

ANIMATE RHETORIC, QUEER BEASTS:
REWILDING DOMESTICITY

by

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of
The University of Utah
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Communication

The University of Utah

May 2014

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The University of Utah Graduate School

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ABSTRACT

Boundary violations between the human and the more-than-human serve as unruly “crossings” that queer and rewild the world as we know it. *Animate Rhetoric, Queer Beasts: Rewilding Domesticity* explores such puncturings of our everyday worlds. Specifically, I am interested in how animals challenge and transform naturalized human boundaries and barriers. How do animals breach the boundaries surrounding anthroponormativity? Animal crossings at unsanctioned intersections have the power not simply to disrupt, but to animate the world.

This project challenges the essentialist claim that rhetoric is the domain of humans, and puts forward the concept of *animate rhetoric*. Animate rhetoric expresses the potential that everything *might* be speaking: mountains conversing with wind, rain, sun and pica; chickens clucking in soil and fussing with insouciant Scrub Jays; rivers churning against asphalt and whispering amongst tree roots. Animate rhetoric does not claim that everything *is* speaking or that it is speaking *to us*, merely that there is the *possibility* of such engagement. Such an approach opens up a vibrant, multivocal space for encounters with animal others, rather than silencing them or forcing them to speak in human terms.

These discursive productions are *events* which encourage us to reconsider the world as perceived from the animal’s perspective. Social media present unique avenues to consider these multiple worlds. Disruptive animals who rewild the screen reveal the importance of looking at animals, not as mere spectacle, but as animate agents who challenge humans and our own perspective of the world. These productions can challenge the boundaries

surrounding the human and spark possibilities for new relationships where borderlines are incoherent and unstable. Linking images of animals together produces an unruly force that plays a role in shaping realities and serving as unexpected sites for resistance. Using case studies that span a range of species, we encounter animal others who bound into our domestic sphere via the digital screen.

To Alf and Mia, my two peripatetic companions whose
feet and paws remind me: *solvitur ambulando*.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authorship of this book extends well beyond my own fingertips. It includes fellow humans and more-than-human others whose thoughts and practices invade this text. I am particularly indebted to my dissertation chair, Kevin DeLuca, who both supported and encouraged my own unruly academic boundary violations. Kevin's guidance was a fortuitous convergence in my academic journey that has opened up unexpected terrains of intellectual possibility. Rather than admonish me to mend holes, my committee members—Danielle Endres, Len Hawes, Helene Shugart, and Steve Tatum—encouraged me to explore those ruptures and revel in their wild alterity. I am indebted to them for their time, encouragement, and dedicated feedback that has expanded this project.

Portions of this dissertation include forthcoming journal publications. I am grateful for the feedback I received from Gerard Hauser with *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, and Alison Anderson at *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture*. In addition, I owe thanks for the feedback received at conferences where portions of this dissertation were presented: the 84th Western States Communication Association Conference, and the 97th National Communication Association Conference. Attendance at these conferences was made possible through the generous support of the Department of Communication and the Graduate School. This dissertation was completed with the gracious financial support of the Steffensen Cannon Fellowship. I am grateful for the support of Kent Ono, Connie Bullis, Mark Bergstrom, and Jessica Tanner. I am deeply indebted to Alan Reiser for his assistance with the production of this document.

I owe a debt to my family. In particular, my parents, Bill and Jane McVaugh, instilled in me a strong love and dedication to education. I am especially grateful to my family members for providing encouragement, advice, and humor: Nate McVaugh and Lydia Middendorf, Lisa and Bart Foust, Becky McVaugh and Mary Ann Falcosky, Jackie Anderson, and Ruth Huff. I also owe a special thanks to Vicky Newman, Alf Seegert, Joe Metz, Patrick Curry, Pamela Grubaugh-Littig, Fred Montague and Ellie Light for their feedback and suggestions.

In addition to the food, the sun, and the soil who have fed my body and soul, I am also grateful to the antique glass pane that was my “window to the world” while writing. The rippled distortion of the glass has been a constant reminder of the complex production of seeing. Moving to other senses, Mia’s presence—especially her twitching nose—has been a welcome reminder to pause and sniff for coyotes. Finally, I owe debts of gratitude and distraction to my feline companions in all their stages of life and decomposition: Friida, Lemuria, Andelain, and Theophrastus. Their furry presences filled both my lap and my laptop. A special thanks goes to Theo whose animate presence wilded our home and whose absence has left it regrettably tame. Most of all, thanks to Alf, my fellow gardener in life.

INTRODUCTION

When alone in the fields, with no one to see them, they would hop, skip and jump, touching the ground as lightly as possible and crying “We are bubbles of earth! We are bubbles of earth! We are bubbles of earth!”

– *Flora Thompson, Lark Rise to Candleford (32)*

They advance across night skies in the constellations of stars. In fairy tales they fill us with delight and horror. They perform in circuses and are made into imprisoned spectacles for the human gaze in zoos. Select species are eagerly invited into human homes, while others are abjected and annihilated. They are transformed into buffoon-like mascots. Their flesh nourishes human flesh. In one Navajo emergence myth, Badger’s strong claws dig a hole in the earth to let feeble, clawless human limbs emerge and tread upon solid soil (Klah 35). In indigenous accounts, animals are both guides and messengers. In contrast, the biblical account in Genesis tells of a very different relationship between humans and animals, one where humans either dominate nature or at best perform as caretakers *over* other creatures (Scully 315; White 1205). In this myth, the line between human and nonhuman animals is decisively drawn, with humans taking primacy over other animals. As a result, the bodies of animals were either disciplined or othered in such a way that additional power hierarchies emerged: humans over animals, culture over nature, urban against wild, and domestic versus foreign (Evernden 102; Merchant 291). When we only acknowledge the voice of one species, we attempt to sever communication with the wider system of which humans are only one part.

Yet, despite this heritage of dominion over the nonhuman, these more-than-human animal presences still invade our imaginations, our media, and the spaces where we work and dwell. When animal bodies leap from the stars, or off the pages of a fairy tale, they disrupt established boundaries. A queering occurs. Animals, like shamans, perform a crossing from the marginal hinterlands—the unruly animal assumes liminal new roles. Such invasions threaten our system of distinct boundaries regarding what it means to be “human,” and what it means to be “animal.” Art critic John Berger refers to animals as the “first circle of what surrounded man” (3). Yet, despite this formerly central role—a role that once involved not merely sustenance or clothing, but that of companionship and omen-bearing—the animal has been marginalized and abjected. As Berger points out, currently when animals are permitted near our human-center, it is most often as a member of the human family, a role that potentially turns them into a fetishized projection of our human selves and diminishes the animals’ lived experience and secrets. Alternatively, they become spectacles in zoos or high-definition nature shows projected on plasma screen televisions (Berger 15).

We live on a planet in peril. The gravity of our ecological wounds is no longer debatable and the need for radical action is more profound than ever. It is an understatement to stress the dysfunctional relationship between humans and the more-than-human world. Such dysfunction manifests itself in discourse that denigrates and abjects the nonhuman world while stalwartly affirming the human as the pinnacle of progress. Although the humanities has taken a decidedly poststructuralist turn, the human center continues to be privileged and centralized over all other species. In short, the human is naturalized. Given that the most intimate encounter people typically have with nonhuman animals is on the dinner plate, serious consideration needs to be given to other ways that humans encounter

animals. In what ways do animals breach cultural boundaries and puncture the naturalized human center?

My work explores the intersections and relationships between animals—the human animal, and the more-than-human animals who puncture our everyday worlds.¹ Boundary violations between the human and the more-than-human serve as unruly “crossings” that queer and shift the world as we know it. Animals’ unexpected bounds and flagrant flights into our lives are transgressive acts. Specifically, I am interested in how animals challenge and transform naturalized human boundaries and barriers. How do animals breach the boundaries surrounding anthroponormativity? Animal crossings at unsanctioned intersections have the power not simply to disrupt, but to animate the worlds where we live. Transgressive crossings queer the ways we think about animals. A queering displaces what is considered normative and performs what Umberto Eco calls an “aberrant reading” (105). An aberrant reading results when a message produced by one culture is read by another culture in an entirely different way that disregards the intention of the “original” encoder. Thus, messages defy intentionality and are open to interpretation not just across cultures, but also across species that have their own symbolic worlds. In the case of human-animal crossings, aberrant readings deconstruct dominant epistemologies which attempt to maintain the human as a naturalized center. An aberrant reading explores how animals themselves resist and gnaw on the confining boundaries humans desperately attempt to maintain. The

¹ I deliberately use “who” (and “he/she”) when referring to animals. The grammatical category of “animacy” places a hierarchy on the animacy of beings -- and thus what pronouns can be linked with nouns -- with humans coming first, then animals, plants, natural forces and finally objects. I am trying to disrupt this hierarchy, and the disciplining that occurs through the built-in editor in word processing programs, by upsetting the use of pronouns associated with humans and with animals.

anxiety-laden maintenance of such boundaries reveals how humans have already lost control of the perimeter separating the human animal from all other animals.²

This project seeks not only to problematize the human center in our culture generally, but also confronts traditions specifically in the field of communication—namely, the assumption that rhetoric is the domain of humans alone. Despite communication’s embrace of postmodern critical approaches to rhetoric, one area that remains largely unchallenged—indeed which is naturalized as a center—is the realm of the human voice. While the privileged voices of white males have been challenged through the exploration of marginalized human voices (e.g., those populations which might fit into Gayatri Spivak’s category of the “subaltern”), the subaltern voices of the more-than-human world are largely ignored and frequently considered to be unintelligible. The uncritical assumption that we cannot address the issues of the nonhuman animal seems to be elitist in and of itself, given that the academy already assumes to unproblematically “speak” for marginalized human populations (e.g., women, minorities, or those who experience forms of sexual oppression).

Rather than ignore the “incoherent” voices of the more-than-humans, the privileged position of the academic critic *demand*s something. One of the roles of the critic, particularly an academic in the humanities, is to identify structures that maintain naturalized centers of power by abjecting and marginalizing others. Limiting the interpretation of the world to the singular perspective of one species has severe political consequences with an end-product of unprecedented ecological suffering. A shift from the humanities to the inhumanities is critical work that explores the space of possibility where anything considered “natural” can

² Slavoj Žižek discussing the authority of the father figure, asserts that for the father to resort to punishing a child actually reveals the father’s impotence. A father who truly maintains power does not need to overtly demonstrate that authority (i.e., a father with true authority would merely give his child a sharp look in order to discipline the unruly youth) (Wright). Thus, when human animals demonstrate their power through the disciplining of unruly animals, they are actually revealing their own impotence as authority figures.

be unraveled and played with like a cat batting a ball of yarn connected to a sweater. The entire sweater might become unraveled, or in the very least it will require constant maintenance and will never be the “same” sweater. It is this unraveling of the human center that motivates my work. Thus, I consider an engagement with the animal other as an academic imperative that works to destabilize the human center as the singular perspective. As Nietzsche reminds us, the human perspective is only one of many perspectives, not a God’s-eye view (253). The cat I delight in as it playfully unravels the sweater, is also capable of observing me and delighting in what it perceives as unknowable acts by a playful human animal. We are, after all, always engaging with animals. The problem is that too often it is only one animal—the human animal—we engage with.

Rather than attempt some form of understanding and deep connection with animals, my work problematizes the human-animal relationship and the discourse surrounding those relationships. Instead of making humans the center of rhetoric, we need to radically break from these limiting definitions that still frame rhetoric as the privileged domain of the human. For example, Sonja Foss in *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*, a popular textbook for teaching rhetorical criticism, defines rhetoric as “the human use of symbols to communicate” (3). Thus, the focus goes to one species, and to a narrow conception of what counts as a symbol for that particular animal. In a similar vein, Robert Cox’s frequently used textbook *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*, defines rhetoric as the “purposeful use of language” to “shape our [human] perception” of the world (63). The perception that rhetoric is the privileged domain of the human is perpetuated in the classroom in both standard rhetoric classes as well as in coursework focused on the environment. Given that epistemology and ontology are inextricably linked, how we think about rhetoric, and who has a rhetorical voice, has material consequences. Instead of changing the center from

humans to some other singularly-focused center, I argue for irrevocably multiple centers, *plural*, each one provisional, each with its own voice, yap, snort, or caw. Each one alive.

Animate Rhetoric, Animate Earth

As a challenge to the essentialist claim that rhetoric is the domain of humans, I put forward the concept of *animate rhetoric*. Animate rhetoric expresses the potential that everything *might* be speaking: mountains conversing with wind, rain, sun and pica; chickens clucking in soil and fussing with insouciant Scrub Jays; rivers churning against asphalt and whispering amongst tree roots. Animate rhetoric does not claim that everything *is* speaking or that it is speaking *to us*, merely that there is the *possibility* of such engagement. Such an approach opens up a vibrant, multivocal space for encounters with animal others, rather than silencing them or forcing them to speak in human terms. Animate rhetoric moves from perceiving the world as a passive object to act upon, and shifts the engagement to include the active voices of a world already speaking.

Animate rhetoric is a shift not just in the vocabulary of rhetoric, but in its very grammar. Philosopher Patrick Curry's focus on the animate in terms of *possibility*, transforms the grammar of how discourse is framed by the subject vs. object binary. Curry does not seek to flip the binary (and thereby create a totalizing dominion of subjects), but instead transforms the relationship between subject and object. For Curry, the animate is a possibility of multiple subjects, "any object *can* turn out to be a subject," but, continues Curry, "not that every object necessarily *is* one. Accordingly, the only ontological assertion about the world that is implied is that it is one in which such an experience is possible" ("Enchantment and Modernity" 86). Put simply, an animate approach suggests that that we ought to respect the possibility that our encounter is with an animate subject, but not insist

on its actuality. Linking both animate subject and communication, Val Plumwood frames the animate where nature is both an agent and a potentially communicative other (Plumwood, *Environmental Culture* 177). Such an approach opens up the space of opportunity for vibrant encounters with animal others, rather than shutting it off, or forcing it to speak in human terms.

Animate rhetoric is always based in possibility, an openness that does not seek to systematize or categorize. It is a rupture which forces us to think about rhetoric, and animals, in different ways. Importantly, it is a rhetoric that is itself animate, that is, always in movement, in flux, and in collision with other rhetorics. Animate rhetoric becomes a discursive event, a moment in which we recognize the possible animateness of the other, which results in opening ourselves up to and engaging in new forms of discourse. Rhetoric already has an ancient connection with the animate. In Plato's *Timaeus*, he speaks of the *anima mundi*, the soul of the world, a "living creature that was to embrace all living creatures within itself" (22). Round in shape, the *anima mundi* does away with linear progression and instead stresses a world alive with interconnections—complex mixtures—that have no *telos*, but instead cross into an infinity of directions composed of lapping water, rushing winds, and stampeding herds. In relation to theoretical discourse, animate rhetoric becomes one node in a web of theory that has particular affinities with object-oriented ontology, actor-network-theory, assemblage theory, new materialism, and unit operations (Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics*; Harman, *Tool-Being*; Latour, *Reassembling the Social*; DeLanda; Deleuze and Guattari; Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*; Bogost, *Unit Operations*).

In particular, object-oriented ontology has gained particular traction in the academic community (Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*; Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*; L. R. Bryant; Harman, *Tool-Being*; Meillassoux; Morton). I laud object-oriented ontology's rejection of

anthropocentrism and its privileging of the human over all nonhuman things (Harman, *Prince of Networks* 124). My own approach which invites the marginalized play of animals into a destabilized “center” benefits from the decentering advocated by object-oriented ontology. I do, however, have several concerns with the application of object-oriented ontology to ecological issues. First, the objects in object-oriented ontology have no investment in what is done to them. A blind man’s cane does not care how it is acted upon. Indeed, breaking a cane may simply result in new uses, new ways for the object to form connections—or indeed, new objects. In animate rhetoric, the crows, the bears, the coyotes, the dogs, and the beavers do care how they are acted upon.³ They are invested in how they are treated. More significantly, they actively express their nonhuman needs, connections and desires and in the process disrupt the anthropocentric discourse.

Second, while object-oriented ontology considers the connections between objects, I am concerned that it does not focus *enough* on the relationships between objects. Harman dismisses relational ontology as an approach leading to mere “monism” where everything in the universe is connected as a “world-lump” (Harman, *Prince of Networks* 159). Contrary to Harman’s assertions, relational ontology does not deny specific realities, but instead permits for multiple realities even within “one” being (as the bacteria in the human gut reveal, there is no actual singular). In relational ontology, all is not one, all is multiple. Applied to animate rhetoric, a relational ontology stresses that a network is never static, but is instead always animated with acts of becoming. Put differently, there is no “me” without an encounter with the world. “Me” is always predicated on “we.” Agency exists not in the singular, but in the plural, incoherent, dynamic relations that are constantly flowing into and out of the “me” which is always a “we.”

³ Significantly, there is a growing body of evidence for the sentience of plants (Pollan).

Finally, aligning myself with the work of David Abram, words do matter (“Between the Body and the Breathing Earth” 172). The phrase “object-oriented ontology” not only conveys clinical sterility void of life, it also carries with it the baggage associated with the word “object.” Derrida’s concept of iterability reveals how language is always undergoing transformations that open up new discursive possibilities. Words are capable of assuming new meanings provided those new uses do not stray too far from current understandings. The iterable word wears the mantles of multiple iterations and significations, but will always contain a phantom trace of the past. The term “object” is capable of assuming new meaning that for Harman places it in a plane of connections, but it will still carry with it the significance of something “inert” that sentient species—in particular the human species—“act on,” “control,” and “manipulate.” It seems that Harman in his attempt to decenter the human, has simply inverted the binary by turning all potential subjects into objects. Harman may have done better to have focused on the potential subjecthood of the world rather than universalizing objecthood.

Thus, while animate rhetoric has certain affinities with object-oriented ontology, it departs from it by seriously considering the consequences of theory and what theory demands of human relationships with the worlds that do not fall under the current regime of privileged human concerns. By putting my nose to the trails currently traversed by animistic thinkers like David Abram, Patrick Curry, and Graham Harvey, I examine how the voices of the more-than-human world have always been present, alive, animate, and in conversation with other animals—including humans who too frequently forget their own animality. Seeing all beings as potentially animate has serious consequences; as Hans Peter Duerr perhaps too strongly asserts, “People do not exploit a nature that speaks to them” (92). By placing all nonhuman objects on the same plane as humans, there is the risk of ignoring the speech of

more-than-human animals busy rewilding spaces previously dominated by humans. Our discursive acts are our prayers to the world. By taking our productions seriously, recognizing our kinship with other animals, and acting with humility—a humility rooted in the humus of soil—discourse expands to include the whirl of a hummingbird, the grating of clawed paws on concrete, and the chortle of cranes.

These discursive productions are events. Animate events encourage the consideration of the world as perceived from the animal's perspective. Like Nietzsche, Jakob von Uexküll radically destabilizes the notion of a singular world through his concept of the *umwelt*, the “self-world” each animal inhabits and makes meaningful through biosemiotic interpretations of environments. Uexküll invites the reader to consider the world not from our naturalized human perspective, but from the perspectives of other animals. In doing so, we find not a singular world, but infinite worlds where landmarks, scents, and chemical processes that bear no significance for the human animal, are of major significance to animals like the bee, bear, or tick. For Uexküll, the significance of individual environments can be likened to a spider: “As the spider spins its threads, every subject spins his relations to certain characters of the things around him and weaves them into a firm web which carries his existence” (14). It is as if, asserts Uexküll, all animals climb into their own individual soap bubble the interior of which represents a world filled with perceptions that the animal alone knows (Uexküll 6). Uexküll's approach forces humans to consider what it means to be an animal amongst a multiplicity of animals.

Social media present unique avenues to consider these multiple worlds. The scopic nature of social media speaks to our own animal *umwelt*. Not only do media transform our perspective of how we see animals, they also challenge the notion of what it means to be human. With ubiquitous camera phones and an easily accessible venue to post images, the

distance between the hand holding the camera and the wild animal has been diminished, sometimes with terrifying results. Carefully edited nature documentaries shot with a powerful camera lens produced a “safe” distance between human and “wild” beast. Now, almost anyone who comes into contact with more-than-human animals has the capacity to record the event. It becomes what DeLuca refers to as an “image event” (DeLuca, *Image Politics* 6)

Image events involving animals have resulted in powerful representations of connection between species as seen by images of swimmers untangling fishing line that trapped a whale, to those that are full of amusement and wonder as we watch foxes jump on a trampoline (Fimrite; Samron). More dramatically, there have been images that initially reify the human view that animals are mere objects for our human gaze, but then challenge this notion when humans find we are not the only ones doing the looking, but can be looked at in return...and more. Instead of the camera consuming the animal, we watch as the human is consumed by the animal. The objectified animal becomes an animate animal—fully capable of speaking to and engaging with beings outside of his or her own species. Social media bring the animal world alive in ways that nature documentaries never could. Images of animals record a solitary dog soulfully singing as he plays the piano, an elephant who speaks like a human, or the unexpected: friendships between a tortoise and a hippopotamus (Helms; LiveScienceVideos; Picardy). While images may present a limited *visual* perspective into the *umwelt* of others, it is still a rupture in how we perceive animal others. New media reveal animate, animal worlds that challenge the boundaries of anthroponormativity.

One example of such boundary violations which animate the more-than-human can be seen with animals rejecting the role of passive automaton animated by the human gaze. Unlike the nature documentaries that maintained aesthetic distance between human and

animal, the fourth wall has been abruptly demolished. Such violations occurred in a woodland setting where a sleek, wet beaver pads deliberately down a dirt road as birds sing in the background (PRdienst). Waddling along, this charming herbivore was filmed by a human who kept pace with the beaver, pausing when the beaver would pause and grace the camera with a full view of her serious face, moving once again when the beaver continued on her journey. Initially, the beaver was an endearing, furry object performing on the screen for human amusement. Suddenly something shifts; the beaver lunges unexpectedly towards the human at a truly terrifying speed. The human continues to film and all boundaries are violated as visual incoherence consumes the camera lens. The dissonance between charming furry friend and teeth-baring predator is so jarring and abrupt that both the viewer, and the photographer, jump.⁴ The beaver has stepped out of the role of animated “character” we have imposed upon her and becomes her own animate being. Cute, furry beaver has been replaced with threatening and terrifying beast. The objectified “other” becomes an “other” with a lifeworld and needs of her own. The beaver ramming full speed towards the human is an unsettling event. An event which reminds us that humans are not the only ones capable of looking, but can be looked at in return with a menacing expression that challenges the stability of our anthropocentric world.⁵

Visual disruptions by animals on the screen may serve as *events* for the viewer. For Derrida, ruptures serve as events, becoming an “absolute spark” which announces the arrival of the unknown (*Echographies* 20). Events are neither predictable nor knowable. When an event is perceived as an event, it results in a filtering and sifting through the rubble,

⁴ In this case, the human survived the beaver attack. In another instance, a fisherman in Belarus wanted his photograph taken with a beaver. The beaver was not so obliging and bit the man’s femoral artery which resulted in the man’s death (Karmanau).

⁵ This beaver is significant because it did not perform as humans would have demanded. The risk, of course, is that such videos can also be interpreted as an example of nature’s “violence” and as something to fear and respond to with heightened human discipline.

provoking a responsibility to the other. Thus, the event, much like an animistic view of the world that demands an ontological praxis, disrupts relationships with the world. It provokes dissent and discord. The disruptive force of an event allows the subject to see the world differently and bring forth new discursive possibilities. An event ruptures political discourse as we know it. Here the human subject is disrupted by the experience of being seen and becoming the recipient of violent action instead of remaining the only clear agent involved. The beaver's response challenges our scopic appropriation and becomes an unsettling event. That boundary violation may result in a fidelity to both the selfhood and the rhetoric of animal others.

The unsettling beaver reveals the importance of looking at animals; not as mere spectacle, but as animate agents who challenge humans and our own perspective of the world. Just as Derrida playfully explored writing to reveal the privileged position given to speech as an origin, I playfully explore how animals disrupt the privileged perspective of humans which also serves as an origin. The visual encounter with the beaver forces us to look again at the video, to recognize that the beaver was always alive, animate and speaking.⁶ Speaking softly at first, but by the end she was yelling, screaming, and literally gnashing her teeth on human flesh. As the camera turns upward revealing an incoherent flash of trees and sky, the privileged human perspective ruptures under the sharp teeth of the beaver. Social media sites can thus present unexpected encounters that shock the human from our privileged sphere obsessed with anthropocentric uniqueness and rationality.

⁶ The problem was with the “deaf” human who was more automaton than the beaver—walking along like a zombie in order to film something to put online. What were initially charming pauses and coy, sideways looks can now be understood for what they were—communicative acts directly telling the human to leave her alone.

As the beaver example shows, animate rhetoric is happening all around us, provided we have the awareness, the time, and the attention to encounter an “other” who is not merely another human. In the relation between the beaver, the human and the camera we gnaw on multiple aspects of the animate. The term “animate”—like “animal”—always has present in it the Latin root *anima*, which can mean air, breath, life, soul and mind. *Animate* assumes different roles depending on whether it is used as an adjective, a noun, or a verb. Like the beaver who is taking in the scents, sights, sounds, textures (and ultimately the taste) of the world around her, each of those forms assumes different identities based on use, and on the time period in which it was used. Animate rhetoric invites play. An animate approach makes visible naturalized anthropocentric logics that can then be played with like leaves in the wind.

Animate as an adjective is anything considered to be endowed with life, to be living, lively and full of activity, or to be alive. Thus, the beaver, the singing birds and even the water on the beaver’s sleek pelt are imbued with life. They are not only animate, they are animate agents. A more rarely used form of the adjective *animate* refers to a disease or infestation caused by animals. The charging beaver may have her own internal animate rumblings in the form of internal parasites. *Anima mundi’s* worlds within worlds occur at the microscale for the bounding beaver. Applied to rhetoric, an “animate rhetoric” is not simply a rhetoric composed of human voices, but is itself animated with the voices of the more-than-human world where microcosms animate, play with, and are related to other microcosms; rhetoric itself is alive and changing in response to the animate world around it.

Animate as noun can also assume the now-obsolete use of “an animate” which refers to “a living thing.” Thus, the singing birds are “animates” and the beaver who hears their song is also “an animate” (as is the sun, the wind, and the observing human) Another use of

animate as a noun, refers to the grammatical category of “animate” or “animacy.” It is this latter use in linguistics that presents opportunities for play and some boundary breaking. It is, as Derrida explains, a play that “tries to pass beyond man and humanism” (“Structure, Sign, and Play” 292). Animacy as a grammatical category denotes a hierarchy of nouns where, not surprisingly, humans are always placed on top, followed by animals, plants, natural forces, objects, and abstractions. This category of nouns is based on how sentient the referent of the noun is, which explains why my word processor always attempts to correct my grammar when I refer to animals as a “who” instead of a “what.” For my own purposes, “animate rhetoric” hopes to resignify this grammatical category by referring to the more-than-human world by using pronouns like “who,” “she,” and “he” as opposed to the grammatically correct “it” and “what.” Language use will cross the animate/inanimate divide which feebly attempts to reify human dominance. Discourse gains power through use, and by changing the discourse, power structures find themselves on brittle scaffolding that cannot support the feather weight of a crow.

It is *animate* as a verb that assumes the most uses and possibilities. Most generally, it means “to give life to,” or, to breathe life into a being so as to bring it to life. Wind and breath are inherently bound to our animating world—each breath from animal or plant, or even the crackle of snow on north-facing slopes reminds us that the world is composed not merely of objects, but of active beings. *Animate* as a verb can also have the action of causing something “to move or to act.” Thus, the human animates the selfhood of the beaver by following the sharp-toothed herbivore, an act that results in the beaver acting on the body of the human. This unexpected action reveals other meanings surrounding *animate*, specifically the concept of filling one with “boldness, courage and spirit,” which results in someone becoming animated and brightening up their surroundings. All of the characters in this story

are animate subjects. On an entirely different front, “to animate” also refers to animated films where characters are given movement through various visual techniques. The unruly beaver could be scripted and commodified through animation.

Visualizing a three-dimensional beaver with links to a two-dimensional animation leads to another form of animate play. The *animate* is never-ending. An adjective leads to noun leads to verb and we find ourselves in a form of animate play where one concept/idea/fragment sparks or animates another concept which leads to a never-ending chain of signification. *Animate* is a chain of boundless possibility where, just as the animate world is always alive, moving and engaged, so too are the endless connections we encounter. Perceiving the world as potentially animate—and rhetoric in particular as animate—opens up a space of possibility that need not adhere to the dualisms that haunt us such as culture/nature, human/animal, mind/matter, domestic/wild, or subject/object. Rather, animate rhetoric is an enlivened discursive crossing that permits for the *possibility* of a dialogic relationship amongst all species, as opposed to the anthropocentric and anthropogenic monologue in which we all too frequently find ourselves engaged. Such an approach reminds us of our interconnected insignificance, for, as Abram reminds us, “It is the animate earth that speaks; human speech is but a part of that vaster discourse” (*The Spell of the Sensuous* 179). Animate rhetoric places all beings in possible communion, rather than only select beings who are deemed capable of “rational” speech. Thus, animate rhetoric is both affective and affirmative.

Animate rhetoric does not claim to be a rational approach to the rhetorics of the more-than-human world. Instead, it is an affective approach. While human animals cannot make definitive claims regarding the cognitive, rational, or linguistic abilities of other animals, all animals do share affective experiences. Affect is prelinguistic, precognitive,

perational, preconscious and a-signifying (Abel n.p.). While Heidegger considered the world of the animal to be closed to humans, an unknowable terrain, affect serves as an “active connection” between humans and all other animals (Massumi 39). Rhetoric is foremost an affective experience and occurs in *relation* to other beings, as well as a living, breathing cosmos. Thus, animate rhetoric becomes an affective performance where the stories of animals act upon us—not just through print on the page, but also through the conjuring of scents, colors and textures—the ineffable marks that dance, waft, and brush against us.

Animate rhetoric brackets out arguments regarding animal rights, language, culture, or morality, and instead frames everything in terms of *possibility*. By circumventing these never-ending arguments that attempt to neatly maintain human uniqueness—arguments which are daily debunked and result in a perpetual “raising of the bar” regarding what it means to be a “unique” species—we instead enter into a space that permits for engagement.⁷ Cartesian binaries of post-Enlightenment modernity where mind (*res cogitans*) prevails over matter (*res extensa*), are far messier than many humans would like to admit and the boundary between the two demands some unruly boundary violations, as well as some encounters that many humans will find uncomfortable. It is an ironic inversion that the very root of the word animal is something that is living and ensouled, and Descartes defines animals as soulless automata. The irony as well, is that it is not just animals who are denied souls, humans are also denied a relationship with the world because Descartes focuses on *res cogitans* which is exclusively a thinking thing not engaged with the world. There is no possibility for *exchange* with the world which comes from anima’s breath, for with breath

⁷ One of the many ironies revealed in these futile attempts to maintain a purely “unique” human, is that it reveals how much of identity is based in lack. What other species lack, results in what makes humans “uniquely unique” (Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* 77). The result is that all nonhuman species are defined as “man-minus.” The twist is that any species could make such claims should that species make itself the referent for all things (as humans do). After all, it might be possible that our cat would assert we are “cat-minus.”

there is a constant exchange with the world. When the boundary between mind and matter is crossed and punctured by animal bodies, it reveals a mongrel identity that refuses to wear the mask of human uniqueness.

Animate rhetoric also breaks with common tropes in rhetoric such as intent, coherence and meaning. Instead, animate rhetoric maintains an openness that permits for multiplicity. Animate rhetoric asserts the possibility that all beings *might* be speaking, which means there is a lack of authorial authority and of intentionality. Animate rhetoric asserts that dissemination drives signals, rather than a traditional transmission model of communication. N. Katherine Hayles and Marshall McLuhan both stress the entanglement of materiality with signal. According to Hayles, no message is ever sent; only signals are sent (18). By moving away from the focus on symbolic action, and instead focusing on signals, rhetoric moves away from a modernist approach that privileges meaning and intent. A focus on signal stresses a dissemination model of communication and reminds humans that rhetoric is a relational construction of how individuals—human and more-than-human—interpret the signals that have been sent. Since we can never be certain that any message has been sent or received, we acknowledge that there will always be incoherence and abysses that cannot be bridged. Simply because something cannot be understood, does not mean that it is not a message and that it is not relational. Indeed, animate rhetoric is always relational; it is simply a relation that involves spaces and gaps of incongruity where nothing is ever full, present, or complete.

By shifting to an animate perspective, instead of seeing the world as a collection of objects, it instead becomes what Thomas Berry refers to as a “communion of subjects” (16). The human is merely one of many subjects forming a vast coalition composed of fungi in the soil, cats meowing at the door, and rain pounding on the pavement. Such an approach

opens up encounters with coalitions of others, rather than shutting it off, or forcing it to speak in human terms. Animate rhetoric frames everything in terms of possibility. By circumventing these never-ending arguments that attempt to neatly maintain independent human subjects, we encounter animal others who invite relational engagement and play that is not merely a form of ludic, rule-based interaction, but who instead engage in the unstructured and spontaneous play of *paidia*.

This project focuses on the animate rhetoric that occurs through encounters with nonhuman animals. I play with animate rhetoric in two primary ways: the first is with rhetoric-producing animals, and the second with images. Both animals and images produce rhetoric that is *animate*. It is alive. Animate rhetoric speaks to humans in unexpected and powerful ways that move beyond the privileged domain of clear, rational human-produced speech. These productions potentially challenge the boundaries surrounding the human and spark possibilities for new relationships where boundaries are incoherent and unstable. More specifically, linking the two together, images of animals exert an unruly force that plays a role in shaping realities and resisting anthropocentric structures. Animal images are a venue for marginalized animal bodies to cross and upset anthropocentric boundaries. These crossings and boundary violations may actually serve to make humans recognize the rhetoric-producing potential of the animal world, and in the process a queering occurs of what it means to be animal, both human animals and more-than-human animals.

