Differens
magazine

× **II. inside animals | animals inside**

× ii. a bestiarum vocabulum *spring 2022*

untitled, Mark Peckmezian

ii. a bestiarium vocabulum

In the recent article "Monster as Medium: Experiments in Perception in Early Modern Science and Film" written by the filmmakers Sasha Litvintseva and Beny Wagner, the duo poses a paradox between taxonomy and monstrosity. They write:

"*Coming across this term [taxonomies of monsters], we wondered how monsters could possibly be subjected to taxonomical categorization. Weren't taxonomies those modes of classification that whittle down the excesses of imagination in order to produce quantifiable objects of knowledge? And aren't monsters, conversely, the unruly forms that emerge when imagination spills over the bounds of reason? To insert a living being into a taxonomic logic is to conceptually arrest the fluidity that animates life. Yet monsters would seem to resist this, as they are amorphous, composite beings that somehow evade the restrictions by which the world of ordered appearances must abide.*" [1]

Flirting with this interrogation and paradoxical relation raised by Litvintseva and Wagner, we in Difference Magazine started working on the second part of our second issue, *#II. inside animals / animals inside,* with the aspiration to achieve a *Bestiarium Vocabulum*; a vocabulary for thinking critically about the relationship and conflicts between modes of categorization and the modes of the living object, being categorized. For this reason, this part of *#II. inside animals / animals inside* has collected texts on individual animals, exploring their role and relationship of animals to humans and human conceptualization.

The result of this collection, *ii. a bestiarium vocabulum,* begins with a plunge into the world of an animal with a special status among humans: we start by entering the world of dogs. As a guide for the blind, as a guardian of gateways to unknown worlds, like the Greeks' Cerberus, and as a bridge between man and animal, photographer Mark Peckmezian's dogs crack open the issue and take on the role of escorting us through it. We stumble into the worlds of other animals, along the way, such as the world of the octopuses, horses, birds and primates. At last, we once again come to engage ourselves with one of the human's closest friends, the cat, here not as the homely, familiar, but as the utterly alien; as an abstract and technological gaze.

By asking ourselves questions such as *where does the animal and the monster overlap?*, *how can the animal be thought without its attributed monstrosity?*, or *is the horror of the monster the same as the horror of the conceptless?*, we have oriented ourselves towards this final form of our work that, rather than answering these questions, attempts to show something in the spaces in between.

Some aesthetic theories suggest that our cognition represents objects more naturalistically, more naked and truthful to the real thing, when we lack linguistic concepts of it. Some of these theories, like that of Nicholas Humphrey in his famous article "Cave Art, Autism, and the Evolution of the Human Mind", try in this way to explain why cavemen depicted animals so lifelike but humans so abstractly, like stick figures, by referring to the evolution of human cognition and language. It is supposed that we developed concepts for particular animals and plants later than for particular humans and human relations. Humphrey suggests that when our eyes lack linguistic concepts to guide our vision, they remain innocent and nakedly spectating. Accordingly, the impressions, or at least the representations, like those made by the cave painters of animals without particular names, remain lively and perhaps, if we were to take one step further, *frightening*?

As an echo of the first dichotomy, between taxonomy and monsters, between concepts and the conceptless, we in Differens Magazine want to invite the reader of *ii. a bestiarium vocabulum* to activate a vision and attention to what lies outside of the conceptualized. To the questions between the questions and to the texts between the texts. To the monster and its innocence in both animals and humans, incapable of grasping the other or herself, always incapable of being grasped but perhaps not impossible to depicted or seen, clearly...

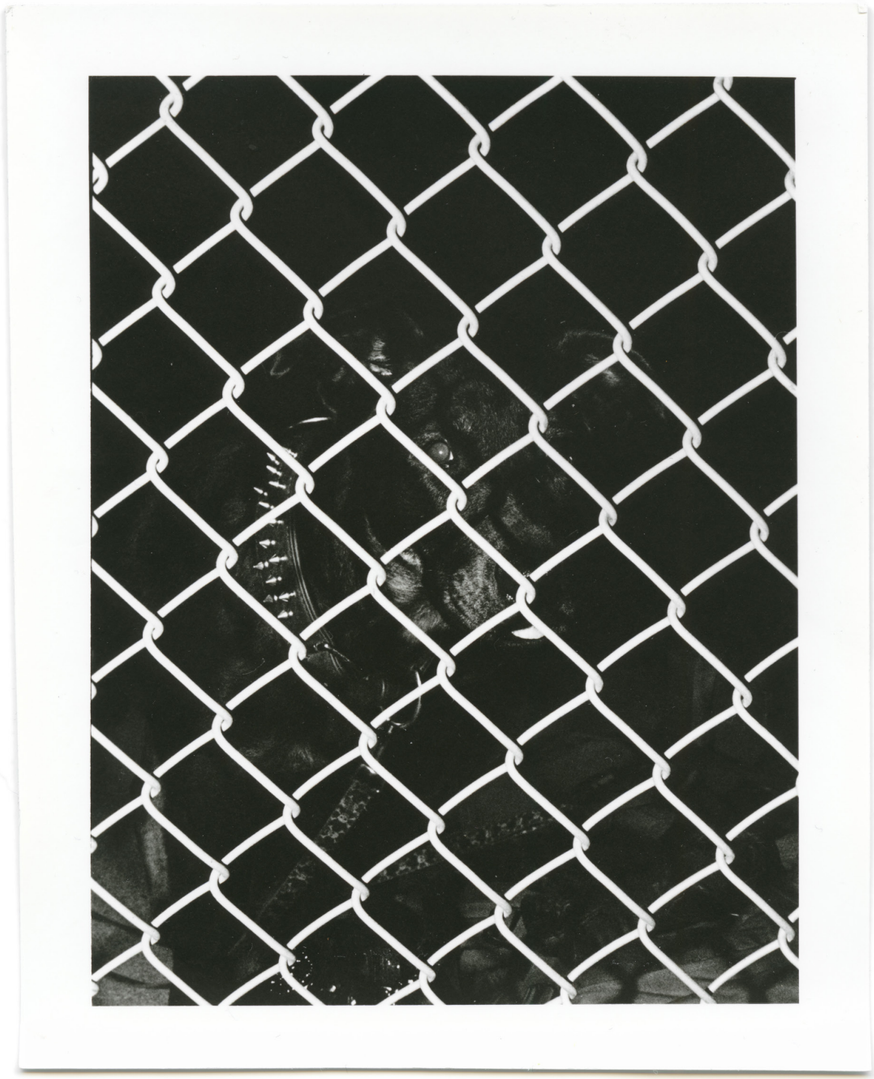
In conclusion, we invite you to the convergence of the frightening and the conceptless and we hope that these thoughts will, much like the mentioned echo, continue to resound throughout your reading.

[1] https://www.e-flux.com/journal/116/379558/monster-as-medium-experiments-in-perception-in-early-modern-science-and-film/)

/ the editors of Differens Magazine

the editorial team

fig. 1



untitled, Mark Peckmezian

release the dog...

In Conversation with Mark Peckmezian

Amanda Winberg

Mark Peckmezian is a Berlin-based fashion-photographer and artist with an extraordinary eye for the beautiful awkwardness in failed visual archetypes. He has earned international fame for his creative fashion-photography for major fashion houses such as Gucci, Hermes and Dior, as well as for his portraits of Bill Gates, Joe Biden, and other political animals, featured in outlets like The New York Times and Le Monde. The most recent work of his is the artistic portraiture book Nice from 2021, printed by Roma Publications.

In this issue of Differens Magazine, we have been given the oppurtunity to learn more about Peckmezian's dog photography. Describing it as a reconnection with his artistic practice after many years of art theory at the Ryerson University in Toronto, photographing animals seem to has figured as something like a source of creative vitality for Peckmezian since the beginning of his career:

"I started shooting dogs immediately after leaving school, actually. It felt like a bit of a detox or something. Returning to an innocent and joyous engagement with photography after being brainwashed by university, this delusional academic discourse. I hated the way my professors talked about and conceived art. In fact, they would've absolutely hated these dog photos."

With a visual language characterized by irony, drama and extravagance, the dogs in Peckmezian's photography raises fundamental questions about interspecific perception, scenes and spectacles. The dogs does not seem to be nonhumans but morethanhumans, pointing toward something extremely, perhaps supreme, human, yet to find its concepts. We, being this embarrassingly contrived species with too much self-consciousness to assertively express and stage our equally hilarious as beautiful temperaments, find ourselves admitting, that humans have a lot to learn from the expressive aesthetic of the dogs, in Peckmezian's photography.

Being one of our times hottest dog photographers, what do you think about when you hear the word dog?

Haha I reject that characterization but nevertheless: I think I think about dogs? I should say that I don't think my dog photos are about dogs really. I see the dogs as a token subject. They're a stand in for the human subject, and the project is a space to play with photography and its codes and conventions. This describes my creative motivation at least. They are still literally pictures of dogs, and I do like dogs a lot. I can see why the pictures would be interesting to dog enthusiasts even though they were meant differently.

Your dog photography often investigates the moods and attitudes of dog-being, how different is it to approach and shoot dogs compared to humans?

I think of shooting dogs and shooting people as very, very similar activities. They both involve a lot of the same creative 'modules': Getting a read on a character, a personality; distilling that into a relatable idea; finding the right photographic form to articulate that.
I think I often approach portraiture as something like caricature. You get an overwhelming sense of a subjects' mental state or persona. For example: the small prissy dog, wound up tight, trotting anxiously on its little ballerina feet. I know that mood! I know that person. How do you depict this visually, in a clear and compelling way? To answer that question involves understanding a lot about photography, and a lot of that knowledge is directly applicable to portraiture of people. In this way I see these photos as one big exercise.

Describing it as a retreat from theory, do you at all work with something like an ideal for the portraits or is it just interaction and Zen all the way through?

I think this work specifically is all about letting go and reacting. I found that whenever I go to a dog park with expectations, the pictures fall apart. There are too many variables to ever really control, so it's foolish to even try. I just walk around, watch dogs, and daydream about picture ideas. The vast majority of my dog pictures were taken spontaneously, when I was out with a camera. I would also deliberately go to hang out at dog parks to find dogs.

untitled, Mark Peckmezian

untitled, Mark Peckmezian

I'd like to take a moment to think about the meeting between these fluffy sometimes clumsy and, you know, *fleshy,* bodies and the hard, objective, and technical instrument, that the camera is. What happens in the meeting between dog and camera?

As it happens, dogs don't really care so much about my presence. They usually pay me minimal attention, they're too busy sniffing shit or whatever. Sometimes the flash angers them.

Something I always find interesting is the reaction of the dog owners. I've photographed hundreds of dogs and not once has an owner ever objected. On the contrary they seem to beam with pride. This always makes me laugh for some reason. I imagine that they think "someone else sees how beautiful and perfect my dog is," their personal vanity somehow extending to another being.

While I was doing some research for this interview, I came across texts about your photography that suggested that you were "giving personality" to the dogs through your style of expression. How do you feel about this characterization?

I have a very agnostic attitude towards this. I always start off being inspired by something specific about the dog, but I'm not loyal to that perception. I'll do whatever makes for a good picture: 'Don't let the truth get in the way of a good story.' I cheat pictures all the time. Maybe a dog was in fact a graceful dog, and was running gracefully when I took the picture, but in the frame I have he looks like a wild mess. Maybe that attitude makes for a better picture.

