

Responding to Significant Otherness:  
An Interdisciplinary Approach to Critical Theory and Nonhuman Animals

by

Mariah Pease Harrower  
B.A., University of California at Santa Cruz, 2003

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In the Department of English and the Cultural, Social, and Political Thought Program

© Mariah Harrower, 2006  
University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy  
or other means, without the permission of the author.

Responding to Significant Otherness:  
An Interdisciplinary Approach to Critical Theory and Nonhuman Animals

by

Mariah Pease Harrower  
B.A., University of California at Santa Cruz, 2003

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Arthur Kroker

---

Supervisor

Dr. Stephen Ross

---

Departmental Member

Dr. Michael Asch

---

Outside member

## Supervisory Committee

Dr. Arthur Kroker

---

Supervisor

Dr. Stephen Ross

---

Departmental Member

Dr. Michael Asch

---

Outside member

## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the roles “the animal” plays in various broad movements in contemporary critical theoretical work in and around the humanities and social sciences. It brings together elements of theory and practice in imagining discursively-constructed subjects who are not necessarily human. Some vocabulary drawn from the equestrian practices of *dressage* and Centered Riding© is employed as a means of translating phenomenologically various and immediate embodied expression into written language. Central theorists are Vicki Hearne (*Adam’s Task: Calling Animals by Name*), Barbara Noske (*Beyond Boundaries*), Cary Wolfe (*Animal Rites* and *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, ed.), Donna Haraway (a number of selections), Temple Grandin (*Thinking in Pictures* and *Animals in Translation*), and Jacques Derrida (“The Animal that Therefore I Am” and “And Say the Animal Responded,” two sections of a 1997 conference lecture entitled “L’Animal autobiographique”).

## Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Epigraph.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: The Imagined Animal.....	28
Chapter Two: The Represented Animal.....	61
Chapter Three: The Animal in Discourse.....	82
Conclusion.....	114
Bibliography.....	124

“In some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there was once a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the haughtiest and most mendacious minute of ‘world history’—yet only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths the star grew cold, and the clever animals had to die.”

One might invent such a fable and still not have illustrated how wretched, how aimless and arbitrary, the human intellect appears in nature. There have been eternities when it did not exist; and when it is done for again, nothing will have happened. For this intellect has no further mission that would lead beyond human life. It is human, rather, and only its owner and producer gives it such importance, as if the world pivoted around it. But if we could communicate with the mosquito, then we would learn that it floats through the air with the same self-importance, feeling within itself the flying center of the world.”

--Friedrich Nietzsche “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense”  
(ed. Walter Kaufmann, N.Y: Random House, 1980)

## Introduction

“Redistributing the narrative field by telling another version of a crucial myth is a major process in crafting new meanings. One version never replaces another, but the whole field is rearranged in interrelation among all the versions in tension with each other. Destabilizing an origin story is perhaps more powerful in the deconstruction of the history of man than replacing it with a more progressive successor” –Donna Haraway (in Blier 84-85)

There has been widespread recognition over the past few decades of the need to formulate alternates to some of those narratives bequeathed by the Enlightenment tradition in the humanities and social sciences. Spaces in which to configure potentially new and different stories about various historically-excluded others have emerged. I propose that it is time to think about extending this space into nonhuman worlds, to interrogate various entrenched depictions of other species and re-envision the roles of nonhuman animals in the stories already told.

The groundwork for theorizing “the animal” (whether actual animals or the figure of the animal), much less applying that theory, is far from complete or, perhaps, even fully begun. In equestrian practices, the term “groundwork” refers to systematic exercises aimed at “suppling” (making supple, balanced, and responsive) a horse’s body, creating focus and responsiveness, and establishing regular forward cadence. All must be well-established for sustainable success in jumping, working with other animals (herding cattle, etc.), or performance of the advanced dressage movements known as the “airs.” The whole of the practice, operating through a system of touch and pressure, takes the form of a conversation, a discourse between different minds learning to find common ground on which to base effective communication. I would like to introduce the same kind of groundwork within critical theoretical work relating to other species.

In this thesis I will concentrate on domestic mammals—equines in particular. Domesticity, as Haraway and Noske acknowledge, represents a sharing of formative species histories with rich potential for understanding the co-constitutive and relational nature of species identity.<sup>1</sup> I find that equestrian systems of communication and thought provide exceptional examples of the vocabularies and knowledges that can emerge between phenomenologically various individuals. However, I would not necessarily limit investigations of significant otherness to domestic species, mammals, or even “the living.” I understand that these classificatory systems have particular referents and are instrumental in maintaining internal relational organization, but my goal is not to maintain or even renew the structures of differentiation that support particular identities. I would like to explore relationships and forms of life in which otherness is enacted and the lines between species complicated and hybridized. Addressing and responding to the many significant differences that characterize disparate beings is another matter. Martha Nussbaum’s “capabilities approach” offers one possibility for addressing this issue.<sup>2</sup>

The central writers on whom I will rely in this analysis—Jacques Derrida, Cary Wolfe, Barbara Noske, Vicki Hearne, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and Temple Grandin—come from disparate disciplinary backgrounds; all approach animality and nonhuman animals with significantly different assumptions and methodological knowledges. An interdisciplinary approach to “the question of the animal”<sup>3</sup>—the many debates and issues (ethical, biological, philosophical, and practical) that surround nonhuman animals—is necessary because the question has been formulated so differently in the various contexts of its address; the work generated “remains widely scattered among disparate and often hard-to-locate discussions episodically embedded in a wide

range of texts” (Wolfe *Zoontologies* x). I include Hearne and Grandin’s non-academically published works and some voices and writings here that have mainly been heard outside of academic contexts because I see them as adding a vital—especially to this subject matter—element of practice, or work “on the ground,” and also because I think that alternative methodological approaches, to this discourse in particular, need to be authorized for any kind of comprehensive analysis to take place.

Each of my sources offers a potent alternative site of entry and context for this discourse on the “question of the animal.” Most of the theorists here (of those who address the issue at all) are also critical of the approach of most animal-rights groups, humane societies, and moral philosophers—in short, those who currently dominate popular public discourse on issues surrounding other species. Despite differing disciplinary backgrounds, many of the authors’ ideas and conclusions are complementary and can be used to further explore those of the others.

I see my own position as a partial synthesis and expansion of these writers. I align my conceptions of identity and relationship with Deleuze and Guattari’s multiplicitous and sliding formations. I draw especially strongly from the theoretical approaches of Wolfe, Haraway, and Derrida, and from the practical and experiential insights of Hearne and, to a lesser extent, Grandin. Haraway does refer to some of the practical aspects of species divisions and interspecies relationships,<sup>4</sup> but I find that equestrian relationships (in which participants are physically in contact and cannot help but feel every movement and rhythm of each other) —rather than human-canine, on which she bases much of her assessment—actually better exemplify many of her points. Though I agree with many of Hearne’s central tenets (the responsibility and authority accompanying relationships,

training as a teaching of “language games,” and language [not only communication]—with grammar, syntax, and trope, and naming—as a nonhuman possibility), she ignores the symbolic roles animals play in human societies and cultures as well as oppositional depictions of the Animal and the Human (Hearne 43). I take much of my critique of biological and disciplinary prejudices from Haraway and Noske; however, there have been advances in sociobiology, ethology, and related fields since Noske’s work, and the analysis there would need to be refined and made more subtle—as Haraway acknowledges<sup>5</sup>—to better do justice to contemporary scientific work. Wolfe and Derrida offer exemplary theoretical critiques of the species division—in Derrida’s case, mingled with the gaze of an individual cat—but generally lack reference to the individual or lived aspects of interspecies relationships.

This is by no means a comprehensive study and I do not engage in a complete critique of the theories of any of these writers. Instead, I analyze and critique parts of their works which deal specifically with the aspects of ‘the question of the animal’ with which I am concerned here: problematic oppositions between human and nonhuman animals, the breakdown of the humanist subject and depictions of otherness, some theoretical dilemmas of the animal rights debate, and interpersonal communication across the phenomenological divide separating human and nonhuman animals. Each of my main sources explicitly addresses “the animal” in his, her, or their writing. The intersections and resonances between some of them—what happens when their works are contrasted and used as alternative yet intersecting sites of entry—has also provided me much insight into the variety of possible approaches to the topic.

The strict disciplinary division of what constitutes legitimate subject matter may

go some way toward explaining the relative lateness of ‘the question of the animal’ to critical social theory. The subject matter and methodological boundaries of particular disciplinary fields limit potential questions, and the fact that, in this case, there is almost no contact between the formal disciplines and informal practices with which the subject is associated—“no genuine exchange between training and the academy”—has extenuated these conditions (Hearne xi).<sup>6</sup> As a result, it is indisputable that at the present moment “the pressing relevance of the question of the animal has been generated in contemporary culture more outside the humanities than within” (Wolfe *Zoontologies* x). The radical re-evaluation of nonhuman animals has manifested itself in an explosion of scientific and ethological studies on animal behavior—communication, in particular—and in the influx of popular books on various aspects of non(solely)human animal behaviors in the past decade.<sup>7</sup>

There are many directions in which the investigation of the role of the animal in various contexts could occur. Within recent critical social theory, I see it as principally aligned with other attempts to respect both similarity and difference in discussing “otherness.” Theorists in the social sciences and humanities have led the way in challenging many established characterizations of ‘otherness’ (feminism, queer studies, post-colonialism, etc.), but few seem willing to extend this approach to nonhuman subjects. If ‘otherness’ is to be fully addressed, however, a range of phenomenologically various experiences of otherness must be taken into account.

The disparate visions of the animal and animals that accompany the strict separation of the various disciplinary contexts in which they are studied leads to reductive and problematic generalized depictions. The natural sciences focus on the

physical aspects of specific animals and species and address animals as organisms. This presupposition that all organisms and their attributes are worthy of consideration is one advantage of the scientific approach. Serious studies of nonhuman animals tend to be relegated to this physical realm—which, I should note, does extend to such areas as sociobiology and cognition. Although theoretically there is little difference in the physical study of human and nonhuman bodies, the approach and license to study each differs widely, and humans—as subjects with considerations and autonomy beyond the physical—maintain a qualitatively different status from nonhuman animals. The physical study of humans is supplemented by the non-quantifiable inquiries of the humanities and social sciences, but there are no authoritative corresponding areas of inquiry for nonhuman animals. These disciplines, to the extent that they take up “the question of the animal” at all, inquire about the Animal: the idea signified by the figure of the animal or animality, to the exclusion of specific and embodied animals.

There is rarely sufficient comparison or interaction between these approaches. These are not necessarily *opposing* positions and I am not trying to *resolve* the contradictions they present or get at some truth of how nonhuman animals “really” are, but instead to interrogate the expanse between these very different ways of seeing and perhaps revise the potential stories that can develop from either method separately. Both approaches tend to neglect consideration of animals as individuals, much less individuals capable of potentially dialogical relationships. The meaningfulness of particular interactions with nonhuman animals can only be acknowledged once the lives and meanings of nonhumans are established as potentially valuable in themselves, aside from the general pursuit of knowledge of which their study is a part—or at least acknowledged

worthy of study in themselves to the extent that human meanings are worthy of study (the Kantian question of whether or not life is of itself inherently valuable is largely irrelevant to this discussion). This project may sound far-fetched at this point, but so did the extension of similar concern to many *Homo sapiens*, only fairly recently allotted the privileges of full human status, not long ago.

In the variously-sanctioned stories involving nonhuman animals, the role of the Animal is often that of ‘actant,’ which

operate[s] at the level of function, not of character. Several characters in a narrative may make up a single actant. The structure of the narrative generates its actants...Action is not so much an ontological as a semiotic problem. (Haraway *Reader* 115)<sup>8</sup>

Actants are pre-established structural supports for narratives rather than active semiotic participants in them. The type of story or structuring of narrative determines and limits the roles available for actants. Because actants—as opposed to actors or agents—have set functions or roles to fulfill, they are not true characters. The types of stories told about nonhuman animals have largely precluded either their agency as “significant others” (as with much popular culture: Disney cartoons, for instance, where nonhuman animals are merely humans in somewhat different forms) or depicted them as wholly, unknowably, ultimately other, so that they function as figures (even to the extent of vague and inanimate “nature”) or symbols, allusions to other stories. In either case, nonhuman animals tend to be presented as static objects, without active agency or discursive constructions of their own.

These circumstances of depiction, since (culturally, socially, etc.) created, are modifiable. The various stories can be revised, and if this is accomplished the narrative possibilities in which they take place will be subsequently restructured, since

every story in a 'field' alters the status of all the others. The total interrelated array of stories is what I call a *narrative field*...the set of scientific discourses constituting primatology, especially biology, psychology, and bioanthropology; as the dynamic web of stories and possible meanings; as the many complex spaces where meanings are contested and stabilized for a time through the productive relations of knowledge and power. (Haraway, in Bleier 81)

These 'relations of knowledge and power' in narrative fields must be constantly revised and supplemented to remain productive. One potentially valuable place from which to draw insights about nonhuman animals—as *active participants*—might be the stories and accounts of some of those who work or interact directly with other species as a career or on a regular basis. This site, often neglected or even actively derided, seems to me essential to include in the many points of entry to “the question of the animal.”<sup>9</sup>

Attending seriously to this question in turn fulfills a necessary and important part of the project of critical theory as a whole: the interrogation and consideration, and finally alteration and construction, of new meanings and stories in “our” collective narratives.

Barbara Noske is a professor/theorist from the Netherlands with a background in sociocultural anthropology (M.A.) and philosophy (PhD). In *Beyond Boundaries: Humans and Animals*, she reaches past the usual borders of her discipline (anthropology) to provide an analysis of Western philosophical and anthropological thought and nonhuman animals that ranges from historical processes of domestication to current industrial farming practices. She explores various incarnations of the relationship between human and nonhuman animals, critiquing the inconsistencies and unstable assumptions abstracted in the binaries of human versus animal and nature versus culture and permeating the treatment of nonhuman animals. She is very critical of the general approach of the natural sciences to nonhuman animals, the methodological framework of which she sees as reductive and overly restricted.

In the natural sciences and ethology,<sup>10</sup> attributing non-physical or non-physically-definable agency to objects of study (of whatever species) has traditionally been frowned upon, and therefore Noske asserts that

the animal sciences are simply not equipped to deal with those characteristics in humans which, according to the social sciences, make humans human...we find ourselves stuck with the images of humanness and animalness as conveyed by two different types of sciences: humans are social and cultural; animals are biological. But some awareness that the two states cannot be entirely separate has always remained. (90)<sup>11</sup>

It seems that as many problems are caused by the rigid enclosure of epistemic possibilities as by the strict boundaries prescribed by scientific methodologies.<sup>12</sup> The largely unquestioned authority and preeminence of the representations of the physical sciences has been a substantial part of the problem of posing “the question of the animal” in the social sciences.<sup>13</sup> “Animal,”<sup>14</sup> however, describes a vast array of beings and practices, human and nonhuman. Investigating “the question of the animal” entails gathering and constructing information and representations from various sources, not least of which is the natural sciences. Haraway suggests that

the strength of scientific articulations is a practical matter, involving the development of analytical tools, narrative possibilities, representational technologies, patterns of training, institutional ecologies, structures of power, money, and, not least, the ability to craft diverse connections with nonhumans of many kinds. (*Reader* 202)

Integrated investigations are vital to shaping both theories and lives, expanding the range of potential stories and representations accorded animals of all kinds.

Noske and, more sensitively, Haraway, are critical of the authoritative role the purportedly objective standpoint of the physical sciences has played in various discourses of “otherness” (including those that surround nonhuman animals). Both maintain that “the stories of the Scientific Revolution set up a narrative about ‘objectivity’ that continues to get in the way of a more adequate, self-critical technoscience committed to situated knowledges” (*Reader* 233). Representations of other species that stem from the

natural sciences permeate nonscientific realms. As Noske notes, it is from the natural sciences—biology and ethology in particular, that “the sciences of humankind implicitly derive their own image of animals and animalness” (87). As a result, she believes that social scientists may “fail to appreciate that the image of animalness as conveyed by the natural sciences may well be a de-animalized biological construct rather than a mirror of animal reality.” She also traces this ‘reductionist and objectifying’ image back to

the so-called 'Scientific Revolution' [which] created a specific image of the natural world: nature as a semi-divine life force was replaced by nature as a useful, technical object with no purpose or value of its own. In the eyes of modern scientists, nature became mechanical, measurable and quantifiable matter. This process, known as *the disenchantment of nature*, has been strengthened by the advocacy of the *parsimony principle*, a principle which requires scientists to reduce natural phenomena to their lowest possible, that is, most material and measurable, level. According to this principle, scientists should try to stick to material levels of explanation, such as neurophysiological, nature. In the animal sciences this has led to a neglect of the complexity of animals and animal life, since cognitive priority is given to those aspects of animals which can be measured and controlled. The other aspects of animals, those which can hardly be measured in terms of mainstream biological methodology, are therefore dismissed as secondary or, worse, rationalised out of existence. Thus, the part of animals under scrutiny in the laboratory and under the control of the positivist natural scientist comes to represent the whole animal. On top of this all came the Cartesian notion of the animal-machine, a view which denied animals all subjectivity, feeling, suffering, needs, fear or knowledge. In short, animals ended up as passive and law-bound products of the laws of living matter. (in Cavalieri, 261-62)

Once one has “rejected the caricatures some reductionists have made of humans,” Noske asks, “why take their animal caricatures at face value?” (88) This is not the whole picture, however. On the one hand, as Noske relates, nonhuman animals do signify inanimate “nature,” but on the other (and this is the hand that, when the subject is addressed explicitly, tends to be used in the social sciences and humanities) they also represent a kind of ultimate limit of active “otherness.” The ambiguity of what the figure of the animal represents has played a large part in the variety of approaches to the subject.

The label of anthropomorphism that looms as a discrediting specter over scientific inquiry has had a huge impact on the way nonhuman animals have been approached in the physical sciences and beyond them. Anthropomorphization misleads by displacing

behavior into frameworks that obscure contextual relevance. However, it seems necessary and inevitable that the experience of others be understood—to the extent that this is possible at all—through some facet of one’s own experience and knowledge.<sup>15</sup> Careful acknowledgment of both the potential and the limits of scientific investigation as well as the particularities of human perception will aid in understanding nonhuman others.

The question of how to see otherness—and potential sameness—as valid and meaningful within the context of various identities is of central importance to many projects in the humanities and social sciences. These disciplines operate within conceptual frameworks that allow for the study and theorization of subject matter as ultimately incommensurable, with dynamic potential that always exceeds the analysis of physical components. They seem, therefore, the only ones appropriate for the kind of approach to nonhuman animals that I have in mind. The various and never fully calculable attributes of nonhumans, however, are almost always preemptively excluded from debates in these disciplines; rather, the Animal operates as the figure against which the Human is distinguished and as such is foreclosed as an object of serious inquiry. The anthropological approach does contain potential value for addressing “the question of the animal” or studying nonhuman animals because, as Noske puts it,

anthropology is the science of the Other, it has all the makings of an inter-subjective science even if situated in the sea of subject-object oriented sciences. It possesses a pre-eminently inter-subjective method: participatory observation of people in other societies and cultures. Apart from being inter-subjective, it is also holistic in its approach of the Other. A participant-observer does not just work with her mind as if observing humans in a laboratory setting- she has to immerse herself body, mind, and soul in the Other’s sphere, sharing her people’s daily life, learning their language as well as their habits and views. (Noske 169)<sup>16</sup>

The field of sociobiology has to some extent taken up the anthropological approach with regard to nonhuman animals, and this is a start in the process of according legitimacy and value to the various ways of being other.

In *The Savage Mind*, Claude Levi-Strauss described “the ultimate goal of the human sciences to be not to constitute, but to dissolve man. The pre-eminent value of anthropology is that it represents the first step in a procedure which involves others” (247). However,

anthropology’s birth [is] from the distinction between primitive and civilized, between nature and culture, between those who travel and look and those who stay home and are looked at. There is no way around the charged historical constitution of the Other as an object for appropriation, for observation, for visualization, for explanation. This structure has been generative of the sciences of man (sic). It works in art, politics, economics, science. (Haraway, in Bleier 91)

With regard to nonhuman animals, the field remains problematic—and this is evident in its title—because of the fundamental distinction of human-ness that forms the basis of prescribed subject matter. In addition,

anthropologists have inherited the storytelling strategy rooted in structural functionalism deeply tied to social and cultural anthropology, while the biologists have inherited the storytelling strategy of positivism and empiricism deeply tied to the hegemonic authority of physical sciences. Both inherit versions of political economy. (Haraway, in Bleier 89)

Critique of political and ideological power structures and Enlightenment meta-narratives, therefore, is crucial to comprehensively rethinking “the question of the animal.”

Cary Wolfe, an English professor/theorist, edited *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, which collects a range of important recent essays on animal otherness. His essay “In the Shadow of Wittgenstein’s Lion: Language, Ethics, and the Question of the Animal” (which also appears in the work cited below), details how ‘the question of the animal’ has been dealt with in the writings of a number of influential philosophers/theorists of the past century. He provides excellent critiques of mainstream animal-rights approaches (Singer, Reagan). Though theoretically sophisticated, none of his pieces address animal others as individuals or reach beyond the theoretical realm into practice or into the wide variety of inter-species relationships. His *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* also contains several insightful

textual (including film) applications of posthumanist theory to specific works with regard to the subject of “the” animal other.

In critical studies of (literary) theory, which constitutes Wolfe’s background, animals tend to appear as figures, as symbols and metaphors in various human cultural economies and as representatives of abstracted human conceptual categories. Focus on the *figure* of “the animal,” as metaphor or concept, can overshadow the value and nature of the physical, specific, and self-sustaining individuals from which the figure takes its form. Concern with animalized or “bestial” depictions of some humans, furthermore, has not led to interrogations of the underlying validity of such depictions of animality.

Donna Haraway, a science theorist trained as a biologist, assigns non-humans a significant role in her theoretical work, arguing that other species and beings (cyborgs, machines, etc.) have an essential role to play in shaping future narratives. Most of her work deals with (in her words) ‘inherited dualisms,’ of post-Enlightenment Western knowledge structures, among them the animal/human binary, and her approach to her material is exceptionally non-anthropocentric. For these reasons she is able to provide very powerful and detailed critiques of the historical construction and potential reshaping of nonhuman others.

The discipline of biology, in which Haraway is trained, has been perhaps the most dominant and influential source of information in the study of nonhuman animals. Her investigation of the heritage of the natural sciences has been instrumental in undermining the supposed objectivity of these fields, revealing their permeation by the same various historically specific cultural and social biases and epistemological categories that have long concerned (generally more self-reflexive) criticism in the social sciences and

humanities. All of her material seems to “take as a self-evident premise that ‘science is culture’” (*Reader* 64). In her excellent and unprecedented explication of the theoretical *why*, however, she does not delve much into the *how* of direct and specific inter-species interaction/ communication. At this point I turn to Vicki Hearne.

Vicki Hearne was a former poetry professor at Yale who also worked as a dog and horse trainer throughout her life. Her intellectual background was grounded in English, poetry, and classical philosophy. Her efficacy in interacting with the animals she trains (proven through the *response* of those animals) and ability to explain this process with reference to a range of philosophical concepts illuminates many of the significant subtleties within inter-species relationships and communication across species boundaries. Hearne—as would doubtless many trainers, were they familiar with the terms—likens training to teaching animal various “language games” (42). Her explorations of specific internal and broader conceptual significances within and around interspecies relationships and conversations mark essential points in mapping the territory from “*thinking with animals*”<sup>17</sup> to “*thinking with animals*.” Problematic in Hearne’s theories is the emphasis on the ultimately *moral* nature of these relationships and the fact that her explicit overarching theoretical conclusions remain within the classical Western humanist tradition. The central text in this analysis will be *Adam’s Task: Calling Animals by Name* (citations from other texts will be specified).

Temple Grandin, an autistic woman who works in animal science (PhD) and has revolutionized slaughterhouse construction,<sup>18</sup> provides an unique example of more direct communication from the perspective of ‘significant otherness’ (to use Donna Haraway’s apt phrase). She is exceptional in her ability to articulate the way—very different from

most humans—that she perceives and understands the world. As an autistic person, Grandin has learned *cognitively* all the behaviors (social interactions, etc.) that “normal” (non-autistic) humans learn instinctively and intuitively. Grandin is very involved with nonhuman animals in both her professional work and private life, and though the methodology she employs in her work is scientific (she consistently supports all her observations and conclusions with data from scientific experiments and studies), her most promising insights come from her personal experiences. She provides an exceptional “outsider” perspective on the human species itself.<sup>19</sup> Her physical and phenomenological impressions as well her emotions and ways of processing information make her subjectivity radically different from that of non-autistic humans—and, she asserts repeatedly in *Animals in Translation*, closer to that of nonhuman animals (Intro xx).<sup>20</sup> I will use *Animals in Translation* (Scribner, 2005) and *Thinking in Pictures and Other Reports from My Life with Autism* (Vintage Books, 1996) as the basis of my analysis.

Rethinking classical Oedipal psychological analysis, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have effectively disrupted and skewed many long-established stories and origin myths. Their notion of “becoming animal” (appearing mostly in *One Thousand Plateaus*) provides a compelling and dynamic way to think about being in the world and phenomenological problems of otherness. The concept also presents a potentially significant counterpoint to Grandin's experiences as a person with autism. It is, however, a term and therefore a metaphor, and as such cannot fully take into account or address the questions that come from outside the (human) system of signification in which it is situated—questions from animal others themselves. Despite their multiplicitous attempts to undermine initial conditions and origins, “the animal” for Deleuze and Guattari seems

to remain a representative category qualitatively distinct from “the human” (perhaps an insufficiently examined residue of Judeo-Christian originary separation). Nevertheless, “becoming-animal” describes a flexible mode of imagining with significant potential for conceptualizing a wide range of fluid and multiplicitous identities.

I will also draw from the two translated and published sections of Jacques Derrida’s 1997 conference lecture at Cerisy-la-Salle, France, on his work, entitled “L’Animal autobiographique;” namely, “The Animal that Therefore I Am” (the introductory outline of the lecture)<sup>21</sup> and “And Say the Animal Responded?,” (a section dealing with Lacan and the animal).<sup>22</sup> Derrida’s analysis considers both the roles the animal has played in various influential theories and the significance of actual animals, as well as the complexity of asking “the question of the animal” itself.