A Note on Form and Tone

The form of this book is meant to explore the incoherence and the gaps that surround our relationships with animal others. Instead of seeking an understanding of the animal other in human terms, how might the animal displace our own naturalized center and

unsettle our perspective of the world? The trails and flight patterns of the various animals cross each other, leaving their own scent, tracks, and gifts that will defy human understanding. Many of the animals we encounter in the following chapters seem decidedly to fall close to our circle surrounding humans—dogs, bears with their uncanny resemblance to humans—that are what some humans might consider to be “kin.” Yet, their presence in our domestic sphere reveals that they straddle a space of both “kinship” and of “radical alterity.” Rather than lamenting such gaps, they instead can provoke a sense of awe and wonder for an “other” that defies and challenges the world as we know it. In addition to the term “animal” to refer to nonhuman animals, I also deliberately use environmental philosopher David Abram’s term “more-than-human world” to remind the reader of a far larger world that both transcends and includes the human-centered sphere and thus remind us of both kinship and alterity (*The Spell of the Sensuous* 22).⁸ Animals will assist as unknowable and unstable guides throughout this book. They will stalk us as spectral presences, animating and challenging traditional academic form and content. They will animate the very rhetoric of rhetoric so that it includes not just the voices of humans, but also the voices of the more-than-human.

I try to enliven the very language we use so as to avoid the sterile and somewhat mechanistic style that can dominate academia. The aim, though not entirely successful, is to animate my own academic rhetoric so that we can experience new approaches to intellectual play. How we write about the world influences how we perceive the world and thus how we interact with the world. Thus, how we write (and what we read) influences both our

⁸ I fully recognize that using terms like “animal” and “more-than-human” risks maintaining the dualism of human and animal that I am attempting to displace. This is one of those many inconsistencies that haunts all relationships and one of the gaps of language always requires the supplement of other words and phrases as we attempt to explore complex ideas.

ontology and our epistemology. As a result there may be moments when the reader challenges my play bows, while at other points the bow will be engaged with a wagging tail. My approach in the following chapters does not simply privilege a standard linear argument focused on rationality. Rather, I am interested in the animate performances that shock the reader and highlight the incoherence of anthropocentric logics. The flight patterns of crows will cross with the lumbering gait of a bear who sniffs at the wet pelt of a beaver.

Chapter Overviews

This book will explore the animate rhetoric embodied by five different animals who rewild urban environments. As we will see in the following chapters, they are animals who challenge the anthroponormativity humans attempt to maintain. Boundaries between human and animal are challenged through visual encounters in the digital sphere. I examine three major concepts related to each case study. Specifically, I explore how animals animate rhetoric; I sniff, trace and backtrack upon the trails of boundary crossings; and I play with the queerings that occur, in particular the queering of concepts surrounding wildness and domesticity. Methodologically, my work explores the loose threads in the fraying fabric of anthropocentrism—the digital trails made by animals, the fur clinging to branches, and the tracks left in mud that weave into and out of our own human footprints. Here we will follow and tug at those unruly threads. To do so, we will need to cock our ear to the side, and tilt our nose into the wind in order to discover the subtle shifts in binaries invading our everyday world.

In Chapter 1, “The Crowing of Corax: A Flight Path into Animate Rhetoric in the Digital Sphere” I explore how the crow serves as a liminal, totemic figure who actively engages us in the topic of animate rhetoric. This engagement occurs through play on the

digital screen, specifically by a Hooded Crow in Russia whose antics of snowboarding on a rooftop were caught on film and disseminated through the digital sphere. A chance encounter with a “crowboarder” demonstrates the power that digital media have in conveying the experiences of animal others. As a result of such encounters, the audience may acknowledge the animate presence of a nonhuman world already engaged in its own rhetorical expressions.

When a brown bear upset pastoral tranquility of the Bavarian Alps, the ursine figure became a cultural imaginary humans animated with competing visions of wildness. Chapter 2, “Taxidermied Wild: Ursine Perforations in the Pastoral,” takes us on the unexpected pathway of Bruno the bear, the first wild brown bear to step foot on German soil in 170 years.⁹ While Bruno was venerated by the public as a symbol of wildness, the Bavarian government animated Bruno as a “problem” bear in need of disciplining. These competing animations neglected to respect the selfhood of the animate other—that is, the selfhood of a bear who was already animate.

The coyotes of Chicago reveal the animate absences that invade all of our encounters with the other. In Chapter 3, “Play of ‘Sniffication’: Coyotes Sing in the Margins,” we encounter coyotes who have been assimilated into the anthropocentric structure of the work-a-day world.¹⁰ Considered to be “official city employees,” the coyotes of Chicago are charged with keeping the urban mouse and vole population in check. Their ghostly presence in the city serves to highlight the ruptures in the urban system, as well as the gaps that assert themselves despite attempts to convey a full presence of their activities. Thus, the absences,

⁹ Portions of Chapter 2 are included as part of a journal article for *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture*. “Queer Beasts: Ursine Punctures in Domesticity” published in Volume 8, Issue 1, 2014. Taylor & Francis offers reuses of its content for a thesis or dissertation free of charge contingent on resubmission of permission request if work is published.

¹⁰ Portions of Chapter 3 are included as part of a forthcoming journal article for *Philosophy & Rhetoric*. “Play of Sniffication: Coyotes Sing in the Margins” will be published in late spring, 2014.

the moments of lack, reveal themselves as animate absences where we attempt to reassemble the fragments of our wild encounters in the domestic sphere. Such incomplete reanimations reveal an “other” who can excite wonder.

Leaving the wilds of the urban coyote, the stray domestic dogs of Moscow’s metro guide us into a journey of the underworld. In “Canine Perestroika: Riding a Fast Train from Domesticity,” Chapter 4 explores how the metro-riding dogs of Moscow upset the “domestic” relationship between humans and dogs. By treading on the boundaries of this long-established relationship, the dogs leave behind the status of a fetishized “almost-human,” and instead become actors animating the symbolic order while making visible unexpected networks of relationships. Such animations reveal the fragility of human structures which are constantly being restructured by the nonhuman. The canine networks reveal the human as simply one of many tools the dogs of Moscow utilize in their daily practices.

Finally, in my Coda we leave behind the play of crows, bears, coyotes and dogs and return once more to the figure of the beaver who started the conversation. In this conclusion, “When Images Take Bite: A Plea for the Inhumanities,” the mental image of a beaver will bite, nibble, and chew on several of the major themes addressed throughout the book. Concepts like animate rhetoric and queer rewilding playfully destabilizes the human center that dominates the humanities. Through acts of rewilding, the humanities is pushed to the margins and in its place the multiplicity of the inhumanities emerges. The inhumanities enters into a conversation with the animate rhetoric of a world already speaking, and encourages acts of humble ensoulment.

Rather than place my own research on a restrictive leash and collar, and thus limit the possibilities of inquiry, I hope to explore the myriad scents and pathways guiding my

academic journey. While I cannot expect to know all of the conclusions drawn from my previous chapters, this final chapter will explore the various warrens and tunnels that may lead to future research. This digging may also result in some challenges regarding the limitations of various theorists and the need to seriously consider the animal as a being with rhetorical force.

Ultimately, this project engages mediated animals as an act of hope. Frequently perceived as mere spectacle or entertainment, videos and images also serve as ruptures, what Derrida calls an “event” or what Patrick Curry refers to as a moment of “enchantment.” Encounters with otherness serve as visual jolts that alter our perception of the world and remind us that we are also animate creatures who are part of a larger story. Neil Evernden describes such chance convergences as “The shock of encountering something which is other is the shock of being alive; isn’t it amazing that there is that, and not just me—and even that there is something rather than nothing” (112). Shocking the human body into wakefulness, aliveness, allows for the possibility of chance encounters between humans and the more-than-human world. Such encounters can spark a sense of alterity, compassion and action for beings who are “others.” Considering past “others” who were once silenced but who have gained some measure of cultural standing—women, minorities, homosexuals—serves as a point of hope in a world growing ever more homogenous as the more-than-human world is permanently silenced by extinction. Val Plumwood reminds us that by recognizing the subject in the other, we encounter a world that is “already full of form, spirit, story, agency, and glory” (Plumwood, *Environmental Culture* 226). The expansion of discourse to include the more-than-human world is not merely an expansion in the number of conversants. Rather, it results in an amplification of the system where, as Jane Bennett asserts, “every new assemblage reverberates back upon the old atoms and changes them”

(*The Enchantment of Modern Life* 31). Animate permits for iterations of interconnected play, networked play similar to an ecosystem whose very diversity results not just in increased interconnections, but in the greater resiliency of *multiple* worlds (Harding 216). Perhaps playful encounters with crows, coyotes, bears, dogs and beavers will help to reignite a wonder of animals who haunt our ontology—animals who wander in the liminal space of both kinship and of radical other.

CHAPTER 1

THE CROWING OF CORAX: A FLIGHT PATH INTO

ANIMATE RHETORIC IN THE DIGITAL SPHERE

The Bird of Birds the Indian Crow...He has been reincarnated more times than Shiva; and he has kept a sample of each incarnation, and fused it into his constitution. In the course of his evolutionary promotions, his sublime march toward ultimate perfection, he has been a gambler, a low comedian, a dissolute priest, a fussy woman, a blackguard, a scoffer, a liar, a thief, a spy, an informer, a trading politician, a swindler, a professional hypocrite, a patriot for cash, a reformer, a lecturer, a lawyer, a conspirator, a rebel, a royalist, a democrat, a practicer and propagator of irreverence, a meddler, an intruder, a busybody, an infidel, and a wallower in sin for the mere love of it.

– Mark Twain, *Following the Equator: A Journey Around the World* (353)

Tricksters Overhead, Tricksters on the Screen

They are most commonly heard before seen: the swift, steady *woosh, woosh, woosh* from strong wings slicing air. They intermittently disrupt the hum of city, suburb, farm, and wilderness with their raucous *kra, kra, kra*. Crows, and their larger family *Corvidae*, dwell all over the world with the exception of the southernmost tip of South America and around the poles (Sax 9). A human is just as likely to hear them soaring amongst skyscrapers, as they are above the heat and hollows of redrock cliffs. Their constant presence and larger-than-life personalities make them prominent figures in folklore and mythology. Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome, Europe, Asia, and the Americas all have stories that involve the crow or raven—some more flattering than others. They serve as familiars to gods, and as envoys of death or of mystery. Much like humans, they accrue shiny objects in their homes, and they

adeptly make tools. They are playful tricksters, teasing both the corvid, and the more-than-corvid animals they encounter. They chat, caw, quork, and preen, observing humans far more frequently than we observe them.

Perhaps it is their very talkativeness, their charm, and their resourceful nature that link crows so readily to rhetoric. “Corax” which means “crow,” was the nickname given to the Greek inventor of rhetoric (Kennedy, *Comparative Rhetoric* 21). From its inception, the esteemed art of persuasion was directly yoked to the animal world, and more specifically to the rowdy crow, whose effusive gestures and speeches rival those of the human animal. Crows use diverse combinations of feather erection, body posture, and voice to express a wide range of emotions. According to biologist Bernd Heinrich, “an experienced observer can identify anger, affection, hunger, curiosity, playfulness, fright, boldness, and (rarely) depression” (Heinrich 191). Crows, like other animals, will use all available tools to express themselves. Humans and corvids alike are successful because they “exploit, experiment, invent, innovate, learn, remember, and share” (Marzluff and Angell 195).

Similar to humans, crows are culturally and technically complex. Their highly structured family units result in the sharing of knowledge that is explicit to their particular environment. If a young crow needs to be wary of a specific human or locale, this knowledge will be shared and passed down like a prized heirloom. Crows are technically adept, creating complex tools to solve multipart problems. Crows play. They do not simply play, they *delight* in play—somersaulting in the air, sledding on snowy slopes, and swinging from lithe willow branches like trapeze artists. They have not forgotten that the entire world is *animate* and ready to be engaged. Their playful intelligence results in innovation, never sedimenting or tranquilizing past practices. Ravens and crows also enjoy mischief, what biologist John Marzluff refers to as “delinquency.” Removing rubber blades from windshield wipers,

stealing laundry hung up to dry, or deliberately shitting on a specific automobile are all acts performed without the expectation of “advancing” the birds’ well-being. Rather, they are performances where “the reward is in the chase, not the prize” (Marzluff and Angell 82). Crows are an insouciant model for a rhetoric of playful mischief which has already broken free of its neo-Aristotelian confines. Crows guide us on the flight forward into *animate rhetoric*.

Crows and animate rhetoric encourage playful border crossings. Crows are liminal beasts capable of moving across boundaries with their aerial movement permitting for flight outside of the political and cultural borders imposed by humans. Crows remind us to play with the given; to play in between the margins. Using crows as a case study, how can their playful wit transform our approach to rhetoric and our engagement with the animate animal bodies conversing around us? How might new media serve as a site for methodological inquiry and reveal potentials regarding which animal bodies are given a voice? In this chapter, I will examine how crows serve as a totemic guide to rewilding and queering both rhetoric and images. How crows *play* in the world reveals a corvid queering of the domestic and the wild spaces that exist in both rhetoric and in images. Specifically, I claim that both rhetoric, and digital images are wilded by animals. This chapter serves to introduce how animate rhetoric in the digital sphere is performed throughout the rest of this book.

The significance of approaching the world as animate—where all things are potentially alive and speaking—is important because it influences how we respond to a suffering world. A litany of wounds greets the reader each day through stories regarding climate chaos, species extinction, and the pollution of air, water and soil. Such environmental horrors have led to an advocacy for more direct contact with nature. In particular, Richard Louv serves as an advocate for programs such as “No Child Left Inside” where children engage “directly”

with nature (Louv 34).¹¹ Such calls echo Thoreau's desire for "contact" at the wilds of Ktaadan: "Think of our life in nature,—daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it,—rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! The *solid* earth! The *actual* world! The common sense! *Contact! Contact!*" (Thoreau 71). Direct contact is, of course, a myth, as all interactions are mediated albeit in different ways and to different degrees. More significantly, the kind of contact valorized by both Louv and Thoreau is not how most urbanized people encounter the more-than-human world. Sometime in 2007/2008 the world population shifted so that the majority of the earth's human population became urban dwellers. In industrialized nations like the US and Europe, the number of inhabitants in urban areas was far greater than those of developing nations in Africa or Asia (*Economist*). As a result, the individuals who use the most resources and cause the most environmental harm are most likely to live in urban environments where contact is most often made with other humans and not with the more-than-human. It is possible that for urban dwellers, the most intimate contact with the more-than-human occurs on the dinner plate or through the interface of a digital screen. Rather than lament and demonize this multilayered mediation, it might be more productive to explore what opportunities exist in the digital realm for encounters with animal others.

Ironically, digital media provide unexpected means for encountering a nonhuman other. Digital visual encounters have the potential to puncture the naturalized human center and as a result queer our conception of what it means to be "human" and to be "animal." Specifically, the recognition of more-than-human subjects who speak and who feel can upset both anthroponormativity and anthropocentrism. Humans are quick to link our physiological evolution to nonhuman animals, but we bracket out our emotional and

¹¹ Unfortunately, the "direct" contact advocated by Louv is frequently in the form of quantifying and "understanding" nature from a human perspective.

cognitive evolution that also link us to these beings. In rhetoric, we perform the same cherry-picking by rejecting the more-than-human world as capable of producing rhetoric. When humans consider themselves to be both separate from, and superior to the more-than-human world, it permits for behavior that violates the lifeworlds of any being who does not fit within a narrow realm of moral considerability. Gregory Bateson reminds us that when one only perceives a part of the circuit—namely, humans standing separate from the more-than-human world—opportunities for connection and feedback are eliminated:

When you narrow down your epistemology and act on the premise “What interests me is me, or my organization, or my species,” you chop off consideration of other loops of the loop structure. You decide that you want to get rid of the by-products of human life and that Lake Erie will be a good place to put them. You forget that the eco-mental system called Lake Erie is part of *your* wider eco-mental system—and that if Lake Erie is driven insane, its insanity is incorporated into the larger system of *your* thought and experience. (Bateson 492)

By seriously considering digital images and videos as events that reveal a world outside of ourselves—a world we are a part of and not apart from—we encounter prospective conversations with persons who are not human.¹² Indeed, we encounter animate beasts who are no longer willing to serve as the abjected domain of Lake Erie, but instead invite our gaze upwards and across the urban wasteland.

A Roof is not Simply a Shelter Overhead: Corvid

Reappropriations

Corvid Play on the Digital Screen

The crow will be my primary guide in this chapter; we will take flight and briefly alight at corvid disruptions. These animals have their own stories to tell, but also inform

¹² Using the term “persons,” I am following Graham Harvey’s animist approach where he provocatively states that “The world is full of persons (people if you prefer), but few of them are human” (2).

scholarly approaches to rhetoric, and more generally, conceptions about the environment. These encounters serve as reminders of both our strong kinship with the more-than-human world, as well as how much these beings inhabit a world that is entirely other. Part of the enchantment of encountering an animal “other” is the very wonder the encounter produces. It blurs perceptions regarding boundaries; domestic and wild do not remain neatly compartmentalized.

Boundaries were blurred when a Hooded Crow in Russia used a plastic disc to “go snowboarding” on the peaks of a snow-covered rooftop, the crow’s antics were captured on video by a family watching from a window opposite the playful corvid. Posted on YouTube, the video has garnered the title of “crowboarding.” This event of corvid play speaks to two concepts that will dominate my critical approach to animals, to media, and to rhetoric: *animate rhetoric*. Instead of careening directly into animate rhetoric, I want to first describe this video—my primary text in this chapter—and also reference other texts tied to this lively crow. Following my description of the texts, I will briefly discuss queer theory as a way to play with these unruly animal bodies, before I alight upon my methodological approach of critical visual rhetoric. Finally, I will explore how crows queer the domains of rhetoric and of visual images which results in a wilding of both spheres.

Posted to YouTube in January of 2012, the original video lasted one minute, twenty-four seconds and was then picked up and shortened to just under a minute by the online news channel Russia Today (ВНУКОВ; RT, “Crowboarding”). Between these two videos and subsequent postings by other YouTube subscribers, this crow has had over two million views. Such viewership led to comments not just on YouTube, but also on blogs of mainstream news sources (Goldman; Madrigal; Perlata; Revkin; Telegraph). In the original video we find ourselves looking outside the window of what seems to be the home of a

Russian family. In the foreground we see a snow-covered roof of an adjacent building, while in the background smokestacks puncture the skyline, as well as a tall high rise reminiscent of mass housing projects in Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*. As the camera zooms in on the adjacent rooftop we hear the voice of a young child speaking Russian, and we catch sight of the figure of a black and gray crow. The crow is perched at the pitch of the roof balancing on what appears to be a plastic disc, like a lid of a large yogurt container. Suddenly, the crow is speeding down the roof, wings stretched wide and flapping ever so slightly as if to maintain his balance. As he slows down, in the background we hear the laughter of children and of a woman while a man comments. The crow, having come to a stop on the roof whose snowy pitch is marked by bird-tracks, deftly picks up the disc in his beak and flies the top of the roof. In the background the constant chatter of children and the soft cries of a young infant can be heard. At the top of the roof, the bird surveys the roof, and then once again sets the disc down, stands on it, and proceeds to tug and manipulate the disc with his beak. He then attempts to slide down a different pitch of the roof; but, due to a lack of snow the bird only goes two to three feet before coming to a stop. Again, he picks up the disc in his beak, and returns to the top of the roof. Once again, he sets the disc down, hops on, and sails down his original slope with wings spread out. We hear playful laughter and exclamations in the background from the woman, man and children. At the end of the "run" the bird pecks at the snow-covered disc with his beak, and once more flies to the top of the roof, plastic disc in-beak.¹³

¹³ In the fifty-five second Russia Today video, the clip ends at this point, but it continues for almost thirty more seconds in the original video. For approximately fifteen seconds the crow pecks at snow embedded in the lid and manipulates the plastic lid with both his beak and his feet. Finally, he pauses, looks up steadily in one direction, and then picks the lid up in his beak and flies out of view.

The snowboarding crow sparked discussion on the Internet where numerous news sources and blogs picked up the story. The same day the video was posted to YouTube—January 12, 2012—both the London *Daily Telegraph*, and the NPR blog “The Two-Way” posted the video and a brief commentary on their websites (*Telegraph*; Perlata). The following day, the story was picked up by *The Atlantic* with the title “Science Can Neither Explain Nor Deny the Awesomeness of This Sledding Crow” (Madrigal). Andrew Revkin’s blog, “Dot Earth,” on *The New York Times* also featured the crow video, as did the *Scientific American* blog “The Thoughtful Animal” (Revkin; Goldman). Each of these news sources includes comments by readers and viewers expressing their own hypotheses regarding the crow’s behavior, as well as reader anecdotes concerning interactions with crows and crow intelligence.

Finally, as with all YouTube videos, there are numerous “linked” videos that appear on the YouTube interface. At one point, there was a ten second video of a crow nipping the tail of a small dog wearing a dog-coat while sitting on the beach. A crow sits behind the Chihuahua and nonchalantly hops over and quickly nips the dog’s tail. The startled dog leaps straight up and runs away. Given the short length of the video and the dramatic response of the dog, this moment was turned into a gif (Gifak.net). The sneaky movement by the crow, the nip of the tail, and the leap of the dog are perpetually looped for human amusement. Taken together, these texts reveal how the crow wilds domestic spheres through play, and the responses of humans which range from incredulity and dismissal to wonder and enchantment.¹⁴

¹⁴ Such case studies are not unusual in the corvid world. Not only have crows utilized tools for snow play, they have also used their bodies as a “feather duster” to slide down gilded cupolas of Russian orthodox churches (Marzluff and Angell 121). For Corvids, pulling tails is an international pastime with sly tugs performed on the tails of domestic dogs, wolves, meerkats, and eagles (Marzluff and Angell 79). It is possible

Unmooring the “Normal” in Queer Theory

I am interested in how our relationship with the more-than-human world is disrupted from what is considered to be “normal” or “natural.” Queer, which means to “destabilize” or to put “off-center,” becomes a playful move in relation to *animate rhetoric*. Specifically, by destabilizing meanings and boundaries, queering dominant binaries unmoors them from a singular use and wilds them. Rejecting essentialist notions regarding sexual identity, queer theory can most broadly be considered to be anything that is “at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (Halperin 62). Extending this definition, Nikki Sullivan describes the queer project as anything that seeks “...to make strange, to frustrate, to counteract, to delegitimize, to camp up—heteronormative knowledges and institutions, and the subjectivities and socialities that are (in)formed by them and that (in)form them” (N. Sullivan vi). Emerging from gender studies, and drawing on the work of Michel Foucault who asserts that sexuality is not “natural” but instead is constructed discursively, scholars like Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick have expanded queer notions regarding sexuality, identity and performance. Butler holds that sexual identity is established through the repetitive, signifying performances of heteronormative roles (*Gender Trouble* 185). For Butler, resignification becomes a political act imbued with the hope of destabilizing sedimented constructs. In resignification old meanings are challenged and new meanings are always already in the process of becoming. This becoming is a point of hope where “queer” exists as unstable *potential*, what Halperin describes as “a horizon of possibility” (62). Thus, crows queer the meaning of the roof, the plastic lid, and the wagging tail by reappropriating them for unintended uses.

that the crow is also pulling our human “tail,” reminding us of the importance of cross-species interactions that both upset and play with boundaries.

Queer theory has tentatively engaged with environmental issues, primarily in relation to ecofeminism (Gaard; Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson). Although ecofeminism and queer theory oppose the dominant, heteronormative, masculine center, they have little else in common. A prominent interpretation of ecofeminism asserts that the treatment of the earth is analogous to the treatment of women (Merchant; Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*; Shiva). As a result, some ecofeminisms create a new center which essentializes femininity whereas queer theory disrupts existing categories. More recently there has been a move to bring queer voices into the ecocritical project (Darier; Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson). These moves fall short of radically expanding the definition of “queer” and instead seek to demonstrate the instability of nature where nothing is truly “natural.” Here I seek to expand the queer project to include a queering of anthroponormativity as it occurs in relation to the more-than-human world. I assert that the anthroponormative, analogous to the heteronormative, naturalizes the human as a given center and thus privileges the human center both through discourse, as well as through material conditions. Similar to how queering of sexual identity always disrupts the heteronormative, the queering of and by animals always upsets the stable human center.

Critical Visual Rhetoric: Looking at Animate, Animated Bodies

While many critics perform close textual analyses of images, such thoughtful gazes are not emblematic of how we encounter the world. Both Casey and DeLuca point out that our encounters of the world—and with images—occur in a *glance* that lasts mere fractions of a second (Casey; DeLuca, “Speed of Immanent Images”). It is the glance that dominates, not

the gaze, especially in the digital era of the ubiquitous image.¹⁵ As a critic, I have not yet found myself methodologically capable of conveying the disorienting panorama of discordant images that pierce our retina. As a result, I choose to closely examine multiple images in *relation* to each other. Looking closely at a series of images, as opposed to the closer interrogation of a single image, simultaneously recognizes the fragmented relationships that occur amongst images while at the same time exploring how an image represents larger cultural attitudes. In many ways, this approach is similar to an inspection of a crow's nest which becomes a microcosm reflecting the larger environment. Organic matter like leaves and sticks are woven with, and into, anthropogenic materials like welding rods, Teflon tape, work gloves, screwdrivers, and flagging (Marzluff and Angell 112). This messy hybrid melds nature and culture together into an undifferentiated mass that challenges the imposition of boundaries. A critical visual methodology engages multiple texts surrounding the playfully provocative crow. The texts explored will take flight across multiple digital terrains: videos, blogs, comments, and gifs. Together these visual encounters give a hint of Corax the Crow, whose own crowing serves as an exploration of *animate rhetoric*.

My critical methodology denaturalizes common sense, is analytical, and exploratory. The interrogation of different images surrounding one topic demonstrates how images are representative of larger aspects of the culture. The analysis of “unofficial” texts (e.g., YouTube videos, memes, or blogs) speaks to what communication scholars refer to as the “vernacular” where fragments of local texts and contexts are cobbled together to explore an unfixed and polysemic event (Hasian; McGee; Ono and Sloop). Just as human-produced

¹⁵ The glance has become even more prevalent in the age of high-speed Internet, and high-speed transportation. The human animal coevolved with movement that was the speed of the foot. That speed accelerated with the use of domestic animals like horses, and then took a major hit of methamphetamines with the invention of the train and then automobile. Looking is an embodied experience that informs not just what we see, but how we see. Automobiles only permit for the glance, while the world of bipedal mobility permits for both the glance and the gaze.

rhetoric is not isolated from text and context, it cannot be set apart from the rhetoric-producing bodies of the more-than-human world. Rhetoric is part of a rich ecosystem where “Human factors are not isolated from other biotic or abiotic factors—together, as coupled human-natural systems, they both drive and are affected by the patterns and processes they create” (Marzluff x). Rather than rely solely on the “official” news reports and images of animals in mainstream venues, my method follows both sanctioned and unsanctioned routes.

Always Already Animate: Supplementing Rhetorical Deficiencies

Visual encounters with crows remind humans of the importance of provocative play. Like the crow who nips at the tail of the startled dog, I mean to provocatively critique the rhetoric of rhetoric. That is to say, I aim at more than rhetoricology; I instead challenge the “metarhetoric” of rhetoric which maintains a human center. Specifically, animate rhetoric queers the field of rhetoric itself by wilding it with the voices of the more-than-human other. Through the practice of animate rhetoric, the conversation that occurs between the human and the more-than-human expands. Instead of seeking an understanding of the animal other, how might the animal displace our own naturalized center and unsettle our perspective of the world? How might the human join in on some aerial somersaults that show the world as upside down? Such an approach engages Nietzsche’s concept of perspectivism which stresses multiplicity where no singular perspective or experience of the world dominates (253). There is always the presence of infinite, unstable, nonhuman centers who are constantly speaking. The snowboarding crow sees the world differently from the humans observing him. The dog leaps into air very differently from the crow who takes flight with wings.

As a reminder of how much our physical biology influences our perception of the world, humans are physically limited in our color perception of the world due to only having three color-receptive cones in our eyes. Compared to species like the butterfly or the mantis shrimp who, respectively, have five and sixteen color-receptive cones, the color perception of humans is feeble (Inman). We cannot even fathom how their world is colored because we do not have the physiological capacity to recognize the colors of the world they inhabit. They remind us that they inhabit a radically different world we are incapable of conceiving or imagining. One planet is composed of multiple worlds. Likewise, we assume that communication, and more specifically rhetoric, has been successfully demonstrated by superior human abilities and we seek to find parallel abilities in other animals. Yet, it is completely possible that our rhetorical abilities may seem feeble by other animals who interact in ways unknown to us, and whose very biology makes their perspective of the world radically different, if not inconceivable to the human animal.

Animals like crows have long captured the imagination of human animals. There has been a cultural, as well as biological, coevolution with corvids—as messengers, as companions in the hunt, and in the development of rhetoric.¹⁶ In 1992 George Kennedy published the lamentably undervalued article “A Hoot in the Dark: The Evolution of General Rhetoric.” Kennedy, an Aristotelian scholar, made the rather controversial claim that nonhuman animals, indeed even nonsentient plants, produce rhetoric (Kennedy, “Hoot in the Dark” 4). Kennedy’s “untimely” piece is typically only cited with reference to his definition of rhetoric—rhetoric as energy—and its major point that animals produce rhetoric has been

¹⁶ Marzluff and Angell assert that our coevolution with the crow cannot even be separated from culture: “As crows affect our culture, so, too, do we affect their ecology, evolution, and culture... Our cultural heritage with crows may even affect our mental processes, because the opinions we have formed about crows—their association with death, fidelity, creation, planning, thievery, and the like—are deeply embedded in our memory” (Marzluff and Angell 198).

largely ignored (Hawhee 82).¹⁷ Calls have been made for scholars of rhetoric to reexamine Kennedy's claims regarding the production of rhetoric, to "reopen the question of the language relation, to reconsider not only what it involves but who or what engages in it" (Davis 92).¹⁸ My work aims to participate in this conversation through the exploration of unruly animal bodies challenging human centers. Crows flying overhead and engaging us on the Internet is a reminder of an already present "other." The time has come to *look at* and *listen to*, not just *talk about*, nonhuman animals. Kennedy's hoots started the conversation. Rather than relegate those hoots to the dark, let us invite the voices of the more-than-human-world into the liminal space of dawn where a murder of crows converse together under trees...and from there to fly swiftly into broad daylight.

An animate approach to rhetoric explores the prospect of speaking *to*, rather than *about* animals. Animate rhetoric does not claim that everything *is* speaking or that it is speaking to us, merely that there is the *possibility* (Curry, "Enchantment and Modernity"; Harvey). Thus, the family filming the crow has already engaged the more-than-human world. They picked up on the play and through the medium of film on the YouTube forum, disseminated an engagement they considered significant. Likewise, the various news sources and blogs also grasped the disseminated seeds of the YouTube film and corresponded with the playful corvid in their own fashion. Famed musician Peter Gabriel has used his own musical talent as a means of connection and affective communication with chimpanzees. Rather than expect animals to learn "human," he used the medium of musical instruments as a means to "jam" with chimpanzees in a manner that is both evocative and musically

¹⁷ Indeed, Emily Plec goes so far as to claim that the field of communication as a whole is predominantly anthropocentric and relegates animal bodies to the margins (1).

¹⁸ Celeste Condit also encourages rhetoric to move beyond its current parameters and to engage with the voices and expressions not just of animals and ecosystems, but also of DNA (188).

complex. The approach was that of a middle way that resulted in a form of relational communication (Reiss et al.).

Animate rhetoric is the exploration of what things *do* in the world—a relational doing that always occurs *between* beings picking up on signals that may have been promiscuously disseminated. For example, a crow will cache not just food, but will also cache the memory of the terrain specific to each edible treasure. Trees, poles, buildings, and fields all have significance for the crow as place and food become engrained in his prodigious memory. The roof the Russian crow snowboards on becomes part of his grammar of “play.” Texts and messages abound which are not read by the human body or which have a different significance, but all the same have rhetorical force in the world. For a crow, a dog’s tail is not simply a tail, nor is the nip simply a nip. The relationship of the crow to the urban environment issues a rhetorical signal. It is a relational doing that engages the world along unsanctioned routes. Specifically, it challenges the logics of human civilization which marginalize and abject particular animal bodies.¹⁹ The crow reveals that trash like a plastic lid, or a roof are far more than human constructs. Such mundane items reveal the very instability of human constructs—the world and its diverse inhabitants are always exploring and playing with roles and uses. Animals like the crow lay bare the means of human dissemination. They feast on the abjected materials discarded by humans who have forgotten both the means of production and the means of decomposition.²⁰

Extending rhetoric to animals—and crows in particular—is not so radical (Kennedy “Hoot in the Dark” 5). Considered to be opportunists, crows find a use for anything—

¹⁹ The crow belongs to this category of abjected animals known as “R-Selected Species.” In many countries, crows are considered to be a nuisance species for crops and as a result it is legal to shoot them (Dion and Rockman 8).

²⁰ As Julia Kristeva would remind us, both abjection and the return of the abject are crucial feedback (Kristeva 71). We send away what we do not want, but the forced confrontation of the abject can have a transformative power when we actually perceive what is *a part of us* and not *apart from us*.

whether it is a rock to toss in the air, trash to pick through and consume, or a shiny object to leave at the home of people who feed them—for a crow, possibility exists in every encounter. The corvid world is animate. Rhetoric has also seized on new opportunities and venues to engage in academic play. Rhetoric no longer limits itself to the narrow confines of speeches made by great orators; it has also taken flight and carried with it some unexpected treasures that are not speech-based. Examples include performance, visual rhetoric, and the rhetoric of space and place. We permit human bodies, anthropogenic images, and space to be capable of rhetoric, and yet the discipline remains reticent to consider the rhetoric of the more-than-human world.