If there is such a thing as unphotogenic humans (that is, humans that doesn't photograph well), are there correspondingly unphotogenic dogs?

On an ultimate level I think there are no boring subjects. Every subject has some kind of interestingness somewhere. It comes down to the intelligence and talent of the photographer to be able to find and articulate that. But conventionally speaking yes of course. I think people or dogs that are banal, have nothing specific about them, are "unphotogenic." Of course even that banality, if concentrated enough, can become special.

An interesting corollary would be that some subjects are too photogenic. I think this exists. I think about subjects that are too obviously interesting. Consider the poodle with dyed pink hair or something. I think as a viewer you always want to feel like you're discovering something, and subjects like to deprive you of that experience.

I understand your dog portraits as an endeavour to capture the temperaments, directness and playfulness of the dog's bodily expressions, perhaps suggesting that a similar humour is to be found in the expressions of the human body and its doings? Is the value of something being "fun" or, as your latest publication is called, "nice" underestimated in the art world?

Yeah I think that's the tone I bring to most of my work, lightness and humour. I laugh a lot when I take pictures. I think about the whole enterprise of making art as possessing a fundamental absurdity. But I don't mean that as a complaint: I want to celebrate that absurdity, I want to enjoy something as it is, *exactly* as it is.I don't believe that all art has to be pleasurable per se, but personally I certainly prefer art that is.

Additionally I have no tolerance for work that discards pleasure unduly, usually out of narcissism (refusal to meet the viewer half way), incompetence (inability to communicate well), or out of some sort of ideology that says 'pleasurable work is unserious work.'

As we approaching the end of this interview, I must ask the question I've been most excited about: do you envy dogs and their humor?

Great question and the answer is absolutely, yes. I think I fetishize a state of innocence. I admire that deeply. I think dogs have many attitudes that, if possessed by a human, would be very admirable. I'm imagining the cliche good natured dog: easy going, down for whatever, always enthusiastic about whatever they're doing, curious and adventurous, friendly, trusting.

I know some people like this. I see these qualities as a kind of moral intelligence. I think there are many kinds of intelligence, and I think moral intelligence is the most valuable kind by a factor of ten. And some people just seem to be born with sound moral intuitions. I don't have that, I felt like I had to fight for every inch haha.

Haha, relate. But now I immediately feel compelled to ask one supplementary and last question… If you must pick a human to symbolize the virtues of the dog, who would it be?

Hmm in terms of a well known figure, maybe the Prince from The Idiot.

imagining the primate...

untitled, Mark Peckmezian

fig. 2

The Human Need for a Future

Peter Gärdenfors
Lund University Cognitive Science

After all, life can be summed up in the paradoxical formula: the preservation of the future.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Broadening horizons

Humans have, as long as there is history, been obsessed with demarcating themselves from other animals. Different answers have been tried, such as that we are alone in using tools. Then it was found that many species use tools. Next attempt was to say that we are alone in *making* tools. Again, this is not true since both apes and birds make tools. One demarcation has remained though: humans have language.

From an evolutionary point of view, the next question then becomes why we are the only species that has language. Before attempting to answer that question, the *ecology* of our ancestors must be considered. One explanation for what happened when the ancestors of humans (hominins) separated from those of chimpanzees some 6-8 million years ago is that the hominins adapted to a life in open landscapes, while the early chimpanzees remained in forests or denser vegetation. The adaptations to a savannah landscape provided new evolutionary pressures on the hominins, who had to travel over larger distances. Foraging demanded planning for longer periods of time. In brief, the ecology forced the hominins to broaden their spatial and temporal horizons. We have become the far-ranging apes.

The selection pressures, however, also affected the inner worlds of the hominins. In the same way as they needed to see further across the savannah, they needed to be able to see further within themselves. The evolution of human thinking is closely connected to how we have succeeded in broadening our inner and outer horizons. In short, my thesis is that the unique position of humans is due to the fact that we are the only animals that can plan for future needs and not just for the needs we have here and now.

It is a peculiarity of man that he can only live by looking to the future – sub specie aeternitatis. And this is his salvation in the most difficult moments of his existence, although he sometimes has to force his mind to the task.

Viktor Frankl

The poet Paul Valéry says in one of his aphorisms that the task of consciousness is to create a future. Much of the analysis of the minds of animals, children and adults concerns precisely how rich their images of the future are. Evolution has given humans an increasingly rich inner world and more and more cognitive abilities. As I shall argue, this has generated language, leading to an increasing ability to transmit knowledge between generations.

As Rüdiger Safranski notes, however, a rich consciousness leads to complications in our relationship to the world.

Consciousness results in a broken link with the world. It plunges us into time: into a past that harasses us because we cannot forget it and that remains present even when repressed; into a present that constantly escapes our grasp; and into a future that may become a disturbing scenario beset with threats. Everything would be simpler if consciousness were only conscious being. But it breaks loose and becomes open to a horizon of new possibilities. Consciousness is able to transcend the given reality, and hence to discover either a dizzying nothingness or a god in which everything comes to rest.

Rüdiger Safranski

Prospective cognition

The main advantage of an inner world is that it makes it possible to go through an imagined future before the real one falls upon you. To the extent that you manage to foresee the consequences of your choices, you are in a better position to control the future. The essence of planning is that, in contrast to trial-and-error, an individual imagines a series of actions that will lead to a desired goal before carrying out the actions. One should however distinguish between *immediate* planning, which aims at fulfilling current desires, and *prospective* planning, which aims at satisfying future desires.

It was, for a long time, assumed that humans were the only animals capable of prospective planning. This is sometimes called the Bischof-Köhler hypothesis. We can foresee that we will be hungry tomorrow and save some of the food; we realise that it will be cold and windy in winter and build ourselves a shelter well in advance. We sow and we harvest. Humans live in their dreams and plans – notions that carry them away, but also give them perseverance. We act on what's in our heads, not just on what's around us. This applies to all kinds of distant goals: to pass a degree, to build a house, to write a book, to get the one you love, and so on. Imagination is our strongest driving force.

What makes it harder to plan for future needs than for present ones? The answer is that the two types of planning rely on different levels of imagination. When planning to satisfy a current need, the value of the consequences is determined in relation to what one wants to do at the moment, but it does not require conscious thought about the need. Planning for future needs, on the other hand, requires the ability to imagine and value these potential needs even though one is not experiencing them now.

The human throws at the future

an arrow tied to a string.

The arrow lands in an *image*,

and the human reels itself in towards that object.

Paul Valéry

The limited future of animal thought
Apes don't believe in God. That's what happens when you have so much fur you can't see your own navel. They don't ask about origins, any more than they believe in death. They just laugh as if it were a joke that they exist.

Cecilia Bornäs

Yet much of what animals do seems to be planning for the future: birds building nests, squirrels gathering food for the winter, etc. But these behaviours are only instinctive. Most animals seem to have no idea of the future – they just follow their urges.

One example of how difficult it is for animals to imagine being different is how monkeys are caught in Asia. They find a hole in a tree trunk just big enough for a monkey to get its hand in. In the hole you put boiled rice, which the monkeys are very fond of. When a monkey spots the rice, it reaches in and grabs it. But then the hand is too big to be pulled out of the hole again. The strange thing is that the monkey is left sitting there, its hand clutching the rice. It cannot disconnect from the thought of the presence of the sweet rice and imagine itself as a free monkey, only to let go of the rice. The monkey's prospective planning seems to be completely non-existent.

The Bischof-Köhler hypothesis can, however, no longer be upheld in the light of recent experimental results. Great apes are not only able to select tools for future use, but also to save tools that have currently been used to satisfy a desire. Perhaps most importantly, great apes are able outcompete current drives in favor of future ones as well as being able to envision future events. Another example is that in Furuvik Zoo in Sweden, the male chimpanzee Santino has been observed calmly collecting stones in a pile in the morning (and hiding them from his care-takers), and later in the day throwing them at visitors that he becomes angry with. Interestingly, this ability to plan for future needs also seems to have evolved independently in the avian taxon of corvids. For example, scrub jays save food that they will prefer for breakfast tomorrow. Even though these results show that some animals have the capacity for prospective planning, the time range and variations of the plans are rather limited in relation to the capacity of humans.

The difference between immediate and prospective planning can be seen, for example, in the use of tools. Apes and other animals make tools, but almost only for their current needs. Humans, on the other hand, may realize that they will need the tool tomorrow as well and thus carry it with them to a new environment. Signs of carrying tools therefore become an interesting test of whether you are capable of prospective planning or not. Stone tools dating back some 2.5 million years have been found from the so-called Oldowan culture. Archaeologists have been able to show that many of these tools were transported over several kilometres. Even the raw material for the tools has been moved over long distances, suggesting that there was a plan to produce the tool later at another location. In contrast, studies of chimpanzee tool use have mostly seen them carrying their tools a few hundred metres. This suggest that is a marked difference in prospective planning ability between apes and early humans. It is clear, however, that human foresight has become more extensive over time and nowadays we are constantly juggling the future. We carry not only tools, but also tickets, almanacs, mobile phones, etc.

The dilemma of the future

Our most important thoughts are those which contradict our feelings.

Paul Valéry

Prospective cognition gives rise to a fundamental predicament. The dilemma is that the actions required to satisfy future needs are often in conflict with those that satisfy present desires. If I don't want to freeze later tonight, I must go out and look for firewood, but right now I am warm and cosy and have no desire to leave the fire. We have to choose between acting for the present or for the future. There are big individual differences between how we deal with the conflict between our present desires and the future needs we can foresee. The differences are well illustrated by Aesop's fable of the ant and the cricket. Some people, like the ant in the fable, find it difficult to live in the present and get their greatest satisfaction from planning for the future. They take out retirement insurance at the age of twenty-five.

The conflict between the present and the future self is closely related to what Kierkegaard calls "despair" in his book *The Sickness unto Death*. Despair means that we have no way out of the conflict between living in the present and thinking ahead, but it is precisely this that makes us human. Kierkegaard also points out that the form of "sickness" that despair represents is unique to human beings:

The possibility of this sickness is man's superiority over the animal, and this superiority distinguishes him in quite another way than does his erect walk, for it indicates infinite erectness or sublimity, that he is spirit.

When humans acquire the ability to choose their own ends and to plan and dream accordingly, they become more flexible beings, but at the same time their paradisiacal innocence is ended. They become dual natures, living in both a real and an imagined world. The imaginary world can easily become a seductive refuge – a heaven of fantasy – that overshadows the grey, often arduous everyday life. It is tempting not to connect the two worlds – to let the imagination gallop away with no requirement for action in the real world. The inner world becomes a gnawing longing and the inability to realise it leads to constant frustration.

We should once again become good neighbours with the nearest things, and not stare beyond them as contemptuously as we have done hitherto at clouds and night skies. In forests and caves, in swamps and under cloudy skies – there man has lived too long, in millennia-long stages of culture – and lived miserably. There he has learned to despise the present and the neighbourhood and life and himself – and we, the inhabitants of the lighter regions of nature and spirit, still have in our blood, by inheritance, something of this poisonous contempt for what is nearest.

Friedrich Nietzsche

In this way, the rich inner world of humans has become a burden to us – much as the male peacock has to drag around his gaudy tail to attract the females. As Nietzsche suggests, perhaps it is better to come to one's senses, abandon the most alluring castles in the sky and strive to anchor one's thoughts in the reality in which one finds oneself, even if it is far less tempting.

