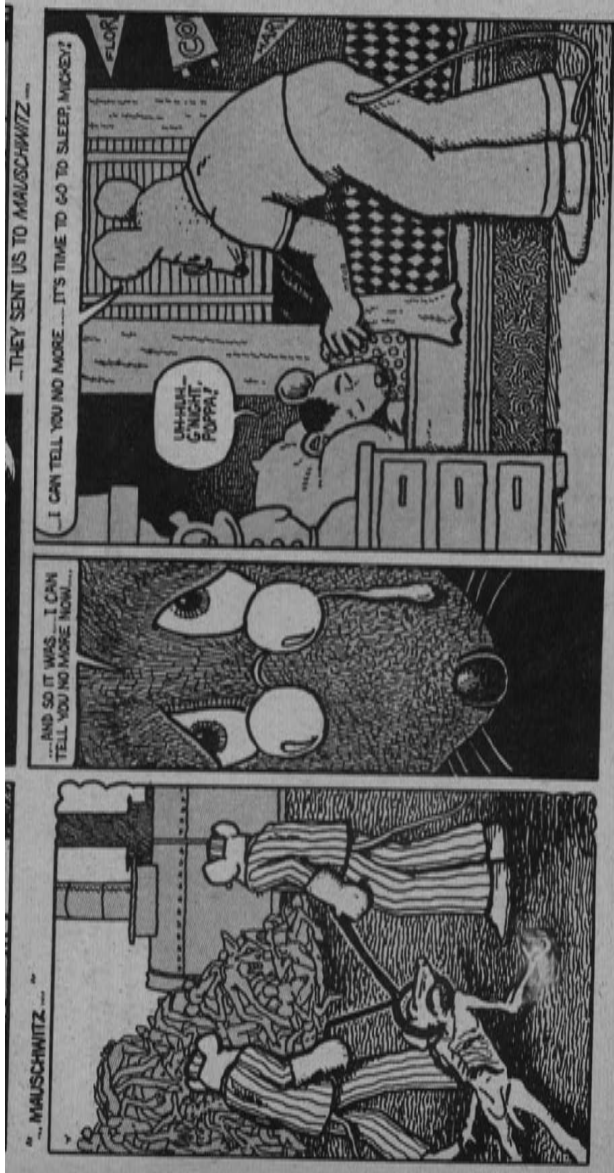


Fig 10.5 *Maus* (© Art Spiegelman, 1986)

The anthropomorphism offers the advantage of all stories involving speaking animals: it defamiliarizes, it flips the safety catch of the imagination. Here it even allows a constant play of humor, which, far from diminishing the horror of the story, stops us from glazing over into numbness. But Spiegelman also observed that the mouse metaphor was “like a snake skin, to be shucked off as quickly as possible” (in Ron Mann’s film *Comic Book Confidential* [1988], cited in Witek [1989], 112).<sup>30</sup> It allows us, as all animal stories do, to project ourselves onto the neutral figures of the animals. Yet at the same time it does not deny the individuality of the Jewish protagonists, who if they look identical in face and physique are pointedly distinguished in posture, dress, speech and personality. And although they are animals, their mousiness is always transparent: they are so human in all their postures and movements—quite unlike the cute big baby Mickey Mouse—that they undermine the racial metaphor, the Nazi equation of Jews with vermin. The only time they are drawn with tails is when they are out in the street in Polish towns, wearing pig masks—in other words, in the hope of passing as Poles—and afraid of being noticed as Jews.

When we were young, as individuals and as a species, we made stories about people *and* animals *and* things all acting as agents. As adults, especially in the West, we tend to drop the stories about *things*, but even when we are acting grown up, we continue privately to construct stories about the animals we deal with, even if only as pets. Recently, in trying to be super-adult, some have tried to rule out such stories altogether, to treat animals and their behavior as the passive product of evolutionary forces. (In a similar attempt at sophistication, humans too have been denied agency and viewed as response machines in behaviorism or as constructs of cultural fields in much poststructuralist theory.)<sup>31</sup> But we return, we have to return, to stories with people and with animals, too, as agents.

As a species we are both very confident of ourselves and our difference from others and deeply unsure. We have evolved to communicate in richly satisfying ways with other members of our own species, and yet we are not quite satisfied; we are profoundly stirred by the idea of interacting with creatures outside our species, with extraterrestrials,

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. also Spiegelmann: “These metaphors, which are meant to self-destruct in my book” (1991a, 98).

<sup>31</sup> See for instance Vickers (1993), Richard Levin (1990) and Francis-Noel Thomas (1992).



Fig. 10.6 “*Maus*. And So The Train Man” (© Art Spiegelman, 1986)



Fig. 10.7 *Maus*. “Maybe We Should Try...” (© Art Spiegelman, 1986)

nowadays, but also still with animals, with the new, dolphins and chimpanzees, as well as with the immemorial, with horses and dogs, with the domestic alien, the other on the hearth. Are we the family upstairs, or do we have neighbors above us, or below us, or on our own story?



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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### PIGS, PEOPLE AND PIGOONS

Helen Tiffin

#### *Pig and Long Pig*

Human flesh tastes like pork, hence the term ‘long pig’ for human meat cuts, the ‘long’ denoting the difference between the limb lengths of pig and human. Although there are few ‘first hand’ accounts of the flavor of human flesh, its similarity in texture and taste to that of pork seems generally agreed upon. This is not surprising given our anatomical and physiological congruences. To the extent, too, that ‘we are what we eat’, our shared food preferences might be expected to result in not dissimilar meat.

Connections between carnivorousness and cannibalism have always been uneasy ones. For most Hindus, Buddhists, growing numbers of Westerners and in some traditional agricultural societies, the eating of all flesh is abhorrent; and the raising and killing of animals (or humans) for the specific purpose of eating or eviscerating them, particularly so. Nonetheless, the majority of people in so-called Western societies routinely accept the eating of animals, and take for granted their horror at the thought of *their* being eaten either by other humans or by those they regard collectively as ‘animals’. Considering themselves the top predators of the terrestrial food chain (and of the ocean in coastal areas), most Western humans have seen it as their right to kill and eat other species, and they regard any violation of that order as ‘unnatural’. The killing or mauling of people by, for instance, one of the few Bengal tigers left on earth, or the ‘taking’ of a surfer by a shark receive wide media coverage and evoke responses of fear and horror wholly incommensurable with the (usually isolated) human death. Yet there is a particularly interesting paradox to be observed in the attitudes of human survivors of predator attacks. Rodney Fox and Val Plumwood, ‘attacked’ by, respectively, a great white shark and a crocodile, became exponents of animal conservation, devoting their lives, in the case of Rodney Fox, to preservation of the very animal who injured him (see

Fox), while Val Plumwood has become one of the most prominent conservationist philosophers of our time (see Plumwood 2002).

Unlike Plumwood and Fox, however, most modern day Westerners rarely see 'real' animals at all, let alone in the wild, and while a substantial number may keep animal pets on whom they rely for comfort and support, their most regular encounters with animals are through representation (often in the form of stereotype) and through consumption of their flesh. We depend on 'animals' for much else as well, and on the collective category of 'animal' itself for our self-definition. Although we sometimes refer to ourselves as animals, we construct our so-called humanity against the animal and the animalistic. Yet our selective group of an animal other is a peculiar one: there is, after all, a far greater distance in terms of form, anatomy, physiology and function between a bee and a pig than between a pig and a human, although humans use both bee and pig to sustain their lives. Nevertheless, we continue to construct the so-called 'species boundary' which divides 'us' and 'them' *between* humans and pigs; not pigs and bees.

Aside from the primates, pigs are regarded by those who have observed or studied their behavior as the most intelligent of species. Like us they are omnivores and share many of our food preferences, choosing mangoes over broccoli (Masson 2003, 20) and regarding truffles as a gourmet treat. (It is they, and not we, who have the skill to find them). Their favorite foods are nuts and fruit, together with tuberous roots (such as yam) and dairy products when these are fed to them. They will, like us, eat meat and have been, on rare occasions, known to consume human flesh; by contrast, and notwithstanding widespread religious prohibitions against the eating of pork and other pig 'products', humans worldwide consume enormous quantities of pig flesh in the form of bacon, ham, pork and even pig heads and 'pig's trotters'. The pig's skin (easily sunburnt like ours) is eaten as 'crackling' and they 'supply us' (a euphemism implying consent) with other bodily parts which we take into ourselves, though not necessarily through ingestion and digestion. Heart valves and brain *dura mata* from pigs are used to prolong human lives, while pigs are currently being bred to supply humans with replacement organs because, again, aside from the primates, their physiology, especially their hormonal and immune systems, are similar to ours. The bio-engineering that facilitates the genetic alteration of pig immune systems to ensure that the implantation of their organs into our bodies is 'successful' has also resulted in a spin-off, whereby

their flesh is being ‘reconstructed’ to contain omega-3 fatty acids (a substance traditionally found in seafood) for the culinary benefit of those humans allergic to marine organisms (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 2006).

Since pigs are so like us in terms of anatomical and physiological composition, it is unsurprising that we also share emotional responses, such as losing weight under severe stress, and expressing contentment and happiness when, in the case of pigs, being allowed to range free at farm animal rescue centers or sanctuaries. Humans and pigs abhor close confinement and pigs behave aberrantly when incarcerated in factories unless sedated or genetically altered to facilitate docility. Like humans they experience fear, and sometimes demonstrate great ingenuity in escaping their certain slaughter. They over-eat when depressed, though are rarely ‘greedy’ (in spite of the stereotypical representation) in free range situations even where unlimited food is available (Scully 2002, 269–77). And as Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson has demonstrated, they possess what we call a spiritual side in relation to the earth and the universe around them (2003, 50–1). Their screams when they are being physically tortured, as for instance in being singed of hair before being butchered—a practice in some cultures—are so like those of humans that many people who have heard the sound no longer eat the flesh of pigs. They make loyal and affectionate pets and have been known (like the fictional Babe [*Babe* 1995]) to fulfill the roles of dogs, finding ways to save their human captors by bringing help when they know something is radically wrong. We study their individual and social behaviors to learn about ourselves, and we addict them to alcohol to experiment with cures for forms of diabetes caused by our own alcohol abuse. They have traditionally been raised successfully on human milk in some Papuan communities (see Clutton-Brock 1999, 97–8).

Although anatomically, physiologically, psychologically and even socially, we ‘share’ so much with pigs, we raise them in increasingly appalling conditions for the purpose of killing them and experimenting on them so that, whether by ingestion or by surgery, we can take them into our fleshy substance. Although the ultimate ‘cannibalistic’ horrors of European explorers—the imperfect sight of a cut of meat being roasted on the fire or the ‘grisly remains’ hanging in a string basket from the roof of a dark ‘native’ hut—are now believed more often to have been pig rather than long pig, the Western obsession with its apparently ‘cannibal’ others still facilitated the torture, killing

and enslavement of these apparently 'savage' flesh eaters. From the self-righteous Western viewpoint, such wholesale animal slaughter and genocide was justified. Eating people (or being suspected of so doing) was so much worse than torture or murder, exiling the accused to the category of 'animals', although, paradoxically, the animal majorities of the earth are vegetarian.

