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About

Gender forum is an online, peer reviewed academic journal dedicated to the discussion of gender issues. As an electronic journal, *gender forum* offers a free-of-charge platform for the discussion of gender-related topics in the fields of literary and cultural production, media and the arts as well as politics, the natural sciences, medicine, the law, religion and philosophy. Inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier in 2002, the quarterly issues of the journal have focused on a multitude of questions from different theoretical perspectives of feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies. *gender forum* also includes reviews and occasionally interviews, fictional pieces and poetry with a gender studies angle.

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Editorial

The Question of the Animal and the Promises of Postanthropocentric Feminisms

By Dominik Ohrem, University of Cologne, Germany

1 Some we love, some we hate, some we eat. Such, in a nutshell, is psychologist Harold Herzog's assessment in his popular book of the same title regarding the obvious inconsistency and ambivalence of human relations with other animals – an ambivalence so ubiquitous and pervasive that it sometimes seems as if we were merely witnessing different historical and cultural inflections of the same underlying anthropological principle. Indeed, one might well argue that human-animal relations have always been a troubled and troubling compound of intimacy and violence, longing and detachment, affection and abjection. While it is, for example, no longer a rarity that people – affluent Westerners in particular – spend small fortunes on those animals classified as 'pets' (from the most absurd accessories to expensive state of the art medical treatment), at the same time every year billions of other nonhuman beings, designated 'vermin', 'livestock' or scientific 'specimens', are in for a very different treatment. In "The Animals: Territory and Metamorphoses," a chapter in his *Simulacra and Simulation*, Jean Baudrillard rather bleakly summarizes the history and present of humans' treatment of other animals:

Beasts of burden, they had to work for man. Beasts of demand, they are summoned to respond to the interrogation of science. Beasts of consumption, they have become the meat of industry. Beasts of somatization, they are now made to speak the 'psy' language, to answer for their psychic life and the misdeeds of their unconscious. Everything has happened to them that has happened to us. Our destiny has never been separated from theirs, and this is a sort of bitter revenge on Human Reason, which has become used to upholding the absolute privilege of the Human over the Bestial. (133)

2 The differential treatment associated with the above classifications of nonhuman beings is testimony to the way discursive constructions of animals and animality are intricately interwoven with the (inter)corporeal practices and material realities of human-animal relations. As studies of gender, race or (post)colonialism have long shown, our material relations with other groups and individuals are inseparable from the concepts we impose on them. There is a violent potential in the names we give, just like the names we give often bear the imprint of the violence that brought them into existence. And in the case of nonhuman others, as Jacques Derrida so famously argues in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, the very term 'animal', a word so unquestioningly used by all of us to epistemically capture a bewildering multiplicity of earthly beings and nonhuman modes of being-in-the-world, betrays a more fundamental involvement in what for Derrida amounts to no less than a

“veritable war of the species” (31). In the last seminar before his untimely death in October 2004, Derrida once again addresses this issue of the grotesque asymmetry inherent in the distinction between ‘humans’ and ‘animals’. While the former “are supposed to belong to the same species or the same genus, the human species, the human race,” the term animals (or ‘beasts’) “designates a set with no other unity [...] than a negative one [...]: namely that of not being a human being. But there is no other positively predicable unity between the ant, the snake, the cat, the dog, the horse, the chimpanzee – or the sperm whale” (*Beast II* 8).

3 An implicitly or explicitly hierarchical juxtaposition of a uniform conception of animality with what is supposed to count as the genuinely and exceptionally human has been, since ancient times, a major obsession of Western humanity and in particular those human beings we like to call scientists and philosophers. Over and over again throughout the history of Western thought, some concept of the distinguishing “‘properties’ of man” (Derrida, *Animal* 5) has been defined against a supposed lack of some kind on the part of ‘the animal’ – the incapacity for language or reason, morality, tool use, tool making, humor, the inability to lie, the inability to pretend to pretend – the list goes on. However, because at least since the ‘Darwinian revolution’ the cherished fantasy of the human as not-animal has become untenable even for the more radical proponents of human exceptionalism, the focus has increasingly shifted to the alternative notion of the human as not-*really*-animal as a last-ditch effort to prevent humanity’s absorption into animalkind. ‘Man’ might indeed be an animal, the argument goes, “but one with at least one added category – a rational animal, an upright animal, an embarrassed animal – that lifts it out of the categories of all other living beings and marks man’s [...] movement beyond the animal” (Grosz 12).

4 While the historical and contextual mutability of the human-animal boundary indicates how constructions of the human, the animal and the difference between them can be employed in various social, political or historical contexts, the persistent obsession with the question of human-animal difference also points to something else. An undercurrent of anxiety runs beneath the metaphysics of humanism and the smug triumphalism often implicit in (Western) human attempts at self-definition. This is because the irresistible meta-figure of the animal does not lend itself as a negative foil for ‘what is proper to man’ in any simple and straightforward way but inevitably provokes troubling questions – not only regarding the supposed fixity, or even the reality, of a boundary perennially under (re-)construction but also regarding the definition of the human as such. Indeed, as Akira Mizuta Lippit puts it, the animal inhabits “a phantom world that has haunted, throughout its long history, the domain of human subjectivity” (8) and continues to “accompany the crisis in human ontology” (20). It is

in this sense that the question of the animal is inextricably bound up with the question of the human – so much so, in fact, that articulating the one always already, in a mode of inevitable co-articulation, also evokes the other.

5 Arguably, the crisis in human ontology is also a crisis caused by the enigma of nonhuman ways of being and inhabiting the world, the unknowability of which poses a problem for constructions of human identity, dependent as they are on an animal otherness always eluding human definitions and appropriations. The deployment of a veritable scientific and philosophical machinery of knowledge production notwithstanding, humans remain unable to comprehend the lives of other animals in their unique experientiality and modes of being-in-the-world – and this goes not only for Thomas Nagel’s oft-cited bat but even for those creatures with a perceptual apparatus more similar to that of *Homo sapiens*. Animals, though “familiar of our existence”, as Luce Irigaray puts it, “inhabit another world, a world that I do not know. Sometimes I can observe something in it, but I do not inhabit it from the inside – it remains foreign to me” (195). Observations like these point to the paradox that humans both *do* and *do not* share the world with other animals. On the one hand, both humans and animals are obviously bound to *earth*, a place characterized by the multifarious relational dynamics of “creaturely cohabitation” (Oliver, “Earth Ethics”; Oliver, *Earth and World*), and their lives intersect in myriad ways – routinely, daily, in concrete relationships, but also indirectly in ways we remain largely or even entirely unaware of. On the other hand, however, as Irigaray indicates, earthly beings nonetheless live in different worlds that comprise different forms of inhabiting and relating to the same earth. We might thus recognize something of a productive tension in ecofeminist Val Plumwood’s characterization of nonhuman beings as “earth others” (*Mastery* 137). Creaturely life is ‘earthbound’ and in this sense all creatures are fellow ‘earthlings’ (whether this is acknowledged or not, and no matter the ethical implications we do or do not draw from this). But beyond this existential commonality, the notion of earth others also points to the fact that the multiplicity of beings with whom we share earth as a home will always remain, at least to a certain degree, strange and foreign to us. As familiar strangers and strange familiars, as earth others, animals eschew simplistic epistemologies and ontologies of either sameness or difference.

6 In contrast and response to the longstanding exclusion (or anthropocentric ‘inclusion-appropriation’) of ‘the animal’ in Western thought, throughout the last decades and most significantly in the last couple of years the study of animals, animality and human-animal relations has garnered increasing scholarly attention across the disciplines. As a result, what is now often referred to as ‘human-animal studies’ or simply ‘animal studies’ is no longer

confined to a frowned upon existence at the margins of academia (for introductions to the field, see, for example, DeMello; Gross and Vallety; Weil; Waldau; Marvin and McHugh). In a nutshell, animal studies can be characterized by its interest in the manifold intersections of human and animal lives, the role of animals in human cultures and histories, and the way human societies can be understood as multi- or interspecific co-constructions involving a wide range of interactions between humans and nonhuman species. Especially in its more posthumanist vein, animal studies are also crucially interested in interrogating dominant notions of human-animal difference and their decisive role in constructions of human identity and exceptionalism – what Aaron Gross refers to as “the phenomenon of human self-conception through animals” (4).

7 From its inception, the question of interdisciplinarity was a decisive one for an emergent field that not only sought to move beyond the anthropocentric confines of established cultural, literary or historical studies and other disciplinary frameworks but also intended to reach across the ‘great divide’ that has traditionally separated the humanities and the natural sciences into discrete – and often mutually hostile – (imagined) academic communities. Accordingly, many works in animal studies by scholars from the humanities draw on the insights of disciplines such as biology, anthropology, on zoological studies of animal behavior (ethology) as well as other non-humanities perspectives. In turn, however, animal studies reject the deeply ideological assumption that disciplines such as biology and zoology constitute the ‘natural’ and/or the only authoritative field of knowledge production in this regard and that, in order to approach the question of the animal in all its complexity, this question needs to be addressed with the combined insights of a variety of academic disciplines. Or, to put this differently and more pointedly: Not least because the question of the animal requires a distinctly ‘naturalcultural’ perspective (see Haraway), animal studies scholarship potentially challenges the very concept of academic disciplinarity as such. This is because animal studies not only incorporates different disciplinary perspectives, it also has a transformative potential of its own. It ‘speaks back’ to and challenges the boundaries of the very disciplines it integrates into its interdisciplinary framework and thus evokes the question “how the internal disciplinarity of history or literary studies or philosophy is unsettled when the animal is taken seriously not just as another topic or object of study among many but as one with unique demands” (Wolfe, “Human, All Too Human” 566–567).

8 These unique demands of ‘the animal’ are not merely of an epistemological or ontological but also, and crucially so, of an ethical nature. Perhaps more so than other academic fields, animal studies requires a critical attentiveness to what Karen Barad refers to

as the “intertwining of ethics, knowing, and being” (185), and a constant awareness that ‘the animal’ of animal studies is not merely “a theme, trope, metaphor, analogy, representation, or sociological datum” (Wolfe, “Human, All Too Human” 567) but an embodied, experiencing, living creature that imposes a particular ethical responsibility on the practices and politics of academic knowledge production. As philosopher Matthew Calarco argues in his seminal *Zoographies*, “There is no doubt that we need to think unheard-of thoughts about animals, that we need new languages, new artworks, new histories, even new sciences and philosophies” (6). Calarco thus forcefully emphasizes the inadequacy of our concepts, our forms of knowledge and our epistemologies, steeped as they are in a long and dominant tradition of anthropocentrism, to rethink and reinvent human relationships with other animals and with nonhuman life more generally. Much of the recent work pursued or discussed in animal studies effectively challenges this dominant tradition: The study of animal cultures and societies (see, for example, de Waal and Tyack; Nimmo), the ‘philosophical ethologies’ of scholars like Vinciane Despret and Dominique Lestel (see the recent special issues of *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*) or the perspectives of zoosemiotics and zoopoetics (Wheeler; Tüür and Tønnessen; Moe) are only a few examples of such attempts at articulating – or at least approaching – the ‘unheard-of thoughts about animals’ that Calarco refers to.

9 How might we understand the specific role of feminist thought in the face of this challenge of rethinking animals, animality and human-animal relations? Despite the diversity of and tensions between various forms of feminist thought and politics, what different feminisms have arguably always had in common is a commitment to the articulation of new forms of knowledge that question, challenge or point beyond the frameworks of a patriarchal and/or heterosexist status quo. This includes a critical awareness of the complex ways in which our modes of seeing and knowing are woven into the materiality of our lives and the ethics and politics of our equally material lived social relations. Of course, as postcolonial, black feminist and other critiques have shown, Western mainstream feminism has had (and in some ways continues to have) a number of problematic blind spots of its own, and its Eurocentric imaginings of a ‘global sisterhood’ have been prone to impose the perspectives and experiences of Western white middle-class women as the normative framework of feminist critique. The more complex epistemologies of contemporary feminist theory with their stronger sensibility for the many intersections of gender and sexuality with other categories of difference and inequality such as race, class and dis/ability can in part be understood as a reaction to this. It is perhaps particularly this feminist commitment to the

articulation of new emancipatory forms of knowledge that might also be able to assist us in our endeavors to re-encounter animals beyond the hegemonic forms of relating authorized by established anthropocentric conceptual and discursive frameworks (also see Ohrem and Calarco; Ohrem and Bartosch).

10 Indeed, not only are there obvious historical parallels between the emergence of feminist theory out of the political activism of the women's movement on the one hand and the emergence of animal studies out of animal rights activism on the other (see, for example, Birke), there are also, and perhaps more importantly, broader historical interconnections and intersections between anthropocentrism and androcentrism/patriarchy that require further scholarly investigation. Feminist theory and historiography is uniquely suited to address these complex historical entanglements and the ways in which they reach into the present. In this light, as Claire Colebrook points out, feminist attention to and concern for animals and nonhuman life "should not appear as an addition or supplement but as the unfolding of the women's movement's proper potentiality" while, in turn, feminist "criticisms of man would not be add-ons to environmentalism but would be crucial to any reconfiguration of ecological thinking" (Colebrook 72). Animals and animality as well as the nonhuman more generally are not something against which feminism should be defined – or even *has to be* defined – in order to demarcate its ethico-political involvements. Rather, as Elizabeth Grosz argues in *Becoming Undone*, human as well as nonhuman animal life – both the particular forms of being(s) it allows for as well as its mostly imperceptible (biological) processes – is something that should be positively embraced as an important aspect of a form of feminist theory and politics that does not leave "questions about the rest of existence [...] untouched" (84), that does not limit itself to questions of human subjectivity and identity but embraces the non-, the other-, the more-than-human as one of its core interests. "What would a humanities, a knowledge of and for the human, look like if it placed the animal in its rightful place, not only before the human but also within and after the human?," Grosz ponders:

What is the trajectory of a newly considered humanities, one that seeks to know itself not in opposition to its others, the "others" of the human, but in continuity with them? What would a humanities look like that does not rely on an opposition between self and other, in which the other is always in some way associated with animality or the nonhuman? What kind of intellectual revolution would be required to make man, and the various forms of man, one among many living things, and one force among many, rather than the aim and destination of all knowledges, not only the traditional disciplines within the humanities, but also the newer forms of interdisciplinarity? (13–14)

As Grosz's own work amply demonstrates, feminism is of major importance in this process of reinventing the humanities. And it is surely not a naively optimistic interpretation to argue that what Grosz in 2010 imagined as feminism's postanthropocentric horizons is now well on its way of becoming a much more widely acknowledged aspect of feminist theory and politics. Without a doubt, feminist thought plays a key role in recent attempts at reorienting the humanities, "those disciplines that have affirmed and even constituted themselves as beyond the animal" (Grosz 12), in the direction of an "ecological" or "environmental humanities" (Rose and Robin; Hutchings) or a "posthumanities" (Badmington; Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*; Herbrechter), which is also, crucially, a *feminist* posthumanities.

11 Grosz's work not only testifies to the broader potential of feminist thought to effectively address the question of the animal, it is also a good example of what might be referred to more specifically as 'postanthropocentric feminisms' – feminist perspectives and approaches that take into account the relations between the human and the nonhuman, the importance and agency of nonhuman beings and non- or more-than-human environments, but also the more-than-human nature of the human itself. In fact, as the work of Donna Haraway, Lynn Margulis, Stacy Alaimo and others demonstrates, interspecies relations are not limited to the various interactions *between* the human and nonhuman species but already begin with (what we like to call) the 'human' body, which is why "[h]uman nature is an interspecies relationship" (Tsing 144, emphasis in original). Postanthropocentric feminist thought comes in a variety of forms, under different headings and with different emphases and priorities. While, for example, a strong focus of ecofeminism, a rather heterogeneous field in itself, was and is the dualism between human life and nature/animality, its violent consequences, and its interconnections with patriarchy and forms of gender(ed) oppression (see, for example, Plumwood, *Mastery*; Gaard, *Ecofeminism*; Warren; Sturgeon), feminist technoscience and early feminist posthumanism were primarily interested in the human-machine/technology nexus – evident, for instance, in the prominence of Haraway's figuration of the cyborg – as a way of challenging the metaphysical subject of humanism and traditional notions of human identity (see, for example, Halberstam and Livingston; Lykke and Braidotti; Hayles; Wajcman). Today, ecofeminism and feminist technoscience are accompanied by, or have given rise to, a range of other fields or approaches of postanthropocentric feminist critique, such as "feminist post-constructionism" (Lykke, "Timeliness"), "material feminisms" (Alaimo and Hekman; also see Alaimo), "posthumanist gender studies" (Åsberg, "Timely Ethics"), "feminist ecocriticism" (Gaard, Estok, and Oppermann) or "queer ecology" (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson; Morton; Seymour; also see Roughgarden), all of which

are not limited to perspectives on animals and animality but for the most part share a focus on the nonhuman and on nonhuman material or corporeal agency. Throughout the last years, such feminist perspectives have accompanied the wider acceptance of ‘the animal’ into academia and the heightened interest in the non- and more-than-human in traditional humanities disciplines.

12 A particular interest animal studies scholarship shares with feminist, gender or queer perspectives lies in the ways in which various constructions of otherness and modes of othering underpinning the violent and oppressive epistemologies and material realities of speciesism, sexism or racism are to be understood as intersecting logics of domination (see Adams and Gruen). From the perspective of an intersectionally oriented feminist theory and politics, this means that the role of discourses of species and the figure of ‘the animal’ have to be taken into account with a specific focus on how they – at times subtly, often explicitly – inform gendered and racialized constructions of animality and humanity that function to exclude both nonhuman animals and particular groups of humans from the sphere of ethical and political consideration. In fact, already in her groundbreaking 1993 *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Plumwood points out that nonhuman life constitutes the “missing piece” (2) of intersectional feminist analytics and that the inclusion of nature and earth others into an extended framework of feminist theory would allow us to more fully address the complex intersectional dynamics informing a larger logic of domination that encompasses and affects both human and nonhuman life.

13 The contributions to this issue of *Gender Forum* serve as examples of the many possibilities for transdisciplinary collaboration between animal studies and intersectional feminist, gender and queer studies. Among other things, what the specific analyses in this issue demonstrate is that rethinking human relations with other species (and, by extension, with nonhuman life more generally) remains inseparable from rethinking human relations with other(ed) groups of *humans* – one of the more important reasons why animal studies needs feminism and feminism needs animal studies. Megan Condis analysis of Disney films, for example, emphasizes how representations of animality and nonhuman animals in seemingly ‘innocent’ works of popular culture often function to reinforce not only the established anthropocentric hierarchies between human and animal life but also relegate nonwhite people(s) to an ‘inferior’ in-between position of semi-humanity that is informed by the more explicit discourses of racist animalization in Western history. With a similar awareness of such problematic intersections, both Miranda Niittynen’s and Peter Le Couteur’s articles are interested in the ways in which animal bodies traverse the discursive, imaginary

and material landscapes of Western culture and how the animal functions as a focal point and nexus of intersecting discourses of gender, sexuality, race and species. Niittynen's article discusses the queer potentials of the 'rogue taxidermy' movement to articulate a critique of the violent masculinist, racist and heteronormative framework of traditional taxidermy, its colonialist 'exhibitions' of both nonhuman animal and racialized human bodies, and the anxieties about human, animal and interspecies sexuality that inform its productions. Discussing a body of folklore centered on the figure of the 'selkie', a mythical hybrid of human and seal, Le Couteur's article addresses similar anxieties about gender/sexual, racial and species difference and hierarchy. A particular focus of his analysis is on the topos of the Seal Wife which, as he argues with reference to Plumwood's arguments about the 'network of dualisms' pervading Western thought, "superimposes gender, race, and species onto a progressively cross-linked and hyperseparated binary". Concluding this issue, Jacqui Sadashige offers a range of insightful reflections on her experiences in Northern Thailand's Elephant Nature Park (ENP), a sanctuary and rehabilitation center for rescued elephants. While ENP's departure from and reform of traditional practices of elephant management may be and indeed has been characterized as 'ecocentric', Sadashige points out that ENP's approach also resonates well with the tenets of ecofeminism. Collectively, the articles in this issue of *Gender Forum* demonstrate that grappling with the 'question of the animal' offers a productive lens for a decidedly postanthropocentric form of feminist critique and that, in turn, feminist, gender and queer perspectives open unique avenues for 'imaginings otherwise', for the reinvention of our understanding of both human and nonhuman life.

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Animal Magic: Sculpting Queer Encounters through Rogue Taxidermy Art

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Abstract:

Rogue taxidermy is a form of pop-surrealist art that fuses elements of traditional taxidermy with mixed media design. What differentiates this current pop-surrealist art movement from more traditional approaches to taxidermy are the ways in which these artists produce nonrealist and unconventional representations, while following an ethical mandate to never kill animals for the purposes of art. Analyzing Sarina Brewer's sculpture "Something Up My Sleeve" (2012) that displays a taxidermy monkey-bird hybrid pulling an artificial phallus from a magician's hat while facing a rabbit, this article looks at the political potential of rogue taxidermy to playfully disrupt normative structures of sexuality, gender, race, and species. I analyze Brewer's sculpture for its ability to queer our affective engagements with taxidermy and, in doing so, argue that rogue taxidermy has the potential to disrupt the colonial encounter between spectator and (animal) art object.

1 Taxidermy is produced in many forms, most notably in the context of sport hunting, where animal bodies are acquired for the purposes of creating trophies for display, which are meant to replicate the 'authentic' and 'natural' pose of the respective animal prior to death. As a complex set of practices historically founded on and rooted in colonial and imperial projects, the traditional profession of taxidermy is not devoid of criticisms that these scientifically and aesthetically produced 'objects' serve to perpetuate the domination and destruction of animals. This method of body preservation, however, is socially and culturally relative, often ambivalent in its ethics and politics and thus in need of a closer intersectional analysis. A number of scholars have addressed the thorny relationship the practice of taxidermy and the display of taxidermied animals have with cultural or racial(ized) (mis)representations of different marginalized groups and bodies (Haraway; Wakeham; Desmond; Tobing-Rony). In addition to the various scholarly responses to this peculiar and arguably violent cultural phenomenon, the contemporary pop-surrealist art movement known as *rogue taxidermy* has blossomed throughout North American urban spaces. Rogue taxidermy artists produce environmentally conscious and ethically sustainable art, while simultaneously counteracting or subverting the dominant narratives and traditions of western science and philosophy, which have historically produced and perpetuated a distorted image of animal/human difference.

2 The North American branch of rogue taxidermy art first manifested itself in Minneapolis, when artists Sarina Brewer, Scott Bibus and Robert Marbury founded the Minnesota Association

of Rogue Taxidermy (MART), coining the name rogue taxidermy in 2004 (Brewer, “Introduction”; Marbury 7). Brewer, Bibus and Marbury collectively founded this association after realizing the many interconnections between their art practices and politics. Rogue taxidermy, as a pop-surrealist art movement, fuses elements of traditional taxidermy with mixed media design. What differentiates rogue taxidermy from more traditional approaches are the ways in which these artists produce nonrealist and unconventional representations, while also following an ethical mandate to never kill animals for the purposes of art. According to MART, rogue taxidermists should partake in art that uses animal bodies only if these bodies are acquired through ethical means, and so their animal art mostly relies on “roadkill, discarded livestock remnants, casualties of the pet trade, animals that die of natural causes, and destroyed nuisance animals that are donated to them” (Minnesota Association of Rogue Taxidermy, “Primary Directive of MART”). Employing a surrealist technique, these artists create fantastical, monstrous, and abstract figures fusing together multiple animal body parts and popularly recognizable (often kitsch) objects, in order to produce curiously innovative and atypical sculptures. This alternative art movement is, however, not simply an offshoot of traditional or realist taxidermy, as it both transforms and transgresses these practices by re-creating sculptures through alternative materials, objects, and dyes.

3 Outlining a survey of the rogue taxidermy movement is no easy feat, given that rogue taxidermy sculptures encompass a diverse and broad set of aesthetic media and styles, spread across a number of geographical and cultural borders. Each rogue taxidermy artist employs a unique, idiosyncratic technique when adapting this method into her or his practice. This remodeled art movement also moves taxidermy away from a solely masculine endeavor and is spearheaded by, and prevalently practiced among, female artists. In what follows my paper focuses primarily on artist and MART co-founder Sarina Brewer and the way her peculiar art style unconventionally recreates taxidermy by mixing fantastical and mythological creatures with historical freak show abnormalities. More specifically, my paper discusses Brewer’s 2012 sculpture “Something Up My Sleeve” and, in doing so, attempts to grapple with the political capacities of Brewer’s rogue taxidermy (beyond her political decision to create sustainable art) to playfully disrupt normative structures and discourses of sexuality, gender, race, and species.

IMAGE: Sarina Brewer, “Something Up My Sleeve” (Brewer1).



