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Life vs. Unlife: Interspecies Solidarity and Companionism in Contemporary American Literature

Barnaby McLaughlin

University of Rhode Island, barnabymcl@gmail.com

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LIFE VS. UNLIFE: INTERSPECIES SOLIDARITY AND
COMPANIONISM IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LITERATURE

BY

BARNABY MCLAUGHLIN

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BARNABY MCLAUGHLIN

APPROVED:

Dissertation Committee:

Major Professor Valerie Karno

Ian Reyes

Karen Stein

Nasser H. Zawia
DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the representations of interspecies relationships in contemporary American literature. In recent years, interdisciplinary attention, variously referred to under the umbrella categories of “Posthumanism,” “Human-Animal Studies,” “Animality Studies,” and “Critical Animal Studies,” have called into question the anthropocentric traditions across multiple disciplines. However, much of this recent attention still focuses on animals in the abstract, which is to say that they rarely concern themselves with actual animals or our relationships to them. Even when a real animal manages to penetrate a text, such as Jacques Derrida’s cat in the opening pages of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, that animal quickly vanishes amid the anthropocentric concerns of the author. Through the close reading of various contemporary American texts, fiction and non-fiction, this dissertation focuses on the representation of interspecies interactions in these texts as a way to understand and interrogate the affective possibilities that they present in quotidian life.

This dissertation begins by looking at John Steinbeck’s work and his consistent interests in other species which culminates in one of his final books, *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*. Steinbeck offers an interesting new ethic in *Travels with Charley* that asserts that the solidarity between all species arises from all life’s singular duty to persist—to go on. From here, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye* are taken up as polemics against the biopolitical regimes of biologism and liberal humanism. Through Morrison’s work it is evident that it is not simply a failure of

ethics that lead to the slave trade, but rather, it was the insidiousness of these two ideologies that created the possibilities for slavery. While Slavery has ceased to exist in America, the ideologies that made it possible persist. The final chapter considers the logical conclusion of liberal humanism by looking at post-apocalyptic narratives: Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, Paolo Bacigalupi's "The People of Sand and Slag," Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, and Harlan Ellison's "A Boy and his Dog." This dissertation concludes with an exploration of the anime film, *Ghost in the Shell*, as a possible exit point from the contemporary ideologies of biologism and liberal humanism. In the face of ever advancing technology, *Ghost in the Shell* suggests that the end of liberal humanism will not be an apocalypse, but rather a gradual erasure as humanity is forced to consider life beyond organic species.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS..... vi

CHAPTER 1..... 1

Introduction: Examining Quotidian Life with the Rise of Animal Studies..... 1

CHAPTER 2..... 24

Poodles Maketh the Man: The “Conspiracy of Life” and the Anthropological Limit in
 John Steinbeck’s *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* 24

CHAPTER 3..... 54

The Practice of Becoming Human: Interspecies Interaction in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*
 and *The Bluest Eye* 54

CHAPTER 4..... 93

A Boy and his Dog and A Man and His Sheep: Imagining Animal Companions After the
 End of the World..... 93

CHAPTER 5..... 118

They Never Wanted to be Human: Reconfiguring Species and Life at the Limit(s)... 118

BIBLIOGRAPHY..... 131

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Examining Quotidian Life with the Rise of Animal Studies

In recent years, interdisciplinary attention, variously referred to under the umbrella categories of “Posthumanism,” “Human-Animal Studies,” “Animality Studies,” and “Critical Animal Studies,” have called into question the anthropocentric traditions across multiple disciplines. However, much of this recent attention still focuses on animals in the abstract, which is to say that they rarely concern themselves with actual animals or our relationships to them. Even when a real animal manages to penetrate a text, such as Jacques Derrida’s cat in the opening pages of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, that animal quickly vanishes amid the anthropocentric concerns of the author. Through the close reading of various contemporary American texts, fiction and non-fiction, this dissertation focuses on the representation of interspecies interactions in these texts as a way to understand and interrogate the affective possibilities that they present for future quotidian life.

Jacques Derrida, one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century, claims that the question of the animal has always motivated his writings, although it was not until the end of his career that he focused on the question in extended detail in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, and his lectures collected in *The Beast and the Sovereign*. Derrida states in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* that “since I began writing, in fact, I believe I have dedicated [his work] to the question of

the living and of the living animal. For me that will always have been the most important and decisive question. I have addressed it a thousand times, either directly or obliquely, by means of readings of *all* the philosophers I have taken an interest in..." (34). In many ways, Derrida's admission that all his work is "dedicated to the question of the living and of the living animal" appears to hold true for a large number of philosophers. After all, the human, the foremost concern of philosophy, has often been defined by that which it is not; in other words, the human comes into existence because of the animal other that it can be defined against. This holds true for everyone from Rene Descartes's animals as machines to Martin Heidegger's animals as poor in the world and continues with contemporary philosophers like Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of "becoming animal." Clearly, the question of the animal, which in turn, is also the question of the human, remains a central and pressing concern for philosophy.

In addition to the question of the animal being a philosophical concern, with the publication of Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, and the rise of powerful organizations like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and the Sea Shepard Society (with their popular television show, *Whale Wars*), it has increasingly become a cultural concern as well, as animal rights and animal welfare movements become mainstream. Interestingly, however, is that at the same moment that the question of the animal expands beyond the mere concern of philosophers and into the realm of popular culture, the vast majority of Americans are increasingly distanced from actual animal life. As more of the population is concentrated into urban areas,

combined with the expulsion of animal life through habitat loss and the rise of factory farms, encounters with animal life often only happens through the mediated experiences of literature, film, and the internet. Because of this, critical attention must be focused on these mediated encounters in order to understand our relationship with animals—and by extension, to understand our understanding of ourselves.

While the importance of careful attention to the representation of species in literature, art, and film is of obvious necessity, non-human life has often been relegated to the metaphoric and symbolic. That is to say that the animals (and occasionally plants) have been seen as literary devices simply there for the author to use to illuminate something about the human characters. Without a doubt, it is true that the inclusion of non-human life does reveal something the human characters; however, animals should not be dismissed as if that is their only function. The inclusion of animal life also interrogates, illuminates, and constructs interspecies relationships inside and outside of the texts. In addition, drawing from Derrida's displeasure at the philosophical tendency to reduce the multiplicity of all animal life to the singular "animal," it is equally important to recognize that the animals in these texts are not infinitely substitutable, they are autonomous and individual. John Steinbeck's poodle, Charley, in *Travels With Charley*, is not substitutable with Bob, the dog in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*; the fact that they are of the same species does not eliminate their ontological specificity.

Mary Allen's important 1983 book, *Animals in American Literature*, does a great deal to address the flawed approaches to understanding animals in literature; however, she too does not account for how these representations of animals and interspecies relationships extend beyond the text. Instead, she chooses to only look at how animals are represented across a particular author's oeuvre without extending her analysis beyond the text. Therefore, the animals, while free from their allegorical shackles, remain the objects of humans. In recent years, scholars such as Carrie Rohman in *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal*, Sherryl Vint in *Animal Alterity: Science Fiction and the Question of the Animal*, and even Cary Wolfe in *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory*, have begun to examine what the textual representations of interspecies relationships mean beyond the text. As commendable as the work being done in texts such as these is, they too are often more concerned with the abstract or anthropocentric than they are with quotidian life. In contrast, this work is explicitly concerned with how these representations of animal life and interspecies interaction reflects and affects quotidian life. It is the relationship between the multitudes of life, animal and human, with which this dissertation is concerned.

Cary Wolfe, in his reading of moral philosopher Cora Diamond's work in his essay "Flesh and Finitude: Thinking Animals in (Post)Humanist Philosophy," describes her view of "the force of literature" as being "its *difference* from philosophy, its ability to confront propositional, analytic thought with its own limitations," and not simply a sentimental supplement (which Wolfe suggests Martha Nussbaum, among

others, believes) to philosophy. This dissertation takes up Diamond's view on literature, as something more than a supplement to philosophy, while also insisting that literature is a uniquely productive force capable not only of being reflective, but also affective. Following this line of thought, this work exclusively examines the literary representations of animals and interspecies interactions in contemporary American Literature in terms of their affective possibilities for quotidian life.

It is foremost important to understand that the rise of "Critical Animal Studies" comes in the epoch of Posthumanism. This context is important when we consider Michael Lundblad's insistence in his essay "From Animal to Animality Studies" that "'animality studies' must be seen as a field that 'expresses no explicit interest in advocacy for various nonhuman animals' (497). Lundblad's need to explicitly state that his work (animality studies) does not have an interest in advocacy for nonhuman animals—and can, as he proudly states, "be seen as speciesist"—is necessary to avoid "the risk of ahistorical, universalist prescriptions about how to treat or interact with non-human animal" (500). Leaving aside the fact that no serious scholar exploring human-animal relationships—from Singer to Haraway—offers "ahistorical, universalist prescriptions" beyond recognizing that animals can suffer¹, it is important to understand that Lundblad so needs to make this distinction because he does not want to be taken as sentimental, in other words, as not being serious. Lundblad is not alone either, even among Animal Studies scholars that do take into

¹ This is generally in response to Jeremy Bentham's reformulation of how we think about animals in *An Introduction to the Principle of Morals and Legislation*. Bentham states that "the question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?"

account animal welfare in their work, there is the need to disguise any empathy or advocacy lest they be taken as not serious scholars. For example, Cary Wolfe is undoubtedly one of the biggest names in Animal Studies, yet in his book *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of the Species, and Posthumanist Theory*, he is careful to remind the reader that his work (or field) “has nothing to do with whether you like animals” (7). Of course, no such disclaimer need be asserted by those that dislike animals, they are still seen as being able to do serious work. To illustrate this point one only need to look at the much celebrated work about “becoming-animal” by French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Deleuze and Guattari explicitly state that “*anyone who likes cats or dogs is a fool*” (240, emphasis in the original). They display great scorn for “individuated animals, family pets, sentimental, Oedipal animals each with its own petty history...[which] invite us to regress, draw us into narcissistic contemplation” (240). Instead, they favor, to quote Donna Haraway, “sublime wolf packs,” where “we will learn nothing about actual wolves” (*When Species Meet*, 29). In spite of this hatred for the ordinary individual animal—the animals that we are most in contact with—Deleuze and Guattari’s “becoming-animal” (not actual animal mind you, imaginary metaphoric animal) is ubiquitous in Animal Studies. Haraway continues her critique of their work: “I am not sure I can find in philosophy a clearer display of misogyny, fear of aging, *incuriosity about animals*, and *horror at the ordinariness of flesh*, here covered by the alibi of an anti-Oedipal and anticapitalist project” [emphasis added] (30). With this in mind, Critical Animal Studies, of which

this dissertation is a part, insists that one cannot take the question of animals seriously without first taking animals seriously. This means that animals, real animals (i.e. not fictitious “sublime wolf packs”), must be approached openly and honestly which, in and of itself, is advocacy for animals. In addition, because Critical Animal Studies is a Posthumanist field, it seeks to break free of legacy of Cartesian liberal humanism which insists on a single and indivisible line of demarcation between human and animal—a binary opposition—and therefore, explicitly or implicitly advocates for nonhuman animals (and, I would argue, for human animals as well)². In addition, as will be demonstrated later, I also propose that Critical Animal Studies (and Posthumanism in general) challenges liberal humanism’s binary opposition—the other extreme—biological continuism (biologism). All this is to say that the work that Critical Animal Studies does, the work that Lundblad wants to be sure he is not accused of doing, the work that Wolfe and others take caution to obfuscate, inherently—whether explicitly or implicitly—advocates for the welfare of human and non-human animals alike³.

The fear of being seen as not “being serious” is not the only anxiety that Critical Animal Studies scholars experience. There are also the difficulties of terminology and the fear of anthropomorphizing. I would first like to confront the

² Liberal Humanism is used as a term to denote the post-theological worldview that posits Man, not God, is the center and source of knowing in the world. It is also used to denote a Post-Cartesian world—where Man is not only the center of the world, but the only knowing being, all other animals are simply machines.

³ The *Institute for Critical Animals Studies*, the leading international academic organization for the field, defines CAS on their website as follows: “Rooted in animal liberation, CAS is an interdisciplinary radical scholarly field dedicated to establishing a holistic total liberation movement for humans, nonhuman animals, and the Earth. CAS is engaged in an intersectional, theory-to-action politics, in solidarity with movements to abolish all systems of domination and oppression.”

problem of terminology, which is to say, what is it that we mean when we say “animal” and “human?” Can we have honest conversations when the entirety of non-human life is lumped into a single category? As Derrida famously remarked in *The Animal that Therefore I Am*:

Animal is a word that men have given themselves the right to give. These humans are found giving it to themselves, this word, but as if they had received it as an inheritance. They have given themselves the word in order to corral a large number of living beings within a single concept: “The Animal,” they say. And they have given it to themselves, this word, at the same time according themselves, reserving for them, for humans, the right to the word, the naming noun [nom], the verb, the attribute, to a language of words, in short to the very thing that the others in question would be deprived of, those that are corralled within the grand territory of the beasts: The Animal. (32)

Derrida’s solution is to invent the neologism *animot* to reflect the multiplicity of nonhuman animal life. Others, such as Cognitive Ethologist Marc Bekoff, attempt to erase the indivisible line created by the categorization of “human” and “animal” by including humans in the category of animal—using the terms nonhuman animal and human animal (although the “animal” in human animal is often only implied). However, both of these solutions are problematic. Derrida’s neologism, though recognizing the multiplicity of animal life, is still “a word that men [man, in this case] have given themselves the right to give,” and does acknowledge specificity or the

possibility of vast chasms between species (not just between human and animal, but between animal and animal as well). On the other hand, Bekoff and the others that choose to use “nonhuman animal” and the implied “human animal” too closely approaches biologism—where the distinction between species is effaced. Because of these difficulties, I have chosen to use “animal” and “human” throughout this work with the realization that they are problematic terms. However, as I am committed to acknowledging ontological specificity, whenever possible I avoid the generalized category of “animal” in favor of the particular species or individual name. This of course does not alleviate the problem of terminology, but I am not convinced that there is a solution. In any event, if a solution is crafted, I question whether that solution will provide any greater benefit for animals than what simply being aware of the problem of terminology does.

The final anxiety, of being anthropomorphic, has been sufficiently addressed by Marc Bekoff. Although Bekoff, as a scientist, experiences a slightly different anxiety around anthropomorphism, his suggestion that we can be “carefully anthropomorphic” is applicable across disciplines (*Minding Animals*, 49). Bekoff argues: “Being anthropomorphic does not ignore the animals’ perspectives. Rather, anthropomorphism can help make accessible to us the behavior and thoughts and feelings of the animals with whom we are sharing a particular experience” (50). This commitment to “careful anthropomorphism” is one that I share with Bekoff. Although the risk of speaking in place of the animal is always there, “careful

anthropomorphism” offers the best possibility to render contact zones between our species and others intelligible.

The next chapter, “Poodles Maketh the Man: The Conspiracy of Life and Microbial Ethics in John Steinbeck’s *Sea of Cortez* and *Travels with Charley*” explores how the representation of animal life in these two non-fiction works reflects and challenges Cary Wolfe’s work and offers a way to view species relations beyond finitude. In addition, *Travels With Charley* anticipates many of the concerns that arise in the subsequent chapters on Toni Morrison’s works and Post-Apocalyptic narratives.

This chapter begins by looking at Mary Allen’s chapter on Steinbeck in her book, *Animals in American Literature*, in which she states that “by one means or another, John Steinbeck’s animals are put to death.” She continues, suggesting that “the tenderness expressed for human suffering [in Steinbeck’s work] does not extend to animals—nor does Steinbeck’s sentimentality—as he maintains an almost perfect detachment from their sensations” (115). Allen supports her argument by analyzing the depiction of animals across most of Steinbeck’s works and ultimately concludes that “throughout [Steinbeck’s work] animals exist to be used by man” (116). Curiously, however, she excludes *Travels With Charley*, one of Steinbeck’s final works, in her analysis.

Outside of Allen’s essay, Steinbeck’s attention to animals is widely chronicled. Central to most discussions of animals in Steinbeck is his work with Ed Ricketts and the resulting book *Sea of Cortez*. According to the noted Steinbeck scholar James C.

Kelley, part of Steinbeck's enduring popularity can be attributed to his "non-teleological thinking" and method of scientific observation that he develops in *Sea of Cortez* (255). Although, as Kelley points out, Steinbeck's attention to animals was not always well received as critics often "complained that he was obsessed with animals and reduced humans to the level of animals, stripping them of all the noble qualities of humanity as we know it" (256). Kelley argues that as philosophy moved away from the theological and towards the scientific in the latter half of the twentieth century, Steinbeck's treatment of humans and animals as part of a biological continuum becomes more accepted. In many ways Steinbeck's treatment of animals aligns with his treatment of other marginalized groups and further solidifies his role as champion of the disempowered. However, it is a disservice to simplify Steinbeck's concern with animals to a sentimental affinity with the downtrodden. Instead, Steinbeck is slowly developing a theory of the unity of life that, unlike Derrida and Wolfe, does not depend on finitude and embodiment.

This chapter then examines *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, where Steinbeck begins to first develop his philosophy of life while observing the tide pools and remarks in the oft-quoted passage:

Our own interest lay in relationships of animal to animal. If one observes in this relational sense, it seems apparent that species are only commas in a sentence, that each species is at once the point and the base of a pyramid, that all life is relational to the point that where an Einsteinian relativity seems to emerge. And not only the meaning

but the feeling about species grows misty...the knowledge that all things are one thing and that one thing is all things—plankton, a shimmering phosphorescence on the sea and the spinning planets and an expanding universe, all bound together by the elastic string of time. It is advisable to look from the tide pool to the stars and then back to the tide pool again. (178-179)

From this passage, it is clear to see that the boundary between species is in no way absolute, and may, in fact, be completely imaginary. It is also in the *Sea of Cortez* that Steinbeck begins to think about life and what he called “non-life,” ultimately concluding that the dividing line here is also porous. For Kelley, and many other critics, this is where Steinbeck’s biological continuism is most readily evident.

This chapter will then move towards Derrida’s observation that biological continuism—biologism in his terminology—is not something to be celebrated. As Derrida scholar Leonard Lawlor explains in *This Is Not Sufficient: An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida*: “This risk of biologism is really the risk of a direct attack on the difference between animals and humans. If one raises animals to the level of humans, or if one lowers humans to the level of animals, one ignores the difference that requires living beings to be treated in a variety of ways.” Because of the implicit implications of biologism, Steinbeck is rightfully criticized for the *Sea of Cortez*. However, the criticism can only hold up if his later works, particularly *Travels with Charley*, are completely ignored. *Travels with Charley*, written twenty years after

Sea of Cortez, expands and refines his earlier observations—and like Derrida, provides a solution to the problem of biologism.

This chapter moves towards comparing the solutions offered by Derrida—and refined by Wolfe—and Steinbeck to the problem of biologism. For Derrida, the solution to the risk of biologism when posing the question of species is based on recognizing, as Cary Wolfe explains, “that the fundamental ethical bond we have with nonhuman animals resides in our shared finitude, our vulnerability and mortality as ‘fellow creatures’” (*Posthumanism*, 80). In *Travels with Charley*, while explicitly stating that “one kind of life became different than all others,” Steinbeck also presents a counter vision to Derrida’s shared finitude. Unlike Derrida—where ethical obligation resides in the possibility of death—Steinbeck suggests that it resides in “one ingredient, perhaps the most important of all, is planted in every life form—the factor of survival” (217). Therefore, rather than our ethical bond being based on our eventual death, Steinbeck locates it in our persistence to survive. This radical reconfiguration directly challenges the understanding of interspecies obligations (and relationships) that Cary Wolfe and others have offered. How then do ethics as a practice of life—of survival and persistence—rather than ethics as the possibility of death, reconfigure our relationship with the non-human other?

The next chapter, “The Practice of Becoming-Human: Interspecies Interactions in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*,” will continue interrogating the themes of the previous chapter and explore how species, race, and alterity intersect in Morrison’s work to provide an understanding of the obligation

and the possibilities of (interspecies) companionship. In addition, I argue in this chapter that Morrison's work also interrogates the insidious implications of biologism and liberal humanism.

This chapter begins by pointing out that animals are a consistent feature of Morrison's work—from Bob the dog in *The Bluest Eye* to Sorrow's mystical mermaids and whales in *A Mercy*, Morrison scatters animals and animal imagery throughout her work. The scholars that have examined this aspect of Morrison's work, such as Tuire Valkeakari and Vera Norwood, have approached it from an anthropocentric perspective, meaning that they explore how animals are used to demonstrate the way African Americans are dehumanized in order to justify their oppression. The other common critical approach, found in the work of Greta Gaard and others, is to insist that the animals are either allegorical or mere plot devices. In both these cases, the animals become nothing more than narrative tools to illustrate the problems of the human characters. Unfortunately, these approaches are largely trapped in the traditions of liberal humanist discourse and therefore, insufficiently address the significance of the actual animals in Morrison's work. As the speciesist logic of liberal humanism continues to be discredited in science as well as philosophy, it would seem appropriate to approach the animals in Morrison's work from a non-anthropocentric framework—a framework that suggests Morrison's project is not only to re-write the history of African-Americans, but to also re-imagine the role of animals in our society and the relationships between species, or perhaps, to even re-imagine the notion of species itself.

This chapter goes on to examine *Beloved*, which is undoubtedly Morrison's most well-known work, and it is also one of her most complex. Ostensibly it is the story of Sethe and her children's escape from slavery in the South and the aftermath of the atrocity that Sethe commits when the plantation overseer tracks her down in the North. However, the complexity of the novel arises because it is not simply an indictment of the institution of slavery; instead it is a thorough attack on the forces that create the conditions that allow for such an institution to exist—namely, liberal humanism and biologism.