The fear of being eaten, stronger than the fear of death itself, has complex origins. But a part of that complex is the unsettling violation of what we regard as the order of things. As top predators we eat 'other' animals; they should not eat us. Cannibalism radically disturbs the 'natural', in particular destabilizing the imaginary line of the species boundary, especially in conjunction with the closely related and apparently inviolate division between what we have come to consider the edible and the inedible. We feel that we are meant to be the flesh consumers, not the consumed. Part of the horror of cannibalism, as Maggie Kilgour notes, is that it is where

the body is made symbolic, the literal the figurative, the human reduced to mere matter. In fact cannibalism involves both the *establishing* of absolute difference, the opposites of eater and eaten, and the *dissolution* of that difference, through the act of incorporation which identifies them and makes the two one. (1990, 7)

If the idea of the cannibal still haunts the human imagination it does so today in a form different from that feared by explorers and Empire adventurers. Montaigne in "On Cannibals" ([1580] 1958) was one of the first writers to turn the West's image of the savage cannibal/'animal' back on itself. European 'civilization' had in fact begun to 'eat up' the rest of the world; to destroy (in most cases irretrievably) those societies it had banished to the animal side of the species divide whence, in Derrida's phrase, a "non-criminal putting to death" (1994, 278) had generally resulted. "In prying so narrowly into their [the cannibals'] faults we are in ours," Montaigne wrote.

I think there is more barbarism in eating men alive, than to feed upon them being dead; to mangle by tortures and torment a body full of lively sense, to roast him in pieces, to make dogges and swine to gnaw and teare him in mammoekes...than to roast and eat him after he is dead. (Montaigne 1958, 112)

Increasingly, such metaphoric inversions have become more common, less as condemnation of colonialist invasion practices than as a figuration



of abuses of all kinds, and of late capitalist consumerism in particular. Cannibalism thus remains an important trope today, because, as Kilgour notes,

anthropological, New Historicist, post-colonial and feminist analyses of literature and society [are] concerned with undoing the myths through which the modern world has built itself on the blood and bones of others. (1998, 241)

In Peter Greenaway's 1989 film, *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover*, the cannibal scene takes place in a fashionable French restaurant, not on a Caribbean or Pacific island or even in "what is left of the Amazonian forest" when "a small plane goes down . . . and the pilot eats the passengers or vice versa" (Greenaway, cited in Bartolovich 1998, 205). Elizabethan in its revenge plot, this modern representation of cannibalism is a critique of unbridled capitalist consumption:

I wanted to use cannibalism not only as a literal event but in the metaphorical sense, that in the consumer society, once we've stuffed the whole world into our mouths, ultimately we'll end up eating ourselves. The film is intended as an allegorical consideration of what cannibalism means, as well as being a literal event. (Greenaway, cited in Bartolovich 1998, 205)

Neither Kilgour nor Greenaway refer to animals. The "blood and bones of others" are those of humans, though of those who have been designated as 'animal'. And Greenaway's warning about consumer capitalism is that we will, eventually, by stuffing "the whole world into our mouths," destroy ourselves. The modern uses of the 'cannibal complex' thus become a potent reminder of our vulnerability, even potential edibility; of our inevitable inclusion in the lowest common denominator of all animals, that is, flesh.

Yet, the (very rare) reported occurrences of cannibalism (like those of shark 'attacks') evoke a horror and fear entirely incommensurate with the human damage caused. Indeed, the degree to which cannibalism has ever been a widespread custom, or even a sporadic ritual, remains unclear. In his controversial *The Man-Eating Myth*, William Arens (1979) investigated accounts by Europeans of anthropophagy and concluded that there was little *direct* evidence to support cannibal practice in non-European cultures, past or present. Instead, Arens asserted it was the *idea of the cannibal* rather than the act of eating people which is the common phenomenon, because cannibalism is such an important aspect of "cultural-boundary construction and maintenance" (1979, 145).

The significant question, then, is not why people eat human flesh, but why one group invariably assumes that others do. Accounting for an overall system of thought, rather than an observable custom, becomes the issue. (Arens 1979, 139)<sup>1</sup>

While the charge of cannibalism still serves and has served as a primary boundary marker between ‘civilized’ and ‘savage’ humans, its instrumental significance—that is, the political uses to which the charge has been put—have changed over time. In the age of European imperial expansion the accusation of cannibalism was a very useful weapon in the grab for extra-European territory, facilitating arguments in favor of the necessity for the intervention of the European powers and their ‘civilizing missions’ (read: the dispossession and slaughter of other ‘animals’ who stood in the way of European progress). But this useful boundary between ‘civilized’ and ‘savage’ peoples thus serves much the same symbolic and instrumental purpose as that between ‘human’ and ‘animal’. As Cary Wolfe (2003) argues, citing Jacques Derrida and Georges Bataille, the humanist concepts that underlie “Western subjectivity and sociality as such” are formatively dependent on “the discourse of species” and on the “*institution* of speciesism,”

an institution that relies on the tacit agreement that the full transcendence of the “human” requires the sacrifice of the “animal” and the animalistic, which in turn makes possible a symbolic economy in which we can engage in what Derrida will call a “non-criminal putting to death” of other *humans* as well by marking *them* as animal. (6, original italics)

The effectiveness of this “discourse of species” continues Wolfe, is that “when applied to social others of whatever sort” it can rely

upon the taking for granted of the *institution* of speciesism—that is, upon the ethical acceptability of the systematic, institutionalized ‘noncriminal putting to death’ of animals based solely on their species. (2003, 7)

While we, particularly in the West, thus reap all the material benefits of this ‘enabling’ species boundary, we are also dependent on it for the category which establishes our (usually unquestioned) human status; our belief in species exceptionalism. The ‘human’ is that which is not ‘animal’.

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<sup>1</sup> Arens’s controversial conclusions about the reality and meaning of cannibalism in human culture are still the subject of vigorous debate among anthropologists; see for example Barbara Creed and Jeanette Hoorn (2001) and Gananath Obeyesekere (2005).

Although we are sometimes prepared to acknowledge that we are anatomically and physiologically animals, our self definition and our way(s) of operating in the world constitute a continual and rigorously guarded denial of it. Where possible we have shifted the bases of obdurate difference between animal and human to non-anatomical and physiological traits such as speech, tool use, consciousness, self-consciousness and intelligence (as measured by our self-serving concept of it). As these 'basic differences' between us and those we constitute as animals are challenged or eroded, we have elaborated these traits in terms of quantity rather than in kind. Increasingly, however, we are left with only the 'might is right' justification for our treatment of animal (and human) others and/or with the underlying and culturally specific distinctions between the edible and the inedible.

In the West we continue to breed and raise what were once referred to as 'farm' animals for the express purpose of killing and eating them. For us this is an apparently "non-criminal putting to death"; but as Nick Fiddes (1991) and others have noted, the majority of human urbanites (the largest proportion of meat consumers) do not wish to witness or even think about the processes of such 'putting to death'. (It is not just for health reasons that abattoirs are situated well away from city centers and suburbs.) While we may be quite comfortable with eating pork, pork sausages, ham, bacon, 'spare ribs' and prosciutto—the most common forms of treated dead pig we consume—we generally do not want to be reminded of the living animal or, especially, the conditions of its suffering in being raised and slaughtered. To 'see' a ham as the leg chopped from a bleeding, suffering and dying pig would be upsetting to so many meat consumers that 'the industry' might be imperiled. And in English at least, our language allows us to by-pass the obvious. Pork, bacon, ham, the misleading 'spare ribs', spare us the vision of the terror, pain and blood of the once living being with whom we share so many anatomical and temperamental traits. Between the pig and our plate lies the necessarily hidden 'aporia' of the abattoir, into which, for our comfort, any potential for sympathetic similarity can be voided; 'a pig' disappears to become pork and ham which, in time, is reconstituted as 'long pig', whose subsequent consumption by pigs or humans horrifies us to an extraordinary degree.

*Disappearing Acts*

The hiding away of factory farms and abattoirs are not the only means by which we excise 'meat-producing' animals from our consciousness and consciences. Much of our cultural apparatus is directed towards creating or facilitating animal invisibility; converting their potentially disturbing presences into more easily ignored absences. With what is often termed the increasing 'mechanization of the meat industry', so-called farm animals have been returned to a Cartesian dystopia in which they are represented as mere automata; 'raw material' for the production of meat. This view, though the norm in the business of large scale factory farming, is not, however, one shared by many consumers. In general, meat is sold in such a way as to occlude its source. At point of sale, at least to urban middle class customers, 'meat' (*not* found in an 'animal flesh section' in supermarkets) is packaged as attractively as possible and frequently placed on a background of fringed green paper, a bucolic (and comforting) allusion to the grassy fields in which the 'absent' animal apparently once browsed. A more direct representation of the pig's life-before-meat is found less often in supermarkets than on restaurant billboards or window displays in delicatessens and butcher shops. Here the 'animal' is represented before its murder into meat as having enjoyed an open air life of ease and freedom. Pigs roll on the grass; lambs gambol on a greensward against a blue sky, or smiling cows and pigs appear to be collusively enticing customers to eat them—less genetically modified versions of the apparently amiable cow in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (Adams 1996). The 'product' in these representations has had a good life—on the classic farm of our childhood imagination—and being consumed as meat is its 'natural' and accepted fate. These representations in effect help us enact the disappearance of the 'real' animal as living being and encourage us to imagine that pigs-before-meat have led lives akin to the representations of farm life we read as children. Real factory 'farming' conditions are neither represented nor alluded to.

Although pigs, for instance, are regarded as so radically different from humans as to allow their continued enslavement and slaughter (a process we refer to as 'meat production'), it is in one sense they who 'produce' us; their 'meat' contributing to the construction of our flesh. But the literal amalgamation of their bios with ours, is made possible only because our symbolic construction of them as categorically 'other' enables their literal rendition into our 'same'. Through

the vehicle of 'meat', the 'farm animal' literally disappears into the substance of the human; pig is incorporated as long pig, its identity thus doubly erased.

Our unquestioning acceptance of the literal disappearance of the (potentially edible) animal into the (inedible) human is, however, a learned response; an essential part of the child's socialization into adult culture. Children generally regard animals as co-beings until taught the rules of anthropocentrism; and many biographies and fictions attest to the traumatic induction into adulthood (the passage from 'innocence' to 'experience') through a forced recognition of the edibility of former animal companions.<sup>2</sup> It is no coincidence that such lessons in flesh consumption are accompanied by the acquisition of more 'sophisticated' reading or listening skills whereby the presence of the animal in *narrative* is also denied, its place usurped by the human. Children learn that the animals they read about are 'really' humans in disguise; that the *Little Red Hen* is really about human social co-operation; that *The Crow and the Pitcher* is not about bird intelligence at all, but teaches us how we can and should exercise our ingenuity when faced with an apparently insurmountable problem. After childhood, animals (pets are exceptions) exist largely in absentia; "absent referents," as Carol Adams (1990) terms it, at the dining table where they are now 'just meat', and, just as significantly, in our readings of various texts.

