Animals, Ethics, and Aesthetics: Expanding Lexicons

Joni Doherty
IDSVA
ANIMALS, ETHICS, AND AESTHETICS:
EXPANDING LEXICONS

Joni Doherty

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Lynette Hunter, Ph.D.

Doctoral Committee

Other member’s name, #1 Ph.D.

Other member’s name, #2, Ph.D.

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[I]t is clear that there is no classification of the Universe not being arbitrary and full of conjectures. The reason for this is very simple:

we do not know what thing the universe is . . . .

We are allowed to go further; we can suspect that there is no universe in the organic, unifying sense that this ambitious term has.

If there is a universe, its aim is not conjectured yet;

we have not yet conjectured the words,

the definitions, the etymologies, the synonyms,

— Jorge Luis Borges

“I prefer it ‘open.’”

— Lynette Hunter
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation considers the ways in which artists working with living animals articulate the complex and paradoxical nature of human-animal relationships. The examples used are from signature moments in the more recent past, with an emphasis the interactions of contemporary European and American artists. Works considered include circus acts, natural history dioramas, and pieces by Bartabas, Joseph Beuys, Carolyn Carlson, Catherine Chalmers, Hubert Duprat, David Nita Little, Joanna Mendl Shaw, and David Wojnarowicz.

Various discursive and knowledge systems are at play in these works, and affect how the animals are treated and how they are represented. This project also challenges the cultural construction we call nature. Much effort has been put into avoiding the hazards of positivism, duality, and relativism. In spite of the inevitably limiting cultural and historical constraints, my aim is to generate some usable knowledge that informs how we understand the languages of art and philosophy and engage with systems of knowledge, especially as it concerns our ethical and aesthetic relationships with animals, including other humans.
Combining artistic and deconstructive practices within the theoretical framework of situated textualities reveals the richly complex yet tenuous nature of our relationships. The art works considered here express misunderstandings, tensions, connections, and the potential for transformation, sometimes simultaneously. Deconstruction is used as a prism to reveal a spectrum of insights, where what once seemed familiar now points toward the unknown, ignored, or overlooked. Situated textualities, which insists that a complex matrix of practices, materials, beings, and contexts must also be taken into account, offers openings for tacit and sensory ways of knowing, which both complement and resist the limits of rational analysis. My theoretical approach is influenced by the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin, Matthew Calarco, Jacques Derrida, Donna Haraway, Lynette Hunter, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Jakob Von Uexküll and, of course, by the artists whose work is considered here.
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INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation I consider the ways in which artists working with living animals, ranging from damselflies to coyotes to horses, express the complex and paradoxical nature of human-animal relationships. The works considered include the eighteenth century circus, natural history dioramas created in the early twentieth century, and works by European and American artists from the mid-twentieth century to the present. Since they involve living bodies, the narratives and experiences found in these art forms extend beyond the written and spoken word to encompass sight, sound, movement, and touch, all of which are heightened by the presence of the animals. This often enhances the perception that what is portrayed is “natural.” Less obvious is that the animals in these works are rarely acting “naturally” but instead are being used by the artists to express particular ideas or produce certain effects.

I will argue that the various discursive and knowledge systems which influence these works affect both how the animals are treated by the artists, and how they are represented. This in turn influences our response to the works, and also our understanding of the animals and our relationship with them. Still available in these art forms however, in spite of the various cultural and historical constraints that inevitably limit both artist and viewer, is what Donna Haraway
calls a “usable, but not an innocent, doctrine of objectivity” which, with respect to
the animals, can help us “name where we are and are not, in dimensions of mental
and physical space we hardly know how to name.”¹ This usable knowledge can
help to inform the ways in which we communicate with and understand animals,
and especially the ways in which artists might use these insights to enhance
respect for and the desire to better understand other animals.

Using a critical approach informed by methodologies associated with
deconstruction and situated textualities, I will consider how the material and
semitic fields within which these works are created by artists and encountered by
others express what Haraway has described as a “situation of tensions, resonances,
transformations, resistances, and complicities.”² I have tried to avoid the hazards
of positivism, duality, and relativism, and to be alert to what Haraway calls the
“god trick” of being a disembodied “know it all.”

While obviously humans have always lived with animals, over the past
several decades scientific and philosophical inquiry into and aesthetic exploration
of these relationships has intensified. Most relevant to my study are those that
concern the question of identity or being, and those that concern ethics. My goal
in this project is to consider how the arts might help us become more answerable
to — and more ethically and aesthetically aware of — our relationships with and
responsibilities to animals. Doing so will enlarge the discursive possibilities that
frame human-animal relations. My approach is guided by the premise that the
“reality” being represented in each of the artworks considered is not a “still life”
waiting to be decoded, but instead, as Haraway notes, comprised of living and dynamic agents that can make claims on us.³

That said, I will continue to use the binary implied by the terms “human” and “animal” whenever it is not possible to refer to a particular species or individual. In part this is because I wish to draw attention to this still-dominant cultural construct, and also because this inquiry involves considering the ways in which art either reifies or subverts what Derrida has called the abyss that has long existed between human and all other living things. I also want to avoid substituting one binary for another, such as referring to human animals and non-human animals, which is another kind of negation. This problem of which words to use reveals how our interactions with other animals is always already part of an ongoing matrix (or quagmire!) of human histories, languages, and vested interests.

Finally I am (intermittently) aware that I am also ever the insider, profoundly influenced by the discourses and systems of knowledge in which I am a participant. I also do not want to deny or forget other animals, for example, that one particular woodchuck who lives and is raising her offspring (or should I say children?) under the porch of the house next door. She is, as far as I can tell, is pursuing her own interests and (most likely) perceiving the world, including “my yard,” in ways very different from my own.

I will begin with a brief historical overview of human-animal relations and then move to chapter summaries. Each of these chapter summaries will include a
review of the thinkers and artists whose work has been influential in furthering my own understanding.

1. Relationships and Responsibilities

Some scientific and philosophical approaches to human-animal relations rely on an anthropocentric scale. Others assign animals a moral status that at first glance appears to be independent of their relationship to humans, but often ultimately prioritizes human concerns. Still others propose a meta-ethics that goes beyond rights or recognition to the obligations of responsivity. In an array of disciplines and with increasing frequency, contemporary artists have also taken up the question of human-animal relations in works that include living animals. Artists who are working with these animals, even “lowly” insects such as larvae and cockroaches, are faced with ethical as well as aesthetic decisions. Here too, one can discern a diversity of approaches. Sometimes the animals are objectified — used as a means to an end, as symbols or props or the embodiment of the “natural” or the “pure;” at other times artists claim an intersubjectivity which insists the outcome is the result of a collaboration or a partnership. More typically, the engagement is characterized by a dynamic that expresses the contradictory or confused nature of our relations.

These moments are what Derrida has termed aporias, the simultaneous appearance of a paradox that appears and yet at the same time its paradoxical nature is passed over as unremarkable. How the answers to these questions are worked out will depend in part on one’s understanding of human-animal relations.
and in part on the distinctions made between human and animal, and culture and nature. A brief review of some of the literature that considers the history of these relations in western societies is helpful for understanding their complicated nature.

Over the past few centuries philosophers and theorists have approached the question of the animal from differing perspectives. Most relevant to my study are those that concern the question of identity or being and those that concern ethics. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, utilitarians such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill and developed a philosophy which asserted that outcomes that achieve the greatest good or happiness for morally significant beings is the best approach to ethics. For many utilitarians, then and now, this status is exclusively assigned to humans, but Bentham also included animals. He argued that an animal has intrinsic moral standing regardless of its relationship to humans. His question, which still carries a great deal of power today, directs us to the quality of a life rather than the traits it possesses or its place in an anthropocentric hierarchy. With respect to animals, he asked, “The question is not can they reason? Nor, can they talk? But can they suffer?”

Peter Singer, a contemporary utilitarian philosopher, further developed Bentham’s ideas. His seminal book, Animal Liberation, published in 1975, brought the term speciesism (originally coined by psychologist Richard Ryder) into widespread usage. Speciesism is the discrimination against or exploitation of animal species based on an assumption of human superiority. Singer believes utilitarian principle of equality should be prescriptive rather than descriptive. Animals may not be guaranteed treatment that is equal to humans, but they do
deserve equal consideration. In this equation, for example, it is still morally allowable for humans to kill animals for meat, something that Bentham would agree with. However Singer goes further than Bentham in that he argues that animals should not be raised or slaughtered in ways that cause them to suffer, and also that they should not be eaten if nutritionally adequate alternatives are available.

Another way of considering human-animal relations arises from ontology, the questions related to being. In the early twentieth century, and early in his own inquiry into animals, Heidegger attempted to understand animals on their own terms, rather than through the lens of human concerns, something he later abandoned. Foreshadowing the conclusions of contemporary scientists he acknowledged, “It is difficult to determine . . . the distinction between man and animal.” In contrast Tom Regan takes a nonconsequentialist or deontological view. According to Regan, both humans and all animals that posse a particular degree of cognitive and sensory capacity have inherent value. As Regan explains, both an animal and a human are “the experiencing subject of a life.” He goes on to explain, we are similar in that we both possess,

an individual welfare that has importance to us whatever our usefulness to others. We want and prefer things, believe and feel things, recall and expect things. And all these dimensions of our life, including our pleasure and pain, our enjoyment and suffering, our satisfaction and frustration, our continued existence or our untimely death — all make a difference to the quality of our life as lived, as experienced, by us as individuals.
Therefore Regan believes we should never use animals as a means to an end. Unlike Kant, who believed that animals do not have intrinsic moral value, Regan says that because animals are “subjects of a life,” they have a right not to be harmed.

In *Animal Rights* the contemporary philosopher David DeGrazia describes three kinds of moral rights; each is based on a different kind of moral status. In the first, the moral status of humans and animals is unequal. This is essentially Kant’s position. Equal consideration, the second category requires an animal’s suffering or needs to be weighed as much as a human’s when making a decision. In the third category, there is a “utility-trumping sense of rights, which means that the rights of the animal should be protected even if it is harmful to society as a whole.”11 Inevitably rights are associated with hierarchical rankings, or at least the rights that most people in Western societies are willing to consider. While the majority of people in western societies still dismiss the claim that animals have a moral status today, there is an increasing willingness to consider quality of life for animals, especially mammals. In contrast, concern with the well being of animals has long been the case for many indigenous traditions, which are characterized by a respect for certain nonhuman animals. Also some religions, including Buddhism, teach ethical values that result in the protection of nonhuman animals.12

In spite of the efforts of the animal rights movement, as the legal scholar Paul Waldau points out, many people still use Cartesian arguments to support the dismissal of any rights for all non human animals. He points to the considerable challenges faced by those advocating for animals rights:
Claims about all organisms, at times including plants and viruses, confound even the most inclusivists of human minds. The rhetoric of total equality of all life — lettuces or chimpanzees, bacteria or viruses (not normally considered “living” in the classical sense), fungi or protocists can mislead. It obscures what all human cultures and moral systems have recognized: that given the value of all forms of life, some forms, animals, take ethical priority over others.\(^{13}\)

However, while conclusions about the moral and legal status of animals remain elusive, the questions we ask about animals and their relationship to us have changed. As Angus Taylor, a philosopher specialized in animal rights and author of *Animals and Ethics*, points out, the debate has shifted from whether animals possess consciousness to what kind of consciousness and what this may mean for their moral status. Other criteria for recognizing moral status might include having self-awareness; whether or not self-awareness is even necessary; and if self-awareness must be combined with the ability to think rationally. Taylor points out that we do not agree about “*who fundamentally counts in our moral reckoning*” or “*whose interests should receive the same consideration as our similar interests.*”\(^{14}\) The grey zone is the area where interests conflict. Taylor concludes, just as Waldau did, that “even those willing to grant that many animals possess consciousness [are] likely to find some reason to justify subordinating their basic interests to human interests, whether basic or not.”\(^{15}\) Nevertheless, the following questions, posed by Taylor, are ones that increasing numbers of people, including artists, are engaging with. These include: “Who counts as someone?”
“What justifies harming someone?” and “Can any rational justification be given for drawing a neat, one-and-for-all line in the sand between all humans and all animals?”

Although this is now changing to some degree, western philosophy has long affirmed human superiority, including our uniqueness and our right to use all other living things for our own purposes. Reflecting on this history and mounting a challenge to Rene Descartes’ belief that animals lack both reason and feeling, Derrida writes in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*,

All philosophers have judged [the] limit [between human and animal] to be single and indivisible, considering that on the other side of that limit there is an immense group, a single and fundamentally homogeneous set that one has the right, the theoretical or philosophical right, to distinguish and mark as opposite, namely, the set of the Animal in general, the Animal spoken of in the general singular. It applies to the whole animal kingdom with the exception of the human.

This text, published posthumously, is the complete text of Derrida’s ten-hour address which was presented at “The Autobiographical Animal,” the third of a series of conferences devoted to his work. It was held in Ciresy, France, in 1997. Derrida opens his address with a meditation on his pet cat, whose intimate yet indecipherable presence reveals the paucity of our language with respect to what Derrida will call *l’animot*. In a review of this book, Kari Weil, a scholar of comparative literature observes, the look of an animal, even one as familiar as a pet cat,
prepares me, if it does not compel me, to address the vulnerabilities we share as living, mortal beings, as they also bring me to acknowledge the qualities and talents of an other I may know little of and may not know despite my efforts to name him or her.¹⁸

She concludes her review of this text by writing, “Letting animals be in their being, outside our projects and outside our will for knowledge, would, Derrida seems to suggest, constitute the ultimate ethical stance.”¹⁹ At the same time she acknowledges the difficulty of stepping outside of our anthropocentric selves. This may be because, as Derrida himself observes,

  Philosophical right . . . presents itself as that of ‘common sense.’ This agreement concerning philosophical sense and common sense that allows one to speak blithely of the Animal in the general singular is perhaps one of the greatest and most symptomatic asininities of those who call themselves human.²⁰

Our increasing knowledge of genetics affirms Derrida’s critique of human exceptionalism. As it turns out, the difference in genomes between humans and some primates is only between five and seven percent. According to the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History, “The wall between human, on the one hand, and ape or animal, on the other, has been breached.”²¹

In addition to dismissing the close connection that humans have with some species, insisting on the binary of human and animal with some species obscures the vast range and diversity of animal life. Instead, Derrida points out,
Beyond the edge of the so-called human, beyond it but by no means on a single opposing side, rather than “the Animal” or “Animal Life,” there is already a heterogeneous multiplicity of the living, or more precisely (since to say “the living” is already to say to much or not enough”) a multiplicity of organizations of relations between living and dead, relations of organization or lack of organization among realms that are more and more difficult to dissociate by means of the figures of the organic, and inorganic, of life and/or death.\textsuperscript{22}

Both our closeness to other animals, and our differences, along with the richness and diversity of life itself complicates the discussion. One thing we can be sure of is that there are complex nuances rather than simple boundaries.

Such a restructuring of the “natural order” poses ethical dilemmas. How would life — for both human and nonhuman animals — be different if we put aside or at least questioned what has so long been assumed as our human right to use animals as we wish? In \textit{Animal Lessons} the philosopher Kelly Oliver points out that before we can begin defining rights or relationships, we must define animal and human, “particularly as the man/animal binary has been elemental in the development of the very notion of \textit{rights}.”\textsuperscript{23} She observes that most discussions about rights measure animals against humans and that although challenged, it remains the case that “[e]nlightenment ideals that make man superior to animals lay the foundation for the rights discourse.”\textsuperscript{24} This leads to the creation of hierarchies that value animals based on their similarity to humans. For example, many would agree that the great apes deserve protection while shellfish,
since they do not feel pain, do not.\textsuperscript{25} Such an approach, according to Oliver, addresses the symptoms but not the structures of oppression, which include material, economic, linguistic, conceptual, and cultural structures and institutions.\textsuperscript{26} She notes the “struggle that continues between environmental and business interests over the allocation of resources for wildlife.”\textsuperscript{27} Although some rights are better than no rights, they do not go far enough.

As Oliver points out, “Moral rules and juridical legalism may help us sleep peacefully at night, whereas ethical responsibility, as Emmanuel Lévinas might say, produces insomnia. Rights can be granted, laws can be followed, but ethics and justice cannot rest there. In this sense, ethics must go beyond rights.”\textsuperscript{28} Such a complex web of relationships is not one that lends itself to a legal code or a set of moral precepts. Instead, as Oliver observes, it calls for a “meta-ethics that goes beyond rights or recognition to the conditions or embodied life on a shared planet and the obligations those conditions entail.”\textsuperscript{29} She sees the first step as one in which we reconsider “oppositional and exclusionary ways of thinking about animals.”\textsuperscript{30} It’s clear that the centuries-old quandary regarding human relationships with other animals, including their rights and our responsibilities, continues on today.

2. A “Natural” History

While the Bible is often used to justify the exploitation of animals, and the message it delivers has been criticized by animal rights activists, and as some contemporary scholars have observed, interpretations of this text vary, with some
challenging the broadly accepted notion of the “dominion” of humans over nature. Given its long history, numerous sources and authors (or transcribers), and the various cultures within which it has circulated, this is not surprising. Even today there is little agreement on the meaning of passages related to current social issues. Instead, scholars including Rod Preece, a political scientist, and David Fraser, a zoologist, argue that many people today misinterpret the Biblical messages concerning the treatment of animals, and that they were more valued (and therefore received better treatment) than is commonly understood. For example, the King James version of Genesis provides the following account of the relationship between humans and animals:

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green
Preece and Fraser think that the harsh critique of *Genesis* offered by Peter Singer and other philosophers concerned with the well-being of animals is a narrow one, and represents a “failure to recognize the complexity of the development of animal ethics in the Christian tradition.” While acknowledging that the “inherent worth of animals” has not always been recognized, they believe the Christian tradition is “complex and inchoate” and that within Christianity “the status and appropriate treatment of animals have been repeatedly discussed and debated.”

Further, some people believe that this passage reveals that humans and animals are to be vegetarians.

To support their position, Preece and Fraser point out that in a pastoral economy domestic animals are “repositories of wealth, sources of food, and items of trade,” and so to prosper these “possessions must be treated with appropriate care.” Also the often-quoted “dominion” of human over animals that appears in *Genesis* could be interpreted as either despotic or as like a “good shepherd.” Preece and Fraser lean toward the latter, asserting the intention of these passages is to direct humans to model themselves on the divine. Therefore, just as God brought “blessing and goodness, not tyrannical mastery, to the world” that was under his dominion, just so should humans treat all that was under their dominion. As evidence they cite a number of examples, including several from the eighteenth century alone, which illustrate how the meaning of dominion has changed over time:

In *Seasons* of 1728, James Thomson, former divinity student, understood
our role as “the Lord and not the Tyrant of the world.” In *Self-Interpreting Bible* of 1776 John Brown, the staid Biblical traditionalist, declared it an “honourable dominion over the creatures.” “Gentle dominion,” avowed George Nicholson in his 1801 *On the Primeval Diet of Man*. In 1802, Joseph Ritson described the dominion of *Genesis* as instituted, “for the sake of authority, protection, and the glorious offices of benevolence and humanity.”

The relationship with animals portrayed here is patriarchal, but not ruthless exploitation.

Preece and Fraser also find a kinship between humans and animals in Ecclesiastes, one they believe has not been emphasized enough. Both humans and other species are “works of God . . . [both] are created from dust, return to dust,” and “all draw the same breath.” Their conclusion is that Christian thought was influenced by contradictory ideas about animals from Greek, Roman, and Hebrew religious and philosophical traditions. The result of all of these influences is that there was no “uniform ethic.”

A closer look at the Great Chain of Being also reveals a more complex dynamic of human-animal relations than is commonly portrayed today. Now this concept is imagined by most people as a linear hierarchy, with those above dominating the beings below, but just as with the Bible the concept has a long history and interpretations have varied over time. The idea of a Chain of Being originated in classical Greece, was developed into a formal system by Plotinus (a vegetarian) in the third century CE. It was highly influential from the Middle
Ages through the end of the eighteenth century. Preece and Fraser observe that in some versions hierarchies are emphasized more than in others. One can find examples where the Europeans are above all of the other “races,” and men are superior to women. However a more careful study of this “chain” reveals that especially in the Middle Ages the interconnectedness of relationships was emphasized. Instead of a line or ladder, one could imagine it as a three-dimensional grid, with coordinates determined by the proportion of soul to matter. While there is no question that God, as pure spirit, was superior, and followed by angels, humans, animals, plants, and inanimate objects, each being was valued for possessing a divinely ordained, unique, and irreplaceable position.

In addition to faith, reason became increasingly influential in understanding human-animal relations in the early modern period. As noted above, Descartes, sometimes called the first modern philosopher, believed that animals lacked both reason and feeling, and so humans were free of any moral responsibility with respect to them. As Taylor explains, Descartes acknowledges that animals possess sensitivity which provides them with the ability to react appropriately to their environment, but this is not the same as consciousness. Taylor uses the following example to explain this Cartesian thinking:

By way of analogy, we might think of an automobile: it possesses equipment that allows it to “sense” the amount of fuel left in the tank and to register this on a dial, or to “sense” that a seat-belt is not fastened, or a door is not properly shut, and to announce this by means of a buzzer, or even in human language.
In the Cartesian view, mind and matter are separate entities. Animals and humans have “machine bodies,” but only humans have minds. As Taylor points out, there appears to be a contradiction in Descartes’ thinking in that he also acknowledged that animals experience feelings such as joy or fear. On the other hand, this might be explained away as simply a natural behavior rather than a conscious mental state.\(^3\)

The claim that animals do not have consciousness was challenged even during Descartes’ lifetime. Most of the philosophers that followed, including Hobbes, Locke, and Kant, disagreed with him. However, while these philosophers thought that animals did have perceptions and emotions, because they lacked reason, it was widely accepted that animals do not have moral status.

Kant’s influential moral theory of autonomy asserts that because humans have free will, humans are free from the causal determinism of nature. Therefore humans are intrinsically valuable and so have a moral status. They never should be used as a means to an end. In contrast, since animals lack free will, they have neither autonomy nor moral status and only possess instrumental value. Also, since animals lack will, they are inferior to humans, and so there is no duty of reciprocity. Since animals do not have a moral status, humans do not have a duty toward them and can use them as they wish. However even though there is no direct duty, as is the case between beings that possess intrinsic value (humans), Kant believed we do have an indirect duty to animals, including a moral responsibility to not cause them needless suffering. To illustrate his point, Kant uses the example of a man that shoots his dog because the animal can no longer
serve him. He has an indirect duty to treat the dog “humanely,” but not a direct
duty that forbids him to shoot the dog. At the same time Kant’s work was
interpreted to suggest that animals should be treated “kindly” because someone
who is cruel to animals will also treat people badly. While this was Kant’s
conclusion, others, including the philosopher Christine Korsgard, use his theory to
make substantive arguments for animal rights.

Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*, published in 1859, intensified an ongoing
debate over evolution, especially because his theory of natural selection
decentered God’s role. This accelerated a growing loss of confidence, fueled both
by scientific discoveries and philosophical thought, in the existence of an essential
and transcendental human-self, and along with it the possibility of a meta-
narrative that provides a reassuring historical justification of human superiority.
Ever since, we have been grappling with our identity and human-animal
relationships in one way or another. Evolutionary theory now asserts that the
differences between human and nonhuman animals are far less distinct that we
once had imagined. Differences are now described as in quality rather than in kind.
Both human and non-human animals use symbolic communication, live in social
groups, and care for each other in ways that suggest the experience of empathy.
Humans, whose uniqueness seemed to be marked by their exclusive access to
reason and free will, are now understood to be strongly influenced by
physiological forces, which affect how we feel and think. One more reminder that
we too are animals.

The influential Swiss biologist Jakob von Uexküll (1864-1944) imagined
living beings as inhabiting a horizontal matrix. In a short monograph, *A Stroll Through the Worlds of Animals and Men: A Picture Book of Invisible Worlds*, published in 1934, Uexküll invites the reader on a “stroll into unfamiliar worlds, words strange to us but known to other creatures, manifold and varied as the animals themselves.” Uexküll embodies liberal humanism’s optimism in that he believes that one can enter other realms to attain an objective understanding of them. Refuting the Cartesian metaphor of the machine, Uexküll argues that animals are “subjects whose essential activity consists of perceiving and acting.” The “self-world” of an animal, although it may be invisible to some humans, consists of the *umwelt*. To “unlock the gates that lead to other realms” one must stop perceiving animals as machines and enter into, as much as possible, the perceptual world (what an animal perceives) and the effector world (what an animal does). Instead of a universal reality, Uexküll describes a subjective universe, a complex matrix comprised of the perspectives of all living things.

For Uexküll even time and space are based on perception. For example, during the period that a tick is waiting for her prey, time does not exist. Operational space, which is used by some, but not all animals, is an embodied experience measured in “directional units” (right/left, up/down, forward/back) and will vary depending on the characteristics of the animal’s body. Tactile, auditory, and visual space, which are used to identify location and manage navigation, are also particular and subjective orientations. In addition, because space is dependent on each animal’s experience, the horizon or farthest plan will vary. Since animals are capable of acting and perceiving, this is “not an exchange of forces between
two objects, but the relations between a living “subject” (the animal) and its
object.” For example, in the world of a tick, it is the subject and its object is the
dog. The stimulus of heat given off by the dog is perceived by the tick, which then
performs the action of dropping from its perch onto its prey. This sequence is
neither mechanistic nor instinctual. Each creature is free to act according to its
perceptions, unconstrained by internalized or external social, economic, or
political forces.

During the period when Uexküll was writing, liberal humanism is based
on the concept of an autonomous and unified self, widely understood as the
“unconstrained author of meaning and action.” Uexküll applied this ideology to
his concept of the umwelt. The umwelt is a humanist’s utopia where every being is
free to act according to his or her own perceptions. Yet at the same time Uexküll’s
decentering of the human anticipates posthumanism in his insistence that animals
are beings in their own right. According to the philosopher Brett Buchanan, this
is the beginning of an onto-ethology, “an ontological elucidation of ‘what is’ via
the active behavior of living beings.” Buchanan acknowledges this term was
first used by Eric Alliez in his analysis of the work of Deleuze and Guattari.
However for Buchanan the concept can first be found in ideas of Uexküll, and
especially in his descriptions of the relationships between being and
behavior.

Another aspect of Uexküll’s concept that challenges both the concept of a
unified self and the so-called abyss between humans and animals is that Umwelts
are not isolated units, but may overlap or encompass each other. Further, there
isn’t a one-to-one correspondence between species and *umwelts*. Individuals within a species can have different *umwelts*. The *umwelts* evoke curious miniature empires, each with its own subject/ruler. There is a sense of dynamism and multiplicity as well as the implication that the many others inhabiting these overlapping worlds must somehow manage to co-exist.

These *umwelts* are organized around “functional cycles” which balance what Uexküll calls “nature’s plan” and “the subject’s goals.”

According to Uexküll, organisms differ from machines because they are “self-developmental and autonomous.” As a result of this dynamic, the laws that rule nature are neither mechanistic (or purely instinctual) nor teleological (determined by a master plan), but rather are similar to those that guide the creation of a harmonic composition. In language reminiscent of Bakhtin’s theory of discourse, Uexküll writes about the tension which exists between the “centripetal architecture of things” and the “centrifugal architecture” of organisms. In a similar way, Bakhtin describes a dynamic in which centripetal forces seek to maintain the official forms of language while centrifugal forces resist this order through the continuing use of local dialects, slang, and other informal intragroup or interpersonal ways of speaking. Both Uexküll and Bakhtin are describing a dynamic in which both centrifugal and centripetal forces are necessary if there is to be a workable order for living things.
3. Reasons for Caring

During the lectures he gave at Cerisy Derrida launched an impassioned critique of the ways in which language obliterates both similarities and differences between “us” humans and “those animals.” He described this gap as: the infinite space that separates the lizard from the dog, the protozoon from the dolphin, the shark from the lamb, the parrot from the chimpanzee, the camel from the eagle, the squirrel from the tiger, the elephant from the cat, the ant from the silkworm, or the hedgehog from the echidna.\(^{51}\)

This is not merely a linguistic or conceptual matter, but one that has profound consequences for animals, both human and not. How we are in relationship with each other influences the quality of our lives together and also, potentially, the quality and length of each animal’s life. Derrida characterizes the abyss between human and animal as a “disavowal” of our obligations to all living beings. The emphasis on differences supports hierarchies that obscure or negate not only what we hold in common but also muddy ethical considerations and responsibilities. Bruno Latour, a French philosopher and sociologist of science, calls this abyss the “Great Divide.” The ways in which humans have separated themselves from all other animals raises a number of significant questions for how we live today, ranging from the treatment of the animals we raise to eat or use for medical testing to habitat preservation and the extinction of species.\(^{52}\)

Derrida and the other contemporary thinkers discussed so far outline the broader parameters of identity and ethics with respect to human animal relations. They offer some insight into the barriers that continue to prevent us from
acknowledging the immense diversity of animal life, its significance to us in
terms of our mutual dependence, and ethical responsibilities to other living beings,
including the animal. As Derrida has pointed out,

No one can deny seriously, or for very long, that men do all they can in
order to dissimulate this cruelty [to animals] or to hide it from themselves,
in order to organize on a global scale the forgetting or misunderstanding of
this violence that some would compare to the worst cases of genocide
(there are also animal genocides: the number of species endangered
because of man [or more inclusively, human beings] takes one’s breath
away). 53

How might the arts engage us with animals in ways that interrupt, obscure, or
reify this dissimulation? How might the arts assist us in rethinking a human-
animal ethics? Rather than a fixed moral code or set of precepts, ethical decisions
are themselves inevitably subject to a continuous process of consideration and
reconsideration, as conditions and contexts change. Because the arts respond and
rely upon particular contexts and material conditions, they have the capacity for
continual transformation necessary for engaging with the ongoing processes of
ethical decision-making. Aesthetic processes and products also yield their richest
communications when they invite a rigorous and continuous process of translation
and reflection.

In addition to questions related to identity, relationship, justice, and
renewal, there is the fundamental challenge of survival. A reconsideration of the
hierarchies that have been in place for centuries in western societies may help to
reduce the ever-increasing acceleration of extinction. Some experts estimate that
over the next twenty years the rate could reach 10,000 times the background rate
(defined as the rate before humans) in a world made smaller through the
expansion of human technology and population and their effects on habitat and
climate.\textsuperscript{54} These rates of extinction not only threaten those “other” animals, but
also the human. According to Simon Stuart, chair of the Species Survival
Commission for the International Union for the Conservation of Nature,
“Anything over ten times the background rate of extinction – ten species in every
million per year – was above the limit that could be tolerated if the world was to
be safe for humans.” \textsuperscript{55}

Rethinking human-animal relations is a complex undertaking. Derrida has
described this network as “a multiplicity of organizations of relationship between
living and dead, relations of organization or lack of organization among realms
that are more and more difficult to dissociate by means of the figures of the
organic and inorganic, of life and/or death.”\textsuperscript{56} An additional challenge is the
distance between humans and animals forged by urbanization. Instead of being in
direct contact with a wide array of animals in their native habitats, we live and
work for the most part in environments that are segregated from other species.
Our animal companions are, for the most part, those who have been domesticated,
captured. Our exposure to “wild” animals is for the most part limited to what is
portrayed through images and stories designed to appeal to us. These animals,
made available for our consumption, “exist” in wildlife programs on television, in
Hollywood films, in zoos, and in natural history museums. As observers of these animals, we are spectators who as the theorist and filmmaker Guy Debord points out, are always “at a distance” from ourselves, lost in “spectacular time.” The spectacle generated by a culture dominated by consumerism and the mass media isolates human beings from directly experiencing contact or becoming familiar with most other species. Instead of the “luxurious expenditure of life,” we exist within boundaries determined by a mediated rather than a living world. This mentality of the spectacle can lead to the abuse of animals by artists. Those types of work will not be discussed here. This dissertation will focus on the expanding possibilities for relationships between the animal and the human that are being created by art makers.

4. Chapter Summaries

A. Skin Deep: Collecting Animals

The dioramas in the Akeley Hall of African Mammals at the New York Museum of Natural History are the focus of my first chapter. Carl Akeley began envisioning the project in 1909, and continued working on it until his death in 1926. The Hall was completed in 1936. At the time, the 28 dioramas were presented as a scientifically sound, objective presentation of a world Akeley feared was vanishing, and even today, the museum still emphasizes that these are accurate and realistic portrayals. In “Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936,” which was published in 1984, Donna Haraway agrees that these dioramas depicted a threatened world, but that
world was America, not Africa. Early in the twentieth century, many Americans, including the board of the museum, feared the large waves of immigration and rapid urbanization would destroy American as they knew it. According to Haraway, the dioramas present the animals as object lessons about an ideal American way of life, especially with regard to the nuclear family, and the gendered division of roles and responsibilities.

Using the Akeley collection as an example, Haraway explores themes related to natural history exhibitions, eugenics and conservation. According to her, Akeley, and more generally the American Museum of Natural History, had three overlapping preoccupations which guided the development of the Hall of African Mammals. The first was to use the exhibition as “a practice to produce permanence, to arrest decay;” the second was to affirm the value of eugenics in order to “preserve hereditary stock, to assure racial purity, to prevent race suicide;” and finally, to further conservation as “a policy to preserve resources, not only for industry, but also for moral formation, for the achievement of manhood.” The goal was “to cure or prevent decadence,” and to ensure the “preservation, purity, social order, health, and the transcendence of death, personal and collective . . . in the face of extraordinary change in the relations of sex, race, and class.”

Although some of her analysis anticipates a reading informed by situated knowledge, a theoretical tool that she was instrumental in developing, in this early essay Haraway employs a social constructionist approach. While situated knowledge is a “view from somewhere” which takes into account the observers’ particular situation with respect to culture and power, social construction asserts
that social relations, including a complex of interactions among individuals, groups, animals, and objects, and science combine to create knowledge that is jointly constructed. While the stuffed bodies of these animals were considered evidence of “embodied truth” by Akeley and his museum supporters, Haraway reveals the subjectivity of their position, and uncovers layers of hidden social relations, including the cultural and social preoccupations of elite, white, and male twentieth century American, and the hidden labor of the many Africans who assisted Akeley during the hunting expeditions and the dozens of museum employees who worked on the project.

Also examined in this first chapter is a narrative written by Mary Hastings Bradley, who along with her husband and five-year old daughter, accompanied Akeley and one of his adult nieces on a safari in 1911. The memoir provides some insight into what these hunters were thinking; equally interesting is what is not considered. For example, while Hastings Bradley regularly expresses admiration for the animals, frequently anthropomorphizes them, and regrets their impending extinction, she does not appear to consider the implications of her own actions or those of her companions. In one passage she worries that she will not secure a trophy-quality gorilla before these animals are hunted to extinction. “There were moments,” she writes, “when we wondered anxiously if there were any gorillas left for us, anything but lone widows and undergrown youths.” While Hastings Bradley and her family valued the wilderness and the animals, their belief in and commitment to the “sporting life” and to human superiority resulted in competing
values in which empathy for the animals she was hunting did not prevent her from killing them, even to the point of extinction.

During the period between 1890-1930 a nature movement, deeply informed by organicism, was a powerful influence in American culture. Organicism, which equates the universe to an organism, was a view of the world that was embraced by many involved in the natural sciences. Since both are “orderly and alive,” each animal can be seen as a metaphor for the world. The engraving in the American Museum’s lobby: “Speak to the Earth and It Shall Teach Thee” is evidence of this. The museum, according to Haraway, is “the ideological and material product of the sporting life.” As she points out, every specimen is presented as a permanent fact.” These “facts,” the animal bodies, are actors in a morality play. She explains, “Artistic realism and biological science were twin brothers in the founding of the civic order of nature.” For this reason, “Taxidermy became the art most suited to the epistemological and aesthetic stance of realism.” Realism is not simply a particular point of view but a fundamental assumption of civic order. Realism is an ideology that assumes there is an objective truth which can be depicted. In the dioramas realism and organicism are used to teach visitors to aspire to a more natural way of life, which is equated with the American way of life.

Certainly the Akeley Hall dioramas and Hastings-Bradley’s book exemplify an episteme that, according to Michel Foucault, makes “certain perceptions, certain statements, certain forms of knowledge possible, others impossible.” The episteme is an epistemological field, which is not governed by
rational value or objective form. Just as with Akeley, the contradictions in Hastings Bradley’s account of the safari appear to be indiscernible to her. In *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, Foucault proposes that in various periods differing sets of laws govern knowledge. Therefore “the very possibility of recording facts, of allowing oneself to be convinced by them, of distorting them in traditions or of making purely speculative use of them” is determined by the period within which these activities occur. Foucault explores what he calls “epistemological spaces,” not in order to “restore what eluded consciousness” but rather to identify the “rules of formulation that were never formulated in their own right.” As the philosopher Gary Gutting explains, “Individuals operate in a conceptual environment that determines and limits them in ways of which they cannot be aware.” Foucault calls this the “positive unconscious of knowledge,” something outside of the consciousness of the scientist and yet part of scientific discourse. One particular twentieth century episteme, that of formal science, is explored by Haraway, who of course is thinking and writing within another episteme, another “epistemological space” which is outside formal science.

Foucault is interested in the middle ground rather than either of two poles of theory and empiricism. One is the locus of scientific theories or philosophical interpretations; the other is the material and experiential realm. In between lies the invisible, imperceptible, which creates an underlying order between the “encoded eye” and reflexive order. While for social constructionists these networks are organized and driven by power relations, Foucault believes the forces can
sometimes be arbitrary. In any period, there are limitations to what might be thought or expressed, and this is determined to some degree by the terrain and relationships that are accessible or perceptible at that time. The breaks between periods are marked by discontinuities, rather than any sense of historical progression as, for example, with Marxism. The underlying code of implicit and unconscious rules proposed by Foucault within a given period are not as variable or situation specific as those described by social constructionists.

For Foucault, language is not only grammar and logic, but a set of implicit rules that limit what can be thought. He writes, “The whole curiosity of our thought now resides in the question: what is language, how can we find a way around it in order to make it appear in itself, in all its plentitude?” Foucault focuses on thought, but not the thinker. He is interpreting text not with the aim of understanding individual psychological processes, but to investigate the system within which we think and communicate what we know. The a priori in this case is a set of conditions for knowing that arise from a historically contingent network of laws. These ideas are exemplified in his comparative study of three periods. In the first, which ends in the 1500s, idea and object resemble each other. In the Classical Age (which Foucault identifies as beginning with Descartes and ending with Kant), language is a physical manifestation and a transparent representation of an idea, with idea understood as a mental representation of what we know. Beginning in the nineteenth century, the empirical is understood as subjective, and language is a thing in itself, something that creates its own autonomous reality. In what might be characterized as an overreaching claim by Foucault, each
age is characterized by one episteme, one set of codes. Now it is widely accepted that epistemes are not so monolithic. In any given time or culture, multiple epistemes can co-exist.

As the political scientist William Gorton observes, “For Foucault what counts as truth or knowledge in a particular society is merely the product of a certain configuration of power relations. There is no truth or knowledge outside of such power regimes.” Societies create rather than discover “the categories by which we make sense of our social world.” Gorton concludes, “Foucault’s radical relativism would seem to undermine the central aim of any critical approach that seeks to unmask oppressive ideologies, enhance human autonomy, advance justice or promote greater social transparency.”

In the social constructionist approach used by Haraway in “Teddy Bear Patriarchy,” the effects of ethnicity, class, and gender are context-rich and specific. Certainly realists such as Akeley, who put forward his own direct experiences as an indicator of a universal, non-subjective, would not agree with Foucault’s thesis that in the twentieth century the empirical is widely understood to be subjective. Foucault and Haraway offer significant challenges to assumptions of positivism and scientific objectivity but do not always use the same theoretical lens. For example the difference between Foucault and social constructionists is that the latter rely heavily on the various disciplines of the social sciences to critique positivism. Foucault does not believe that the social sciences are neutral (something that Haraway would soon agree with), or more generally that reason is the pathway to justice and knowledge. This is because he considers change to be
at times unpredictable and therefore not subject to reason, and also that the social sciences themselves are arbitrary constructions. He believes various disciplines or fields of study are not based on any kind of objective structure or empirical reality but rather that the categories are determined by social institutions with the aim of making sense of our world.

In a wonderfully inventive way, Foucault introduces this problem of categorization in the preface to *The Order of Things*. The Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge's Taxonomy from Jorge Luis Borges’ essay “The Analytical Language of John Wilkins” places animals in the following categories:

(a) Those that belong to the emperor
(b) Embalmed ones
(c) Those that are trained
(d) Suckling pigs
(e) Mermaids (or Sirens)
(f) Fabulous ones
(g) Stray dogs
(h) Those that are included in this classification
(i) Those that tremble as if they were mad
(j) Innumerable ones
(k) Those drawn with a very fine camel hair brush
(l) *Et cetera*
(m) Those that have just broken the flower vase
(n) Those that, at a distance, resemble flies
Reflecting on this list, Foucault asks,

When we say that a cat and a dog resemble each other less than two greyhounds do, even if both are tame or embalmed, even if both are frenzied, even if both have just broken the water pitcher, what is the ground on which we are able to establish the validity of this classification with complete certainty? On what ‘table,’ according to what grid of identities, similitudes, analogies have we become accustomed to sort out so many different and similar things? What is this coherence — which, as is immediately apparent, is neither determined by an a priori and necessary concatenation, nor imposed on us by immediately perceptible contents? For it is not a question of linking consequences, but of grouping and isolating, of analyzing, of matching and pigeon-holing concrete contents; there is nothing more than tentative, nothing more empirical (superficially, at least) than the process of establishing an order among things.  

These kinds of questions lie at the heart of my research, which considers how various discourses, representations, and fields of knowledge can limit relationships and obscure ethical considerations. Useful tools provided by Foucault include his emphasis on the value of thinking outside of the “customary boundaries” which led him to developing case studies outside of traditional disciplinary fields, and his efforts to expose the unstated or unconscious “codes” that govern whether particular knowledges and their practical application can be recognized and accepted at any given time. His treatment of representation, including various forms of discourse, and of the ways in which preconceptions
govern how we think about the empirical world is relevant and informative. As I work with Foucault’s concepts, it is fair to say that I am not working with equivalences, but expansions: episteme becomes pluralized and situated; an unconscious code becomes tacit understandings; an underlying structure becomes invisible dynamics, and so on. Nevertheless, *The Order of Things* was an important starting point for my own investigations, and it led to some of the questions that this dissertation explores.

**B. Representing Relationship: Framing the Animal**

Insight into our relationships with animals, as suggested by the second chapter, can be gained through looking at the history of zoos and circuses in Western Europe and the United States. As Diane Ackerman observes, “We flock to zoos for many reasons, not least to shed some of the burden of being human.” Zoos and circuses often provide the only opportunities for most people living in post-industrial urban societies to come into contact with animals. These venues have served as a means for demonstrating power over animals, pursuing knowledge, instructing children, inspiring patriotism, and even recreating Eden. More recently zoos have also become sanctuaries for preserving species threatened by extinction (a role which has been disputed by some animal activists).

Because the dominant view in Western societies is that animals do not have language, and so it was assumed that discourse between humans and animals was not possible, historically zoos and circuses have been places where we go to *look at* animals. As John Berger notes in his essay, “Why Look at Animals,”
cages operate as frames that transform the animals into actors in a daydream; the animal becomes “an ideal, an ideal internalised as a feeling surrounding a repressed desire. The image of a wild animal becomes the starting-point of a daydream.” He notes that communication with animals is only possible by someone who is an “exceptional being,” such as Orpheus. Historically trainers and performers in circuses and other kinds of performances have also been seen as having a special relationship with animals.

Menageries, owned by royalty and those with great wealth, were first established in 2500 BCE. The animals displayed in them were used as symbols of power. Some animals were gifts from foreign rulers or from territories captured during military campaigns. During the Enlightenment, zoological societies had private collections which were only open to their members. The societies emphasized that these were for scientific study, not for popular entertainment. The first modern zoo that was open to the public was established during the French Revolution, after the royal menageries were appropriated by the revolutionaries. Public zoos in London and Berlin soon followed. The idea of a wild animal itself is a cultural construct, in that humans determine categories such as wild, domestic, and exotic.

The early modern circus was established in England in the late eighteenth century and consisted of exhibitions of equestrian, acrobatic, and other performances presented in a theatre format. (The circus is not a descendent of the Circus Maximus, which were actually Roman chariot races.) The first modern circus was established by Philip Astley, an Englishman, and his wife Patty. Astley,
a former cavalry man, offered equestrian lessons each morning and performed riding tricks in the afternoon in an open ring near what at the time was the outskirts of London. He also established the circus’ signature format, a ring approximately 42 feet in diameter. He soon added acrobats, clowning, and vaulting to the cavalry-style horsemanship demonstrations. Just as with the zoological societies, Astley and other circus owners wanted the circus to attain the status of theatre, which was considered an elite form of entertainment, and so they sought to distance themselves from lower class animal entertainments, such as bear baiting and cockfighting offered at fairs. (Both bear baiting and cockfighting continue today.) For a period of time the circus owners were successful. Although there were critics that believed the association with circuses degraded theatre, they were embraced as suitable entertainment for the upper classes, and even women and children. In part this may have been because the early modern circus animal acts were devoted almost exclusively to horses and displays of fine horsemanship, which were animals and activities associated with the elite classes. In contrast to the horses used for agricultural purposes or the transportation of goods, maintaining a stable of fine horses and carriages was an expensive undertaking,

The Hippodramas that were popular in nineteenth century England also express racist and imperialistic attitudes which supported and fueled British colonialism. The fascination with the “exotic” that accompanied these ideologies are evident in one of the most famous hippodramas, “Mazeppa and the Wild Horse of Tartary,” which was based on the poem by Byron and first staged in
In the story a commoner becomes romantically involved with a woman betrothed to a nobleman. The commoner (actually a nobleman who has been unfairly cast out) is lashed naked to the back of a wild horse that is then released into the wild. The young man survives, eventually reunites with his lover, and is recognized as the rightful heir to the throne. This combination of violence and sexuality expressed in the binding of human and animal bodies together was enthusiastically received by audiences. Of course the actors were never presented as being English or American, but as members of the uncivilized Tartar “race.”

In his essay “Animal Apparatus,” Michael Peterson, a scholar of performance studies takes the concept of matrixing and applies it to animal performances. Matrixing is a concept developed by Michael Kirby, who also studied and critiqued theatre. Matrixing describes how meaning is produced through simple behaviors and appearances, even without the performer’s awareness. While Kirby applied this concept only to human performers, Peterson points out that this is what happens in animal acts. He writes, “Animal actors function either in a ‘symbolic matrix,’ in which, quoting Kirby, ‘the performer does not act and yet his or her costume represents something or someone,’ or in . . . ‘received’ acting.” As Kirby has noted, “When the matrixes are strong, persistent and reinforce each other, we see an actor, no matter how ordinary the behavior.”

Peterson points out, “behind the referential and thematic content of representations lie questions about their production; the analysis of animals as objects of performance necessitates investigating how actual animals perform.”
He then goes on to ask, “How are animals made to perform?” On one level, if acting is “creating for the audience the illusion of events and interactions that [are] fictional,” then he asserts, animals do not “act.” However on another level, animals are “made to perform” by being taught behaviors which are then presented in a series of framed units which add up to a narrative. The animal apparatus consists of “framing trained behaviors in a ‘non-animal narrative,’” that is, a human narrative is wrapped around units of trained behaviors in ways that lead to the “constructions of social relations between humans and animals.”

Peterson also notes, “Much human culture about nonhuman animals, including performance and especially live performing animals in anthropomorphic frames, works to ‘humanize’ humans and ‘dehumanize’ animals.” Peterson believes that using animals can make “art safe” because they seem to "demand only a simple emotional response.” Furthermore, these frames and narratives are representations of animals; although they may be presented to the audience as such, these are not unmediated encounters. Peterson believes that simply by their very presence animals “matter as themselves” in artistic performances.