The future and free will

There is a very strong link between having free will and being able to plan for future needs. Harry Frankfurt says that a necessary criterion for an individual to be a person is that the individual not only wants something but also wants it to be wanted. This criterion of free will is based on being able to imagine one's own desires, which is a prerequisite for prospective planning. Thus, free will requires prospective planning. The converse is also true to some extent: The capacity for prospective planning requires that one can freely choose between trying to fulfil the goals one has now or to fulfil the goals one imagines one will have in the future.

A free will also presupposes a form of self-consciousness in the sense that one must be conscious of one's own desires in order to want another desire. Kierkegaard expresses the connection as follows:

Over all, consciousness, i.e., self-consciousness, is the decisive thing in relation to the self; the more consciousness, the more self; the more consciousness, the more will; the more will, the more self. A person who has no will at all is not a self; but the more will he has, the more self-consciousness he has also.

The explanation of why there is a strong correlation between the degree of free will and the level of self-consciousness is that the more freely humans want to be able to choose, the more different goals, present and future, they must be able to conceive of. In other words, the richer your inner world is, the more choices you have. By developing your imagination, and thereby your capacity for prospective planning, you increase your ability to choose freely.

Morality and the future

The ability of human to foresee their future needs leads to two complications. First, individuals are given a much larger set of options from which to choose, since they must also consider future possibilities. Secondly, they can reflect on their own choices and contrast different values. These two complications often lead to great uncertainty for the chooser – in difficult cases to existential uncertainty. In a sense, humans are so free that they can even disregard their self-interest. (This is the topic of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*.)

In order to reduce this uncertainty, humans need guiding rules to help them choose. To be moral, one must have free will. Darwin writes that morality consists in being able to reflect on and evaluate one's actions. He believes that short-term desires such as hunger and lust need to be suppressed in favour of longer-term values. Darwin already clearly identifies the dilemmas faced by a prospective planner.
Morality is needed to support the long-term and overarching goals in the struggle between them and our throbbing egocentric desires. Morality points to our future actions, towards things we have not yet decided to do, and it therefore presupposes prospective thinking and a free will.

An unselfish strategy, which is often unconscious, involves foregoing short-term selfish gain in order to build trust that may lead to future benefits in forms of collaborative outcomes that are more valuable than a quick windfall. Nietzsche puts it that people are selfless because they care about their reputation:

A fixed reputation was formerly a matter of the very greatest utility; and wherever society continues to be ruled by the herd-instinct, it is still most suitable for every individual to give to his character and business the appearance of unalterableness, – even when they are not so in reality. "One can rely on him, he remains the same" – that is the praise which has most significance in all dangerous conditions of society.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Therefore, being selfless now generally means being selfish in the long run. Such an investment model, where trust is capital, provides a rational explanation of general morality. It is important to note, however, that the reasoning is based on the premise that one is capable of prospective planning. We need to be able to compare the reward that an egoistic choice gives us directly with the value of the opportunities that future trust may offer.

Self-consciousness enables us to reflect on our choices and thus to make moral decisions – this possibility is not available to other animals. Already Darwin notes in *The Descent of Man* that a moral creature must be able to reflect on and evaluate his actions. Jean Piaget argues that children's moral values do not derive from following the rules of their parents or other authorities, but from their ability to empathise with others,

that is, the ability to put themselves in someone else's shoes. Such a role reversal presupposes that the child has an idea of the feelings of the other. But this is not enough for morality to emerge. If I am to be moral towards you, and not just compassionate, then I must make a conscious choice – I must have an idea of my goal and be able to contrast this with other possible goals. Immanuel Kant says in the third part of *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* that one must see oneself as the origin of one's principles, without outside influence, in order to consider oneself morally free.

Morality is an ill-chosen and ill-reputed term for one of the branches of generalizing politics, which involves the tactics of the self against itself. In the statements, I am master of myself, I give in to myself, I allow myself, 'I' and 'me' there are separate – or are they not? One could simplify the moral analysis to a determination of whether the distinction between these two pronouns is real or fictional.

Paul Valéry

To be moral, therefore, requires self-consciousness and free will – to be able to distinguish between 'I' and 'me' as Valéry puts it. Animals are not moral because they cannot consciously evaluate their actions. For the same reason, we generally do not assign morality to young children, because we understand that their inner world is not yet sufficiently developed for them to make conscious choices. On the other hand, monkeys, apes and children have a sense of being treated unfairly and react accordingly.

Small children also have difficulty thinking ahead and are therefore, in all their sweetness, great egoists. A well-known experiment that has been performed with four-year-olds is the following: The experimenter gives a child a marshmallow and says: "If you can wait a few minutes to eat it, I'll give you another marshmallow". Then the person leaves the room and the child sits there alone with the candy. After fifteen minutes, the person comes back in and if the child still has his marshmallow, he gets another one. Only about a third of four-year-olds can wait. The most interesting thing about the test, however, is that it was followed up ten years later and it turned out that the children who could put off the reward were also the ones with the best school grades. For these children, the inner world was sufficiently developed by the age of four that the glow of the imagined future with two marshmallows was more appealing than the present piece of candy.

Language and the future

Man's unique capacity for foresight also has consequences for our ability to cooperate. Different animal species can cooperate in many ways. Such seemingly simple animals as ants and bees build complex societies with collective efforts. This form of animal cooperation is instinctive – they have no idea of the goals to which the work will lead. Therefore, they cannot create new goals to collaborate on. My main thesis concerning the evolution of language is that, humans have created symbolic communication as a powerful tool for achieving innovative cooperation on future goals.

Homo sapiens is the only species that use symbols to communicate about what happened long ago, about their plans for the future, and about their dreams. In their natural state, animals do not use symbols. They communicate with signals about what is happening here and now. Unlike human communication, animals seldom check whether their signals are getting through. It takes two to tango – human language is, in contrast, based on an interaction with the person you are communicating with.

The difference between the symbols of a language and the signals that animals use is that the signals are only about what is present in the animal's environment. Bees only dance immediately after returning to the hive after finding nectar. Vervets only signal when danger is imminent. Neither they nor the bees ever tell each other stories or make joint plans.

The point is that without the help of language symbols, we would not be able to share visions of the future and convince each other that a certain unknown goal is worth striving for. This function is probably one of the most important evolutionary drivers behind the emergence of language. Unlike other theories of the evolution of language, it also explains why humans are alone in having a language, since the ability to cooperate on future goals requires both an awareness of oneself in the future and an advanced ability to empathise with the inner worlds of others. Both of these abilities are most developed in humans.

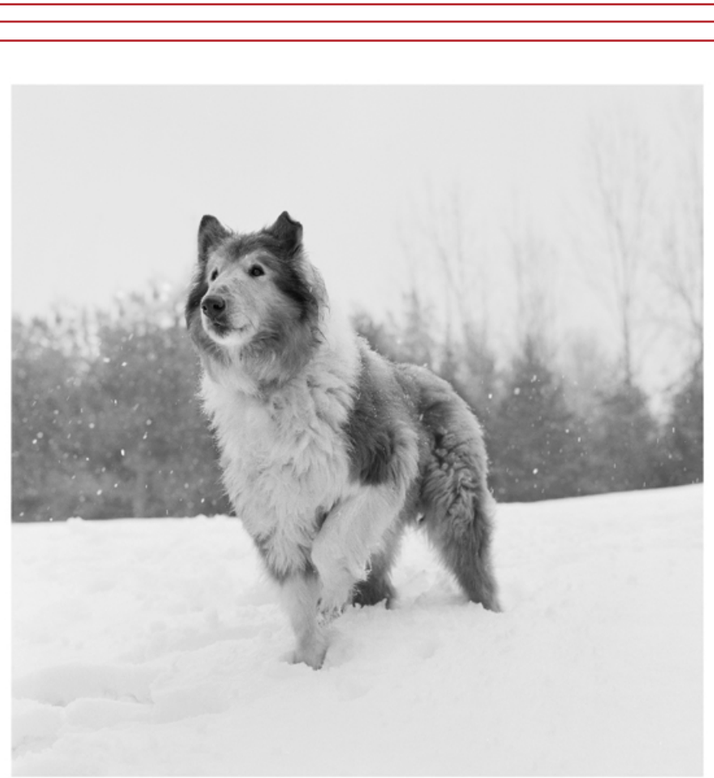
Conclusion

The increasingly rich inner world of man has increased our awareness and extended our imagination of the future, but at the same time made it more difficult for us to choose. We are increasingly able to reflect on our decisions and judge them from a moral perspective. Moreover, our capacity for prospection means that we need to think not only about the consequences of our choices for the present, but also about how they will affect our future choices. These complex choice situations create a need for meaning, for deliberations that place the various choices in a larger context.

If I were a tree among trees, an animal among animals, life would have meaning, or rather, the problem would have no meaning, because I would be part of the world. I would be the world, to which my consciousness and my whole demand for familiarity now place me in opposition. It is ridiculous reason that sets me against the whole of creation. ... And what is at the bottom of this conflict, this rupture between the world and my thought, if not my own consciousness of the world?

Albert Camus

The text builds partly on material from my book *Den meningssökande människan* (The Meaning-seeking Human), Natur & Kultur, Stockholm 2006.



untitled, Mark Peckmezian

watching the octopus...

untitled, Mark Peckmezian

fig. 3

In a Tentacled Neighbor's Garden

Axel Rudolphi

If Derrida's decisive experience of being under the gaze of a cat—or more precisely, his own "little pussycat," in his own bathroom—left him with an unprecedented propulsion to "think through this absolute alterity of the neighbor" (2002, 380), one may wonder what further philosophical impetus would have come out of an encounter like the one that the South African filmmaker Craig Foster had with a certain octopus(sy) in his own coastal backyard. In the Academy Award-winning wildlife/human-autobiography documentary My Octopus Teacher (Netflix 2020), Foster documents his developing, and increasingly intimate, relation to a nameless common octopus (Octopus vulgaris) in the cold waters outside his Western Cape home, to the backdrop of his own previous psychological burnout. In the course of eleven months, Foster pays daily visits to the octopus and follows her throughout the remainder of her life, presented in a string of fragmental moments of however long he manages to hold his breath. As a matter of fact, a lot seems to come out of these encounters: a transformative development for the human protagonist, a symbolically rich piece of reality-cinematography for the viewers, and presumably even a few valuable events for the other, cephalopod, lead character, herself.

In this essay, I will explore some of the questions that, like in this example, arise concerning the human relation to the animal other. In the first part of the essay I discuss some of the philosophical literature on the topic, with a particular emphasis on the writings of Jacques Derrida. I then turn to the example of the octopus in the essay's second and final part, with some reflections on this particular human-animal encounter and the things that render it interesting.

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In Derrida's account, the topic of animals is of fundamental importance to philosophy, with ineluctable consequences for all three of philosophy's core branches, of ethics, ontology and epistemology. As such, the maladroit, rejective treatment—or perhaps, rather, the careful repression—of the topic of animals within the history of Western philosophy, warrants a certain deconstructionist examination.