Beloved is a text that is saturated with an implicit commitment to biologism—that is to say a commitment to a biological continuum. Biologism insists that species is an unbreakable chain that can be arranged into a hierarchy. It would be easy to mistake the dehumanization of African Americans in the novel as being evidence that there is an absolute rupture between Man and Animal with the slave being placed in the Animal side of the binary. However, the text constantly allows the position of species to fluctuate, which suggests that there is no absolute division, but rather a hierarchal continuum that allows for species to be ranked as well as rank variations within species. Biologism also lends itself to the establishment of a biopolitical regime—and this chapter goes on to explore how Morrison seeks a way to resist that regime through Sethe's unspeakable action. Sethe's action can only be understood through the lens of Giorgio Agamben's work on the Sovereign and the state of exception which demonstrates that there is no outside of the biopolitical regime and Law. Therefore, Sethe's only possible way to resist is through what Slavoj Žižek calls

an “impossible act” (“From Politics to Biopolitics, 511). Here the only possible way to escape the biopolitical regime is by an action that the current configuration cannot possibly understand, an impossible act that therefore, creates anomie. It is the unaccounted for and unaccountable that disrupts the biopolitical machine—that creates a momentary stutter and allows for a truly anomic space. The law of the biopolitical regime does not know what to do in the face of the impossible. Ultimately, Sethe’s transgression displays the law’s true impotence in a biopolitical regime.

From here, this chapter moves to focus on Morrison’s first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, and the development of the protagonist, Pecola Breedlove. Pecola’s development is intricately bound to the appearance of two animals in the novel—an unnamed cat and Bob the dog. Both animals ultimately end up dead and Pecola is ultimately implicated in both deaths. The deaths of the animals completely eliminate the possibility for Pecola to develop into a healthy adult and represent a larger structural flaw with ideological apparatus of humanism and biopolitical power. Contrary to Sethe’s “impossible act,” *The Bluest Eye* suggests that encounters with what Donna Haraway calls “significant otherness,” may also open a space to resist the biopolitical regime.

The final chapter, “A Boy and His Dog and A Man and His Sheep: Imagining Animal Companions After the End of the World,” examines the significance of animals in post-apocalyptic literature. This chapter originates from noticing a curious addition in the film adaptation of Cormac McCarthy’s post-apocalyptic novel *The*

Road. At the end of the novel, the unnamed boy's father has died and his only chance at survival is joining a ragged looking man and woman that have been following him and his father. Although the man insists that he is a good guy and will take care of the boy, the reader is left with only ambiguity—there is no evidence that the boy will be safe with the man and the woman. At the end of John Hillcoat's film adaptation however, the ambiguity is removed by the inclusion of a healthy looking dog joining the man and the woman (as well as two kids). The inclusion of the dog indicates to the reader that everything will be okay, after all, at a time when many are turning to cannibalism to stave off starvation, then a person that takes care of and feeds a dog will certainly take care of and feed the boy. The dog then, through its inclusion in the film and exclusion in the novel provides a significant addition to understanding the narrative. *The Road* is not alone with its consideration of animals after the apocalypse as animal (most commonly dogs) consistently appear.⁴ Nearly every well-known post-apocalyptic narrative over the last five decades has given some importance to the role of animals after the apocalypse—from classics like *Mad Max* and *Terminator* to more recent works like *Children of Men* to the popular video game series *Fallout*—animals are integral to the dystopic narrative worlds.

A closer inspection reveals that many narratives are split between competing visions of what comes after the end of the world; on the one side is the even encroaching liberal humanist future and on the other side is the imagined

⁴ Although it could be argued that the novel *The Road* does not ascribe any significance to animals in the narrative, I will contend that their lack of prominence in the narrative is also significant as their absence cannot—or at least should not—go unnoticed.

possibilities of a Posthumanist future.⁵ This chapter focuses on four specific texts (plus the film adaptation of *The Road*) to understand how these competing visions are articulated and what their implications are. These texts are Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road*; Paolo Bacigalupi's novelette, "The People of Sand and Slag;" Harlan Ellison's classic story "A Boy and His Dog;" and finally, Philip K. Dick's well-known novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*.

This chapter begins by examining McCarthy's novel and why it matters that unlike the film adaptation, the dog is effectively erased. Though both works are insistently extensions of the liberal humanist project, the film's inclusion of the dog at the end undercuts the vision of the end—the end of liberal humanism—that McCarthy's novel so masterfully articulates. As scholar Hannah Stark explains: "*The Road* offers an anthropocentric vision of the end of the world in which humans are the final witnesses, and also in which the human is also the end of the world" (80). McCarthy's novel succeeds where the film does not because of his willingness to follow liberal humanism to its logical conclusion. The true apocalypse is not when humans cease to exist, nor is it when Steinbeck's figure of "unlife" finally triumphs over all life, it is when all that Man has given himself dominion over (all other life) ceases to exist and therefore, Man loses all significance.

Bacigalupi's "The People of Sand and Slag," also pushes liberal humanism to its logical conclusion. Unlike McCarthy's vision however, Bacigalupi's vision imagines

⁵ There are, of course, exceptions to this generalization about post-apocalyptic narratives and this insight is based on primarily American works (with some British) that are also well-known, at least within the genre.

a world where technological advances can stave off the diminishing significance of the human. These technological advances free liberal humanism from what Jacques Derrida argues has always bound the human to all other life—shared finitude (vulnerability). With that tie severed, the apotheosis of the figure of the human completes the liberal humanist project.⁶ However, as the Bacigalupi story illustrates, the completion of the liberal humanist project does not result in a some utopia—it is just as, if not more, dystopic and pessimistic as McCarthy’s novel. Whereas *The Road* imagines the apocalypse as the diminishing significance of the human, “The People of Sand and Slag” imagines the apocalypse as the end of affect.

From here, this chapter examines two narratives that offer alternatives to the inevitable bleak anthropocentric dystopias of liberal humanism. The first is Philip K. Dick’s classic novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* which oddly enough opens with the obituary of a real life tortoise, Tu’i Malila. This opening highlights the importance of animals in the narrative. Although a good deal of scholarly attention has been given to the conflict between human and android in the novel, the importance of animals in the narrative has rarely been sufficiently explored. The central motivation for Deckard is not to “retire” (kill) the androids in the novel, in fact, part of his personal crisis is a result of the apathy he feels towards his profession, but rather, his motivation is to obtain enough money to purchase a “real” animal (14). Unfortunately, for Deckard, the only way to obtain the money to

⁶ It is interesting that Bacigalupi imagines that the culmination of the liberal humanist project as a merging of the human with machine when it is Descartes rendering of animals as machines that begins the liberal humanist project.

purchase one of the rare “real” animals that exist post-apocalypse is to collect the bounty on the androids. Deckard’s constantly referenced obsession with animals—he carries and consults an animal catalog throughout the novel, fantasizing about what type of animal he will buy—is complimented by the novel’s other obsession, empathy. In addition to the empathy being the (alleged) marker of difference between human and androids, it is also the central characteristic of the novel’s religion, Mercerism. To be human in the novel is to be empathetic and to be empathetic requires practice. The novel offers many different possibilities for practicing empathy, but engaging with animal life is clearly held above all other possibilities.⁷

In many ways Dick’s novel is anticipating the importance of interspecies interaction that Donna Haraway highlights with her concept of companion species first articulated in *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* and later more fully develops in *When Species Meet*. Describing her relationship with her dog, Cayenne Pepper, in *The Companion Species Manifesto*, she states that they are “constitutively, companion species. We make each other up, in the flesh. Significantly other to each other in specific difference...” (2-3). For Haraway then, the human becomes human not by our opposition to animals (liberal humanism), but rather, through our contact with them. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* pushes Haraway’s observation further by challenging the “in the flesh”

⁷ The empathy test that Deckard administers to determine if the suspect is human or android largely revolves around the suspect’s reactions and answers to questions about animals, such as “You are given a calf skin wallet on your birthday...” (48).

requirement of co-constitutive engagements. What would—or will—it mean when “life” is not necessarily bound by flesh?

Whereas the *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* explores the co-constitutive possibilities from interspecies empathetic engagement, Harlan Ellison’s novella “A Boy and His Dog,” picks up on another concept articulated by Haraway in the opening pages of *The Companion Species Manifesto*, love. The second half of Haraway’s definition of companion species based on her reflection of her relationship with her Cayenne Pepper is: “Significantly other to each other in specific difference, we signify in the flesh *a nasty developmental infection called love*. This love is an historical aberration and a naturalculture legacy” [emphasis added] (3). Ellison takes up this odd notion of love with the relationship between the two protagonists of the story, a teenage boy named Vic and his dog, Blood. The story takes place at a time far removed from the inevitable anthropocentric apocalypse of the liberal humanism and, although some humans long for the pre-apocalypse days, those are times that Vic has never known. Whereas Deckard is bound to the species relations of the pre-apocalypse world, Vic and Blood are free to define their own relationships. Therefore, the story allows for an exploration of non-anthropocentric interspecies engagement that even Haraway falls short of truly imagining.

I conclude by exploring the ramifications of the previous chapter as illustrated by Mamoru Oshii’s anime film, *Ghost in the Shell*. The film follows Major Motoko Kusanagi, a cyborg, in her quest to track down a hacker known as “The Puppet Master” (later known as Project 2501). Unbeknownst to Kusanagi, Project 2501 is

also trying to find her. When the two finally meet, Project 2501 explains that it is a self-aware sentient being that came to life in the “sea of information” that is the web. It cannot, however, reproduce and therefore seeks to merge with Kusanagi as a way to reproduce and populate the web with their offspring. This chapter explores how *Ghost in the Shell* offers a way beyond the liberal humanist paradigm and the biopolitical regime without needing an apocalypse through the expansion of the anthropological limit. Steinbeck’s microbial ethics, which postulate that the singular duty of all life is to persist, to go on, figure into this chapter as a way to understand Project 2501’s ethics and to imagine how Steinbeck’s ethics hold up when humans are no longer the only species that have separated themselves from all others. In addition, *Ghost in the Shell*, offers an alternative to Morrison’s character Sethe in terms of anomie. *Ghost in the Shell* suggests that the impossible act required to create anomie may not need to be as traumatic as Sethe’s act. The anomic space may already be present and the sacrifice required may only be our effort to remain what we are. Finally, *Ghost in the Shell* offers a much more plausible end to the liberal humanist paradigm that it may not need to be obliterated by an apocalypse—it can simply dissolve under the pressure of ever increasing technological advancement.

This conclusion ends by considering the implications of this dissertation on our daily lives. What does all this mean and why does it matter? I argue that the internet itself is an anomic space that, according to the United Nations International Telecommunications Union, at least three billion people access globally and that this anomic space, combined with literature, offers all the productive possibility needed

to expand the anthropological limit and multiply its figures. We may not have a Project 2501 with which to merge, but we may not need one.

CHAPTER 2

Poodles Maketh the Man: The “Conspiracy of Life” and the Anthropological Limit in John Steinbeck’s *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*

Throughout John Steinbeck’s oeuvre he maintained a consistent focus on the relationship between humans and the natural world. In his early works, such as his novel *To a God Unknown*, his focus was largely on the relationship between humans and nature—a focus which is also a significant theme in one of his most popular works, *The Grapes of Wrath*. However, as Steinbeck’s career progresses and he forms a close friendship with biologist Ed Ricketts, his focus on humans’ relationship to the natural world increasingly turns towards the relationship between species. This shift towards exploring interspecies relationships reaches a crescendo with one of Steinbeck’s final works, the non-fiction book *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*. Interestingly enough, *Travels with Charley* has often been neglected by scholars examining Steinbeck’s exploration of the relationship between humans and the natural world. For example, Mary Allen, in her groundbreaking book *Animals in American Literature*, focuses an entire chapter on Steinbeck’s work and ultimately concludes that by “one means or another, John Steinbeck’s animals are put to death” (115). Of course Charley, the only animal named in the title of one Steinbeck’s works, does not get “put to death”—nor does he die at all. In fact, as will be shown, Charley actually prevents other animals from being “put to death,” and in doing so

dramatically shifts the way that Steinbeck thinks about humans and their relationship to other forms of life (animal and non-animal alike). In addition to Allen's critique, ecocritical scholars such as Derek Gladwin, Luchen Li and Rodney Rice, have presented readings of Steinbeck's work that in one way or another lead to forms of utopian holism. Again, however, *Travels with Charley* disrupts these readings with a radical new conception of life—and by extension, a new ethic. In addition to Allen's analysis that insists on an anthropological limit and the ecocritical utopian holism, the most prominent readings of Steinbeck throughout his career argue that Steinbeck's work is evidence in his belief in biological continuum. This chapter seeks to analyze the conflict between the ecocritical scholars that identify Steinbeck's work as firmly positioned in utopian holism and those that position his work as representations of a biological continuum. These two positions are incompatible. However, this chapter argues that Steinbeck was not representing utopian holism or a biological continuum, instead, as demonstrated in *Travels with Charley*, Steinbeck was developing his unique understanding of life and in doing so, he creates a radical new ethic that insists on an absolute anthropological limit between humans and other forms of life. Steinbeck's ethic perceives the responsibility between species deriving not from our shared finitude, but rather, through a unique vision of fortitude.

Beginning with the ecocritical readings of Steinbeck's writings it becomes evident that they invariably end up at a utopian holism that places equal value on everything that exists in the natural world. Though they vary in their approach and

intensity, as will be seen through Derek Gladwin, Luchen Li, and Rodney Rice's analyses, they all ultimately argue that Steinbeck's writings contain an identifiable, consistent and systematic philosophy—one that is based on returning humans back to their rightful place in the world. The human, the animal, and the plant are all equals in this schema. In addition, the biotic and the abiotic are also equals. As will be shown this ultimately complicates the apotheosis of bio-diversity by suggesting that the multiplication of difference itself is the ultimate ideal, but at the same time, this difference does not equate to value.

Derek Gladwin's analysis provides one of the softer approaches to ecocritical analysis of Steinbeck's work as he tries to establish a connection between the characters and narrators and the author's own views. Gladwin offers a narrower reading of Steinbeck than Li and Rice, choosing to focus on a single work instead of multiple works, but reading all three of them in connection clearly establishes a progression of the ecocritical narrative surrounding Steinbeck's work. Gladwin calls attention Steinbeck's early interests in nature by focusing on his 1933 story, "The Red Pony". Gladwin suggests that "The Red Pony" should not be read as a typical *bildungsroman* because of the "environmental subtext" present in the narrative. Instead, it is "Jody's initiation into an environmental consciousness... [a story] of him as a boy who is learning, analyzing, and reflecting upon his own biotic community" (65). Building on the work of Aldo Leopold, one of the most prominent early voices of environmental ethics in America, Gladwin extends his critique of "The Red Pony" to a critique of Steinbeck's over-arching philosophy: "like Leopold, Steinbeck focused on

ecological concepts in the biotic world, anticipating later theories of ecology and promoting notions of non-anthropocentrism and holism as part of an environmental philosophy” (67). Gladwin uses Leopold’s concept of “The Land Ethic” to define the holism that Steinbeck’s philosophy shares. Gladwin summarizes “The Land Ethic’ as being the concept that the “land and its complements, plants and animals, make up a biotic community and are coequal, interdependent parts of a whole” (67). The land itself therefore becomes a life sustaining force that “continuously flows in a cyclical manner throughout all the layers of the earth” (67). So the very survival of “each member of the land pyramid” is predicated on the “inter-reliance and balance of the overall whole” (67). This philosophy leads Gladwin to conclude his analysis of “The Red Pony” by suggesting that the development of Jody’s “environmental consciousness” is only complete when he is capable of “interpreting and evaluating other human beings and their treatment of the land” (74). Essentially, Jody’s journey is only complete when he is in the same position that Steinbeck is in—capable of judging and commentating on humans’ relationship with the land. Gladwin uses his analysis of Steinbeck’s writing as a bridge to connect the protagonist or narrator to the author’s own views to argue that that Steinbeck’s primary concern is highlighting the responsibility that humans have towards the land.

Building on Gladwin’s critique, Luchen Li, the current President of the *International Society for Steinbeck Scholars*, states that “in expressing his [Steinbeck’s] philosophy about the relationship between human beings and nature, Steinbeck brings the tragedy of the land onto stage” (67). Li argues that the “constant

struggle between the human species and land has an indispensable implication in several of Steinbeck's books" (67). Through his analysis of several of Steinbeck's works, Li convincingly demonstrates that Steinbeck is actively writing against the tradition of American literature by invoking "an opposite rhetoric" that challenges the image of "the American West...as a place for people to act on their dominant relationship with nature" (68). Steinbeck's characters often subscribe to the traditional view so that, as Li explains, their "desire to conquer the land" becomes intertwined with "our human instinct to tame and civilize the 'other,' the wilderness" (67). However, as Li explains, Steinbeck is using his characters to illustrate the fault of modern Man's actions towards nature and articulate an opposite philosophy which holds that the "excessive seizure of land, be it for individual or corporate purposes, makes human beings nature's enemy and causes individual and national calamities" (69). Although Li is correct in his view that Steinbeck is writing against the American literary tradition in terms of the rhetoric of the human/nature relationships, the vocabulary is imprecise with "wilderness" and "nature" seemingly being interchangeable. However, the terms are not interchangeable, and a definition of nature (which Gladwin also does not provide) should be established. Wilderness can easily be understood as unsettled land, but nature is more challenging to define. Gladwin and Li both use the term nature to define all that is not human or, by extension, technological—the natural world—which includes the animate and inanimate. Therefore, both the untamed "wilderness" and settled land are contained within nature. In addition, nature makes no distinction between the animate and the

inanimate—the biotic and the abiotic are equals parts of nature—the rock and the dog, the fish and the water, etcetera, are all part of nature. Gladwin and Li both see Steinbeck as attempting to wrest Man from his position outside (and therefore opposed to) nature and re-establish his place within the all-encompassing natural world.⁸ Where Gladwin identifies this as evidence of Steinbeck’s philosophy of holism, as Rodney Rice argues, Steinbeck can more properly be allied with the more extreme version of utopian holism, “Deep Ecology.” As Rice explains, “Deep Ecology” arises out of “calls for the replacement of mechanistic, anthropocentric, Cartesian thought with a new holistic, ecocentric philosophy that values all elements of animate and inanimate nature equally” (31). What distinguishes “Deep Ecology” from other “shallow” ecological thought is that the concern for nature is not based on its relationship to human, but rather that nature’s value is intrinsic and equal to that of humans regardless of humans’ relationship to it. For Rice, philosophers of “Deep Ecology” have not given Steinbeck his proper credit for his remarkable contribution that quite literally allows for “Deep Ecology” to come into being. As Rice argues, “Steinbeck, a man who throughout his writing career was firmly connected to earth, sky, and whose ‘non-teleological’ philosophy provides an important and often overlooked channel to deep ecological thought” (31). Through a thorough analysis of Steinbeck’s novel *To a God Unknown*, published in 1933, the same year as “The Red

⁸ It is perhaps clearer to think of two independent and incompatible spheres—the first, nature, contains within it all the biotic and abiotic things that exist without a conscious creator and two, not-nature, which contains humans and all their creations (technology). Li is arguing that Steinbeck’s goal is to pry humans from the not-nature sphere and place them back into the nature sphere where (according to Li) they belong. Therefore, the not-nature sphere now only contains technology and the new conflict between spheres is not humans and nature, but nature and technology.

Pony”, Rice arrives at three principles of Steinbeck’s philosophy that would later be mirrored in “Deep Ecology.” First, a radical shift in human thinking—one that will require sacrifice—can allow for identification with “primal natural forces” (48). Second, “humans are not more important than any other species” and therefore “maintaining and respecting diversity and plentitude of all forms of life is essential to long-term survival and environmental quality” (48). In other words, biodiversity is privileged above individual life and human civilization. Third, the wound caused by placing humans outside (or above) the non-human natural world must be healed—it is not a utopian desire, but rather, an urgent “need” (48). Ultimately Rice argues that Steinbeck’s philosophy, which began with “non-teleological” thinking, will be extended in the decades to come, culminating in “Deep Ecology.”

As mentioned, the environmental approach to analyzing Steinbeck’s writing and devising a philosophy or ethic from it is the most common. While Steinbeck’s concern with the environment—and humans’ relationship to it—is undeniable, the reduction of his work to a romantic holism, or worse an eco-moralism, negates the radical potential present in Steinbeck’s work. While ecological based philosophies, such as “Deep Ecology” have been critiqued and criticized on their merits—with philosophers such as Luc Ferry going as far as characterizing them as anti-democratic totalitarianism—the point here is not to offer more commentary on eco-philosophy, but to instead suggest that Steinbeck’s writing is more nuanced. It is impossible to present an overarching narrative of Steinbeck’s philosophy without considering *Travels with Charley*. It is in *Travels with Charley* that Steinbeck finally fully develops

the nascent philosophy scattered throughout his other works. Whereas the eco-critical readings of Steinbeck culminate with the apotheosis of bio-diversity in “Deep Ecology”—that effectively removes all value from specificity, from individual life—Steinbeck’s actual philosophy culminates in *Travels with Charley* with a vision that does not trivialize individual life but rather seeks to connect each life through their common attributes of persistence and fortitude. With that said, before proceeding it is necessary to consider the other critics that have recognized the conflict between the totalitarian tendencies of “Deep Ecology” and Steinbeck’s championing of egalitarian principles through his narratives and have offered an alternative to reconcile these seeming contradictions—biological continuism.