Sarina Brewer, “Something Up My Sleeve” (Brewer1)

4 Displaying an amalgamated monkey body with a halo and (bird) angel wings, Brewer’s sculpture captures an enchanted and transfixing encounter between an angelic simian hybrid pulling an artificial phallus from a magician’s hat, while facing a small taxidermied rabbit. By means of its playfully queer aesthetics and its taunting elements, her sculpture distorts traditional taxidermy, breaking the established and strictly policed borders of ‘proper’ interspecies intimacy. Discussing how art operates as a space to perform and articulate critiques of the violation of animals’ bodily rights, I analyze Brewer’s sculpture for its ability to queer our affective engagements with taxidermy. I also expand on the role of animals in queer scholarship and activism, which – through experimental art forms – resists normative representations that reproduce sanitized displays of animal (and human) sexual desire as inherently heterosexual. Looking closely at the potential of Brewer’s sculpture to disrupt heteronormative narratives and

to subvert the essentially colonial encounter between spectator and animal (art) object, I unravel the many ways that Brewer's sculpture embodies a form of "haunting back" (Goddu), which implicitly criticizes the ongoing colonization of animal bodies.

5 The historical display of taxidermy is part of a "fetishistic colonial gaze" (4), Pauline Wakeham argues in *Taxidermic Signs*. Wakeham highlights a genealogy of taxidermy methods that were "linked to the rise of colonial exploration and the related desire to collect and study specimens from distant lands" (10). In imperial and colonial contexts, the collection and subsequent display of exotic animals and objects staged alterity in order to inform longstanding narratives of human exceptionalism and white superiority. Discussing how animals and animal encounters are integral to the colonial logic of Victorian adventure fiction, John Miller writes that "[e]mpire's racial project thrives through a hierarchy of engagements with animals, but not without irony" (92). As I discuss in more detail below, it is in relation to ironic slippages and the ways in which animal bodies do not conform to the meanings and representations imposed upon them that rogue taxidermy sculptures have the potential of troubling the power dynamics of display. Situating rogue taxidermy in relation to the oppressive racist, sexist and speciesist past of traditional taxidermy works to show how the practices of rogue taxidermy do not simply aim to preserve animal bodies as 'trophies' or 'specimens.' Rather, I argue here, it is through rogue taxidermy's aesthetics and the way it confronts the principles of traditional taxidermy (in part through techniques of ironic intensification) that a spectator's attention is turned back on the peculiarity of preservation itself.

Women's Interventions in a Masculine Tradition

6 Beginning in the early 2000s, female artists have reinvented the taxidermy art movement that was traditionally practiced by men. In his book *Taxidermy*, Alexis Turner provides a comprehensive history of this cultural phenomenon from the nineteenth century to its current popular revival. Turner writes that the contemporary reappraisal of taxidermy is largely female, even though, with the exception of Martha Maxwell¹, taxidermy "was once a largely male preserve" (25, 28), centered on the capture and display of impressive 'specimens' as a reflection and measurement of "masculine prowess and status" (26). The works of female rogue taxidermy artists, however, not only deviate from the realist forms and masculinist politics of traditional

¹ Martha Maxwell was a nineteenth-century female taxidermist in Colorado who exhibited her work at the Centennial Exhibition of 1876 in Philadelphia.

taxidermy, they also seem to contradict historically entrenched notions of a ‘peaceful’ and sentimental connection between women and nature. While, as numerous scholars have shown, historically women were assumed to have a closer connection to animals and nature than men, this connection was, and to some extent continues to be, more or less strictly circumscribed. In this light, women’s participation in (rogue) taxidermy – similar to women’s involvement in international game hunting – goes against habitual norms of ‘proper’ female behaviour and ‘woman-nature’ relations more specifically. While these practices are, of course, strikingly opposite – given the political stakes of rogue taxidermy art to institute no harm on living animals – there are many similarities between the reception of and responses to both forms of women’s involvement with dead animal bodies.

7 Despite their political mandate not to kill for art, female taxidermists Lisa Black and Sarina Brewer have stated that they have received violently sexist online harassment and even death threats due to their involvement in taxidermy (Voon). In contrast, and, at least from a feminist perspective, somewhat unsurprisingly, MART co-founder Robert Marbury explains in a 2014 article that men usually do not receive sexually aggressive responses to their involvement in the art movement in the way that women do (Voon). These responses seem to demonstrate that there are insidious cultural beliefs surrounding gender that elicit such aggressive reactions to women’s role in the contemporary rogue taxidermy movement – reactions which arguably address, and attempt to sanction, an unwanted female ‘intrusion’ in traditionally masculine trades such as taxidermy and hunting.

8 One can hardly ignore the online media coverage of then nineteen-year-old Kendall Jones’ photographs in 2014 that displayed the young cheerleader posing with the “Big Five” game (including the at risk white rhino) or Rebecca Francis’ photographs in which she is featured next to a slain giraffe that received widespread criticism on social media, spurred by a Twitter post from popular English comedian Ricky Gervais (Saul; Leopold). In the examples of Jones’ and Francis’ photos on social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter, both these women received sexually explicit, violent harassment directed at their gender, testimony to a persistent and harmful patriarchal culture that deems women exploitable and as targetable objects. Philosopher Kelly Oliver argues that women in hunting culture – especially those who fit the norms of Western standards of feminine beauty – stand out negatively in contrast to the typical male hunter, who is rarely criticized for photographing his hunts (Oliver; Kwong). In contrast,

Oliver argues, women figure paradoxically as both hunter and prey. This is also made evident by the online responses to Minnesota dentist Walter Palmer, who hunted and killed the well-known South African Lion ‘Cecil’ in June 2015. Palmer’s hunt of Cecil has spawned international outrage about ‘canned hunting’ practices and has resulted in calls for Palmer’s extradition to Zimbabwe to face charges for carrying out an illegal hunt (Reuters). International outrage about this story, however, has not been sexually charged and directed at Palmer’s gender in the ways that Jones and Francis have been targeted.

9 While my analysis does by no means condone the actions of hunters (female or male) and their exploitation and killing of endangered animals or equate the practices of rogue taxidermy artists with those of sport hunters, it does attempt to highlight the ways in which human relationships with animals are structured and complicated by a hierarchical system that celebrates masculinity and whiteness and reduces ‘other’ bodies to an inferior status. Reactions to women’s involvement in taxidermy or sport hunting not only show how sexist beliefs and sexual violence against women is normalized more generally but also how women’s specific participation in these male preserves is perceived as a threat to masculine power. Rogue taxidermy art challenges these historically entrenched systems of hierarchy and also illustrates the violence animals are subjected to daily and routinely. Unlike sport hunting, self-reflexivity and questions of animal rights are integral to the rogue taxidermy art movement. And yet, rogue taxidermy cannot easily be separated from traditional taxidermy’s oppressive and colonial past. It is thus important to analyze the ethical implications and intricacies of using animal bodies as objects of political art and, more specifically, the seeming contradiction that rogue taxidermy artists are simultaneously politically conscientious and necessarily implicated in a tradition of violence against animals.

Taxidermy and Historical Spectacle

10 Today, taxidermy is often considered a controversial art form, as historically it has involved the capture and death of (often ‘exotic’) animals used as objects in a range of body exhibitions, such as discovery exhibits, freak shows and circuses, and natural history museums. Brewer, among many rogue taxidermy artists, has received numerous criticisms for her taxidermy art. These criticisms extend beyond online forums and also include academic texts, such as Mark Hawthorne’s *Bleating Hearts: The Hidden World of Animal Suffering*. Hawthorne argues that Brewer’s sculptures destroy animal dignity and constitute a violation of animals’

bodily rights after death; he writes that, “[animals’] dignity as beings is utterly destroyed when they become mere displays, their bodies transformed into surreal mutations to please patrons of the macabre. Would we tolerate such disrespect if the animals used were human beings? Not very likely” (412). While Hawthorne’s criticism may reflect a common reaction to the preservation and exhibition of dead animal bodies, it disregards the ways in which Brewer’s pieces articulate a critique of and provoke a reflection on the narratives of exoticism inherent to traditional preservation practices and how rogue taxidermy more generally also highlights the underlying anthropocentrism and violence of exhibition practices. The specific debate involving bodily rights of animals after death is indeed a contentious one and no easy answer can be offered. However, it is the unsettling character of Brewer’s sculptures and the way in which they encourage a mindful response that might shed new light on harmful social and cultural practices that inflict violence on animal bodies. Moreover, Hawthorne’s argument that violations of *human* bodily rights after death would not be tolerated in the same way tellingly fails to mention the colonial history of human body preservation in Western European culture, especially the preservation – and concomitant racist devaluation – of African bodies.

11 The practice of taxidermy cannot be separated from its historical involvement in the representation of bodies constructed as ‘other’ in traditional Western discourses of alterity. First, taxidermy must be situated within the history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century exhibitions involving the display of deceased bodies in order to show their alleged monstrosity with regard to their gender, race, sex, class, ability, and/or species classification. For example, a number of human rights violations are recorded in response to the preservation of postmortem human bodies, including the ongoing debates on the treatment of Indigenous remains as ‘artifacts’ in archaeological research (Sillar et al.; Watkins), the display of Mr. Charles O’Brien’s (otherwise known as ‘The Irish Giant’) skeletal remains at the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow (Asma), but also, and more specifically, the display of African bodies in the cases of Saartjie Baartman (otherwise known as the ‘Hottentot Venus’) and the man known only as the ‘Negro of Banyoles.’ The remains of Baartman and ‘El Negro’ were placed on display to convey notions of gender and racial difference and hierarchy to white European spectators and their bodies were not repatriated to their homelands until the early 2000s (Parsons and Kelo Segobye; Rapoo). These examples point to a complex and problematic social history that involves the collection

and preservation of both animal and human bodies, especially bodies constructed as ‘other’ or ‘abnormal’ in European and Euro-American discourses and cultural imaginaries.

12 Looking specifically at the ways in which taxidermy is informed by colonial projects, scholars like Donna Haraway, Fatimah Tobing-Rony and Pauline Wakeham argue that taxidermy is heavily bound up with dominant norms of gender, race, sexuality, and species. They argue that the historical practice of collecting specimens and preserving bodies sought to interpret, create and (re)produce images of otherness. Donna Haraway writes that “[t]axidermy fulfills the fatal desire to represent, to be whole; it is a politics of reproduction” (30). Depictions of ‘otherness’ in taxidermy representations contribute to the ways in which bodies are repeatedly understood as ontologically different in the context of Western normative frameworks. Rethinking the semiotic and symbolic system of taxidermy beyond the confines of the practice, Wakeham argues that taxidermy is “a mode of representation, a way of reconstructing corporeal forms, that is immediately bound up with the colonial disciplining of both animal and aboriginal bodies” (5). For Wakeham, the functions of taxidermy are similar to those of other forms of cultural representation such as ethnographic texts and discovery exhibits, which are, in turn, inseparable from colonial discourses that continually adapt to reproduce a fundamental alterity in contrast to and in service of white western norms. Likewise, cultural representations of otherness often intersect with depictions of ‘animality’ in colonial narratives in which particular racialized human bodies figure as models of the ‘beastly’ and ‘savage.’ Finally, Fatimah Tobing-Rony illuminates the ways in which representations of otherness (both human and animal, or a hybrid of the two) are created and produced through ethnographic spectacles in museums, films, and popular culture (e.g. *King Kong*). Arguing that these narratives are part and parcel of racist discourses and inform the ways racialized bodies are constructed and perceived in the intersubjective relations of the everyday, Tobing-Rony conceptualizes this production of racist images as a form of “fascinating cannibalism” in that Western culture’s obsession with alterity allows for a consumption of the other through techniques of display and spectacle (10).

13 Examples of postmortem human bodies placed on display thus cannot be separated from animal taxidermy, given that animals have always been heavily implicated in and exploited by the projects of colonialism and imperialism. Whether physically transported across geographical borders or symbolically used to define groups of humans as ‘inferior’ to white settlers, animals have figured prominently in the conquest of peoples, the appropriation of ‘exotic’ lands, and the

exploitation of natural resources. According to Philip Armstrong, the longstanding resistance to bringing animal and human colonization into conversation is the result of a fear of “trivializing the suffering of human beings under colonialism” (413). However, as Rebecca Tuvel argues, these fears merely tend to reproduce narratives of animal alterity that are made not only at the expense of *nonhuman* animals, but also fail to question the extent to which racist discourses work with and are reliant on notions of animal inferiority (223). Tuvel conveys how animal oppression and the exploitative imprisonment of South African Khosian woman Saartjie Baartmann are implicitly related, arguing that the colonization of racialized bodies would look very different were it not first informed by our cultural understanding of *animal* alterity. This alterity, Tuvel argues, is informed by tropes of ‘beastliness’ and ‘savagery,’ shaping Baartman’s supposedly wild, unabashed sexuality (223).

Rogue Taxidermy’s Haunting Interventions

14 While the above criticisms of the preservation of bodies for display complicate the altruistic drive to produce ethical forms of taxidermy art, it is in the ways that rogue taxidermy artists rechart and refashion preservation that allows for what might be termed a queer politics of the macabre. Rogue taxidermy that creates hybrid ‘monsters’ from numerous animal bodies is one method among many to break taxidermy from its aesthetic traditions, a method which also reveals realism as an aggressive Enlightenment norm. When rogue taxidermy artists use traditional practices – altered through experimental forms – their art sculptures constitute an interactive display that resists traditions and transgresses restrictive boundaries. Experimental aesthetics work to exhaust the techniques and strategies of representation and, in doing so, make visible the acts and politics of representation itself. To “experiment” is to create phenomena or “make visible the invisible,” write Paul Basu and Sharon Macdonald (2) and it is in this sense that taxidermy sculptures which engage in social criticism can work to unmask what usually remains unseen in traditional forms of realist display.

15 Similarly, Indigenous and postcolonial scholars have engaged in conversation over the deconstructive potential mimesis harbors as a tool of “writing back” or “speaking back” to the colonizer (Ashcroft et al.; Tiffin). Writing back can take the form of challenging the canonical texts of empire while writing in a “counter-discursive” format that allows for a critical “encounter [with the] former colonizer” (Thieme 81). In other words, anti- and postcolonial

scholars attempt to re-present colonial languages, grammars, aesthetics, and narratives in order to parody, subvert or unsettle hegemonic cultural discourses that continually reproduce inequalities and are often a legacy of colonialism. By using techniques of ‘writing back,’ feminist Indigenous scholars have critically employed colonial epistemologies and styles of writing *against* colonizing institutions such as Western academia and, as a result, produced new, Indigenous forms of knowledge not created by and for the *already knowing* western researcher and reader (Acoose 36; LaRocque 21-22). In the case of rogue taxidermy, it is thus important to ask what potential this art practice has for, to use Teresa Goddu’s term, “haunting back” hegemonic narratives and practices of body preservation and their oppressive and destructive representational history. Writing/talking/haunting back is done through strategical inversions, mimicry, repetitions, and exaggerations of dominant norms; it employs recurring tropes, such as racist stereotypes of Blackness as ‘monstrous,’ in order to refigure, mock, and satirize these tropes and the normalizing, dominative knowledges that have been crucial to the subordination of various groups (including animals). Specifically discussing the notion of haunting back, Goddu writes that American gothic stories produce histories of horror that must be repressed in order to create an ideal national identity (Bodzioc 96). By evoking these horror stories in the form of satire and humor, these narratives can be retold as resistance strategies to the colonial narratives that normalize and reproduce discrimination, fear, and hatred towards different racial groups (Young 11).

16 In a similar sense, rogue taxidermy’s aesthetics of monstrosity may also be understood as a political strategy that serves to highlight the ways in which these sculptures ‘haunt back’ colonial imaginaries and articulate a critique of the ongoing colonization of animals. There are significant ties of the ‘bestial’ to cultural understandings of the monster, as Pramod Nayar argues in *Posthumanism*. He writes that the human expulses the ‘animal within’ and that, in turn, the very “presence of the animal makes the human monstrous” (Nayar 85). Monsters (as liminal beings, neither fully animal nor fully human) threaten to puncture the borders of the inside that is considered ‘civilized,’ ‘natural’ and ‘normal.’ It is through their ability to transgress borders that monsters often embody human qualities that must be “repudiated” and “exorcised” by civil society (Dendle 196). Accordingly, as Margrit Shildrick explains in “Monsters, Marvels, and Metaphysics,” it is this transgressive and transformative potential that makes monsters productive figures to question established boundaries. Because the monster is grotesque and

abject and signifies the leakiness of boundaries, it provokes anxieties about the collapse of a supposedly whole or clearly bounded body (304).

17 While the style and aesthetic of each rogue taxidermy sculpture is unique to the vision of the artist, many pieces seemingly confront and expose the traditional and ongoing violence done to animal bodies. Rogue taxidermy employs the very tools of ‘objectivity’ and ‘authenticity’ which lie at the heart of the dominant Western epistemologies of science; however, it is through unconventional forms and ironic slippages that Brewer’s sculptures in particular are able to articulate criticisms of science’s historical obsession with the display and mastery of the ‘unnatural’ and unknown. Using traditional tools and methods of display (such as bell jars) to exhibit barnyard curiosities² or using graphic patchwork to create Frankenstein-like creatures, her sculptures expose a history of exhibition shows which displayed nonhumans as monsters and freaks in order to define the (gendered and racialized) normality and normativity of the human.

² Brewer’s sculptures “A Bad Egg” (2004) and “Barnyard Bastard” (2004) depict barnyard curiosities and attempt to visualize notions of alterity popular in twentieth-century cabinets of curiosities. Images of both sculptures can be found in the artist’s “Carnival Curiosa” collection on her website. See <http://www.sarina-brewer.com/image-galleries/carnival-curiosa.html>



IMAGE: Sarina Brewer, “Frankensquirrel” (Brewer2)

18 In less subtle ways, artist and MART co-founder Scott Bibus uses blood, guts and gore to depict present-day forms of animal violence through his ‘zombie taxidermy.’ Bibus’ sculptures illustrate the overt and yet often hidden violence of factory farming, environmental destruction and disease as well as the casualties of roadkill. His unique aesthetic speaks back to the violent effects of modern technologies of capitalism, while also attributing a kind of retributational agency to animals through their own consumption of human flesh (e.g. “Toe-Eating Frog” or “Snapping Turtle Eating a Human Eye”³). Monstrosity (zombies and freak abnormalities included) does not belong to the realms of either ‘the animal’ or ‘the human;’ rather, it is found within the scene of recognition, the display or the encounter that produces the “traditional human colonizing impulse” to either assimilate or differentiate (Nayar 98). In what follows, I engage in a closer

³ Images of Bibus’ art can be found on the artist’s website. “Toe-Eating Frog” (2006) can be found under <http://deadanimalart.com/pages/toefrog.html> and “Snapping Turtle Eating a Human Eye” (2007) under <http://deadanimalart.com/pages/snapper.html>

analysis of this encounter and the aesthetic forms that enable rogue taxidermy to unravel and decolonize these traditions.

Encounters with Rogue Taxidermy

19 The scene where (living) human and (dead) animal meet is predetermined and mediated by a representational system, which is no different in the case of the taxidermy diorama; and yet, such an encounter also allows for a number of ontological disruptions. Similar to Jacques Derrida's well-known discussion of an encounter with his cat in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, I approach the encounter with taxidermied animals in general and with Brewer's sculpture in particular as a space where ontological beliefs can become disoriented under the gaze (real or imagined) of 'the animal' (living or dead). In order to unravel this disorienting affect, in what follows, I engage in a theoretical discussion of the encounter between (human) spectator and (animal) art object and look to Brewer's monkey sculpture and its potential to produce a critical spectator, aware of the violence involved in the preservation and display of animal bodies.

20 Discussing encounters with animal art, Rob Broglio writes that any encounter with an animal can take place only on a surface level given the long history of Western thought in which animals are constructed as lacking all capacities to think, reflect or communicate like humans (xvii). However, Broglio argues, it is through art that a different type of encounter has the potential to occur, since "[a]rt brings something back from this limit and horizon of the unknowable; it bears witness to encounters without falling into a language that assimilates or trivializes the world of the animal" (xxiii). Broglio's argument is heavily influenced by Derrida's aforementioned encounter with his cat, Logos, a "real" cat characterized by her "unsubstitutable singularity" (Derrida 9). When caught naked in a *contretemps* with his pet cat, Derrida reflects on the power of his cat's gaze to disorient his previous perceptions of and assumptions about human-animal difference as well as nonhuman (and human) animals more generally. As Matthew Calarco argues, the "contretemps" of this encounter is a "time out of joint, prior to and outside of knowledge and identification," similar to "madness" (125), an affective moment unable to be effectively captured in language or reduced by and to the usual narrative conventions. It is the moment when the thinking human subject cannot put into words the impact of this encounter, when it finds itself face-to-face with what Derrida describes as an "existence that refuses to be conceptualized" (Derrida 9).

21 Because any encounter with an art piece is unpredictable and dependent on the viewer who comes into contact with the piece, it is difficult to conceptualize the multiplicity of possibilities or affective capacities inherent in an encounter with the art sculptures discussed here. In fact, any attempt at encapsulating the encounter between viewer and art object must ultimately lead to a failed endeavor, as Sara Ahmed argues. Like Derrida who highlights that there are experiences and forms of being that cannot be conceptualized, Ahmed argues that any discussion of an encounter fundamentally negates space and time in order to function as an “event” (*Strange Encounters* 7). In other words, the very perception of an encounter – or the coming together of “*at least two elements*” (7, emphasis in original) – involves a magnified reading of time and space in order for it to be linguistically articulated. Building on and complicating further the Levinasian argument that intersubjectivity is at the core of human experience and that the self has a fundamental ethical responsibility to the other, Ahmed goes on to argue that the “encounter itself is ontologically prior to the question of ontology” (7) or, put simply, the self does not come into being without (encountering) the other. And yet, as she also explains, face-to-face encounters are “mediated precisely by that which allows the face to appear in the present” (7), the norms, conventions and modes of seeing which make it possible for the face to be recognized in moments of encounter. Encounters are thus always shaped and accompanied by this mediation, by social norms, culture and history, by “other faces, other encounters of facing, other bodies, other spaces, and other times” (7).

22 Calarco extends the Levinasian discussion of the face-to-face encounter to include animal bodies. He shows that the dividing line determining who and what can be understood as (not) having a ‘face’ in Levinas’ philosophy is based on an implicit anthropocentrism regarding the kinds of beings that may enter the sphere of moral and ethical consideration (68). As Calarco argues, we need to expand this line to include other, nonhuman beings and their potentials to “shatter our ontology” (71). As he goes on to explain,

If it is the case that we do not know where the face begins and ends, where moral considerability begins and ends, then we are obliged to proceed from the possibility that *anything* might take on a face. And we are further obliged to hold this possibility permanently open. (71, emphasis in original)

From different perspectives, both Ahmed and Calarco thus highlight that encounters are always significantly predetermined by norms of the human face or faces that are already shaped by linguistic and cultural norms and a subject’s experiences. This argument is further fleshed out in

Ahmed's analysis of perception in *Queer Phenomenology*, where she argues that norms come to formation through the social lines that are drawn prior to, and are necessary for, subject formation. She writes that "[t]he social depends in part on agreement about how we measure space and time" (13) and groups do not necessarily make this 'agreement' at one singular time or space, but through an ongoing set of social norms that are reproduced through the systems of gendered, racial and sexual difference and privilege.

The Queer Affect of Rogue Taxidermy

23 In order to discuss the queer aesthetics and politics of Brewer's sculpture and to show how an encounter with rogue taxidermy art can unsettle both heteronormative and anthropocentric ontologies and notions of the 'natural,' I follow the definitions of queer(ness) in the writings of Ahmed and Mel Y. Chen. Ahmed discusses the ways in which we are situated in specific sociocultural and political environments that contextually *straighten* our perception of the world. Ahmed's use of queer is twofold: on the one hand, it stands for a body that is oriented toward the 'wrong' object: "[q]ueer in this sense would refer to those who practice nonnormative sexualities, which as we know involves a personal and social commitment to living in an oblique world" (*Queer Phenomenology* 161). On the other hand, queer also stands for a form of perception that is itself "oblique" or "off line" and seeks to "disturb the order of things" (161). It is only when we are disoriented, when we have a queer, strange or off-kilter sensation or experience that we are able to realize that the straight orientation to the world is the result of hegemonic norms. Straight lines, alignment, and heterosexuality come to dominate our ways of thinking through a repetition of the norms of body and space and, as a result, disorientation (the moment of queer perception or 'epiphany') must forever be reiterated, reoriented, and redirected on the 'proper' path.