In the essay "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)" (2002), Derrida takes up this task, with a particular emphasis on the philosophies of thinkers like Descartes, Heidegger, Lacan and Levinas, and on the mythologies of the Judeo-Christian and Greek traditions. According to Derrida's (2002, 399) main argument, the line separating man and animal, as imagined in traditional Western philosophy and "common sense," does not constitute a unilinear, indivisible border, but is rather a heterogeneous one that also has an ongoing history. Moreover, on the other side of this imagined line across from man, we do not find a group of beings that can legitimately be subsumed under the unified concept of "the Animal" in general. Rather, this is a space of great plurality and of shifting relational divisions, which renders futile the idea of steadily objectifying this realm once and for all. Finally, the history of the relational border between man and animal seems, according to Derrida, to have recently entered an unprecedented phase, with important consequences for both human subjectivity and ethics.

Let us now take a closer look at what Derrida means by these various, connected claims. It is first of all important to make clear that Derrida (2002, 398) is not at all trying to simply erase any conceptual border between human and what humans call "the Animal," in favor of some kind of biologically underpinned continuity between all living creatures. This would, on the one hand, leave us with an even blunter concept of "Life" in general, saying even less than "the Animal" in general, by ignoring all possible differences. On the other hand, such geneticism can, as we are well aware of, have ethically dubitable consequences. Rather, what Derrida is interested in is what "feeds" this limit and gives rise to its various configurations.

Unsurprisingly, one of the things that seems to feed this limit the most, is the concept of language. For Descartes, and his philosophy of mind-body dualism, the aspect of language easily settled the question of how the animal is distinguished from man. He writes (2007, 61):

[A]lthough all animals easily communicate to us, by voice or bodily movement, their natural impulses of anger, fear, hunger, and so on, it has never yet been observed that any brute animal reached the stage of using real speech, that is to say, of indicating by word or sign or anything pertaining to pure thought and not to natural impulse. Such speech is the only certain sign of thought hidden in a body.

Moreover, although we may be tempted to infer the idea that *some* resourceful animals also possess immortal souls just like humans, this, Descartes (2007, 60) writes, "is unlikely, because there is no reason to believe it of some animals without believing it of all, and many of them such as oysters and sponges are too imperfect for this to be credible." The issue of language thus becomes at least twofold: for philosophers like Descartes it is the criteria by which we can distinguish man from animal, while for Derrida this tendency to name, and subsume all animals under a single linguistic concept also becomes the track for his deconstructionist approach to animal philosophy.

This way of thinking about the animal is far from unique to Descartes, Derrida observes. It is, rather, endemic to all of Western philosophy. In fact, the very title of Derrida's essay on Lacan's theorizing on the animal, more or less sums it all up. In "And Say the Animal Responded?" (2003) Derrida questions the rigor with which Lacan's distinction between "reacting" and "responding" determines the limit between the human and the animal. Despite preliminary hopes of a more nuanced account of the psychoanalytical subject vis-à-vis the cited evidence of something similar to a mirror stage in certain animals, Lacan nevertheless maintains a distinction between animal communication as "gregarious" and human communication as "social." In an attempt to counter ill-founded communication theories of "language as sign," Lacan holds that human language, rather than operating within a fixed structure of signs, functions by *evocation* (of a response in relation to the other), and not through simply *informing*. By contrast, animal interaction can legitimately be seen as a type of pre-wired system of communication, but to then infer that this must also be the case with humans would be a fallacious case of, as Lacan (cited in Derrida 2002, 126) puts it, "putting the rabbit into the hat so as to be able to pull it out again later." Moreover, animals can of course also work to *misinform* through pretense, but what here allegedly distinguishes the human realm is the human further capacity of "pretended pretense."

Derrida's mission is then, again, not to collapse the difference between concepts such as "reaction" and "response," but rather to question the way in which these distinctions are taken to provide the border between the human and the animal. How does one in actuality determine whether a behavior is a case of "pretended pretense" or merely simple "pretense"? And can we in fact attribute all these capacities that have been denied the animal, to man in every instance? Furthermore, Derrida (2003, 135) asks, even if such a distinction would be possible to draw in principle, what would be its foundation? Since Lacan refuses any theoretical input from empirical accounts of e.g. ethology, it seems that the bedrock here consists in mere dogma. Any allowance for the animal to actually be giving a response is just rejected *a priori*.

This trait becomes, I believe, more explicit in Heidegger (1995), whose phenomenological ontology essentially takes as one of its core aims to clarify the metaphysical foundations of the sciences. Thus, even if biology and zoology may talk about "the environmental world" of the animal, we cannot, Heidegger (Ibid., 193) seems to say, engage in any detailed interpretation of such theories on the lives of animals, before the question of what constitutes the essence of animality has been examined on a metaphysical level.

Heidegger's thesis is that animality consists in "poverty-in-world," which means that animals, in contrast to inanimate objects, do have a certain access to being, and yet lack the human capacities of world-formation and of ontologically penetrating one's lived environment in the sense of "taking-as," as of human *Dasein*. Here, again, the animal is deprived of exhibiting some essential capacity, which in turn separates it from man. In line with this, Derrida (2002, 388) cites Walter Benjamin's similar idea of the perceived aphasic "sadness" of nature in not being able respond. Accordingly, humans can name the animals, but in contrast to named—or, to use Althusserian language, *interpellated*—human subjects, animals lack the possibility of linguistic resignification (FN: crucial to e.g. Judith Butler's [1997] philosophy) or,

untitled, Mark Peckmezian

more simply, of responding to this quasi-subjectifying call from the other.

But is this really the proper approach with regard to the animal? And to what extent is this not just a question of a lack in animals, but rather of something that relates to ourselves as human subjects?

As for the general methodological decision to take ontology as the fundamental starting point in philosophy, an important alternative has been provided in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas (1959; 1961) instead argues that subjectivity and ontological discourse first comes into being through the encounter with the other in the form of a face, which expresses the vulnerability of that other, along with an ethical injunction to be in its service and to not harm it. Accordingly, it is rather the ethical relation toward this perceived lack in the other that produces the subjectivity of the human "I" and all that follows from this. As such, before ontology and before language, there is the encounter with the untotalizable alterity of the face of the other, and this is how humans gain their essential abilities of responding and of responsibility.

Yet, even in the case of Levinas, one may, as Derrida does, ask how other this other is taken to be. As Levinas (1988, 172) states in an interview, his principal thesis is that "the human breaks with pure being," in the sense of "being," proposed by both Heidegger and Darwin, that "the living being struggles for [its own] life." This is then what separates man from animal life, namely a fundamental ethics with regard to the other. And yet, Levinas does not entirely break with Heidegger when he earlier in the same interview (Ibid., 169) states that "[w]e understand the animal, the face of the animal, in accordance with *Dasein*." Conceding, furthermore, that the existence of a face in an animal is not something we can entirely refuse, Levinas nevertheless maintains that the face of an animal is not a face in its purest form (again, this Heideggerian in-between state), and that any ascription of a face to the animal will always be secondary to, and derivative from, the concepts that arise from the fundamental event of encountering the face of a human other.

However, this humanist line of reasoning may be found somewhat surprising, given the crucial *asymmetry* that fundamentally structures the ethical relation in Levinas' account. According to Levinas (1986, 31), ethics has its basis in the original, dual 'I-Thou' relationship, in which this perspectival 'I' is not generalizable to a demand for ethical or moral reciprocity. To take such a step would be to enter directly onto the *political* level, where several other 'Thous' must be taken into account, and be compared to some (essentially tragic) extent. And yet, what must remain the primary guide in such a second-level strife toward ideal, and always improvable, political justice, is the ethical encounter with the other. As Levinas (1986, 31) phrases this fundamental ethics: "*not only am I more responsible than the other but I am even responsible for everyone else's responsibility!*"

So, why, one may ask, should we then suddenly refer to a perceived lack of reciprocal responsibility in the other, when it comes to denying the animal a proper face? This question becomes all the more pressing when we take into consideration the fundamentally infinite alterity that Levinas ascribes to the face. How is it that this infinity is somehow still conditional upon it being a *human* face?

In response to this, as well as to all the ontological accounts we have just discussed, Derrida describes a similar face-to-face scene where he, naked, meets his cat in his bathroom and is filled with not only a sensation of shame, but of shame of being ashamed. The encounter may be said to have two crucial components. First of all, Derrida asks, how could it be denied that I am in fact *being seen* by the cat, whose gaze moreover is so bottomless and undecidable that it can only be described as an infinite alterity? And secondly, whence this shame of being ashamed? Ashamed in front of whom? Regarding this second point, Derrida makes a lengthy exegesis of Western mythology which lands in the fact that the human acquisition of clothes, technics and language—in other words, all that is taken to uphold the distinction between man and animal—is fundamentally related to an imagined fault or original misdeed in the human.

This can be said to help reverse the whole perspective. What the encounter with the face of a cat produces is not just a pity of the silent animal but, rather, a feeling, in the *human* subject, of shameful neglect of proper responsibility toward the unique animal other. The question that, as Derrida (2002, 396) argues, should be asked in regard to animals is thus not "can they think?," but rather, as Bentham suggested, "can they suffer?," or somewhat paradoxically, "can they *not be able*?" The affirmative response to that question seems so obvious

and undeniable, that Derrida wonders how it is that no other philosopher in history (except presumably Bentham), has had or has acknowledged such an encounter with another animal in their philosophies. Perhaps it is rather due to a case of shameful repression, that the question of the suppression and suffering of animals has been supplanted by the question of whether they possess language or not. In light of this, the first step forward in the political economy of animals, must, as Derrida (1991, 113-5) states in an interview, be that we acknowledge the fundamental, ethical crime in killing and suppressing animals, without any redemptive prevarications or disavowals. In other words, although we inevitably must eat, what we need to do is to at least "sacrifice sacrifice."

As both Derrida (2002, 394-5) and John Berger (2007) recognize, humans' relation toward animals seems to have entered a completely new phase in the last roughly 200 years. Since the industrial revolution, the presence of animals in human society has increasingly been one of seeing animals in terms of *materials*, to be produced in factories, or alternatively as distractions in zoos. Simultaneously, this brutal disavowal of animal dignity has, however, also spurred a seemingly new awareness of the rights of animals. To come back to the theme of the perceived "mute sadness" in animals, it is perhaps not surprising that the restricted mode of existence that animals have been assigned in zoos, yields, as Berger (Ibid., 260) seems to describe, a disappointing muteness with regard to what we could plausibly take to be the animals' own ways of responding or of exhibiting some sort of expression of life. So, how can we, on a more positive note, work to decrease the suppression of animal dignity, and do so more on the animals' own terms?

A first step would naturally be to acknowledge the obvious fact that animals lack the capacity to sit at the political negotiation table themselves. But this, as Martha Nussbaum (2006) argues in her criticism of the social-contract model for political justice, should not mean that they should thereby be excluded from holding any rights. In her alternative "capabilities approach" to political justice, Nussbaum conceives of justice in the form of sets of inviolable and non-fungible rights to the various capabilities required to lead a dignified life, regardless of birth. Such a list of basic capabilities will determine a minimum threshold for the provided possibilities of pursing a dignified existence according to one's own further convictions, but will naturally vary depending on what is at least minimally normative to the given species in question. This means that each individual must, in the first instance, be seen in terms of their own specific abilities and inabilities, against which an engagement to help develop these capabilities must rely. The direction of this facilitation of basic capabilities must, in Nussbaum's view, then be guided by some kind of normative *species ontology*, and especially in cases where the right-holders in question may themselves be unable to linguistically express themselves (as in the case of animals) or even be partly unaware of what form such a dignified life could have. Although this Aristotelian-inspired approach of Nussbaum's thus certainly operates with an ontological understanding in the pursuit of justice, the acknowledged asymmetry with regard to the plurality of rights-holders, along with its fundamentally ethical momentum, make it seem to me as a basically *instrumental* use of ontology, and, overall, as not too far from the kind of path toward greater justice that both Derrida and—though slightly unwittingly or unwillingly—Levinas gesture toward.