In *Circus and Culture: A Semiotic Approach* Paul Bouissac analyzes how animals are made to perform, both literally and semiotically, using a structuralist approach informed by Saussure. Bouissac examines how the circus presents “spectacular events that are remarkably patterned and highly meaningful for large audiences.” Bouissac approaches circus acts as cultural texts. The acts employ a language system that uses a code to communicate. His assumption is that this code delivers messages that are intentionally sent by human trainers and
performers in animal acts, received and understood by the audience. According to Bouissac, the trainer uses rewards and coercion to attain the desired behaviors. Once these are established, only the subtlest hints are needed to control the animal’s behavior. The goal, as Bouissac notes, is to “integrate, perfectly, the gestures of the training code with the paralinguistic (i.e., nonverbal) gestural code of a natural [human] dialogue.”

Bouissac appears to assume that these communications are uniformly interpreted by viewers, and so doesn’t allow for varying interpretations that may arise from differences, such as gender, culture, experience with animals, and so on. He also doesn’t consider the ways in which animals might impact what is being communicated but instead seems to think they are a transparent medium, at least in the sense that they correctly enact a sequence of trained behaviors. And finally he does not discuss the impact of particular animals whose actions may disrupt the “code” through behaving in ways that are unanticipated by the trainers or performers nor does he mention the resistances described by Calarco. While it was interesting to see how this theoretical approach assumed the same stance as the positivist approach critiqued by Haraway and Foucault in the first chapter, Bouissac’s assumptions about a single, common reception of these codes was not convincing. However his discussion of how the many possible units and combinations of units create meaning is helpful in expanding the definition of discourse to include not only the written and spoken word, but a vast array of movements (from the smallest gesture to a complex choreography) visuals, and sounds.
Bouissac observes, “The circus [or theatrical performance more generally] freely manipulates a cultural system to such an extent that it leaves the audience contemplating a demonstration of humanity freed from the constraints of the culture within which the performance takes place.”93 (emphasis provided) It is interesting to consider Bouissac’s ideas with those offered by Deleuze and Guattari. They describe the ways in which relying on a structural approach inhibits freedom because it “is designed precisely to deny or at least denigrate their [the animals’] existence: a correspondence of relations does not add up to a becoming. When structuralism encounters becomings of this kind pervading a society, it sees them only as phenomena of degradation representing a deviation from the true order.”94 While Bouissac suggests that the circus can somehow step outside of culture, from the perspective of Deleuze and Guattari, both the structuralist analysis and the performances that are being critiqued would inevitably “denigrate” the animal’s existence. Therefore neither is an expression of freedom, but only a simulation of it. Of course one must wonder what Deleuze and Guattari mean by a “true order.” If it means a natural order outside of culture, then it would be a perpetually elusive one according to both Foucault and Haraway.

C. Means to an End: The Symbolic Animal

In the third chapter, a work by Joseph Beuys created in 1974, “I Like America and America Likes Me,” challenges the dominant social, political, and economic order of that period. He intended for this work to be a challenge to rationality and science, and what he saw as our over reliance on its processes and
strategies yet it was as meticulously constructed as any scientific experiment. In “I Like America and America Likes Me” predetermined roles and symbolic concepts limited possibilities for relating to the animal-other, and especially to a particular coyote named Little John who was used in the performance. In a statement which describes his intention, Beuys explains,

My intention was firstly to hold together and retain in the West powers, and then to appear as a being representing the group soul area. I wanted to show the coyote a parallel power, but I also wished to remind him that it was now a human being who was speaking with him, and that's why my behavior was varied: sometimes the image was more like a hieratic figure—a shepherd, but then, when I sprang out of the felt, I was quite an ordinary man. And then the drooping tulip hat which had quite lost its form made it just like the circus. What I tried to do was to set up a really oscillating rhythm.

What was for Beuys a mixture of “circus” and a shamanistic ritual designed to restore order to a natural world disrupted by imperialism and capitalism must have been stressful, if not downright terrifying for the coyote. The cycle of movements and sounds were also symbolic: a triangle was an “impulse of consciousness,” the roar of a turbine was “undetermined energy,” a flashlight symbolized the kind of energy which dissipated as the day progresses (similar to a sun or a hearth), and the brown gloves represented the energy of human hands. 95 The coyote represented “psychological trauma point of the United States’ energy constellation: the whole American trauma with the Indian, the Red Man.” 96 This
must have been a difficult experience for the displaced and undoubtedly disoriented coyote.

Beuys’ challenge to imperialism, scientific positivism, and rationalism, ironically enough, led him to inadvertently reaffirm those very structures and behaviors, including the authoritarian practices, the affirmation of the role of a solitary and heroic individual who dominates and controls nature, and the reliance on mechanistic and objectifying methodologies. While his system was intentionally irrational, it was nonetheless a totalizing technological system that was imposed on a creature trapped in circumstances beyond his control. Rather than treating the animal in ways that demonstrate an awareness of and sympathy for its particular needs, Beuys was focused on other things. As is the case with so many colonized peoples, Little John is used as a means to an end. While Beuys thought that he was seeking out a mutually beneficial relationship with him, all of the terms of engagement are defined by Beuys, not Little John.

Many philosophers have, like their artist contemporaries, tried to seek a relationship with animals, using their writing as the performance space to make sense of the encounter. For Derrida the chance encounter, the interlocking gaze, ended in an unanswerable question marked by an awareness of “absolute alterity.” Derrida’s experience with his little cat was the kind of encounter that Lévinas has termed face-to-face. It causes Derrida to wonder, “Who I am—and who I am (following) at the moment when, caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal . . . I have trouble, yes, a bad time, overcoming my embarrassment.”

This cat, named Logos, is not referred to by name in the essay, but is repeatedly
described as little. It’s interesting that this word, an adjective that can be used to express endearment or to minimize, is also part of the coyote’s name, and also that in his own writing about his performance Beuys never refers to Little John by his name.

However, unlike the relationship between the coyote and Beuys’ where he never seems to wonder about this particular coyote’s perspective, this little cat provokes a powerful response from Derrida. He writes,

the cat that looks at me in my bedroom or bathroom, this cat that is perhaps not “my cat” or “my pussycat,” does not appear here to represent, like an ambassador, the immense symbolic responsibility with which our culture has always charged the feline race . . . If I say “it is a real cat” that sees me naked, this is in order to mark its unsubstitutable singularity. If it responds to its name . . . it doesn’t do so as the exemplar of a species called “cat,” even less so of an “animal” genus or kingdom. It . . . comes to me as this irreplaceable living being that one day enters my space into this place where it can encounter me, see me, even see me naked. Nothing can ever rob me of the certainty that what we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualized.98

Clearly the cat is neither a symbol (unlike Beuys’ coyote, he does not represent anything or anyone other than himself) nor is he a concept — a “cat” — but instead possess “unsubstitutable singularity” and is an “irreplaceable living being.”

Derrida goes on to reflect that this experience is “The point of view of the absolute other, and nothing will have ever given me more food for thinking
through this absolute alterity of the neighbor of the next (door) than these moments when I see myself seen naked under the gaze of a cat.” De Derrida asserts that human relationships with the “animal,” (as if there is only one) opens up questions related to “living, speaking, dying, being, and world as in being-in-the-world.” The other (a particular cat) provokes a line of inquiry that is outside of language and yet the power of this moment of exchange between the two, and Derrida’s effort to make sense of it—to translate—initiates a philosophical inquiry. This did not occur in the encounter between Beuys and Little John. The coyote was, essentially, a concept and was never really recognized as a particular living being.

Beuys’ encounter with Little John was far less intimate than what Derrida experienced with Logos. Beuys used the coyote as a prop for a performance that was intended to critique/heal humans. Although rich in the use of sensory media, the interactions between the two were governed by a set of pre-scripted behaviors. The relationship between Beuys and Little John, the coyote, occurs within a highly controlled environment, and one that is further constrained by a set of concepts which affirm binary oppositions such as human/animal and culture/nature. Any opportunity to engage with the coyote in ways that would permit a more open-ended relationship is “deflected” (to use a term coined by the philosopher Cora Diamond).

Beuys is an artist who cared deeply about the environment. He is rejecting “science” and turning to myth and shamanism to find another language to heal the rupture between culture and nature, and human and animal. However he is not
treating the animal in an animal-focused way, but as a way to act out a symbolic language. In *Ecology without Nature* Timothy Morton, an interdisciplinary scholar who works at the intersections of philosophy, ecology, literature, explores how in art, “the fantasies we have about nature take shape—and dissolve.”102 He believes “nature’s ‘confusing ideological intensity . . . impedes a proper relationship with the earth and its life forms.’”103 This is because, “Putting something called Nature on a pedestal and admiring it from afar does for the environment what patriarchy does for the figure of Woman. It is a paradoxical act of sadistic admiration.”104 In doing this we turn nature into a fetish object.

In order to change from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric worldview, Morton says we need to ask of any text, “What does it say about nature?” I would ask more specifically, “What does it say about animals?”105 Doing this will help us to engage with “things that are not identical to us or our preformed concepts” about nature.106 He believes that deconstruction, because it searches for points of contradiction and “deep hesitation in systems of meaning” can help us to this. According to Morton, shifting our worldview can alter how humans experience their place in the world, and since art is concerned with questioning established ways of feeling and perceiving, it is a powerful means for change. Even so, Morton does not believe we should “aestheticize ethics” (i.e., small is beautiful) or use it as a means of re-enchanting the world, which would then turn the aesthetic into an anesthetic.107 He writes,

Our notions of place are retroactive fantasy constructs determined precisely by the corrosive effects of modernity. Place was not lost, though
we posit it as something we have lost. Even if place as an actually existing, rich set of relationships between sentient beings does not (yet) exist, place is part of our worldview right now — what if it is actually propping up that view?\textsuperscript{108}

This is an argument against the re-enchantment of the world, and one which affirms the value of engaging the world as it is, not necessarily to accept it, but rather to give the attention it so richly deserves, to look closely and wonder, as Derrida did with his cat.

The concept of nature has continuously changed in western civilization. In the Middle Ages it was “practically a synonym for evil” while in the Romantic period it was considered the “basis for social good.” In the Enlightenment nature was a justification for establishing hierarchies for sexual and racial identity. Science used nature to make claims about what was abnormal and what was not. Nature is a common metaphor (i.e., the “invisible hand,” the “survival of the fittest”) and understood as either substance (the material realm) or essence (abstract principles, or the sublime).\textsuperscript{109} Morton proposes that we think about nature as an environment where humans live “in continuity with other beings such as animals and plants.”\textsuperscript{110} Perhaps following Haraway, he believes it is about “being-with, and offers some compelling reasons for why this is important:

All kinds of beings, from toxic waste to sea snails, are clamoring for our scientific, political, and artistic attention and have become part of political life—to the detriment of monolithic concepts of Nature . . . . Historical conditions have abolished an extra-social nature to which theories of
society can appeal, while at the same time making the beings that fell
under this heading impinge every more urgently on society.111

If we removed the ideology of nature, Morton thinks our relationship with the
environment would de-accelerate, which in turn would open up opportunities for a
closer reading. Using a theoretical approach to ecocriticism (Morton’s focus) or
human-animal relations (my focus) allows us “to examine the ways in which
ideological illusions maintain their grasp.”112 The goal is not to feel better or to
“attain any special state of mind” but rather to come to a place where “thought
necessarily bumps its head against what isn’t.”113

D. Object or Actor: An Insect Aesthetic

In chapters so far, the critical engagement is with institutions and
individual artists who are using nature and animals as foils, as means to human
ends. The fifth chapter considers the work of Hubert Duprat, a French conceptual
artist, and David Wojnarowicz, an American artist and AIDS activist working in
multimedia. Their work offers rich opportunities for considering relationships
between these artists and these insects, and also the ways in which other artists
and scientists interact with animals. These include questions related to whether or
not these objects are “art” or “artifact;” whether or not the artist can claim to be
the creator; and the artist’s responsibilities to the animals.

Duprat places the insects in an environment carefully designed to suit their
requirements, and then replaces the organic material that they would normally use
to construct protective casings with precious materials. The jewel-bedecked
outcomes, cast off by the tiny animals after they mature, are presented as aesthetic objects. Although the objects are quite beautiful, just as much attention has been paid to the process by which they are created. While he is an excellent caretaker, carefully providing the larvae what they need to flourish, Duprat doesn’t seem to have settled on exactly what kind of a relationship he has with these creatures. In a short documentary about his exhibition at Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery, Duprat’s ambivalence is clear when he describes the process as “a collaboration between me and the caddis larvae. I create the conditions necessary for the caddis to display their talents. I create situations. I’m a bit like an architect who has builders carry out his work.” Collaboration is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “[u]nited labour, co-operation; esp. in literary, artistic, or scientific work.” As it is commonly understood, collaboration suggests consent, but “united labour” is ambiguous in that it does not assign identity to whoever is doing the uniting. Collaboration implies equality, but the metaphor of an architect working with builders who “carry out” the work refers to a hierarchical arrangement in which one person is giving the orders while others are following instructions. To assert that this process is a collaborative effort glosses over the artist’s manipulation of and power over the insects, and clearly is not a description that even Duprat always feels comfortable with. In another interview the artist is quoted as saying, “I am playing a very bad trick on them.” In a third interview he noted that when he etches his name onto the gold plates that the insects will weave into their casings, he sometimes feels, “as if I am exploiting my workers. It is their work as much as it is mine” (emphasis added). In this final example,
Duprat affirms that the insects are co-creators and co-owners of the artifacts, but at the same time they are not collaborators, but workers. The possible relations described here range from a Marxist system in which the workers own the products of their labor to what occurs in an extractive colonial economy.

Many critics also anthropomorphize the relationship. One admiring reviewer refers to the insects as Duprat’s “beloved apprentices” and “assistants,” and notes that the artist has learned to speak their language. Some responses are more scientific. For example another reviewer impersonally describes the situation as one of “productive collisions between organic forms and technologized materials” — in other words the random interaction of nature and art. Here the insects are not anthropomorphized, but there is also a failure to recognize them as living creatures. From an environmentalist perspective, this might be seen as the equivalent of grass-fed cows or free range chickens; yet a postcolonial perspective could characterize this as an extractive economy where the colonized are fortunate enough to be ruled by a benevolent despot.

The philosopher Christian Besson brings a Kantian perspective. In his discussion of Duprat’s work, he quotes Kant’s claim that “Art is distinct from nature just as ‘making’ (facere) is from ‘doing’ or ‘causing’ in general (agere) and [just as] the product of the consequence of art is distinct as work (opus) from the product of nature as effect (effectus).” Besson also takes up questions of causality, ownership, and the relationship between Duprat and the caddis larvae. He asks,

Is the caddis worm's precious case the work of the insect or the work of
the artist? This is not the right question . . . . According to the first view, the caddis worm owed nothing to the artist (who is simply the author of one noise among the thousands of other noises in its environment).

According to the second view, the caddis worm is merely the executor of the artist's project. Besson believes that both questions miss the mark. For him the question is not so much whether it is the insect or the artist that creates the work, but both. The caddis worm is doing what it does, regardless of the interference of the artist and the insect might be considered “merely the executor of the artist’s project.” The result is a “doubly exposed object” which is both natural and artistic. Besson notes the “random upheaval” caused by replacing the organic matter with precious metals (the “noise” in the insects’ environment) that results in what Henri Altan, a biophysicist and philosopher, calls “absolute novelty.” Again, quoting Altan who takes a Kantian view, for human actors, a “series of gestures [such as the insertion of the foreign material into the larvae’s environment] is the result of our conscious will and is directed toward the goal that we wish to attain.” In contrast, for the insects, innovation or “absolute novelty stems from the indeterminate character of stimuli which thus play the part of random upheavals in the system which they affect.”

These “events” occur on two levels in the construction of the altered larvae cases: the biological and the aesthetic. The first involves the response of the larvae to the “noise” in their environment and the other is the action of the artist. While the human actor behaves in ways that are determined by a specified
goal, the larvae, while indispensable in producing an artifact that is a “novelty,” in this view are only responding to their environment in a genetically-determined manner. They are reactive rather than proactive. Kant wanted to clearly delineate differences between culture and nature as well as human and animal. However these hybrid artworks blur the distinction Kant wished to establish between beauty in art and in nature. In fact, if one challenges the nature-culture divide, Kant’s aesthetic theory evaporates.

In “Third Nature or the End of Origins,” the cultural historian Celeste Olalquiaga considers the history of and values attached to nature and culture in contemporary society. Because we place so much value on being there first, she explains, nature trumps culture. Nature is seen as natural and good. In contrast, culture is secondary, imitative, and inferior to nature. Oddly enough this makes culture, which is comprised of experiences, a material good while nature is immaterial, larger than life, and independent of time. Because nature, the original, was there first, it appears to transcend the chronology of culture. However “origins” is itself a cultural concept and so therefore is not outside of historical experiences. Nevertheless the “naturalization” of the cultural concept of origins allows it to escape “its cultural source by identifying with nature,” while ironically, at the same time, nature itself is “essentialized by such idealization” and so becomes denaturalized and immaterial. While culture seeks legitimacy in nature, nature is made abstract, and is an “empty matrix” to be used by culture.
Until the end of medieval period, nature, in the abstract, is associated with divine will. Natural materials or things made out of natural material can be cult objects that possess religious and spiritual powers. Over time, Olalquiaga writes, this change from a sacralized nature to one that, already in the eighteenth century has become a relic of itself . . . [and] will later be known as ‘natural history,’ that is, a field of knowledge, is so gradual and dramatic that we still have trouble assessing its full impact. The change from cult value to exhibition value of organic objects is in fact the transformation of a living nature, with which culture maintains an active, dynamic relationship, to a dead nature, which far from being the agent of divine power, is reduced to a passive object of human curiosity.\textsuperscript{126}

The preoccupation with originality and authenticity is a result of the mass production of the industrial age. Progress, individualism, and constant change were also associated with originality. Olalquiaga explains that only when the “proliferation of copies threatens and in effect displaces the singularity of an object does this singularity become important, representing an experience and a presence considered unique in space and time.” Originality becomes associated with authenticity, which in turn embodies truth and singularity (a quantity that takes on qualitative attributes). This occurs during this period because, according to Olalquiaga, authenticity and originality are reactionary responses to mass production.

However authenticity and originality are no longer meaningful in postmodernism. This is because while in the premodern period, copies were
secondary to the original (nature), over time modern copies lost their “inferiority complexes.” Olalquiaga reflects on this change,

It isn’t easy to state this aspect of modernity without falling into moral judgments, such as we have lost the capacity to relate cosmically or spiritually with the work; therefore we are worse off than before, we are less human, more mechanical and cold, and so on. She then proposes the concept of a “third nature,” which could allow us to think of nature “without immediately attaching to it the notion of origins and its collar of authenticity.”

Third nature relieves nature of its idealism and allows it to be “intertwined with the cultural.” Olalquiaga defines nature as “a condition we’ve adapted to” rather than something that is “biological and non-socialized.” This is because our relationship to nature is mediated by language and culture, and also because human interactions within nature and culture change both. Therefore both nature and culture are experiential rather than static state or essence imagined by idealists. In other words nature has always been “contaminated” by culture. She explains,

From the moment it goes beyond the strictly sensorial, our relationship to nature becomes a second-degree relationship, one that is not direct and immediate, but filtered by culture. However, this is a two-way street, since in the same way that nature becomes cultural to our eyes and through our actions, our own human nature is susceptible itself to this change. That is, our ‘original’ nature is transformed by culture in what is sometimes
perceived as a ‘second nature,’ usually indicating that something outside us has become such a part of ourselves that we now consider it part of our very nature.\textsuperscript{130}

Third nature is defined by Olalquiaga as the manipulation of nature with no cultural presence. Some examples of third nature provided by Olalquiaga include:

- Clones, “an original that is only nature, nothing else” because it is all biological, contains all attributes of original, and is not a copy or a fake (Further, if a clone can experience subjectivity, then it is a form of nature that is neither singular nor unique); and

- \textit{In vitro} fertilization, where an egg is fertilized in an artificial environment outside of the living organism.

According to Olalquiaga, the jeweled casings produced by the caddis larvae are an example of third nature because after intervening, Duprat allows nature to “take its course.” It is similar to pearl farming in that both create “a hybrid issued from nature and culture.”\textsuperscript{131} In contrast, cyborgs are not third nature because they contain a mixture of the biological and the artificial (natural and cultural).

Duprat’s work, and that of Catherine Chalmers, which are discussed in the next chapter, are situated at the intersection of science with aesthetics and ethics. In the 1980s, the philosopher Sandra Harding called for a successor science, an approach that recognized the societal structures that influence the production and acceptance of what we call scientific knowledge. According to Harding the ideology of objectivity dominates Western science. A more accurate and inclusive understanding of the world could be achieved by taking into account the ways in
which particular “social locations” influence scientific practices and understandings. These social locations are located at various intersections within a structure organized around power hierarchies and include groups whose identities are determined by race, ethnicity, gender, and class, among other factors. Harding thought including as many points as possible in this “grid” would offer a better way of doing science, since traditional perspectives rely too heavily on an assumed universal reality. Therefore she argued, social and natural science should include various standpoints, each of which may value different types of knowledge, and thereby challenge knowledge-producing systems that overlook these standpoints.132

A standpoint is not the same as a viewpoint or a perspective. A standpoint is the place from which people usually peripheral to the social hierarchy analyze the conditions of their lives and engage in a political struggle for change.133 While Harding’s standpoint theory offers a powerful critical tool to offset the isolated, rationalist, and universalizing strategies of science at the time it was first developed, since then Harding and others recognized some of its problematic tendencies. For example, since there is no objective position, standpoint can be criticized for being overly subjective. Because there is no clear way to determine which of competing stances or theories are correct or valid, it is vulnerable to relativism. In response to the first problem, one could argue that subjectivity already exists in science and that standpoint is actually a more democratic scientific practice. To the second, as others have observed, along with true, not-true and false, less false can be a category of “epistemic assessment.”134 A final
caution is that anyone using standpoint theory must be careful to avoid the essentialist trap, and not assume all members of a particular group share the same opinion. Harding herself brings her work to the point of strong objectivity, arguing that ‘objectivity’ that is dependent on the dominant order does not understand its parameters nearly as clearly, or ‘strongly,’ as an objectivity that is based in standpoints from marginalized positions.

Donna Haraway agrees with Harding that we need “views from somewhere” rather than “a conquering gaze from nowhere.” However, rather than focusing on the knower, Haraway emphasizes what is known within the particulars of a situation. Her concept of situated knowledge builds on the work of Harding and also addresses some of its potential pitfalls. Knowledge that is specific to a particular situation, according to Haraway, “offers a more adequate, richer, better account of a world, in order to live in it well and in critical, reflexive relation to our own as well as others’ practices of domination and the unequal parts of privilege and oppression that make up all positions.”

Theorist and performance artist Lynette Hunter expands Haraway’s ideas, arguing that not only the sciences but also the arts would benefit from a situated critique. In “A feminist critique of the rhetorical stance of contemporary aesthetics: Alternative standpoints,” Hunter introduces the rhetorically-informed concept of “situated textualities.” Situated textualities are places and occurrences where “people work on words together to build common ground for the articulation and valuing of knowledge.” Hunter draws upon rhetorical theory and practice, which has long distinguished between the situated, the systematic,
and the authoritarian. Rhetoric also positions truth as that which can be certain, plausible, or negotiated or probable.\textsuperscript{138} She explains that rhetoric can be understood as situated communication, and that it can create pathways between the situated textualities of the arts and the situated knowledges of science.\textsuperscript{139} Approaching art in this way can begin to offer alternatives to the “wordlessness” of what is denied, even as these pathways themselves should be critiqued. It is not only the end point of either the art-making or the science that is important, but also the textuality of the process used to get there while at the same time sustaining the medium.

The elements employed by science often appear to rely on an “autonomous, isolated individual” who is using “rationalist analytics in the service of absolute value-free logic” in the production of knowledge that appears to possess “neutral objectivity with verisimilitude and exact replicability.”\textsuperscript{140} However while scientific knowledge is subject to critical review, insights discovered or revealed by the arts are often not. Yet, as Hunter points out, “much recognized ‘art’ is just as systematic as science,”\textsuperscript{141} and both are concerned with knowledge and with the communication of knowledge. We need to recognize that aesthetics as well as science has its epistemological concerns and so we must more seriously study this kind of knowledge, including how it is acquired and communicated. Without this effort at articulation, knowledge in both of these domains remains tacit. The “autonomous yet universal man” and other tacit assumptions will continue to obscure the situatedness of the lives of every
individual, including scientists and artists, and limit what falls within the “representational parameters.”  

The consequence is that many people (and I would add, other sentient beings) are erased or overlooked. As a result the insights of those with differing perspectives that could enrich processes of assessment, change, and renewal are lost. Hunter goes on to ask, “[I]f the artistic texts are also able to carry and impose precisely the same elements as reductive science, why has there not been a parallel and through-going critique of aesthetics and criticism as they are taught and/or disseminated in the same institutional structures of the western world?”

Situated textuality allows one to read against the “privileged status,” in ways that are engaging rather than controlling or being controlled by it. Sidestepping adversarial debate, the work can become a “discursive site” that includes engaging with others in discussion or analysis. Rather than an “isolated genius who simultaneously can speak on behalf of all, conveying the absolute truth, through pure beauty,” artists can become engaged with “attempting the strategy of articulating the not-yet-represented or even embodied.” These epistemological and discursive strategies allow the arts and humanities to “discuss the difficulties that arise from the impossibility of neutral objectivity, fixed subjectivity and value-free knowledge” and provide a “context for the material working out of probably-the-best” rather than “plausible rationalization.” In contrast, according to Hunter,

When valued canonical art, in the name of culture, wrests some element from ideology’s obscuring and brings it to language and representation, it
finds something that seems ‘true’ because it fits so neatly into the interstices of social life, something that seems to be ‘beauty.’ The power of such production occludes the fact that we have few ways of recognizing, let alone valuing, elements brought to language from outwith ideological representations and their shadows.148

While standpoint offers opportunities for negotiations to occur between individuals and communities, not all standpoints are morally acceptable. Hunter warns, “[T]extuality is not always conducive to moral or indeed ethical awareness. Much negotiation between the self and community is authoritative, it imposes rather than articulates, and so does a considerable amount of textuality.”149 Other criticisms to this approach arise from more traditional stances. For example, as Hunter observes, Barthe’s and Foucault’s work on critiquing the “isolated genius” is treated as “erasure of the ‘individual’” and Derrida’s critique of “pure truth” is dismissed in the essentialist/relativist dichotomy.150

David Wojnarowicz, who died of an AIDS-related illness in 1992, used cockroaches as metaphorical objects and actors in his artworks, which were a response to the AIDS crisis. In the 1980s, Wojnarowicz identified with the cockroaches, and called them “non-charismatic mini-fauna.” Unlike in Duprat’s work, many of the cockroaches were harmed or killed during the art-making processes or while they were being exhibited. Ironically Wojnarowicz’s treatment of the cockroaches unintentionally mimics the abuse suffered by many gay people at the hands of homophobic people. In these works which address cultural phobias about AIDS and homosexuality, sexism and speciesism meet
While Haraway would surely not condone Wojnarowicz’s harmful manipulation of these insects, the ways in which the artist altered their bodies could be described as a cybordic process in which the cockroaches become hybrid creatures of both fiction and social reality. In “A Cyborg Manifesto” the metaphor of a cyborg is used by Haraway to address the problem of dualism, including human/animal and human/machine. Cyborgs do not have stable identities and cybernetic organisms can be divided into four categories: biological and mechanized systems; a hybrid comprised of machine and organism; a “creature of fiction” or a creature of “a lived social reality.” Any of these four categories allows for a cyborg to be human or animal, or a bit of both along with mechanized components or networks. The cyborg throws into disarray any conception of a stable identity or discrete social groups.

Haraway wants to confuse boundaries and facilitate border crossings, because she rejects identities based on the ideologies of naturalism, essentialism, or traditional feminism. Instead Haraway is interested in what Media Studies scholar Theresa M. Senf calls a “linguistic community of situated, partial knowledges,” which instead of dividing the world into public and private, operate as “partialities” rather than as a “totalizing whole.” Along with a number of contemporary theorists, Haraway sees Western science and politics as building on “a tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture.” This has led to a breakdown in relations between humans and animals due to pollution, tourism and medical experimentation among other things. The result is that “A stressed system goes awry; its communication processes break
down; it fails to recognize the difference between self and other.” Now, according to Haraway, machines are making “ambiguous the difference between the natural and the artificial.” She anticipates a time when “people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints.” As Senft notes, Haraway uses the metaphor of the “integrated circuit” to illustrate that categories such as home, state, and church now function more like networked communications forms, rather than the separate, discrete entities they once claimed to be under older forms of capitalism. “A Cyborg Manifesto” has two main points:

1. [T]he production of universal, totalizing theory is a major mistake that misses most of reality, and
2. Taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics, a demonology of technology.

Haraway concludes by stating “Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. This is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia.” Haraway’s writing enacts what it might be like to be in such a linguistic community. Senft observes, “To a large degree Haraway's Manifesto operates in the spirit of ‘l'écriture féminine’, using non-linear, performative and autobiographical language to describe the truth of a new kind of body: that of the cyborg.” This approach to theory was compelling to me because of the interdisciplinary nature of this dissertation, which melds art and philosophy.
Duprat and Wojnarowicz both use insects in their work, but there the similarity ends. For Duprat, the insects create the aesthetic object; for Wojnarowicz, the altered insects become the aesthetic object. Were one to image Duprat and the caddis fly larvae within the framework of the medieval conception of Chain of Being discussed earlier, each could be seen as functioning in unique ways within an indivisible whole, rather than as two discrete entities working either in a hierarchical fashion or across a nature-culture divide. It is also clear that Duprat is aware of the lifeworld or *Umwelt* of these tiny animals. Also Duprat appears to be as concerned with human-animal relations as with the objects created with or by them. Although harsher than Beuys, who did not intend to harm the coyote and seems to have developed a real affection for Little John, both Beuys and Wojnarowicz use the animals to communicate symbolically. Wojnarowicz is using the cockroaches in a very instrumental manner and seems to hold a Cartesian attitude toward them. They are treated more like machines than living beings. The artist does not seem to perceive, or perhaps doesn’t care, that the cockroaches have particular needs and interests, He transforms them into mechanized objects to create particular effects or reactions. In contrast, Duprat’s direct experience with the caddis fly larvae in their own environment is similar to that of an ethnographer intimately familiar with the people (or in this case, insects) he is studying, and with their ways. From how he handles and speaks about the caddis fly larvae, it is clear he is beginning to work on developing a culture and a language that honors their relationship.

**E. Biophobia: Situated Animals**
The fifth chapter examines the American Cockroach project, which was created by Catherine Chalmers, an American artist who lives and works in New York City, using photography, video, sculptures, drawings, and installations. She began exhibiting these works in 2003. Her exploration into the lives of insects, amphibians, reptiles, and small mammals more generally began in 1994. Chalmers’ work is an example of more recent and challenging theories of human-animal relations, and different concepts of sentience. As this summary demonstrates, the artwork being studied prompts a thorough-going reassessment of late twentieth-century philosophy around issues of aesthetics, ethics, and ontology.

Not only in film, but also in performances with living animals, a comfortable distance between animals and humans is typically maintained through an array of artistic conventions. Michael Kirby, a drama theorist, describes a performance as a symbolic matrix of time, place and character. As discussed earlier in this introduction, he believes the disparity between the artistic event and the spectator’s reality is important in performances. Some theorists would disagree, and believe that affirming the audience member’s personal response can result in a much deeper and stronger aesthetic experiences. Chalmers’ work, in which the staged “performance” of the cockroaches is designed to intrude upon the spectator’s distanced perspective, is an example of this alternate view. In contrast, in a non-matrixed performance of a task (for example in scientific experiments with cockroaches) scientists are simply performing tasks, but not “performing” in the theatrical sense. This suggests the differing aims of art and science with regard
to animals. In both situations, the insects are manipulated by humans to one degree or another and so “perform.” Chalmers intends to provoke thought and reflection in viewers. In a scientific study, the focus is on a performance that has measurable outcomes. There is no audience, only consumers of information, and the animal is an object of study. Chalmers presents the cockroaches as subjects or actors. They both embody and deliver content and even emotion, in a symbolic matrix. In a scientific experiment they are objects used as a means to deliver content.

Chalmers describes herself as being “born with an over-active sense of what E. O. Wilson calls ‘biophilia.’” In addition to her strong sense of a bond with all living things, her interest in human-animal relationships is driven by the realization that we live in a time when many animals are becoming extinct. For her, the art is “a toolbox I use to investigate what intrigues me.” Her artwork is a “record of her discovery.” She hopes that her work “could function like a flashlight illuminating what I think is important.” Food chains were obvious and there was “No need to make art about them” a few hundred years ago, but there is now because people today are much less connected with natural processes and no longer raise their own food.

Just as with the theorists discussed earlier, Chalmers also sees nature as a human creation: “It's one of those words whose definition changes throughout time. We would call a nature reserve natural because there are no buildings or roads there. But that reserve has been completely modified and managed by human beings.” Zoos, with their breeding and conservation programs, are
another example. She notes, “We have got ourselves into a position where, in the natural world, things are so out of balance that there is a need for intervention on our part, trying to put it right, or to what we believe is supposed to be right.”

Although through her close-up, large-scale images Chalmers is engaging with face-to-face encounters in a literal, rather than a metaphysical sense, it is irresistible to think about her work within the context of the ethics of Emmanuel Lévinas. The ethics of Lévinas is phenomenological in that it is founded upon a face-to-face encounter that is a “pre-intellectual affective experience.” As Bruce Young, a critical theorist, explains, the “other” (autrui) means the other person. This is someone that we encounter one at a time, face-to-face. Lévinas defines “face” (visage), according to Young, as a human face, but one that is not experienced as a physical or aesthetic object. Instead it is the “living presence of another person” and so could include bodily presence and other sensory impressions. Our inability to conceptualize this other face demonstrates the other’s “infinity.”

This encounter with the other arises from an individual’s capacity to experience sensations and emotion, sensibility and affectivity, and not from logic, utility, or duty. Lévinas believes the impact of the other on one’s senses and emotions is unlike any other experience one could possibly encounter. According to the philosopher Bettina Bergo’s reading of Lévinas, this “affective event,” in which another person calls out to me, even without words, evokes a response in me. This “intrinsic relationality” is “the beginning of language as dialogue.” According to Lévinas during a face-to-face encounter I first perceive an other (the
third person), then recognize the “thou,” the second person. In both instances there is an unbridgeable distance, but a sense of responsibility arises with a shift to the second person. Bergo describes this encounter as “an affective interruption” or a “lived immediacy” that is translated into language before it can be understood. This “lived immediacy” is also a characteristic of many creative activities and arts-oriented experiences. With respect to animals, the artist can make choices which will either enhance or diminish the likelihood of this kind of face to face encounter. In addition to increasing the potential for ethical recognition, according to Lévinas, the ego will discover its particularity — the “me,” the “I” — only after being “singled out by the gaze of another.”

165 We recognize ourselves at the same moment as becoming aware of our responsibility to others.

Bergo identifies three stages in this “event of transcendence,” or the interruption in which dialogue and ethics are intimately intertwined:

First, the onset of the other, as the expression of the face, causes freedom of will to falter and opens a “me” to goodness. Second, in accounting for itself, the subject approached by the other engages the first act of dialogue. Out of this, discourse eventually arises. The unfolding of discourse carries a trace of ethical investiture and self-accounting, and may become conversation and teaching. As the breadth of dialogical engagement expands, the trace of the encounter with the other becomes attenuated; and this, to the point where the meaning of justice poses a question.

166 The transcendence is the spontaneous sense of responsibility for another person. As such, it is essentially relational. This “face” of the other is “outside of
structures of force and conflict” and makes a “demand” that is unavoidable and so pulls the “me” outside of its usual sphere. The face-to-face encounter is between particular beings, so transcendence is redefined as a day-to-day common event rather than an “out of this world” experience. Since it is precognitive, there is no clear memory of it; each event has unexpectedness about it, and a unique quality. It is not intentional and cannot be contained by moral codes or universal precepts.

So far, this does not preclude what Lévinas calls the face-to-face relationship with an animal, and yet he restricts this kind of encounter to humans. In “Ethics and Trauma: Lévinas, Feminism, and Deep Ecology,” the philosopher Roger S. Gottlieb agrees with Lévinas that our responsibility for the other arises from “our sense of the other’s vulnerability and need, together with the other’s call to justice.” He also agrees that we need to move ethics away from “knowledge, emotional connection, or self-interest.” However Gottlieb is critical of any ethics founded on the binary premise that humans have choices while animals, bound by instinct, have none. As other contemporary thinkers concerned with human-animal relations have noted, Lévinas himself offers a compelling example of an animal whose actions appear to contradict this instinct-driven fight for survival that precludes the capacity for ethical encounters. In “The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights,” Lévinas recalls the period when he was incarcerated as a prisoner-of-war. A stray dog wandered into the Nazi prison camp and prisoners named him Bobby. Lévinas calls him “the Last Kantian in Nazi Germany.” During the time of their encounter with Bobby, Lévinas describes himself and the other men as “stripped of our human skin. Both guards
and local residents behaved as if the prisoners were “subhuman, a gang of apes.”

Bobby’s joyous greetings each morning and evening, “jumping up and down and barking in delight,” reminded them that they were men. Yet for Lévinas, Bobby does not have a face.

The philosopher Matthew Calarco devotes a chapter to Lévinas in *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida*. In spite of the fact that for Lévinas “the Other is always and only the human Other,” Calarco argues that the “underlying logic of his thought permits no such anthropocentrism.”

Instead Calarco finds a foundation for a universal ethical consideration without a priori constraints or boundaries. He challenges two premises used by Lévinas. The first is that no nonhuman animals are capable of an ethical response to the other, and the second is that animals do not elicit ethical responses from humans.

Calarco points out that Bobby is acting altruistically. Although he has nothing material to offer the prisoners, and even though his life is also at stake, he “pause[s] in his struggle for existence to be with the men and to offer them what he can: his vitality, excitement, and affection.” This gift is received but not recognized by Lévinas. Further Calarco asserts these kinds of gifts are not “interruptions” in the order of being, not marks of human transcendence, but are done by both humans and animals, and are “purely and wholly immanent to the natural world.”

Calarco argues that Lévinas’ reading of Darwin, in which Lévinas
concludes that “animal existence is ‘solely a struggle for survival without ethics’” is off the mark. Rather Calarco believes Darwin believed that “basic forms of ethical behavior can be found throughout both human society and the animal kingdom.” Second, Darwin identifies characteristics such as rationality, language, and morality as traits that are not unique to humans but can be found elsewhere in Nature. Finally, unlike Lévinas’ claim that there is a fundamental difference in kind between humans and animals, Darwin found (and 21st century scientists agree) that the differences between humans and animals are only in degree. Calarco concludes that to make a distinct break between animals and humans is not only bad biology, but also bad philosophy.

Biological continuism, first introduced by Darwin, is today widely accepted by many scientists. Calarco calls for philosophy to critically examine “the anthropocentric-epistemological thrust that has dominated and continues to dominate the overwhelming majority of philosophical inquiry.” He believes, Philosophy can no longer in good conscience ground itself on the assumption that human perspectives and human interest constitute the primary locus for thought. In short, today philosophy finds itself faced by animals, a sharp reversal of the classical philosophical gaze. While we are inevitably — perhaps — anthropocentric, if this were to be recognized, instead of blindly assumed, we could admit, in Calarco’s words, “We know neither what animals can do nor what they might become.” We would not only admit that we are unable to definitely claim that animals do not have a face, as Lévinas did, but also to becomes more vulnerable to their power to call our
egoism into question. Being open to “an affective interruption” from an animal offers rich opportunities to recognize our own particularities, which is also something that experiencing the arts can do.

Calarco believes Lévinas’ account of ethical experience doesn’t support the boundary he tries to establish between human and animal. In *Totality and Infinity*, the other is not identified specifically as a human being, but as an “ethical concept.” Exclusions to the ethical challenge posed by the other include the feminine, essentially an empty placeholder for intimacy and welcoming, and “the resistance of nonhuman things [which] does not make any impact on me.”

Neither can evoke a sense of responsibility from the ego. If one were to remove what Calarco calls this “idiosyncratic restriction,” there would be far more occasions where we might experience the interruption of egoism and also more opportunities for the evocation of ethical responses. Also, Calarco suggests that we enlarge the possibilities for interruption to include kindness or vitality as well as lack. The possibility of transformation, understood as the push by the other toward responsibility, might occur not only through giving, but also through leaving alone or joining with in celebration.

Historically Calarco notes all attempts to enlarge moral considerability have always been met with “the same reactionary rejoinder of absurdity from those who uphold common sense.” As feminists and environmentalists and animal rights ethicists have enlarged areas of moral considerability, we should recognize that the question of who is eligible for this status does not have a final answer. Calarco asks, “If ethics arises from an encounter with an Other who is
fundamentally irreducible to and unanticipatable by my egoistic and cognitive machinations, how could this question ever be answered once and for all?”

As Calarco observes, “If we are to learn anything from Lévinas, it is that ethical experience occurs precisely where phenomenology is interrupted and that ethical experience is traumatic and not easily captured by thought. Given its diachronic structure, ethical experience can at best be only partially reconstructed in thetic form. This would, it seems, require us always to proceed as if we may have missed or misinterpreted the Other’s trace.” While the arts use many strategies, including concepts and logic to communicate, they can also reach us on the precognitive and affective level. Therefore the arts are especially well suited for offering new ways of engaging with the animal other and for the strategic disruption of metaphysical anthropocentrism called for by Calarco.

Calarco concludes his chapter on Lévinas with a reminder of the urgency and the necessity of recognizing our responsibility to the animal other: “Never before in human history have so many animals been subjected to horrific slaughter, unconscionable abuse and unthinkable living conditions.” He also calls on us to notice animal resistance:

The elephant who escapes from its imprisonment at a circus; the pig who flees the slaughterhouse and runs free in the streets until shot by police; the whales who protect each other from harpoons; the lion who mauls its human handler; the chimpanzee who attacks an experimental scientist; the feral cat who refuses to be handled; Bobby the dog surviving against all odds in ‘some wild patch in the region of the camp’ — these and other
such figures of animal resistance should remain at the core of animal ethics as much as the suffering animals whose terrible fate we indirectly catch sight of at meal time or in underground videos of slaughterhouses.\textsuperscript{186}

This notion of animal resistance is one that is rarely considered by theorists, and for many artists and animal trainers it is simply something to be overcome. For Calarco it is an intentional act by the animal, an articulation of a position demands our attention and an ethical response.

In “(De)Facing the Animals: Zooesis and Performance,” Una Chaudhuri also reflects on the story about Bobby. She also challenges the denial by Lévinas to see in Bobby an “ethical face.”\textsuperscript{187} “The phenomenon of the face is not in its purest form in the dog,” Lévinas claims. One wonders if in that moment it is Lévinas who is unable to access that moment of transcendence, that “Good beyond Being,” and not Bobby. As the years went on, although Lévinas never affirmed that animals could have this capacity, he seems to have become less definite about it. In an interview in the late 1980s he says, “I cannot say at what moment you have the right to be called ‘face.’” Yet he continued to believe that “The human face is completely different and only afterwards do we discover the face of the animal.”\textsuperscript{188}

Why does Lévinas deny the “ethical face” of the animal in his philosophy? Perhaps for a man that was treated as subhuman for so long in a concentration camp, it was too threatening to think that a dog could contain “a trace of the infinite.” Perhaps the answer lies in his effort to connect philosophy and religion, the immediate moment and the infinite, the material and the ineffable. Bergo
explains that Lévinas believed “[it] is and must remain a question too large for philosophy to know what explains the force of the other’s expression. Nothing explains it.”¹⁸⁹ The transcendence is the “Good beyond Being” and as such contains a trace of the infinite. Therefore transcendence is neither fully in the world, nor is it an exclusively spiritual experience. Because animals are only “biological” according to Lévinas, they do not contain the “trace of the infinite.”¹⁹⁰

Chaudhuri notes many similarities between the face-to-face encounter of Lévinas and those experienced by artists who are working with animals. These include embodied presence and expressive encounters in a shared time-space.¹⁹¹ In spite of what she calls “the laugh test,” the response of most people to the claim that we should take animals seriously, she points out that an increasing number of artists and philosophers are concerned with our ethical relationship with animals. She cites Derrida’s observation that ignoring the capacity of an animal to look at us is a “calculated forgetting” and that pets are “radical others sharing one’s most intimate moments and spaces.”¹⁹² On the other hand, Chaudhuri points out the face is not always a means of connecting. She describes Deleuze’s and Guattari’s description of the face as a “deadening social mask imposed on the modern subject.” This face, according to them, can “cover the whole body, indeed the whole world; it is a grid, a diagram, a binary machine, and is in its very nature despotic; it takes the human animal and makes it Man; it takes the love and makes her Citizen; it takes the animal and makes it bestial.” The animal on the other hand is “free of faciality, immersed in the very condition that
makes the animal so threatening to individualistic humanism: its multiplicity, its membership in a herd or pack in which individuals are not readily distinguishable.” While the dog remembered by Lévinas is very much a particular individual, the erasure of his face, as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, would cast him into a pack.

In spite of our perception of their pack-like existence, if we could in fact see the faces of insects in the ethical sense described by Lévinas, our relationships could be reimagined, something that Chalmers is very much interested in exploring. In the text accompanying “Befriending a Bug,” a multimedia work created for “Should You Ever Find Yourself in Solitary,” Chalmers writes, “Flies, spiders, ants and cockroaches – all could easily come and go through the cracks of a prison cell as if they were freeways, challenging the very notion of solitary.”

There are many similarities: for example, ants are social and have “invented a networked communication system that rivals the Internet.” She compares antennae touches to text messages, and points out that ant conversation is not top down, but is one of connection and collaboration. Anyone could benefit from feeding ants, because “those antennae touches will communicate a message to come visit you. To feed and care for another being, or hundreds of beings, has proven health and emotional benefits.” Flies live out the same dramas of birth, sex, predation, war and death as humans, just on a smaller scale. However, as Chalmers observes, “humans often prefer control over companionship, and this is something that bugs offer even someone in solitary confinement.” She concludes, “But maybe you buy none of this. For some people solitary confinement is
preferable to the company of insects. Then at least a bug could provide a rare
opportunity for the expression of control over your environment, as you chase it
around the cell and simply squish it out of existence. Humans have been doing
this for a very long time.”

Her imagined interactions between prisoner and insect dissolve the barrier between the aesthetic object or actor and the spectator or viewer. The insect and the person are in one matrix of time and space, perhaps a “becoming animal.”

For Lévinas, for whom the particular and singular individual is so important, the pack would be an erasure of the self, and so of one’s humanity. In contrast, in *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari reject the idea of any stable and fixed self, preferring instead the pack. Rather than affirming the value of an individual, which could be understood metaphorically as a tree, with its single trunk and stable point of origin, they prefer the rhizome, a multiple that grows horizontally and has an expansive network of connections. Not only plants, but also animals, and especially those in packs are rhizomes.

Also in contrast to Lévinas, who prioritizes the human, Deleuze and Guattari affirm a horizontal orientation in which animals are important because, as they explain,

the relationships between animals are the object not only of science but also of dreams, symbolism, art and poetry, practice and practical use. And on the other hand, the relationships between animals are bound up with the relations between man and animal, man and woman, man and child, man and the elements, man and the physical and microphysical universe.