Despite a critical embrace of poststructuralism, rhetoricians still cling to the dream of an essential nature to humans—an intrinsic quality that makes us distinct from all other beings.²¹ Marzluff and Angell remind us that difference occurs only “by degree,” adding, “Corvids assume characteristics that were once ascribed only to humans, including self-recognition, insight, revenge, tool use, mental time travel, deceit, murder, language, play, calculated risk taking, social learning, and traditions” (Marzluff and Angell 198). Rather than seeing the animal world as dethroning the human’s privileged status of the “symbol-using” animal, I instead consider the expansion of rhetoric to the more-than-human world as a widening and wilding of the conversation that involves other beings who swoop over city streets, converse in parks, and trail behind garbage trucks.

Given the poststructuralist move of upsetting boundaries and exploring margins, synanthropic animals like crows become excellent models for approaching rhetoric.

²¹ An obvious challenge to human uniqueness involved Jane Goodall’s work with chimpanzees who, like humans, used tools. No longer were humans the “tool-using animal.” A more recent example involves the “unique” ability of humans to keep beat to music. This unique characteristic was debunked by a video on YouTube of a cockatoo grooving to The Backstreet Boys (Greenfieldboyce).

Synanthrope refers to any wild animal or plant who benefits from some kind of association with humans and human activities (Marzluff et al. 332). A synanthropic species plays with the boundaries between human and nonhuman. Corvids, who can thrive in almost any environment, are highly successful in their urban environments due to the high concentration of anthropogenic resources for consumption and nest-building. Applied to rhetoric, by venturing outside of the isolated confines of academia's ivory tower and into the buzz of the wild, urban environment, ears, eyes, nose, tongue and fingertips are met by a surplus of more-than-human rhetors and texts. Indeed, as the corvid images of "crowboarding" and tail nipping show, the animal wild can be seen from the computer screen. Animate rhetoric permits for the radically vernacular. This play in the margins leads us to corvid—and more-than-corvid—ruptures that provide openings to differences and to becomings. Rather than simply engage with humans and anthropogenic artifacts, rhetoricians can muck about and converse with carrion eaters.

Différance serves as a theoretical framework for the eternal becoming of rhetoric that never reaches fruition. Meaning is constructed through difference, but because meaning is *always* deferred and never complete, it—much like a human "center" in the discipline of rhetoric—is inherently unstable. Thus, meaning is never actually reached but is instead suspended not just between "to differ" and "to defer," but also between the past and a future (or multiple futures?) that is never reached. Meaning always has a trace of the past, but that trace is merely a trace of a trace stretching towards a nonexistent telos. Likewise, rhetoric will always have a trace of its Aristotelian past which includes Aristotle, Corax the crow, as well as the silenced voices of forgotten beings. Simultaneously, rhetoric engages in an act of becoming that will be deferred, and will differ on its uses and interpretations, especially as it expands into *animate rhetoric*.

Watching the crow snowboarding reminds the viewer of how much is conveyed through behavior and intonation. We never see the humans; instead, the focus literally moves from the anonymous human-centered environment of an industrial city, to the close-up of the snowboarding bird. His speech is not transmitted with vocal cords, but through performance. Even if he had emitted a gravelly *keru-keru-keru*, it would have been no more discernible than the Russian speech of the humans is to a monolingual, English-speaking audience. Unless the viewer speaks Russian, we do not understand what is being said by either the children or by the adults whose voices are overheard as they film the crow from the interior of their home. Yet, we do understand something, the gist of what is being said by two sets of animals—more-than-human and human—who may not speak in our native tongue. We find ourselves standing at a chasm of alterity not just with the crow, but with the Russian family who many American viewers do not understand. Rather than attempt to bridge such chasms, John Durham Peters sees them as “vistas to be appreciated or distances to be respected” (59). For Peters, attempts to cross such chasms through “...’better’ communication might be to drain solidarity and love of all their juice” (59). Indeed, pure communication would also drain wonder and enchantment.

Simply because alterity and difference govern, does not mean that seeds of dissemination cannot make it across the gulf. Rather, an ineffable *frisson* passes the divide. Yet, the desire to decode, to “understand” still persists. In each of the five blogs, arguments occurred between commenters regarding whether or not the bird was playing, or if it was simply trying to use the lid as a way to get food. On *The Atlantic*, some commenters staunchly asserted that the crow was attending to basic needs: “No doubt in my mind that the crow is trying to get to some food inside of the lid, its [*sic*] obvious” (Madrigal). Still others, like this commenter on *The Telegraph*, were equally as certain that the bird was

engaged in play, “It is clearly playing, just like a dog or a monkey or a cat. If you cannot see that with your own eyes I pity how disconnected you are from our wonderful natural world” (Telegraph). While some humans commented on the playfulness of the bird, others dismissed such claims stating we could not possibly know the intent of the bird or what emotions it expresses.²² One scientist interviewed in *The Atlantic* warned against the perils of anthropomorphizing, “...when humans look at a crow doing something human-like, they have a very hard time not seeing themselves as the crow” (Madrigal). Might it be possible that such projections lead to greater recognition of an other who also feels?²³ There seems to be a naturalized assumption that humans can understand the intent of the family filming the bird, or even the intent of the audience watching the video. Yet, there never seems to be a questioning of what is evoked. The “indiscernible” speech of the Russians is not questioned. Nor is the laughter of the children. What is questioned is the crow. Such naturalized privileging results in a speciesist double-standard where we assume we understand the intentions of animals who belong to our own species, but dismiss the rhetoric of another species because we could not possibly know what that animal is thinking. Communication may only be an encounter with fragments—a series of feathers that fall from the air. Even if what we view lacks the narrow-sense of “meaning,” some form of relational connection prevails.

²² While it is certainly impossible for any individual to accurately understand the experiences of any other individual, to assume that only humans have emotions is an outdated notion that is slowly being abandoned in the sciences (Bekoff, *The Animal Manifesto: Six Reasons for Expanding Our Compassion Footprint*; de Waal). All animals, including humans, are “sensation junkies.” Pleasurable sensations are explored, repeated, sought out, and do not necessarily satisfy a basic need of food, water and shelter. Examples include Russian bears getting high off of jet fuel, both human children and corgi canines seeking out the dizzying movement of a playground merry-go-round, or the increasing legalization of marijuana in the United States (Lawson; Locker; Frosch).

²³ This philosophical issue is referred to as “The Problem of Other Minds,” a skeptical approach which asserts that since we can only *observe* the behavior of others, it is not possible to actually *know* that others have minds.

The focus on “meaning” or “understanding” is a modernist approach that favors a return to an origin. Kennedy seeks to expand the concept of rhetoric, but in doing so seems to return to his own rhetorical origin of “nature.” Kennedy perceives the origin of animal voices to be natural, and what is natural is often considered right and good. Similar to landscape architect Anne Whiston Spirn who prescriptively applies classical rhetoric to the natural environment and landscapes, Kennedy applies classical rhetoric to the animal world, discussing examples of judicial, deliberative and epideictic rhetoric using examples from deer, bees, Vervet Monkeys, crows, and gibbons (Spirn 239). Despite Kennedy’s unorthodox expansion of rhetoric, he continues to unproblematically place the human at the center. For example, in his discussion of rhetorical eloquence, arrangement and style, he does not ask the question of “eloquent to whom” but instead asserts that the prize of artistic and pleasing animal rhetoric goes to birds with their melodious bird songs that please human ears (*Comparative Rhetoric* 22–23). Kennedy also seems intent on decoding the messages of the more-than-human world as he attempts to discover their meaning and intent.²⁴ Kennedy has certainly set the foundation for animal rhetoric, and for animate rhetoric, but it is time to

²⁴ A frequent friend of “intention” is “rationality.” Rationality is often valorized and normativized. In the bombings at the Boston marathon, individuals lamented that no “rational” person could have done such an act. Indeed, the bombing was a very rational act from the perspective of the bombers. The violence was planned, the context was deliberately selected, and the acts were coldly carried out without the confusion of emotion (images of the purported bombers at the marathon show them not reacting to the bomb). In contrast, it was the irrational acts of spectators that were so remarkable. Without pausing for “rational,” thoughtful consideration, people ran *towards*—not away from—the bombs so that they could help the hundreds who were injured. They did not pause to think, they acted on feeling. Hundreds of people responded to the suffering of others not with strategic, calculated rationality, but with emotion. Primatologist Franz DeWaal laments the “vener theory” that attributes all things bloody, violent or sexual to the more-than-human world, but anything that is commendable or valorized is attributed to human uniqueness (10–11). DeWaal scratches at this thin paper-thin veneer and advocates a shift where humans recognize both the positive and negative attributes we share with the more-than-human world. Supporting de Waal, Marzluff and Angell write, “For centuries, many philosophers and scientists have believed that other animals were incapable of conscious thought and emotion. But as we learn more about how information travels through the brains of other mammals and birds, and how similar this trip is to the way our own brains work, we can no longer perpetuate this self-serving idea” (39).

fluff our feathers and strut outside of these traditional confines so that we can perch upon its stalwart columns already whitewashed with raven waste.

By moving outside of the stately towers of rhetoric, we find ourselves in the “wilds” where a cacophony of voices assaults our gangly limbs. Seeing a crow nip the tail of a dog or take a fast ride in the snow evokes laughter in the human animal—laughter which can join the caws of a black bird with a glinting eye. Through animate rhetoric that engages with the more-than-human world, we experience a queering of the field of rhetoric. That is, a queering—a wilding—of rhetoric occurs. No longer is rhetoric domesticated under “rational” human control. Instead it is wilded by the voices of more-than-human world.

Visual Punctures: Disruptions of Animate Bodies

While some nonhuman animals have learned the language of human animals, humans rarely learn the languages of other nonhuman animals.²⁵ As a result, images of the more-than-human world are vital texts. Because I cannot easily discern the writing of animals—writing that might occur in the form of scents, textures, excretions, scratches and tracks—I turn to the medium of visual images where I can encounter one aspect of animals through their own visual “performances” on the screen. Linking images and animals together is not unusual. The oldest known painted images, created 32,000 years ago, are of animals. The Chauvet Cave in southern France contains hundreds of paintings on undulating cave walls depicting at least thirteen species of paleolithic animals: lions, horses, bison, bears, ibex, woolly rhinoceros, reindeer, panthers, insects, butterflies, birds, woolly mammoths, and hyenas. Only one partial image of a human figure can be found: the genitalia and legs of a woman which meld into the head of a bison (Herzog). In these early images, the animal is

²⁵ Famed parrot Alex was capable of communication with humans. Dogs have the ability to follow complex verbal commands; chimpanzees and gorillas learn sign language (Carey; PBS; King).

never far from the human form. The fascination with the animal body and image-making continued into photography with Muybridge's famous "Horse in Motion." The visual enchantment humans have with more-than-human animals continues on the Internet where lolcats dominate and occasionally make appearances with crows. These videos, in conjunction with the crow nipping the dog's tail, demonstrate how more-than-human animals actively engage across species lines.

Animals and images share some common attributes. Both images and animals have the potential for speech; that is, both are animate, but that speech may actually fall into what art historian James Elkins terms the "anti-semiotic" (xi). Animals and images resist semiotics which reduces graphical marks to mere building blocks for signs, or as signs themselves. Aspects of the animal and of the image escape and resist semiotic rationality and a reduction to mere utility. Images defy disciplining and boundaries which privilege "meaning." From the human perspective, images of animals connote more than they denote. As a result, a great deal of play can be encountered when looking at images of animals—play that resists the clearly defined rules of *ludus* and instead jumps into the free play of *paidia*. Digital images provide a visual medium to remind humans of an animate more-than-human world which in turn challenges anthroponormativity. Through images of crows, we experience a queering not just of humans and animals, but of the play that occurs between the human and the more-than-human.²⁶

One "wild" place for encounters with unruly rhetorical texts lies in new media. In digital space, human animals—much like crows—find themselves drawn to bright, shiny

²⁶ It is not surprising that so many people commented on "play" in relation to the crow video. Play, after all, is a form of knowing: "We—humans, corvids, lab rats, and probably all vertebrates—build better brains through play" (Marzluff and Angell 136). A playful engagement with animal images builds a connection with an other.

objects. Capable of acclimating to new challenges and taking advantage of the resources that are ready to hand, crows remind us that there are a variety of ways to engage with animate rhetoric. When it comes to animals, YouTube takes us directly to the remarkable, the extraordinary, and in the process part of our world pauses for a moment to delight, mourn, or gasp at an animal other. While this “virtual” encounter may seem counterfeit to “direct” contact, we forget that the virtual is already at play in rhetoric. The virtual refers not simply to the space of the Internet where humans have virtual encounters with animals, seemingly opposed to the “actual” encounters we may have with animals on our dinner plate, in our homes, or in and on our bodies. It also refers to the virtual overlays—for example the cognitive and emotional overlays—that humans place on the world, producing a form of rhetoric that has naturalized the logics of anthropocentrism. Thus, a turn to animate rhetoric is much like a crow who lays bare human constructs. Put another way, animate rhetoric, especially the animate rhetoric of images, lays bare the forms of virtuality that already pervade our limited discourse.

Culture, technique, play and innovation influence our perception of the world, weaving themselves together to result in fresh perspectives that resist sedimentation. Actively engaging the presence of other bodies reminds the human that the world is never ossified and that sedimentation is subject to violent upheavals. Crows, with their sophisticated culture and their use of tools present a fresh view on our relationship with the world because in certain ways they have a kinship with our human culture, and at the same time their feathered bodies are radically “other.” The very fact that they are simultaneously like and not like us is a benefit. It gives us an opportunity to step back, observe, and marvel in a being that is not human. Our encounter with animals through visual texts has the power to transform how we think about and perceive the very animals who snowboard on

rooftops, and play tricks on beaches. The visual has the potential of being a visceral encounter. On the *Russia Today* posting of the video, one commenter linked his own movements to that of the crow: “I love how at 0:40 the crow bangs her board to try to keep shredding through the deep stuff. I’ve done that!” (RT, “Skatecrow”). The physical movement of the bird is felt by viewers who have also experienced the thrill of snowboarding. Visual encounters present an opportunity for recognizing shared experience in an animal other.

Why Look?

We like to watch. The human animal is primed for visual stimulation, just as the snout of a dog is primed for olfactory engagement. This penchant for looking has flourished in our age of ubiquitous communication where images are captured by anyone with a camera, a camera which is commonly both a phone and Internet browser that fits in your pocket. Our desire to look has sparked social media networks which feed our ravenous appetite for image consumption. The photo or video we take on our phone can be immediately uploaded to sites like Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Vine, Snap Chat, etc.²⁷ Social media have transformed our relationship with images. No longer are images solely circulated on the nightly news or in the glossy pages of magazines that are held captive to the tyranny of the gatekeeper. Instead, the gatekeeper has been challenged as individuals post images on unsanctioned sites, sometimes with the hope of viral fame.²⁸ Images disseminate

²⁷ The popular photo-sharing site Flickr demonstrates the rapacious growth of still images. More than four thousand photos are uploaded to the site each second. Simultaneously, on YouTube, in 2010 there were twenty-four hours of video uploaded every minute, a number that in 2011 doubled to forty-eight hours uploaded every minute, and the site also exceeded more than two billion views a day.

²⁸ Obviously the gatekeeper has not been demolished given that sites like YouTube and Facebook are constantly policed for images that violate policies regarding issues like copyright, nudity, or incendiary comments. The gate and the wall surrounding images has simply been expanded to include individuals who would not have access to centralized news portals.

through these social networks like dandelion seeds dancing in the wind. Some parachuting seeds fly and disappear into an abyss of forgotten possibility, while others take root in fertile, and not-so-fertile, soil where they spark the creation of new seeds who in turn journey into unknown spheres. A crow snowboarding on a rooftop might be a momentary distraction for one human, where for another it might inspire a wonder for an animate other.

Digital Possibilities

The digital image marks a rupture that is just as significant as the rupture that occurred with photography when there was a sense that we could capture and transmit an accurate depiction of events. The digital image takes the world and adds a twist to it. According to William Mitchell, “Images do not just mirror the world directly, as they once seemed to do, but reflect traces (perhaps tinted or distorted) of other images” (52). Thus, we encounter a form of iterability inherent to the digital image that can queer the world. In the unfixed image, there are also unfixed futures, as well as unfixed pasts. We are in the land of multiplicity where things can simultaneously go many different directions. The snowboarding crow became an opportunity for other viewers to transform the video by adding filters, a soundtrack, or even their own subtitles interpreting the antics of the bird.

Heidegger’s concept of *bestand*, or standing reserve, frames the world in terms of utility, and more specifically, utility to a limited class of privileged humans. Thus, the world is perceived from a limited perspective. Heidegger’s concept of the world picture is applicable when we consider the ways we engage—or do not engage—with a more-than-human world that is far from being only anthropogenic. No reciprocity occurs when the world picture is composed entirely of anthropogenic images that do not invite the presence of tracks, whitewash or caws of a more-than-human world. This loss of encounter with beings who

challenge the grids we impose upon the world (and that are not “naturally” there) results in a world that only points back at the human. Heidegger points out that “As soon as the world becomes picture, the position of man is conceived as a world view” (134). In our world of hyper-mediation, that human world view is *the* world view, and is no longer just one of many world views. Provocatively, the digital sphere, though anthropogenic, brings us multiple perspectives on the animal, as opposed to a singular perspective. Here animals are not merely scopic amusement, but can also disconcert us and spark empathy and wonder. An animate perspective of animals—that is, a perspective that is dynamic, alive and changing, challenges a cultural epistemology that frames things in terms of utility or even mere biology.

The liberated image is no longer fixed, but encounters divergent voices who communicate with (and possibly challenge) the viewer. Thus a play of temporality begins, a space where, as Ritchin puts it, “The past enters into a conversation with the present about the future, and each perception can be both amplified and contradicted, its authority less inviolate” (60). Digital images imply a certain sense of fluidity with their malleability. No longer is the image maker beholden only to what was captured on the film, she can now take those images and seamlessly manipulate them. Playful, animal others are one possibility that has been liberated by binary code. Suddenly, a crow in Russia can be seen world-wide as it uses a plastic disc to “snowboard” on a snow-covered roof. Thus, the image and the new media where it flourishes, potentially give voice to an entirely more-than-human world and in the process opens up possibilities of being and becoming.²⁹

²⁹ This assertion might seem counterintuitive given that digital images are technologies produced by humans and commonly mirror the human form and not the more-than-human form. The digital equally has the potential of becoming McLuhan’s concept of “narcissus as narcosis” where the technologically generated reflection of the self serves as an enchanting but deadening narcotic.

When it comes to animals, our relationship to the more-than-human world has been transformed by our proclivity for looking. John Berger reminds us that looking at animals is an activity linked directly to our modern condition that has moved humans away from a direct experience of animals, as occurs when one both likes her pig *and* eats it, and is directly contrasted to the fetishized relationships we currently have with animals (7). Animals like dogs and cats lost their role as herding and working dogs or mousers, and are now part of the family structure. With the advent of television, new animals were invited into our living rooms, but they were highly-produced animals given significance through a credible narrator who informed us how we should be seeing and interpreting the actions of the animal world. Charismatic megafauna became something to marvel at through the extreme distance of the objectified lens of nature documentaries. David Attenborough's *Nature*, Marlin Perkins' *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom*, *Nova*, *Whale Wars*, and *Animal Planet* all become gory spectacles.³⁰ Nature documentaries became a means to "other" the animal kingdom as a brutal domain that we are only a "part of" when noble attributes like caring for young, or "marital" fidelity were displayed on the screen.^{31 32}

³⁰ Ironically, such displays of predatory violence may actually serve to reify human-perpetrated violence on the more-than-human earth. Rather than spark a sense of awe in the more-than-human, the focus on predator-prey relationships perpetuate the myth of Social Darwinism. Such nature shows amputate one relationship from a complex ecosystem and send the message that the way of nature is "red in tooth and claw" where the goal is to eat and not be eaten. Thus, if humans want to be like nature, then the goal is to assert violence on creatures who cannot escape our speed and force—a speed that has been amplified through the internal-combustion engine and bullets. Thus the act of bulldozing forests can be asserted to be analogous to the lion hunting the gazelle.

³¹ Crows are popularly cited as a model of marital fidelity in the much-revered state of sexual monogamy. However, no "universal" crow sexuality dominates as biologists give accounts of competitive ravens acting as the proverbial milkman sneaking in for a "quickie" when they know the female is fertile and the male is away from the nest (Heinrich 119–120). While monogamy might be prevalent amongst certain species (or is it that scientists are simply choosing to privilege it?), it is by no means universal. Just as there is no single description for humans, the same can be said for the crow.

³² The accuracy of such portrayals has been challenged by scientists who point out the penchant for heteronormativity within the scientific discourse (Roughgarden 3). Cases of animal homosexuality were deemed "aberrant" and were dismissed from data sets and from scientific discourse. In 1911, George Murray Levick observed homosexual behavior in penguins, but considered the behavior to be too depraved to release in a report to the public and thus wrote his finding in Greek. His journals were only recently released in 2012

The nature documentary no longer holds the same authority as it did in the past. That proclivity for looking has been transformed by the digital data circulating before our eyes. Now, any human with a camera phone can record images that do not rely on the long-shot of a lion bounding across a golden field to an unsuspecting gazelle. Instead, close-up, amateur productions are uploaded to the Internet. The lack of production to the images lends a sense of “authenticity” and rawness to the medium. Amateur images queer the way we see animals in the digital age. Visual encounters with animals are no longer only orchestrated by scientists on nature programs in the wilds of Africa. With ubiquitous photography and filmography, visual encounters with wildlife are shown to be happening in mundane spaces. An abundance of images documenting these encounters transforms our view of what animals are capable of. While many websites refer to the snowboarding crow as simply one anecdote of potential corvid play, with enough postings, such anecdotes can lead to a potential data set for ethologists, psychologists, biologists, and visual rhetoricians to interrogate.³³ New media circumvent the sanctioned routes of documenting animal worlds, and by doing so reveal animal worlds that challenge traditional views regarding what is “natural” for animals. Thus, new media queer the concept of the objectivity of science. In short, digital images not only queer how we see animals, but how we account for those animals.

Both images and animals weave their way into and out of the worlds we inhabit. Images, like animals, are there before us, there next to us, there in front of us. *They surround us*. Derrida points out that we lump all animals into one category. The category of “animal”–

(McGrath). While nature has served as a guide for what is considered “moral” behavior, that very morality is challenged by the accounts that challenge such normativization.

³³ Marc Beckoff, an ethologist, moves beyond the confines of traditional science and asserts that when it comes to studying animals in the wild, the plural of anecdote is evidence (Beckoff, *The Animal Manifesto: Six Reasons for Expanding Our Compassion Footprint* 7).

that which is not human—contains within it both the chimpanzee and the ant or bee or slug (an irony given how closely linked the chimpanzee is to the human). Images are frequently lumped into one category with no distinction between the images that dance inside our heads, to sand paintings, to photographs, or to paintings, films, etc. When distinctions in images are made, the boundary between the marginalized abject and the privileged center comes into play. Consider how we distinguish between graffiti on the street and the art displayed within the sanctified walls of the museum. Just as we attempt to exterminate certain species labeled “vermin” like pigeons, rats, and even crows we also attempt to squelch the power of “lesser” images. It is as if graffiti is a mere street rat that should be quickly poisoned and eliminated, whereas the *Mona Lisa* is like a polar bear that needs to be indefinitely preserved and protected.

Both animals and images upset and challenge these feeble attempts to maintain boundaries. Rather than attempt to assign meaning or a sense of coherence to images and animals, I am instead interested in how images and animals open up opportunities for what is rhetorically possible. Animals and images act as coconspirators who *challenge* the naturalized human regime, but they do so in an affective approach that does not utilize human words. Images of animals are an important rhetorical tool in our age of ecocatastrophe. Images offer an avenue for transforming our cultural understanding of, and relationship with, the more-than-human world. Images reveal a glimpse into an animate world alive with voices that permit for both incoherence, as well as punctures that might connect. Images of animals present an ontological imaginary—a possible glimpse into other ways of being that circulate amongst and around our own naturalized sphere.

Queer Birds of a Feather: Trailing After Totemic Guides

Crows and ravens learn from and teach each other new skills. Their highly complex social structure permits for cultural adaptation. Humans, also an adaptable and complex animal, can learn a great deal from the *Corvidae* family regarding the importance of transformation. Humans may marginalize animals, but animate rhetoric demonstrates that such marginalization can be queered. In animate rhetoric one queering occurs through the wilding of the discipline and the persons engaged. Queering does not ignore the abjected state that many marginalized animals are assigned. Instead, queer theory stresses the unstable nature of such identities and the potential of moving into and out of central and marginal roles. Queering permits for iterability, instability and resignification of meanings and of identities. Animals like the crow encourage a queering of our discourse that results in a wilding, a wilding where we might find we are not completely at ease, but are instead startled by the mischievous *kra kra kra* overhead, behind us, in front of us.

More significantly for my work, the crow highlights the role that new media wield in giving a voice to an animal who is too frequently silenced. Specifically, digital images—both still and moving—are one way of exploring an animate world and the animate rhetoric produced there. Texts woven together with animated animal bodies and digital binary code permit for a new line of engagement with the more-than-human world. It is a fusion of playful animal bodies and an anthropogenic medium. While ravens are given a voice through new media, there are some animals who remain silent, but who also haunt these images. Trash composed of rotting waste and laced with insecticides, antibiotics and patented genes. Rabbits struck down on hot asphalt by rank-smelling automobiles. The brown mouse plucked by sharp talons from the wheat field whilst tending to his own desire to survive. These are synanthropic stories that are part of the raven, and thus are woven into our own

human story. The animate world does not lie outside of the human sphere; it is always present should we have the care and intelligence to consider it.

Crows will serve as my own totemic guide throughout this book. Their play, intelligence, and culture remind us of lifeworlds that exist beyond the human sphere of understanding. Not only do crows animate the world of rhetoric, they also cross the boundary between human and more-than-human. Finally, through visual encounters with crows, we experience a queering not just of humans and animals, but of traditional, domesticated rhetoric that aches to play in thermal currents of wildness.

CHAPTER 2

TAXIDERMIED WILD: URSINE PERFORATIONS

IN THE PASTORAL³⁴

Look, children, here is the shy,
flightless dodo; the many-colored
pigeon named the passenger, the
great auk, the Eskimo curlew, the
woodpecker called the Lord God Bird.
the...
Come, children, hurry—there are so many
wonderful things to show you in
the museum’s dark drawers.

– *Mary Oliver, "Showing the Birds" (43)*

Bears haunt the human imagination. Arrested in the stars, the big and the little bear—*Ursa major and Ursa minor*—chase each other across the night sky. In the ancient Chauvet Caves of France images of bears—painted in red and black by human hands—stalk stone walls. Hairy hulks of bears also participated in the creative act through inscriptions made by long, sharp claws over their painted likenesses (Herzog). Venerated by numerous tribes ranging from Japan to Siberia, and from Scandinavia to North America, it was taboo to call on the bear directly. Instead, delicate sideways calls were made to “the grandfather,” “the glory of the forest,” or simply to “honey paw” (Pastoureau 50).

³⁴ Portions of this chapter are included as part of a journal article for *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture*. “Queer Beasts: Ursine Punctures in Domesticity” published in Volume 8, Issue 1, 2014. Taylor & Francis offers reuses of its content for a thesis or dissertation free of charge contingent on resubmission of permission request if work is published.

In myths surrounding the bear, metamorphosis serves as a prevalent theme (Pastoureau 28). Ursine metamorphoses occur on several levels. There is the transformation of blind, furless bear cubs who are shaped by the constant licking of their mother bear's tongue; an act that simultaneously performs an ursine baptism and resurrection as her nurture brings both sight and warming pelt to the mewling cubs. There is also the seasonal metamorphosis of hibernation, an event once celebrated by humans in November when bears went into their dens, and again in February when bears emerged from the darkness and into the faint glimmers of winter light.³⁵ Then there is the uncanny possibility of both bear and human metamorphizing into each other. Because the plantigrade bear so closely resembles humans—the ability to walk on the soles of their feet earned them the title of “four-legged human”—the threat of a grotesque likeness troubles their presence. In addition to being capable of walking upright, the bear shares additional similarities: an omnivorous diet, dexterous fingers capable of picking delicate berries (albeit no opposable thumb), eyes aligned on a frontal plane, and the ability to swim, sit, roll and climb (Brunner 1). Some German warriors were considered capable of actually transforming themselves into bears as suggested by terms like *Bärenhaftigkeit*, “bearhood,” and *Bärenfähigkeit*, “capacity to become a bear” (Pastoureau 51).³⁶ Finally, the bear experienced, and continues to experience, a cultural metamorphosis. First he was transformed from a revered—indeed, royal—animal and then into a persecuted brute. Currently, the bear's metaphorical metamorphosis continues as humans shape him into a new cultural imaginary surrounding wildness.

³⁵ The metamorphosis from the cult of the bear to the cult of Christian Saints resulted in the November celebration of Saint Martin's Day (Pastoureau 106). The February celebrations were taken over by numerous saints including Saint Valentine, as well as local saints whose names have ties to bears (e.g., Ursus of Aosta, or Uricinus) (Pastoureau 110).

³⁶ Such transformations also occurred in Scandinavia where Viking Berserkers experienced their own animal shapeshifting.

While the mischievous crow served as a companion to the gods, the bear was once revered as a god (Ward and Kynaston 11). He was a king, a sovereign ruling over both animals and humans. Cultural historian Michel Pastoureau asserts that ursine veneration was especially strong among Germans, “In their eyes, it was not only an invincible animal and the incarnation of brute strength; it was also a being apart, an intermediary creature between the animal and human worlds, and even an ancestor or relative of humans” (2). Such proximity to the animal world soon became a threat, demonstrating what Barry Lopez refers to as theriophobia—fear of the beast. Lopez conceives of theriophobia as not just a “fear of the beast as an irrational, violent, insatiable creature,” but also as a “fear of the projected beast in oneself” (Lopez, *Wolves* 140). Theriophobia prevailed and the sovereign rights of ursine rulers were eradicated by human kings who followed church orders to destroy animals associated with “heathen cults.” Huge massacres of bears were instituted by Charlemagne primarily in Germanic countries from 772-773, 782-785, and 794-799. The killings involved not just the bears, but also the sacred forests which were home to the boreal bear (Pastoureau 90). As a result, the bear was driven to lonely mountains from whose height he could peer down on villages—villages where stories surrounding the bear continued to be told in fairy tales like “Goldilocks,” “Beauty and the Beast,” and “Snow White and Rose Red.” By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the bear had been dethroned as “King” in Europe (Pastoureau 135). The animate beast was replaced by anthropocentric singularities—rule by kings and by a monotheistic religion.³⁷

³⁷ Ironically, the bear was brought in close to the Christian sphere through the application of religious beliefs. Specifically, the bear was associated with five of the seven deadly sins: envy, lust, wrath, gluttony, and sloth (Pastoureau 184). This appropriately leaves the sins of greed and pride safely within the sphere of humanity—sins made manifest through the eradication of the bear and the domination of privileged humans.

Despite this dethroning, bears continue to make their presence known. All extant bears descend from *Ursavus elemensis*, the “Dawn Bear” (Bieder 9). Now, as climate change and the loss of bear habitat threaten bears worldwide, humans may now find themselves seeing a fading species. Worldwide, the increasingly threatened bear species might collectively be called the “Twilight Bear.” In Germany, twilight may have shifted to a moonless midnight where the only bears are those shaped by stars. In 2006, Bruno (designated as “JJ1” by biologists) wandered onto German soil—the first time a brown bear had done so in 170 years (Rosenberg).³⁸ The offspring of two Slovenian brown bears reintroduced in the Italian Alps, Bruno leisurely traversed the Italian border into Austria, and from there to Germany. It was in this last location, in the province of Bavaria, where Bruno was shot and killed on June 26, 2006. Little did Bruno know that by crossing into Bavaria, he may as well have been crossing into Arcadia, which means “land of bears.” By passing into the pastoral, Bruno experienced his own “Et in Arcadia ego,” (Yet in Arcadia I Am), made famous in the Poussin painting where pastoral shepherds stand around a tomb. The “I” of Poussin’s Arcadia is Death, just as it was for Bruno. Europe is rife with connections to bears. In myth there is King Arthur and Beowulf, as well as the Greek Artemis. In southern Germany there was the goddess Artio, a Germanic version of the Greek Artemis (Pastoureau 33). The presence of gods who associated themselves with the bear led to complex rituals involving enactments of “being bear.” Unfortunately for Bruno, the German enactments of “being bear” took many forms including his own demise. After his death, Bruno’s body was taxidermied and displayed at the Museum of Man and Nature in Munich, Germany.

³⁸ Naming a bear Bruno is not insignificant. Pastoureau points out that “the Germanic bear derives its name from its dark fur, *der Bär* meaning ‘the brown,’ ‘the dark,’ or ‘one who glows with a dark light’” (48). Bear and brown thus began to be associated with each other, as can be seen when “the word entered Latin (*brunnus*) and then the Romance languages (*brun, Bruno*)” (Pastoureau 48).

During the seven weeks preceding his death, Bruno's plight captured the imagination of many Europeans to the point that his popularity challenged that of the 2006 World Cup being held in Berlin (Fischer and Neukirch). His travels were animated on the airwaves, followed in mainstream newspapers like *Der Spiegel*, the *BBC*, the *Guardian*, and *The New York Times*, and narrated on countless blogs. Bruno's death also sparked creative productions on the Internet. There was an online video game titled "Bruno's Rache" ("Bruno's Revenge"), as well as an "acoustic tribute" by various musical artists (Bar; Gruenrekorder). Bruno's entrance into human dominated space resulted in the creation of multiple identities for the bear—the queer beast became queer *beasts*. Bruno entered into a new ursine metamorphosis where he was animated and shaped into many characters.