Missing from this analysis are two of the most prolific writers on the subject of animal others: moral philosophers Mary Midgley and Bernard Rollin. Each has added significantly to the extensive reasoning and logical arguments supporting increased consideration of nonhuman animals and various aspects of the animal rights argument, as well as to the discourse as a whole. Though their exclusion is mainly in the interests of space, it is also because I do not want the focus of this thesis to be predominantly ethical nor aligned with the dominant ideas of the “animal rights” approach. Debates about the various lives of nonhuman animals within both the animals-rights movement and most mainstream philosophical discourses<sup>23</sup> tend to address the issue of the duties related to otherness as first and foremost—or often solely—*moral* in nature, with avoidance of cruelty and suffering as the ultimate moral imperatives. Nonhuman animals are accorded the status of victims in the entire philosophical framework of many conversations. Most

of these follow Jeremy Bentham's famous question:

'What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty or reason [sic?], of perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day or a week or even a month old. But suppose they were otherwise, What would it avail? The question is not, Can they *reason*? nor Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?' (qtd. in Ferry, 27, in Wolfe *Animal Rites* 33)

To this,

[Derrida's] answer is that two hundred years ago when Bentham insisted that the real question was not whether animals could think or speak, but 'Can they suffer?'- everything changed. Bentham inaugurated a reversal from considering animals in terms of their powers, to considering their passivity. (Wood, in Atterton 140)

Situating "the question of the animal" in a negative ethical context and reducing the complexity of interspecies relationships to stories in which humans are actors and subjects and other animals are passive (though feeling) actants precludes discussing animal others as agents and subjects, who call and to whom responses are due. A positive sense of ethical response to otherness (akin to that of Levinas and Derrida) seems required in this context. I would like to explore some sites of possibility and connection rather than focus on what should not be done and why it should not be done—although these questions remain extremely important in the discourse surrounding other species.

Bentham's question is indubitably posed to a human audience (further, a human audience assumed to experience the world in a culturally normative fashion) and the answer will also be for that audience; it is a question about otherness that never refers itself to any of the actual others concerned. This means of considering otherness is not sufficient to any attempt to really respect or understand—to the extent that this is possible—these others; *there must be a response from the other for any analysis to be valid.*<sup>24</sup> The way to validate response is to do the groundwork of establishing a conversation, a *discourse*, in which sustained listening and active response by *all* of those involved is evident.

Another concern of this essay is the huge discrepancy between the conclusions reached by those who work directly with other species and those who theorize about them and study them scientifically (in both laboratory biology and field ethology). The extent of difference in the methodological assumptions involved in these approaches severely limits and structures the range of possible conclusions. Even taking these differences into account, the subjects described in conclusions are often barely recognizable as related, much less, as is often the case, the same subjects. Hearne remarks that

for the trainer there are hot working Airedales, dutiful and reliable German Shepherds, horses with intense, fiery, and competitive temperaments, other horses who are irredeemably dishonest. In the universities, there were more or less Cartesian creatures of uncertain pedigree, revised by uncertain interpreters of Freud and Jung, which may be why in the world of letters in general animals are invoked to mark 'primitive' and usually unsavory impulses (14).

Hearne's descriptions of the two worlds she inhabits reveals the extent to which the constitution of "the animal" as a theoretical category has defined itself through imagined opposition to imagined human markers. This is a negative definition that ignores positive (demonstrated) characteristics of nonhuman animals and, in practice, leads to an oppositional vision of the relationships between humans and other animals.

While characterizations of various historically disenfranchised groups have been and are still under intense scrutiny and interrogation, the depiction of other species has been largely ignored. Why has the movement to undermine established hierarchies and hegemonies so persistently kept the issue of where other species fit into the evaluation off the agenda for so long? Why does it still generate such immediate and profound anxiety? To upset the species status quo in most of Western society (and elsewhere) would require a wholesale renovation and upsetting of established cultural configurations, faiths, and ideological (not to mention economic) systems, more drastic even than those transformations which have accompanied critiques of racism or sexism. Perhaps there is

some kind of unconscious intuition that the logic of speciesism, as with that of sexism and racism, may not stand up to a genuine critique, or perhaps the idea of facing the drastic implications of that critique may be too daunting. Regardless, there is a marked and even excessive anxiety and resistance—often expressed through strong but often uninformed opinions on the subject or scornful dismissal of *any* validity in the issue—to opening discussion of the subject at all. What would happen, for instance,

if Western philosophers truly reopen the question of the relation of the subject and the species? What happens if thinkers in these traditions—which have depended fundamentally on the category of the animal in order to generate and legitimate the class of humans—really ask, not knowing the answer, if non-humans are subjects? (Haraway, jacket cover of *Animal Rites*)

The possibilities are especially anxiety-producing now, when,

by the late twentieth century in United States scientific culture, the boundary between human and animal is thoroughly breached. The last beachheads of uniqueness have been polluted if not turned into amusement parks—language, tool use, social behavior, mental events, nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal. And many people no longer feel the need of such a separation... Movements for animal rights are not irrational denials of human uniqueness; they are clear-sighted recognition of connection across the discredited breach of nature and culture. Biology and evolutionary theory over the last two centuries have simultaneously produced modern organisms as objects of knowledge and reduced the line between humans and animals to a faint trace re-etched in ideological struggle or professional disputes between life and social sciences. (Haraway, *Reader* 10)

In contemporary postmodern theory in the social sciences and humanities, focus on the disintegration of the humanist subject has only rarely (in comparison to the focus of most theoretical exercises) led to increased interest in nonhuman subjects and subjectivities. As Noske puts it,

postmodernism may have done away with the enlightenment focus on the autonomous human subject but rather than *human-centred* it now tends to be *human-discourse-centred* thereby inviting anthropocentrism back in, albeit by the back door. After all, it is *human* constructions and narratives that postmodernists worry about... as Marian Scholtmeijer so astutely observes, postmodernists tend to deny that the literal animal has the power to seize narrative and bend it toward acknowledgement of its, the animal's own, reality. (Intro x)

Many theorists<sup>25</sup> remain focused on difference, on which characteristics or capabilities definitively *distinguish* humans from other animals. This focus has done much to shape the discourse on otherness. With each new ethological find and biotechnological advance

the line between humans and other animals must be drawn more finely, yet the concentration remains on the line-drawing.<sup>26</sup> Why, at least for those not overtly espousing Judeo-Christian views, has interrogation of “what makes us human” been so focused on proving the ultimate impermeability of the species barrier? That there are differences, and that these differences determine much is obvious; the implications of this fact are not. Over-emphasizing difference often serves to exaggerate otherness and impede attempts to connect. Acknowledging either known or presumed differences is also insufficient without respectful attempts at discourse. Perhaps different questions could be asked—or at least the possibility of asking them could be explored. In (19<sup>th</sup> century author) George McDonald’s *Lilith*, the protagonist steps through a magic mirror and meets a man who changes into a man-sized raven. The protagonist asks, “...am I wrong, then, in presuming that a man is superior to a bird?” The bird replies, “That is as it may be. We do not waste our intellects in generalizing, but take man or bird as we find him. I think it is now my turn to ask you a question.”<sup>27</sup>

The apparent substantial overlap between human and nonhuman subjectivities seems to provide a potentially much richer and more productive—for understandings of humans as well as nonhumans—space for interrogation. The possibilities that might stem from such study, however, seem to continuously provoke either intense anxiety and refutation—and subsequent highlighting or darkening of lines drawn—if not denial of the usefulness or validity of the question itself. This reaction has included many canonical philosophers, who have refused to think beyond the, or a, human subject, multiplicitous or not. What if, for example, the “countenances,” the faces or “hands” (and I would take the liberty of expanding this term to any organ that functions as a hand, such as an

elephant's trunk) that so clearly signify human-ness for Levinas and Heidegger were allowed to even some other animals?

"We" often learn most about "ourselves" through trying to understand others. Attempts to understand animal others that do not involve those others themselves, directly and not only as material objects or symbolic markers—cannot provide any kind of comprehensive understanding of either those others or of oneself. Defining oneself by one's *own* perception and interpretation of others allows only superficial introductions of new material and becomes tautological; there is no feedback loop of information. In "The Animal That Therefore I Am," Derrida asks "who am I therefore? Who is it that I am (following)? Whom should this be asked of if not of the other? And perhaps of the cat itself?" The particular realities of individual animals have been perhaps the most neglected part of "the question of the animal."

Finally, this paper attempts to treat some aspects of Derrida's question posed in "And What If the Animal Responded?"<sup>28</sup> How would s/he respond and what would this response mean, in both the particular and theoretical senses? And how to respond *back*? Derrida sets out the three most necessary aspects of the project of thinking about animal others quite clearly in "And Say the Animal Responded:"

1. *On the one hand*, casting doubt on responsibility, on decision, on one's own being-ethical, seems to me to be...the unrescindable essence of ethics: decision and responsibility. Every firm knowledge, certainty, and assurance on this subject would suffice, precisely, to confirm the very thing one wishes to disavow, namely, the reactivity in the response. I indeed said "to disavow [*dēnier*], and it is for that reason that I situate disavowal at the heart of all these discourses on the animal.

The strict division between reaction—an automatic internally-generated effect—and response—which we are ethically obligated to give others—is often considered to coincide with that between human and nonhuman animals. The disavowal of animality and its attributed characteristic, reactivity, is at the core of much human self-identity.

This disavowal, which is also a denial of the responsibility to meaningfully respond to nonhumans, itself tends toward reaction rather than response. He continues,

2. *On the other hand*, far from erasing the difference—a nonoppositional and infinitely differentiated, qualitative, and intensive difference between reaction and response—it is a matter, on the contrary, of taking that difference into account within the whole differentiated field of experience and of a world of life-forms. And that means refraining from reducing this differentiated and multiple difference, in a similar massive and homogenizing manner, to one between the human subject, on the one hand, and the nonsubject that is the animal in general, on the other, by means of which the latter comes to be, in another sense, the nonsubject that is subjected to the human subject.

The indeterminate complexity of the animal must be *maintained*, rather than reduced to a category definable by opposition to that of the human. It is necessary to broaden “our” approach to the whole differentiated field of experience to respond in an ethical and responsible way to all others. Derrida concludes that

3. *Finally*, it would be a matter of developing another ‘logic’ of decision, of the response and of the event...a matter of reinscribing this *difference* between reaction and response, and hence this historicity of ethical, juridical, or political responsibility, within another thinking of life, of the living, within a different relation of the living to their selfness [*ipsēitē*], to their *autos*, to their own autokinesis and reactional automaticity, to death, to technics or to the mechanical [*machinique*]. (in Wolfe, *Zoontologies* 128-29)

Fully addressing “the question of the animal,” would entail inscribing the human in that category as well, and hence re-imagining—as Derrida does—how one addresses others at all. Listening to and responding to others in their significance is a worthy and vital—both literally and figuratively—project for critical theory. This thesis attempts to bring together elements of both theory and practice in imagining discursively-constructed others who are not necessarily human. I would like to begin some of the groundwork of developing understandings with nonhuman others through what I would term “evocative language,” a dynamic and incalculable process of call and response that does not necessarily signify, symbolize, or invoke but is variously interpretable and contains a surplus of simultaneously possible meanings and levels of complexity. Nonverbal systems of signification and communication underlie and intermingle with the abstracted

symbolism of human languages and their systems of understanding and in fact gesture beyond these, toward a wider array of beings and discourses as yet largely unexplored in critical theoretical practices.

---

<sup>1</sup> Haraway: *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) and “Cyborgs to Companion Species: Reconfiguring Kinship in Technoscience,” in *The Haraway Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2004.  
Noske: last three chapters of *Beyond Boundaries: Humans and Animals* Montreal, New York, London: Black Rose Books, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> *Frontiers of Justice*. Belknap Press (Harvard UP). Cambridge, MA: 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Cary Wolfe’s phrase in *Animal Rites*.

<sup>4</sup> Especially in *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) and “Cyborgs to Companion Species: Reconfiguring Kinship in Technoscience,” in *The Haraway Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> In “Otherworldly Conversations; Terran Topics; Local Terms,” in *The Haraway Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> “The science of animal, especially primate, groups developed so as to span the nature-culture split at precisely the same “time in American intellectual history, between 1920 and 1940, when the ideology of the autonomy of the social sciences had at last gained acceptance, that is, when the liberal theory of society (based on functionalism and hierarchical systems theories) was being established in the universities. Intrinsic to the new liberal relations of natural and social disciplines was the project of human engineering—that is, the project of the design and management of human material for efficient, rational functioning in a scientifically ordered society. Animals played an important role in this project. On one hand, they were plastic raw material of knowledge, subject to exact laboratory discipline. They could be used to construct and test model systems for both human physiology and politics...It was precisely direct reduction of human to natural sciences that the post-Spencerian, post-evolutionary naturalist, new ordering of knowledge forbade...It is part of the nature-culture split. On the other hand, animals have continued to have a special status as natural objects that can show people their origin, and therefore their pre-rational, pre-management, pre-cultural essence. That is, animals have been ominously ambiguous in their place in the doctrine of autonomy of the human and natural sciences. So, despite the claims of anthropology to be able to understand human beings solely with the concept of culture, and of sociology to need nothing but the idea of the human social group, animal societies have been extensively employed in rationalization and naturalization of the oppressive orders of domination in the human body politic. They have provided the point of union of the physiological and political for modern liberal theorists while they continue to accept the ideology of the split between nature and culture. (Haraway “A Political Physiology of Dominance,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 11)

<sup>7</sup> The examples are extensive. For some of the most notable, see Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson and Susan McCarthy’s *When Elephants Weep: The Emotional Lives of Animals*, Elizabeth Marshall Thomas’s *The Hidden Life Of Dogs*, Katharine M. Rogers (2001) (2005) , and the bibliographies of these books.

<sup>8</sup> Quotation from footnote 11 in “The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others,” [*The Haraway Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2004] in reference to Terence Hawkes’s introduction to *Greimas*, 1997, p.89.

<sup>9</sup> See Hearne’s *Adam’s Task: Calling Animals by Name*. New York: Knopf, 1986.

<sup>10</sup> Ethology, the scientific study of animals, is most closely tied to biologists Konrad Lorenz and Niko Tinbergen, who used the term to describe their own studies—in which theories were developed in accord with observed behavior—of various species of nonhuman animals. For the direct experience (data-gathering) and study of other species in their own habitats to be granted the status of legitimate scientific knowledge, it had to be made to fit into the strictly defined methodologies of the hard sciences. Alfonso Lingis (in his critique of the animal figures or allegories in Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra*) sums up this situation, remarking that

for its modern founders, ethology’s destiny as a science required the absolute repudiation of anthropomorphism. Not only were the ‘higher’ activities of thought, aesthetic appreciation, and learning to be denied animal species other than human, but even for perceptions and feelings distinctive technical terminology and descriptions had to be devised for nonhuman species. Eagles could not be said to be ‘proud’ nor serpents ‘wise.’ Nietzsche’s procedure is the reverse of anthropomorphism; he naturalizes the human species, attributing to humans the perceptions, feelings, and behaviors of other natural species.”(9-10, in Atterton).

It is worth noting the etymology of the term—perhaps especially in comparison with *ethnology* and *ethnography*—to uncover some epistemological assumptions embedded within it. A brief etymological inquiry reveals potentially significant differences; the oldest (obsolete) definition of ‘ethology’ is “the portrayal of character by mimic gestures: mimicry.” The subject implied by this term is necessarily an automaton, a Cartesian animal-machine. Though the term is no longer used in this sense, its previous use may indicate some of the *a priori* differences employed in studies of nonhumans and humans.

[Ethnology: The science which treats of races and peoples, and of their relations to one another, their distinctive physical and other characteristics, etc.]

[Ethnography: The scientific description of nations or races of men, with their customs, habits, and points of difference. 1878 RECLUS in *Encycl. Brit.* VIII. 613 s.v., Ethnography embraces the descriptive details, and ethnology the rational exposition, of the human aggregates and organizations.]

Ethology: The portrayal of character by mimic gestures: mimicry. *Obs.*

1843 Mill *Logic* VI. v. §4 The laws of the formation of character..are to be obtained by, etc. A science is thus formed, to which I would propose to give the name of Ethology, or the science of character. 4. *Zool.* [nature or disposition of animals; in pl., customs, haunts.] That branch of Natural History which deals with the actions and habits of animals, and their reaction to their environment; esp. the study of instinctive animal behaviour. 1897 Parker and Haswell *Zool.* I. 9 The whole question of the relation of the organism to its environment gives us a final and most important branch of Natural History which has been called Ethology or Bionomics. 1910 W.M. Wheeler *Ants* viii. 124 Their ethology, that is, their functional aspect (physiology and psychology). 1956 O. L. Zangwill in A. Pryce-Jones *New Outl. Mod. Knowl.* 170 A new type of behaviour study which endeavours to combine the rigours of scientific materialism with genuine understanding of the ways of animals..has been christened *ethology*. 1962 *Listener* 9 Aug. 207/1 Ethology is a method developed for studying automatic behaviour in animals, by looking at their movements and postures, but it can also be applied to man.

Note the strongly-implied methodological approach suggested by all three terms.

Anthropology: 1. The science of man, or of mankind, in the widest sense.

This seems to have been the original application of the word in Eng. but for two and a half cent., to c 1860, the term was commonly confined to the restricted sense b. Since that date, it has sometimes been limited, by reaction, to c. b. The science of the nature of man, embracing Human Physiology and Psychology and

their mutual bearing. c. The 'study of man as an animal' (Latham). The branch of the science which investigates the position of man zoologically, his 'evolution,' and history as a race of animated beings.]

<sup>11</sup> In regard to the methodology of these disciplines,

positivism gives cognitive priority to that part of nature (and of animals) which can be measured and controlled...Inwardness, mental states, ideas, values and meanings are not included in a biological description of a phenotype; these aspects of living creatures are either ignored or distorted and reduced to the manageable level of genetics, physiology and behavior [which has] led to a neglect of the complexity of living beings. (Noske 84).

Some of Noske's statements here seem a bit oversimplified and dated; there is a growing body of evidence of culture among nonhuman animals, though many previous ideas of a strict nature/culture divide remain entrenched in various theoretical frameworks.

<sup>12</sup> None of this criticism, of course, wholly devalues information gathered within its disciplinary confines. Noske and Grandin, especially, constantly cite and refer to an extensive range of physical, physiological, ethological, and neurological studies and experiments involving the abilities of nonhuman animals. As Hearne, Noske, and Grandin (among many others) have remarked on, however, data collected through the scientific methodologies of fields like biology and experimental psychology (ethology cannot be included here, since it is based on observation in uncontrolled environments) are not necessarily more valid than those in which strict controls are not used. In laboratory experiments, for example, it is obvious that what is ultimately learned is how certain animals and groups (generally not even species) behave in the specific and highly artificial situations that are laboratory experiments. Grandin describes an experience from a year she spent in the psychology department during graduate school (when, as she puts it, "everything was behaviorism"); after extensive laboratory work, "finally people started doing things like letting a bunch of lab rats out in a courtyard and watching what they did. Suddenly the rats started developing complex behaviors that no one had ever seen before" (*Translation* 16).

<sup>13</sup> Noske characterizes (and exaggerates) the current situation as stemming from the fact that

it is now science rather than religion which has been vested with authoritative and normative powers, but, contrary to religion, it does not think of itself as normative. Rather it participates as a neutral and 'objective' agent in those processes of act and thought by which nature is rendered valueless and meaningless. (Noske 79)

<sup>14</sup> The OED defines 'animal' as "a living being; a member of the higher of the two series of organized beings, of which the typical forms are endowed with life, sensation, and voluntary motion, but of which the lowest forms are hardly distinguishable from the lowest vegetable forms by any more certain marks than their evident relationship to other animal forms, and thus to the animal series as a whole rather than to the vegetable series."

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the scientific method itself could be said to 'anthropomorphize,' in that it compares and understands the subject/object of study only in the context of a specifically human knowledge-formation.

<sup>16</sup> Noske also sees 'special potential' in the broader conceptual framework of ecofeminism, which "has demonstrated the interconnectedness of anthropocentrism and androcentrism and criticised the subject-object approach to both nature and women" (172). Both approaches rest on a critique of the figure of "Man" [which] must be dissolved, not given resolve" (Badmington *Alien Chic* 39).

Implicitly, anthropologists do have conceptions pertaining to a universal human essence...if humanness should be identical with nonanimalness, then what constitutes animalness, what are animals and what are apes? As we have noted before, hardly any social scientist shows even a remote interest in animals for their own sake, let alone cares to ask sociological and anthropological questions about animals. What I am referring to are typically questions pertaining to collective meanings as existing within animal societies in general. (Noske, in Cavalieri, 260-61)

Just as the ethological approach is of value in studying human as well as nonhuman subjects, the anthropological approach contains great potential value for studying non-anthropoids. However, the discipline of anthropology—the study of humans and human-ness itself—implicitly rests on the premises of humanism, which posits an essentialized category of the Human, the limit of which is the Animal (a binary distinction).

Human-ness as a category extending beyond the biological is a problematic concept for many critical theorists. The approach to nonhuman animals employed in the social sciences and humanities can even seem hypocritical; for instance,

social scientists tend to be very much on their guard against any form of biological essentialism, that is, against notions of humanness, a universal human nature. They will hasten to point out the dangers of explaining social differences between people in terms of their biological essences such as race or sex—and rightly so—and will stress that it is humanity's nature to have no specific nature. It is frequently argued that anthropology should study the social, cultural and historical diversity *within* the human species rather than come up with some sort of universal human essence.

Ironically, many social scientists who hold this view almost imperceptibly gravitate towards precisely those essentialist positions they claim to detest so much, as soon as another biological category comes into view, namely the species barrier between us and apes. Suddenly rather clear-cut notions as to what *is* human and what *is* animal crop up among anthropologists and other social scientists. Their outspoken and valid criticisms of those who think in terms of biological essences suffer from considerable credulity loss in the face of their own assumptions about human and animal essences. (Noske, in Cavalieri, 260-61)

The lack of critical interrogation of embedded assumptions about nonhuman others seems to stem from both the fact that the issue is rarely raised and from the basic lack of contact, or absence of interaction *on equal footing*, that characterizes many depictions of nonhuman animals. The resulting lack of dialogue has enabled the distance between the two to grow until finding a common theoretical ground of consideration has become almost impossible.

<sup>17</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss's famous dictum "animals are good to think with."

<sup>18</sup> She has redesigned more than one-third of livestock handling facilities in the U.S., among numerous other accomplishments.

<sup>19</sup> Anthropology, the study of humans, generally distinguishes important cultural and social differences between groups rather than, as Grandin does, differences in how *reality itself is perceived* by differently-configured individuals.

<sup>20</sup> Grandin also places a great amount of faith in the physical sciences—much more than do any of my other sources. She includes extensive passages and whole chapters (especially in *Animals in Translation*) on the results and implications of specific studies and experiments, mostly of a neurological nature. So, almost paradoxically, she provides the most systematic scientific groundwork for the observations and partial theories herein as well as the best example of "significant otherness."

<sup>21</sup> Initially published in *Critical Inquiry* 28:2 2002.

<sup>22</sup> Published in Wolfe's *Zoontologies*, trans. David Wills, 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Most notably, post-Kantian analyses.

<sup>24</sup> The current popularity of "animal communicators," who profess an ability to channel the thoughts of various (mostly domestic) animals, is arrogant and misguided, and must be distinguished from some "animal whisperers," for whom the act of listening is as crucial as their whispered response.

<sup>25</sup> One of the most notable is Noam Chomsky, but it seems that many philosophers or theorists who addresses the issue of nonhuman species focuses primarily on human uniqueness and difference, on what

---

definitively distinguishes humans from all other species of animals (who then constitute a single category and whose own uniqueness is buried in this homogeneous grouping).

<sup>26</sup> I refer to speculations about which specific self-endowed human characteristics prove ultimate difference rather than genetically-based species classifications. These characteristics (for example, tool use, cognitive abilities, and language), though often evidenced or validated by particular studies, have transformed with the changes in scientific methodologies, such as the introduction of ethology.

<sup>27</sup> McDonald, George. *Phantasies and Lilith: Two Novels*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing, 1964.

<sup>28</sup> Trans. David Wills. *Critical Inquiry*: 28, Winter 2002. 369-418.

## Chapter One: The Imagined Animal

Before proceeding into the body of this chapter, I would like to address the need to introduce and develop new vocabularies—ones that will allow for discussion not just about but with nonhuman others and aid in imagining alternatives to those stories that have been and are currently told about nonhuman animals in critical analyses and academic settings. This vocabulary will, due to cognitive and phenomenological differences, necessarily point to a more embodied system of signification. I propose the language of *dressage*<sup>1</sup> as one way of formulating these possibilities for discourse. Dressage terminology is a fully embodied vocabulary, one that translates into kinesthetic as well as cognitive expression and understanding. Its concepts are not only metaphors or symbolic ways of thinking; each also describes a physical movement performed within a single equine and human partnership. In the chapters that follow I will periodically introduce these terms and their descriptions into my analysis as one way of imagining interspecies discursive constructions.

The first dressage term that I would like to apply to this analysis is “*through-ness*.” *Through-ness* describes a circular and sustained conduit between a horse’s motion and a rider’s hands, seat, and legs. This creation of simultaneous forward and circular energy in a horse’s movements is cultivated first through the hindquarters, as the horse “steps under” him- or herself, engaging the stomach muscles and lifting the back. The rider supports this forward motion with his or her legs and seat and asks for the horse to “soften” and come “on the bit;” to accept contact with the rider’s hands through the bit. The horse “rounds” at the poll (flexes the first three vertebra of the neck) and this

connection makes the whole motion “round,” so that the horse’s energy moves in an internal circular pattern as well as forward.

In this analysis, I see this internal movement of energy or *throughness* as aligned with the nature of discourse itself. The wordless and embodied communication symbolized by this term entails continuous invitation and response; the discourse sustains and transforms the forward energy of each of its participants. The ineffability at the heart of the sign system called language seems to authorize a broader and more variegated potential than that which is generally allowed in the disciplinary context of the humanities and social sciences. As Derrida writes,

if one defines language in such a way that it is reserved for what we call man, what is there to say? But if one reinscribes language in a network of possibilities that do not merely encompass it but mark it irreducibly from inside, everything changes. I am thinking in particular of the mark in general, of the trace, of iterability, of *difference*. These possibilities or necessities, without which there would be no language, *are themselves not only human*... And what I am proposing here should allow us to take into account scientific knowledge about the complexity of ‘animal languages,’ genetic coding, all forms of marking within which so-called human language, as original as it might be, does not allow us to ‘cut’ once and for all where we would in general like to cut. (“Eating Well,” 116-17, qtd. in Wolfe 73-4)

This internal gesture of language or discourse refers beyond itself and therefore also beyond the human subject. The ‘possibilities or necessities’ that arise in equestrian systems of communication are already inscribed in broader systems of signification, themselves functions of embodiment. This internal movement implicates “the question of the animal” from within.

The creation of a conduit of energy is the impetus behind all subsequent movements in dressage. This conduit requires continuous forward movement to sustain itself. Forward motion, in this context, is the driving force of the pressing need to address “the question of the animal” itself. Now we will begin moving *through* this process, by framing and circulating this forward movement. In dressage, *throughness* can take

months or years of sustained daily practice to achieve and much depends on the individual relationship and personality of each partner. The first step in this process is asking for relaxed and energetic forward movement. By the end of this thesis, I hope that the circular connection and contact between the various essential parts will be in motion also, and that the beginning of some kind of *throughness* will emerge.