While animals aren’t explicitly valued for their instrumental use, the focus is still
on the human. Based on their relationships with, and use by people, Deleuze and Guattari categorize animals in three ways.\textsuperscript{198} “Individuated animals” are sentimental pets. These are “oedipal animals each with its own petty history.” Deleuze and Guattari disdainfully state that “anyone who likes cats or dogs is a fool.” The second category applies to animals used in myths, often for patriotic or religious purposes. The third grouping, the “demonic animal,” is in a pack or comes together as “affect animals that form a multiplicity, a becoming, a population, a tale . . . .” The philosopher Alain Beaulieu explains that demonic here means \textit{daïmon}, a creature existing between the world of the living (states-of-beings) and some kind of suprasensible world comprised of inorganic life, affects, and impersonal forces.\textsuperscript{199} An animal in one category can be “treated” in ways that will move it to another one. For example, an animal that is a member of a pack might be singled out to be treated as a pet.

In their philosophy Deleuze and Guattari transform subject-object relations. Molar units — discrete forms with clearly delineated boundaries and identities — are replaced by fields of activity described as molecular. Affect is not a personal emotion but an interactive state. Molecular dynamics are not contained within nor dependent upon form. The molecular “effects a dissolution of form that connects the most diverse longitudes and latitudes, the most varied speeds and slownesses, which guarantees a continuum by stretching variations far beyond its formal limits.”\textsuperscript{200}

These multiplicities — the pack or the molecular dynamics (and not a collection of entities) — become assemblages. Assemblages come into being,
change, or even dissipate in an ongoing dynamic of becomings. Deleuze and Guattari celebrate “multiplicity” because they believe that “everything is not composed of units operating within rules, as in structuralism, but of multiplicities spreading and connecting with other multiplicities within a non-centered structure.” According to them, “A multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature . . . .” Instead of offspring — or filiation, as they characterize the process — the life of the pack increases through infection or contagion. Therefore “packs form, develop, and are transformed by contagion.” The pack is simultaneously an animal reality, and the reality of the becoming-animal of the human being.

Instead of “playing” family with animals, Deleuze and Guattari place the greatest value on “becoming animal.” Becomings occur in the space in between rather than within any given entity. Since they emphasize what becoming animal is not in great detail, but do not spend much time defining what it is, I found it helpful to consider they ways in which other philosophers interpreted this concept. The one that came closest to my own reading of One Thousand Plateaus was written by Gerald L. Bruns:

Basically “becoming-animal” is a movement in which a subject no longer occupies a realm of stability but rather is folded into a nomadic mode of existence in which one is always an anomaly, that is, inaccessible to any form of definition. It is a movement from body to flesh, where the one is a figure of unity and strength, while the other is in an interminable state of
disarticulation or disfigurement . . . It is not animal metamorphosis but an achievement of non-identity, which for Deleuze and Guattari is the condition of freedom. Deleuze and Guattari contrast this work of becoming free through the dissolution of identity — a philosophical approach, with two scientific ones: natural history (defined as exploring relationships within a framework of series and structures between animals) and evolutionary science (which is concerned with “genealogy, kinship, descent, and filiation). In both, the driving principle is mimesis: for the natural sciences, this is “as perpetually imitating one another, progressively or regressively” in relation to a divine being. For evolution, this is in the form of “mirror imitation with nothing left to imitate because it itself is the model everything else imitates, this time by ordered difference.”

Chalmers’ work with insects, and especially cockroaches is interesting to consider within the differing perspectives of Lévinas and Deleuze and Guattari. The cockroaches’ movements in packs that are both impersonal and energetic are unnerving for many. These pack-like characteristics are just what Chalmers is challenging in her subversive presentation of them as individuals with “faces” and facing very human predicaments. The cockroaches are “becoming human.” They are certainly not pets or mythic beings. Chalmers’ cockroaches could also be understood as falling into what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the demonic category, living yet without affect, embodying a human reality — or perhaps nightmare in the execution series. Both of these apparently incongruous philosophies can be applied to Chalmers’ work, in which the animal moves into
narratives once reserved only for humans. In the follow chapter, it is the humans who try to “become animal,” not by relinquishing their humanity but by merging with a herd and seeking out a common language.

**F. Leaving the Field: Being with Animals**

In chapter two I consider the question “How are animals made to perform in circuses?” In chapter five I engage with the question “How are animals made to mean?” through looking at some recent changes in the ways in which artists work with animals in performances.\(^{206}\) In that interview with “The Guardian” cited earlier in this introduction Chalmers observes that we bring a “third human eye” to the predator-prey act. Humans place themselves outside of nature and watch, both “fascinated and repelled by violence among animals . . . .” Another strategy for distancing is that afforded by maintaining the human-animal and nature-culture divide. Televised nature films are an example of this dynamic. “[A]s long as nature stays over there, we accept it being red in tooth and claw and, as every TV producer knows, viewers get a thrill watching, from the comfort of the couch, animals tearing one another apart.” Chalmers observes, “But, when nature unfolds in the human realm, people’s reactions are all over the map.”\(^{207}\) Chalmers’ work is designed to disrupt the distance, and so is the work of the artists discussed next.

Animal acts that emphasize human-animal relationships and celebrate the innate behaviors of horses are the focus of the performances in this concluding sixth chapter. While the productions of Théâtre Équestre Zingaro, under the direction of Bartabas, are informed by mythic and symbolic content, the dances
by Nita Little and Joanna Mendl Shaw focus on how we might redefine human-animal relations through expanding our conception of language and creating a shared vocabulary. In all of the works, nature is presented as superior in one way or another to culture, and so that binary is a powerful influence. The premise that language is a uniquely human attribute is challenged by all of these artists, and other, embodied kinds of languages are embraced, studied, and utilized. With perhaps the exception of Little, the works described here are cultural products created for audiences that present a vision of human-animal relations or of what humans imagine about these animals, about nature, or both. While more or less building on natural behavior in ways that are distinctively different from the circus acts described in chapter five, the horses are still not simply acting “naturally.”

Théâtre Zingaro comes out of a circus tradition, but also integrates theater, dance, music and poetry in its spectacular multimedia productions. The head trainer and artistic director, Bartabas, uses a system of incentives or disincentives with the horses, and is careful to respond to each particular animal’s personality and abilities. In language that echoes the ideas of Haraway and Deleuze and Guattari, Bartabas describes his work as “a joint ‘becoming,’ a collaboration between two forms of intelligence”: “dances of the im/possibility of contact.” Bartabas also seems to express the longing for that cross-species connection described by Diane Ackerman.

Nita Little describes her interactions with a horse named Kate during a workshop offered by Mendl Shaw. In her essay, “Dancing Attention on a Ground
of Inequivalence,” Little uses a form of dance called Contact Improvisation to explore relationships between the territories of her own body and that of the horse. Contact Improvisation has been described as a “framework for an improvised duet” and “a dance of investigation of weight, touch, and communication.”\textsuperscript{209} Mendl Shaw is interested in the “nonverbal conversations” which can occur between humans and horses. Her work is informed by the Parelli Natural Horsemanship (PNH) equine training system. PNH training uses a set of exercises called horsenatilities. Depending on the horse’s personality, approaches to training will vary.\textsuperscript{210} Like Bartabas, Mendl Shaw emphasizes a relational and embodied approach. The Equus Project under the direction of Mendl Shaw presents large-scale site-specific works for dancers and horses. One of their dances, \textit{(Un)stable Landscape}, which is performed on a hillside field in Maine, is discussed at length in the last chapter.

The field, as contrasted with a paddock, serves as metaphor for a movement by horses and dancers from culture to nature. Fields are also used to refer to areas of scholarly specialization. These fields, as Edward Said observes in \textit{Orientalism}, “acquire coherence and integrity in time because scholars devote themselves in different ways to what seems to be a commonly agreed-upon subject matter.”\textsuperscript{211} In another passage he writes,

Yet it goes without saying that a field of study is rarely as simply defined as even its most committed partisans . . . claim it is. Beside, a field can change so entirely, even in the most traditional disciplines . . . as to make an all-purpose definition of subject matter almost impossible.\textsuperscript{212}
Said connects these disciplines with the production of particular kinds of knowledge. As Spivak has noted, these relations are informed by assumptions which support the establishment of power relations based on hierarchies which in turn justified Western imperialism. While Said is referring to the Western production of knowledge about the Middle East, his insights also can be applied to how we produce knowledge about and understand concepts such as nature and culture, and more specifically, human-animal relations.

The challenges for artists who are concerned with these issues evoke the one raised by Gayatri Spivak in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” This essay explores relations between imperialist Britain and the Indian Hindus in general, and the practice of sati in particular, and suggests that this dynamic might also be applied to other situations and relationships. She considers the challenges associated with understanding groups that are in subordinate positions in relation to those in control. As Spivak’s later work, clarifies, the subaltern is not simply the radical other. She believes excessively emphasizing differences, or in the case of her work in subalternity, the inability to speak or to be heard diverts our attention away from the necessity of having in place what Spivak calls a “valid institutional background for resistance.” In the example of sati, there is only “institutional validation” for this practice and so resistance was possible, or in the case of those who did resist, it was not recognized. In some ways this parallels the animal other, who is positioned on the other side of that “abyss” or “Great Divide” and yet both is and is not the other we imagine. Spivak describes the ways in which those with the power cannot help but impose their standards and ways of knowing on
that other. The interests, activities, and perspectives of the subaltern group are
distorted, according to Spivak, because even in spite of the best intentions the
dominant group inevitably and at times even unconsciously, put its own interests
first. Even those wishing to give others a voice end up unintentionally silencing
them.

In “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography,” Spivak considers
possibilities for change, and specifically ones that will put the subaltern in the
position of being a change agent rather than the object of reform. Summarizing
the conclusions of the Subaltern Studies group, she describes change as something
that should be “pluralized and plotted as confrontations rather than transition” and
that such changes are “signaled or marked by a functional change in sign
systems.” An example of a functional change in a sign system is the shift from
describing a group from criminal to insurgent, or an individual from bondsman to
worker. These shifts relocate the agency of change; in this case from the
enforcers of the law to the insurgent (or subaltern).

Spivak writes that a functional change in a sign-system is a “violent event”
because “change itself can only be operated by the force of a crisis.” For change
to occur, the space for a change must already have been present in the sign-system
as it was functioning beforehand. This is because the change functions as a
supplement to a lack in a previous function. Therefore, Spivak explains, “The
crisis could not have made the change happen.” She directs her reader to
Derrida’s analysis of this shift: “The movement of signification adds
something . . . but this addition . . . comes to perform a vicarious function, to
supplement a lack on the part of the signified.” For Derrida, texts are structures that are created through “inclusions, exclusions and various means of cancelling out contradictions.” A text may be a book, and it also can be any kind of structure that has borders, edges, or limits. Texts have what Derrida calls “contradictory coherence,” which means that the contradictions in it are suppressed. In what Spivak calls the “clandestine operation of supplementarity” something is added to complete a thing, make up for a deficiency, or extend or strengthen the whole.

According to Derrida, it is impossible to know everything about any field of study. As the literary theorist John Phillips explains, this “assumption of totalization” is an illusion for two reasons. First, “There is more than one can say. There is no theoretical language rich or dense enough to capture the finite world of rich particularity.” The second reason is that the field itself — exclusive of whatever content it contains — is finite, without a center, and nevertheless contains infinite substitutions. At this absence center is the process of difference, which can mean either to defer or to differ from.

Because of this absence at the center, knowledge is never complete. In “Structure, Sign, and Play,” Derrida explains,

If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field — that is language, and a finite language — excludes totalization. This field is in effect that of play, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis, instead of being
too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions.\textsuperscript{220}

Derrida’s point, as Phillips emphasizes, is that there is an “unpresentable absence at the very core of experience.”\textsuperscript{221}

In “Violence and Metaphysics” Derrida considers the differences between empirical knowledge, arising from the senses, and philosophical knowledge arising from an interaction between experience and reason. Lévinas’ “radical empiricism” is one that is neither transcendental nor empirical. While Derrida agrees with Lévinas’ description of this encounter, and agrees that “the experience of the other (of the infinite) is irreducible” he asks,

\[ \text{[C]an one speak of an } \textit{experience} \text{ of the other or of difference? Has not the concept of experience always been determined by the metaphysics of presence? Is not experience always the encountering of an irreducible presence, the perception of a phenomenality?} \textsuperscript{222} \]

Derrida concludes that the experience of the infinitely other exposes the illusion of a “metaphysics of presence,” the belief, or perhaps the premise, that one can use either rational or empirical means to gain a complete knowledge of another creature or thing. Yet even the radical empiricism of Lévinas’ experience of the other is insufficient. As Phillips points out,

\[ \text{You cannot see a difference per se (nor taste one). You cannot think a difference per se. If one is serious about calling the experience of difference an experience then one has to go beyond both empiricism and metaphysics. The empiricality of the trace or mark . . . cannot be reduced} \]
to sensible or intelligible experience. There is now a different concept of experience altogether.”

While Said and Spivak consider the ways in which field of knowledge and cultural hierarchies limit understanding, and Derrida examines how language itself is a centerless field of infinite substitutions, Bakhtin affirms the value of a “multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships.” He is also interested in the multilayered links between utterances and languages.

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin uses the concept of polyphony, a situation in which voices do not add up to one complete whole and yet they do not necessarily contradict each other. Instead, polyphony is related to the “unfinalizable self.” While Bakhtin’s focus was on humans, these insights can be applied to communications between and among many species. In their biography of Bakhtin, Clark and Holquist explain, “In Bakhtin, the difference between humans and other forms of life is a form of authorship, since the means by which a specific ratio of self-to-other responsibility is achieved in any given action — a deed being understood as an answer — comes about as the result of efforts by the self to shape a meaning out of the encounter between them” (emphasis added). Bakhtin’s ideas about language extend beyond the written and spoken word. He writes, “The dialogic contrast of languages (but not of meanings within the limits of a single language) delineates the boundaries of languages, creates a feeling for these boundaries, compels one to sense physically the plastic forms of different languages.”
Heteroglossia or the “social diversity of speech types” refers to internal stratification within the same language. Age, group membership, profession, current events, “passing fashions” and “sociopolitical purposes of the day, and even of the hour” influence how we use language. In “Discourse in the Novel,” Bakhtin writes, “Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life.” In The Dialogic Imagination Bakhtin describes language as embedded in a physical realm:

At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions — social, historical, meteorological, physiological — that will insure that a word [and I would add gesture, sound, touch, glance] uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it could have under any other conditions; all utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup, and therefore impossible to resolve. Heteroglossia is as close a conceptualization as is possible of that locus where centripetal and centrifugal forces collide; as such, it is that which a systematic linguistics must always suppress (emphasis added).

An utterance — a spoken word, statement, or vocal sound — is one of many links in innumerable chains of speech acts. Utterances are not simply generated by an individual, but are “responsive reactions to other utterances.” According to Bakhtin, each utterance has four traits: boundaries, responsivity or dialogicality; an ending (where the speaker has finished), and a generic form. The generic form depends on the sphere where the communication is occurring, and yet at the same
time it is maintained by the speech genre. If the genre doesn’t match the sphere, the one communicating is seen as incompetent by others in that sphere. A sphere could be a professional, social, or familial environment, among others.\textsuperscript{232} An utterance — a spoken word, statement, or vocal sound — is one of many links in innumerable chains of speech acts. Utterances are not simply generated by an individual, but are “responsive reactions to other utterances.”\textsuperscript{233}

A philosopher whose work lies directly in the path of concerns put forward by Said, Spivak, Derrida and Bahktin, Donna Haraway opens her most recent book, \textit{When Species Meet}, with two questions: “Whom and what do I touch when I touch my dogs?” and “How is ‘becoming with’ a practice of becoming worldly?”\textsuperscript{234} She is critical of philosophy’s tendency to generalize \textit{from} rather than grapple \textit{with} the ordinary, especially with regard to animals. This, she believes, results in a movement away instead of a staying with. As her questions suggest, an embodied engagement with particular beings and an intentional sharing — a becoming with — is a worlding experience. Worlding is an active process in which “sticky knots . . . bind intra-acting critters, including people, together in the kinds of response and regard that change the subject — and the object.”\textsuperscript{235} There is no first place, but instead a becoming consisting of “meetings make us who and what we are in the avid contact zones that are the world.” Responsibility comes out of this because “if we know well . . . we care.”\textsuperscript{236}

In contrast to the Great Divide, Haraway asserts, “To be one is always to \textit{become with} many.”\textsuperscript{237} This is a challenge to human exceptionalism, which holds that humans are unique in not being part of the “spatial and temporal web of
interspecies dependencies.” This is also clearly a criticism of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s “becoming animal” in which the figure represents a metaphorical movement from a body into a state of nonidentity that they associate with freedom.” For Haraway embodied experience is highly valued, and animal and human bodies engage in the “subject-and object-shaping dance of encounters.” The figures in this dance are “ordinary beings-in-encounter in the house, lab, field, zoo, park, office, prison, ocean, stadium, barn, or factory.” These figures, Haraway writes,

are not representations or didactic illustrations, but rather material-semiotic nodes or knots in which diverse bodies and meaning coshape one another. For me, figures have always been where the biological and literary or artistic come together with all of the force of lived reality. My body itself is just such a figure, literally.

Obviously Haraway disputes the Cartesian claim that while humans can respond, animals can only react. In contrast, for Haraway, animals (including humans) are always “meaning–making figures that gather up those who respond to them, into unpredictable kinds of ‘we.’” Further, these figures don’t only respond but also ask, “who ‘we’ become when species meet?” Haraway is interested in the ways in which this “we” might flourish together. Contact between ordinary beings and actual bodies is an indispensable part of that process. In addition to touch, looking and becoming with “make us responsible in unpredictable ways for which worlds take shape.”
While Haraway very much agrees with Derrida’s critique of Cartesian tradition, she believes he misses the opportunity to truly engage with the animal other, even his little cat, which he recognizes as unique and irreplaceable. She also appreciates Derrida’s point that

in asserting human exceptionalism and dominion, we are not simply attributing particular traits to humans; we are also denying, in Derrida’s words, the animals’ capacity for “speech, reason, experience of death, pretense of pretense, covering of tracks, gift, laughter, tears, respect, and so one— the list is necessarily without limit.”

By expanding Bakhtin’s communicative sphere beyond speech, to include other sensory forms of communication and other species, it is not only the self that is unfinalizable, but all of our relationships with other creatures, and even the world itself. Haraway refers to this as creating a “we” while Derrida presents it as the impossibility of totalization.

The question of the animal responding leads to the challenge of communication, and inevitably of translation. Can they speak? Many would say yes. If so, how do they speak and what are they saying? How can we avoid the anthropomorphic temptation to put words into their mouths or interpret their actions in ways that make sense to us, but do not necessarily correspond with the particular animal’s intention? One way of engaging with these questions is to consider how animals have been “made to mean” in performances both in popular culture and in the performing arts. Another would be to ask, as Haraway does, “How can we create a world together.” This different kind of experience, is one
which is set in motion by an encounter with the “other” — or as Haraway describes it, a “being with” our companion species. The three encounters considered in this final chapter demonstrate how elusive it is to have such an experience, even for those who care deeply and have a great deal of insight into the behaviors of the horses they are working with and are sensitive to what they perceive as the needs of these animals.

A willingness to make the attempt to be with another, and to become with particular being, whether it be one’s own species or another, opens up new possibilities and responsibilities. It can generate insights and instigate creativity. This is what Mendl Shaw discovered during her troupe’s exploration of a movement vocabulary. “What is realized . . .” she writes, “is the process of coming to know one’s own language as it is perceived in someone else’s language, coming to know one’s own belief system in someone else’s system.”246 An *Un/stable Landscape* does not only refer to a dance by the Equus Project, but also to the territory we inhabit when we open the gate, and thereby expand possible fields of knowledge that have been too long constrained, either arbitrarily or unintentionally. It is a profoundly life-affirming move, and certainly expands the number of dancing partners. No longer need we be that lonely species, isolated on the other side of that abyss.

5. Questions to Consider
How do the art practices and the critical practices discussed here speak to each other? Both are concerned with the nature of being and the ethics of relationship. These artists and philosophers explore ways of becoming and being with, of particularity and of the dynamics which obscure or erase boundaries. All are deeply involved with language and expanding possibilities of expression and communication among and between species. All of the works considered here are addressing what Hunter has more generally called the “rhetorical context of moral and ethical issues in society.” My dissertation focuses this rhetorical context more specifically on the ways in which artists who are working with living animals may or may not open up new possibilities for understanding and being in relationship with these animals. Even as I consider the blind spots of Beuys, I wish to heed Hunter’s observation that “responsible critics” do not “leave the pieces on the floor” but attempt to reconstruct new strategies. These strategies include a set of questions raised by Hunter that I find extremely helpful. This includes:

- Why am I working on this in the first place?
- Where are the tensions and difficulties in the art work?
- What kind of pressures are put on art to so that it can fit a representation more understandable to the reader or viewer?
- Is the artwork understood as created by a single individual, acting as a transgressor on behalf of the reader/viewer? If so is the viewer “deprived of agency, unable to discuss or respond or articulate the things “difficult to value yet immediate to our lives?”
• How can this artwork be understood in the “rhetorical context of moral and ethical issues in society”

• And then finally, and more specific to my own project, are the animals also deprived of agency? What would agency look like or be like for this specific animal in this particular situation?

Each artwork presents not one, but multiple “views from somewhere,” as Haraway expresses it, rather than the single artist’s or viewer’s “conquering gaze from nowhere” discussed earlier. As discussed earlier, knowledge that is specific to a particular situation, offers a richer account of the world and helps us to live in ways that keep us aware that each of us has our own particular ways of seeing the world. It will also help us to remain sensitive to the challenge and even the impossibility of understanding the perspectives of other living creatures, both human and not. In spite of the inevitable misreadings and omissions, this approach still “offers a more adequate, richer, better account of a world.” And finally, Hunter’s point that it is not only the endpoint, whether that be an aesthetic product or scientific knowledge, but also the “textuality of the process used to get there” that should engage our attention and our critical reflection.
Chapter One

Skin Deep: Collecting Animals

On a winter weekday morning, hundreds of elementary school children pour into the Akeley Hall of African Animals at the American Museum of Natural History. Their high-pitched voices echo through the cavernous galleries. Like flocks of sandpipers rushing along intertidal zones, the children ebb and flow, pausing briefly at each diorama, then quickly moving on. Their animated motions and sounds accentuate the animals’ unnatural stillness. In addition to school groups, there are families with young children. Mothers mostly (and the occasional father) gently direct their child’s attention to the dioramas with comments such as “Look honey, Can you see the mother and the baby?” or “They’re a family, just like us!” On the other side of the glass, the animals, eternally frozen behind the plate glass, gaze back or seem to interact with each other, the life-like gestures painstakingly recreated by invisible hands. A mother nuzzles her offspring; a male protectively stands by his “family;” exuberant cubs tumble and play with each other. Although the species change, idealized familial interactions are a reoccurring theme. In one of the most poignant arrangements a massive grouping of elephants, led by an enormous and confidently posed bull, is
forever traveling in a tightly-knit formation. A baby elephant, “safely” ensconced in the midst of its enormous elders, hooks its small trunk around its mother’s larger one and perpetually gazes up at her.

This family-oriented narrative is occasionally interrupted by an animal that has been presented in a fierce pose — obviously futile, considering the eventual outcome. What were the last moments of these animals like? Were their deaths mercifully sudden? Prolonged? Painful? What prevented them from escaping? From successfully protecting their young? The answers are not presented in the carefully composed texts on the panels accompanying each display. It is just not something that comes up for most of the visitors. It’s not what they think about when they visit the museum.

1. **Object Lessons**

Natural history is a branch of knowledge that uses observation rather than experimentation to learn about natural objects, including animals, vegetables, and minerals that dates back to Aristotle and Pliny the Elder. Over time, the focus has shifted to living things. Since the middle of the seventeenth century, natural history has with increasing frequency been associated with presenting that knowledge in a popular rather than a formal scientific manner.\(^{250}\)

Predating dioramas such as those used in the Akeley Hall of Mammals, other three-dimensional forms for presenting information about the natural world were employed. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries collections called cabinets of curiosities were an increasingly popular means for satisfying the desire to learn about nature in ways that were visually oriented, which many preferred to written scientific texts. A cabinet is a non-specialized collection that might contain “such diverse objects as alligators’ skins, chameleons, insects set in amber, corals, shells, medals, intaglios, South American feather work, and wampum belts [and] representations of mythical creatures (the unicorn, the basilis).”\(^{251}\)

In “Cabinets of Curiosities and the Organization of Knowledge,” literary scholar Maria Zytaruk notes, “If cabinets were implicated in new taxonomic projects to order the natural world, they also acted as preserves of older, more
imaginative readings of nature. Close quote. These “readings of nature” were quite subjective; in many collections human preoccupations were influential in determining what was understood as the natural order. Zytaruk writes,

The order that collectors imposed on nature in their cabinets was often a precarious one . . . and inhabiting their displays were specific anxieties about humankind’s susceptibility to temptation and about the body’s inevitable decay. Religious and secular influences lay behind such practices as the suspension of crocodiles and other reptiles from the collector’s ceiling.

The scientific displays were sometimes duplicated in religious settings, and each offered mutually reinforcing messages about morality. For example, the cathedral of Seville hung enchained crocodile carcasses from their ceilings as emblems of evil. These collections were “site[s] for contemplating the body;” museums as well as churches were places where visitors contemplated their own mortality. Zytaruk paraphrases Jean Baudrillard’s argument: “through objects, the collector is able to mourn for and to transcend symbolically his own death.” She describes the early modern museums as institutions that perform “the work of elegy.” She explains,

[T]iny arks and Edens, repositories and botanic gardens strove to reassemble the scattered products of Creation and thereby to recover lost Adamic knowledge. Cabinet collections register, then, the longing of a fallen humankind and perhaps, like elegy, functioned as a mechanism for consolation. At the same time, the fragmentation occasioned by the early
museum and articulated in its exhibits (of carcasses, fossilized teeth, eagle claws, disembodied hands) could also be read as a continuation of the dispersion and dislocation brought about by the Fall.\textsuperscript{256}

These cabinets of curiosities evolved into the private collections of scientific societies that in the late modern period became natural history museums that were accessible to the public. This desire to recreate a lost Eden is the same impulse that drove Akeley to create his dioramas. His “cabinets” contained more integrated, and yet in some ways just as imaginary, fragments of a world. While techniques for preserving animals have been in existence since the sixteenth century, there are only a few mounts that predate the 1830s.\textsuperscript{257} Once the technology of taxidermy improved in the middle of the nineteenth century, dioramas made with life-like animals became increasingly popular, and museums funded hunting safaris to collect specimens for their collections.

Nature, as Haraway, Morton, and others have explained, is itself a historical and culturally contingent idea. And as was also discussed in the introduction, according to Harding and Hunter the same is true for science. Both are constructs created by human; both are used to fulfill human needs and desires. Although there is a material reality, our interpretations of the world, including what we emphasize or overlook, is inevitably situated, and represents the practices and perspectives of particular individuals and groups, and particular situations and experiences. And as Foucault has pointed out, in various epistemes “reality” is organized in ways that are not always logical or predictable. Animals are another cultural construct. Our understanding of them and relationships with
them are inevitably filtered by our own perspectives and situations. Often animals are set up as foils, and serve by their contrast to augment or enhance human identities and activities.

In literature a foil is a character that is contrasted with another character, typically the protagonist. This character may be either quite different from the protagonist (always a human) or extremely similar except for one significant characteristic. Depending on the period, the culture, or the situation, sometimes the similarities between the animal-foil and the human-protagonist are emphasized, at other times the differences are the focus. In natural history both written texts and exhibitions are filled with examples of how animals have been used as foils in the narratives that humans create about themselves, their relationship with nature, and with other animals. Within the context of human-animal relations and especially the taxidermied animals considered in this chapter, it is interesting to note that foil also refers to the track of a hunted animal. In this narrative or “epistemological space” some species were vilified even as others were admired, usually for some anthropomorphized quality. This is true of both wild and domestic animals. For example in western cultures we see a dog as loyal (and beloved members of our families) while pigs (which are actually more intelligent) are described as slothful, gluttonous, and dirty (yet edible). As the anthrozoologist Hal Herzog has noted, “some we love, some we hate, and some we eat.”

Beginning in the nineteenth century, natural museums began developing exhibitions designed to appeal to the general public while still retaining their
authority as scientific institutions. As opposed to the idiosyncratic nature of private collections of earlier times, museums such as the New York Museum of Natural History claimed to present science, including natural history, objectively. Visitors, scientists and other staff affiliated with the museums believed their exhibitions were depicting a scientifically verifiable reality, but as Donna Haraway has pointed out, what was presented was profoundly influenced by the social and cultural preoccupations of the day.\(^{260}\) This is why Harding called for a successor science, one that could challenge the dominant knowledge-producing systems and the ideology of objectivity. As Haraway demonstrates in “Teddy Bear Patriarchy,” scientific objectivity is very much an ideology. The dioramas in Akeley Hall were just as imaginative and creative as the Renaissance cabinets of curiosities. Lessons about how humans should behave were conflated with what was sometimes unintentionally misleadingly presented as an accurate portrayal of the lives of the animals. The wild animals are actually portrayed idealistically because the natural world they embody is not the world they actually lived in, but one created by Akeley and the museum.

The discovery guide developed for children, which now emphasizes only our current environmental concerns rather than the extensive social reform goals for which the dioramas were created, includes the following:

Scientists and artists at the American Museum of Natural History first created dioramas over 100 years ago to educate the public about the vanishing wonders of the natural world. They worried that many of these animals were being overhunted, or that their environments were being
destroyed. Today, many of the places you see in these dioramas no longer look like this, and lots of the animals shown here are in danger of extinction—of disappearing forever.\textsuperscript{261}

This text carries a message that has been important to the museum for over a century: conservation. The lessons of organicism are no longer articulated or even implied. Also absent from these materials is that even as concerns mounted over the threat of the extinction of these animals in Africa, they were still hunted and killed for this collection. Instead, many Americans in the first part of the twentieth century were preoccupied by fears that their own way of life was being eradicated by the forces of urbanization, industrialization and, since the 1880s, the increasing number of immigrants entering the country; Between 1900 and 1920 over 14.5 million immigrants came to the United States\textsuperscript{262} Because of this number of people, many of whom were not from northern Europe, as had been the case earlier in the country’s history, some feared that traditional American values, and even the American “race,” was being threatened. Therefore “nature” was used as a cultural tool for resisting social corruption.

According to H. F. Osborn, a member of the board of trustees during the time the Hall of African Mammals was being developed, the primary audience for the museum’s message was children. He hoped that young visitors would “become more reverent, more truthful, and more interested in the \textit{simple and natural laws of their being} and \textit{better citizens} of the future through each visit”\textsuperscript{263} (emphasis provided). Organicism, with its assertion that the universe functions in the same way as an organism, turns animals into metaphors. Both are orderly, and
so nature and the wild animals that inhabit it are antidotes for a society seen as increasingly disorderly. This view is more philosophical than scientific.

Organicism can find its roots in Platonic idealism. The philosopher Richard McDonough explains, “in contrast with the Darwinian view that the emergence of life and mind are accidents of evolution, [Plato] holds that the universe, the world, is necessarily alive and intelligent. And mortal organisms are a microcosm of the great macrocosm.”

Haraway notes “The credos of realism and organicism are closely connected; both are systematizations of organization by a hierarchical division of labor, perceived as natural and therefore productive of unity.”

She also observes, “The relations of life and death in technologies of enforced meaning, or realist representation, are not . . . straightforward.” The life-like animals presented in the dioramas are literally a resurrection of the dead, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Akeley’s safaris were criticized, but not as we might imagine today, because rare and endangered animals were killed. Rather, skeptics believed the money spend on these exhibition halls would be better allocated to the life sciences rather than social reform. In defense of the expenditures, Osborn defends the museum’s decision:

The exhibits in these Halls have been criticized only by those who speak without knowledge. They all tend to demonstrate the slow upward ascent and struggle of man from the lower to the higher stages, physically, morally, intellectually, and spiritually. Reverently and carefully examined,
they put man [sic] upwards towards a higher and better future, and away from the purely animal life.\textsuperscript{267} (emphasis provided)

Museum board members believed it was appropriate to spend this money to help elevate “man,” and perhaps especially at a time when confidence in human exceptionalism was being undermined by Darwin’s theory of evolution. The “slow upward ascent” which Osborn mentions might also be understood as referring to the long evolutionary advancement of white Euro-Americans, whose numerical dominance and even status were perceived as being threatened by the immigrants.

As Haraway describes in her essay, the dioramas were designed to present a persuasive argument about proper masculine and feminine roles in Western societies, the ideals one should strive for in family relationships and, as embodied in the animals and especially the males, what character traits one should cultivate to be a good citizen.\textsuperscript{268} The message embedded in each of the twenty-eight dioramas is consistent. All portray taxidermied animals grouped in ways that are emblematic of the ideal American family or depict signature animals with good character.

According to Haraway, each diorama (falsely) presents, [a] vital moment in the narrative of natural history of . . . . ‘brightest Africa.’ Each group forms a community structured by a natural division of function; the whole animal in the whole group is nature's truth. The physiological division of labor that has informed the history of biology is
embodied in these habitat groups which tell of communities and families, peacefully and hierarchically ordered. Sexual specialization of function — the organic bodily and social sexual division of labor — is unobtrusively ubiquitous, unquestionable, right. 269

Also Haraway thinks that for Akeley, “[t]axidermy was the craft of remembering this perfect experience” because the “animals are frozen in “the supreme moment of life.” 270 She points out, “Realism was a supreme achievement of the art of memory, a rhetorical achievement crucial to the foundations of Western science.” 271 In contrast to situated textualities, the places and occurrences where “people work on words together to build common ground for the articulation and valuing of knowledge,” Akeley relied on a single worldview to construct a more “realistic” or actually idealistic world. 272 As Hunter observes, rhetoric can be used in different ways. It can position truth as that which is authoritarian and certain, or it can be understood as situated communication that leads to situated knowledges in science.

The portrayals in the dioramas often have little or no correspondence to the ways in which these animals experienced their lives and their deaths. For example, in many scenes the “father” protectively stands over the “mother,” who in turn often attends to one or more of “their children.” 273 These young animals typically include a baby and an adolescent. The reality is that these animals (or more accurately, the animals from whom these skins were taken) would probably not have been related but instead would have been tracked and killed in widely diverse locations. Also for some species, the male would not have participated in
the rearing of the young and may have not ever even seen them, moving on once the female was impregnated. And certainly the final moments of their lives are never portrayed in this hall.

As mentioned earlier, fears about the declining “purity” of American “race” and the erosion of uniquely American values strongly influenced how powerful members of the economic and political elite understood their world. The museum’s trustees represented some of the most powerful and wealthy men in the United States. These were also the people who had the power to influence what kinds of stories would be told in the nation’s institutions. It was not a coincidence that interest in eugenics was high in many political and intellectual arenas at this time. Osborn was an ardent supporter and believed the Second International Congress of Eugenics in 1921 was “perhaps the most important scientific meeting ever held in the Museum.” Copies of the proceedings were widely circulated and sent to members of Congress, and an ever-increasing number of politicians and nativists worked to restrict immigration. In the years between 1921 and 1923, members of the Congressional Committee on Immigration made several trips to the museum to study its exhibition on immigration. Federal laws restricting immigration in order to protect Americans from “submergence by the influx of other races” were passed in 1923.

Just as with the cabinets of wonder discussed earlier, during this period science and religion merged into a seamless whole, along with a dose of politics. As Haraway notes,
Each diorama presents itself as a side altar, a stage, an unspoiled garden in nature, a hearth for home and family . . . Each has its special emblems indicating particular virtues. Above all, inviting the visitor to share in its revelation, each tells the truth. Each offers a vision. Each is a window onto knowledge.  

The dioramas functioned as “morality plays.” For Akeley and many other early twentieth century hunters, an animal’s “character” was just as important as its physical appearance. In classical rhetoric, ethos refers to the character of the speaker. Since in these dioramas, the rhetor is the animal, and especially the male, his character had to be flawless. This was essential if the viewers were to be inspired to cultivate virtuous habits of thought and action. Since the male was considered to be the epitome of his species, it was essential to secure a perfect specimen. This included behavior and character as well as physical traits. As Haraway notes, “[C]owardice would disqualify the most lovely and properly portioned beast.”

2. Recreating Eden

Carl Ackley was a kind of the Wizard of Oz, the man behind the curtain. He dedicated his life to recreating an idealized natural world in the heart of New York City, and to convincing all who enter the darkened gallery that what they were seeing was “real.” Akeley, whom the museum describes as “a dedicated explorer, taxidermist, sculptor, and photographer,” is considered the father of modern taxidermy. He founded the museum’s Exhibitions Department (an art and research program that designs and produces museum installations) and led teams
of scientists, hunters, and artists on several expeditions to Africa to collect what were then and continue to be euphemistically referred to as specimens. Beginning in 1905 until his death in 1921, Akeley worked tirelessly to realize his dream of recreating an African paradise in these galleries. In addition to creating perfect animal mounts, every detail of their habitat is painstakingly recreated, from the grasses, shrubs, and trees to the more distant vistas of forests, plains, and mountains. For decades these dioramas were celebrated for their realistic portrayals, based on the twin foundations of scientific meticulousness and the direct encounter with and study of animals in their native habitats.

Akeley was driven by a passion to literally possess the animals and also to disseminate the “truth” about Africa. However, as described above, the stories he created are as much about an idealized American way of life as how these animals actually lived and died. As Haraway points out,

Natural history can be — and has sometimes been — a means for millennial expectation and disorderly action. Akeley himself is an excellent example of a self-made man who made use of the mythic resources of the independent man's honest vision, the appeal to experience, the testimony of one's own eyes.

However, the “testimony of one’s own eyes” is always and inevitably only visible through a subjective lens.

3. Resurrection of the Dead
While one fictional element concerns the animals’ lives, another arises from their deaths. Although these animals were tracked and killed, death masks made of their faces, and their bodies measured and skinned for these displays, the violence of the last moments is erased, and any evidence of injury to their hides is hidden or repaired. “Natural” history, but not that history, fills the panels accompanying the dioramas, the educational literature distributed to children, and the content on the museum’s website. Instead the museum directs our attention to the “living” animals, not the sculpted armature under the carefully stretched and preserved skins. Those bright light-filled eyes, among other parts, are manufactured, purchased at a taxidermy supply. Only the skin or hide of the animal is irreplaceable. It is the seal of authenticity.

If the dioramas are to successfully represent the illusion of life, the killing and processing of the animals must be concealed by an indiscernible labor. The photographing, sketching, and taking of field notes are emphasized while the killing of the animals and processing of their carcasses are passed over. The fictions are physically embodied in the meticulous work of reconstructing life from each carcass. Death is “ironed out, silenced, deleted.” One museum professional explains that the animal’s “constructedness needs to be hidden by those whose credibility depends upon them. Mounts are intended to be ‘resurrections,’ as close to life as possible . . . Their meticulous verisimilitude renders them uncanny, especially in the context of the habitat diorama, which is intended to immerse the viewer entirely in illusion.” The “fundamentally ironic epistemological structure” as anthropologist Jane Desmond notes, is that in
taxidermy, “death is the absolute and always prerequisite to the process of creating lifelikeness.” Yet in a museum display, this killing must not intrude upon the viewer’s pleasure. Desmond goes on to say,

The ‘as-if-ness’ of the looking relations, the invitation to imagine as alive that which is patently not, creates for the moment an imaginary relationship of ‘being there’—for instance, in front of a living, about-to-charge bear. The ideal viewer completes the imaginary act of resurrection that taxidermy invites; the depicted moment is like an excerpt in a play, a fictional (yet naturalistic and naturalized) narrative based in and on dominant tropes of human–animal relations.285

This is especially true for young animals. As Desmond observes, “In these cases especially, the awareness of the killing that had to occur for the scene to be staged must be kept at bay, or the ooohhh factor—the sighing over the cuteness of the babies and the endorsement of protective motherhood that it recalls—cannot be sustained.”286 By the time Akeley was making the last of his expeditions to Africa in the 1920s, the era of hunting safaris mounted by Americans and Europeans, along with the development associated with colonialization, had severely depleted wildlife populations. During what has been called the “Seizure of Africa,” a 25-year period ending in 1912, almost the entire continent had been claimed by European countries. This seizure was fueled by economic interests and nationalism and justified by the belief that Africans were racially inferior. The success of the land grab was seen as proof of white European superiority.287

As a result of the uncontrolled hunting of wildlife and the degradation or
destruction of their habitats, it became apparent that many species were headed
toward extinction. While some colonial administrators considered all wildlife to
be vermin, many others, motivated by an ethic of sustainable use, sought to
control the widespread killing of animals. Conservation efforts, including the
regulation of hunting and the creation of conservation areas, began very late in the
nineteenth century. In 1911 the German government passed hunting legislation
which gave chimpanzees full protection in Tanzania. Even earlier, in 1896, the
first general Wildlife Ordinance was enacted. Imperial Governor Hermann von
Wissmann, wrote in a decree:

I felt obliged to issue this Ordinance in order to conserve wildlife and to
avoid that many species become extinct which can be expected for the not
all that distant future, if the present conditions prevail . . . . We are obliged
to think also of future generations and we should secure them the chance
to find leisure and recreation in African hunting in future times. I am also
planning to create Hunting Reserves in game rich areas in order that
wildlife can find their refuge and recovery. In such areas hunting of game
will be permitted only with the explicit prior permission of the Imperial
Government. Their establishment should also serve science, in order to
conserve such game species which have already become rare in East
Africa (emphasis added).

The purpose of “refuge and recovery” was so that animals could continue to be
available for human pleasure and scientific study.
As described in the introduction, speciesism, the prejudice or bias in favour of the interests of members of one’s own species and against those of members of other species, permits the destruction of animals (and their resurrection) for human use. From this perspective, animals are not understood to have interests, and their emotional and physical experiences are not considered. The logic for killing increasingly endangered animals to preserve them for museum collections was seen as both justifiable and rational. If these animals were on their way to extinction, the focus was on securing a specimen so that it could be preserved and shared with future generations. For perhaps any number of reasons, the goal of protecting and preserving living animals was not the priority that it is for so many people today. Foucault might relate this to the interests of those in power. For example, at that time there was broad acceptance of hierarchies, including those based on biological determinants and for extractive colonial economics, animals were just another resource for the west. Today the ability to maintain tracts of land untouched by development is often associated with wealth.

When one reads about Akeley’s life it is clear that he loved Africa and the animals that he found there. Although it may seem odd to us today, Akeley thought of himself as a conservationist. He believed that it was essential to capture a world threatened by humans by participating in the very same activity that threatened the animals he was trying to preserve, that is, by mounting hunting expeditions. And he was not alone. During the early twentieth century it was commonly thought that killing even the rarest and most endangered of animals
was necessary so that they could be seen (as taxidermied specimens) by future
generations. Scientific expeditions sponsored by museums such as the American
Museum of Natural History, the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., and the Field
Museum in Chicago were undertaken regularly, beginning in the 1880s and
continuing through the 1930s.\textsuperscript{290}

4. Doomed Anyway

It was not uncommon for wealthy big-game hunters and scientists to join
forces. One such group included Akeley, Mary Hastings Bradley, Herbert, her
husband, and their five-year old daughter Alice. Hastings Bradley wrote a book-
length account of the expedition, \textit{On the Gorilla Trail}, which was published in
1922. In the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, big game hunting
— even of endangered species — was widely accepted. Especially if conducted in
what was considered a sportsman-like manner, hunting was seen as a fair contest
between a man (usually) and an animal. It was also understood as a rite of passage
to manhood. “What qualities did it take to make an animal ‘game’?” Haraway
asks. “One answer is similarity to man, the ultimate quarry, a worthy opponent.
The ideal quarry is the ‘other,’ the natural self.”\textsuperscript{291} The concept of an “equal
contest” governed how the hunt was conducted and often appeared to obviate or
mitigate any regrets about the animal’s suffering or death. However, hunting
remained popular even after increasing mechanized access to animal habitat and
more sophisticated weapons undermined these claims. Although it didn’t
influence her behavior, Hastings Bradley acknowledges, “The perfection of the
modern weapon does not give the gorilla the chance he had in the old muzzle-loading days.”

The expectation that the animals they sought were doomed to extinction is clearly expressed in her account of this elephant hunt, as is the absence of any distinction between recreational hunting and scientific research:

We reached a hill above the plains and crept cautiously forward through the bush till on the brow we had a splendid view of the elephants. There were six of them about two hundred yards below us, five full grown and one smaller, all feeding utterly unaware of us, their trunks swinging in the bundles of grass, their tusks gleaming against the dark skins. There is something prehistoric looking about a wild elephant that makes him seem unreal. He is a leftover from another age. His very size is archaic . . . . Mr. Akeley picked one for me to shoot at and one for Miss Miller. The men were to follow our shots with their heavy guns.

When he said "Fire," the bull I was trying for was swinging about in the brush, and my only chance was the headshot. I tried to place it low, guided by the glimmer of the tusks, and I thought I had succeeded, for he staggered, and I thought he was down, but he recovered and made off, although my husband and Mr. Akeley opened instant fire and Mr. Akeley was sure he had placed five shots in the animal.

Through the cannonading I heard Martha saying, “Mine’s down,” and so he was. She had placed a splendid side shot through the ear. She started to fire at the black dots of escaping elephants when hers got up
again, and was then brought down for good. We cut about in a circuit and made our way to him. He seemed enormous as he lay there. There was something sad about the helplessness of his great bulk. *The only reconciling thought is that the elephant is doomed anyway, and this was a quick death.*

It was so dark that we turned back immediately to camp. We heard the wounded elephant trumpeting and believed we should find him dead in the morning. I hoped so, for his sake and my own, for I hated to think of a wounded elephant coming to a slow death, and, now that I had wounded him, *I wanted those tusks of his.* But the night rains washed out every vestige of track, and the natives sent next morning to reconnoiter could not be stimulated by any offer of reward (emphasis added).293

Here a beginning sense of empathy and the desire for a trophy are in tension with each other. This conflict is resolved by the justification that the species is “doomed anyway.” The pain of a particular individual is buried in the anonymity of the generic animal. “There were moments,” she writes, “when we wondered anxiously if there were any gorillas *left for us,* anything but lone widows and undergrown youths. Of course a gorilla was a gorilla, but it was the grown male who had given the legend of ferocity to his race” (emphasis added)294

As is clear from these passages, the boundaries between securing specimens for science and collecting trophies was fuzzy at best. As Haraway points out, hunting was considered a “tool of science and art.”295 It was not unusual for the museum expeditions to be funded in part by wealthy hunters, a
practice that few museums would find ethical today. And it was not unusual for hunters on non-scientific expeditions to donate the animals they had killed to museums for preservation. And although in the field a distinction was made between what was done to an animal carcass that was to be used as type specimen as distinguished from a trophy in which the individual features of the animal were not seen as important animals from both sources ended up in museum displays. For example the Northern White Rhinoceros still on display at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History was one of many animals shot by Teddy Roosevelt during the Smithsonian-Roosevelt Expedition of 1909-10. This animal, which was on the brink of extinction at the time of Roosevelt’s hunt, is now extinct in the wild and survives only in captivity.296

For the museum collector as for the trophy hunter, “collecting” (a widely used euphemism for killing animals) the ideal specimen was the goal. Akeley sought out the largest and healthiest male — also the desire of those who hunted for sport — and perfect “family” group: a female, a baby, and perhaps an adolescent or two. Akeley’s anthropomorphizing impulses extended beyond creating expressive family groups. He believed that the animal should possess characteristics that would be admirable in a human (courage, loyalty, etc.,) and the killing had to be done in a sportsmanlike manner.297 Hastings Bradley, somewhat defensively, explains,

We were not at all bloodthirsty, and we hadn't the slightest desire for indiscriminate slaughtering, but we did feel the lure of big game hunting, and I was convinced that I was offering any of the animals I mentioned a
more than sporting chance in the present state of my shooting. I had shot at one elephant, two targets, and three crocodiles in the three months in Africa.