When Bruno upset the pastoral tranquility of the Bavarian Alps, the ursine figure became a cultural imaginary who humans animated with competing visions of wildness in a pastoral setting. These conflicting animations neglected to respect the selfhood of the animate other—that is, the selfhood of a bear who was already animate and did not need the human public to "call him forth." Taken together, Bruno's unruly actions and the human responses they evoked invite an examination of boundary violation and the queering of bodies in space. My analysis will examine images drawn from five sources: a photo gallery from the mainstream German news source *Der Spiegel*; images from a travel blog written in English, a blog chronicled by a German twenty-something *Star Trek* fan, and a blog by vegan activists; and finally, an online video game about Bruno. These sources represent both an "official" account of Bruno's unruly body, as well as the "unofficial" ways in which Bruno was more broadly appropriated to reveal differing notions regarding wildness. Collectively, the "official" and "unofficial" texts provide insight into the national imaginary around Bruno and raise broader questions about the place of wildness and animality in contemporary

culture. Specifically, how did Bruno queer the dimensions of space and the bodies that occupy that space? In light of this ursine threat from the marginal hinterlands, how did humans choose to animate Bruno and his threat to normativity and stability?

In this essay I explore how the hirsute body of Bruno functions as a character which the public animates with competing cultural imaginaries regarding “human,” “animal,” and “wild.” Bruno is a “beast” confronting “sovereign” powers that seek to discipline unruly bodies. These highly visible contestations queer constructions of wildness and domesticity, and the boundary that separates the two. Human anxiety regarding Bruno’s presence reveals itself through three strategic animations: through wildness in need of discipline, through wildness as fetish, and through wildness as a critique of power. The act of animating an unknowable other reveals how boundaries themselves are animate and constantly experiencing their own cultural metamorphoses.

Ursine Animations in the Digital Sphere

Bruno made multiple marks on the landscape during his journey around the Alps. His ursine presence was most felt during the summer of 2006 when he wandered into Germany. His status of media sensation was not limited to that year alone. Rather he resurfaced in the news-stream with the controversial 2010 WikiLeaks. Classified correspondence revealed that Bruno had also caught the attention of US diplomats to Germany. It was in this most recent revival of Bruno’s virtual presence that *Der Spiegel*—a weekly German news magazine with a circulation of more than one million readers—created an online gallery featuring nine photos (Fischer and Neukirch). The visual narration of these photos depicts Bruno’s “uncivilized” acts that disrupted the tranquil domesticity of the German Alps—an overturned trash bin and a farmer holding a dead sheep—and attempts to

deal with that unruly presence through the use of Finnish bear hunters. In addition, the photo gallery shows how Bruno captivated the public imagination as depicted in a German Legoland representation of Bruno, as well as through images of protest where one German man dons a bear costume while holding the government/war flag of Germany. Finally, the gallery included two images of Bruno's taxidermied body encased in glass and on display in the Museum of Man and Nature in Munich.

Images from "unofficial" sources are also analyzed to demonstrate how Bruno was appropriated and deployed through alternative venues. The travel blog *Jaunted* included eight postings about Bruno by "amandak." These posts began in June, 2006 and continued through October, 2008. Each post consisted of both text and one image which chronicled either Bruno's escapades and death, or the responses to Bruno's death (amandek). The specific image used from this blog is of a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) shop with the moniker of "Bruno's" and a bear statue. An image from a personal blog by Florian König-Heidinger was posted in July, 2006 and includes an image of the author of the blog and a female companion wearing black t-shirts emblazoned with the text "JJ1 'Bruno' World Tour 2006." They hold a teddy bear with a small, black flag printed with an iconic white bear paw (König-Heidinger). An image from the blog, *Super Vegan*, was posted by Jamie Hagen of New York City and is one of the few English-language blogs to include an actual photograph of Bruno himself. Finally, a screen shot of the online video game "Bruno's Rache" ("Bruno's Revenge") is included to demonstrate how a cartoon-Bruno avenged himself in heaven (Bar). Collectively, these texts reveal different aspects of the unruly disruption and also demonstrate differing appropriations and strategic animations of Bruno that come to light through disciplining, fetishization and ultimately as a challenge to power.

Framing Bruno

Bruno's transgression into human-dominated space serves as a wild event, a rupture that disrupts the plane of human tranquility and domesticity. As with all ruptures, attempts are made to mend the hole. Unfortunately, just as we might attempt to repair a much-loved teddy-bear, some stuffing always escapes and we find that Bruno's ambling pathways take us in unexpected directions where meaning is never fixed, but is instead animate, always changing and never stable. Bruno's passage across the Bavarian landscape let loose a den of hibernating "fables" regarding wildness and discipline. It was a form of dissemination that not only followed in the much-publicized pathways of the bear himself, but also spread across political boundaries, cultural ideals, and the Internet itself into a digital sphere of becoming.

More significantly, it brought the unruly body of the bear into contact with governmental powers, what Derrida would refer to as an encounter between the "beast and the sovereign" (*Beast* 70). In addition to the bear's former status as a "king" or "god" of the forest, the blending of bear and human DNA was once considered a royal status symbol. As recently as the 13th century, Danish royalty identified its lineage with bears. Danish animal ancestry was scrupulously documented in official royal genealogies and was considered to be a demonstration of strength (Pastoureau 79). Not to be left out of the human-ursine action, Scandinavian countries like Sweden and Norway touted their marriages with Danish royalty who had direct ties to the documented ursine lineage. Thus, the beast and the sovereign became one and boundary violations were something to celebrate. An additional link between the bear and the sovereign occurs through spectacle and kingly power. Specifically, a menagerie of animals served as a political status symbol, a tool to gain power and assert

influence (Pastoureau 57–58). Kings would gift significant animals, like bears, as a means to gain political status and control. Thus the beast was commodified as a tool for the sovereign.

In Derrida's posthumously published collection of seminars delivered from 2001-2003, *The Beast and the Sovereign: Volume 1*, he explores how the relationship between beast and sovereign becomes entangled through law. Specifically, the sovereign is above the law, but the beast falls below the law. In this sphere outside of law (both above and below) we find an intermingling of beast and sovereign where there is a pawing at the heels of the sovereign and a politicization of the beast. From a Derridean perspective, the bear's move from revered king to abjected beast may not have been too much of a leap as he somersaulted and danced on the outskirts of legality. Derrida, lecturing immediately after 9/11, cites Saddam Hussein who was kept close to the sovereign state of the U.S. until he asserted his own autonomy—at that point he became the “Beast of Baghdad” (*Beast* 20). Thus, asserting autonomy from the sovereign results in labels of beastly baseness. Simultaneously, Derrida explores how other texts, for example Machiavelli's *The Prince*, explicitly link the human to the animal, specifically to the cunning fox (*Beast* 89). Thus, the beast is never far from the sovereign and the sovereign is never far from the beast. In the case of Bruno, he becomes what DeLuca refers to as “unruly” body (DeLuca, “Unruly Arguments” 9) That is, an unruly beast who queers our constructs of bodies in space.

Bruno became an “other” to animate with human projections. Animating bears on the screen is not uncommon. Perhaps the most famous animated bear is Baloo from Disney's (and Rudyard Kipling) *The Jungle Book*. Other characters like Yogi Bear in the United States have also been brought to life through film. Film animation consists of taking a series of still images and piecing them together so that a sense of movement and life is conveyed. Thus, any character can be brought to life through the artful relations of images

that convey a sense of agency and intent. A blank reel of film becomes an opportunity to create personas and stories that reflect our own cultural anxieties and dreams.³⁹ Because animation consists of linking a series of still images, it is possible for the characters to undergo visual metamorphoses as they transform from one cultural imaginary and into another—the hungry bear potentially becomes bear as menace or bear as revolutionary. Animating an unknown other comes to represent our human-centered projections and desires, and may have no connection to the world Bruno smelled, pawed at, or consumed with giant teeth. Indeed, animation may give no consideration of an “other” whose selfhood humans can hardly fathom. Derrida, speaking of the figure of the wolf, could just as easily be speaking of Bruno: “...real wolves, are the same on this side or the other side of the Pyrenees or the Alps; but the figures of the wolf belong to cultures, nations, languages, myths, fables, fantasies, histories” (*Beast* 4–5). Supporting Derrida, Robert Bieder points out that we have long filled the figure of the bear with our cultural beliefs. Whether it was as a spiritual guide during the Pleistocene or as a shamanic figure for native tribes, the bear has haunted our cultural imaginations (Bieder 49, 67). In Derridean terms, the event of Bruno resulted in a “dissemination” of cultural concepts and fables surrounding the bear. Without intending to, Bruno became a body to animate with projections that both celebrate and malign wildness. Significantly, Bruno becomes a queer beast whose unruly body assumed multiple roles.

³⁹ The act of animating an “other” is similar to the concept of the cipher. The cipher serves as a space for encoding an empty vessel filled with our own desires and meanings. As Ono and Buescher define it, “Initially it makes sense to think of the cipher as a blank slate, an empty container, an unwritten text, or an unornamented or unadorned figure—in short, perhaps, a free-floating signifier that ultimately is then filled with various meanings” (25).

“Get Stuffed” and Other Responses to the Taxidermied Wild

When a hunter’s bullet pierced Bruno’s body and killed him, an international debate ensued regarding who could claim the right to perform the last rites on Bruno’s still frame. Because Bruno was the progeny of two bears who were part of Italy’s bear reintroduction program, Italians claimed Bruno. Germany ignored Italy’s demand and instead enacted literally what had already happened figuratively: Bruno was taxidermied, stuffed, and placed on display for our human gaze. A battle of sovereign powers over the body of the beast was enacted. *Der Spiegel’s* first image of the taxidermied bear is a common depiction of Bruno on the Internet (Anderson; Brown; Bry; Parker; Sagha). In *Der Spiegel’s* image we encounter a close up of the fixed bear encased in glass in the Museum of Man and Nature in Munich. The angle of the photograph is taken from below, forcing the audience to gaze up at Bruno’s structure which towers over his human audience. His brown body is on all fours with his two front paws elevated on a wooden pallet that contains toppled beehives. Greenery frames his body as he calmly looks back at his audience. With his mouth slightly ajar, Bruno seems to neither be smiling for the cameras that surround him, nor threatening them. Rather, it is more an expression of magnanimous resignation and acceptance. From this camera angle, Bruno himself becomes an ambiguous terrain upon which humans can ascribe and then animate differing meanings.

The image of a taxidermied Bruno speaks in varied voices and to multiple audiences. Bruno’s presence in Bavaria sparked excitement because it was the first time in over 170 years that a wild brown bear had selected its own pathway across political space and was not confined to pacing the cement enclosure of a zoo.⁴⁰ Trapped behind glass, Bruno now

⁴⁰ The ramblings of Bruno have become a “pilgrimage” for tourists who are able to follow maps which guide their upright, two-legged bodies on the same pathways Bruno trod on four legs. Included in the

towers above his audience in a transcendent, romanticized notion of elevated nature. Bruno is almost noble in his disinterested observation of the crowd which gawks at him. He is not passive, but instead asserts his own desires and needs through the active disruption of beehives which he appears to have been happily consuming like Winnie-the-Pooh would have done in similar circumstances. It is as if a self-reflective wink has occurred—transcendent nature can be so naughty! For the Bruno enthusiast, while his presence in the museum is most likely deplored, the representation of Bruno serves as a material reminder that he *had* been present in Germany and *had* momentarily stepped outside of the law—an amble outside the system that brought some sense of wildness back to a highly controlled, pastoral landscape. Even in death, he serves as a reminder of boundary violation in space. Bruno’s boundary violation brought him in direct contact with another body that exists outside of the law, the sovereign body who according to Derrida, “has the right and the strength to be and be recognized as *himself, the same, properly the same as himself*” (*Beast* 66). While Bruno may not have been granted the sovereign power to be recognized “as himself,” his body did serve as a site for others to develop an expanded sense of wild identity that challenges sovereign powers.

An event appreciated by some as a celebratory return of the wild is perceived as a threat by other camps. After killing thirty-three sheep, numerous chickens, rabbits, and one hapless guinea pig, Bruno had transgressed the boundary between wilderness and civilization and would soon be considered a direct threat to humans (Expatica; Rosenberg). This anticipated threat to humans can also be seen in the image of Bruno’s taxidermied body. His massive body looms over disciplined human bodies and serves as a frightening material

walking tour are tips on living a happy, care-free, bear-like existence. Based on the lethal response he found there, Bruno would likely disagree with how “happy” his own life was in Bavaria.

reminder of the *potential* for physical aggression. His open mouth reveals teeth that not only gnaw on legs of lamb, but potentially on legs of human. His front paws are visible and highlight menacing claws. Though he is not standing upright on two legs as a human would, the fact that his front paws are elevated intimates that he could do so, a pose that would not only be threatening in stature, but psychologically disruptive to the human who is revered as being the dominant two-legged creature asserting control over subservient four-legged creatures. His raiding of beehives is not simply an enactment of bear-desire for sticky sweetness; it is a disruption of lawful, domesticated human activities and productivity. After all, bees are cultivated in hives to serve *humans*. His enclosure in a glass museum case attempts to fix the rupture he created. This iterable, queer beast can only be permitted to go so far with his disruptions of space.

Just as Bruno's glass-encased and taxidermied body speaks to multiple audiences and is a commentary on the queer ruptures of space and of normativity, the other images included in this analysis also challenge boundaries. The disciplined confines of academic writing attempt to cobble together dominant themes surrounding an issue, for the texts themselves can be unruly and do not always remain neatly contained within the established categories they find themselves assigned. While I will endeavor to address these images within the dominant themes of "discipline," "fetishization," and the "critique of power," I recognize that some images, much like a wild bear, could just as easily traverse these academic-anthropogenic boundaries and assert their presence in another category.

Nature Must Not Run Wild: Disciplining Unruly Bodies

Bruno's disruption of space resulted in an impulse to show a need for disciplining the "problem" bear. The Bavarian government chose to animate Bruno as a wild threat who

upset the tranquility of an orderly, disciplined society. When the 2010 Wikileaks revealed diplomatic correspondence, it was found that US diplomats to Germany had also been captivated by Bruno's presence and made their own assessment of the implications of the bear's presence on German soil:

Nature is good, as long as it is controlled, channeled and subdued. If the saga of Bavaria's 'Problem Bear' is any indicator, the strategy of reintroducing wild bears to the Alps, at least the German Alps, may be doomed to failure—that is, unless the bears are willing to cooperate by not being too wild. (Fischer and Neukirch)

Bruno was a challenge to the political structure because he was “not willing to adapt to German culture and traditions” (Fischer and Neukirch). Bruno did not see the government's story board depicting “appropriate” bear behavior. Instead of recognizing human culture in terms of restriction and self-discipline, he instead adapted to it by permitting his sensuous body to respond to the culinary delights so considerately made available to him by his German hosts. Guided by his substantial ursine snout, Bruno wandered from the crags and peaks towards the pungent odors of civilization. Entering into domesticated space must have been the ursine equivalent of the queen of all camp—a Las Vegas casino buffet, except this buffet did not consist of hyper-real, processed food. Crossing the boundary of nature and wilderness that is “out there” and “away,” he entered into civilization where his presence was not only disruptive and challenged which bodies were permissible in that space, but also which actions were permissible. In short, Bruno became a threat to “normal” *human* behavior. Normativity in Bruno's case was always based on humans. The human sphere was directly challenged by Bruno's queer presence. Bruno rewilded the pastoral. These disruptive actions required deploying Bruno as a threat to humans which required disciplining and banishment from civilized space.

One example of Bruno's threat to orderliness and thus the need to discipline him can be seen in the *Der Spiegel* image of a toppled trash bin, out of which spews the typical candy wrappers, cigarette packages, plastic bags and newspapers (Fischer and Neukirch). The trash—much like the disorderly and rambling pathway of the bear who toppled it—wanders uncontained across the earth. It is as if the trash has joined both the sovereign Bavarian government, and Bruno the beast in a realm outside of law. Through his very presence, Bruno has “unfixed” established social mores and challenges the “natural” order of the civilized world. When the receptacle is overturned and bounded orderliness is disrupted, what was abjected comes back into view, and becomes a threat to the power structure that disciplines bodies. This breach in the system is what Julia Kristeva refers to as “the horror” that challenges our bounded identity (Kristeva 71). It is almost as if the toppled trash bin, now a breached vessel of containment, has the potential of becoming something else. Its disheveled and empty state signifies a potential opportunity for resistance towards cultural standards of legal normativity. Culture has been directly challenged by the wild. As a result, clearly defined cultural boundaries signifying human dominance must be carefully maintained. The threat to that orderliness and human boundaries was dealt with using a firm hand to discipline unruly bodies stepping outside of the law.

Part of the perceived need for discipline was due to Bruno's threat to pastoral domesticity by his “barbaric” incivility. While it is charming to imagine a bear at a distance, the presence of a wild body in the pastoral landscape threatens our sense of congruity and how space “should” function. Bruno left not just paw prints in mud and scat on hillsides, but also—not surprising for an omnivore—a trail of death. Bruno's assault on the pastoral space is demonstrated in the *Der Spiegel* image where we encounter a dead sheep with a bloody gash on a partially-gnawed leg (Fischer and Neukirch). The violated sheep is propped

up by a kneeling, mustachioed man wearing a Panama hat, a black polo shirt, shorts and Birkenstock sandals. The somber gaze of the sheep farmer does not look directly at the camera. Green, verdant grass supports not just the sheep's body, but also the man's body as his fingers tenderly hold one of the sheep's ears. This sheep is the victim of undisciplined wildness. Ironically, the sheep was destined for slaughter and consumption by *humans*, an act that would have been considered disciplined and civilized. A symbol of the pastoral, a being that requires a human shepherd to care for it, the sheep's dwelling space was no longer stable. Rather, the queer threat of an omnivorous bear threatens the stability of a "safe" landscape. With the transition of hunter-gatherer cultures to agriculture, the cultural imaginary of the bear underwent a metamorphosis. Once a figure held in high-regard, agricultural societies were intent on abolishing the bear from domesticated realms. As a result, the bear began to be conveyed as an oafish brute who was a threat to the pastoral (Bieder 70–71). The dead, domesticated animals became a material reminder that brutish Bruno had disrupted space through his actions and what is worse, left behind reminders of his presence even when he was not present. Bruno, even when absent from the scene, continues to haunt the space.

To deal with this threat to orderliness, a new resource must be employed to discipline the unruly ursine. The Bavarian governor, as quoted in newspaper articles, determined that Bruno's undisciplined behavior was not "normal" and deemed Bruno to be "a problem bear" (Fischer and Neukirch). Keeping alive a long tradition of hunting bears with the assistance of dogs (Bieder 86), Finnish bear-hunters were called in to find Bruno, tranquilize him, and relocate his body. All of this was to occur at a controlled distance from Bruno. Such an approach is almost laughable when one considers how past Germans ritualistically encountered bears. In the fourth century, there were records of young

Germanic men who were required to kill a bear in hand-to-paw combat with only the assistance of a dagger (Pastoureau 39). Sometimes the human lived, sometimes the bear lived, but there was always the guarantee of *contact* between species. When contemporary Germans encountered Bruno, the only permissible combat occurred at a distance with the aid of guns filled with tranquilizers or bullets.

The distance between species is exemplified in the portrayal of the “hunt” for Bruno. *Der Spiegel’s* image of the Finnish bear-hunters portrays four unsmiling men kneeling on the grass (Fischer and Neukirch). These men are the very embodiment of discipline. All are dressed identically in black t-shirts, fluorescent yellow-green vests, gray baseball caps and sunglasses. They seem more reminiscent of a vacationing Agent Smith from the film series *The Matrix*, than of men attempting to help a troubled bear. Each man holds a tethered dog. The dogs, who wear fluorescent orange vests, seem to be the only creatures enjoying the situation. Many have their mouths open with tongues lolling out. Despite being leashed and controlled, they do not seem to hold the same discipline their human companions command. Here we have a direct sense of the orderly discipline the political powers desire not just from humans, but also from more-than-human animals. While Bruno was elusive and escaped the view of spectators and of the Finnish bear-hunters, the dogs belonging to the hunters are tethered, always kept under human control, and are even outfitted in their own uniforms. Uniforms place both the men and the dogs into a disciplined, look-alike mass which results in a loss of individuality. While Bruno disrupted beehives and ripped honeycombs apart, the men and their dogs enter *into* the orderly hive and become drones for a larger political system. Indeed, one can easily imagine their being accompanied by the hum of mechanized drones to assist them with their search. Their presence provides the illusion

that the rupture of wildness into domesticated space will be mended through politically-sanctioned discipline.

This performance of discipline becomes almost comical given the ambivalence of the bear they hunt. A close companion to queer theory is the aesthetic of “camp.” Camp, in the Sontagian sense, refers to an aesthetic which is exaggerated, affected and self-aware of its performance. According to Sontag, “Camp sees everything in quotation marks,” thus the Finnish bear hunters are not merely hunters, they are “hunters” (280). True to camp’s ironic queer roots, a twisting occurs. Rather than the political forces enacting power upon Bruno, the bear is the one wielding rhetorical force as he ransacks private property and leaves behind a wake of disorderly mayhem. Bruno actually queers dominant political powers by forcing *them* to perform “power” as seen in their efforts to control and discipline the unruly bear. Thus, when the Bavarian government demonstrates their power through the disciplining and death of an unruly bear, they are actually revealing their own impotence as an authority figure. By disrupting space and forcing a confrontation, there is a queering of performance where the hegemonic powers become more of a “dancing circus bear” than Bruno himself. Indeed, it might be said that sovereign powers are guilty of “playing the bear,” an idiom that carried with it insinuations of oafishness (Pastoureau 62, 83). While Bruno managed to avoid the tranquilizer gun and continued to wander the Bavarian province, the government was forced to perform for the public gaze as it bungled through the queer space created by Bruno. Thus, while the sovereign government might exist in a Derridean space outside of the law, it was still beholden to the tyranny of the image through the gaze of the public. Reclaiming this domestic space for the “normal” inhabitants was not an easy performance when the threatening character—Bruno—does not adhere to the political script of discipline. Instead, boundaries of space, and the roles performed in that space,

break out of the neat and tidy constructs of the dominant political powers and result in some fingers sticky with honey and shoes muddied with bear scat.

Queer Eye for the Bear Guy: The Fetishization of Bruno

Not all humans fixed Bruno as a body to animate with fears of nature run wild. Echoing past human rituals which established the bear as a totemic figure imbued with power, contemporary bear enthusiasts rallied round Bruno. Rather than taxidermy Bruno as a threat in need of disciplining, other human camps taxidermied Bruno as a bear to be animated through fetishization. Like the desire to discipline Bruno's unruly body, these forms of fetishization momentarily fix Bruno and fill him with human desires. He is filled with a public imaginary that sees the intersection of an unruly body in a domestic space as an ideal. This idealized wildness indirectly challenges the disciplining force of the dominant political powers through a form of mockery. By fixing Bruno as a fetishized plaything or an orgiastic "outdoorgasm," a form of political ridicule is performed.

Bruno's unruly behavior became an event to fix through play. While Derrida conceives of all texts as open to an endless play of difference and deferral, Bruno both figuratively and literally enters into the realm of play (*Positions* 27). Legos, the plastic, interlocking blocks of Denmark, are a favored plaything for children worldwide. Legoland in Günzburg, Bavaria was so captivated by Bruno that they created, and dedicated, a display to the disorderly ursine. This display was captured in an image, taken from the *Der Spiegel* photo gallery, which depicts a Lego-constructed brown Bruno in vegetation that mimics that of a meadow (Fischer and Neukirch). Included are three white, Lego-sheep who do not seem to mind the ursine presence. Bruno the undisciplined "threat" has literally been transformed into a toy. The Lego-creators have simultaneously demonstrated that Bruno is an

unthreatening plaything to fetishize, and that they were able to easily achieve a task of which the government was impotent—controlling unruly members in space. The control so craved by the Bavarian government was achieved through plastic simulation. Bruno’s infiltration of domestic space sparked the creation of miniaturized space where bear and sheep can dwell together peacefully.

Bruno’s presence was not merely confined to that of a display inside of a building. Rather, he made his way outside and into the public where he became a queer icon. The elevated status of iconicity reveals itself through an appropriation of Bruno as a mascot at an LGBT shop. Taken from the travel blog *Jaunted* by “amandak,” we find an image of a white shop with a rainbow-striped awning serving as a backdrop for the shop’s name: “Bruno’s” (amandek). The shop windows are covered with posters including one for *Brokeback Mountain*, a film which featured a queering of ruggedly wild space by two gay cowboys, as well as a prominent poster of a bare-chested man with his arms raised above his head. Greeting customers is a statue of a brown bear who, like the bare-chested man in the background, also has his arms raised above his head. With a brown head and brown paws that feature brightly painted bear claws, Bruno is not simply a brown bear; he has become a rainbow-festooned “bear” through brightly colored paints that wrap around his body. Bruno has been fixed as a character to animate and to fetishize in the cultural space of gay icon. In this role, he wears the rainbow flag, a symbol of the LGBT movement which is used to not only represent the diversity of the movement, but also to show pride. Just as Bruno was seen by some as a celebration of wildness, the bright colors of the flag are celebratory of sexuality that has culturally been labeled as “not normal” or “unnatural.” Thus Bruno becomes a symbol of transgression, of upsetting fixed notions of normalcy and challenging dominant, sedimented structures.

Bruno's presence at this shop also plays with another facet of gay culture—that of “bears.” Moving beyond the stereotype of gay men as effeminate and well-groomed, the gay “cubculture” of “bears” celebrates the hirsute body, relishes the beer belly, and prefers the garb of the working-man to that of Calvin Klein (Hennen; A. Sullivan). Like the wild bear, these human bears resist domestication and celebrate their animality as evidenced through their revelry in the most basic human act of sweating and body odor (Kampf 52). Like Bruno, these men transgress boundaries, becoming what Andrew Sullivan refers to as “post-gay.” While Bruno queers the domesticated space through his unruly presence, “bear” men transgress and queer what it means to be a gay male. Rather than flamboyantly resist normativity through the donning of drag-queen lamé, these men subvert straight culture through their very ordinariness of denim and flannel—an ordinariness that can be far more threatening due to its banality. Each set of bear transgressions—Bruno and the human men—upset established cultural norms of what is considered “acceptable.” This complex negotiation of identity demonstrates that even the “transgressive” state of homosexuality can never be completely fixed. Rather there is always a resistance to stability and an opening to what Butler refers to as resignification: “The resignification of speech requires opening new contexts, speaking in ways that have never yet been legitimated, and hence producing legitimation in new and future forms” (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 41). The resistive force of resignification gains materiality through bodies in space and in the case of Bruno serves as a potential point of hope. Just as homosexuality was considered clinically aberrant by the DSM less than forty years ago, that “deviant” identity gained some sense of social acceptance and stability through the mediation of the groomed, gay, male body which came to symbolize “gayness” (A. Sullivan). That sedimented stereotype of what a gay male should “be” is now

challenged through hirsute “bear” bodies which demonstrate that the oft-essentialized homosexual landscape is anything but homogenous.

Bruno’s presence in Bavaria served as a reminder that space is far more complex and does not always adhere to human-constructed boundaries. Bruno reminded us that threatening more-than-human bodies once roamed the Bavarian Alps long before humans settled in picturesque hamlets and disciplined the landscape. Bruno’s unprotected penetration of the Bavarian landscape ruptured the hymen of the *Heimat*. Once such space has been ruptured, it can never return to its bounded, virginal purity. Attempts to do so will still bear the marks of inept suturing. Once queered, the landscape can never be made completely straight, but will instead hesitate in a hymenal space somewhere between virginity and consummation, between the imaginary and truth, between the law and the uncontrollable (Derrida, *Dissemination* 209–210). Indeed, between the beast and the sovereign.

Roaring at Oppression

Part of a queering impulse is a critique—frequently satirical—of oppressive forces. Using camp, this critique becomes parodic with characters like Bruno serving as a prankster in a Bakhtinian carnival (Bakhtin 70).⁴¹ Camp becomes a form of resistance. Bruno’s body became the “beast” outside of law and was appropriated and mobilized as a vessel by multiple publics. In this way Bruno could be taxidermied and stuffed both to embody and critique sovereign political forces. However, long before Bruno was murdered, he had

⁴¹ Carnival, when individuals don new roles, statuses and identities is also tied to a form of ritualized metamorphosis. It is a momentary, culturally-sanctioned transformation. In the Pyrenees, a young man would dress as a bear and “kidnap” a young maiden who he would carry away to his “den.” The maiden would be rescued, but the insatiable “bear” would again repeat the offence which the villagers would once more rectify (Pastoureau 243).

already been taxidermied and stuffed as a symbol for political resistance. Resistance that some camps felt needed disciplining, and which others saw as an event to celebrate. This resistance not only fetishized Bruno and fixed him with a human ideal of wildness and nature, Bruno himself became a symbol used to challenge the German cultural mores of order and control. In this role, Bruno transcended the material bear that swam in lakes, had run-ins with automobiles and even sat on the front steps of a local police station eating a guinea pig (Parker). Rather, he became “Bruno,” a synecdoche for idealized nature that signals alterity and nonconformity to rigid, cultural customs. “Bruno” became a vehicle through which cultural cynicism over rigidity and hyper-discipline was critiqued in a satirical manner. This critique of power was exemplified through humans “becoming” Bruno in order to seriously, but playfully, critique governmental decisions. Not only was the geographic landscape queered by Bruno’s presence, so too was the political landscape.

Within hours of the Bavarian government giving a last-minute shoot-to-kill order, Bruno was murdered by unnamed hunters. Bruno was animated and given a name by humans, while his murderers were stripped of theirs in order to protect them not from the claws of a bear but from their fellow humans. Bruno’s heavy-handed murder sparked outrage across Germany. In one *Der Spiegel* image we find a blond, blue-eyed male dressed in a cartoon-like bear costume (Fischer and Neukirch). Unlike the Bavarian government who unwittingly “played the bear,” this man gleefully assumes the role. The man, whose cheeks are painted red as if with blood, peers out of a hole in the bear costume’s neck, with the dopey, bulbous-nosed bear head rising high above the man’s own stature. The man holds wide in front of him the *government* flag of Germany which is emblazoned with an eagle coat of arms. This is not the civil flag of the people. Use of the governmental flag is a punishable offense that can result in a fine. Thus, the governmental flag represents the sovereign nation,

and not the people. The man assumed the role of a cartoon-like bear to directly contest rigid political structures. By turning Bruno into a silly bear that appears far more dim-witted and bumbling than he does conniving and threatening, there is an under-handed critique of the political structures so threatened by Bruno's presence in Bavaria. The man in the bear costume revives the oafish qualities of the bear circulated in agrarian cultures (Bieder 71), but queers those qualities as a means to critique the sovereign. As a result, the "oaf" becomes a guide for the people, almost a blending of agrarian notions of the bear with far more ancient notions of the bear which framed him in terms of a spiritual guide. Ultimately, in the landscape of public protest, Bruno became an animated character used for mocking government buffoonery.

The collective rejection of government actions can also be seen in the commodity fetishization that surrounded Bruno's death. The ubiquitous t-shirt became a site of protest and contestation of Bruno's death and the government's actions. Florian König-Heidinger's blog displayed the author of the blog and a female companion wearing t-shirts typically reserved for rock stars on tour. The shirts are black, symbolic of traditional funeral garb, and are printed with orange text reading "JJ1 'Bruno' World Tour 2006" (König-Heidinger). The tour dates indicate locations and dates of Bruno sightings as well as where he killed sheep. Framing this list of dates is the outline of a bear head and a waving bear paw—it is as if the spectral outline of Bruno looms over and haunts his death, but is never completely present. The young couple holds a plush teddy bear festooned with a small, black flag with a white paw print of a bear.

The combination of teddy bear and references to Bruno as rock star serves to transform the bear into a fetishized, fantastical "friend." Specifically, both teddy bear and rock star status are additional cultural imaginaries surrounding the bear. With its humanoid

features, the domesticated teddy bear serves to link humans to a wilderness that is merely a memory or an imaginary (Bieder 122–129). Already a regular feature of zoos in the late eighteenth century, and then in circuses in the mid-nineteenth century, the bear entered the twentieth century not so much as a spectacle or a performer, but as a friend (Pastoureau 246). Perhaps responding to some inexplicable zeitgeist, toy teddy bears ostensibly developed simultaneously in both the United States and in Germany around 1902/1903. While intimate human-bear relations dominated folklore, the act of bedding down with a bear is now only culturally sanctioned when it is with a simulacrum of a bear, a toy bear.⁴² Thus, the bear enters into the most private of spaces, the bedroom, where children treat their plaything as a confidant and as a source of comfort.

Just as children invite teddy bears into their room, teenagers invite rock stars into the inner sanctum of their angst-ridden lives. Listening to music in bedrooms, teens develop a relationship with an icon who they can imaginatively fill with private fantasies. In death, Bruno has assumed the persona of a deified rock star cut down in his prime, the Kurt Cobain of *Ursus arctos*. This comparison was not lost on the German media. In a *Spiegel Online* obituary, Bruno joins an elite set of cultural icons: “Bruno follows in a line of worldwide celebrities whose lives were ended far too soon. Elvis, Marilyn Monroe, Jimi Hendrix, John Lennon, Princess Diana—now Bruno” (C. Bryant). Like rock music which traditionally plays the role of pushing back against rigid, cultural values, Bruno becomes an animated star

⁴² The representation of sexual relations between bears and humans were once very common. In addition to the theme of “metamorphosis,” there is also a prevalent theme of mating with bears. The interspecies mating theme is seen in Greek myths, as well as in tales of Saxon women who were raped by bears and gave birth to extremely hairy children whose great strength resulted in their being knighted as great warriors. While it was asserted that female bears had an insatiable sexual desire, apparently such flagrant sexuality by a female has always been considered threatening, as the idea of a female bear mating with a male human was considered repugnant, whereas it was permissible for a female human to mate with a male bear (Pastoureau 69, 79). Contemporary myths surrounding human-bear love continue as seen in the 1976 novel *Bear* by Marian Engel, and in Charlie Kaufman’s 1985 film *When Nature Calls (The Outdoorsters)* which briefly depicts a hilarious coming-of-age scene between a young virgin teenager and a virile bear.

challenging heavy-handed government actions. His antics on the landscape become events to celebrate as resistive punctures in a rigid system.