### **Animals and Humans: Oppositional Categories**<sup>2</sup>

There is a long tradition of interrogating the paradigmatic Western Post-Enlightenment Man as the measure of all things within humanist thought.<sup>3</sup> The species boundary, upon which the idea of Man or the Human (as a category with meaning beyond the solely genetic) rests, however, is only rarely questioned or seen as problematic. “The Animal” still stands as the otherness which solidifies the sameness of the Human; in its broadest incarnation, the “we” of ethical discussion is implicitly understood to encompass the human species—at the boundary of which a solid wall of difference prevails. This process is often accomplished through a process of disavowal,<sup>4</sup> whereby human identity is constituted through opposition to those traits that have come to signify animal identity (these include instinct, physicality, and lack of ethical capacity).<sup>5</sup> Envisioning “the human” and “the animal” as oppositional categories is problematic for the identities of all those implicated. In addition, examining that which is disavowed or foreclosed in the constitution of particular identities—here, the Human—is a valuable tool for investigating the often-disguised social impetuses and currents by which they are formed.

The human subject is sharply and decisively distinguished from inanimate “nature” (the category into which all nonhuman animals are placed) in most of Western thought.<sup>6</sup> Noske explains this process as co-constitutive:

nature could only be if and when humanity detached itself from nature and ceased to feel a part of it. The Dutch philosopher/ anthropologist Ton Lemaire makes clear that the two developments, namely, the objectification of nature and the autonomization of the human subject, go hand in hand, 'reality could only fully become an object after humanity had collected its personality out of the unconscious intertwinement with external nature.'

It was the new mechanical worldview in combination with positivist experimental science that met these requirements. Together they created a distance between the human observer and the (natural) observed, reducing nature to an exploitable and useful *thing*, removing its comprehensive moral status and leaving it value-free. (Noske 53-4)<sup>7</sup>

The object-status of nonhumans leads to treatment as *means* in many areas, including production (meat, etc), legal status (possession), and research (experimentation).

Concentration on bodily elements has further aligned animals with their physical and functional attributes in human imaginations, magnifying these elements at the expense of those that are non-quantifiable.

Darwinism and theories of evolution and phylogenic continuity, generally accepted throughout the secular world (as well as most of the non-literalist/ fundamentalist non-secular population), have been applied mainly within physical analyses. It is insufficient to debate the various implications of specific characteristics (relative cognitive ability, sense of self, etc.) only within the contexts of their established conceptual frameworks (the most dominant being the methodology of the physical sciences). The broader implications of these scientifically substantiated theories—which have led to extensive questioning of the theological narrative of species-separation and anthropocentrism—have as yet largely failed to materialize in much non-scientific discourse.

The most immediate and obvious example of the paradoxical practices generated by the oppositional status of humans and other animals lies in the use of nonhuman animals in scientific research. Noske effectively summarizes the situation:

at the heart of the animal research industry is the paradox of a presumed comparability of animals and humans, and at the same time the negation of this comparability. The interested parties do show awareness of human-animal continuity – their experimenting practice rests on precisely this

awareness. But what is relied upon in practice, is thereupon denied in theory. For not only do objective similarities exist between humans and animals, their subjective mental states such as pain, fear, and discomfort are bound to be similar too. Indeed, should there be any doubt, animal experiments have proved this, ironically. (37)

Less obvious examples of the problematic configurations generated by using human and animal as oppositional categories abound.<sup>8</sup> Defining the characteristics of human animals *against* those of a vague multitude of various other animals does violence to all the many individuals in either category and to their particular embodiments or modes of being as well.

Though the absolute nature of the Cartesian distinction between mind and body has been supplanted by the physical findings of the natural sciences and the theoretical investigations of the humanities and social sciences, the (theoretical and concrete) divide between humans and other species seems in many ways to have grown and become naturalized at an unprecedented rate. This may be partly because the relationship between humans and the rest of the animate world has been so long and often expressed as oppositional, with humans distinct and fundamentally separate from an imagined unitary “nature,” that it has become part of Western mythology. Constraining the multiplicity of animate beings and inanimate forces in the world to categories of “us” (humans) and “nature” (the personified “them” tends to be reserved for other human groups) has contributed much to the conceptual distancing of other species from those characteristics considered to comprise “human nature.” It is still the case that more often than not that

the notion of an animal stands for the unhuman, the anti-human. It is a symbol for the forces which we fear in our own nature, and do not regard as a true part of it. It displays those forces as continuous with ones which we fear in the world around us—with floods, earthquakes, and volcanoes—and thereby dramatizes their power. By speaking of those forces as ‘animal,’ we imply that they are in some way alien to us, incomprehensible. But the peculiar alarm that they produce suggests also that they are *not* altogether alien—that we too carry the seeds of them in our nature, and are liable to feel their stirrings if offenders are allowed to set their inhuman example. ‘Our animal nature’ exists already as a Trojan horse within the human gates. Only constant vigilance can stop it playing an active part in human life. (Midgley, in Ingold 35)

And the vigilance has indeed been constant, on the part of social scientists and philosophers as much as the economic interests behind the industries which profit from the strict separation and consideration of human and nonhuman animals.

The idea of an unique human essence has taken many forms. The main distinction on which this characterization rests is that from the animal or “nature.” In *Animal Rites*, Wolfe critiques the view of one contemporary theorist, Luc Ferry, who believes, in a “blend of Rousseau and Kant,” that

the ‘*humanitas*’ (of the human) ‘resides in his freedom, in the fact that he is undefined, that his nature is to have no nature but to possess the capacity to distance himself from any code within which one may seek to imprison him. In other words: his essence is that he has no essence. (5, qtd. in *Animal Rites* 32).<sup>9</sup>

Or, the essence of the human is that ‘he’ is not animal—according to the implied essentialized definition of the animal and animality. The potentials of other species are circumscribed and defined by an internally-prescribed essential “nature.” The pre-determined code or definition attributed to nonhuman animals translates into the practical imprisonment of *use*. When put in direct relation with humans, this depiction resonates with the extreme anthropocentrism of Judeo-Christian doctrine, which also prescribes nonhuman animals as means, appropriate for various human uses. The exploitation and domination that follow can only be legitimated when, as in humanism, all of nature is constituted in opposition to humanity (“Man”). This co-constitution portrays identities in a binary relationship which does violence to the multiplicity of beings it describes and affects.

The processes of transformation which have accompanied the transition to and now (partially, anyway) from humanism, are obviously too lengthy and complex to discuss here, but it is apparent that associated shifts in sources of legitimation, authority,

and focal point have played an immense role in how, and if, “the question of the animal” has been posed. In the current stage of (some parts of) human civilization, acceptance of the physical evolutionary continuity of species frequently and regularly exists alongside the strict maintenance (even on non-theological grounds) of ultimate and qualitative divisions between humans and other animals. It is clear, however, that the distinction between “the human” and “the animal,” and “culture” and “nature” on which humanism rests is far from universally applicable among the human species. Alternative historical views abound; in Hinduism, Celtic and old German heritage, and many indigenous populations, for instance, one finds widely differing stories about nonhuman animals. Oppositional presentation seems to be a strongly Western phenomenon; many indigenous accounts seem to place humans in a fundamentally *relational* and interdependent position to a variety of distinctive animal others with whom they share the world.<sup>10</sup> The change in sources of authority and value across temporal and geographical expanses clearly lead to dramatic shifts in conceptions of personhood and identity. As David Wood remarks, “it is clear that the key stages in the development of human civilizations have been marked by transformations in our relations to animals, and hence in our dominant attitudes” (in Atterton 136). There is a substantial amount of concern for nonhuman animal welfare among (especially Western) human populations worldwide, but that concern is quite uneven and fragmented, with animal rights groups and welfare organizations often strongly at odds with those who interact directly with other species daily and those who study nonhuman animals in academic or professional contexts (ethologists, biologists, etc.) at odds with both. Endeavors to address “the question of the animal” entail different sets of approaches and materials altogether. How can these relations and dominant

attitudes be interpreted and what kind of analysis might they point toward?

### **The Figure of the Animal**

The dynamic potential for thinking about and interacting with “the other” is readily apparent. There is, however, a significant grammatical distinction still at work here; “the other” implies the *idea* of otherness; it refers to a distant and wholly separate entity, singular and autonomous. This phrasing suggests a preemptive separation of the figures of “them” and “us,” one that forestalls inclusion or variance even before any specific content or modifiers are introduced. “Others,” on the other hand, connotes multiplicity, plurality, and variance, without implying either previous or potential unity. This need for plurality of term seems to have been noticed in regard to other (and less multiplicitous) subjects; “W/woman,” for instance, is now generally replaced by “women.” It is extremely rare to hear, or see written, “the humans” (except perhaps in science-fiction novels); this phrasing creates distance and other humans, of course, are always part of an inclusive humanist “us.” As Derrida has suggested in “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” “the animal,” like “the other,” (as unified oppositional terms referring to a multitude and variety of subjects) must be complicated and pluralized in order not to re-inscribe division within the very term whose divisive nature we are interrogating.<sup>11</sup> The bounding of otherness—whether these boundaries are set by a sovereign self or a more collective category—significantly impedes the potential of the other from unfolding. Changing the focal terms from “the other” or “the animal” to “others” or “animals” might be a preliminary step in enabling this process.

The objectification resulting from the oppositional distinction between humans

and other animals is expressed normatively on another grammatical level as well. Human individuals are always (when gender seems obvious, anyway) referred to as “s/he,” other animals most often as “it.” Generally, even if particular animals are named and known personally, they remain denoted—especially in stories—by “it” (this is by no means universal; Hearne and others—especially, but by no means always, those who work directly with other animals—and the myths and stories of many non-Western cultures, denote individual animals with gender-specific pronouns). Hearne remarks on this strange phenomenon, briefly recognizing that “even many animal lovers conventionally use the pronoun ‘it’ rather than ‘he’ or ‘she’ to refer to an animal. I find this...evidence of the superstitions that control the institutionalization of thought” (169). It is also one example of the deeply rooted ambiguities surrounding both the figures of nonhuman animals and those animals themselves.

“It,” even when describing an animate, rather than an inert, figure, still describes a *thing*, to be activated through (human) performance or intervention. “The animal” as “it” stands is an imagined ideal category, and this influences particular references directly to living beings, symbolic representations, or figures of alterity (as alternate ways of being or distinctly other phenomenological worlds). The underlying notion of the animal, or animality, remains confined to the exterior, as essentially and ultimately unknowable; the animal, whether animate or inert, is still a figure, imagined by a human and forever trapped within the confines of his or her mind or gaze.<sup>12</sup> As Derrida and others have commented, the category of “the animal,” itself—composed as it is of myriad varieties of phenomenological world—remains incoherent, especially as a basis for theories of incalculable and various otherness.

The distancing stories told about nonhuman animals permeate the colloquial climate. As Steve Baker has noticed, “when animals figure, or can easily be thought of as figuring, in binary oppositions, *they invariably represent the negative term in the opposition: ‘the Other, the Beast, the Brute’*” (83). Phrases such as “they behaved like animals” are quite often and unselfconsciously used to describe various “inhumane” behaviors of humans (quarreling over food, sex, territory, etc.). These terms and phrases signify Otherness, unknown and therefore fearful. This use effectively expels some elements from pure “human nature” and expresses particular behaviors as “less than human.” This animal is an imagined figure, and as such remains within the human semiotic representational system and tied to exteriors, denoting meaning within the superficial level of appearances. Though the symbolic presentation of animals in stories and myths does frequently point toward common attributes of particular species, subspecies, and types, it seems to more accurately represent various aspects of human belief systems than characteristics of living animals (the treachery of the snake, for instance). It also presupposes a culturally-mediated and anthropocentric approach that often obscures, denies, or mystifies many qualities of those groups. Even to the extent that they are sensitively and insightfully represented, because these figures are representations they remain symbols and allegories, constructed by and for humans.

Nonhuman animals are frequently cast as known markers or symbolic indicators by which to distinguish human characteristics. From my own observation and analysis, the characteristics generally referred to in reference to “animal nature” tend *not* to be more common in “displayed” (to use scientifically-sanctioned terminology) nonhuman animal behaviors than they are in human behaviors; sometimes, as in the case of sexual

obsession, for example, these behaviors seem quite common in humans and fairly uncommon in other animals. The current popular prevalence of the term “sexual predator” to refer to humans who demonstrate deviant and violent (often pedophilic) behavior is another example of the covert distancing of unacceptable behaviors from the human species and imputing of them to other species. In the process these behaviors (predation) are twisted and demonized and the concrete dimension of the situation omitted (humans are often predators). Regardless of relative descriptive in/accuracy, pejorative phrases and comments that incorporate the term “animal” (with all the various assumptions and implications it encapsulates) and other terms explicitly associated with animality act effectively as myths, influencing as well as expressing general perceptions of other animals and perpetuating and renewing the cultural biases of which they are a part.<sup>13</sup>

In most of Western culture nonhuman animals have long functioned as representatives of nature or ultimate otherness<sup>14</sup> (if not objects or automatons of the Cartesian variety). The figure of the animal unifies “humanity” by providing an idea against which to define a human essence and autonomy. It is continuously animated (more in the sense of cartoon animation than that of its etymological implications) by those who construct and tell its story—which is, of course, really their story.<sup>15</sup> Ideas of human subjecthood—even the now de-centered variety—generally rely on “the animal” as the often-unacknowledged dialectical other.<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, however,

reified images of ‘the’ animal...produce equally reified images of ‘the’ human. The reduction of the complex plurality of animals to a singular generality underwrites the poverty of a humanism that thinks it has grounded itself in a human essence, a stable species identity to be secured by contrast with animality. (Mitchell, in Wolfe xii)

The de-centering of the human subject can only be partly accomplished if “the animal” is allowed to remain as the undeniable limit of “the human.” Breaking apart the binary of human and animal is a necessary part of interrogating and de-centering the modern human subject. In addition, if “the animal” remains a figure in the human symbolic economy, significant and incommensurable otherness cannot emerge. Interrogating the ways in which nonhuman animals are depicted—as has been done with depictions of various humans—is necessary in order to destabilize the figure of the animal as the ultimate otherness which supports an essential and identifiable humanity.

Most modern and even postmodern literature, criticism, and theory reifies rather than questions the established role of nonhuman animals. It is the symbolic roles of nonhumans in systems of cultural meaning that tend to be investigated in this context.<sup>17</sup> This is a valuable undertaking, but—with this subject, especially—it is rarely done with a critical understanding of the dangers of using living beings solely as figures (‘the native,’ for example) and is often uninformed by other discourses—from ethology to animal rights—on animals and animality. As a result of this symbolic economy, “the animals of the mind remain with us, while real animals have become marginalized” (Tapper, in Ingold 56). The problem with treating the animal, or animals, as analogies or figures, is that nonhumans are wholly subsumed into the human symbolic economy, thereby preempting any possibility of significant (and unknowable, indescribable) otherness as valid or meaningful in itself.

Constructing new stories, or at least problematizing and complicating established ones, would be aided by recognizing the possibility that alternate narratives about nonhuman others could come from those others themselves. In dressage—or really any

kind of training—each animal writes his or her own story.

\*\*\*\*\*

When I met Molly<sup>18</sup> for the first time, she was very aggressive (“pushy”) on the ground, especially around food. She was very stiff when ridden, with little understanding of how to flex her neck or body. In the story of herself that she tells us, she has cast herself in a difficult role, as both domineering and distractible.<sup>19</sup> On the ground, we ask her to respect our personal space by continually reminding her to pay attention to who is around her and what she is doing. She begins learning a new story about imposing herself on others and listening to those in her presence. Molly is not timid, so learning to move forward under saddle is not difficult for her, but moving forward in a physically balanced, straight, and rhythmic manner is a challenge. We work on the consistency and regularity of her gaits<sup>20</sup> and encourage her to keep her attention focused on her own straight and regular forward movement and her rider’s cues. We also exercise her enough so that she is sufficiently fit physically to accomplish the tasks we ask of her, and so undue fatigue will not hinder the conversation we are trying to have.

The immediacy and particular character of these conversations cannot be overemphasized. Each horse is an individual and as such is conversed with or ridden differently. Many horses have had traumatic or confusing experiences in the past and need to have their confidence—in themselves and their rider or partner in discourse—built up, while others need to have firm boundaries delineated. A timid horse may start to tell his or her story by being afraid to accept direction of which s/he is not sure or commit to sustained movement forward, so s/he may try to bolt, buck, or swerve to avoid addressing the issue. A bold horse may be easy to convince to move forward, but s/he

may then grab the bit and resist the next step of accepting contact. Subtle adjustments in the pressure of legs, seat and hands (the “aids”) are continually made to fit each horse’s preferences. In most cases, trust and connection with a rider—the partner in discourse—are the keys to fluid and fruitful conversations.

\*\*\*\*\*

The implications of holding a conversation with Molly are far broader than can be fully addressed here. However, I do see a real need for additional (minimally anthropomorphic) depictions of nonhuman animals as complex and incalculable beings, capable of discourse and possessing valuable “situated knowledges.” This project would involve according nonhuman animals *additional*—I am not suggesting that such investigations are in any way valueless—meaningful roles to those of symbolic or representative carriers for human meanings (including their standing as indicators for ultimate otherness) and their status as voiceless victims of human abuses to be accorded some form of “rights” based on their animate physicality. Envisioning animals as individuals as well as groups or species is essential here, as is the realization that nonhuman animals—especially “the animal”—cannot plausibly (in a scientific sense or otherwise) be situated foremost in opposition to humans or “the human.” This would entail taking a multiplicitous and nondeterministic approach to the question of “what it means to be human” and acknowledging that, to “be human,” is already to be animal, inextricably tied to animality and nonhuman animals.

### **The Trace of the Human?**

In “The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others,” Haraway notes that “human beings use names to point to themselves and others

and easily mistake the names for the things...representation depends on possession of a passive resource, namely, the silent object, the *stripped actant*" (*Reader* 89). The idea of animality is the invisible but felt non-presence or prior presence necessary to establish the human-ness of the human. Derrida's concept of the "trace," though used in relation to written language, may be useful in conceiving of one function of the nonhuman animal. Wolfe states that "the other-than-human resides at the very core of the human itself...as part of reason itself—the 'trace' that inhabits it, to use Derrida's term" (*Animal Rights* 17). This trace is not animals themselves; it is humanism's imagined singular *figure* of "the animal," constituted in opposition to an imagined universal human figure. Derrida explains that

the trace is not a presence but is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself. That the trace has, properly speaking, no place for effacement belongs to the very structure of the trace....In this way the metaphysical text is understood; it is still readable, and remains read. ("Différance" 403)

The figure of the animal acts as the trace of the human in human self-conception. The human is present or known through the figure of the animal—or, sometimes, that of a broader Nature—which acts the mark by which the human defines itself. Yet the figure of the animal is not and has never been real or present itself, just as "the 'human,' we now know, is not now, and never was, itself" (Wolfe, *Animal Rites* 9). The residual power of the trace, of that which is suppressed or unconscious at the base of the consciously imagined order of the world, is at the heart of the process of deconstructing or decentering the essentialized human identity.

Traces erase (themselves) like everything else, but the structure of the trace is such that it cannot be in anyone's *power* to erase it, and especially not to 'judge' its erasure, even less by means of a constitutive power assured of being able to erase, performatively, what erases itself. The distinction might appear subtle and fragile but its fragility renders fragile all the solid oppositions that we are in the process of tracking down [*dē-pister*], beginning with that between symbolic and imaginary which underwrites finally this whole anthropocentric reinstatement of the superiority of

the human order over the animal order, of the law over the living, and so on. (Derrida, in Wolfe *Zoontologies* 138)

Examining the potential of the animal, the discursive, and tactile or scent-based perception as well as questioning the priority that the human, the symbolic, and the visual have so often taken is central to this investigation. The constant and energetic suppression of “the animal,” as significant other and even as a discourse itself paradoxically indicates its importance. Using either individuals or groups as allegories permanently denies the specificity of their personhood—in effect, makes them functional symbols and narratives or myths. And, as Barthes writes in *Mythologies*, “the function of myth is to empty reality: it is, literally, a ceaseless flowing out, a haemorrhage, or perhaps an evaporation, in short a perceptible absence” (142). The absence marked by myth, in relation to the animal, is conspicuous as the *trace* of the humanist human subject.

This description of “the human” does not take into sufficient account the influence of physical embodiment, the very (“animal”) conditions of life. Furthermore, as Wolfe puts it, the humanist framework “presents as differences in *kind* what are maintainable only as differences in *degree*” (Wolfe *Animal Rites* 32). And these differences may even be more maintainable in *mode* than in degree. If taken seriously,

like writing and the feminine, the animal poses grave definitional and practical threats to the discourse of humanism, in which authority and autonomy are ‘attributed to the man (*homo* and *vir*) rather than to the woman, and the woman rather than to the animal.’ (Wolfe *Animal Rites* 100, citation from Derrida “Eating Well” 114)

Bringing in others in all their dimensions and significances (especially those others under whose figures the discourse is taken up) is essential to realizing the full extent to which a new and alternative story—to humanism and posthumanism too, perhaps—might begin to be told about and with nonhuman animals.

\*\*\*\*\*

After Molly has learned to move forward freely and regularly in her own balanced cadence, I begin to ask her for moments of light *contact* (direct connection from my hands to her mouth, so that she can feel light pressure from my hands and I from her mouth). She is half of the conversation that constitutes riding, and accepting light pressure from the rider's hands through the bit is part of consenting to respond to the rider's questions and suggestions. After regular practice over several weeks, she learns that by lowering her head and accepting contact with the bit, she can ask for and instantly receive a release of pressure from the rider's hands. She does not yet sustain this contact, but it—and her focus on the rider's signals—increases incrementally. Over time she begins to arch her neck and lift her back, so that she can carry her own and the rider's weight in a more balanced manner. Because this makes her feel more comfortable, she begins to engage more fully in the conversation, responding to my requests promptly and willingly.<sup>21</sup>

Many animal stories are wholly man-made. I do not suggest “animal-told” stories of animality, but stories which map some of the spaces between and overlapping species. The point of introducing these stories and the relationships that incarnate them lies in the possibilities of the discourse they enact. This discourse requires common or overlapping understandings between species. These wordless understandings, which in dressage make conversations of applied pressure and movement intelligible to both participants, are possible, in my view, because the potential for shared understanding and discourse is held within embodied and dynamic systems of signification that are not limited to the human species. Phenomenological particularities do significantly structure comprehension, but the underlying elements of systems of communication and discourse span beyond these

differences. Rethinking the nature of language itself—as Derrida has done—is helpful for rethinking and revising narratives of unity and categorical distinctions. If creation is mediated through discourse, then, in contrast to the humanist story of humanity,

nobody is self-made, least of all man. That is the spiritual and political meaning of poststructuralism and postmodernism... 'We,' in these very particular discursive worlds, have no routes to connection and to noncosmic, nongeneric, nonoriginal wholeness than through the radical dismembering and displacing of our names and our bodies. So, how can humanity have a figure outside the narratives of humanism; what language would such a figure speak? (Haraway *Reader* 49)

I think the conditions required for this 'figure outside the narratives of humanism' would be precisely this 'radical dismembering and displacing of our names and our bodies.' In order for such a figure to speak, "we" would need to re-envision some of the established implications of speaking. Haraway suggests

unblinding ourselves from the sun-worshipping stories about the history of science and technology as paradigms of rationalism; and (2) refiguring the actors in the construction of the ethnospecific categories of nature *and* culture. The actors are not all 'us.' If the world exists for us as 'nature,' this designates a kind of relationship, an achievement among many actors, not all of them human, not all of them organic, not all of them technological. In its scientific embodiment as well as in other forms, nature is made, but not entirely by humans; it is a co-construction among humans and non-humans. This is a very different vision from the postmodernist observation that all the world is denatured and reproduced in images and replicated in copies. (*Reader* 66)

Allowing Molly's response to be *response*—rather than reaction—would be a first step in imagining one possible figure outside traditional humanist narratives.

### **Categorizing nonhuman animals**

There are many ways to imagine both the figure of the animal (including specific symbolic species) and actual animals—just as there are with human groups and individuals. Categories are frequently used as tools for managing fundamental disparities in perspective and clarifying underlying differences in approach. Several of my main sources analyze the situations of nonhuman animals through various distinct groupings.

Barbara Noske distinguishes between three kinds of nonhuman animals. The first

is composed of individual animals, mainly domestic or within cities. Humans who involve themselves with nonhuman animals—and use analogous depictions—in this sense are characterized by their concern for individual suffering. This approach is paradigmatic of the animal rights movement. The next category perceives and depicts animals as *species*. This position concentrates solely on “wild” animals, animals as part of “nature” or the physical environment. It is best exemplified by the position of “deep ecology,” for which “the dichotomy between humanity and nature is final” (Noske xi). Less narrow and reductionist is the position Noske ascribes most directly to Canadian naturalist and environmental philosopher John Livingston, to whom she attributes the stance that

the everyday consciousness of wild beings tends to be participatory rather than self-centred...animals have several integrated selves...in addition to an individual self there exists a form of group awareness, a sense of biocommunity, an awareness of other species and even an awareness of the biosphere. (Noske xii-xiii)

This description sounds remarkably similar to Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas of multiplicity and the pack nature of “the animal” in “becoming animal.” This seems to be one example of the fluid and non-categorical character of the various conceptions of both human and nonhuman animals, which appear to have various unexpected “rhizomatic” connections between and among apparently distinct fields of thought.

Wolfe arranges his categories along slightly more figurative theoretical lines or “species significations.” The first of the four categories applied is *animalized animals*, those linked most directly to

speciesism...a whole network of material practices that reproduce the logic as a materialized *institution* and rely on it for legitimation...tak[ing] for granted the fundamental sacrifice of *nonhuman animals* (in what we eat, what we wear, the testing of the products we buy, etc.), which must continue to be legitimized if the ideological work of marking human others as animals for the purposes of their objectification and sacrifice is to be effective. (*Animal Rites* 101)

This is followed by *humanized animals*, primarily pets, “that we exempt from the sacrificial regime by endowing them with ostensibly human features.” Third is the category of *animalized humans*, encompassing humans who have been branded “subhuman,” for reasons from ethnicity and cultural practices to criminal behaviors. Inclusion in this category legitimates exploitation and/or killing of those within it. Finally, there is what Wolfe terms “the wishful category of the *humanized human*, sovereign and untroubled” (*Animal Rites* 101).

Concepts of purity and hybridization are essential to the species discourse. There are many and recurrent unnamed and named breaches and overflows, overlaps and minglings, of humans and other animals. In a section called “symbiosis,” Alphonso Lingis reminds us that “the oldest religions taught humans to become half-lion, half-bull, half-stag, half-fox, half-ibis” (in Atterton 11)<sup>22</sup>. Less figurative expressions of these combinations occur along lines of mutual and cooperative animal-human interactions, not the least of which is domestication. *Beyond Boundaries* contains an intriguing section on animal-reared children, of whom Noske remarks that

on the one hand they typify the extent of animal-human continuity: animals and humans cannot be radically different if they actually form societies together... On the other hand these children were living proof of the profound and lasting impact of the social environment, supporting the humanist conviction that humanity needs a (human) social context to become human (whereby the animal environment tends to be treated as no social environment whatsoever) [sic]. (163)

Mingling with nonhuman animals requires the same sort of adaptations as those by which one “becomes human;” the process of interacting with nonhuman animals or “becoming animal” (in the concrete sense that Noske indicates here, as well as, perhaps, that indicated by Deleuze and Guattari) would seem to call for the same.