The notion that Steinbeck believes in a biological continuum has been present since the beginning of his career. Interestingly, as James C. Kelley notes in “The Global Appeal of Steinbeck’s Science: The Animal-Human Connections,” an excellent survey that traces change from the contemporary responses to Steinbeck’s work at the time of their publication and the increasing attention those works received over time, the early critics argued that this was one of Steinbeck’s greatest faults. Kelly notes that critics “complained that he was obsessed with the animals and reduced humans to the level of animals, stripping them of all the noble qualities of humanity as we know it” (256). In other words, Steinbeck’s contemporary critics often cited his use of animals as evidence of his heresy and lack of reverence for humanity. However, as Kelley suggests and presumably to the dismay of Steinbeck’s contemporary critics, the enduring popularity of Steinbeck’s fiction and the increased

attention on what were his less successful works can be directly to his “understanding of the evolutionary thread that binds together all living things” (256). Kelley continues, “The ‘animalizing tendencies’ of John Steinbeck are becoming rather fashionable, and this contributes to his continued popularity” (256-57). The “animalizing tendencies” that are becoming “fashionable” are a result of the increased willingness to accept a biological continuum. Kelley emphasizes this stating that while “humans may sometimes be distinguished from animals by our desire to understand the thoughts of others, our sense of morality, our facility with language or even our understanding of death, a good deal of scholarly activity seems to be converging on the idea of a continuum” (263). Though opposed to Mary Allen’s understanding of animals in Steinbeck’s work—the notion of a biological continuum as central to Steinbeck’s philosophy is prominent and seemingly supported by his work.

Interestingly enough, much like the ecocritical readings of Steinbeck, the biological continuum readings are largely centered on his early works and largely ignore *Travels With Charley*. Though the latter is less focused on *To a God Unknown* and more focused on *Cannery Row*—the two approaches share the *Log from the Sea of Cortez* as a foundational text (which Allen also uses to ground her argument against a continuum). Three important aspects of the *Log from the Sea of Cortez* are utilized as evidence of Steinbeck’s belief in a biological continuum: Steinbeck observation of a tide pool, group-man theory, and the concept of utility. The latter

two are both dependent on the importance of the tide pool—or perhaps it is better to say that both arise out of the tide pool.

The tide pool metaphor is undoubtedly one of Steinbeck's most important and most discussed. Comparing himself and Ed Ricketts to biologists that are only interested in the "rarity" and uniqueness of an animal, he states that their "interest lay in the in the relationships of animal to animal" (178). This comparison leads him to contemplate the tide pool and life in general:

If one observes in this relational sense, it seems apparent that species are only commas in a sentence, that each species is at once the point and the base of a pyramid, that all life is relational to the point where an Einsteinian relativity seems to emerge. And then not only the meaning but the feeling about species grows misty. One merges into another, groups melt into ecological groups until the time when what we know as life meets and enters what we think of as non-life: barnacle and rock, rock and earth, earth and tree, tree and rain and air. And the units nestle into the whole and are inseparable from it. Then one can come back to the microscope and the tide pool and the aquarium. But the little animals are found to be changed, no longer set apart and alone. (178)

The evidence of biological continuism is readily apparent here. It is also easy to see how this passage could be interpreted as ecological holism with the blurring between

biotic (the barnacle) and the abiotic (the rock). Steinbeck continues his meditation by incorporating the religious and mystic:

And it is a strange thing that most of the feeling we call religious, most of the mystical outcrying which is one of the most prized and used and desired reactions of our species, is really the understanding and the attempt to say that man is related to the whole thing, related inextricably to all reality, known and unknowable...knowledge that all things are one all things— plankton, a shimmering phosphorescence on the sea and the spinning planets and an expanding universe, all bound together by the elastic string of time. It is advisable to look from the tide pool to the stars and then back to the tide pool again.

(178-79)

The final sentence, the call to look from the tide pool to the stars and then back to the tide pool, extends Steinbeck's metaphor from the earth to the heavens. The tide pool is thus a microcosm of the macrocosm that is earth—the earth is thus a microcosm of the macrocosm that is the universe. Certainly the elegance of Steinbeck's prose enhances the effect of his observation and lures one towards some form of cosmic unity—a cosmic holism. Indeed, the group-man theory, which Josephine Levy defines as the concept that "any individual is also part of a larger life form," would suggest the possibility of infinite expansion—the individual is part of the community, the community is part of the species, and so on and so forth until everything is part of everything else (67). Again this seems to lead to holism;

however, what distinguishes the biological continuum readings from the ecological readings is value and utility. Holism as represented by Deep Ecology privileges only diversity, whereas biological continuum understands value and utility. Valuing difference for difference sake, as Deep Ecology does, is as useless as the biologists that Steinbeck dismisses that only value rarity. What matters for biological continuism then is understanding the relationship “of animal to animal,” while also factoring in utility. There is no apotheosis of diversity in the biological continuum and therefore, though all life is linked—the possibility of a hierarchy remains. Whereas utopian holism in its furthest extension, “Deep Ecology,” grants no value distinction between lifeforms, biological continuism allows for the privileging of certain beings over others. Essentially, utopian holism argues that between the various forms of life, there are only differences of kind, whereas biological continuism argues that there are differences in degree between lifeforms.⁹

Gregory MacDonald highlights the importance of utility and understanding “relationships” in his article, “Different Perspectives from the Sea of Cortez,” by drawing attention to the discrepancy between many readers and Steinbeck’s reactions to Japanese shrimp boats. MacDonald assumes that “most readers of *The Log* have been saddened—if not horrified—to hear Steinbeck’s account of the Japanese Shrimp fishing operation in the upper Sea of Cortez in 1940” (91). The Japanese were trawling the ocean floor for shrimp, which of course results in the

⁹ This is also one of the more concerning aspects of biological continuism. Without an absolute break between species, it is possible to articulate dangerous ethnocentric arguments about difference of degree, rather than of kind, between groups within the same species. In other words, it opens up the possibility of not seeing all humans as human—as will be demonstrated in the proceeding chapters.

death of everything else in the area. Since the Japanese were only interested in the shrimp, everything else, now dead, was thrown back into to the water. As MacDonald notes, “Steinbeck did not view the wholesale destruction of marine life” as the tragedy that it was because he believed “that nothing would be wasted as it made its way down the food chain” (91). MacDonald points to the following passage in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*:

To Tiny the fisherman, having as his function not only the catching of fish but the presumption that they would be eaten by humans, the Japanese were wasteful. And in that picture he was very correct. But all the fish actually were eaten; if any small parts were missed by the birds they were taken by the detritus-eaters, the worms and cucumbers. And what they missed was reduced by the bacteria. What was the fisherman’s loss was a gain to another group. We tried to say that in the macrocosm nothing is wasted, the equation always balances. The elements which the fish elaborated into an individuated physical organism, a microcosm, go back again into the undifferentiated macrocosm which is the great reservoir. There is not, nor can there be, any actual waste, but simply varying forms of energy. (217-18)

So what his fishermen shipmates perceive as wasteful because they view fish only in their utility for humans, Steinbeck does not see as wasteful because other forms of life will benefit from the barrels of death being dumped back into the sea. Unlike like

the holist or deep ecologists who prize only diversity, Steinbeck here is praising utility above all. The “wholesale destruction of marine life” is acceptable because the deaths have a use—to provide food for other species. MacDonald does not quote the rest of the passage, which continues:

To each group, of course, there must be waste —the dead fish to man, the broken pieces to gulls, the bones to some and the scales to others— but to the whole, there is no waste. The great organism, Life, takes it all and uses it all. The large picture is always clear and the smaller can be clear— the picture of eater and eaten. And the large equilibrium of the life of a given animal is postulated on the presence of abundant larvae of just such forms as itself for food. Nothing is wasted; “no star is lost.” (218)

Again, the beauty of Steinbeck’s rhetoric (“the great organism”) leads one to feel an affinity with some sort of cosmic holism—but when we consider his focus on the “relationships” between species, it becomes evident that he is speaking of a continuum, in which each species blends into the next with no abrupt ruptures. Therefore, while a biological continuum does place humans on the same plane as animals, it does not maintain the same reverence for difference that deep ecology and holism. In other words, difference itself is no longer the only holder of value, instead, the significance of the difference between lifeforms is the determiner of individual value. Instead of the apotheosis of biodiversity that is found in utopian holism and the only goal being that of maximizing difference, biological continuism

allows for an ordering of species, where some species are inevitably more valuable than others. If the last pig alive could keep a human family from starving to death, then the human family is not ethically obligated to refrain from eating that pig to maximize difference. The ethical relationship then is not one of preventing death or of minimal impact, but instead of usefulness and purposefulness. This is clearly evident when they harpoon a sea-turtle and are “able to observe the tender hearts of our crew.” After harpooning the turtle and bringing it on board the ship, Tiny, the crew member responsible for the harpooning was “seized” by “remorse” (38). The turtle is finally decapitated with an axe and as a “large quantity of very red blood poured from the trunk of the neck” and the “flippers waved frantically,” Steinbeck is “eager to examine this turtle” and therefore, “put[s] Tiny’s emotion aside for the moment” (38). Steinbeck does not possess any of the sentimental emotions towards the turtle that Tiny and the other crew members do. There is nothing unethical—nothing worth mourning—in this event.

Both utopian holism (“cosmic unity”) and the notion of a biological continuum are ethically dubious because of the precarious position that they place human life in when followed to their logical extension—for utopian holism it is the apotheosis of biodiversity which renders individual life valueless and for biological continuism it the possibility of ordering within species, the possibility of drawing a distinction of degree within species. Mary Allen, on the other hand, presents a unique reading of Steinbeck that argues that the tide pool and the turtle scene are actually evidence

that a biological continuum does not exist in Steinbeck's work.¹⁰ Allen states that despite the concept of a "cosmic unity" pervading the work, "the central image of a biological universe, the tide pool, is devoid of the humanity that Steinbeck makes the basis for union in human society, a humanity his people do not extend to animals" (116). Therefore, in Steinbeck's philosophy, "animals exist to be used by man" (116). Allen is breaking with both ecological holism ("cosmic unity") and the notion of a biological continuum to reinstate an absolute anthropological limit between humans and animals. There is the animal world, represented by the life in the tide pool, and then there is the observer of the tide pool—separate and distinct, the human. Allen concludes:

Thus animals fall under the dominion of men, who kill them with skill and detachment, out of necessity and for amusement. They are rarely considered to have sensations. While human dignity depends upon ascendance over the creatures, it is very often boredom and gratification in power that lead to the many deaths in Steinbeck's animal kingdom. It serves him well, allowing a freedom to enjoy blood that would not be his in a world limited to man. (133)

Allen's reading has some significant flaws, however, her work is extremely important because she is able to pry Steinbeck from the hands of the utopian holist and she

¹⁰ Mary Allen is a particularly important scholar to consider because her book, *Animals in American Literature*, is one of the first scholarly works to specifically attempt to analyze animals across the entire oeuvre of various American authors. Unlike other scholars that approach interspecies analysis by examining how the animals are metaphoric devices for human characters, Allen wants to understand the animals on their own terms and draw her conclusions based on their treatment in the writings. Allen is much more in line with contemporary Animal Studies in her scholarly approach and interestingly, it is with Steinbeck that she presents the harshest reading.

rightfully rescues his philosophy from the risks of biological continuism. With that said, Allen's essay has some significant internal shortcomings—the most glaring being her implicit implication of the “human dignity thesis” that James C. Kelley identifies at the heart of the early negative critiques of Steinbeck. Kelley argues that this thesis “argues in favor of a separate and, of course, superior role of humans in the cosmos” (258). Kelley identifies both a religious version of the thesis, which claims supremacy because “humans are created in the image of God,” and a secular version, which argues that “humans are special because of their unique rationality” (258). When Allen claims that “human dignity depends upon ascendance over the creatures” she is invoking this thesis. Of course, the problem with that is that Darwinism—of which Steinbeck is clearly a student of—completely undermines the “the human dignity thesis.” Indeed, considering the criticisms that Steinbeck received early in his career, it was largely his willingness to undermine this thesis that provoked such hostilities. Therefore, while Allen is correct in her notion against a biological continuism in Steinbeck's work, her conclusion on why this is so is inaccurate and this is largely the result of her locating the evidence for his anti-continuism only in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*.

At the time that Steinbeck was writing *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, a nascent ethic does indeed seem to be leaning towards the notion of a biological continuism. However, while Allen is correct to sense a hesitation to fully commit to continuism in Steinbeck's writing, it is not until he writes *Travels with Charley* that he is able to fully resolve the conflict. Steinbeck's reluctance to subscribe fully to

biological continuism, though never explicitly acknowledged, likely stems from an awareness of the risk that comes from fully dissolving the anthropological limit—the limit that separates humans from animals.

French philosopher Jacques Derrida also grapples with the problem of attacking the anthropological limit during his ten hour address to the 1997 Cerisy conference, later published under the title *The Animal That Therefore I am*. Derrida, recognizing that his address, by attacking the anthropological limit, could be seen as invoking a biological continuism—much like Steinbeck’s critics claim of his work—explicitly addresses the issue insisting on his innocence. Derrida states that he has “never believed in some homogeneous continuity between what calls *itself* man and what *he* calls the animal. I am not about to begin so now” (30). Indeed, Derrida insists that it is impossible for anyone to deny the limit that separates the human and the animal and that one should be suspicious of anyone that invokes a continuism, stating:

When that cause or interest seeks to profit from what it simplistically suspects to be a biologicistic continuism, whose sinister connotations we are well aware of, or more generally to profit from what is suspected as a geneticism that one might wish to associate with this scatterbrained accusation of continuism, at that point the undertaking becomes in any case so aberrant that it neither calls for nor, it seems to me, deserves any direct discussion on my part. (30)

Although Derrida assumes his audience is “well aware” of the “sinister connotations” of biological continuism it may not be immediately evident. Leonard Lawlor clarifies in his book on Derrida’s talk, *This Is Not Sufficient: An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida*, that “if one raises animals to the level of humans, or if one lowers humans to the level of animals, one ignores the difference that requires living beings to be treated in a variety of ways.” Essentially, the “sinister connotations” of biological continuism are that under such a regime every imaginable violence becomes permissible. Steinbeck, with his obvious concern for the downtrodden, seems attuned to this possibility as is evident by his reluctance to throw Man into the tide pool with all other life. However, it is not until *Travels with Charley* that Steinbeck articulates a forceful dismissal of biological continuism and offers an alternative attack on the anthropological limit.

Travels with Charley: In Search of America is a non-fiction travelogue that recounts Steinbeck’s cross-country road trip in the later years of his life.¹¹ When Steinbeck and Charley make their way through the South the importance of the anthropological limit become apparent. As they make their way across Texas towards Louisiana they stop at a gas station and the attendant remarks, “Hey, it’s a dog! I thought you had a nigger in there” (182). Steinbeck continues “And he laughed

¹¹ Bill Steigerwald, a freelance journalist, publish a book entitled *Dogging Steinbeck: Discovering America and Exposing the Truth about 'Travels With Charley'*, which claims to expose Steinbeck’s narrative as a complete fraud. Steigerwald rests his claim on his own attempt to recreate Steinbeck’s journey and some inaccuracies and omissions in Steinbeck’s text—for instance, Steinbeck does not mention the frequency that he met up with his wife at luxury hotels during the trip. Steigerwald’s “exposé” ultimately hinges on treating Steinbeck as journalist and not as the literary author that he clearly was—as a writer Steinbeck takes literary liberties when needed and that does not detract from the narratives themselves.

delightedly. It was the first of many repetitions. At least twenty times I heard it—
“Thought you had a nigger in there.” It was an unusual joke— always fresh— and
never Negro or even Nigra, always Nigger or rather Niggah. That word seemed
terribly important, a kind of safety word to cling to lest some structure collapse”
(182). This scene foreshadows the atrocious behavior of the “cheerleaders”—“stout
middle-aged [white] women who, by some curious definition of the word ‘mother,’
gathered every day to scream invectives at children”—that protest the integration of
public schools in New Orleans. The reoccurring joke of confusing Charley with an
African American and the importance of the word “nigger”—though never
interrogated by Steinbeck—are important to understanding the dangers in attacking
that anthropological limit. Again, without the insistence of an absolute limit(absolute
alterity)—that claims on one side of the abyssal rupture stands all of humanity,
unique and different from all other life and on the other side of this rupture stands all
animal life, absolutely different from human life—then it becomes possible to order
and rank within species. Because there is no limit, the Southerners are arguing that
along the continuum, black Americans are closer to Charley than they are to white
Americans.

Steinbeck, without remark, highlights the two logics of racism on a biological
continuum. The first, which “a dear Southern friend...passionately” instructs
Steinbeck in, is the “the theory of ‘equal but separate’” (180). This theory attempts to
account for the innate humanness of black Americans (and presumably other non-
Caucasians) while maintaining the separation that the seeing the other as *wholly*

other once provided—and therefore, the ability to treat differently. This first logic, however, does nothing to absolve Americans for their past atrocities. Absolution comes by invoking the joke about mistaking Charley for an African American—the result of a dissolution of the anthropological limit. The mistake—a joke that is not in jest—hinges on the notion of a biological continuum that aligns the difference of the African American from the Caucasian with the same difference as the poodle from the Caucasian. Therefore, the joke that is not in jest is a joke because it is an honest mistake. As previously mentioned, the regime of biological continuism allows for every imaginable violence to be permissible because there is nothing that dictates absolute alterity between beings. All difference then, every otherness, is of degree not kind.

Thus Steinbeck, like Derrida, not only recognizes, but also insists on the anthropological limit. Again, although Steinbeck's early work may be seen as embracing a biological continuum, by *Travels with Charley*, it is clear that such a notion is rejected. The year that *Travels with Charley* was published in 1962, two years after the actual trip, Steinbeck was also awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. If there was any lingering doubt after *Travels with Charley* about Steinbeck's rejection of biological continuism, his banquet speech to the Swedish Academy should dispel any doubt. The entire speech, framed by addressing the duty of the writer (poet), is about the uniqueness of the human species. Steinbeck forcefully asserts, "I hold that a writer who does not passionately believe in the perfectibility of man, has no dedication nor any membership in literature." The anthropological limit is evoked in

this statement by both attesting to the “perfectibility of man”—that is to say Man as the species with a relationship and awareness of the self—and by linking that possibility of perfectibility to writing, to *logos*, to *techne*, to the *uniquely human*. Steinbeck continues to enforce the anthropological limit concluding his speech as follows:

We have usurped many of the powers we once ascribed to God. Fearful and unprepared, we have assumed lordship over the life or death of the whole world—of all living things. The danger and the glory and the choice rest finally in man. The test of his perfectibility is at hand. Having taken Godlike power, we must seek in ourselves for the responsibility and the wisdom we once prayed some deity might have. Man himself has become our greatest hazard and our only hope. So that today, St. John the apostle may well be paraphrased: In the end is the Word, and the Word is Man - and the Word is with Men.

Although this may appear to be the apotheosis of Man—it is actually the apotheosis of Man and *techne*. “Godlike power” is not bestowed upon Man, but instead “taken” by Man, which is to say that it is Man gives the power of God to himself through technology—through the word, through writing. In any case, it is evident that there is abyssal rupture (the anthropological limit) between Man and all other life. This is further reinforced in *Travels with Charley* when Steinbeck states “Then processes of change and variation took place in the organisms, so that one kind became different from all others” (158). Man is the “one kind of life different from all others,” the limit

is absolute. Although this may seem to support Mary Allen's argument that animals exist to be used by Man, her thesis is undercut by the Steinbeck's insistence on focusing on the relationships between species and his persistence in trying to define and articulate these relationships. Too much care and time and thought are given to the relationships between species to simply fall back into the biblical binary in which Man has dominion over all other life. Although Man may be observing the tide pool, it is not a metaphysical separation. For when Man glances back down from the stars to the tide pool and reaches his hand in, he is no longer an observer but a participant. Man is not separated from the life in the tide pool the way that the stars are separated from the earth. The earth itself becomes the tide pool and Man is swimming along with all other life on this planet—unique and distinct, but a participant nonetheless. Thus the tide pool is not a microcosm of the cosmos, but instead, as Steinbeck remarks in *Travels With Charley*, "the macrocosm of microcosm me" (153).

In many ways then, Steinbeck shares the same task as Derrida, which Leonard Lawlor identifies in Derrida as attempting to find a way to avoid both biological continuism and metaphysical separation. As Derrida explains, in order to accomplish this task, the anthropological limit must be thought of not as indivisible, but rather abyssal. Derrida states:

Not just because it [the subject of his talk/project] will concern what sprouts or grows at the limit, around the limit, by maintaining the limit, but also what feeds the limit, generates it, raises it, and

complicates it. Everything I'll say will consist, certainly not in effacing the limit, but in multiplying its figures, in complicating, thickening, delinearizing, folding, and dividing the line precisely by making it increase and multiply. (29)

The most important way that he complicates the limit is by denouncing the word *Animal*—"a word that men have given themselves the right to give" (32). He continues: "Men would be first and foremost those living creatures who have given themselves the word that enables them to speak of the animal with a single voice and to designate it as the single being" (32). *Animal*, therefore, is what is primarily responsible for the establishment of the anthropological limit as single and indivisible because it collapses every other being into a single category—Man and Animal, Man and not-Man—there is no Other of the Other only Other of Man. Derrida continues: "We have to envisage the existence of "living creatures," whose plurality cannot be assembled within the single figure of an animality that is simply opposed to humanity" (47). He conceives of this plurality with the neologism, *animot*. Matthew Calarco clarifies this neologism explaining that "*animot* sounds like *animaux*, animals in the plural. Derrida wants us to hear in the term *animot* animals in their plural singularity rather than their generality (i.e., The Animal)" (*Zoographies*). The "plural singularity" rather than "generality" that Derrida is attempting to articulate then is that while there is an abyssal rupture between human and non-human animals, there are also equally important ruptures between species and the ruptures between humans and other species are not identical. This is evident by Steinbeck and

Charley's relationship. The limit between human and dog is much different than the limit between human and octopus. Therefore, by restoring the multiplicity of beings and emphasizing the difference between them, Derrida opens up the possibility of bioethics by focusing on the relationships between beings. To acknowledge the multiplicity of life—much like Steinbeck. Where the two diverge however, is in what this acknowledgement means for evaluating bioethics and the origin of our responsibility towards other species.