The classic example of the disappearance of animals as characters in their own right is the traditional reading of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* ([1945] 1989). Orwell's main characters are animals and although humans and the human world occasionally intrude, the characters and the action concern a farm rebellion led by a pig, Napoleon, against the animals' enslavement and exploitation. But Orwell's novel, so critics have generally argued, is 'really' about the persistence of privileged elites even under socialist regimes (some animals are always "more equal" than others) and in particular the novel offers a stringent critique of Russian communism under Stalin. Like human/animal cartoons, these allegories depend on the constant interplay of difference and similarity for their effect; but such critiques or satires can only work if the similarities between human and animal societies on which it draws are underpinned by a taken-for-granted assumption of radical difference.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, James Serpell (1999), Olin Eugene Myers Jr. (1996 and 1999), and Kathleen R. Johnson (1996).

Animal allegories (particularly those for adults) work because the species boundary between us and ‘other animals’ is assumed to be an obvious and ‘natural’ one, even if the basis of the text seems to be human/animal similitude.

Political cartoons depicting, for instance, politicians with their ‘snouts in the trough’ do not need to mention pigs at all. But they draw on a general acceptance of human stereotypes of pigs as greedy and dirty (and thus, metaphorically, corrupt) to effect the satire. Here our popular notions of pigs—which in any case have little to do with the behavior or condition of pigs in the wild, that is, outside our incarceration of them—are re-projected onto the politicians in order to critique human behavior. Once again in Carol Adams’ resonant phrase, the animal becomes—as it does on our plates—the “absent referent.”

Animals of course ‘appear’ before us each day in discourses other than cartoon, fiction, allegory or satire. But in the majority of these they are also ‘absent’, if in different ways. In scientific discourse the animal becomes again either a human surrogate (as it does in medical, psychological and sociological research) or, in those disciplines such as biology and ecology where the focus is allegedly on animals (and/or animal behavior and habitats), the individual animal is considered as only part of a species to be rescued or culled depending on its place in human plans and paradigms. While the Western episteme is still driven by the ideologies of the Enlightenment (with its reification of human reason), scientific discourse in particular demands, in its approaches and methods, an absence of emotional involvement and minimal recognition of interchange between observer and observed (see Boyd, in this volume). *Popular* scientific representations of animals are, however, not so confined, and the evocation of awe and appreciation for animals is often an essential part of such presentations. But like the disciplines of science, popular wildlife television programs, dominated as they so often are by photographic opportunities, are also wary of anthropomorphism while remaining, inevitably, anthropocentric in their conceptions. Biological science’s determination to eschew the anthropomorphic, while laudable in many ways, comes at both a political and interpretive cost. While it ostensibly prohibits the observer from projecting, quite inappropriately, human motivations, actions and emotions onto other animals, it also inhibits the exercise of what J. M. Coetzee’s character Elizabeth Costello terms “the sympathetic imagination” (2003, 80). We must learn to *value* animals equally with us while remaining acutely aware of their *differences* from us. The exercise of “the sympathetic

imagination” in animal observation, while it may seem to share with allegory and experimental science a reading through the animal only to arrive again at the human, does however have the potential to work in the opposite direction—reading through humans to bring the (absent) animal into presence.

While the Western animal has been spirited away by our representations and practices to become a mere mirror of ourselves or a ‘product’ we consume, we have at the same time removed ourselves from the category of animal. Not only has the ‘real’ pig or animal disappeared, we have also removed the ‘animal’ and the animalistic from us, another striking disposal of ‘the animal’.

### *Flesh Dress and Representation*

While animal rights activism has had a long history, it is arguably in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries that concern for animals and, in particular, a recognition of their powers and complexities, together with our ultimate dependence on them (for material, ecological and emotional/spiritual well being) is energizing epistemological and ontological interrogation of the category of the animal across a broad range of disciplines. In bringing animals as co-sharers of the planet to our attention again, representation plays a key role. As Steve Baker notes, since modern urban humans are more familiar with animals in representation than in “the real,” the “representational, symbolic and rhetorical uses of the animal must be understood to carry as much conceptual weight as any idea we may have of the ‘real’ animal” (2001, 10).

Rethinking our epistemologies and in particular our habits of interpretation is thus crucial. Once again an interesting case is provided by Orwell’s classic *Animal Farm* and Canadian novelist Timothy Findley’s more recent *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (1984). Virtually all interpretations of Orwell’s work read *through* the ‘animal’ characters to derive a political and satirical message about the inability of humans to form functioning societies without the rapid evolution of pernicious hierarchies. But Orwell, as Masson has pointed out, offers a rather different impetus and trajectory for *Animal Farm* from that emphasized by his critics:

Literary critics and ordinary readers alike have seen his tale of farm animals as merely a device, an engine for the story. Orwell however saw it in another light, explaining in a preface written for the Ukrainian

translation, that the story came to him when he saw a little boy, perhaps ten years old, abusing a carthorse. He was struck with the force of a revelation “that men exploit animals in much the same way as the rich exploit the proletariat”. He went on to explain that he turned Marx’s fundamental insight on its head: “I proceed to analyze Marx’s theory from the animals’ point of view. To them it was clear that the concept of a class struggle between humans was pure illusion, since whenever it was necessary to exploit animals, all humans united against them: *the true struggle is between animals and humans.*” (Masson 2003, 9)<sup>3</sup>

Masson comments that

[C]onsidering that Orwell’s small book is considered the greatest statement ever written about revolution, it is astonishing that Orwell’s own revolutionary comment about humans and animals has been effaced from the public record! (2003, 239 n. 4)

Timothy Findley’s *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (1984) re-writes the story of Noah and the Great Flood from the points of view of the animals and Mrs. Noah (Mrs. Noyes, in Findley’s version). The Biblical account of salvation here becomes, in Findley’s retelling, a saga of the institutionalization of a ruthless patriarchal dominance of animals and women and the consequent closing off of imaginative and empathetic possibilities of equality amongst all living beings. By challenging one of the key Western documents of species boundary establishment and animal/human separation, Findley draws attention to the way(s) in which our attitudes towards animals are *constructed* and contingent, not ‘natural’ or universally accepted. *Not Wanted on the Voyage* has rightly been read as one of the greatest feminist works of the twentieth century, as an allegory of sexual and national ambivalence demonstrating the resistance androgyny poses to authoritarianism, and as an allegorisation of the ways in which the West came to conquer and control other human societies, annihilating in the process diverse epistemologies and ontologies.<sup>4</sup> Curiously, however, it is only recently that critics have begun to read it as being *about* human/animal relations; as an exploration of the processes by which the species boundary, and concomitant human dominances, have been held in place, at least in part, through Biblical accounts of Noah’s ark. *Not Wanted on the Voyage* exposes that fundamental

<sup>3</sup> Citing George Orwell (1989, 112); Masson’s emphasis.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989), Lamont-Stewart (1997), Brydon (1998), Dickinson (1998), Pearson (1999).



separation and maintenance of the divide as a product of human self interest, not apparently divine fiat (Nielsen 1998, Tiffin 2001).

This is not to argue that other interpretations of either *Animal Farm* or *Not Wanted on the Voyage* are illegitimate or unimportant. But the almost exclusive focus on the human in the interpretations of these novels draws attention to our habitual allegorizing of stories we take to be only ‘ostensibly’ about animals; our blindness to their actual presences as co-beings on the planet; and our determined conversions of their presences into absence.

In attending to the animal presence in such narratives, and thus opening the possibility of interrogating and dismantling the so-called ‘species boundary’, the cannibal complex is of particular importance, especially in conjunction with the division between ‘food’ and the inedible. Not only is the boundary between flesh eaters (of animals) and flesh eaters (of humans) exposed as arbitrary (and socially and historically contingent) but that which separates animals and humans as equally so. Thus, in the establishment of the ongoing rule of patriarchal ‘reason’, Noah/Noyes in Findley’s novel cannot tolerate beings who straddle the human/animal borderline. The Lotte children (including significantly, one of Noah’s own children), who are half human, half ape, must be murdered to establish and maintain the clear separation of humans and animals, since their ‘in-betweenness’ poses a constant threat to the clear divide on which anthropocentrism depends. But significantly also, edible and inedible are destabilized when a ruffian gang captures and marinates Japeth with a view to eating him. The blue effect of the vinegar on his skin ‘scars’ him for the rest of his life, a perpetual reminder that the edible/inedible, especially in relation to humans, is, like the ‘species boundary’, arbitrary, contingent and easily ‘transgressed’.

That we are particularly averse to reminders of our own potential edibility, to recognizing our easy capacity for conversion into ‘meat’, was attested by many responses to the “meat sculpture” (as it was frequently termed) by Jana Sterbak in 1987: a long flowing gown made of flank steak, sometimes exhibited on a wooden stand and sometimes worn by a living model, entitled “Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic” (Urban Legends Reference Pages, “The Meat Dress”). Whatever Sterbak intended (and her title suggests a range of resonances beyond those I have space to explore here), what shocked so many viewers was the sculpture’s exposure of the abject. Turned

‘inside out’ (or minus clothing and skin) we were, in fact, meat—steak or pork. Reinforcing this ‘message’, the replacement of the sections of steak as each ‘dress’ naturally decayed was the seeming violation of the categories of edible and inedible, even animate and inanimate. The frame of the dressmakers dummy ‘dressed’ in cow meat produced not just a ‘real’ illusion of that in which humans are clothed, but collapsed a number of hierarchized binary categories we accept as ‘fact’ but which are essentially the fundamental bases of the contradictions through which we live out our relationships to ‘the animal’.<sup>5</sup>

One of the ways in which we deal with our contradictory and conflicted attitudes to animals is by confining them within categories—pets (inedible); ‘farm’ animals (edible); ‘wild’ animals (edible or inedible depending on their species)—or on our ‘placement’ of them in national parks. Such categorizations not only vary radically from human society to society but are variable even within single human groups. Often the effects are apparently not disturbing: we are quite familiar with the anthropomorphizing of, for instance, pigs when they have performed what is regarded as a *human*-like action and the zoomorphizing (theriomorphizing) of humans who have been ‘cast beyond the pale.’ But the transgression of categories associated with edibility/non-edibility can have profound effects. The film *Babe* (1995) cast a ‘farm’ animal as a dog, shifting the potentially edible pig into the ‘eating prohibited’ category. Different cultures of course have quite different notions of the edibility (or lack thereof) of different animals, but in a film made in the West for largely Western audiences this was transgressive. (*Babe* was also transgressive in that it showed Babe’s mother being sent to slaughter with the other ‘farm’ pigs, all apparently confidently expecting they were headed for a ‘better’ place.) Moreover, in *Babe* the human world receded in such a way that the people, rather than the animals, became quasi-cartoon figures, observed by the animals in a transposition of the usual direction of the gaze. Steve Baker comments that it is animals who are “always observed. The fact that they can observe us has lost all significance. They are the objects of our ever-extending knowledge” (2001, 15). In the case of *Babe* the issue of edibility

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<sup>5</sup> Complaints also focused on the issue of art (this was *not* ‘Art’) and the waste of meat when people were starving. The latter in particular is extraordinarily ironic, given other forms of animal wastage in Western societies. Both objections seemed really to be implicitly addressing other issues. Interestingly, no-one objected to the loss of cow lives in the re-dressings of the sculpture.

together with Babe's increasing success as a working 'dog' caused many patrons of the film to abandon the eating of pigs—at least temporarily (Wainwright 1995).