24 The queer subject (/object) is deviant from society, given that it runs counter to straight lines and is oriented toward the *wrong* object (i.e. the same sex). Cultural consensus in the West has historically normalized heterosexuality and pathologized homosexuality. As Chen shows, the term 'queer' has traveled through various "linguistic economies" (57) that render it an animate term both through its circulation and its slippery history. Chen provokes an interesting dialogue about the use of the term and how it has been institutionally and academically solidified, even though the term itself works to refuse any form of stagnation and sedimentation. This 'stagnant'

academic use becomes evident when the term itself is made into an *object*. Cautious of the misuse of the term, I thus reject queer(ness) in the sense of a monolithic object, while also arguing that we should be receptive to the ways in which material, worldly objects – in this case Brewer’s taxidermy sculpture – may give rise to or embody a political aesthetics of queerness. A complex, entangled social history involving taxidermy may also offer us a possibility to bridge the reoccurring divides of animal studies scholarship and queer-feminist anti-oppressive politics by emphasizing how both acknowledge – albeit differently – the multiple ways in which bodies (including nonhuman animal bodies) are colonized.

25 Brewer’s use of the monkey figure is particularly interesting given that monkeys are not native to North America. Historically, the monkey has figured as a powerful symbol and placeholder for notions of a prehistoric or semi-humanity in contrast to notions of ‘civilization’ and ‘progress’ associated with European and Euro-American societies. In *Primate Visions*, Haraway writes that “[m]onkeys and apes have a privileged relation to nature and culture for western people: simians occupy the border zones between those potent mythic poles” (1). Similarly, Chen points out that the image of the primate is a “powerfully loaded trope” (98) informed by a number of racist norms that are shaped through

pseudo-Darwinian evolutionary discourses tied to colonist strategy and pedagogy that superimpose phylogenetic maps onto synchronic human racial typologies, yielding simplistic promulgating equations of “primitive” peoples with prehuman stages of evolution. (101-102)

Primates not only stand in as symbols for racialized groups, but are the polarized model of uncontrollable and unrestrained animal sexual behaviour (Haraway 12). In this sense, the monkey figure often embodies different forms of racial and sexual deviations in Western discourses and cultural imaginaries; mainly though, primates are a symbol for the “almost human” (2).

26 Animals – in their own unique ways – step outside conventional frameworks of human cultural norms, never truly fulfilling the restrictive categories imposed on their behaviours and expressions. As Elisabeth Lloyd points out, heteronormative discourses of evolutionary reproduction have shaped our perceptions and interpretations of animal bodies engaged in sexual activity. Criticizing previous scientific discoveries that argue female macaques never experience orgasms, Lloyd exposes the ways in which these studies were informed by a strong heterosexual bias. In the context of her discussion of a study conducted by zoologist Desmond Morris, Lloyd

notes that his observations of primate sexual behaviour focus primarily on copulation with the opposite sex and ignore the pervasive examples of same-sex sexual activity. Highlighting two studies that observe same-sex sexual behaviour among female primates, Lloyd writes that “researchers found clear electronically measured evidence of orgasms only when females mounted other females, but not when females were engaged in heterosexual intercourse” (55). And yet, as Susan McHugh argues, “[r]evered as the goal of all sex acts, reproduction provides scientists with the conceptual means of avoiding these very questions about the social and other purposes of physical intimacies that do not so clearly result in progeny” (154). Such assumptions involving the sexual acts of primates further inform the ways in which heterosexual norms – the *straight lines that we follow* – infect and police our perceptions of what is ‘proper’ animal and, indeed, human behaviour.

27 Criticizing scientific norms of gender and sexuality involving primates, HIV/AIDS activist and scholar John Greyson uses the natural history museum as the setting for his film *Zero Patience*. In this musical satire about Canadian flight attendant Gaétan Dugas, who was accused of transmitting HIV to Canadian men, Greyson playfully reinterprets Dugas’ story in the form of a new queer reimagining. His film includes talking taxidermy sculptures, AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) activists and a romance between historical (yet fictionalized) characters Sir Richard Francis Burton, a famous Victorian explorer, author and ethnologist with a particular interest in sexuality, and Dugas, the so-called ‘Patient Zero’ of HIV/AIDS in North America. After being magically reborn into the land of the living, ‘Zero’ meets the scientist and sexologist Burton, who is working on the taxidermied specimens to be exhibited in the natural history museum’s ‘Hall of Contagion.’ Burton farcically embodies the persona of a scientist who is so blinded by his own bias that his search for scientific ‘truths’ involves reinterpreting his data and discoveries to conform to his own preestablished conclusions (including a manipulated and violent representation of Zero through documentary video). As the film moves forward, Zero makes Burton realize his prejudices (as well as his sexual desires), thus resulting in a filmic critique of the anxiety-ridden narratives that pathologize bodies based on hegemonic norms of sexuality, species, gender, and race.

28 In one significant scene of the film, Zero initiates a conversation with the taxidermied African green monkey in the exhibit, another body accused of hosting and transmitting HIV. As Zero addresses the motionless simian – “lucky thing - you cannot feel guilty like me” – the

taxidermied animal suddenly and magically turns into a woman. After this transformation, the female human-monkey character criticizes the problematic policies of preservation, informed as they are by racist, sexist and homophobic scientific discourses. Throughout this encounter between Zero, Burton, and the African Green Monkey, the audience learns that the monkey is actually a lesbian. In response to Burton's assumption that she should be naturally attracted to male primates, she jerks with disgust: "Yuck" is her response to the idea of heterosexual intercourse. That the sex, the personified gender and the sexual orientation of the African monkey remains unknown prior to her transformation into a human further underlines the ways in which scientific constructions and evaluations of animal behaviour are inevitably skewed not only by dominant norms of race, sex or gender as such, but also by the implicit anthropocentrism underpinning these norms. It is through constructions of animal bodies as 'sexless' or without any form of sexual subjectivity that the representation of taxidermied animals has what might be termed a 'neutering affect' on the human observer.

29 Linking this discussion back to Brewer's sculpture, I argue that the taxidermy monkey that grasps onto a white phallus embodies a queer aesthetics by satirically pointing to the neutering affects of traditional taxidermy and their asexual(ized) animals. Pulling an artificial phallus from a magician's hat, Brewer's monkey sculpture offers a tongue-in-cheek gesture at the peculiar lack of genitalia in traditional taxidermy exhibits (including the sculpture itself). Like the monkey, the accompanying taxidermy rabbit also lacks any sign of genitalia. Moreover, Brewer's careful staging of the rabbit, monkey, and phallus magnifies the queer erotics of the encounter. Similar to the ways representations of primate sexual behaviour are shaped and complicated by Western cultural norms, rabbit sexuality is represented in ways that are antithetical. While rabbits are depicted as 'innocent' asexual creatures, particularly in their role as domesticated pets, other representations highlight the relentless, 'crazed' sexual appetite supposedly evident in their mating behaviour (including rapid reproductive cycles). Observing the monkey's magic trick and facing the artificial phallus, the rabbit functions to address the contradictions and ambivalences of such popular representations of animal sexual behaviour and invites the viewer to reconsider human understandings of animal sexuality more generally.

30 Brewer's other sculptures, such as her 2007 piece "Forever Yours,"⁴ elicit similar affects in their portrayal of animal sexual intimacy. The piece displays a taxidermy rabbit with two heads (one blue, one pink) which share the same body. Brewer's sculpture portrays two rabbit heads positioned in a kissing gesture with their hands and arms in an embrace. The sculpture lacks any visual markers of the animal's sexual anatomy and highlights cultural norms of gender placed onto bodies through the coloured signifiers of pink and blue. What is most striking about these pieces is the way in which the boundaries of intimacy are stretched (between heads, hands and interspecies touching), how these depictions of animal desire trouble the boundaries of the body, but also how gender is an operative norm inevitably marking not only human but also nonhuman animal bodies. At the same time, Brewer's sculptures point to the broader *failure* of such human representations of animals with their attempts to impose human norms of gender on animal bodies (especially pets) and their implicit desire for a mastery or regulation of animal sexual expressivity, autonomy and freedom. Her rogue taxidermy serves to highlight that interpretations of animal sexuality are funneled through anthropocentric and anthropomorphic norms – norms that are restrictive and rigorous in their adherence to an ideal (read: straight) behavioural system. Following Jane Desmond, we might thus argue that taxidermy reproduces a narrative of normative and sanitary behaviour, in that it "presents specimens performing specific behaviours from a limited repertoire of approved activities" (359). This repertoire all too often does not include representations of sexual behaviour: "the moment of coitus," as Desmond puts it, is "apparently tacitly forbidden" (359).

31 Moreover, human perception of animals, animality and animal behaviour are fragmented parts of a larger structure – sown together by philosophical, scientific, aesthetic, and literary discourses. It is through contact and encounters with animals (dead or alive) that humans come to realize that their epistemic and imaginary access to animals is pre-shaped by specific norms. This is the queer affect of animal art: to shed light on our inability to grasp the unconventional, unpredictable and perhaps ultimately unknowable being of 'the animal' with the limited means of human language and perception. The queer affects of animal art emphasize animals in their refusal to be conceptualized – to again evoke the words of Derrida – and it is this potential of queer animal art – to disorient and thus *humble* the spectator, which also underpins its ethical and

⁴ An image of "Forever Yours" (2007) can be found in Brewer's "Designer" collection on her website. See <http://www.sarina-brewer.com/image-galleries/designer-.html>

political relevance. Nonhuman animal bodies remain queer through their uncompromising nature, their resistance to impositions of human meaning and their subversion of human knowledges. For Chen, queer is what offers “exceptions to the conventional ordering of sex, reproduction, and intimacy,” but, perhaps even more importantly, queer potentialities are also, and always already, inherent in “animacy’s veering-away from dominant ontologies and the normativities they promulgate” (11). In this sense, taxidermy sculptures that produce animating affects – especially affects that deviate from conventional norms of animal sexuality – go beyond simply ‘tricking’ the viewer into a simulation of liveliness. More specifically, taxidermy sculptures such as Brewer’s monkey violate the viewer’s capacity to translate norms. In other words, Brewer’s monkey, having angelic wings and a halo (and holding a dildo), mocks the very enterprise of a normative scientific policing of species (including the supposed bodily threat of contagion), the blurring of corporeal boundaries and, in particular, of the religious and social taboo status of interspecies sexuality. Her sculpture provokes a queering affect of ‘proper’ touch of flesh on flesh with its display of white, human (genital) skin coming into contact with ‘improper’ animal skin (or ‘inferior’ species and races more generally).

32 Similarly, Chen’s discussion of the cover of the DVD *The Adventures of Fu Manchu* (an American TV series which aired in 1956) goes on to show that “queering is imminent to animate transgressions, violating proper intimacies (including between humans and nonhuman things)” (11). Regarding the cover’s depiction of Fu Manchu, who holds his pet monkey, Peko, on his lap, Chen writes that there is a tension between animal/human touching, especially when represented on the cover beside an eroticized woman figure (120). The queer embrace in Brewer’s sculpture produces a very similar tension. The monkey clasping onto (stylized) human flesh – not to mention human genitalia – skews normative perceptions of ‘proper’ and ‘appropriate’ interspecies touch and relationality – a queer embrace that playfully but effectively addresses dominant taboos about animal and human sexualities, interspecies sexual encounters, and Western anxieties surrounding bestiality. As Wendy Pearson and Susan Knabe write regarding Greyson’s aforementioned film, “[w]hile the green monkey hypothesis secured (however erroneously) a foreign origin for AIDS, the means of transmission between the green monkey and humans was haunted by the specter of bestiality and an anal primate primal scene” (124). Anxieties involving animal sexuality and animal flesh speak loudly to the longstanding

and deeply entrenched narratives of bodily contagion, represented here by the origin stories linked to HIV transmission.

33 Indeed, there is much more going on in the rogue taxidermy movement than our initial reactions to animal art might convey. This includes the aesthetically compelling ways in which artists transgress, play, and destabilize bodily norms of gender, sexuality, race, and species – norms that inform the ‘neutering affect’ and its sanitization of animal representations. Brewer’s sculpture exposes the ways in which gender and sexuality are often skewed in representations of animality, but it also articulates a more specific criticism of the sexual politics of traditional taxidermy. The queer aesthetics of her sculptures mock both the *over*representation of racialized and gendered sexuality as testimony to deviant ‘bestial desires,’ but also the *under*representation of animal sexual behaviours, especially those not conforming to the normative framework of reproductive heterosexuality. Lastly, Brewer’s sculpture lightens the load of the animal to carry the burden of representation, allowing for the beautiful taxidermy beast to push this representational weight back to the spectator. In doing so, human spectators are induced to think and imagine otherwise, to question historical discourses of animals and animality, and to allow themselves to be challenged by animal art’s unpredictable ability to queer human thought.

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She Was a Beautiful Girl and All of the Animals Loved Her: Race, the Disney Princesses, and their Animal Friends

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Abstract:

Disney Princesses are well-known for their magical relationship to animals. They can charm the beasts with nothing more than a smile and a song, and they count on the animals' help and protection when they get into trouble. However, this special relationship is imagined differently depending on the race of the princess in question. How does the Disney Princess Line teach audiences about their own subjectivity, about their gendered, racialized bodies, through these human/animal relationships? I contend that, in keeping with the historical linkage of people of color and animals, the Disney Princess Line presents two mirrored images of the ideal woman. White princesses are shown in positions of authority over a happy servant class of animal "subjects" who labor in their stead. Princesses of color are shown alongside animal "sidekicks" who are portrayed as being of equal stature and importance and with whom they must work in tandem to achieve their aims. While Disney's definition of princesshood initially seems to be welcoming to girls of all races, it actually sorts its aspirants into different categories. Thus, while the gestures towards diversification in the Disney Princess line seems designed to allow the Disney corporation to reassure its audience that the company is inherently inclusive and progressive at heart, the text of the Disney Princess films continues to imagine what it means to be a "good girl" differently depending on race. Animal characters serve to illustrate these differing registers of "goodness," different ways of relating to the world that, the films suggest, are appropriate for different types of girls.

1 In 2009, Disney fans were buzzing with excitement over the announcement of Tiana, the first African-American character to be included in the popular Disney Princess product line. Before the film ever arrived in theaters, "Tiana-themed products were being promoted in Disney stores across the nation" and a "version of Princess Tiana [could] be found at Disneyland, ready to pose for photos" (Gehlawat 429). However, cultural critics found themselves perplexed upon the film's release, as Tiana's story in *The Princess and the Frog* was quite unlike that of any princess who came before her. In fact, Tiana spends more time as a frog over the course of the movie (fifty-seven minutes of the film's ninety-seven minute running time), than she does as a human being, let alone as a princess (Breau 405). Disney Princesses have always been famously beloved by their animal friends,¹ but never before had a princess spent so much time literally

¹ The live action princess film *Enchanted* (2007) aptly parodies this trope by having Princess Giselle enlist the help of New York's animals (rats, pigeons, flies, cockroaches) to help her clean her Robert's messy apartment.

mucking about in a swamp. Never before had a princess transformed into an animal herself.

2 The Disney Princesses provide several different kinds of traditionally feminine models for little girls to choose from as they learn different ways they might perform their gender. However, like all socially validated categories, the princess is defined against an Other, an opposite object against which a subject can be created. In the earliest Disney films, animals provided the perfect foil for the princess. They were a class of peasantry whose simplicity and devotion proved the princess's worthiness as a ruler and a role model. The princesses proved they were exemplary (human) women by demonstrating their benevolent superiority over their animal subjects. However, when the role of the Disney Princess expanded to include women of color, the line between the animal and the human seemingly grew a bit fuzzier. Rather than contrasting sharply against their fellow animals, princesses of color were often depicted as being of equal stature with their animal friends or even as having beast-like traits themselves. As such, an account of the princesses requires an intersectional approach with a perspective on how constructions of gender, race, and class intersect and dissolve in the play between the categories of the human and the animal. Cary Wolfe argues that "you can't talk about race without talking about species, simply because both categories – as history well shows – are so notoriously pliable and unstable, constantly bleeding into and out of each other," (43) that "the distinction 'human/animal' – as the history of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism well shows – is a discursive resource, not a zoological designation" (10).

3 An examination of the relationships between the various Disney Princesses and their animal companions bears this out, revealing a continuum of humanity (Weheliye 3), with white human at one end of the spectrum, animals at the other, and with non-white humans occupying an intermediate position, sharing some of the characteristics of animals and some of the characteristics of human beings. As Alexander G. Weheliye points out, the design of this range of discursive categories with regards to human/animal relations utilizes "black subjects, along with indigenous populations, the colonized, the insane, the poor, the disabled, and so on [...] as limit cases by which [the straight white] Man can demarcate himself as the universal human" (24). The princesses of color and their animal friends serve as a kind of "troubling double" (Haraway 11) against which whiteness can define itself through contrast. In other words, the

Disney Princess line² sorts its members “into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans” (Weheliye 3). As such, these depictions of princesses of color actually reinforce white hegemony by occupying the boundary that divides civilization and savagery, culture and nature. Their existence allows whiteness (and white femininity in particular) to separate itself from animality. The princesses of color might be lovely and good at heart, but they are shown to be closer to expressing their animal natures than white women are. They are therefore unable to fully occupy the performative space of ‘universal humanity’ (and unable to partake in the privileges that accrue to those who occupy that space) in the way that white women can.

4 My thesis is not intended to reify the human/animal binary by implying that to be animal-like is to be debased and unworthy of moral consideration. Rather, I am interested in looking at how the anxious denial of the animal within has been used over and over again throughout history to justify various atrocities committed against both animals and people of color. After all, as Christopher Peterson writes in *Bestial Traces: Race, Sexuality, and Animality*, just as whiteness needs an excluded Other against which it can define itself in order to exist as a useful category in the hierarchical organization of human beings, so does that which “names itself human does so precisely by suppressing the animality that conditions its emergence” (2). Thus, “although speciesism and racism are often viewed as independent ideologies, they are logically and historically enmeshed” (2).

Walt’s Girls: Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty

5 Snow White, Cinderella, and Princess Aurora (otherwise known as Sleeping Beauty) are the three oldest characters in the Disney Princess line, the ones who were introduced to the

² This essay is only concerned with the official Disney Princesses as denoted on the Disney Princess Website. Interestingly, membership in this group does not actually require that one actually be a real princess (Pocahontas, Mulan). Furthermore, there are several actual princesses in the Disney canon who are not included (Princess Eilonwy of Llyr from *The Black Cauldren* (1985), Kida Nedakh from *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* (2001), Princess Giselle from *Enchanted*, Vanellope von Schweetz from *Wreck-It Ralph* (2012), and, in light of Disney’s recent acquisition of the *Star Wars* (1977) franchise, Princess Leia Organa). These omissions suggest that it is not royal blood or marriage that makes one an official Disney Princess. Rather, the decision is based on marketability. Some princesses are not individually popular, but their inclusion allows the Disney corporation to make a claim for the diversity of their stable of films. Those princesses who don’t fill a hole in the line-up or who don’t fit the patterns of representation established by the brand are excluded. For more on this, see my article “Applying for the Position of Princess: Race, Labor, and Privilege in the Disney Princess Line” in *Princess Cultures: Mediating Girls’ Imaginations and Identities* (25-44).

public during Walt Disney's lifetime. They represent the traditional definition of princesshood within the Disney universe: they are kind-hearted and gentle girls whose beauty is so legendary that it inspires love and devotion from all the peasant people and animals who behold them. These animals do the most difficult tasks for Snow White as she cleans out the dwarfs' cottage, take on the burden of Cinderella's extra chores and sew her a dress so that she can go to the ball, and attend to Princess Aurora while she is hiding out in the woods from Maleficent. The use of their labor on the part of the princess is coded as natural and inevitable. They are happy to serve.

6 The first three Disney Princess films establish a hierarchy that separates the human princess characters from their animal helpers. Humans unquestionably represent a 'higher order of being' than animals in these early films. This separation is partially achieved through the use of very different artistic styles for the animal and human characters. The human characters were drawn in a realistic style and animated through rotoscoping, or the tracing of individual frames from footage of movements performed by real actors. The animals (and even Snow White's dwarfs) are drawn in a much more playful, cartoony squash and stretch style. The sound emphasizes this separation as well. In *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), the animals are completely mute. The princesses occasionally talk to them in the patronizing sing-song voice one might use to talk to (or rather, at) a pet or a baby.

7 Cinderella speaks this way to her mice as well. And although we *do* see Cinderella's mice speaking to one another as they make plans to sew her ball gown, they pronounce words strangely and use an odd form of grammar. It is as though we are hearing a translated version of their mouse language. In fact, they never actually hold a conversation with Cinderella. They might speak in Cinderella's presence, but her words to them retain the peculiar feeling that they are being spoken to someone who cannot understand them (although we in the audience know they actually can). And though the animal characters sometimes attempt to put on the trappings of humanity by wearing the clothes in *Cinderella* (1950) or by working together to try and be a substitute for Aurora's dream-prince in *Sleeping Beauty*, their attempts to rise above their animal natures are only ever played for laughs.

8 The animal characters are also spatially and culturally separated from the princesses. The animals represent nature, the countryside, the wild. The princesses represent civilization, the home, the well-appointed castle. Snow White and Sleeping Beauty encounter their animal friends

only after they have been driven from their prospective palaces out into the forest, and even then, the princesses take time out to establish their inherent distance from their helpers. For example, when Snow White first encounters the various animals who will serve as her protectors and companions for the rest of the film, she demands that they help her find a suitable house to stay in, saying "But I do need a place to sleep at night. I can't sleep in the ground like you [rabbits] do, or in a tree the way you [squirrels] do, and I'm sure no [birds'] nest could possibly be big enough for me." Snow White reminds the animals and the viewer that, as a princess, she belongs indoors, not out in nature amongst the animals.

9 And while Cinderella's beloved mice and birds do live in and about the family household, their presence is seemingly unwanted. They are drawn as rural bumpkins, wearing aprons, kerchiefs, and rough spun cloth, a fact which emphasizes their connection to the natural and the unrefined as well as their place within the class system as rural laborers. Cinderella also emphasizes her distinctness from the animals with whom she shares her shores by recreating the classic scene in which the human differentiates himself from the animal: the Biblical story in which man names the animals. As Christopher Peterson writes, "In the biblical book of *Genesis*, the power of naming permits the human to establish itself as separate from and superior to the nonhuman. The Adamic act of naming authorizes humans to assert their mastery over a diverse group of species who are nonetheless catalogued under the general name of 'the animal'" (2-3). Like Adam, Cinderella grants herself the authority to name (and clothe) her animal friends, though she gives them individual pet names like Jaq and Gus instead of species names.

10 In each case, the films explain what princesses (and, by extension, the little girls to whom they are marketed) should be like by contrasting them against supposedly lesser creatures: the uncultured, the unrefined, the primitive, the provincial. Furthermore, the adoration that these animals bestow on the princesses seems to authorize the hierarchy that places human beings over and above animals. They are happy to serve the princess and so we do not question her rule over them. And, by extension, we come to accept the inevitability of her rule over the peasant classes, common folk who are themselves strongly associated with the natural world and who are traditionally depicted as closer to animals than are the nobles (Anderson 302).

Taming the Beast Within: Ariel and Belle

11 The second wave of princess films, developed under the stewardship of Michael Eisner, featured much spunkier, much more relatable princess characters than the impossibly perfect girls created by Walt Disney. And yet, it seems that the way in which these princesses embrace their fallibility necessitates an even stronger rejection of the concept of animality. In fact, these two princesses are forced into direct confrontations with beastliness, which they must either leave behind or rehabilitate in order to achieve their happy endings.

12 For example, Ariel from *The Little Mermaid* (1989) initially occupies a liminal position between humanity and animality. She is unhappy with what she perceives as the limitations of her life under the sea and so she attempts to purge herself of her fishy ways by purchasing herself a pair of legs from the sea witch Ursula. Multiple musical numbers are dedicated to laying out the two divergent worlds that Ariel must choose between: the peaceful, pristine, uncultivated world under the sea or the landlocked world where the people are. In fact, the driving force of the story is Ariel's desire to trade in her fishy existence for a place in the human world, whose markers of civilization and technology she fetishizes in the form of her collection of human artifacts. Ariel may be closer (physically and relationally) to the animals than Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora, but in her heart she desires to distance herself from her fishy origins.

13 Ariel also has animal subjects that can and do talk directly to her and are given much more of a sense of 'personhood' than Snow White's and Aurora's animal helpers or even Cinderella's mice. However, viewers should take Ariel's seemingly friendly relationship with Flounder the fish and Sebastian the crab with a grain of salt; when her desires clash with theirs, she invariably pulls rank, dragging them along in her wake into adventures above the surface that they do not want to undertake and which are dangerous to them. In this manner, Ariel's differs somewhat from the earlier princesses. While the animal friends of Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora were all too happy to help, Flounder and Sebastian often express exasperation and even frustration with the tasks that their sovereign gives them, though, in the end, they remain fond of her.