Mr. Bradley particularly wanted a buffalo, Miss Miller [Akeley’s niece] and I were eager for lions. Miss Miller already had one elephant to her credit [the kill mentioned earlier] and I was hoping for similar luck. While never mentioned in any detail in the book, her companions would have included a sizable contingent of people to provide support for the safari. As is the case throughout most of the book, they are invisible. The European or American hunter was the only one allowed to shoot animals during the expedition. The “boys,” as the guides were called, were not to shoot without permission (unless it was to save the life of the hunter) although they were often allowed to kill orphaned babies. For example, when Akeley was hunting the gorillas for the American Museum diorama, he shot a male and a female and the porters speared the female’s baby. This seems to be another form of distancing. The hunter takes on a worthy foe, but is not responsible for the death of helpless animals.

Early in her book, Hastings Bradley explains her decision to bring along her daughter Alice. She describes Alice as “an outdoor child who loved the open” and believed “the experience would be an unforgettable part of her life. Our camp would be comfortable and well protected,” she writes, and Alice’s “chief danger would be the equatorial sun against which a helmet and unceasing vigilance could guard her.” Akeley believed that safaris could and should be family-oriented. He believed this would convince the public that the animals were not wantonly
dangerous toward humans, but were only aggressive when defending their own families. Although her activities on the expedition are frequently described, particularly her interactions with the “natives,” Alice does not appear to have been present during the actual hunts. Perhaps this was seen as too dangerous or inappropriate for a young child. Nevertheless, Alice was influenced by these activities. Hastings Bradley describes a favorite game of her daughter as a “violent little pastime called spearing gorillas, which she played with native spears.”

5. The Giant of Karisimbi

The emotional distance between the humans and the animals they hunted was erratic. For example, in the earlier passage, Hasting Bradley expresses misgivings about the suffering of the wounded elephant, but these were quickly replaced with regret for the loss of the ivory tusks. Also these emotions did not prevent her from continuing to hunt.

During the same expedition Herbert Bradley shot the silverback gorilla that eventually became known as the Giant of Karisimbi. This animal was a silverback male gorilla, and its skin was used in the mount that dominates the diorama depicting the site of Akeley's own grave in the mountainous rain forest of the Congo, today's Zaire. The gorilla was killed in 1921. Hastings Bradley’s account of the shooting is filled with oddly juxtaposed observations that betray her matter-of-fact account of the hunt. Because of its complex dissonance, a substantial extract from the original text is included here:
There, on the steep mountainside stood a gigantic creature, black and shaggy. My first impression was of shoulders incredible shoulders huge, uncouth, slouching shoulders. His side was toward us and his back was silver gray. We were seeing at last the great beast we had come so far to see a male gorilla in his savage haunts. It seemed an eternity before my husband fired. I suppose it was only an instant or two. The roar of the gun sounded as unreal in the silence as the sight of the gorilla. Immediately the gorilla went crashing down into the welter of vegetation. We thought him dead and raced down towards him after Herbert, but we then found he had made off, leaving a trail of crushed greenery and blood. For a few moments the waving bushes gave us the only clue, then he emerged on the slopes above and looked back over his shaggy shoulder as the gun crashed again, as if trying to comprehend this sudden assault upon his solitudes. I shall never forget the humanness of that black, upturned face.

Then he went plunging down the slope, passing near Herbert, who put in a finishing shot. The great body struck against a tree and lay still. There had been no sound from him, no bark or roar. He had shown no instinct of fight, nothing but the rush of a wounded beast to escape. We found him dead against the tree, face down, a huge, shaggy, primeval thing, like something summoned out of the vanished ages. And the scene in which he lay had a beauty that was like nothing earthly . . . .
All that day the men worked on the gorilla, for Mr. Akeley preserved everything for museum and medical records. *They paused often to photograph the changing clouds and mountains.*

*It was a marvelous day! The sheer beauty of it was a spell, and the presence of this great gorilla made it seem like a page from the very beginning of time* (emphasis added).\(^{302}\)

Multiple and discordant strands weave their way through this account: the “humanness” of the gorilla, the thrill of the hunt, the Eden-like beauty, a sense of displaced time, the vulnerability of the animal, the moment of death, and the extensive processing that followed. Hastings Bradley describes the pursuit and the gorilla’s attempt to escape in some detail. After being shot the animal is found “dead against the tree, face down” in a place that “had a beauty that was like nothing earthly.” Passages that are
packed with detailed descriptions of action that occurred during the hunt are juxtaposed with meditations on the landscape and descriptions of an emotional state characterized by a sense of timelessness. Once the processing of the carcass begins, the pace quickens. Only one sentence is spent on the time-consuming processing required to create a death mask and secure the skin: “All that day the men worked on the gorilla, for Mr. Akeley preserved everything for museum and medical records.” Even the men doing the process take frequent breaks to look at the sky.

The raw and violent transgression by the hunters into the animal’s habitat brings with it a violence and bloody physicality that is literally unspeakable and is displaced by innocuous comments about the weather and the scenery. The abrupt, almost filmic, cuts to these redirect our attention away from the killing and flaying. While the site of killing is described as sacred — “the scene in which he lay had a beauty that was like nothing earthly” — the lengthy skinning of the carcass is passed over without comment. She instead notes that the men “paused often to photograph the changing clouds and mountains”. These displacements and omissions are notable in a text that until this event has been characterized by closely-observed and carefully transcribed details. While Hastings Bradley mentions that there is still a sense of the now absent “presence of the great gorilla,” the energetic writing about the hunt becomes almost languid. As with a cat who “plays” with a mouse but loses interest when its prey no longer moves, Hastings
Bradley’s energy dissipates. Or perhaps there are other reasons for the sudden inarticulateness in her account of this event.

Many contemporary readers would be disturbed by the apparent callousness with which this story is told. Foucault’s concept of the epistemological space, which was first described in the introduction, is helpful in understanding, why in any given place and time certain ideas, beliefs, and behaviors are thinkable — and acceptable — while others are not. Narratives are inevitably told from a particular perspective, and this one relates the challenges and pleasures of a hunting safari as told by a woman of privilege, yet she is also challenging the conventions of a woman of her day. Hastings Bradley is obviously making assumptions that she thinks her readers will, for the most part, share. She is aligning herself with a dominant male perspective, that of the hunter/explorer, and is following the models offered by adventure stories of her day. She assumes the story she has to tell is one that is both interesting and acceptable. She is writing out of the ethos of her time, and to an audience that shares for the most part, an understanding of her motivations and actions. Her contemporaries were probably far more accepting of the hunt itself than her decision to bring her daughter with her.

6. Giving Permission

The inability to articulate — or perhaps even to recognize — some aspects of an experience demonstrates the power of a particular episteme, and also why it is so hard to understand when one’s own stance is coming from another time and
place. In this example, the violence to the living animal and its corpse is literally indescribable, which could indicate, along with the somewhat defensive tone of some of the passages, that this is a period of change. According to Foucault, an episteme is the “strategic apparatus which permits of separating out from among all of the statements which are possible those that are acceptable within . . . a field of scientificity, and which it is possible to say are true or false.”

An episteme, again quoting Foucault, makes “certain perceptions, certain statements, certain forms of knowledge possible, others impossible.” The episteme permits some statements to be made (in this example, the hunt and the killing), but prohibits others (any description or reflection about the suffering and mutilation of a particular animal, and this in spite of the author’s sympathy and identification of human-like attributes). As Foucault observes, the unthinkable elements are not connected with what is true or false, but rather with what may or may not be characterized.

The episteme makes possible a mentality that permits alarming rates of animal extinction to go unchecked and factory-farming that generates untold animal suffering to be ignored. The words and symbols associated with animals exemplify these blind spots. Eating an eagle is inconceivable yet turkey is the bird of choice for Thanksgiving. Baby calves at the country fair are adorable, while veal is a delicious delicacy. One is displayed for our entertainment, while the other, which few people ever see, is removed from its mother just after birth and confined in a tiny crate for four to five months before its slaughter. One possesses a singularity that makes relationship possible while the other is generic meat.
Epistemic principles determine what can be identified by a community, how they can be marked, and in what ways they can be ordered: These principles make certain perceptions, certain statements, certain forms of knowledge possible, others impossible.\textsuperscript{306}

The gradual shift in attitude toward hunting safaris on the part of the general public as well as museum professionals as the twentieth century went on has been explained by advances in technology that permit animals to be captured on film. Good quality portable cameras that yielded good results in the field were just beginning to be available in the early part of the twentieth century. The field camera, which Akeley invented and used on his last expedition, was a novelty. Yet as Foucault points out any narrative of causality and change is inevitably embedded in a particular episteme and therefore suspect. It is only the acceptable explanation that we embrace. Now “common sense” tells us that technology has led to the gun being replaced by the camera, and that it is foolish to intentionally hunt and kill endangered species to “save them” for future generations. However as Foucault observes, our thought, “bears the stamp of our age and our geography—breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between Same and Other.”\textsuperscript{307}

Hastings Bradley’s perception of the Giant of Karisimbi’s vulnerability, triggered perhaps by “the humanness of that upturned face,” caused her to reconsider her position to some degree. Her inclination to anthropomorphize
certain animals was also an influence in creating this opening. Certainly her sense of intrusion into this animal’s habitat softened the barriers between hunter and prey, and made possible, at least to some degree, another way of relating to this particular individual gorilla, which was later extended to silverback gorillas more generally. At the end of her book she writes,

There is no excuse for keeping the gorilla on the game lists. *He is too valuable and too rare to be exterminated.* He ought to have his own preserves and official protection on his mountain heights and if he doesn't have them, and that soon, he will go the way that so many great beasts have gone the way that all are going fast now in Africa. We estimated that not more than seventy-five or a hundred of the gorillas exist in those mountains. Though our licenses gave us ten gorillas, we killed only the five necessary for the Museum group (emphasis added).³⁰⁸

This represents a subtle but significant shift in her thinking. While earlier she somewhat dismissively categorizes elephants as “doomed anyway,” here she is arguing for the preservation of the gorilla because they are “too valuable and too rare.” However she still holds on to the justification for killing the gorillas for the museum dioramas, essentially for “scientific” purposes.

Akeley also acknowledged his regret at the death of that particular individual gorilla, something he rarely did. In his own account of the incident he wrote:
As he [the gorilla] lay at the base of the tree, it took all one’s scientific ardor to keep from feeling like a murderer. He was a magnificent creature with the face of an amiable giant who would do no harm except in self defense or in the defense of his family.309

As a result, in part at least, of this experience, Akeley persuaded the Belgian government to establish what would be the first wildlife sanctuary in Africa. This was a radical departure from Akeley’s previous rationale (and one shared by his colleagues and the society in general), which was based on the premise that hunting and collecting was a means of preserving the soon-to-be-extinct animal for future generations. As with Hastings Bradley, this adjustment in his position did not signal a complete change in his thinking. Akeley continued his hunting and collecting expeditions with the aim of realizing his dream of recreating Africa in the exhibition halls of the American Museum.

We can now see these animals on TV, videos, and the Internet, where their portrayal as singular individuals and bonded family units cultivates emotional connections not possible in an earlier age. Although this seems to be the case for many wild animals, especially those who are endangered, most human-like, or especially charming (and also for our pets), that filmic empathy does not extend to the slaughterhouse and factory farms. Undercover films shot by the ASPCA and other animal rights groups have not been effective (at least yet) because they are not acceptable in our culture. Therefore, they as of yet have not substantially reduced what Derrida has called the “unprecedented proportions of this subjection of the animal. Such a subjection . . . can be called violence . . . no one can
seriously deny the disavowal that this involves.”

Maintaining the abyss between human and animal is a way of hiding it. As noted earlier, Derrida believes this is a willful move intended to perpetuate “on a global scale the forgetting or misunderstanding of this violence, which some would compare to the worst cases of genocide.”

These animals suffer the violence of objectification made possible by an ontology that conceptualizes life using the binary of human and animal. The concepts generated by this system erase irreplaceability of other living animals and substitute for it a machine-like repeatability. One can see in Hastings Bradley the conflict between her expectations about “the gorilla” and her actual encounter with a particular individual. Initially she imagines the animal in the abstract. When she first sees the animal whose skin in a taxidermied mount is eventually called the “Giant of Karisimbi,” Hastings Bradley describes him as “a male gorilla in his savage haunts.” Earlier in her book she simply repeats what others have conveyed to her: “The gorilla was a terrible antagonist. The great length of his huge arms gave him a tremendous reach and he was credited with being able to scoop out a man like a soft-shell crab.” After her own direct experience — one might call it a face-to-face encounter — she reflects, “I shall never forget the humanness of that black, upturned face.” Isn’t this the call to accountability described by Lévinas?

7. The Haunts of Animals
Bradley Hastings’ written account of her experiences in Africa describes what it was like for her to enter into the habitats of the animals. In contrast, Akeley’s dioramas portray an Eden-like environment of those habitats, but one in which the animals are motionless and mute. In both, the ethos (or character) of humans and animals is emphasized. Also for both there is also a preoccupation with place. Character and place come together in an archaic definition of ethos that dates back to Homer. Then it was defined as the place “wherein people dwell and bond together.” Ethea, its plural, has also been translated as the “haunts or abodes of animals.”

In his etymological analysis of ethos, Charles Chamberlain identifies a metaphorical connection between habitat and habit which melds the experiences of life, in a day-to-day sense, with character and place. The earliest use of ethos “refers to the range or arena where someone is most truly at home” and this influences “all the fine appearances [habits and customs] that people adopt.” Edmund Husserl also makes this connection, equating ethos with what he called the concrete “lifeworld.” He asserted that this lived experience was preferable to the more abstract reality of European rationalism. Michael Hyde, a communication scholar, believes understanding ethos as a place we inhabit together permits us to change “the ways discourse is used to transform space and time into ‘dwelling places.’”

Recovering the original meaning of ethos can provide a way out of what Derrida describes as the “originary violence” of language. The absence of this ethos — embodied beings sharing habitats and in habitual relationships marked by trustworthiness — and the dominance of logocentric and human-centered...
discourses deny the relational singularity and vulnerability of bodies. *Ethos* can remap a world whose coordinates are over-determined by concepts and logic. This definition of ethos resonates with poststructuralist concepts of being: who you are is *where* you are, a singular being whose habits of thinking and acting are profoundly influenced, and even molded, by the particular place and time in which one lives, as opposed to a heroic and virtuous individual.

In “Ethos as Location,” Nedra Reynolds notes, “Identity is formed through negotiations with social institutions . . . and through one’s locatedness in various social and cultural ‘spaces.’” It is not just the particular individual who speaks, but the location — the socially constructed space — from which that person speaks that can be understood as ethos. This can also be understood as a kind of negotiation between rhetor and the community. Philosopher Iris Marion Young believes that members of a group must acknowledge that they “do not understand one another as they understand themselves” and then “accept this distance without closing it into exclusion.”

What would animal discourse sound like? The rhetorical scholar and widely-acclaimed translator of Aristotle, George A. Kennedy, has noted, both animals and humans use “signs, including utterances such as howls, cries, and human speech.” “A Hoot in the Dark,” written by Kennedy in 1992, drew criticism because of his assertion that animals use ethos, pathos, and logos as they “gesture and preen, sing and growl.” Before Aristotle, Kennedy writes, “the energy inherent in emotion and thought, transmitted through a system of signs, including language, to others to influence their decisions or actions” was
understood as rhetoric. As Debra Hawhee observes in her essay, “Toward a Bestial Rhetoric,” this “shifts attention from ‘wordy’ language to language rendered with calls, tones, facial expressions, and bodies . . . and it posits rhetoric as energetic intensity, a movement, or an urge to move others.” It creates a new kind of discursive environment, one that is more spacious, inviting an expansiveness not possible in dialectical or classical rhetorical models that depend so heavily on virtue and reason. It is one based on an awareness of self and other as it is expressed and embodied in living beings or as the poet Adrienne Rich has called it, the “geography closest in.”

What might happen if the divisions between nature and culture, and human and animal became more permeable? If socially constructed spaces were extended to include an array of habitats and habits frequented by all kinds of beings? Humans may become much more aware of their connections to other life forms. Living things, living together, might begin to communicate with each other through various discursive means, including sight, touch, sound, and even smell! The discourses we now use, and especially the artistic ones, could help to create the pathways to expand the ways in which all of us understand expression and communication. Acknowledging different sites and multiplicity of identities created by simultaneous membership in different groups also opens up the discursive field, especially if, as Kennedy has proposed, animals (or at least some of them) can engage in rhetoric. This could foster a much greater awareness of unequal power relationships among members in a community, both human and not.
Reynolds defines ethos as something that isn’t comprised of “measurable traits displayed by an individual; rather, it is a complex set of characteristics constructed by a group, sanctioned by that group, and more readily recognizable to others who belong or who share similar values or experiences. This notion of ethos, therefore, includes the social context surrounding the solitary rhetor.” Communications scholar Karen Burke LeFevre describes “that socially created space, in the ‘between,’ the point of intersection between speaker or writer and listener or reader” as a place of creativity and invention. This affirms its spatial and social nature. It is one that does not need to be limited to a particular individual, group or site, but can also exist in the “in-betweens,” in the contacts between various life forms, especially if our understanding of discursive communities is expanded to include all life forms.

Animal encounters, such as the one that Derrida famously describes with his cat, occur in what philosopher Anthony Calarco describes as a “contretemps, in a time out of joint, prior to and outside of knowledge and identification.” The scene of nonknowing in which one finds oneself exposed to the other animal is somewhat akin to madness, which is why Derrida calls it a “deranged theatrics.” Derrida describes this as a time, “impossible to determine, for the ‘I,’ whether it is conceived in terms of the subject, cognito, transcendental unity of apperception, transcendental ego, or self-consciousness—is not fully there to synthesize and make sense of the experience.” Calarco concludes, “Animal ethics is not simply a matter of theoretical consistency and rationality.”

The experience of contretemps and the decentering of the human subject is
evident in Hastings Bradley’s encounter with the gorilla. Earlier, as her husband takes aim before shooting, time is described as an “eternity” that occurs “in a second or two.” Other indicators that time is out of joint include the use of words such as “primeval” and “vanished ages.” The temporal and sensory confusion described by Hastings Bradley suggests that the deadly violence here triggered a response in which the presence of the gorilla decenters what up until that point had been an anthropocentric realm, and eventually lead to a reexamination of what the human-gorilla relationship should be. It was “the presence of this great gorilla” that made the day “seem like a page from the very beginning of time” rather than the successful achievement of their long-sought goal. Tragically enough, the unprovoked killing of an animal that only sought solitude in his remote habitat evoked from Hastings Dudley a response that challenged what Derrida has described as transcendental violence, or the “reduction of the other to a real moment in my life.”

8. Beyond “Wordy”

In “Violence and Metaphysics,” Derrida takes up Martin Heidegger’s idea of “letting be.” As Sarah Wood explains in her analysis, “Letting be is not the same as ignoring or letting alone. It means an opening of thinking toward what is nameless, towards Being before social organization and therefore before ethics. So letting be is what would make ethics possible. Letting be may allow comprehension, but it also acknowledges the form of an existing thing or person that cannot be transformed into an object of understanding.”
Enlarging our “wordy” language to include an animal rhetoric could offer an antidote to what Jacques Derrida has identified as “the violence of concepts.” He writes,

Truthfully, one does not have to wonder what this encounter is. It is the encounter, the only way out, the only adventuring outside one’s self toward the unforeseeably-other. *Without hope of return* . . . there is no way to conceptualize the encounter: it is made possible by the other, the unforeseeable ‘resistant to all categories.’ Concepts suppose an anticipation, a horizon within which alterity is amortized as soon as it is announced precisely because it has let itself be foreseen. The infinitely other cannot be bound by a concept, cannot be thought on the basis of a horizon; for a horizon is always a horizon of the same, the elementary unity within which eruptions and surprises are always welcomed by understanding and recognized. Thus we are obliged to think in opposition to truisms which we believed—which we still cannot not believe—to be the very ether of our thought and language.331

Derrida argues that a human-animal ethics is awakened when we recognize the “embodied exposure of animals, their finitude and vulnerability” rather than particular capacities and traits. In his analysis of Derrida’s animal ethics, Calarco identifies this awakening as one that is “an interruptive encounter with animal suffering that calls for and provokes thought.”332 The artists whose work is discussed in the chapters that follow enter into that “interruptive encounter.”

Derrida looks at how language, and more specifically concepts both create
and limit meaning within particular contexts or events. Enlarging discourse to include both body and place can create a complex and embodied situation that can help us become aware of our anthropocentrism, if not step outside of it. Becoming sensitive to the ways in which language continually defers meaning suggests that there is another place, a habitat, outside of language. If the human is decentered, possibilities opens up for what Derrida describes as a “joyous affirmation of the play of the world, and of the innocence of becoming, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation. *This affirmation then determines the none center otherwise than as loss of the center.*”

This way of making meaning, tries to “pass beyond man and humanism.” To seek out encounters which support “adventuring outside one’s self toward the unforeseeably-other,” even if one may not be able to move beyond, as Derrida puts it, “the horizon of the same” or elude the truisms “which we still cannot not believe.”

Akeley loved Africa and the animals there. Although the dioramas are his attempt to “realistically” recreate this world, he never gained a truly intimate knowledge of it, but instead created a mirror of his own values and desires. “Nature” as represented in these dioramas, is an idealized human society. Just as visitors to the museum look at the dioramas, so Akeley and Hastings Bradley looked at the African mammals and never experienced what Derrida has called the “interruptive encounter.” Instead of being in dialogue with the other living beings, the animals became life-sized puppets, a means to a human ends. Whether they were positioned as worthy adversaries during the hunt or as taxidermied
mounts in the museums, the animals were only allowed to say what the humans wanted to hear. At this time most people would not think that an “abyss of noncomprehension” between humans and animals even existed, and if they were aware of one, it certainly was not a problem.
Chapter Two

Representing Relationship: Animal Actors

“What a lonely species we are,” Diane Ackerman observes in her essay, “Why We Love Zoos.” She describes us as continuously “searching for signals of life from other galaxies, adopting companion animals, visiting parks and zoos to commune with other beasts . . . . We flock to zoos for many reasons, not least to shed some of the burden of being human.” Zoos and circuses often provide the only opportunities for most people living in post-industrial urban societies to come into contact with animals. According to The New York Times more than 150

Figure 3. Craig Barister, Azy with Girl, The International Orangutan Center, Indianapolis Zoo, Indianapolis.
million people visit zoos and aquariums annually in the United States, and worldwide there are hundreds of millions of visitors. About fifty percent are families, but a significant number are adults without children. As with all encounters between species, how do we make sense of these encounters? The answers to this question are indeterminate, situation-specific, and dependent on economic, scientific, and social factors.

1. Ruler of Nature, Lord of the Wild

Menageries, private collections with a history dating back to 2500 BCE were the exclusive domain of royalty and the very wealthy. In his essay, “Zoos and Eyes,” Ralph Acampora writes, “in its days as a private garden, the zoo was a powerful symbol of dominion: It projected an imperial image of man-the-monarch—ruler of nature, lord of the wild.” Early zoological societies, which were only open to members, sought to separate the scientific study of animals from more “vulgar” exhibitions. However the support of a public which paid to see the animals turned out to be a financial necessity. As mentioned in the introduction, in “Why Look at Animals?” John Berger notes that the animals in these royal menageries were a “symbolic representation of the conquest of all distant and exotic lands,” an expression of national pride and power. Animals in the royal menageries symbolized the importance of their owners or military or colonial dominance. The animals may have been given as gifts by other rulers for special occasions, to mark agreements, or collected during foreign campaigns.

While the animals were expensive, this didn’t prevent their abuse. For
example, James I staged a match between a bear and a lion, neither of which attacked the other and so the spectacle was disappointing for viewers. James I also sent a tiger to a public arena (known as a bear garden) in London to be baited. Bear baiting was popular in England until the nineteenth century. In these events, a bear would be chained by its neck or leg to a post in a pit and dogs would be set on it. The last known example of lion baiting in England occurred in a match between two lions and six dogs in 1825. (Fortunately, the lions — named Nero and Wallace — survived.\textsuperscript{342}

At the beginning of the nineteenth century rapid industrialization and urbanization in Europe and North America reduced contact between humans and domesticated animals.\textsuperscript{343} The first modern public zoo was established in Paris in 1783 after the leaders of the French Revolution removed the animals were removed from royal menageries. Others sprang up in major urban centers, including London and Berlin. While contemporary zoos are public, and emphasize missions of education and conservation, Acampora believes the same principle of domination continues, in that the animals are used to fulfill fantasies of impossible encounters and “powerful presumptions of mastery and control.” The meaning of the animals, he believes, is shaped by “the perversions of a patriarchal gaze.”\textsuperscript{344}

The imperial gaze, the pursuit of knowledge, or the exoticism and wistfulness evoked by an imaginary Eden are evident in the design of contemporary zoos. One example is the Indianapolis Zoo, which has recently constructed a 20 million dollar orangutan exhibit. According to Mike Crowther,
President and CEO, “To engage, enlighten, and empower children and families, we need exhibits that bring people close to animals. In return, we owe the animals in our care a habitat where they can lead enriched, fulfilled lives.” (my italics). The intention is dual: The animals will seemingly be free to go about their daily lives even as they will simultaneously be available to human audiences. Crowther goes on to describe the exhibit’s central feature, the Hutan Trail, as an ingenious interpretation of an orangutan highway through the forest . . . the cables and bridges of the Hutan Trail allow orangutans to leave the Atrium and travel to different places . . . over the Zoo, and over the heads of Zoo guests. Perhaps most importantly, the Hutan Trail allows orangutans to make choices such as where they go and with whom they associate or avoid.345

Crowther refers to the central element in the new exhibit as “a soaring Tower of Hope” for both people and orangutans, a startling romantic metaphor for human-orangutan relations.346 Certainly large and stimulating environments are improvements over the more cell-like cement and bars of earlier zoos. Still there is a robust argument about whether zoos can justify holding animals in captivity. On the one hand, the animals are preserved and protected. However it is also true that significant money and resources are directed toward simulating natural habitats even as native ones are destroyed by human development.
While the new exhibit is presented as one that offers freedom and replicates nature, the animals were placed in the enclosure for six months before opening it to the public. Primates will pound continuously on the glass walls, attempt to dismantle structures (by unscrewing bolts, etc.), and engage in various other behaviors as they try to break out of any new enclosure. Therefore any new exhibit requires a period of observation so that modifications can be made as needed to prevent escape. The intensity of their efforts, and especially the repeated pounding on the glass, is upsetting to zoo visitors. An acclimatization period allows the animals to adjust to their new enclosure and also prevents the
public from being exposed to potentially upsetting behaviors such as excessive pounding on the plate glass as animals figure out the limits of their new environment. Public viewing is allowed only after the animals have adapted. Inevitably, the human narrative about the Hutan Trail and the orangutans’ reactions to it diverge. While the designers of the exhibit try to create the best possible zoo environment, frequently the best is not defined by what animals need and want. Instead there is often an uneasy tradeoff between what visitors desire and the ideal environment for animals.

2. The Linguistic Abyss

The dominant view in Western societies is that animals do not have language. It has long been defined as a system of arbitrary symbols (i.e., words, either written and spoken), a privileged form of expression limited to humans. One of the barriers to cross species communication is of course that this definition excludes all other species, which is why historically we go to zoos and circuses to look at animals. While other forms of communication (i.e., touch, nonverbal sounds) exist, these have always been assigned a lower, and even unintentional status. For example, the communications of nonhuman animals are perceived as unintentional and assumed to be instinctual. Again, the human relationship to zoo animals is only across that “abyss of noncomprehension” discussed earlier. The cages operate as frames that both isolate the animals from their native habitats and allow viewers to easily impose their own perceptions and preoccupations upon them, as evidenced by the “Tower of Hope” metaphor. As discussed in the introduction and noted by Berger, the lives of these animals are erased and
replaced by our daydreams about them.\textsuperscript{348} If we are lucky, they look back at us, and certainly exhibition designers do all they can to ensure this happens. The inarticulate visibility of the animals makes it easy to turn them into objects for fulfilling our human needs and desires.

Unlike the barriers posed to communication encountered by people who do not speak the same language, which can be rectified by learning a new language or by a translator, Berger observes that understanding the language of animals demands an “exceptional being” such as Orpheus who was able to communicate with animals through music.\textsuperscript{349} Examples from contemporary popular culture include the fictional Harry Potter, a magician in training who can talk with snakes, and a proliferation of professional “whisperers” who can communicate with cats, dogs, horses and even wild animals. The endurance of these myths and popularity of contemporary practitioeers (regardless of the veracity of their claims) demonstrate the desire to cross not only the so-called abyss human and animal, but also the one between nature and culture. As Ackerman and Berger observe, humans are irresistibly drawn to the edges of a domain they have so carefully constructed. Yet those edges might be fuzzier than one might think. For example, horses have learned develop communication strategies based on human clues and share work-related relationships with humans.\textsuperscript{350} Communication, after all, is as they say, “a two-way street.”
3. Wild, Domestic, Tame, Feral, Exotic

Humans have rich and often contradictory ways for categorizing other species. Some of the animals on display at zoos are wild, but others are not. It would be a mistake to assume that domestic and wild have clearly defined traits. While it may seem obvious to state that orangutans are not domesticated, but rather wild and even exotic animals, these categories are both more complex and less stable than might be assumed. For example, dogs, cats, sheep, and cattle are domesticated in that they are dependent on humans for their care. Through centuries of selective breeding, their appearance and behavior have been altered and along with this, their ability to survive in the wild. Through domestication the human environment now represents the “natural” life conditions for many species.\(^{351}\)

In contrast, wild animals have not been bred to live under human control. However some domesticated animals do end up living successfully live in the wild as feral animals. Other animals raised for commercial use, such as ostriches and raptors, are semi-domesticated. Still others, such as Asian elephants, are wild but have been captured and tamed for human use for thousands of years. As elephant conservationalist Richard C. Lair observes,

\[\text{[M]}\text{any wild-caught elephants quickly and easily form intimate bonds with their keepers even though their wild temperament has never been modified through selective breeding. Some elephants form such warm and affectionate bonds with man [sic] as to deceive the observer into thinking}\]
that this animal must have been made truly domestic. Many other elephants in domesticity, however, remain unremittingly wild, hostile . . . Clearly, a domesticated elephant is simply a wild animal in chains — but a wild animal frequently gentle and intelligent enough to be totally trustworthy as a baby-sitter to watch over human infants. What adjective best describes such animals when kept by man [sic], particularly in relation to their wild congener's?352

Taming and domesticated are two different processes. In addition, it is not always the case that a wild animal is ferocious, aggressive or untrainable. Because these captive elephants have never been bred selectivity, they have the same genetic traits and many of the same behaviors as untamed animals. Lair believes many of these elephants could successfully live in the wild, something not true of truly domesticated animals.

In addition to the 16,000 captive elephants in Asian countries, there are large captive groups in European and North American zoos and circuses.353 In these parts of the world, elephants are exotic (non-native) species. While often perceived as wild, exotic animals may in fact be long-domesticated. In North American and Europe, zoos typically exhibit what visitors perceive as exotic wild animals such as elephants and camels. While the elephants are actually wild but possibly tamed or trained, camels, which are native to desert areas of Asia and northern Africa, have been domesticated for about five thousand years.
Another category, feral, refers to once tamed or domesticated animals that now live in the wild. One example of a feral population is the 700,000 Dromedary (single hump) camels in Australia. Although extinct in the wild, these camels are descendants of nineteenth century domestic herds. Another example are mustangs, descendants of the domesticated horses the Spanish and others brought to the “New World.” While these animals were once considered wild, now they are labeled feral and currently under the control of the United States government’s Bureau of Land Management. There are also some herds in Canada. In another twist, the Spanish Mustang Registry, established in 1957, asserts the Spanish Mustang is a distinct breed, primarily domesticated and not feral, and should not be confused with the feral horses under the control of the federal government.

Purebred domestic animals, whose lineage can be traced from generation to generation, horses may be either livestock or pets. Others object to the term pet, and prefer to describe these as companion animals.

Horses have long-evoked an array of contradictory or incongruous meanings for humans. This is evident in both the nineteenth century circus acts and hippodramas and also in contemporary performances. Throughout their long history of service to (or control by) humans, horses have been abused, taken-for-granted, or celebrated. Long domesticated, horses symbolized freedom. Beasts of burden that were often badly abused — a sight not uncommon in nineteenth century cities, they were simultaneously admired as god-like.

The narratives told by displays and performances involving animals express beliefs about identities (theirs and ours) and also what kinds of
relationships are possible between us. Often the emphasis has been on human mastery, obedience, and subjecting the animal to the will of humans. Historically, in acts which involved horses for example, the human was front and center, and animals were celebrated for their service to human causes or for their anthropomorphic qualities. In contrast, in a number of contemporary performances humans and horses appear to be engaged in equitable partnerships, as will be discussed in the last chapter.

Considering the ways in which humans categorize animals offers insight into the changing relationships between us and them. These categories are depended on human economic, social, and political interests. For example, in England a camel might be perceived as a rare and exotic wild animal and a highly valued asset to a zoo, in Australia as a feral animal that has become a nuisance, and in northern Africa as long-domesticated and commonly used for labor. Mustangs simultaneously (and even in the same country — the United States) can be labeled as a feral animal whose overpopulation harms the environment and therefore must be culled, a valuable purebred horse, a pet, livestock, or symbolic of the free and wild spirit that epitomizes the American frontier.

All of these categories describe relationships from a human perspective, one in which the standard is the animal’s position with respect to a particular society’s worldview. While zoos today emphasize their scientific and educational missions, as Gayatri Spivak observes in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” knowledge is a product that expresses the beliefs and values of those producing it. In the postcolonial discourses that Spivak critiques, the other is always positioned in
terms of its lack measured by an ideal imposed by another group. In the same way, all nonhuman species are evaluated according to a human measure and found lacking. These shortcomings then serve as a rationale not only for human dominance, but too often for the abuse of animals by humans, including the destruction of environments essential for an animal’s survival. As Spivak writes, “a project understood in essentialist terms must traffic in a radical textual practice of differences. The object of the group’s investigation . . . is a deviation from an ideal . . . which is itself defined as a difference from the elite.”³⁵⁷ While the group to which Spivak refers is the subaltern, the framing she critiques is one that has also been applied to animals. Rather than focusing on what animals lack (symbolic language, culture, moral reasoning, and so on), exploring what these differences cannot tell us offer pathways for consideration that have up to now too often been in the shadows. At the least, as Spivak points out, “[O]ne must nevertheless insist that the colonized subaltern subject [and I would add animal] is irretrievably heterogeneous.”³⁵⁸ The exhibition of animals in zoos expresses not only our interest in animals, but how we create binaries between us and the exotic other, which sometimes may be another culture, and sometimes nature itself.

4. The Early Modern Circus Horse

Just as with zoos, and also as seen in the natural history diorama discussed in chapter one, the circus ring presents very particular kinds of interactions between human and animals. Approximately seven million Americans attended a circus performance in 2012. The early modern circus, which came into being in the late eighteenth century at about the same time that public zoos were being
established, was associated with the theatre. However during most of the twentieth century circus was considered a coarser form of popular entertainment. Over the past few decades, the pendulum is beginning to swing back. For example the Arts Council of England has recently defined circus as a “supremely physical and visual artform that exists in its own right; not a an adjunct to theatre or dance. It has a very specific relationship with the gaze of the audience and with the involvement of participants, which means it is one of the most accessible artforms that exist today.”

The report also notes that this is not a widely-shared view.

In “The Classification of Circus Techniques” Hovey Burgess observes, “The modern circus is by no means a direct descendant of the ancient Roman circus. Roman circuses, such as Circus Maximus, were architectural structures designed primarily for chariot races.” In 1768 Philip Astley, an Englishman, and his wife Patty founded what was considered to be the first modern circus. Using the skills acquired during his service in a cavalry regiment during the Seven Years War, for several years Astley offered equestrian lessons each morning and performed riding tricks in the afternoon in an open ring near what at the time was the outskirts of London. Astley built the New British Riding School or Amphitheatre Riding Ring, near the Westminster Bridge in 1773. Just as with the theatre, there were a variety of seating options, including the pit, boxes, and galleries. During the same period Astley expanded his performances to include first acrobats then cavalry-style horsemanship, clowning, and vaulting. All were typical offerings of the period.

Astley’s unique contribution, which earned him the distinction of being
the founder of the modern circus, was his signature format, a ring approximately 42 feet in diameter. As Astley had discovered, this dimension provides an “optimum balance between centrifugal and centripetal forces for a man attempting to maintain his balance on the back of a galloping horse.” In addition the ring
provided the audience with a much better view of the performance than a straight line. While the modern and Roman structures were both circular arenas surrounded by tiers of seats, Astley’s building was designed for what we now call the circus: an exhibition of equestrian, acrobatic, and other performances. Other early modern circuses would also house their performances in theatre-like permanent structures.

Through emphasizing similarities with the theatre, these early circus owners wished to distinguish themselves from the rowdy entertainments of country fairs and town festivals, or more brutal activities such as cock fighting or bear baiting. Horses, which were increasingly perceived as status symbols by the English gentry, embodied this distinction. Humans who owned or controlled horses, and especially well-bred and well-trained animals, were associated with superior classes. As part of this public relations campaign, cultural historian Marius Kwint notes, horses “became a pliant rhetorical device as well as a practical instrument for performing astonishing feats. Horsemen had long served as emblems of conquest — of nurture over nature, of reason over passion — and indeed of civilization itself.” Astley used horses (among other devices) to align his circus with educational, patriotic, and cultural institutions and distance himself from nomadic performers and their offerings, which were often perceived as disreputable, and inappropriate for those aspiring to middle class status in a rapidly urbanizing society. In contrast, horses were associated with the nobility and the cavalry; both groups were highly respected in an age when militarism and imperialism were celebrated. The skillful equestrian performances and riding
lessons offered by Astley brought audiences and aspiring students closer to the elegant, highly trained steed which exemplified these values.

Americans had a different relationship with the circus and with horses. There were few cities in early nineteenth century America large enough to support a resident circus. At the same time, the frontier was rapidly expanding. Although also associated with wealth and military prowess, for thousands of Americans horses provided access to opportunities afforded by westward expansion. Circus were also on the move, offering diversion and a chance to gaze at the unusual and the exotic in large but rural nation. In 1828 Joshuah Purdy Brown began using a portable canvas tent to house his circus. About the same time, traveling menageries were added to circus performances. Finally rather than being owned by a family of performers, these circuses were run by businessmen. The combination resulted in an American form of circus that distinctly differed from the European model.

One of the most famous American circuses, P.T. Barnum’s, began as a traveling museum, menagerie, and circus in 1871. P.T. Barnum had a museum background, and, according to Deborah Walk, curator at the Ringling Museums, tried to promote his circus as an educational institution. Eventually this became a multi-ring circus; the menagerie and the museum became a sideshow that featured human and animal oddities. A decade later Barnum formed a partnership with James Anthony Bailey. After Barnum’s death, Bailey took became Barnum & Bailey’s “Greatest Show on Earth” on a European tour, which led to the establishment of tented traveling circuses with menageries in Europe.
In both Europe and the United States, as horses were replaced by other forms of transportation, the appeal of equestrian acts diminished. While exotic animals had made occasional appearances in the circus, by the end of the nineteenth century wild animal acts, acrobats, aerialists, jugglers, and clowns became increasingly popular. In the late twentieth century, in large part due to the efforts of animal rights activists, circuses have come under increasing scrutiny and criticism for their treatment of animals, especially wild species. These reports of animal abuse further diminished the reputation of the circus. The use of exotic animals were replaced in the “new circus” by an increasing emphasis on human performers and/or the use of domestic animals, especially horses, which were the focus of the early modern circuses.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, an increasing awareness of various forms of abuse in the training and care of zoo and circus animals led to calls for reform. While I will not be directly addressing these reform efforts, I want to acknowledge them as an influence in our changing perceptions of animals and how they are treated. In its campaign to pass legislation to protect exotic animals in the United States, Animal Defenders International, a nonprofit organization founded in 1990 that focuses on the use of animals in entertainment and laboratories, identifies the primary causes of animal suffering in circuses. These include insufficient space, being transported for extended periods, the inability to exercise or act normally, stress from abnormal conditions (including having solitary animals being housed with other animals, being separated from family members, or keeping predators and prey in close proximity), physical abuse, and
the development of health, behavioral, and psychological problems from all of the above.\textsuperscript{370}

In large part due to the efforts of animal rights activists, circuses have come under increasing scrutiny and criticism for their treatment of animals, especially wild species. These reports of animal abuse further diminished the reputation of the circus.\textsuperscript{371} While the traditional three-ring animal circus is still popular, caused by shifting artistic and animal rights-influenced values has led to what is called the “new circus,” which only presents acts with domestic animals or focuses solely on human acts. In addition to changes in the animal acts, the new circus’ identification with the performing arts has resulted in a shift in artistic and commercial attitudes in these companies.\textsuperscript{372}

The replacement of exotic animals in the new circus with an increasing emphasis on human performers and/or the use of domestic animals, especially horses, is reminiscent of the early modern circuses. Some such as Cirque du Soleil, founded in 1984, do not include any animal acts while others, including the Big Apple Circus, use only domesticated animals. In spite of these efforts to rethink the circus, the spectacular nature of many “new circus” performances cause them to be categorized as entertainment rather than art forms for various reasons, including the circus’ emphasis on commercial income, the “perceived class based nature” of its appeal, a lack of artistic quality, and animal rights issues.\textsuperscript{373} As an increasing number of visual and performing artists use living animals in works that are shown in galleries, museums, and other venues, it is useful to keep in mind how these artworks and especially how animals are treated, echo or diverge
from what has been done with and to animals in circuses and zoos.

In contrast to the contemporary new circus format, the older circus’ connections with theatrical productions such as the hippodramas were not only due to its architectural forms, but also its practices. As noted by A. H. Saxon in “The Circus as Theatre: Astley's and Its Actors in the Age of Romanticism,” while tumbling, juggling, rope dancing, trick riding, and the exhibiting of trained animals can be traced to antiquity, Astley was the first to bring these acts together to form “a distinct entertainment of sufficient magnitude to stand on its own.”

In Astley’s England, circuses and other entertainment venues were legally prohibited from offering, “legitimate drama,” defined as a five-act play with dialogues in prose unaccompanied by music. However circuses and theatres alike had dramatic companies. The dramatic companies associated with the circuses were allowed to perform burlettas (brief comic operas) and pantomimes. The circus also had equestrian companies and units which offered what we now consider the traditional circus acts. Sometimes the performances by these groups were presented separately; at other times there would be overlap in the increasingly popular hippodrama, which inserted equestrian displays into dramatic productions.

In addition to melodrama, other forms of hippodrama included the reproduction of military campaigns, Easter or Christmas religious spectacles, and eventually, comedic stories. The hippodramas included music provided by an orchestra, spectacular costumes, compelling backdrops, and various special
effects. In some productions the horse was the star of the show, acting as the protagonists responsible for saving a child or identifying a villain. The hippodrama quickly became the feature, typically opening the program. This was followed by “Scenes in a Circle” (acrobats, clowns, strongmen, gymnasts, etc.). Closing the evening, and appearing on the increasingly popular proscenium stage, would be a “pedestrian” melodrama, a burletta, or a pantomime.375

By the beginning of the nineteenth century hippodramas, initially a circus offering, became increasing popular and eventually found their way into “classical” theatre. One of the most famous hippodramas was “Mazeppa and the Wild Horse of Tartary,” based on the poem by Byron and first staged by Astley in 1831.376 In the story a young man, apparently a commoner dares to become romantically involved with a woman betrothed to a nobleman. His punishment? He is lashed naked to the back of a wild horse that is then released into the wild. The young man survives, eventually reunites with his lover, and is recognized as the rightful heir to the throne. The hippodrama concludes with the restoration of order (Mazeppa survives his ordeal in the wilderness and assumes his rightful position as Prince of the Tartars). In a later production, at Whitechapel's Pavilion Theatre in 1861, it is the young woman, played by the American actor Adah Isaacs Menken who, nearly naked, is bound to the horse in what became a far more erotic sequence.377
Mazzepa’s move from Astley’s circus to Whitechapel Theatre demonstrates both the popularity of hippodramas and the impact they had on “classical” theatre. An earlier example of the influence of hippodramas on theatre occurred in 1811, when a new production of *Blue Beard*, a play by George Colman the Younger at Covent Garden used trained horses from Astley's Circus in two acts. While audience were enthusiastic, theatrical productions that used living animals (in addition to horses, dogs were popular along with the occasional elephant) drew criticism and praise. A contemporary review by Leigh Hunt’s in *The Examiner* captures both:

If it were possible to present the public with such exhibitions and at the
same time cherish a proper taste for the Drama, they [horses] might even
be hailed as a genuine improvement in representation; for if men, and not
puppets, act men, there seems to be no dramatic reason why horses should
not act horses. But . . . [t]hey are too powerful a stimulus to the senses of
the common order of spectators, and take away from their eyes and ears all
relish for more delicate entertainment. The managers and the public thus
corrupt each other; but it is the former who begin the infection (emphasis
added).

Following the revival of *Blue Beard, Timour the Tartar*, which also included
horses, drew intense criticism from reviewers, in part because it was a new work
(as opposed to a revival where innovative additions were more acceptable).
Further, since *Blue Beard*’s success had restored the theatre to a secure financial
footing, it was perceived by supporters of classical theatre as driven by greed
rather than by a more pardonable effort to save the theatre from financial ruin.

As Michael Gamer, an English Romantic scholar describes it, “In
commissioning a new play solely for the purposes of exhibiting equestrian
spectacle . . . the management of Covent Garden crossed a number of ideological
lines.” The classical or legitimate theater had been overcome by the “illegitimate
forces of pantomime and the circus, and all the expected dualisms of reason and
madness, authority and misrule, and good and evil, follow.” The inclusion of
living animals (in this case, the horse) in a production, contaminates legitimate
theatre. The criticism arises not from the horses’ capacity to successfully perform
their roles, but from the “powerful stimulus to the senses.” In the theatre, the
spoken word is important. Substituting sensuality or pantomime, as was done in the hyppodramas, threatened theatre’s artistic foundations. Madness, misrule, and evil follow. Living animals on stage — horses performing as horses — are more compelling than the spoken word. Horses, animals without language, embody the “illegitimate forces of pantomime.” As the nineteenth century progressed, hippodramas became less popular. Exotic animals such as elephants and lions were introduced and gradually become more prominent than horses in these dramas and also in circus acts more generally.

5. The Way Things Work

As discussed in the introduction, in Circus and Culture: A Semiotic Approach Paul Bouissac thinks of circus acts as a form of language. He assumes that the acts deliver a uniform message that is understood in the same way by audience members because the code used is one which everyone interprets in essentially the same way. The codes, which include objects, costumes, music, lighting, the ring, the types of acts, sounds, the use of natural materials (or not), and the actions performed by humans and animal, and the relationships between these codes create “rules of compatibility” which govern the way things are supposed to work in everyday life. The “way things work” include expectations about relationships between humans and animals. Sometimes the rules of compatibility are challenged and then tacit understandings about the way things are, about what’s normal, are disrupted. For example, rules of compatibility are
challenged when in traditional circus acts, a horse makes its trainer look foolish or an elephant answers the telephone. In these situations, once the punch line has been delivered, order is restored.

From a semiotic perspective, the performances are texts written in a code of constant and variable units. These units might include material elements, processes, and the relations between materials and processes. Together these elements and their variations may create a narrative or evoke an emotional or cognitive response from the audience. The use of costumes is an example. An acrobat dressed as a tramp may elicit a humorous response from the audience, and successful completion of the maneuvers may seem to come in large part through chance. In contrast an acrobat dressed in a traditional leotard costume may successfully complete the same program, but evoke a response of admiration and a sense that the performer possesses superior skill and intelligence.