The representation of humans as edible (or potentially edible) is also an inversion of 'a norm' which thus acts as a strategy of returning the animal (and the animalistic) to its (inescapable) role in human being; and in some contemporary novels this inversion augments or complements experiments with animal representation directed towards a recovery of full animal being. Margaret Atwood's dystopic novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003) presents us with a future world (not so far in the future, according to Atwood) in which humankind (as we know it) has been all but annihilated by a deadly disease. The apparently lone survivor/narrator, Snowman (formerly "Jimmy"), while acting as guru to bio-engineer Crake's new breed of humans during the day, must spend his nights in a tree for fear of being attacked and eaten by the genetically engineered animals, originally manipulated for human benefit. The most important of these are the pigoons. To facilitate the acceptance of pig organs by human bodies, some human genes have been introduced into those of pigs. The result—the pigoon—has acquired a degree of human-like intelligence, and the human desire to hunt prey. In this ruined world, food is scarce, and the pigoons regard Snowman as an edible morsel. By contrast, Crake's new breed of humans are vegetarians who, significantly, lack all but the most minimal capacity of storytelling, including 'creation' narratives which order the human/animal world. It is to Snowman that these "children of Crake" turn for narratives and although they abhor his habit of eating flesh, they bring him fish in exchange for his protective knowledge and his stories—ones which will (like the Genesis story the Crakers crave) in time reintroduce the symbolic and the allegorical and, with them, the sense of separation from their surroundings, from the world of other beings, in which the Crakers have to this point unconsciously situated themselves. In *Oryx and Crake* it is the former pigs (now pigoons) who have in a sense become 'cannibalistic'—depending of course on the definition of 'cannibal' in a situation where its meaning has been radically destabilized.

Proponents of xenotransplantation and gene manipulation generally appeal to the long history of both in human societies. Domestication and cross-breeding over centuries have, they stress, produced today's 'farm' pigs. Even xenotransplantation, it is argued, goes back at least as far as the sixteenth century—the first recorded attempt being to transfer a pig kidney to a 48-year-old woman in Lyon, France, in 1906

(Deschamps et al. 2005; Cozzi and White 1995; Murphy 1996). Thus these are not ‘new’ and disturbing technologies at all; they merely develop existing ones. And despite the dangers of disease transfer from animals to humans—the most worrying of which to researchers (that is, those dealing with pig breeding for human replacement organs) is the *porcine endogenous retrovirus*—proponents of xenotransplantation assure us that careful monitoring will protect humans from such zoonoses.

Pigs have been preferred (and are being preferred) to primates for this purpose because of ethical issues; an area of increasing sensitivity in relation to medical research. Ironically, however, pig organs are often also considered more suitable for transplant because there are a number of similarities between pig and human anatomy and physiology not applicable to primates. While ingestion of pig flesh also problematizes the species divide, contradictions in the case of transplantation are more insidious. If pig organs can be transferred to human bodies because of certain essential similarities, what happens to the obdurate difference (expressed as the species boundary) on which we depend for their allowable exploitation and murder in the first instance? While it seems generally accepted that xenotransplants involving pigs are likely to become routine, a corollary is the transfer of human genetic material to pigs to facilitate organ acceptance by the recipient. (Pigs in these accounts are always referred to as ‘donors’, as if their ‘contributions’ were voluntary.)

While such recombinant gene experiments do not at present appear to have had such impacts on pig intelligence as Atwood suggests in *Oryx and Crake*, the transfer of genetic material itself again raises some striking contradictions in our attitudes to animal difference from and similarity to ourselves. In *Oryx and Crake* OrganInc Farms employs Jimmy’s father, “one of the foremost architects of the pigoon project” (22) as a genographer.

The goal of the pigoon project was to grow an assortment of foolproof human tissue organs in a transgenic knockout pig host—organs that would transplant smoothly and avoid rejection, but would also be able to fend off attacks by opportunistic microbes. . . . and now they were perfecting a pigoon that could grow five or six kidneys at a time. Such a host animal could be reaped of its extra kidneys; then rather than being destroyed, it could keep on living and grow more organs. . . . That would be less wasteful as it took a lot of feed and care to grow a pigoon. (22–3)

Pigoon organs, Jimmy learns, “could be customized” and

to set the queasy at ease, it was claimed that none of the defunct pigeons ended up as bacon and sausages: no one would want to eat an animal whose cells might be identical with at least some of their own. (23–4)

But as world environmental conditions have worsened and food has become scarce, the scientists (like Jimmy's father) have realized that their canteen food always includes disproportionate quantities of pig-derived products:

'Pigeon pie again,' they would say. 'Pigeon pancakes, pigeon popcorn. Come on Jimmy, eat up!' This would upset Jimmy; he was confused about who should be allowed to eat what: He didn't want to eat pigeon because he thought of the pigeons as creatures much like himself. (24)

With the gene exchange, this has potential to 'cut both ways', even if under the circumstances before Crake's virus, humans are still totally in control. Jimmy finds the pigeonlets "cute," but is a little frightened of the adults: "They glanced up at him as if they saw him, really saw him, and might have plans for him later" (26), as indeed, in the later changed circumstances, they do.

Atwood's pigeons of *Oryx and Crake*, and the attitudes of humans to them, point up a number of continuing contradictions in our perceptions of and practices in relation to animals and ourselves: increasingly we may come to share a 'flesh dress', as if, already, we didn't through our regular ingestion of dead pigs; flesh consumption and what precisely might constitute acts of 'cannibalism' become far less (apparently) clear 'cut', and who is or is not edible is exposed as contingent. Atwood is not concerned, in *Oryx and Crake*, with developing these contradictions and ironies, nor with interrogating and problematizing the species boundary as such. Her portrait of our dystopic future is primarily a critique of unbridled commercialization, rampant self-indulgence and self-gratification together with scientific hubris. Nevertheless, her treatment of pigeon xenotransplantation in association with eating taboos undermines the ontological and epistemological foundations of the species boundary itself.

*The Dreaded Comparison: All Flesh is...*

The residents of Jimmy's compound strongly suspect, even if they do not *know*, that they are eating pigeon—an expressed 'mixture' of pig and human genes. In 2002, residents of British Columbia were horrified to discover that they too might have been eating a combination of

pig and human flesh—if under vastly different circumstances—when a Port Coquitlam pig farmer was charged with the murders of thirty-one women. Robert Pickton, Canada’s worst ever serial killer (if convicted), had disposed of the bodies of some of his rape and murder victims by ‘processing’ them as he did his pigs. While he did not sell this meat on the open market, he had, it was alleged, distributed some of it locally. That nearby residents might have eaten some of the remains of his unfortunate human victims should perhaps have been seen as considerably *less* horrific than the sufferings of the live women captured by such a butcher; but this did not deter the media from playing up the cannibalistic theme, bolstered by rumors that pigs on Pickton’s farm might also have consumed some of the mangled remains of the unfortunate victims.

Seizing the opportunity to promote vegetarianism while stressing the connection between the treatment of human victims *and* pigs by Pickton, and the treatment of women and animals generally, PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) produced billboards and leaflets with pictures of a young girl and a pig, captioned “neither of us is meat” (PETA, “Neither of Us is Meat”). Although this was designed to shock, PETA’s campaign was also intended as educative. Attitudes to, and thus the fates of animals and women in many communities, Western and otherwise, are intrinsically interwoven, not only in the obvious ways whereby those who perpetuate cruelty to animals are often those who injure humans, or whereby there have been demonstrable connections between violent sexual abuse of women and abuse of animals, but more generally in that, as Adams, elaborating on Elizabeth Spelman’s concept of somatophobia (hostility to that which is *bodily*) puts it, the rejection of the body

is symptomatic of sexism, racism, classism *and* speciesism, and demonstrates how hostility to despised and disenfranchised bodies, that is, those of animals, children, women and nondominant men becomes interwoven. (1994, 145)

To avoid somatophobia, Adams argues, “feminist philosophy must take the connections between abuse of animals and abuse of women seriously” (*ibid.*).

But as the many outraged responses to the PETA poster demonstrated, members of the public and some (though not all)<sup>6</sup> of the victims’

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<sup>6</sup> An exception was Pat de Vries, mother of one of the victims, who felt that once

relatives found the connection pernicious and offensive, referring to the comparison as “grotesque” and a “disgusting travesty” (Perkel 2004). Melanie Cishecki, “executive director of MediaWatch, which monitors the portrayal of women in the media for sexism” was “stunned by the ad,” reporting that she had had

a really visceral feeling of disgust that an organization may be trying to make a link between their message promoting vegetarianism and a huge tragedy that has fallen on women. (Perkel 2004)

In her groundbreaking *The Dreaded Comparison* (1987), Marjorie Spiegel tackled a similar problem to PETA’s when she compared the treatment of African peoples during the era of European slave trading and colonial plantation slavery with our current treatment of animals. Because the animal designation has always been used by humans as the fundamental basis for radical abuse of other human groups, it is very difficult, as Alice Walker notes in her foreword to Spiegel’s work, to ‘unpack’ such comparisons (Walker in Spiegel 1987, 13). To do so requires the recognition that it is the very persistence of the hierarchized human/animal boundary itself which enables, in Derrida’s phrase, “the non-criminal putting to death” of individuals or groups *designated* as animal. And implicated as it inevitably is with our habits of consumption, such a designation facilitates the inevitable interlocking of ostensibly different expressions of violence.

Answering criticism of PETA’s posters, Bruce Friedrich, director of PETA’s campaign, argued that

Canadians who are shocked at the thought that they may have eaten human flesh should think about the fact that there appears not to be a difference in taste between pig flesh and human flesh. A corpse is a corpse, whether it formerly belonged to a pig, a cow, a chicken, or a human. (cited in Perkel 2004)

The rehabilitation of the animal involves a radical reconsideration of the ironies, contradictions and complexities by which we negotiate our attitudes and practices across the so-called species divide, and a recognition of the contingently constitutive nature of that divide itself. In such a process close consideration of the ways in which we annihilate or simply bypass animals and the animalistic—in textual as well as culi-

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her daughter “was dead and her pain was over,” there was no point in being “hung up about what happened to her body” (Perkel 2004).

nary practice(s)—remains crucial. Recognizing our affinity with animals requires acknowledgement of our fleshly nature and of ourselves as potential prey. With this in mind, the sentiments and careers of Rodney Fox and Val Plumwood after their close encounters with shark and crocodile no longer seem surprising.