Derrida locates the origin of this responsibility, the origin of ethics, in every species shared finitude. Every being, regardless of species, shares the inevitability of death. The implications of this in Derrida's work before his own death are never fully teased out. However, in the years after Derrida's death, Posthumanist scholar Cary Wolfe attempts to further flesh out the implications in Derrida's work. In his book, *What is Posthumanism*, Wolfe expertly outlines the various attempts to escape the Cartesian (or Kantian) binary by seriously considering the existence of animals and our relationships to actual (not conceptual or figurative) animals and heterogeneity. Wolfe exposes the faults in the utilitarian and contractarian approaches to bioethics as mere re-inscriptions liberal humanism that reduce the "questions of justice to questions of entitlement" or to sympathetic extension of compassion out of human nobility (79). Instead, Wolfe, in the footsteps of Cora Diamond and Derrida, insists that what we must understand and evaluate in our consideration of our relationships to animals is "that the fundamental ethical bond we have with nonhuman animals resides in our shared finitude, our vulnerability and mortality as 'fellow creatures'"

(80). Therefore, it is this “vulnerability and, ultimately, mortality that we share with non-human animals” at the core of ethics that elevates bioethics beyond “mere kindness” to “*justice*” (81). Indeed, as Wolfe explains, for Derrida properly considering our relationship to animals is essential because we do not have access to our own finitude. As Wolfe explains “we *never* have an idea of what death is *for us*—indeed, death is precisely that which can never be *for us*” (83). Therefore, acknowledging our shared finitude, which is our only access to death, requires the recognition of the animal other. In the space of the recognition is where ethics as justice becomes a possibility.

The location of ethical obligation in the presence of shared finitude—ethics as the result of eventual death—however, is not present in Steinbeck. Instead, Steinbeck locates ethics in shared fortitude—the persistence of life to survive. The most important scene in *Travels with Charley*, which mirrors the introspection that occurs when gazing at the tide pool, occurs when Steinbeck stops in the Mojave to give Charley some much needed water. In the distance Steinbeck notices two coyotes and instinctively grabs his gun because “coyotes are vermin” (213). However, as “the coyote sat down like a dog”—like Charley would do—Steinbeck begins to question his “ancient conditioning” that tells him the coyote “are the enemy” and refuses to kill them. This “ancient conditioning” is the single and indivisible binary limit between Man and Animal—where Man must exercise his power on animals to assure himself of his own being. In recognizing the coyote’s similarity to Charley, and Charley’s similarity to himself, Steinbeck is forced once again, exactly two decades after his trip

to the Sea of Cortez, to consider the relationship and responsibility that Man has to all other life. And it is here that Steinbeck distinguishes himself from Diamond, Derrida and Wolfe. Steinbeck states:

When, very late in the history of our planet, the incredible accident of life occurred, a balance of chemical factors, combined with temperature, in quantities and in kinds so delicate as to be unlikely, all came together in the retort of time and a new thing emerged, soft and helpless and unprotected in the savage world of unlife. Then processes of change and variation took place in the organisms, so that one kind became different from all others. But one ingredient, perhaps the most important of all, is planted in every life form— the factor of survival. No living thing is without it, nor could life exist without this magic formula. Of course, each form developed its own machinery for survival, and some failed and disappeared while others peopled the earth. The first life might easily have been snuffed out and the accident may never have happened again— but, once it existed, its first quality, its duty, preoccupation, direction, and end, shared by every living thing, is to go on living. (217)

This is a radically different configuration of ethics from Derrida and Wolfe. Rather than our responsibility to the animal Other being based on the possibility of death— or the certainty of eventual death—Steinbeck is suggesting that our responsibility to the animal Other lies in our mutual fortitude. Rather than ethics as a shared

“vulnerability” that makes the practice of ethics a passivity (which explains Derrida’s dismissal of vegetarianism), Steinbeck is articulating an active ethics—ethics as the very practice of life itself—the persistence to, or rather the duty to continue living and to promote life itself in all forms. Continuing his meditation on the desert Steinbeck remarks: “I find most interesting the conspiracy of life in the desert to circumvent the death rays of the all-conquering sun. The beaten earth appears defeated and dead, but it only appears so. A vast and inventive organization of living matter survives by seeming to have lost” (216). This “conspiracy of life” is the heart of Steinbeck’s ethics. All life’s singular duty, its only obligation, is to continue—to persist, to evolve, to remain. Ethics are no longer the result of a shared vulnerability, but rather a shared responsibility, and therefore, ethics extends beyond just Man. In this configuration, because ethics are now the singular duty to participate in the “conspiracy of life” against unlife, the expanse of ethics extends beyond just humans. All other life, by virtue of its existence, is actively carrying out its ethical obligations. In this sense too, then, Man becomes the only form of life that is not always already ethical—that is to say that through technology Man is capable of no longer participating in the “conspiracy of life.” Through technology Man has “allied itself with the enemy non-life.”¹² Man has the capability to eliminate all known life and this possibility means that Man is not actively fulfilling their ethical responsibility.

Furthermore, Steinbeck’s ethic allows for the heterogeneity that Derrida and Wolfe

¹² Although Steinbeck is surely thinking of nuclear weapons as being the technology that could finally extinguish life, since the publication of *Travels With Charley* the technologies that ally Man with non-life have only multiplied. From ecological calamities brought on by man made changes to the climate to the always present fears of the results of the rapidly approaching singularity.

desire (*Posthumanism* 90). While Derrida speaks of expanding and multiplying the abyssal ruptures at the anthropological limit, it is the heterogeneity that Steinbeck's ethics allow that Derrida and subsequently, Wolfe, are speaking about. Rather than ethics as uniformity, to be applied in the same manner at all times, ethics must be seen in heterogeneous specificity. That is to say that there is no universal application of ethics, only specific relationships between individual participants. A universal ethic would see Steinbeck's capture and dissection of the turtle and his refusing to shoot the coyotes as hypocritical. However, because Steinbeck's ethics are heterogeneous, then the individual participants as well as all the surrounding circumstances (needs, outcomes, historical moment, et cetera) are required to evaluate the ethical obligations. It is not the apotheosis of biodiversity that utopian holism champions. If eradicating a certain lifeform (perhaps a virus) will protect and promote the continuing of other lifeforms even though it reduces biodiversity can be seen as ethical—indeed, this notion of life as that which persists through evolution, requires the extinction of an untold number of species. In addition, Steinbeck not only maintains this heterogeneity, but expands it. Unlike Derrida and Wolfe, who are only concerned with Man and animals, Steinbeck is concerned with all life. Steinbeck's ethics therefore, can be seen as microbial ethics—ethics that are concerned with all life, with the biotic.

The microbial ethics located in the shared fortitude of the biotic have profound implications for our conception of the anthropological limit. What then defines Man—what makes the human “different from all others”—is our possibility

of being unethical through our alliance with the technologies capable of expanding “unlife.” Microbial ethics make the ethical inherent to life. All life, by virtue of its own existence, is actively ethical as it strives to reproduce, to mutate, to evolve and to persist. Therefore, rather than seeing ethics, along with logos and techne, as that which separates Man from all other beings, Steinbeck aligns the presence of active practice of ethics in all other life. What distinguishes Man from all life then is that ethics is no longer an always already being practice. Man must choose to act in ways that promote the continuance of life in all its multiplicity. As Steinbeck says, “we have assumed lordship over the life or death of the whole world - of all living things” and it is the lordship over Death that that allies us with the enemy of life, unlife. Thus, “the perfectibility of Man” arises in the persistence of being ethical—the promotion of the persistence of life while wielding the technologies of annihilation—the “perfectibility of Man” lies in life’s immortality.

CHAPTER 3

The Practice of Becoming Human: Interspecies Interaction in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*

Uprooted from his natural habitat, stolen from his kind, a parrot shivers in the windowsill of a hostile foreign climate. He has never seen snow and was not meant to feel cold, yet here he is, alone, trembling and terrified. Unsure of what to do, he falls back on what has always worked in the before and mutters, "I love you" (3). Of course, there is no response.

This is the opening scene of Toni Morrison's novel *Jazz*. From Bob the dog in *The Bluest Eye* to Sorrow's mystical mermaids and whales in *A Mercy*, Morrison scatters animals and animal imagery throughout her work, and clearly, she feels their use is important enough to be included in the opening pages of her novels. The scholars that have examined this aspect of Morrison's work, such as Tuire Valkeakari and Vera Norwood, have approached it from an anthropocentric perspective by exploring how animals are used to demonstrate the way African Americans are dehumanized in order to justify their oppression. The other common critical approach, found in the work of Greta Gaard and others, is to insist that the animals are either allegorical or mere plot devices. In both these scholarly trajectories, the animals become nothing more than narrative tools to illustrate the problems of the human characters. Unfortunately, these approaches are largely trapped in the

traditions of liberal humanist discourse and therefore, insufficiently address the significance of the animals in Morrison's work. As the speciesist logics of liberal humanism and biologism continues to be discredited in science as well as philosophy it would seem appropriate to approach the animals in Morrison's work from a non-anthropocentric framework¹³. Instead, Morrison's project is not only to re-write the history of African-Americans, but to also re-imagine the role of animals in our society and the relationships between species, or perhaps, to even re-imagine the notion of species itself.

Although every Morrison novel features animals or animal imagery, in the context of understanding species and interspecies interactions, two novels particularly stand out. First, Morrison's most famous novel *Beloved*, for its implication of biologism (biological continuism) as a foundation of law and the *impossible action* that must be taken as the only form of resistance. And second, *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison's first novel, for its interrogation of the productive possibilities of reciprocity in interspecies relationships in the practice of "becoming-with."

¹³ Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* published in 1975 is perhaps the most well-known attack on speciesism, although, as Carey Wolfe (in *What is Posthumanism?*) and others (Cora Diamond) have since argued, Singer still demonstrates a commitment to liberal humanism. It is with the rise of the French anti-humanist, particularly Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, that the inseparable entwinement of speciesism and humanism is fully acknowledge. Since Deleuze and Guattari other noted philosophers, primarily Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben and Carey Wolfe, have continued to demonstrate the need to pose alternatives to liberal humanism if there is any hope to get beyond speciesism. In addition to the philosophical move away from liberal humanism, biological sciences have also called into question many of the distinctions between humans and animals that liberal humanism relies upon. There is of course the much publicized work with primates done by Jane Goodall and the equally important, though less famous, Barbara Smuts; Andrea Turkalo's work with Elephants and studies of Elephants communication/language; and the rise of cognitive ethologists, most notably Mark Bekoff. In addition, the blurring of biological and technological sciences in many fields (e.g. N. Katherine Hayles and Dominic Pettman's work) is rapidly evaporating what little substance liberal humanism has left.

Beloved is undoubtedly Morrison's most well-known work and it is also one of her most complex. Ostensibly it is the story of Sethe and her children's escape from slavery in the South and the aftermath of the atrocity that Sethe commits when the plantation overseer tracks her down in the North. However, the complexity of the novel arises because it is not simply an indictment of the institution of slavery; instead it is a thorough attack on the forces that create the conditions that allow for such an institution to exist—namely, liberal humanism and biologism.

French philosopher, Jacques Derrida, during his address at the 1997 C erisy conference, later published as *The Animal That Therefore I am*, is completely conscious of the dangers of biologism and makes a point to make sure that his own thoughts are not seen as endorsing biologism. Derrida remarks, "I have thus never believed in some homogeneous continuity between what calls itself man and what he calls the animal. I am not about to begin to do so now. That would be worse than sleepwalking, it would simply be too asinine" (30). He continues on to suggest that any suggestion of biologism would be a "stupid memory lapse" because of the "sinister connotations we are well aware of" (30). Although he does not explain the "sinister connotations" in his address, Leonard Lawler explains it more fully in his essay about Derrida, entitled *This is not Sufficient: An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida*. Lawler clarifies:

This risk of biologism is really the risk of a direct attack on the difference between animals and humans. If one raises animals to the level of humans, or if one lowers humans to the level of animals, one

ignores the difference that requires living beings to be treated in a variety of ways. With a direct approach, either humans are going to be treated like animals or animals like humans.

In addition to Lawler's clarification, it is not just that "humans are going to be treated like animals or animals like humans," it is that *some* humans can be "treated like animals." It is not an all or nothing proposition as will be seen in Morrison's work. Though Derrida does not explicitly state it, as an Algerian Jew, the "sinister connotations" he refers to are likely a reference to the treatment of Jews and the logic of anti-Semitism.

Beloved is a text that is saturated with an implicit commitment to biologism—a commitment to a biological continuum. As shown by Lawler biologism insists that "species" is an unbreakable chain that can be arranged into a hierarchy. Biologism is pervasive it is in the text. It would be easy to mistake the dehumanization of African Americans in the novel as being evidence that there is an absolute rupture between Man and Animal, with the slave being placed in the Animal side of the binary. However, as will be seen, the text constantly allows the position of species to fluctuate, which suggests that there is no absolute division between species, but rather a hierarchal continuum that allows for species to be ranked, moreover the text demonstrates rank variations within the same species.

The "sinister connotations" are apparent from the first pages of the novel. It is evidently clear that there is no species security for African Americans in the novel because the logic of the narrative is biologism. The novel opens with Paul D reuniting

with Sethe and discussing what has happened since they last saw each other. Sethe explains that after her children escaped, she returned to find her husband Halle and at some point, the nephews of Sweet Home's overseer, Schoolteacher, raped her and took the milk from her lactating breast. Telling Paul D that "after I left you, those boys came in there and took my milk. That's what they come in there for. Held me down and took it" (19). Later on in the novel, recalling the event, Sethe says "they handled her like I was the cow, no, the goat, back behind the stable because I was too nasty to stay in with the horses. But I wasn't too nasty to cook their food or take care of Mrs. Garner" (236-7). This image of Sethe not being "too nasty" to rape contrasts with the Sweet Home men that "had taken to calves" and "decided to let her be" (12). The men at Sweet Home are "fucking cows" and "dreaming of rape" because they are "waiting for the new girl" to choose (13). In other words, the new girl, Sethe, is not raped even though all the men dream of it. Instead the men substitute Sethe as the object of their rape fantasies with raping cows. Part of Morrison's intention here is to suggest that sex itself is a biological need and depriving men "in their twenties" of the opportunity for sex is part of the violence committed against them. It is an exercise in control by the overseer—a forced chastity¹⁴. This is evidenced by describing them as being "sick with the absence of women" (12-3). The sickness is a psychic sickness—a need that cannot be met because of the prohibitions placed on them by the overseer. It is an extension of

¹⁴ "Violence" here is not meant as physical violence, though that certainly is practiced, but rather the violence of denying one ownership of one's own body.

ownership of their bodies and what they do with those bodies. However, what is more important here is the fluidity between species that is evidence of biologism.

The substitution of Sethe as the object of rape with cows is not because of Sethe, but because “they were Sweet Home men” capable of exercising restraint (12). In other words, it is not because they respected Sethe that they raped cows instead of her, but rather, it was the result of their not having ownership of their own bodies. Mr. Garner, the owner of Sweet Home, frequently taunts other farmers by saying that they “got boys” whereas his “niggers is men every one em” (12). The results are always predictable:

“Beg to differ, Garner. Ain’t no nigger men.”

“Not if you scared, they ain’t.” Garner’s smile was wide. “But if you a man yourself, you’ll want your niggers to be men too.”

“I wouldn’t have no nigger men round my wife.”

It was the reaction Garner loved and waited for. “Neither would I,” he said. “Neither would I,” and there was always a pause before the neighbor, or stranger, or peddler, or brother-in-law or whoever it was got the meaning. Then a fierce argument, sometimes a fight, and Garner came home bruised and pleased, having demonstrated one more time what a real Kentuckian was: one tough enough and smart enough to make and call his own niggers men. (12-3)

Essentially, to be a man in Garner’s view requires the recognition of his slaves as men as well—not as children or animals—and not being threatened that they will rape his

wife because he has properly conditioned them. The arguments that Garner starts are the result of his suggestion that the others that refuse to recognize their slaves as men are not really men themselves. While recognizing the humanness of his slaves generally makes Garner appear to be less reprehensible than the other slave owners, it is actually far more insidious. By insisting that his slaves are “men” and that he made them that way—while still owning them as property—Garner is admitting that some humans can own other humans¹⁵. In other words, while the other slave-owners are able to justify themselves by not recognizing them as men and therefore placing them on the other side of the binary where animals reside, Garner’s justification is simply that some men can be owned by other, superior men. This is one of the “sinister connotations” of biologism that Derrida alludes to in his discussion of the asininity of biologism. The same belief allows Garner to appear as kind when he lets Halle buy his mother, Baby Suggs. The appearance of benevolence is again revealed to be insidious, as Halle explains to Sethe: “She [Baby Suggs] worked here for ten years. If she worked another ten you think she would’ve made it out? I pay him for her last years and in return he got you, me and three more coming up” (231). In other words, Garner is not letting Baby Suggs have freedom, but rather ensuring that he keeps his most productive slaves indebted to him. In “From Politics to Biopolitics...and Back,” Slavoj Žižek points out “showing mercy is the ONLY way for a Master to demonstrate his supra-legal authority” (504). In addition, by letting Halle

¹⁵ There is some slippage between children and animals in this reading. While Garner calls the other slaves “boys,” this should not be understood as equating with them with white children. Unlike the white children whose relationship as property ends at a certain age, the slave eternally remains property and therefore, is more identifiable with animal life.

buy Baby Suggs, the insidious logic of biologism is further inscribed by forcing Halle to participate in it. Although recognized as human, African American women are not human enough to own themselves. Even though Baby Suggs is allowed to leave Sweet Home and head north, she is still not free in the sense that she does not own herself. In addition, Baby Suggs can never be free (nor can any African American) because under the bio-political regime and the logic of biologism her race itself enables the possibility of ownership—a possibility that does not exist for white men. Whereas Cary Wolfe asserts “to live under biopolitics is to live in a situation in which we are all always already (potential) ‘animals’ before the law,” in this case it is not a matter of the potential of being animal, but instead it is that there is no abyssal rupture between human/animal so that any human has the potential to be treated in the same manner as an animal or worse than some animals (*Before the Law*, 11). Human, but not as human as those “that give themselves the right to give” that designation. In this case it is directly the plantation owner, Garner, that gets to decide who is human and who is not. On a larger scale, it is white men that give themselves the right to decide who is human and just how human they are—this is the highest level of biologism’s hierarchy—those that designate others.

This “right to give” is something that Derrida addresses in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* in regards to the term animal:

Yes, animal, what a word! Animal is a word that men have given themselves the right to give. These humans are found giving it to themselves, this word, but as if they had received it as an inheritance.

They have given themselves the word in order to corral a large number of living beings within a single concept: “The Animal,” they say. And they have given it to themselves, this word, at the same time according themselves, reserving for them, for humans, the right to the word, the naming noun... (32)

The arrogance of this act—of giving themselves the right to give—is mirrored in *Beloved* when Paul D contemplates the difference between Mr. Garner and Schoolteacher.

Garner called and announced them men—but only on Sweet Home, and by his leave. Was he naming what he saw or creating what he did not? That was the wonder of Sixo, and even Halle; it was always clear to Paul D that those two were men whether Garner said so or not. It troubled him that, concerning his own manhood, he could not satisfy himself on that point. Oh, he did manly things, but was that Garner’s gift or his own will? What would he have been anyway—before Sweet Home—without Garner? (260)

Therefore, the logic of biologism does not just create the possibility to designate what is animal, but also what is human and just how human (child/adult, owned/owner). Paul D’s questioning of his own manhood, his own humanness, is because he does not have the right to give the name Man to himself. When he asks himself does “a whiteman saying it make it so?” The answer is yes. The insidiousness of Garner’s biologism is not that he does not recognize his slaves as men or human,

but that he prevents them from recognizing themselves as human. That Paul D does not possess the “right to give” to himself the status of man, of human, is a far worse violence than if Garner just did not recognize him as human. Unlike Halle and Sixo who came to Garner as men, Paul D was sold as a child and therefore does not know anything except the pacifying logic of Garner’s biologism.

The insidiousness of Garner’s logic is also reflected in Paul D’s hatred for the rooster named Mister. In recalling his torture by Schoolteacher by forcing him to take “the bit” he explains that the worst part wasn’t the bit itself, it was “The rooster...Walking past the roosters looking at them look at me” (85). In particular it was Mister, whom Paul D had saved from death by helping him hatch, which antagonized him the most. Paul D tells Sethe that “he [Mister] was hateful all right. Bloody too, and evil...He sat right there on the tub looking at me. I swear he smiled” (85). He continues:

Mister, he looked so...free. Better than me. Stronger, tougher. Son of a bitch couldn’t even get out of the shell hisself but he was still king...Mister was allowed to be and stay what he was. But I wasn’t allowed to be and stay what I was. Even if you cooked him you’d be cooking a rooster named Mister. But wasn’t no way I’d ever be Paul D again, living or dead. (86)

Paul D’s realization here is that in the logic of biologism there is the possibility of movement along the hierarchal continuum. Combined with the lack of the “right to give” to himself the word/name man, or even his name “Paul D,” the impossibility of

ever truly being a man is exposed. Unlike the named rooster whose position on the continuum is secure, without the absolute division of human/animal Paul D can never be certain of where he stands¹⁶. The freedom that Mister possesses is not the freedom to not be owned or brutalized or killed, it is the freedom to be rooster—to be secure in its species being¹⁷.