Props are read the same way. On one level, a chair serves a specific function and conveys style on the social and aesthetic levels, but the chair assumes *additional* meanings in other contexts. In a circus a chair may become a weapon for a lion tamer, a clown’s musical instrument, or a difficult object to juggle. In the same way, he points out that animals can also become “polyvalent” elements. A horse may serve as a platform for a bareback rider or “a ‘superhuman’ actor, able to make a fool of its trainer.” In many of these examples, a shift in context or relationship results in a new identity or relational properties, even if the basic element (chair, horse, or acrobatic prowess) remains the same. In all of these examples the object (i.e., chair or horse) is a tool used by
the human performer in ways that eventually reaffirm his or her superiority. Any other outcome would diminish the audience’s sense of pleasure in the show.

In his semiotic-based analysis, Bouissac describes a hegemonic model, or as what Bakhtin might have described as the official language. Bouissac does not account for the intrusion of informal or centripetal forces that might create alternative readings of the act. The rules of compatibility in this structuralist analysis imply there is broadly accepted norm and any other interpretation is a misreading. While it is true that circus performances are elaborately constructed narratives that involve intense training and rehearsal, and draw from traditional or standard models, the actors, both human and animal, and their audiences are always unique and particular individuals. Even the most standardized of codes will be expressed and perceived in various ways, depending on each individual’s own preoccupations, experiences, and motivations. While these acts are historically and culturally grounded, just as with any form of communication, socio-economic class, personal history, and an array of other factors will be in play.

Yet norms do exist. They can frame performances in ways that foreground some readings and exclude others. For example, while audiences for the early “modern circus” which began with Astley may have anticipated seeing animals behave in unusual or extraordinary ways, and understood this as evidence of human – or even more specifically racial or ethnic — superiority, in the contemporary performances considered in the final chapter, the emphasis is on creating an environment where horses are encouraged to engage in “natural”
behaviors. Yet in both, the animals are being trained and handled in ways designed to achieve specific outcomes.

Bouissac observes, “The circus [or theatrical performance more generally] freely manipulates a cultural system to such an extent that it leaves the audience contemplating a demonstration of humanity freed from the constraints of the culture within which the performance takes place” (emphasis added). However not only is what is imaginable culturally bound, but also what we imagine nature to be is also a cultural construction. As Pierre Vost, another scholar of the circus and author of *The Circus and the Music Hall*, observes, “Circus and vaudeville are not only brilliant and fascinating forms of spectacles but also, and above all, very precise and very lucid ones. They are very meaningful; to content ourselves with a passive enjoyment is to insult our intelligence.”

6. Creating Oppositions

Nature and culture are thought of as opposites, and yet an increasing number of theorists think that nature is a product of culture. While it is widely accepted that culture plays an important role in the development of human identity, culture’s role in establishing the identity of animals and of nature — that is, how nature is defined — has been recognized relatively recently. Nature has often been “identified” as simply whatever is outside of culture, although increasingly scholars such as Haraway, among others, challenge these boundaries. Nature is increasingly recognized as a cultural construct. Nature and animals have also been traditionally identified as a resource for humans. In part this last point is
based on an assumption that humans have intrinsic value (or more intrinsic value) while other animals have either instrumental value or less intrinsic value.

Traditional circus acts play off of the binaries of culture/nature and human/animal. Sometimes these are reaffirmed, sometimes challenged. Culture is a perpetually elusive term. This word has had a long and varied history, and one in which its meaning has not remained constant. According to the critic Raymond Williams, a foundational theorist in the field of cultural studies, “Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language . . . mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought.”

In the field of anthropology, culture can be defined as the social circulation of meaning, with the meaning embedded in various cultural products. According to the anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski, “Culture is a well organized unity divided into two fundamental aspects—a body of artifacts and a system of customs. More recently Clifford Geertz, another anthropologist, defined culture as “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols.” Culture is a text that can be interpreted through producing “thick descriptions” which capture the point of view of participants in a ritual or an event. In Geertz’s semiotic approach, according to the philosopher Jesse Prinz, “behavioral practices are described in sufficient detail to trace inferential associations between observed events” and to recognize that events have different meanings and consequences depending on the social groups. These “observed
events” could include circus acts, performances, and also the forms of preparation
and training associated with these activities.

Media scholar John Fiske provides a definition that may be especially
relevant. According to Fiske culture ranges from,

the social circulation of value and pleasure, to the processes of forming
social identities and social relationships, and to entering into relation with
the larger social order in a particular way and from a particular position.
Social relationships are personal, social relations are structural, and the
former turn the latter into the lived experience of every day life. 392

As Raymond Williams notes in his book, Keywords, the Latin root word Colere
was a verb that meant inhabit, cultivate, protect, or honor with worship. By the
early fifteen century, the English word culture meant the tending of natural
growth such as crops or animals. In the sixteenth century a metaphorical use of
the term referred to individual human development. Over the next two centuries
culture began to be understood as a more abstract and general process. Williams
quotes Milton, who wrote in 1660, “spread much more Knowledg and Civility,
yea, Religion, through all parts of the Land, by communicating the natural heat of
Government and Culture more distributively to all extreme parts, which now lie
num and neglected.” 393 Civilization and civility were often associated or
interchangeable with culture over time. The German cultur, which eventually
became kultur in the nineteenth century, was a synonym for civilization. Kultur
also took on an Enlightenment-influenced meaning associated with a secular
process. The German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder observed,
“nothing is more indeterminate than this word, and nothing more deceptive than its application to all nations and periods.” 394 Resisting the implied superiority of European culture, Herder wrote,

Men of all the quarters of the globe, who have perished over the ages, you have not lived solely to manure the earth with your ashes, so that at the end of time your posterity should be made happy by European culture.

The very thought of a superior European culture is a blatant insult to the majesty of Nature. 395

As Williams observes, Herder was the first to recognize that culture is plural. He observed there are numerous cultures existing not only in different counties and periods but also even within a single country.

During the Romantic movement the term was positively associated with national and traditional ways of life, in opposition to and as a critique of civilization, which was then associated with mechanization and industrialization. During this period culture was associated with the spiritual, and civilization with the material realm. During the nineteenth century both culture and civilization were associated with what G. F. Kelmms characterized as the “human development from savagery through domestication to freedom.” 396 Culture can then refer to “a general process of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development,” a meaning which emerged in the eighteenth century; or beginning in the nineteenth century, a particular way of life (of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general; and finally, beginning in the late nineteenth century, as “the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity” (emphasis
Raymond Williams observes, “Faced by this complex and still active history of the word, it is easy to react by selecting one ‘true’ or ‘proper’ or ‘scientific’ sense and dismissing other senses as loose or confused,” something that has been done by North American anthropology, as is evident from the discussion above.\textsuperscript{398} Although this is perhaps necessary in a discipline, as Said has noted, it creates a field that somewhat arbitrarily includes or excludes other ideas, meanings, and possibilities. But especially since this term is also widely used in public discourse, maintaining an awareness of the term’s variable meanings and associations, whether positive or negative, is necessary for recognizing, as Williams notes, “complex argument about the relations between general human development and a particular way of life, and between both and the works and practices of art and intelligence.”

Williams points out that an awareness of culture’s multiple meanings can keep alive the “central question of the relations between ‘material’ and ‘symbolic’ production.” Also, as he notes, doing this can sensitize us to the “alternative views of the activities, relationships and processes which this complex word indicates. The complexity, that is to say, is not finally in the word but in the problems which its variations of use significantly indicate.”\textsuperscript{399}

The human and animal acts presented in circuses provide an opportunity to explore our society’s behavioral practices with respect to human-animal relationships in ways that expose how the nature/culture framing impacts the
“lived experience of everyday life.” In the nineteenth century performances considered here the horse is subservient to culture (i.e., a tool to be used for economic or military purposes, or in the case of the wild horse of Mazeppa, destroyed by it). In contemporary works horses are presented as somehow superior to, or outside of, or free of culture. Yet because performance is itself a cultural product, the horse is always already part of culture (as defined above) and simultaneously assigned an insider and an outsider status. Further, humans participate in culture and yet as animals cannot be considered as separate from “nature.” Finally, many scientists, including evolutionary biologists, primatologist, neurologists, and others have demonstrated that “nonhuman” animals have “culture.”

Any potential for increasing insight or initiating change is mediated, according to Bouissac, by rules that govern the circus’ “ritualistic manner that tempers this transgressive aspect.” So while the circus can challenge the cultural norms, because it is contained within a narrowly proscribed frame of time and space, its threat is often contained or neutralized. Yet the potential challenge to the status quo, according to Bouissac, is why circuses are “semireject[ed]” by the dominant culture and generate an ambivalent response characterized by a mix of repression and fascination. While the content presented by circus acts by its nature is set apart from daily life, the challenges posed are minimized because the it is viewed as something for children and other “individuals who have not been fully integrated into a culture,” including those with a “marginal status or unique status, such as poets or artists.” While Bouissac’s reading of the circus acts
assumes a somewhat unambiguous alignment between what is being expressed (even if it is intended to undermine dominant norms) and its reception by an audience, Williams approach opens up possibilities for more varied reactions. The differing reactions to and relationships with culture, in all of its various meanings, is especially relevant to the circus, which over the past two centuries has operated in a grey zone marked by various attitudes toward high art and popular entertainment, and also toward human and animal relationships.

Zoos, which are often perceived as objectively presenting animals are, as Bouissac observes, a “pedagogical discourse that contributes to a general system for interpreting the animal world. In this respect, it is a replica of the current zoological myths of the contextual culture, i.e., an evolutionary perspective that stresses specific differences along a hierarchical scale leading to the final, radical gap between animals and humans.”

This system has changed over time, with older zoos collecting one-of-a-kind animals or “monogamous families” while contemporary zoos focus on an ecological or behaviorist approach. While acknowledging their contributions to zoology and efforts to maintain objectivity, Bouissac believes zoos can be understood as myth-making enterprises, “systems of collective interpretation of the experience of the ‘world’” that seek to establish clear-cut categories and non-ambiguous relations.

In contrast, Bouissac asserts that circuses “create confusion between the animal species” and “promote ‘unnatural’ behavior on the part of animals.” Examples include acts where one animal impersonates another (a horse acts like a bull, a dog acts like a lion) or humanization of animals (a horse moves its head to
indicate yes/no, or a chimpanzee plays a musical instrument). Even more transgressive are acts that imply boundary-crossing intimate relations, such as the photograph from the University of Amsterdam Library’s Circus Collection, which reminds one of the series of photographs made by Carolee Schneemann that depict her kissing her cat.\(^4\) One distinction Bouissac makes between the two is that because (although this is changing) zoos present individual species in isolation from one another and their native habitats, they “organize experience in a network of discontinuous categories.” In contrast circuses “compensate for the inadequacy of the system with respect to the actual experience of everyday life.”\(^5\) Because of this Bouissac believes the circus restores “biological continuity denied by contextual culture”\(^6\) His thesis is that circus performances articulate something that is “not-said” in culture. However he is not talking about the radical difference of the horse or animals more generally, in the sense of a profoundly unknowable “other,” but rather about the transgression of unspoken boundaries between human and animal.

Because these acts follow long established rules governed by tradition, Bouissac associates circus with rites, which he defines as “not concerned with generalization, but with variety and individualness. They emphasize exceptions and dissimilarities with the use of the same artifacts and gestures in the contextual culture.” Rites and circuses are characterized by the “prestige of uniqueness and repetitiveness in performance.”\(^7\) Both use symbols that have an affective impact on the audience. A number of performances by artists using animals possess the
same ritualistic traits, including Beuys’ *I Like America and American Likes Me*, which is discussed in a following chapter.

In “The Animal Apparatus: From a Theory of Animal Acting to an Ethics of Animal Acts,” Michael Peterson asks, “How are animals made to mean?” Echoing Berger’s description of zoo cages, Peterson notes that performances with animals also employ framing. Animals are taught behaviors which are then presented in a series of framed units which add up to a narrative. The animal apparatus consists of “framing trained behaviors in a ‘non-animal narrative,’” that is, a human narrative is wrapped around units of trained behaviors in ways that lead to the “constructions of social relations between humans and animals.”

For example in *Mazeppa* the “wild horse” travels along pathways that diagonally cut across the stage, carrying his “helpless” captive. As number of audience members at the time noted, the stagehands often had to coax the amiable horse to “act the part,” to showing more energy and spirit. The human melodrama of danger and exile and ultimate triumph in this case did not seamlessly blend in with the simple and often too quiet crisscrossing of the stage by the horse with its human burden. As Peterson accurately observes “the horse’s docility was . . . vital to making the play work at all;” and that was something well understood by audiences. The presence of a real horse on stage was enough to “make meaning” so it was not necessary for animal’s actions to be convincing. If however the horse misbehaved (i.e., truly acted wild), it was not disruptive to the performance but an enhancement which surprised and often delighted the audience (and most likely terrified the actor). In the later and more popular productions, when it is
Mazeppa’s lover that is bound to the horse, the action is compelling because of
the very real and physical juxtaposition of female human flesh and horseflesh —
the visceral presentation of enmeshed female and animal sexuality — and not
because of the quality of the acting. It is the sheer physical reality that makes the
living horse irreplaceable. Not clear – is it that the female body is nearly naked?
Or is there a cultural association between female and animal that is at work here.
Either way you need to be clearer.

Peterson also notes, “Much human culture about nonhuman animals,
including performance and especially live performing animals in
anthropomorphic frames, works to ‘humanize’ humans and ‘dehumanize’
animals.”410 Peterson believes that using animals can make “art safe” because
they seem to “demand only a simple emotional response.”411 Furthermore, these
frames and narratives are representations of animals, not an unmediated encounter
with an animal, such as it is. Peterson concludes that simply by their very
presence animals “matter as themselves” in artistic performances.412 It is worth
considering what “themselves” means here. It is not the horse as a particular
individual animal, or even as a more general set of traits and characteristics that
describe a species, but how “animal” is framed, and what “animal” means to the
audience. Other ways of using living animals in artistic performances involve
assigning anthropomorphic or symbolic roles. For example in a circus act one
horse may be trained to act differently from others in the group. The behaviors are
framed in ways that encourage the audience to read this behavior as humorous,
independent, or rebellious. Another, and one that is relatively new, is to create an
encounter where the human interacts with the animal in ways that affirm its “natural” inclinations and behaviors.

The various forms of communication which occur between the trainer, the human performer, and the animal during rehearsal are typically based on a set of cues which become increasingly subtle over time. By the time the act is publicly performed, these cues may be imperceptible to most spectators. This has never been a one-way street, in that the human trainers and performers are aware of and react to the animal’s responses. However, while the animal’s reactions may cause humans to make adjustments to the training process, the desired outcomes typically remain the same.

What Bouissac concluded about the circus, can be applied to hippodramas. other theatre performances. These narratives can affirm, temporarily invert, or challenge widely-accepted beliefs about animals, including their intellectual abilities, their capacity to feel and express emotion, and whether or not they possess characteristics such as dignity, a sense of justice or fair play, and so on. However, just as with human actors, what is portrayed on stage (or in the ring) is not an unmediated encounter with the animal, such as it is, but rather a well-rehearsed sequence of actions that typically embody and express human thoughts, desires, and emotions.

Bahktin’s theory of carnival provides a tool for thinking about these kinds of potentially transformative performances. Unlike the circus and many artistic performances, there isn’t a separation between performer and spectator in carnival.
However because it only occurs during limited and specified times, carnival is set off from “normal” life.” During this period, categorical distinctions are blurred or inverted. While for carnival this occurred between various groups of people, the same is true for the animal acts and performances considered here. Engaging in a cross-species dialogue has the potential to enhance mutual understanding.

Another similarity with Bakhtin’s theory is the challenge posed to binary oppositions. Bakhtin applied his ideas of the carnivalesque to the polarities that existed in medieval life. Carnival is a period of freedom from oppressive poverty and domination, a time when roles were reversed. The peasant could be king, for a time, and a common household item could become a powerful weapon. In performances which feature living animals, long-standing polarities between nature and culture, and especially between animal and human are being interrogated. While the carnivalesque may be understood as a kind of release valve, to lessen tensions without permitting change, these “as if” experiences have the potential to have long-term effects on the culture. Do they really? The mere fact that these performances present living animals and human beings in close physical proximity to each other and the audience has a material and physical reality that can impact how people think and act toward animals in their daily lives. How can you be sure they don’t simply reinforce stereotypical behavior and ideas?

At the least, how nonhuman animals are treated and presented in circus venues can affirm the rules of compatibility or create openings for the reconsideration of human-animal identities and relationships. Bouissac’s book,
published in 1976, focuses on a semiotic analysis of training and performance and makes no mention of the now widely-expressed concerns about the treatment of animals. It’s interesting to note that Peter Singer’s influential book, *Animal Liberation* (which was briefly discussed in the introduction), was published just a year earlier. It focuses on the treatment of animals in research and raised for food. There is no mention of the circus. And People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), founded in 1980, did not begin their circus campaign until 2006. Bouissac’s ideas provide us with a glimpse into how circus animals were viewed at a time when few people were concerned about the ways in which these animals are treated in this environment.

Bouissac, writing in the late 1970s, observes that the circus is “a kind of mirror in which culture is reflected.” While Bouissac’s analysis of animal training and performance is insightful, it must be noted that his theoretical framing is narrowly focused and time-specific. While he is concerned with placing the circus within a larger cultural context, he does not extend his consideration of circus animals to include the quality of their lives overall, or the prevalence of abusive techniques that has now come to light. That this is the case affirms Bouissac’s assertion that circuses are both a “representation of the contextual culture” and “a metacultural discourse” about our beliefs and behaviors.414

Although, his analysis is marked by a preoccupation with biological continuity or discontinuity, especially with respect to language, Bouissac’s observations about how communication operates in these human-animal acts comes out of a system of binary codes that seeks to establish and maintain a set of
stable categories. This provides insights about how the animal-human and nature-culture oppositions are not only described but formed by how language is defined and used.

He notes that the messages used in these performances:

- position either the human or the animal as superior or inferior in relation to each other,
- extend to include substitutes for “natural” (by which he means human) language, and
- substitutive gestures and autonomous gestures are translated into human language by viewers.\textsuperscript{415}

As a result of these manipulations, animals speak in a language that the audience can understand. On the one hand, these acts suggest that animals can speak, that they have a point of view; on the other hand, the “words” they are saying have literally been put in their mouths. Humans are speaking for the animals. Nevertheless, these manipulations shift the cultural system in ways which leave “the audience contemplating a demonstration of humanity freed from the constraints of the culture within with the performance takes place.” According to Bouissac, this accounts for the ambivalent response to the circus. Enthusiasm is countered by repression. The maintenance of the cultural status quo requires that the circus be relegated to a form of popular entertainment which no mature adult would take seriously. Only children and fools dream of running away with the circus.\textsuperscript{416}
While Bouissac sees the circus as challenging established cultural norms, he does not see that the language system he describes here actually relies on the very cultural structures he is critiquing, especially the assumption that there are binary linguistic codes that are used in uniformly accepted ways. In contrast, Bakhtin and later post-structural theorists lay the groundwork for deconstructing these linguistic oppositions. Instead they want to expand conceptual frameworks and establish a more flexible and varied dialogic system, one which eventually moves beyond assigning fixed meanings to the written or spoken codes. They also include more elusive and transitory modes of sensory communication, including movement, touch, smell, nonverbal sounds, and even taste.

7. The Comedy Horse

There are two major types of circus acts involving horses. The liberty horse act is one in which horses appear to move freely in the ring, without either riders or harnesses, while an educated or comedy horse act is one in which the horse matches the human performer in intelligence and other traits traditionally assigned to humans. The first step for the educated or comedy horse act is to select a horse which demonstrates intelligence and the right personality, neither too timid nor too spirited. Next the trainer establishes basic ties by providing pleasurable connections based on gustatory, tactile, and auditory messages (i.e., giving the animal treats, pats and scratches, and speaking in soothing tones.) The training for the act begins as the trainer uses rewards (gustatory, tactile, auditory) and coercion (tactile, auditory) to attain the desired behaviors. Once these are
established, the visibility of the stimuli (reward/coercion) is reduced so that eventually only the subtlest hints are needed. At this point the trainer can now control the horse’s behavior. Since horses also send messages, the trainer must be sensitive to a horse’s appearance, sound, touch and smell. Trainers need to have a thorough knowledge of the horse’s biology, including the ability to distinguish between controllable and uncontrollable responses, expressions of fear, anxiety, aggression, and identification rituals.

The goal, as Bouissac notes, is to “integrate, perfectly, the gestures of the training code with the paralinguistic gestural code of a natural [human] dialogue.” Paralinguistic expression is the nonverbal accompaniment to spoken language. As David Abercrombie, a scholar of phonetics, observed, "We speak with our vocal organs, but we converse with our entire bodies." So for example, a horse may be trained to nod its head in apparent agreement or disagreement with the performer’s verbal statements. In the narrative of the act, these movements create the illusion that the horse has a knowledge of human language and can accurately respond to a series of questions or statements. This creates a double disjunction, separating the horse from other horses and affirming its special relationship to the human.

“Dynamite, International King of Laughter” is example of a comedy horse act that was popular in the late 1960s and early 70s in the United States. In this routine Dynamite, free of any saddle or bridle, enters the ring chasing a cowboy (his trainer, Dany Renz). The “drunken” cowboy carries a saddle and bridle. The horse repeatedly nips the cowboy’s buttocks throughout a sequence in which the
cowboy attempts to saddle the animal. Eventually the cowboy is successful, but then can’t manage to mount or ride the horse. The horse then chases the man out of the ring. Upon returning, the man falls down and the horse comes to his aid, helping him to stand. After jointly bowing to the audience, the cowboy whispers something into the horse’s ear, causing the horse to “laugh.” The horse then chases the man out of the ring, which indicates the continuing superiority of the horse. As Bouissac points out, the horse attacks the man whenever it is treated like a horse, but helps the man when it is treated as if it is human.421 The drunken man is portrayed as beast-like, while the horse is humanized. In addition to the inversion of the traditional roles of horse and human, the act references and reworks Western film narratives where the domination of the cowboy is always emphasized. While the narration relies on visual and physical sequences, the use of verbal language (the horse understands and responds to the joke the cowboy whispers into his ear) establishes the humanity of the animal.422 In spite of the role reversal, standard categories about human-animal identities and relations remain unchallenged. These two are the exception to the rule. The drunken man is a failed cowboy and the horse is an exceptional individual, not a typical representative of its species.

8. The Liberty Horse

Liberty horses are riderless and perform in response to verbal commands. The liberty horse act was introduced in the 1920s and remain popular today. The number of horses is even and there is an emphasis on symmetrical patterns. All of the horses are either alike or different. There is a tension between the group and
the individual through shifts in position from the center (where the anonymous horse becomes a star, however briefly) to the periphery.

For example, in a modification of the traditional “Maximum/Minimum Act” (which typically uses one color for ponies and another for the horses), the trainer Andre Vasserot treated each of the six pairs as unique, identical in color, shape, and trappings. As the performance begins, the pairs are announced, one by one, with the horse entering the ring first, shortly thereafter followed by a matching pony. In one instance, a black horse enters but the pony does not. Its solitude stands out in the arena of matched pairs. The pony arrives “late,” just before the last pair is announced. The animal appears to “rush” to its proper position, and harmony is restored. Then the horses together perform a series of pirouettes, sequences of patterns at a canter, and jumps, intermittently pausing to bow or stand on pedestals.

In the abstract patterns created by the animals (as matched horse-pony pairs or divided into a set of ponies and another set of horses) the only asymmetry was the gap created by the missing pony. Although its absence was brief, the pony (which was black) has a large impact on the audience’s perception of the rest of the performance. The pony is a “black sheep” which has disrupted the harmony of the whole, and is perceived as being “penitent” as it “hurries” to take its proper position. Individual transgression, as embodied in the pony threatens the collective harmony of the group. Bouissac identifies this as a visual enactment of the tensions which arise in Western societies where individual freedom and conformity are competing values.
In both types of acts the animal is understood from solely anthropocentric perspectives and concerns. Both acts are primarily visual narratives, performed in ritualistic manner within the traditions of a particular institution, and designed to enact and appeal to human audiences. Dynamite’s “human-like” intelligence is exceptional for his species, and the pony is perceived as remorseful: the animal-other is recognized as having human characteristics. While the hand of the human trainer is ideally invisible in each act, the animals’ movements and expressions are crafted and controlled by their human trainers. Unlike the zoo, the audiences have come to see the acts, not the animals as such.

9. Savage Behavior

During the rapid urbanization and industrialization of nineteenth century England, there was increasing awareness and criticism of the cruelty and abuse directed to children and working animals. While most activists focused on children, some directed their attention toward the abuse of working animals. Some extended their criticism to the methods used by animal trainers. Kwint refers to a 1785 Morning Herald story about “[t]he encrease of learned animals of the brute species, as horses, dogs, pigs, &c. must touch the feelings of every humane heart, when it is known that the tricks they perform are taught by the most excruciating torture.” In response, Kwint points out, circus horsemen, including Astley, “added notions of effective progress through ‘rational’ training techniques and the enlightened understanding of animals.” For example, Astley claimed that anyone who learned these techniques could “prevent the savage behavior that left animals liable to punishment.”
In 1822, just before Parliament passed the first animal protection act, Astley presented “The Life, Death and Restoration of the High-Mettled Racer,” a story about a thoroughbred’s harsh treatment after his racing days ended. This performance foreshadows *Black Beauty*, a story by Anna Sewell that was popular in both England and the United States. Published fifty years later, in 1877, this book depicts the typical hardships experienced by a working horse as he or she is passed from owner to owner. Sewell’s intended audience was carriage and cab drivers, and she hoped that reading the book would cause them to be more compassionate toward their animals. *Black Beauty*, told from the horse’s anthropomorphized perspective, led to heightened awareness of the abuse endured by these working horses in England and the United States. Astley publically affirmed that animals should be treated well, yet his actions didn’t always align with his words.

This chapter has provided a look at human-animal relations in the period preceding the animal rights movement 1970s and the dissemination of ideas generated by poststructural theory and postcolonial studies. As was true of the dioramas discussed in chapter one, at this time zoos were designed primarily for people, with far less attention paid to the needs of the animals they housed. While the dioramas and zoos displayed wild or exotic (non-native) animals, the early modern circus used horses in equestrian displays or theatrical dramas. The exotic element, if there was one, was supplied by the physical contact of human and animal bodies in close relationship with each other, as was the case with many of the hippodramas.
While animals may perform, as Peterson explains, they do not act. Unlike human actors, animals are not intentionally creating illusions. In each of these situations, the animals are positioned in symbolic matrix that has been created by humans. Each animal’s behavior is controlled and sequenced in ways that are meaningful for the human narratives built around them. In Bouissac’s structuralist analysis of the circus, animals are simply units that are part of complex linguistic codes used by trainers and performers. As Peterson points out, they are “made to perform” and “made to mean.” In the chapters that follow, informed in part by the animal rights movement, changing ideas about how language works, and the role of “the other” in ontology and ethics, relationships between humans and animals in western societies began to change. Advances in evolutionary biology and genetics also contributed to this shift.
Chapter Three
Means to an End: The Symbolic Animal

In May of 1974, as the plane approached the North American continent, Joseph Beuys covered his eyes. Upon his arrival at the JFK International Airport he was wrapped in felt and transported by ambulance to an art gallery in lower

Figure 7. I Like America and America Likes Me, 1974 (arrival by stretcher), (Performance 1974), René Block Gallery, New York City.
Manhattan. Through isolating himself in the felt cocoon Beuys was cutting himself off from American culture and focusing on the sole purpose of his visit: a healing encounter with a “wild” coyote. It was Beuys’ intention to communicate with the “Coyote” for eight hours each day for three days in a room that had essentially been converted into a cage. The performance, which was open to the public, also marked the opening of Berlin art dealer René Block’s new gallery in New York City.

Beuys, who was also a founding member of the Green Party in Germany, clearly cared about relations between humans and animals. The performance in New York, *Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me*, appears to be a genuine effort to turn away from typical forms of communication with other human beings, such as lectures and conversations, which he perceived as inadequate, and reach out for new ways of relating to others, including animals.

1. Art, Action, and Animals

*I Like America and America Likes Me* was one of a series of actions or ritualized performances based on Beuys’ theory of Social Sculpture. For Beuys, art is action; Social Sculpture is the activity of living in a society. As Beuys explained,

My theory depends on the fact that every human being is an artist. I have to encounter him when he [sic] is free, when he [sic] is thinking . . . .

These concepts – thinking, feeling, wanting – are concerned with sculpture.

Thought is represented by form; feeling by motion or rhythm; will by
Beuys believed living is a creative act and that society is a work of art. Because everyone lives and acts within a social setting, everyone is an artist, and so capable of using creativity to change society. Although the senses play a role, conceptual thinking and language are the foundation:

THINKING FORMS – how we mold our thoughts or / SPOKEN FORMS – how we shape our thoughts into words or / SOCIAL SCULPTURE – how we mold and shape the world in which we live: SCULPTURE AS AN EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS; EVERYONE AS AN ARTIST. / That is why the nature of my sculpture is not fixed and finished. Processes continue in most of them: chemical reactions, fermentations, color changes, decay, drying up. Everything is in a STATE OF CHANGE.

Social Sculpture is movement and action; static form impedes change and limits thinking. Therefore the objects that come out of the art-making process are simply artifacts, the remnants of the artistic process.

According to Mark Rosenthal, a curator and critic who has studied Beuys’ work extensively, Social Sculpture and the actions (ritualized performances that were associated with it) sprang from Beuys’ intention to create works that would “affect society.” Actions were not rehearsed and did not have a script, but Beuys would plan the sequence of movements (often using a score) and specify or provide all of the objects used in the Action. Art was “therapeutically capable of effecting personal, social, and political change.” However, the ritualized
Actions (however indirect the means) had explicit personal, political, and social goals. In spite of Beuys’ efforts to avoid scripted performances, *I Like America and America Likes Me* was not an open-ended dialogue or encounter with a member of another species. Instead predetermined roles limited the possibilities for opening up new ways of understanding and experiencing the world.

2. The Coyote from New Jersey

The “wild” coyote that had been brought into the gallery for this Action was assigned the role of “Coyote,” the symbol of a human-animal interface. In fact, the coyote in the performance was not from the west, but an eastern coyote named Little John that was owned by a man from New Jersey. Beuys explained that he intended to make “contact with the psychological trauma point of the United States’ energy constellation: the whole American trauma with the Indian, the Red Man. You could say that a reckoning has to be made with the coyote, and only then can this trauma be lifted.”

(In addition to the damage inflicted on Native Americans, Beuys believed American capitalism and the country’s involvement in the Vietnam War were other sources of trauma.) Beuys explained that Native Americans believed “the coyote was one of the most mighty of a whole range of deities. He was an image of transformation, and like the hare and the stag in Eurasian myths, he could change his state from the physical to the spiritual and vice versa at will.”

Because of these associations, the coyote embodied the destruction wrought by European colonizers on the North American continent and its indigenous population. David Williams, a scholar of performance theory and practice, explains, “Beuys staged himself as a sick man
separating himself from the world to seek and present a tentative, reconciliatory healing for himself and the coyote through their encounter: a mutual creative co-evolution, a *conjunction oppositorum*.

In *Between Dog and Wolf: Essays on Art and Politics*, David Levy Strauss describes the coyote as “the wild and untamed, an unacceptable threat to husbandry, domesticity, and law & order . . . . Like the American Indian, he was the Other in our midst, and we did everything we could to eliminate them both.” In the almost 25 year span between Beuys’ performance and the publication of Strauss’ book, the long war waged by humans against coyotes continued. Efforts to eradicate the animal have included:

- poisons such as strychnine and thallium sulfate, leg hold traps, cyanide
- “coyote-getters” designed to explode into the coyote's mouth, snares, den-hunting to destroy pups, aerial hunting from planes and helicopters, “dying rabbit” calls to guns, sterilization baits, sight-running hounds, toxic collars on sheep, and “Compound 1080” sodium monofloroacetate), hailed as “the best, most species specific, most foolproof predator poison ever developed by man.”

As Gerry Parker, a research biologist, notes, not only are these efforts futile, but also humans actually aided in expanding the coyote population by pushing back the frontier and opening up the forests. And Starker Leopold, a distinguished zoologist, observed “If biologists were asked to devise a plan to produce bigger, smarter, and more widely-distributed coyotes, they would no doubt recommend doing more or less what had been done . . . remove many predators that competed
with the coyote, eliminate some of the coyote’s traditional food sources, but then, thorough our agricultural and waste disposal practices, provide it with new and more varied edibles.” Beuys made the right choice in using the coyote as the scapegoat that symbolizes the abuse inflicted on those who resist the dominant culture. At the same time, it’s clear that the coyote is not simply a victim, but also a highly adaptable and skillful animal. It’s interesting to note that the powers Beuys assigned to this animal extend beyond the spiritual and symbolic realm, as is evident in coyote’s resilience in the face of human efforts to eradicate it.

While it is true that coyotes prey on livestock, and sometime have a significant impact, humans have played a major role in acerbating the problem through creating breeds that are docile, gain weight rapidly, are not able to run quickly, and do not protect their young as effectively as wilder animals do. Sheep are especially vulnerable. Many biologists recommend that the centuries-long and unsuccessful efforts to exterminate coyotes be replaced by more effective measures including using breeds with stronger flocking instincts, effective fencing, avoiding remote pastures or those near coyote cover, removing coyote cover, and moving animals to barns or corrals near homes (and having ewes lamb in these more protected locations), using guard animals, and accepting that some loss to predators is a “natural tax.” While Beuys was critical of Western science and imperialism, which he perceived as a monolithic whole, this critique of Western agricultural practices by biologists show that in fact societal institutions and forces are more nuanced than he believed, and in this case the scientists may actually be Beuys’ allies, in that they are calling for methods that
are less intrusive with respect to the natural world.

Beuys wanted to bond with Little John in order to heal a rift between humans and nature. He tried to do this through spending a sustained period of time in close physical proximity with the coyote. Doing so, he believed, would forge close emotional and spiritual bonds. Yet his lack of knowledge about the natural history of Little John, his physical needs, his preferences, and even his perceptions maintained the very divide between human and animal that Beuys wished to heal. Science, undeniably, has caused great harm to animals, but it also offers opportunities to avoid misunderstandings and even abuse. Several examples of this are offered in the following paragraphs.

First, as with many colonizing forces, Beuys did not understand Little John’s history and identity. As Strauss points out, “Beuys embraced the coyote as the progeny of the paleo-Siberian, Eurasian steppe-wolf that came across the Bering Strait 12,000 (or more — some estimates go as high as 50,000) years ago and adapted to its New World home. Coyote carried the paleo-Asiatic shamanic knowledge with him, spreading it throughout the North American West and into Mesoamerica.”441 However the western coyote is not the descendent of the Siberian wolf, an animal associated with transformation in the shamanic tradition. The reverse is true; the coyote is the ancestor of the Russian wolf. *Canus latrans* (or barking dog) originated on the American continent during the Pleistocene Epoc, about two million years ago, and then spread via the land bridge across the Bering Strait to Russia.442
Originally living in what is now the Central United States, Northern Mexico, and southwestern Canada, coyotes spread to the eastern part of the continent only after predators such as the wolf were eliminated by European settlers. In the twenty-first century, and in spite of long-standing and continuing efforts to exterminate them, their numbers have rebounded and their range is larger than any other wild animal in North America. Because Beuys thought that the coyote was “an animal of the steppes,” he believed the coyote “elucidates the principle of movement and later becomes the image for the whole ‘Eurasian’ story.” Beuys misidentifies the origin of this species (and also Little John in particular, since he was an eastern coyote, a different species. Also, rather than being threatened by settlement, the coyote thrived. Nonetheless, as art historian and critic Mysoon Rizk notes, “With coyote as America’s stand-in, Beuys signaled a pre-European, pre-literate era along with the American frontier’s scapegoat par excellence.”

In previous actions and drawings Beuys repeatedly identified himself with the hare. He had used dead hares in two earlier actions and a living white horse was in Titus/Iphigenia. Animals served as a bridge between earthly and spiritual realms. He described them as "figures that pass freely from one level of existence to another." Strauss explains,

In Beuys’ iconography the Hare symbolizes birth and especially incarnation. Though fertile, the Hare represents the vulnerability and finiteness of humankind. Like the Hare, Beuys is careful. He always uses felt and fat to insulate and protect. He moves slowly and deliberately,
approaching Coyote carefully. In the Coyote action, Beuys/Hare is burrowing in, wanting to be born into Coyote’s world. Coyote Old Man is the long survivor, found painted on paleolithic cave walls as already having been around a long time. “I know what happened after the before and before the after,” he says. Hare comes to Coyote to learn how to survive.447

In the mythical world of this Action, the Beuys/Hare is a student of the coyote. If Beuys/Hare were to be born into the world of an actual coyote, he would have to learn how to survive quickly, or be eaten.

Why is it important for me to insist that the material reality has as much weight as the mythical? Consider the animal’s perspective. Little John’s experience of this event was grounded in a more immediate and physical reality. The coyote was separated from spectators by a chain link wall, which also prevented him from removing himself from Beuys’ presence. Little John maintained almost constant eye contact with the artist, In addition Caroline Tisdall, Beuys’ biographer and a personal friend, observed that the coyote’s “back was never turned to the people watching from behind the barrier”448. In videos taken at the time the coyote appears graceful, wary, and extremely alert. Beuys, needless to say, was also quite attentive to the animal’s movements.

Eastern coyotes resemble German Shepherds, are about two feet tall at the shoulder, four-to-five feet long from the tip of the nose to the tip of their tail, and weigh between 30-45 pounds. The more fox-like western coyotes typically only weigh between 20-25 pounds. As Little John demonstrated during his encounter
with Beuys, coyotes are very adaptable. They have learned how to live in close proximity to people, and now are common in suburban areas and even cities. They are omnivores, eating just about anything, and will adjust their social customs and breeding habits to accommodate the circumstances. Karl Devine, a naturalist, observes, “Coyotes have adapted to humans better than any wild animal that has ever existed.”

In written accounts and videos of Beuys and the coyote this is evident in how the animal is responding to its predicament.

In contrast to their western counterparts, eastern coyotes are more social and less aggressive with littermates and mates. Coyote packs are usually family groups that include the mated pair, the young of that year, born in March or April, and a few adolescents from the previous year. The male will stay with the same female until their offspring is raised, and sometimes for several breeding seasons, and assist. Solitary coyotes look for their own territory and once they establish it, will find a mate and begin breeding. Because he had been captured and was living on a ranch in New Jersey, at the time of his forced participation in Beuys’ Action, hopefully Little John was not separated from his mate. If that were the case, May (the month of Beuys’ performance) would have been an especially busy time for him. The pups, born from mid-March to mid-April, would still be in the den and fully dependent on their parents. The young coyotes don’t leave the nest until they are six-to-nine months old. Little John’s capture, if it had happened that spring, would have greatly diminished the chances of the pups’ survival.

Two realities clash here. One is the human and environmental challenge faced by particular and living coyotes; the other is a performance based on a
narrative drawn from a mythic past but designed to address a contemporary political and social human conflict. Beuys was seeking to escape the constraints of hegemonic culture, and especially the constraints it imposed on opportunities for addressing social problems. However, binding himself to symbol and ritual, and isolating himself from the lived reality of other beings — literally and mentally wrapped in a felt cocoon — only created different constraints. If each of these concept-driven worlds were used to illuminate the other, perhaps insights could be gained. This missed opportunity for juxtaposition seems a curious omission, given the artist’s interest in strengthening connections between art and science, or intuition and logic.\textsuperscript{451} It is a demonstration of the challenges of being aware of, much less embracing, conflicting conceptual realities.

Although rich in sensory experiences, the materials, sounds, and movements in this Action were understood and narrated through an anthropocentric perspective in which any in-depth awareness of and sensitivity to the animal’s experience was absent. What was being done to the animal — the unequal distribution of power — was obscured by the myths of Coyote and Hare, Human/Animal, Nature/Culture, and Artist/Shaman. To “see nothing of America other than the coyote” meant not to see the coyote except in a narrow framing imposed by the artist’s interests and not the coyote’s.\textsuperscript{452} This created a system of signifiers and signifieds that inadequately addressed, distorted, or erased experiences related to coyote life in general and Little John’s in particular. Beuys inadvertently ended up reenacting a continuing pattern of domination and oppression.
3. Colonizing the Coyote

Beuys brought a “Eurasian staff” (a tall walking stick with a curved head) and a flashlight into the enclosure and arranged to have 50 Wall Street Journals delivered each day. In addition, Beuys recounts, “[T]here was the felt I brought in. There was the hay the coyote brought in. These elements were immediately exchanged between us” (emphasis added). Beuys’ account of what he provided and what was brought in by the coyote — and the exchange of these materials — suggests this is an encounter in which each participant is acting freely. It would be more accurate, but less evocative (both poetically and politically) to state that just as with the Wall Street Journals, the flashlight, and the staff, the coyote and the hay were also brought in as props. Furthermore, since Beuys conceived the idea, his confinement was self-imposed. He was free to determine the duration of the event and the length of each day’s performance. He was free to leave, and did so at the end of each day. This was not a choice given to the coyote, which didn’t even have the option of concealing itself from Beuys or the spectators, something that is typically offered today to zoo animals as a way of relieving the stress of being on exhibition.

During the performances Beuys moved in ritualized ways that included three principle stances. The first was a “hierarchical one, upright and distant;” the second was bowing to the coyote in a devotional gesture; and the third was lying down. During all three movements, Beuys was wrapped in felt and held the staff, which protruded from the opening at the top of the dark form, (and further increasing its height and power from the coyote’s perspective). Tisdall describes
Little John’s responses anthropomorphically. She notes the coyote “reacted particularly strongly when the felt figure was lying prone and motionless, nosing at it anxiously, poking it solicitously, pawing at it like the anxious friend, or avoiding it with a wary suspicion.”

Coyotes see lying down as a submissive gesture, and prone figures as potential prey or carrion. This is probably why the coyote approached Beuys during these periods. Beuys explained that he jumped up when the “atmosphere had become a little restless” in order to restore harmony and maintain “the simple circling rhythm again.” As soon as he stood up, Beuys struck the equilateral triangle he was wearing three times. Ten seconds after striking the triangle, a twenty-second blast of tape-recorded turbine engines roared; this would provide

Figure 8. Joseph Beuys, *I Like America and America Likes Me*, (Performance 1974), René Block Gallery, New York City.
an additional destabilizing experience for the animal. Then Beuys would take off his gloves and toss them to the coyote.

Coyotes have their own precise set of rituals designed to maintain harmony in the pack, which is often about six animals — typically the mated pair and offspring. Positions of relative dominance and submission are clearly communicated to avoid disputes. In a coyote’s vocabulary the standing and bowing movements may have been perceived as gestures of dominance and the loud noises that immediately followed this movement would have been startling or even frightening. In fact, unexpected sounds are one of the non-lethal means recommended to repel coyotes and protect livestock. In many images from this extensively photographed performance the coyote is displaying neutral or submissive gestures, not dominant ones such as raising his hackles, holding his head high with neck arched and ears pointed foreward, or fluffing out his tail a 45 degree angle.\textsuperscript{457}

What Beuys defined as “restoring harmony” also communicates dominance to a coyote. Experts advise people who encounter coyotes, something that is increasingly common even in urban areas, to stand upright, appear as large as possible, and maintain eye contact. This is the only safe way to relate to an adult coyote.\textsuperscript{458} The encounter between the two might have been peaceful because, intentionally or not, Beuys managed to keep the upper hand and coyotes avoid conflict. Also, coyotes fear new things and tend to be reclusive, and Little John, as a captive coyote, was to some degree socialized to humans and assumed a submissive role. For the artist, the triangle symbolized an elevated form of being
in the spiritual sense. Here, Beuys’ abrupt physical elevation, combined with the sudden noise, establishes his dominance.\textsuperscript{459}

Another example of cross-species differences involves the much-noted treatment of the copies of the \textit{Wall Street Journal} which were brought into the enclosure each day. Coyotes use urine and droppings, rather than aggression, to mark their territories, and so Little John would always urinate and defecate on them.\textsuperscript{460} He was literally claiming them for his own with his scent. However Beuys and other observers understood this action in a very different sense, interpreting it as a rejection of American materialism. In addition to the title, \textit{I Like America and America Likes Me}, there were many ironic aspects to this performance.

Beuys celebrated animals as symbols of natural grace, renewal, and incarnation.\textsuperscript{461} In several Actions he almost literally colonized the bodies of dead hares as he gave “voice” to animals, identified them as “collaborators” and manipulated their bodies. In \textit{The Chief – Fluxus} “the artist lay prone, microphone in hand, encased in a roll of felt, his furry companions at either end; one ‘hooked up’ to a length of copper rod, also coiled in felt; it, in turn, aligned with a rod against the wall . . . . Both animal and dead, hares appear incapable of testifying, yet Beuys as transmitter coaxes, if not exactly their voices then his own thinking/vocalized dialogue, as much ingredient as fat, felt, body parts, copper, or speaker” (emphasis added).\textsuperscript{462} In \textit{How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare}, a three-hour action performed in 1966, Beuys cradled the body of a hare while showing it his drawings. Tisdall describes the performance: “Helping his lifeless mate ‘paw’ the
works on view, Beuys mouthed explanations and imperceptible whispers, later explaining: In putting honey on my head I am clearly doing something that has to do with thinking. Human ability is not to produce honey, but to think, to produce ideas. . . . The idea of explaining to an animal conveys a sense of the secrecy of the world and of existence . . . Even a dead animal preserves more powers of intuition than some human beings with their stubborn rationality.” Beuys explained that this Action was “a complex tableau about the problem of language and about the problem of thought, of human consciousness and of the consciousness of animals, and of course the ability of animals.” In Eurasia, 34th Section of the Siberian Symphony, Beuys tied a dead hare’s body to wooden sticks. His intention, according to Willoughby Sharp, an artist and long-time collaborator with Beuys, was to “indicate the meaning of space . . . the sign of transitoriness, fleetingness,” with the hare “on the move.” Rizk writes that the redemptive hare invokes a heterogeneous dream of “aggregate” Materia. Being “crucified,” the hare’s mobility remains sustained through Beuys and Audience tunneling thought on its behalf” (emphasis added).

4. Intentions and Impositions

Beuys wanted to maintain close relationships with animals because he believed he could learn from their intuitive intelligence, yet at the same time, both intentionally and inadvertently he maintains a clearly demarcated power differential. In the statement below Beuys’ intention to establish a congenial relationship exists in an uneasy tension with the establishment of his own position. There is an assumption that the one (whose authority is assumed) can speak for
the many. Also, although he plans to show the coyote a path to freedom and suggests the coyote has a parallel power, freedom is something possessed by the artist — not the animal. Although the artist has the upper hand, the animal’s cooperation is necessary.\textsuperscript{467} Beuys explains,

\begin{quote}
My intention was firstly to hold together and retain in the West powers, and then to appear as a being representing the group soul area. I wanted to show the coyote a parallel power, but I also wished to remind him that it was now a human being who was speaking with him . . . . What I tried to do was to set up a really oscillating rhythm. First of all to remind the coyote of what you could call the geniality of his particular species, and then to demonstrate that \textit{he too has possibilities in the direction of freedom}, and that we need him as an important \textit{cooperator in the production of freedom}. (emphasis added)\textsuperscript{468}
\end{quote}

In this statement Beuys also seems to speak from three positions. The first is in a formal political capacity (one who can hold and retain power with regard to the West); the second is as a representative of a spiritual community (the group soul area); and finally as a particular individual (a human being who is speaking). The coyote is placed in a contradictory position. Held in what is essentially a cage, a gallery in New York where he is on display to all visitors, the coyote is both the token of his species (a thing) and a cooperator (a free agent) in the production of freedom. Within this single statement about the Action, Beuys identifies the possibility of at least five voices. However, the Action and the interpretation of its meaning and significance is monologic. The artist states what it means in a
unilateral way, and does not engage in discourse with the coyote or the viewers. He is the actor, the coyote reacts, and the viewers passively observe. While the quirky mix of materials, clothing, and irrational actions seem to critique Western culture, the performance is essentially a grand narrative in which the hero courageously spends time with a wild beast in a redemptive quest. What is lost here, and this re-examination seeks to open up, is the hidden heteroglossic richness — the coexistence, tensions, and conflicts — that, as Mikhail Bakhtin noted, are always present.