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## CHAPTER TWELVE

### WALKING THE DOG

Ian Wedde

#### *A Favorite Walk*

On a sunny spring Saturday morning last year, we drove to a favorite walk at Seatoun, up to an old pa site (fortified Māori village) with a view across Cook Strait. There are usually people on the beach fishing, or cooking on driftwood fires. Further around, you encounter divers coming from the reefs with dripping bags for the fires back at the beach. Sometimes there's a spectacular regatta with colorful spinnakers. You go along a track lined with flax and taupata (*Coprosma repens*) that follows a ridge to the top of the headland and the old pa site, marked with a red pouwhenua (ownership pole).

From the top of the cliff above Breaker Bay you can look down at the beach with its nude gay section and walking families gazing straight ahead and not seeing the insouciant bodies. If it's not rough, there'll be fishing runabouts dotted about the foamy outcrops of Barrett's Reef. Across the Strait, the southern cordillera's covered in snow.

What's missing from this description? Where's the foreground?

That day, we sat in the car. Out there was a lovely merger of social and natural worlds, a little liminal wilderness, a sense of history scruffily inhabiting the present; the vivid space between cold water and warm sun, the salty wind coming over the cliff-top from somewhere without cars and air-conditioning; but no Vincent.

This had always been one of his favorite places. What made it so wasn't talk, the views or the regatta, and it wasn't history. It wasn't anything that wasn't there, like a situation at work. Vincent liked the Breaker Bay walk because of its many dogs. The intensity with which he investigated the evidence of dogs: the long, stubborn, immobile inhalations by urinous taupata stems, the pouwhenua, and the shitty margins of the track, his abrupt swerves or backtracks to another site, the resolute trot towards the future encounter, his complete disregard of us, his total disinterest in people and his contrasting attention to

the dogs with them—these were the signs by which we knew this was a favorite walk.

I could go back through my description of the walk and put the dogs (and Vincent) in where they're missing. It would be different. Its focal lengths, pace and language would change. Discursive 'topics' would largely disappear; sensory 'attentions' would fill the time and space of the walk. Its incidental, voyeur human society would be replaced by intense, individual encounters.

There are deep meditations in a dog's inhalation of old, dried turds. I'm unsure about the therianthropism involved in pondering a dog's sense of time—what I know is a degree of reciprocity in our shared experience of it. For me, it came to involve pace, space and focal length, as well as duration and memory. My sense of the present became more vivid; concurrently, Vincent's perceptual pace altered if he was required to share my speed. Our combined time contained my enhanced sense and his altered pace; we were both fixed in vivid temporal foregrounds.

I don't have the heart to go back over the walk and describe it with Vincent in it. That day, we didn't have the heart to go on it at all.

### *A Lexicon*

Lucky dog, you dog you, mad dog, barking mad, bitch, cur, mongrel, son-of-a-bitch, tail wagging the dog, young puppy, in the dogbox, a wolf in sheep's clothing, beware of the dog, the Dog Star, doggerel, dogs of the Dow Jones, gone to the dogs, hot dog, sea dog, you're dog tucker, dogged, dog bludger, hair of the dog, dogtown, dog's-cake, go dog on, Mongrel Mob, done like a dog's dinner, a dog's life, dog collar, dogfish, dogger-on, dog-end, dog-leg, dog watch, arse-licker, rabid, imperialist running dog, lap-dog, give a dog a bad name, dog eat dog, every dog has his day, the dog returns to its vomit, lie down with dogs and get up with fleas, let sleeping dogs lie, you can't teach an old dog new tricks, every dog is allowed one bite, the dog that barks does not bite, tutae kurī.

Music dogs: Dogs on Acid, Diamond Dogs, Coyote Ugly, Dogs in Space, Street Dogs, and the "Snarling Dogs" wah pedal.

Dogs on-line: [www.dogsincars.co.uk](http://www.dogsincars.co.uk); [www.wheelchairsfordogs.com](http://www.wheelchairsfordogs.com).

*Vincent*

Vincent was a Rhodesian ridgeback. They're down as the savage guard dogs of white Rhodesian farmers. They were cross-bred by early European settlers out of the so-called Hottentot hunting dog, descendants of wild dogs of the veldt. Their improbable reputation includes being lion killers. They've sometimes been cross-bred with bull mastiffs, boxers, and pit-bulls to make formidable pig-dogs and fighting dogs. They're large, spectacularly lean and muscled, with very short golden or reddish hair, whip-like tails, huge jaws, and the males especially have dark highlights on their ears, around their lips, and encircling their eyes. The barrel-chested males are narrow-hipped with pronounced upper thigh muscles. They're absurdly center-fold. The bitches are smaller muzzled, slinky, with voluptuous, swaying hips.

The breed's best-known feature is the spinal Mohawk crest that runs from neck to tail. This is widely believed to give them a permanently raised hackle that makes other dogs behave aggressively and inculcates default savagery in their own behaviour. The possibility that the ridge might have the opposite effect—of increasing their need and ability to signal good intentions—is usually overlooked.

In reality, Rhodesian ridgebacks are social, hierarchical, responsible, indolent, and anxious in inverse proportion to their Mohawk accoutrement. Their elaborately disarming displays include prancing, balletic, whining approaches to other dogs that are usually understood by the dogs but not always by their owners, and especially not by anxious leash-tuggers. Ridgebacks are more likely to bite restrained dogs than assertive ones who perform hierarchical acts of mock buggery: on his regular Mount Victoria walks, Vincent endured the ludicrous attentions of "Bill the Bugger" with patience; if he got fed up, a terse barking snap did the trick; both serenely went their separate ways.

Like most social pack animals (including humans), ridgebacks get anxious about solitude, want everyone to be clear about their status, have protective feelings for their families (including their human families) and patiently undertake the training of acolytes. Perhaps like many social animals in hot climates, they like lying around together and conserving their energy. They like being petted by their family and are coldly indifferent to the caresses of others. Ridgebacks may be stubborn where sniffing is involved and are best treated patiently at such moments. They like their meals at regular times. They're not

scavengers, but I once saw Vincent very gently take a hotdog from the mouth of a child in a push-chair on Oriental Parade.

Vincent's pedigree name was Shamva Storm. The puppy Storm came to Wellington in a dog-box on a flight from Greymouth on the West Coast. His breeders would have killed him because he had a small fault in his Mohawk: a spiral twist close to his rump. At its worst this means a spinal defect, a pedigree hazard in the breed; at best, it made Storm unshowable. His breeders loved him, but that wasn't the point. We saved him as a non-show dog on their condition he got castrated. It never happened: we lamely promised the owners we wouldn't breed him. His testicles were black, shiny, and streamlined, like racing bicycle helmets. He mated twice, by accident. Patsy was a mature, big-teated mastiff cross, who spotted his genetic talent early and visited regularly during his adolescence, finally securing his inept services in front of an admiring crowd of builders on a construction site over the road, a bus-load of backpackers from Beethoven House and one of our sons, who drove past in his car with a look of anguish. Vincent's second mating was with Honey, out at Riversdale Beach. Honey's aromatic trail led from the convenience store to her place a block away, where her owners drew up chairs on the balcony and saluted their good fortune with upraised cans of beer.

As a puppy, Vincent loved to lift his muzzle into the sawdust pouring from my skill saw when I worked on the house: his breeders ran a building yard on the Coast and sawdust made him happy. He knew immediately what sheepskins were for: this he'd learned before we ever made his puppy bed. He tore up sofas, French doors, many shoes, and left rips in window-sills: he'd been used to the pack of his people and siblings and never became resigned to being left alone. No ridgeback ever does. Once he'd grown up he stopped destroying things when we went out, but he'd climb on to our bed and suck his paw, leaving a damp patch. Sometimes he'd carry the kitchen waste bucket to the front door and put one of my shoes on top. He only did this when we went out at night. Because we took him with us on trips, he sometimes entered motels illegally, sitting between poker-faced kids in the car's back seat, with a shawl over his head.

He had one white toenail where he'd ripped the original out falling down a cliff in beech forest near Lake Matiri in from the Matakītaki River—the kind of country that exhausted Thomas Brunner and his dog in 1846, of which more soon. He had unusually dark, kohl-like rims around his eyes: hence “Vincent”—the sultry Vinnie Terranova from

the TV series *Wiseguy*. We usually called him Vinnie. He lived for twelve years, a long time for such a big breed. Once, after he'd had bladder surgery, the neighbors could have seen us naked in the street at dead of night, holding up his saline drip after he'd bolted from the house to find a place to piss through the catheter stitched to his penis.

His eventual death was stoic, as dog's deaths are. During his last moments we talked him along another favorite walk, up the Orongorongongo River. He heard a word he knew well, Orongorongongo, repeated many times; he sighed happily, and went there to die.

### *A Literature Search*

"You common cry of curs! whose breath I hate . . ."—William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*;

"Cry 'Havoc!' and let slip the dogs of war."—William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*;

"The godless arch scoundrel Voltaire is dead—dead like a dog, like a beast."—Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart;

"A large shaggy dog just unchained scouring the beaches of the world and baying at the moon."—Robert Louis Stevenson, on Walt Whitman;

"Anybody who hates children and dogs can't be all bad."—W. C. Fields;

"I am I because my little dog knows me."—Gertrude Stein;

"Plus je vois l'homme, plus j'aime mon chien."—Pascal;

"All knowledge, the totality of all questions and answers, is contained in the dog."—Franz Kafka, *Investigations of the Dog*

Plutarch's account of Alcibiades's dog; Byron's dog Boatswain (see below); Launce's dog Crab, in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*; Diogenes in Dickens's *Dombey and Son*, Jip in *David Copperfield*, Bulls-eye in *Oliver Twist*; Garryowen in James Joyce's *Ulysses*; Labes in Aristophanes *Wasps*; Lufra in Sir Walter Scott's "The Lady of the Lake," Mustard and Pepper in his *Guy Mannering*, and Roswal in *The Talisman*; Quoodle in Chesterton's *The Flying Inn*; Tartar in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*; Matthew Arnold's Geist, Emily Brontë's Keeper, Scott's Maida, Wordsworth's Music, Thomas Hood's Dash, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Flush, W. S. Landor's Pomerio and Giallo.

Epitaph to a Dog

Near this spot Are deposited the Remains

Of one Who Possessed Beauty

Without Vanity, Strength without Insolence,  
 Courage without Ferocity,  
 And all the Virtues of Man  
 Without his Vices.

This Praise, which would be unmeaning  
 flattery If inscribed over Human Ashes,  
 Is but a just tribute to the  
 Memory of Boatswain, a Dog  
 Who was born at Newfoundland,  
 May, 1803,  
 And died at Newstead Abbey  
 Nov. 18, 1808.

—Lord Byron

“To sit with a dog on a hillside on a glorious afternoon is to be back in Eden, where doing nothing was not boring—it was peace.”—Milan Kundera.

Arthur Conan Doyle’s *Hound of the Baskervilles* (1974) was based on the ghost Black Dogs of English and Scottish folklore. The Black Dogs: Guytrash, Shriker, Skriker, Barguest, Black Shuck, Shucky Dog, Schuck, the Shug Monster, Black Shag, Skeff, Scarfe, Trash, Moddey Dhoo, Yeth, Wish Hounds, Padfoot, Hooter, Galley-trot, Hairy Jack, Muckle Black Tyke (in Scotland), and Le Tchan Bouole (in Jersey); Mauthe Dog appears in Sir Walter Scott’s “Peveril of the Peak.”