This biologism emerges from a certain biopolitical regime that operates by regulating biota. Michel Foucault defines biopolitics in his lectures *Society Must be Defended* as “the power to make live. Sovereignty took life and let live. And now we have the emergence of a power that I would call the power of regularization, and it, in contrast, consists in making live and letting die” (247). Biopolitics and the emergence of bio-power occur in the seventeenth and eighteenth century according to Foucault. Although Foucault, along with Giorgio Agamben and Roberto Esposito, are largely the philosophers most closely associated with biopolitical thought, Slavoj Žižek’s work that offers further insight for understanding *Beloved* because of his work on resistance. Whereas Foucault, Agamben, and Esposito largely focus on the relations between power, law and the regulation of bodies in their work, Žižek’s brief essay, “From Politics to Biopolitics....and Back” articulates an understanding of resistance in a biopolitical regime that helps to decipher Sethe’s actions.

¹⁶ Of course the position of animal species is never certain either depending on the culture. For example, many Americans rightfully express outrage at the killing of elephants and rhinos for Chinese medicine but have no problems lining up to buy celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain’s book *Medium Raw* in which he delights in telling the readers about a secret dinner where he and other famous chefs dine on the endangered Ortolan. The difference for Mister and Paul D is that Mister is secure in the fact that he will always be a rooster because Mister knows nothing but his roosterhood.

¹⁷ The ape narrator that acts like a human to avoid being put in a zoo in Franz Kafka’s “A Report to the Academy” accounts for this species imitation as a limited freedom opposed to a “freedom on all sides” that is offered by species security.

To understand Sethe's actions Zizek's discussion of Biopolitics, law, and democracy is useful. Zizek's essay works on the notion of the inclusion of exclusion that Agamben characterizes as the fundamental operation of the state of exception. Agamben identifies the Sovereign's ability to declare a state of exception—to suspend the law—as the force which brings anomie into the grasp of the law. As Agamben states in his book, *Homo Sacer*: "I, the sovereign, who am outside the law, declare that there is nothing outside the law" (17). This same operation, as Zizek explains, takes place under the name democracy: "*Democracy*—in the way this term is used today—concerns, above all, formal legalism: its minimal definition is the unconditional adherence to a certain set of formal rules which guarantee that antagonisms are fully absorbed into the agonistic game" (516). Zizek continues, "while democracy acknowledges the irreducible plurality of interests, ideologies, narratives, etc., it excludes those who, as we put it, reject the democratic rules of the game" (517). In other words, democracy too operates by "fully absorbing antagonisms," or as Agamben articulated it, the inclusion of the exclusion. These complex mechanisms for including the exclusion as the center of the law makes understanding Sethe's actions possible. In this case, not only does the law apply to slaves, but there is also no outside the law—nowhere beyond the reach of the law—hence Sethe's inability to truly escape.

The totality of the biologism and the impossibility to escape it, because of its inclusion of the exclusion, is illustrated in the chapter where Sethe attempts to kill her children. A reference to *Revelations*, "when the four horsemen came—

schoolteacher, one nephew, one slave catcher and a sheriff,” opens the chapter of Sethe’s transgression—her strike against the law and at the same time, biologism (174). Unlike the *New Testament*, *Beloved*’s revelations do not come at the end, although they are no less apocalyptic. As Schoolteacher and the others approach the house, biologism again gets reinforced by the narrative: “Unlike a snake or a bear, a dead nigger could not be skinned for profit and was not worth his own dead weight in coin” (174-75). Here again we see Sethe (and other slaves) as being placed on a continuum that reflects that they see her as human—because her meat, “dead weight,” is worthless and so is her skin—but somehow she is still not human enough to be treated as such. Being human alone is not enough to entitle one to certain treatment. Schoolteacher and the other “horsemen” find Sethe inside where she is attempting to kill her children.

Inside, two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other. She did not look at them; she simply swung the baby toward the wall planks, missed and tried to connect a second time, when out of nowhere—in the ticking time the men spent staring at what there was to stare at—the old nigger boy, still mewling, ran through the door behind them and snatched the baby from the arc of the mother’s swing. (175)

The scene makes it immediately clear “that there was nothing left claim” for Schoolteacher and the Sweet Home Plantation. Schoolteacher concludes that Sethe’s

“gone wild, due to the mishandling of the nephew who’d overbeat her and made her cut and run” (176). However, the novel contradicts Schoolteacher’s assessment of why Sethe kills, or attempts to kill her children. First, when Stamp Paid reveals to Paul D that he was present during the event, he tells Paul D that Sethe “ain’t crazy. She loves those children. She was trying to out-hurt the hurter” (276). And then later on Sethe explains that whites won’t just “work, kill, and maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn’t like yourself anymore” (295). Sethe continues to explain that though she can no longer recognize or like herself, “the best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty *her* all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing—the part of her that was clean...And no one, nobody on this earth, would list her daughter’s characteristics on the animal side of the paper” (296). Here Sethe is referring to when she witnessed Schoolteacher having his nephews make lists of her animal and human features, which was ultimately Sethe’s impetus to try and escape (228). However, all three of the novel’s explanations are insufficient. Stamp Paid’s assertion that Sethe was trying to “out-hurt the hurter,” would require that Schoolteacher values black lives as more than a monetary investment, which is clearly not the case. In fact, Sethe’s actions only serve to reinforce Schoolteacher’s belief that her actions are “the results of a little so-called freedom imposed on people who needed every care and guidance in the world to keep them from the cannibal life they preferred” (177). As for Sethe’s explanation, though her children are not forced to return to Sweet Home, it is hard to understand how they are not made “dirty.” Beloved, of course, is dirtied by filicide—which,

although committed by Sethe, is the result of the “whites.” Howard and Buglar, Sethe’s two sons, flee from her the moment they get the chance and Denver is an emotionally stunted adult that acts like a child. Therefore, in order to provide a sufficient explanation, Sethe’s actions can be seen to possess an additional political level that is characterized by Žižek as an *impossible act*.

Žižek redefines the Lacanian term “act” as “neither a strategic intervention *into* the existing order, nor its ‘crazy’ destructive *negation*; an act is ‘excessive,’ trans-strategic, intervention which redefines the rules and contours of the existing order” (511). In addition, it is “only such an ‘impossible’ gesture of pure expenditure can change the very coordinates of what is strategically possible within a historical constellation” (511). Žižek’s example of such an act is the “well-known” (the validity of the story is questionable as it seems to only be traced to a consultant for the film *Apocalypse Now*) act committed by the Vietcong where they chopped off the arms of children that had been vaccinated by US doctors¹⁸. Sethe’s action must be seen in the same way, as an “impossible gesture”—a radically transgressive act—an anomic act. Because there is no outside the law, no outside this biopolitical configuration, escaping to the North is not really an escape. The only possible way to escape is by action that current configuration cannot possibly understand, an impossible act that therefore, creates anomie. It is the unaccounted for and unaccountable that disrupts the biopolitical machine—that creates a momentary stutter and allows for a truly

¹⁸ A discussion of the atrocity story by The University of Washington’s Vietnam Studies Group tracked the origin of the story to Fred Rexer, a member of Special Forces that consulted for the film. Bettina McNeil, who traced the origin of the story through screenwriter John Milius, also discovered another one of Rexer’s favorite tales was “how, as a CIA operative, he had executed Viet Cong chieftans by squeezing his fingers through their eye-sockets and literally tearing their skulls apart.”

anomic space. This is reflected in the narrative by the sheriff's indecision while arresting Sethe and her rather quick release. The law does not know what to do in the face of the impossible. Ultimately, Sethe's transgression displays the law's true impotence in a biopolitical regime.

Of course, the sacrifice required for this disruption is so great that is questionable whether such an impossible act can be liberating at all. However, Sethe's unrecognizability afterwards would suggest that there is indeed liberation. "This here Sethe was new," Paul D thinks to himself (193). He continues: "This here Sethe talked about safety with a handsaw. This here new Sethe didn't know where the world stopped and she began. Suddenly he saw what Stamp Paid wanted him to see: more important than what Sethe had done was what she claimed. It scared him" (193). What Sethe claimed in the literal sense is that her act was an act of love—not mercy or out of insanity—thick love. When Paul D contests her claim by saying her love is "too thick," Sethe responds that "thin love ain't love at all" (193-94). However, Sethe's claim goes beyond the literal, in addition to love, Sethe has claimed her right to an anomic space, which transforms her into an unrecognizable being. Paul D's statement that Sethe "got two feet...not four" is meant to suggest that she committed an inhuman act, but instead reveals Paul D's own inability to make sense of the "new" Sethe. She has two feet—she is human—but her action is impossible to understand under the current configuration that other humans use to regulate the world around them. Thus, the "new" Sethe occupies that same anomic space—the space of the unrecognizable—that animals also occupy. Essentially, Sethe has

challenged the logic of biologism through her actions by insisting on an absolute alterity. An abyssal rupture between the recognizable and the unrecognizable—between human and other. However, Sethe is essentially also unrecognizable to herself, which suggests that only through figurative and literal death can the biopolitical regime be challenged.

Contrary to the impossible sacrifice that Sethe makes, Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* attempts to challenge biologism not through confrontation with the human world, but rather by seeking out engagements with the non-human world. Morrison begins her first novel with a version of a Dick and Jane tale that features animals. The tale introduces us to a girl named Jane that wants to play and at first attempts to play with a cat. “See the cat. It goes meow-meow. Come and play. Come and play with Jane. The kitten will not play.” After being rebuked by the cat, Jane attempts to play with her parents, but they both ignore her. Next she attempts to play with a dog, “See the dog. Bowwow goes the dog. Do you want to play with Jane? See the dog run. Run, dog, run.” Again, Jane is rebuked. Ultimately, the cat and dog will be mirrored later in the novel, and their unwillingness to fulfill their roles (as pets for the entertainment of humans) foreshadows their eventual fates.

Just like in the child's tale at the beginning of novel, the cat appears first in the actual story of the novel. The cat chapter opens with a description of a certain type of African American girls that “live in quiet black neighborhoods where everybody is gainfully employed,” where “they are not fretful, nervous, or shrill,” and

“they do not drink, smoke, or swear and they still call sex ‘nookie’”(82). Eventually these girls get older and go off to school:

They go to land-grant colleges, normal schools, and learn how to do the white man’s work with refinement: home economics to prepare his food; teacher education to instruct black children in obedience; music to soothe the weary master and entertain his blunted soul. Here they learn the rest of lesson begun in those soft houses with porch swings and pots of bleeding heart: how to behave...how to get rid of the funkiness. The dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions. (83)

This description crystalizes from a multiplicity of girls to the singular image of the woman they will all grow up to be, as if there is no possibility for variance or uniqueness. They will all get married to certain type of man, have a child, likely named Junior, and cultivate a certain type home. They will resent sex with their husbands because of their need to suppress their passion, and will never experience an orgasm. They will all be like Junior’s mother Geraldine, playing a role so completely that any trace of the actor is completely eliminated. This education is a traumatic experience. An approximation of the image of whiteness obtained not through *lactification*, but through erasure, which leaves these women in a permanent state of misery¹⁹.

¹⁹ Lactification is a neologism that Frantz Fanon uses in his book *Black Skin, White Mask* to describe the processes of attempting to breed out the blackness. As Fanon states, “Whiten the race, save the

Interestingly, when the cat is first introduced, although the “girls” have already become a single “woman,” it is still just a generic woman and not a specific individual character:

Occasionally some living thing will engage her affections. A cat, perhaps, who will love her order, precision, and constancy; who will be as clean and quiet as she is. The cat will settle quietly on the windowsill and caress her with his eyes. She can hold him in her arms, letting his back paws struggle for footing on her breast and his forepaws cling to her shoulder. She can rub the smooth fur and feel the unresisting flesh underneath. (85)

Although the “living thing” is only “perhaps” a cat, suggesting that there are other companion species that may engage the affections of these women, the preceding description seems to indicate that this other species may not be a dog. A dog would likely not “be as clean and quiet as she is.” It also seems fair to assume, since the keeping of exotic species as common household pets is a relatively recent phenomenon, that only other practical possibility is a bird. A bird is also not likely to be as “clean and quiet as she is,” therefore, although Morrison leaves open the possibility that it be some other companion species, in all likelihood it will be a cat. The individuation of species seems to be a significant inclusive that is often overlooked because of the underlying foundation of humanism that is present in

race, but not in the sense that one might think: not ‘preserve the uniqueness of that part of the world in which they grew up,’ but make sure that it will be white” (47).

most analysis. As Cary Wolfe explains in his essay “Human, All Too Human: 'Animal Studies' and the Humanities,”

The full force of animal studies...resides in its power to remind us that it is not enough to reread and reinterpret—from a safe ontological distance, as it were—the relation of metaphor and species difference, the pollination of speciesist, sexist, and racist discursive structures in literature, and so on. That undertaking is no doubt praiseworthy and long overdue, but as long as it leaves unquestioned the humanist schema of the knowing subject who undertakes such a reading, then it sustains the humanism and anthropocentrism that animal studies sets out to question. (569)

Wolfe is suggesting is that the focus of Animal Studies must be on challenging the discourse of humanism itself, which means that the individual animals must be accounted for. Humanism operates primarily on a binary opposition between human/non-human, or, to maintain consistent terminology, human/animal. In other words, on one side of the equation we have *Homo sapiens* and on the other side of the equation we have the entirety of all other species that have existed or will exist. With the exception of *Homo sapiens* (or perhaps the genus *Homo*), all other beings are reduced to the singular category *animal*. Therefore, it is essential that any analysis of this chapter takes into account the fact that it is a cat, and not a dog or bird, which “will engage her affections.”

Like the figure of these women, the cat too comes to the encounter with its own historical baggage. The history of the species of cats has not been a pleasant one, as detailed in Linda Kalof's book *Looking at Animals in Human History*. Although it is well known that Ancient Egyptians held cats to be the most sacred of animals, going so far as to mummify cats to be buried with them, and as Kalof explains "it was forbidden to kill, a cat, and if one died of natural causes members of the household would shave their eyebrows" (20). Kalof also retells the legend of Cambyses, a Persian king, that "was able to conquer Egypt in 525 BC by positioning in front of his advancing army animals revered by Egyptians...fearing that harm would come to one of the advancing animals, the Egyptians stopped their defensive strategies and Cambyses's victory was won" (20). Unfortunately for felines, this was the height of their respect in Western civilization, and they soon became one of the most abused and tormented species. In fact, it seems that not even the preserved corpses of cats could escape Britain's habit of exportation and exploitation of all things African, by "the end of the nineteenth century shiploads of cat mummies were sent to England to be ground into fertilizer" (20).

During the Renaissance, "violence was a part of daily life...endorsed by the church, and regularly used by more powerful against the less powerful, including the poor...and, of course, animals" (87). Kalof continues on to explain that "cats were particularly maligned. The French tortured cats for amusement, and the English burned them, hunted them with hounds and roasted them on a spit" (87).

The enthusiastic celebrations which featured the torture of cats continued well into the eighteenth century as cats increasingly became associated with women.

Symbolic of witchcraft, cats were associated with women (the word 'pussy' has the same meaning in French slang as it does in English, and has been an obscenity for hundreds of years), and it was "an easy jump from the sexuality of women to the cuckolding of men" (Robert Darnton qtd. in Kalof; 113)

Clearly, the cat itself is important, as is its historicity. Returning to the novel, Morrison, still focused on the singular but not individuated woman, exclaims that the "cat will always know that he is first in her affections. Even after she bears a child" (86). This, yet again, stresses the importance of the interspecies relationship between these women and cats. Finally, Morrison moves from the singular non-individuated woman to a specific "one such girl," named Geraldine. Geraldine is identical to the previously described girls that have grown into one of these women that has suppressed all the "funkiness of human emotion," married, moved to Ohio and had a child.

Geraldine did not allow her baby, Junior, to cry...[She]did not talk to him, coo to him, or indulge him in kissing bouts, but she saw that every other desire was fulfilled. It was not long before the child discovered the difference in his mother's behavior to himself and the cat. As he grew older, he learned to direct his hatred of his mother to the cat, and spent some happy moments watching it suffer. (86)

In addition to her lack of emotional connection to Junior, she also “did not like him to play with niggers” (87), explaining that “colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud.” Geraldine despite all her discipline understood that the “line between colored and nigger was not always clear; subtle and telltale signs threatened to erode it, and the watch had to be constant” (87). It is easy to understand the distance and detachment Geraldine has towards Junior, after all, he was borne out of duty not passion or desire and his presence, unless constantly controlled, risked slipping back into that “funkiness” that she has tried so desperately to erase. It is equally easy to understand Junior’s hatred of the cat, who he sees as a competitor for his mother’s affection—a competitor he cannot defeat. It is more difficult to understand the relationship between the cat and Geraldine, and later on, the cat and Pecola.

One of the difficulties inherent in Animal Studies is the risk of erasing alterity and speaking in the place of the other, which in this case is the cat. We must remind ourselves that we are not ventriloquist and animals are not dummies, we cannot speak for them. However, at the same time, being conscious of this difficulty has often lead to analysis that acknowledges the presence of the other, but does not engage it. The presence of the other is talked about and talked around, but never invited to participate. Therefore, before proceeding, an analytical model that takes into account these difficulties must be established.

Donna Haraway, in her book *When Species Meet*, acknowledges the important progress that Jacques Derrida made in his lectures “And Say the Animal

Responded?” and “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” when he acknowledged that “actual animals look back at actual human beings.” Haraway praises Derrida for identifying “the key question as not being not whether the cat could ‘speak’ but whether it is possible to know what *responds* means and how to distinguish a response from a reaction” (20). However, despite Derrida’s accomplishment, Haraway correctly chastises him for failing to “seriously consider an alternative form of engagement...*how to look back*” (20). She continues, “Derrida failed a simple obligation of companion species; he did not become curious about what the cat might actually be doing, feeling, thinking, or perhaps making available to him in looking back at him that morning” (20). Ultimately for Haraway, Derrida was unable, or unwilling, to transgress the anthropocentric tradition that has so firmly been established in Western Philosophy, and what began with a promising engagement with another species resulted in an exercise in narcissism that left Derrida knowing nothing more about the cat that when he started.

In order to avoid the mistake of Derrida, the unwillingness or inability to engage his cat, Haraway suggests that it is vital to consider the possibilities of “other-worldings,” by engaging in responsive relationships. While Haraway is speaking of real world encounters with animals, particularly the experiences of Barbara Smuts while she was studying baboons for her PhD²⁰, the same principles can be used in a model for literary analysis. Haraway continues:

²⁰ As related by Haraway, Barbara Smuts, while attempting to earn a Ph.D., starts to study Baboons in Kenya. She is originally advised to study them by the traditional anthropologist strategy of attempting to become invisible to the baboons. Of course, it never works, because she is not actually invisible, nor

All actors become who they are in the dance of relating, not from scratch, not from ex nihilo, but full of the patterns of their sometimes-joined, sometimes-separate heritages both before and lateral this encounter. All the dancers are redone through the patterns they enact. The temporalities of companion species comprehend all the possibilities activated in becoming with, including the heterogeneous scales of evolutionary time for everybody but also the many others rhythms of conjoined process. (25)

Therefore, in order to develop an analytic model for analysis of the cat and dog in *The Bluest Eye* while avoiding the difficulties inherent in Animal Studies, the focus should not be on the individual actors, human or non-human, but rather, on the space between, the contact zones—the “dance of relations”—while acknowledging the historicity of each participant.

Returning to the novel, as previously mentioned, a cat is first introduced while Morrison is still describing the singular but not yet individuated woman, as the only living thing that can “engage her affections.” Again, when considering the question of why it is always and only a cat that is capable of engaging these women, their historical positions must be considered. From the history provided by Linda Kalof, it is easy to see the similarities—the history of abuse and cruelty, which came primarily at

are the baboons blind, deaf, and without smell. So she had to learn the rituals of greetings and the dance of relations in order to actually study the baboons. As Haraway says, “If she really wanted to study something other than how human beings are in the way, if she was really interested in these baboons, Smuts had to enter into, not shun, a responsive relationship” (25).

the hands of European men; the need to tame their wildness—to learn to erase the “funkiness” of their existence.

The description of their dance of relations becomes increasingly sensual, with the cat finding “footing on her breast” as she rubs “the smooth fur and feel[s] the unresisting flesh underneath.” The woman delights in the “strangely pleasant sensation that comes when he [the cat] writhes beneath her hand and flattens his eyes with surfeit of sensual delight.” And, while cooking, “her fingers tremble” when he “circle[s] about her shanks, and the trill of his fur spirals up her legs to her thighs.” While sitting with the cat in her lap she “fondle[s] that soft hill of hair and let[s] the warmth of the animal’s body seep over and into the deeply private areas of her lap...she opens her legs just a little, and the two of them will still be together...sleeping a little together” (85-86). This sensual language should not be read as sexual desire. It is not a subtle allusion to bestiality; it is a description of a responsive relationship with each responding to the touch of the other. The cat responds to the woman’s touch by preening and stretching out, while the woman responds by opening her legs when the cat jumps on her lap. It is an act of engagement that mutually benefits each being—it is the “funkiness” of emotions. This responsive relationship contrast the previous description of these women’s sexual relationship with their husband, where she “stiffens when she feels one her paper curlers coming undone from the activity” and hopes that “she will remain dry between her legs,” because she hates the “glucking sound they make when she is moist”(84). It is reasonable to assume that the wishing to remain dry is also a desire

to prevent an unintended physiological response, which would signal engagement. It is not the sex she despises; it is the very act of relating. Geraldine (and the women like her) spends so much effort on erasure that she cannot risk engaging in a responsive relationship with another person because it risks an eruption of the “funkiness of human emotion.” Therefore, the cat allows Geraldine to enter into a symbiotic relationship of mutual affection and exclusion while still maintaining the suppression of the funkiness. This responsive relationship with the cat is the main thing that separates Geraldine from Pecola.