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"*The octopus*," Aristotle (1910) writes, "*is a stupid creature, for it will approach a man's hand if it be lowered in the water.*" Although the originator of deductive logic and biology was certainly a bit too quick in this inference, we could perhaps understand his mistake to the backdrop of the ostensibly radical otherness of this creature. To begin with, the significance of the cephalopod in human culture occupies such an immense range, that it seems both wider and deeper than the oceans. From the Hawaiian sea god of Kanaloa to the terrifying myths of the deep-sea monster Kraken in Scandinavian folklore—recurring in the infamous giant squid attacking the Nautilus in Jule Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas*—and H.P. Lovecraft's more recent Cthulhu deity, the cephalopod again and again shows up as *the other par excellence*; as master of the infinite seas, or as an atrociously other-worldly creature, imagined as so infinitely alien and far from the life of man.

Its spineless, soft body that can squeeze itself through the smallest aperture, its capacity to adapt and camouflage the color of its skin, and its decentralized intelligence with neurons dispersed throughout its entire body to the tips of its multiple suckered arms—poking and grabbing in various directions—also gives it the shape of the omnipresent, surveilling Parent, God or State. When the U.S. National Reconnaissance Office launched its NROL-39 reconnaissance satellite project in 2013, it opted—to much subsequent public outcry—for the logo of a gigantic yellow octopus wrapping its arms around the Earth, along with the slogan "Nothing Is Beyond Our Reach." As a spokeswoman of the NRO explained the choice (Hill 2013): "NROL-39 is represented by the octopus, a versatile, adaptable, and highly intelligent creature. Emblematically, enemies of the United States can be reached no matter where they choose to hide." Here, the octopus is, thus, not only master of the seas but also of space.

The figure of the octopus, moreover, lends itself to many obvious psychoanalytic interpretations: again, the omnipresent parent (cf. Louise Bourgeois' famously imposing eight-armed spider sculpture *Maman*) and last but not least, the conspicuous set of tentacles. The cephalopod tentacle remains one of the most famous fetishes of Japanese erotica and pornography, with a tradition stretching back to at least Hokusai's celebrated 1814 woodblock print *The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife*. The genre of tentacle erotica is frequently associated with rape (or at least as taking place in the murky waters between violation and consent), as perpetrated by the beastly cephalopod, and it is perhaps this very transgression—between human and the frightening, othered animal—that serves to eroticize this scene, similarly to what the film scholar Linda Williams (2004) has described in an article on the skewed dynamics of interracial pornography. In fact, one of the first and loudest internet discussions upon the release of *My Octopus Teacher*, was the one of whether Foster in fact engaged in a sexual act with the octopus. In one Twitter thread (Lewis 2020), Foster was even critiqued for his own patently queerphobic disownment of having had sex with the octopus. That may be a step too far to state (Foster cuddles with the octopus, at the octopus' initiative; not exactly a Hokusai scene), but the cultural imagination at work here is indeed telling.

Finally, cephalopods are eaten and enjoyed as food in many places of the world: from the calamari of Greece (perhaps the symbol of its cuisine) to Korean sannakji, where the cephalopod is ingested alive, or, at least, posthumously still moving (often taken as a sign of the consumer's masculinity). To conclude, and to stop this inexhaustible list, the topic of the relation between human and cephalopod, seems to warrant a sub-discipline in itself.

Although some criticism has been vented against the autobiographical narrative aspect of *My Octopus Teacher*—notably, the trope of the white, depressed man reconnecting with nature—as stealing the spotlight from the real, non-human, star of the show, I still believe that the film marks an interesting contrast to the standard, popular wildlife infotainment found everywhere else on Netflix and other channels. Here it is not just a question of a digitally mediated aquarium or of a "technical clairvoyance" that, to cite John Berger (2007, 257), allows us to see the normally "invisible" nooks of the natural world. Rather, what we see is *someone being seen* by the seeing animal, and who—despite any cynical tropes—in fact gains, and regains, some sort of *subjectivity* due to this fact. In the wake of mourning his deceased octopus friend, Foster's reaction is not simply one of personal gratitude, but also one of felt *responsibility* towards marine life, as he comes to initiate an organization (Sea Change Project), with the mission of informing about the preservation of threatened marine life.

However, as with many other similar charity initiatives, one may legitimately ask whom it is for, and by what means. On the front page of Sea Change Project's website (www.seachangeproject.com), one is met with the exhortation "remember you are WILD," to the backdrop of a fluctuating ocean surface capping a beautifully swaying, dark-turquoise forest of kelp. First of all, it would be very easy to interpret this reminder as merely another message to the modern urbanite that the main value of the preservation of marine habitats and habitants lies in the therapeutic possibility for disconnected humans to heal *themselves* through nature. And secondly, one may ask, does "nature" have to be this beautiful in order to be protected?

These critical remarks may be fitting to some extent, but then, from the point of view of Derrida, why, initially, disparage this arguably responsible approach of Foster's? Especially when it is so clearly grounded in the caring for an individual animal other, as in this case. Despite Foster's exhilaration at "being part of this place" he—lacking gills—still clearly remains a guest in these "wild" waters (where it is, ironically, the *octopus* who hurries to cover her body, in algae clothing, in the first face-to-face encounter with the semi-nude man, outside her den). If more animals have their capabilities of leading a flourishing existence increased by such initiatives, then so much the better.

And yet, choosing one specific habitat to protect, in the wake of a one-on-one encounter, will of course, as Derrida would point out, naturally mean a disregard of another *third party,* who does not get seen or protected to the same extent. Here it becomes, I believe, particularly clear that the aesthetic predicates we tend to ascribe to various animals and species have an important impact on who gets seen and who gets protection. As Roderick Nash points out in a fascinating overview of the history of the U.S. Endangered Species Act of 1973, despite the fact that the U.S. federal law of 1973 made up a great advancement in animal rights, the law's formulation remained somewhat anthropocentric in its stated purpose of protecting species that are "of aesthetic, ecological, educational, historical, recreational and scientific value to the Nation and its people" (Nash 1989, 176). Emblematically, while the ESA made possible the first non-human plaintiff in a U.S. court, in the form of a beautifully yellow Hawaiian bird whose habitats had become threatened by excessive grazing, and who later won the case, the law's specification of e.g. "aesthetic value," also made possible certain loopholes. One of the first cases of ESA lawsuits going to the Supreme Court, included a legal battle between a multi-million dollar Tennessee dam project and the snail-darter, which is a grey, three-inch type of minnow fish discovered to only live in a small section of the Little Tennessee river. As the main opponent Rep. John Duncan of Tennessee expressed his position in the battle: "I have a picture of the snail-darter. You cannot eat it. It is not much to look at. It is a slimy color." (Nash 1989, 178). After a long protracted legal battle, the snail-darter eventually lost to the dam project.

Similarly, we may wonder whether the greyish and horrifying pajama sharks that repeatedly harass and even dismember Foster's octopus friend, will be granted a face in the extended Levinasian sense. For, common to most empirical accounts of respectful human-animal relations in which the animal is granted a subjectivity of its own, is that they are after all accounts of either primates, genetically and morphologically close to ourselves, or of animals that have been bred and trained to live with humans, which we thus naturally tend to have an affectionate regard toward (see e.g. Smuts 1999). Against this background, a similar account from a relation with a wild mollusk like Foster's octopus friend is indeed a significant step farther. Yet, having proven what an intelligent, graceful and fascinating animal the octopus in fact is, we may wonder to what extent her rights of a dignified existence are indeed conditioned upon her aesthetic features. How can we guarantee justice for all the ugly, scary, and disgusting animals out there?

Regardless of its ethical relevance to the question of animal justice, I can't help feeling compelled by the octopus' being, which is presented in *My Octopus Teacher*. This is an invertebrate animal with a resourcefulness and inventiveness that in several situations make myself feel outsmarted, and whose shifting form, colors, and ways of moving I could probably look at indefinitely. It is also arguably an animal that is playful and *curious* about what it *sees*, and that sometimes reaches out an arm *just to see*. What Aristotle took for stupidity may in fact just have been an invitation of trust.

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fig. 4

tracking the horse...

untitled, Mark Peckmezian

Ecce Equus!

Egalitarian Equine Communities' Acknowledgement of the Horse as Subject

Nicole Pergament Crona

And each horse, whether jumping, trotting, racing, hitched in a troika, each one of them knows precisely the extent of human stupidity, knows that for all these 3000 years horses and people have spent together, everything could have been different.[1]

Alexander Nevzorov

The Russian author, filmmaker, and horseman, Alexander Nevzorov, condemns the way in which Man has made use of the horse ever since we first started to employ this animal for our own purposes. But more than anything else he condemns equestrian sports. Nevzorov predicts a future in which equestrian sports will be outlawed and our grandchildren will try to forget this "shameful practice of man's biography"; they will "burn of shame" thinking of this practice of the past, as we are ashamed now thinking of slavery or concentration camps.[2] A "horse revolution" is coming, Nevzorov claims, and the fight has already begun; it is a fight between two completely different views regarding the horse and its relation to humans.[3]

Even though Nevzorov is a controversial person whose opinions are rather provocative to many people – there are even those thinking that he "asks to be shot" – he still has followers and official representatives in several countries across the world, including Sweden.[4] There are also other prophets, besides Nevzorov, predicting a future "paradigm shift".[5] Still, I cannot say myself, overlooking the equine world of today, that I see any real signs of a coming "revolution". On the contrary, contemporary equine scientists have highlighted the difficulties in impelling people in the equestrian world to adjust to current scientific findings concerning the wellbeing of horses.[6] And within human-animal studies (HAS),[7] as well as within the post humanistic field in general, it has been pointed out that we still lack knowledge of how animals can be recognized as subjects and agents with the possession of cognitive and social abilities.[8] But even if it is hard to find any signs of a coming equine revolution in a *literary* sense, there are, luckily, signs of an ongoing and pervasive *change of attitudes* in today's horse-human relationship.

This article is based on my master thesis in ethnology,[9] in which I set out to examine what I – with an obvious wink to the French revolution – chose to call *egalitarian equine communities*. Egalitarian, since they are *aiming* for equality – not for themselves, but for horses. Although these communities showed to be not as condemning of man's use of the horse as Nevzorov, most of their members have still abandoned all kinds of contesting activities involving horses. They are also critical against many of the values of the formal equestrian world since they regard these values to be constituted by the nineteenth hundred's cavalry riding, when training and conditioning of the horse aimed for the horse's obedience and subordination. Instead, their aim is to acknowledge the horse as a subject. But how is this acknowledgement expressed and practiced? And what are the implications?