Another black dog—the black of human corpses after embalming—was the Egyptian dog or jackal god Anubis or Anapu, god of the dead, later relegated by Osiris to being god of the funeral cult. Anubis was usually depicted as a black jackal or dog, or as a jackal- or dog-headed man. It was dog-god Anubis who walked with human souls to the ‘Western lands’: he was also known as Khenty-Imentiu, or chief of the westerners. He is ever-present in William Burroughs’s *Cities of the Red Night* (1981) and *Place of Dead Roads* (1983): “The boy suddenly stops, sniffing like a dog.”

Among the hundreds of Native American nations that tell “little dog,” coyote stories are: Papago, Pima, Wasco, Chippewa, Mayan, Flathead, Blackfeet, Salish, Dine, Navajo, Saponi, Karuk, Caddo, Shasta, Crow, Nez Perce, Abenaki, Cherokee, and Tuscarora. The stories are also about people: the narrative, its telling, and its reception balance the consciousness of coyote and human; they understand themselves because



they become each other. Similarly, the dingo lives deeply within the self-consciousness of many Aboriginal communities, for example in the story of Ankotarinja, the dingo ancestor at Ankota on Burt Plain.

One of the best dogs in literature is Willy Christmas's dog Mr. Bones, in Paul Auster's novel *Timbuktu*, a story told from the dog's point of view, which raises emotional questions about the distinctions between metonymy (the animal standing for the human) and metaphor (the animal likened to the human); and between anthropomorphism (attributing human qualities to animals), theriomorphism (a human having the form of a beast), and therianthropism (images combining the forms of animals and humans)—once, that is, you've mopped up the tears shed over Mr Bones's final departure for "Timbuktu."

The same can't be said for Jack London's dogs: brutally, sentimentally, and simplistically anthropomorphic. Comparing the animalist rhetorics of Paul Auster and Jack London, we understand the need for lucidity in the way we use language about 'human' consciousness in relation to our representations of other animals.

Writing in *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* about the thundering injunctions of the Old Testament book of Leviticus, Mary Douglas identifies the rhetorical thrust of its animal classification as a strategy for "holiness" given "external, physical expression in the wholeness of the body seen as a perfect container," and therefore holiness (and wholeness, and wholesomeness) "exemplified by completeness . . . [requiring] that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong" (Douglas 1969, 51–52). Petting each other, being a party animal or a sexy beast and subsequently imbibing a hair of the dog, let alone indulging in cannibalism or 'farm sex', would qualify as Levitical abominations. Such activities might also qualify as subversive of patriarchal, monotheistic, repressive and dissociated social regimes.

In *Powers of Horror* (1982), Julia Kristeva raids Leviticus for its ritualized condemnation of classification-disrupting animals as "unclean," and makes play with the word *l'impropre* to "signify both the unclean and that which is not of the self." This last phrase is from *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity and Representation* (2001), Steve Baker's patient summary of the iconography of animality. He goes on to say: "What is at stake here is not the self's identity but also the assumed superiority and moral righteousness of the self" (Baker 2001, 113). In order to keep walking the dog a while longer, we have to amend Baker's gloss on Kristeva by rewriting 'self' as 'human self'.

Most abominable Levitical therianthropisms depicting humans as beastly are negative and often racist. By cross-breeding the human and the animal, they work to pollute the holier-than-thou-ness of the *human* self. It's not only animal rights activists who see this as anthropocentric and insulting to other nonhuman animals. Most of the dog-walkers I've met do too. And in *Buffalo Gals* (1987) Ursula Le Guin writes, "in literature as in 'real life', women, children, and animals are the obscure matter upon which Civilisation erects itself, phallogically" (Le Guin 1990, 10). Echoing Kristeva, Le Guin hints at a consciousness not phallogically repressed, not divided along proper and improper lines, not classified and controlled according to what is holy, whole, or wholesome (and what is unclean), with no separation of the internal and the external and therefore of the pure container and its disgusting consumption or waste.

That sounds like infant consciousness which, as is repeated often in children's and 'folk' stories, doesn't distinguish between animals and humans. Human children are inconsolably separated from their 'soft toys'. The adult separation is gradual, but may be traumatic—mine was marked by Mowgli's grief at leaving his wolf brothers in Kipling's *Jungle Books*; their covert reunions outside the civilized village unreasonably comforted me.

J. R. Ackerley is best known for his 1932 *Hindoo Holiday: An Indian Journal*, unsensationally homoerotic and untroubled about the interracial (let alone homosexual) sex that tormented the British Raj's Levitical sense of *l'impropre*. His beautiful portrait of his Alsatian, *My Dog Tulip* (1999) is serenely adult, and unflustered by the intimacy of his emotional empathy for her. This equanimity was perhaps possible because he was "by nature" transgressive (a homosexual), perhaps because he didn't subscribe to the racist classism of the declining Raj; but mostly perhaps because he saw through the "cunning, orderly surface" of Kristeva's "civilisation" to a tolerant socius whose improprieties are liberating, the peaceful opposite of (Kristeva again) "wars that will necessarily be holy" (Kristeva 1982, 210). The misanthropic Arthur Schopenhauer preferred the company of his beloved white poodle Atma, named after the Brahmin world-soul, from the Upanishads he read every night. It may have been the combination of misanthropy, Upanishads, and dog-loving that generated Schopenhauer's concept of the *Wille zum Leben*, a presentiment of contemporary, neo-Darwinian evolutionary psychology.

*The Intelligence of Dogs* (1995), *How to Speak Dog* (2001), and *The Pawprints of History* (2003) by Stanley Coren will introduce many dog lovers to cognitive psychology. It may be that discussing such matters through the mediation of the dog isn't only helpful, but necessary—can we even understand 'human' cognition as separate from 'animal'? It's refreshing, too, to have recent evolutionary and cognitive psychology remind us to be skeptical of the vanity of much human discourse on culture, and in particular on aesthetics and the sublime. We might prefer, now, to see the sublime as the moment when the abject "collapses" (as Kristeva says) not as a consequence of the terrible loss of human self identity *before* the awesome otherness of nature, but through its pleasurable absorption *within* nature (Kristeva 1982, 210). Culture doesn't separate us from animals: it joins us to them.

Suetonius described the frescoes painted by Fabullus for Nero in the Domus Aurea in Rome (Suetonius *De vita Caesarum*, Nero 31). Playful dogs frolic among the riotous, erotic figures of Psyche, Aphrodite, Eros, Zeus, and Ganymede, with nymphs astride strange beasts, ephebes floating in the air with vases clenched orgasmically between their thighs, satyrs, owls, sphinxes and dragons. It's a world from which the binaries of modern Western consciousness are happily absent: divine and mortal, religious and secular, human and animal, natural and cultural, reality and representation.

Though Plato was strict about categories and idealist in his earlier dialogues, in the Eighth Antinomy of the late dialogue *Parmenides* he proposes that if there is no unity whatever in things, the Many cannot appear to be one, not even a plurality of ones, and therefore there is no language that can speak of things unrelated to other things (Plato 1961, 64). We'll have to see how, even as post-Cartesian *mentalité* wants to separate our thought from the natural world, dogged language will keep trying to return us to it. The dog in language will tug at us to return to the world: the animal that shares our socius of language, the barking spook, the Moddey Dhoo, the coyote, Ankotarinja, who won't be sent away; who scratches at the door, demanding a walk. The return may even take the terrible form of Kristeva's "sublime point at which the abject collapses in a burst of beauty that overwhelms us"—the moment, as she writes in the last, cataclysmic paragraph of *Powers of Horror* (1982), when we come to terms with

the cunning, orderly surface of civilizations, the nurturing horror that they attend to pushing aside by purifying, systematising, and thinking; the

horror that they seize on in order to build themselves up and function. (Kristeva 1982, 210)

### *Good Dog*

Dogs appear often in representations of hunts—including the unicorn hunt that entered the Christian symbolism of the Middle Ages in Europe. In these hunts, both the Heavenly Father and the archangel Gabriel may be hunters, while the unicorn may be Christ the pure lover (as well, of course, as God, again). The pure maid capable of taming the priapic unicorn is the Virgin Mary. In the altar piece *Die Einhornjagd*, in what was then called the Großherzogliches Museum in Weimar, the virtuous dogs are named from *Psalms* 85:10: “Misericordia et veritas obviaverunt sibi; iustitia et pax osculatae sunt” (Mercy and truth have met each other: justice and peace have kissed). The white dog is called “misericordia,” the red “iustitia,” the gray “pax,” and the yellow “veritas.” God the hunter, assisted by the archangel Gabriel and his virtuous dogs, drives the unicorn Christ/God into the “secret garden” and into the womb of the Holy Virgin (in Kuryluk 1987, 333).<sup>1</sup>

In the Greek temple of Antikyra, the divine virgin huntress Artemis is depicted rushing forward with her hunting dog. Christianity reversed this image, making God hunt the virgin; the dogs now belong to him and his archangel and represent Mercy, Truth, Justice, and Peace. In Swinburne’s satire, *Atalanta in Calydon* (1868) the sado-masochistic opportunity offered by the aggressive goddess Artemis or Atalanta, and the virtuous tradition of neo-pagan Christianity, are both exploited and mocked. Virtuous dogs appear in degenerate, sado-masochistic forms as neurotic lap-dog men in the 1920s and 1930s drawings of Bruno Schulz, licking the boots of and being stepped upon by huge women. The writings of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch are full of admiration for the cult of Venus, combined with fantasies of submissive, infantile, “doggish” boot-licking by men of fur-coated women, particularly “Wanda,” his *Venus im Pelz* of 1870.

Running through these narratives and through their twists, reversals and satires, are themes familiar to those who keep, love and walk dogs:

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<sup>1</sup> Citing H. von der Gabelentz, 1913. “Die Einhornjagd auf einem Altarbild im Großherzoglichen Museum zu Weimar.” *Sonderdruck aus dem Jahrbuch der Königlich-Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 3.

dogs are social and like to hunt and play together; they are hierarchical and will obey their senior; they mediate our experience of a unified natural socius; and they are “virtuous,” as the poet Byron recognized in *Boatswain*. “Good dog,” we say. We’ve been saying, telling, writing, painting and sculpting good dogs for centuries.

“Good boy,” we say also. Hounds weren’t just associated with Huntress Artemis in ancient Greece, but also with Adonis (or Attis or Osiris and his dog-headed underling guardian of the Western Lands, Anubis), like Jesus Christ the child of an incestuous relationship. Adonis was the child of his sister and his grandfather. He was killed by a boar that his hounds had flushed from its lair; the grief-stricken Venus commemorated his death with the blood-red anemone.