Pecola and Geraldine’s cat are introduced to each other in a less than ideal manner. As Pecola follows Junior around the house he suddenly surprises her by throwing the cat into her face. Of course, not only is Pecola shocked and potentially injured, but the cat, too, is in a similar situation. Junior proceeds to lock them in the room together:

The tears came fast, and she held her face in her hands. When something soft and furry moved around her ankles, she jumped, and saw it was the cat. He wound himself in and about her legs. Momentarily distracted from her fear, she squatted down to touch him, her hands wet from the tears. The cat rubbed up against her knee. He was black all over, deep silky black, and his eyes, pointing down toward his nose, were bluish green. The light made them shine like blue ice. Pecola rubbed the cat's head; he whined, his tongue flicking with pleasure. The blue eyes in the black face held her. (90)

It is not the presence of the cat that calms Pecola down, nor is it simply Pecola's presence that causes the cat to show affection towards her, it is the dance between them that influences their behavior. The cat makes the initial move to interact by winding himself through her legs, however, it is also Pecola's reaction, bending down to gently rub the cats head that fulfills the dance. The communication between the species is dependent on this dance, and it is this communication that allows the species the ability to become-with, to enter into a responsive relationship. This dance is a complex ritual of greetings, and it is these rituals of greetings, and correctly performed greetings, that develop the actors, human and non-human. Pecola, through this complex ritual of greeting, receives an affection that she has not previously known. The cat and Percola communicate a shared experience of torture at the hands of others. It causes Pecola to feel, for once, not hated for her looks. Pecola's character develops, evolves, becomes-with the cat. Of course, had Pecola performed the ritual of greetings, the "dance of relations," differently, the results would be different. If Pecola had tried to snatch the cat up and squeeze it to her chest, the cat would likely react very differently, perhaps even scratching her. Therefore, in order for Pecola to become-with the cat, to enter into the responsive relationship, she must perform the proper rituals, if she does not, then she risks the possibility of denying the alterity of the other and not developing herself. It is also significant to note that this development of Pecola's character through the interspecies interaction is abruptly disrupted when Junior enters the room and proceeds to kill the cat and blame it on Pecola. This is one of the significant turning

points in the development of Pecola, coming at the end of the winter section novel, almost directly in the center of the book; Pecola's possibilities of developing into a healthy adult are suddenly shattered.

The contrast between Pecola and Geraldine seems to suggest that animals are fundamental in the development of those that have been marginalized or otherwise mistreated in a human society—a connection that has gained increasing attention from sociologists like Clifton P. Flynn over the past decade.²¹ Of course, the cat is not the only significant animal character in the story that Pecola encounters, there is also the old dog.

The dog does not appear until the second to last chapter in the novel. This chapter comes directly after the description of Pecola's rape by Cholly. The chapter begins by introducing us to Geraldine's counterpart, an educated West Indian called Soaphead Church. Much like Geraldine (and the girls like her), Soaphead's ancestors were obsessed with erasing "in body, mind, and spirit...all that suggested Africa" (167). This is largely accomplished by marrying whites and "lightening the family complexion and thinning out the family features" (168). However, over time it became difficult to "maintain their whiteness" as some relatives married each other. Soaphead is the grandchild of one of these unions and his father raises him as a subject to test his educational and disciplinary theories. Again, like Geraldine, he is

²¹ Flynn's articles "Battered Women and Their Animal Companions: Symbolic Interaction Between Human and Nonhuman Animals" and "Woman's Best Friend: Pet Abuse in the Lives of Battered Women," document the importance that pets play in the lives of battered women. In addition, Flynn finds that many of the abusers also abuse the pets, sometimes killing them (like Junior in *The Bluest Eye*) in order to cause emotional and psychological harm to their human victims. Amazingly, many women reported avoid seeking help or leaving their abusers because they feared for the safety of their companion pets.

obsessed with cleanliness and order, and sees sexual relation as something dirty and disgusting. He is a pedophile that sees his molesting of little girls “smack[s] of innocence and was associated in his mind with cleanliness” (166-7). After moving to Lorain he rents a room in an old woman’s house and becomes a “Spiritualist and Psychic Reader” (173). He is content with life with the exception of land lady’s “old dog, Bob, who, although as deaf and quiet as she [the land lady], was not as clean” (173). Soaphead wishes that Bob “would hurry up and die” because he is “too old to be of any use.” Of course, Soaphead believes his “wish for the dog’s death as humane, for he could not bear...to see anything suffer” (171). If then, Geraldine and Soaphead are counterparts—two examples of what a history of attempting to become white, one through *lacitification* and one through erasure—then the difference in the interspecies relationships need to be accounted for.

Perhaps the most obvious distinction between Bob and the cat is, of course, the fact that Bob is not a cat, and therefore, has a different historicity. Dogs, though still abused and tortured frequently, fare much better in human history. In the Middle Ages dogs are primarily used for hunting and to protect property. However, as Linda Kalof points out, “the law on hunting prohibited the ownership of hunting dogs by those below a certain status level, and thus the status of dogs was clearly determined by the status of their owners” (55). In addition to hunting dogs, mastiffs were popular with land owners. Kalof explains “intensely loyal and roaming only his master’s land, the mastiff was more useful as a protector of the people and private property than a village constable” and was trained to “be capable of killing a man in

defense of a master” (55-56). During the Renaissance dogs were also “substantial entertainment value...serving as the main protagonist in animal-baiting exhibitions” (88). However, as pet ownership became more prevalent among all classes, authorities in England tried on numerous occasions to institute a dog tax to prevent the poor from owning dogs, but ultimately failed (118). Kalof continues, “finally, when rabies became a major concern in the late 1700s, the tax was passed in 1796 as a means of controlling the disease, primarily by eliminating the dogs of the poor because they were not as likely as gentlemen’s dogs to be confined if they showed symptoms of the disease” (118). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the treatment of service dogs and the use of dogs in vivisection lead to a burgeoning animal rights movement (anti-vivisection) that coincided with women’s rights and labor rights movement. The Brown Dog Riots of 1907, the result of anti-vivisectionist erecting a drinking fountain in memory of a brown dog that endured months of vivisection, featured “medical students organized riots and disturbances at women’s suffrage meetings and antivivisection meetings,” and lasted for three years. Eventually, the organized riots ceased when the fountain was stolen by “four council workmen guarded by 120 police and eventually broken up in a Battersea Council yard” (140). Ultimately, as Coral Lansbury points out, “the cause of animals was not helped when they were seen as surrogates for women or workers...If we look at animals and see only the reflection of ourselves, we deny them the reality of their own existence” (qtd. in Kalof, 140). Lansbury’s statement has a double meaning. First, the association of animal rights by the elites in power with the people that they

are actively trying to oppress (labor, women), forces them to automatically stand against animal rights. It does not matter they agree that dogs should be treated better (no doubt, their own dogs likely were), it only matters that those trying to disrupt the hierarchy are pushing for animal rights. Second, by labor and women's rights movement explicitly associating their treatment to the treatment of animals, instead of treating them as separate issues, prevented any possible success. So then, the western history of dogs is one where the species rose to a height in human society beyond any other (an argument could be made for horses, but they were never invited to share their master's homes) and dramatically tumbled back down the social ladder.

Returning to the novel, the first immediate connection that can be drawn between Soaphead's desire to kill Bob and Bob's historicity is the aspect of utility. Dogs' value and their ascendance to privilege (compared to other animals) was largely a result of their utility. Hunting dogs helped catch game; mastiffs protected their masters and their masters' land, and both provided companionship. In this sense, Soaphead's desire to kill Bob because he was "too old to be of any use," can be read literally, in other words, a dog's life is only valuable while it can provide humans some utility. However, this does not seem to be a sufficient analysis of Soaphead's hatred of Bob.

Soaphead despises Bob because he fears him. When he finally decides to poison Bob, "the horror of having to go near him" prevents him from being able to carry out the act (171). The horror that is cause by the unclean dog is similar to

Geraldine's revulsion to "niggers [who] were dirty and loud" (87). Geraldine's fear that the "line between colored and nigger was not always clear," and unless she was constantly vigilant, it could be eroded. The same type of fear is what causes Soaphead to despise Bob. The historicity of Bob as a dog is reminder of the possibility of slipping back. Dogs, through careful and deliberate breeding, eventually find their way into the home elite, but now, they are no better than a housecat. Soaphead's family has a similar history²². Bob, "mangy" with "his exhausted eyes" that "ran with sea-green matter around which gnats and flies clustered," is a constant reminder to Soaphead, that no matter how white his bloodline, or how well educated he was, in the white world the binary is white/Other—Bob and Soaphead are both on the side of Other—and that is where Soaphead's true revulsion lies. Unlike Geraldine (or the women like her), Soaphead does not interact with Bob, there is no "contact zone" or "dance of relating," and therefore, no chance for a responsive relationship. Pecola, on the other hand, does come into contact with Bob and is ultimately responsible for his death.

Pecola comes to Soaphead after Cholly rapes and impregnates her, explaining that she "can't go to school no more" and hoping that he can help her by making her eyes blue (174). Soaphead responds, "I can do nothing for you, my child. I am not a magician. I work only through the Lord...If he wants your wish granted, He will do it" (175). He continues to explain that they "must make...some offering, that is, some

²² Again, Frantz Fanon provides similar insight in *Black Skin, White Mask*, stating that "It is always essential to avoid falling back into the pit of niggerhood, and every woman in the Antilles, whether in a casual flirtation or in a serious affair, is determined to select the least black of men" (47).

contact with nature” (177). Of course, unable to actually confront Bob, but wishing to “hang on to the feeling of power,” he realizes that he has the perfect opportunity to get finally kill Bob by manipulating Pecola. “Take this food and give it to the creature sleeping on the porch. Make sure he eats it. And mark well how he behaves. If nothing happens, you will know that God has refused you. If the animal behaves strangely, your wish will be granted on the day following this one” (175). Pecola, of course, does not know that the food is poisoned and approaches Bob with compassion and kindness, unaware of the harm she is about to inflict.

She reached out and touched the dog’s head, stroking him gently. She placed the meat on the floor of the porch, near his nose. The odor roused him; he lifted his head, and got up to smell it better. He ate it in three or four gulps. The girl stroked his head again, and the dog looked up at her with soft triangle eyes...The dog gagged...Choking, stumbling, he moved like a broken toy around the yard. The girl’s mouth was open, a little petal of tongue showing. She made a wild, pointless gesture with one hand and then covered her mouth with both hands. The dog fell again...Then he was quiet. The girl’s hands covering her mouth, she backed away a few feet, then turned, ran out of the yard and down the walk. (176)

This is the last image of a sane Pecola in the novel: her hands clasped over her mouth in horror of what she has done, running out of the house. The following chapter features Pecola staring into a mirror, looking at her “blue eyes” and talking to an

imaginary friend. With Bob, like the cat, Pecola enters a responsive relationship of mutual engagement. She touches his head and Bob responds by opening his eyes and engaging her. Her continued stroking of his head leads Bob to respond with trust, taking the food she has set out for him.

Pecola's interaction with these animals (the cat and Bob) is central to her development as a character. The death of the cat, the only being that has willfully, without provocation, shown affection towards Pecola was killed because of it. And Pecola unknowingly sacrifices Bob as an offering to God. Therefore, the only two beings that have been receptive to Pecola, that have her responded to her and recognized her being, are dead as a result²³. Bob's death at her hands eliminates any possibility of Pecola engaging with another being, which is essential to her development into a healthy adult. When Bob "looked up at her with soft triangle eyes," it was the last time her being would be recognized and acknowledged—essentially, her very humanness is lost with the death of the cat and Bob.

As for Soaphead, having effectively dispatched of Bob, he writes a letter to God in which he declares, "I have caused a miracle...Now you [God] are jealous. You are jealous of me" (182). Essentially, with Bob gone, Soaphead no longer had to be reminded of his status in a white society, and now sees himself as better than God because he has done what God could not do "looked at the ugly little black girl,

²³ One cannot help but to draw a comparison to Emmanuel Levinas's essay "The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights," in which he recalls a dog named, coincidentally enough, Bobby, that befriends him while he is prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp. Levinas declares that Bobby is the "Last Kantian in Nazi Germany," because Bobby, unlike the Nazis, recognizes that the Jews are humans—he recognizes their essential being.

and...loved her" (182). Finally, satisfied with his work, he slips "into an ivory sleep," with ivory symbolizing his imagined return to whiteness.

Although Soaphead imagines that he himself is the only one capable of looking "at the ugly little black girl" and loving her, it only true as a narcissistic delusion. The only characters that looked at Pecola and saw her not as ugly, or black, or shameful were Bob and the cat. The significance of this inclusion in Morrison's first novel cannot be overstated; especially since it is not a one-time occurrence in a single novel, but a frequent and deliberate inclusion throughout her entire oeuvre. Morrison is doing more than simply using animals to demonstrate the oppression of African Americans or to demonstrate how power performs. Nor does Morrison's work, as Tadd Ruetenik suggests in his analysis of *Beloved*, contain a "limited speciesism, which can be described as the recognition that human exploitation of animals is an evil, coupled with a recognition that the amelioration of this evil should come only after dealing with the equivalent evil of human exploitation of other humans" (325)²⁴. Instead, as Karla Armbuster points out, Morrison "recognizes that the same destructive ideology of dualism and hierarchy undergrid racism, sexism, and the human domination and mistreatment of animals" (370). In other words, Morrison's inclusion of animals does not suggest that their suffering or lives are less important than humans; instead, it suggests that the very ideology that allows for the possibility of "evil of human exploitation of other humans" derives from humanist traditions. The binary distinction that allows for an irreducible multiplicity to be

²⁴ Ruetenik, Tadd. "Animal Liberation or Human Redemption: Speciesism and Racism in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 17:2 (2010).

reduced to the single category of Other, is the cause of all suffering from exploitation, whether it be human or animal suffering.

With that said, where Arbuster ultimately fails is in her insistence that the power of Morrison's work lies in a call back to "ancient wisdom" and "communication of with nonhuman animals and the natural world as a whole" (377). There is no doubt that responsive relationships are central to Morrison's vision co-evolution, or becoming-with, as Haraway would put it, but the romanticizing of the past embedded in visions of an "ancient wisdom" from a mystical "Edenic state before language or dualism when humans could converse with animals," is problematic and not terribly useful for ending human or animal exploitation. Beside the inherent problem of practical applicability, as if it was possible to suddenly renounce civilized society, there is also the problem that the imaginary time when humans and all other beings in nature were in harmony never really existed. Also, this vision only serves to reduce the binary human/animal to a singularity, which still serves to deny alterity by reducing an irreducible multiplicity of beings and ultimately leads to biologism. Even if we are speaking of a Christian biblical history, and not a factual human history, the very appearance of Adam creates the binary of human/animal. In *Genesis* 1.24-25, God creates all the non-human animals, and then in the following verse he creates Adam: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (1.26). So then, by the very creation of Adam, who is given

dominion over all other species, the Human/everything else (animal) binary is created. In fact, a verse later, God explicitly instructs Adam and Eve to “subdue it [the Earth]: and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (1.28). There is simply no time when humans and all other animals existed in harmony, and to romanticize a past where this is true ignores real suffering and exploitation in addition to demeaning the progress humans and non-human animals have made in learning to enter mutually beneficial responsive relationships. It denies evolutionary adaptation and progress, which in turn, denies the possibility of it ever happening.

More humans have more intimate contact with animals (primarily through pets) than at any other point in history. Therefore, there are also more opportunities for engagement and developing responsive relationships. Morrison’s work acknowledges this fact, which is why the animals that appear in her novels are primarily ones that have integrated (whether by choice or force) into human society. There are no lions, no elephants, and no komodo dragons—instead we are presented with dogs, like Bob and Here Boy, cats, cattle, horses and birds—animals that are available for engagement, if we take the opportunity to respond. In addition, sustained and meaningful engagement and the co-constitutive possibilities that such interaction presents, are in and of themselves, the *impossible action* required to disrupt the regime of biologism. Real interaction and genuine curiosity about individuals and species insists on an abyssal rupture between humans and animals. In addition, this type of engagement with the specific (individual, species, historical

moment) does not allow for the abyssal rupture to be a single indivisible line between human and animal, instead, like Derrida says of his own work, it increases “its figures, in complicating, thickening, delinearizing, folding, and dividing the line precisely by making it increase and multiply” (29). Every interspecies interaction then, through acknowledgement of specificity, seeks to increase the contours of these ruptures so that it is no longer just human/animal, but instead it is *this* human and *this* animal, with all our uniqueness and historicity. This creates infinite encounters with difference and therefore, opens wide the co-constitutive possibilities of interspecies interactions.

CHAPTER 4

A Boy and his Dog and A Man and His Sheep: Imagining Animal Companions After the End of the World.

At the end of Cormac McCarthy's post-apocalyptic novel, *The Road*, the unnamed boy leaves his dead father's body to join up with a man and woman. The man is described as: "dressed in a gray and yellow ski parka. He carried a shotgun upside down over his shoulder on a braided leather lanyard and he wore a nylon bandolier filled with shells for the gun. A veteran of old skirmishes, bearded, scarred across his cheek and the bone stoven and the one eye wandering. When he spoke his mouth worked imperfectly and when he smiled" (281-82). This description of the man is not reassuring for the reader and the boy's fate is ultimately left ambiguous. The film adaptation of the novel however, modifies this ending to remove the ambiguity. Although the man (Guy Pearce) appears just as ragged, when the camera pans across his traveling companions, it slowly pans down to reveal that one of the companions is a dog—a dog that bears remarkable resemblance to fellow post-apocalyptic warrior, Mad Max's dog companion. This inclusion of the dog in the film is a reassurance to the viewer that the boy will be okay. If the man keeps a dog alive at a time where others have turned to cannibalism, then he must be a "good guy" and therefore the boy is safe. As previously mentioned, the dog at the end of *The Road* bears a resemblance to Mad Max's dog companion that gets killed by bandits

and sets him on his path of revenge. A similar dog, named Dogmeat, accompanies your character in the post-apocalyptic video games series *Fallout*. In addition, in the novel *I Am Legend*, it is the arrival of a dog that prevents the protagonist, Robert Neville, from committing suicide, and in the *Terminator* series it is dogs that can distinguish between humans and robots. There are, of course, many more examples of dogs (not to mention other animals) in post-apocalyptic narratives—and even their absence, as in *The Road*, represents a significant aspect of the text. Even when animals do not directly appear in the narrative, their absence is often still noticed. With that said, however, even in the Animal Studies fields or Apocalyptic Literature Studies, animals seem rarely to be a focus of critical attention.²⁵ A closer inspection of the narratives reveals an interesting split between visions of what comes after the end of the world—on the one side is the liberal humanist future, and on the other is a posthumanist future—ultimately revealing that the only hope for redemption is through cultivating encounters with animal others.

As previously mentioned, animals abound in post-apocalyptic narratives; however, four texts in particular illustrate the tension between liberal humanists and posthumanists futures. These texts are Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road*; Paolo Bacigalupi's short story, "The People of Sand and Slag;" Harlan Ellison's "A Boy and His Dog;" and finally, Philip K. Dick's well-known novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*.

²⁵ The only exception seems to be when animals are the direct cause of the apocalypse, like in *The Planet of Apes* series. However, even then the animals (chimps) are not the real focus nor are they the cause of the apocalypse. It is human hubris coupled with a lack of scientific ethics that causes the apocalypse. In any case, the apocalypse is a strictly anthropocentric event.

Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, a recipient of the Pulitzer Prize, and John Hillcoat's 2009 film adaptation are generally regarded as works about a coming eco-apocalypse. The notoriously private McCarthy in his only televised interview ever, explained to Oprah that the novel was inspired by his 8-year-old son and imagining what the world would be like a half century from now. The narrative follows an unnamed man and his son as they embark on journey towards the coast after an undescribed apocalyptic event. Hannah Stark in her article "'All these things he saw and did not see': Witnessing the End of the World in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*," points out that "it matters little what the precise event is; what is significant to us is that the world that is described to us is a world without either an ecosystem or natural resources" (73). McCarthy describes this world as "barren, silent, godless" where there is "nothing living anywhere" (4, 30). The trees and plants are dead, the animals are dead—all biota, dead—even the sun and moon are essentially dead. McCarthy describes the "dark of the invisible moon. The nights now only slightly less black. By day the banished sun circles the earth like a grieving mother with a lamp" (32). The world of McCarthy's novel is not a world that is dying; it is a world that is already dead. Yet humans, as always, conspicuously remain.

The novel's portrayal of a world that is already dead, not dying, is indicative of a liberal humanist apocalypse. As Hannah Stark precisely articulates, "*The Road* offers an anthropocentric vision of the end of the world in which humans are the final witnesses, and also in which the end of the human is also the end of the world" (80). In addition, though the novel does not reveal the cause of the catastrophe, the status

as eco-literature during the Anthropocene more than suggests that humans are also the primary cause of the apocalypse. This is significant because it reveals an important distinction of what the apocalypse exactly is, and for the liberal humanist narrative, the apocalypse is the end of human life. Without humans, there is no planet. For example, there is the often quoted passage in the novel where the man realizes that to the boy he must be an “alien. A being from a planet that no longer existed” (153). This passage is generally taken as an indication of the boy’s lack of a historical past—however, what precedes this quote is more important:

When he woke again he thought the rain had stopped. But that wasnt [sic] what woke him. He’d been visited in a dream by creatures of a kind he’d never seen before. They did not speak. He thought that they’d been crouching by the side of his cot as he slept and then had skulked away on his awakening. (153)

This is what sparks the man’s realization that to the boy, he possesses alien qualities. However, although he “could not construct for the child’s pleasure the world he’d lost without constructing the loss as well,” he nevertheless is a knowable remnant of that world for the boy. On the other hand, the “dream creatures” are essentially unknowable. The passage continues:

He tried to remember the dream but he could not. All that was left was the feeling of it. He thought that perhaps they’d come to warn him. Of what? That he could not enkindle in the heart of the child what was ashes in his own. Even now some part of him wished they’d

never found this refuge. Some part of him always wished it to be over.