Deleuze and Guattari identify assemblages that fall exactly along the lines of Noske’s categories (though they acknowledge that these assemblages are themselves

fluid):

individuated animals, family pets, sentimental, Oedipal animals each with its own petty history, 'my' cat, 'my' dog... (when psychoanalysis talks about animals, animals learn to laugh): *anyone who likes dogs or cats is a fool*... there is a second kind: animals with characteristics or attributes; genus, classification, or State animals; animals as they are treated in the great divine myths, in such a way as to extract from them series or structures, archetypes or models... Finally, there are more demonic animals, pack or affect animals that form a multiplicity, a becoming, a population, a tale... Or once again, cannot any animal be treated in all three ways? (in Atterton 90)

Though these groupings are useful for analyzing the way "the animal" functions in various discourses, I find that they neglect (if not deny) the possibility of animals outside their 'treatment' by human narrative, as active in their own stories and saying meaningful things *by themselves*.

### **Deleuze and Guattari: "Becoming Animal"**

Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "becoming-animal," offers an insightful possibility for thinking about ways of being as well as for dissolving the human/animal binary.<sup>23</sup> In "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," Haraway states that "to be other is to be multiple, without clear boundary" (*Reader* 35). To *become* other, then, would be the active and continuous process of living without the artifice of oppositions and boundaries, or at least without attempting to reify and make solid the shifting and interwoven borders that divide and connect (multiplicitous and indeterminate) beings. Deleuze and Guattari look at the problem of otherness in precisely the appropriate terms of embodiment and multiplicity. However, in regard to the otherness involved in species difference, they initially set up species difference itself, "the animal," as a unitary category incongruent with the concept of continual becoming they then posit.

The notion of "becoming-animal" is especially useful for theorizing "the question of the animal" because

in logical terms the notion of 'becoming-animal' challenges the primacy traditionally accorded to negation, a claim concerning the nature of thinking shared by both Aristotelian and Hegelian philosophy. The significance of such a displacement is clear if it is recalled that it is via negation that self-identity and indeed all distinctions in kind, including the opposition between 'man' and 'nature' are established. (Urpeth, in Atterton 104)

The idea of becoming as a way to rewrite origin is central to Deleuze and Guattari's "becoming-animal." It undermines traditional origin stories, destabilizes binary categories, and offers an alternative to conceiving of beings as impenetrable singularities or essences. Deleuze's work on the multiplicity of possible realities and alternatives to binary or dialectically-determined relationships has been instrumental in configuring spaces for alternative narratives to emerge. In *Animal Philosophy*,

James Urpeth shows how the notion of becoming-animal is to be understood both as a critique of some of the basic assumptions and values prevalent in the philosophical and humanist tradition, as well as a continuation of the Nietzschean project of affirming the priority of becoming over being. The two projects are linked owing to the fact that animal-becoming is precisely the manner in which the subject is able to free itself from a humanist straitjacket without being posited as a subject from behind the becoming in turn. (Atterton xxii)

Urpeth comments on Deleuze and Guattari's

overcoming of the man/nature opposition- indeed dualisms in general- through the elaboration of a *non-reductive* materialist ontology of difference and multiplicity...a radically non-anthropomorphic...conception of 'nature' within which the 'human' is inscribed... This requires the expunging of all 'moralism' (the source of negation) regarding individual or species identity...seeking to think and affirm a radical order of *immanence*, a primordial ontological domain in which free-form creative synthesis operates unimpeded by the properties and boundaries of preset identities. (in Atterton 101-102)

The foundations of animal and human as distinct and insoluble binary categories are shaken; if the human can become animal, the solid ground of his or her humanity, (as distinct from animality, the "they" by which the human "we" distinguishes itself) is proven illusory.

On closer inspection, however, in suggesting the process of "becoming-animal" for what Nietzsche terms "this animal man,"<sup>24</sup> Deleuze and Guattari must first assume a fundamental distinction between those to whom the terms refer. Are humans of the secular, non-humanist, anti-Oedipal variety not already a species of animal, a particular

mode of becoming, and therefore *always already animal*? Or at least “allied” with, inextricable from and part of the multiplicity of animals on the plane of consistency? Why would the assemblages termed “human” need to *become* animal, if, as part of the world, they were always in a process of becoming and also already part of the plane of nature, which is necessarily shared with other animals and living things? There seems to be some kind of presupposition of originary division between human and “nature” at work here.

The choice of “animal” as the term by which best to describe these modes is, to my mind anyway, suspect and insufficiently justified. Why is the process Deleuze and Guattari describe not termed “becoming-multiple,” “becoming-species,” “becoming-collective, or “becoming part,” since these terms seem to indicate the same process or performance without relying on an essentializing definition of actual beings to signify a way of being. The term “becoming animal, in the sense that they use it, indicates that the descriptive term “the animal” (all animals *except* humans, that is) always already has some kind of intrinsic nature, even if that nature is in being multiple, a pack or kind of species-being;

a becoming-animal always involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity...One may retain or extract from the animal certain characteristics...But we are not interested in characteristics; what interests us are modes of expansion, propagation, occupation, contagion, peopling. (in Atterton 88)

Aside from ignoring the problem of the (multiplicitous, etc.) individuality of the wide variety of nonhuman animals, using this imagined figure of the animal as a mode by which to think about alternative ways of being seriously limits the potential for actually posing “the question of the animal.”

Deleuze and Guattari are not (nor do they claim to be) therefore really addressing “the question of the animal” (the question of how to theorize and talk about other species) at all, but using a particular *figure* of “the animal” as a descriptive metaphor or concept;

for Deleuze and Guattari...animals serve to rupture notions of identity and sameness...the animal is the very *mode* in which becoming is possible...animality is the ‘line of flight’ along which the human manages to escape Oedipal triangulation and identification. (Atterton xxi)

The focal point of “becoming” seems to have, necessarily and unquestionably, a specifically *human* identity. The notion of “becoming animal” also contains an assumption that the journey between human and animal requires a significant impulsion (a “becoming”), thereby situating “the human” and “the animal,” whatever these terms refer to specifically or internally, as distinct spaces or ways of being, thereby reinscribing initially the originary categories that they later attempt to bridge.

What exactly is intended by or added to Deleuze and Guattari’s underlying concept by the use of the term “animal?” Brian Massumi describes the process of “becoming-other” as “orchestrat[ing] an encounter between bodies, considered from the point of view of their virtuality, in order to catapult one or all onto a new plane of consistency, in the kind of leap in place characteristic of incorporeal transformation” (98). In effect “becoming is bodily thought, beyond the realm of possibility, in the world of the virtual. At once superabstract and infraconcrete, it grasps the environment of molarity common to different bodies from the perspective of the potential curtailed” (Massumi 99). The assumption of the more immediate or intrinsic physicality of nonhuman animality, therefore, seems to be one (implicit and unexplained) reason for the particular designation of “becoming-animal.”

Deleuze and Guattari explain that

to become animal is to participate in movement, to stake out the path of escape in all its positivity, to cross a threshold, to reach a continuum of intensities that are valuable only in themselves, to find a world of pure intensities where all forms come undone, as do all the significations, signifiers, and signifieds... There is no longer anything but movements, vibrations, thresholds in a deserted matter: animals, mice, dogs, apes, cockroaches are distinguished only by this or that threshold, this or that vibration. (*Kafka* 13)

Presumably humans would be distinguished by particular thresholds or vibrations as well.

The presupposition that animals (in general) always already perceive a world as composed of 'pure intensities' and that humans do not, seems to me unexplained and insufficiently justified. The incredibly common assumption of original and comprehensive knowledge of animality or 'animal nature' is inherent in Deleuze and Guattari's term here, despite specific statements belying this position. Though they do not rely on particular archetypal or mythical animal figures, the category of the animal remains unitary and distinct.

On the issue of what they mean by the term "animal," Deleuze and Guattari explain that

every animal is fundamentally a band, a pack...it has pack modes, rather than characteristics, even if further distinctions within these modes are called for. It is at this point that the human being encounters the animal. We do not become animal without a fascination for the pack, for multiplicity. (in *Atterton* 89)

This statement suggests that this integrated and non-individual 'pack' nature or mode is what divides humans and animals. Humans are already social animals (prior to inclusion in the human species), organized into groups with 'pack modes' of culture; so it would seem that humans are already as originally multiplicitous as other animals. Why not describe this process as a kind of pluralizing, a "becoming-animals?" Especially when, for instance, "the rat and the man are in no way the same thing, but Being expresses them both in a single meaning in a language that is no longer of words, in a matter that is no longer of forms, in an affectability that is no longer that of subjects" (Deleuze and

Guattari, in Atterton 93). Since Deleuze and Guattari are aware that “one cannot draw a symbolic boundary between the human being and the animal. One can only compare powers of deterritorialization” (*One Thousand Plateaus*, 307), it seems that the divisions they imply would be problematic. Why is the concept so essentially identified with the term “animal” if ‘becoming-animal’ “affects the animal no less than the human” (*One Thousand Plateaus*, 237)? Even with their intense focus on upsetting the Oedipal tradition, the categorical distinction between human and animal implied by the term “becoming-animal” carries echoes of Judeo-Christian originary separation.

I do, however, see the *concept* indicated by “becoming-animal,” as useful in making clear the fundamental continuity in multiplicity and the potential of relationships for transformation. As James Urpeth puts it, “The key feature of this ontology is the theme of ‘immanence’- a reality that contains no negations or boundaries, but only differences and ‘thresholds,’ in which everything is implicated in everything else” (in Atterton 103). Deleuze and Guattari do reorient the discussion to all-encompassing multiplicity, stating that

each individual is an infinite multiplicity, and the whole of nature is a multiplicity of perfectly individuated multiplicities. The plane of consistency of nature is like an immense Abstract Machine, abstract yet real and individual; its pieces are the various assemblages and individuals, each of which groups together an infinity of particles entering into an infinity of more or less interconnected relations. There is therefore a unity to the plane of nature, which applies equally to the inanimate and the animate, the artificial and the natural. (*One Thousand Plateaus* 254)

In affirming the multiplicity within “the human” as well as “the animal,” (though I am unclear as to whether they mean to include individual nonhuman animals in ‘each individual’)—Deleuze and Guattari set the path for the next step of dissolving origin and hierarchy—a step which, however, they themselves do not take.

It is the *term* that Deleuze and Guattari use here, rather than the concept,

that, to me, presents a problem. The use of the term “animal” to signify collective integrated existence reinscribes the established, stagnant vision of animality and the divisive relation between humans and other animals at the same time as it attempts to dissolve specific boundaries in a multiplicitous “becoming.” By phrasing the underlying concept in this particular way (addressed, of course, to “us,”) they reinstitute a sharp and originary divide between the two categories of being. It is only after they have set up this division that they attempt to show that it does not exist. The difference in *origin* is never erased; it remains a necessary condition for the term to provide the meaning they give it.

Why is the main distinction here between animal and human if

what we are talking about is not the unity of substance but the infinity of the modifications that are part of one another on this unique plane of life... A fixed plane of life upon which everything stirs, slows down, or accelerates. A single abstract Animal for all the assemblages that effectuate it? (in Atterton 254-5)

This passage belies the previous implied non-inclusion of humans into the category of “animal.” If it is indeed ‘what we are talking about,’ then ‘we’ are, in my opinion, on the way toward expanding critical theoretical analysis of significant otherness.

Replacing animal others themselves with the symbolic (anthropomorphized) meaning of the figure of “the animal” transforms them (as it does with various human groups) into empty vessels, to be filled with particular (culturally, geographically, and temporally marked) human meanings. This is what the *figure* of the animal has come to represent; “‘Animal,’ in other words, is one of the ways we say ‘Other’...the way we treat animals is deeply caught up with the ongoing need for symbolic reaffirmation of our own humanity” (Wood, in Atterton 133).<sup>25</sup> The situation of animality is much more accurately represented by difference or the event of difference than oppositional or dialectical relationships. If “the question of the animal” is to be asked in the context of all

animals, it will take the form of a conversation that involves “who” and “how” rather than “what.”

### **Impulsion**

Critical theoretical analysis does have great potential for renewing practices. Drawing the energy from analysis into forms of life and communications is the next step in the continuous flow of taking action and telling new stories, another process that Deleuze and Guattari might call a “becoming.” In dressage, a parallel to this increased “becoming” might be *impulsion*. Impulsion describes the expansion of a horse’s movement, a full and active expression of each gait. The driving force—for horses this is the hindquarters—of active motion is the impetus behind all subsequent movements. Impulsion is garnered through continuous response to forward-directed pressure (a powerful “stepping under”) to gather energy, which is then collected and recycled through the rider’s hands and body.<sup>26</sup> Molly now moves forward with increased balance and rhythm while accepting contact. She lowers at the poll and flexes her neck to round the circle of energy that is her movement, recycling her forward energy through her whole body. In the same way theoretical discourse follows this pattern, in that it needs free forward motion (generating energy), contact (making connections), followed by impulsion, which generates increased energy in the forward motion.

The object-status and treatment of other animals long ago reached the status of common sense in most of Western culture and passed into the myths that structure (and are structured by) established social orders.<sup>27</sup> Myth, wrote Roland Barthes,

always comes under the heading of metalanguage: the depoliticization which it carries out often supervenes against a background which is already naturalized, depoliticized by a general metalanguage which is trained to *celebrate* things, and no longer to ‘act them.’ (Barthes 144)

Foucault follows these conclusions, stating that

good sense is the world's most effective agent of division in its recognitions, its establishment of equivalences, its sensitivity to gaps, its gauging of distances, as it assimilates and separates. And it is good sense that reigns in the philosophy of representation. Let us pervert good sense and allow thought to play outside the ordered table of resemblances; then it will appear as the vertical dimension of intensities, because intensity, well before its gradation by representation, is in itself pure difference: difference that displaces and repeats itself, that contracts and expands; a singular point that constricts and slackens the indefinite repetitions in an acute event. One must give rise to thought as intensive irregularity—disintegration of the subject. (183)

One requirement for asking “the question of the animal” is freeing or at least provisionally separating that category of being from its status in the domain of some cultural myths and common-sense knowledges. Another is the inclusion of action, by which to open “ourselves” to and become involved in difference as it enacts itself, in (mutual) relationships and communications. This opening to difference necessarily involves active concrete practices. It cannot be over-emphasized that dressage, to take the present example, involves not only concepts but a circle of variable and evolving *processes* that extends from the first step forward to the highest level of performance.

<sup>1</sup> Dressage (the term comes from the French term for 'training') is a discipline of horseback riding that focuses on developing a horse's own balance, rhythm, and suppleness of movement, as well as subtlety of response to the rider in flatwork (not jumping). It can function as the basis of a horse's education or training in any other discipline or itself be developed to a high degree of complexity.

<sup>2</sup> A strict opposition between human and animal, implying a categorical boundary between both, is a widespread phenomenon in Western culture. It plays a fundamental role in the articulation of middle-class cultural identity, which defines a civilised being as one who controls her or his animal impulses, and tend to look upon other social categories such as peasants or the working classes as closer to animality because they are, so the middle classes believed, less controlled in this respect. One culture-specific background to the way the human-animal boundary has usually been constructed in Western discourse, legitimising daily practices, is the Christian idea that humans stand high above the animals because they are the only creatures created in the image of God. But there is another, more general reason for negative views of animals, which in fact the Western cultural tradition shares with many others: animals by their very nature behave in uncivilised ways—ways disapproved of in most human cultures. . Therefore they are forceful symbols of uncivilised behavior. Animals and animality are good vehicles for symbolising, for thinking, for moralising, for disapproval. (Corbey, in Paoli 128)

<sup>3</sup> A fundamental premise of the humanism theoretical framework is the ultimate importance and value of universal human interests, characteristics (nature), and societies. The human, even more than humans, resides at the center of the universe and acts as provider of meaning and value. Humanism provides the overarching structure of values for modernism. Postmodernist critiques have questioned and disrupted these modernist values and with them the figure and 'nature' of the human ('Man') by which they are incarnate.

The universal subject of humanism is problematic on many levels. As Althusser noted several decades ago,

One thing is certain: one cannot *begin* with man, because that would be to begin with a bourgeois idea of 'man,' and because the idea of *beginning with* man, in other words the idea of an absolute point of departure (= of an essence) belongs to bourgeois philosophy. This idea of 'man' as a starting point, an absolute point of departure, is the basis of all bourgeois ideology; it is the soul of the great Classical Political Economy itself. 'Man' is a myth of bourgeois ideology: Marxism-Leninism cannot *start* from 'man.' It starts 'from the economically given social period;' and, at the end of its analysis, when it 'arrives,' it *may find real men*. These men are thus the *point of arrival* of an analysis which starts from the social relations of the existing mode of production, from class relations, and from the class struggle. These men are quite different from the 'man' of bourgeois ideology. (Althusser 'Reply to John Lewis' (self-criticism))

If one cannot begin with "man," even less so can one begin with the exponentially more vague, multiplicitous, and inclusive category of "the animal." In "The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences," Foucault points out again the instability and contingency of the humanist subject:

one thing in any case is certain: man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge. Taking a relatively short chronological sample within a restricted geographical area—European culture since the sixteenth century—one can be certain that man is a recent invention within it. It is not around him and his secrets that knowledge prowled for so long in the darkness. In fact, among all the mutations that have affected the knowledge of things and their order, the knowledge or identities, differences, characters, equivalences, words—in short, in the midst of all the episodes of that profound history of the *Same*—only one, which began a century and a half ago and is now perhaps drawing to a close, has made it possible for the figure of man to appear. And that appearance was not the liberation of an old anxiety, the transition into luminous consciousness of an age-old concern, the entry into objectivity of something that had long ago remained trapped within beliefs and philosophies: it was an effect of a change in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge. As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of a recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end. (Badmington *Posthumanism* 28-9)

The humanist subject, being particular and contingent, has undergone a long and continuous process of disintegrating and re-coalescing. This process is aligned with the ideological and epistemological

transmutations of the notion of subjectivity that have been taken place over the past few centuries. Posthumanism offers remarkable potential for theorizing kinds of subjectivity that do not require a specifically human locus.

Wolfe identifies the “two primary factors [that] have combined to enable an archaeology and mapping of this problematic [the question of the animal] as “the crisis of humanism itself over the past three decades in critical theory” and poststructuralism’s “interrogation of the figure of the human as the constitutive (rather than technically, materially, and discursively constituted) stuff of history and the social” (*Zoontologies* x-xi). In addition, “the new transdisciplinary theoretical paradigms that have poured into the human sciences over the past few decades (cybernetics and systems theory, chaos theory, and the like)” have “had little use and little need for the figure of the human as either foundation or explanatory principle” (ibid xi). Humanism’s paradigmatic figure, ‘Man’ and the semi-transcendent ‘human nature’ that characterizes him, has been undermined as the only possible focal point or perspective for analysis even without invoking theological authority. The de-centering of the human that has come along with more recent formations of knowledge has almost incidentally expanded the notion of subject-hood.

Alan Badmington notes some of the potent internal conflicts that have damaged the (humanist) human subject and the tenets of humanism. Through anthropological inquiry, for instance, Claude Levi-Strauss “challenged existentialism’s faith in the figure of ‘Man’ ... *Mythologies* and *The Savage Mind* both recognize that any appeal to universal human identity can only savage difference, force the other into a version of the same” (*Alien Chic* 39). With the gradual reconfiguration and partial disintegration of the figure of ‘Man’ or ‘the human,’ (and the human/humanist story of subjectivity) ‘the animal,’ the figure that makes that distinctive subject possible, is also reconfigured.

‘The animal’ is the boundary-securing category on which the very idea of Man (the humanist myth of the human subject) or even the more inclusive category of ‘H/human’—as an exclusive category or dialectically definable essence—(theoretically incorporating women, historically oppressed ethnicities and groups, etc.) has, and does, depend. Humanism,

like all myths... bestows upon the established order of things ‘a natural and eternal justification’ that grants normalized practices the status of ‘inevitability’... Nature renders otherness unnatural, impossible, unthinkable. ‘Man’ rests upon a bland, complacent, unjust sameness. (Badmington *Alien Chic* 37)

“The animal” functions as the known term in these kinds of inquiries; “the human” is that which is indeterminate and uncertain. Neither term of this equation is ever wholly or even substantially knowable, however (through either dialectical opposition or identification), and therefore to make assumptions about ‘the animal’ in order to define ‘the human,’ is both inaccurate and unjustified.

Wolfe remarks that “concepts of nature are always inseparable from those of *human nature*” (*Animal Rites* 31). Hearne calls the practice of saying ‘what animals are like,’ or ‘the problem of animal consciousness,’ a

way of providing a rhetorical and conceptual frame for investigations of human consciousness in all sorts of areas. Whatever the author in question thinks woman are like, or blacks, or philosophers, or Jews, or Republicans, or Americans, or whatever category defines the ‘we’ of a given discussion, it must be first made clear that the ‘we’ is to be distinguished from the animals. It generally takes no more than a paragraph or so to characterize all of animate creation that is not the ‘we’ at hand. (10)

This distinction upon “our” identity is established is so naturalized as to be almost wholly unacknowledged and implicit. The range of animals behind the figure of the animal—as with the ‘native’—are not accessible to any substantive range of critiques. This distanced position does not allow for a plural and grounded version of animals but facilitates their representation by pseudo-human symbolic figures or marks them as the mere symbolic sign-posts that limit fields of inquiry.

<sup>4</sup> See the first paragraph of the quotation from Derrida in the introduction.

<sup>5</sup> This was suggested by Dr. Stephen Ross.

<sup>6</sup> In *Posthumanism*, Badmington paraphrases the Cartesian stance on nonhuman animals as

an absolute difference between the human and the inhuman: only the former has the capacity for rational thought. Reason belongs solely to the human and, as such, serves to unite the human race...the basic model articulated by Descartes- a model which might be called *humanist*, precisely because, to use Soper's words, it 'appeals (positively) to the notion of a core humanity or common essential feature in terms of which humans can be defined and understood- continues to enjoy the status of 'common sense' in contemporary Western culture. (4 in Soper, *Humanism and Anti-humanism*)

<sup>7</sup> Citation from Lemaire, *Filosofie van het landschap* Ambo, Baarn, 1970, pp.30-7, and Bernal, *Science in History* p.445, as well as William Leiss, *The Domination of Nature*, Braziller, New York, 1972 p.111.

<sup>8</sup> For more examples see Noske, Midgley, and Rollin (and their bibliographies).

<sup>9</sup> Luc Ferry, *The New Ecological Order*, trans. Carol Volk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995)

<sup>10</sup> For a few examples see Ingold, ed. 1988 (in bibliography), Robin Ridington's collection *Little Bit Know Something: Stories in a Language of Anthropology* [Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1990] (58-62, 66-70, 102, 123, 175, 254), Harvey A. Feit (104-107) and Arquette and Cole (345-47) from *In the Way of Development: Indigenous Peoples, Life Projects, and Globalization* [New York and London: Zed Books, Ltd., 2004].

<sup>11</sup> Though the natural sciences individuate among different species much more than do other disciplines, they also remain tied to the exterior, the superficial physical level of performance, and their methodological orthodoxy prevents full acknowledgement of the variety of meanings which nonhuman animals may themselves give to the events of the world and themselves.

<sup>12</sup> For more on this gaze and the related variety of animal representations see Steve Baker, *Picturing the Beast* (1993).

<sup>13</sup> "Myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal...formally myth is the most appropriate instrument for the ideological inversion which defines this society...myth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things: in it, things lose the memory that they once were made. The world enters language as a dialectical relation between activities, between human actions; it comes out of myth as a harmonious display of essences" (Barthes 142).

<sup>14</sup> Haraway remarks on the "troubling dualisms" that emerge in analyses involving those

constituted as *others*, whose task is to mirror the self...The self is the One who is not dominated, who knows that by the service of the other; the other is the one who holds the future, who knows that by the experience of domination, which gives lie to the autonomy of the self. To be One is to be autonomous, to be powerful, to be God; but to be One is to be an illusion, and so to be involved in a dialectic of apocalypse with the other. Yet to be other is to be multiple, without clear boundary... ("A Manifesto for Cyborgs," *Reader* 35)

<sup>15</sup> **OED etymology:** a. L. *animal* a living creature, prop. 'anything living,' for *animāle*, neut. of adj. *animā* *l-is* having the breath of life, f. *anima* air, breath. Life

<sup>16</sup> The way that "we" *depict* others, unconsciously or merely implicitly, reveals much about who 'we' perceive 'ourselves to be—perhaps even more than specific explicit descriptions or definitions. These depictions and the presuppositions that they connote are present in the whole range of disciplines dominated by scientific, 'objective' methodologies. It is clear that "the word 'animal,' though it exists as a term of science, does most of its work in areas which are far from being detached and scientific. It serves continually as a reference point in the forming of our communal self-image" (Midgley, in Ingold, 36).

<sup>17</sup> See Steve Baker (1993).

---

<sup>18</sup> Molly is a ten-year old Connemara pony, a former broodmare who was given as a trail horse to a woman who was dying of cancer. This information, though important and informative in its way, composes the story *about* her, rather than *from* her.

<sup>19</sup> For some great examples of stories horses have been told about themselves see Hearne, especially chapter five (“Crazy Horses”) in *Adam’s Task*.

<sup>20</sup> The ‘gaits’ are the tempos of each of the horse’s three natural rhythms or speeds of movement: walk, trot, and canter.

<sup>21</sup> I am using some dressage terminology here because I think it the most concise and accurate way of describing Molly’s movement or ‘way of going.’ For further information on these terms see The German National Federation’s *The Principles of Riding* and Wilhelm Mūseler’s *Riding Logic*.

<sup>22</sup> In a commentary on “Nietzsche and Animals.”

<sup>23</sup> In *One Thousand Plateaus* as well as some parts of *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*.

<sup>24</sup> Throughout *On the Genealogy of Morals*, for instance.

<sup>25</sup> In a commentary on Derrida’s “The Animal that Therefore I Am” in Atterton (2004).

<sup>26</sup> The concentrated call and response necessary to maintain impulsion can, like *throughness*, take months and even years of practice.

<sup>27</sup> “Myth...purifies [things], it makes them innocent, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact” (Barthes 143).

## Chapter Two: The Represented Animal

In this chapter I will briefly inquire into three current discourses: posthumanism, which tends not to be readily applied to the discourse on animals; racism, which tends to use the discourse of animality without sufficient critical examination; and that of the mainstream animal-rights movement, the most accessible and prominent discourse for contesting “the question of the animal.” This last line of thought often positions itself as a self-proclaimed representative of nonhuman species, thereby situating those whom it claims to represent as voiceless victims. I will also cursorily examine some ethical frameworks on which this discourse generally bases itself. All three discourses are valuable as critical sites of entry and all contain potential problems, not least because they neglect to sufficiently address other species as they present *themselves*.<sup>1</sup> Addressing “the question of the animal” comprehensively will involve a process of inserting animals themselves into the concept of “becoming animal,” listening to nonhuman animals and *responding to them* rather than reacting to either their mere animate physicality or representative functions.