The redemptive myth of the adorable male victim, hounded by fate and incest, and challenging the underworld, has often spilled out into male infantilism, including the Christian infantilism of the *Pietà* with its attendant incestuous motifs. Beardsley, who hid neither his infantilism nor his sexual ambiguity, and who begged his mother for soft toys when he was dying in Menton at the age of twenty-six, was caricatured by Max Beerbohm as an infantile Faust/Adonis, dragging a toy poodle on wheels. Beardsley himself drew a winged, naked boy-man dragging a cringing, dressed-up dog on a leash. Good dogs may sublimate male human desires to be good boys: innate adult male childishness may find gratification in a masterful relationship with a pet dog. Bullying human male behavior towards dogs (and underlings: “kicking the dog”) may not always be the alpha evidence it seems: dogs (and underlings) may not respond to it as alpha. The big guy sopfully smooching his smug mutt in the cab of the truck may, by contrast, be secure in his social equilibrium; as will the dog.

Such ambiguity in power-relations also informed the feminist Austrian artist Valie Export’s 1968 performance work “From the Archives of Doggishness”: in the *Kartnerstrasse* in the center of Vienna, the artist walked her husband, crawling on all fours, on a leash.<sup>2</sup> Voluntary, fetishistic submission can be turned to involuntary effect: recently, newspapers have carried shameful pictures of American soldiers humiliating Iraqi prisoners by forcing them to go on all fours, naked, on leashes.

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<sup>2</sup> There are comprehensive summaries of animalist sado-masochism in Ewa Kuryluk (1987).

*Bad Dog*

Unlike pigs and chickens, dogs (along with rats) survived the passage with Polynesian voyagers to New Zealand. Generally known as ‘kurī’ in Māori, they were regarded as food. The Māori creation cycle has the Polynesian demi-god Maui turning his brother-in-law Irawaru into a dog because he was lazy: ‘lazy dog’—even, perhaps, ‘bone idle.’ Ranginui Walker annotates this doggish origin myth as being the consequence of Maui’s jealousy of Irawaru’s fishing prowess, and as a reminder of the “capricious and dangerous” relationship between brothers-in-law (Walker 1990, 18). Maui was also turning Irawaru into food. It’s important to mark a complex distinction between the Māori value-system that what is acceptable as food is thereby profane (unless made tapu [tabu]); and the post-Levitical, and broadly European one, that what is acceptable as food is thereby holy (and should be blessed by a ‘grace’).

The words ‘kurī’ and ‘kararehe’ were used of all large quadrupeds when James Cook noted them in his Journal entry for 31 March 1770. He also noted that kurī were raised solely for food (Cook, cited in Beaglehole 1968, 277). This is an over-stringent analysis of their value for Māori. The shaggy pelts of kurī were made into huruhuru kurī, prestigious cloaks: these were not reviled remains. Their bones and teeth were made into fish hooks and ornaments, and in 1777 George Forster’s *A Voyage Round the World* noted that the dogs were often seen happily riding in canoes, tethered by a safety harness around their middles (cited in Colenso [1877] 1996, 6).<sup>3</sup>

In *The Trial of the Cannibal Dog: Captain Cook in the South Seas* (2003), Anne Salmond pivots her account of Cook’s Pacific voyages on the mock trial and eating of a kurī by the crew of *Discovery*. The book’s first chapter, “How Englishmen came to eat dogs” (Salmond 2003, 1–9), may seem to be an exemplary introduction to the complex of value, power, and defilement in negative therianthropism. The English crew’s consumption of the “cannibal dog” was a ritual payback for the “biting the head” of the *Adventure’s* boat-crew in 1770. It was also a ritual dehumanizing of the ‘savages’ and a de-metonymizing of their dog: neither savages nor dog, said the *Discovery’s* dog-eaters, deserved to be treated as human.

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<sup>3</sup> From Forster, George (1777, 219).

However, class may have come into it: Cook's officers, not crew, got most of the fresh meat, including dog. Dogs were eaten by officers (and scientists) on board Cook's ships on at least four documented (and probably more) occasions, as recorded by Cook himself, as well as by Sydney Parkinson, both Johann and George Forster, and Anders Sparrman. On one occasion Cook's Journal notes that it was "a favourite dog of Mr. Forster fell a sacrifice to my tender stomach" (cited in Colenso 1996, 13), on another "a fat, though ugly, Dutch dog" (Sparrman, cited in Colenso 1996, 13)<sup>4</sup> and on yet another occasion a dog that had been bred on board. George Forster recorded the *Resolution* taking on board thirty dogs at Huahine (and the *Adventure* a similar number) (cited in Colenso 1996, 8).<sup>5</sup> They were meant for food, but most refused to eat and themselves died of starvation. The language that surrounds the on-board eating of dog is pathological: Cook bluntly pleaded necessity: "[N]ecessity is governed by no law" (Colenso 1996, 13);<sup>6</sup> Johann Forster inferior breeding: "The dogs of the South Sea . . . are exceedingly stupid . . . and are lazy beyond measure" (cited in Colenso 1996, 8).<sup>7</sup> William Colenso summarized much of the Course of Empire shaggy dog story in a lecture to the Hawkes Bay Philosophical Institute in 1877, an account that almost involuntarily, by quoting much of George Forster in particular, equates cannibalism, including the dog-eat-dog variety, with species (and racial) inferiority (Colenso 1996): the younger Forster, a romantic, revolutionary social engineer, suggested that nurture not nature might be the key to the superior and anti-cannibal character of "our dogs": "Education may perhaps . . . graft new instincts" (cited in Colenso 1996, 6–7).<sup>8</sup> There was, in fact, a flourishing if minor cult among European revolutionaries of drawing attention to depraved acts of human cannibalism by degenerate aristocrats.

According to Colenso, the last pure-bred kurī was killed around 1831 at Mangakahia and fed to a tohunga ta moko (expert tattooist) as ritual food, to the great distress of its owner (1996, 17). Writing about animal burials in Polynesia, the archaeologist Geoffrey Clark notes that dogs (and pigs) were ritually buried in many parts of Polynesia, and in

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<sup>4</sup> From Sparrman's journal: Sparrman, Anders. 1786. *A Voyage Round the World with Captain James Cook in H.M.S. Resolution*. London: 88.

<sup>5</sup> From George Forster (1777, 219).

<sup>6</sup> See also Salmond (2003), quoting Cook in Beaglehole (1968, 333–4).

<sup>7</sup> From Johann Forster (1778, 189, 208).

<sup>8</sup> George Forster (1777, 219).

New Zealand (1996, 30–38). This sign of significance was supported by the exclusivity of dog as food, as noted by Colenso, but also by Joseph Banks (Beaglehole 1962, 343), and subsequently by numerous anthropologists including Katherine Luomala (1960, 190–240), who observe that it was tapu for women and children, and for all but chiefly men, to eat dog. Archaeological evidence also shows that by the time Cook observed kurī in New Zealand, and ate dog flesh, not only their numbers but their size had decreased over time, largely as a result of moa and marine mammal decimation by humans (Anderson and Clark 2001, 161–163). The eating of dog by both Māori and European was not mundane, though for different reasons.

The “long flowing white hair of the tails of the New Zealand dog” was observed by Colenso at the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi.<sup>9</sup> Dogs appear in much settler art depicting the domestic life of Māori. A photograph by Alfred Burton from 1885, of a group of Whanganui Māori at “Ti Eke [Tieke]—Wanganui River—King Country,”<sup>10</sup> shows a woman canoodling with what looks like a kurī pup wrapped in her blanket. If so, it would have been one of the last recognizable but mongrel kurī. Te Heu Heu Tukino, 1859: “As clover killed the fern, and European dog the Māori dog; . . . so our people will gradually be supplemented by the pākehā.”

Dogs of all sorts were so numerous around Māori communities they were deemed a nuisance by settlers. The “Dog Tax War” of 1898 resulted in the establishment of a separatist Māori state by the prophet Hone Toia at Waima near Kaikohe. The suppression of Toia ended Māori separatism in the far north, but not Māori fears that Dog Taxes and registration were the thin edge of a metonymic wedge, as a result of which the wild, roaming packs of forty or fifty ‘Māori dogs’ that enraged early sheep farmers were made to represent Māori themselves: lazy mongrels given to theft. Hone Toia prophesied that, “if dogs were to be taxed, men would be next” (Orange 1993, 542–543). Indeed: the Dog Tax was used to harass the prophet Rua Kenana at Maungapohatu in the first decade of the twentieth century.

These days, the metonym is often flaunted: aggressive breeds of dog are tauntingly kept by gangs whose dogs signify their resistance,

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<sup>9</sup> “[H]ere and there a *hani* (or *taiaha*, a chief’s staff of rank, &c.) was seen erected, adorned with the long flowing white hair of the tails of the New Zealand dog and crimson cloth and red feathers” (Colenso 1890).

<sup>10</sup> Burton Brothers Collection, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.



illegality, and savagery; the rugby-loving public laments the absence of ‘mongrel’ in its All Blacks: bad dogs replace good sports as the patch-wearers of national virtue. “You’re dog tucker, mate!” The dog tucker ambiguity persists.

*Famous Walking Dogs*

The Austrian taxidermist and naturalist Andreas Reischek’s dog Caesar was, he wrote in his book *Yesterday in Māoriland*, “so ugly that my friends congratulated me on having found the ugliest dog in the country.” ([1930] 1970, 44) Caesar was Reischek’s constant companion for eleven years in New Zealand, during which they walked together over vast tracts of extreme terrain, Caesar on his pads, Reischek sometimes on his famous home-made steel-soled boots. When he returned to Austria in 1889 with the largest collection of ethnological and natural history specimens ever taken to Europe (but no kurī), he left behind a history of Caesar dedicated “To the People of New Zealand” (Reischek 1889).

On one of his most perilous expeditions, to Fjordland in 1884, Caesar kept the hypothermic explorer alive by bringing him wekas (raul or woodhen) to eat. Presumably they shared this food. Reischek left Caesar, too old to walk any more, with the Stevenson family in the remote Paringa Valley. “I was losing for ever that piece of my heart and soul, my old dog Caesar,” wrote Reischek of their parting (1970, 267). Caesar died of grief when Reischek left, and “Mr Stevenson carefully preserved his head in spirits” (ibid.).

The dog of the explorer Thomas Brunner was less fortunate. In the company of four Ngati Tumatakokiri, Brunner undertook his most famous journey in 1846, tracing the Buller River to the sea. The party of five was forced to eat Brunner’s dog to survive. Thereafter, in recognition of his uncharacteristic act, Brunner was known by Māori as “Kai Kurī,” the Dog Eater. Or, perhaps, Dog Tucker.

It’s not possible to imagine Andreas Reischek eating Caesar. This is probably because he didn’t think of dogs as food; this, in turn, was probably because he thought of Caesar as being metonymically human, certainly part of his, Reischek’s, society. One way of distinguishing between metaphor and metonymy in respect of dog-human representation may be by asking if it’s possible for us to objectify ‘dog’ sufficiently to eat it (as James Cook did, brusquely). Caesar and Reischek in their

freezing Fjordland bivouac ate birds with grateful relish because the human among them didn't admit *poultry*, the word for birds-as-food, past the safe perimeter of human society, keeping them at edible arm's length with the metaphorical (rather than metonymic) language of 'nesting', 'pecking order', and 'bird-like'. It's probable that the eating of *kurī* by Māori was often ritualized: the high esteem accorded *kahu kurī* or dogskin cloaks may support this; as does the fact that dog was the privileged fare of *tohunga*.