14 And yet, Ariel's disturbingly blasé attitude towards the various attempts made by the humans on land to kill and eat her animal chaperones indicates a certain lack of concern for their welfare. She is warned time and again that humans harvest from the oceans to kill and eat the

sentient beings (fish, crab, clams, oysters etcetera) over which her father, King Triton, rules. And yet, this horrific fact does not deter her from wanting to join humanity. Part of her separation from her animal side entails coming to terms with this gradual Othering of the entities that she called her friends. Jacques Derrida describes this relation to the bodies of others in “Eating Well or the Calculation of the Subject”:

I feel compelled to underscore the *sacrificial* structure of the discourses to which I am referring. I don't know if "sacrificial structure" is the most accurate expression. In any case, it is a matter of discerning a place left open, in the very structure of these discourses (which are also "cultures") for a noncriminal putting to death. Such are the executions of ingestion, incorporation, or introjection of the corpse. An operation as real as it is symbolic when the corpse is "animal" (and who can be made to believe that our cultures are carnivorous because animal proteins are irreplaceable?), a symbolic operation when the corpse is "human." (278, original emphasis)

And, indeed, as history has shown, these same rhetorical gymnastics that allow us to apply the commandment “thou shall not kill” (Derrida 279) to some kinds of life and not others is regularly extended from the discourse of animality to discourses of racial identity and biopolitics.

As Derrida, Agamben, and others have reminded us, those who fall outside the frame, because they are marked by differences of race, or species, or gender, or religion, or nationality, are always threatened with ‘a non-criminal putting to death.’ [...] One of the most powerful insights of biopolitical thought is thus to raise this uncomfortable question: if the frame is about rules and laws, about what is proper, and is not simply a matter of a line that is given by nature between those inside and those outside, then to live under biopolitics is to live in a situation in which we are all always already (potential) “animals” before the law – not just nonhuman animals according to zoological classification, but any group of living beings that is so framed. (Wolfe 10)

15 Furthermore, the animal world that Ariel so longs to escape is "given many elements which link it with disenfranchised groups in American society" (Davis 108). For example, Sebastian, the royal composer for King Triton's court and the foremost cheerleader of the virtues of life underwater, has a Caribbean accent, and his featured songs, "Under the Sea" and "Kiss the Girl," have a calypso beat. Furthermore, there are a few background animal characters played as visual gags, namely a "black fish" reminiscent of a Little Black Sambo figure and a fluke who is dubbed the "duke of soul" and who closely resembles jazz musician Duke Ellington, in the "Under the Sea" number.

16 These fish of color demonstrate “the conflation of racialization with mere biological life as opposed to human life” which “enables white subjects to ‘see’ themselves as transcending

racialization due to their full embodiment of this particular genre of the human while responding apathetically to nonwhite subjects as bearers of ontological cum biological lack” (Weheliye 27). In other words, the world that Ariel longs to leave is not just the undersea world or the animal world. It is the non-white world. Eric’s kingdom is your typical white fairy tale setting, complete with a European style castle and a French chef.

17 If Ariel is desperate to escape from the world of the beasts under the sea then *Beauty and the Beast*’s Belle (1991) is tasked with civilizing a beastly prince and returning him to his (white) humanity. When her father is captured by the imposing Beast, Belle bravely sacrifices her own freedom to take his place. While trapped in his castle, Belle becomes familiar with the curse that has condemned all of its residents to be trapped in inhuman bodies. Her job is to tame the Beast, turning him into an object worthy of love and therefore enabling the breaking of the curse (Craven). This involves Belle teaching the Beast about proper, high society white coded behaviors such as polite dinner manners and ballroom dancing.

18 As Kay Anderson describes in “‘The Beast Within’: Race, Humanity, and Animality,” racialized discourse often refers to people of color as “beastly”: ruled by their passions and unable to control their violent rages. We see these constructions regularly in news account about people of color such as those surrounding the recent riots in Ferguson, Missouri (Terkel) and Baltimore, Maryland (Gordon) over the killings of unarmed young black men by police in which “hardly a month goes by without a judge or journalist proclaiming that someone ‘lives like an animal’ or, worse, has become one through their behaviour” (Anderson 302). Such rhetoric is a part of the

discursive production of social groups identified for their base drives, proximity to “nature”, infantilism, eroticism, and absence of civilised manners. Human beings “in the raw” supposedly motivated in their conduct by naked impulse rather than rational deliberation... either beyond, or potentially improved by, the cultivation of self-government. So too have such groups been variously identified with the discursive spaces of “wild” nature (as distinct from that proud monument of “civilization” known as the city or, alternatively, those counterpoint spaces like “ghettoes” within the city’s “dark side”). (302)

Thus Belle’s intervention into the Beast’s beastliness can also be read as a restoration of the Beast’s whiteness (and therefore, the restoration of his suitability as a romantic partner for Belle).

Jasmine, Pocahontas, Mulan, and Tiana: The Princesses of Color

19 Disney's *Aladdin* (1992) was Disney's first attempt at broadening the role of the princess to include non-white characters. It also reimagines the relationship between its principal characters and their animal friends. In keeping with the racialized logic of the films of the past, Jasmine and Aladdin are depicted as being of equal status with animals, not as their betters or their masters. In this way, a modicum of difference divides Jasmine from Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, Ariel, and Belle. This difference, as we shall see, will be exaggerated in *Pocahontas* (1995) and *Mulan* (1998) and will reach its greatest height in *The Princess and the Frog* (2009).

20 While previous princesses held themselves above their animal helpers, Jasmine and Aladdin are quite intimate with the animals in their lives, as though the gap between racialized others and animals is smaller than the one between animals and whites. Firstly, all of the major characters, Aladdin, Jasmine, and Jafar, are referred to as various types of animals in the dialogue of the film. Aladdin is constantly called a "street rat" by the palace guards, and, during her foray into the market place, Jasmine is dubbed a "street mouse." Jafar describes Jasmine as a "pussy cat," and he is in turn cursed by Aladdin as a "snake." Secondly, the principal characters of *Aladdin* have a much more egalitarian relationship with their animal friends like the monkey Abu than do the previous stars of Disney Princess movies. These animal partners do not fawningly obey their human companions but rather 'talk back' to them as equals. They have their own desires and interests which sometimes are not in alignment with those of Aladdin and Jasmine.

21 Pocahontas, Mulan, and Tiana, all also have close bonds of friendship with the animals they know. Readers might be forgiven for not knowing that Pocahontas and Mulan are even a part of the Disney Princess line. As Peggy Orenstein notices, they are often excluded from images that feature the rest of the lineup posing together. Nevertheless, the Disney Princess website lists Pocahontas and Mulan as official members of the royal group (though neither one actually is a princess in the traditional sense of the word: Pocahontas is the daughter of a Native American chief and Mulan becomes the wife of a general in the Emperor's army, not a prince).

22 In a move that will not surprise any reader who is familiar with the stereotypes that surround popular depictions of Native American characters, Pocahontas constantly reminds both

John Smith and the viewer that, as a Native woman, she has an uncannily intimate relationship with the natural world. Pocahontas has an animality about her that is unique in the princess line. Her buckskin dress marks her as a child of nature and her graceful style of movement as she creeps through the forest to watch John without his knowledge resembles that of a stalking cat. She also has two close animal friends who follow her wherever she goes, Flick the hummingbird and Meeko the raccoon, and their relationship is far more egalitarian than that of Cinderella and her mice and birds or Snow White and her forest friends. Like Abu and Iago in *Aladdin*, Flit and Meeko make mischief in Pocahontas's life. They live together with her rather than working under her. Her theme song, "Colors of the Wind," in which she evokes her connection to the wolf, the grinning bobcat, the heron, and the otter (who she calls "my friends"), emphasizes this connection. She even brings John to see a family of bears, implying to him that, to her, animals and people are equally deserving of respect and even familial love. In the case of Pocahontas's mentor (and judging by her title, her relation?), Grandmother Willow, they are perhaps deserving of an even greater degree of respect and deference than are humans. These egalitarian relationships are in direct contrast with the way in which the film's villain, Governor Ratcliffe, treats his companion animal, a pug named Percy. Percy may be pampered, but he is most definitely not his owner's equal. He is a pet, treated more like a prized possession than a friend. It is not surprising when this animal, who is originally antagonistic towards Meeko and Flit, defects to join up with Pocahontas and her friends, as they afford him a greater degree of freedom and respect.

23 *Mulan* also features egalitarian (at times antagonistic) relationships between protagonists of color and their animal friends. Mulan is not worshiped and adored by her animal companions. They are her friends and family. For example, although Mulan does foist her daily chores off on the family dog in the first scene of the film, she also calls that dog "Little Brother," implying a familiarity and a love between them based on equality and mutual respect, not servitude. Even Mulan's trusty steed cannot be counted on to work for her silently and meekly. He, too, is more of a friend than a possession, and he is bold enough to laugh at Mulan's attempts to adopt a masculine drag persona so she can serve in the army. And of course, Mulan's most boisterous, most rebellious companion, is the dragon, Mushu, who is voiced by African American comedian Eddie Murphy and who anachronistically "speaks with a cadence and vocabulary that the U. S.

mainstream society associates with twenty-first century African Americans" (King, Lugo-Lugo, and Bloodsworth-Lugo 100). Mushu often acts as Mulan's superior; as her family's guardian spirit he sets himself up to be both her moral guide and her drag king coach. Interestingly, Mushu seems to realize that his relationship with Mulan is somewhat different from the ones that have existed between earlier Disney princesses and their animal friends. In one scene, when Mushu wakes Mulan up for her early morning training, he sarcastically calls her "Sleeping Beauty," as if to highlight the distance between Mulan's princesshood and that of her filmic ancestors.

24 While *Mulan's* heroine is marked as different from previous depictions of white princesses by her closeness with animals, the villains of the piece are also defined according to their animalistic, racialized identities. *Mulan* is a story about a conflict between two peoples, the enlightened Hans and the evil Huns. One of the ways that the film ensures our identification with the Hans is by depicting the Huns as little better than wild animals:

To empathize with the Hans, the dominant Chinese race, the audience must be made to reject the Other – the Hun invaders. The polarization of race manifests itself in the Huns' gray skin tone and in the Hans' fairer skin tone. Disney accomplishes this further by rendering Shan-Yu and his followers as animalistic, predatory barbarians. With fingers like hawk's talons, the steep forehead of a gorilla, eyes and eyebrows squashed together, and two pointed snake fangs, Shan-Yu is, arguably, simian. He hangs upside down like an ape; he scales the Great Wall and climbs trees; he sniffs at the doll which his falcon brings back from its scouting. With his superhuman strength, he bursts out of snow that annihilates his entire army except his closest comrades. His henchmen subsequently penetrate the palace hidden inside the dancing dragon, a Chinese Trojan Horse in mockery of the emperor's symbol. (Parekh 162)

In this way, the film sets up a sort of sliding scale of animality for racial Others that further complicates the model set up in *Aladdin* and *Pocahontas*. Mulan and the Hans are not white and so they quaintly identify with animal spirits and allow their animal friends to back talk them and interact with them as equals. But the evil Huns are even worse. Their race is so barbaric, and evolutionarily underdeveloped that they have become animal-like themselves.

25 In each of these examples, the contrast between how white princesses and princesses of color interact with their animal friends creates two separate models of how one relates to the world (or perhaps, how the world relates to you). The racial identity of the princesses determines whether they are treated with deference and awe or thrown into a joyful but chaotic scramble.

And for no movie is this more true than *The Princess and the Frog*, a film in which all of the associations between animality and race come together in the most literal way.

26 The figuration of African Americans as frogs has a long history in American animation (including animation produced by the Disney corporation). Many animation studios took to creating froggy caricatures for the voices of African-American jazz musicians in musical shorts because, according to one former studio animator, their large mouths made them "suitable animals to depict as African Americans" (Lehman 39). Ub Iwerks, an animator who intermittently worked for Disney during his career, created one of these jazzy frogs with his *Flip the Frog* series from the 1930s while MGM produced froggy versions of Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington, Thomas "Fats" Waller, Louis Armstrong, and Ethel Waters throughout the 1930s and 1940s (Maltin).

27 Thus, it struck many as unfortunate that Disney's first ever African American princess would spend the majority of her movie saddled with a froggy body. Tiana is transformed into a frog because she dares to occupy a princessly position by kissing Prince Naveen before she has the proper credentials (which are depicted in her friend Charlotte's story book as beauty, wealth, and whiteness). As a result, she and Naveen are forced to flee to the Louisiana bayou. There they meet their animal companions, Louie the alligator and Ray the lightning bug, who help them on their journey, as well as the black voodoo priestess Mama Odie, who "lives deep in the bayou in a boat on top of a tree, and receives her voodoo wisdom (and walking assistance) from the living plant and animal community surrounding her" (Terry 478). Mama Odie has an affinity with the animal world that goes far beyond that of the white folks who live in the city. It is in the bayou, not in a church, that Tiana and Prince Naveen are finally married by Mama Odie, and, at the conclusion of the film, Tiana's restaurant functions as a borderland space where white humans, black humans, and animals alike can enjoy gumbo and jazz music. While she may end up as a princess in the end, her court is quite unlike those of the white princesses who came before her. Her wild "kingdom" provides a stark contrast to the fairy tale castles occupied by Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty.

Conclusion

28 The Disney Princess line purports to encourage little princesses of all races and creeds to

live out their fairy tale dreams. But as my analysis has shown, the diverse representations of princesshood found within the franchise actually work to erect a barrier (or rather, use the labor of princesses of color to build and maintain a barrier) that separates white women from women of color, thereby strengthening racialized, gendered divisions instead of breaking them down. The drawn bodies of Jasmine, Pocahontas, Mulan, and Tiana serve as foils to the traditional, white princesses, Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, and even to the spunky, feisty royals, Ariel, and Belle. The franchise invites girls of color to try their luck at adopting a princessly role only to insist that *their* princesshood be different from the one experienced by white girls. Princesses of color are expected to be more rugged, more earthy, and less cultured and refined than their white counterparts due to their greater degree of animality, their greater kinship to the beast within.

29 Since *The Princess and the Frog*'s debut in year, three more official Disney Princess films have been introduced, all of which feature white protagonists: *Tangled* (2010), *Brave* (2012), and *Frozen* (2013). Although these films deserve more space than I can give them here, I do think it is important to briefly situate them in terms of the structures of race, femininity, and animality outlined above.

30 *Tangled*'s Rapunzel has a chameleon friend named Pascal with whom she is very close. However, the film implies that she is forced to have animals as friends because Mother Gothel has never allowed her to meet any another human beings. Anna and Elsa of *Frozen* do not really interact with animals very much although the trolls in that film serve as racialized animalistic not-quite-humans against which the royals of Arendelle can be compared. And finally, *Brave*'s Merida, much like Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*, must reject the beast within by curing her mother, who has been transformed into a bear. Although these films deserve to be celebrated for the ways that they subvert many of the gendered tropes of the Disney Princess line, the racialized tropes I describe above are still firmly in place. These princesses might have more freedom than their forebearers, but they are still not allowed to embrace their wild side.

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Slipping Off the Sealskin: Gender, Species, and Fictive Kinship in Selkie Folktales

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Abstract:

Figure: a pale grey sealskin, lying empty. Ground: the shore of a cold sea. We are in Iceland, or Norway. In Scotland, or Ireland. We are in Shetland, or – half a world away – the South Shetland Islands of the Antarctic Peninsula. For those of us who study this multiple sealskin – who have heard the tales of the Seal Wife – a question arises, unmoored from the quotidian: to what body does the skin belong? Was it cut from a carcass for meat or fur, stripped seal flesh left bloody? Or did someone step from it, slipping naked and uncanny from the skin to walk upon the shore? Some seals are not what they seem, their eyes are too human. They are selch, selkies or silkies, from the Shetland and Orcadian for seal; fey creatures who can shed their sealskins, step from the water, and walk as humans on the shore. This essay examines a cluster of selkie folktales in order to study this sealskin, a locus where questions of gender, species, and kinship intersect. What can this shifting figure reveal about the Seal Wife topos, and the changing landscape of folklore in the twentieth century?



Caption: Stuffed with horsehair, armature, and two glass eyes: this taxidermy sealskin lying on fibreglass rocks in the Husavik Whaling Museum, Iceland, is both full and empty.

Prelude: The Empty Skin

As soon as the seal was clear of the water, it reared up and its skin slipped down to the sand. What had been a seal was a white-skinned boy.
- George Mackay Brown, *Pictures in the Cave* (41)

1 Figure: a pale grey sealskin, lying empty. Ground: the shore of a cold sea. We are in Iceland, or Norway. In Scotland, or Ireland. We are in Shetland, or – half a world away – the South Shetland Islands of the Antarctic Peninsula. Sites overlaid as one wave upon the next; one shore for another, one skin for another, one or another telling of a tale. Some details are lost, unique, but others build, composited. For those of us who study this multiple sealskin – who have heard the tales – a question arises, unmoored from the quotidian: to what body does the skin belong? Was it cut from a carcass for meat or fur, stripped seal flesh left bloody? Or did someone step from it, slipping naked and uncanny from the skin to walk upon the shore?

2 Some seals are not what they seem, their eyes are too human. They are *selch*, *selkies* or *silkies*, from the Shetland and Orcadian for seal; fey creatures who can shed their sealskins, step from the water, and walk as humans on the shore. This essay examines a cluster of selkie folktales in order to study this sealskin, a locus where questions of gender, species, and kinship intersect.

Introduction: Gender as Species – Dualism and Category Distinction

If I self-identify as a cat, a feline, do I have to pay income taxes? I mean, I'm just wondering.
- *Fox News* anchor Andrea Tantaros (quoted in Haraldsson)

3 During the recent furore over civil rights activist Rachel Dolezal's appropriation of another ethnicity, many commentators likened Dolezal's race to Caitlyn Jenner's transgender identity.¹ But another analogy consistently appeared alongside this equation of race and gender: species. Articles and comments, in tones of exasperated common sense, compared “#transracial” and transsexual identity – both seen as equally absurd – with the allegedly equivalent claim to being a different species.² These viewpoints were most explicitly expressed from a conservative Christian worldview, exemplified here by the Messianic Jewish author Michael Brown:

¹ These claims bore striking resemblance to those employed by Janice Raymond in her notorious work, *The Transsexual Empire: the Making of the She-Male* (1979). As part of her elaborate argumentation against the moral validity of transgender identity, Raymond used race as an analogy for gender. Raymond asked whether we would conscience the actions of a Caucasian (male) who claimed membership of the Black community, and accordingly demanded medical intervention to change their appearance, full access to Black spaces, and public recognition as Black. Another example of the eerie phenomenon that Raymond's slim volume seems able to prefigure nearly every popular argument against trans identity, some thirty five years on. (150) This style of anti-transgender feminism is alive and well. In the ongoing debate in the British media about protests against Germaine Greer speaking at Cardiff University, Greer made a comment on the VictoriaLIVE show in response to the protests that re-hashes the conflation of gender and species in no uncertain terms: “Just because you lop off your d**k and then wear a dress doesn't make you a ***** woman. I've asked my doctor to give me long ears and liver spots and I'm going to wear a brown coat but that won't turn me into a ***** cocker spaniel” (Saul).

² “#transracial” seems to have originated in multiple locations, but particularly alongside the associated hashtag #WrongSkin as part of the satirical Twitter trolling of @GodfreyElfwick, whose tweets were taken as genuine by the

Who's to say Bruce Jenner isn't a woman? [...]

Who's to say Rachel Dolezal isn't black?

Who's to say that people suffering from species dysphoria are not actually part animal?

[...]

I'm convinced that the LGBT war on gender will undermine itself, being part of the larger war on reality, and that soon enough, sanity will prevail in our society.

[...]

...when we cut ourselves off from the one true God, the ultimate source of reality, we really do lose our bearings. ("Moral Relativism")

To this dualist mindset – which conflates sex, gender and sexuality, arguably combining misogyny, transphobia and homophobia – distinctions between male and female are as clear, as natural, and as unbridgeable as those between, say, people and seals. These distinctions are, moreover, eternal conditions of “reality”, albeit conditions which paradoxically require ‘upholding’ (“Gay Deception”).

4 This intersection of a sex/gender binary with species is by no means a twenty-first century novelty. Val Plumwood’s ecofeminist work charts the development of dualism’s denigration of the animal, the feminine and the corporeal from Plato via Descartes to the twentieth century. Plumwood argues that “[f]orms of oppression [...] have left their traces in western culture as a network of dualisms, and the logical structure of dualism forms a major basis for the connection between forms of oppression” (2). To accept binary dualism on its own terms as an original, traditional or ‘natural’ conception of difference is mistaken, however; black-and-white thinking of this kind does not characterise worldwide pre-contemporary or non-Occidental thought (Watts 16–19). On the contrary, dualism must be understood as a ‘network’ in an advanced stage of development. This historically entrenched and predominantly Western onto-epistemology, championed by Cartesian mechanists and Enlightenment rationalists in the eighteenth century, extends its hegemonic, colonising reach through the capitalist nineteenth and twentieth centuries, up to the present day (Plumwood 7, 12, 111, 132). The “network of dualisms” continues to progress, ramified and reinforced by “linking postulates” (64), cultural concepts which cross-link the hierarchical pairs, mapping the terms onto one another: truth–rationality–mind–culture–human–male are cross-linked in opposition to fiction–sensation–body–nature–animal–female. Overlap between these supposedly opposite categories is denied as ontologically impossible and/or ethically undesirable, resulting in a

national press (eg. www.mirror.co.uk “#WrongSkin: Twitter campaign by white man who 'identifies as being black' goes viral”, 12 June 2015) I use the hashtag here to distinguish this discussion from more serious discourse on the transracial identities of adopted children. The claim to identify as non-human, termed ‘species dysphoria’, is in fact not unknown, and is referenced and hyperlinked in the op-ed by Michael Brown, quoted below. Internet communities who self-identify as belonging to other (often mythological) species include Otherkin, Furies and Therians.

form of rigid black-and-white thinking Plumwood terms “hyperseparation”. As anthropologist Philippe Descola argues, however, because the “world presents itself to us as a proliferating continuum, [...] one would have to adhere to a truly myopic realism of essences to consider it cut up in advance into discontinuous domains that the brain is designed, always and everywhere, to identify in the same manner” (86).

5 To borrow psychoanalytic Object Relations terminology originating with Ronald Fairbairn – returning Brown’s dubious favour of pathologizing those worldviews that contradict one’s own – dualist thinking is characterised by a schizoid ‘splitting’ of complex phenomena into categorical opposites of positive and negative qualities (for an overview, see Semply & Smyth 834–6). Fairbairn considered splitting a universal element of human thought – ‘brain design’, in Descola’s terms – but one which can become pathological. For our discussion, the key element of Fairbairn’s complex theory is that *a single entity* is split into the fundamental dualism *good/bad*, due to experiences of it which cannot be integrated into the self and must be repressed.³ Indeed, for Fairbairn, splitting and repression are aspects of the same operation (Rubens 13). Plumwood also identifies repression as a key mechanism in dualism (49, 91). As the person is split into the human and the animal, the mind and the body, the rational and the emotional, these split elements of the self become increasingly difficult to integrate. The deepening “fault-line” which Plumwood observes “run[ning] through [Western culture’s] entire conceptual system” (42) is not only a pathological, impoverished conception of the world but also serves “to mark out the Other for separate and inferior treatment” (102). This, Plumwood argues, is the *cultural function* underwriting the allure of Descola’s “myopic realism of essences”: hyperseparated dualism ratifies hierarchical master/slave relations, excluding the subordinated Other ontologically from “the privileged domain of the master” (3). The cultural motivation to continually re-inscribe a binary categorical split is thus twofold; dualism underwrites and legitimates power structures, and is a crucial aspect of repression both for society as a whole, and for the individual.⁴

6 Cross-linked dualism works to overwrite all heterogeneous difference with the same binary model, and it is in this way that the ‘intersectionality’ of gender and species becomes a key issue. In Michael Brown’s exposition above of what he would likely not object to calling ‘traditionalist’ values, his argument’s structure – with sequential line breaks between the statements on gender, race and species – forms an escalating scale of perceived absurdity. But what this format implies is

³ Fairbairn’s use of the concept of internalization is notoriously confusing, not least because he seems to have employed the term in two distinct senses, but never explicitly acknowledges this (Rubens, 18). Lacanian analysis, on the contrary, sees the original splitting of the self as the entry into language or ‘speech’. This features in Cary Wolfe’s sketch of the posthuman decentred subject (2010, 182, 189, 196).