Bruno's queering of the political landscape assumes an analogous satirical role in the online video game "Bruno's Rache" ("Bruno's Revenge"). Here Bruno transcends the hegemonic political structure and sits atop a white cloud in heaven where he inflicts "punishment" upon his pursuers (Bar). The storyline asserts that after Bruno was murdered and went to heaven, he grew tired of being the "good" bear and wanted to return to some of his wily, disruptive ways. As a result, he now dresses in the white robes of heaven with flapping angel wings and sits atop a fluffy, white cloud from which he pours honey onto Bavarian hunters, Finnish hunting dogs, police officers, and government officials. Included in this narrative are other key characters in Bruno's narrative—honey bees, chickens, a cyclist who followed Bruno into the woods, sheep, and a World Cup soccer player.

In the game, Bruno now sits above law and even peers down upon sovereign powers. He has literally been animated as a deified cartoon character capable of punishing the humans—but with sweet honey instead of bullets. While Bruno has been fixed in online play, his pouring honey on the landscape below reveals how sticky the events surrounding his death actually were. The viscous honey gums up the system and demonstrates that the political decisions surrounding Bruno's shooting were anything but clear-cut and rigidly defined. The smooth functioning of political power is not as streamlined and controlled as the government would like the public to believe. Rather, Bruno's presence on the landscape made both relationships and boundaries sticky. No longer were the pastoral and wild cordoned off from each other; instead there was direct contact that challenged which beings – indeed, which species – are permitted to belong. Likewise, the relationship between the people and the government was also troubled by Bruno's presence. In addition, the act of

pouring honey serves as a direct mockery of the punitive stance taken by the government. Here Bruno pours honey on his perpetrators, hardly an act worth killing a bear over. The game makes the political powers, specifically the sovereign government, appear ridiculous, even outrageous, regarding their response to Bruno. Fixing the brown bear as a playful cartoon character challenges cultural rigidity and has material consequences regarding whose bodies are permitted on German soil.

Bruno clearly captured the imaginations of the German public. This was not simply due to his appeal as a charismatic bear. Rather, he ambled into the collective imaginary because of what he came to symbolize. As Bieder points out, the stories we tell about animals and bears provide us with cultural meaning and reaffirm social practices and institutions (71–73). The stories that erupted with Bruno’s unruly presence reveal the competing notions of wildness and discipline. There is no singular story of the bear. Rather, we have animated unruly *ursines* on the public screen—revered Bruno collides with denigrated Bruno. It is unlikely that Bruno himself was aware of the boundaries he transgressed, but the act of crossing unknown cultural boundaries resulted in his body being animated as a character critiquing government. Bruno’s presence on the landscape signaled resistance, nonconformity, alterity and queerness. His presence brought to the surface concerns regarding which bodies are permitted to occupy Germany and call it home. Derrida shows how we characteristically limit ethics to those human beings who are “recognizable” or considered “fellow” (e.g., family, race, religion), a form of ethics which for Derrida is decidedly shallow and narcissistic (*Beast* 108–109). For Derrida, the beginning of ethics is our confrontation with what is “unrecognizable:” “The ‘unrecognizable’ [...] is the beginning of ethics, of the Law, and not of the human... The ‘unrecognizable’ is the awakening. It is what awakens, the very experience of being awake” (*Beast* 108). Bruno, the “unrecognizable,”

became an animation by which the politics of difference could be questioned. He was a rupture whose roar potentially aroused an awakening. While his queer presence was “contained,” the impact he had on the political landscape was not so easy to quarantine and instead became fodder for political satire.

Fixing Bear Tracks

When Bruno continued to defy the cultural norms regarding the appropriate place for wildness, the only way to discipline his unruly discourse—what Butler might call excitable speech—was through death. Death presented the ultimate disciplining of wildness by political forces. The last image from *Der Spiegel* demonstrates the hyper-disciplining of Bruno (Fischer and Neukirch). The singular, still frame of animation becomes totalized in the taxidermied body of Bruno. Unlike the first image of taxidermied Bruno which was close-up and gazed upward at Bruno, this image was captured from a slight distance. We, perhaps like a sovereign power, look down on Bruno—hierarchy prevails and surveils—and the perspective reveals the bodies of other photographers all shooting Bruno with their telescopic lenses. Bruno has been put on display for the human gaze and humans themselves are permitted to re-enact the shooting performed by Bavarian hunters. The vulnerability of Bruno’s body on display for consumption by so many lenses, makes the scene almost pornographic. The hierarchical perspective and Bruno’s pose make him appear more like a 1950’s centerfold hoping to please the audience consuming him, rather than a carnivorous threat capable of inflicting harm on humans. It is as if the cameras are dominating Bruno from behind as he beguiles the photographers’ gaze with his tawny fur and coquettishly cocked head. The bear that toppled trash bins, gnawed on sheep and eluded Finnish bear-hunters has finally been subdued. In an attempt to deny Bruno’s ability to symbolize something other than threat,

political powers have stuffed the animated character and placed him inside of a receptacle. By placing his body in a museum—itsself a symbol of a hermetically sealed culture—political forces demonstrate that the threat has been stopped, the rupture has been temporarily sutured shut, and the only pathways surrounding Bruno will be in a rectilinear fashion around his cubical prison of glass. Bruno, along with the last brown bear that had roamed similar pathways 170 years earlier and is also taxidermied in the same museum, is now on display for human consumption.

In his glass case, Bruno becomes a still image, a character to animate three responses to his presence—discipline, fetishization and critique of power—which are themselves queered in the space of the museum. Bruno himself is disciplined in a fixed pose, but so too are the people who come to see Bruno's body. Not only are their bodies forced to move in prescribed patterns through museum space, they are also being disciplined ideologically into a limited understanding of where wild animals are permitted. Bruno's taxidermied body informs the public that the only good bear is an objectified dead bear. This objectification fetishizes Bruno as a material demonstration of political force that can dominate and subdue resistance. Significantly, the taxidermied body of Bruno becomes a fetish for the "religion" of political power. Bruno's presence demonstrates that when there is a critique of power there will be fast action to subdue the unrest. True to camp, there is a wink going on here. Ironically, Bruno's very presence in the museum shows that there was a resistance to museum-like discipline and that the government was not entirely in control of the bodies wandering the landscape. His taxidermied body serves as a reminder that at least one body resisted the constructs of what is permissible in space. That resistance signals and haunts an unstable system.

Caves represent a space for metamorphosis—not just of bears in hibernation, but of humans who have been lulled into a numbing hibernation through the nauseating hum of narcissism. Bears roamed the walls of the Chauvet Caves where the skull of a bear may have served as a form of ceremonial veneration. Now, bears are arrested in museums which may serve as a contemporary form of Plato’s Cave. The museum acts as a safety zone where humans, too attached to the monuments of their own importance, cling to the darkness for fear of walking out into daylight where the groans, growls, and murmurs of other animals challenge, threaten, and enrich our human animality. Bruno’s uninvited presence challenged humans to leave the dark caves dedicated to the human figure, and to instead smell the repulsive allure of overturned trash bins, to wash honeyed fingers in a lake, and to hear the concerned bleats of sheep in a rewilded pastoral clime.

How Green Was My Uncanny Valley: Queer Conclusions

Temporarily Stilled

Bruno the bear served as a queer beast in the anthropogenic landscape. He challenged boundaries of what is permissible, and normal. By refusing to honor given borders and cultural norms, he disrupted our human sense of control of the landscape. In response to Bruno’s queer presence, people in turn appropriated him, fixed him as an animation to fill with their own constructs of wildness, and then deployed those rhetorical articulations of wildness and animality. Bruno’s unruly body was taxidermied and fixed long before his death. However wild he might technically be, Bruno becomes a “performing bear” upon which we fix both our fears and idealized notions of wildness. The anxiety Bruno’s presence evoked manifests itself through the desire to fix and fill his body as we would an animated character. Bruno became an imaginary wild. The figure of “Bruno”

consumed our human imaginations of what wildness means. By reconfiguring his wilderness encampment as “camp” in Sontag’s sense, the figure of Bruno was appropriated and deployed by humans who both revered and feared his undisciplined presence. Bruno’s presence not only queered the geographical landscape, but more significantly the political landscape.

The public imaginary surrounding Bruno was significant because it demonstrated how the *idea* of Bruno was appropriated and deployed. What was noticeable regarding this analysis was the dearth of actual images of Bruno himself. While Bruno was noted for his elusiveness and his ability to escape the Finnish bear hunters who were attempting to subdue his unruly body with a tranquilizer gun, in the age of camera phones one would still expect there to be actual photographs of a bear who swam in lakes next to highways, sat on the front steps of a police station, and rummaged through trash bins. While numerous blogs included photos of bears when reporting on Bruno, these images were stock images and not photographs of Bruno himself. Even in Bruno’s actual photo from *Super Vegan*, we encounter a bear who is not willing to be posed and manipulated. Rather, we encounter a side-profile of the bear ambling along a gravel path (Hagen). Bruno does not look at the camera, but instead seems oblivious to the presence of the human photographer. Bruno is not performing for the human gaze. Indeed, he does not even seem to be aware of, or care about, the human presence.

Bruno seemed to care little, if at all, about humans. Yet we humans cared a great deal about him. Animating his body enabled us to capture the potential of the imaginary wild that he signified. Bruno’s absence as a hairy, hulking beast in the Bavarian landscape, and his re-framed museum presence bear significance. Bruno demonstrates not just the disruptive rhetorical force of animals in space, but the power of animals themselves to disrupt

anthropogenic boundaries. By revealing the means of animating the animal world, we encounter the absence of acknowledging the bear who was always animate and did not need human appropriations to bring him to life. Bruno, as his own bear, his own animation, reveals an animate rhetoric that considers the actual selfhood of the other. By considering the selfhood of the other, we open ourselves up to a metalevel critique of how we control and limit our relationship with the living earth—

—an earth that invites the fleshly presence of bears who splash in lakes while the hum of bees wafts on wind, scarcely distinguishable from the hum of flies swarming over dead sheep.

CHAPTER 3

PLAY OF “SNIFFICATION”: COYOTES

SING IN THE MARGINS⁴³

In his clearest manifestations he is a faithful copy of an absolutely undifferentiated human consciousness, corresponding to a psyche that has hardly left the animal level...He is a forerunner of the savior, and, like him, God, man, and animal at once. He is both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being, whose chief and most alarming characteristic is his unconsciousness.

– *Carl Jung, “On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure” (200-203)*

Multiple Aliases Across Unfixed Terrains

Moon Dog, Medicine Wolf, Coyotl, Song Dog, Singing Trickster, Prairie Wolf, Cojote, God’s Dog, Cayeutes, Prairie Tenor, Burrowing Dog, Brush Wolf, Ky-o-tee, Ghost of the Prairie, Cased Wolf, Ky-ote, Barking Wolf, *Canis latrans*. Don Coyote goes by many names, all of which suit the furtive and mutable canine. Indigenous to North and Central America, the coyote has been revered in the stories of indigenous tribes, trapped and hunted by ranchers, and detonated in Saturday-morning cartoons. Originally a native of the desert, the coyote can now be found in all major metropolitan areas. Like a prophet returning from the ascetic sphere of the desolate desert, coyotes now construct their den in the din of the city. Not only does coyote lope along the asphalt dystopia of Los Angeles, he also howls in the constructed wilds of Central Park. Crepuscular creatures, coyotes hunt in the liminal light

⁴³ Portions of this chapter are included as part of an article for the journal *Philosophy and Rhetoric*. “Play of Sniffication: Coyotes Sing in the Margins” will be published May, 2014 in Volume 47, Issue 2, pages 158-178. This article is used by permission of The Pennsylvania State University Press.

where they haunt the liminal margins of the city. Recently, the multitextual coyote has assumed a new role, that of official “patroller” in downtown Chicago. While some cities ignore the presence of coyotes provided they do not pose a direct threat to domesticity, Chicago has chosen to respond and to engage the coyote by legitimizing his presence in the urban center.⁴⁴ The Ghost of the Prairie is now the Ghost of the City.

If the playful crow is the animal guide for animate rhetoric, then coyote is the guide for queer beasts. With his shapeshifting abilities, coyote becomes the ultimate “queer” beast, the “Drag Queen” of the animal world. In Barry Lopez’s collection of coyote myths from forty-two North American tribes, we find that not only does the masculine Coyote marry a man (61), he also resurrects a dead maiden (in order to sleep with her) (23), engages in wife-swapping across species lines (77), transforms himself into other animals (53), and dismembers and then reassembles his own body (Lopez, *Giving Birth to Thunder* 93). True to his trickster nature, he is not merely prurient; he is also munificent. He forms the earth, fathers human beings, brings fire to humans, and in the process he dies and is reborn on multiple occasions. He is both a creator and a lascivious liar.⁴⁵ Coyote is never simply one thing: “We praise her and idolize her, and fear her and hate her, sometimes all in the same breath, and as such she has become an analogy for our relationship with all of nature” (DeStefano 149). Coyote’s capricious character has come to symbolize human’s own contradictory relationship with the more-than-human world.

⁴⁴ While other major metropolitan centers report the presence of coyotes, only a few of those cities have initiated scientific studies to better understand the behavior of urbanized coyotes. Six cities have participated in radiotelemetry studies where coyotes are tracked using radio collars. Chicago is unique from other urban centers due to its population density of 5,602 people per square kilometer (six to twenty-seven times larger than the other cities in the study) and the number of coyotes with radio collars (Gehrt and Riley 80).

⁴⁵ Given Coyote’s mutability, I will shift this dominant myth by referring to the coyotes in this piece as a female. I do not think Coyote will object.

Coyote's mutability reflects the physical terrain she claims as "home." The farther north the coyote ventures, the larger she becomes in order to better maintain warmth. While tan is the dominant color of coyotes, some of their fur may have highlights ranging from red to brown, to almost white, grey, or silver depending on the coloration of the surrounding environment (Bekoff and Gese 484). Such variation in each individual coyote permits for better blending with rocks, shrubs, and grasses. The terrain also cultivates a certain acuity in senses. Desert-dwelling coyotes will more frequently use their eyesight to hone in on distant movements, while forest-dwelling counterparts will more frequently rely on sound and scent. As the coyote leaves behind the golden grasses of the prairie and moves into canyons composed of concrete skyscrapers, she may find grey or silver fur to be of better use. The coyote reminds us there is no such thing as self-presence. Rather, we are "present" only in relation to the entities we find ourselves circulating about.

Such urban wildness appears only as fragments. Coyote ghosts remind urban inhabitants that presence is never complete or whole. Even coyotes momentarily tranquilized on film remind their audience that such visual anesthetizations are one fragment of a larger, dynamic context. Coyotes and humans alike are animate beings in an animate environment. To be animate is to be alive, vivacious and dynamic. Dynamic quality disrupts static quality, and as a result we find that in animate rhetoric there is always a movement across prescribed boundaries as opposed to simply following the rectilinear patterns of an existing grid. The coyotes running in Chicago do not re-inscribe the linear patterns created by asphalt and painted lines, nor do they remain in one lane of traffic. Instead, they leap across concrete barriers and reveal the permeability of anthropogenic boundaries, boundaries which include anthropocentric rhetoric. The presence of the coyote forces the public to create a new understanding of who "belongs" in the cityscape and who has a voice in a

context dominated by humans. In the human-dominated center of the city, the creation of a revised *animate* rhetoric is put into play.

Animate rhetoric—always in motion—dismisses any hope for static full presence. Presence and being are impossibilities we long for with a sense of nostalgia for an authenticity that never was. The presence we seek—knowing and understanding all coyote behavior and signs—is like chasing after a ghost of the prairie or a ghost of the city who is never completely whole. We always have a residue, a trace, or a fragment of past experiences and slumbering moments. Rather than lament this lack of presence, lack and nonpresence become a form of “animate absence” which celebrates the game of reassembling the fragments. The absent is always present in the animate. That is, all encounters with the world involve some form of animation by both humans and other animals as we sift, gather, and assemble the fragments of daily encounters. Such productions yield an animate encounter whose very absences—the very impossibility of it ever being whole—produce a form of wonder in an “other.” Similar to a coyote on the hunt whose process consists of “search,” “approach,” and “capture,” animate absences encourage “seeking,” “engaging,” and “responding.”

Tugging at coyote paths in the urban environment, I perform my own nonlinear sniffing at the scents and signals of Chicago’s coyotes. Sometimes catching a faint scent, I patrol how the coyotes of Chicago paw at the animate absences surrounding the dominant narratives of human and more-than-human relationships. Specifically, how do the coyotes reveal the deficiencies of human environments? How are notions of anthropocentric domesticity upset by the Chicago coyotes? How do the Chicago coyotes “wild” the urban landscape? I contend that the texts surrounding the coyotes of Chicago reveal the unfixed

notion of a marginalized being who challenges the larger nature/culture binary and upsets the naturalized human-center of urban environments.

By queering the narratives of urban spaces, a subtle decentering occurs. The coyotes actively invade the borders of the nature/culture binary and challenge the boundary that relegates some species to the margins. A dexterous trickster, the coyote not only leaps the supposed culture/nature divide, but also leaves traces of her own in the lush ravine in between. Exploring this marginalized status, I have structured this chapter based on the four seasons. Each section begins with a brief description of the world as the coyote might experience it.⁴⁶ While humans attempt to avoid the “discomfort” of seasonal changes through the ease of climate-controlled homes, offices, stores and cars, coyotes and other nondomestic animals are constantly aware of the shift in the seasons. The tilt of the earth’s axis in relation to the sun not only influences weather, but also transforms behavior and diet. The performative act of structuring my own analysis around the nonhuman disrupts the linearity of discourse. The grand narrative binding rhetoric from the nonhuman is challenged, indeed shat upon by a creature who does not necessarily follow “civilized” humanity’s social mores.

What made the event of a coyote running through downtown Chicago significant is that the coyote breached long-established boundaries demarcated by the logic of the “culture/nature” divide. This dominant narrative prescribes which bodies belong in which specific environments. Such prescriptions establish a hierarchy of anthropocentric culture

⁴⁶ Texts referenced for these descriptions come from scientific studies (Bekoff, “Social Play in Coyotes, Wolves, and Dogs”; Bekoff, “Coyote Control”; Bekoff and Gese; Carlson and Gese; Gehrt, Anchor, and White; Hennessy, Dubach, and Gehrt; Knowlton, Gese, and Jaeger; Peterson, Heaton, and Wruble). Of particular interest are articles by Marc Bekoff who initiated some of the earliest and most detailed work on wild coyotes, and by Stan Gehrt whose work on urban coyotes sparked the “permitted” presence of coyotes in Chicago. Books on the coyote that were of particular interest include J. Frank Dobie’s *The Voice of the Coyote*, Wayne; Grady’s *The World of the Coyote*, and Todd Wilkinson and Michael H. Francis’ *Track of the Coyote*.

over wild nature. Wildness, while certainly thrilling and unexpected, is not permitted to dominate the urban environment, which is the material manifestation of disciplined culture. One conquers wilderness in order to establish civilization for a cultured *human* society. Thus, when more-than-human creatures breach the boundary established between nature and culture, it becomes an event. Biologist Stephen DeStefano frames the coyote as the unruly actant in this ruptured narrative:

The coyote represents a return to nature, though not one of our choosing—we are way too caught up in a world of our own creation to make the transition back to nature ourselves. The coyote represents nature returning to us, uninvited and unexpected. (8)

The presence of a wild coyote ruptures boundaries surrounding culture and allows for the possibility of *resignification* of the overarching culture/nature narrative.

The event of a coyote running down the streets of Chicago asserts a breach—what might be interpreted as a return of the repressed—regarding the social order and which bodies belong in the urban space. The canine breach is not so much significant, as it is “re-significant.” The coyote’s breach of the culture/nature divide requires a resignification of that barrier which seeks to keep nature outside of the urban boundaries. The coyote, who legally occupies the class of “vermin” in many states, has been resignified to the role of consumer *of* vermin in the urban environment.⁴⁷ Clearly, Derrida’s concept of iterability applies to more than mere words, but also encompasses the texts borne out in hirsute bodies (*Limited Inc.* 119). Demonstrating iterability in a text composed of sentient bodies, the coyote has not strayed too far from the category of “vermin,” but her relationship to that category has experienced its own transformation—she now has been domesticated and given

⁴⁷ The status of “vermin” produces state mandates which both permit and encourage the trapping, shooting and poisoning of coyotes. Some states, including Utah, place a bounty on the body of each dead coyote (Olsen).

a “job.” Since meaning is never sedimented, but plays with the past, the present, and the future, meanings of “coyote” and “vermin” might also be transformed so that they are not simply maligned and abjected.⁴⁸

Coyote Tracks/Texts on the Mediated Landscape

Although the coyote performs a tricksterish meandering from the streets of Chicago into the digital landscape, this paper will follow one primary part of that textual path, specifically, the Krulwich blog with its accompanying video, photos, and reader comments. Texts that lead off from and leave their own scent on the boundary surrounding the coyotes of the Krulwich blog will also be briefly addressed. These texts include the “Cook County, Illinois Coyote Project” website as well as additional images and memes associated with the urban coyote. These texts, broadcast on the Internet and across television screens, do not include the texts the coyotes themselves produce that are disseminated across the geographical terrain: scat, urine, dens, howls, animal trails in parks, shedding fur clinging to branches, as well as their phantom shapes furtively wandering the city. These multiple coyote texts weave their way across cityscapes, screens and culturescapes, producing threads composed of both techno-mediation and of organic matter. Coyote texts, both virtual and physical, tug at and challenge the meanings of human and more-than-human relationships. Through the use of media, humans encounter a fragmented world of the coyote, one that resists human boundaries and gleefully disrupts comfortable notions of who belongs where.

⁴⁸ Such transformations have already occurred with the phrase “go native.” The act of “going native” can be a colonial pejorative referring to “civilized” foreign individuals assuming the customs of the “uncivilized” native culture. The phrase has undergone a resignification in environmental and botanical discourse. Botanically, to “go native” is a celebratory act which cultivates the indigenous plants already growing in the soil and eschews invasive, decorative plants.

The Chicago coyotes' appeared on the public screen on November, 2010 when local news station WGN9 featured a video of a coyote running down State Street in Chicago. That video was then highlighted on National Public Radio's online "Krulwich Wonders" blog. The Krulwich blog begins with a few lines of printed text and then moves to the embedded thirty-seven second video titled "Coyote on the run helps control mice and rats." In the video we are greeted by an enthusiastic, female news anchor who informs us that "A coyote photographed running through The Loop, was apparently just out doing its job." We switch from the newscaster to an image of a coyote running down an urban street void of any cars, but which is clearly part of the business district as neon signs and stoplights brighten the night scene. In the background we hear Aram Khachaturian's "The Sabre Dance." The camera is unsteady, as the human capturing the coyote on film follows behind in a car, tracking the coyote as it jumps over a median dividing traffic. The news anchor continues, "Here, he is running down State Street overnight. This morning the Chicago Commission on Animal Control is reassuring us that the coyote is no threat. He's actually pretty timid they say, he stays away from people. Rats, that's another story. He performs a service." We then cut to a side-view of the coyote who appears to be running jauntily down the asphalt boulevard. "Listen," continues the news anchor as the video once again cuts to the image of the coyote from behind as it trots along a brightly lit urban street at night, "an Animal Control supervisor says the coyote has the run of The Loop to help deal with rats and mice. He's been fitted with a radio collar to monitor his whereabouts." Her male co-anchor interjects, amidst laughs, "The new city employee!" The frame comes back to the two news anchors seated side-by-side as the woman quips back, "I could have used him when I lived in New York."

The blog then continues with its printed text which has six images interspersed to frame the coyote's surveilled presence in the urban environment: an image of a tranquilized coyote fitted with a radio collar being held by a scientist whose face is not included in the photo; an aerial view of the gridded city mapping red and yellow dots to represent the movements of two coyotes; a coyote den underneath a tree root where we see coyote pups both sleeping, as well as looking up into the camera; another aerial map conveying the movements and territories of different coyotes; an additional image of a tranquilized coyote lounging on a couch; and finally a coy-looking coyote with one ear cocked looking directly into the camera as it presses its lanky frame against cool, plastic bottles in a refrigerated beverage container of a Quizno's Sub shop. The blog also contains comments by seventy-seven readers, as well as hyperlinks to associated stories. Considered together, these texts seek to stabilize a wild incursion by the coyote which is inherently unruly and unfixed.

Winter Deficiencies: The Febleness of Furless Legs

Winter cold and snow-covered terrain make hunting by scent difficult. What the coyote lacks in winter scent, she makes up with through bearing. Coyotes can hear at much higher frequencies than humans and their large, pointy, upturned ears amplify that sound. Coyote ears can move independently of each other and will cock in particular directions to better hear the movement of rodents moving underground. Venturing from urban parks to the urban alleyways, they will find that keen scent will guide them to fragrant trash bins which are frequented by rats.

Winter is lean, a time for conserving energy. Yet, as days grow a bit longer, it is also a threshold to new beginnings. The monogamous coyote mates for life. Mating occurs once per year in February or March when frigid winds and snow flurries rise off of Lake Michigan and still bite at nose and ears. Gestation lasts a little more than sixty days and the litter size is a direct response to the surrounding environment. If the coyote density is high indicating limited food, then coyotes will conceive a smaller litter of four to six pups. If the presence of other coyotes is low indicating plentiful food resources, then litters will expand.

The coyotes of Chicago not only queer the meanings of nature/culture narratives, the wily canines also reveal the deficiencies of such narratives. The coyote serves as a

supplement to a human-centered environment. As with all deficiencies, the use of a supplement not only adds onto something that was considered complete, supplements also take the place of something. Thus, a supplement reveals a lack or a gap. By highlighting the importance of coyotes in eradicating the resident *rodentia* of Chicago, the city reveals a gap that had previously been sutured over and supplemented through the use of human exterminators poisoning unwanted pests. By inviting the coyote back into the city, nature serves as a supplement to the cultural domain of the city. The marginal song dogs supplement an urban lack.⁴⁹ In the process, the city reveals itself as an ecosystem that need not rely on anthropogenic means of “pest” control, but can instead supplement itself with more-than-human animals for support. Thus, the coyote supplements a deficiency of the city and in the process queers the division between nature and culture.

Although Derrida’s poststructuralist approach may seem anathema to many ecologists, he is very much in line with the “play” of ecological systems. That is, nature is always in a state of “lack” and thus enters into a play that seeks some form of “full” presence. This play is constantly supplemented through complex relationships among water, plant, sun, air, animal, etc. The common romanticized belief that nature is “in balance” or can achieve “balance” is simply another narrative of stability and of purity.⁵⁰ Three individuals commenting on the blog directly invoked the balance metaphor regarding the coyotes. Steve B. commented, “The world’s [sic.] needs a balance between predator and prey. It’s the circle of life!” (Krulwich). Two other commenters challenged the blog’s indirect

⁴⁹ From a canine-centric perspective, the humans serve as a supplement to the coyotes. For the coyotes, the humans are marginal creatures supplementing canine dinners through abjected human waste left in trash bags. Thus, artifacts of abjected human culture sit on the margins as supplements to coyote meals.

⁵⁰ Ironically, human attempts to eradicate the coyote have resulted in an increase in coyotes. By providing coyotes with more food options, or hunting them at the wrong time periods, it upsets the coyote mechanism for population control and actually results in an increase in coyote populations. As a result, there are more coyotes to fear and defame. Humans are thus responsible for creating “the enemy,” both literally and metaphorically (Grady 32).

assertion that the coyotes establish a semblance of ecological balance by keeping the rodents in check. SDH de Lorge wrote, “If their major predator now is automobiles, they are in danger of proliferating into a ‘weed species,’ hogging the ecological niche, and wiping out other species. Where’s the balancing control?” (Krulwich). Similar to de Lorge, m lynne posits “So who’s your coyote predator? They are multiplying quickly. You have to have a food web circle to make this work. Not thinking about the complete circle is what has gotten us in trouble with species out of balance in the first place” (Krulwich). While both SDH de Lorge and m lynne challenge the notion that there is more balance and stability due to the presence of the coyote in Chicago, both comments are still anthropocentric in nature. Commenters do not ask about the “balancing control” on the human population, nor do they address the rate of growth of the human population who are also “multiplying quickly.” The presence of the human is still given a central place in the dominant narrative, and that human center is not questioned.

By framing the coyotes in relation to a scientific study, the authority of science serves to both domesticate the coyotes by placing them under some form of control, while simultaneously supplementing the threatened “culture” narrative. Specifically, science supplements culture through an attempt to stabilize unruly nature which has crept in at the margins. Science serves to mend the coyote rupture. Coyotes are especially prone to scientific supplements due to their incredible ability to adapt to almost any context; such adaptation, according to Wayne Grady, is “said to rival rats and humans in their ability to survive under just about any conditions” and coyotes are now the most studied predator in North America (28). The very fecundity of the coyote has resulted in its being “the most

maligned and least understood of the continent's top predators" (Grady 28).⁵¹ The authority of a scientific study surrounding the urban coyote attempts to show some form of stability when it comes to the body of the coyote who has ruptured urban space: "Through 2008, we have captured over 300 coyotes and radio-collared over 250 so far, making this the largest urban study of coyotes in the world" (Urban Coyote Ecology and Management). The study gives the impression that 300 coyotes are under human control and monitored through human technology. Nature is not permitted to "run wild," but is stabilized under human surveillance.

Simple procreation by coyotes challenges stability by showing that meaning is always deferred, as is the control of reproductive bodies. The Krulwich blog reports on two of the monitored coyotes, saying, "Together Mama and 115 have had at least six litters, producing 45 babies, and those babies now have babies." Given simple mathematics, there are far more than 300 coyotes in the Chicago area and those coyotes are not part of the study (Urban Coyote Ecology and Management). Implicit in the distinction of there being "collared" coyotes, is the presence of uncollared coyotes who also haunt the city. Their pathways are not monitored and their behavior resists the stable narrative where humans surveil the urban scene. Indeed, one wonders how much more carefully the "undocumented" coyotes surveil

⁵¹ The vilifying of certain species is a highly productive process from a Foucauldian perspective. With the wolf sentenced, shot and silenced by 1915, government agencies needed a new target and the coyote was the next largest predator who could be easily blamed (Grady 83). Thus, the coyote became the focus and methods to target and destroy the song dog demanded that the humans match their own cunning to that of the coyote. The annihilation of species produces categories (e.g., "predators") to target and government agencies to carry out the predacide. The government administrated killing was highly effective with 1,884,897 reports of coyote murder occurring from 1915-1947 (Grady 83). In 2009, Wildlife Services reported 90,000 coyote deaths as part of the Animal Damage Control Act (Fox). Wildlife Services prioritizes which animal bodies matter. Servile, domesticated sheep who unwittingly advance capitalism are protected, while the coyote is eradicated. Despite this targeted violence, the coyote has survived and expanded. Much like the Coyote of legend, contemporary coyotes continue to "trick" the human predator and are constantly reborn. As a result, the populations of coyotes found throughout America are not only more numerous, but are more knowledgeable about how to survive with predatorial humans. We are now living in "the era of the "Super Coyote"" (Wilkinson and Francis 103).

the human species of which it must be wary in order to survive.⁵²

The fecund presence of the coyote manifests the process of ruin and decay. Given that meaning is always deferred in the play of *différance*, meaning is always already in the process of ruin and decay. Thus we are constantly trying to re-member it, to gather its remains together to form something. This re-gathering is a myth of impossible stability. The coyotes of Chicago demonstrate this sense of decay in stable meaning. The resistance to human control through the fecundity of procreation, challenges the stability of the scientific narrative and reveals that the scientific process, indeed all processes, are also in a state of decay. Like meaning that always contains the traces of past traces, ruin and decay also refer to traces of past traces (or the ruined remains out of which they established themselves). The coyote tracks left in the mud of Chicago parks are instantaneous signs of organic decay—texts and messages that will vanish with the rain and the wind. Even the images on the blog reveal this sense of decay. The highly visual human animal uses the images as an attempt to “fix” the identity and the narrative surrounding the coyote. Yet, as Barthes would remind us, images always have death peering back at us—a lost moment of being who might be dead. Decay is inherent to the image and we are always trying new supplements to fill the void.

Ruin and decay are not necessarily negative processes. Indeed, they are highly productive processes. Decomposition not only permits new life to spring forth, it also offers new constructions of reality. The breach of the city boundary permits an opening that challenges meaning. A significant meaning challenged is the narrative of a human center. The video-taping of a coyote trotting down State Street in The Loop of Chicago, makes visible an unruly body that has moved from the margins to the city center (much like a reversal of the

⁵² The link between beings who are “undocumented” and “coyotes” also conjures images of human bodies attempting to survive and adapt in new environments. The term “coyote” refers to humans who transport undocumented immigrants across the U.S.-Mexican border, frequently in inhumane contexts.

scapegoat). No longer is the coyote a mere phantom of the margins. Instead the coyote dances around us. The hegemony of the homogenous, which filters media and only allows some voices to be heard, has made visible on the evening news the body of a subaltern animal who ruptures anthropocentric boundaries and notions of discourse.