### Posthumanism

A critical posthumanist theoretical framework seems to offer considerable potential for effectively revising traditional humanist animal stories and thereby addressing “the question of the animal.” Posthumanism describes a rethinking of humanist frameworks of value and meaning and questions the basis of human identity.<sup>2</sup> Because human identification relies on an implicit distinction from animality and nonhuman animals, undermining the stability of what human-ness represents has major implications for concepts of animal identity.

With the disintegration of the humanist subject and some of myths of the (rational, free, civilized, etc.) essence of “man,” the claims of many of those within the human species who have historically been denied full consideration—or considered “subhuman”—are increasingly (in theory) being recognized. Haraway states that

it is this barely admissible recognition of the odd sorts of agents and actors which/whom we must admit to the narrative of collective life, including nature, that simultaneously, first, turns us decisively away from enlightenment-derived modern and postmodern premises about nature and culture, the social and technical, science and society and, second, saves us from the deadly point of view of productionism. Productionism and its corollary, humanism, come down to the story line that ‘man makes everything, including himself, out of the world that can only be resource and potency to his project and active agency.’ (“The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others,” *Reader* 66-67)

The realization that “man” may be neither of divine origin nor wholly autonomous and self-constructed (nor necessarily the center of the universe) opens a space for conceiving of more fluid and changeable identities than the humanist framework could allow.

Extending what is meant by “man” is accompanied by an expansion in concepts of being and agency, and this, in my opinion, entails looking toward ways of living and comprehending that are not only human.

Posthumanist analysis has, however, overwhelmingly focused on the nonhuman figures of machines, robots, and cyborgs (despite Haraway’s later realizations)<sup>3</sup> in formulating alternatives to the humanist storyline. This fact points toward an implicit reinstatement of the hierarchy of beings—animal, human, human/machine, etc.—in what portends to be an upsetting of the priority of the human (much the same way the term “postmodern” reinstalls the temporal logic of the modern even as it places itself beyond it). The tendency with regard to the focal nonhuman heroes of postmodern analyses and science fiction seems to be toward (originally, at least) humanly made figures. Sometimes the move is outward, toward various phenomenologically different alien species, but the role of other terrestrial species (in science fiction stories, for instance) is minimal, even

though the extent of difference portrayed between humans and other alien species is comparable to (and seemingly potentially productive as) that between humans and other terrestrial beings.

The meanings of most roles and stories of nonhuman animals in the Western tradition have long been pre-determined and codified. Status and validity as phenomenologically-various beings *from whom humans can learn* tends to be minimal or implicitly denied. Unlike extraterrestrials or cyborgs, nonhuman animals are neither new nor exciting, perhaps because they are often seen as steps in the evolution of humans rather than fully developed and evolved beings in their own right. Posthumanist analyses, which would seem to contain great potential for examining all nonhuman discourses and ways of being, often limit themselves through their choice of significantly different (and this is often only very superficially the case) characters.<sup>4</sup> It is much easier to imagine and analyze robots and aliens who—because imagined—are still at least partly understandable and knowable to and by humans than it is to meet actual significantly different beings and communicate with them.

Although “there is a sense in which we cannot know the Other...we must remind ourselves that other meanings exist, even if we may be severely limited in our understanding of them” (Noske 160). With the infinite differences that characterize the particulars of subject-construction (particular phenomenological structurings of time-awareness and resulting constraints on possible presentations and communications of knowledge, especially), the most that can ever be expressed is approximation; as Haraway writes, “translation is always interpretive, critical, and partial, and

the topography of subjectivity is multi-dimensional; so, therefore, is vision. The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without

claiming to be another... Vision requires instruments of vision; an optics is a politics of positioning. ("Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 193)

Creating a broader and more comprehensive politics of positioning will be necessary to envision ways of seeing that span beyond those traditionally envisioned as human. To imagine meaning and discourses beyond, outside, or otherwise foreign to humans—thematically and phenomenologically—it might be helpful to go directly to those other kinds of imaginings and beings.

### Soft Eyes

A fitting physical analogy of Haraway's 'situated' yet aware perspective within a relational context is described in the term "soft eyes," coined by Centered Riding® founder Sally Swift. It refers to one of the central tenets of her integrated riding techniques:<sup>5</sup> specifically, the practice of indirect focus, by which a rider does not directly focus on objects, etc. but uses the wide range of peripheral vision to approximate how the horse (whose eyes are on the sides of his or her head) sees things—while, of course, also continuing to look ahead to direct the course. Swift contrasts this way of seeing with "hard eyes," where the rider stares at the target to the exclusion of all else.<sup>6</sup> Swift describes soft eyes as

much more than just a way of looking. It is a method of becoming distinctly aware of what is going on around you, beneath you, inside of you. It includes feeling and hearing as well as seeing. You are aware of the whole, not just separate parts. Ponder the implications of this technique, this tool. The two ears of the horse are always in front of you, but so many of the important parts are under and behind you, where you cannot see them. (11)

The result of such practice is an awareness based very much on *relationship*. The effects of soft eyes are described as "a greater field of vision, increased awareness of your own and your horse's body, fewer tensions, easier and freer forward motion" (11). Perhaps

these results are translatable [in a non-species-specific sense] to the process of critical theory as well.

\*\*\*\*\*

Haley<sup>7</sup> came to us to be trained very tardily in her life. She has very little experience of what working with humans entails, but shows herself intelligent and unafraid. She does not try to represent Horse, but herself, individual and autonomous. We remain aware that these surroundings are new to her, and start the process of acquainting her with us and the tools that we will use very slowly. At first she is restless, paying more attention to outside distractions (horses in other fields, noises of people at the barn, etc.) than to us. We put sweet syrup on the bit before putting it into and removing it from her mouth, and this gets her attention; her ears come forward and she nods her head, tasting and feeling the new sensation. She yanks back hard enough to break the metal clip on the thick lead-rope that ties her to the barn, and so is tied again with one too thick for her to break, though she tries, violently but not desperately. We repeat and add slightly to the still brief routine daily; its particulars follow the vagaries of Haley's moods. We tell her, through touch and tone and body cues, what we appreciate, what we disapprove of, and what we want. She tells us, through her head and body and other cues, when she is comfortable, ready to listen, and interested in involving herself in this intriguing experience.

### **Animality and Racism**

Some representations of animality appear in discourses that do not usually venture beyond consideration of humans. Full inclusion in the category of humanity is far from readily assigned to all humans. Xenophobic or racist-tinged portrayals of various—often

indigenous—peoples are often couched in language that draws directly upon assumptions of nonhuman animal nature (as overwhelmingly physical, instinct-driven, etc.) and place in the world (part of “nature,” etc.). The rationale for these kinds of racist descriptions rests on the principle that “to be anything other than fully human is ipso facto a degradation” (Atterton 53). Therefore, as Wolfe notes in his introduction,

it is crucial to pay critical attention to the discourse of animality quite irrespective of the issue of how nonhumans are treated...the discourse of animality has historically served as a crucial strategy in the oppression of *humans* by other humans—a strategy whose legitimacy and force depend, however, on the prior taking for granted of the traditional ontological distinction, and consequent ethical divide, between human and nonhuman animals. As Etienne Balibar has observed, for example, ‘every theoretical racism draws upon *anthropological universals*,’ underneath which we find ‘the persistent presence of the same ‘question’: that of *the difference between humanity and animality*’ that is at work in ‘the systematic ‘bestialization’ of individuals and racialized human groups. (*Zoontologies* xx)<sup>8</sup>

The legitimizing basis for racism, then, is speciesism. And both are inextricably tied to the envisioning of an exclusive and universal humanist subject. Wolfe again puts the dilemma clearly and succinctly:

because the discourse of speciesism, once anchored in this material, institutional base, can be used to mark *any* social other, we need to understand that the ethical and philosophical urgency of confronting the institution of speciesism and crafting a posthumanist theory of the subject *has nothing to do with whether you like animals*...as Gayatri Spivak puts it, ‘The great doctrines of identity of the ethical universal, in terms of which liberalism thought out its ethical programmes, played history false, because the identity was disengaged in terms of who was and who was not human. That’s why all of these projects, the justification of slavery, as well as the justification of Christianization, seemed to be alright; because, after all, these people had not graduated into humanhood, as it were.’” (*Animal Rites* 7)<sup>9</sup>

Stories and critiques of harsh repression and slavery provide paradigmatic examples of the speciesist problems within the race discourse. The subjugated status and inadequate living conditions of victims are consistently described as “inhuman,” the victims “treated like animals,” and the explicit mission to raise those involved from their “subhuman” conditions to the imagined higher (“civilized”) state appropriate to their human conditions. Such descriptions reinscribe and naturalize the logic of speciesism that underlies the justification for racism against which most of them protest.

The institution and discourse of speciesism rests on the same flawed logic as that of sexism, racism, and other bigoted practices now generally condemned. Speciesism often even underlies and justifies these discourses; as Wolfe recapitulates in one of his central points, “the discourse of species has been used historically as a chief strategy for marking and exploiting other *human* subjects” (*Animal Rites* 188). The “common-sense” naturalization of speciesism has historically lent much support—especially in symbolic representational practices—to all discourses that privilege particular groups or individuals within the human species. However, “the use of ‘animality’ as a crucial supplement to the discourse of racism is effective only so long as the distinction between human and nonhuman is assumed to be unproblematically coterminous with the distinction between subject and object” (Wolfe, *Animal Rites* 167). Rethinking this distinction, and the kinds of responses and discourses to which it leads, is necessary for dissolving human/animal and subject/object binaries and destabilizing reified subject-making practices. This possibility is actualized in discourse across cultural borders and species boundaries.

\*\*\*\*\*

Haley comes to us in the pasture, interested in our still brief interactions. She is calm and comfortable with her tack,<sup>10</sup> with us, and with the many peripheral distractions at the farm. We begin teaching her to longe<sup>11</sup> and leaning across her, acquainting her both with the feeling of weight on her back and with being connected to a human body. She prances around on the longe line at first, paying no attention to us, but the physical exercise tires her and eventually her head comes down, her ear flicks toward us and for a

second she looks inward toward the person she circles. In this gesture she shows us that we finally have her attention.

Haley learns quickly, proving herself athletic and graceful. Her vocabulary has expanded to all gaits on the longe, and to these she incorporates her own knowledge of movement, rhythm, and balance.<sup>12</sup> Her training will broaden her possibilities and perhaps eventually allow her rider to help her reach toward some parts of her full multifaceted potential, but all this is dependent on her own willingness to listen—and this, in turn, is dependent on our willingness to listen to her.

### **Animal rights**

One of the most notable and influential approaches to the species discourse has been that of the animal rights movement. Animal rights groups offer ways to rethink some established ethical imperatives by including nonhumans in the space of moral consideration. The mainstream animal rights movement—the ASPCA, in particular—emerged with women’s suffrage and anti-slavery activism, born of the same impulse toward (Christian) kindness, pity, and “humanity” toward those less fortunate. Centrally an anti-cruelty movement, it moved people to consider—and pity—the *suffering* of nonhuman animals.<sup>13</sup> Though it has led to some more radical egalitarian approaches, the general thrust is still toward ending (mainly physical) suffering—a worthy goal, but one that does somewhat limit the potential positions of its objects. The animal rights movement includes many factions and approaches, so general comments will not always apply to all those involved. However, since it is the most prominent critical discourse to address the issue of nonhuman animals and interspecies relations, I will make a few remarks on some of the problems I see with its focal tendencies and broad theoretical

concerns. I do realize the difficulty of formulating a balanced and effective approach and do in fact support the animal rights movement. I am aware that it is very often the case that humans are in positions of power over other animals regardless of their personal desires or wish for involvement and must respond (and assume responsibilities) to nonhuman animals in that position. None of the following criticism is meant to diminish the value of the many laborious and groundbreaking struggles by which the movement has succeeded in bringing the lives of nonhuman animals to public consideration and alleviating suffering in many of them.

I agree with Cary Wolfe's statement that "current critical practice, for all its innovation and progressive ethical and political agendas, takes for granted and reproduces a rather traditional version of what I will call the discourse of species—a discourse that, in turn, reproduces the *institution* of speciesism" (*Animal Rites* 2). The institution of speciesism resides in the nature of the discourse itself, which tends to take for granted both established species roles and the rights discourse as the means of addressing them. In concentrating (often solely) on the *treatment* of nonhuman animals, prominent animal rights societies (like the ASPCA and PETA) often neglect any deeper analysis of how animals are popularly depicted and imagined—their function in the cultural myths and social practices that create the space for the perpetuation of their treatment. The tendency to focus on specific issues, from mink farming to vegetarianism, often functions to the detriment of awareness of the broader range of issues and underlying cultural stories associated with other species and interspecies relations, although it does attain the goals of accessibility and provide a focus for public interest and support.

However admirable the goals and effective the methods, the animal rights

approach is theoretically problematic on multiple levels. Its past and current discourse takes place within an unacknowledged but implicit humanist philosophical framework.

As Wolfe remarks,

one of the central ironies of animal rights philosophy... is that its philosophical frame remains an essentially humanist one in its most important philosophers (utilitarianism in Peter Singer, neo-Kantianism in Tom Regan), thus effacing the very difference of the animal other that animal rights sought to respect in the first place. (*Zoontologies* xii)<sup>14</sup>

The idea of “rights” itself is based on a particular conception of a specifically human subject, which makes the goal of sameness—rights for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all living creatures—incompatible with the differences that are its condition. Next, the theoretical framework of the animal rights movement is generally closely tied with moral and ethical philosophy, with consideration of nonhuman animals ultimately based on concern for physical suffering. Reducing the species relationship to this kind of ethical situation assumes the human as actor and subject and animal as passive object or victim, thereby preventing potential discussions in which animal others are situated as powerful and active agents. Finally, the lack of critical interrogation of the ways that animal others are *depicted*, often in the very materials associated with these movements, reflects a dangerous inattention to the ongoing cultural symbolism that systemically determines the image and connotations of other species in popular imaginations.

Arguing for animal rights is problematic at its very base, given that “the very idea of *human rights*... is predicated on the difference between humans and animals” (in Wolfe *Animal Rites* ix). The concept of rights presupposes a human subject within a humanist system of values. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights begins with the “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members

of the human family.” Later charters have drawn up documents that guarantee rights for those (disabled or handicapped people) who do not fit into the humanist conception of rational subjecthood that determines the consideration of personhood, yet the figure of the human remains the boundary of such consideration. If the rights of animals “can be modeled only on the ‘rights of man’ and...the rights of man are in turn based in the lack of rights in the animal” (ibid xiii), the animal rights movement rests on a theoretical paradox, and one that is anchored firmly in the Western philosophical tradition.

The reasoning behind such seminal founding texts of the animal rights movement as Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* is sufficient only if one accepts the utilitarian philosophical principles on which they are based. Since, according to Singer’s argument, animals have an *interest* in not suffering, it follows that they need *rights* to protect those interests. The protection of *negative* liberties therefore becomes the basis of any rights; “*speciesism*...like its cognates racism, sexism, and classism—discriminates against an other based only on a generic description and not on what we actually know about its needs, interests, and capacities” (Wolfe, *Animal Rites* 34). Singer’s utilitarian arguments do have some significant benefits for discussions of (especially the potential rights of) nonhuman animals. The most important of these is probably the principle of equality of interests. Since the interests every subject has in achieving or striving for “goods”—avoidance of suffering, etc.—is equal, no arbitrary priority should be given to some subjects over others in pursuing these goods. If one accepts this argument, the imperative to act in accordance with—at least to the extent that one does not act against one’s own analogous interests—the interests of nonhuman subjects is established. All the extensive logical reasoning here is valid only if one agrees with the central premise of utilitarian

philosophy (equality of interests, avoidance of pain and suffering as the foremost knowable interest, etc.). These philosophical assumptions mark out only one course that the discourse of nonhuman otherness could take. This course has, however, dominated the animal rights discussion.

Considering others in terms of their knowable “interests” is indeed a step toward a more egalitarian evaluation of justice, but the theoretical framework remains problematic. In her critique of Tom Regan,<sup>15</sup> ecofeminist Deborah Slicer argues that

rights theories ‘reduce individuals to that atomistic bundle of interests that the justice tradition recognizes as the basis for moral considerableness. In effect, animals are represented as beings with the *kind of capacity* that human beings most fully possess and deem valuable for living a full *human* life. (in Wolfe *Animal Rites* 36)<sup>16</sup>

It is an extremely important but rarely acknowledged fact that, within the utilitarian discourse, nonhuman “subjects” are *not* the “rights-bearing, humanist subjects of Western philosophy and political theory” (Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto* 51). The aspects of the ‘liberal philosophical tradition’ that seemed to contain some potential for theorizing nonhuman otherness; namely, “its emptying of the category of the subject, its insistence that subjectivity—and with it freedom—no longer depended on possession of any single identifiable attribute” (Wolfe *Zoontologies* xii), have been overshadowed by its underlying humanist philosophical framework.

In the theoretical approaches, attitudes, and practices of humane societies and many animal rights activists, as well as ethics philosophers, potential rights for other species are often accorded on the basis of similarity to humans. The dangers and dilemmas of this approach abound;

much as we would like to free animals from their object-status by showing that human-animal discontinuity is far from absolute and that animals do indeed resemble us a great deal, we may nevertheless remain trapped inside anthropocentric bias. We may fail to acknowledge and respect animals’ Otherness. Basically we face a dilemma in that there seems to be no option to imposing on animals either object status or *human* subject-status. However, animals are neither machines

nor human. As yet there exists in our thinking little room for the notion of a non-human Subject and what this would imply. (Noske 157)

Though it attempts to make room for nonhuman subjects, animal rights philosophy has not yet addressed the need to create a respectful space for difference. Wolfe identifies the problem as being “not that it is anti-humanist, but that it is *too* humanist;” it brings the humanist subject back into the underlying theoretical framework even while it focuses on nonhumans (36).<sup>17</sup>

This is part of the problem with the term “speciesism,” however useful it may be as shorthand. The analogy with other human discourses, such as sexism or racism, only applies to the situation of nonhumans to a limited extent. The point of discourses about excluded humans is generally to recognize these various human others as fully human and therefore worthy of the “inalienable” rights theoretically accorded to all humans. This aim will not suffice for nonhuman animals. Barbara Noske articulates the dilemma particularly astutely.

To define [animals] as human-like individuals...and give them their rights accordingly, is to do them a disservice- to downplay their otherness and to treat them ahistorically as it were... Instead of lifting animals up to our level it actually reduces them to humanness: Western individualized humanness.

Although campaigning for animal rights may be a good idea strategically, it does carry the risk of redefining animals in terms of Western human law systems such as those pertaining to property, obligations, compensation and so forth. These systems might not be relevant to the situation other human cultures find themselves in, let alone be appropriate for animals.

It may all boil down to a form of anthropocentric colonizing, where everything and everyone is still being measured by a human and Western yardstick. In the context of our legal systems, animals are bound to appear as human underlings. However animals are not lesser humans, they are other worlds whose otherworldliness must not be disenchanting and cut to our size but must be respected for what it is. (Noske xiii)

Discussing treatment of (or, preferably, but not entirely accurately here, “relationships with”) nonhuman animals in terms of rights is only one possible approach. Invoking the discourse of rights situates the issue in a humanist legal framework, where subjects are accorded rights on the basis of apprehended similarity to a normative definition of what

constitutes human-ness. Within this discourse, even those representations of other species that purport to be sympathetic will not overcome the fundamental distinctions that give nonhuman animals the role of inferior and partial humans. There is no hope of getting outside the discourse to achieve meaningful difference worthy of respect or “significant otherness.”

Many arguments for animal rights are based on attempts to prove—often through scientific and sociobiological experimentation, which is invoked to disprove these claims as well—that the extensive physical and behavioral similarities between humans and other animals indicate an imperative for “humane” treatment.<sup>18</sup> These arguments, because so deeply rooted in the classical humanist philosophical traditions, miss much of what is at issue in postmodern and posthumanist theory. Rather than justify the attribution of rights to nonhuman animals,

the point of thinking with renewed vigor the question of the animal is to disarticulate the problem of a properly postmodern pluralism from the concept of the human with which progressive political and ethical agendas have traditionally been associated—and to do so, moreover, *precisely by taking seriously* pluralism’s call for attention to embodiment, to the specific materiality and multiplicity of the subject...[following Zizek] the “human,” we now know, is not now, and never was, itself. (Wolfe *Zoontologies* xiii)

Critically interrogating “the human” has significant implications for conceptions of “the animal.” Rethinking the relationship between the two in a way that does not situate them as oppositional or hierarchical categories but as interrelated and enfolded multiplicities has potential for revealing the—shifting, indeterminate, and multiplicitous—possibilities for each.

\*\*\*\*\*

Haley does not seem to regard herself as a victim, grazing in a field with friends or trotting on the longe line. She is herself, a creature faced with an array of situations

and choices, and we see her as such. Like us, her potential for knowledge grows with experience. The interspecies relationship that we have begun and sustain is dependent upon the respect and trust we have established and the possibilities that reveal themselves as a result. With that trust and respect come duties; for us, to respond to Haley's needs, listen to her calls to us, and respect her otherness as well as the mutual system of communication and the rules we have established together.

### **Ethics**

The discourse of species is often centered primarily on debates over morality and ethical imperatives. The questions that dominate this discourse are based on how "we," as moral, ethical, and reasonable beings, should treat other sentient beings. The starting point is human beings; other beings or actors are considered to have interests, and to be knowable thereby, to the extent that they resemble humans.<sup>19</sup> The ability of other species to physically suffer pain (following Jeremy Bentham's famous question) becomes the main—and often sole—reason for concern and grounding for any subsequent conceptions of animal rights. This discourse is, I think, overly reliant on depictions of palpable physical sufferings and the subsequent positioning of nonhuman animals foremost as victims. This placement leads to a lack of consideration of the significant abilities and often enigmatic potential of nonhuman species.

The mainstream animal rights movement's main strategy for calls to action relies on an underlying positivism. The associated calculation of subjectivity and the responsibilities that unfold from it presents problems for any attempt to respect and retain the ultimate alterity of others in all their unknowable capacities. Citing physical suffering

as the lowest common denominator and therefore ultimate goal for ethical consideration is also problematic. Hearne remarks (in regard to the rise in animal rights sympathies) that

these new stories, which appear to be honoring animals by elaborating on their suffering, are a response to what Cavell calls our 'skeptical terror' in the face of the Otherness of anyone or anything that is Beloved... To tell stories about the pitiful plight of animals is to deny their Otherness, their autonomy. (264)

Moreover, and more to the point of this paper, is the fact that, as Hearne writes, "when the logician has said, 'for all  $x$  such that  $P$ , where  $P$  is the ability to feel physical pain, etc., etc.,' and goes on from there to propose a theory of animal rights and consciousness, s/he has said virtually nothing, has not taken the tiniest step toward imagining the personhood of any animal" (62). And if ethics, especially the kind of utilitarian ethics that characterizes the animal rights movement, is the only or even main criterion for consideration, nonhuman animals will remain perpetual victims (their roles in the stories "we" tell will be those of victims). In addition, genuine discourse is, as animal trainers will attest, impossible to achieve if one's discursive partner is viewed first and foremost as a victim.

Even if one were to accept ethics, and ultimately the physical capacity for pain, as the only basis for considering other animals, the utilitarian concept of ethics is still only one of many. As Wolfe notes,

the sense of ethics in Levinas and Derrida is diametrically opposed to what we find in a utilitarian like Peter Singer, the leading figure in animal rights philosophy. For in Singer... ethics means precisely the application of a 'calculable process,' namely, the utilitarian calculus that would tally up the 'interests' of the particular beings in question in a given situation, regardless of their species, and would determine what counts as a just act according to which action maximizes the greatest good for the greatest number... Derrida is quite forceful on this point—it reduces ethics to the very antithesis of ethics by reducing the aporia of judgment in which the possibility of justice resides to the mechanical unfolding of a positivist calculation. (*Animal Rites* 69)

The kind of ethical response to the other developed most notably by Levinas and refined by Derrida seems to harbor much potential for a radical and comprehensive re-thinking of the ethical dimension of encounters with nonhuman otherness. Although Levinas ultimately refuses ethical consideration to other species, his insight that it is the ultimate alterity of the other (signified by the countenance or face—which he denies nonhumans) that calls for a response before one's own being or presence is resolved would seem to imply potential regard for nonhuman otherness. "We" must afford other species ethical consideration through acknowledging the relationship we already have with "them." This is a positive, personal sense of ethical responsibility, a calling-forth of the other that itself would seem to provide a reason for communicating with other species and perhaps validating ways of knowing and communicating beyond or without regard to the species barrier.

"Proving" similarities and establishing identities, whether these are of the "human-ness" of nonhuman animals or the animality of humans, has very limited potential for establishing the need for meaningful ethical relationships with other species. Affirming difference as such and then revealing that ethical responsibility actually relies on this difference would dissolve one of the frameworks of the animal rights movement.

Wolfe writes that

the philosophy of animal rights, at least in its current state of the art, remains tied to the theoretical topos of the mirror and the look, and as such it reorients the question of the alterity of the nonhuman other once again toward the figure of the human. What seems to be needed, then, is a framework for thinking about the problem of subjectivity and species difference in terms of embodiment and multiplicity rather than identity. (*Animal Rites* 169)

This framework would need to involve other senses and tropes than the visual and the mirror, with its privileging of the gaze and identification. Audio, tactile, and sonic media—embodied means of communication—might be necessary for this new story.

Expanding possible ways to “see” (and I think concepts like “soft eyes” can aid in this) assists and supports prospective practices.

It seems that the theories of the mainstream animal rights movement, though effective in specific instances and for the worst physical offences, cannot take “us” far enough into contact with nonhuman others to grant them real respect, for difference as well as similarity. As a result, as Haraway puts this dilemma in “Otherworldly Conversations; Terran Topics; Local Terms,”

the last thing they ‘need’ is human subject status, in whatever cultural-historical form...The best animals could get out of that approach is the ‘right’ to be permanently represented, as lesser humans, in human discourse, such as the law—animals would get the right to be permanently ‘orientalized.’ As Marx put it in another context and for other beings, ‘they cannot represent themselves; they must be represented. (Reader 141)

The need for a discourse about non-human otherness that does not presume to speak *for* those others remains significant. Assuming such authority, as Haraway argues, tends to generate

lots of well-intentioned, but finally imperialist ecological discourse...Facing the harvest of Darwinism, we do not need an endless discourse on who speaks for animals, or for nature in general...We need other conversations with animals, a much less respectable undertaking. The point is not new representations, but new *practices*, other forms of life rejoining humans and not-humans. (Reader 141)

In order to get closer to a theory of nonhuman otherness that will respect difference while noting and employing the overlaps in phenomenological and epistemological spaces, it will be necessary to include nonhuman others—those being talked *about*—in the conversation.

In his commentary on “The Animal that Therefore I Am,” David Wood refers to Derrida’s warning “of the twin dangers- of appropriating the other (e.g., the animal) and of leaving it in silence” (Atterton 388). It is one of the greatest achievements of deconstruction to have drawn our attention to the fact that thinking (and responsible

action) consists not in resolving ambivalences, but in “going through the undecidable, finding ‘productive’ ways of acknowledging and responding to conflicting considerations” (Atterton 135). It is extremely problematic theoretically to attempt to “speak for” other animals, but perhaps less so to learn to *listen*, to take nonhuman responses *as responses* and the “calling-forth” of nonhuman faces (or “countenances,” to which Levinas attributes the initial point of ethical action) seriously.<sup>20</sup> Conversations are necessary, and a basis of respect and provisional trust must be established for this conversation to take place, since “talking entails care and care-taking. That is part of what respecting one another means” (Hearne 21). This is an attempt not only to theorize *about* animal others, but through and with them as well.