⁴ Plumwood’s discussion of Plato’s doctrine of self-mastery and its expression in the metaphor of the horse-breaking charioteer is relevant here (87–88).

that for traditionalists like Brown, such binary category distinctions are equivalent in kind, if not intensity. They follow according to a ‘self-evident’ mytho-logic. To respect Caitlyn Jenner’s claim to be female is tantamount to respecting a claim to be feline, whether motivated by neurosis or tax avoidance as the case may be. A hyperseparated “unbridgeable crevasse” or “great chasm” – in Bart Ehrman’s wording – lies between the human and animal, equivalent to that between male and female, man and God, truth and fiction, and between black and white (3).⁵ To bridge these opposites, with their ‘natural’ gender roles, dislocates us from unitary reality, originating from “the one true God” (Brown “Moral Relativism”). Hybridity is monstrous, the gender-bending version of Doctor Moreau’s ‘playing God’ with species. To claim legitimacy for transgender experience is to be ‘at war with gender,’ ‘at war with reality,’ and against God’s natural order.⁶

7 But, following Ehrman (see endnote 5), the conceptual framework of this ‘traditionalism’ is not in accordance with its own stated origins. Traditionalist dualism projects itself back into the past, inscribing for itself a claim to natural and historical originary status.⁷ Ehrman’s historicization of this “black and white” paradigm implies that what I am terming traditionalism is a *retroactive* splitting, which overwrites the same categorical split onto multiple “continuums”; a hyperseparated mytho-logic which is therefore interminably wrestling with paradoxes of integration. Here discussions of the ontological and the mythological become entangled. Nineteenth-century folklorist Walter Traill Dennison, who collected several of the folktales this essay explores, claimed a similar process had formative effects on myths of animal shapeshifters:

Man, in ignorance and pride, raised a huge barrier between the instinct of the lower animals and his own more God-like reason. And the slight attempt on the part of an inferior creature to cross this imaginary barrier was regarded as a proof of human intelligence. The possession of human intelligence by a lower animal could only be accounted for by assuming that such an animal was a human being in disguise. (“Orkney Folk-Lore” 172)

⁵ Bart Ehrman charts the development of Christian conceptions of Jesus’s divinity, casting unexpected light on this contemporary fusion of binary race, gender and species. Ehrman’s key observation is startling: the “black-and-white” paradigm of today’s thought is a causal factor in scholarly disagreements on Christ’s divinity. (3) Previous cultures did not believe “the divine and human realms [to be] categorically distinct, with a great chasm separating the two... [but] two continuums that could, and did, overlap.” (4) Ehrman’s research demonstrates the split thinking of many contemporary Christians – including scholars – is *not* in fact an original feature of this religion’s worldview, but a comparatively recent paradigm. “Two continuums” with soft boundaries have become one split binary. Ehrman demonstrates that conceptual opposites – such as a basic component of human thought – are culturally specific. Ehrman’s use of “chasm” in this context recalls Heidegger’s “abyss” between the human and animal, as it is discussed by Kelly Oliver (ch. 8).

⁶ In a further hint of the astonishing mythic unity behind seemingly-opposed worldviews, this is remarkably similar in structure to Janice Raymond’s apocalyptic RadFem conspiracy theory that “techno-science” is going against nature, and attempting to replace biological women with man-made transsexuals to create a patriarchal paradise. A gender-swapped version of this argument is deployed by “Men’s Rights” activists, concerned about IVF, alimony without custody rights, and male exclusion from childcare: harbingers of a conspiracy to make fathers obsolete. Much could also be written on contemporary American usages of ‘at war with ___’ and ‘the war on ___’ and its appearance in this context.

⁷ There is a clear link here to the extensive work of Michel Foucault and his successors on the retroactive production or projection of origins, and to Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* on the obsessive scientific and moralist categorisation of sexuality, including the “discovery” of the species-like category of the homosexual.

The ‘savage’ and animalistic are to be repressed in ourselves and controlled in others. Thought, love and language are human and divine, categorically distinct from the animal.⁸ These mores are also bound up with the fear and repression of sexuality uncoupled from procreation; particularly non-heterosexual expressions, flickering unsettlingly between ‘bestial’ and ‘unnatural’.⁹ The irony of this conceptual splitting, however, is that such mutually exclusive categories require their ‘opposites’ for definition: hyperseparated opposites are ‘unbridgeable’ yet ineluctable. To borrow an image from Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus*, dualist traditionalism might be termed a relentless schizoid splitting machine. As hyperseparation increases, so must repression: the split must be endlessly re-inscribed and re-enforced against the threat of undifferentiated, chaotic grey areas, hence longstanding anti-LGBT campaigns against a dystopian genderless future. Or, as Brown puts it: “Who can imagine what’s coming next if we don’t uphold the standard of God’s male-female creation?” (“Gay Deception”)

8 The logical or common-sensical tone of discussions such as Brown’s, which reify dualist ontological categories, belies their status as myth. In John Gray’s account, as in Mary Midgley’s, a culture’s worldview, rationality, historiography and myth are entangled, a mytho-logical structure that underwrites common-sensical factuality. Ironically, however, *contemporary* mytho-logic believes mythology to be “the relic of a barbarous past” (Watts 12),¹⁰ forming a pervasive, exceptionalist mythology which doesn’t consider itself as such. As Midgley puts it, “many of the favourite fairy-tales of our age – the myths that actually shape our thoughts and actions – are ones which owe their force to having appeared in scientific dress” (xii). As Gray notes, the seemingly opposed contemporary worldviews of science and religion share a remarkably similar dualist

⁸ Conversely, a similar rationale perhaps underlies the ‘pets in heaven’ trope: in many instances of this popular contemporary heresy, ‘loving’ pets have individual souls, while animals do not. See, for example, the fascinating discussions on this subject found on BibleInfo.com, christianity.about.com, ChristianityToday.com, WhatChristiansWantToKnow.com, and many other sites.

⁹ Perhaps there is an explanatory link here with the otherwise baffling argument against homosexual marriage, made by various conservative Christian demagogues including Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, that it is a ‘slippery slope’ to bestiality and marriages with animals. The discursive or ideological links between sexuality, animality, and a debased femininity have been traced by many scholars, often with a focus on its emergence during the Renaissance (Schiesari, 8ff; Oliver). The equivalence of these categorical distinctions may also contribute to the distaste for racial mixing that is a common feature of the religious conservative, and which results in the ‘one drop’ school of racial purity. Likewise the surprisingly widespread occurrence of articles and discussions online about whether men and women are ‘different species.’

¹⁰ It is, however, imperative that we do not seek to replace the split binary of dark past and bright future with its equally-mythic partner, the Edenic past and Fallen present. Myths of progress go hand-in-hand, in both roots and branches, with prelapsarian beginnings and apocalyptic endings: according to a 2002 Times/CNN poll, for example, 36% of Americans viewed current events in the context of biblical eschatology. (Brooks & Toth, 20) All too often, as Plumwood discusses with great lucidity, there is a temptation to simply invert the dualist structure. Raised in a culture in which dualist ‘with us or against us’ perspectives are endemic, deconstructing the dualism is a task of great intricacy, amounting to a “logical maze” (42).

mytho-logic (4–5).¹¹ British-Indian polymath J. B. S. Haldane, writing in the 1950s, argues that “the concept of a species is a concession to our linguistic habits and neurological mechanisms” (95–6). These habits and mechanisms – amongst which, following Fairbairn, we include splitting – are inevitably caught up with culture-bound paradoxes of category and duality. How a culture negotiates splitting underwrites its conceptualisations of duality, whether with regard to supposedly ‘ontological’ categories like gender, sex or species or epistemological issues such as the relationships between truth and fiction, or between history and myth.¹² Imaged as fault-line, abyss, unbridgeable crevasse or huge barrier, there is a distinctly spatial – or sculptural – element to these abstract conceptions, diverse differences which dualism recasts onto a single binary model.¹³ Phenomena sited between these binary categories, or moving between them, thus appear uncannily unsettling and paradoxical, demanding mytho-logical narrative resolution. And whether in cultural productions or social interactions, such resolutions often entail violence.

9 Biological investigations into the concept of species distinction negotiate what Marc Ereshefsky describes as “vague” or fluid category division in the natural world (391). The pains Ereshefsky takes to reassure his readers that he is not *really* denying categorical truth is revealing: “suggesting that the divide between species and higher taxa is vague should not cause us to doubt the existence of those categories” (391). Here is the well-known intrusion of the folk (logic) into the formal: *but if categories are not absolutely distinct, how can they be categories?* We should not forget,

¹¹ The notion that the dualist globalized culture in which this essay is situated is necessarily ‘advanced’ in a moral, intellectual or epistemological sense due to its supposed position at the leading edge of history, or its scientific or technological developments, is itself a function of a pervasive contemporary belief system: the progress mythology of (post)colonial capitalism. This analysis is well-known from philosophers of science such as Karl Popper and Mary Midgley, as well as from posthumanist theorists such as Cary Wolfe. John Gray’s recent work offers a perspective with special relevance to Human-Animal Studies: denying our animality is a causal factor in the braided myths of progress, human perfectibility, and the earthly paradise, touted by the seemingly opposed worldviews of global capitalism, religious fundamentalism, and the prophets of technocracy (see also Wolfe 2010, xv). As Gray explains: “For those who live inside a myth, it seems a self-evident fact. Human progress is a fact of this kind... the myth of progress is extremely potent. [...] In the story that the modern world repeats to itself, the belief in progress is at odds with religion. [But]... the idea of progress is not at odds with religion in the way this modern fairy tale suggests. Faith in progress is a late survival of early Christianity” (4–5). It is far beyond the scope of this essay to provide any adequate analysis of the mythology of progress, its relationship with Christian eschatological beliefs, or begin to survey the various models of conceptualising dualism that cultures other than this have produced. For an introduction to dualism in world mythology, see Watts. In the context of a *progressively* dualist splitting, which this essay charts in selkie folktales, progress takes on a negative ethical sense.

¹² Another concept from the Object Relations school, D. W. Winnicott’s ‘transitional space’, works well in this context: transitional space is the zone of culture, which exists between inner experience and the outer world, and cannot be reduced to either. For a discussion of transitional space in the context of gender and splitting, see Muriel Dimen. Wolfe (2003) gives in-depth exploration of the relations between gender and species binaries and the animal in American cultural works, undertaken from an alternative psychoanalytically-informed perspective.

¹³ The controversial ‘cognitive linguistics’ work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, and their successors, provides some fascinating insights into this spatial, metaphoric aspect of seemingly-abstract thought. For an introduction, see their *Metaphors We Live By* (1980).

however, the opposite process, which Anthony Giddens termed the double hermeneutic¹⁴: dissemination of a culture's formal, philosophical investigations of category shape its folk beliefs. Plumwood would argue that it is our cultural history of dualist philosophy which makes notions of category and 'vague division' seem contradictory, even paradoxical (see also Plumwood, ch. 2). Giddens' double hermeneutic also applies to the study of folktale as a whole. For folktale types like "The Seal Wife", which this essay explores, finding a source who had never been influenced by any folktale collection would be a task for Diogenes, a task compounded in the search for 'oral origins' through textual scholarship. Likewise, euhemerist explanations – which attempt to establish causal origins for mythology and folktale rooted in fact – have been active since before the time of Euhemerus (3rd–4th C. BCE). A dualist-progressive view of mythology which links the mythic/fantastic with the past, and the factual/rational with the present, does not do justice to the material. The boundary between euhemerism and ætiological myths of origin is undoubtedly vague.¹⁵ This is aptly expressed in *mythology*, a word which refers equally to the making of myth and to its study.

The Sealskin and "The Silver Cross"

10 Both the institution I work with, the John Affey Museum (JAM), and its eponymous founder, could stand accused of being partisan on the losing side of Brown's aforementioned 'war on reality.'¹⁶ The work of John Henry Affey (1905–1969) as an amateur ethnographer, folklorist, and historian of whaling might generously be described as 'radically revisionist'. Affey's never-realised Transnational Whaling Museum project amounted to an archipelagic series of curios and snippets of dubious provenance, counter-factual speculations, and specious arguments that – though perhaps ironic – verged on the delusional. A "fabulation backed by congeries of improbable fact," to borrow Iain Sinclair's description of Patrick Keiller's *Robinson* films (57). Besides being an eclectic, autodidactic academic of the ragged fringes, Affey was what we would now call a conspiracy theorist. Affey fervently believed – or made every appearance of belief – in the existence of an

¹⁴ "[T]he concepts of the social sciences are not produced about an independently constituted subject-matter, which continues regardless of what these concepts are. The 'findings' of the social sciences very often enter constitutively into the world they describe" (Giddens 20).

¹⁵ The 'purity' of Rev. Campbell's oral sources for folk beliefs (see below), as he is well aware, are absolutely in question. It is hard not to smile at his efforts to exclude the textual so thoroughly that he rejected any source material sent to him by epistolary means (ix–x), though in the context of his stated intent of focusing on beliefs then current among his source population this tactic makes good sense.

¹⁶ My own research concerns *the fictive*: that troublesome area of human experience irreducible to either fact or fiction, but which admits and partakes of both. This usage follows Antoinette LaFarge's term *fictive art* for artworks which involve the creation of "realia" (214ff). My PhD research-by-practice in sculpture studies *fictive museums*: hybrid works combining qualities of museums, conceptual art, literature, and hoax, which operate in an unstable transitional territory between the factual and factitious. The fictive as a category is particularly relevant to folktale, which is a genre told *as-if* true. Research by practice has a strong anti-dualist tradition: Clive Cazeaux argues that 'cross-categoriality' is an intrinsic element of the fine art research discipline (111–122).

indigenous nomadic people of the Antarctic, the ‘Whale Rider Culture,’ all evidence of which was suppressed by the Establishment. But in addition to, indeed in service of, this fantastical side to Affey’s researches, he amassed a unique ethnographic collection. Among the more evocative subsets of the JAM’s surviving accessions are folktales and ballads Affey recorded from the men he worked alongside in the British/Norwegian Antarctic whaling industry, during the years before its closure in the early 1960s. Here we find category confusion between the objects of a museum collection, the practice of ethnographic collecting, and scholarly textual quotation; Affey viewed the innumerable quotations he gathered for his museum from texts and people as accessions, equivalent to artefacts. In my ongoing work charting the JAM archive, I came across one such accession, a quotation–folktale–artefact at the intersections of gender and species, fact and fiction, which led to my interest in folktales of the Seal Wife topos, and the mythic sealskin.¹⁷

11 Rather than deploy a scientific argument on the ‘true nature’ of categories – refuting the analogical move equating binary categories of gender and species – this essay examines a cultural knot or locus, a densely interwoven ball of relationships, which attests to the existence of a systemic turbulence.¹⁸ My point of departure is one such locus, a figure that recurs in the JAM’s collection: the mythic sealskin. This sealskin is, with regard to the Dolezal/Jenner story discussed above, as seemingly unrelated as one could imagine to these high-profile American news items. Lying in the littoral zone of the shoreline, the skin crosses categories of nature and culture, human and animal. This trans-cultural, trans-temporal figure or site comprises a concatenated and entangled set of objects, texts, processes and events, which include a group of folktales concerning the selkies: the seal people. I propose this locus is influenced by the same mytho-logic – the categorical intersection of gender, race, species and sexuality – found at the juncture of the Dolezal and Jenner stories. In this sense, the sealskin is intimately connected with political, social and cultural life. It is examined here to unfold relations between gender, species, and the fictive: turbulent relations amid the ice-floes and currents of culture, underlying diverse contemporary debates on morality and the real. The dualist split which erases difference is hence refigured as a knot.

¹⁷ In both rhetoric and literary theory, the term ‘topos’ (Greek: place) is used in a typological sense, describing a structure that is not unique to one text, but can be found in various iterations throughout a corpus or canon. There is an interesting link here with biological systems of taxonomy. Selkie myths of fictive heritage could be described as a genus, like the seal itself. In various local habitats, distinct species of the seal genus co-exist. We could therefore liken the Seal Wife topos discussed in this essay to an aggressively invasive species, which – much like the invasive species introduced by colonization – destabilize an ecosystem and critically endanger local biodiversity. The discipline of folklore as collection, study and – crucially – publication therefore becomes engaged with the biopolitics of diversity. Does the folktale collection, as a managed habitat, have an ethical imperative to preserve and encourage diversity? If so, collections such as Sherman’s are cast in a less than favourable light.

¹⁸ “[T]he peculiar motion of the current among ice-floes has woven the thousands of floating pine-needles into compacted balls, so intricately intertwined that their symmetrical shape is permanently retained. They can be lifted out of the water and kept for years, a botanical puzzle to those who have not been told the secret of their formation.” (Shepherd, 33)



Caption: Affey's 1962 Hospital Diary. The words "Her Majesty's" have been excoriated.

12 Having recovered what remained of the JAM archive-collection from storage in Canongate, Edinburgh in early 2014, I began to explore it: a mass of unsorted and unlabelled materials, comprising 35mm slides, diaries, letters, typescripts and other documents, rough sketches of museum exhibits, and mid-twentieth century ephemera. One of my earliest real finds was an untitled story on a single typewritten sheet, which I have since referred to as "The Silver Cross", folded between the leaves of Affey's *1962 Hospital Diary*. It forms part of a wider trans-cultural corpus of selkie folktales, with strong links to Affey's native Shetland:

It was still early in the season and there was the usual mad rush to fill the quotas. But the whales were few, and the ice floes were setting in thick. One catcher, the Southern Actor, ventured too far south and got herself trapped. The lads made camp on the ice, for they thought she was to be crushed like a tin. All hands set to with the hatchets, the blubber spades, anything, meaning to cut a channel out to the open water, or die trying.

As they worked, the men noticed somethink [sic] near them on the ice. It was a white seal, seeming to follow them with its dark eyes. They had a young man with them called Michael, out on his first voyage, and the men began to joke that the seal was in love, for as it crept closer, it seemed to have eyes only for him.

That night, as Michael lay in his cot, he dreamed a young woman was out on the ice by the stores tent, calling his name. He cursed himself for a fool for hearing voices on the wind, as many have, and tried to get his rest.

The next day, all the channel the crew had cut the day before had frozen hard. The groans of ice under heavy pressure were loud all about them. The men set to again

with heavy hearts, working now not from hope, but to warm their bones. As they worked, there was the white seal again. Again it crept closer to Michael over the ice, having eyes only for him, unmoved by the shouts and jokes of the men. ‘Your seal wife is back again, Michael,’ they said. And some whispered to themselves that it was Michael was the Jonah, whose bad luck had cursed them all.

That night, Michael once again dreamed a woman calling his name. He dreamt he rose and went out into the freezing night to smoke. Outside, by the stores tent, he heard a voice calling ‘Michael, Michael.’ Thinking he was being made a fool of, Michael burst into the tent. But there, just inside the door, was a girl with black hair and snow white skin, naked as the day she was born.

‘Do you love me, Michael?’ the girl asked.

‘Aye,’ Michael said, without a thought. ‘I do.’ And he reached into his shirt, and pulled out the silver cross his mother had given him, and gave it to the girl.

The next day, Michael could not find his silver cross anywhere, though he searched high and low for it. When he came out to begin work, he found the men gathered around, staring. The channel they had been working on had cleared, leaving a way near a mile long to the open water. And waiting in the channel was the white seal. As soon as Michael appeared, the seal turned its eyes on him in a speaking look, and dove down out of sight beneath the ice.

When they returned to Leith, the men heard that the captain of the whale catcher had ordered the taking of seals on his next voyage to make up his losses, and as luck would have it they took a record number of them. A queer thing was reported about that, which was that around the neck of one of the skins, a prize fur as white as snow, they found a silver cross, which no-one would admit to having put there.

In Affey’s retelling-quotation-collection, working on the assumption that Affey himself was not the original author, several aspects link this folktale to a wider corpus of selkie stories. Beyond the fact that the whalers themselves refer directly to the Seal Wife topos (discussed below), there are: the whiteness of the girl’s skin, and of the sealskin; the darkness of eyes and hair; the presence of silver; and overlaid and overdetermined binaries: male/female; mundane/magical; civilized/wild; clothed/naked; human/animal; and land/sea. A potent example of Plumwood’s cross-linking and hyperseparation, played out in a liminal, littoral space between land and sea. We can also join many folklorists in the observation that this and other selkie tales – particularly a subset that describe hunters who give up sealing¹⁹ – betray a deeply conflicted relationship with the slaughter of seals for their skins. Few cultures, it seems, have been entirely immune to “the large, full, soft eye of the seal, with its appealing semi-human expression” (Macdonald, A. vi).²⁰

13 As with many folktales, proper nouns – often place names – serve as an anchor to reality, seen here in the whaling station of Leith Harbour, South Georgia.²¹ The additional name, the whale

¹⁹ See, for instance, “Gioga and Ollavitinus” (Briggs, 255–6) and “The Seal Hunter” (Briggs, 317–9)

²⁰ The seal is an animal associated with innocence – particularly the white seal pup. In Inuit translations of the Bible, the word for seal pup is substituted for lamb, a creature alien to the Arctic landscape. Christ thus becomes the “Seal-pup of God.” Many stories in the selkie corpus also describe the seal as shedding tears.

²¹ As with much mechanised industry, whaling was strictly gender-segregated. Leith Harbour whaling station was an overwhelmingly male environment, the very few women present being wives and daughters of resident doctors or

catcher vessel Southern Actor, ties the tale not only to a place but to a time period, ‘dating’ the action of “The Silver Cross” between 1950 and 1962, when Affey left the industry.²² The tale could, however, be an adaptation of an older version, retold to/by Affey with a familiar vessel’s name. Regarding the question of the tale’s authorship, and its legitimacy as a folktale, we might ask: At what point does a tale become a folktale? How many re-tellings shear a tale of individual authorship? Is it the case that, in some form, every folktale has an original telling? And if a tale is (mis)presented as being heard from someone else, or in a dream, rather than invented by the teller – as is common in oral traditions the world over – does this not make the ‘folk’ category itself fictive?²³

The Seal Wife’s Skin

...because it is not separable from the body, the skin is always being imagined as breaking from it ... [It] is not a part of the body, because it is the body’s twin, or shadow...

- Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (29)

14 Selkie tales have been collected in Norway, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, the Shetlands, Orkney, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. (And, accepting Affey’s status as an ethnographer, there is a trans-national corpus from the South Shetlands.) This is a living tradition, particularly in children’s fiction, and includes Irish films like *The Secret of Roan Inish* (1994), *Ondine* (2009), and *Song of the Sea* (2014). In these, as in the overwhelming majority of contemporary re-tellings, selkie characters are not only almost exclusively female, but display a hyperseparated, dualist femininity (also see the brief discussion of selkies as sex-workers in the conclusion). These works develop a trans-cultural topos known as the Seal Wife. The following paradigmatic example was collected by the nineteenth-century Icelandic folklorist Jón Arnason, as quoted by Alexander Krappe at the opening of his 1944 paper “Scandinavian Seal Lore”:

officers. Jennifer Keys (25) reports that the men were actively against the presence of these women, going so far as to pointedly ignore them.

²² The Southern Actor was operative from 1950 to 1975, when it was sold to the Spanish firm Industra Ballenera. In 1981, she was scuttled by Sea Shepherd activists and sold for ship breaking in 1989, but rescued by Norwegian whaling enthusiasts (Lardex). The Southern Actor now exists as a working museum ship as part of Sandeffjord’s Whaling Museum. There is a certain irony here, given Affey spent the final years of his life lobbying unsuccessfully to have the Southern Venturer – a whaling factory ship, and a far larger vessel – recommissioned as a “Transnational Whaling Museum” to mankind’s whaling history.

²³ This question is also relevant to Traill Dennison’s “The Play of the Lady Odivere”, discussed in the following section, and indeed his entire collection, given that he claimed other ‘outsider’ mythographers would be unable to gather the evidence he discovered: “seek, and ye shall not find it” (Traill Dennison, 173). “The Play O’ De Lathie Odivere” was ostensibly collected in fragmentary form by Traill Dennison over a forty year period in the mid-nineteenth century. Folklorist Alan Bruford argues on several points that the ballad is of Dennison’s own making, merely an elaboration on the theme of Child Ballad 113, “The Great Selkie of Sule Skerry” (109). The ballad thus forms one of many parts of the corpus of selkie folktale – including Affey’s “The Silver Cross” – for which any legitimate status as folktale is highly questionable.