Vernal Rewildings: The Play of Sniffication

While all the other months of the year involve sleeping in brush, amidst bushes and trees, or in tall grasses, spring brings with it the season of the den. Digging into moist earth on hillsides, at the base of a tree, or amidst rocks, the female coyote establishes a den with multiple escape routes for the pups she carries within. When she gives birth sometime between April and June, her pups find themselves in a womb of soil where the escape routes provide not only safety, but the gentle breezes of bright, spring days, and crisp, cool nights. They loll in their dark domicile, nursing, sleeping, mewling and grunting.

Both parents remain constantly vigilant of their pups. If the den becomes infested with mange mites, they dig a new den and relocate. If the territorial family includes young coyotes from the litter of the previous year, they also engage in the protection, care and feeding of the mother and new pups. The male coyote hunts constantly to feed the mother coyote. Eventually, all adults regurgitate meals for the growing pups who are almost ready to leave their den like a flurry of canine Persephones emerging into the fresh light of spring.

In “Structure, Sign, and Play,” Derrida writes of the “event” that ruptures the “stable” center (*Writing* 278). Such ruptures, for example a coyote penetrating a “civilized” city center, result in an opening of space, an absence where the center is challenged, the structure is put off center, and we find ourselves tumbling into a dark den of coyote puppies. This collision and queering of the center throws us into the infinite play of signification, or in the case of the coyotes’ “sniffication.” The play of signification ruptures both the center, and the *system* around the center. The system is no longer limited. Much like a litter of coyote pups playing and frolicking in an ever-changing mass of bodies colliding with bodies colliding with earth, the system is pushed in all directions with messy abandon. Coyotes nip at the system—indeed they occupy the system in unexpected places—resulting in a loss of

stability, balance and order. Animate rhetoric echoes in canyons composed of asphalt and glass towers.

The presence of the coyote disrupts the public's understanding of who "belongs" in the cityscape. For the Chicago coyotes, new understandings circulate regarding domestic activities like employment and family life. Efforts to "harness in" the unruly rupture to the system's center demand constant maintenance by humans. Such attempts at stability can be seen in the formation of new rhetorics that permit for some slippage of whose voices can participate. Coyotes are permitted into the urban setting because they earn their keep by eating small rodents. Some animals—like domestic cats and dogs who are fed regular meals—already have standing within an urban narrative, while new scripts must be created for those who do not fit the traditional structure. In an attempt to re-establish human stability and mend the canine rupture, the coyote's presence is framed as being of service to humans: "This is a coyote 'patrolling' the streets" (Krulwich). By having to state that the coyote actually "belongs" in the urban setting, it reveals the desire to cling to an anthropocentric rhetoric that has always been sniffed at and marked by nonhuman bodies. The human center is not as strong, nor as stable, as previously thought.

Extending "employment" to the coyote superficially seems like a rupture to the center to include nonhuman bodies. Such extensions, however, still maintain a form of anthropocentric discipline that continues to frame the more-than-human world in terms of utility. The "ideal" human citizen must contribute to the well-being of the economic sphere through hard work and civic engagement. The utility of the coyote is stressed: "The animals earn their keep eating small rodents, especially rats and voles" (WGN9). The coyote is thus perceived to have a "job," indeed the male newscaster of WGN9 even refers to the coyote as "The new city employee!" and the female newscaster accounts for the coyote's presence in

The Loop as a matter of the coyote “out doing its job.” Utility functions to domesticate the wild coyote because anyone who is perceived to have a job is part of the “system” of the work-a-day world.⁵³ The coyote, however, is not denigrated to the marginalized sphere of “vermin” that it legally occupies in many Western states. Rather, it is a consumer of the urban vermin, the rats, the mice and the voles which are not granted moral standing in the cultural realm. Unlike the house pets that are fed regular meals, the wild coyote is permitted into the urban setting because it earns its keep by eating small rodents. If it is going to be permitted into the urban setting, then it has to be framed as a service to humans. In addition, cultural authority grants the coyote a place in the urban environment: “It’s supposed to be there, say the police” (Krulwich). Through the authority of law enforcement officials, the public is assured that the coyote is simply a new character in the downtown setting. By domesticating the wild coyote as a servant to humans, the narrative is altered, but is still permissible in the telling due to its anthropocentric framing of the coyote character.

The newscast attempts to frame the coyote as not simply there to serve humans through vermin extermination, but also through its ability to entertain. As the enthusiastic newscaster conveys the narrative of the unruly coyote, Aram Khachaturian’s “The Sabre Dance” drives the story. This G-major riff gained popularity in cartoons and serves to frame the coyote in a comic manner which conveys that the more-than-human world is there for human amusement. Clearly, this is not an animal to take too seriously. The more-than-human world has been assigned the role that many marginalized minorities historically served in the United States. Just as disenfranchised blacks were relegated either to menial

⁵³ It is ironic that the coyotes of Chicago are referred to as “city employees” given that human employees pay taxes to fund governmental programs like the Animal Damage Control (ADC) which implements the eradication of coyotes. Such eradication measures have ranged from the more benign aerial shootings of coyotes to more violent measures involving traps, cyanide guns, poisonous gases, and lacing carcasses with strychnine poison so that any “dirty” carrion eater who consumes the poison dies a painful death (Grady 82).

jobs of household labor or as great “entertainers” (provided they did not breach boundaries of miscegenation), the coyote has taken on a similarly demarcated role. It is no longer culturally permissible to openly assign humans such roles, but when it comes to the more-than-human world which does not respond with “intelligible” human speech, such marginalization remains culturally acceptable. The coyote’s presence in the city serves humans by eating vermin and by entertaining viewers of the evening news. Just keep the wily character away from the women and children and everything will be fine.

An additional example of anthropocentric domestication of the coyotes is themed around the topic of the “family.” The first coyote caught and outfitted with a radio collar was named “Big Mama.” While referring to a female animal as a mother is certainly not unusual, officially giving this coyote the name of “Big Mama” has an important rhetorical effect. The name evokes the image of a large, no-nonsense mother who lovingly cares for her young. We almost picture the folds of a large body embracing the young pups she mothers. The name moves the coyote from a perceived threat to that of an endearing matriarch caring for her family, much like a human mother. In addition to the name “Big Mama,” themes of domestication via anthropomorphizing occur in other aspects of the family unit. The Krulwich blog refers to the Urban Coyote Project which states, “They are similar to many married couples where at times they are inseparable, and other times they take short breaks from each other, but they have defended the same territory together continuously.” By framing the coyotes in terms of marital fidelity, the two canines—in this case Big Mama and her mate Coyote 115—gain legitimacy in the human sphere. The realm of family relations moves them from a threat of heathen wildness and into the domesticated sphere where they function much like idealized, stable human families. The narrative of who belongs in the human sphere is mildly expanded and the concepts of family and marriage

resignify our narrative of the coyote itself. Rather than having its wildness highlighted, the coyote is instead *domesticated* and placed under human *control*. Just as with public discourse, dissent is repressed by being tolerated, and indeed, incorporated into the dominant narrative. “Marriage” between heterosexual coyotes is close enough to that of heterosexual humans to be tolerated. The coyote’s otherness is valued only to the extent that it can be made to resemble us.

As much as humans attempt to make the coyotes a stable part of an anthropocentric narrative, this attempt is anything but stable. Just as with the play of signification, the meanings the coyotes establish in the urban setting will constantly change. Just as a scent is never fixed but instead is disseminated by winds and is impacted by rain and sun, the coyotes of Chicago wander both the city’s margins and centers like nomadic ghosts. Theirs is an unsettling spectral presence. It is what Derrida refers to as “disjointure” where we are collectively put off-center (*Specters* 25). Meaning is never stable, but is instead constantly deferred and the meandering play of sniffication with nose to the ground and leg cocked continues *ad infinitum*. The system’s stability, and the omnipotence of the system’s narrative center, is revealed to be anything but stable. The only way to momentarily “stop” the instability is through an ephemeral narcotic. That is, the narcotic of human “control.”

Images are fragments of digital tracks used to form new narratives of coyotes in the urban environment. Of the three images of adult coyotes on the website, two portray tranquilized coyotes. The first image on the blog displays tranquilized Big Mama in the arms of a scientist while two other scientists stand on either side, one of whom holds up her glassy-eyed head. Her neck, encircled with a radio collar, is clearly visible. The heads of the human scientists are not included in the image. Instead the focus is on Big Mama who is clearly not in control of her body but is instead held up triumphantly like a trophy, or like

the kill of hunters. This image intimates that science has control of the coyote, and thus diminishes the threat of a wild presence. The humans, surprisingly, do not play a more dominant presence in the image. The humans are the ones in control of Big Mama's body, indeed their truncated, headless torsos are supporting her body, but they are less central to the image and thus to the narrative. It is as if the scientists themselves are aware of the boundaries they are pushing with their study.⁵⁴ This control of Big Mama's body is transitory. The moment the tranquilizer wears off, she will once more avoid photographs—a human produced form of rhetoric—and will destabilize the urban environment through her phantom presence that speaks its own form of rhetoric.

The meaning of a city is suspended between differences, in this case the difference between nature and culture as well as a constant deferral of meaning. A part of the great American frontier, Chicago was “conquered” by rugged frontiersmen who transformed the prairie into a thriving center of commerce. Coyotes did not move east of the Mississippi River until the 1940s (Grady 25). Thus, they reverse the European colonization from East to West. They challenge the movement of colonizing white humans, by rewilding lands tamed through violence to human and nonhuman populations. Chicago served as a gateway for movement. Specifically, westward movement in the 1800s by humans and in the 1900s it became a gateway for eastward movement by the unruly coyote. The coyote signals a return not just to the margins of the city, where its gangly hirsute body skulks in alleyways or city parks, but to the *center* of the city: “This is a coyote ‘patrolling’ the streets (and not just any street, this is State Street!) in downtown Chicago” (Krulwich). Chicago's State Street in The Loop is the financial district, seat of government for the city, and is also the theater and

⁵⁴ Alternatively, it could be that the scientists are removing themselves from the image in order to assert a more “objective” study that is solely focused on the coyote and is “uninfluenced” by the human scientist.

shopping district. This one location embodies essential characteristics of a “civilized” culture: government and politics, finance, the cultural arts, and commerce. Now it also contains the presence of a coyote “patrolling” the nighttime streets. The city residents may have to tread carefully lest they step in the dry scat of a carnivorous coyote disrupting the civilized meanings of State Street. The “state” in State Street serves as a reminder of the assertion of a “unified” government which imposes political rules and boundaries on land already inhabited and governed with a myriad of symbolic orders that are not human. The marginalized coyotes challenge the city center, and wild the boundaries.

A city is not the wilderness, but the presence of a “wild” coyote on the State Street of Chicago reveals that the meanings of “nature,” “culture,” “wild,” and “domestic” can never fully be disciplined. The relationships between concepts enter into a playful “rewilding” of unstable meanings. In the case of the coyote, true to its trickster nature, she walks between two worlds. She does not occupy the moral standing granted to domesticated house pets, as demonstrated by the following statement in the Krulwich blog: “Stan Gehrt [research biologist with the Cook County, Illinois Coyote Project] says he’s seen small Pekinese house dogs chase coyotes away. Every so often, a coyote has killed a dog or cat, but this is still rare” (Krulwich). The urban setting serves as a reminder of which bodies, indeed which species, are valued in that space. The loss of domestic cats and dogs are noted, but the deaths of coyotes struck down by automobiles are not.

The coyotes of Chicago show the meaning of a city is inherently unstable and always deferred. Unlike urban rats, which are a ubiquitous, though frequently abjected nonhuman urban animal, the urban coyote occupies a liminal status that upsets the human center associated with urban environments. The presence of the coyote destabilizes the meaning of the urban environment and opens the sphere of conversation to include more than the

limiting voice of one animal. Indeed, it reveals that the city was deficient and in need of a more-than-human supplement.

Summer in the Windy City: Sniffing for Presence, Finding Animate Absences

After eight weeks of care by both the mother and the father, the young pups leave the safety of the den and adventure short distances under the watchful eye of both parents. Summer brings with it play amongst the pups, and with adults. Rolling, tumbling, nibbling, biting, yapping, barking bodies provides a kinesthetic knowledge of relational dynamics, limits, and vulnerabilities. During the short, summer nights, pups learn what it is to be a “song dog” as they join a chorus of adults who guide them in the art of yaps, howls, barks, and a multitude of combinations that biologists have slowly begun to decipher. The number of voices involved in the family sing-along will have diminished with young coyotes perishing to disease, or predation by humans or other animals. Young coyotes experience a sixty percent mortality rate in their first year of life, with the average coyote’s life spanning six summer solstices.

The nose is the sense organ of summer. The coyote nose has 220 million scent receptors compared to the human who has five million. Like other canines, the coyote’s nose is built for receiving and processing scents. The moist, dark nose acts as a “scent magnet” serving to attract scents into her nose, which is one of the reasons why olfactory primed carnivores will sometimes lick their noses. Summer scents will help to feed hungry stomachs in the urban wilds of Chicago. In the midst of gas fumes, restaurant aromas and rotting trash, there will also be the scents of urban green spaces. Barbecues and picnics will produce delectable morsels desirable not only to coyotes, but also to rats and mice who may also become a meal for a hungry urban coyote.

Mapping: Filling in Gaps with Transitory Transmissions

Encounters with coyotes come to humans in many forms, but rarely through the sighting of an actual coyote body loping along a city street. Rather, shy coyotes reveal traces of their presence through scat, howls, and even through radio transmissions. To demonstrate the presence of the coyote who typically avoids human contact, the biological study posted images which make “visible” the pathways of the coyote. The photos demonstrate the need to represent the coyote through other visual means since the ghost of the city does not always submit to the scopic human gaze. Images revealing pathways of nonlinear movement on a linear terrain serve as a supplement to our understanding the coyote in an urban

environment. Such mapping may also assuage human fears of the wild. The maps demonstrate that the coyotes tend to favor green spaces away from humans. Thus, the wild canine is less of a threat to children or the domesticated dog or cat. The image as supplement becomes a drug, a narcotic, to lull away threats of the wild.

Without the images, the coyotes' presence would be more spectral and less concrete. Just as there is always a residue of a trace within a trace, it is possible that there is also a supplement within a supplement. These images would not be possible without the technology of the radio collar. The biological study would not be possible without the radio collars constant transmission of signals. While the urban coyotes are the topic of the biological study, that study is supplemented by enclosing coyote necks with radio collars and marking pathways onto aerial maps. A "watchful" technology attempts to domesticate wild canine bodies.

Surveillance, as mediated by the radio collars that sixty coyotes sport, assures the human population that the coyotes are being kept in check and are under human control. Big Brother has its eye on the wild ruptures of the urban environment; it is as if the Patriot Act has invaded uncontrolled wildness. Both the WGN9 news report and the Krulwich blog stress the presence of radio collars on the coyotes which permit for constant monitoring. The public is assured that "Project workers always know where the collared coyotes are" (Krulwich). Numerical values are also used to assure the public that science has control over the coyotes. We are informed that there are over sixty coyotes with radio collars and that those coyotes have been located more than forty thousand times (Krulwich). The images of aerial mapping also convey a sense of security and control. The aerial maps reveal different colored lines and dots which continuously convey the movements of the coyote. The Krulwich blog, in reference to these images, assures the public not just that we have an

image that clearly demonstrates surveillance, but also that the coyotes tend to “stick to green spaces.” Thus, the presence of a coyote on State Street is more of an aberration and thus diminishes the threat of wildness too strongly asserting itself.

Even in the case of the radio transmissions there is never complete presence. In *Memoirs of the Blind* Derrida talks about the action that occurs in the blink of an eye—the moment or split second when we are not looking—we forget how much happens in the material world and how we are always striving to capture this lost moment in film (*Memoirs* 48). Yet, as we watch the flow of images, we still blink our eyes, we never fully gain access to the entire process. There are always animate absences which escape our comprehension. Knowledge and experience are always incomplete, never full. Similarly, communication, and rhetoric more specifically, is never complete. John Durham Peters discusses the impossibility of communication and the gaps that are always present: “Meaning is an incomplete project, open-ended and subject to radical revision by later events” (267). Just as meaning can never be complete between humans, we also find we will never have complete presence or understanding of the more-than-human world. Despite this lack of presence, an expansion of rhetoric opens ourselves up to a diversity of voices which enrich our own conversations with the earth.

Coyote rhetorics become animate presences lurking in the hidden terrain of the maps. Maps composed of coyotes movements are texts that reveal more than resting spots, boundaries and ranges. The maps reveal a coyote umwelt in unexpected ways. Coyotes have eyes of liminal times. The amber colored eyes of coyotes have been formed through a reciprocity of light, movement and hunger. As hunters of dawn and dusk, the crepuscular coyote is highly sensitive to light and to movement due to large pupils and retinas that have more rods than cones—a necessity for an animal who hunts at night. This acuity to light and

shadow limits the coyote's color vision which, like all canines hunters, is primed for yellows and blues that appear during daylight (Bekoff and Gese 468). Green, however, appears in shades of white and grey with white for light green and greys for dark green. The world comes to them in shades of yellows, blues and greys. The lack of a green color cone results in an *absence* of color. If a coyote looked at the map of "resting spots" marked by yellows and reds, she would most likely see shades of yellow, and not necessarily a distinct difference between the red and the yellow spots. If she peered at the map of "territories and ranges" she would find circles of blue, shades of yellow with the red and yellow circles, and only absences with the green.

The maps of the coyote movements momentarily tranquilize the territories of the coyotes giving the impression that these circular ranges are bound. The territories of coyotes are never static or established through mere movement. Rather, coyote territories expand and contract through complex relationships amongst animate presences—the coyote family structure and size, the seasonal conditions and resources which limit movement, the potency of the urine and scat making territorial scent "posts," the volume and force of the yaps, barks and howls, the presence of solitary transient coyotes, and even the force of aggressive encounters with stranger coyotes who have breached the territorial boundary.

Complex family relationships also come to life through the maps. Yellow circles show the movements of Big Mama, red depicts her mate "115," and the blue and green are two of their pups. The largest range is established through the yellow and red trails of Big Mama and 115 which embrace each other, frequently holding within their loping curves the movements of their two pups. We see that both Big Mama and 115 venture outside of the primary territory taking a solitary journey to the outskirts, each a lone shaman outside of their coyote domain. While the "green" pup remains safely within the established family

territory, the “blue” pup moves boldly outside of the family domain, exploring broadly and in much larger swaths than either parent. The “blue” pup may be exploring the possibility of establishing a territory of her own, leaving the protection of Big Mama and 115.

Absent from the map are the movements of coyotes who do not wear a radio collar. The map gives the impression there are only four occupants of the space. It is far more likely that lone, transient coyotes pad quietly along the buffer strip—a “no man’s land”—separating the different family territories from one another. These lone coyotes move between the margins of the coyote symbolic order, careful to not venture into a range claimed and occupied by families which have established multiple centers on the terrain. All the while, they walk over the underground tunnels which compromise other “territories” belonging to mice, voles, rabbits, and bugs who themselves navigate the root systems of trees, shrubs, and seasonal plants. Overhead, birds nest in trees and flit and swoop in their own complex dance. Hidden in the map are wild absences

The maps produced by incomplete radio transmissions have frozen only one pattern of movement amongst coyotes. While project workers may know where the coyotes are, the coyotes themselves defy any sense of static quality which seeks to define and tranquilize identity. As Wayne Grady points out, there is no “coyote” in the singular. Rather, “Local populations respond to local conditions—food sources, terrain, exploitation by predators—making nonsense of definitive statements” (Grady 32). Coyotes resist sedimentation in a rapidly changing world. In North America, the contemporary human and coyote share a great deal in common. Both species are constantly seeking out new opportunities. These opportunities do not tie coyote or human to one location. Instead, both engage in a form of nomadic movement tied to possibility. For the opportunistic human it is professional possibility with the promise of an increased standard of living, while the Moon Dog seeks

out new terrain that permits for some wildness and survival in an urbanized world.

Following stars and road signs, coyotes and humans traverse mountains, prairies, suburbs and cities. Each trails after signs, signals, and traces that are themselves never static.

In a similar vein to our desire for presence and fullness in our communicative acts with humans, the maps produced with the mediation of radio transmissions give the illusion that we understand where the coyotes move. The maps attempt to fix and stabilize the coyote bodies. Yet the coyote is always moving in ways that the radio collars will never capture. The maps do not show *how* coyotes move, whether it is by way of a trot, a pounce, or a calculated, stalking gait. Nor do the maps convey the way their bodies pause, hesitate, grow stiff with alertness, nuzzle the ground or play with litter mates. The images on the Krulwich blog do not show the twitch of the coyote's nose, the cock of the ears, or the wag of a tail—all movements that communicate meanings amongst coyotes (or even to a coyote-literate human who may encounter them). These messages defy the surveillance of the radio collars. Thus the images reveal absences, absences which themselves reveal how a text is never complete and never fully comprehended. We think we have some understanding of them, but it is never full. There is always a lack.

Howling at the Moon, Marking the Shrubbery: Coyote Articulations

The desire for presence is related directly to logocentricism. We privilege speech because it is more “present” than promiscuous writing which can be misconstrued (*Grammatology* 152). In addition to revering presence, logocentricism is also decidedly anthropocentric. The human voice is still dominant in the story about a more-than-human animal. There is an absence of the song dog's voice in the blog. This is an irony given that it is rare to actually see the shy coyote. More frequently we encounter their voice and not their

visage. Their songs spill into twilight and the dark of night with a rolling of yips, barks and ululations. It was their vocal nature which earned them the Latin name of *Canis latrans*, “Barking Dog” (Grady 27). The video only contains the voices of humans. We do not hear the voice of the ghost of the prairie. Yet, it is the coyote’s howl that has made the canine iconic. Anyone traveling throughout the West and Southwest can attest to metal yard art depicting the profile of a sitting coyote with its head upturned and howling at a full moon. Hearing a howl of connection in the coyote, DeStefano writes, “It is that voice which reaches us across the darkness and reminds us that we share the earth with others” (66). The “humanist” project which separates humans from the inhuman is challenged by Gary Snyder and his “Tawny Grammar.” There are no pure origins to our texts, and as Snyder asserts, there is not even anything that makes the text “purely” human (76). Tawny Grammar holds within it not simply the language, but the culture and the civilization, which for Snyder includes the movement of stars in the heavens, the scratches of claws, the caws of ravens, the howls of coyotes, and the soft whisper of leaves. Our human *being*, our cultural practices, develop in relation to the more-than-human, the world that is “inhuman.”

The coyote has a complex system of vocal communication which biologists are just beginning to identify (Grady 45). While we do not hear a mediated howl or yelp from a coyote, we do encounter a trace of the coyote’s voice through comments on the blog: “Nothing beats a pack of yelping coyotes on a night with a full moon...” or “I would hear them at night...Loved the sound...” or “...we heard coyotes yipping near the house.” and “We lived in Oklahoma for about 5 months and loved hearing the coyotes at night.” The coyote’s voice is only referenced through human comments. While the coyote’s song may not be heard on the blog, its presence still haunts digital discussion and enters into the

stream of discourse. The howls of coyotes surreptitiously pass into the human conversation and disrupt the meanings and significations of an urban center.

The modes of coyote discourse are not heard above the din of howling sirens that mark a city's soundscape. Like the scapegoat, the coyote exists on the margins, excluded from both the center of power and from discourse. In Derrida's "Pharmakon," the scapegoat was kept *within* the city walls and then expelled to the *margins* in order to cleanse and purify the interiority of the city center (*Grammatology* 130). Just as the coyote in the video leapt over the median in the road, it has transgressed other boundaries in a play of place-reversal where it assumes the role of "scapegoat." Previously the coyote was defined as "a nuisance animal, a furbearer or a game species" and was kept outside of the city walls (Grady 112). In a reversal of the scapegoat parable, the coyote is now invited from outside the city, back into the city center in order to cleanse and purify it of vermin. Coyote, *Canis latrans*, becomes *Pharmacanis latrans*. Given the fecundity of the coyote in the urban setting, one wonders how long its presence will last within the urban boundary. If small, domestic dogs become the dinner of Big Mama's offspring, will the coyote once more be banished from the city limits?

The coyotes of urban areas also leave their marks, what one might consider their writing, on the landscape. Coyote writing is a technology that uses animal trails, urine, and fecal matter—as well as the dens they occupy—to signal not just a presence to each other, but to humans as well. Nor do the images show coyote culture. Coyotes, through scent marking, have an intricate system of establishing territory to indicate to outsiders what is off-limits. The boundaries of coyote territory, is, however, extremely malleable—changing with the seasons and in response to particular contexts (Grady 40). These marks signal that humans are not the only species capable of marking space and laying claim to a piece of land. Just as

we sign deeds for properties, the urine and scat are themselves a form of inscription, a deed on a specific place.

The coyote “deed,” unlike human documents, is not fixed. It does not claim some false assertions regarding singular ownership that is frequently expressed in human artifacts like the copyright of a book. Copyright is a means of maintaining originality and proprietary rights to the reproducible (Derrida, *Limited Inc.* 30). This focus on “rights” takes us back to *Phaedrus* and the anxiety regarding the promiscuous written word. Issues of copyright demonstrate the desire to maintain some shape of an authentic, singular author, but one never knows where the author begins and ends. Indeed, if authors were to be completely up front, they would acknowledge not just editors, colleagues and loved ones, but would also thank the food which permitted them to participate in the act of writing, as well as the coal seams that power the electricity in their homes. Acknowledgements would not end, but would be deferred, endlessly. Yet, we draw a fantasy self that includes certain relationships and excludes others. We grant moral considerability to some animals, while others are clearly set outside that circle and are either pushed into the margins or ignored entirely. Where does the coyote fall in terms of human identity? It has been a liminal character in the stories we tell to make sense of our world, and now it is physically occupying liminal spaces, moving from the plains to the city. In the shadow of skyscrapers the coyote feasts on rats and mice which in turn feast on our own human-produced refuse. Creeping furtively through shadows, the coyote has become a part of our human rhetoric and of our human identity. God’s Dog now animates the city streets. Her spectral presence reveals an absence of wildness—an absence animated by paws that pound pavement as noses guide gangly hirsute bodies towards the scents of dinner.

Autumnal Conclusions: The Animal That Therefore I Howl

The “autumn shuffle” disperses the young coyotes into the wilds of the urban, suburban, or rural landscapes. Capable of running forty miles-per-hour, these furry, four-legged “seeds” disseminate into the four winds. They traverse the landscape in one of two ways. They set out on their own as transient, lone coyotes, or they form a territorial family. The solitary, transient coyotes will wander the buffer zone—the margins—in between two or more territories. Those who take the “family” route will find a mate, establish a territory and come February, they too might mate and give birth to a litter of playful, nipping, yapping pups that tumble and fall over each other and their parents.

Autumn brings forth a flurry of activity in the urban wilds. The slant of autumn light and the clear coolness of air bring forth prime hunting conditions. Scents are not yet muffled by heavy moisture, the sound of animals scurrying on autumn leaves lets the coyote know the location of potential meals, and the reds and yellows provide a canvas of beauty that is richer than the whites and greys of spring and summer. Squirrels scurry to cache nuts and rats and mice gather seeds. Coyotes take advantage of this increased activity swallowing fluffy tails while being teased by flying jays and chickadees who also prepare their winter stores. Stomachs become full in preparation for long nights and freezing temperatures.

All animals share the capacity to suffer and all are unique in different ways. This realization makes it possible to transgress philosophical borderlands and challenge the hierarchical duality of humans and animals. Derrida challenges the abstraction of these very categories which ignore the “immense multiplicity of other living things that cannot in any way be homogenized, except by means of violence and willful ignorance” (*Animal* 47–48). Hierarchy in the animal kingdom where some animals are valued more than others due to their utility or “resemblance” to human animals results in an abjection and othering of all more-than-human animals, who are relegated to subhuman categories because they are supposedly too different from the human form. By doing so we lump together a milieu of sentient beings who are as different from one another as the human animal is from the sponge.

Derrida calls into question the “naturalized” dualism between animals and humans and ruptures the hierarchy that humans cling to in order to justify our behavior towards the more-than-human animal. The coyote, by breaching the dualism between nature and culture,

challenges the anthropocentric center of our narratives and who can come near that center. While such a move is certainly not a complete success at giving voice to a subaltern population, it is a beginning that may permit a rewilding of animate rhetoric so that the howls of sirens can be challenged by the howls of coyotes.

A myth of purity dictates our transmission and reception of information. Derrida reminds us that all transmissions, even those that are broadcast “live” or “direct” are always produced: “What is ‘transmitted’ ‘live’ on a television channel is *produced before being transmitted*” (*Echographies* 40). While it is important to recognize that all interactions are produced in some form or another, it is also important to recognize that not all productions are created equal. There is no authentically “pure” medium to return to (even hunting and gathering relies on manipulation, technology and sign-reading), but some productions have less of an ecological impact than others. This is where politics enters in and active choices arise like spirits: “To inherit is not essentially to *receive* something, a *given* that one may then *have*. It is an active affirmation, it answers an injunction, but it also presupposes initiative, it presupposes the signature of countersignature of a critical selection. When one inherits, one sorts, one sifts, one reclaims, one reactivates” (*Echographies* 25). It is this act of sifting and sorting, of choosing one spirit over another (there are always multiple spirits) that becomes significant. The challenging political act of sifting and sorting forces the individual to take action and as Derrida puts it, responsibility:

Only when the assignations are multiple and contradictory is there inheritance, only when they are secret enough to challenge interpretation, to call for the limitless risk of active interpretation. Only then is there a decision and a responsibility to be taken or made. When there is no *double-bind*, there is no responsibility. (*Echographies* 26)

Perhaps this is why the question of the animal is so perplexing. How do we, human animals, enter into discourse with a more-than-human world? How might a coyote in an urban environment reawaken our encounters with an animate other?

In the summer of 2007, a worn-out coyote walked into a Quizno's sandwich shop and hopped into the cool embrace of a refrigerated beverage case. The cool coyote gazed back at the humans who came to snap photographs and upload videos onto YouTube. The coyote disrupted not just the urban setting, but moved from the margins of parks and streets and *into* the interiority of capitalism. In that business space it rested and gazed back at the throngs of astonished humans. The significance of this exchange reaffirms alterity, but an alterity that need not alienate. The very awareness of alterity can lead to a sense of wonder for beauty not made by human hands into a world experienced in decidedly different ways by a more-than-human other. Writer Frank J. Dobie conceives of encounters with the more-than-human world as opportunities for relational engagement where the "understanding" that is achieved is more emotional than factual: "The life history of the coyote consists not only of objective facts about the animal as an animal but of the picturesque and empathic reality of his own impact on human beings" (Dobie xiv). By inviting the coyote back into the urban environment, albeit as a service to humans, perhaps we have legitimated a rupture that will permit additional and more complex emotional encounters with a more-than-human world.⁵⁵ Such ruptures can then challenge privileged anthropocentric narratives which

⁵⁵ The Urban Coyote Project in Chicago is unique and should be commended in that it attempts to alter the dominant narrative which keeps wild nature outside the boundaries of the domesticated, urban setting. This resignification is permitted only because it frames this coexistence in such a way that still makes the human the center with control over the ruptures. While this approach is savvy in its attempt to resignify urban space and who can call the city home, it is still important to note that the coyote does not have an inherent right to be in the city. Its presence is permitted through servitude to humans. Inherent to any narrative is a cultural normativizing of what counts as an acceptable/valued/appropriate narrative. As Cooper and Pease point out, it is just as important to note what is not included in framing a story, as what is included (263). By exploring and questioning what is framed in the narration, one becomes acutely aware of the silences: radio

frequently do not address the moral considerability of other creatures who also share in both the joys and sorrows of living.

Images, like all experiences, are open to numerous interpretations. In *Right of Inspection*, a text consisting of photographs which Derrida then comments about, he says, “You will never know, nor will you, all the stories, not even the totality of one single story I kept telling myself” (*Right* n.p.). Meanings are multiple and always deferred. The image of the “Quizno’s” coyote displayed the multiplicity of meaning that readers impose. One commenter on the blog wrote: “I just love the look on that coyote in the fridge’s face. It’s like ‘Hey, howyadoin?’ OK, wrong accent, but still!” (Krulwich). When I read this comment I could not possibly understand how one could interpret the coyote as being so cavalier and relaxed. The reason for my own disbelief was due to my watching a YouTube video of the coyote in the refrigerated case. The coyote in the video does not look nearly as cavalier as the coyote in the still image. In the video he sits in the case for nearly forty minutes. His breathing is labored and his ears twitch with concern as humans move about the shop. He is reported to have an injured leg and when Chicago Animal Control officials arrive to relocate him to a park, he looks helpless and scared as he attempts to resist the grip of the metal vice around his neck. My encounter with the video influenced my response to the still image on the Krulwich blog. The residue of the video infiltrated all other texts surrounding the coyote. Now, after time has passed, and I look at the still image again, I can see the cool, cavalier coyote that the commenter on the blog saw. However, I also see the exhausted, injured coyote breathing heavily in a place that provided some momentary respite from pain. Coyote wears multiple guises, sometimes simultaneously.

collars replace scat and urine for marking paths, and YouTube Videos usurp the unrecorded howls, yelps and songs of *Canis latrans*. These silences in turn reveal hidden assumptions—assumptions that attempt to stabilize the anthropocentric narratives surrounding themes of domestication and control.

Criticizing past philosophers who have tackled the question of the more-than-human animal, Derrida writes, “They have taken no account of the fact that what they call ‘animal’ could *look at* them and *address* them from down there, from a wholly other origin” (*Animal* 13). The gaze of the other becomes relational, a gaze shared between *two* parties—not just that of a meaning-bestowing human. Such encounters can be serendipitous. The coyote gazed back at the humans who came to snap photographs and upload videos onto YouTube. What might have happened if instead of simply taking photos of the exhausted canine as a mere object for our human gaze and entertainment, the humans had acknowledged the potential for a relational connection that exists in the space, the gap, the absence, between eyes looking at eyes? What if this relational encounter, this nexus, had sparked the Wasteland-reviving question of “What ails thee?” The response will likely not be articulated in human words, but will instead come to us in the fleeting, wondrous absences of animate rhetoric.