The study included participant observations as well as interviews conducted in Sweden in 2018 and 2019 with thirteen horsepersons,[10] all of them being what I consider as egalitarian. They were between twenty-seven and sixty-nine years old, and all but one were females. Most of them were or had been horse-owners, and a majority kept horses back at their farms. Four of them were professional horse trainers and/or riding instructors. All of them were riders and had experiences from formal riding schools. However, seen through the lens of a phenomenological HAS perspective,[11] my point of departure is that when studying the horse-human relationship, a focus on the human as a *rider* not only confirms the traditional view of what constitutes a relation between the two species; it also supports a taken for granted assumption that the horse is a being meant to be mounted. As already mentioned, the egalitarian ambition is to acknowledge horses as subjects. That means giving them a greater portion of agency, something that implies the right to say no – even to be ridden. Therefore, unlike many other studies, commonly focused on the relation between the horse and the *rider*, my study examined the interaction between the horse and the *human*, that is, the relation as a whole, regardless of where and how it takes place – whether the human has her feet on the ground or is sitting on top of her companion.

Egalitarian communities

The egalitarian communities can be understood as a reaction against the "interpretive precedence" of the Swedish Equestrian Federation and its subdivisions – the riding schools and the riding clubs. Not only have these institutions dominated equestrian education in Sweden for generations, but they have also decided over what is understood as "good" and "bad", "right" and "wrong" in the equestrian world.

However, since the end of the nineties, we have seen a wider range of knowledge distributors in the Swedish equine world. For those who never felt comfortable with the military legacy of the equestrian context, the internet offered alternative equine identities, informal knowledge providers, and new "truths". According to sociologist Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, anti-definitions of reality, as well as of identity, emerges as soon as a few such individuals start to gather in *socially durable groups*.[12] This is the first impulse for a change process to start, something that enables a more complex knowledge distribution. As a result, an anti-reality might start to be objectified and these marginalized social groups will soon start their own processes of socialization.

I claim, supported by my material, that these kinds of processes of socialization are exactly what we have seen emerging in Sweden since the beginning of this millennium. Employing the internet, unsatisfied individuals started to reach out, find like-minded people, transgress national borders, build chat forums. They began the setup and marketing of courses and clinics, offering IRL education, as well as distance education. They sought and found new, more egalitarian ways of riding, new "disciplines", of which some were not new at all. Academic riding, baroque, western, Icelandic, and Portuguese riding replaced what had up until then been the only options: traditional dressage and jumping.

Others looked for alternative ways of spending time with their horses. They came across philosophies and methods like natural horsemanship, relation-based horse training, treat training, trust technique, and others. Some people even gave up mounting their horses, ensuring they were happy just taking a walk together.

Even though a greater portion of equality in the relation between human and horse was what they were looking for, it is not possible to distinguish a clearly defined common set of values among today's egalitarian communities. Their members, let us call them "egalitarians" for the sake of simplicity, often share normative opinions and values that are supported by current research within veterinary medicine as well as behavioral science, a circumstance that has bearing on how they interact with their horses. On the other hand, many egalitarians think of knowledge as something that is not necessarily scientifically legitimized; to them, true knowledge can also be found in the everyday interaction between themselves and their horses, as well as from "within" – from insights, authenticity, intuition, meditation, mindfulness, and personal growth. In addition, conceptions concerning the extent of equality, as well as what this equality is supposed to embrace and how it is to be manifested, vary. Still, in my material, I did find a set of central ideals connected to the egalitarian approach to horses which proved to be shared by many within these communities. These ideals were such as *naturalness, relation before achievement, welfare and sustainability, willingness and consent, presence, closeness, and authenticity.*

Naturalness

Over time, the concept of naturalness has had different understandings within the egalitarian communities. Some egalitarians – such as myself – have a background in the philosophy of *natural horsemanship*, with its training methods of negative reinforcements. However, this philosophy is nowadays being criticized for not having much to do with the concept of equality – even if we, the followers, used to work hard to convince ourselves that this was the case by repeating the mantra: "the horse is always given a choice", neglecting the fact that the options available were not always very pleasant to the horse. I was among those convinced of

the idea that horses do not seek equality in the wild herd, why the state of hierarchy is "natural" to them, implying that a happy horse is a horse with a strong human leader. Notchka, my own breeding, proved me wrong. Unlike her mother, who always accepted my dominance with something I preferred to interpret as "natural" submissiveness, Notchka demanded to have a say of her own concerning where, when, and how to do things.

Today, hardly any of my former friends from the natural horsemanship community remains within the philosophy and the same goes for several of the informants in the study. The concept has been given negative connotations, charged with more or less explicit accusations for saying one thing, doing another. The idea of every relationship demanding the one and only leader, no matter what the situation is, has been challenged – as have the idea of negative reinforcement being the most effective way of training a horse. Instead, so-called *relation-based training* and *treat training*, using positive reinforcement, have been given much more attention.

However, whatever training or conditioning method you prefer, there is something the egalitarian horseperson cannot ignore, namely the actual "non-naturalness" of any horse-human relationship. For a prey animal to be together with a predator is in fact not very natural at all. Seen from an evolutionary perspective, the amount of time that humans and horses have spent together is very brief – just about 6000 years, compared to the almost 60 million years horses have rambled this earth without us interfering. To think that they by now have come to experience our presence as something "natural" is but wishful thinking. This means that the egalitarian horseperson needs to be extra cautious, not taking it for granted when asking a horse, especially a young horse, to step out of the stable or pasture to go training with a human. Even if it is temporary, from the horse's point of view, this means to *leave the herd* – any prey animal's utmost guarantee for survival – to go with a potential killer. To think this is a "natural" thing to do for a horse is to be anthropocentric.

Another way of relating to naturalness concerns the amount of time one lets the foal remain with its mother. Instead of the anthropocentric idea of the foal being "ready" to go by the age of four to seven months, after which most foals in human custody never see their mother again, the egalitarian way is to wait as long as possible. Ultimately, one let the mare and the foal take care of their own business, leaving it to them to decide when and how to separate. In the wilderness, that would mean not until just before the next foal is to come, in other words, not until the first foal is approximately ten months.

Another aspect of naturalness is that of *natural horsekeeping*, the idea that it is your responsibility to make sure your horse is given a meaningful everyday existence. That does not mean going on the racetracks, becoming sweaty for a reason you cannot see – as a lot of equestrians seem to think – but being together with horsy friends in a wide pasture where you spend most of your time eating and searching for more to eat. Concepts like "free-range stabling" and "active stables" are seen as ideals. In these settings, horses live a more "herdlike" life, spending all their time outdoors together with their companion species.

Relation before achievement

The conception that a horse is a creature made for usage is a common-sense knowledge that is challenged by the attitudes within the egalitarian communities. As mentioned earlier, competitions are no longer of interest to many egalitarian riders. Instead, one is searching for knowledge on how to, in one way or the other, relate to horses in new, untraditional ways. Building a lasting and mutually respectful relationship with the horse is seen as much more important than achieving glory and fame on the racetracks. This idea might sometimes entail a reluctance to lend your horse to someone else. One of my informants, Bodil, compared the question "may I try out your horse?" with "may I try out your husband?", which I interpret as a fear of offending the horse. You simply do not lend out your dear ones –whether husband or horse. As a consequence, Bodil did not like to go on so-called horseback vacations since she thought of them to be too short for building a relationship with the horse you are temporarily renting at the site. "I'd rather drive a moped!", she said. Again, the horse is seen as a subject and not as a machine, tool, or automat. The philosopher Jonna Bornemark has pointed out that there is a difference between seeing a horse as an automat and seeing a horse as a subject. You cannot do to a subject what you can do to an automat.[13]

Whether a horse has the same need to build a lasting relationship with its human can of course be discussed. I think Bodil thinks so. I think most egalitarians think so. I even think most horsepersons think so. Being an egalitarian horseperson, I think so too. As a scientist, I took refuge in the phenomenological perspective's focus on how individuals subjectively construct, experience, and understand their reality, regardless of whether this reality can be considered objectively "correct" or not. Consequently, during my study, I examined the egalitarian communities' *interpretations* of the horses' experiences, regardless of whether these interpretations can be expected to be even close to the horses' actual experiences or not since that is irrelevant to "the phenomenological attitude".[14] Hence, by applying the phenomenological attitude, I examined how the horses' experiences of being acknowledged as subjects *appeared* to my informants. No more, no less.

Welfare & Sustainability

Welfare and Sustainability are two other ideals that are often highlighted among egalitarians, especially when it comes to riding. The academic art of riding is a popular riding style within the egalitarian communities. Instead of competing, the focus here lies on the upbuilding and sustainability of the horse's body and mentality, as well as on getting the horse's consent. A central ambition is to make the horse actually *want* to be ridden and to *want* to perform certain moves.

Sustainability is of course of interest in the traditional equestrian world as well. But a basic difference is that within equestrian sports, the *achievement* is still the goal. It is still taken for granted that a horse is to deliver at the racetrack or at the competition ground. It is only a matter of keeping it physically fit, because as soon as it is not, when the horse is worn out, then it is time to replace it with another, still not worn out horse. While in the academic art of riding, the goal is to make *this* horse, *this* very individual, become as good as only he or she can be, based on the ability *and* willingness he or she happens to have at the time being.

Willingness & Consent

How do you get a horse's consent? Well, as Anna, one of my informants, said: "It is like calling a friend - you don't start talking until you get a hello in the other end, do you?" Anna is a highly educated riding instructor who abandoned the equestrian world to devote her life to the academic art of riding. When she rides today, she tries to think about the horse as a partner with whom she has dialogue, and not as someone who has to obey her orders. Instead of commandingly moving the horse's body from A to B, Anna asks the horse, (physically using her aids,[15] and telepathically, using her thoughts): "Can you make a turn here?" And whatever the answer is – whether it is "No, I can't make a turn right now", or "Yes, sure, no problem", it is alright. In other words, she gives the horse an option and a possibility to give consent – or not.

Presence

At one of the study's participants observations, I visited a retreat called *"A day for relaxation and mindfulness, guided by the wisdom of horses"*. The day started off with me and the other participants spreading out in a pasture to practice meditation while observed by a bunch of quite surprised horses. Afterwards, we all agreed this was a new and odd, but very pleasant way of visiting a pasture: just being here and now, without any particular intention or purpose. That is something we never do, the course leader said. But this is how the horses live their lives. From horses we can learn to take care of ourselves, forget about such things as time, forget about the "musts", forget about achievements, what others might think, how we are being looked upon or judged. Therefore, we do not need to feel that we have to train our horses all the time, or to *achieve* things with them. All we have to do is to be with them! Learn from them! Enjoy the present!

Closeness & Authenticity

Several of the informants expressed the feeling of becoming mentally harsh in the traditional equestrian world, they became something they did not want to be. Instead of the tenderness and closeness, the little stable girl is longing for when she enters the stable for the first time, she gets to learn discipline.[16] She learns how to discipline the horses. She learns how to discipline herself: "You've got to be tough with him", they say, "you've got to show him who's in charge! Don't let him do that! Don't let him scrub his face against you! Keep him out of your way! Use your whip! Use your spurs! Shorten your reins!" In the end, she has got it all internalized. This is the process of socialization. Or, as Berger & Luckmann claims: this is the handing over of a world

of established norms and practices.[17] Instead of being close, we are taught to tie up, lock up, hold on, hold in. Making us aware of this might be what horses can help us with, some egalitarians claim. To make us understand that the encounter with the Other might actually be the encounter with ourselves. The horse wants us to be authentic. And when we are not, the horse confronts us with the revealing question: Is this really you?