A man of Myrdal, in passing by a cave one early morning, noticed music and dancing going on inside, while a number of seal skins were lying outside. He took one of these home, locking it in a chest. On passing by the grotto, he beheld a pretty girl entirely without clothes and weeping bitterly. She was none other than the seal whose skin he had taken. He gallantly consoled her and took her to his house. Taking a liking to her, he subsequently married her, and they had many children; but she was often seen sitting near the window, looking yearningly out to sea. On going out, he was always careful to take with him the key of the chest, in which the seal skin lay safely locked up. One fatal day, however, he forgot the key and, returning home, found that his wife had disappeared: she had donned the skin and swum out to sea. Our farmer noticed a seal swimming near his boat, and he always had luck in his fishing. His children, too, often saw the seal, who presented them with multicoloured fish and seashells; but their mother never returned. (156)

As with “The Silver Cross”, a place name anchors the folktale to a specific site, Mýrdal, familiar to its intended audience. Many versions – for example Traill Dennison’s “The Goodman o’Wastness” from Orkney – follow largely the same structure, with an alternate place substituted, but also include an additional detail. It is the children who discover the selkie’s skin – whether locked in a chest, hidden in the aisins²⁴ over the bed, up in the thatch, in a haystack, or above the lintel – and bring it to their mother.²⁵ In “Goodman”, rather than merely looking in the locked chest out of curiosity as in certain tellings, the selkie searches for her sealskin whenever she is alone (173–175).²⁶ Also more explicit in “Goodman” and many other versions is that the Goodman (the male protagonist) takes the selkie’s skin with the explicit intention of capturing her. The selkie as passive captive here contrasts with the dynamic role in Affey’s tale, where it is the selkie herself who actively seeks Michael as a partner. However, the selkie’s likely capture and death rather than escape as in the Seal Wife type, suggests that in “The Silver Cross”, the selkie’s active desire does not form a wholly different dynamic, but is instead an inversion of the same basic structure.

15 A comparatively early literary treatment of the Seal Wife is found in the title piece of little-known Victorian poet Eliza Keary’s (1827–1918) mythology-inspired debut collection, *Little Seal-skin, and Other Poems*, of 1874:

Then “How,” said he, “can this thing be?
A seal-skin, and no seal within?”
[...]
The Fisherman stroked the fur
Of the little white seal-skin,
Soft as silk, and white as snow;
And he said to himself, “I know

²⁴ Narrow roofing stones used as eaves in traditional Orkney buildings.

²⁵ In certain tellings, it is a coat, belt or hood rather than a skin which allows the selkie to shapeshift. This shows marked similarities with the Germanic tradition of the ‘wolf belt’ in werewolf folklore. In the version featuring the Mackay sept, it is a hood, hidden in a hay-stack, and unwittingly returned by the servants. (Macdonald, 191–2)

²⁶ The destabilizing effects of feminine curiosity is a common trope and plot device in folktale. See, for example, Caleb Sivyer.

That some little sea-woman lived in
 This seal-skin, perhaps not long ago.
 [...]
 Ah! well, she never meant
 It for me,
 That I should take it. But I will,
 Home to my house upon the hill,”
 (1–2)

Keary’s take on the folktale predates its collection and publication by well-known folklorists including Traill Dennison, James Frazer, and Francis James Child. Keary adds three strikingly contemporary features: repetition of the whiteness and littleness of the skin, both signifiers of juvenile virginity and innocence; that the Fisherman, in eventual awareness of his wife’s suffering, leaves the skin for her to find; and that in her escape, the selkie “didn’t kiss” her children (6, 10). These last two features are – as far as I have found – unique, and give Keary’s seemingly childish poem a strikingly ironic bite. Given Keary’s childhood interest in mythology and folklore, and her location in Yorkshire, we may add the Seal Wife to Jennifer Westwood and Sophia Kingshill’s conclusion that such tales were “in fairly wide circulation by the mid-nineteenth century” (407).

16 The Seal Wife is, of course, an explicitly gendered and sexualized tale; the male captures the female against her will, coercing her into sexual, domestic and childbearing roles. He steals and withholds a vital, magical part of his seal wife, without which she cannot return to the sea or to her people. In several accounts, the man is warned that destruction of the skin would cause her death. As Amy Hoff writes, the Seal Wife reads “like an allegory for abuse and possession”. Jennifer Holladay – protesting the inclusion of Susan Cooper’s 1986 ‘classic’ *The Selkie Girl* in the USA’s Common Core curriculum for early readers – goes further: the book “is essentially about a magical seal-woman who is kidnapped and raped repeatedly during her long captivity.” Most versions make explicit the selkie’s awareness that her husband is her captor. Without her sealskin, the selkie woman is naked – literally and metaphorically – and it is this that both attracts the man and gives him power, making her dependent on his clothing and housing. In many versions of the story, it is directly stated that the selkie woman is a “good” wife and mother. But it is also often explicit that the selkie is extremely distraught, staring longingly out to sea for hours, or searching repeatedly for her skin. A similar line recurs in several tellings, the only spoken by the seal wife: “Where have I to flee/ I have seven kids in the sea/ And seven kids on dry land”.²⁷ This functions to explain any disparity between the seal wife as “good” mother, and her return to the sea and her folk. The

²⁷ These lines are from a contemporary retranslation of the same version (The Viking Rune). Møllegaard offers another version of this Icelandic legend, which also renders the lines in verse: “This I want, and yet I want it not,/ Seven children have I at the bottom of the sea,/ Seven children have I as well here above.” Looked at in terms of structural binaries, this line is even more evocative, with a tremulous balance between desire and rejection, between the land and air above, and the waters below. The lines’ presence as verse in both the versions of the Icelandic tales points to the possibility that these are surviving fragments of an earlier *saga*, and also links to the association between selkies and singing found in many selkie tales.

doubled use of *seven* – five in Susan Cooper's version, and two in Solveig Eggerz's – makes clear that though the selkie provided exemplary childbearing for her human husband, she had already done so equally for an unmentioned selkie mate. This makes clear that the seal wife by no means escapes her reduction to the functions of child-rearing, motherhood or domesticity. The land and sea children are equal in number, implying that the selkie's (super)natural draw to the sea tips the balance.

17 Within the tale, there is generally no commentary on the motivations or morality of the man's actions, beyond the fact that the selkie woman is beautiful, the object of his desire. While ellipsis is common in folktale – brevity and ambiguity characterise this primarily oral genre, providing ideal conditions to spark debate in the audience – in this instance it arguably also points to a broader cultural consensus regarding what Plumwood would see as the discourse of the master, a "multiple, complex cultural identity [...] formed in the context of class, race, species and gender domination" (5. For a more detailed exposition of the seal wife as 'other', see Kirsten Møllegaard). Just as with the exploitation or killing of animals, in the sexual objectification of women and their subordination to male desire and agency, neither the man's actions nor their moral legitimacy require explanation. In Traill Dennison's "Goodman" however, the tale opens with a description of the Goodman's disdain for 'womankind' as "only sent fur a trail tae man" and the consequent warning / prophesy of an old woman that he would be "bewitched" one day (1893, 173). This prelude explicitly references the Biblical Fall narrative, a structure which places the blame for man's troubles – and his desire – on woman. In attempting to reject 'natural' male desire, the Goodman falls prey to a 'supernatural' version of it. A century later, Holladay's account of her own young daughter's response to Cooper's *The Selkie Girl* is extremely distressing in this regard. The three "beautiful" selkies all have "gleaming white bod[ies]" and are distinguished by hair colour: "fair... red, and... black." The blonde is, unsurprisingly, "the most beautiful." Here gender, race and species intersect for Holladay's daughter, who explained this was proof that she (an African American preschooler) was "not pretty": for a young child, the tale's cross-linking of lightness with beauty (male desire) was unambiguous.

18 The number seven recurs elsewhere in the selkie mythos, in a group of tales concerning male selkies that point to a significant shift in gendered meaning. Hoff describes Scottish tales recorded in the nineteenth century alongside the Seal Wife type, in which a woman who was unhappy in love or sexually unsatisfied could cry seven tears into the sea, summoning a beautiful, long haired selkie man to be her lover:

The woman could also steal his sealskin and bind him to her. He would be a devoted husband, and a wonderful father. However, due to her duplicity, their children would inevitably find the coat and ask 'why does mother keep a leather coat in the attic?' The selkie would then return to the sea and break her heart. However, the selkie could also fall in

love with the woman, in which case, he would bring her to the sea and turn her into a seal so they could be together. Many selkie tales are tragic romances, but some are positive. They were also a way to explain away otherwise-unexplainable pregnancies in a close-knit community. Why lay blame on the local boy you love when you can claim ‘the selkie-man seduced me’?

To Hoff’s account of this vanishing ‘Seal Husband’ type, I would add that selkies thus also provided a fictive mask for rape and incest. A darker tale of this link between selkies and the ætiology of mysterious pregnancies is found in the Shetland tale “Da Selkie Boy o’Breckon,” which “concerns a young girl who fell asleep at the shore and was impregnated by a seal.”

She had a son who was half boy and half seal; she was thrown out of the house by her father and was destitute. She had a dream that if she went to the place where she fell asleep by the shore, and scraped in the sand, she would find silver.

The silver was for the boy and his wellbeing and when he went to the sea for good the girl was still as poor as ever but she never again found any silver no matter how much she scraped; but the geo, to this day, is known as Silver Geo. (*Shetland Times*)

Here, the union of a male selkie and female human produces a hybrid offspring, whose place is in the sea. In giving justification for a place name – Silver Geo, otherwise inexplicable since no silver is found there – this functions as an ætiological myth, explaining origins. Many selkie stories are ætiological, the most significant example for our reading of species, gender and the fictive being Traill Dennison’s two tales of Orkney selkies, and the case of Clan MacCodrum of the Seals and the contemporary Scottish folktale “MacCodrum and his Seal Wife”, discussed in the following section.

19 Hoff’s positive account of ‘original’ male selkie myths, and her enjoyment of what she calls “a culture in which the idea of beautiful men was [...] celebrated, and the idea of strong women with purpose was also a thing of joy and beauty,” is contrasted with a later imposition of a violent, gendered hierarchy: altered Seal Wife tales that “seem more like an allegory for abuse and possession”. In Hoff’s historiography, in which a more complex construction of gender is replaced by (Victorian?) traditionalist splitting, where do we place “Da Selkie Boy o’Breckon”? The seal that rapes the sleeping girl, and later pays reparation for the child’s rearing, is clearly a selkie. Reparation in silver is found several times in selkie lore, for example in Traill Dennison’s Orkney ballad “The Play o’ de Lathie [Lady] Odivere”, which emphasises the payment of the nurse’s fee in exchange for the selkie’s child. Here, the selkie returns after six months with one of his hands full of gold and the other full of silver or “white monie” (“Play” 56).²⁸ Befitting Lady Odivere’s status as high-born Norwegian nobility, and the selkie San Imravoe’s rule over the thousand seals of Sule Skerry, this fee is far more than the poor unnamed girl of Breckon receives. Neither of the two,

²⁸ “When the six months were come and gane / He cam’ to pay the noris fee / The tane o’ his hands was fu’ o’ gowd / The tither fu’ o’ white monie.”

however, receive pleasant treatment at the hands of their male relatives: the girl of Breckon is disowned by her father and Lady Odivere's relatives plan to burn her alive for infidelity. In each case, the hybrid offspring of a male selkie returns to the sea, unlike those of the Seal Wife. While our reading of these examples does not confirm Hoff's positive reading of male selkie myths, there is some evidence to support her observation that the gender structuring of selkie stories since the nineteenth century has been undergoing a radical shift. As examined below, the mere presence of a sexually potent male selkie contradicts two ongoing processes – hyperseparation and cross-linking – which accompany the dualist simplification of these folktales during the twentieth century.

Webbed Fingers and Horny Palms – Fictive Kinship and the Selkie

Neither you nor any man here believes that foolish thing. How can a man born of woman be a seal, even though his *sinnsear* [ancestor] were the offspring of the sea-people, — which is not a saying I am believing either, though it may be...

- Fiona MacLeod [William Sharp], *The Sin-Eater* (165-6)

20 Growing up in Shetland during the First World War, John Affey inherited the Shetlander's passionate nationalist sense of difference from both the Scottish, and the British. Selkie stories play an unexpected part in this cultural identity. For all that he was a Scot, the euhemerist theories of folklorist, antiquarian and ethnographer David MacRitchie (1851–1925) about the selkies' origins were enthusiastically adopted. They survived long after MacRitchie had lost academic credibility on the mainland, “with Shetlanders ‘missing’ the eventual conclusive rejection of this variety of euhemerism” (Grydehøj 108). Folk-historical accounts of national heritage – particularly regarding racial kinship – are passionately held constructions, and rarely correspond with the most recent or reliable research; another retroactive traditionalist mytho-logic bent on splitting and fictive racial purity. MacRitchie attempted a systematic euhemerist investigation of folklore, seeking historical – and particularly racial – roots for faery creatures such as selkies. MacRitchie's hypothesis for the selkies' origins was that they were ‘Finns’ or sea-going Inuit peoples, visiting the isles in their sealskin *kayak* and *annuraq*.²⁹ MacRitchie quotes the German revolutionary and mythologist Dr. Karl Blind (1826–1907), stating Seal Wife myths were given as personal genealogy: “Among the older generation in the Northern isles persons are still sometimes heard of who boast of hailing from Finns; and they attribute to themselves a peculiar luckiness on account of that higher descent”

²⁹ This seductive hypothesis is still current outside the academic mainstream, promulgated in both John MacAulay's *Seal-folk and Ocean Paddlers* (1998), and by Dr. Andrew Jennings in a public talk on “The Finnfolk” given at the Shetland Museum in 2010, transcribed on the University of the Highlands and Islands website. Jennings' talk is unusual in the fact that, though he mentions Karl Blind, Walter Traill Dennison and Shetland historian and folklorist Jessie Saxby, he neglects to mention MacRitchie at all. This is particularly unexpected as Jennings uses exactly the same two sources (Brand and Wallace) as MacRitchie employed to make the argument his *The Testimony of Tradition* (1890), quoting precisely the same passages, though in reverse order. (5–7)

(2).³⁰ Here again, we find the entanglement of gender, race, and species present in the Dolezal/Jenner commentary. The Seal Wife structure becomes a mythologized account of family heritage: the sexual enslavement of Inuit women – confused with animals as a result of their sealskins – by Nordic / Scottish male colonizers of the Shetland Isles.³¹

21 As well as becoming embroiled in conceptions of Shetland national identity, euhemerist-ætiological selkie stories therefore play another unusual role: fictive kinship in family heritage or clan origin myths. In the terminology of anthropology, and subsequently adoption law, *fictive kinship* describes voluntary or customary establishment of family ties other than those of blood and marriage: the ‘auntie’ who raises a child, but who – unless sanctioned by the legal status of ‘fictive kin’ or adoptive parent – has no rights to custody. The kinship structure is a ‘fiction’ which becomes ‘real’ through performance, and exposes the split binary of true and false – in this case at least – as utterly untenable.³² Both in MacRitchie’s euhemerist reading, and in many selkie tales themselves, an account is given of a ‘fictive kinship’ with (shapeshifting) animals. Many Seal Wife tales in contemporary Scottish folklore collections concern not only a specific place – the Isle of Uist in the Outer Hebrides – but also a specific family, the MacCodrums of the Seals. Here is Scottish national folk historian Donald Smith:

Among the clan tales are many origin legends. Clan MacCodrum of the Uists, for example, is supposed to derive from a union between the clan’s progenitor and a seal woman. As in most selkie stories, the woman finds the skin... [then returns to her] seal form and the sea,

³⁰ MacRitchie’s argument relies absolutely on uniting the figures of the Finn, the seal, and the selkie. Traill Dennison explicitly denies this unity, stating that his Orcadian “old informants regarded the selkie folk as a wholly different race of beings from the Finfolk.” (173) Traill Dennison’s Orcadian folklore, in seeming opposition to Shetlandic and other traditions, splits the benign selkie from the malevolent Fin(n). Bizarrely, however, he himself makes this same confusion in describing the beings in both following tales as both “selkie” and “finfolk” interchangeably.

³¹ There are two significant links here for gender–species–race intersectionality at the locus of the sealskin. The first is an account from 1654 of the kidnap and sale of several Inuit women, who were lured into the hold of a Danish ship while they were trading for sealskins (Jennings). The second is the #Sealfie campaign of 2014, in which Inuit people took selfies alongside seals they had hunted, in order to protest what they saw as the demonization of this practice by animal rights groups. The #Sealfie which Inuit musician Tanya Tagaq took of her baby next to a dead seal sparked widespread attacks on Twitter, in which Tagaq and her people were described as “savages.” In a curious case of reversal, the Inuit became ‘bestial savages’ while the seals became ‘innocent people’: “If they have the mentality 2 murder a seal like that, they could easily murder humans.” These and similar attacks were followed by a Photoshopped image of men clubbing and skinning Tagaq’s baby (Dean).

³² John Affey’s efforts in this area might be described as those of a man trying to bridge Ehrman’s aforementioned “great chasm” with any and all materials at his disposal; the hubristic effort not only to build a bridge by bricolage, but erect upon it a habitable structure. But rather than an integrative project of rehabilitation, Affey appears to be striking out into new, transgressive territory: instead of healing the rift, Affey cultures new flesh within it. Though Affey did not provide explicit commentary upon “the Silver Cross,” the fact that he filed it alongside the works of David MacRitchie in his archive is suggestive. Did Affey, as a committed euhemerist, consider this folktale to constitute ‘evidence’ for the existence of his natives of Antarctica? At times, reading the notes Affey left behind, it seems as if those speculative natives of the Great White South – a nomadic, oceanic people Affey claimed husbanded whales as the Sámi do reindeer – were an attempt to construct a fictive kin for himself; a people far removed from the mechanized savagery of ‘the whaling,’ and the Second World War. (The link here between whaling and warfare is not coincidental. The same munitions and propulsion technologies – indeed many of the same vessels – were employed in both, and the use of the new militarized post-war whaling fleets devastated whale populations, hastening the industry’s demise and doing incalculable damage to the Antarctic ecosystem).

leaving her human offspring to become ancestors of the clan. Although folk tradition has shaped this story according to selkie convention, there is clear suggestion of a totemic clan animal which reflects the life sources of the tribe or sept. Members of Clan MacCodrum, it was believed, were men by day and seals by night. (42f.)

Smith notes the “folk tradition has shaped this story according to selkie convention”. Contemporary folktale collections often include “MacCodrum and his Seal Wife” (e.g. H. Sherman, 14-15), and it is one of the most well-known selkie tales in Scotland. However, Frazer’s seminal anthropological study of mythology and religion, *The Golden Bough*, gives this same origin myth (132) for the Mackays of Sutherland, referencing James Macdonald (191), but footnoting “a precisely similar legend” told of the MacCodrums by Rev. Campbell. Campbell’s title page claims his material was “collected entirely from oral sources”, much of it “before 1860” on the Isle of Tiree (v). Some of the earliest accounts of the MacCodrums are those of one John MacCodrum or Iain Mac Odrum (1693?–1779), an eighteenth-century bard and folk legend, with many riddles and tricks attributed to him. Already in his time the MacCodrums were known as *nan rón*, ‘of the seals’ (Macdonald, A., iv). But, though he relates several folktales concerning seals, Macdonald does not mention the Seal Wife topos. During the twentieth century, however, Scottish examples of the Seal Wife topos have come to be almost exclusively associated with the no-longer extant MacCodrums of Uist, perhaps due to the earlier association of seal lore with this legendary figure. Smith’s ‘conventional folk tradition’, again, has followed the ‘traditionalist’ dualist model, overwriting difference and complexity. The MacCodrum males’ uncanny ability to become seals has been largely erased, replaced by a simplified Seal Wife story in which gender and species are cross-linked. This recasting of the MacCodrum tales therefore supports Hoff’s observation of the vanishing male selkie, and points to an ongoing dualist hyperseparation: the female, the animal (seals), and indeed the natural and supernatural realms are conflated into a simplified, exploitable identity formed in opposition to Man’s agency as protagonist. As this hyperseparation increases, male selkie characters are excluded from the narrative frame.

22 The tale of the MacCodrums has also – at least in one instance – become fused with another ætiological myth of fictive kinship, but one that might be termed ‘mytho-medical’ ætiology:

In this case, the sign of preternatural parentage was not beauty but an hereditary horny growth between the fingers that made MacCodrum hands resemble flippers. In what may have been the culmination of the fascination with the fairy bride ancestress, the Folk-Lore Society, in 1895, studied magic lantern slides taken of Baubi Urquhart of the Shetland Islands. On the basis of family stories and a seal-like appearance, Baubi claimed to be the great- great-granddaughter of a Selkie captured by her ancestor. (Silver 111)

For Baubi Urquhart, though perhaps not for the members of the Folk-Lore Society, the selkies were her fictive ancestors. Carole Silver’s feminist contribution, however, appears to have confused the re-written MacCodrum origin myth with the “horny growth” from the tale which follows Traill

Dennison's "Goodman" in *The Scottish Antiquary*. In the passage immediately after Traill Dennison's version of the Seal Wife (discussed above), he tells of the pseudonymous "Ursilla," who determines to – as the author terms it – "indulge unlawful love" with one of the selkie folk (175). She accomplishes this by crying seven tears into the sea, as Hoff described. Ursilla is the very archetype of the transgressive female; she is "masculine," "determined [...] to choose [her own husband]", marries across class boundaries, and is then unsatisfied, committing infidelity with a selkie. In consequence, her descendants are born with "web hands and webbed feet, like [...] paws" (176). The midwife "clips" these webs repeatedly, and they do not grow 'naturally' but develop into horny growths on the palms and soles which still afflict the family in Traill Dennison's time:

Another of the same family told me that when, through the growth of the horn, he was unable to walk or work, he would, with hammer and chisel, cut off large slices of horn from the soles of his feet. This growth is by no means confined to those engaged in manual labour. I have felt it on the hands of one of the same race who followed a profession where manual labour was not required.

This curious phenomenon seems well worthy of careful investigation by the physiologist. Pity it could not be traced to the seal; we might then be in sight of the missing link.

Many wild tales were told of the offspring of such strange parentage who had webbed hands and feet; but the foregoing will serve to illustrate a once popular belief. (177)

The family appear to have suffered from hereditary palmoplantar keratodermas, a rare condition which affects several genetically distinct families in Scotland to this day (Pöhler *et al*).³³ Fictive selkie kinship structures were, according to Traill Dennison, "once popular".

23 One can speculate that on island communities with restricted gene stock, fictive selkie heritage provided a powerful explanatory framework for deformity, and recessive genetic colouring besides (for an in-depth treatment of this hypothesis, see Susan Schoon Eberly). Carol Silver's mistake is significant, however, with regards to the intersectional mytho-logic of gender and species played out in the corpus of selkie myths: both species and hybridity are gendered constructions. As with "Da Selkie Boy o'Breckon," debilitating deformity is the consequence of a human female's "unlawful" intercourse with a male selkie. But for the midwife and Ursilla's repeated intervention – which kept the fins from growing "in their natural way" – we can surmise that Ursilla's children would have returned to their oceanic natural/paternal domain (Traill Dennison 1893, 176).³⁴ This is, therefore, a point *right on* the intersection of gender and species: an issue of determinative paternity. Hybrid features are occasionally present in nineteenth- and twentieth-century instances of the Seal Wife topos; webbed fingers are mentioned as the conclusion to the tale in the Irish "Tom

³³ In line with these naturalistic aetiologies for several features of selkie myths, Boria Sax (68) points to the fact that along with "large, wide eyes, which appear human and very amorous" – compare A. Macdonald's description, above – grey seals moult large patches of their skin annually. This forms a compelling link to a recurring detail; selkies are often said to only come ashore at specific times of year, particularly the spring tide.

³⁴ One is reminded here of Dr. Moreau's description of his battle with hybridity: "But somehow the things drift back again: the stubborn beast-flesh grows day by day back again" (Wells 69).

Moore and the Seal Woman” (H. Sherman 14). The Seal Wife’s children are never fully hybrid, however; their place is on land, they cannot shapeshift, and their humanity is not in question. Later generations are much more likely to inherit unusual luck, immunity from drowning, fishing or swimming ability, or dark hair, eyes and skin – the “Finns” of Shetland, or the “dark ones” born “once in a generation” in *The Secret of Roan Inish*. This is a telling instance of the intersection of gender and species, namely that paternity produces species in the offspring: as in Plumwood’s critique, humanity is associated with the male.³⁵ Children of a male selkie ‘naturally’ become selkies, a structure which takes part in the dualist mythology of paternity as the active principle, working on the female as passive ‘vessel’. Cross-linking and hyperseparation therefore provide an intriguing explanatory model for the vanishing male selkie in so many collections of folktales and contemporary retellings, including the gradual disappearance of the Seal Wife’s selkie husband, once a common feature of the topos. Comparing retellings of the older “Goodman o’Wastness” (Briggs 258–60) with the three near-identical Seal Wife versions given in Howard Sherman (13–16), it is only “Tom Moore” that includes a male selkie, who has now become a “brother”, and there is no mention of the Seal Wife’s selkie children.