CHAPTER 4

CANINE PERESTROIKA: RIDING A FAST TRAIN

FROM DOMESTICITY

I leave to several futures (not to all) my garden of forking paths...all possible outcomes occur; each one is the point of departure for other forkings.

– *Jorge Luis Borges, "The Garden of Forking Paths" (125)*

My own eyes are not enough for me. The man who is contented to be only himself and therefore less a self, is in prison. My own eyes are not enough for me, even the eyes of all humanity are not enough. I regret that the brutes cannot write books, very gladly would I learn what face things present to a mouse or a bee. More gladly still would I perceive the olfactory worlds charged with all the information and emotion it carries for a dog.

– *C.S. Lewis, An Experiment in Criticism (140)*

Evolutionary Hauntings: Always Present Domesticating and Wilding

The figure of a dog trails beside, in front of, and behind the human form. Humans and dogs have been companions to each other on a long, and continuing, evolutionary journey. As the first “domesticated” animal, dogs’ liminality to the human animal is both loved and loathed. They are simultaneously “man’s best friend,” “faithful companion,” “bitch,” “cur,” and “mongrel.”⁵⁶ Dogs easily romp across boundaries, not just geographic and cultural confines, but also species boundaries. *Canis lupus familiaris* copulates and

⁵⁶ While referred to as “man’s best friend,” the concept of “friend” and “best” reveal a not so loving and magnanimous side. Unwanted and stray dogs are slaughtered by the millions each year and serve as “degraded” research subjects (McHugh 9). They may be “man’s best friend” so long as they serve as surrogates not just within the human family, but also as surrogate humans in medical and corporate test labs.

produces fertile offspring with wolves, coyotes, and jackals (McHugh 8). Due to such promiscuous engagements, the domestic dog's very origins are not entirely discernible. Just as a dog's own pathway weaves back and forth across the terrain, so too does its evolutionary history. Individually, the domestic dog and the modern-day wolf are descended from a common, but unknown, "wolflike ancestor" (Coppinger and Coppinger 273). Sometimes considered a perversion of wild, romanticized wolves, domesticated dogs started their evolutionary pathway almost 135,000 years ago and along the way acquired the piebald fur and floppy ears that humans eagerly stroke. By the time the dog became an established companion to Cro-Magnon Man somewhere between 18,800 and 32,000 years ago, the canine looked more like a sheep dog and less like a wolf (Thalmann et al. 871; Udell and Wynne 247). Today, dogs have more variation than any other species which means that when one imagines the "figure of a dog" it can take on infinite possibilities and significations (Serpell, "Hair of Dog" 258). The five-pound Chihuahua and the 110-pound Irish Wolfhound are both classified as *Canis lupus familiaris*, and can play together, fight, and even attempt to copulate. Still, the very mention of their breeds evokes very different images of "dog."

Throughout this evolutionary transformation, dogs were carefully observing the human animal. Indeed, dogs were both the first anthropologists and psychologists. They not only carefully studied human behavior and responses, they also "hacked" the human psyche with their soulful eyes that, unlike other animals, will steadily gaze back at human eyes. Rather than humans domesticating dogs—an act which seems to imply a human hierarchy, control, and intentionality regarding relationships with nonhuman animals—perhaps the dogs performed their own domestication, taming the human as a useful tool which provides a steady stream of food, and secure shelter. Alternatively, carnivorous dogs may have "wilded"

human homes and camps with their unruly presence while addressing rodent issues, assisting on hunts, and providing some bodily warmth. A more likely scenario is that both human and dog trot somewhere between the wild and the domestic. Despite this long history of canine domestication and domination through training and discipline, there is always the risk that the dog will “turn” and “bite the hand that feeds him.” The presence of the wolf lurks nearby. Thus, the dog exists not entirely in the realm of culture or of nature, but somewhere in between. The dog’s long-time role as a guide to the underworld of hell—a psychopomp—produces movement across thresholds unbound to physical space. The dog is never entirely in one place.

Together, dogs and humans made the ecologically significant transition from hunter-gatherer to agriculture, and they have once again transitioned to industrial capitalism.⁵⁷ Dogs, like humans, have had steady and diverse forms of employment. As James Serpell points out, dogs have served as “security guards, burglar alarms, beasts of burden, weapons of war, entertainers, athletes, fighters, lifeguards, shepherds, guides, garbage collectors, and instruments for detecting truffles, drugs, dry rot, explosives and oestrus pheromones in cattle (“Hair of Dog” 259). Dogs are bound to technological “advancement” serving as test subjects in laboratories, as well as advancing the military industrial complex through bomb sniffing and as couriers in the battlefield. Dogs have become a technological extension of the human body, a role most profoundly felt by the blind who “see” the world with dog eyes. Currently, dogs have made a direct entrance into the age of ecological catastrophe as they don canine beesuits and use their nose to detect disease in honeybee hives (Richard). Working beside human animals, dogs are guides, companions, workers, and scapegoats.

⁵⁷ Along the way we have developed breeds to match these transitions. Hunting dogs for the chase, dogs that herd sheep for agriculture, and fierce dogs that serve as guards, sentries, and forms of intimidation.

To Infinity and Beyond: Puncturing Boundaries

Despite domestication, dogs bound outside of human control. Indeed they leap out of range of human hands. After human animals, domesticated dogs have the broadest geographic range (McHugh 7). In the case of Laika the canine cosmonaut, *Canis lupus familiaris* momentarily transcended the range of humans. The Muscovite street dog raced into the heavens where she soared with Sirius and Procyon, the stellar hounds faithfully following behind their master Orion. Laika's own lighting of the sky was far more fleeting than that of her stellar companions. Other famed Russian canines include Pavlov's dogs whose feats of salivation established the foundation for classical conditioning. Russian dogs have once more come into public view for unexpected achievements. In the city of Moscow, more than 30,000 stray dogs wander the streets and parks (Sternthal). These dogs never experienced the comforts of the domestic sphere but were instead born on the streets and, according to biologists, are now a species that exists somewhere between the wild wolf and the domestic dog (Sternthal).⁵⁸ They inhabit a status that is not-quite-dog and not-quite-wolf. To survive and prosper, these dogs study Muscovites and deploy artful tactics that manipulate the human inhabitants. Examples include sending smaller, cuter, and younger dogs to beg since older, larger, and unattractive canines are typically unsuccessful at procuring food for the pack; or having a group of dogs bark and startle an individual with tasty food, causing the human to inadvertently drop their meal (Wheeler).

More significantly, approximately twenty dogs have learned how to navigate the second-largest underground metro system in the world, harmoniously commuting with nine million humans from one stop to another (Moscow Metro, "Lines and Stations"; Sternthal;

⁵⁸ While extant wolves and dogs descended from a common ancestor, contemporary wolves are still held as a reference point, frequently a reference point that is seen as more authentic.

Wheeler).⁵⁹ Collectively, these dogs have adapted to their urban environment by learning how to effectively manipulate humans and human constructs. The dogs have become so much of a fixture of the metro that public outrage ensued when a fashion model stabbed to death a long-term canine resident. The victim, named Malchik, was honored with a bronze statue which metro-riders nuzzle for luck. Unlike the coyotes of Chicago who are ghosts in the margins padding silently through the shadows with the occasional appearance in populated areas, the dogs of Moscow's metro walk right beside humans. Living in the urban wilds, Moscow's stray dogs restructure a new dog identity and symbolic order that treats humans more as a tactical tool and less as a companion.

While Moscow has long had a stray dog population, the size and characteristics of the population shifted with *perestroika*. Initiated under Mikhail Gorbachev, *perestroika*—which literally means “restructuring”—produced political reform within the Communist party and changes to economic policies (McNair 3). As with any shifting of old foundations, multiple restructurings occur, some of which move beyond human centers. Changes to economic policies produced a canine *perestroika* where the status and roles of stray dogs underwent their own restructuring and reappropriation of human-dominated systems. Focusing on the metro dogs of Moscow, how does the human-initiated *perestroika* reveal a network of animate beings? How do such restructurings open up tactical opportunities that rupture and subvert the dominant system? How do the dogs of Moscow upset the sense of a “bound” system like that of an underground subway? The dogs of Moscow's metro will take us on a fast train

⁵⁹ The Moscow metro dogs are not the only animals who independently hop rides on public transit. Cases include a Jack Russell terrier who would regularly hop the bus to the local pub where he would happily consume sausages (Stead). Another case involved an elegant white cat who would alight on the bus for a quick jaunt to a fish and chips shop (Thangham). A significant difference between these two cases and the metro dogs, is that a metro itself is a far more complex system to navigate than city buses which provide one route option and also provide not just olfactory cues, but a wider range of visual and auditory cues for the animals seeking a specific destination.

through a cavern of tunnels where we will explore the restructuring of liminal spaces and statuses. The canine *perestroika* can be taken as an event which restructured symbolic orders and revealed animate systems. Specifically, canine *perestroika* reveals the multiplicity of networks experienced in radically different ways that serve as a rupture of the human center. Just as Gorbachev's *glasnost* indicated an openness for policy reform and critique, the Moscow canines dig at the system so they can encounter new ways of being and becoming dog. Such a shift in human-dog relations is significant. Given the proximity of domestic dogs to humans, they are one of the primary ways that human animals engage with nonhuman animals. The Moscow dogs tread on the boundaries of this relationship and in the process we discover an animal other who is not so much a fetishized "almost-human," but an animator of the symbolic order. Such animations reveal the fragility of human structures which are constantly being restructured by the nonhuman.

Underground Tactics: Restructuring Symbolic Systems

Under the Soviet regime stray dogs limited their contact with humans, preferring to live on the margins (Schoofs). They raided food from trash cans and sought shelter in industrial warehouses in the city center. *Perestroika* and the rise of capitalism led to an increase in food resources, a culinary excess that tantalized the noses of dogs who developed sophisticated begging techniques. An unexpected effect of *perestroika* occurred with Moscow's metro system. Under Soviet rule dogs were excluded from mass transit. *Perestroika* signaled not just restructuring, but decay, as the diverse metro passengers were no longer strictly monitored. Soon stray dogs learned they could access the metro system—an excellent shelter that bustles with the scents carried by riders who benevolently bestow morsels of food on dogs. Some dogs even learned they could achieve the Western "dream" by living in

the safety of the suburbs, but commuting to the city on the metro to work for their daily sausage (Wheeler).⁶⁰

The dogs of Moscow's metro represent not simply a rupture in a structure—a *glasnost* with openings for unauthorized bodies—but also a deployment of de Certeauian tactics which resist the authority of the over-arching structure. Both humans and canines who enact tactics do not have the ability for the long-term planning and stockpiling which is demanded by strategy. Instead, they play in the margins and respond opportunistically to potential nodes of resistance. For de Certeau, tactics are dependent on time, “always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing,’” or in the case of the dog, “on the wag” (de Certeau xix). Everyday practices are constructed from a multitude of incoherent relationships which assemble unexpected systems. There is the “official” overarching construction of a subway system meant for human use, and then there is the secondary, unauthorized production and practices that put the subway to use for unsanctioned purposes (de Certeau xii). The dogs of Moscow's metro, subvert the subway not through a direct challenge with bared teeth and raised hackles, but by quietly putting the system to use for their own needs and purposes. For de Certeau, “The space of the tactic is the space of the other” (de Certeau 37). Tactics become tools and modes of resistance for those who do not have standing within the “proper” system.

The everyday practices of the metro dogs—what de Certeau refers to as “modes of operation”—have affinities with Bruno Latour's concept of “Actor Network Theory” (ANT). It is the *relationships* between actants in the network that are worth exploring. Significantly for Latour, actants are animate actors who can be both human and nonhuman. The actants do

⁶⁰ To provide perspective on the number of people traveling on the metro each day, the population of the state of Utah is slightly less than three million humans. On the weekdays, the Moscow metro has a daily ridership that is more than three times the state's population.

not exist outside of their relationships in the network and each actant is composed of additional actors who form their own networks (Latour, *Reassembling the Social* 46). Thus, there is a multiplicity of realities—networks of forking paths. Applied to the metro system and the metro dogs, the network is composed of relationships amongst dogs, humans, swinging doors, stairs, escalators, platforms, scents, train cars, recorded train stops on the trains,⁶¹ food handouts, air ducts, dark corners, and countless other unknown characters. On the dog there is also an assemblage or network of actants: fur, flea, skin, microbes, blood, and body temperature.

Similar to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome, there is no hierarchical privileging in a network. Rather, it is a series of interconnections, each of which has the potential of influencing the relationships of all other nodes in the network. Thus, not only are the actants animate, so too is the network. The network is never stable, but is always in a process of remaking, and thus undergoes a series of micro- and macroscale "*perestroikas*." The actants sift amongst the ruins, rummaging through the legacy—a restructuring that always has present in it an inheritance of the past. While the network may appear coherent and stable, it is actually only maintained through constant performances that give the illusion of stability. Depending on the station, the dog may only enter if a human happens to open the swinging door, which itself is dependent on a security guard unlocking it in the wee hours of the morning. If one of these actants does not engage, then the relationships between other actants in the system are compromised.

Applied to animate rhetoric, the tactics deployed by dogs in the subway network reveal a series of animate agents, agents who are speaking to each other in ways that are both

⁶¹ To distinguish between inbound and outbound trains, a male voice is used in one direction and a female voice is used in the other direction. This is one of the many cues dogs may use to navigate the underground network.

coherent and incoherent to human bodies. Animate rhetoric and its engagement of the nonhuman as “agents” does not presuppose any forms of intentionality. Significantly for the concept of “agent” it is not a static quality existing in any one form, but is instead brought into being through the *relationships* of subjects. Thus, the agent is never stable and always engages in interactions that animate different facets of the network. The agent has the ability to affect other actants and be affected by them. This form of affective engagement reveals a world already alive and speaking through a series of complex relationships that precede and exceed the realm of logic.⁶² Animate rhetoric, through its engagement of subjects who fall outside of the stifling collar and leash of human linguistic rationality, invites a permeability between barriers. In the crowded trains of the metro, bodies touch that might never have had contact above ground. A lawyer’s dry-cleaned pant leg will brush against a janitor’s work boot, or the fur of a dog—all animate actants in a network of relations. By entering into an underground opening beings find themselves in an indeterminate mixture of animate bodies.

Paws Among Fleeting Feet: Imaging the Metro Dogs

The stray dogs of Moscow, and the metro dogs in particular, have been featured on countless blogs and news outlets throughout the world. While one blogger mentions his first metro dog encounter in 2000, most accounts of the train-riding mutts peaked between 2007-2010 (Benfield; Dish; McGrane; Rubashov; Una). This increase may be in part due to the proliferation of camera phones and social media sites which permit for easy-access image-stalking, seeking out unusual and noteworthy “prey” to “capture” with the camera lens and

⁶² By “affective engagement,” I expand on Gregg and Seigworth’s approach which explores affect not merely as emotion which can be a result of affect, but more significantly as a force of encounters: “Affect marks a body’s *belonging* to a world of encounters or; a world’s belonging to a body of encounters but also, in *nonbelonging*, through all those far sadder (de)compositions of mutual in-compossibilities” (Gregg and Seigworth 2). Affect is a reciprocal engagement recognizing all participants as potential animate forces.

then disseminate online. To explore the canine ruptures into human-dominated space, my own study will use images from four sources. One American source is an ABC News segment, “Nature’s Edge,” hosted by Bill Blakemore (Marquardt, Blakemore, and Eichenholz). The piece, titled “Stray Dogs Master Complex Moscow Subway System,” aired on ABC on March 19, 2010, and was then independently reposted to YouTube. This short video features ABC Russian correspondent Alexander Marquardt, whose narrative accompanies footage of stray dogs in the city, a film crew following a canine metro-rider, and supplementary images from both YouTube and a professional photographer’s black and white still images.

The remaining three sources are Russian. The first comes from the Russian website “Metrodog” where metro riders post images and videos of dogs they encounter on their commutes. Though the site only has nineteen posts, it is frequently referenced in articles and blogs about the dogs. A short video from the site follows the journey of one canine passenger from the train car into a station bustling with humans (Metrodog). The second Russian source is a blog titled “EnglishRussia” which includes a post titled “Smartest Dogs: Moscow Stray Dogs” (EnglishRussia). The post profiles the dogs of the metro and includes numerous photos and videos which have been reposted by other blogs. I explore the canine *perestroikas* in two short videos of escalator-riding dogs, as well as two images of dogs sleeping on the metro. Finally, images of the statue “Compassion” erected in honor of Malchik the dog, come from the official Moscow Metro website (Moscow Metro, “Unveiling of ‘Compassion’”). Together, these pedigreed and mongrel texts demonstrate the presence of a more-than-human population that has gone to the tunnels and reappropriated the system for unintended uses. These texts were selected because they are the most frequently

viewed, reposted or cited by other online users. Their visual narrative provides a fleeting glimpse into the subterranean umwelt of mutts whose bodies haunt intersecting tunnels.

Ruptured Perspectives: The Metro from a Dogs-Eye View

Cities are built for the human body and their multiple mechanized accessories. They are constructed by humans for humans, and the accessibility for the more-than-human is rarely considered. From the front porch of a domicile to the glass and steel of the workplace the human body encounters curbs, doors, stairs, levers, knobs, elevators, and escalators which most able-bodied humans unconsciously navigate.⁶³ When nonhuman animals manipulate spaces intended for humans, ruptures occur around issues of accessibility and negotiated pathways. A dog's eye view of the world reveals spaces, gaps, openings, and opportunities that are not readily visible to the human who stands approximately three feet higher than the dog. The challenges, adaptations, and advantages of a four-legged body in the metro are highlighted by human attempts to track the canines. In one blog account, the author recounts how as a human entered the metro, a dog nimbly slipped into the station minding his tail on the swinging door. The same dog adeptly slid under the turnstile that was furthest away from the metro attendant, and walked expertly towards a train platform through a maze of fast-moving human feet who were not on the lookout for his body (Rubashov). By chasing after the metro dogs we encounter an unexpected network of animate beings. A brief pursuit reminds humans of the myriad of life-worlds, what Uexküll referred to as "bubbles," that are engaged in their own pursuits.

⁶³ In the documentary *Examined Life*, Judith Butler explores how cities are built for able-bodied humans and do not take into consideration how other bodies, specifically disabled bodies, navigate, are limited by, and make use of that space. We forget that the "naturalness" of the cityscape is not at all "natural" but was built with a specific human body in mind (Taylor).

The Dog's Sensuous World: Chasing After a Network of Sensations

Despite walking through the “same” space, the *umwelt* of the dog presents a different world than that experienced by humans. Not only can the dog's body move through space differently due to his height, size and four-legged stability, he also sees, hears, and smells the world in ways that fall outside of the human sensorial capacity. Contrary to popular belief, dogs are not color blind. Rather, their range of colors is limited and favors blues and greens over reds and oranges (Horowitz 128). What dogs' eyes lack in color-range, they make up for in their flicker-fusion rate which is around seventy-eighty cycles per second compared to the human rate of sixty cycles per second (Horowitz 131).⁶⁴ With the lateral placement of eyes on their head, dogs see the world in 250-270 degrees compared to the human whose range is limited to 180 degrees (Horowitz 124). Dogs are both seeing and hearing the world differently from humans. From upright triangles to floppy, long lobes, dog ears come in a wide range of sizes and shapes. They cock these velvet-soft appendages up, forward, back, and lay them flat against their heads—all movements which signify information and processes. Dogs' hearing ability conveniently overlaps with the human range, but also exceeds it with their capacity to hear high pitches we classify as “ultrasonic” but which are the canine “normal” (Horowitz 93). From the dog's auditory perspective, humans are sonically handicapped. When it comes to truly remedial human senses, it is the nose that puts the dog in the “genius” category.

⁶⁴ The flicker-fusion rate is most easily understood by how humans create the simulation of moving images. By lacing together a series of still images—frames—at a specific speed, we gain the illusion of movement that appears seamless and “real.” In the analogue era of film making, twenty-four frames-per-second was the norm. Currently, digital film makers employ thirty-six, forty-eight or sixty frames-per-second, all of which change our experience of film with sixty frames per second appearing a little “too real” on the big screen. It is the dog's ability to see in more frames per second that permits him to catch balls and Frisbees with impossible finesse. Just as in the chase through the metro, the human eye is forever playing “catch-up” with the canine, always a fraction of a second behind. The canine flicker-fusion rate also means the dog is able to discern the individual frames “streaming” on films and on television, as well as the flicker of the fluorescent lights that dominate the Moscow metro.

When a loud sound disrupts our movements, a human will look for it, but a dog will smell for it. Smell is the primary way dogs experience the world, exploring both visible and invisible surroundings through a series of inhalations. A dog's sense-of-smell is estimated to be millions of times more sensitive than that of humans (Horowitz 72). Dogs constantly breathe in multiple worlds. Through a complex muscular system, dogs draw in "air-based odorants" which displace present odor-filled air deeper into the dog's nose. The dog's nose contains within it multiple olfactory presences that remain distinct from other scents. Ethologist Alexandra Horowitz describes this process as a way of "seeing" the world: "The sniffing method of dogs enables them to avoid habituation to the olfactory topography of the world: they are continually refreshing the scent in their nose, as though shifting their gaze to get another look" (Horowitz 70–71). A dog's world is never static but is instead a vast flow of air currents from a surfeit of sources. From a dog's point-of-scent, the world is in constant motion. Time never stands still but wafts through the dog's muzzle with scents of vanishing things that already were, and things that can almost be hinted at. The ephemeral quality of scent is always tied to a process of decay as aromas fade into odorant rubble.

An attempt to follow a dog through the metro—and the difficulty of such pursuits—provides humans with a visual glimpse into the *umwelt* of a metro dog. In a three minute, thirteen second video from the Metrodog website, a dog is followed from inside of a train car and into the station. At 144p, the footage is very low quality. The low-resolution of the video hinders the viewer's "full" knowledge of what is being filmed and what the experience of the train car and station are like. Not only does the low-resolution lay bare the device—we are always aware we are watching something in ways that high-definition camerawork attempts to mask with a highly pixelated glamour—we are also reminded of how much our own senses are impaired. If vision, our primary sense organ, is not able to clearly encounter

the world, in what other ways are our senses impoverished when it comes to attempts to understand the world as experienced by another species? Even before low-resolution filming could begin, the human had to change her own habits in order to create the possibility of an encounter. The individual who posted the video noted in the accompanying text that she deliberately sought out the last car of the train as dogs tend to board the extreme-most cars that have fewer human riders. Footage begins in the interior of a train at a dog's perspective—foot and leg level. At this height, the dog must smell hints of each passenger's footfall on city pavement: oil, food, dog excrement, spit, soil, human urine, rotting leaves. Then again, the perfume and cologne of some humans might overwhelm all other aromas rendering the dog scent-impaired regarding the olfactory travelogues of those around her.⁶⁵

Train doors open and passengers disembark into Komsomolskaya station where the dog-chaser follows after her four-legged subject. The camera is unsteady and lacks complete focus as the videographer attempts to keep the dark, feather-tailed dog in view. At times we only see inarticulate images racing by. At other moments we catch a glimpse of a low, furry body. The dog is always outpacing the human and the occasional glimpse of moving feet provides the audience with some understanding of where the dog is in the mass of people. Hugging his body to pillars, the dog utilizes the round forms as waypoints away from human feet. Perhaps he pauses to listen to the ultrasonic chattering of rats in the shadows. Perhaps he sensed the aroma of fear from a human passenger and uses the pillar as a point of protection away from people. Perhaps he can smell the videographer chasing after him.

⁶⁵ The majority of the dogs photographed in the metro appear to be somewhere between forty-fifty pounds which would put the dogs at nose-level to many human genitals, a particularly pungent location on the body. Metro dogs may harbor knowledge of human activities that would breach human symbolic orders. The dog smells what humans abject and mask.

After a sometimes dizzying chase lasting one minute, the dog arrives at what seems to be his destination: a wrought-iron railing that looks down to a lower level. He stands between humans who loiter and sometimes look down. With ears cocked up and forward, tail gently swaying, and a slight pant revealing a pink tongue, the dog moves excitedly back and forth to catch a better scent/view of what is below. Unlike the humans who are stationary and do not seem actively engaged with their surroundings, the dog appears to strive for a better understanding of what captures his attention. He moves constantly as if attempting to catch a current of an aroma, or a visual perspective that might provide more information. Such movements are impossible for the camera to capture without a complete sense of incoherency. The video moves back and forth, sometimes clearly filming the dog, but more often catching a whirl of human movement. At times, the audience has no idea where the dog is. Supporting the visual incoherency, there is an auditory cacophony. All that can be heard is the deafening roar of trains decelerating and accelerating as if being moved by the suction of a pneumatic pipe. Not even the din of humans is audible above the trains. Perhaps the dog hears the trains even before the humans do – a pitch of metal against metal that exceeds human aural capacity.

After a minute of active study, the dog deftly moves along the railing leaving the human, once again, in the position of catch-up. Finally, we discover the object of the dog's attention: an escalator. From the wrought-iron railing, he was studying the movements of the escalator below. Was he sniffing for the difference between ascending and descending passengers? Do those emerging from trains and platforms carry with them ineffable, olfactory signatures that speak the routes of their journeys, the stations, their daily activities? Is he assessing the difficulty with which he can board the escalator—the number of people, the tenor of the crowd? Is he perhaps excited by the actual movement of the escalator steps

themselves? After all, he can see the movement a fraction of a second faster than humans which means that if he is new to escalator riding, then he should be able to time his movements to the pace of the escalator better than a human could.⁶⁶ Perhaps this is a new adventure, a new tool to master, for the train-riding canine.

Standing next to the escalator railing, the dog's body partially obstructs the direct movement of humans alighting on the moving stairway. A few human hands first touch the dog's furry head before placing their hand on the escalator railing. Touch momentarily connects. Eventually, the dog joins the humans becoming a part of the stream of passengers. He disappears.

The canine umwelt presents ruptures that permit his movement through space—a door held open just long enough to slip through, avoidance of humans with authority, quick maneuverings along narrow edges, and careful study of new tools. He takes advantage of openings. For the human following after the dog—and with our ungainly legs it is always a chase *after*, never beside—these openings are not so easily navigated and may not even enter our awareness. A four-legged dog can dexterously weave in and out of the trunks of human legs and does not adhere to the conventions of personal space that humans attempt to maintain even in cramped spaces. Efforts to track metro dogs force humans to behave differently as they chase after an animal whose agenda differs from that of their own. Dogs and humans evolved together. That relationship presents some opportunities for connection and shared experience, but it also means there are worlds we will never taste, smell, or rub

⁶⁶ More significantly for dogs moving through the metro, their ability to process movements a fraction of a second faster than humans becomes important when they are moving through swinging doors or jumping on train cars as doors are closing, a “game” played by dogs on the ABC news segment (Marquardt, Blakemore, and Eichenholz).

against. Instead we might catch a faint scent that never enters complete consciousness, an opportunity to follow after an animal other, catching an incoherent glimpse of his world.

Disrupting Binaries: Moving Up and Down Hierarchies

With an ultimate goal of a classless society, the Soviet Union constructed public works which served as beacons for an idealized golden future. The metro was more than a symbol of technological progress. It also served as an architectural cathedral for the daily mass of people who entered underground tunnels adorned with mosaics, chandeliers, marble tile, statues, and arched ceilings (Cooke 142; Jenks 697). The Moscow metro opened in 1935 providing an underground passageway where the former bourgeois stood next to the proletarian in jostling and cramped trains. A rupture in class structures placed bodies on the same transit platform in the underworld, a condition that had once only occurred through death. Though denied access to the metro under Soviet rule, dogs have historically assisted as guides or conductors of souls—psychopomps—to the underworld and companions in death. From Nordic Fenris to Anubis of Egypt or the Greek Cerebus, canines have served as intermediaries, both as a barrier and as a link between one world and the next (Serpell, “Paragon to Pariah” 249).⁶⁷ Dogs inhabit a state of liminality not simply between life and death, but also make present a little wildness in the domestic.

Movement into the underground by people challenges human animality. As terrestrial creatures, the movement of humans through the darkness of subterranean spaces

⁶⁷ In Russian myth, dogs are less than obedient and are subject to the carnal desires. A dog, charged with guarding the entrance to paradise, ignored her duties when she was thrown a bone which she happily consumed. This gluttonous behavior resulted in the Devil entering into the forbidden paradise (Dale-Green 91).

is more frequently associated with a journey into the unconscious.⁶⁸ A venture into the underground disrupts not just class hierarchies among humans, but also among species. By facing an animal other in subterranean space, we encounter a form of wildness we evolved with. The domestication of both humans and dogs were not discrete events but occurred together with the body of one species reciprocally shaping the other. This evolution continues in the underground as dogs learn about anthropogenic tools that permit for increased mobility and to varying degrees less dependence on humans. In two videos taken from the EnglishRussia blog we encounter the movements of two different dogs on escalators (EnglishRussia). In a fifty second video a dog attempts to descend an ascending escalator. The dog walks against the movement of the escalator, as if on a treadmill, occasionally navigating around static human bodies and glancing up at the videographer. In a different video lasting seven seconds, a dog nonchalantly rides and walks up the ascending escalator. The first video shows a dog using a human tool “incorrectly” while the second briefly depicts a dog using the same tool “correctly.”

It is impressive that both dogs maneuver a mechanism that can be a challenge for humans to master. While the escalator is unconsciously used by able-bodied humans, anyone who has ridden the device with small children or less mobile/agile adults is made suddenly aware of the skill it demands. The coordination and speed required to mount the escalator at the correct moment when the step is flat, and then to dismount in time to avoid pinched feet can be a challenge. Yet, the dogs of Moscow’s metro have learned to do so. Indeed, their mastery of the escalators is essential if they want to ride the trains. By riding the escalators, the dogs move up and down a mechanism that was built for human bodies. The dogs

⁶⁸ The anima and animus in Jungian psychology serve as archetypes of the unconscious. According to Jung, animus is a psychopomp, a guide to the unconscious (Jung 164).

literally move between different levels and in the process disrupt symbolic hierarchies. Their movement on the escalator becomes a symbolic violation and appropriation of a tool intended for humans. These dogs independently ride the escalator *beside* human riders who are not their “owners.” Their movement on escalators is a reminder that hierarchies, and the binaries associated with those hierarchies, are never stable. Rather, just as an escalator is in constant motion between two levels, so too are the bodies engaging with the tool. Impermissible canine bodies make use of the tool at hand and in doing so reveal that the stratified levels of the structure are instable.

A Reversal of Hierarchies: Playing the Other

Metro dogs make visible other human/animal hierarchies. In one image from the blog EnglishRussia, a dog sleeps soundly on her right side on the bench of a train car (EnglishRussia). Below the dog, on the floor, is a woman on her right side who also appears to be sleeping. The dog’s light tawny fur contrasts with the chocolate brown vinyl of the seat. One ear is cocked up, as if on alert, and legs seem to mimic running. It is as if the dog could spring to attention at a moment’s notice. Unlike the dark-nosed dog, the woman’s face is not visible. Her brunette curls and pale pink hand serve as a shroud. One arm cradles her head; a striped, multicolored scarf runs undisciplined along the scuffed, tan-colored floor. Unlike the dog, her legs are not seen; we do not get the sense that she is primed for action. Instead, the chambray blue of a long coat folds over a blue and pink skirt, while pink plaid cuffs of a shirt emerge from the coat. In contrast to the dog who wears no vestiges of the human symbolic order, the woman wears a ring—perhaps a wedding band—on her left ring finger. We might think these two are alone, but of course they are not. Not only is the unseen photographer present, men’s feet can be spied in the upper, right corner of the

image. Was this image posed? Was it a candid moment of two individuals desperate for sleep? Perhaps both animals have been lulled by the rocking of the train carriage into unknown dreamland filled with scents for the dog and images for the woman? It is impossible to know the circumstances of the two sleepers, but the unexpected contrast is striking. The two sleepers replicate each other, except that the dog sleeps where the human normally sits, and the woman sleeps where the dog typically sits. The dog occupies a space that was not built with the canine body in mind, and takes advantage of a dry, warm and cushioned bed that permits for comfortable snoozing.⁶⁹ The human, rather than sit or sleep next to the dog—there is room—occupies the floor, a space typically designated for the unclean soles of dirty feet that stride through the muck of a city. Only abjected bodies or body parts reside on the ground.

The placement of bodies in this image reveals hierarchies that are far more slippery and unstable than what initially meets the eye. A human in the “denigrated” position reserved for the nonhuman, makes visible how all nonhuman animals have been consciously and unconsciously placed in this degraded position of “other.” The shock of seeing the dog where the woman should be and the woman where the dog should be upsets the human symbolic order. Human symbolic orders dictate not only the placement of bodies, but that certain bodies through that physical placement are endowed with dominion over others. If humans have dominion over the nonhuman, that power is not exercised by assuming a position that literally places the human beneath that of the common dog. The performative act of corporeal submission has symbolic consequences.

⁶⁹ Uexküll refers to such things as “tones.” For the dog, all flat surfaces are potential “sitting tones,” ranging from chairs, sidewalks, overturned crates, to a basket (Uexküll 48). What counts as a “sitting tone” for a dog, may not count as one for the human.