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Footnotes

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untitled, Mark Peckmezian

chasing the bird...

fig. 5

untitled, Mark Peckmezian

For the Birds: *Beauty in Human-Avian Companion Agency*

Nicole Miller

Philosopher Vinciane Despret introduces the idea of "companion agents" as animals that are agentic actors in a web of interrelations with other creatures. The web of interrelations necessitates a reciprocally dependent relationship where cooperation or resistance can occur.[1] *Despret exemplifies this relationship with an experiment about cats who quickly learned how to fulfill the researchers' goals but then refused to cooperate any further once they realized it was what the researchers desired. It is notable that animal agency exerted through resistance is often directed towards human imposition of work, as if the drive to work is against animal will. Within the framework of companion agency, a heterarchy of influence can be seen in human-animal relations. It is specifically evident in the relationship between humans and pet birds where both humans and birds have the power to sculpt the relationship and the social situation, which is often done through play.*

By allowing animals into our homes, allowing them to be seen as more human, their capacities and ours are extended past their categorical limitations. Friedrich Schiller famously asserted that play is a state achieved by humans and which makes one human.[2] Today we know that animals also have the ability to play, which seems at times more developed than ours considering the amount of time we devote to work. When animals move into our homes and we start to play with them, a number of things change in our relationships. We become comfortable with them, building an intimacy and trust with them, while becoming more attentive to their moods and desires. Increased daily interaction means we build bonds with them, much like we might with a coworker, a family member or a friend. Eventually we start to understand our pets as subjects much like humans. Finally, and what I am most interested in, we can start to understand them as co-participants in creating moods, situations and worlds. The act of play with the trust and mutual affection it implies, allows the borders of the cage to be momentarily dissolved in a heterarchical relationship.

The concept of social aesthetics and its focus on the beauty of interactions allows aesthetics to be processual. A shifting human-avian relationship, due to the nature of its interactivity and entanglement, must be called social by nature. Philosopher Arnold Berleant emphasizes that nonhierarchical relationships, aspects of interactive performativity and an underlying element of harmony are essential to achieving an ideal social aesthetic.[3] In bending our world to better include birds as well as affecting and being affected by the bird world with our human interventions, the idea of human-avian companion agency could in its best form represent these ideals.

The companion agency relationship can in itself be beautiful, and this can be seen through an increased play dialogue between pet birds and humans, resulting in adaptations and points of mutual meeting in each other's previously distant lifeworlds. There is an adaptability necessary in activities like competition, training, and play, necessitating both subjects to extend the boundaries of their worlds to better include each other; this flexibility serves as a focal point for aesthetic examination. Additionally, the cooperation between pet birds and humans results in something akin to artworks - aesthetic material products that come into existence as a result of the playing between them - giving a concrete form through which to recognize the human-pet bird relationship.

Three groups of pet birds in particular are useful for observing a human-avian social aesthetic: homing pigeons, songbirds, and parrots. There is a gradient of birds as companion agents where increased interactions facilitates play and the mutuality of the relationship increases with each interaction. They each exemplify a different level of human intertwinement ranging from the light game playing interactions of humans and racing pigeons to the completely dependent relations of humans and pet parrots in which parrots assume a role similar to another human. The interactions of humans and pet birds demonstrate an aesthetically beautiful flexibility in humans and birds to shift their lifeworlds to include each other.

Homing Pigeons/Racing Pigeons: *Otherwise known as Regular Pigeons if they Don't Come Home*

Pigeons provide an opportunity to observe a shift in domesticating birds for human pleasure. Pigeons are not typically thought of as pets, but their urban presence marks a shift towards increased interconnection with humans. Additionally, pigeons have historically been brought into the house for specific purposes ranging from function to pleasure. For thousands of years homing pigeons were trained to make journeys back home when being released farther and farther away. They were used to deliver messages, and they worked to set up an infrastructure for exchanging information at (relatively) quick speeds.[4] Pigeons were the predecessor of the modern day post office or internet. In other words, Western society created a permanent infrastructure that was heavily influenced by human-avian relationships.

In 19th century France breeding and training pigeons became popularized for an activity loosely labeled as 'sport' - pigeon racing. Pigeon racing entailed a competitive aspect centered around the speed of returning *home*. The frame of competition created a condition for play between humans and pigeons. French racing pigeons could not really be considered pets in the sense that we often associate with the term today. They were often given away and sometimes eaten by their owners if they were poor performers (ie. not fast enough).[5] This is abnormal for the common conception of a pet, which in many cultures is now synonymous with being part of the family. However, the spirit of cooperation and consistent interaction involved in training a pigeon reflects an intimate relationship between a human and an animal. If a pigeon is trained to learn that their home is the same as their trainer's, it can be argued they are no longer wild, but part of the family, sharing a common address as well as sense of belonging. At the same time, in pigeon racing as in message delivering, it is not uncommon for a pigeon to disappear. The unexpected agency of a trained animal that never returns home challenges the idea that humans are in complete control of the natural world or of their pet relationships.

Songbirds and the Humans that Copy Them

Songbirds are perhaps where an element of human-bird performativity has existed the longest. Humans have been driven to attempt to replicate and capture their sounds. In the wild, bird fanciers have created elaborate instruments for replicating bird calls, while also trying to transcribe the sounds birds make in order to duplicate them.[6] The transcriptions, called 'bird words', reflect a cultivated communication method that resembles an alien language (language of the bird people) or an attempt at poetry.

"Woonk-a-chunk

po-ta-to-chip (and dip {in flight})

please; please; please squeeeeze

I am so laz-eeeeee

ra-vi-o-li (flute-like)

ee-oh-lay (flute-like - last note trilly)

ra-vi-o-li (flute-like)

chak; chak; chak" [7]

The instances of perfecting bird calls, as well as inventing new recording methods such as the stereophonic record[8] just to re-listen to birdsong, reflect an avian obsession that propelled humans into inventive states to fulfill a desire to better understand and connect with birds. It is not surprising that this obsession was contemporaneous to increased popularity in caging songbirds and training them, resulting also in inventions such as the whistling "bird organ" (or serinette), created to teach canaries to sing.[9] New inventions and tools to facilitate more interactions in the home demonstrate a shift to a more intimate relationship, where imitation can be seen as a form of flattery. In fact, humans' obsessive mimicry of birds is a typical avian behavior. As a result of humans becoming more bird-like, a whole aesthetic genre, ranging from classical music imitating birdsong to "bird words" and the sounds of the "bird organ", can be attributed to the influence and companion agency of songbirds. The historical trajectory of humans adapting themselves to the sounds of birds is demonstrative of a processual and transformative beauty in human-bird relationships.

Parroted Fragments: *Trying to be Human*

A humorous, almost alien take on the human experience can be seen when it is imitated by parrots. As is

the case with other pet birds, domestication has made parrots highly dependent on humans. They need significant amounts of attention including stimulating toys and playtime. Because of their close relationships with their owners, developed through constant interaction and talking, they are often called 'companion parrots'. Their desire for playful activities allows humans to use playtime for teaching competitive activities, like has been done with pigeons. For instance, Zac the Macaw achieved the Guinness World Record for most canned drinks opened in a minute with his beak (35) in 2012.[10] This arguably useless skill for a bird likely results from hours of engagement between Zac and his owner.

Parrot owners are often surprised by the mimetic training of their pets; it is somewhat unpredictable which phrases and sounds a parrot chooses to learn and repeat. In 2017 a pet parrot named Bud was witness to a murder in Michigan and was found to be repeating the final dialogue between the victim (his owner) and the assailant including the words "don't shoot".[11] Bud was the first parrot to be considered a potential witness in court, although at the last minute his testimony was cancelled. Aside from providing evidence in court cases, parrots as companion animals provide the feeling of a human interaction in their ability to 'speak' human languages. But they also demonstrate an absurdity in the human experience when selected sounds and phrases are repeated over and over. Parrots perform an interpretative summary of their human relationships according to their own mood and preferences for crafting language. The human world takes on a new perspective when viewed through the audio fragments of a parrot.

"I wanna go to kitchen.
Let's eat dinner.
Sweet potato. Corn. (eating sounds)
Raspberry. Let's go kitchen. Let's eat!
Let's go eat some lunch.
Corn. (eating sounds)
It's gooood. Carrot. Sweet potatoes. Broccoli. Carrot." [12]

The attempted adaptation of parrots to human life is not one-sided as parrot owners often restructure their entire lives around their pets, making adjustments to their house decor and schedules to account for playtime and pleasing environments. Cookbooks such as *A Parrot's Fine Cuisine Cookbook*[13] offer information on preparing teas, smoothies, and elaborate meals for one's pet. The bereavement forum for a popular parrot owner community, which has 35,000 members and nearly 1 million posts, demonstrates how deeply affecting parrots are on humans, as funeral arrangements, last moments, and sentimental memories are discussed tenderly.

"I don't think he's ever had human affection before but I hope I was able to give him that. He liked being sung to and sweet talked. He would always grind his beak contentedly. I sang a lullaby to him and Pewpew every night before I turned the lights off." [14]

Parrots with their ability to 'speak', not just sing as with songbirds, have carved out a space in our homes where their roles can be categorized as almost human. They exemplify an openness between both species to live with and care for one another.

Collaborative Art: *Material Evidence of a Human-Avian Social Aesthetic*

Birds and humans have been mutually influential on each other over time, becoming increasingly more entangled as birds were brought closer to earth and into the home, in part due to the usage of the cage. If humans approach relationships with their pets by letting them inside (both literally and metaphorically), and if animals have a desire for human companionship, a conscious harmony can be reached comparable to an ideal social aesthetic. Although the intentionality of birds and the feeling of their lifeworlds cannot be fully known, the sway of human-animal relationships in an agentic assemblage can be seen as processually beautiful, where one's will bends at times to the other's wishes and desires. In a companion agency relationship birds and humans become a little closer to each other, a little more empathetic in their explorations of each other's worlds, creatively collaborating on the invention of material culture that shows our willingness to be part of each others' worlds. The artifacts produced, such as pigeon racing trophies, the bird serinette, or a gourmet cookbook for parrots, serve as physical evidence of a symbiotic, affectionate merging of human-avian lifeworlds.