Conclusion: Splitting Ice, Swan Songs, and Retroactive Traditionalism

24 In “The Silver Cross”, we find a novel folktale drawing upon the Antarctic whaling community’s Norwegian and Shetlandic traditions. The tale conforms both to that heritage, and to a conflation of gender and species, demonstrating no features to contradict what I have described as the ongoing splitting, hyperseparation and cross-linking of this body of folklore. “The Silver Cross” conforms to this trend particularly in the absence of male selkies, but arguably also in that the sole female presences are an absent mother and the would-be Seal Wife herself. Unlike the majority of contemporary selkie tales, the male protagonist is in peril, coinciding with a trend noted by Josepha Sherman: “As people became less fearful of the ocean, the power of the mermaid also waned” (307). Here the shoreline as border zone has been replaced by the ice floe, and it is tempting to read the life-or-death efforts to split the ice as intimately bound up with the dynamics of splitting. The seal’s whiteness may signify youth and virginity, as in Keary’s piece, but also serves to identify the selkie with the icy landscape, and highlights her potential value both sexually and commercially. Michael’s inability to possess the sealskin, and its markedly impersonal fate as company-owned commodity, arguably point to contemporary male anxieties. The selkie’s appearance in “Fae Gone Wild” (2011) – season two, episode seven of the Canadian TV series *Lost Girl* – for example, features a

³⁵ It is important to note that besides evidence of gender-species intersectionality, this is a pseudo-naturalistic detail: the sex of parents in ‘interspecies’ couplings may indeed determine the nature of the hybrid if the chromosomes in question are sex-linked. Such hybrid pairs – for example, the mule and the hinny – are often known as ‘reciprocal crosses,’ have strikingly different traits, and produce different species.

group of female selkies forced into sex work through the theft of their sealskins by a male nightclub owner. This recasting of urban selkies as trafficked sex-workers mirrors the young female protagonists' movement away from the urban in both *The Secret of Roan Inish* and *Song of the Sea*. In both these films, industrialised urban life is depicted as a dangerous and unwelcome intrusion into the female coming-of-age narrative.

25 Kirsten Møllegaard's Lacanian-feminist reading of selkie mythology opens with the well-referenced observation that animal spouse myths are often sex-segregated, with men telling tales of animal brides like the Seal Wife, and women telling animal bridegroom tales (93). We observe here that in contemporary folktale collections and popular culture, a simplified male-type Seal Wife structure appears to be overwriting the trans-cultural diversity of selkie myths. Smith's "folk tradition" and "convention" cited above do not entail continuity with origins. Nor – to return to Giddens' classic observation – should we imagine a purity of oral folk 'tradition' distinct from the 'history' of written scholarship. Carole Silver's discussion of the Seal Wife as 'fairy ancestress' takes part in the trend of typologically reducing selkie folktales to an notionally-original Swan Maiden topos.³⁶ This argument is central to the thesis of folklorists including Boria Sax (229), and Donald Haase:

In its simplest and most direct form, the plot was perpetuated by giving it the function of the genealogical legend [...] As the story was told in coastal areas of Scandinavia and Scotland, she was converted into a seal-woman, who was the ancestress of some local families; and in Ireland she was usually a mermaid. (934-5)

As noted at the start of this essay, at least three recent film plots in Ireland have indeed taken up the selkie, rather than the mermaid.³⁷ In this light, two charming Irish children's films are re-figured,

³⁶ The Swan Maiden topos has clear links with the Seal Wife: a man 'wins' for himself a supernatural bride by capturing her swan-feather garment, preventing her from escape by flight or swimming. After bearing the man children, the Swan Maiden recovers her garment and escapes. While Silver, Sax and Haase all attempt to reduce the mythical sealskin locus to a derivative local adaptation of an ordinary Swan Maiden folktale type, there are many elements that refuse this reduction. Not least among these is that the Swan Maiden "type" is itself problematic: "Clearly in neither type nor motif classification has the swan-maiden been able to find a secure place in Western scholarship: either it is virtually ignored (types) or it crosses so many lines of demarcation between categories (motifs) that it calls into question the usefulness of the system itself" (Miller 55).

³⁷ In two of the three recent Irish mainstream selkie films – *The Secret of Roan Inish* (1994) and *Song of the Sea* (2014) – the central protagonist is a young girl. Neil Jordan's *Ondine* (2009) is arguably a more layered, postmodern rendering of this folktale structure (see Møllegaard for a detailed reading). In *The Secret of Roan Inish*, the plot centres around the motherless girl's return to the countryside without her father, and her rediscovery of her lost younger brother through uncovering her family's selkie origins. In *Song of the Sea*, the girl has also lost her mother, and she and her brother are taken from their grieving father by a witch-like grandmother. On discovering her selkie heritage, her magical white sealskin, and thus her ability to sing, the girl and her (non-selkie) brother are able to escape the witch and be reunited with their father. In each of these tellings there is a strict gendering of the selkie; she is always female. By re-aligning herself with her selkie nature, the young female protagonist is able to take the place of the lost mother and heal a family trauma, often rescuing the male family members. This is also the case in *Ondine* where the selkie legend is explicitly female, and the arrival of the mysterious Ondine is somewhat redemptive for Syracuse, the male protagonist, who plans to marry her at the end of the film. In another inversion, Annie – the young girl who, again, is the centre of the selkie information – tells Ondine that selkies can cry seven tears into the sea in order to remain with a lover on land. The seven tears of the Seal Husband type are retained, as is the gender of the character who cries them (tears being themselves highly gendered). As a consequence of hyperseparation, however, this character must therefore be a selkie according to the mytho-logical of the revised folktale.

becoming retellings of the male form for a young female protagonist/audience. But if the Swan Maiden origin hypothesis is correct, while this homogenising, genealogical Swan Maiden/Seal Wife structure is undergoing substantial contemporary elaboration, it is overwriting the diversity of alternative selkie structures from Iceland to Ireland. Folktale collections and scholarship thus take part in a “double hermeneutic” feedback effect, assuming themselves to stand apart from an allegedly oral “folk tradition” while contributing to a dualist-traditionalist overwriting of diversity (see endnote 17). Given that one of the determining characteristics of folktale as a genre is its fictive ‘origin-less’ status – standing outside of specific historical authorship – an artificial air of timeless local tradition is generated by the mere fact of inclusion in a folktale collection.

26 This is particularly the case in Scotland, where the Seal Wife topos has become linked with a legendary patronymic long associated with seals, to the exclusion of previous MacCodrum seal tales. In this increasingly split structure, where several gendered binaries are cross-linked in a male-pattern tale of fictive heritage – not to mention allegorised kidnap and rape – the Seal Wife conforms with what I have described as traditionalism, rather than tradition. While we cannot join Hoff in her acclaim for the gender politics of male selkies, the process of overwriting that we have been tracing may thus be seen as a specifically gendered erasure of difference. However, making any clean categorical distinctions between purely oral folk traditions and the many popular and literary treatments of the same structures is highly problematic. As we have seen in the case of Eliza Keary’s work, this has been the case since at least the mid-nineteenth century, and likely long before. Susan Cooper’s standardisation of the tale for young children, for example, sits in this “vague divide” between oral and textual. But while contemporary fiction, folktale collections, and novel folktales like Affey’s add variety and difference, they are in the main elaborations of a highly split Seal Wife topos which superimposes gender, race, and species onto a progressively cross-linked and hyperseparated binary. The mythic sealskin marks a point of intersection for traditionalist dualism; a site of sexualised beauty and violence, a locus where the supernatural, the irrational, the female, the racial and the animal are increasingly overlaid.

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The Mother of Elephants: ‘Lek’ Chailert, Elephant Nature Park, and the Gendering of Elephant Husbandry (Op-Ed)

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Abstract:

Often described as “elephant heaven,” Elephant Nature Park (ENP) is a sanctuary located in Chiang Mai Province in Northern Thailand. Begun in 1995 by Sangduen “Lek” Chailert with a single elephant, ENP is now home to over sixty elephant rescues. Tourists wishing to visit ENP can choose between booking a day excursion or a weeklong “voluntourism” stay. In contrast to traditional methods of training and handling elephants, ENP employs positive reinforcement and target training to manage its herd. Although ENP’s approach has been described as “ecocentric,” I argue here that it actually represents a feminization of both the management of elephants and the animal itself, which has ultimately become a key to its success.

Today we celebrate Lek, who devotes her life to helping the elephants of Thailand. With trunks full of love and passion Lek is changing lives everyday and today we celebrate the mother of the Asian Elephant of Thailand.

- Patty Enp

Elephant Heaven

1 Often described as ‘elephant heaven’, Elephant Nature Park (ENP) is a verdant sanctuary located in Chiang Mai Province in Northern Thailand. Begun in 1995 by Sangduen ‘Lek’ Chailert with a single elephant, ENP is now home to over sixty elephants rescued from the illegal logging industry, trekking camps, circuses, street begging, and other forms of animal labor including forced breeding.¹ Here, the elephants wander across open grass, wallow in mud baths, play with ‘toys’ specifically designed for physical and mental enrichment, and – in some cases – receive special diets for digestive or dental problems as well as medical treatment for wounds or long-term disabilities. They are not, however, the park’s sole residents. A veritable Noah’s Ark, ENP also houses rescued cows, some twenty water buffalo, more than two hundred cats, and over four hundred dogs. It also plays host to a steady stream of elephant-loving humans from across the globe.

¹ I would like thank Lek Chailert, Jodi Thomas, and Darrick Thomson for their hospitality and generosity. I would also like to thank Dominik Ohrem for being such a patient and engaged editor.

2 Tourists wishing to visit ENP can choose between booking a day excursion or a weeklong stay; those staying at least a week are designated as ‘volunteers’.² The park has offered a form of ‘voluntourism’ since its inception. Broadly defined, voluntourism (or volunteer tourism) is a form of travel in which participants pay to volunteer in development or conservation-oriented projects (Conran; McGehee; Mostafanezhad; Rattan et al.). Not only has voluntourism generated a growing body of scholarly literature, it is also now one of the fastest growing alternative tourism markets in the world (Conran 1454). Volunteers at ENP pay 12,000 Thai baht (approximately \$400 US) for the privilege of living at and ‘working’ for the park (“Visit and Volunteer”). Because the park is privately owned and does not receive financial assistance from the Thai government or a private sponsor, its survival depends wholly on the income generated by tourism and donations (Rattan 6).³ The accommodations consist of dorm-like rooms equipped with beds, ceiling fans, and mosquito nets. Although some rooms have en-suite bathrooms, the majority of volunteers share common bathroom facilities and showers. Meals are served buffet-style, include both Thai and western cuisine, but are vegetarian in keeping with Chailert’s own beliefs.

3 Volunteers, who can number over fifty in a given week, are divided into teams. The teams are assigned a rotation of duties to help maintain the park and its nonhuman residents. Common duties include cleaning the elephant shelters, unloading truckloads of fruits and vegetables and then washing them, clearing the park grounds of elephant dung and uneaten fodder, and traveling off site to harvest banana stalks or corn. Other duties may involve general park maintenance, such as fence construction or tree planting. Typically each team will receive both a morning and an afternoon task, most of which involve physical labor. One afternoon ‘task’, however, usually consists of a guided, educational tour through the park during which volunteers learn the histories of individual elephants. During this time they are also given ample opportunity to observe the ele-

² In addition to its single-day visits and week-long volunteer (with elephant or dog-focused work), ENP offers a number of other volunteer options under its umbrella non-profit, Save Elephant Foundation (SEF). Other projects include: Journey to Freedom, which is situated in a Karen village that is home to several newly rescued elephants; Surin Project, where volunteers live among the Gwi community in the “elephant village” of Ban Tha Klang; Elephant Sanctuary Cambodia, a project in conjunction with the 25,000 acre Cambodia Wildlife Sanctuary; and, most recently, Elephant Haven, a newly formed collaboration with a former trekking camp in Kanchanaburi. All of the above entail week-long stays except Elephant Haven, which at this point only offers single-day or overnight visits (“Visit and Volunteer”).

³ The prices charged by ENP, it should be noticed, are considerably higher than that of elephant camps offering more traditional activities such as elephant rides. A 2009 study found that ENP’s prices were 10 times higher than two camps in the same region (Kontogeorgopoulos 443).

phants in close proximity as well as enjoy limited contact with them, for example, by feeding them fruit. Volunteers are also welcome to take part in the twice daily snack feedings and almost daily bathings that are held for single-day visitors. It should be noted that the hand-feeding of elephants is strictly controlled. Visitors and volunteers are only allowed to feed specific elephants (in most cases, fully grown adults with mild temperaments), and the snack baskets are customized according to the elephant's age, nutritional needs, and dental health.

4 I visited ENP twice in 2015. My first visit occurred in early January as part of their Journey to Freedom program (see endnote 2 for information on their other programs). I returned again in May as a weekly volunteer and ended up extending my stay for an additional week. During my first week I participated fully as a regular volunteer. Volunteers who stay two or more weeks are far fewer in number and are given separate tasks after the first week. These tasks often include preparing special meals for geriatric elephants and creating mental enrichment challenges for select elephant families. Since ENP is not a fenced property, the elephants must spend evening hours in enclosed shelters. Enrichment helps prevent boredom, provides mental stimulation, and encourages foraging. Essentially, a portion of the elephants' nighttime food ration is arranged in a way that makes it a challenge to retrieve ("Doing What We Can"). Much of my time during the second week of my stay was devoted to preparing and delivering five meals a day to Saza, an elderly female who had arrived at ENP in early 2015. Although both trips were scheduled as vacations, I contacted the park's founder, Sangduen 'Lek' Chailert, via Facebook prior to my second visit. I explained to her that I was writing an article on gender and animals and asked if she would consent to an interview. Although we had met only briefly during my first visit, she immediately agreed.

5 In this essay I situate Chailert's and ENP's approach to wildlife – and in particular elephant – management against more traditional and still extensively used methods in Thailand. Although ENP's approach has been described as 'ecocentric', I suggest here that it actually embodies a perspective reflecting several tenets of ecofeminism. Moreover, I ultimately argue that ENP has effectively 'feminized' both the management of elephants and the animal itself, a move that has not only become a key to its success but is now effecting a wide-ranging shift in ecotourism in Thailand.

En-Gendering the Elephant

6 I began my interview by pursuing Chailert's thoughts on the relationship between elephants and women. My interest in the 'woman-elephant' question largely stems from the observation that female figures have come to dominate the *popular* discourse surrounding elephant conservation, the ban on ivory, and even scientific study. Of late nearly every television program or news story devoted to elephants has spotlighted one or more of the women who appear to be spearheading efforts to save the species. For instance, in 2014 the Oscar award-winning film director Kathryn Bigelow created a short film *cum* PSA called *Last Days* in conjunction with Annapurna Pictures and WildAid. The film, which debuted online in December 2014, presents a three-minute attack on the illegal ivory trade by linking it to terrorism. Behavioral scientist, conservationist, and co-founder of ElephantVoices Joyce Poole is regularly featured on programs and print media produced by *National Geographic*. Finally, one of the most prominent figures at present is Dame Daphne Sheldrick, founder of and the figurehead for the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust in Kenya.⁴ Sheldrick has achieved worldwide fame for her Orphan's Project, which accepts orphan elephants and rhinos, nurtures them, and ultimately reintroduces them into the wild ("About Us"). Not only has Dame Sheldrick published an autobiography titled *An African Love Story – Love, Life, and Elephants*, her life has been featured in the PBS series *My Wild Affair* in the episode title "The Elephant Who Found a Mom." Although the association between mothering and elephant management in no way dominates the discourse of conservation, it is echoed in the World Elephant Day greeting cited above and in Chailert's own approach to animal management.

7 As tourists are transported to ENP, they are shown a documentary about ENP and some of the issues facing elephants in Thailand (Rattan et al. 6). In the film, an episode of the television series *Caught in the Moment*, Chailert recounts how she 'trained' a wild bull elephant named Hope to accept medical care. She uses this anecdote to illustrate what has become something of a mantra for her, "Love can tame anything." With this in mind, the first question I posed to Chailert was whether or not she considers herself to be a *mahout*. *Mahout* is usually translated as 'elephant rider' or 'keeper,' and *mahouts* are typically male. Chailert responded with an immediate,

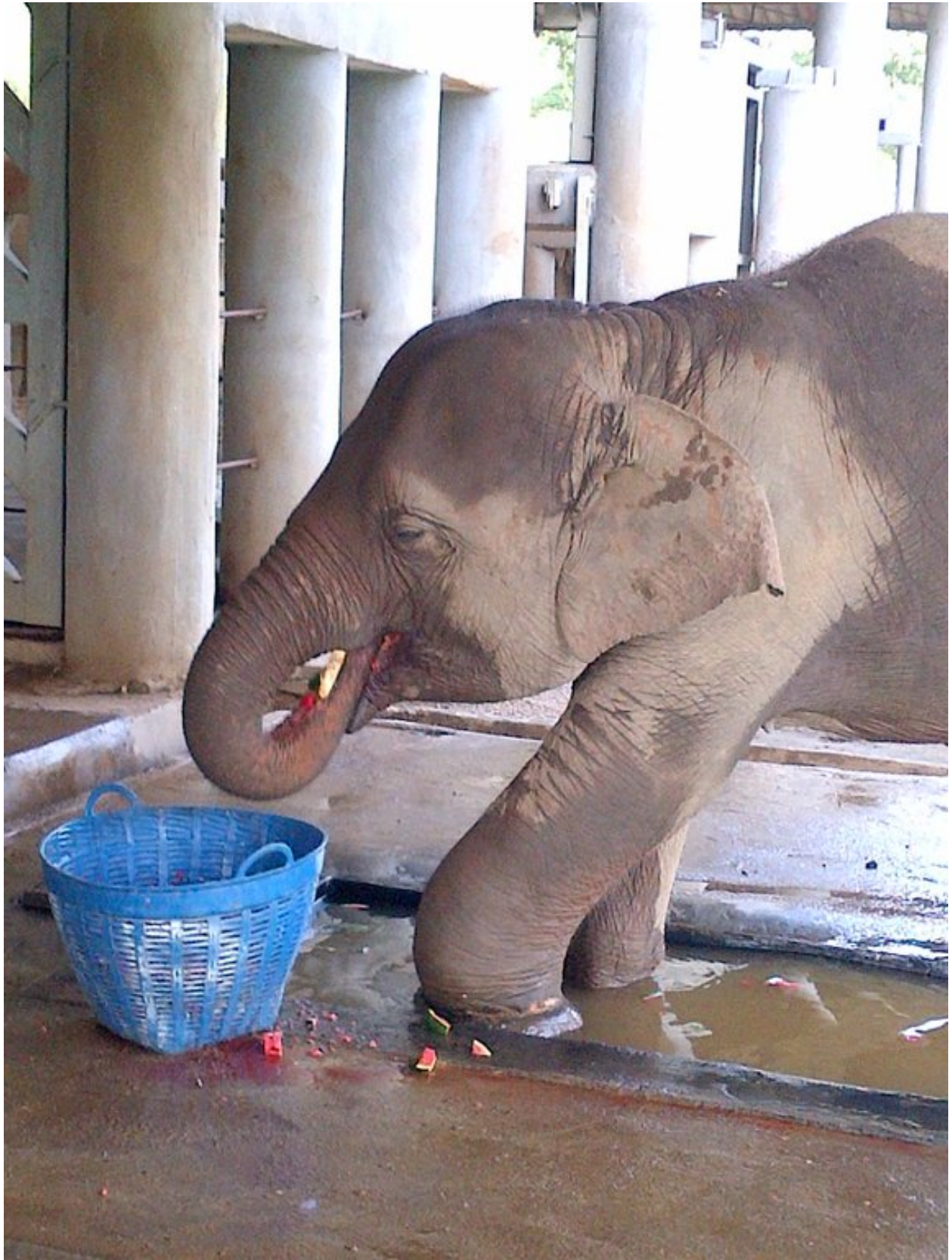
⁴ Additional notable women include Caitlin O'Connell, elephant researcher, co-founder of Utopia Scientific, and author of *Elephant Don*, for which she has recently been touring; Cynthia Moss, director of the Amboseli Elephant Research Project, who is also the focus of several *Nature* television programs; novelist Jody Picoult; Carol Buckley, co-founder of Tennessee Elephant Sanctuary and founder of Elephant Aid International; Soriada Salwala, founder of Friends of Asian Elephant hospital in Lampung, Thailand, and subject of the documentary *Eyes of Thailand*; as well as Lek herself.

“Yes, because I’m like an animal keeper”. When I noted that there were not very many female *mahouts* (for instance, none of the *mahouts* currently employed at ENP are female) she added, “Yes, unfortunately. I would rather a woman to be a *mahout* as well, because women have a mother instinct. This is the best the thing for taking care of a gentle animal like an elephant”. In keeping with her own philosophy, Chailert enjoys an intimate, familial relationship with the park’s elephants. Not only does she know each elephant by name, but she spends much of her ‘free’ time at the park getting to know any new rescues, visiting long-time residents, and has even said that she feels safer sitting under an elephant than walking down a street (Upworthy). At one point during our interview I asked her how she devises her many ideas to keep the park economically self-sustaining. She answered, “I have a thousand animal including elephant, cow, buffalo, everything. I have to make this survive. So all the time my mind is thinking, if one day we have no tourists, what is the next way I can find the money to feed them? I have to make sure these animals, all my babies, will never suffer and go hungry”. Thus Chailert’s sentiments towards the park’s residents would seem to extend beyond that of mere ‘companion animals’ to include a sense of familial obligation.

8 Despite the fact that ENP’s current *mahouts* are male, Chailert’s approach to elephant handling is nonetheless the standard at ENP, and all new *mahouts* undergo training in the positive reinforcement system (“Lek Is Training”). In this system, *mahouts* use food rewards and praise to manage their elephants. In addition to simply directing the elephants – for instance leading them to the feeding platform or back to their shelters for the evening – *mahouts* are encouraged to build a cooperative relationship with them (“Meet the Mahout”). Some *mahouts* take frequent photographs or short videos of their wards and post them online; a few elephants even have their own Facebook pages. ENP also employs a more specific form of positive reinforcement called “target training”. In target training elephants first learn the names of various body parts. They are then taught to present a body part upon request. This training allows elephants to undergo medical examinations or even treatments such as injections or bandaging without the use of restraints or force.

9 Target training is a technique developed by Carol Buckley, founder of the Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee and Elephant Aid International. Buckley has worked with ENP to train *mahouts* in her methods (see Buckley and “Mahout and Elephant Training Initiative” on *mahout* and target training and Ammon on Buckley’s work with ENP). During my stay at ENP I was able to

observe a young male, Khun Dej, receiving treatment for an injury. Before being brought to ENP Khun Dej had caught one of his legs in a snare. He arrived at ENP in October 2014 with an infected wound. Despite medical attention, the wound still requires periodic treatment. The wound is treated by soaking the entire foot in a medicinal bath and then bandaging it. To eliminate the need for restraints, the veterinary staff places a basket of watermelon near a shallow pool full of the solution. Khun Dej simply feeds from the basket while standing with one foot immersed in the pool.



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10 ENP's methods represent a radical departure from traditional elephant management in Thailand. In particular, Chailert's ideology reframes animal ownership as stewardship. I invoke the term stewardship with caution as it has been employed by feminist scholars to describe and critique human-animal relationships that reflect broadly western, patriarchal notions of human superiority over nature. In the west, the notion of stewardship finds its roots in the biblical creation narrative where Adam is charged with overseeing the Garden of Eden and Eve is given as his helpmate. Carolyn Merchant has pointed out that the Christian narrative actually offers two variants of the creation story—in one case man is granted dominion or mastery over the earth (Genesis 1), in another he is placed there as a steward of nature (Genesis 2-3). Yet despite the fact that stewardship offers a more ethical alternative to domination, Merchant underscores the anthropocentric nature of both variants (10-36). Regardless of its tenor, stewardship has remained burdened with hierarchies that privilege human over animal and male over female (Hoffman 18; Haraway 247). Yet Merchant herself is careful to point out that "[n]arratives however are not deterministic" (36). And more recently, Jennifer Welchman has called for a reconsideration of environmental stewardship. To this end she notes, "It is worth asking oneself what reason one has to suppose that the historical origins of stewardship concepts or practices must necessarily determine the forms it either takes now or will take in the future" (308). To her mind, contemporary environmental stewardship should now be seen as a role taken on by individuals "within the limits our prior and more encompassing moral principles, agreements and values allow" (310).

11 It is within this contemporary and morally self-conscious vein that I place Chailert's version of stewardship. Given the absence of the biblical narrative in traditional Thai conceptions of human-animal relationships and the 'special needs' nature of many ENP residents, I use the term to reflect Chailert's interest in protecting and preserving Thailand's wildlife beyond any instrumental value, a perspective that is in keeping with Welchman's recuperation of environmental stewardship (302). That is, although tourists certainly pay to visit ENP, its nonhuman residents are viewed as beneficiaries rather than sources of revenue. At the same time, stewardship also signals Chailert's recognition that the elephants at ENP are still confined to and dependent upon the park for their health and nutritional needs, although it has long been Chailert's hope to purchase several hundred acres of land where elephants not requiring special medical attention could roam without *mahout* supervision ("Elephant Nature Park Halts Rescues"). Thus stewardship in this context also embodies a state of 'in-betweenness' or perhaps, more accurately, 'not-yet-there'.