---

<sup>1</sup> The disciplines of ethology and animal training, for instance, might be included in analyses which examine how other species present themselves.

<sup>2</sup> “Critical posthumanism in the sense evoked by Catherine Waldby (2000) as “a general critical space in which the techno-cultural forces which both produce and undermine the stability of the categories of ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman,’ can be investigated” (43) (in Simon, *Cultural Critique*, 53:3).

<sup>3</sup> In *The Companion Species Manifesto* and *The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others*, for instance.

<sup>4</sup> Disney movies and popular films provide many good examples of this faux-alien affinity, in which monsters and aliens are recognizable as functioning according to clearly human standards and codes of conduct despite their differing outward appearances. See also Badmington, *Alien Chic* (2004).

<sup>5</sup> There are four of these tenets: soft eyes, breathing, building blocks, and centering.

<sup>6</sup> It must be noted that Swift requires action, practice, here. In describing ‘hard eyes,’ she directs one to “look intently at the object. Concentrate on its exact outlines, its shape, density, color. Take in everything acutely,” and to notice how differently a horse responds to that intent “look between his ears” focus with the practice of ‘soft eyes,’ the essentials of which are “wide-open eyes and peripheral awareness,” by which to “maintain awareness of your entire field of vision, allow yourself to feel sensations from within” (11).

<sup>7</sup> Haley is an eight-year old half-Arab mare. Most horses begin their training at two or three years of age, but at eight (this corresponds roughly to age twenty-four in humans) Haley had never been ridden or worked with in any serious manner.

<sup>8</sup> The science of animal, especially primate, groups developed so as to span the nature-culture split at precisely the same “time in American intellectual history, between 1920 and 1940, when the ideology of the autonomy of the social sciences had at last gained acceptance, that is, when the liberal theory of society (based on functionalism and hierarchical systems theories) was being established in the universities. Intrinsic to the new liberal relations of natural and social disciplines was the project of human engineering—that is, the project of the design and management of human material for efficient, rational functioning in a scientifically ordered society. Animals played an important role in this project. On one hand, they were plastic raw material of knowledge, subject to exact laboratory discipline. They could be used to construct and test model systems for both human physiology and politics...It was precisely direct reduction of human to natural sciences that the post-Spencerian, post-evolutionary naturalist, new ordering of knowledge forbade...It is part of the nature-culture split. On the other hand, animals have continued to have a special status as natural objects that can show people their origin, and therefore their pre-rational, pre-management, pre-cultural essence. That is, animals have been ominously ambiguous in their place in the doctrine of autonomy of the human and natural sciences. So, despite the claims of anthropology to be able to understand human beings solely with the concept of culture, and of sociology to need nothing but the idea of the human social group, animal societies have been extensively employed in rationalization and naturalization of the oppressive orders of domination in the human body politic. They have provided the point of union of the physiological and political for modern liberal theorists while they continue to accept the ideology of the split between nature and culture” (Haraway “A Political Physiology of Dominance,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 11)

<sup>9</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Remembering the Limits: Difference, Identity, and Practice,” in *Socialism and the Limits of Liberalism*, ed. Peter Osborne (London: Verso, 1991), 229.

<sup>10</sup> Saddle, bridle, etc.

---

<sup>11</sup> The longe line is a thin strap that attaches to the bit. The horse moves in a circle around the person longeing, who holds the other end of the strap and gives signals for gait changes, etc. Longeing can be done with or without a rider on the horse. It is intended both as exercise and a way to teach horses to bend and balance while moving in a circle.

<sup>12</sup> Hearne refers to animal training as the teaching of a vocabulary, with grammar and syntax.

<sup>13</sup> Rivas, Mim Eichler. *Beautiful Jim Key*. New York: Harper, 2005. 152-164.

<sup>14</sup> “The philosophical basis for animal rights as put forward by its two most important practitioners—Peter Singer (in *Animal Liberation*) and Tom Regan (in *The Case for Animal Rights*)—is based squarely in the liberal philosophical tradition of utilitarianism (Singer) and Kantianism (Regan)...The philosophical basis for animal rights that Singer articulates in *Animal Liberation*—often called the founding text of the animal rights movement...follows Jeremy Bentham” (Wolfe *Animal Rites* 33).

‘What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty or reason [sic?], of perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day or a week or even a month old. But suppose they were otherwise, What would it avail? The question is not, Can they *reason*? nor Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?’ (Bentham, qtd. in Ferry, 27, in Wolfe *Animal Rites* 33).

<sup>15</sup> Wolfe characterizes Regan as having a revisionist relationship to Kant’s ‘indirect duty’ view (*Animal Rites* 33-34).

<sup>16</sup> “Your Daughter or Your Dog? A Feminist Assessment of the Animal Research Issue,” *Hypatia* 6, 1 (Spring 1991) 111.

<sup>17</sup> Wolfe focuses specifically on the relationship between non-human animals and language to expose the humanist framework and ‘speciesism’ on which even most arguments of ‘animal rights’ proponents are based.

<sup>18</sup> See Masson and McCarthy, especially.

<sup>19</sup> Singer’s three grounds for believing animals suffer and hence have ‘interests,’ for instance, are scientifically proven behavioral, neurological, or evolutionary correspondences with humans (235).

<sup>20</sup> See chapter four in Atterton for more on Levinas’ relation to and the application of his work to nonhuman animals.

### Chapter Three: The Animal in Discourse

“To imagine a language is to imagine a form of life” –Wittgenstein

“*every act of knowing brings forth a world*” -Maturana and Varela<sup>1</sup>

In the Chicago stockyards, the center of the American meat industry at the turn of the century, a common saying was “we use everything but the squeal.”<sup>2</sup> This seems to have been the approach of most serious Western thought with regard to nonhuman animals—to efficiently use the physical bodies but not the *voices* of other species.<sup>3</sup> In the many stories (many of which, in the contemporary Western tradition, are directed toward children) whose characters are nonhuman animals, animals do talk, but when they do so it is in wholly human fashion; only very rarely do the humans (for instance, in *Dr. Dolittle*—the protagonist of which, significantly, is considered a subversive and potentially dangerous oddity) attempt meaningfully to listen and respond to other species on their own terms. In this chapter, I will attempt to use the “squeal,” to explore the self-expression of nonhuman others as a meaningful and significant part of responding to the question of the animal.

If the implications of nonhuman animals as partners in discourse are to be posed as valid concerns not solely generated by and for humans, nonhumans themselves must be brought into the analysis. In this multiplicitous world,

we must engage in forms of life with non-humans—both machines and organisms—on livelier terms than those provided by harvesting Darwinism or Marxism. Reconfiguring conversations with those who are not ‘us’ must be part of that project. We have got to strike up a coherent conversation where humans are not the measure of all things, and where no one claims unmediated access to anyone else. Humans, at least, need a different *kind* of theory of mediations. (Haraway *Reader* 139)

This theory of mediations would necessarily be a consciously embodied one, and would have to take into account the different modes of perception and communication of its subjects.

Though their philosophical conclusions differ (and though she wrote before Haraway), Vicki Hearne details some of the next step—taking theory into active practice—of Donna Haraway’s analysis. Describing conversations and telling stories, Hearne presses forward her concepts into specific enactments, which in turn continually structure and revise her theories. She achieves *thoroughness* in the intersubjective circle of discourse by listening for and using the embodied responses that complete and affirm her ideas to sustain and deepen them. This discourse and knowledge of otherness proceeds—and this is necessarily the case with nonhuman animals—through direct personal interaction and experience.<sup>4</sup> Establishing and maintaining relationships that remain meaningful over extensive phenomenological divides requires acute observation of what seems to order the world comprehensibly in each specific context for each individual. The comprehensibility and validity of communication is judged through the responses evoked.

\*\*\*\*\*

Elly Mae<sup>5</sup> does not come to us in the pasture. She grabs the proffered grain bribe and jerks back before the rope and halter can touch her, then gallops madly back and forth. We follow patiently until she gets bored and stands still, allowing herself to be “caught.” When we bring her to be groomed and tacked up, she is aggressive in her defensiveness, pinning her ears back and sidestepping rapidly, even threatening to kick as the girth is tightened. Unlike Haley, who is inexperienced but open to our advances, Elly

Mae expresses no interest in or willingness to listen to us. Her behavior is her response to past experiences; at this point in her life she seems to have decided that humans have nothing to say that she wants to hear or to which she would respond. The possibilities for communication have diminished with mishandling, ignorance, fear, and/or pain, and incomprehensibility is finally met with a refusal to engage. How can one have a conversation with someone who has already decided that s/he is not going to listen?

Epistemic biases—closely related to the separation of theoretical approaches and physical practice—impede the ability to talk about nonhuman animals as much as do phenomenological obstacles. The singular universal figure of the animal may be useful in discussing human symbolic or conceptual meanings, but it is not sufficient for representing—in fact, it will even impede—conversations with its individual physical referents. In an anecdote from *Adam's Task*, Hearne observes that in “obedience and riding classes, people with training in the behavioral sciences hadn't much chance of succeeding with their animals, and that the higher the degree held by the person, the worse the job of training was likely to be” (12). Doubt about the possibility of comprehension, *a priori* skepticism or refusal to see *any* others as potential agents inevitably inhibits interactions. The poverty of the resulting exchanges in turn limits the epistemologies that will be formed and the potential for future interactions.

The scientifically sanctified objectivity of laboratories and the excessive anthropomorphism often found outside of them are both approaches in which respect for both sameness and otherness is compromised. Haraway recognizes the “the perfect mirror twin of totalization in the ideologies of objectivity; both deny the stakes in location, embodiment, and partial perspective” (“Situated Knowledges,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and*

*Women* 191). Hearne takes up this criticism from the side of the species division, explaining that

to be 'objective' is to try to approach the condition of being No One in Particular with a View from Nowhere and cats know better than that. They are uneasy around such people because people who don't know better tend to ride roughshod over the cat's own knowledge that a cat is Someone in Particular. (Hearne 229)

Physical encounters and interactions with unknown others are particularly effective in disrupting visions of coherent and unmarked subjecthood,<sup>6</sup> insisting as most do on their individual nature and claim to consideration.

Hearne details in *Adam's Task* how people (this is exceptionally and particularly common with well-educated *adult* humans) undermine their own initial understandings, intuitions, and perceptions and assume that what another animal or human is telling them is not language, that it cannot be meaningful, understood, or perceived semantically. This skeptical distrust will be communicated to that other in the same nonlinguistic way to nonhuman animals as it would to humans speaking an unfamiliar language. In order for coherent conversations to take place, a baseline of trust must be established. For this trust to be established, it is necessary to first reach out and express one's own particular individuality or truth, to make some kind of initial leap of faith. Withholding immediate skepticism or disbelief in what someone else is expressing—or the fact of that expression as a meaningful communication itself—is necessary to establishing the baseline of trust from which relationships and dialogues emerge.

This process is almost wholly lacking in studies of nonhuman animals in the physical sciences, the methodology of which generally does not require that one make *oneself* understood by those with whom one is working. This results in analysis characterized by a significant lack of self-reflexivity and numerous blind spots. Through

one-way observation of the kind that characterizes these disciplines, one may come to have what Hearne calls “knowledge *that*,” but one will never have “knowledge *of*” (60);

the story the behaviorist brings into the laboratory affects not only his or her interpretation of what goes on but also what actually does go on. To the extent that the behaviorist manages to deny any belief in the dog’s potential for believing, intending, meaning, etc., there will be no flow of intention, meaning, believing, hoping going on. The dog may try to respond to the behaviorist, but the behaviorist won’t respond to the dog’s response; there will be between them little or no space for the varied flexions of looped thoughts. The behaviorist’s dog will not only seem stupid, she will be stupid. (ibid 58)

Flows of communication depend on continuous response. People often *react*, rather than respond, to the behavior of nonhuman animals, and these behaviors are in turn often considered reactive rather than responsive. This makes for a very short story and precludes the emergence of much meaningful communication. The break in the chain of discourse occurs even before its links can be effectively joined.

The potential for listening to nonhuman animals is increasingly complicated by the ongoing process of urbanization. Living circumstances for many people have been drastically altered, with the result that direct and unrestrained interaction and communication with even most domestic or feral animals, let alone wild animals, is severely curtailed. Most people now live in places and situations in which individual contact—or contact with individual animate beings rather than lifeless products, stuffed surrogates, or humans in animal form (Disney animals, for instance)—is unlikely, rare, or limited to a few species. As a result, many people are unable to meet and interact with (and often, as a result, respect) even various historically familiar nonhuman animals. Physical expression<sup>7</sup> is an essential avenue of communication, one which precludes a wholly theoretical approach to the question of the animal. With the increased physical separation of humans and nonhumans has come increasing conceptual separation. There is no possibility of communicating with or recognizing what Levinas called the

“countenance” of the nonhuman animals without direct contact, observation, and recognition.

Nonhuman animals themselves are moving even farther from embodied human reality than the ghosts that their figures have become. This is accomplished quite effectively through the rapid disembodiment and specialization characteristic of modern industrialization. The lives of most animals are now mechanized; they have ceased to be seen as individual lives or voices and have become, far more than any human, Heidegger’s “standing reserve”—a faceless mass of material, shaped to its function, imminently and predictably accompanying modern technology in shaping the human subject and supporting the clean ideals of humanism. It is, especially in the Western world, readily apparent that “we now have come to the stage where the animal has almost totally been incorporated into human technology...the animal is modified to suit the production system, and its offending parts simply cut off” (Noske 20).<sup>8</sup> The possibilities for nonhuman animal lives have diminished along with the reduction in their roles and lessening of their importance in human societies.

Fear has always been a prominent aspect of interspecies interactions and imaginings. Fear is indeed part of generating the initial and necessary respect in meetings between unknown and different beings, but when magnified by separation and ignorance it often precludes genuine attempts to connect or understand the other. Physically, fear is communicated through such actions as holding the breath, stiffening the spine, and “hard eyes.” All of these signals often lead to fear, and even aggression born of fear, in answer. I think that there is also an often-disguised fear underlying the way the broader question of the animal is addressed—or not addressed. This fear is expressed in the “hard eyes” of

the single-minded and adamant finality with which the many various definitive separations of the animal and the human are posited as well as the claims to comprehensive knowledge of the defining qualities of animality, which are insistently disavowed in constituting human identity, perhaps in fear that nonhuman animals will somehow undermine the uniqueness or priority of human claims. It is also expressed in a refusal to address the question at all, a kind of holding of the breath when faced with possibilities beyond the bounds of the known or knowable.

### **Animals as Respondents**

Humans and other animals already share a world and live the power structures and relationships that characterize and change it. As trainers, farmers, or anyone who has spent significant amounts of time with nonhuman animals knows, animals address and respond to (and ignore) “us.” If “they” are observed and their behavior interpreted, they are also observing and interpreting, as well as responding to what is communicated to them. Direct communication within meaningful relationships is essential here; subtle and often unconscious gestures and expressions are (both to other humans and other animals) part of “what is said,” and to which we respond. If what is communicated is hysterical, incoherent, or fearful—even if these qualities are not intended—serious and even dangerous misunderstandings will result. Hence Hearne’s constant emphasis (after Cavell) on the importance of taking responsibility for meaning what one says. This process of intending and taking responsibility entails a self-reflexive awareness of one’s own particular and situated position.

Recognizing the *reality* of animal others, as other beings whose worlds overlap

“ours,” is fundamental to addressing “the question of the animal.” In “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” Derrida makes it clear that “the cat I am talking about is a real cat, truly, believe me, *a little cat*. It isn’t the *figure* of a cat. It doesn’t silently enter the room as an allegory” (in Atterton 115). Analogously, Haraway states that “dogs are not just an alibi for other themes; dogs are fleshy material-semiotic presences in the body of technoscience. Dogs are not surrogates for theory here; they are not here just to think with. They are here to live with” (“Cyborgs to Companion Species: Reconfiguring Kinship in Technoscience” in *Reader* 298) and, later, that “we have real histories of dogs and people; not The Dog and The Human” (ibid 316). Nonhuman animals are not only metaphors for humans to think with and use in various symbolic equations, but significant in themselves, the centers of their own phenomenological and epistemic worlds.

\*\*\*\*\*

In the riding arena for the first time, we try to ascertain the breadth of Elly Mae’s knowledge. It is apparent that she has little experience under saddle, but she seems amenable to my suggestions, walking and trotting in response to leg pressure and halting when I stop the motion of my body and tighten the reins. Since all has been going well, I ask for a canter. The gait transition is rushed and unbalanced, but Elly complies. She does pick up the wrong lead,<sup>9</sup> however, so I ask her to trot a few strides and then pick up the canter again. She stops in her tracks. I ask her to walk forward, first lightly and then more insistently and finally forcefully. She remains where she is, determinedly ignoring my repeated requests. Past experiences and abuse of sensitivity have apparently led her to decide on this particular course of emphatic non-action. The refusal to move further, to

reply even to urgent entreaties, is clearly her response to uncertainty, to what are to her— at this point—incomprehensible signals. The conversation has stopped.

### **Variations on the Verbal: Visual and Kinetic Perception and Language**

The infinite gradations and forms of comprehension and communication that characterize interactions are essential to imagining both human and nonhuman worlds.

Those who argue that communication is *not* the primary function of language<sup>10</sup>

hold that language is first and foremost an instrument of cognition, or a modeling device that enables its possessors to construct in the imagination, possible future worlds, alternative scenarios and plans for action. As such, language does not lie on an evolutionary continuum with non-verbal communication. (Ingold 7)

Language as a symbolic cognitive tool is not what I am concerned with here. It is largely irrelevant and unhelpful in addressing “the question of the animal” and investigations based on relationality and affect. If, as Haraway maintains, relationships are prior to cognition, relationships with, rather than cognitive judgments and categorizations of, nonhuman animals should be the starting point of analysis. Haraway provides the insight that multiplicity is a condition of articulation; Hearne and Grandin describe the intricacies of this variegated articulation. The approach, therefore, is from multiplicity and diversity rather than original division.

In a section comparing animals and autistic people, both of whom are often believed to lack cognitive ability, Grandin remarks on various definitions of thinking—the differences between language-based thought and picture-based thought, for instance. She points toward studies noted by Marian Stamp Dawkins (a researcher at the University of Oxford who specializes in the study of thinking in nonhuman animals) to illustrate their particular and somewhat arbitrary natures. These studies have apparently “proven” that “animals have the ability to generalize,” and that this ability distinguishes

true thought from instinctive “hardwired” behavior. However, Grandin points out,

according to Dawkins’s criteria, then, autistic savants are not capable of true thought...I would be denied the ability to think by scientists who maintain that language is essential for thinking. When a well-respected animal scientist told me that animals do not think, I replied that if this were true, that I would have to conclude that I was unable to think. He could not imagine thinking in pictures, nor assigning it the validity of real thought...I have observed that the people who are most likely to deny animals thought are often highly verbal thinkers who have poor visualization skills...It is very likely that animals think in pictures and memories of smell, light, and sound patterns. In fact, my visual thinking patterns probably resemble animal thinking more closely than those of verbal thinkers. It seems silly to me to debate whether or not animals can think. To me it has always been obvious that they do... my experience suggests that animals think in discrete visual images. (Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures* 159-160)

Grandin, incidentally, adds cattle to “thinking” categories here, a very rare inclusion in the world of the natural sciences, in which only a few relatively privileged species (other primates and some sea mammals) are generally considered to lay potential claim to this ability. Later, she emphasizes the extent to which her own

experience as a visual thinker with autism makes it clear to me that thought does not have to be verbal or sequential to be real. I considered my thoughts to be real long before I learned that there was a difference between visual and verbal thinkers...I do believe that recognizing different capacities and kinds of thought and expression can lead to greater connectedness and understanding. (Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures* 164)

Legitimizing a variety of modes of perception and comprehension is essential to addressing “the question of the animal.”

The limited extent to which validity or credulity is accorded different (nonhuman, etc.) ways of knowing is evident in the story of what has come to be known as “the Clever Hans fallacy.” This term refers to the well-known and often-invoked story of a man (Herr von Osten) who was so impressed by the intelligence of his cart horse (Hans), that he began to teach him “to respond to questions either by tapping with a hoof a certain number of times or else by indicating one of a number of blocks on which the alphabet was written.” After much testing, by a variety of different professionals from all over, it became apparent that

Hans could not answer questions if he could not see the person asking him. It turned out further that if the questioner was in sight, Hans could always find out what the questioner thought was the correct answer, no matter how hard the questioner worked at remaining still and impassive. Hans apparently read minute changes in breathing, angles of the eyebrows, etc., with an accuracy we have trouble imagining.

As a result of this “fraud,”

there has now come to be a technical term in academic studies of animal psychology, the ‘Clever Hans fallacy.’ This is the fallacy of supposing that an animal ‘really’ understands words or symbols when what the animal is doing is ‘merely’ reading body language. In the literature, this notion is used to discredit virtually anyone who disagrees with the writer in question as either a fraud or a charlatan or else as just plain credulous and stupid. (Hearne 4-5)

To me, this story indicates the necessity of broadening the definition of what counts as valid knowledge(s) and thought rather than drawing increasingly finer lines to constitute more distinct categories. The “Clever Hans fallacy” seems to me to appropriately illustrate what Derrida refers to as the “materiality of speech” and “corporality of language” (in Wolfe *Zoontologies* 127). Haraway expands upon this suggestion to conclude that

discourse is practice, and participation in the materialized world, including one’s own natural/cultural (one word) body, is not a choice...Practitioners of [all sciences and discourses, analyses, theories] all invoked the same eminently material, theoretically potent stories to do real work in the world, epistemologically and ontologically. (Haraway, “Morphing in the Order” *Reader* 204).

How, then, Hans’s discourse with his interlocutors so readily and continually dismissed as a “fallacy?” And, perhaps more importantly, why? Why does the response to the possibility that nonhuman animals might have abilities often considered the sole property of humans so consistently evoke the uneasiness that usually accompanies threats? And why is the possibility that (at least most) humans may not (ever) be able to fully comprehend the abilities that many nonhuman animals have so often met with the same reaction? Especially since “biologists argue that it is meaningless to compare the intelligence of one species with another: every species that survives over time develops the extent and kind of intelligence required for its environment,” and that “every animal

is motivated by individual perceptions, memories, and feelings” (Lingis, in Atterton 10). The difference in mode or kind of intelligence is inevitably one of the main difficulties of communication, judgment, and knowledge.

Hearne (108-9, 80-81) emphasizes the importance of recognizing the differences in kind of intelligence for creating a coherent conversation (in the course of training). For instance, it is likely that

for dogs, scenting is believing...A dog who did comparative psychology might easily worry about our consciousness or lack thereof, the way we worry about the consciousness of a squid...We can draw pictures of scent, but we don't have a language for doing it the other way around, don't have so much as a counter for a representation of something visual by means of (actual) scent. We cannot know, with our limited noses, what we can know about being deaf, blind, dumb or paralyzed; we do not have words for what is absent. (Hearne 79-80)

Dogs' senses of smell and horses' senses of touch are Hearne's main focus, but she also acknowledges the sonar of dolphins, low frequency vibrations of elephants, etc.<sup>11</sup>

I find that equestrian relationships provide perhaps the most exemplary example—better even than Haraway's dogs/companion animals—of the nature and potential of establishing languages and relationships across “significant otherness.” There seems to be less chance of what Deleuze and Guattari would term “affiliation” in these relationships than, for instance, in those between humans and dogs, and hence a greater need for “becoming.” The divide—in practical life as well as phenomenological space—between humans and horses is a far greater than it is between humans and dogs; dogs can get much closer to human worlds and languages, and understand words in ways that horses seem not to. Communication (in riding, anyway, which is where the relationship between humans and horses has been most developed) is achieved through systems of touch. The level of body awareness required—what Hearne refers to as “the skin's modes of thought”—is part of the reason that communication in this context can achieve such a high level of subtlety (113-14).

Allowing one's own knowledge to be incomplete in imagining others—allowing otherness to remain as such—is necessary for interpersonal respect. For example,

comparing the neural apparatus of the horse's kinesthetic powers with ours leads...to a humbling realization that when we talk with horses, we are talking into a kind of intelligence we can just barely have any understanding of, partly because we communicate with horses largely through touch, and in particular through the lips and mouth. (Hearne 106-107)

Breathing itself as a mode of communication is an essential element of interspecies interfaces, as it is of poetry. The rhythm of pauses, holdings and expulsions of air that impel verbal language also express states of being, and this an expression which crosses species boundaries. Awareness of the breath, as of the other elements structuring conversations, is part of being aware and fully meaning what one says. Communication—and the inklings of personhood it reveals—is always multidirectional, and in horseback riding, as Hearne has indicated, noticing and responding to (and being noticed and responded to by) one's horse is inescapable; the conversations in which one becomes engaged are unavoidable.

### **Significant otherness: Temple Grandin**

While Deleuze and Guattari use abstracted and general theories of particularity and multiplicity, Grandin approaches the phenomenological problem of otherness through specific differences and personal experiences. Grandin “sees” nonhuman animals in an unorthodox manner; she herself experiences and enacts the world in a way that is significantly “other” to most humans—much closer, she asserts, to some animals—cattle, especially (*Animals in Translation* 6, 57). As a result she understands the need to use various senses and perceptions to communicate and imagine the world especially well, relating, for instance, that “an autistic man who composes music [who] told me that he

makes ‘sound pictures’” (*Pictures* 90). She has adapted the pressure chute used by ranchers to immobilize cattle for vaccination for her own personal use, and describes her “squeeze machine”<sup>12</sup> as “a language of pressure... the tactile equivalent of a complex emotion” (*Pictures* 32). Though Grandin has learned to approximate her own way of being in the language of normative human experience, she navigates across quite an expanse of “otherness” to do so.

Grandin is one example of significant otherness possible within the human species itself. In the Foreword to *Thinking in Pictures* (1995) Oliver Sacks calls her “a revelation that there might be people, no less human than ourselves, who constructed their worlds, lived their lives, in almost unimaginably different ways” (*Pictures* 11). This is a potentially fruitful insight, yet Sacks still validates only the otherness of *human* experience and perception. What of the millions of others, not human but perhaps “persons” in some sense, who also construct their worlds and live their lives in almost unimaginably different ways? Sacks credits Grandin’s voice as coming “from a place which had never been granted real existence, before,” but there seems to be no underlying awareness or notice of the statement’s potentially equal applicability or relevance to nonhuman subjects (*ibid* 11).