Jock Mackenzie, the famous Gaelic shepherd and sheep-stealer after whom the Mackenzie Country and Mackenzie Pass in New Zealand's South Island were named, and his equally famous sheep dog, Friday, combine the themes of explorer, wild dog, and metonym. Having walked across the vast hinterland around lakes Tekapo, Pukaki, and Ohau, and brought wealth to Canterbury pastoralists, Mackenzie is remembered rather for having stolen a sheep. It's likely Jock and Friday dined companionably on mutton, hogget, and lamb, which they may or may not have conspired together to steal as sheep. It's said Friday refused to leave Mackenzie's grave, and died on it after a long vigil. Another version says that when McKenzie was released from jail he sought but never found Friday and himself died of grief. There's a bronze statue of a border collie, often characterized as 'McKenzie's dog', near the Church of the Good Shepherd at Lake Tekapo: ears pricked like Anubis, he looks across the lake towards the Western Lands.

### *Holier Than Thou*

The early chapters of Leviticus are preoccupied with burnt offerings of animals: the Lord's nostrils were gratified by sweet savors of roasting meat, and Aaron and his priestly sons feasted upon unblemished bullocks, sheep, goats, turtledoves, and pigeons. Some of these meats were completely burned; some were eaten. All of it was burnt or eaten in atonement by elite male priests: the meat represented sin, not theirs, but that of the tribal congregation.

Much blood was sprinkled on the altar by the priestly sons of Aaron. These were old pagan rites, but the stern first-person pronoun of Leviticus is monotheist, authoritarian, regulatory, and holier-than-thou. The rites are also contemporary: Jesus Christ represented himself as a lamb: his flesh was eaten to atone for sin; his blood was ritually consumed. The "horror" identified by Julia Kristeva, the "holiness"

described by Mary Douglas, and the “Civilisation” which Ursula Le Guin disliked, share a linguistic, pronominal preoccupation with pure self(-container) and abominable other: a monotheist ‘I’, and a feral ‘they’.

Many other animals including dogs were proscribed as unclean in Leviticus; so were lepers, cripples, the blind, lame, flat-nosed, dwarfed, castrated, hunchbacked, or otherwise blemished. Substantial tithing was formulated in Leviticus, including the capitalizable value of people, establishing the priesthood as a privileged, hereditary plutocracy. Idols, graven images, and standing images were prohibited.

Without the courage of Kristeva’s unflinching gaze at abjection, or Meaghan Morris’s at the teeming livestock sections of Asian wet-markets (2003), we will too easily be drawn into a Eurocentric tradition of sentimentalizing and privileging our own (ambiguous) respect for animals. We may confuse this respect with what Nancy Scheper-Hughes, in *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*, following the phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas, calls the “pre-cultural” nature of ethics (1993, 23). As did the poodle-loving Schopenhauer, we will culturally prefer the Brahmin or Vedic polytheistic nature-worship of the ancient Aryan conquerors of northern India, with its proscriptions against eating animals, to Korean and Chinese customary practices of raising dogs for human food. We’ll turn the metonymic edge of our respect for dogs against other races and cultures, even as, like the famously ravenous Schopenhauer, we wolf down large lunches of meat (Elder et al. 1998).

But despite the specter of my own post-cultural hypocrisy, I still want to sit facing west at Lake Tekapo with the heathenish graven statue of Jock Mackenzie’s sheep dog and pay my respects to Caesar, Tulip, my beloved, long dead border collie-doberman cross bitch Japonica (Japonie), the handsome wiseguy Vinnie, and Thomas Brunner’s poor burnt offering whose bones lie somewhere in the Buller Gorge. I don’t feel holier, or wholer, or more wholesome, than them. Like Milan Kundera on his hillside, I won’t be bored. I’ll be at peace.

### *A Daily Walk*

Vincent and I step out into the dawn air, as we have every morning for ten years. Vincent runs joyously down hill to the wall of Wareham House. Here he releases an immense, pent-up piss. From now on he doesn’t pee, he communicates through calibrated squirts. We go quickly,

warming up to run, past Guinness, an Airedale who lives outside in a kennel. Guinness greets Vincent loudly and runs along the fence to get a kiss. But Vincent is abrupt with him—he's got his mind on the quarry at the top of the hill, where he prefers to shit.

We run up the hill to the quarry: Vincent's gait becomes cramped and anxious. Magpies live in the pines around the old, grassed-over quarry—they don't like Vincent and dive-bomb him, but he ignores them and squats grinning in the grass near the margin of blackberry. Some wild, stiff-legged turf-rakings follow his shit: grass and clods fly into the weeds. Now he's eager to get going.

It was here that the bewildered puppy Storm, recently renamed Vinnie, first learned to play with us and the kids. It took time: he didn't understand touch football. Years later, in a deep river pool on the Coromandel Peninsula, he leaped in after an enormous branch three times his length and wrestled it to the bank, where he flayed it, spitting chips and bark. We laughed until we nearly sank. We had to learn his entertainments, too.

How do we treat the social lives of animals? How do we treat their freedom? How do we empathize with them? The answers to these questions may go towards defining our human societies—not just their *mentalité* in respect of animals, but their values in general. I didn't think much about this back then, when Vincent and I still ran through the wet lupines, smelling their flowers in spring and early summer, and getting soaked with fresh dew. But I think about them now, as I take the same walk, knowing that Vincent won't be doubling back to see what's delaying me. Back then, sometimes, I'd have stopped for a pee of my own: politely, he'd have returned and covered it with one of his. This was a kind of conversation we had: ten years of courteous over-peeking, its meaning and value sustained, the silence of the trees around us, both of us panting as our steam rose through the leaves.

Epicurus advocated friendship, freedom, and thought as the foundations upon which to build happiness. Vincent and I were always happy in the mornings. Our friendship and our freedom were clear, as we puffed together up the hill over slippery layers of pine-needles; and after running for years with this alert, courteous dog, I learned to think outside the claustrophobic confines of strategizing my day: my thought resembled running, sniffing, and looking, more than it did planning. The Stoics believed that unreasonable expectations are what make us unhappy: some thought is best done in a simple, vivid, sensory present, rather than in the frantic, dystopic realms of desire and

over-cooked imagination. I learned to think better as a result of running with Vincent; I don't know what he learned, but I think it included a kind of doubled pace, his and mine; I know he liked Senecan regularity and simplicity, and the morning run gave him that too.

Now we begin to meet the other dogs and their walkers. Amy is a small, white, fluffy bitch who, every morning, is frantic for Vincent's attention but unable to drop the pine-cone in her mouth: her greeting whines are muffled and often result in choking. Alas, Vincent ignores her, as he does most females, with the exception of the boxer Jimmy. The artist Rob McLeod lives nearby, and takes his two boxers, Jimmy and George, up the hill every morning. Vincent and Jimmy are old playmates, and he leaves her unwillingly, panting, covered in foam and slobber. Our neighbor on the corner, an investment banker, begins his day heartily with Tiggy and Beau, wiry fox terriers, whom Vincent runs obliviously over the top of. Nor does he deign to notice them staring in unison at him from the downstairs window of their house. He likes two identical white Samoyeds, but they ignore him—he stops to look after them with regret; the woman who walks them always shrugs apologetically at me. “Bill the Bugger” isn't out in the mornings. Nor is Silver, whose owner, a vivacious elderly woman who'd been a racing-car driver in her youth, has for years walked with a group of other elderly women, exchanging gossip, jokes, and greetings. We meet these dog walkers, and others, later during the day or at weekends. We notice that we've stopped meeting some of them, dogs and people: we learn from others that they've died. Boxer Jimmy died, and Vincent grieves when he meets George by herself. The racing-car lady used to struggle to the top of Mount Victoria to take her chemo, and then sit on the hillside with her dog: her remission is good, and she and Silver are going strong.

Vincent does more turf scratching: there's a lot going on. I know that the dog and I are utterly different in ways that neither of us will understand; and yet we inflect each other's behavior, and we inhabit a shared world that is simultaneously comprehensible and mysterious. One of the good things about the dog's utter difference is that he extends the range of what's mysterious in the world: he enriches my ignorance. It's this sense, I think, that many of the Mount Victoria dog-walkers share: they, and their dogs, walk within a zone of incomprehension and tolerance. The ones who are empathetic about their dog's freedom and social life are humorous: they walk in groups, laughing—they laugh, but without scorn, at poor old Bill, humping. But the leash-tuggers

are seldom humorous, they don't stop to talk, and their dogs are often unsocial, anxious, scared, and aggressive. I think it's because their owners don't understand their need for social freedom. They need to read Epicurus and Seneca, not training manuals.

As we run on the environment changes. There's a stand of old gums: the sound of the wind in them is different from the pines, they smell astringently different, and the underfoot ground-cover is different from the pine-needles. Vincent was my mentor, and enhanced my pleasure in such details. He himself learned much from his wise mentor Tatz, a German shepherd. In turn, he mentored Tatz's successors, the hooligan Vivo, and the sweetly inept Lupo. Mostly, he taught them to run crashing through the bush. This was what he did with the delirious Lupo on the morning he finally collapsed into his death: after a last walk and bush-crash with his young ward, Vinnie stood helplessly vomiting in our back yard.

But now we are running down-hill over bumpy clay between gorse bushes, and down the steep, pine-needly slope to the overgrown petanque court above the Haughton Court apartments at the top of Marjoribank Street. Vincent's not good at down-hill: his back legs go out of kilter, and he's almost out of control as he goes belting out on to the playing field, where there's a man doing Tai Chi holding a sprig of fresh broom-flowers, and another man standing, smoking a cigarette and reading the newspaper while monotonously whacking a tennis ball across the 'dog exercise area' for his grateful pooch.

We run along a narrow, tar sealed track behind the Victoria Bowling Club, where the puppy Vincent was once startled by a bush full of sparrows (as he was also, on other occasions, by an umbrella, a log of wood in the surf at Paekakariki and a length of black polyurethane field-drain near the beech forest above the Tauherenikau River). We run past the children's playground next to the Mount Victoria bus tunnel and down Pirie Street past cats on letterboxes in the early morning sun. Vincent thinks twice about the cats and would have thought three times if his bad-influence acolyte Vivo had been with him; but he now has a destination in mind and he's outlived Vivo. People are beginning to line up at the bus-stops and some of them want to pat Vincent, but he's in the home straight now and won't be stopping. He doesn't stop for his enemy, a raucous border collie around the corner in Porrit Avenue, nor for Puppy, the delinquent Alsatian who lives behind us.

At the corner of Armour Avenue, Vincent increases his pace. Then we reach Albany Avenue where we live. He sprints joyfully uphill to his

home, leaving me behind. When I come in the back door the morning household kissing's already over, Vincent's drinking great noisy swallows of water, and then he lies down content that whatever's going to happen will be what happens next.

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