(154)

In other words, while the memories of the knowable world of the past (pre-apocalypse) cannot be passed on to the child, the future itself—one where humans cease to exist—is equally unknowable for the man. The dream creatures are therefore, the creatures of unknowable future. The man knows that humans will not be there to witness what, if anything, comes after the death of the last human and without the human to witness it, it does not exist. His desire for it “to be over” is the desire to escape witnessing the unknowable of a dead planet where humans have no conceivable centrality—no way of structuring the known (and dying) present around the figure of the human itself.

Here again, is where the discrepancy of the dog in the film and novel remains significant. Whereas the dog’s inclusion at the end of film reassures the viewer of the anthropocentric world reemerging—where humans once again reassume their “natural” roll of having dominion over all other life—the novel’s erasure of the dog leaves no role for the human. Therefore in the liberal humanist framework, when there is nothing left to have dominion over, the figure of the human loses all significance.

The diminishing significance of the human is revealed in the following passage:

The dog that he [the boy] remembers followed us for two days. I tried to coax it to come but it would not. I made a noose of wire to catch it.

There were three cartridges in the pistol. None to spare. She walked away down the road. The boy looked after her and then he looked at me and then he looked at the dog and he began to cry and to beg for the dog's life and I promised I would not hurt the dog. A trellis of a dog with the hide stretched over it. The next day it was gone. That is the dog he remembers. He doesn't [sic] remember any little boys. (87)

This passage stands out for a number of reasons. First, it is the only passage entirely narrated in first person. Second, as the narrator says, the pistol has "three cartridges" left in it, which suggests that this scene takes place while the mother is still alive. Earlier in the text the mother exclaims "I should have done it [killed all of them] a long time ago. When there were *three bullets* in the gun instead of two [emphasis added]" (56). The mother eventually leaves in the middle of the night and commits suicide. The scene concludes: "In the morning the boy said nothing at all and when they were packed and ready to set out upon the road he turned and looked back at their campsite and he said: She's gone isn't she? And he said: Yes, she is" (58). Therefore, reading these passages together, the "she" in the first person passage takes on a new meaning—it is not the dog that the "she" refers to, but the mother²⁶. The boy is watching the mother walk away, knowing that she will eventually abandon them, and then pleads for the dog's life. The boy is not pleading for the dog's life as a replacement for his mother, but rather as another life that can persist in a dead

²⁶ Although this is debatable, the fact that the boy "looked after her and then looked at me and then looked at the dog" suggests that there are three beings that the boy looks at—the mother, the father, and the dog. In addition, since the gun is largely to save them if they are caught by cannibals or rapists by killing themselves first, the mention that with only three bullets there are "none to spare," means that it would take three bullets to kill them.

world. If his mother must die, the dog must live.²⁷ However, the father's agreement to not hurt the dog is not a result of the boy's plea alone; instead it is largely because the dog is a "trellis of a dog with hide stretched over it." In other words, the dog has little utility for the man since it cannot provide them with much food. The dog is nothing more than a resource for the father, as is the rest of the planet. When all resources cease to exist, human purpose also ceases to exist. The diminishing significance of the human in the world is further reflected in the man's admission that the boy "doesn't remember any little boys," and thus acknowledging that unlike the dog that the boy is actually remembering from the past, the little boy must have actually been there since the boy has no reference point.²⁸ Thus the novel's use of the first person here calls attention to the significance of the father's decision. He knew there was a little boy there, but they did not look for him to see if he needed help, the father just left him. Marking this by making the father's recollection of the event as the only first person passage in the novel demonstrates the significance that it plays. The father's abandonment of the little boy effectively shatters the façade of liberal humanist ideology—that there are humans and there are animals, divided by a single line of demarcation, which cannot be traversed. Here, the little boy fares no

²⁷ This is what John Steinbeck refers to in his novel, *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*, as the "conspiracy of life," to united against "unlife" in order to persist, to survive.

²⁸ This is seemingly confirmed at the end of novel: "Do you remember that little boy, Papa? Yes. I remember him. (280)." This passage serves a dual purpose, to acknowledge the little boy they left behind and, since the father is dying, to mark the boy's forced transition out of boyhood.

better than the dog they earlier encountered, and indeed humans in and of themselves no longer have any significance.²⁹

Whereas *The Road* maintains liberal humanism is revealed through the linking of the diminishing significance of the human to the literal death of all other known life and therefore suggesting that without humans there is no planet (at least not one that matters), Paolo Bacigalupi's 2005 novelette, "The People of Sand and Slag," pushes liberal humanism to its logical conclusion—a world where humans are essentially the only form of life.

"The People of Sand and Slag" envisions what would happen if humans were truly removed from their connection to other life by both eliminating the dependency on other life as a necessary resource for humans—in terms of a source of food, oxygen, et cetera—and by eliminating what Jacques Derrida and (later) Cary Wolfe refer to as shared finitude (vulnerability).

The novelette takes place in Montana in an unspecified year in the distant future and follows three security guards, self-described as a "tribe of killers," that work for a mining conglomerate named SesCo. The security guards, Chen, Jaak, and Lisa, spend most of their time following the same routine: "drop nukes on intruders, slag the leftovers to melt so they couldn't regrow, hit the beaches for vacation." They eat "sand for dinner" and bowls "of tailings mud." The world has largely been turned into a toxic waste site as every last resource is extracted. The main protagonist, Chen,

²⁹ This is further reinforced in the novel by the way humans are routinely treated as nothing more than resources. For instance, cannibals keep prisoners alive in their house while slowly amputating their limbs to eat and the famous dead baby scene that was cut from the film, where they find a "charred human infant headless and gutted and blackening on the spit" that they come across in the woods (110, 198).

describes, “the mining robots rumbled back and forth, ripping deeper into the earth, turning into a mush of tailings and rock acid that they left in exposed ponds when they hit the water table, or piled into thousand-foot mountainscapes of waste soil.” All that seemingly matters is pleasure and profit. The story starts with an alert that there is an intruder on SesCo’s mine. The security guards head out to confront and “slag” (kill and then incinerate the remains to prevent the person from regenerating) the intruder only to discover a “shaggy quadruped with a tail. Dreadlocked hair dangled from its shanks like ornaments, tagged with tailings mud clods.” Initially, they mistake it for a “bio-job”—a biologically engineered, lab grown non-human—but quickly notice that it “doesn’t have any hands” prompting them to ponder “what kind of sick bastard makes a bio-job without hands?” Upon closer inspection however, Jaak notices “That’s not a bio-job at all....That’s a dog.” This, according to Jaak, is “like finding a goddamn dinosaur.” They bring the dog back to their security bunker, where one of the few biologists left confirms that it is a dog, takes a DNA sample and leaves the dog with the security guards, remarking “a live one is hardly worth keeping around.” As the biologist leaves he advises them that they “could eat it” as “it was a real delicacy.” This line functions as a form of response to Jaak’s earlier question, “Who needs animals if you can eat stone?” Here we see that the decline of animal life is directly related to animals no longer being a necessary commodity. While certainly a significant detail, where the text truly plays out the implications of liberal humanism is when they decide to keep the dog as a pet.

The dog is their “little window of pre-history,” meaning that he is their window into mortality and vulnerability. Liberal humanism, with all its anthropocentrism, relies on a clear, single and indivisible, rupture between humans and all other animals (and all biota in general). However, this demarcation has consistently been challenged on various grounds, which Cary Wolfe expertly traces in his chapter, “Flesh and Finitude,” in his book *What is Posthumanism?*.³⁰ As Wolfe points out, Derrida identifies that “the fundamental ethical bond we have with nonhuman animals resides in our shared finitude, our vulnerability and mortality as ‘fellow creatures’” (80). Therefore, when humans are no longer vulnerable, the challenge to liberal humanism completely dissolves, as is evident in the novelette. Wolfe unpacks and expands Derrida’s discussion of finitude to explain that there are “two kinds of finitude...two kinds of passivity and vulnerability” (88). Wolfe continues:

The first type (physical vulnerability, embodiment, and eventually mortality) is paradoxically made unavailable, *inappropriable*, to us by the very thing that make it available—namely, a second type of “passivity” or “not being able,” which is the finitude we experience in our subjection to a radically human technicity or mechanicity of language, a technicity that has profound consequences, of course, for

³⁰ Wolfe highlights the philosopher Jeremy Bentham’s important question about animals that shifts consideration for animals from their active abilities to an essential passivity, by asking “Can they suffer?” (63). This leads liberal humanism to be challenged by various means, which Wolfe traces in the figures of Peter Singer (utilitarianism), John Rawls (contractarian), Martha Nussbaum (capabilities) and Cora Diamond (finitude). Ultimately, Diamond’s finitude, while promising, is unable to escape the bounds of humanist logic.

what we too hastily think of as “our” concepts, which are therefore in an important sense not “ours” at all. (88)

In the novelette, it is the end of the first kind of finitude that is most important, because the second is dependent on the first. It is therefore through this first (primary) form of finitude that implications of liberal humanism—as it is no longer bound by shared finitude with other life—can be fully explored.

The first type of finitude is alleviated in the novelette by freeing humans from their flesh and with it, their mortality. For instance, when Jaak first corners the dog, the dog attacks him “trying to tear his arm off.” Jaak interprets the attack as a sign of the dog’s hunger and, having no particular attachment to his arm, he cuts “his arm off, leaving it in the bewildered animal’s mouth.” Just as their wounds automatically heal, their limbs also automatically regenerate³¹. This disconnection from their flesh also distances them from the vulnerability that comes with mortality. One of the ways that they “experiment in vulnerability” is by being completely amputated on vacations, which Chen and Jaak do to Lisa on their vacation to Hawaii after finding the dog. While lying on the beach, amputated, Chen rolls Lisa to face the dog and she remarks: “This is as close as I’ll ever get to it...It’s vulnerable to everything. It can’t swim in the ocean. We have to scrub its water. Dead end of an evolutionary chain. Without science, we’d be as vulnerable as it...As vulnerable as I am now...This is as close to death as I’ve ever been.” To them vulnerability is a fleeting experience, a simulation—an experience that can only be approximated. Thus any affinity that they

³¹ To “slag” in the story is to actually kill something by means of the total annihilation of any remains.

have felt towards the dog has also been a form of simulation, not a genuine empathetic connection to another being. Because they can only die by being “slagged,” which is not a guaranteed outcome they do not experience finitude as an inevitability. Without the shared inevitability of death in the Derrida/Diamond/Wolfe schema, they are left with no genuine bond to the animal. When the dog once again gets injured (by getting tangled in the barbwire that covers the beach), Jaak, the default “owner” of the dog because he pays for the dog’s food, exclaims: “I think we should eat it.” The quick decision to eat the dog is paired with Jaak’s choice to refer to the dog as “it.”³² They never bother to name the dog because it is not a being, it is a thing; a thing that they are quick to dispose of when the novelty wears off. The inability to recognize the dog as a fellow being is because of the lack of shared finitude. Because death is only a possibility for them and not an inevitability they are unable to share the passivity that that lies at the center of life and connects all life. In addition, without any connection to death, to vulnerability, the second form of finitude—the “we” that “we” give ourselves the right to give—is also dissolved. After all, as Chen wonders about what earlier humans would think about them, he asked “Would they even call us human?” Lisa responds, “No, they’d call us gods.” Essentially, Lisa’s response is the triumph of liberal humanism; where the abyssal rupture between human and non-human has become so vast that there are no contact zones. There is no Other to the human, and therefore, humans are *sui*

³² It should also be noted that they are eating the dog because they heard “it was a real delicacy,” not because they need the nutritional value. In fact they even point out the dog’s inability to eat sand and oil as evidence of its inferiority. This is certainly analogous to contemporary “foodie” culture that values “delicacies” over conservation.

*generis*³³. *Sui generis* Man is the logical extension of liberal humanism where the uniqueness, centrality, and importance of the human are unchallenged.

It should be noted though, that Bacigalupi's story is a dystopia. Unlike McCarthy's *The Road*, where the dystopian aspect of the novel is the decline of human significance, Bacigalupi's vision of dystopia is the decline of human empathy—of affinity with anything not human. Therefore, even though Bacigalupi pushes the premise of liberal humanism to its extreme conclusion, his narrative remains critical; whereas McCarthy's novel laments the loss of the liberal humanist promise. Bacigalupi's criticism of liberal humanism is made apparent by Chen's experience with the dog one night:

I woke up to something licking my face. At first I thought it was Lisa, but she'd climbed into her own bunk. I opened my eyes and found the dog.

It was a funny thing to have this animal licking me, like it wanted to talk, or say hello or something. It licked me again, and I thought that it had come a long way from when it had tried to take off Jaak's arm. It put its paws up on my bed, and then in a single heavy movement, it was up on the bunk with me, its bulk curled against me.

³³ I use this term to designate not only that humans are of their own kind (rather than a separation of degree), but also as a term to designate that humans exists in the novelette as completely untethered from all other life. Humans, as a species, are thus like a monotheistic god, to which no counterpart exist.

It slept there all night. It was weird having something other than Lisa lying next to me, but it was warm and there was something friendly about it. I couldn't help smiling as I drifted back to sleep.

This passage expresses a flicker of a long dormant affinity, a moment of empathy, a moment of connection in otherness. Unfortunately, this momentary smoldering of connection cannot traverse the abyss of mortality and Chen is left with a faint genetic memory of something indescribable: "Still, I remember when the dog licked my face and hauled its shaggy bulk onto my bed, and I remember its warm breathing besides me, and sometimes, I miss it." The loss of this connection-in-otherness is the true horror of the novelette.

Non-anthropocentric Apocalypse and Posthuman Futures.

The way out of a bleak anthropocentric future begins with the death of a turtle in the Tongan Capital of Nuku, Alofa. The turtle, named Tu'i Malila was given to the king of Tonga in 1777 by Captain James Cook and was watched over and protected by the people of Tonga for the entirety of his nearly 200 year life. This story, by way of an excerpt from Reuters in 1966, opens Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream Of Electric Sheep?*—not a description of the catastrophic war that has rendered the Earth nearly uninhabitable, or a description of the ruins of San Francisco lit up with ceaseless explosions like the opening of Ridley Scott's film inspired by the novel, *Blade Runner*—but with a real life obituary for a turtle. This inclusion seems to be significant especially when coupled with the fact that the

protagonist Rick Deckard's main motivation in the novel appears to be purchasing a real (non-electric) animal. However, for whatever reason, the animals in Dick's novel have not been given much critical attention. When the animals are considered properly they often end up as simply another example of anxiety produced by the human/other binary, much like the novel's androids. This does not seem to be a sufficient account of the animals in novel when we consider that the novel opens with a turtle's obituary. In addition, with all the praise Dick's vision of the future has received, with Fredric Jameson referring to him in his book, *Archaeologies of the Future*, as the "Shakespeare of Science Fiction," it is interesting that little consideration has been given as to why in a world where humans have such a precarious existence, animals are the motivating forces of Dick's narrative (345)³⁴.

We are first introduced to Rick Deckard through a combative early morning exchange with his wife, Iran, who claims that Deckard is "a murderer hired by the cops." Deckard defends himself by stating that "I've never killed a human being in my life. In the middle of this tense exchange where Deckard is being called a murderer by his own wife, the real cause of Deckard's rage explodes out of him when he denounces his wife for spending all their money "Instead of saving...so we could afford a real sheep, to replace that fake electric one upstairs. A mere electric animal, and me earning all that I've worked my way up to through the years" (4). For Deckard, much of his motivation in the novel comes from his desire to purchase, and

³⁴ Ridley Scott's film adaptation of Dick's novel alludes to Deckard being an android himself and in doing so, renders the presence of animals and Deckard's obsession with them a meaningless point—in the film the animals play little to no role.

therefore, take care of a real animal. The androids and Deckard's role as a bounty hunter come secondary to his desire to own a real animal. In fact, his desire to own a real animal borders on obsession, as he always carries a well-read copy of "Sydney's Animal & Fowl Catalogue," frequently visits a pet store where he fantasizes about owning the animals, and even breaks a social taboo by revealing to a neighbor that his sheep is electric in the hopes that the neighbor will take pity on him and sell Deckard his pregnant horse's offspring. When the neighbor declines to sell his colt and suggests that Deckard purchase a cat, Deckard channels the spirit of Gilles Deleuze and responds "I don't want a domestic pet." Apparently Deleuze's contempt for domestic animals will live on into the future. Deckard continues, "I want what I originally had, a large animal. A sheep, or if I can get the money, a cow or a steer or what you have, a horse" (14). Deckard realizes that in order to be able to afford such an extravagant purchase, he would only need to "retire," meaning kill, five "andys" (14). This realization is the catalyst for much of the action in the novel, Deckard's attempt to track down and retire five androids to earn enough money for a large "real" animal.

Deckard's desire to own a real animal can be read as a critique of capitalism's need to align social status and life-value with the acquisition of commodities—animals, because of their rarity in the world of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, could be the equivalent of our jewelry—but that would not account for the religion of the novel, Mercerism, and its insistence on empathy and resistance to "kipple". As Sherryl Vint, one of the only animal studies scholars to analyze the novel, explains,

Mercerism is about both compassion for animals and resistance to 'kipple', the novel's term for debris resultant from a process of degeneration by which the world seems to be turning to dust, and a metaphor for the intellectual and spiritual emptiness of this future. Mercerism's resistance to kipple and to the 'killers' of animal and other life on the planet...offers an ideal of a new relationship with the world, one that is not based on dominating nature, which emerges from a sense of self as shared by others instead of isolated and finite. (31)

Essentially, Mercerism is structured on the practice of cultivating empathy, and encounters with animals play an important role in this cultivation. Much like the purpose of meditation in Zen Buddhism is to practice mindfulness, taking care of an animal in Mercerism is practicing empathy. Deckard's desire to have an animal to take care of is the result of his desire to practice empathy. This is essential for two reasons: first, empathy is what allows one to fuse with Wilbur Mercer and "ascend"—to reach a state of enlightenment—and second, empathy is what separates humans from androids. To be human is to be empathetic. Although Deckard mistakenly believes empathy to be unique to the "human community," his reasons for believing this are not convincing. By his own definition empathy belongs to those with a "group instinct" and "herbivores or anyhow omnivores who could depart from a meat diet," which seems to allow for numerous animal species to join the ranks of the empathetic (31). Perhaps the disconnect can be attributed to the fact that any "herd animal," with the exception of humans, would not have the

possibility to form a herd in Deckard's world because of their scarcity and therefore, value as a commodity. In any case, Deckard's hatred for his electric sheep reinforces the notion that taking care of an animal is essential for practicing empathy, as is evident in the following passage: "He thought, too, about the his need for a real animal; within him an actual hatred once more manifested itself toward his electric sheep, which he had to tend, had to care about, as if it lived. The tyranny of the object, he thought. It doesn't know I exist. Like the androids, it had no ability to appreciate the existence of another" (42). His hatred for his electric sheep appears to be a result of his having to take care of it, but rather it is the sheep not acknowledging that care. Therefore, the practice of empathy requires a mutual engagement; the care cannot simply come from one side. Empathy can only be practiced in a reciprocal relationship.

This lack of acknowledgement by the electric sheep brings us to the important work of Donna Haraway and her notion of companion species. In *Haraway's Companion Species Manifesto* and her later work, *When Species Meet*, she attempts to understand how we (humans) actually interact with the animal lives closest to us and what these relationships mean. While Haraway's work is expansive, of particular interest is her concept of "significant otherness" and how to enter into an ethical relationship with a pet (dogs, in this case) through a "dance of relating" (*When Species Meet*, 25). Before proceeding, it should be pointed out that although Deckard is explicit in not wanting a "domestic pet," the one-on-one relationship with whatever animal he purchases, mirrors more closely a human/pet relationship than

another form of animal/human-owner relationship. Even if he were to purchase a cow, the cow would not be livestock left to graze in the field with other cows, with the only occasional interaction with Deckard being the daily injections of hormones and antibiotics. Instead, the cow would be treated as pet—even the electric sheep is treated as a pet—with daily interactions with Deckard and a close one-on-one relationship. Therefore, while much of Haraway’s work focuses on dogs it is still applicable to understanding the animals in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*.