Just as with nonhuman animals, “it is said that autistic people lack ‘theory of mind’—any direct perception or idea of other minds, or other states of mind” (*Pictures* 14). It is apparent in Grandin’s case, and, presumably, in that of many other people, that the common designation of near object-status and lack of agency or ‘theory of mind,’ to those who are “significantly other” (to the traditional humanist subject) stems more from an inability to produce or adapt to a particular mode of expression—specifically, to

human symbolic language—rather than from any assumed *lack*, any substandard cognitive or phenomenological *ability*. The perceptions and understandings of minds expressed in ways outside of this abstract idea of language tends to be preemptively excluded from serious consideration, from “consciousness” and full personhood. Grandin, in a rare occurrence, learned language cognitively, creating a ‘card catalogue’ of specific associations for the concepts that words signify.<sup>13</sup>

It seems to be through vision, for the human species generally and for Grandin in particular, that most social nuances are communicated. As Oliver Sacks succinctly summarizes, she feels her own nature is

quintessentially concrete and visual...She feels that ‘thinking in pictures’ gives her a special rapport with cattle, and that her mode of thinking is...akin to their own mode of thinking—that she sees the world, in a sense, with a cow’s eye. Thus though Temple often compares her own mind to a computer, she roots herself, and her own way of thought and feeling, in the creaturely and organic. (*Pictures* 15)

Moreover, (and Sacks sees this as a “strange juxtaposition”) “for Temple, clearly, there is a continuum of experience extending from the animal to the spiritual, from the bovine to the transcendent” (ibid 16). Though Sacks reinscribes a traditional value scale and hierarchy—beginning with the animal and bovine and reaching to the opposing pole of the spiritual and transcendent—into this description (of what is explicitly described as a ‘continuum’), Grandin herself does not. It is not that she does not make a clear distinction between humans and other animals, but that she does not structure this distinction as opposition or hierarchy. Following this statement, Sacks reports that “thinking in pictures [Grandin feels] represents a mode of perception, of feeling and thought and being, which we may call ‘primitive’ if we wish, but not ‘pathological,’” and goes on to state that, “though profoundly different from most of us, she is no less human for being so, but, rather, human in another way” (ibid 16). If this is the case, then could some nonhuman

animals be described as ‘human in another way?’ Or Temple, and other humans, as “animal in another way?” Or why not, for both, simply “living” in another way?

Grandin describes a way of “becoming animal” that is substantially different from that of Deleuze and Guattari:

when I put myself in a cow’s place, I really have to be that cow and not a person in a cow costume. I use my visual thinking skills to simulate what an animal would see and feel in a given situation. I place myself inside its body and imagine what it experiences. It is the ultimate virtual reality system, but I also draw on the empathetic feelings of gentleness and kindness I have developed so that my simulation is more than a robotic computer model...I have to follow the cattle’s rules of behavior. I also have to imagine what experiencing the world through the cow’s sensory system is like. (*Pictures* 143)

Noske echoes this sentiment.

Even though we may not succeed in becoming animal with the animals, we humans may make the effort of meeting the animals on their own ground ...to participate in animal societies and to understand the meaning animals give to the world. To do this one must try to empathize with animals, to imagine what it is to be a wolf, a dolphin, a horse or an ape. (167)

The dangers of anthropomorphization, “affiliation,” or over-identification loom large in this territory. Empathy and openness to alternate meanings does not preclude allowing the unknowable to remain ultimately unknowable; it creates a space for it. In Haraway’s and Hearne’s accounts, as in Noske’s, subjects constantly learn and are formed by processes of sociality across communicatory boundaries. This learning involves experience, by which to observe and recognize behavioral patterns and modes, as well as direct interaction. When most effective, subsequent communicative sociality is (like dressage) a continual process of exchange and dialogue, with each partners both leading and following, and expressing themselves through the aggregate movements that make up the conversation.

### **Communicating across phenomenological divides**

The stakes are how we think about liveliness and agency in different worlds. We require a multi-species and a multi-expertise way of doing/thinking worlds and ways of life, and that requires muting the command/communication/control/intelligence idiom. (Haraway, *Reader* 308)

It is significant and relevant that both Hearne and Haraway write about their interactions with individual animals, having learned directly about the otherness of various nonhuman animals. In the acknowledgements that precede the main body of her book, Noske writes “most of all I am grateful to all the animals that I have ever known who have taught me to look beyond my own species” (vii).<sup>14</sup> Alois Podhajsky, in his seminal *My Horses, My Teachers*, attributes all his (extensive) learning to the various horses—described and honored individually—with whom he has worked throughout his life. Relationships, collective conversation that includes as essential elements the “ongoing descriptive recursion which we call the ‘I,’” are included as starting points in these analyses.<sup>15</sup>

The potential benefits of analyses and ways of life that begin with relationships and communication are vast; “a promising form of life, conversation defies the autonomization of the self, as well as the objectification of the other” (Haraway, *Reader* 144). Learning appropriate ways of interacting with others from those others seems to be accepted and even celebrated by anthropologists; “as Margaret Mead once said, anthropology has informants, not objects of study. People teach us.”<sup>16</sup> I think that this is the kind of acknowledgement that must be made in order to better address the broad potential of nonhuman animals, but the approaches that would accompany it have as yet been far underutilized in studies involving nonhuman animals. Potential answers depend on the capacity in which “the question of the animal” is posed; whether the animals in question are ‘informants’ or ‘objects of study. When nonhumans install themselves as ‘informants’ through their own heeded calls and responses perhaps it will be time to “learn about possible alternative narratives by the same way dogs, humans, and other

humans do—by means of the activity of projecting the term into new contexts” (Hearne, *Bandit 72*).

### **Training and power dynamics**

The broad range of structures that generate signification point toward relational possibilities that extend beyond the particular.

The playful baring of the fangs between two wolves, for example, signifies the bite that does not exist; but the bite that does not exist itself signifies a *relationship*—in this case of dominance or subordination—whose ‘referent,’ if you will, is itself the autopoiesis of the pack structure that determines those relationships. (Wolfe *Animal Rites 85*)

Relationships are broader referents for specific significations, as are relational structures for their individual incarnations; it is these contextual frameworks that give specific instances their meaning. Deleuze and Guattari, like Haraway, continually emphasize the importance of relationship over identification. They describe “becoming” as

always of a different order than filiation. It concerns alliance. If evolution includes any veritable becomings, it is in the domain of *symbioses* that bring into play beings of totally different scales and kingdoms, with no possible filiation. (in Atterton 88)

Interestingly, however, they never devote any serious consideration to interspecies relationships, or (aside from a brief derisive remark about “liking dogs or cats”) nonhuman animals at all. Although “filiation,” here akin to anthropomorphism, is possible in alliances with individuals of other species—and perhaps this is a reason for their exclusion from serious analysis here—the symbioses of humans and domestic animals that arise from “bringing into play beings of totally different scales and kingdoms” seem to have a huge amount of potential for explicating “becomings.”<sup>17</sup> I think that this lack of consideration is mainly due to some misunderstandings or oversimplifications about the potential of interspecies interactions.

When Deleuze and Guattari dismiss and scoff at “my” pet, “my” dog, for example, it seems that they only think of “my” in relation with nonhuman animals as connoting physical *possession*, rather than, for instance, as analogous to “my” friend, “my” mother, etc. The possessive pronoun here denotes a *relationship*, a making-connected rather than a possessing, substitution, or any other single-direction expression of individual selfhood. Analogously, their notions about the training relationship—and these very possibly result from lack of direct knowledge or practice—are problematic. Though Deleuze and Guattari’s explicit ideas of domestication and training center around power and domination, the non-specific conceptual processes they describe provide strikingly accurate descriptions of the (theoretical ideal of) training process. Brian Massumi interprets Deleuze and Guattari’s “becoming-animal,” in a way that describes well many prolonged inter-species interactions. He writes that

the body-in-becoming does not simply react to a set of constraints. Instead, it develops a new sensitivity to them, one subtle enough to convert them into opportunities—and to translate the body into an autonomous zone effectively enveloping infinite degrees of freedom. The body is abstracted, not in the sense that it is made to coincide with a general idea, but in a way that makes it a singularity...Becoming-other is the counteractualization of necessity. (102)

This passage provides what many would consider an accurate abstracted description of the communicative relationship involved in horseback riding and training—in fact, it could easily complement some of the images in classic dressage manuals. The goal of (equestrian) communications in these contexts is the expansion of existing vocabularies and creation of new possibilities. It is indeed the case that “the place of invention is a space of transformational encounter, a dynamic in-between” (Massumi 106).

Massumi earlier describes “thought-in-becoming” as “the process whereby the body regains the ‘spontaneity’ characteristic of the undomesticated body, becoming an untrained animal again, or a child, or anything else it chooses. But always with a

difference” (100). This is also an excellent description of upper-level dressage, in which various physically-strenuous movements that some horses do “in nature” (generally by stallions courting mares) are displayed—but are, in this context, directed—the seeming ‘spontaneity’ now purposeful and meant outside of the “natural” context; in other words, ‘with a difference.’<sup>18</sup> In the end, though their ideas about the training relationship are problematic when approached specifically and explicitly, Deleuze and Guattari end up describing the ideals of training quite accurately in their concept of “becoming.”

Hearne’s convictions about domestication and, especially, training, are almost diametrically opposed to those of Deleuze and Guattari. She repeatedly compares the complexity and potential of horseback riding to that of poetry, arguing against oversimplified and retroactive analyses of apparent power relations. To use nonhuman animals—specifically or figuratively—solely as examples of coercion and repressive power dynamics (even to the extent that these species become themselves symbols of these oppressive power relations) in theoretical analyses and critiques presupposes the accuracy and validity of these depictions as well as implies that this characterization is ultimately the most valuable to take away from direct inter-species interactions. Nonhuman animals—even if the image is of a triumphant “free” animal who has somehow thrown off his or her chains—again become symbols, emptied of their own potential for power and meaning, their individual and collective agency, and subsumed into the symbolic (human) world of meaning. Hearne, and many others who work or interact directly with nonhuman animals over prolonged amounts of time, have interpreted

the visions that have led to genuine horsemanship [as] visions that come from artistic rather than psychological thinking...No description of technique, of the rider-as-subject, horse-as-object sort, however minute its details, can account for the myriad moments of transformation that are daily

fare in the good trainer's world. Such moments are among the things that move trainers to pitying exasperation from semi-Marxist descriptions of all training and discipline as coercion for the purposes of the state, which in some cases is often represented by the trainer's 'ego'...this leads some writers who know nothing to speak of about horses to use horse training...as an example of coercion. (Hearne 122-123)

Moreover, such a coercion-based envisioning of nonhuman animals and power refers, as does the majority of animal rights theory, to animals as if they were passive and powerless, with no acknowledgement of their own agency, power, and ability to create meaning.

As Grandin writes in *Animals in Translation*: "real riding is a lot like ballroom dancing or maybe figure skating in pairs. It's a relationship" (5). Some kinds of basic training activities can indeed be learned through fear, but the progressive developments in understanding that sustain higher levels of performance cannot. This kind of training is rarely about compulsion and control—if it is, as trainers since Xenophon (427-355 B.C) have cautioned, it will also be ultimately unsuccessful.<sup>19</sup> In order for communication to be effective, the idea of absolute or one-way power relations must be abandoned; as Hearne remarks,

one must get past the notion of the bridle as an instrument of the kind of subjection that, in my experience, exists only in the fantasy lives of people who have bizarre notions about the nature of power. Abandoning such notions is essential to conversing with horses, and I think that the fear of abandoning fantasies of power, which may also be a fear of genuine power, is part of the fear of horses (114)

The fear of horses and of power is the fear of the other and of the responsibilities and risks that must be taken in genuine relationships with others. The term "training," in the sense in which it is employed by Hearne and Podhajsky, among others, does not describe a behaviorist-influenced process of physical and/or mental coercion. Hearne describes training as the learning of a "coherent language and grammar" through which to develop each partner's capacity to make sense of the elements shared by their phenomenological

spaces or worlds. Her training methods differ significantly from behaviorist conditioning in that they acknowledge the active and situated nature of all participants.

The training process—ideally—is in many way analogous to that of teaching in a university classroom. The main difference between the conditions of training and the classroom is the classroom itself; the analogy would probably more apt in, for instance, a dance class, a “hands-on” situation where learning is embodied—since memory writes knowledge into bodies as well as minds. In both the classroom and formal training session, the particular context of learning or discourse is overtly determined by one of the actors (the teacher/ trainer); neither situation is or pretends to be a democracy, since it is necessary to assume some kind of authority or legitimacy in order to teach.

Acknowledgment of this necessity of imposing oneself, to some extent, on others, determines the conceptual framework in which conclusions emerge. Instructors or trainers assume such power of authority *provisionally*, on a pre-established basis of trust (in their intentions, which requires a prior relationship, either or both personal or figural, with the position itself). It is only once this context is in place that effective training—again, in the sense in which Hearne and Podhajsky—who continually refers to “developing the horse’s understanding”—can begin. Effective training is the process of establishing a set of terms, a grammar, a set of rules or a system that remains operative and valid beyond the particular context of its establishment and becomes the grounding for future communications. It results (ideally) in the ability of participants to have a coherent and cogent conversation, in which a reciprocal flow of intended expression and response is established. Both—or all—participants are effectively “trained” or taught in this process.

\*\*\*\*\*

We begin our attempt to engage and regain Elly Mae's attention by going back to the earliest conversation, our meetings in the pasture. We come to her persistently, with treats and sometimes a rope, which we put around her neck and then often remove with no further advances, a kind of catch-and-release that she tolerates increasingly willingly—or perhaps only resignedly. She lets us groom her without resistance but still sidesteps and pins her ears back when we tack her up. We threaten her back when she threatens to kick or bite, and she begins to respect the rules we establish. Riding itself has become more basic, walking and trotting and moving slowly, making sure she is comfortable and even on the edge of boredom before asking for new movements. Elly Mae may agree to try to revise the previous conclusions to which she has come, but she, as with many others, may not.

### The Response

In “And Say the Animal Responded?” Derrida remarks on Lacan's strict separation of gregariousness and sociality (attributed to the animal and the human successively) and his denial of *response* to the animal. The result of such denial is that

not only is the animal held within the imaginary and unable to accede to the symbolic, to the unconscious, and to language...but the description of its semiotic power remains determined, in the *Discours de Rome* (“The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis,” 1953), in the most traditionally dogmatic manner, fixed within Cartesian fixity, within the presupposition of a code that only permits *reactions* to stimuli and not *responses* to questions. I refer to the ‘semiotic’ system and not to ‘language,’ for Lacan also refuses the animal language, recognizing in its case only a ‘code,’ the ‘fixity of coding,’ or a ‘system of signaling.’ These are other ways of naming what, within a cognitivist problematic of the animal that often repeats the most worn-out truisms of metaphysics even as it appears to resist them, is called the ‘prewired response’ [*réponse précâblée*] or ‘prewired behavior.’ (Derrida, in Wolfe, *Zoontologies* 124)

In other words, the animal is not allowed to refer to pluralized, vocal, living beings rather than a singular symbolic or representational figure. One of the main projects of this thesis

is to theorize possibilities for getting from “the animal” (a symbolic, historically-determined figure) to—individual, contingent, active, and significantly other—animals, who are, like Man and men, the Human and human, quite different. As long as it—and this “it” (as indicated in midway through the first chapter) is also indicative of an abstracted emblematic status—remains a figure, “the animal” will remain imaginary, passive, and inert. Lacan “keeps ‘the animal’ prisoner within the specularly of the imaginary” (Derrida, in Wolfe *Zoontologies* 130), by essentially “abandoning” “the oppositional distinction between imaginary and symbolic that forms the very axiomatics of the discourse on the animal” (ibid 134).

Critiquing Lacan’s express contrast of the reaction and the animal to the response and the human (in text cited above), Derrida remarks that

it is difficult to reserve, as Lacan does, the differentiability of signs for human language only, as opposed to animal coding. What he attributes to signs that, ‘in a language’ understood as belonging to the human order, ‘take on their value from their relations to each other’ and so on, and not just from the ‘fixed correlation’ between signs and reality, can and must be accorded to any code, animal or human. (in Wolfe *Zoontologies* 126)

Wood, commenting on Derrida’s “The Animal that Therefore I Am,” recognizes that “if I can be called, addressed (accused, requested, ignored) by an animal, it is as if speech-act theory is being given a second life” (in Atterton, 135). Later, responding to Lacan’s insistence that pretending to pretend (being able to erase one’s own trace) stands as the definitive separation between humans and other animals,<sup>20</sup> Derrida points out the difficulty of identifying “an invisible threshold between pretense and pretense of pretense,” at all. This leads him to characterize “the affirmation that refuses the pretense of pretense to the animal [as] that of a simple dogma” (in Wolfe *Zoontologies* 135),<sup>21</sup> and ultimately to situate “disavowal at the heart of all these discourses on the animal” (in

Wolfe, *Zoontologies* 128-29). Derrida locates the subject of the signifier, more specifically, as the place where

the passage from imaginary to symbolic is determined as a passage from animal to human order. It is there that subjectivity, as order of the signifier from the place of the Other, appears as something missed by or lacking in the traditional philosophy of the subject, as a matter of relations between human and animal. That is at least what Lacan alleges at the moment he subtly reintroduces an anthropocentric logic and strongly reinforces the *fixism* of the Cartesian *cogito* as a thesis on the animal-machine in general. (in Wolfe *Zoontologies* 133)

In reference to the “constitution of the subject as human subject to the extent that the latter crosses the frontier of information to gain access to speech,” Derrida quotes Lacan:

For the function of language is not to inform but to evoke.

What I seek in speech is the response of the other. What constitutes me as subject is my question. In order to be recognized by the other, I utter what was only in view of what will be. In order to find him, I call him by a name that he must assume or refuse in order to reply to me. (Lacan, *Écrits* 86, qtd. in Derrida, in Wolfe *Zoontologies* 126-27)

This is exactly the powerful connection between names and personhood that becomes central to Hearne’s conception of bridging the apparent boundaries of significant otherness. She invokes linguistic anthropological research to illustrate “names that really call, language that is genuinely invocative and uncontaminated by writing and thus by the concept of names as labels rather than genuine invocations” (Hearne 170). This idea of words as specific invocations rather than generalized abstractions or concepts (written symbols) indicates the power of personhood latent in language. Hearne interprets the biblical allegory of the original human-animal communication in this light.

Adam gave names to all the creatures, and they all responded to their names without objection, since in this dominion to command and to recognize were one action. There was no gap between the ability to command and the full acknowledgment of the personhood of being so commanded. (47).

This use of names in an evocative sense, as ways of calling-to or calling-forth rather than static labeling devices, puts analysis in a space where physical movement or nonverbal languages are especially significant. Superficially, Adam may be assigning phonetic symbols to the creatures, but he *calls them by name* because they recognize and

acknowledge this naming. The system of communication by which recognition and response operated encompasses to some extent all these biblical creatures (who perhaps already had their own personal scent, touch, etc. signatures by which to recognize and be acknowledged by the other nonhuman creatures around them). This is a process of communication and relationship as much as one of assignation, and as such misrecognition and interpellation do remain significant possibilities.

Commenting on Derrida's "The Animal that Therefore I Am," David Wood makes an important and relevant distinction between names and categories as these apply to other species.

The violence lodged in the word animal is not the product of naming. We do not *name* the creatures of the world 'animal' or 'the animal.' Rather 'animal' is a category, one of the same order as 'man.' To call it a category rather than a name is important. Categories are gross ways in which we (humans) carve up the world. Violence arises at two levels. First, these categorical distinctions (man/animal, man/woman) are affirmations of the very kinds of distinctions that would block the extension of consideration (for example, from man to animal). For it is no accident that these categorical distinctions are actually wielded by only one of each pair...Second, these categories *can* be deployed nominally and descriptively so that such violence can be applied to this or that particular animal. (in Atterton, 133)

Categories are static oppositional units of analysis; names are potentially active ways of relating. If "human" is re-inscribed within the category "animal," rather than put into opposition with it, the categories become no longer relevant and a whole range of possibilities for relationships open in this formerly blocked space.

Derrida takes a different tactic in disintegrating the human-animal opposition; instead of redeeming "the animal," he questions the basis of language and subjectivity on which it is based, regardless of whether referring to humans or other animals.

It is less a matter of asking whether one has the right to refuse the animal such and such a power (speech, reason, experience of death, mourning, culture, institution, technics, clothing, lie, pretense of pretense, covering of tracks, gift, laughter, tears, respect, and so on—the list is necessarily without limit, and the most powerful philosophical tradition within which we live has refused the 'animal' all those things) than of asking whether what calls itself human has the right to rigorously attribute to man, which means therefore to attribute to himself, what he refuses the animal, and whether he can ever possess the *pure, rigorous, indivisible* concept, as such, of that attribution.

Thus, were we even to suppose—something I am not ready to concede—that the ‘animal’ were incapable of covering its tracks, by what right could one concede that power to the human, to the ‘subject of the signifier?’ (Derrida, in Wolfe *Zoontologies* 137-38)

If certain behaviors and knowledges with regard to animals can never be “proven” (especially under the stigmatizing specter of anthropomorphization), it is for the same reason (the impossibility of ever wholly knowing others or ourselves), that we can not “prove” these things for humans. Hearne, more cryptically and in a different context, comes to much the same conclusion, remarking that “the investigation of animal consciousness, like the investigation of human consciousness, is centrally an investigation of language, and this ought to remind us of what an investigation of language is” (74).

In “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” Derrida advocates expanding the range of significations rather than tailoring their analysis to fit specifically nonhuman others. He remarks that

it would not be a matter of ‘giving speech back’ to animals...but perhaps of acceding to a thinking, however fabulous and chimerical it might be, that thinks the absence of the name and of the word otherwise, as something other than a privation. (in Atterton 126)

This thinking will implicate beings other than humans, and it will also call into question the nature of thinking and discourse themselves.

### **Cats and the Limits of Knowledge**

Power and knowledge flow through points of contact, whether reins or books. Haraway remarks that “bodies as objects of knowledge are material-semiotic generative nodes. Their boundaries materialize in social interaction among humans and non-humans” (*Reader* 68). Bodies traverse and respond to diverse, though already overlapping, phenomenological worlds, and therefore generate many kinds of knowledge,

not all of them directly communicable. Vicki Hearne quotes a letter she received from Stanley Cavell—one of her most significant philosophical influences—in *Adam's Task*:

It is something about horses...that sooner makes us wonder what we conceive knowledge to be...There is something specific about our unwillingness to let our knowledge come to an end...The unwillingness...is to make room for their capacity to feel our presence incomparably beyond our ability to feel theirs...

The horse, as it stands, is a rebuke to our unreadiness to be understood, our will to remain obscure...Our stand, our stance, is of denial...We feel our refusals are unrevealed because we keep, we think, our fences invisible. But the horse takes cognizance of them, who does not care about invisibility.<sup>7</sup>

The horse does not care about invisibility, at least not in the way that we do from somewhere around the age of ten, which is when...we create a persona, a social self, a mask through which the Other and I must mediate ourselves in order to talk, most of the time. The oddly triumphant appeals to the Clever Hans fallacy in some denials of horse consciousness have so far been the usual response of science and philosophy...The capacity to know our presence in this way has been, oddly, also the grounds for a denial of equine intelligence. (115-16)

Commenting on this same letter, Wolfe remarks that “as Cavell’s early work suggests, the traditional humanist subject finds this prospect of the animal other’s knowing us in ways *we* cannot know and master *simply unnerving*” (*Animal Rites* 4). He paraphrases Cavell’s ultimate question as “are *we* ready...to ‘understand’ the animal—‘underknow’ her and thereby stand ‘under,’ not above her—by surrendering the dream of mastery troped as vision? Can *we* handle the skeptical terror of ‘letting our knowledge come to an end?’” (ibid 5).<sup>22</sup> Interactions and understanding between various significantly different others necessitate the kind of initial leap of faith or conditional extension of trust that forms the basis of *all* relationships with others. Hearne explains that

with horses as with dogs, the handler must learn to believe, to ‘read’ a language s/he hasn’t sufficient neurological apparatus to test or judge, because the handler must become comprehensible to the horse, and to be understood is to be open to understanding, much more than it is to shared mental phenomena. It is as odd as Wittgenstein suggested it is to suppose that intersubjectivity depends on shared mental phenomena...since we are primarily talking to someone, which pretty much guarantees little area of phenomenological overlap. (107)

Intersubjective experience rests upon incomplete knowledge. Though this irresolute character—generally missing from the scientific method—is part of the instability of experience, it also comprises its flexibility and the condition of its existence.

A remarkable resonance between Hearne and Derrida occurs on the subject of “thinking with cats” (to borrow the title of Wood’s essay in *Animal Philosophy*). Cats—and perhaps this is somehow connected with the apparent awareness of situated selfhood characteristic of so many of them—seem to be especially adept reminders of particular and permanently unknowable otherness. Remarking on Kipling’s allegories of domestication, Hearne notes that “the Cat refused the tale the humans wanted to tell of him,” and that

cats, unlike horses and dogs, are more likely...to force the dimmest of us temporarily at least to abandon our epistemological heavy-handedness...When a cat looks at us, there is always in the looking the reminder that a cat can look at me or at a king and in both cases equally from the chosen poise of *that* particular angle of grace and speculation...They are saying that *to us*. They take infinite trouble that we should be aware of their way of looking. (240-41)

These sentiments echo the experience of being watched by his cat that Derrida describes in “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” where

naked before a cat that looks at you without moving, just to see...the single, incomparable and original experience of the impropriety that would come from appearing in truth naked, in front of the insistent gaze of the animal, a benevolent or pitiless gaze, surprised or cognizant. The gaze of a seer, visionary, or extra-lucid blind person. (in Atterton 113)

The questions generated by the look of the cat that frame Derrida’s essay reaffirm the significance of those posed by Hearne in *Adam’s Task*. She quotes from John L’Heureux’s poem ‘The Thing About Cats,’ which “closes with the question; ‘A cat is not a conscience; I’m not/ saying that./ What I’m saying is/ why are they looking?’” Hearne comes to the realization that this “was the question I had been looking for, or a real question and a real noticing of the fact that our cats are looking at us” (Hearne 230-31).<sup>23</sup> Derrida also notices this gaze, and follows it into his discussion of otherness and difference.

These questions, and the multidirectional examination they imply, are essential to the broader “question of the animal.” The individual components of this question need,

even if only for a more comprehensive analysis, to be realized in their (own mode of) non-figural specificity, but the question as a whole, as a question and in its intrinsic plurality, cannot be addressed as solely specific and physical. This is the difference between questions to and of animals and of The Animal. Both call for a broader response and perspective in their address. And I do mean 'call for' literally.

<sup>1</sup> *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding*, rev. ed. Trans. Robert Paolucci, forward by J.Z. Young (Boston: Shambala Press, 1992) 26, qtd. in Wolfe *Animal Rites* 91.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted most famously in Upton Sinclair's classic *The Jungle* (1906).

<sup>3</sup> The stories and beliefs of many indigenous peoples, on the other hand, often include talking animals. For one example, see Robin Ridington's collection *Little Bit Know Something: Stories in a Language of Anthropology* [Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1990]. Currently the dominant Western approach does seem to be changing this tendency, with ethological and sociobiological research on nonhuman animal communication continually expanding and gaining momentum.

<sup>4</sup> This is due to different senses of time, memory, sensual and phenomenological differences, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Elly May is an eight-year-old pinto mare (possibly a Saddlebred) who has been a broodmare most of her life.