*I Like America and America Likes Me* was organized around concepts based on symbols rather than singular and particular animals. It assumed at that time that there were distinct conceptual categories, including nature/culture and animal/human that today are being increasingly questioned. The singular and particular is erased by the weight of a generalization—an emblem, a stereotype. Beuys is rightly celebrated for the challenges he posed to the establishment, and in ways that demonstrated the value of the irrational and the intuitive, it is his process that opened up new ways of engaging in political and cultural critiques. The object of his criticism, and his position in relation to it, remained trapped in a binary opposition. This perspective is offered with the gift of distance, and the work done in the intervening years by philosophers and theorists. Of course it is Beuys, and all of the other social reformers who were so active during the sixties and seventies, all of those who sought to reform through taking oppositional stances, that paved the way for these insights.
It is also important to remember that Beuys was working in a period that predated the animal rights movement which became more prominent in the late twentieth century, and also before ethnologists, biologists, and other scientists began challenging our assumptions about the social, emotional, and even ethical lives of animals. When Beuys was creating works with animals, both living and dead, the assumption that humans have the right to use animals for their own benefit was not often questioned. While one might wonder if he was attempting to raise these questions in his performance, there is no evidence of this in *I Like America and America Likes Me* or any of his other work with animals. Even if there was, the treatment of Little John is questionable. Although Beuys thought that animals possessed great intrinsic value because of their connection with the natural and spiritual realms, at the same time, he used them as a means to an end. In some sense, just as he appropriated the role of shaman from another culture, he was appropriating animal bodies, both dead, as in his performances with the hares, and the living, as in his action with Little John. This is reminiscent of an imperial worldview in which a more powerful being believes it has access to a truth denied to others, and therefore the right to take what it needs, justifying the action by asserting that this exchange will actually benefit the Other, which is perceived as lacking.

Foregrounding the unequal power dynamics at play here reveals, however unintentionally, that Beuys recreated a colonial structure in which an outside force caused a native dweller to be forcibly removed from his home. In addition, since the benefits arising from the dislocation and the imposed “exchange” that
followed all went to the “colonizer” what was set up was essentially an extractive economy. The coyote was neither treated as an individual animal with particular needs and interests, nor as a member of an integrated community but merely as a means to an end. The coyote was not recognized as a subject but only as a resource for realizing the vision of Beuys, the artist/shaman. For all of these reasons one could argue that this was a reenactment of colonial processes rather than one designed to heal ruptures between animal/human, nature/culture, or victim/oppressor.

As mentioned above, coyotes possess a healthy sense of neophopia (the fear of new things) and are extremely wary. They prefer not to be seen, which helps them elude predators both animal and humans. Their stealthful habits are one reason they have earned the reputation for being wily. In no small way this accounts for their continued existence in spite of centuries of human effort to eradicate them. In the west, they prefer open grasslands; in the east they keep to the edges of woods and hedge rows.\textsuperscript{469} In order to avoid people, urban and suburban coyotes are more nocturnal than rural ones.

Relocating an animal against its will, even to a location within its native habitat, is harmful. The sheer stress of being in unfamiliar territory can result in the animal’s death.\textsuperscript{470} There is no question that all of the responses of Little John, who found himself enclosed in a room without any cover, unable to escape, and easily visible to human eyes, would cause distress, although this seems to have been only infrequently noted by the artist, spectators, and commentators. This was not something that was common knowledge at the time, and it unlikely that Beuys
was aware of the toll he was exacting on the coyote. Instead, Beuys assigned a great deal of power to the coyote, who was in fact a wild animal. Therefore the focus was on Beuys’ willingness to be in the enclosure with a wild animal, which was seen as heroic and mesmerizing. Strauss observes, “it took a good deal of courage for Beuys to put himself in vulnerable contact with the more dynamic and chaotic force of Coyote.”

Tisdall described the animal’s behavior after Beuys left: “Little John behaved for the first time like a caged and captive animal, padding up and down with the true wolf’s swing, back and forth, sniffing, searching, whining and scenting the air with fear. While she attributed this to the loss of the bond established with Beuys, a more likely explanation is that the change in routine ramped up the coyote’s anxieties. Beuys seems to have developed some affection for the coyote. Tisdall notes that he “took his leave of Little-John, hugging him close without concealing the pain of separation.” In contrast, according to a video taken at the time, Williams notes that Beuys attempted unsuccessfully to hug the coyote, which shied away.

At the end of the encounter, Beuys once again was wrapped in felt and returned by ambulance to the airport to fly home to Germany. In some ways, this is the ultimate imperialist gesture, to arrive, control through domination, and then leave, insulated from any exposure to the native culture. Or is he consciously mimicking the European intrusion into Native American cultures, and to their being treated “like animals”? Yet if he is, he is also reenacting an intrusion into the life of a being less powerful than himself, the life of Little John. Beuys later
explained: “I wanted to isolate myself, insulate myself, see nothing of America other than the coyote.” The question is, did he ever actually “see” the coyote?

If Beuys thought that this experience would be enjoyable for or benefit Little John, it was short-lived. Tisdall notes after the artist left, “The man who owned the coyote . . . came in with a big iron bar because this was a very wild and dangerous animal . . . . He put the animal back into a cage and took it back to the ranch in New Jersey.” After the Action, Little John reverts back to his “animal” status—he is “wild and dangerous.” As Williams points out, the iron bar, a “clumsy instrument of apparent domination and potential violence as a coda to the encounter rather undoes the narratives of interspecies communication and cooperation.”

One also wonders if the coyote associated the staff that Beuys always carried with the “big iron bar” used by the owner to control the animal. Beuys was right. Animals are not free.

Unlike dogs, which have had 10,000 years of domestication, coyotes are wild animals. Little John was in a dangerous situation. Although captured and “owned” by a person, coyotes can only be inadequately domesticated and therefore these animals have a bleak future. They are “too used to humans . . . to make it in the wild, and too wild to make good pets.” As with all wild animals, increased contact increases the likelihood that they will lose their fear of humans. Feeding them increases this tendency, and with predators such as coyotes, may result in the animals becoming more aggressive toward humans. Not only is it dangerous for people, but also the resulting change in animal’s behavior will usually result in its being caught and killed. Wildlife experts warn, “A fed coyote
is a dead coyote.” Befriending a coyote will be dangerous to the animal. It lessens the wariness that is essential if wild animals are to co-exist with humans. One expert warns, “Even if you love coyotes, never let them know it.”

Strauss asserts that Beuys’ intentions were “primarily therapeutic” in healing “the schism between native intelligence and European mechanistic, materialistic, and positivistic values.” Yet from my perspective, as someone concerned with the impact of the artist’s behavior on the animal, the coyote is appropriated by Beuys for a political and social agenda that is essentially centered on human concerns, with little apparent awareness of the impact on this particular animal or with any effort to use “social sculpture” to bring attention or awareness to the way that coyotes as a species have been treated by humans. Of course, I am looking at this work 40 years later, and during a time when human-animal relations receive far more attention than they did in the early seventies. Also, deconstruction has provided insight into the ways in which language, and especially the violence imposed by concepts, I have a very different perspective. Relying on conceptual thinking rather than responding to the immediacy of the situation can result in unintentionally cruel or hurtful behavior. Because a symbol refers to something else, not the thing in itself (or in this case, being as a particular and singular entity), Beuys does not notice that he is essentially reenacting the colonial past by imposing his will and his thoughts on another living creature which may have his own wants and needs. The animal has been captured and brought to the gallery. Its participation is not voluntary. Beuys is
free to come and go. The coyote remains a captive, under the control of the New Jersey rancher, and Beuys for a time.

More than ten years later, in an account of the work that appeared in *The New York Times* on the occasion of Beuys’ death, the legend continued to grow. Three days had turned into two weeks, and the symbolic Action remained as compelling as ever: “Between them, harmony reigned . . . . Man and pariah were mates . . . . A strand of Beuys's hair and a twist of the coyote's hung side by side on the wall. The nearness of man and animal could be read as a metaphor for open-mindedness and freedom from prejudice in all human affairs — and for a readiness to embrace an unfamiliar country in its every aspect.  

5. The Inadequacy of Language

Beuys created The Political Party for Animals in 1966. It was intended to permit humans and animals to engage in dialogue. This exchange would allow the humans to be energized by the animals’ “soul powers, feeling powers, [and] powers of instinct and orientation” thereby accessing abilities which had either been lost or undeveloped. Rizk notes, “Beuys sought to enable full political representation while never clarifying how diverse species might reach consensus or convey respective interests. The New York performance, framed as a communication between human and animal, posed the same dilemma. Although the coyote responds and/or reacts to Beuys’ presence and ritualistic actions, its preferences or interests are not considered in any significant manner. Yet in spite of the considerable difficulties regarding fair or even adequate representation, the concept of a political party for animals is one way of challenging the traditional
divide between “animal” and “human.” Strauss identifies this gesture as one that can be traced to today’s animal rights movement.  

Beuys’ “Energy Plan for Western Man,” a series of lectures given in the United States earlier in the same year as *I Like America and America Likes Me*, emphasized the need to move beyond “rationalist, positivist and material thinking in the West” and “encompass all the invisible energies with which we have lost contact.” Strauss notes that because the content of these exchanges remained constrained by the audience’s lack of familiarity with Beuys’ ideas, it did not often result in any substantive discussions. Beuys saw it as a failure and perhaps this accounts at least in part for his decision to engage in a non-verbal Action with the coyote. Also, there appeared to be significant tension between some of Beuys more utopian ideas, especially those concerning the role of materialism, and the values of his American audience.

According to Tisdall, Beuys believed, “Language is not to be understood simply in terms of speech and words. That is our current drastically reduced understanding of language, a parallel to the reduced understanding of politics and economics. Beyond language — a verbalization — lies a world of sound and impulses.” Rizk describes the relationship between Beuys and the coyote as an “immersion in interfaces occupying neither the category of human nor animal, but some third or fourth ‘incalculable’ domain, where one can evade language’s limitations, entrapments, and forms of cultural hegemony.” In spite of his search for another domain, his reliance on fixed structures, such as myths and symbols, and oppositional ideological stances, Beuys fails to extend language
beyond the logical/rational/European model that he is critiquing. Rather than engaging in a dialogic exchange, that includes many voices—novelistic and heteroglossic—Beuys remains constrained by the modernist cult of the artist’s heroic narrative. He sets himself up in opposition to his culture but does not also recognize his own position within it.

Both Jacques Derrida and Beuys are aware of the inadequacy of language, and each in his own way seeks to address it in his work. Derrida asserts that human relationships with the “animal,” opens up questions related to “living, speaking, dying, being, and world as in being-in-the-world.”490 As mentioned in the introduction, Derrida recounts an encounter in the bathroom with his cat. Startled, he wonders, “Who I am—and who I am (following) at the moment when, caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal . . . I have trouble, yes, a bad time, overcoming my embarrassment.”491 He goes on to reflect that this experience is “The point of view of the absolute other, and nothing will have ever given me more food for thinking through this absolute alterity . . . than these moments when I see myself seen naked under the gaze of a cat.”492 The other (in this case, a particular cat) has been assigned a place outside of language. “The animal” is the category of the not human that includes all other living beings. All other differences are obscured by this concept. As previously discussed, the very word “animal” marks what Derrida calls the “rupture or abyss between those who say . . . ‘I, a human,’ and what . . . he [or she] calls the animal or animals.”493 To resist this conceptual violence Derrida replaces animal with animot in an effort to resist the erasure of differences implied by the singular noun. Derrida wants to
draw attention to what he describes as “a multiplicity of organizations of relationship between living and dead, relations of organization or lack of organization among realms that are more and more difficult to dissociate by means of the figures of the organic and inorganic, of life and/or death.”  

Ultimately both Derrida and Beuys are seduced by language, by concepts (in Derrida’s case) and symbols—also a form of conceptualization (in Beuys’) that draw them away from a more direct engagement with their respective animal partners. Although the cat is a powerful presence at the beginning of Derrida’s essay, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, as Donna Haraway points out, “the animal was never heard from again in that long essay.” And in spite of the considerable amount of attention given to Beuys’ actions, the coyote is in service of the artist’s agenda. Just as Derrida’s cat is never heard from again, at the conclusion of Beuys’ action, scant attention, if any, is given to whatever happened to Little John afterward.

Philosopher Cary Wolfe asks, “What modes of thinking the animal other are possible in what Derrida has called the ‘spatial arts’ that may too readily be foreclosed in the domain of language?” Beuys sought to use this art form to engage with the animal other. However his opportunity for engaging the animal other with openness and genuine wondering is obscured by the moral concepts and abstract symbolism that he imposes on the experience. In spite of Derrida’s interest in animals and the considerable contribution he has made to thinking about the relationships between humans and other living beings, as Haraway observes, he missed the opportunity for an “other-worlding” offered by the
“intersecting gaze.” Was it that he did not become curious about what the cat "might actually be doing, feeling, thinking, or perhaps making available to him in looking back at him that morning." Or, on the other hand, perhaps Derrida did not presume to know what his cat was thinking. Beuys, in contrast, assumed that he could speak for the animals.

With its multiple sensory experiences and discourses, art can open up new perspectives. Yet, as an exploration of this work by Beuys demonstrates, one cannot assume that this can be done simply by rejecting science and logic, or by using only non-verbal signs and symbols. It is difficult if not impossible to escape our anthropocentric orientation, since it informs, in its many and varied ways, the human experience of the world. Looking and listening for what is not present, and especially for whose voice(s) are not being heard, is one way of moving outside of our inevitably narrow framings. As Bakhtin has noted, polyglossia offers an opportunity to free consciousness from “the tyranny of . . . [one’s] own language and its own myth of language.” Including and listening to others is necessary: “Only knowledge of a language that possesses another mode of conceiving the world can lead to the appropriate knowledge of one’s own language." To imagine Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me as an art form that is more like a novel than an epic tale so as to bring in as many voices as possible is a worthwhile undertaking. Its erasures and omissions are our own, still, today.

Most accounts of the performance written at the time, and for years after, did not attempt to provide an account that includes the animal’s experience, or describe where he came from or what happened to him afterwards. In part because
of the work of Derrida, Foucault, Harding, Haraway, and Spivak more attention is paid to diverse perspectives, includes those that have in the past been overlooked or intentionally disenfranchised. It is clear that Beuys felt free to speak for the coyote, rather than attempting to understand how his artistic decisions affected the coyote.

In his analysis of Beuys’ work Verwoert argues,

On the one hand he incessantly attacked traditional notions of the authority of the work, the artist, and the art professor, with his radical, liberating, and humorous opening up of the concept of art with regard to what a work, an artist, or a teacher could still be and do beyond the functions established by tradition, office, and title. On the other hand, however, it seems that in the presentation of his own interpretative discourse, Beuys regularly fell back on the very tradition of staging artistic authority with which he was trying to break.⁵⁰⁰

As Verwoert observes, Beuys “conferred on himself the mandate to express collective needs.”⁵⁰¹

While critical of his authoritarian stance, Verwoert believes Beuys’ artwork is nevertheless resistant to “conclusive interpretations” because of the tensions inherent in the use of materials, the qualities that time, and space bring to his performances. For example Coyote: I Like American and America Likes Me is a complex piece even though it does not fulfill its programmatic claims. While Verwoert believes the photographic documentation is misleading because of how it represents the relationship between Beuys and the coyote, the performance itself
not only raises important questions about the possibility of co-existence, but demonstrates this throughout the duration of the performance. Verwoert writes, “through everything he does, the coyote demonstrates his utter indifference to the artistic allegory being constructed around him and, in doing so, destabilizes it.” Instead the performance is about the ways in which two unequal characters, for whom communication constantly fails, somehow find a way to deal with each other and with the failure of their communication simply because they live together in close proximity.”

In demonstrating the “impossibility of a symmetrical exchange between

Figure 9. Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys Coyote* (sic), (Performance 1974), René Block Gallery, New York City.
two divided worlds of experience” however unintentionally, Verwoert thinks, a pragmatic lesson is learned: “what collective violence destroys, one person alone cannot heal.” At best, one small thing or another may be resolved on the level of daily coexistence, but only if one side is prepared to face and live with unclarified conditions. Beuys claims he is seeking to heal the genocide inflicted on Native Americans by the United States. Buchloh and the art historian Donald Kuspit believe an attempt to come to terms with the catastrophe of the Holocaust drives much of Beuys’ work. Yet the particular material conditions of this work, and especially the use of a living animal, demand that we consider what was happening then and there, in that room in the gallery in New York City.

As the relationships between humans and other animals becomes an increasingly important consideration, understanding the relationships between artists and the living animals they work with can provide unique insights into the ethical and aesthetic nature of our relationships. The challenge is to remain aware of our anthropomorphic natures, and also not become too overly tangled in the inevitable snares set by language and habits of thinking. As is clear from the work considered so far, it is quite easy to deflect our attention from what is before us and turn it back onto ourselves. How do we humans get out of the way? Can we ever really hear what the animals have to say?
Chapter Four
Object or Actor: An Insect Aesthetic

Cockroaches, as creatures that “live in the shadows” are seen as very different from us, and because of this were a powerful metaphor for the AIDS community in the work of artist and AIDS activist David Wojnarowicz. The Latin origin of the word cockroach is \textit{pline}, one who flees the light, and certainly during the period in which Wojnarowicz was working, the gay community was pushed into the shadows.\textsuperscript{502} Nathalie Blanc, Director of Research at the National Center for Scientific Research in Paris, notes that cockroaches are imagined as dark and consequently, “as animals which one closely associates with technical objects.” In other words, they are unnatural, a characteristic that is still, but less frequently, applied to homosexual activity. She goes on to say,

The pipes of buildings, the interstices of the building, faults of all kinds, are their house; the cockroach nests there and hides there when it is hunted, the better to invade familiar spaces. It is thus an animal of the shade. It stands at the margins of the familiar world. It can be used to represent objects which are not there, that is to say, to invent new objects from those that one already knows. When it comes to cockroaches, the imagination,
as a powerful engine for the introduction of new elements into public space, is activated to an extraordinary degree.\textsuperscript{503}

Blanc describes the cockroach as having a “double exclusion” because of its association with poverty and dirtiness. The insect is used as a metaphor for “social infamy” because its “animality and its autonomy feed the representations concerning its mobility in the building and the way in which it penetrates the apartments and hides there.” Therefore people believe that the insects, or metaphorically speaking, the diseases and groups associated with cockroaches, come from structural flaws or from strangers. For example, in Paris cockroaches are associated with Arabs, a group that is often the target of discrimination. Cockroach infestation represents an invasion; it “passes everywhere; it is like water, a small crack is enough.”\textsuperscript{504}

“Metaphors are nourished above all by aesthetic experience . . . ” Blanc argues, and foster “a poetic and imaginative entry into reality; [a metaphor] expresses a consciousness of the relations that link us to the environment.” These relations can be positive or negative. Blanc believes it would be possible “to unite the aesthetic and the ethical by the awakening of a more or less pleasant relation to the world.” The first artist considered in this chapter, David Wojnarowicz, plays off the negative associations with cockroaches to draw attention to homophobia and AIDS while Hubert Duprat, whose work is discussed later, uses insects in a process by which humans and insects work “collaboratively” to create aesthetically beautiful objects.
1. Non-Charismatic Mini-Fauna

David Wojnarowicz, a New York artist who died of an AIDS-related illness in 1992, used animals, and especially cockroaches, as metaphors in his politically oriented artworks, which were responding to the AIDS crisis and the lack of public support. In 1988-89 he used a photo of a natural history museum diorama depicting the slaughter of buffalo as a stand-in for people living with and dying from HIV/AIDS. Earlier in his career, in the 1980s, Wojnarowicz created works with cockroaches, with whom he identified. He called them “non-charismatic mini-fauna,” in contrast to the buffalo, a “charismatic megafauna.”

Sociologist Linda Kalof explains, in her essay, “The Human Self and the Animal Other: Exploring Borderland Identities,” that it is widely accepted that human identity is formed in social relationships within particular historical and cultural contexts, but it is less acceptable to think that relationships with “nonhuman others” are also influences. She notes,

Because of the human penchant for conceptualizing self-other, same-different, and culture-nature as binary oppositions, animals are not considered part of the human identity equation. This dualistic thinking fosters a hyperseparation in which differences between humans and animals, or culture and nature, are emphasized and magnified.
We tend to offer help to those we perceive as similar, but because animals are seen as dissimilar, maltreatment can be justified. Kalof concludes,

The most important factor in determining our attitudes toward animals is how similar to us we think they are . . . . It comes as no surprise that dislike of dissimilar distanced others is closely linked to racism and sexism, in which marked categories of people metaphorically resemble animals.⁵⁰⁸

Despite the considerable gap between humans and insects, due to their size and their reputation as pests, most people set “bugs” apart from all other “animals.” While they are often viewed as faceless collectives, sometimes insects are as metaphors for other people, and some can even see themselves in the insect
“mirror.” In these cases, as Haraway has said, “We polish an animal mirror to look for ourselves.”

Susan Sontag writes about the use of metaphors in *Illness as a Metaphor* and *AIDS and Its Metaphors*. In both books she explores the ways in which diseases are conceptualized as unnatural. While both cancer and AIDS are described as invasive, in the early years of the AIDS epidemic it was also seen as a punishment. This is because the groups most strongly identified with the disease at that time were homosexual men and intravenous drug users, both of whom were condemned by mainstream society. While public empathy and the funds needed for care and research have grown as fears about the disease have been eased by increasing knowledge and education about the disease, in the 1980s people with AIDS were often marginalized at best, or even shunned. The majority of people who have died from AIDS in the United States have been from the gay community. As a result, attitudes toward the disease were intertwined with preexisting condemnations of gay life. In addition to being stigmatized by what some defined as immoral sexual practices at the time, the spread of the disease through contact with bodily fluids increases the likelihood that intravenous drug users would contract the disease, thus further criminalizing it.

As art historian Mysoon Rizk explains, “cockroaches are readily conflated with pests, vermin, and disease, in spite of fastidious grooming practices . . . the unwelcome order of 4,000 species remain subject to entrenched human characterization as disease transmitters even though according to one reference book ‘less than one percent of cockroach species . . . are significant pests.’”
The artist claimed that he sought “coexistence” with arthropods, including cockroaches. In a videotape on “how to make cock-a-bunnies” the videographer, Sophie S. Breer, asks Wojnarowicz if he wishes to “take the ‘s’ out of pest.” It appears that Wojnarowicz replies in the affirmative. On the other hand many of these insects were injured or died as a result of his manipulation of them. For his “cockabunny” project he glued paper rabbit ears and cottontails on cockroaches. All of the insects died, probably from the process of attaching the materials. In cockabunnies at a PSi (Performance Studies International) opening, and those insects met the same fate. The artist, who in many other instances seemed to be quite kind-hearted, justified the killing of the insects, saying that this has long been an acceptable response to a home infestation. However the deaths caused by his activities in many cases were more prolonged than those that would have occurred through more traditional means.

Rizk suggests that Wojnarowicz may have been paying tribute to Joseph

Figure 11. Sophie S. Breer, Stills from Waje’s Cockabunnies, 1981.
The younger artist called his PSi interventions an “action” and the transformation of cockroaches into bunnies suggests the hares that Beuys used for inspiration in many of his works.\textsuperscript{513} The cockroach often is used as a metaphor for the outsider and the marginalized, and so was an obvious choice for Wojnarowicz, who was preoccupied with the theme of “Illegitimacy [which was] closely associated with being designated abject or diseased.”\textsuperscript{514} Rizk notes “the manipulated creatures embody the poignant poetics of ontological discomfort experienced firsthand by the queer artist from Jersey.”\textsuperscript{515} In his obituary in \textit{The New York Times}, the critic Michael Kimmelman describes his work as “distinguished by its rage and its spirit of personal longing. His paintings, photographs, installations, performances and writings railed against the status quo as they also mourned death.”\textsuperscript{516} Ironically Wojnarowicz’s abusive treatment of the cockroaches is a reenactment of the abuse suffered by many gay people at the hands of homophobic heterosexuals.

2. Returning the Gaze

In liberal humanist societies human beings, as individuals, are granted moral status and the accompanying rights and protections. The animal rights movement has tried to extend that status to animals, and has attained some success in those efforts especially for mammals. Insects rarely if ever are included in these discussions. Although some insects possess characteristics such as the capacity to communicate with each other and respond to certain stimuli in their environments, insects are rarely perceived as having the attributes necessary to be granted the same rights as individuals. They are instead a collective. While, for example, there might be some sympathy for the right for butterflies to exist, and
so efforts to protect their habitat would be supported, the argument that a butterfly had the right to life would appear odd to most people. And as for the many insects which are considered pests, few oppose efforts to kill or even exterminate them altogether. As Giovanni Aloi observes, perhaps this is because, unlike mammals such as Derrida’s cat, insects can’t “return the gaze.”

Although some insects are more highly regarded than others by the general public and artists alike, few people in Western societies think twice about killing insects, either individually or in a wholesale manner.

Conflicts about social boundaries associated with race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, including their construction, maintenance, and defense, have been a significant part of human activity for thousands of years.

Wojnarowicz’s use of cockroaches, as mentioned above, was a searing critique of the public’s attitude toward AIDS. Over the past few decades these discriminatory attitudes have been challenged by, among others, Feminist, Postmodern, and Postcolonialist critiques, and by the Women’s and Gay Rights Movements.

Many premises upon which European philosophical traditions sought to establish universal truths or principles have been undermined or discredited. This broad intellectual movement and the theories associated with it, philosopher James Bohman explains, have “practical consequences [which] are assessed and verified in democratic practice and solved by inquiry into better democratic practice.” The process is not so much one of cause and effect as a dynamic where theory and pragmatics are not distinct fields but co-actors in on-going processes. Most recently, the concept of “the other” has expanded to include not
only other humans, but also, to the degree that our anthropocentric orientation permits, other animals.

The advent of Animal Studies in the 1990s was sparked in part by these earlier social and intellectual movements. Jacques Derrida’s essay in which he describes his discomfort under the searching gaze of his cat is cited by many as a turning point. This ‘return of the gaze,’ notes Giovanni Aloi, editor of Antennae, “extensively contributed to the revisioning of the animal (mammals that is) from object to subject.”

One reason for this is that contemporary philosophy is skeptical of the ideology of objectivity and universal narratives. “Perhaps the most characteristic tenet of postmodern critical work,” J. L. Lemke explains,

is that everything that European philosophy and science has held to be fundamentally true at an abstract or programmatic level (ontology, epistemology, metaphysics, logic) is in fact a contingent, historically specific cultural construction, which has often served the covert function of empowering members of a dominant social caste at the expense of Others. It dismantles the most foundational procedures and assumptions whereby prior European philosophical traditions sought to establish universal truths or principles.

This in turn has led to an affirmation of the legitimacy of multiple perspectives and the value of situated knowledge. Building on the work of Haraway, Hunter, as discussed in the introduction, defines situated knowledge as that which arises
from a “deep context,” situated rather than isolated, concerned with “the concrete other” rather than the autonomous self, and valuing “logic or situated textuality” rather than “abstract rationalistic structures.”

When linked to the concept of the other, this can include not only an array of human perspectives, but to the degree that our anthropocentric orientation permits, animal perspectives. However in Wojnarowicz’s work, the standpoint is that of the AIDS activist, and in the understandable intensity of that position, other standpoints can be easily pushed aside, and overlooked. Also, if animals or insects are used symbolically or metaphorically instead of being recognized as life forms with their own needs and interests, they become a means to an end. The ways in which Wojnarowicz used these insects is a painful and vivid expression of how gay men, especially during the early years of the AIDS epidemic, experienced the world.

3. The Missing Piece

Since the modern period began, science has studied nature and animals as if a pure and objective knowledge is possible, as if humans could step outside of nature and their own animal selves to attain a detached and outsider worldview. The processes related to the generation of knowledge and to developing solutions to political and social problems, if understood in this way, could be compared to constructing pieces for an elaborate jigsaw puzzle. The pieces of knowledge produced by science, philosophy, and art, among other disciplines, are constructed to fit into openings whose boundaries are determined by economic, social, political, and even religious forces. We create the pieces of data we need to fill the holes we have created.
Yet since these forces change over time, the pieces of data that we need to fill those holes change too. In fact, the holes themselves change. This creates some fairly unstable ground upon with to construct knowledge. Therefore the idea that knowledge can be something that is fixed, pure, or objective is suspect. Therefore, as Donna Haraway points out, scientific knowledge is always situated knowledge. It is always partial and incomplete, and relies upon other perspectives. It is also always contingent on any number of actors. From a different disciplinary perspective, Foucault has also investigated the ways in which knowledge is contingent. He writes about a situated perspective; however it does not arise from particular individuals or groups, but is historically and geographically based.524

Based on the work of these thinkers and others, our knowledge about “nature” is now more widely understood as historical and culturally contingent and so are our knowledge about and relationships with the “animals” which inhabit it. This is not a denial of physical things and processes, but instead a reminder that what we can know is inevitably caught up not only in our own interests, but also in how we, as animals ourselves, experience the world. However since humans are not separate from nature, but of it and in it, our observations and explanations are always partial, based on what can be seen from where we stand, in every sense: physical, cultural, and temporal.

4. Changeable Narratives
A traditional puzzle is a set piece, an all-at-once image with any missing pieces clearly identified. In contrast, narratives are dynamic and temporal works in which not everything can ever be presented all at once. While a puzzle is a metaphor for one form of relationship, one in which all of the pieces lock together to form a cohesive whole, narratives are another thing altogether. They are slippery. Also in a narrative, your understanding of the plot and of the characters is contingent on where you are in the story. Animals, as we understand them and our relationships with them, can best be understood as characters in a narrative that is continuously being rewritten even as it is unfolding. Animals have typically appeared in a supporting role to the protagonist, serving as a foil in the stories that humans create about themselves and their relationships with nature and with other animals. The traits they are assigned (by us) typically highlight our traits and behaviors rather than their own. They are the backdrop that allows the human-jewel to shine.

Wojnarowicz used the cockroaches as foils in artworks that engage critical political and social issues in a human centered narrative. In a curious kind of reversal, in the work of the French conceptual artist Hubert Duprat, the insects are the protagonists and create the jewels while the human role is a supporting one. The insects are the manufacturers and the artist who is both their captor and their devoted attendant, must ensure all of their needs are met in order for the artmaking process to continue. Duprat, a French conceptual artist, asserts that he collaborates with caddis fly larvae. The jewel-bedecked outcomes invite a reconsideration of the life cycle and activities of this insect, and also obscure the
differences between the work of a human artist and the work of an insect. The reactions of viewers and critics suggest that it is the process as much as the aesthetic outcome that draws them to these works.

Duprat is meticulously attentive to the caddis fly larvae’s perspective, wants, and needs. He has carefully studied what they need to thrive and ensures that these conditions are met during the art making processes which they, unknowingly, participate in. While, at first glance, his work may not seem as socially or politically oriented as that of Wojnarowicz, closer consideration will reveal that his interactions with the insects may very well be informed by an environmentalist sensibility and an acute social justice. The process involves an intimate knowledge of the life cycle of the insects, and fastidious care of their needs while they are in captivity. Duprat collects the larvae in mountainous areas from January to April. The insects are placed in aquariums where the water, which is kept at 40 degrees centigrade, is oxygenated and circulated. This “artificial winter” prolongs the larvae's period of case-building. The artist removes the cases already made by the insects in the wild by taking off the cap at the rear end of the natural case and pushing the tiny animal forward with a blunt-tipped instrument. This causes the larva, which attaches itself to the case with two hind hooks, to release itself from its protective covering.

Next the vulnerable juveniles are placed in a “gold-filled environment” to form new cases. Using a spiral movement, each larva binds first binds the gold
flashing as it creates a new case with a silk thread. They are then moved to various aquariums, each one filled with different jewels, including turquoise, opal, lapis lazuli and coral, rubies, sapphires, diamonds, and pearls. Instead of using grains of sand, plants, or other organic materials typically available in their ecosystem, they bedeck themselves with jewels instead. These casings, held together with a threadlike silken material excreted by the animal, protect their fragile bodies. By moving the larvae from tank to tank at specific intervals, Duprat controls which materials are used to make the rings that form the casing. He also controls the placement of particular jewels by damaging the newly-made cases in particular spots. The larva will then repair the damage with whatever materials are currently available, in this case the jewels selected by Duprat. At that point, just as in their native habitats, the cases are disregarded by their builders but may be appropriated by other larvae, which will adjust them to suit their own needs through changing the size or form of the casing.
When the insects are exhibited they are shown at eye level in small aquariums that also maintain the same winter-like conditions. Since they are only active in the dark, at night, after the exhibition closes, the animals are moved from the exhibition tanks to tanks filled with the materials used for the construction of the cases. Visitors to the exhibition do not see the actual process of case-building but only the outcomes of that activity. Duprat states, “I have not turned the caddis worms into circus animals, nor have I put the manufacturing process on display.” Clearly the artist wishes to distinguish his work from activities designed for entertainment. Also, although he is undoubtedly manipulating the animals for his own purposes, Duprat is making every effort to enter into what the Swiss biologist Jakob von Uexküll (whose work was discussed at length in the introduction) would call the caddis worm’s umwelt and to attend to their well-being, both in the short and the longer term.

In an interview with philosopher Christian Besson, Duprat describes his interest in archaeology and natural history, and his boyhood years spent in the country where he spent time with hunters and fishermen. He maintained aquariums to store the water scorpions, water-striders, newts, tadpoles, pond skaters, planorbid snails and caddis worms he collected. In the early 1980s the artist got the idea of providing the caddis larvae with gold spangles after watching gold panners in the Ariège River in southwestern France. Caddis flies belong to the order of Trichoptera, which has 895 species in Europe, and resemble primitive butterflies but have an aquatic larva. All caddis flies have caterpillar-shaped aquatic larvae which use mineral or plant matter or a combination, to make
The tube-shaped case uses minerals as ballast in flowing water, and plant matter to trap an air bubble so that the insect can develop on the surface of stagnant water. The case’s appearance mimics the natural environment and protects the larva from predators. The entire body of the insect undergoes metamorphosis during nymphosis, which takes place within the case.  

The cases now constructed by the larvae appeared only after a lengthy evolution of the insect. Their ancestors were widespread some 200 million years ago but didn’t have larvae that built casings. When they first constructed shelters, these were fixed and only later became “mobile homes” about 150 million years ago, at which point the carnivorous larvae became vegetarians. Early case construction was a rough combination of grains of sand, plant fragments, shells, and bits of fish bones. Over the course of 50 million years the larvae built increasingly diversified and well-made shelters. Case-building Trichoptera are now widespread throughout the world. Not only do the larvae use different materials, but they also arrange these in a very a precise way. The caddisfly larva's cases reveal the history and the evolution of their instinct for building, one that dates back to the age of the dinosaurs. Yet today, because the larvae are very sensitive to water quality, they are very susceptible to environmental threats posed by pollution.

Duprat has been profoundly influenced by scientific theory and process. He describes the influence of various scientists, beginning with the work in 1834 of François-Jules Pictet, an entomologist from Geneva. Pictet also conducted experiments with the caddisfly larvae, but with scientific rather than artistic
intentions. He was interested in seeing if the insects would use foreign materials rather than what was typically available in their environment. Jean-Henri Fabre, one of the founders of the field of ethology, the study of animal behavior, conducted similar investigations. Fabre compared the caddis larva to a bricklayer, noting just as “when the mason uses bricks to construct the narrow flue of a factory chimney, he stands in the middle of his turret, and gradually lays new courses by revolving on his own axis” so the caddisfly uses the same process in the construction of his tube.

Duprat is familiar with the activities of Canon C. H. de Labonnefon, a scientist, who in 1923 provided the insects with little glass beads. In describing his observations Labonnefon used a metaphor from the performing arts. After bedecking itself with the beads, he noted the caddis larva case looked like “the many-coloured appearance of a magnificent Harlequin's costume.” Duprat is also knowledgeable about more recent experiments, and most especially those of Christian Denis, who has recorded effects on the casings arising from alterations in the natural habitat, including the gauge of sand grains and brightness of light. Denis also worked with the insects beginning with the period of egg-laying, which was unique. Everyone else had worked with older larvae that already had cases. While many species, including the caddis worm, have been described as having the capacity to construct shelters, humans rarely think of animals as creatures that wear clothes of their own making. Yet the caddis worm may be so named because it does actually create what could be understood as a garment for itself. References to “cados worm” and “cadis worme” appeared in the mid-
Cados and cadis may be a blend of earlier words for various kind of fabric. The Old French cadaz, the “coarsest part of silke, whereof sleaue is made” and the Irish cadas or cotton were in use in the early thirteenth century. By the mid-eighteenth century, after the caddis worm was so named, caddis was used to refer to soft lint and also to ribbons.

Although an admirer of Denis’ work, Duprat notes the “aesthetic nature of the outcome is of no concern in all recent scientific literature.” The distinctive boundaries between art and science of the modern period began during the Enlightenment. The philosopher Christian Besson notes that this was not only true for science, but also for philosophy. He reminds us of the divide Kant established between art and nature:

Kant’s distinction between works of art and those of nature leave us in a quandary. The production of the artifact within nature herself poses a problem — even more so when an aesthetic aspect is involved. Whether the insect is a craftsman or whether, more generally, nature is a creator of forms, the consideration, within nature, of an aesthetic dimension is the stumbling block of science . . . in [Duprat’s] diversion of the caddis worm’s behavior, in [Duprat’s] artistic manipulation, the effect is twofold. From a biological viewpoint, a random event triggers self-organization. From a human viewpoint, the experimenter’s intent produces this effect . . .
It is clear from this discussion that one of Kant’s preoccupations was to clearly delineate differences between, for example, culture and nature, as well as human and animal. Besson goes on to note that the question is not so much whether it is the insect or the artist that creates the work, but both. The caddis worm is doing what it does, regardless of the interference of the artist and the insect might be considered “merely the executor of the artist’s project.” The result is a “doubly exposed object” which is both natural and artistic.  

5. Self-Worlds

As discussed in the introduction, Uexküll believes that all animals, even insects, offer us the opportunity to “stroll into unfamiliar worlds, words strange to us but known to other creatures, manifold and varied as the animals themselves.” Animals, including insects, are not machines but can act on their own volition. They have the capacity to perceive and act, and inhabit their own worlds, which he called *umwelts*. If we are to “unlock the gates that lead to other realms” we need to recognize this and attempt to be aware of, if not actually to perceive and understand, the perceptual world of animals and to recognize that animals have their own reasons for acting in the ways they do.

Uexküll’s example of the female tick has been repeatedly considered by philosophers interested in questions related to ontology and phenomenology. Uexküll describes the insect in dramatic terms: “Out of the vast world which surrounds the tick, three stimuli shine forth from the dark like beacons, and serve as guides to lead her unerringly to her goal.” Buchanan, who also refers to this
example, notes, “The moon, weather, birds, noises, leaves, shadows, and so forth do not matter to the tick. They may belong to the umwelt of other organisms that live in the midst of the tick, but they do not have any meaning for the tick itself.” After mating, the tick, although blind, responds to photoreceptive cells on her skin and climbs upward. Clinging to a leaf or branch, she may wait for up to eighteen (human) years before responding the smell of sweat from a passing mammal (let’s say the dog that accompanies you on that walk through the meadow). Drawn to the dog’s heat, the tick drops from her perch and seeks a bare patch of skin to feed on its blood. This will trigger fertilization of her eggs by the sperm. After this event, the tick will die. Uexküll describes this as “not an exchange of forces between two objects, but the relations between a living subject [the tick] and its object [the dog].” Although this world may be described as poor (a characterization picked up by Heidegger, who is familiar with Uexküll’s work) Uexküll understands it as a guarantee of the “unfailing certainty of her actions, and security is more important than wealth.”

Uexküll uses the metaphor of a soap bubble to describe his concept of the umwelt in the following passage:

We may therefore picture all the animals around us, be they beetles, butterflies, flies, mosquitoes or dragonflies that people a meadow, enclosed within soap bubbles, which confine their visual space and contain all that is visible to them . . . . The fluttering birds, the squirrels leaping from branch to branch, or the cows that browse in the meadows — all remain permanently surrounded by their soap bubbles, which define
their own space.

Only when this fact is clearly grasped shall we recognize the soap bubble which encloses each of us as well. Then we shall also see all our fellow men [sic] in their individual soap bubbles, which intersect with each other smoothly, because they are built up of subjective perceptual signs. There is no space independent of subjects. If we still cling to the fiction of an all-encompassing universal space, we do so only because this conventional fable facilitates mutual communication.  

Uexküll concludes that not only time, but also space is subjective. Instead of a universal reality, he describes a subjective universe, a complex matrix comprised of the perspectives of all living things. Even time and space are based on perception. For example, during the period that the tick is suspended, waiting for her prey, time does not exist. Operational space, which is used by some, but not all animals, is an embodied experience measured in “directional units” (right/left, up/down, forward/back) and will vary depending on the characteristics of the animal’s body. Tactile, auditory, and visual space, which are used to identify location and manage navigation, are also particular and subjective orientations. In addition, because space is dependent on each animal’s experience, the horizon will vary. Since animals are capable of acting and perceiving, this is “not an exchange of forces between two objects, but the relations between a living “subject” (the animal) and its object.” For example, in the world of a tick, it is the subject and its object is the dog. The stimulus of heat given off by the dog is perceived by the tick, which then performs the action of dropping from its perch.
onto its prey. This sequence is neither mechanistic nor instinctual. Each creature is free to act according to its perceptions, unconstrained by internalized or external social, economic, or political forces. The fascinating section above seems to echo the introduction more than most.

As discussed in the introduction, the philosopher Brett Buchanan calls this the beginning of an onto-ethology, in which being is understood based on the “actual behavior of living beings.” Also Uexküll is optimistic about our ability to enter into the umwelt of other species. Conversely, exactly forty years later in “What Is it Like to Be a Bat?” the philosopher Thomas Nagel argues that while we might imagine an approximation of what it is like for a human be a bat, we can never actually experience what it’s like for a bat to be a bat. Nagel denies humans the ability to appropriate the life experience of an “other” as one’s own. Unlike Uexküll, Nagel is living in a postcolonial era and so his thinking is informed by social and political contexts that have demonstrated how hard it is to set aside one’s own worldview and truly enter into and understand even that of another human being.

Uexküll has also been identified as a forerunner in biosemiotics, which studies how signs are communicated through living systems. This kind of semiotic system takes the biological dynamics described above a step further. It includes but is not limited to the relationship between the animal and its environment, but also extends to others who are capable of “interpreting the signs, be they other animals or humans.” Buchanan suggests that what Uexküll describes is an “intersubjective theory of nature.” Organisms can only be
understood within their environmental context.

For Duprat the caddisfly larvae are not symbols or metaphors, but living beings that must have specific physical needs met or they will die. At the same time, he creates a story about his relationship with them, but struggles to define what that is. Are they collaborators? Workers? Or victims of his manipulations? Also there are questions about whether the work is art or artifact. Nevertheless, in his acknowledgement of the ambiguity of the relationship Duprat recognizes his dependence on the larvae. In his treatment of the insects it is clear that Duprat is aware of the lifeworld or *Umwelt* of these tiny animals, and that his own *umwelt* overlaps with theirs.

In “The Discourse of the Novel” Bakhtin argues that stylistics imprison artistic works into a “dungeon of a single context” because isolating genres prohibit the exchange of “messages with other utterances.”553 Similarly, isolated activities within narrow behavioral or disciplinary boundaries erase not only possible discourses between them but also the integration that can support rich and vibrant ecologies. It is interesting to think of Duprat and the insects as interacting in a way which permits a cross-species exchange of materials and the creation of a new kind of aesthetic object which otherwise would not be possible. This results in what Besson has called a “doubly exposed object, like a double exposure: a scientific-cum-artistic palimpsest.”554 How different from the double exclusion of the cockroach described above!
Although Mikhail Bakhtin was referring to the complex forms of communication that occur in the novel, his ideas address a vast communicative territory. Rather than dividing the world into the phenomenological and the semiotic, or focusing on the boundaries where the two meet, Bakhtin’s heteroglossic theory can be applied to interactions between and across species. Just as Uexküll offers an explanation of the natural world that challenges a universal reality, Bakhtin challenges the unity of language. Instead he asserts that both can better be understood within conditions that acknowledge internal stratification, social heteroglossia, and a variety of individual voices.

The interruption or intrusion of difference produces unanticipated effects that dislodge repetitious patterns and create discursive opportunities. Art making as well as discourse can be a kind of relational and navigational activity in which no one is sure what the next step will be or how to define the relationship, which creates opportunities for discovery and creativity. Bakhtin writes,

This place – the place of encounter between the utterance and an alien word – is where something new can enter the discourse. In contrast, the passive understanding only makes demands such as greater clarity or more persuasiveness that leave the speaker “in his own personal context, within his own personal boundaries” (emphasis added). He goes on to say, “an active understanding assimilates the word into a new conceptual system that establishes a series of complex interrelationships, consonances and dissonances with the work and enriches it with new elements . . . . The listener is a specific conceptual horizon which can cause the speaker to
construct his utterances on the “alien territory” of the listener’s “apperceptive background.” Artists working with living animals might also imagine their actions as occurring on the animal’s alien territory. As our conceptual horizons shift, so do our relationships with animals.

6. L’Animot

Derrida does not exclude insects when he raises “the question of the animal,” which he believes must be grappled with if we are to “awaken . . . to our responsibilities and our obligations with respect to the living in general.” As Derrida points out, raising these questions does not mean that animals are to be treated on human terms, “ignoring or effacing everything that separates humankind from other animals.” However that does not absolve one from “taking into account a multiplicity of other living things that cannot in any way be homogenized, except by means of violence and willful ignorance within the category of what is called the animal or animality in general.”

Through replacing the all-encompassing and generic word animal (all living beings that are not human) with animot, which sounds like the French plural for animal (animaux), and drawing attention to the ways in which a word (mot) determines what can be thought, Derrida seeks to affirm “the existence of ‘living creatures,’ whose plurality cannot be assembled within the single figure of an animality that is simply opposed to humanity.” This recognition of “the thing, as such, as what it is in its being” complicates our relationship with “the Animal” considerably. Derrida suggests that this confusion in and of itself is a
crime. He goes further. “Do we consent to presume,” he writes, “that every murder, every transgression of the commandment ‘Though shalt not kill’ concerns only man?” Can living beings other than humans be murdered? Or only killed?

While I wouldn’t charge that the artists considered in this chapter are guilty of murder (or conversely, dispute it), how the insects are used and treated does raise some ethical dilemmas. How does one interact in ways that do not reinscribe the too familiar relations of colonialism or sexism or manipulation? Instead of assigning rights, which inevitably leads to a hierarchical structure in which some beings have them and others don’t, it may be helpful to move away from the concept of a social contract. Rather than asking what, if any, responsibility does the artist have to these tiny creatures, what if one were to consider the quality of the relationship? Is it really equitable? Who is benefiting? Are the animals being treated as beings in their own right, or as artist materials? What is being communicated by their presence in the works, and by our fascination with them?

One way into these questions is, as Bakhtin suggests, through language. Another, one proposed by Uexküll, is through the body and its relationship with its environment. Derrida suggests that both matter, along with the recognition of the particularity, for example that very particular situation of the cat in the bathroom with Derrida, cause just the disruption needed to create an opening. Artists, philosophers and scientists, each from their various perspectives, point to the necessity of considering other ways of being in relation with the multiplicity of beings.
Chapter Five
Biophilia, Biophobia: Repositioning Relationships

In her *American Cockroaches* project Catherine Chalmers explores the relationships between humans and animals, and especially those which are especially disconcerting. She chose cockroaches “because everyone hates them.” Why? According to Chalmers, there are any number of reasons:

They’re nocturnal, coming out at night when we are asleep and vulnerable. They also operate in numbers, whereas we see ourselves as individuals. If we find ten in the kitchen, we know there are hundreds more behind the walls that we can neither see nor get at – a hidden enemy is horrifying to us. And by mutating quickly they can genetically outwit the technologies we throw at them . . . . Cockroaches outnumber us, we can’t control them, and they don’t share our values.