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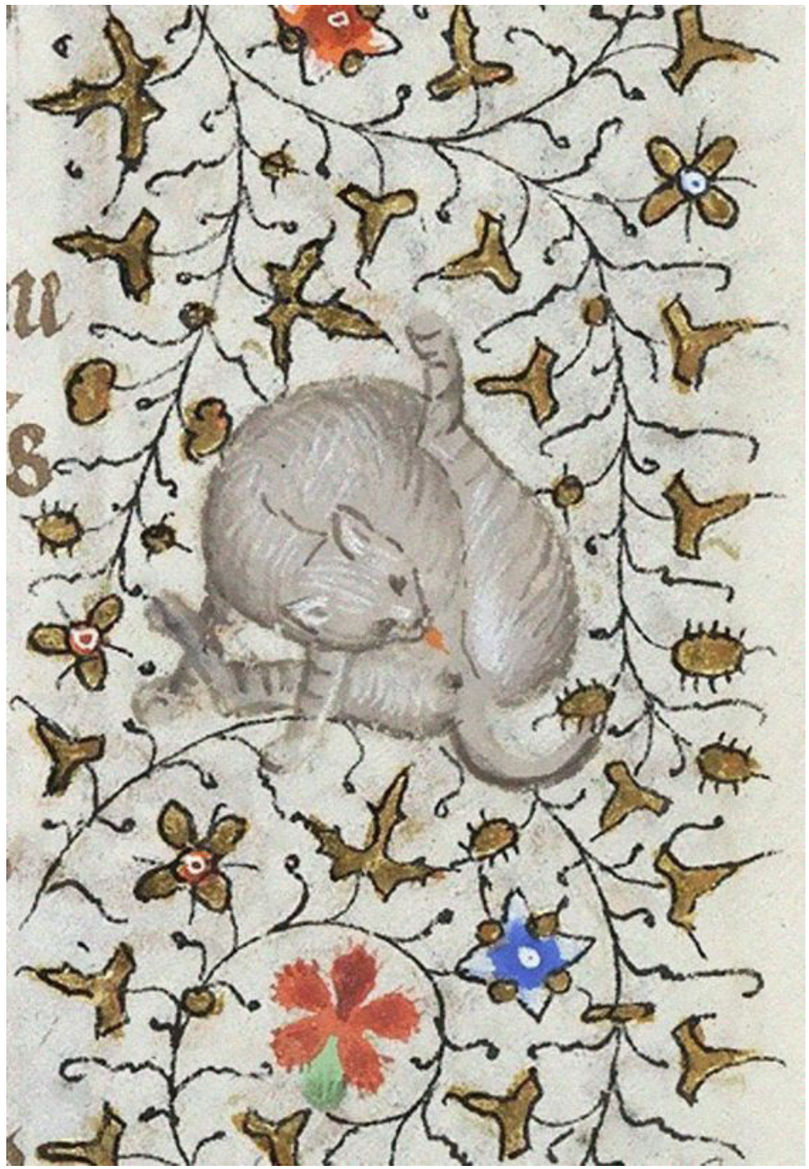

fig. 6

untitled, Mark Peckmezian

greeting the cat...

Interspecific connections and a cyborg eroticism:
about the cat, Kitch, and the camera in Carolee Schneemann's short film, Fuses

Olivia Fert

Carolee Schneemann's short film *Fuses* (1964-1967) is a silent film in 16mm format, shot over a period of three years between 1964 and 1967, with a duration of 22 minutes at 24 frames per second. The film is composed of short sequences of erotic scenes from a love act, in which the artist herself and her partner at the time, James Tenney, participated. *Fuses* is the first film in Schneemann's "autobiographical trilogy" followed by *Plumb Line* (1968-1971) and *Kitch's Last Meal* (1973-1978). *Fuses* is principally known for its subversive representation of female sexuality. Carolee Schneemann (b. 1939 in Fox Chase, Pennsylvania - 2019 in New York, N.Y.) has been a pioneer in confronting in her own feminist art practice the visual representations of the female body in the media and the underrepresentation of women artists in the United States. After the 1960's, as the feminist movement in the United States grew, both appreciation and criticism of Caroline Schneemans' works deepened. As the topic of female sexuality has offered the most natural framework for interpreting *Fuses*, the special appearances in the film by Kitch, Caroline Schneemann's cat from 1956 to 1976, have been downplayed. Here, I want to open up for a closer investigation of Kitch's contribution to Schneemann's controversial short film.

Most of the scenes in *Fuses* take place in the interior of a bedroom. Since the film was shot over a long period of time, a few scenes from the outside environment show different seasons. A landscape in the snow, Christmas lights towards the end of the film as well as more spring-like moments outdoors, in a meadow and on the beach. At several moments, close-ups of body parts break through the film, like bodily landscapes, a metaphoric frequently explored in experimental film at the time. The viewer may find it difficult to identify the active bodies. But he can recognize somatic and organic elements mainly by close-up shots of moving skin, sometimes shiny, smooth or wet. Then, suddenly, images of genitals appear, unavoidable.

In this expressive and erotic show, the cat Kitch is filmed, standing at the window. The shot/countershot cuts make Kitch an observer of the scene. Scenes where Kitch is being caressed sometimes appear between the most intimate love scenes, suggesting a close relationship and entanglement between the loving couple and the cat. Kitch, who has his eyes closed, also appears to be feeling enjoyment and is stroked by an unidentifiable hand in some sporadic shots. This is especially articulated in *Fuses* in two consecutive scenes. The first shows a hand stroking Carolee's vulva, while in the second, a similar close-up shot shows one caressing Kitch. Beside a humorous configuration, this depicted encounter shows an intimate tactile relationship between the animal and the human.

The interpretations of Kitch's role in *Fuses* have been many and varying in kind. *Fuses* isn't the first occasion where Schneemann film intimate and tender moments with her cats. In her video work *Infinity Kisses* (2008), an endless series of kisses between Schneemann and her cats indicate the close relationship between her and her various feline companions, Kitch, Cluny and Vesper, and the importance of them in her artistic practice.

Functioning as an observer in *Fuses*, Kitch could be understood as a metaphor for a neutral position, addressing issues around the male gaze in feminist film theory (Mulvey 1975). The cat would then be understood to embody a gaze, freed from any cultural determination, as if she edited and authored the film. However, the first person to film the erotic liaison between James Tenney and Carolee Schneemann in 1957 was Stan Brakhage, a close friend and cinematic source of inspiration for Schneemann. In the four min long 16mm silent film *Loving*, he portrays Tenney as the active and mostly covering Schneemann in a dominant manner. Unhappy with the outcome, she herself portrays an equal relationship with Kitch, who metaphorically represents an impartial point of view.

Against this, Thyrza Nichols Goodeve argues that Kitch would not be an "objective point of view", but rather a "subject position". She thus suggests a co-production of "co-shaped species" and points out that the perspective that the viewer identifies with is neither just "human" nor just "animal" but what in *Animal Studies* is emphasized as an "encounter". This, Nichols Goodeve argues, makes the film "a twenty-two minute cinematic excursion into the 'space in-between' animal and human."

Schneemann herself is supposed to have claimed that her "muse-cats who have inspired and guided [her] work [...] have enlarged and shifted [her] scale of perceptions". One might want to suggest that Schneemann's cats are to be regarded as a medium, an extension of her senses – perhaps working much like the camera, feeling and filming? Schneemann presents us with a monstrous sensuality and eroticism through her interchanging usage of cameras, objects, bodies, humans and cats as mediums. *Fuses* recode and reconnect modern dualisms, relations of domination and subordination and suggests a new ontology for what we understand as natural sexuality. Perhaps we could talk about a cyborg-erotic aesthetics here, in Donna Haraway's sense.

When Donna Haraway published "A Cyborg Manifesto" in The Socialist Review 1985, she used the concept of the cyborg in a rather broad way, where technology is not to be understood only as technical tools or processes but as encompassing cultural practices of everyday behaviors like writing, lovemaking and performing genders. Donna Haraway's understanding of feminism, characterized by a postmodern socialist and scientific view, lets the cyborg embody a hybrid of machine and living organism, intended to exercise criticism of the modern concept of nature. The cyborg is not to bring a new category, but new possibilities to the table, without fixing an identity. Technology in the high-tech age mixes with the biological. Science fiction would for example be a genre that allows us to imagine these mixtures, like "monsters", even more extreme. The emancipating potential in the use of the cyborg metaphor lies in the utopian that is worth thinking about. Schneemann might not use the world of science fiction to blur cultural categories but uses her own aesthetic in the same manner.

The hand-held camera in *Fuses* allows access to the intimate, to the hidden, makes accessible what could not be shown. The development or improvement of media techniques in the 60s, such as the portability of the camera with 16mm and 8mm formats, is a significant technical contribution that allows media to be used more widely and under new conditions that were previously unthinkable. For this purpose, the camera is placed in bed, manipulated, exchanged and hung to be able to film. It is completely immersed in the sexual act, as part of the performative act. It gives the camera an important role as actively shaping the sexual act. "It's a participant in the experience, functioning both as a stimulus and receiver of stimulae." One might want to say here that this poses an eroticism of the human/machine.

The role of the camera does not only determine the means of interaction between the different actors but also the aesthetics that Schneemann proposes to the viewers. Close-ups reinforce the closeness to the viewer, which can give him/her the feeling of being part of the sexual act. In *Fuses*, the reality of the sexual act competes with the distinct formal aesthetic aspect that the artist has achieved. In fact, Carolee Schneemann brings a particular touch from her artistic language as a painter; she modifies the celluloid of the film tape itself. The transformation of the celluloid enhances the sensual qualities of the images. This technique was common in experimental animation in the 1920s among the Dadaists and Surrealists.

David E. James, theorist of independent film from north America argues that these cinematic effects merge with the erotic in *Fuses*; "Emerging as the totalizing, polymorphous, introverted energy and self-absorbed hyper-sensuality of the sexual activity of the profilmic, the erotic power of *Fuses* overflows into the filmic, is reproduced there as a filmic function" and that "filmmaking itself becomes the site of sexual action between filmmaker and film." But the mode of filming in *Fuses* is not limited to the artist's self-engagement. The medium acts as an extension of the human body. It could be considered as a "feminine" counter-model to what Stan Brakhage was doing at the time but what interested Schneemann was rather to present a diversity and equality of perspectives. Here, the private and

intimate merges with the public – art makes visible what is not supposed to be visible and introduces a counter-model of society.

Although *Fuses* displays typical roles of women and men, such as James Tenney driving a car, representing a modern male, and Schneemann walking on a beach, fluidity emerges from the erotic and sensuous field, a space where cultural codes are ignored and renegotiated. Scott Macdonald, professor in Art History at Hamilton College, who has made numerous interviews with filmmakers, including Schneemann, has already noted that the body here constitute the connection between the species – perhaps also between genders – taking place in the domain of the senses, arguably in the aesthetical domain where the camera works.

Haraway wrote, "Communication sciences and biology are constructions of natural-technical objects of knowledge in which the difference between machine and organism is thoroughly blurred; mind, body, and tool are on very intimate terms." Schneemann is not the sole creator of this sexual act, but the tools, the camera, the film, and Kitch as mediums also shape the act and its representations. She questions us about our erotic relationships with others, be they men, women, machines, objects, media, or animals, through an aesthetic of the in-between. It testifies to the fact that there is a tactile, sensual and erotic way of being connected, intertwined.

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Historical figures in #II. inside animals / animals inside, ii. a bestiarium vocaubulum

Figure 1: Jagdszene aus: Abhandlung über die Jagd, Mailand, 863 n. d. H./ 1459 u. Z. Chantilly, Musée Condé, Ms. 368, fol. 85r

Figure 2: Book of Hours, MS M.282 fol. 58r France, Paris, ca. 1460 - Images from Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts.

Figure 3: Utagawa Kunyoshi, "Tamakazura, die Taucherin holt die Perlen zurück" aus der Serie Vergleich von Darstellungen aus dem Genji-Roman und der fließenden Welt, 1843-1847. © MAK/Georg Mayer

Figure 4: The Prophet Muhammad and the Muslim Army at the Battle of Uhud, from the Siyer-i Nebi, 1595. The David Collection, Copenhagen, Inv. No. 13/2001

Figure 5: Detail from The Luttrell Psalter, British Library Add MS 42130 (medieval manuscript,1325-1340), f58v

Figure 6: Hours of Charlotte of Savoy, Paris ca. 1420-1425. NY, Morgan Library & Museum, MS M.1004, fol. 172r