<sup>6</sup> For example, that described at length in Haraway's "Modest Witness."

<sup>7</sup> Increased awareness of physical gestures, postures, and other nonverbal means of communication is necessary in conversations with other species. In a piece on Cesar Millan, host of "Dog Whisperer" on the National Geographic television channel, Karen Bradley, a 'movement expert' (Laban Movement Analysis) who heads the graduate dance program at the University of Maryland, explains that "combinations of posture and gesture are called phrasing, and the great communicators are those who match their phrasing with their communicative intentions. To me, this resonates with descriptions of writers and poets and relations between style and substance or form and content. [from Malcolm Gladwell's "What the Dog Saw" in *The New Yorker*, May 22, 2006 p.53].

<sup>8</sup> Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (Trans. Sheila Faria. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994) contains an illuminating section ("The Animal: Territory and Metamorphoses") which expands upon this idea.

<sup>9</sup> The canter is a natural gait with a rhythm of three beats. The lead is determined by which foreleg reaches further forward (acting as the third beat). On a circle, the inside foreleg should be ahead.

<sup>10</sup> Chomsky (1980), Sebeok (1986).

<sup>11</sup> Hearne is quoted extensively by Noske (158) and Wolfe on this subject.

<sup>12</sup> For pictures and description of Grandin's squeeze machine see *Thinking in Pictures* p.64-65 and *Animals in Translation* p.114-17

<sup>13</sup> "The images I visualize are always specific" (*Pictures* 28).

<sup>14</sup> Further, Noske acknowledges that

my motivation for writing [her book] hinges first of all on my own emotional involvement with animals. In my childhood, relations with a number of animal individuals played a decisive role. Contrary to current notions about humans and animals, I never once felt myself to be a superior human subject dealing with an inferior and passive animal object: my experiences with animals were of a personal inter-subjective nature and seem strangely incompatible with the ideas about humans and animals that were later conveyed to me...In addition to a human-animal relationship I had always been conscious that there existed an animal-human relationship between us as well. (Introduction viii)

<sup>15</sup> It is in language...that the self, the I, arises as the social singularity defined by the operational

---

intersection in the human body of the recursive linguistic distinctions in which it is distinguished...in the network of linguistic interactions in which we move, we maintain an ongoing descriptive recursion that we call the 'I'...[this account allows] us to address the specificity of our similarities and differences with other creatures—especially those creatures who are enough like us to complicate and challenge our discourses of subjectivity—but without getting caught in the blind alleys of 'intention' or 'consciousness' (or what amounts to the same thing on methodological terrain in the sciences, 'anthropomorphism') that have plagued attempts to understand in what specific sense we share a world with nonhuman animals. (Maturana and Varela, *Tree* 231, qtd. in Wolfe *Animal Rites* 87)

“Would animals perhaps also have an unnamed pronoun for ‘I’?” (Noske 150).

<sup>16</sup> In Fred R. Myers, *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> These symbioses are notably explored by Donna Haraway in *The Companion Species Manifesto* and “Cyborgs to Companion Species: Reconfiguring Kinship in Technoscience” (reprinted in *Reader*, chapter 9).

<sup>18</sup> See Podhajsky—or many other upper-level dressage training manuals—for more information.

<sup>19</sup> See (especially) Hearne, 150-151.

<sup>20</sup> I always think of one of Hearne’s anecdotes about training a young dog to retrieve when I read about this denial of pretense of pretense to nonhuman animals. One time that Hearne throws the dumbbell (the training aid she has always used with this dog), she runs over to retrieve it, but instead jumps on a stick near the dumbbell. As Hearne interprets this, the dog does not imagine that she (Hearne) does not know the difference, but is pretending that she (the dog) thought she meant her to retrieve the stick.

<sup>21</sup> See Wolfe, 137.

<sup>22</sup> Derrida’s play on words in the title of “The Animal That Therefore I Am (more to follow)” [“L’Animal que donc je suis (à suivre)”] is (indirectly) given a interpersonal communicative interpretation by Hearne, who writes that “we can follow, understand, only things and people we can command, and we can command only whom and what we can follow” (76). David Wills, the translator, explains the title as “an obvious play on Descartes’s definition of consciousness (of the thinking animal as human), it also takes advantage of the shared first-person singular present form of *être* (to be) and *suivre* (to follow) in order to suggest a displacement of that priority, also reading as ‘the animal that therefore I follow after’” (in Atterton 113).

<sup>23</sup> It is emphatically *not* the human who gazes at the cat, as with information gathered in ethological research.

## Conclusion

Nonhuman animals and the figure of the animal can play vital roles in theorizing and living the disintegration of the rational and autonomous humanist subject. The importance of “the question of the animal” for discourses of otherness and alterity cannot be overestimated. I agree with Stanley Cavell that

our stance toward the animal is an index for how we stand in a field of otherness and difference generally, and in some ways it is the most reliable index, the ‘hardest case’ of our readiness to be vulnerable to other knowledges in our embodiment of our own, an embodiment that arrives at the site of the other before we do. (in Wolfe 5)<sup>1</sup>

Incorporating knowledge from various intersubjective practices into past and current animal stories is a necessary part of their responsible revision. Communication, opening oneself to others *as others*, rather than as opposites, images or other reflections of the self, constitutes a kind of

desistence before the law, in the face of necessity, passivity beyond passivity, vulnerability, these are revelations beyond humanity, animality, divinity, and responsibility. In the name of language, well beyond language, beyond reading and writing, beyond words. In the depths of words is something beyond words. In the depths of humanity, in the face of an animal, is the earth beyond any world- our world, if you wish, never only ours. (Ross, in Atterton 191)<sup>2</sup>

Because Levinas saw the countenance or face as the initial site of the imperative to ethical response, he did not fully grant nonhuman animals faces. Yet recognition, response, and connection—the relationships which make present the self—are evident across species borders. Establishing embodied “interfaces” with various and differently-situated others reveals presence in ways that make particularly explicit and intense the means of this revelation.

The kind of conversations and relationships that will disrupt entrenched species narratives are individual, inimitable, and aligned with Deleuze and Guattari’s “becoming,” in which identification is overruled by multiplicitous intersubjective

discourse. The conversation on otherness must include the voice of the other—here, the presence of nonhuman animals—rather than only phantasms, traces, the figure of the animal, “animals of the mind,” “humanized animals,” or any of the other human constructions of animality or otherness which characterize the discourse. Interspecies conversations, which necessarily reach toward different phenomenological subjectivities and remain tied to embodied locations and particular perspectives, are one way to construct new knowledges and develop alternative stories. Haraway states that

knowledge is *always* an engaged material practice and *never* a disembodied set of ideas. Knowledge is embedded in projects; knowledge is always *for*, in many senses, some things and not others, and knowers are always formed by their projects, just as they shape what they can know. Such shapings never occur in some unearthly realm; they are always about the material and meaningful interactions of located humans and nonhumans—machines, organisms, people, land, institutions, money, and many other things. Because scientific knowledge is not ‘transcendent,’ it can make solid claims about material beings that are neither reducible to opinion nor exempt from interpretation. Those solid claims and material beings are *irreducibly* engaged in cultural practice and practical culture; i.e., in the traffic in meanings and bodies. (*Reader* 200)

This analysis indicates the necessity of moving from theory to practice, envisioning others through their enactments rather than through pre-constructed conceptual frameworks. These discursive constructions, like bodies, are material, active, and “radically historically specific... [with] a different kind of specificity and effectivity; and so they invite a different kind of engagement and intervention (*Haraway, Reader* 67). The dogs or others that remain so “compellingly present” must—and this is an ethical necessity in the sense of Levinas’ obligations to others—be addressed by reason of that presence (*Hearne* 44). The implacable gaze of Derrida's cat, which cannot be denied (erased) or fully met, provides a sense of the specificity of personhood and address involved.<sup>3</sup> This sense of embodied specificity or situated-ness is missing in much theory—and this absence is especially prominent with regard to the specific plurality of nonhuman animals.

### Reinscribing the Human in the Animal

Recalling and examining that which is disavowed or foreclosed in established narratives—even implicitly by particular modes of expression—has great potential for disrupting, rethinking and revising established stories and cultural narratives. Disavowal of animality has long been a basis of (Western) human identity. The first step to ethically re-considering other species is acknowledging the contingency, situatedness, and fragility of one's own constituted species identity. Fully addressing “the question of the animal,” entails including the human in that category as well (humans are animals before they—“we”—are human) and hence re-imagining how one addresses living creatures at all.

Referencing Derrida's “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” Wolfe concludes that

the only way out is through, the only way to ‘before’ is ‘to come,’ and the only way to the ‘there’ in which the animals reside is to find them ‘here,’ in us and of us, as part of a plurality for which perhaps even ‘the animals, in the plural, is far too lame a word. (*Animal Rites* 207)

Expanding the subject effectively dissolves it, or at least magnifies the chinks in its armor enough to reveal them as permeable by a wide range of significations and partial knowledges. In his critique of Levinas, Wolfe remarks that “it is this incalculability—this multiplicity, if you like—that is meant to be marked and kept permanently open by Derrida's insistence not just on the question of the animal, but on the *animals*, in the plural” (ibid 198).<sup>4</sup> Wolfe advocates an (ethical) approach that takes

nonhuman animals not as the other-than-human but as the *infrahuman*, not as the primitive and pure other...but as part of us, *of us*—and nowhere more forcefully than when reason, ‘theory,’ reveals ‘us’ to be very different creatures from who we thought ‘we’ were. (*Animal Rites* 17)

And perhaps nowhere has theory revealed “us” so much as it has in language.

### Evocative Language

Language is the pivotal point in many debates on “animal consciousness” and

human uniqueness. Hearne recounts that

most of the questions I encountered [about philosophy and training and how to talk about nonhuman animals in these contexts] quickly became questions about language, questions that located the boundaries of language in regions often understood to be remote from language. (16)

The broader system of meta-communication that underlies the training/teaching process allows the development of syntax, grammar, and particular significations. For all animals,

it is the nonlinguistic that matters just as much as the capabilities of the higher animals—the silence, the stare, the gesture, the reflex. It is also the inhumanity of language, the arts, and social forms as such, their evolution as autopoietic systems that elude control of their supposed ‘creators.’ (Mitchell, in Wolfe *Animal Rites* xiii)

The kind of conversations that can happen among “significantly-different” others may require the use of senses and ways of knowing with which humans are generally unfamiliar. Acknowledging the incalculability and complexity of nonverbal communications—as well as that of symbolic language—is essential for establishing spaces where these can be legitimated and brought into discussion.

Instead of only *invoking* animals (with various symbolic or figurative stories) in discourse, “we” must also *evoke*—actively call forth—responses from them. Establishing common grounds of access (by which I mean ways of communicating, reaching—at least partially—across phenomenological divides) is participatory and even political.

Subjecthood is inextricably tied to language, and the incalculable excess of language opens a space for significant multiplicity to emerge. Expanding on Derrida’s “trace beyond the human,” and the consequences of the “inhumanity of language,” Foucault relates that

for the entire modern *episteme*- that which was formed toward the end of the eighteenth century and still serves as the positive ground of our knowledge, that which constituted man’s particular mode of being and the possibility of knowing him empirically- that entire *episteme* was bound up with the disappearance of Discourse and its featureless reign, with the shift of language toward objectivity, and with its reappearance in multiple form. If this same language is now emerging with greater and greater insistence in a unity that we ought to think but cannot as yet do so, is this not the sign that the whole of this configuration is about to topple, and that man is in the process of perishing as the being of language continues to shine ever brighter upon our horizon? Since man

was constituted at a time when language was doomed to dispersion, will he not be dispersed when language regains its unity? And if that were true, would it not be an error- a profound error, since it could hide from us what should now be thought- to interpret our actual experience as an application of the forms of language to the human order? Ought we not to admit that, since language is here once more, man will return to that serene non-existence in which he was formerly maintained by the imperious unity of Discourse? Man had been a figure occurring between two modes of language; or, rather, he was constituted only when language, having been situated within representation and, as it were, dissolved in it, freed itself from that situation at the cost of its own fragmentation: man composed his own figure in the interstices of that fragmented language. Of course, these are not affirmations; they are at most questions to which it is not possible to reply; they must be left in suspense, where they pose themselves, only with the knowledge that the possibility of posing them may well open the way to a future thought. (in Badmington *Posthumanism* 28)

The humanist subject deconstructs itself from within, through the very language by which it characterizes and legitimizes itself. The possibility of posing these questions is, I think, substantially aided and opened by taking seriously “the question of the animal”—and this includes nonhuman animals themselves at least as much as the figure of the animal.

The human system of signification upsets and refers beyond itself, implicating its partly ineffable conditions of existence. Derrida asks,

What is Lacan doing when he holds that ‘the signifier requires another locus—the locus of the Other, the Other witness, the witness Other than any of the partners?’ In order to break with the image and with the likeness of a fellow must not this beyond of partnership—thus beyond the specular or imaginary duel—be at least situated in a place of alterity that is radical enough to break with every identification of an image of self, with every fellow living creature, and so with every fraternity or human proximity, with all humanity? Must not his place of the Other be ahuman? If this is indeed the case, then the ahuman, or at least the figure of some—in a word—*divinanimality*, even if it were to be felt through the human, would be the quasi-transcendental referent, the excluded, foreclosed, disavowed, tamed, and sacrificed foundation of what it founds, namely, the symbolic order, the human order, law, and justice. (in Wolfe *Zoontologies* 134)

This ‘divinanimality,’ the ahuman place of true Otherness and sacrificed foundation of the human order and law, stands in the same relation to the nonhuman as to the human.

The workings of the system of symbolic order and language<sup>5</sup> are *felt*, tied inextricably to physical articulation. Haraway states that

language is the effect of articulation, and so are bodies... The articulata are cobbled together. It is the condition of being articulate... Nature may be speechless, without language, in the human sense; but nature is highly articulate. Discourse is only one process of articulation. An articulated world has an undecidable number of modes and sites where connections can be made. The surfaces of this kind of world are not frictionless curved planes. Unlike things can be joined—and like things broken apart—and vice versa... To articulate is to signify. (*Reader* 105-106)

Articulations in this sense are embodied movements, ordering space into significations. Modes of articulation and signification span across species and so, therefore, must sites of connection. Multiplicity is one condition of being articulate, and *relationships*, communications, are a necessary part of this multiplicity.

### **Relationships**

Haraway states that “humans, other organisms, artifacts, and technologies are all players, a requirement of an aliberal approach. The relationship is the smallest possible unity of analysis” (*Reader* 315). As a result, “subjects and objects (and kinds, genres, genders) are the products of their own relating,” and

relationships—co-constitutive relationships in which none of the partners pre-exist the relating, and the relating is never done once and for all. Historical specificity and contingent mutability rule all the way down, into nature and culture, into naturecultures...Dogs might be better guides to what Karen Barad (1995) calls intra-action than Niels Bohr’s troubling quantum phenomena at the scale of wave forms and elementary particles. Inter-action implies that already-existing actors get together and act. Intra-action implies something...much less determinate, ontologically speaking. (*Reader* 298, 315)

The subject unto itself and the subject-object boundaries as parameters of analysis have been undermined as the focal point of theoretical analysis.<sup>6</sup> Using multiplicitous relationships as units of analysis prevents many of the problems related with the humanist subject, but it is very difficult to be specific in analyses with this dispersed focal point and hence to put theory into active practice. The resulting problems are especially troublesome with regard to terminology (as with “becoming animal”). Using the multiple modes of specific conversations as units of study might be advantageous—especially when discourse involves such uncertain and significantly “other” partners as nonhuman animals. Otherness is expressed through specific manifestations in processes of relational

signification and therefore begins with multiplicity and situated knowledges rather than symbolic categorical identities.

An appropriate figure for such study might be theorist Trinh Minh-ha's term "inappropriate/d others," which Haraway explains as implying

critical, deconstructive relationality, in a diffracting rather than reflecting (ratio)nality—as the means of making potent connection that exceeds domination. To be inappropriate/d is not to fit into the *taxon*, to be dislocated from the available maps specifying kinds of actors and kinds of narratives, not to be originally fixed by difference. To be inappropriate/d is to be neither modern nor postmodern, but to insist on the *amodern*...another geometry and optics for considering the relations of difference among people and among humans, other organisms, and machines than hierarchical domination, incorporation of parts into wholes, paternalistic and colonialist protection, symbiotic fusion, antagonistic opposition, or instrumental production from resource. (in *Reader* 69-70)

This relation-based analysis might follow what Haraway calls a "diffraction pattern," which "does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the *effects* of difference appear" (ibid 70). Pictures are formed in encounters, in the spaces between agents, in a kind of lithographic mapping of evocative interaction. This approach would examine sites of effect and manifestation—not just phenomenological but mediated, translated and partially communicable through interfaces with others—without assuming essential characteristics or transcendental subjectivity.<sup>7</sup>

### **What might this story look like?**

Others do often seem unreachably distant, and this makes relationships difficult. This is especially the case when categories and reified lines of imagined difference and separation are the focus of work with others. When unmediated contact, interaction, and communication with various others becomes part of everyday life, categories are traversed and blurred. Re-envisioning and *acting* relationships with nonhuman others is essential for genuine inquiry into, rather than mythical mapping of, "the question of the animal." Listening and enacting response necessarily accompanies analysis in these

relationships. Allowing these interactions to be meaningful requires opening the framework of signification.

Re-embedding language in its material, embodied base of signification is analogous to re-inscribing “the human” in “the animal.” Language

is traced by the material contingency of its enunciation in and through the body, in its ‘involuntary’ kinesic and paralinguistic significations that speak in and through us in ways that the humanist subject of ‘intention’ and ‘reflection’ cannot master, ways that link us to a larger repertoire and history of signification not specifically human and yet intimately so. (Wolfe, *Animal Rites* 86-87)

The particulars of embodiment are significantly other; the cat’s eye is not shaped like that of the human. Though the cat does not have the same gaze as the human, her gaze—as Derrida knows—does indeed implicate the human at whom she is staring.

Acknowledging that “we” will never be able to see with cat’s eyes but recognizing that

all eyes, including our own organic ones, are active perceptual systems, building in translations and specific ways of seeing, that is, ways of life” (or worlds) is an essential part of establishing this relationship. (Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* 190)

‘Seeing’ that the range of ‘active perceptual systems’ to be translated span far beyond the visual, that embodied knowledges involve more modes of perception than those on which humans generally rely is essential for expanding and deepening the paradigms of thought.<sup>8</sup> Relationships, for instance, might be imagined as the exterior reverberations produced by bodies, as in the sonic world-building systems of bats, where focal spaces are echologically mapped.<sup>9</sup>

Images, carried by signs, inform and shape practices. Sally Swift’s Centered Riding® techniques rely heavily on specific visualizations to transform physical practices. These kinds of imaginings rely on the direct link between imagination and physical application. Hearne remarks that

our skepticism is largely entangled in the visible... We learn [how to check validity] through a language whose preferred system is visual. On a horse, though, until you learn not only to read

what your skin tells you but also to be, as it were, kinesthetically legible yourself, you are deprived of that very skepticism that is part of the matrix of thought by means of which we learn to be certain enough, most of the time, for consciousness to proceed with a fair amount of confidence, which includes confiding to ourselves to what we know in order to know it (Hearne 110).

Practices are altered through such imaginings as those by which 'kinesthetic legibility' is achieved (such as Centered Riding practices) and by actively reaching out and connecting with others.

The process of "becoming" that Deleuze and Guattari describe might be interpreted as a becoming-aware or becoming-conscious of the multiplicity and ultimate unknowability of knowledges, forms of knowing, and the routes or rhizomes by which these are reached. In a description of training her dog Belle to track, for instance, Hearne remarks that she is developing 'wind-awareness' (an aid in scent-work), but that

when I say I am developing wind-awareness, I don't mean that my wind-detection powers have improved. But while I'm handling Belle I no longer believe my eyes in the way I normally do. I don't mean that I've gone blind, any more than Belle is blind, but that the general shape of my metaphysics has changed...it is in learning to believe her that I learn a particular kind of doubt of my own eyes, a skepticism that is a true 'chastity of the intellect,' as Santayana has it... This is how there comes to exist for me, in our conversations about tracks, a kind of knowledge not possible in any other way. (98-99)

This kind of awareness is obviously and emphatically not some kind of idealized identification. It is, I think, more of the order of "becoming," a process by which one becomes aware of and accepts or trusts in multiplicitous knowledges that are foreign or never wholly knowable. Knowledge requires relationships (which require trust and acceptance of the finiteness of one's own knowledges) with others, and the more significantly other these others are the farther we (and I emphatically do not just refer to the human "we" here) can go in responding to others, who are both mysteries and equals.

<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Vicki Hearne, reprinted in *Adam's Task* and remarked upon by Wolfe in *Animal Rites*.

<sup>2</sup> In a commentary on Helen Cixous's "Birds, Women and Writing."

<sup>3</sup> In "The Animal that (Therefore) I Am."

<sup>4</sup> Referring to Richard Beardsworth's *Derrida and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1996)

<sup>5</sup> **OED definitions**

**Language:**

a. The whole body of words and of methods of combination of words used by a nation, people, or race; a 'tongue'.

b. *transf.* Applied to methods of expressing the thoughts, feelings, wants, etc., otherwise than by words.

c. *transf.* Applied to the inarticulate sounds used by the lower animals, birds, etc.

d. *Computers.* Any of numerous systems of precisely defined symbols and rules for using them that have been devised for writing programs or representing instructions and data.

2a. In generalized sense: Words and the methods of combining them for the expression of thought.

3a. The form of words in which a person expresses himself; manner or style of expression.

**Communication:**

1. The action of communicating or imparting. Now rare of things material, exc. as the vehicles of information: *e.g.* of a letter, a paper to a society, an article to a magazine, etc.

2. *spec.* The imparting, conveying, or exchange of ideas, knowledge, information, etc. (whether by speech, writing, or signs). Hence (often *pl.*), the science or process of conveying information, esp. by means of electronic or mechanical techniques.

3. *concr.* That which is communicated, or in which facts are communicated; a piece of information; a written paper containing observations.

4. Interchange of speech, conversation, conference. *Obs.*

5a. Converse, personal intercourse.

**Communications theory:** the study and statement of the principles and methods by which information is conveyed, *e.g.* in language

<sup>6</sup> With Nietzsche, various postmodern analyses, Foucault's flows of power, Baumann, etc.

<sup>7</sup> Deleuze's 'event' (in *Difference and Repetition* and *Logique du sens*) a concept complemented by 'becoming animal,' might be useful in imagining potential sites/subjects/focal points along these (nonlinear) lines. Analysis in terms of events avoids trapping itself in the confines of an autonomous subject and also points beyond (even a multiplicitous) subject or subjecthood itself, toward the relations between focal points and events of discourse. The action of multidirectional discourse is preliminarily posited as a necessary incorporation for analysis, as are the ever-shifting relationships implied by this overlapping of reverberations.

<sup>8</sup> Wolfe remarks on this problem briefly (via Hearne), when he refers to "properly decentering the human and the visual from its privileged place as the transcendental signifier to which all other phenomenological differences are referred for meaning" (*Animal Rites* pp.3-4). He also gives her credit for her extraordinary attempts to think about "the relation between 'forms of language' and 'forms of life'" and understand how creatures with vastly different phenomenologies can build something like a common language and thus share a universe" (*ibid* 10).

<sup>9</sup> This reference is to Thomas Nagel's "What is it Like to be a Bat?" essay in *The Philosophical Review* Vol.83, No.4 (October 1974) pp.435-450.

## Bibliography

- Agamben, Giorgio. *The Open: Man and Animal*. Trans. Kevin Attell. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- Atterton, Peter and Matthew Calarco. *Animal Philosophy*. New York and London: Continuum, 2004.
- Badmington, Neil. *Alien Chic: Posthumanism and the Other Within*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.
- *Posthumanism*. New York: Palgrave, 2000.
- Baker, Steve. *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity, and Representation*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993.
- *The Postmodern Animal*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2000.
- Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. Trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972.
- Cavaliere, Paola and Peter Singer, eds. *The Great Ape Project: Equality Beyond Humanity*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.
- Coetzee, J.M. *The Lives of Animals*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Degrazia, David. *Taking Animals Seriously*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton. London: The Athlone Press, 1994.
- and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- *The Logic of Sense*. Trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale. Constantin V. Boundas, ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.
- *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*. Trans. Dana Polan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- Derrida, Jacques. "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)" Trans. David Wills. *Critical Inquiry*: 28, Winter 2002. 369-418.
- "'Eating Well,' or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida." in *Who Comes After the Subject?* Eduardo Cadava Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy, eds. New York and London: Routledge, Chapman, and Hall, Inc., 1991.
- Grandin, Temple. *Animals in Translation*. Scribner, 2005.
- *Thinking in Pictures and Other Reports from My Life with Autism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1996.

- Griffin, Donald. *The Question of Animal Awareness*. New York: Rockefeller University Press, 1976.
- Grossman, Allen, with Mark Halliday. *The Sighted Singer*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.
- Haraway, Donna. *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- *The Haraway Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Routledge: Free Association Books, 1991.
- *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. Routledge, 1989.
- "Primateology is politics by other means" in Ruth Bleier, ed. *Feminist Approaches to Science*, Pergamon Press, New York, 1986.
- Hearne, Vicki. *Adam's Task: Calling Animals by Name*. New York: Knopf, 1986.
- *Animal Happiness*. New York: HarperCollins, 1983.
- *Bandit: Dossier of a Dangerous Dog*. The Akademie Press Inc., 2002.
- Hoage, R.J. *Perceptions of Animals in American Culture*. Washington, D.C. and London: Smithsonian Institution, 1989.
- Ingold, T., ed. *What is an Animal?* London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1988.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. "The Trace of the Other." Trans. By A. Lingis, *Tijdschrift voor Philosophie* (September 1963). 605-23. In *Deconstruction in Context*, by Mark Taylor. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- Levi-Strauss, Claude. *The Savage Mind*. Trans. George Weidenfeld and Nicolson, Ltd. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press and Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd, 1966.
- Lippit, Akira Mizuta. *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Masson, Jeffrey Moussaieff and Susan McCarthy. *When Elephants Weep*. New York: Delta, 1995.
- Massumi, Brian. *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Derivations from Deleuze and Guattari*. Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1992.
- Midgley, Mary. *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

- Nietzsche, Friedrich. Edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann. *The Portable Nietzsche*. New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1954.
- *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, Inc., 1967.
- Noske, Barbara. *Beyond Boundaries: Humans and Animals* Montreal, New York, London: Black Rose Books, 1997.
- Podhajsky, Alois. *My Horses, My Teachers*. trans. Eva Podhajsky. New York: Doubleday, 1968.
- Regan, Thomas and Peter Singer, eds. *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*. Prentice-Hall, 1976.
- Rollin, Bernard. *Animal Rights and Human Morality*. N.Y: Prometheus Books, 1981.
- Sagan, Carl. *The Dragons of Eden*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1977.
- Singer, Peter. *Animal Liberation*. New York: N.Y. Review Press, 1975.
- Swift, Sally. *Centered Riding*. New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1985.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. By G.E.M. Anscombe. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1958.
- Wolfe, Cary. *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002.
- ed. *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2003.