As far as the general public, and even scientists, are concerned, Chalmers is dead right. Many university extension services publish bulletins advising homeowners on how to eradicate roaches. Often these documents include language such as: “Cockroaches are repulsive and objectionable to most people simply by their presence” or “Many people are repulsed and/or disgusted by the simple
presence of cockroaches.” A brochure distributed by the World Health Organization describes them as “pests because of their filthy habits and bad smell.”

Cockroach phobia is also a topic discussed on social media. One person describes her response in this way:

Yes! I have it! I tell you, they are evil creatures, and they can smell fear like dogs or horses. I lived in a house once where there were cockroaches at night in the summer, lurking in the dark. eeek. [sic] Whenever I accidently saw one I totally freaked, started crying, and left the house until someone had killed the thing. Super childish, I know, but they are so nasty and scary. Don’t know of any name for it, but that doesn’t mean it's not a legitimate phobia, unreasonable and silly like the rest of them, but very real to me. yuk [sic].

Scientists and health care professionals take the phobia seriously. For Chalmers this all adds up to a fascinating opportunity to explore our relationship with them.

The first work by Chalmers which attracted significant public and critical attention was *Food Chain*. Created in the nineties, it is a series of photographs which investigates moments in the lives of various insects, reptiles, amphibians, and small rodents, including caterpillars, praying mantises, and mice. A reviewer for *The Guardian* succinctly summarized the subject matter of the project (which included gallery exhibitions and a book, *Food Chain: Encounters Between Mates, Predators, and Prey*) as “Death nourishes. Sex kills. Hunger is brutal.” While it attracted much criticism for the staged deaths of prey being eaten by predators, for
Chalmers exposing the death that is inevitably a part of life was exactly the point. She wanted to capture the “basic mechanisms of the natural world.”

Through using a studio setup with white backdrops and a macro lens, Chalmers made photographs and videos of creatures eating and being eaten in human sized scales. For example, in one scenario,

Baby mice, fed to snakes and frogs, are the size of human newborns. The deaths of these “pinkies” — blind, hairless, vulnerable — are particularly chilling. The baby strains vainly, then relaxes into submission as the snake wraps itself around her tiny form, first caressing then gobbling.

In the photograph the baby mouse is the size of a human baby. While this image was one that viewers found particularly disturbing, Chalmers believes it is because in the West “It's easy to eat a hamburger and never have killed a cow.”

Chalmers’ work dissolves that distance. She raises all of the creatures used in her

Figure 13. Catherine Chalmers, *Baby Mouse.*
Figure 14-16. Catherine Chalmers, *Frog and a Baby Mouse*. 
work and developed an affectionate attachment to some species. In another
interview with Chloé McFeters, a freelance writer and artist, Chalmers shared her
feelings about what she was doing. She recalls,

It was hard. Before I fed a praying mantis, my favorite insect, to my frog,
I’d procrastinate for hours – clean the bathroom, scrub the floor – anything
to delay putting the two together. But dealing with these conflicting
emotions and thoughts led me to the heart of many issues. Why would I
choose one side or another? Was that appropriate or even relevant? 572

In “The Guardian” interview Chalmers also reflected on her reaction:

At first, I was horrified that I was raising animals to eat each other. I felt
that was beyond what someone should do. I'd never killed an animal
before in my life, and throughout this project I never did, myself . . . .

Every time I reached into the cage of mice, there would be a pile of little
pinkies. They all looked the same and I could reach for one or, in a half-
inch, reach for another. That was unsettling. I didn't like being the one to
choose. Part of me felt bad playing God, and the other part felt I was doing
a good job raising my snake. 573

The ambivalence caused by the conflicting values is obvious. In response to this
dissonance, Chalmers both denies killing the animals and acknowledges that she
is the one deciding who will live and who will die. At the same times she is
undeniably the agent of a particular animal’s death, something she is willing to
look at, and to share with us in the interview. As a justification Chalmers points
out, “Just because my snake lives and eats in SoHo doesn’t mean it can or should
become a vegetarian.” One might wonder, more generally, if keeping a snake as a pet in SoHo or any other location is in and of itself an ethically sound act, but her specific point that other animals are killed to feed our preferred animals, our pets, is both true and something we do not want to think about.

Chalmers presents her subject matter in ways that engage our neotenic tendencies. The oversized and close up representations allow the viewer to see features such as large eyes that people find so endearing in both children and many other young mammals that would typically not be noticed in insects and amphibians. “It’s easy, she notes, to have a connection with a cute puppy but much more difficult to be in touch with the parts of nature from which we have worked throughout time to separate ourselves.” Her images show that these small creatures do indeed have faces. Chalmers uses her work as a way of becoming engaged with the natural world and says she is “fascinated by the strange disconnect between what people seem to want to believe happens in nature and what actually does.” Just as the creatures in her photographs, people are also, although oftentimes more indirectly, killers too:

Humans are incredibly efficient killers, yet we are remarkably queasy at facing, or acknowledging, what we do. I’m an omnivore. Eating a chicken running around the yard is an ecologically sustainable thing to do. But supporting the industrial feedlot system of mass produced chickens, for example, is gross and distressing. I try to eat in a way that is easy on the planet. Unfortunately, though, there is really no innocence in eating. Something dies for us to live.
From this perspective, all humans play God. We’ve just become very good at distancing ourselves.

There are also some scientists that share Chalmer’s misgivings. The anthrozoologist Hal Herzog had similar feelings when he worked as an assistant in a biochemical lab. One of his first tasks after he started working there was to collect molecules from the skin surface of earthworms. This was done by a process that involved dropping them in 180-degree water. The worms died instantly and for Herzog it was just another laboratory chore. Some time later he was asked to do the same liquidification procedure to some desert creatures for a scientist who was studying skin chemistry. A box containing crickets, scorpions, a six-inch long lizard, a small snake, and what he describes as “a lovely little gray deer mouse” arrived at the lab. Herzog had no problem killing the crickets and experienced only a twinge of regret about the scorpions, which took longer to die. However when it came to the lizard, a striped juvenile, Herzog remembers,

My stomach turned as I lifted it from the cage, and I began to sweat. My hands shook a little when I dropped it in the near-boiling water. The lizard did not die quickly. It thrashed for maybe ten seconds before becoming still. The little snake was an elegant racer with big black eyes. More shaking hands and sweating brow, and the thrashing reptile soon was reduced to molecules swirling in a solution. Finally, the mouse. I weighted the mouse, calculated the appropriate amount of distilled water, poured it into the beaker and turned on the heat. As the water approached the 180-degree mark, I realized that I just could not “do” the mouse.
Herzog waited in the next room while the lab manager dropped the mouse into the scalding water and completed the procedure. Years later, the questions this experience provoked remain with Herzog. He still wonders if it was a matter of size, phylogenetic status, nervous system development, the grisly manner of their death, or the fact that “the mouse was really cute.” He also wonders if the result of this, or any experiment, is ever “really worth the deaths and sufferings of the animals.”

These kinds of life and death decisions are not only made by Chalmers or by researchers, but in a more distanced manner by pet owners and by everyone that consumes meat. The difference is the distance, not the killing. Chalmers asks, “Should we have pets at all? Look what we've done to dogs. You buy a beagle, which has been entirely manipulated for our pleasure to look like that. Then we have a whole industry that takes cows and grinds them up into little dog pellets. At what point do you start interjecting a morality?” And what for us might be a more abstract moral stance is for the animals an imperative to survive. Chalmers points out that we tend to like other mammals, enjoy the ones that are soft, with big eyes, and tend not to like the ones with glassy eyes and scales . . . .” Chalmers’ observation is supported by researchers such as Konrad Lorenz, who described the human tendency to respond positively to animals that resembled human children. These features include large eyes, bulging craniums, and retreating chins and do not respond as well to long-snouted animals with small eyes. Yet in some instances, as Chalmers observes, preventing a particular insect from going extinct might preserve an entire ecosystem.
Stephen Jay Gould uses the example of Mickey Mouse, whose appearance over time changed from a “small-eyed, long-snouted animal” to a much younger looking animal with rounded features and large eyes. The public response to Mickey’s new image was very positive, to say the least. In his essay “A Biological Homage to Mickey Mouse,” Gould writes, “Many animals, for reasons having nothing to do with the inspiration of affection in humans, possess some features also shared by human babies but not by human adults . . . . We are drawn to them, we cultivate them as pets, we stop and admire them in the wild — while we reject their small-eyed, long-snouted relatives who might make more affectionate companions or objects of admiration.” As the reaction to Chalmers work demonstrates, once any animal — or insect — is personified, people begin to care about it, and especially if it possesses qualities that are similar to a human child.

1. The Trace of the Infinite

Emanuel Lévinas believed “face-to-face” encounters were essential for ethical recognition. For Lévinas this face is not a physical entity but instead the ineffable element in an encounter that permits recognition of others in ways that evoke a sense of responsibility for their well-being. For Lévinas the face was associated with a transcendence which was only possible for humans. He believed that animals do not possess this transcendence and so do not have those metaphorical faces. According to Lévinas animals are bound by instincts and humans are not. (This is increasingly questioned by scientists, who now see increasing evidence that some species act in ways that are not solely instinctual,
while human behavior is driven by instinct more often than previously imagined.) Therefore, since ethical agents must have free will, only humans can be recognized as ethical agents. As beings with free will, through these “face-to-face” encounters humans are called upon and can freely decide whether or not they should treat other humans ethically. According to Lévinas what is acquired through a face-to-face encounter isn’t knowledge about the other (which could be used to objectify or manipulate), but the awareness of an irreducible “otherness” in a being that is also human.

The interplay of evolutionary and biological knowledge and moral philosophy evident in this discussion is an example of the contingency of our understanding of the world and of ethics more generally, and of the foundation upon which we base our interactions with other species. It also demonstrates the permeability of borders that are established for any given field of study. The philosopher Roger S. Gottlieb explains that according to Lévinas the responsibility for others does not arise from “an empirically or conceptually based sense of the “facts;” “the ultimate ontological structures of the universe;” “an expansion of self-interest through identification with the other,” (either practically or transcendentally); or a common commitment to social movements.582 Instead it arises from the direct experience of the moment. This implies that because of its use of the senses, the arts have the capacity to play a significant role in the creation of ethical awareness. This does not only apply to the viewer or audience, but to all participants in the art-making process, including the artist.

In her exploration of our relationships with cockroaches, Chalmers creates
scenarios where cockroaches are placed in human, but not necessarily “humane” situations; in some they appear to be executed by being gassed, hung by the neck, or strapped to a chair and electrocuted. In spite of the widespread human repugnance toward cockroaches and our own efforts to eradicate them, Chalmers’ work has been harshly criticized by some because it appears the insects are being harmed or even tortured. Because of the ways in which the insects are represented, we respond to them as if they are human, we believe that they deserve to be treated ethically, even in the face of the reality that at the very same time we make every effort to eradicate them from our homes. In Chalmers’ portrayals, we become aware of the insect’s “vulnerability and need” and respond to “the other’s call to justice.” It appears that somehow her work evokes that “‘trace’ of the infinite” described by Lévinas.

2. An Ancient Species

According to fossil evidence, cockroaches were thriving as long as 350 million years ago (at the same time as the dinosaurs), and were probably the first flying animals. Even today, most live in wild settings, eat mulch and leaf litter, and are significant contributors to the food chain because they provide food for bats, birds, and spiders. Cockroaches and humans are co-inhabitants of not only the same planet, but the insects literally live with us in our most intimate spaces, our homes. They can thrive wherever food, water, and shelter are available. The roaches spend the day in dark, warm moist areas in and near residential buildings, under kitchen sinks, in ventilation ducts, between walls, and in bathrooms. They come out at night to search for food in kitchens, food storage places, rubbish bins,
drains, and sewers.

As discussed in the introduction Chalmers looks closely at insects and produced work which viewers find both fascinating and revolting, such as encounters between predators and prey. In one sequence of images hornworms devour a tomato and in turn are eaten by a praying mantis, which is then consumed by a tarantula. As Chalmers explains to the artist and critic Chin Lin, people “like to pretend that the food they eat is not killed” because they don’t want to see “the cycles of eat and be eaten that rule the nature world and are repressed by humans.” She goes on to say, “Today, people tend to deny the obvious fact of death and violence in our world.” Food Chain makes that cycle evident.

While frogs and praying mantises have faces that generate the impulse to assign them anthropomorphic traits, the roaches are, according to Chalmers, “a charged subject with a blank canvas. I can paint it. I can kill it. I can put a radio collar on it and trace it around my loft.” While intrigued by her tiny subjects, Chalmers seems somewhat ambivalent about her own relationship with cockroaches. She is painstaking in her efforts to not allow a single one to escape (and understandably so, given their success at reproduction!). In an interview with Blake Eskin from ArtNews the artist explained, “I want to do roach races. I want to make a racecourse and blow air on them and watch them go. When the chaos breaks out, it's really interesting to see a roach panic. Because one panics, and then another panics, and then another—and then it's pandemonium. If it’s panicked for ten minutes, it will die. Once, I had five die on me” (emphasis}
On the other hand, she balances absolute power over them with meticulous care for them.

Lin notes, “The photographs are not exercises in entomological verité. On the contrary, they suggest the various illusions and dissimulations that plague human beings when they try to picture nature to themselves. Chalmers’ photographs, sculptures, and videos transform roaches into a surreal projection of the human psyche, a kind of mythos of the insect that is part curiosity and part revulsion.”

She continues, “Chalmers’ work unveils the varying and contradictory aesthetic [and I would add ethical] responses of human beings to the natural world.” Chalmers agrees, “The photographs stage sentimentality and horror.” Yet in spite of the absence of what is commonly perceived as a face, Chalmers anthropomorphizes the cockroach, and by doing so exacts an uncanny and visceral response from viewers. We peer at them and see ourselves, something that we don’t want to see in an insect that so many find “repulsive.”

3. Ethical Foundations

In spite of Lévinas’ effort to move ethics away from rational justifications, emotional affiliations or self-interest, he remains constrained by a philosophical tradition that affirms an absolute divide between human and animal. Instead of the continuum, which after Darwin was becoming slowly but steadily accepted, Lévinas stakes his philosophy on human exceptionalism, and on the binary premise that while the human has choices, the animal, bound by instinct, has none. Yet, as described in the introduction, Lévinas himself offers a compelling
example of his encounter with Bobby, the dog who energetically greeted Lévinas and his fellow prisoners each morning and evening when they were being held as prisoners-of-war in a Nazi camp during World War II. As the philosopher Matthew Calarco has noted, these actions appear to contradict what should have been, according to Lévinas, Bobby’s instinct-driven fight for survival that precludes the capacity for ethical encounters. Calarco points out, “Bobby’s life is also at stake in the camp. He is a nomad struggling to survive, living on ‘in some wild patch’ of the prison.”

Calarco doesn’t conclude that there is “a general transcendence in the animal itself” or that animals or humans create “ruptures” in the order of being. Rather than a “neoreligious” metaphysics Calarco understands ethics as “acts that are purely and wholly imminent to the material world.” Many animals, including humans, act in ways that are influenced by both biological and subjective factors. Therefore, he argues, the capacity for altruism is not limited to the human realm. In spite of his exclusion of animals, Calarco thinks a close reading of Lévinas’ ethical philosophy supports a “universal ethical consideration” without boundaries. Calarco believes animals exceed our human capacity to conceptualize them and that they are radical alterities which possess the power to make ethical claims on us. (Certainly many would agree that cockroaches fit the first if not the second of these points.) In addition, and drawing on the work of Frans de Waal, a cognitive ethologist, Calarco rejects a binary which sets up animal life in opposition to human life and argues instead for a continuum that acknowledges biological and psychological influences. He concludes,
To mark a rupture in the human-animal distinction, as biology and several other discourses and practices have done, is to announce the fact that philosophy cannot proceed with business as usual. Philosophy can no longer in good conscience ground itself on the assumption that human perspectives and human interests constitute the primary locus for thought. In short, today philosophy finds itself faced by animals, a sharp reversal of the classical philosophical gaze.597

Perhaps Bobby is offering affection in the anticipation that it will be reciprocated, or for the bodily pleasure of being patted or having his ears scratched. Perhaps the recognition by the men is the affirmation of his identity as a dog. But even if it is not without self-interest, in the Kantian sense, it is a recognition and affirmation of relationship that is essential for ethics. And so, day after day, in spite of the energy that the starving dog might spend instead on looking for food, Bobby continues to greet the prisoners until at last he is driven away for good by the guards. In the face of the dog’s affirmation of the men’s humanity, can humans, a priori, deny ethical relations with an animal-other simply because the other is not human? Because Lévinas doesn’t follow the logic of his own argument, he fails to recognize that Bobby has a “face.” If, as Lévinas claims, it is the act of interruption — the rupture — which forms the foundation of ethics, then face-to-face encounters cannot be limited to other humans.

4. The Nameless Hordes

Cockroaches are the ultimate other, the nameless hordes. They don’t have
“faces” — or at least ones that are easily visible. In Chalmers’ work however, we are confronted face-to-face with the “not us” who live with us. Although unlike Bobby, cockroaches run from rather than to us, the literal face-to-face encounters experienced by viewers in Chalmers photographs and videos blur the line between humans and insects. The videos and photographs seem to present actual events, ranging from horrific executions to discomforting domestic vignettes of the insects eating, drinking, and having sex. The roaches are assigned roles ranging from imposters to the condemned. Because they are placed in situations familiar to humans, their vulnerability is exposed.

Thrust into particular and singular encounters, the question of whether we should assume ethical responsibility for these cockroaches isn’t so easily

Figure 17. Catherine Chalmers, Hanging. Gelatin Silver Print. Collection of the artist.
Figure 18. Catherine Chalmers, Burning at the Stake. Gelatin Silver Print.

Collection of the artist.

dismissed. Because the insects seem to be suffering and their deaths seem to be orchestrated for our morbid consumption, the artist has been criticized. One might also question the ways that she disrupts their lives and manipulates them for her own purposes, even if they suffer no physical harm. However this line of thought
incongruously coexists with the long history of human attempts to eradicate these insects through any number of means.

The dissolution of the human-animal binary opens the door for an increasingly complicated and complex set of relations. The animal is no longer a single category but a complex matrix of beings and relationships, as is the human. Derrida has suggested *animot*, a plural that can remind us, “There is no animal in the general singular, separated from man by a single indivisible limit.” Both the particularity and singularity of animot demands a reconsideration of relationships among and between living beings.

The immense diversity of insect life is a case in point. Things get more complicated when the diversity of relationships is considered. For example, in Chalmers’ works insects are portrayed in turn as beautiful imposters, lovers, domestic creatures caught up in the day-to-day routines of life, condemned criminals, and hapless victims. “Imposters” is a series of photographs which depict cockroaches either as flowers or as “more likeable” insects (i.e., ladybugs and bumblebees) in “pretty settings.” The artist first chilled the roaches so they could be easily handled, then painted and decorated them with spines or feathers. (These embellishments fall off in a few days and do not harm the insects.)

In *Infestations* the cockroaches are placed in dollhouse habitats, including a bathroom, kitchen, and living room. They dominate the domestic spaces by their size rather than their numbers. Their behaviors mimic (or perhaps are the same as) humans in the same situations: eating at a table, having sex on a bed. In other
images their roach-like behavior is magnified as the “oversized” insects cling to and dominate walls adorned with signature pieces from well-known contemporary painters and sculptors. These juxtapositions create tensions between impulses to anthropomorphize and demonize. Are they just like us or are they taking us over?

The artist intends for these manipulations to generate reflection about how humans “set out to shape the planet as if it is a tabula rasa for our desires.” She reminds us, “The terror of whatever a roach does to us pales in comparison to what we can do to it.” This is materially expressed in the “Execution” series and also in the drawings made of roach parts glued to paper. A tiny three-dimensional work entitled Trophy which consists of the mounted head of a cockroach on a piece of paper connects the tiny animals to larger “big game” animals which have suffered the same fate. As critic Lin Chin has observed, in these works “the line between insect mortality and human handicraft” meet. These trophies transform living beings into objects as if they were just another form of art hanging on the wall.

The varying forms of execution depicted in Chalmers’ “Execution” series echo the array of eradication methods used by exterminators. These include biological controls, insecticides (including sprays, dusts, and aerosols) baits and traps, and repellents. The lists of recommended toxins include:

Alphacypermethrin, bendiocarb, betacyfluthrin, chlorpyrifos, cyfluthrin, cyphenothrin, deltamethrin, diazinon, dichlorvos, dioxacarb, fenitrothion, flufenoxuron, hydramethylnon, jodfenphos, malathion, permethrin, pirimiphos, propetamphos, and propoxur.
Perhaps because it generates the most empathy, the “Execution” series has
drawn the most criticism. Cockroaches are presented as individuals (in the
electrocution photographs) and as members of groups (in the gas chamber and
lynching images). We can begin to imagine what it would be like to be in their
places. When *Burning at the Stake*, a video and a set of photographs depicting a
cockroach that appeared to be on fire, were published in *The New York Times*
readers reacted negatively. The video, now posted on Chalmers’ website, is
accompanied by text which states, “No roaches were harmed in the making of this
video.” Chalmers only uses the American Cockroach, which is the largest species
living in the United States, and purchases them from a biological supply company.
She has raised cockroaches for years and cares for them meticulously. As they die,
presumably from natural causes (their typical life span is about a year), she
collects their bodies for further use. During the production process, videotaped
flames were overlaid on the video of the living insects; and during the burning
sequence a dead insect replaced the living one shown earlier in the sequence.  

One photograph shows a line of roaches hanging by tiny string nooses.
Two others depict electrocutions. In one an insect is tied to tiny chair, in another
the bug is strapped horizontally to a miniature slab-style table. *Chamber*, a video,
shows cockroaches apparently returning to life after being gassed. What is
actually happening is that as the carbon dioxide used to incapacitate the insects
wears off, they begin to twitch and move as consciousness returns. This return of
consciousness is compelling. On one hand, it reminds us that these tiny creatures
have consciousness (wondrous); on the other hand, it evokes an uncanny
invincibility (perhaps they will dominate the earth someday).

*Squish* is shot at roach level. The insects race horizontally across the screen at astounding speeds or approach the viewer head on, their antennae and legs tap-tapping to the soundtrack as if they were dancers. Chalmers said that the “roach’s syncopated, rhythmic gait” led her to make this video. The squish of the title is the sound one hears after the video has gone to black and the “dancers” have disappeared. Cockroaches can run at speeds up to three miles per hour — the human equivalent of two hundred miles per hour, and that incredible swiftness is evident here.

Although not visible in the *Squish* video, researchers at the University of California at Berkley discovered that to achieve this velocity, the insects rear up on their back legs like bipedal human beings. Another video made by the same scientists shows individual cockroaches racing up a ramp and disappearing under the end with an acrobatic flourish. They appear to vanish. It turns out the insects grab the edge with the claws on their back legs and swing themselves under like pendulums, landing upside down and underneath the ramp. The feat was discovered accidentally when scientists were studying how the roaches use their antennae to sense and cross gaps. When the gap became too wide, the roaches unexpectedly — and without any perceptible hesitation, flipped themselves under the ramp. When the scientist amputated the insects’ back claws they were no longer able to navigate the gesture and simply fell into the gap.

The two videos, one made for aesthetic purposes and the other for
scientific, have notably different aims. While both manipulate the insects, in this video and also in the rest of her work with cockroaches Chalmers is interested in interrogating the human-animal relationship. The scientists, in contrast, focus on acquiring factual information. Chalmers presents the insects as subjects, while for the scientists they are objects, and sometime intentionally mutilated in the pursuit of knowledge.

These scientific studies illustrate Lévinas’ warning that efforts to gain knowledge about rather than recognize the other deny any recognition of its integrity or needs. A comparison of Chalmers’ work with that of the scientists also highlights the ways in which context provides opportunities for bridging and bonding. “In traditional theater,” Michael Kirby, the drama theorist, explains, the performer always functions within (and creates) a matrix of time, place and character . . . . When an actor steps onstage, he brings with him an intentionally created and consciously possessed world, or matrix, and it is precisely the disparities between the manufactured reality and the spectators’ reality that make the play potentially significant to the audience.⁶⁰⁵

A theatrical performance occurs “within a matrix of time and place required by the dramatic action and reinforced by the physical setting.”⁶⁰⁶ This is certainly true in Chalmers’ work. In “non-matrixed” performances, a task (such as a person walking to the store or the cockroach running up a ramp) is simply being performed. This may happen anywhere; it isn’t confined to any one special space. In the videos, the scientists present a non-matrixed situation while Chalmers’
cockroaches are performers in a complex human-insect matrix.

As discussed in the introduction, Peterson applies the concept of matrixing to animal performances. Since animals are not intentionally creating an illusion for audiences, when they “perform” they do not act. Instead he examines the infrastructure used to create the illusion that animals are acting. According to Peterson, because the audience responds to a symbolic matrix governed by appearances and a “received” matrix based on their own perceptions, they accept what is being presented in the performance. The symbolic matrix presented by Chalmers in the settings she constructs for the cockroaches is so convincing that it challenges the received matrix that is strongly informed by the viewers’ perceptions of cockroaches, even to the point, as discussed above, that viewers become concerned for the well-being of the insects. The concept of matrixing suggests two questions that will be considered in more depth in the last chapter. These are

“How are animals made to perform?” and

“How are animals made to mean?”

This suggests the differing aims of art and science with regard to animals. In both situations, the insects are manipulated by humans to one degree or another and so “perform.” In Chalmers’ works, the insects are also “made to mean;” her intention is to provoke thought and reflection. The matrix she establishes affirms the insects’ subjectivity, while in the Berkeley study they are objects with particular properties and the focus is solely on the mechanics of their performance.
Chalmers makes every effort not to harm the insects, while in experiment some of the cockroaches had the claws on their back legs cut off, destroying their capacity to perform this self-protective evasive maneuver.608

Adopting an ethical approach to the production of scientific knowledge or artistic works requires a consideration of the relationship between the human and the animal, and the responsible treatment of both. As Peterson has noted, “behind the referential and thematic content of representations [and I would add scientific research] lie questions about their production; the analysis of animals as objects of performance necessitates investigating how actual animals perform . . . [and] how are animals made to perform?”609

For most people the answer to this question relies on the value assigned to the animal by humans. Often this is based on its similarity to humans, and likeability factors such as having a face, large eyes, being perceived as an individual rather than a collective, or identified as friendly or useful rather than harmful or destructive. Lyall Watson, a scientist who is interested in what Chalmers has been exploring, writes,

Almost everything we know or believe about cockroaches is exaggerated. “Cockroach!” The word itself has become an insult in every language as people heap easy abuse on anything alien. When faced with any such social quandary, humans instinctively distance themselves from its source. We rush to put as much space as possible between us and whatever it is that has made us feel so uncomfortable. And, more often than not, we stack the deck in our favor by dehumanizing our adversaries. Once that
ploy has been put into play, anything goes. It is us against them, and in such conflict, truth and reason are the first casualties.\textsuperscript{610}

Even if it seems more acceptable to gas a living cockroach or burn a dead one, one can imagine the public outcry if puppies — or their corpses — had been subjected to the same treatment. Certainly PETA and other organizations and individuals have spoken out against the treatment of animals, particularly mammals, in scientific studies. We create hierarchies that govern our sense of right and wrong. It also gets to the heart of why Chalmers’ depictions of cockroaches’ “executions” (rather than extermination) are so disconcerting.

However when the anonymous plural has become singular, the dehumanized adversary becomes a particular individual, a term reserved for humans now applied to the insects. In spite of efforts to eradicate them through poisons and traps the face-to-face encounter with particular individuals — even cockroaches — makes a difference.

5. Defamiliarization

As considered in the earlier example of \textit{I Like America and America Likes Me} by Joseph Beuys animals are often used symbolically to represent humans in art and politics. Perhaps inevitably, the “Execution” series not only highlights the insects’ situation, but the suffering that humans inflict on other humans. Some of the portrayals evoke Klu Klux Klan style lynchings or the Holocaust. Chalmers denies this is the case here and explains,
The “Execution” series is not about the suffering humans have endured at the hands of humans, but what other species have endured at the hands of humans. I do not want, in any way, to diminish the pain and horror that we have experienced through the centuries with these methods of killing. It is the opposite perspective: not looking in but looking out across the animal barrier that I am endeavoring to explore through this work.\textsuperscript{611}

On the other hand, although the focus is on the human-insects relationship, the anthropomorphic perspective is paramount:

It has never been my intention, though, to offer them [cockroaches] an apology, to say we shouldn’t hate or shouldn’t kill them. I’m not advocating for their conservation or their destruction. What interests me is that the degree to which people hate cockroaches is so disproportionate to the actual potential for threat in the actions of the animal. This schism is indicative of the subjectivity – perhaps arbitrariness – with which we respond to nature in general. The cockroach is like a distorting mirror that amplifies the attitudes we harbor.

Chalmers’ work humanizes the roaches while evoking an animalization of humans. Cockroaches and humans are connected not only in the choice of habitat, but also in some behavior and culture. Like humans, cockroaches are omnivores. The species that have adapted to living with people immigrate with them across the globe. For example, the American Cockroach used by Chalmers arrived on this continent during the early years of the slave trade, around 1625.
While there are 3500 species of cockroach, many of which live in the wild, only five are identified by the World Health Organization as posing health concerns for humans. Yet for most people, all cockroaches are seen as disease-carrying vermin. While not intrinsically harmful, as they travel from drains, gardens, and sewers into buildings in search of food, many (but not all) scientists think they can potentially carry disease-causing bacteria. More recent studies suggest the allergic reactions in some individuals may turn out to be more common than any disease. Also roaches secrete a fluid with a long-lasting smell that is offensive to humans. 612

Art such as these works creates conditions in which an intersection of contradictory matrices of thought is sustained. As drama scholar Bert O. States has noted, bisociation or the intersection of two apparently incompatible matrices results in a “flash,” a moment of surprise at an unexpected outcome. He compares this to the moment when “the floor cracks open and we are startled . . . by the upsurge of the real into the magic circle . . . . We suddenly see the familiar in the defamiliarization.”613 In a joke, this may occur when the punch line is delivered; in science; for scientists it is the “ah ha” moment; and in Chalmers’ work, is that disconcerting sense of unease when the distinctions between insect life and human life are eroded.

According to States, we perceive a dog on stage “imaginatively” but we see the dingo in a zoo as “indicative because it serves as an illustration of what the “real animal” in the Australian wilderness would be like. However in the theatre, the dog is a “stubbornly real” thing. The animal is “alive in the sense of belonging
to immediate existence . . . but not yet to the world of art.” In art, animals are “defamiliarized and desymbolized object[s]” which are “‘uplifted to the view’ where we see it as being phenomenally heavy with itself.” 6\textsuperscript{14} This kind of situation is rich with potential for both artists and audience members to reimagine our relationships with animals.

This experience of surprise, combined with a sense of the unknowable, the alien other, also appears in the face-to-face encounter of Lévinas’ ethical awakening. Human qualities are attributed to an animal (and an almost universally disliked if not despised one at that) while at the same moment the viewer is aware that the animal is not human. These are real cockroaches in a theatrical setting; they maintain their identity as insects even as they play the role of the human. This leads to a situation where people can complain about the harm seemingly done even as they would probably unhesitatingly, and perhaps even enthusiastically, endorse efforts to exterminate the roaches in their homes. At the same moment that these cockroaches qualify as living beings worthy of care they are vermin that must be eradicated. The unexpectedness of the punch line in a joke brings pleasure and the “ah ha” moment may lead to a breakthrough in understanding. In Chalmers’ work the “transitional moment of shock” which occurs when the cockroach is defamiliarized and desymbolized as it is “uplifted to the view” poses questions about our relationship to this particular category of animal.

6. Deterritorialization
According to Deleuze and Guattari the way to transform subject-object relation is to shift our understanding or reality from subjects and objects (things) to the relations between them and how these are governed by processes. Instead of molar units –discrete forms with clearly delineated boundaries and identities — they propose that becomings, and especially becomings-animal are the primary activities of life. Things are deterritorialized in that they are no longer forms but energies that coalesce and dissipate.

Becomings replace relationships between bounded entities (subjects and objects) with movement itself. The activity of being in relation replaces discrete entities with affects, which are essentially movements of various forces and speeds that encounter each other. These fields of activity are described as molecular and associated with the “natural.” For Deleuze and Guattari affect is not a personal feeling but instead, as Brian Massumi notes, “the ability to affect and be affected,” He goes on to explain, “It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act.”

The free line of flight of molecular dynamics permits the “elementary” to communicate with the “cosmic.” In contrast, natural history conceptualizes relationships between animals based on differences between groups. These differential relationships fall into two categories: serial or structural. Serial relationships are judged by their similarity to an original “perfection.” Structural relations are organized according to the performance of common functions. One example of this is the function of organs such as gills and lungs. In contrast to
natural history, evolution (a kind of genealogy) looks on these relationships as a line of production in which what comes first creates or produces what follows.\textsuperscript{616}

Totemism, another model for understanding relationships between human and nonhuman animals, holds that humans have spiritual connections with animals or plants. According to Deleuze and Guatarri, it is based on “an equivalence of relations, a symbolic understanding based on analogy of proportionality. So for example, a man is to woman what bull is to cow but man is not a bull.”\textsuperscript{617} Because it is a structuration of differences, these relationships are constrained by predetermined structures. Christian theology also depends upon a similar structural model, sometimes referred to as the chain of being.

In all of these analogical models, any new element is situated within a familiar territory. Therefore they privilege the familiar and limit opportunities for experiencing relationships, or even the experience of life itself. Evolution, natural history, myth, and theology, as Deleuze and Guatarri note, create a context in which “the relationships between animals are bound up with the relations between man and animal, man and woman, man and child, man and the elements, man and the physical and microphysical universe.”\textsuperscript{618} This results in a reductively functioning “binary machine.” One example of this is the persistent human-animal divide. As one considers the relationships established during art-making processes and performances, it may be useful to consider whether or not the binary machine is in operation. This might be done by asking if the relationship being created and manifested serves to reinforce, obscure, or dissolve customary boundaries and hierarchies or if what is happening is leading to unexpected and
life-affirming dynamics of relating.

For Deleuze and Guatarri the body is not an entity, does not depend on physical presence, traits, and characteristics, and does not possess boundaries that differentiate it from other bodies. According to their view, “A body is defined only by a longitude and a latitude; in other words the sum total of the material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness (longitude); the sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power or degree of potential (latitude).” They conclude that a body is comprised of affects, local movements, and differential speeds. It is important to remember that affects are not expressions of a self-contained subject; they are not personal feelings or traits.

Bodies are highly fluid and changeable: they are not fixed in time or space. And all boundaries are fluid and permeable. If this is the case, our understanding of what it is to be in relationship with any one or any thing unravels. A radical reconceptualization of relational possibilities — and what it is to be a being — is required. No longer are there individuated subjects and objects interacting with each other, but assemblages which come into being, change, or even dissipate in an ongoing dynamic of becomings.

There are different kinds of becomings. Some include becoming-child, becoming-woman becoming animal, becoming-elementary, becoming-cellular, becoming-molecular, and becoming-imperceptible. Becoming-animal always involves multiplicity. Multiplicity is defined by borders rather than its elements. It
has no center but possesses multiple dimensions. Since it is defined by affects rather than units, it is not divisible. When a dimension is lost or gained its nature is changed. One might think of a swarm of mosquitoes. Bodies are multiplicities, comprised of assemblages that come together, change, or dissipate. Or as Deleuze and Guatarri would put it, processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization are continually occurring.

Instead of individual identities there are packs which move in unison. This is reminiscent of the movement of cockroaches, or flocks of birds in flight. Humans tend to find the first unnerving and the second inspiring, perhaps because of their proximity to us. When birds intrude upon our personal or domestic space (our territory) as was unnervingly demonstrated in Alfred Hitchcock’s film *The Birds*, they become even more menacing than cockroaches. Also disconcerting for humans is the loss of an individual self, another kind of territory. A pack is not a collection of individual animals or units, but a constantly shifting assemblage of two or more affects. The energy that drives this process is not possessed by a particular entity, but rather in the relations within and between affects and other assemblages: Becomings might be said to occur in the space in between rather than within any given entity. These multiplicities enter into assemblages.622

“*Becoming-animal* are neither dreams nor phantasies,” Deleuze and Guatarri explain, “They are perfectly real.”623 Instead it is the individuated self that is an illusion. “If we imagined the position of a fascinated Self, it was because the multiplicity toward which it leans, stretching to the breaking point, is the continuation of another multiplicity toward which it leans, stretching to the
breaking point, is the continuation of another multiplicity that works it and strains it from the inside. In fact, the self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities . . . A fiber stretches from a human to an animal, from a human or an animal to molecules, from molecules to particles, and so on to the imperceptible."624 The fiber is the borderline between human and nonhuman animal. Becoming transforms this from a barrier to a connection. It is not that two discrete beings are bound together, but that there is a shared state.

Becoming is horizontal and subterranean. Once can think of is as a rhizome which is neither a classification nor a “genealogical tree.”625 Becoming involves an alliance in which there are no subjects. It is its own reality, a creation without origins. It is neither the produce of evolution nor a “structure” that can be understood in terms of similarities and difference with other structures or forms. It isn’t a resemblance, an imitation, or an identification.

According to Deleuze and Guattari there are three types of animals: family pets, state animals, and pack animals. The first, pets, run the risk of being appropriated for psychologically regressive or Oedipal purposes. As they harshly express this, “anyone who likes cats or dogs is a fool.”626 The second type of animal populates myths, and they are used as models or archetypes. The third form a molecular pack. The pack animals form a multiplicity that inhabits a space and includes the movements occurring within the same and across heterogeneous populations. Although they do not explicitly say so, humans certainly are within these three types of animals.
The concept of becomings-animal resists natural history’s use of characteristics to classify animals, and the corresponding tendency of societies to use animal characteristics to classify people. Just as becoming is a verb, one could understand “wolf” as “a wolfing.” The animal is no longer a bounded entity but rather a dynamic process. While the elimination of particularity serves to resist categorical limits, it also poses the danger of ignoring the very real needs of animals on a basic physical level. One the other hand, it opens up possibilities for rethinking the human and animal relationship at a time when it is critically important to do so. Becomings-animal could dissolve the boundaries that set each of us apart so that no one is “a definite being distinguished from other beings; nor from all of the becomings running through us.” While Randolph Carter, a character in H. P. Lovecraft’s novel, perceives this as “the nameless summit of agony and dread,” it can also be seen as a profoundly ecological perspective and an antidote to existential isolation. Becoming animal forms “a block that runs its own line ‘between’ the terms in play and beneath assignable relations.”

An animal assemblage is not organized according to state or family structures. Instead, according to Deleuze and Guatarri, becoming-animals requires a human to make an alliance with an exceptional individual in the pack. The individual’s exceptionality is based on its anomalous role in the pack, its deviation from the standard. Anomalous is neither a trait of the individual nor a characteristic of a species. It is also not the perfect specimen: “It is a phenomenon of borderings.”

In One Thousand Plateaus the example of Captain Ahab and Moby Dick
is used repeatedly. Preferring the heroic over the domestic (and indulging in some unexpectedly trite asides which find their sources in stereotypes related to sex and age), Deleuze and Guatarri write, “Ahab’s Moby-Dick is not like the little cat or dog owned by an elderly woman who honors and cherishes it.” Instead Moby-Dick is the White Wall bordering the pack, a demon at the other end of the fishing line. In a dramatic instance of boundary crossing, Captain Ahab is dragged by the whale “that crosses the wall” and drags him “into the void . . .” This exemplifies deterritorialization while the elderly woman with the pet is indicative of Oedipal reterritorialization, a failure to break free from societal and familial constraints. These examples indicate how difficult it is to resist the impulse to categorize, even within a text expressly devoted to dissolving traditional boundaries. The woman-cat assemblage here may in fact be reenacting Oedipal roles, as Deleuze and Guattari assume, or may be engaging in a dynamic that is just as boundary crossing as the imaginary Ahab.

Deleuze and Guattari use an orchid and a wasp as an example of thinking about relationships in terms of assemblages which coalesce and dissolve, rather than as molar units (subjects and objects). One doesn’t understand the wasp and orchid as having a relationship between beings but instead a becoming—the activity of multiplicities which result in an assemblage based on shared affects. An assemblage is not a subject or an object, but a haeccty, a thusness that is not an object. One might imagine cockroach-human as another kind of assemblage. As Chalmers’ work so vividly demonstrates, distinct boundaries — physically, emotionally, and imaginatively—between us and them are a kind of boundary
crossing, a molecular dynamic. The human relationship with cockroaches can be characterized as a dynamic of deterritorializations and reterritorializations. These can create situations and processes that are life affirming or negating. To continue on with efforts at extinction as we have done in the past may very well be an Oedipal impulse, a continuing reaffirmation of the status quo, while reconsidering relationships, as Chalmers’ works suggests we might do, could open up possibilities for a boundary crossing as heroic as that imagined by Deleuze and Guattari for Ahab and that great white whale.
Chapter Six

Enlarging the Field: Animals in Action

The performances created by the artists considered in this chapter illuminate the ever-changing dynamic of relationships between humans and horses in Western societies. Over the past several decades, animal acts that emphasize human-animal relationships and celebrate the innate behaviors of horses have emerged. While still based on some commonly-held assumptions about distinctions between culture and nature arising out of nineteenth century romanticism, they challenge and redefine human-animal relations through expanding our conception of language. Yet even as one binary is deconstructed, another is reaffirmed. It appears to be an endless dynamic. In the performances and relationships described here, nature, as embodied by the horses, is superior to a culture, an artificial cage which isolates people from themselves and the rest of the world. Yet even if they are irresistible, recognizing the limitations of binaries, how they prevent us from engaging the tremendous diversity of life forms and life experiences, is invaluable. We need to remain vigilant that in spite of our urge to direct our attention to one thing or another, this or that, both art and philosophy,
among other disruptions of life, can surprise us into opening up to multi-dimensional spheres of possibilities. The world is so much larger than we two points on a line.

In these works, language is a form of communication that includes all of the senses. It is not simply a linguistic or semiotic system. Although sequences of trained behaviors may be part of the performance, the meaning is driven by an emphasis on communication and relationship between species. Of course it is not as if humans and other animals have never used the senses to communicate, but rather that for a number of reasons over the past few centuries we have been preoccupied with concepts about language that direct our attention away from embodied forms of communication. In the nineteenth century Western societies, reason, the superiority of the written and spoken word, and the ability of humans to control the natural world and even other societies were celebrated.

Preoccupations about human exceptionalism sparked by Darwin’s work in evolutionary biology, imperialism, and the “linguistic turn” in philosophy influenced the Western definition of language and of what it is to be human. As a result language (and culture, for that matter) is understood as uniquely human attribute that make us (and especially during this period, the white Western European and American male) special. The focus then, and still very much so today, was on our uniqueness, rather than what we held in common with other species. In contrast, in these performances, the artists have used practices based on intuitive and sensory exchanges with the animals they are working with.
Especially with the dancers, the relationships are more about “being with,” to use Haraway’s phrase, rather than establishing and maintaining hierarchies.

At the same time, the interactions for the most part are not as “natural” as they might seem. The interactions between humans and horses that follow, with the exception of Nita Little’s, have been shaped into performances that present artistic representations of human-animal relations or of what humans imagine about these animals or about nature. While the performances are based on the natural movements and inclinations of the horses, the horses are not simply acting “naturally.”

During the eighteenth century, artists and philosophers associated with the Romantic Movement celebrated nature as something possessing intrinsic value, in part for the positive effect that “outer nature” had on “inner nature,” the human soul. The divide between nature and culture, including the Romantic view, was challenged by feminists in the twentieth century. For example in their essay on environmental ethics, Andrew Brennan and Yeuk-Sze Lo describe the thesis of Val Plumwood’s 1993 book, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Plumwood believed the oppression of women is “one of many parallel forms of oppression sharing and supported by a common ideological structure, in which one party (the colonizer, whether male, white or human) uses a number of conceptual and rhetorical devices to privilege its interests over that of the other party (the colonized: whether female, people of colour, or animals).” This analysis is particularly relevant to questions associated with the use of living animals in artistic productions in that it clearly describes the relationship between dualism
and the ranking that often accompanies it, and the assumption of the right of
dominance by humans over animals. Accompanying this is the association of
nature with the body and the senses, especially the female body, and culture with
male, mind, language, and reason. And while Romanticism, with its emphasis on
nature and the senses, is often understood as a reaction to the Enlightenment,
positivism, and the celebration of reason, both Romanticism and the
Enlightenment affirm, and even depend on, the same ideological partitioning of
the world. The following contemporary performances frame human and animal
relationships in ways that challenge those binaries.

1. Fenced In

As discussed in the introduction, Said uses the metaphor of a field to in his
description of a scholarly specialization or discipline. Just as with the fields made
by farmers, these scholarly fields are somewhat arbitrary delineations in a much
vaster landscape. What falls within this area seems to “acquire coherence and
integrity.” Over time this cultivated field acquires a sense of inevitability or
stability. Then it appears that the subject matter has a cohesiveness based on its
“agreed upon” characteristics. Yet this sense of permanence is illusory because as
Said points out, “a field can change so entirely, even in the most traditional
disciplines . . . as to make an all-purpose definition of subject matter almost
impossible.” Change occurs because of the sometimes arbitrary shifts in
priorities and interests in various cultures and periods.

Said, among other theorists discussed in this dissertation, believes that
knowledge is not a process of discovery, but one of production. Just as fields are
planted with the aim of produce a specific crop, scholarly disciplines produce particular kinds of knowledge. The knowledge produced in Orientalism, for example, is directed toward relations between the colonized and the colonizers. It is defined, consciously or not, by assumptions that supported the establishment of power relations based on hierarchies which in turn justified Western imperialism. While there are important differences in applying this intra-species theory to interspecies relationships, there are some significant similarities. In her analysis of Said’s work political theorist Margaret Kohn writes,

The term orientalism described *a structured set of concepts, assumptions, and discursive practices* that were used to produce, interpret, and evaluate knowledge about non-European peoples . . . . Said drew attention to the relationship between knowledge and power. By foregrounding the cultural and epistemological work of imperialism, Said was able to undermine the ideological assumption of value-free knowledge and show that ‘knowing the Orient’ was part of the project of dominating it (emphasis added)\(^{636}\)

While Said is referring to the Western production of knowledge about the Middle East, his insights also can be applied to how we produce knowledge about and understand human-animal relations.

In similar ways, the fields of linguistics and semiotics embrace abstract systems that appear to be value free, even as they define systems that recognize only certain human forms of communication and deny nonhuman animals language. This is part of a larger orientation that leads to the framing of human-
animal relations in ways that affirm human superiority. One consequence has been the tendency to overlook a rich array of sensory forms of communication, forms which have always existed between humans, and between and among humans and other species. The “concepts, assumptions, and discursive practices” associated with these fields of study have been used to regulate relations between human and non-human animals in ways which affirm and justify human authority and control.