12 In order to better appreciate the conceptual shift from ownership to stewardship, one must first look to the lived history of the working elephant in Thailand. Based on the 1939 Draught Animal Act, all captive elephants are (still) classified as “working livestock” (Godfrey and Kongmuang 13). In particular, from the late nineteenth century up until a national ban on logging in 1989, large numbers of elephants were employed as the “backbone of the timber industry” (Laohachaiboon 76). The ban on logging – which was in part precipitated by flash flooding caused by deforestation – effectively resulted in the unemployment of approximately 2,000 of Thailand’s then 3,243 domesticated elephants and a revenue loss of nearly 200 million baht per year (Laohachaiboon 78-9). As a result, many elephants were transferred from logging into the growing tourist industry (Godfrey and Kongmuang 13).

13 To a large extent, this move was facilitated by the Thai government. In reaction to both the ban and increased international attention to the elephant as an endangered species, Thailand’s Forestry Industry Organization (FIO) formed the Thai Elephant Conservation Center (TECC). Despite the TECC’s purported goal of conservation, its investment in the elephant remained largely economic, with the result that elephants retained their status as commodities. In his study on the historical development of elephant conservation in Thailand, Suphawut Laohachaiboon notes, “Programs such as elephant riding and homestays became the dominant paradigm of TECC’s elephant conservation activities [...] utilizing the historical setting of working elephants in the north to conserve the elephants and captivate the popular attention of tourists” (80). In other words, elephants were still engaging in similar forms of labor, only now in the context of performance. Likewise the historically entrenched image of the elephant remained unchanged, as such attractions highlighted the immense size and strength of these animals and underscored their status as beasts of burden. The transformation of the elephant into a tourist attraction has been so successful that today “nearly every domesticated elephant in Thailand is employed in the tourism industry with most working in semi-captive ‘elephant camps’ (*baang chang* in Thai)” (Kontogeorgopoulos 430). These camps offer elephant rides and, in some cases, various forms of ‘entertainment’ such as shows in which elephants kick soccer balls, play musical instruments, dance, and/or paint pictures that are then offered for sale (Kontogeorgopoulos 433). Such camps are immensely popular, especially in Northern Thailand: “80-90% of ‘Western’ visitors to Chiang Mai [...] experienc[e] some form of contact with elephants, including tourist camps” (Kontogeorgopoulos 431). In fact, Victoria Turesson, who has completed a recent study on ele-

phant welfare and tourism in Thailand, feels that travelers to Southeast Asia generally view an elephant-backed safari as the capstone of a trip to Thailand (14-15).

14 The traditional method for training elephants for any type of labor is called *phajaan* or *phanchan*. This controversial practice involves either capturing a single elephant or separating a baby elephant from its mother. The elephant is then confined to a small cage or stall, where its mobility is restricted with ropes, and it is deprived of sleep and often sustenance until its will or ‘spirit’ is ‘crushed’ into obedience. The entire process may take anywhere from a few days to several weeks (Laohachaiboon 85-7; Kontogeorgopoulos 430; Ringis 168; Turesson 9-10). *Mahouts* have traditionally wielded a metal *ankus* or bullhook as a goad to maintain control over elephants after this initial ‘crush’. Unfortunately, despite the shift from logging to tourism, methods of training and discipline have remained largely the same. In fact, TECC even offers a *mahout* training course where participants can learn such “skills” as “elephant command words, the fine points of controlling an elephant, correct use of chains, how to live in the forest, and the mahout's way of life” (“Trekking”). As with the displays of logging techniques and elephant-back rides, the *mahout*-training course represents the elephant as strong and even willful. Although the training course is designed as a tourist attraction and thus does not involve anything approaching the brutality of *phajaan*, the language used by TECC is of a piece with tradition. Broadly speaking, elephant training is situated within the sphere of masculinity and represents the elephant as an animal requiring superior willpower and at times violent forms of discipline in order to render it suitable for coexistence with humans.

15 Logging and transport constitute only two uses of captive elephants in Thai culture. Rita Ringis, scholar in elephant history and lore, points out that “commerce, not to mention war, and elephants have been traditionally linked throughout the history of Thailand” (155). As a result, the representation of elephant handling as well as the animals themselves appear to reflect their association with these traditionally male spheres of activity (as opposed, for instance, to their representation in Buddhist art). In addition, elephant hunting and handling have borne links to animistic beliefs well into the end of the twentieth century. For instance, elephant hunting has traditionally been undertaken only from December through March, when elephants are said to be at their physical peak. Ringis even cites a proverb that states, “The cool season is the time to catch an elephant at its best while summer is the best for a girl” (162). Although elephant hunting and keeping may no longer be considered a mystical undertaking, the gendering of the elephant

and its handling persists to this day. Being a *mahout* is still considered a male occupation. And TECC's website notes that they ordinarily use a large bull (male) elephant for riding. Employing males for transport is actually less comfortable than females – their greater height can translate into a less stable ride – but it upholds the long-standing belief that “riding females was considered ignoble for a man of substance” (Ringis 169). Given the popularity of tourist camps, the constant demand for trained elephants, and the way in which elephants have been figured in relation to these activities, it should come with little surprise that elephants working in such camps often display signs of emotional stress as well as physical injuries or ailments due to confined living conditions, lack of socialization, insufficient nutrition, and physical abuse at the hand of their *mahouts* (Kontogeorgopoulos 430; Turesson 10; “Elephant Trekking Holidays”).

16 It is within the context of this burgeoning tourist industry that Chailert established ENP in 1995. As mentioned above, ENP's nonhuman population comprises rescues. Aside from healthy calves that have been born on site, the elephant residents are, for various reasons, unfit for work: several elephants are blind, some suffer from permanent injuries to the hip or back, and four are land-mine victims (“Pornsawan”). Some also arrive severely malnourished and psychologically damaged. While the condition of the animals as well as the lack of the usual tourist ‘attractions’ should come as no surprise given ENP's status as a sanctuary, the line between charitable sanctuary and economically driven camp is not always clear. ENP, for example, calls itself a “park” although it is a sanctuary, whereas TECC offers elephant-back rides along with a show that includes elephant music performances and painting (“Activities”). With its emphasis on the observation (as opposed to interaction) and care (as opposed to exploitation) of damaged animals, ENP represented at its inception what Nick Kontogeorgopoulos has called a “paradigm shifter” (442).⁵ Citing the work of G. Tyler Miller, Kontogeorgopoulos characterizes Chailert's approach as *ecocentric*, which posits the notion that “all species, including human beings, have an equal importance and right to exist”. He contrasts this view to the more *anthropocentric* perspective (adopted by the vast majority of elephant camps) in which wildlife is “valuable only in the context of human needs, values, and desires” (432). Kontogeorgopoulos contrasts these perspectives in the service of a comparative study on tourist experiences. Ecofeminists such as Val Plum-

⁵ Kontogeorgopoulos's article comprises a study of three elephant camps in the Chiang Mai area. In his article he has changed the names of these camps for the sake of anonymity. Based on the description of both the camp and its founder, the camp he calls *Thai Ruk Chang* is, without a doubt in my mind, ENP.

wood, however, have long pointed out the underlying conceptual link between anthropocentrism and a number of other hierarchies and systems of power and oppression (*Mastery*). In fact, Greta Gaard locates ecofeminism's emergence in the "intersections of feminist research and the various movements for social justice and environmental health, explorations that uncovered the linked oppressions of gender, ecology, race, species, and nation" ("Ecofeminism" 28).

17 In her final book-length publication, Plumwood simply and succinctly states: "Dominant western culture is androcentric, eurocentric and ethnocentric, as well as anthropocentric" (*Environmental Culture* 106). Her critique focuses specifically on the inherent centrism of dominant western culture and their dualistic underpinnings—epistemologies that not only enable multiple social inequities but also produce disastrous environmental effects, which have become increasingly evident in recent years. It is well beyond the scope of this essay to trace the mutual imbrications of Thai androcentrism, environmental exploitation, and animal management. It is, however, worth noting the convergence of masculine and human dominance in the lore and practice of traditional elephant handling. Examples such as the elephant-hunting proverb quoted above show not only how both women and animals are rendered as objects to be hunted, but also how, within the dualistic hierarchies of man-woman and human-animal, the female elephant appears relegated to a doubly subordinated position on the basis of both gender and species. Given the fact that such a framework has enabled both the exploitation of elephant labor and the destruction of forest lands, we can begin to glimpse the wide-ranging potential in a broader ecocentric-ecofeminist approach to elephant management.

18 As noted above, Kontogeorgopoulos categorizes ENP as an ecocentric elephant camp. I would agree that ecocentrism aptly describes ENP's commitment to its residents' rehabilitation and welfare. But the term elides one of ENP's defining factors: its emphasis on the emotional aspects of elephant care. I earlier characterized Chailert's ideology as one of stewardship. But to encompass fully both her affect and practice, I would add the term *kinship*, which is implied in her use of phrasing such as "my babies" or "mother instinct". As with stewardship, kinship is not a term used by Chailert; it is a term I have adopted to attempt theorizing the impulses and sentiments that underlie her beliefs and actions. I would first locate Chailert's sense of kinship with elephants in her identity as a member of the Khmo hill tribe and the granddaughter of a traditional healer or shaman. During presentations she offers to ENP volunteers, Chailert often relates how she witnessed firsthand the tourist industry's promotion of both wildlife and ethnic minori-

ties (including her own village) as objects for touristic consumption. Thus her apparent kinship with elephants (and animals in general) would seem rooted in her exclusion from dominant Thai culture and her recognition of the similarly ‘othered’ status of its wildlife. In *Animal Lessons*, Kelly Oliver explores western philosophy’s use of animality and animals. She does so in part to denaturalize human kinship, to estrange us from our own “brotherhood” so that we might consider (invoking Merleau-Ponty) a “strange kinship” with other living creatures (208-28). While far removed from post-Heideggerian phenomenology, we might see a reflection of that kinship in Chailert’s relationship with her wards at ENP.

19 I would also point out that within a historically androcentric sphere such as elephant keeping, the concept of ‘mothering’ offers a strategic and legible language for opposition. That is, Chailert’s willingness to call herself and be called the “mother of elephants” places her in direct contrast to the realms of dominance and mastery. Finally, I actually asked Chailert whether or not she considered herself to be a feminist. She offered a provocative answer, “You know, sometimes I feel a feminist. Most of the time, I never believed about that difference between men and women”. Yet earlier she explained how she has been able to exploit her status as a woman, for instance, to enter heavily guarded areas. She noted, “If you are the man you might get grabbed and asked questions, but they say, ‘Ah, woman it’s no problem, she can come because she is a silly woman,’ so this is how I can get the job done”. Thus despite her seemingly essentialist association between women and mothering, Chailert’s notion of gender would appear more performative than at first glance, even teachable – as seen in her willingness to hire and train male *mahouts* for ENP.

20 ENP employs an extensive online presence to promote their practices and values. As Chailert herself explained, “One thing I have to thank is the social media. Social media is the new word. We have to take this opportunity to voice for animal. This is our tool, the tool for the animal lover”. Thus linked websites dedicated to the Save Elephant Foundation (ENP’s umbrella non-profit) and ENP itself feature regular blog posts about the park’s many residents, rescues in progress, and ENP’s efforts to attract other camps to their philosophy and methods. ENP also maintains a YouTube channel called “Elephant News”. In addition to websites and the video channel, ENP and SEF manage separate Facebook pages. Chailert herself actively maintains personal Facebook pages in both Thai and English; her English language page is followed by nearly 20,000 people. Through extensive cross-posting, Chailert and her team at ENP ensure that fans

have access to a constant stream of media from the park and its many programs. This stream broadcasts Chailert, her *mahouts*, staff, and volunteers as enthusiastically attending to both the physical needs and the emotional lives of their residents.

21 Many of the most popular Facebook posts and videos spotlight one of more of their baby elephants at play. These videos usually contain no narration, but they often include whimsical background music and in some cases have been sped up to amplify their comic effect. One of the most popular “Elephant News” videos features Chailert singing a lullaby to a six-year-old female named Faa Mai (“Lullaby”). To date the video has garnered over 2.5 million views on YouTube alone. Popular Facebook and blogposts are no less emotionally evocative. It is not uncommon for a Facebook post featuring photos or video clip from, for example, the reunion between two rescues, to amass hundreds of ‘likes’ within minutes of posting. Blog posts include titles such as “Now a day [sic], Faa Sai has been changed from the aggressive baby elephant to be the most lovely girl with warm love from our herd at Elephant Nature Park” and “The aggressive elephant, Noi Nah changed to be a gentle and generous lady with love from her mahout”. Another post, titled “The Loving Care of an Elephant nanny”, states, “The nannies at our park come from many different places but when the time is due they volunteer to be a nanny for the expectant calf. They relish their job as one of great importance and their love is so pure and beautiful.”

22 This image of the elephant as a fundamentally emotional creature stands in sharp contrast to the formidable beast of burden promoted by traditional trekking camps. To a certain extent, this characterization reflects the gender distribution and histories of the elephants at ENP. The vast majority of mature adults at ENP are rescues from the tourist industry, an industry that prefers females due to their “relative docility” (Godfrey and Kongmuang 14). Female elephants typically live in family groups for the entirety of their lives. In such groups females other than the birth mother assist in the care of young calves. These “allomothers” (referred to by ENP as ‘nannies’) help rear the young while gaining valuable experience in mothering (Poole and Moss 80, 93; Lee, 278). Since it is not wholly uncommon for elephants to form bonds with genetically unrelated individuals, ENP’s elephant population comprises a number of makeshift or ‘adopted’ family groups. Hence the focus on females stems in part from the fact that most of the elephants at ENP are female. Nevertheless, there is a noticeable emphasis on activities and behaviors such as ‘nannying’. While encouraging a conceptual link between reproduction and womanhood might seem regressive in terms of feminist politics, we might better reframe this move as a strategic

uncoupling of elephant reproduction from elephant commodification. Such a strategy stands in opposition to elephant camps where individuals are denied socialization, calves are seen as a lucrative form of capital, and reproduction can become a form of labor—in the form of forced breeding. I further suggest that ENP’s attention to behaviors such as child rearing should be viewed in tandem with practices such as their extensive visual documentation of elephant rescues. Images and video are posted over the course of several days as gaunt and wounded victims of the tourist industry travel in trucks laden with fruit and banana stalks. Upon arrival at ENP they are welcomed and inspected by the curious trunks of resident elephants. On such journeys the elephant is not merely rescued from servitude, it is reconstituted as a whole being. By highlighting the rich complexity of elephant emotions and the vulnerability of elephant bodies these narratives invite our empathy.⁶ Feminist biologist Lynda Birke has suggested that recognizing our shared embodiment and deep connections with other species “complements feminist concerns with, and challenges to, human oppression in all its forms” (151). As seen in the case of ENP, the ‘feminized’ image of the elephant has functioned as an effective mechanism for eliciting sympathy for its residents and global support for its efforts.

This Women’s Work

23 In a brief survey of key movements in the history of ecofeminism, Greta Gaard notes that in the late twentieth century, “*Feminist* empathy for animals was soon *feminized*, and women’s activism for animal rights was mocked as a movement of ‘emotional little old ladies in tennis shoes’” (“Speaking” 521-22). In particular, although ecofeminist attention to animals has long engaged issues of social justice such as animal experimentation or industrialized food production’s dependence on and exploitation of undocumented migrant workers (“Ecofeminism” 36), Gaard has argued that the animal rights movement gained legitimacy “only when white male philosophers distanced themselves from kindness, empathy, or care” (“Speaking” 522). In other words—and in keeping with the broader celebration of ‘reason’ in western culture and history—emotions have all too often been relegated to an inferior, feminized status along with women more generally, people of color, and even the body itself (“Ecofeminism” 28; but see also Plumwood *Mastery* 189). Yet despite the suspect nature of emotions and empathy in many academic

⁶ For recent work on the complexities and challenges to a human experience of empathy towards nonhumans, see Gruen.

circles, this very same sentimentalization appears to be a key factor in ENP's success, as might be suggested by the park's ever increasing flow of visitors and the growth of its programs. Even since my return from Thailand in early June, ENP has accepted over twenty more elephant rescues and partnered with the Sai Yok trekking camp in Kanchanaburi to convert from a traditional elephant camp to a satellite program of ENP called Elephant Haven ("Future of Thai Elephants"). As of the end of summer, the park itself was almost fully booked for weekly volunteers through the end of 2015. While such events suggest a blanket growth in the acceptance of Chailert's philosophy and methods, an informal breakdown of the park's visitors suggests something far more intriguing.

24 Thus far, no formal study of how gender relates to volunteer tourism at ENP exists. Yet in an extensive study conducted over a four-week period in 2009, Jasveen Rattan found that 59.5% of *non-volunteer* visitors to ENP were women (89). Through post-visit surveys, she also determined that a significantly higher percentage of women were affected by their visit to ENP. In particular, women were less likely to engage in activities such as elephant trekking and feeding street elephants after their visit (84). Since Rattan's study, the gender disparity among visitors to ENP appears to have increased. According to Chailert:

More than 80% of the visitors here [are women]. When I see a man come to volunteer I always go and ask, "Sir, how do you know about our project?" The answer is "My girlfriend recommended me. I come because my wife. I come because my daughter wants to come. My mother wants to come". 15% are men, 85% are women. Then when I ask the 15%, the men, it's almost more than 5% [of the total, i.e., one third of the men] say they come because women recommend. So I can say that 90% is because of women. Some weeks, we do not even have men, only women.

25 It is tempting to relate ENP's popularity – and in particular its appeal to female tourists – to its rebranding of elephant-centered tourism. In a review of academic studies on human-animal relations, Jennifer Wolch and Jin Zhang note that, "Findings with respect to gender differences in values and attitudes have been remarkably consistent [since the 1970s].... [Women] tend to be more biocentric, or oriented towards ecological or environmentalist values" (460). Based upon the largely sociological and psychological literature they surveyed, Wolch and Zhang found that the women involved in those studies tend to be more "humanistic and moralistic [...] more likely to support animal protection [...] less apt to favor lethal methods of wildlife management" (460-

61). Wolch and Zhang are careful to point out that “gender differences may be rooted in the way women and girls are socialized and relate to others” (465) and not due to any inherent or essential difference. Such data suggests that female tourists have increasingly been drawn to ENP through a confluence of their own socialization with ENP’s practices and ideology.

26 Although my findings would not be based on a blind survey or a large sample, I felt that any insight into my fellow travelers’ motivations for volunteering at ENP could contribute to the developing study of voluntourism, turn more attention to the relationship between voluntourism and gender, and shed light on the effects of ENP’s branding. Upon my return from ENP, I reached out to the fellow volunteers whose contact information I had acquired while there. I sent individual messages to each asking, “I was wondering if you would mind answering a question for me. What made you decide to come to ENP?” The group I contacted comprised a mix of women and men, some of whom came as part of a couple, and several who were traveling as individuals. Most of the participants had been in a volunteer ‘team’ with me during my first week at ENP. While the respondents had learned of ENP through a variety of sources, their reasons for choosing ENP were remarkably consistent.⁷

27 Regardless of gender, all nine of the participants surveyed chose ENP deliberately, although their initial degree of knowledge varied. Some based their decision on word of mouth, while several had done extensive research in anticipation of traveling to Thailand. Of those who had conducted research, all four explicitly mentioned ENP’s online material as their source of information. The key factor in every case was that they felt that Chailert actually had the elephants’ best interests in mind. One individual, Jordan, even contrasted ENP’s treatment of their residents with other ‘animal attractions’ available in Thailand: “We have seen so many people (via Facebook) go to Thailand, ride elephants and get photos next to doped up tigers and monkeys and I have always thought it cruel and unethical. So hearing about a sanctuary for these elephants where they are completely looked after rather than abused sounded just right!” Jordan’s emphasis on ethics was echoed by many of the other participants.

28 Emma admitted to a “longstanding obsession with elephants”. She noted that when the opportunity arose to choose an elephant sanctuary, “ENP was the place to go”, as she wanted to go to a place that was “actually working for the welfare of the elephants.” Somewhat similarly,

⁷ All of the respondents were told that the purpose of my question and their answers were for a scholarly article about Lek Chailert and ENP. All agreed to my using their answers and first names.

Hannah engaged in extensive research before choosing ENP. She had read numerous visitor reviews and followed some of rescue cases online. Ultimately she chose ENP because she felt it was “actually ethical,” a place that “truly did put the elephants needs first.”

29 While I would not claim that these responses provide a representative sampling, they do suggest that ENP’s reputation remains singular. For instance, although several other sanctuaries offering volunteer packages similar to those at ENP do exist in Thailand (namely, BLES and BEES, which was founded by a former ENP staff member), none of the participants mentioned that they had considered or were even familiar with those places. This may be due in part to ENP’s larger size, its longevity, as well as the global recognition it and Chailert have earned (Kontogeorgopoulos 433). In fact, several individuals mentioned Chailert by name. Emma wrote, “The fact that it was started by THE Lek Chailert had a huge appeal”.

30 Somewhat similarly, Sarah singled out Chailert as truly exceptional in her commitment to wildlife, “I feel not enough people in this world care, but Lek does. [...] And I am so glad that people like her exist in this world, people who work tirelessly to make the world a better place for wildlife”. Hannah’s response mirrored Sarah’s and even described Chailert as “one of the most inspiring and influential people I have ever met in my life”. It is not surprising that Chailert herself contributes to the park’s appeal nor that some participants see her as something of a role model. Chailert can seem both larger than life (poster-size versions of news stories about her and ENP adorn ENP’s dining area) and extremely approachable. Both online and at the park she maintains a very visible presence. As noted above, she usually delivers a powerful presentation to the volunteers. This presentation spotlights the issues faced by elephants in Thailand and is accompanied by gruesome photographs and film footage of brutal training practices from across Southeast Asia – many of which she has covertly photographed herself. It is not uncommon for volunteers, regardless of gender, to weep openly during her talk.

31 In addition to ENP’s work with elephants, Chailert also discusses SEF’s work with the local community, which includes education initiatives for the children of staff and local villages that partner with ENP (both of which largely comprise ethnic minorities) along with sustainable agriculture in conjunction with reforestation (“Thailand Cares”). Consequently it should come with little surprise that most of my respondents felt that they had made a real difference by volunteering; several even found the experience transformative. Sarah referred to her week at ENP as “the most rewarding experience of my life”. Rosie felt that she had gained tremendous knowledge

“about the politics surrounding animal welfare in Thailand, elephant behaviour and conservation,” but also that the experience fostered a sense of community that encouraged shared values and lifestyle practices: “I met some seriously special people that have actually lead to me having come home and made some serious lifestyle changes and who I think will now be true friends for life (I have now taken up Tai-Chi, I am attempting Yoga and I made the transition from vegetarian to vegan)”.

32 Ultimately, by radically transforming elephant tourism in 1995, ENP seems to have anticipated a global shift towards greater interest in and concern about the lives of captive animals as well as the popularization of voluntourism. As mentioned above, since ENP’s inception several other sanctuaries with similar ideologies have sprung up in Thailand, and several elephant camps have become ENP affiliates and shifted their offerings from elephant rides and shows to elephant care and observation. ENP has accomplished all this not in spite of but on account of their ideology, methods, and public branding, all of which find their roots in Chailert’s feelings of stewardship, kinship, and empathy. More specifically, ENP has constructed and actively promoted an understanding of the elephant, its body, and its care that reads as feminized in contrast to traditional ways of seeing and handling the elephant. In this way, ENP has – perhaps unintentionally – tapped into the economic, emotional, and even the physical power of the female traveler. That is, volunteer work at ENP entails physical labor, and the duties are not segregated by gender or age. Given that the majority of visitors to ENP are currently women, a significant percentage of the wildlife management there constitutes a form of female labor. Yet despite the predominantly female population of current visitors and volunteers, my preliminary survey suggests that male and female travelers alike are being drawn by ENP’s values and methods.

33 As this new generation of male and female backpackers joins Gaard’s “emotional little old ladies in tennis shoes” (“Speaking” 522), and as ENP continues to expand its programs and partnerships, it would seem that Chailert must have inherited something of her grandfather’s shamanistic talents. Theoretically speaking, the interspecies relations that characterize the work at ENP serve to articulate an implicit critique of so many of the toxic ‘centrisms’ identified by Plumwood and other ecofeminist scholars. In practical terms, ENP’s increasing global appeal breathes life into some of their real-world aspirations. As both a steward to countless volunteers and the “mother of elephants” in Thailand, Chailert embodies Oliver’s “strange kinship”. In doing so she gives hope that we might rearticulate other formulations, embrace heretofore unimag-

ined possibilities, and ultimately engage in compassionate and cooperative relationships with what Plumwood has called our “earth others” (*Mastery* 137).

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