At the same time, the image performs its own “play bow” on the audience. Statuses merge. The only humans who might occupy the same degraded status of the subway dog would be the derelict human, the homeless transient who shares the floor and alleyways with homeless canine occupants. By reversing the socially “correct” positioning of bodies, the sleeping woman is not simply reversing species hierarchies; she also reveals how some human bodies are given more value than others. As a result, the visual play of hierarchies reveals how some people might have their status as “human” subverted, making them more “animal” than “human.” Indeed, the dog in this image might be considered more “human” than the woman because he seeks out the “civilized” option for reclining. Thus, the statuses of woman and dog do not perform a strict reversal of hierarchies, but unexpectedly merge into each other. The woman becomes “animalhuman” while the dog becomes “humananimal.” That is, the woman has become less than human making the “animal” aspect the primary signifier but not yet losing the “human” aspect. The dog, in contrast, has become more than animal making the “human” the primary signifier, but never losing the “animal.” The ability to reverse hierarchies demonstrates the very instability of the binary and the “foundation” it sits upon.

Moving Equality Forward, but Still an Event

In another image, also from the EnglishRussia blog, a dog with dark highlights who bears a resemblance to a German Shepherd also sleeps on a chocolate brown vinyl seat (EnglishRussia). This dog slumbers on his stomach with all four legs tucked neatly underneath. The dog’s nose touches the tan jacket of a human who sits next to him. The large man with dark hair wears a blue sweater and jeans and appears to be engrossed with the newspaper that rests on his legs. Dog and human take no notice of the other. Each

animal appears to be engrossed with personal engagements—one sleeps while the other reads. Most remarkable about this image is how unremarkable it is. It does not carry the self-awareness of “Look! I am sitting next to a stray dog on a train!” Rather, man and dog ignore each other, just as most human passengers take no notice of the human they sit next to on the train. The lack of remarkability enacted by the two passengers asserts a form of normalcy. That which is normal is not commented upon or noted. As far as dog and human are concerned, they are simply taking a ride.

Yet, the presence of an image posted on a website implies that man and stray dog seated next to each other is not normal, but noteworthy. A tension arises between the subjects of the image, and those outside of the image. The photographer, the audience, the medium of both image and digital dissemination on the Internet all convey the importance of an image event worthy of the human gaze. Where a man reading on a train is not image-worthy, the presence of the dog implies an aberration to the normal routine of train travel. While the photo implies a leveling of hierarchies between human and animals, the opposite is actually true. If there were no photo, a lack of images, we might intuit that a levelling of binaries had occurred. At the end of the train ride, it is still the dog who lacks standing according to the metro rules. The dog’s presence is impermissible, while the newspaper-reading man is innocuous.

Beyond the Spoken Word: Connections Between Kin

Then again, perhaps the dog wields the power. Dogs with their furry bodies, enormous eyes, and wagging tails affectively connect to the human psyche. Their ability to read humans and to demonstrate a form of grateful “submission” via tail wagging, downcast eyes, and cockeyed ears speaks to our human body. These signs let the human know this dog

is not aggressive, opening up an encounter with an animate agent. For dogs, such connection might be rewarded with treats as was the case with one metro-rider filmed by the ABC news segment (Marquardt, Blakemore, and Eichenholz). The dog boarded the train, walked with his head low in submission and then “read” the “language” of the round, elderly woman who was also reading the dog’s language. Dog and woman connect; a brief petting and exchange of smiles.

The ability to understand the more-than-human world is part of the evolutionary history of humans, and one that is increasingly lost due to the magical potency of human-made signs and symbols which mesmerize our attention. Philosopher David Abram sees this loss of connection as an impoverishment of our own human expression. “As technological civilization diminishes the biotic diversity of the earth,” writes Abram, “language itself is diminished. As there are fewer and fewer songbirds in the air, due to the destruction of their forests and wetlands, human speech loses more and more of its evocative power” (Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* 86). The long connection between humans and dogs serves as a reminder that not all networks have been severed. The proximity of canine and human bodies provides a more-than-verbal connection between animal others. Moving beyond the canine and human ability to comprehend body language, as well as a dog’s ability to smell pheromones, the human capacity to distinguish the intent of dog barks continues. A 2005 study reports that humans could understand whether the recorded barks of dogs indicated aggression, fear, play, or sadness. What is more, according to the ethologists, the ability to distinguish different barks was just as high among dog owners as among individuals who did not own a dog (Pongrácz et al. 136). The claim that someone is, or is not, a “dog person” may be more complex and may move beyond species affinity. When it comes to understanding the canine other, the majority of humans are “dogpeople” who—like a second

language speaker in a foreign land—may understand more than what they themselves can articulate.

Overall, dogs demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the human symbolic order and what behavior is permissible. Free-ranging dogs do not defecate on highly-trafficked sidewalks, but instead take their business of both elimination and copulation to the alleyways (Beck 16). Likewise, in all of the reports about the Moscow dogs, no mention is made of dogs engaging in behaviors that are deemed socially unacceptable to human standards (Schoofs). The dogs are savvy about human behavior and mores. As one Russian biologist stated in a Wall Street Journal interview, “The dogs know Muscovites better than Muscovites know the dogs” (Schoofs). One way of knowing is recognizing how others perceive you. Such knowledge is powerful. One result of being “cute” and submissive is that the dog is imaged. While not necessarily the intention of the dog, such visual records may serve the dog and his ability to ride the train. The human, primed by the dog’s charming appearance, produces evidence that the dog is harmless and therefore is not a threat to the system. As a result, the canine rider gains currency amongst the public who are provided with images of amiable companions who are more charming than they are threatening. Unintentionally, the dog tactically uses the photographing human to his advantage. With the fast dissemination of digital darling dogs, the stray dogs of Moscow have earned the best PR treat possible without even trying.

Beyond the Fetish: Animate “Originals” Transgressing the Network

A slender woman, almost six feet tall, walks into the Mendeleyevskaya Station. It is New Year’s Eve, 2001 and the twenty-two-year-old looks like a model. Yulia Romanova is a

model. She sports tall boots, a short skirt, a wide, black velvet hat, and a blue fur-trimmed coat (Ozernyy). Additional accessories include a children's backpack and a Staffordshire terrier who also looks like a model in his new camouflage coat. Woman and dog have just returned from a shopping trip at one of Moscow's pet boutiques which specializes in outfitting elite Muscovite canines in the latest fashions (Sternthal). Suddenly, a bark joins the din of rush hour passengers jostling their way home. Accounts differ regarding the events that led up to the death. Some say Malchik, a five-year canine resident of the station, barked at the pair as a signal that they were in his territory, his network. Other accounts assert that the woman's terrier, known more commonly in the United States as a Pit Bull, attacked Malchik. No matter the account, the results were the same. Rather than pull her dog away from the mangy metro resident, the woman joined the fight. What she lacked for in long, sharp teeth she made up for with a long, sharp knife conveniently retrieved from her backpack. In front of shocked passengers and shopkeepers, Romanova stabbed Malchik to death.

Unwilling to let sleeping dogs lie, people expressed outrage and the woman was brought to trial, itself an event which revealed a psychologically disturbed woman with a long history of animal torture and abuse (Marsh). Sentenced to psychiatric treatment, the woman's visage is no longer present for Muscovites, but Malchik's presence in the metro has been immortalized.⁷⁰ A bronze statue, titled "Compassion" was erected in the Mendeleyevskaya station. The dog who once received delectable treats from shopkeepers and passengers, continues his physical connection with humans who rub his upturned,

⁷⁰ Given the sensationalism of the case, one might expect a trove of photos of the woman who claimed to be a model. In my search, the only image that actually claimed to be of Romanova herself is a studio-photograph of a thin, long-legged, dark-haired woman in a short, silver dress. She is accompanied by a dog outfitted in a green bell-boy uniform and jaunty cap.

bronze muzzle for luck (Moscow Metro, “Unveiling of ‘Compassion’”). The stabbing of Malchik, and the erection of a statue in his honor, demonstrates a form of fetishization where the relational subject is turned into an object.

The Fetish of the Breed: An Expansion of Possible “Beings” and Becomings

Moscow’s stray dogs have disobeyed the constructs of Western capitalist commodity fetishism made visible through the domesticated housedog. The Moscow dogs queer our concept of “dog.” Not only are the stray dogs from completely indeterminate origins and thus defy the fetishization of the “breed” dog, they also defy the fetishization of property.⁷¹ Divisions are established based on breed and pedigree. The social standing of dogs is demonstrated through the technology of breeding, a form of canine eugenics where controlled copulation deems some dogs as “valuable” while dogs of mixed or indeterminate breeds are denigrated and considered valueless by monetary standards. The cultural lenses worn by Yulia Romanova projected Malchik as “nothing” while her own pedigreed dog had “value.”⁷² While the Moscow dogs may be dependent on a network of relations that includes humans, they do not refer to any single human as “legal owner.” Nor do they let humans determine their proper “job” in the world based on pedigree. These dogs are in direct contrast to the popular image conveyed by the term “domestic dog.” The Moscow dogs defy

⁷¹ While some stray dogs are “breed” dogs who were once the legal property of humans, these dogs rarely have the ability to survive on the streets with biologists estimating a survival rate of three percent (Sternthal).

⁷² The production of breeds was also a production of human “breeds.” Not only is status given to individuals who have the wealth to afford a “pure-bred” dog with registered papers detailing canine lineage, but it was also the case in medieval England where “Forest Laws” only permitted nobility to keep specific dog breeds. The status of peasants was marked on their dogs whose legs were mutilated in such a way to prevent the subaltern dog from running. Not only did this handicap prevent the dog from wandering or killing game, it also discouraged interbreeding with “pedigreed” noble canines (McHugh 74). The fetishization of breeds makes visible the symbolic construction of power relationships amongst humans.

the “proper” system by refusing to be entirely reliant on humans for knowledge, training, sustenance and shelter. Rather, they take advantage of a complex system of relationships. If the metro guard forgets to unlock the station doors, the dog can always find another location—such as a doorway—to serve as shelter and begging post. Mutts serve as an indistinct population that threatens easily identifiable categories. They mark broad networks that are not necessarily determined by concepts of capitalistic property, but instead focus on relational use and the actual means of production.

We forget that breeds have no origins except in the mongrel—those descendants from ancient wolves who had the ability to interact with humans. The “mongrel” was for all intents and purposes the “ur” dog. The first domesticated dogs were not a “breed.” While the Moscow strays have slipped out of clearly defined breeds, in a Foucauldian twist, new categories have been produced by biologists who have observed the stray dogs’ behavior for the past thirty years and classified them as guard dogs, beggar dogs or wild dogs (Sternthal). The creation of categories like “guard” “beggar” or “wild” refers not to pedigree, but to interactions, relationships, and activities. It refers to direct interactions with the world around them that influence how they socialize, what they eat, who they interact with, and where they live. Such relational categories even upset the overarching categories imposed on the animals. The category of “mammal” includes a vole in the ground and a whale in the ocean. Though both animals give birth to live young, the similarity does not go much farther. Developing different categories, the vole may have more in common with an earthworm who inhabits the same underground world and where the movement of soil by each creature may influence the other. Similarly, the whale may have more in common with a coral reef in a rapidly warming and acidifying ocean. The process of creating categories

reveals how arbitrary those structures are and how easily they can be restructured or deconstructed.

The Affective Network: A Totem of Compassion

In the case of Malchik, we encounter a network of connections based not necessarily on hierarchies of breed or ownership, but instead on networks of compassion. Each actant has multiple overlays of different networks that exist not within the plane of a two-dimensional world, but instead branch out, up, down and even inward—much like the complex root system of a shrub or tree that also connects with webs of air, sunshine and free-floating pollen. Malchik had networks that included not just people he knew and interacted with at the station—shopkeepers, passengers, metro employees—but also individuals he would never meet. The canine murder served as an event producing new networks of creative possibility in the lives of Muscovite artists who erected Malchik’s statue (Moscow Metro, “Unveiling of ‘Compassion’”). Malchik, a dog with brown and blonde fur who closely resembled a German shepherd, is now forever bronzed and young. Though dead, he continues to haunt the tunnels that were his home.

Malchik’s statue has become both a fetish and a totem. The “deceased” metro dog performs not just as a fetish in the way people rub his nose for luck, but also as a totem in the way he culturally stands for something larger and more significant that serves to bring beings together. The “psychopomp” becomes a “psychopup.” While the “pomp” in “psychopomp” implies a form of ostentatious ceremony, the “pup” in “psychopup” conjures playfulness, a disruption to the efficiency of everyday movement. His presence serves as a guide who reminds humans of the importance of relational connection. Just as a psychopomp serves as a guide between life and death as well as the conscious and

unconscious, Malchik the psychopup serves as a guide between affect and action. In death he continues as an animate agent affecting those who encounter his stony presence. In bronze he lies down with his chest erect and nose pointing slightly upward. His front legs are splayed in front of him while his rear left leg lies underneath at an angle. His rear right leg is raised to scratch an itch that seems to be on his thick, long-furred neck right beneath his floppy, triangular right ear. A feathery tail cascades elegantly from his equally feathered flank and spreads out on the dark, marble pedestal. Malchik has been elevated from the ground and instead of there being a pile of tantalizing edible morsels at his feet, there are bouquets of flowers. Malchik served as a node in a series of events where some humans showed qualities of cruelty and where others showed qualities of compassion. James Serpell reminds us of the complexity of the dog-human relationship: “In a sense, our attitudes towards dogs reflect our uncertainty about our own status and moral responsibilities with respect to the rest of the animal kingdom” (Serpell, “Hair of Dog” 262). The importance of Malchik was not only in Malchik as an individual actant, but in how Malchik served as an event revealing the relationships and responses between actants.

Restructured Conclusions: Becoming Wolf in the Urban Wild

A tall, dark dog sits in Red Square. We see his profile from behind with his head turned to the right—a perfect silhouette of a noble snout stares at something that is beyond our vision. At the far end of the square we see Saint Basil’s Cathedral and The Savior Tower whose glowing lights reflect off of the damp cobbles of the square. The dog appears to be alone, only a few diminutive human shapes in the background. With the dramatic monuments of human culture around him, this dog embodies a certain nobility which black and white photography can amplify. Perhaps the image of the noble savage, when applied to

the dog can only occur through still images. With the still image, the human—*homo narratans*—creates narratives of the subject. Stories are concocted of what happened the moment before the shutter click, and what happened after. With the moving image, the story is disrupted by the subject who asserts her own movements that may not correspond to the narrative being told by the human audience. Instead of seeing a lone dog staring off into the distance—the image of autonomy and wisdom—we might suddenly see the dog scratch, sniff and lick at genitals, submissively wag his tail and cock his ears, or stretch long legs forward and plop to the ground with a satisfied grunt. Just as the grey that dominates the image, the dogs of Moscow stand in a gray area between two worlds—the lone dog in the midst of a human-dominated city. Culturally, Russia stands between the East and the West and whose very liminality with the upheaval of *perestroika* gave rise to the metro dogs. The subway itself is a liminal space between the surface and the underground. More significantly, the dogs of Moscow are liminal creatures. They are not “wild,” but simultaneously they are not “domestic.” Instead, they form their own category of canine which does not come to a stable stopping point but instead moves ceaselessly through a cavern of tunnels that permit for endless iterations of unexpected rides.

The Moscow dogs actively demonstrate the constant movement of evolution. The evolution of wolves to domestic dog involved not just a docile and friendly personality, but the addition of spots and floppy ears. Now, the metro dogs are losing those characteristics and appearing more wolf-like in their appearance.⁷³ They are shyer of the human hand. This is not a reversion or a “de-evolution” as some blogs assert (pippap). Rather, this is a new

⁷³ The speed of this change in characteristics was demonstrated by the Russian scientist Dmitri Belyaev whose experiments with foxes revealed that after ten generations of selecting for friendly behavior towards humans, he bred a generation of friendly foxes who also sported floppy ears, piebald coats, and wagged their tails when humans approached (Trut 160). Unlike the foxes, the Moscow dogs are forging their own evolutionary change as they wild the urban environment.

becoming. The dogs, interacting with a network of possibilities enter into new relationships that shape who they are. Forested parks on the edge of the city become homes to the “wild dogs;” established institutions in need of “protection” attract the “guard dogs;” the metro and entryways to shops invite the presence of the “beggar dogs.” These dogs are in an active process of reciprocal shaping with their environments and the countless animate bodies who compose the worlds in it. There is never a singular dog, but a network of “dogness.” This new becoming leaves behind *Canis lupus familiaris* and invites a dog whose presence challenges the human who is not changing as quickly.

Perhaps the dogs of Moscow are a challenge because they may evolve to a point where humans are the ones who are liminal creatures. While they currently make use of humans and their exorbitant amounts of food waste, the dogs’ “becoming wolf” challenges a relationship of mutualistic domesticating/wilding that has occurred for more than 30,000 years. With their fast flicker-fusion rate, the dog leaps aboard a train, while the human is left on the platform. While the word “*Sputnik*” has become synonymous with space travel and the Cold War, in Russian it literally means “fellow traveler.” The dog has been present beside us, in back of, and in front of the human form—a “*sputnik*” in a series of grand events traversing time and space. On a warming planet demanding rapid adaptation, “man’s best friend” may lope far out of reach from his human companion.

The desertion of humans by our “noble companion” serves as a reminder of the insignificance of our own species. It is a reminder that we do not transcend systems, but are instead entangled in complex networks that challenge our misconceived sense of control. The domestic dog serves as a symbol of an animal whose devotion gives humans a sense of worship. The Moscow dogs upset this role of devotee by giving humans neither allegiance nor devotion. In these dogs we encounter a flight from domesticity into a liminal space

verging on wildness. The dogs are animate agents rewilding networks filled with subway cars, forested parks, icy cold wind, rats, humans, trash and even patches of sunshine on cement—perfect for napping.

CODA:

WHEN IMAGES TAKE BITE: A PLEA

FOR THE INHUMANITIES

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes, in seeing the universe with the eyes of another, of hundreds of others, in seeing the hundreds of universes that each of them sees.

– *Marcel Proust, In Search of Lost Time, Volume 5: The Captive, The Fugitive*

The Posed Self and the “Other” with Teeth

In 2013, *The Oxford Dictionary* declared “selfie” the word of the year (*Oxford Dictionaries*). With the tell-tale tilt of the camera phone extended from an outstretched arm, these self-portraits are uploaded to Facebook and other social media sites—venues for socially acceptable narcissism. In response, rather than bring a new voice into the conversation, I will return to the beginning. The ambling beaver started the conversation; it seems only fair that we let her finish it as she plays a role in the era of the imaged self. The video of a beaver running at unexpected speed towards the videographer is one of a series of recent attacks made by the Eurasian beaver (Karmanau; PRdienst). When a Belarusian man on a fishing trip saw a beaver by the side of the road, he stopped to have his photo taken with the furry rodent. The beaver, not understanding the human symbolic order that prizes the imaging of human bodies with anything “remarkable,” asserted her own symbolic order which was fatally understood by the man. The beaver’s razor-sharp teeth sank into the man’s leg, striking the femoral artery and resulting in the man’s death (BBC News; Karmanau). Unlike the video of the beaver who “rushes” the human, the only image of this event is the one

inside your head; man and beaver do not circulate on Facebook as a human and more-than-human “selfie.” Rather, this is an image event of absence, but an absence that sparks possibility.

The beaver, acting as an “other” with agency, resisted the imposition of humans. In doing so, she made visible the anthropocentrism of the “selfie.” The “selfie” itself might be a more-than-human entity which strives to reproduce itself at all costs, including the cost of teeth diving into human flesh. The concern with the “selfie” is that it encourages not simply an engagement limited to humans, but specifically an engagement limited to *one* human. Such excessive self-absorption in one species reveals a pernicious “structure of feeling” or zeitgeist which ignores a living, breathing earth. The self does not end at the fingertips, or at the phone which has become a technological extension of the human body. Rather, it expands outward and inward in a web of tangled networks that includes not only the nonhuman microbes in our bodies, but also to the trees gnawed on by beavers who swim in waters laced with petrochemical residues.

Using the toothy response of the beaver as a guide, this coda will briefly take bite at and nibble on some of the major concepts addressed throughout this book. Specifically, I will consider how animate rhetoric expands the humanities into the inhumanities, and in the process presents opportunities for hopeful rewilding. Ultimately, this expansion reveals possibilities for animate connection and healing—an ensoulment of conviviality and solidarity with more-than-human others.

Fist Scent, First Sight, First Bite: Already Animate

The mental imaging of the biting beaver becomes an animate force that unsettles the human center. “Images,” writes W.J.T. Mitchell, “are like living organisms; living organisms

are best described as things that have desires (for example, appetites, needs, demands, drives)” (W. J. T. Mitchell 11). This potential for animism is unnerving because it steps outside of the realm of rational meaning-making and threatens our own anthropocentric worldview that disciplines the other by imposing a limited sense of “meaning” upon it.

In the space between beaver and human audience, we find ourselves in a network of affect. For Gregg and Seigworth, affect is liminal and dynamic: “Affect arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon” (1). Or, as Abram puts it, to touch is to be touched in return (Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* 268). There is always a gap in-between the act of touching and being touched. These gaps produce a network composed of multiple weavings, multiple webs crossing each other, each one a fragile creation that makes visible the possibility of multiple centers rather than “no center.” The rapid action of the beaver matches our current approach to images. Both rodent and image speak, but not in the speech of humans. Rather, they speak to us in affective terms where the imaged beaver is an animate subject entwined in a complex network composed of rodent, roadside, camera, fisherman, news story, human audience, and escape into forest and water. All of these entities come to life through animate rhetoric.

Animate rhetoric serves as an intervention in the discipline of communication and in the subdiscipline of rhetoric. Where teeth sinking into flesh are a beaver “manifesto” which challenges the privileged position of the human, animate rhetoric is a “manifesto” which challenges the privileging of the solitary human voice. Animate rhetoric actively engages with the voices of a world already speaking. In doing so, animate rhetoric asserts the following:

1. Animate rhetoric expands rhetoric to the more-than-human world.

2. Animate rhetoric expresses the potential that everything *might* be speaking. Animate rhetoric does not claim that everything *is* speaking or that it is speaking *to us*, merely that there is the *possibility* of such engagement.
3. Animate rhetoric does not claim to be “rational,” but instead embraces affect which is prelinguistic, precognitive, prerational.
4. Animate rhetoric is always plural, occurring in relation to other beings who are always in movement, in flux with other rhetorics.
5. Similarly, animate rhetoric always performs in a network of relations which bring forth different subjecthoods. Any sense of “me” is always predicated on “we.”

How might animate rhetoric encourage academics to play with anthropocentric structures that privilege a single species? Perhaps the first step is to consider the possibility that the biting beaver cannot only speak, but speaks to us in ways that challenge us and demand a shift in how we respond to the world. Rather than demand the beaver to speak in rational, clearly articulate terms, perhaps humans need to consider the importance of the shimmering uncertainty of calls-to-action that are not expressed in words and do not fit into tidy methods or categories. Putting animate rhetoric into practice transforms academic discourse. More specifically, animate rhetoric wilds academia:

1. Animate rhetoric expands the concept of “vernacular” to the radically vernacular.
2. Animate rhetoric confronts us with the questions not being asked, the perspectives not considered.
3. Animate rhetoric does not seek to systematize or categorize, but instead forces human academics to think in different ways regarding the multitude of more-than-human perspectives informing academic discourse.

4. Animate rhetoric opens up possibilities for considering the network of discursive acts made by a multitude of speakers who upset human notions of normativity.
5. Animate rhetoric invites, even demands, engaged play with marginalized perspectives, ideas, and language.

It is not simply the human and the anthropogenic that influence our relationship with the world; it is also the more-than-human. David Abram reminds us of this forgotten relationship: “Our bodies have formed themselves in delicate reciprocity with the manifold textures, sounds, and shapes of an animate earth—our eyes have evolved in subtle interaction with *other* eyes, as our ears are attuned by their very structure to the howling of wolves and the honking of geese” (Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* 22). The beaver and other animals in these chapters assert their own agency upon human structures. Just as there is no singular “subject,” “agency” exists in the plural, incoherent, dynamic relations that are constantly flowing into and out of relational dynamics. It is not the humans who actively decide to “wild” human-dominated spaces. Rather, animal others utilize all available tools—including the inarticulate force of pain—to rewild the domestic.

Oh the Inhumanities: Expanding Notions of Animal Selves

The beaver reminds us of the importance not of the “humanities,” but of the “inhumanities.” If, as David Abram claims, we are human “only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human,” then our very humanity is woven out of its relationship with what is not human—the inhuman (Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* 22). An embrace of the inhumanities brings forth possible connections between *anima* and humility—acts of humble ensoulment connecting humans to trees, to sandstone, to feather, to fur, and to roads and rivers traveled by countless animals, including humans. We have forgotten that we are all too

human. Animate rhetoric invites conversation and solidarity with more-than-human others. The inhumanities is a direct response to, an acknowledgement of, the animate rhetoric of a world already speaking through affective networks of connection. Such connections encourage an engagement with an animal “other” who resists and challenges the human body.

Where the humanities interrogates foundations, the inhumanities instigates a questioning of what it means to be “human” in a hemorrhaging biosphere. The term “inhumanities” can be played with in multiple ways. One obvious approach addresses the need for acknowledgement of the not-human, an engagement with the more-than-human. The inclusion of animal others in conversation is a direct engagement of animate rhetoric. The inhumanities reminds us that our human condition involves not just an engagement with humans and anthropogenic texts, but also our connections and kinship with the more-than-human world. By viewing the world as a vast network of animate others, we find we no longer dwell in a world of objects, but instead enter into the potential of multiple subjects. Subjects who have their own ancient languages and texts imprinted on the land.

On a more painful level, the “inhumanities” reminds us of our own complicity in the inhumane destruction of the more-than-human world, of the abjection of beings who are not us, but who are part of a network of relationships that forms our very being. The beaver who challenged the man’s desire for a photograph was labeled as “aggressive” (BBC News; Karmanau). The beaver’s response was othered and was not considered in relation to the wider network of relationships involving a loss of habitat and the loss of predators like wolves and bears. The beaver is automatically vilified. The potential of considering her act as an expression of needs—similar to the needs of a human—is dismissed. One possibility of reclaiming the beaver’s subjecthood, is through the contentious act of anthropomorphizing.

Given the ecological catastrophes that permeate our sensibilities each day, the act of anthropomorphizing could remind us that there are other beings with their own life-worlds, each with its own *habitus* unknowable to us and yet still *a part of* the world we all share. While many environmentalists react in horror to the act of personification because it risks only seeing the world on human terms and denies the possibility of alterity, I actually see hope in the poetics of the personified landscape. In a world filled with so many ecological wounds, any act that makes humans engage with the more-than-human world is a step towards a rewilding that includes the splash of beaver tails in ponds that teem with fish and reeds. After all, we already project ourselves onto other humans, a projection that can sometimes lead to greater empathy and connection. Perhaps one response to the inhumanity we inflict on more-than-human others is to more frequently consider the human “self” in the other. One of the many risks of separating humans from the more-than-human is that it becomes difficult to develop a sense of empathy for others who are radically different. Empathy requires similarity between individuals. By denying any type of personification to the more-than-human world, interspecies empathy is also denied.

Finally, the “inhumanities” invites an entering “in,” an inroad into new ways of conceiving and being “human.” The inhumanities reminds us of the fallacy of a bounded self-presence limited to one species. Instead, there is only relational presence, a wily and sometimes capricious force producing different networks of relationships—relationships which play with time, with context, and with the multitude of seen and unseen participants. The relational force of sharp teeth deftly slicing the cellulose of young trees, differs radically from the force of those same teeth puncturing human flesh. A shift from the humanities to the inhumanities is a critical project that plays with anything considered “natural” and rewilds the gaps with more-than-human voices.

Queering the Natural, Rewilding the Domestic

By focusing on the gaps between things—the gap between the beaver and the human desirous of a photo—we find ourselves forced to consider the perspective of an “other.”

Such an approach engages Nietzsche’s concept of perspectivism which stresses multiplicity:

...if each of us had a different kind of sense-perception—if we could only perceive things now as a bird, now as a worm, now as a plant, or if one of us saw a stimulus as red, another as blue, while a third even heard the same stimulus as a sound—then no one would speak of such a regularity of nature, rather, nature would be grasped only as a creation which is subjective in the highest degree. (253)

No singular perspective or experience of the world dominates. Through the concept of multiplicity, Nietzsche queers all notions regarding a “natural” way of encountering the world. Beaver teeth puncture not just flesh, but the notion that there is one way of seeing and of being. The rupture of a unified perspective disrupts the notion of what it means to be human. As a reminder of our relationally constructed presence, the examination of one’s perspective of the world displaces the notion of a center. As Derrida reminds us, from the animal’s perspective we are the ones being observed—the human becomes the object for the animal’s gaze and it is an encounter that can startle (*Animal* 3–4). Knowledge of the gaze of another unsettles our naturalized view of the world and invites a wilding of how we look at the world, considering how it might be perceived by animate, animal others. The fisherman forgot that while he was looking at the camera, the beaver was looking at him.

The wilding of our perspective can impact how we speak about and are affected by the more-than-human world. Articulations matter. In an attempt to maintain our “uniqueness” we frequently hide behind abstract language which results in violence to the wild others who exceed our abstract notions. Such abstractions run the risk of relegating the more-than-human world to mere utility or standing reserve. Abstraction not only diminishes the wildness of beings who exceed and precede rationality, it also diminishes our human

capacity for affect. Specifically, for affect that moves us to deep emotional feeling—to love. We only fight for what we love, and we never love abstractly, only passionately. The emotional force of love transforms our relationships with the world. Aldo Leopold relates such behavioral changes to a change in ethics: “We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in” (251). By queering our notion of a self that expands to include the networks of connections we find ourselves enmeshed in, we open our hearts to the affect of the other.

From Ecocatastrophe to Eucatastrophe: Animate Beginnings

The Endangered Species Act was signed into legislation a little more than forty years ago. Through bans on hunting, changes in pesticide use, as well as habitat restoration, species who were almost extinct were not only brought back from the brink of extinction, some actually thrived (Huff Post–Green; Kauffman).⁷⁴ Now, we find an entirely new form of ecological devastation threatens the more-than-human inhabitants of earth. Only this time, the imminent extinction of entire species like the Polar Bear cannot be addressed by bans on hunting or pesticide use—approaches that can be focalized. Rather, global climate chaos threatens species in multiple biomes—from cold-water fish like the salmon to the small pika of the mountains or the swarm of insects and bugs who are far more ecologically significant than the polar bear—and is the result of a multitude of actions which have come together in a nefarious death dance made visible through chaotic weather patterns and a warming planet

⁷⁴ Both the North American beaver and the Eurasian beaver were almost hunted to extinction in order to obtain their prized fur and gland secretions for perfume and medicine. Both species have made something of a comeback.

(Banerjee). In forty years it is likely the Endangered Species Act will find its success rate to have plummeted far below its purported 99% success rate (Huff Post–Green).⁷⁵

A changing climate makes new demands on the human species. In relation to animate rhetoric and the inhumanities, it requires a shift in how we both conceive and perceive possibilities. By expanding who might play a role in change, that is how the more-than-human world might assert itself, we find glimmer of hope. The narratives we tell have the ability to advance certain ideologies (e.g., human progress), but they also have the ability to invite the bodies and voices of the more-than-human world into the conversation so they are not simply a background or setting, but are characters playing an active role in the stories we tell to make sense of the world.

The biting beaver becomes a point of possibility, a symbol not just of animate rhetoric, but of *ecatastrophe*. Animate rhetoric is the logic of possibility—all things *might* be speaking. That concept of “might” means there are always possible conversations to respond to, possible actions to be taken. Where the force of ecocatastrophe exceeds any hope of healing, eucatastrophe presents another alternative. Like animate rhetoric, the logic of eucatastrophe is a logic of possibility. Writer and philologist J.R.R. Tolkien coined the term affixing the Greek prefix “eu,” which means good, to “catastrophe”—a “good” catastrophe or disaster. Applied to myth and storytelling, eucatastrophe is a sudden turn in dark events where the protagonist avoids what appeared to be inevitable doom and annihilation. This avoidance occurs through the unexpected aid of fellow characters within the framework of the story. Applied to ecocatastrophe, the planet Earth is the protagonist in our story of wounds, suffering, and momentary triumphs. Rather than hope for some technological fix, a

⁷⁵ A more likely future is simply that the criteria for listing a species as “endangered” will be revised and may not include those species whose imminent extinction is primarily attributed to climate change.

deus ex machina that will assert itself from the *outside*, eucatastrophe reminds us that we are all characters—all parts of a breathing, animate network—working from the *inside* out. With eucatastrophe, ecocatastrophe becomes an event of possibility.

Eucatastrophe is a reminder that we cannot perceive all ends. It is what Tolkien refers to as “Hope without guarantees,” a provisional hope which for Curry “permits wonder to act, and this in turn enables places to be defended” (Curry, *Defending Middle-earth* 164). Sometimes, the best we can do is to create the best possible conditions for healing—and this is why the inhumanities matters so much. By bringing the inhumanities in from the margins to upset the ossified human center, we make possible a new provisional center. This is not a creation of a new center, but of multiple centers composed not of one species, but of multiple species. The inhumanities is a reminder to step outside of the carefully constructed sphere of rational, clearly understood speech, and to reconnect with the inarticulate guttural stirrings in our own bodies that evade understanding. It is time recognize our humanimal bodies, bare our teeth, and take part in a collective growl and flap of the wings into a journey of possible healing for all beings.

The inhumanities is a stretching of limbs *outward*. Instead of vilifying the beaver who sank her teeth into the leg of a sixty-year-old fisherman, we instead question the conditions that produced “aggressive” beavers in Belarus. By looking outwards at a web of connections that does not draw sharp distinctions between the human and the more-than-human, we encounter possibilities. Such possibilities include an acknowledgement that humans, like the rest of the world, are always engaged in acts of becoming. Such becomings involve processes of decay. Instead of taking the dead man away from the roadside, he might have instead become part of a sacramental consumption by crows, coyotes, bears, and even dogs. Eventually, the man might have become part of the soil beneath the webbed feet of ambling

beavers. Perhaps hope lies in the act of constant decomposition, a process of hopeful renewal.

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