Just as with orientalism, there is an assumption that we (Western, human) are different from “them” (the animal other, both human and not). Maintaining this outsider position — we are not “animals” — denies or glosses over our own identity and place in the world. Another framing device is culture: As humans, especially as humans living in Western societies, our culture has been a signifier of superiority, as outside of or distinct from nature. Because we live inside the frame we have so meticulously created, these constructs are difficult to discern. Ironically, they seem “natural.” As Said concluded, “systems of thought like Orientalism, discourses of power, ideological fictions—mind-forg’d manacles—are all too easily made, applied, and guarded.”637 While the artists considered here have not broken free from those manacles (How could they?), they are opening gates and exploring the adjoining fields, territories that have been fenced off for a long time.
2. Boundary Crossings

Performances produced by companies such as Théâtre Équestre Zingaro have clear connections with circus traditions. The physical beauty and ability of the horses in the multimedia performances produced by the company, which also include costumes, dramatic lighting, compelling sets, and music, are mesmerizing. Théâtre Zingaro is a 500-seat theater-in-the-round on the outskirts of Paris. Trainers and their families, including Bartabas, the founder, artistic director and lead trainer, and 45 horses, live and work there. Each fall there are two months of equestrian shows that combine theater, dance, music and poetry. According to Bartabas (and many reviewers and critics agree) Théâtre Zingaro’s narrative, design, consistency, broad cultural references drawn from Japanese Butoh dance to Baroque liturgy, and seamless production create an aesthetic animal act that sets it apart from the circus. Bartabas’ skillful use of theatrical elements, which create compelling spectacles, helps to make his unconventional approach more accessible to broad audiences.

While nineteenth century circuses celebrated equestrian abilities and the skill of horse trainers, some contemporary animal acts, including Théâtre Zingaro’s among others, emphasize boundary-crossing narratives which challenge the so-called human/animal abyss and yet assume, even as they seek to transcend, a culture/nature divide. In contrast to the kinds of circus acts presented by trainers such as Astley, which comfortably assume a narrative of human superiority, in these contemporary works the horses seem to be behaving according to their own volition, apparently in complete accord with their two-legged counterparts.
Routines are developed around the animal’s inclinations and behaviors rather than more “theatrical,” artificial, or anthropomorphic movements. Also rather than relying on a system of rewards and punishments, many trainers and artists working with animals today, including Bartabas, seek to control — or perhaps influence might be the preferred term — the horses through giving or withholding a favorite treat.

Another difference is that trainers such as Bartabas select animals based on particular, rather than generic, attributes or tendencies. While in the past trainers may have chosen an animal based on the breed or appearance (color, size, etc.) that would best suit the act, these artists develop routines or choreograph movements which correspond to the personality and behaviors of a particular horse. In other words, the act evolves as an outcome of the artist’s or trainer’s

Figure 19. Bartabas and Zingaro (performance).
experiences with and knowledge of an individual animal. For example it may take
Bartabas several years to develop an act with a particular animal, and it is heavily
influenced by that horse’s personality, tendencies and athletic ability.

Théâtre Zingaro acts grow out of relationships between humans and horses,
or between a particular rider and a particular horse. Bartabas describes his
approach in a 2011 interview:

I don’t make this show to “show” horses — it’s to dive into the depths of
the relationship between man and horse. It’s about working together.
Because you know horses for years and years, you know how to listen —
the ideas come from the horse. When you truly work with animals you
don’t control, you hear the body and the breathing (emphasis added). 640

This passage describes a kind of knowing and way of communicating that relies
on the senses. The emphasis is on relationships that arise out of an embodied
listening, and is quite different from the semiotic sequences described by
Bouissac. It is not a set of arbitrary abstract codes, or rewards and punishments.
While the movements or passages, however spectacular, may draw attention to
the athletic abilities of the horse and/or rider, for Bartabas it is how they —
human and horse — are together that matters.

Bartabas worked with dancer and choreographer Carolyn Carlson together
to create “We Were Horses,” a performance which combined sixteen dancers
from Centre Chorégraphique National Roubaix Nord-Pas de Calais with twelve
horses and riders from the Académie du Spectacle Equestre. During an interview
published in 2011, Bartabas and Carlson shared their perspectives about the
collaboration. According to Bartabas, “Everything is dance,” including acrobatics and trick riding. In this performance his goal was to turn his riders into “horse-riding dancers,” a corps de ballet. Because the horses are difficult to direct and require “knowledge about the way they operate” he choreographed the movements of the horses and riders while Carlson was responsible for the dancers. In spite of his sensitivity to the idiosyncrasies of individual horses, it is interesting to see that Bartabas here is referring to the animals as if they were machines that one must know how to operate.  

Figure 20. Bartabas and Carolyn Carlson, We Were Horses (performance).
Carlson explains that she wanted to do this collaboration because she is “fascinated by horses. They *embody the share of wildness that society has lost.*” Horses create a feeling of well-being since they are free . . . . They have been present *in our culture* since the beginning of humanity. It is part of our collective unconscious” (emphasis added). For Carlson the horses have somehow been able to hold onto the “wildness that society has lost” even though they have always been “present in our culture.” They are both inside culture and outside of it at the same time. Carlson also states that horses are part of us in our collective unconscious, which implies that humans are also inside and outside of culture. In contrast Bartabas does not characterize the horses as being free or wild. Instead he describes a precise training program, yet one that is also sensitive to the needs and temperament of individual animals in any given moment. For example, since a horse’s attention span is short, he notes, “When you teach them new movements, you cannot ask them to repeat them endlessly as you would with actors or dancers. You cannot push them to a point where you get better results. You are working with an animal that hasn’t asked to be there and which doesn’t understand why it’s doing what it’s doing. You therefore have to be extremely vigilant. You have twenty minutes to warm up, twenty minutes of their concentration and then you have another quarter of an hour for relaxation. In the end, twenty minutes a day are all you can use for training.” Improvisation is also difficult, Bartabas explains, because horses are timid. Therefore the trainer can’t make last minute changes. The horses must be introduced to all aspects of the performance beforehand. Bartabas concludes, “You have to be guided by foresight and discipline, as you
would with children. You have to watch out for them. Horses are also very generous. They can die for you. Once they are well prepared, they are totally unlike humans who are aware of their physical limit. You have to curb them so that they don’t hurt themselves.”

Unlike Carlson’s more romantic description of horses as wild and free (and yet part of culture), Bartabas is pragmatic. He sees them as child-like, timid, and easily bored, but still trainable. They are animals that can be trained to present a cultural product: an artistic performance. Yet he also affirms Carlson’s beliefs about their naturalizing effect on humans. Even these carefully trained and long-domesticated animals, according to Bartabas, “help us get back to our instincts.”

In addition to acquiring knowledge of the necessary skills and techniques, the trainer and the rider must be attentive to the horse’s body language because “the animal never reacts the same way and cannot talk.” Further, the time spent with them has taught Bartabas “not to over analyze things and to listen to my feelings.” These lessons, however, are not because of a shared collective unconscious but rather by cultivating sensitivity to the animals’ responses moment by moment.

Scientists studying their behavior have discovered that the horses are attending to the body language of other horses, and of humans, just as carefully as their human trainers. In a study published in 2008, researchers concluded that horses typically use visual signals to communicate and that their history of domestication has aided them in better “reading” human behavior. As is clear from the passage below, humans aren’t the only ones doing the observing:
Subtle changes of the position of their ears, the orientation and widening of the eyes, the dilation of the nostrils, and the tension of the mouth are utilized as parts of communicative signals. Thus, both the history of being domesticated and the predisposition for utilizing visual cues of behavior can provide an advantage for horses in relying on human visual communicative gestures. They respond to the handler’s body language and voice and can perceive and utilize subtle visual cues. The classic example, Clever Hans, showed that horses are able to rely on minute bodily signals emitted by humans.

Clever Hans was owned by Wihelm von Osten, a German math teacher. Von Osten spent four years teaching his horse to count and to tap out the letters to words (i.e., A = 1 and so on). Hans would tap his right foot in response to questions and math problems. He could also nod yes or no and use his head to indicate direction. It also appeared as if Hans could read placards with written words. Von Osten, who did not charge for his horse’s performance, genuinely believed that Hans was not simply trained to respond in particular ways, but could actually think. Ultimately a “Hans Commission” was formed in 1904 to investigate possible fraud. The composition of the commission included a circus manager, a count, teachers, a veterinarian, a major-general, and a physiologist. Since they were unable to discover any trickery or fraud, Hans’ reputation was even further enhanced. The horse became famous, not only in Europe, but also internationally. His abilities were newsworthy enough to be featured in article published in The New York Times.
After the commission disbanded, and upon further investigation, it was discovered that Hans was unable to come up with the correct response if his questioners didn’t know the answer. Eventually it was discovered that Hans was relying on subtle visual cues. He could perceive very slight and subconscious changes in the body language of Van Osten. As one of the investigators, Oskar Pfungst, observed, “The motive for this direction and straining of attention was the regular reward in the form of carrots and bread, which attended it. This unexpected kind of independent activity and the certainty and precision of the perception of minimal movements thus attained, are astounding in the highest degree.”

Hans was able to read extremely subtle changes in the movements of the person anticipating the right answer — even if that person was unaware of making any such movements — and stop tapping at the correct moment.

Anticipating by a century the work of the artists discussed here, and several years after the investigation, Pfungst reflected,

Our horses are, as a rule, sentenced to an especially dull mode of life. Chained in stalls (and usually dark stalls at that) during three-fourths of their lives, and more than any other domestic animal, enslaved for thousands of years by reins and whip, they have become estranged from their natural impulses, and owing to continued confinement they may perhaps have suffered even in their sensory life. A gregarious animal, yet kept constantly in isolation, intended by nature to range over vast areas,
yet confined to his narrow courtyard, and deprived of opportunity for sexual activity — he has been forced by a process of education to develop along lines quite opposite to his native characteristics. Nevertheless, I believe that it is very doubtful if it would have been possible by other methods, even, to call forth in the horse the ability to think. Presumably, however, it might be possible, under conditions and with methods of instruction more in accord with the life-needs of the horse, to awaken in a fuller measure those mental activities which would be called into play to meet those needs.649

The attentiveness to the “life needs” of his horses is a hallmark of Bartabas’ approach. In another interview published in The Guardian in the same year, Bartabas states: “In my technique, I like the horse to be able to do the movement
in his way. It's a very subtle thing, to do with his energy." Listening to the animal is important because it develops empathy. He also takes time. "I work with a horse for six, maybe 10, years," he explains, “And they are all different. I don't cast my work like you would a cast an actor in a film. I make my productions around what the horses can do. I let the horses inspire it." He emphasizes the particular contributions of specific animals. In the same interview, Bartabas reflects, “Horses don't live such a long time. And when they die, it's not only an emotional thing – it also means you lose years of work. Every horse is special; it can do things no other horse can. When he goes, you lose part of yourself. It's like losing an arm or leg. You can never have it back.”

3. Dances of Im/possibility

In an interview with David Williams, Bartabas describes his work as “a joint ‘becoming,’ a collaboration between two forms of intelligence”: “dances of the im/possibility of contact.” This is a kind of communication that may be displayed, but perhaps not shared by the audience. Williams notes, “even if the picture those performances offer is of the merging of two quite different intelligences, the rest of us watch such an encounter at a remove, with Bartabas as our surrogate. Such performance offers a pleasurable distanced fantasy of a cross-species encounter, rather than the philosophical or psychically unsettling challenge of an actual encounter.” He goes on to say it is “an eroticized fantasy of touching the other;” “a fantasy of a magical human transcending the species barrier” and then wonders, “aren't animals once again simply ours to do with as we please?” Williams concludes “in the theatre of animals, the fantasy of animal
contact is usually just that—the fantasy of touching animals and being touched by them.\textsuperscript{651} While the projection of human fantasies onto animals may be a consistent theme in all of the performances discussed in this chapter, it is interesting to notice the dramatic change in their content and tone. Contrasted with the nineteenth century performances of Mazeppa, with its thrill of the forbidden and sexually eroticized nature of the horse-human contact, the “eroticized fantasy of touching the other” here is a longing for connection and the recognition of a desire for that cross-species connection described by Diane Ackerman.

In contrast to the views expressed above, many equine ethnologists think horses are much more in culture than in nature, or in other words that their natural environment is a cultural one. In a study on how horses see the world, and more specifically, if they see humans as “significant objects,” the researchers noted that “through domestication, the human environment now represents the ecological life conditions for this species . . . [therefore] domesticated horses allow researchers to evaluate animals’ perception of humans in “natural” interactions.”\textsuperscript{652} Domesticated horses and humans have the same habitat, not different ones, and furthermore, one is not more “natural” than the other. Also, as noted in the last chapter, domesticated animals, by definition, have been selectively bred by humans for their own purposes. For example, not only is the behavior of horses influenced by culture, but physiologically formed by it. This may change as humans become more skilled with genetic manipulation. Also there is increasing recognition that culture does have physiological effects on
humans. To sum it up, the nature/culture binary is increasingly blurred; even as
the horse continues to signify a natural realm outside of culture, and humans are
distinguished/contaminated by their association with culture.

4. A Ground Of Inequivalence

In her essay, “Dancing Attention on a Ground of Inequivalence,” Nita
Little describes her interactions with a horse named Kate during a workshop
offered by Joanna Mendl Shaw, creator of the Equus Project. Little is interested in
exploring the relationship between the territories of her own body and that of the
horse’s. The relationship between these territories is defined by the attention each
gives to the other’s responses in a form of dance called Contact Improvisation.

Contact Improvisation has been described as a “framework for an improvised duet”
and “a dance of investigation of weight, touch, and communication.”

The encounter between Little and Kate occurred in a ring formed by
people holding a bungee cord. (My attention is drawn to how we name people and
animals. Should I be referring to them as Nita and Kate? Little and the horse?)
Little entered the ring at the point where the previous dancer had exited, behind
and to one side of the horse. Because at this point Kate was standing with her
body and her head lowered, Little interpreted the horse’s position and posture as
one of disinterest—or at the least as disengaged—and mirrored this by putting
the animal in her own visual periphery. “I know, as I enter the ring, that how I
play the edge of this horse’s attention will set the stage for all that is to follow,”
Little writes, “I want her attention to soften with relaxation when she meets me. I
want her to make the call for her boundaries to expand and to bring me into her foreground. I do not want to demand it of her . . . rather; I prefer to let her consider me.” Little describes this peripheral vision as “edge of attention,” as “a potent place,” which is spatial rather than linear or cognitive, and so it may be for humans.

Because horses have monocular vision, they use their eyes in an asymmetrical way. They can see what is to one side or the other more clearly than objects that are directly in front of them. They also can see distant objects more easily than things that are close to them. This is why they will raise their heads to see things that are within four feet, but lower their heads, as Kate was doing to look at things that are further away. Since Little is behind and off to one side, and also not too close, she is actually in a position where Kate, whose lateral vision extends to 205 degrees, can easily see her. Little is very likely not at all in the periphery of Kate’s vision. Also when confronted with an unknown object, horses tend to examine it using one eye. They do not turn their heads from side to side to get a better view, as those with frontal vision might be inclined to imagine they do. In contrast to Kate’s position, which allows her to get a good look at the dancer, Little has decreased her ability to see Kate. On a purely visual level, the two were having very different experiences.

The shape of their bodies gives horses a horizontal orientation toward space, which in turn influences the movements they are included to make. Little is aware that they are herd animals and subject to attack by predators. Further, and although this idea has been disputed by some equine ethologists, Little accepts the
premise of the Parelli natural horsemanship system that horses can smell meat-eaters and so consider meat-eating humans to be predators. Little believes Kate is predisposed to be suspicious of her and so wants to behave in ways that will reassure the animal. On the other hand, since she had been observing Kate’s reactions to other dancers and perceived that the horse was not engaging with them, Little wants to behave in ways that will arouse Kate’s interest.

Little is bringing to this encounter a number of ideas, based on research and observations, about why Kate is behaving in a particular way, but at the same time is very attentive to what the horse is doing at each moment. Little is also focused on shifts in her own internal state which she believes will put her in the “front and center” of the horse’s awareness. When the horse begins to approach her, Little attributes this move to her own attentiveness. “By touching her with my spatial attention (not my eyes or my physical body),” Little explains, “I had brought her with me. The tiny drag that happens when surfaces adhere in touch was enough pull to engage her in motion, probably before she even knew she was moving. I had accomplished a level of tactility that preceded decisions with my spatial attention producing a surface with which she was enminded into action.”

Perhaps it was Little’s attention that drew the horse closer, perhaps not. As discussed above, horses are highly skilled at reading humans, including responding to subtle eye cues (possibly by detecting fine movement of the eyes) as well as overall body and head orientation. In experiments where horses are left to freely move about in a ring, eighty percent of the time they move toward the
person with the more attentive posture, such facing and looking at the horse if that person is not holding work gear such as a halter or a bridle.\textsuperscript{658}

More recent studies of equine behavior confirm Uexküll’s theory (at least with respect to horses): organisms construct their own subjective world. For example, horses choose objects that are significant for them. Since animals regularly encounter other species, they can identify humans as significant and interact with them in ways that are meaningful for them, and clearly also meaningful for humans.\textsuperscript{659} Horses such as Kate, who had a history of positive experiences with humans, were also more likely to respond in an affirmative way to people they did not know, demonstrating an ability to generalize their experiences.\textsuperscript{660} In the study these horses would even approach people who had their backs to them or were not looking directly at them, as was the case with Little. The horses would walk in front of the people who were turned away and also use tactile gestures such as nudging.\textsuperscript{661} The communicative exchange here may have been more dialogic that Little imagines. Rather than “drawing” Kate to her, the horse may have decided to investigate this novel human more closely, based on a number of factors, including her own observations which indicated that Little was neither acting in a threatening way nor holding any work gear.

Some of the questions Little raises are especially relevant to interspecies communication: “How do species make meaning together when [human] speech is not an option? When brains are different, when thoughts emerge through bodies that have such profound dissimilarities?” Since the horse is not a human dancer, Little observes, “there are not those agreements here between us and we cannot
have a conversation to establish the grounds for this process. To do this kind of dance, I have let the horse feel my attention while also letting her know that I feel hers.” Little describes this experience as occurring on a “ground of inequivalence.” She explains, “What I hold in mind with the striking of a bell is certainly different from what ‘comes’ to you [as a human]. Not only is the sound that reverberates through my bodily awareness moving me differently on a cellular level, but the synaptic engagement of areas of the brain are unique to me.”

Little strives to remain sensitive to this inequivalence, which is perhaps even more acute across species, as she tries to have an “an attentional conversation” with Kate. The dance is not about “what happened and when” but “who did what” in a shared space that was neither Little’s nor Kate’s. While it was certainly shared, ownership rights might tilt in Little’s favor, given that she freely entered the ring while Kate was placed and kept there by human handlers, but perhaps this is also part of the inequivalence. Little recognizes that horses, as domesticated animals, and particularly Kate, because of her experiences with other dancers and her attentive owner, lived “a life keyed toward people and their actions.” Next, as Little recalls,

Kate put her muzzle in the palm of my hand! A simple moment, physical touch. It surprised me. And, although she could have been looking for a carrot, I think not. I knew what it was by the feel of her soft lips (my eyes remained reaching into the vertical). Behind her lips I could lightly feel the presence of firmer structures, teeth and bone were pressing into my
hand slightly, moving her felt sense into my body, not playing with its surface (emphasis provided).

In this moment, as Kate is pressing her muzzle and nibbling into Little’s hand, there is a period of almost full-engaged mutuality. I say “almost” because Little is still looking away. She is not turning her visual attention to the physicality of their exchange, but holding onto the idea of being a conduit between the horizontality of the horse and the verticality of the human. Little continues,

*The choice in how I understood her action was critical and significant* — a thing to bring thought to. All further meaning would flow from this moment. *Her intelligence was literally there in the palm of my hand . . . mine to assign. This would happen through the way my return touch would name her.* Who was she that she would put her muzzle in my hand? What is her purpose? I could understand and meet that purpose as open to possibility, the action of curiosity or I could reduce it to a relatively narrow range of wants and needs. The feeling of her soft lips touching the inside curvature of my palm, her breath upon it, and the way she held touch as she moved into it, the feeling of reach into my body told me she was entering me, speaking to me, engaged in knowing rather than finding (emphasis added).663

Little’s perception that Kate is not looking for food while investigating Little’s hand has the support of other observers of equine behavior. The nibbling that Little describes so well is part of social interactions between horses, between horses and humans, and during a horse’s exploration of a “novel non fear-
inducing object.” Nibbling has been defined by these researchers as an “exploratory/affiliative” behavior that is not associated with food. It also does not lead to biting or other aggressive behaviors.

In spite of the powerful experience of touching, several points of separation emerge. First, Little retains the power to “name” the experience. Also, while Kate is apparently fully absorbed in the moment, Little is also interpreting it. Little considers whether the experience is one in which the horse is “speaking” and “engaged in knowing” her or simply acting out of a “narrow range of wants and needs,” such as searching for something to eat. A third possibility, not mentioned here, is a combination of both — that Kate might be “engaged in knowing” even as she is satisfying her “wants and needs.” Finally, Little has entered the ring with a set of intentions that Kate does not share. One is to engage in Contact Improvisation and the other is to explore the concept of enmindedness. Enmindedness is an experience where mind and body are not separate but act as one. It truly is a moment of contact between beings living in the same space and, simultaneously, two different worlds.

Kate appears to be experiencing the “enmindedness” that Little is exploring in this dance. Little seems to be flickering back and forth between enmindedness and a more abstract conceptual thinking. Little is both inside and outside of the moment, acutely aware of the embodied senses but also raising questions, and as she states earlier, maintaining a connection with the vertical. This might be understood as a kind of bilingualism in that Little is translating back and forth between a purely embodied language and an abstract language.
This bilingualism separates the human from fully participating in the horse’s experience. We might assume, but cannot know if Kate is fully immersed either, although it is probably safe to assume that she is having the same experiences as Little.

While Kate is not participating in the internal dialogue that Little is experiencing, she is paying attention. This is yet another layer of communication. Little notes that this attention itself is “meaningful between us; actions fluidly enacted between physicality and attentionality.” For the horse to be part of a duet, and not simply a prop, Little writes, “she [Kate] needed to feel herself in the dance as it was made.” Therefore Little creates a space where Kate can concentrate on Little without being distracted by remaining still. Little observes that the action of concentration has “no words in language which adequately represent this sensory level of awareness.” Little believes that one can concentrate others, even if they do not wish to have this happen. It can be a form of unwelcome control or a gift. In this dance, Little understands herself as “being concentrated by Kate, and moving within the sphere of her ‘living attention’”

Little goes on to say, “Although working with a horse is different, it is also not different in that my attention to the quality of the space of our mutual meeting was on some level a shared language. My participation in the making of the concentration, as well as in receiving it, was information that Kate could understand. It is a visceral level knowing.”

What Little and Kate are doing is attentive and fully embodied listening. This isn’t to say that at times during this encounter their thoughts might wander.
For example, when Little is imagining that she is the vertical axis, which gives Kate access to the stars, yet her attention and her senses are at best divided. Little describes this as a shared “actuality of bodies” and a “shared but non-parallel meaning.” While it does seem as if the embodied experience is shared, particularly during those moments of nuzzling, and appears to be enjoyable and even meaningful to both of them, the experiences are parallel rather than shared. Little understands the exchange as a dance, while certainly Kate does not “think” about what is happening in this way. Both are primarily engaged with each other, however, rather than on presenting a performance to an audience.

Little’s physical contact with Kate is based on awareness and intentionality in each moment. She compares what she is doing with the French ethnologist Jean-Claude Barrey’s concept of isopraxis, which describes how homologous muscles move at the same time in riders who are attuned to their horses. In the same way, Little believes that in her dance with Kate the influence of one upon the other is mutual, as was also the case with Bartabas’ experiences. However, the difference is that for Little’s performance, the communicative exchange has intrinsic value, while for Bartabas, successful communication results not only in a connection between horse and rider, but also is used as an instrumental tool for creating a compelling performance for audiences.

5. Un/Stable Landscape
Choreographer Joanna Mendl Shaw directs the Equus Project. Her work includes large-scale site works for dancers and horses that are shown on stage and in rural and urban landscapes. At times she works collaboratively with equestrians in various locations. Mendl Shaw describes these dances as being created through “nonverbal conversations” between humans and horses. Often the interactions are separated by “interlude of unpressured time” when the human dancers are not asking for the horses’ attention. As mentioned in the discussion of Nita Little’s experience with Kate, Mendl Shaw’s work is informed by the Parelli Natural Horsemanship (PNH) equine training system. PNH training is codified into seven exercises and takes into account the horse’s temperament (i.e., introverted, extroverted, etc.) which in this system is called horsenatalities. Many of Mendl Shaw’s works with horses occurs in round pens where the horses are free to move about without restraint, yet at the same time they can’t seek refuge in a corner where they might avoid contact with their human trainers if they wish to do so.

In the following passage Mendl Shaw describes an experience that demonstrates the shift from making an animal perform to creating a space where the relational aspects between the horse and the human can be explored.

I have had wonderful dances with her [Tory] in the past, moving with her in an open arena where she is free to canter away from me and then come back when she is ready. She likes moving big, striding alongside me. This round pen is fifty feet in diameter, made with six-foot panels of high metal fencing. As round pens go, it is very open and airy, but sometimes the round pen feels confining to Tory. Knowing that she is prone to
claustrophobia, I start with quiet, free-flowing movement, undemanding and somewhat contained in space.

I offer her my hand to sniff then stroke her, especially at her poll (behind the ears) and haunches. These are two of her favorite spots. Then I move to the opposite side of the round pen and focus on pulling some weeds that are growing up through the sandy footing. This activity takes my attention away from Tory and allows her an interlude of unpressured time—time when I am not waiting or asking for her attention. Even stroking is a form of asking for attention! Within a few seconds Tory comes to me, offering another itchy spot for rubbing. We repeat that sequence of events. The dance has already begun in this quiet sequence of stroking and scratching, leaving and returning.

Moving to the next stage of requesting in our nonverbal conversation, I direct my attention to her neck, behind the ears. Without touching her, I add some rhythmic pulsing with my hands directed toward her neck. She yields, stepping left leg across right in a perfect equine pirouette. I change my focus to her haunches and repeat the rhythmic motion, pressing toward her hindquarters, again through gesture, which yields another pirouette, this time with the haunches moving. We rest. She licks and chews. (Licking and chewing is an equine behavior that communicates acknowledgment and a state of willingness to engage.)

As is evident from this passage, the focus is on using the animal’s own inclinations and instincts even as the movements arising out of these encounters
are organized into sequences that will come together in a repeatable, choreographed performance.

Like Bartabas, Mendl Shaw emphasizes a relational and embodied approach. Instead of discipline, the emphasis is on building a relationship based on mutual trust and respect for the animal. And, like Carlson, Mendl Shaw works within a binary that affirms the value of the “natural” over the “rational.” Mendl Shaw wants to “fram[e] equine behavior in ways that reveal its natural beauty rather than parroting rehearsed sequences.” While the emphasis is on apparently spontaneous movements, the human trainer/choreographer/performer is still framing and controlling the situation. The horses are typically in some kind of enclosure, often a round pen, and are “at liberty,” meaning that they are not being controlled by means of a harness or any kind of physical restraint.

Both the training process and the performance present narratives about human-horse relationships, although what these mean for the horses involved obviously can only be imagined. The story of Hamlet suggests how different these perspectives can be. Once Hamlet learned a routine, he would skip to the end. Using a technique learned from circus trainers, Mendl Shaw began rehearsing “skill sets” out of order; the proper sequence was only done during an actual performance. So while Mendl Shaw was creating a representation of human-animal relations which foregrounded the horse’s “natural” behavior, Hamlet apparently preferred to be done with the whole thing as soon as possible.
During periods when the Equus Project dancers weren’t actually working with the horses they experimented with these horsenatalies. Mendl Shaw describes this as steering “clear of imitating equine behavior but investigat[ing] states of being, out of which movement motifs would develop.” One dancer would establish a horsenatality and then the second dancer would create a movement dialogue. The second dancer was essentially responding as he or she would have if partnering with a horse. Mendl Shaw describes these exercises:

[They were] defined by the fundamental curiosity of a moving body — its playfulness or fearfulness, its survival instincts, and its comfort levels. Though we started by rehearsing a way of being with a horse, what evolved was a distinctive way of dancing with another human. By exploring rules of engagement, the horses [including the imagined horses] were teaching us a lot about ourselves.\(^{671}\)

The close physical contact with the horses highlighted the ways in which states of mind such as playfulness or fear are embodied and also expressed by movement. Another outcome was that the human dancers became more attentive to not only their own bodies but also their partner’s. They were developing a physical or movement vocabulary.

This can be compared with Bakhtin’s insights on heteroglossia or the “social diversity of speech types” first presented in the introduction.\(^{672}\) Heteroglossia is both the effect of and the expression of particular contexts or environments. As such, the senses play an extremely important role in all forms of communication, including artistic expression, and for animals as well as for
humans. To repeat Bakhtin, “Each word [and I would add all other forms of expression] tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life.” Although Bakhtin acknowledges the connections between language and the physical realm, and recognizes that “all utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup,” he comes to the very edge of doing so (one might say within a whisker), he does specifically include animals in his discussion.

Bakhtin’s theory of language demonstrates how messy it can be. Every communicative act has a constellation of intended and perceived meanings, all in play with each other. Missed communications, miscommunications abound, even if the intention is to be perfectly clear. The methodical system such as that proposed by semiotics becomes a complex universe with countless possibilities. An utterance (a spoken word, statement, or vocal sound) is one of many links in innumerable chains of speech acts. Utterances are not simply generated by an individual, but are "responsive reactions to other utterances." Each utterance has boundaries, responsivity or dialogicality; a point where the speaker has finished, and a generic form. The generic form depends on the sphere where the communication is occurring, and yet at the same time it is maintained by the speech genre. If the genre doesn’t match the sphere, the one communicating is seen as incompetent by others in that sphere. A sphere could be a professional, social, or familial environment, among others. As Mendel Shaw and her dancers were learning, competence in communicating might also occur in public spheres or social worlds that include other species.
Mendl Shaw’s studio-based work led to the development of intricate scores which, when brought back to the horses, was “humbling.” Mendl Shaw discovered that motions couldn’t simply be clever or graceful. If the dancers were to engage the horses, each gesture had to be clear. Her choreographic vocabulary was simplified as the dancers all learned how to “merge attending and intending.” Every gesture was an embodied utterance that was embedded and could only be understood in context. An utterance — a spoken word, statement, or vocal sound — is one of many links in innumerable chains of speech acts. Utterances are not simply generated by an individual, but are “responsive reactions to other utterances.” According to Bakhtin, each utterance has four traits: boundaries, responsivity or dialogicality; a ending (where the speaker has finished), and a generic form.

The generic form depends on the sphere where the communication is occurring, and yet at the same time, as communications scholar John Shutter observes, “the sphere is created and maintained by its speech genre.” A sphere could be a professional, social, or familial environment, among others. As the Equus Project dancers tried to use the vocabulary they have developed in the studio with the horses, the horses essentially judged them as incompetent and so adjustments had to be made.

The “utterances” developed and then refined by Mendl Shaw can be organized into six movements:

• tracking and sponging (vs. imitation),
• herding scores,
shaping in space,

alpha negotiations,

logging material (doing and remembering), and

shaping the logged material into phrase material.

The careful attending to the horses’ movements, and the animals’ responses to the dancers’ movements, expanded the troupe’s “kinetic dialogue.” Emotional behavior, whether on the part of the horses or the humans, was put aside. Rather than being confrontational, dancers explored “movement situations.” Mendl Shaw reflects that “The high-energy, aggressive-for-no-reason duets that are the mainstay of some dance repertory began to seem fairly simplistic compared to the jagged and complex, often quite raw, and nuanced Round Pen interactions” where the human performer focuses on reacting to the horse’s responses and movements.680

One example of a site-specific work that uses this movement vocabulary is *Un/Stable Landscape*. The dance, which involved ten dancers and five horses, was performed in the paddocks and hillside pasture of a small farm in Pownal, Maine. Mendl Shaw and her colleague, Minneapolis dancer Carl Flink, wanted to create a dance that would “move people, create visual beauty, and honor the horses. Our goal was to entertain the spectators while taking the time to truly engage the horses.”681 The dance was a series of frames that Mendl Shaw hoped would present “equine behavior in ways that revealed its natural beauty rather than parroting rehearsed sequences.”682 The challenge was to create and rehearse the piece in ways which would continue to engage the horses and prevent them
from anticipating cues. At the conclusion, the dancers and horses were going to leave the paddock and run up the hillside together.

To prevent the horses from bolting out of the open gate and up the hillside, the ending was only practiced once. Careful planning, combined with an awareness of equine behavior, led to the desired outcome. At the conclusion of each of the two performances, as Mendl Shaw recalls, “the horses waited *patiently* for the gate to be opened, then trotted alongside the dancers, moving in cadence with them, ears forward, relaxed, and *happy* to simply trot with their human herd up the hillside.”

This sentence is quite rich in its complicated expression of the human artist/horse relationship. In this piece Mendl Shaw was able to realize her vision of successfully integrating human and horses in a movement situation. The horses did move alongside the dancers in ways that clearly were full of ease. The horses and humans are moving together in a hybrid herd. Yet at the same time, the attribution of what are perhaps human emotions to horses is irresistible. This is not to deny that animals have emotions. If the horses were waiting patiently, then they would need to anticipate what the next move was, the very situation that Mendl Shaw had painstakingly worked to prevent from happening. While the moment in the dance is one of seamlessly paired experiences of human dancers and horses, this description reveals the different “linguistic consciousnesses” of the two species.
Figure 22-24. Joanna Mendl Shaw, *Un/stable Landscape* (performance).
6. Unfinalizable Relationships

In the works discussed above, narratives shift from an emphasis on human control or domination to one in which relationships characterized by respect and understanding are increasingly important. Rather than acts that depend upon either anthropomorphized behaviors or the ability of the trainer/rider to control the animal, the emphasis is on performances which highlight sensory and embodied forms of communication that appear equitable and “natural.”

Nature, as embodied by the horses, is celebrated in these works. The artists and trainers often speak of this as preferable to a human culture. Rather than affirming the superiority of reason, progress, and culture, a vision of the natural world where humans can communicate with animals in ways that affirm each other’s natural and innate qualities is the goal. The binary division between culture and nature, reason and instinct, and mind and body, and human and animal are not challenged. Instead the performance seeks to bridge or transcend them. Therefore, although what is traditionally less valued has been elevated, the nature-culture dichotomy are affirmed.

In Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Bakhtin uses the concept of polyphony, or many voices, to describe the ways in which the novel permits individual voices to each express their own view. These voices do not add up to one complete whole nor do they necessarily contradict each other. Instead, polyphony is related to the “unfinalizable self.” Bakhtin believed that people can always change, and also that someone can never be fully known. Expanding
Bakhtin’s communicative sphere beyond speech, to include other sensory forms of communication and other species increases the range, texture, and richness of this musically inspired concept, further extending the “multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships” and also the various multilayered links between utterances and languages.\textsuperscript{683} Also, as is the case with humans, while one can establish relationships with animal others, they can also never be fully known.

In all of the works discussed in this chapter, just as the heteroglossic novel is an artistic representation of language, not language itself, these performances are artistic representations of relationships between horses and humans. The difference is that while these are representations, the performers and trainers and the animals must develop relationships based on some kind of shared understanding of each other and some degree of trust and/or confidence in the predictability of their partner’s responses. The artwork comes together into what appears to be a cohesive whole, even though various humans and horses may be expressing an array of understandings and sensibilities. The later works of the Equus Project also seek to present two social languages — a hybridization — that brings together two “different linguistic consciousness[es].”\textsuperscript{684} Just as with the hybrid novel, a dance such as Un/stable Landscape is what Bakhtin has described as “an artistically organized system for bringing different languages into contact with one another, a system having as its goal the illumination of one language by means of another, the crying-out of a living image of another language.”\textsuperscript{685}
These works also employ what Bakhtin calls stylization, the “artistic image of another’s language.” The artists (Bartabas, Mendl Shaw) are representing the horses in ways that seek to “mutually illuminate” each other—and also the many languages which lie between the poles of stylized language and parody.686 This stylization, according to Bakhtin, is the image of the language as imagined by the stylizer. Finally, while Bakhtin is referring to oral and written language, there is an almost palpable sense of an impulse to expand beyond this limitation: “The dialogic contrast of languages (but not of meanings within the limits of a single language) delineates the boundaries of languages, creates a feeling for these boundaries, compels one to sense physically the plastic forms of different languages.”687 Language is not only a “dialogue of social forces” but language itself is determined by these social forces. The recognition of who speaks and who does not changes.

As Bakhtin notes with respect to the novel, and as is exemplified in the works of the artists considered in this chapter,

Dialogue is determined by the very socio-ideological evolution of languages and society. A dialogue of languages is a dialogue of social forces perceived not only in their static co-existence, but also as a dialogue of different times, epochs, and days, a dialogue that is forever dying, living, being born: co-existence and becoming are here fused into an indissoluble concrete unity that is contradictory, multi-speeched and heterogeneous . . . from this dialogue of languages, these images take their openendedness, their inability to say anything once and for all, or to think
anything through to its end, they take from it their lifelike concreteness, their ‘naturalistic quality’.

Just as Mendl Shaw discovered during her troupe’s exploration of a movement vocabulary, “what is realized . . . is the process of coming to know one’s own language as it is perceived in someone else’s language, coming to know one’s own belief system in someone else’s system.”

Performances such as those of the Equus Project, while still employing symbolic representations, recognize the particularity and preferences of the animals in them. The processes used to create the artwork are literal, in that they engage and build relationships between the human and animal performers in ways, which affirm the value of sensory and embodied communication. Scientific knowledge about the animals informs but is not a substitute for paying close attention and to recognize that horses not only respond but can also initiate or deny exchanges.

Language, if present at all in these performances, is one more possible means of expression. In contrast, the earlier performances such as those discussed in the circus acts, used bodies and senses to symbolically express what could be readily translated into a verbal narrative. An Un/stable Landscape does not only refer to a dance by the Equus Project, but also as Said suggests, fields of knowledge, arbitrarily defined and continually shifting, which define relationships. While the “mind-forg’d manacles—are all too easily made, applied, and guarded,” and the bonds we have constructed are not easily shed, art does have the capacity to open the paddock gate.
Performances such as those of the Equus Project, while still employing symbolic representations, recognize the particularity and preferences of the animals in them. There is a genuine attempt to engage in cross species communication. The processes use to create the artwork engage and build relationships between the human and animal performers in ways, which affirm various forms of sensory and embodied communication. In these dances Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia is expanded to include an embodied animal rhetoric that includes all the senses. Unlike the matrixed performances of the circus acts discussed earlier, where animal bodies and actions were translated into a human narrative, the works in this chapter are not necessarily untranslatable in a solely human language. Instead, they are a hybrid. The artists make an effort to understand the subaltern animal on his or her own terms, rather than expecting the animal to articulate something we can recognize within our own symbolic systems.

Closing Reflections

I designed this project with the aim of bringing together three important areas in my life: animals, the arts, and philosophy. I wanted this research to
address questions that have preoccupied me for a long time, some for as long as I can remember. The questions are both ongoing and foundational ones for the artists, ethics, and relationships between humans and so-called “animals:”

- Is it ever really possible to think a new thing, or to think about things in a new way?
- Can someone ever really understand what someone else (any animal, not just the human kind) is thinking and experiencing?
- How does the way we make art and articulate influence how we think and how we understand each other? In particular, how can we become more sensitive to and use our senses to engage with others and the world around us?

These are broad questions and it took some time to figure out how to create a research project that could contain them.

After reading Derrida’s essay, “The Animal That therefore I Am,” I decided to focus my research on human and animal relations, using the perspectives afforded by continental philosophy, and deconstruction in particular. Deconstruction can work as a prism that reveals a spectrum of ideas and insights. In this practice what once seemed familiar can be understood as containing or pointing to the unknown, ignored, or overlooked. Because the arts uses many different forms of sensory media, considering the these works through the lenses offered by deconstruction provide pathways for, at best, increasing understanding between species and, at the minimum, making us more aware of the tenuous nature of our assumptions with regard to other species. As Morton as pointed out,
“Aesthetics . . . performs a crucial role, establishing ways of seeing and perceiving this place.”† While Morton was writing about “nature” more generally, the same applies to “animals.” Art is a vital means for discerning what lies beyond those typical forms of human communication, the written and spoken word. I decided to explore artworks that included living animals, and more particularly, the relationships between contemporary artists and the animals. These relationships include both what occurs during the period when the artwork is being created — the artistic practices — and what is expressed as a result of those processes. All of this, along with the engagement of audiences, can be understood as part of the situated textualities described by Hunter. A matrix of practices, materials, beings, and contexts inform each other in every artwork consider here, and contribute to our understanding of human-animal relations. I have only picked up a few of these strands to examine in this project.

Some of the artists I have written about challenge us to reconsider how we think about and treat animals. At other times, and sometimes unintentionally, they reiterate the status quo. The artworks discussed present perhaps an idiosyncratic history of U.S. and northern European relationships with animals over the past few centuries. Most of my attention is directed toward art created during the last fifty years. However each work considered occurs at a signature moment in human-animal relations. Most of the works were made by artists and institutions located in the United States or in Northern Europe, and so are influenced by those cultural heritages and societal conventions.
Learning more about the display of animals in the dioramas, zoos, and circuses over the past few hundred years provided helpful historical context. As one considers the history of our relations with animals in these institutional settings, the pattern of imposing upon them the preoccupations and desires of our own species becomes clear. Often, and sometimes almost literally, the animals are made to enact equivalents of human words and actions. Just as Spivak has noted in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” the use of animals in this way does not recognize that they have a language outside of the imposed human discursive practices.

One common theme that emerges from my consideration of the natural history dioramas, the circus rings, and zoo cages, and even Beuys’ performance, is that all the works considered have the same perspective. In each a particular version of reality or truth, whether it be Akeley’s organicism or Beuys’ shamanism, is presented in a monologic manner. Also each frames the animal in ways that reveal more about humans than the animals. We look at the animals but do not interact with them. They are objects of admiration or curiosity. None are presented as particular individuals. All are symbolic — animals that have been transformed into disembodied anthropomorphized abstractions. The individual’s or the species’ particular needs and desires are overlooked.

For example, it appears that Beuys was sincere in his efforts to expose ideological assumptions and undermine positivism through the use of artistic, antirational, and shamanistic methods. Ironically however his critique of and effort to heal the wounds of imperialism and genocide through a symbolic
performance blinded him to the ways in which he was re-enacting those very practices.

Beuys did not have the perspective of the critiques offered by postcolonial or environmental theorists such as Morton, who calls for an ecology without relying on the cultural construction we call nature. Duprat and Chalmers are also engaged with challenging binaries such as art and nature, art and science, or human and animal, but use critiques directed to our senses rather than our intellect. This is not to say that their work does not demand an intellectual as well as a visceral response.

In contrast Bartabas and Carlson in many ways reinforce long-standing binaries, just as Beuys did. They embrace idealistic representations of horses as romantic embodiments of nature and nobility. In particular Carlson, as well as Akeley and Beuys, use imaginary external reference points, which deflect them from responding to the living animal before them. They all looked elsewhere for what is essentially is an Eden-like ideal. All affirm an essentially romantic approach in which animals are the embodiment of nature while humans are contained, and sometimes even corrupted, by culture. The belief that nature is “natural” rather than a cultural construct is challenged by Morton. He observes, “the very word environmentalism is an example of wishful thinking” because there is no other “it” to take care of.692 Both nature and animal are not things that simply surround or differ from us. He hopes that we may “yet return to the idea of the “thing” to its older sense of meeting place,” in order to create ‘a society that
fully acknowledged . . . we were always already involved in our world.” The “thing” here is not an object or an other, but a shared circumstance.

Morton’s work perhaps builds on the earlier thinking of Harding and Haraway, who have both observed that we are never on the “outside” looking in, but already and always implicated in the world offer grounding alternatives to this abstract and utopian stance. There is no place we can go to “get out of the way.” Maintaining an active awareness of this insight can help artists — and the rest of us — to be more self-reflexive as we remember to ask, “What kind of relationship do we have?” and “How is this relationship expressed both materially and in practice in the artworks we are implicated in, in one way or another?” Bartabas’ relationship with animals still contains idealizing tendencies but he also seems to be aware of the highly situated context of his relations with the horses, both as a species and as individuals, with the performing arts environment. Although he acknowledges the animal’s intrinsic value, he uses his knowledge instrumentally to train the animals with the aim of creating what Peterson describes as matrixed performances.

Derrida’s warning about the violence of concepts also comes to mind as I consider the work of some of these artists. He calls for a language that will curtail the violence incurred by the human-animal binary, which denies the tremendous diversity of life. Both art and philosophy depend on languages for communication and articulation. The language of philosophy is abstract, while the language of art also includes the senses. To challenge this binary, he examines the ways in which the words we use have the power to erase our awareness of the diversity and value
of singular living beings. He discards “animal” for the less constricted *l’animot*, to emphasize the particular animal, an animal who is irreplaceable. Chalmers, with the same aim in mind, challenges the binary by creating visual situations in her photographs and videos in which humans cannot easily dismiss the animal other.

What is common in the work of Duprat, Chalmers, Little, and Mendl Shaw is the commitment to understand and respond to the needs of the animal other. This attending to the other is a form of discourse, and developing a deep understanding of the animals, at the least on a physiological level, is crucial to their work. These discourses differ in that Duprat and Chalmers rely on the natural sciences while Little and Mendl Shaw use dialogical practices. Chalmers and Duprat carefully provide for the needs of their animals and are committed to creating optimum living conditions for them. Both artists also describe their struggle with defining these relationships with the “other.” Duprat searches for the right ways of describing just what kind of relationship he has with caddis fly larvae, while Chalmers questions her right to determine which particular animal lives and which one dies. Each life is unique; each one matters. Chalmers positions the animals in ways that demand our response; her work is a manifestation of the face-to-face encounter described by Lévinas.

In their embodied dialogues with horses Little and Mendl Shaw are trying hard not to put “words” in the mouths of these animals. For both artists, the differences in the ways horses and humans literally see the world demonstrate some of the challenges in cross species communication. Inevitably there are missed signals, misinterpretations, and impositions of meaning on the part of the
humans, and perhaps also on the part of the horses. It is very difficult — perhaps it is impossible — to hear not what you are listening for, but instead to receive what another being, another species, is expressing.

Both Chalmers and Duprat produce physical objects that are intended for others to view and react to. In contrast, the dances of Little and Mendl Shaw are more involved with process rather than product. In some sense, an audience is not even necessary. Instead the embodied connection of dancer and horse is the artistic expression. It suggests a participatory art with no onlookers and is instead private dialogue between participating beings. Letting go of the artistic “product” may be one way of truly engaging with the horses, who also do not have the creation of a product in mind, but are living in the present moment, or at least that is how it seems. In their efforts to dance with horses, both Little and Mendl Shaw seek to embody various kinds of assemblages and becomings such as those described by Deleuze and Guattari. The choreography of their dances is informed by imagined continuities, a kind of artistic process which is quite different from the production created Bartabas and Carlson, who very much have the specular view in mind in spite of its traditions of distancing.

These reflections are not a summing up but a survey of the field, with some potential pitfalls flagged to avoid tripping in the same spots again. Art and philosophy can be understood as holistic practices, rather than as two different ways of engaging with life. If art were understood as a situated textuality, as a practice for working out the problem of silence, the “impossible to represent” then it is also an embodied philosophical inquiry into our relationships with other
living beings. It can provide a means of engaging with animals in ways that accept the inadequacy of human languages and resist what Hunter calls a “coercive obscuring of grounds”. After all, those grounds are obscure enough, in spite of our best intentions. As Derrida points out, we do not or cannot ever truly understand what is on the minds of animals. Even so, can our understanding of heteroglossia be expanded to include an animal rhetoric? How can the ethics of Lévinas be enlarged to include the face-to-face encounter with the animal?

While none of the questions identified above have definitive answers, this area of inquiry remains as interesting as ever for me, as one strand of thought or experience continually opens up additional and intriguing possibilities. Engaging the senses, recognizing the material conditions, and being in dialogue with other beings can be a continuous and life sustaining practice, rather than a process marked by endpoints or products. While there is no definitive answer to these questions, Derrida’s definition of textuality comes to mind: it is a sowing that does not produce plants but is still infinitely repeated. And yet each season brings its differences. Repetition is infinitely variable.
NOTES


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27 Oliver, Animal Lessons, 31.


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