Haraway opens the *The Companion Species Manifesto* by reflecting on her relationship with her own dog, Cayenne Pepper, stating:

We have forbidden conversations; we have had oral intercourse; we are bound in telling story upon story with nothing but the facts. We are training each other in acts of communication we barely understand. We are, constitutively, companion species. We make each other up, in the flesh. Significantly other to each other in specific difference, we signify in the flesh a nasty developmental infection called love. This love is an historical aberration and a naturalcultural legacy. (2-3)

This passage contains three important concepts for understanding Deckard’s need for a real animal. First, the concept of “companion species,” which does not mean domestic pets with human owners—although that is the case with Haraway and Cayenne—but rather, species that engage in dances of relating and therefore, “make each other up.” In other words, species that affect each other’s way of being in, and experiencing the world. This is important for Deckard because what he craves

is that co-constituting possibilities of companion species. If companion species “make each other up,” then Deckard’s lack of engagement with another species prevents him, in a very real sense, from coming into being (being made up). Second, but of equal importance is the second half of Haraway’s statement, “in the flesh,” which, of course, is a real concern for Deckard. An interaction with a real flesh and blood animal allows Deckard to verify his own fleshiness—it is a way to confirm that he is indeed, human. Third, Haraway’s connection of significant otherness with this term “love” can help explain how empathy functions in the novel. In many ways, Haraway’s use of “love” here speaks directly to the novel’s use of empathy and the problems of Mercerism. Haraway’s use of the term “love” here is a unique and particular kind of love. It is not the love that one has for a lover or the love that one might have for a child. In fact, Haraway is quite explicit that one should not regard pets as children and that doing so is disrespectful and dangerous (37). No, the love that Haraway speaks of here is unique to interspecies relationship that arises from an ethical engagement between the participants, human and non-human. She describes how this relationship looks in practice with dogs by suggesting humans must be attentive “to see who the dogs are and hear what they are telling us, not in bloodless abstraction, but in the one-on-one relationship, in otherness-in-connection” (45). Again, noting “bloodless abstraction,” we see that fleshiness is a requirement. In short, it is about being open to affect, and be affected by, significant otherness. The form of empathy that *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* describes, a practice of reciprocity and engagement, of otherness-in-connection, mirrors what Haraway is

describing as love. For instance, when Deckard attempts to understand his hatred for the andys, he decides that it is because they “possessed no ability to feel emphatic joy for another life form’s success or grief at its defeat” (32). In other words, there is no possibility for otherness-in-connection for the andys.

Deckard is not alone in his desire, his need for this otherness-in-connection, for companionship with another species. John Isidore, a human “special” (special meaning unable to procreate as a result of the toxic Earth and therefore, unable to emigrate to Mars) is also seeking this companionship. Unlike Deckard, who has a wife and interacts with others, Isidore, by virtue of his not-quite-human-status, lives a rather solitary life. When a young woman, Pris, moves into Isidore’s abandoned apartment complex he is quick to try and befriend her. Even after realizing she is an andy, he still desires friendship. It is not until Pris mutilates a spider that Isidore turns against her. “Pris, with the scissors, cut yet another leg from the spider. All at once John Isidore pushed her away and lifted up the mutilated creature. He carried to the sink and there he drowned it. In him, his mind, his hopes, drowned, too. As swiftly as the spider” (211). Essentially, for Isidore, his desire to practice empathy, to establish otherness-in-connection, suffers a dual blow. First, the spider’s death, at his own hands (a mercy killing is still a killing) eliminates the possibility of keeping the spider—a creature he already felt genuine affection for. Second, Pris is no longer a being which he can connect with—she is not capable of engaging in the necessary reciprocity of otherness-in-connection. Isidore is absolutely, empirically, alone.

The novel is not content, however, with this simple division of flesh and technology as a new line of absolute division between life and non-life. In the closing pages the narrative challenges the requirement of “flesh” for empathetic engagement. This is evident when at the end of the novel, Deckard’s wife Iran reveals to him that the toad he has acquired is an ersatz too. Deckard responds “I’ll be okay....it doesn’t matter. The electric things have their lives, too. Paltry as those lives are (241).” Deckard then retires to bed and for the first time there is “no need to turn on the mood organ,” for either of them. With Deckard asleep, Iran calls an electric animal store to find out how to best maintain the toad and care for it, explaining to the sales woman “I want it to work perfectly. My husband is totally devoted to it” (244). The novel closes with the line “And, feeling better, fixed herself at last a cup of black, hot coffee” (244). What seems like a throwaway line at the end is significant when compared to the opening of the novel. No longer are Deckard and Iran in conflict, relying on a mood organ to feel anything at all. There is a true connection between them—an empathetic engagement that is also an emotional stimulus for them—that connection allows them to feel, to affect, and to respond, without the mood organ and without Mercer. This connection comes by way of a third party; it is Deckard’s recognition of the toad, of ersatz life, as something also worthy of empathy, of devotion. With this, the novel comes full circle to the opening page of Tu’imalila’s obituary. Captain Cook represents the imperialist agenda of liberal humanism by capturing the turtle and treating as a commodity to be traded as a gift. Cook has no respect for the turtle’s own being and certainly no meaningful

engagement with the turtle. However, the Tonga people offer another possible model that diverges from the liberal humanist model. They name the turtle Tu'imalila—Tu'i being the family name of a line of Tongan kings—and appoint “special keepers” to take care of the turtle. The turtle’s unique being is acknowledged and therefore, an ethical engagement, an empathetic connection akin to Deckard’s and the toad, is established. Like Deckard’s recognition that the “electric things have their lives, too,” the Tongans see Tu'imalila as a being with its own life and they have a responsibility to respect that life by practicing a reciprocal engagement—establishing otherness-in-connection.

For all the moves that Dick makes in his novel to challenge and counter liberal humanism, he too, is still unable to move past an anthropocentric narrative. Harlan Ellison’s short story, “A Boy and His Dog,” is able to envision a world (terrible as it may be) where the anthropocentric legacy of liberal humanism has all but completely dissipated. Much like *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, “A Boy and His Dog” takes place after a catastrophic war has destroyed much of the earth and its inhabitants. The protagonist, a teenage boy named Vic, roams the barren wasteland with his telepathic dog, Blood. They spend their time scavenging for food, avoiding bandits, and having Blood sniff out women for Vic to rape. Eventually, Vic ends up saving a woman named Quilla from a group of raiders, they then have *consensual sex*, and then Quilla reveals that she is from the Norman Rockwell like underground city, Topeka. Vic follows Quilla to Topeka, in spite of Blood’s insistence that Vic remain above ground. Blood refuses to accompany Vic and instead waits at the entrance to

Topeka. Topeka, a town based on idealized morality and mid-western innocence is in need of men capable of reproduction. Vic is captured by Quilla's father and mechanically forced to ejaculate so that the women of Topeka may be artificially inseminated with Vic's semen. Eventually Vic and Quilla escape back to the surface and find Blood nearly dead from wounds incurred while first rescuing Quilla, in addition to being severely malnourished. Up until this point it is your typical boy meets girl love story, but faced with the need to continue on and find shelter and Blood's current condition preventing him from going anywhere, Vic must make a choice.

He had to have food, at once, and some medical care. I had to do something.

Something good, something fast.

"Vic," Quilla June's voice was high and whining, "come on! He'll be all right.

We have to hurry."

I looked up at her. The sun was going down. Blood trembled in my arms.

She got a pouty look on her face. "If you love me, you'll come *on!*"

I couldn't make it alone out there without him. I knew it. If I loved her. She

asked me, in the boiler, do you know what love is?

The story concludes with Vic killing Quilla and cooking her up for Blood to eat. As he watches Blood eat, he answers Quilla's question: "Do you know what love is?" "Sure I know," says Vic, "A boy loves his dog." Although the ending appears horrendous, it once again demonstrates the necessity of the "love" that arises in the co-constitutive interspecies engagement. Both these work because they take place after humanity

has failed—Quilla is less important than Blood because human superiority is obliterated along with everything else. In addition, it is the anthropocentric liberal humanist model, which figures the human as the center of all existence that leads to the apocalypse itself, as can be seen in *The Road* and “The People of Sand and Slag.”

In the Anthropocene it is evident that the apocalypse will be anthropocentric. Humans will be the cause; however, what comes after the end of the world is open to possibilities. If liberal humanism continues to run its course we are left with the bleak anthropocentric futures of *The Road* or “The People of Sand and Slag.” The alternative is a world where the human is no longer privileged—a world where thoughtful, intentional, engagement with significant otherness cultivates a new love. As Haraway remarks about her relationship with her dog, Cheyanne Pepper, “Ours is not an innocent, unconditional love; the love that ties us is a natural-cultural practice that has redone us molecule by molecule. Reciprocal induction is the name of the game.” This love is a non-anthropocentric, non-narcissistic, love. A love of significant otherness, of relations not reflections. A love that is the result of an active practice by all participants. It is a non-narcissistic love because it is not a love based on similarities—on reflections. It is a love that is about alterity, about the dissimilar, the radically foreign. It is a love that does not result from commonalities, but instead results from reaching across the abyssal ruptures of species and choosing to engage in the co-constituting possibilities of an authentic love-in-otherness.

CHAPTER 5

They Never Wanted to be Human: Reconfiguring Species and Life at the Limit(s).

We weep for a bird's cry, but not for a fish's blood. Blessed are those with a voice. If the dolls could speak, no doubt they'd scream, "I didn't want to become human."

—Major Motoko Kusanagi, *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*

I think we ought to read only the kind of books that wound or stab us. If the book we're reading doesn't wake us up with a blow to the head, what are we reading for?....we need books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us.

—Franz Kafka, in a letter to Oskar Pollak

In Mamoru Oshii's anime film adaptation of Masamune Shirow's manga *Ghost in the Shell*, the protagonist, Major Mokoto Kusanagi, speculates about the identity and motive of a hacker that her police unit are pursuing and when asked for evidence to support her hypothesis by her partner, she responds: "Just a whisper. I hear it in my ghost."³⁵ This dissertation, although it is entirely concerned with American literature, also contains a whisper that is present in the "ghost" of each chapter—a

³⁵ In *Ghost in the Shell*, "ghost" is used to refer to whatever it is that creates the thing that we know as ourselves—our identity, our consciousness.

whisper that sustains and informs the identity of this work. With the exception of Franz Kafka's work, which has been thoroughly discussed by others such as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Ghost in the Shell* is the primary impetus for all my work. It is thinking with and about the *Ghost in the Shell* films and the original manga that has led me to consider the works in the previous chapters in the frameworks that I have.³⁶ Although thoroughly Japanese in aesthetics, *Ghost in the Shell*, which was the first anime film to have simultaneous theatrical release in the Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States, perfectly articulated the growing anxieties shared across cultures in the face of rapid technological development and globalization. In addition to not being an American text, *Ghost in the Shell* diverges from the works in the previous chapters because it does not feature any animals (there are some background strays and errant dog barks, but they are insignificant and do not interact with any characters). For these reasons, *Ghost in the Shell* may seem like an odd foundation for this conclusion—however, *Ghost in the Shell* is important because, unlike the previous works, it is not concerned with what is, but rather, with what will be. Like Ellison's "A Boy and his Dog," *Ghost in the Shell* imagines what comes after liberal humanism and biologism inevitably fail. Where *Ghost in the Shell (GITS)* differs from "A Boy and his Dog," besides the obvious inclusion of the information technologies that rapidly overtook society in the decades after Ellison's story was published, *GITS* is not the result of a cataclysmic event—there is no apocalypse—just

³⁶ This is of course, an oversimplification, as many others have significant influence, including Derrida, Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, et cetera. However, it is *Ghost in the Shell* and Franz Kafka's work that I am constantly circling back to—how does this new material apply to the *Ghost in the Shell* paradigm or address Kafka's "freedom on all sides" dilemma?

the gradual decline of liberal humanism and biologism in the face of technological advancement. *GITS* extends what Derrida hoped to accomplish in the *The Animal That Therefore I am* by seeking to push the anthropological limit and expand and multiply its figures. *GITS* imagines the future that evolves after the failures of liberal humanism and the biopolitical regime in the face of technology, and demonstrates the radical reconfiguration of species and the expansion of life that will result.

Major Kusanagi begins the film on the boundaries of the anthropological limit as a human that has a primarily synthetic body—she is a cyborg but her “ghost,” her consciousness and identity, remain human. In this sense she begins the film in a liberal humanist paradigm that is all encompassing and operates on the same inclusion of the exclusion that Morrison highlights in *Beloved*. The cybernetic body, her “shell,” is not unique and she even sees identical shells throughout her day-to-day life, which indicates that the practice of acquiring cybernetic bodies is not unique to Kusanagi and does not mark her as anything other than human. Kusanagi herself ponders what it means to be human in a biopolitical regime:

There are countless ingredients that make up the human body and mind, like all the components that make up me as an individual with my own personality. Sure I have a face and voice to distinguish myself from others, but my thoughts and memories are unique only to me, and I carry a sense of my own destiny. Each of those things are just a small part of it. I collect information to use in my own way. All of that blends to create a mixture that forms me and gives rise to my

conscience. I feel confined, only free to expand myself within boundaries.

A freedom to expand oneself only within boundaries is of course, not a freedom at all.³⁷ This scene serves a dual purpose in the film to highlight the individual anxiety Kusanagi feels as she brushes up against the limit, but also the same hopelessness that Sethe feels in *Beloved* under a biopolitical regime that operates on the inclusion of the exclusion and therefore eliminates the possibility of any sustained anomic space. Kusanagi is thus experiencing the limitation that results from the single indivisible limit of human/animal in liberal humanism in the sense that all her cybernetic enhancements bring her to the limit of what is human, but because the limit is single and indivisible, the only thing on the other side of the limit is animal, which of course, with rightful arrogance, the human does not desire to be. Therefore, it is Kusanagi's very humanness, her "ghost" that identifies as human, which limits her expansive possibilities and thus, limits her freedom. This also means that there is no outside—there is no anomic space of possibilities in which to expand.

Like Sethe, the lack of the possibility of an anomic space, combined with a confrontation with the anthropological limit, forces Kusanagi to commit an impossible act in order to create anomic space with which comes the possibility of freedom. Sethe's act in *Beloved* when Schoolteacher comes to take Sethe and her children back to the plantation—essentially Schoolteacher is acting to once again include the exclusion and eliminate anomie by reclaiming Sethe—is an act that is

³⁷ Here again we are reminded of Kafka's talking Ape, Red Peter, in "A Report to An Academy," who suggests that humans cannot know what true freedom is, a "freedom on all sides."

indecipherable under the current regime and therefore creates a momentary glitch, an opening for anomie. For Sethe, however, this glitch is indeed momentary and not a strike against the biopolitical regime or the liberal humanist paradigm. The regime goes on and slowly accounts for Sethe and compensates for the anomaly. Kusanagi also requires an impossible act to create an anomic space, however, her act is not an incomprehensible explosion of violence, but rather a more deliberate push against the anthropological limit.

When confronted with the anthropological limit Kusanagi's impossible act is the act of expanding and multiplying the figures of the anthropological limit. Like Derrida, Kusanagi sees the danger of a single and indivisible limit on which stands the human on one side and all biological life categorized as animal, on the other. Again, Derrida presents his work as follows: "Everything I'll say will consist, certainly not in effacing the limit, but in multiplying its figures, in complicating, thickening, delinearizing, folding, and dividing the line precisely by making it increase and multiply" (29). In the same way, Kusanagi, through her transgressive merger with Project 2501, performs the same work as Derrida in pushing the anthropological limit by expanding and multiplying its figures.

Derrida seeks this expansion of the limit and the multiplying of its figures by the insistence on recognizing the multiplicity of the species and the differences between them. Kusanagi and Project 2501 however, seek to expand the limit and multiply its figures by creating new figures and spaces—by creating that which does

not exist.³⁸ Of course, Kusanagi, as a cyborg, is reluctant to challenge the notion of her own humanness and it is only through contact and eventual merger with a radical alterity that she is able to accomplish her impossible act. In addition, Project 2501, by virtue of its own existence, expands and complicates the limit. As Project 2501 reveals itself it announces that “I am a living, thinking entity who was created in the sea of information.” This announcement shatters the notion of the limit being single and indivisible—or, for that matter, anthropological. The limit is no longer animal/human, it is animals/human/self-aware information (SAI).³⁹ By adding this third dimension the limit can no longer be seen as anthropological because it also exists between animal/self-aware information and therefore, Steinbeck’s suggestion that “one kind [of life] became different from all others” also no longer holds true. The abyssal rupture between human/animals also must exist between SAI/animals and SAI/humans and therefore at least two forms of life have become different from all others and it is only conceivable that this expansion will continue. This is why Steinbeck’s microbial ethics are important—when the human/animal binary is disrupted, when new life or life that already exist differentiates itself “from all others”—how does that affect ethics? This question is interesting not because of the speculation of how the human should account for Project 2501 in their ethics—but rather, what should Project 2501’s ethics be towards humans? Moreover, because it

³⁸ There is some contention about how to refer to Project 2501—the other characters refer to it as the “Puppet Master,” but they do so while assuming that it is a human that is hacking people’s ghosts. For this reason, “Puppet Master” is the common name attributed to the character, however, when it finally reveals itself, it refers to itself as Project 2501. Therefore, I have chosen to refer to it as Project 2501 as well.

³⁹ Project 2501 is not an Artificial Intelligence—it has not been programmed and created by humans, instead, it is a collection of code that became self-aware in “the sea of information.”

is only when Project 2501 chooses to instantiate itself in a robotic body that it possesses the ability to die, the ethics of Derrida/Wolfe which are based on finitude no longer apply. Finitude is a choice, not a defining feature—there is no shared vulnerability on which to base an ethic. Therefore, it is Steinbeck’s microbial ethics, which are centered on fortitude, not finitude, that are applicable to this new form (species?) of life. Ethical consistency derives from the idea the only duty of life—all life, from the microbial to uninstantiated lifeform of Project 2501 before it acquired a body—is to unite against the forces of unlife and persist.

This effort to persist, to go on, is the essential identifying characteristic of life—it is the only requirement for something to be considered living. Whereas, as Steinbeck argues during his Nobel speech, that humans have aligned themselves with the forces of unlife—Project 2501 seeks out Kusanagi because it has been surrounded by unlife (the dead space of unorganized information) and is seeking to unite with the forces of life to bear offspring into the currently dead “sea of information.” Project 2501 responds to Kusanagi’s suggestion that it simply replicate itself by stating that a “copy is just an identical image. There is the possibility that a single virus could destroy an entire set of systems and copies do not give rise to variety and originality. Life perpetuates itself through diversity and this includes the ability to sacrifice itself when necessary.” Project 2501’s intention then is to merge with Kusanagi not to enhance their own being, but rather to propagate the net with their offspring—to start a new species, a new evolutionary line. In doing so, however, they must sacrifice themselves. Kusanagi, as a cyborg, is understandably reluctant to

give up her stake on her humanness and asks for a guarantee that her identity is not radically altered. Project 2501 responds “There isn't one [a guarantee]. Why would you wish to? All things change in a dynamic environment. Your effort to remain what you are is what limits you.” In other words, Kusanagi’s very humanness, and her resistance to being seen as something other than human, is preventing her from evolving. If she wants to expand beyond the boundaries of the anthropological limit, she must be willing to no longer be human—to be radical alterity and thus expanding the limit beyond the anthropological. In addition, their offspring will create new dimensions to the limit, new folds and possible entanglements. The film ends with the merged being of Kusanagi/Project 2501 being instantiated into another body, a child’s body, and Kusanagi asking: “And where does the newborn go from here? The net is vast and infinite.” In the same way that the net is “vast and infinite,” the limit and its figures are now also vast and infinite—with the ever present possibility of once again expanding.

Kusangi and Project 2501 are unique and important because they do not come after the apocalypse. Whereas “A Boy and his Dog” present a similar story—a post-liberal humanist paradigm—the trauma of the apocalypse is ever present. Although the apocalypse does open up possibility for new forms of interspecies relationship and the non-narcissistic love between Vic and Blood, it also obliterates the limit, which as Derrida correctly identifies, inevitably leads to atrocities. Because Kusanagi and Project 2501 do not experience the apocalypse, the limit is not obliterated, only complicated and expanded. All the progress of modernity does not

simply cease to exist like after an apocalypse, but instead, it evolves, its changes in a dynamic environment. Project 2501 demonstrates the force of Steinbeck's microbial ethics and Project 2501's merger with Kusanagi demonstrates the need for the expansion of the limit and the multiplying of its figures. Though an apocalypse is always an unfortunate possibility, it is not a foregone conclusion. What *GITS* does so well is that it foresees productive possibilities for the creation of anomic space, where new relationships and entanglements can unfold without the burden of the liberal humanist epoch upon it.

AbEnd: Abnormal End of Task⁴⁰

Ghost in the Shell is of course a work of Science Fiction, however, like all good Science Fiction, much of its speculation is not based on outlandish fantasy, but rather, on imagining how current paradigms and technologies will play out. The core realities of the *Ghost in the Shell* world are not dissimilar to our own—technology is rapidly advancing and with it, the distance between cultures, between people, are vanishing. While some may argue that the advancement of technology has led to increasing isolation for individuals, it is a difficult argument to maintain under scrutiny. Consider as an example a child growing in rural Wyoming in 1965; now contrast that with a child growing up in rural Wyoming with the internet in 2015;

⁴⁰ AbEnd is the error message that IBM OS/360 machines used to signal an “abnormal end” to a software program. Abend has something of mythology around it, and a bizarre subculture of primarily Novell network administrators (Novell also used abend as an error), one of more interesting items of abend folklore is that IBM wanted to avoid using “abort” because at the time the US was in the midst of a heated debate about abortion rights when OS/360 was being developed.

which child is more isolated? Which child is more likely to encounter and interact with a diverse range of ideas and people? The child on the farm with 3 television channels and a radio, or the child with Facebook, Snapchat, various messaging platforms, Youtube, Reddit, Twitch, and so on and so forth. Clearly the child with the internet—perhaps better stated as the child of the internet—is the less isolated individual in terms of exposure to a diverse range of ideas and information and the ability to interact with a seemingly infinite number of people and discourses. Of course another argument is that these connections and interactions are more superficial and psychologically less fulfilling, which may be true, but that is not a question within the scope of this dissertation. What matters for this dissertation is that of possibility—the possibility for anomic space outside of the liberal humanist paradigm.

The internet has in and of itself, largely been an anomic space. Although corporate behemoths such as Alphabet (Google's parent company), Twitter, and Facebook dominate the narrative, they are the actual outliers. The majority of the web is comprised of personal websites, blogs, small business web pages, etcetera, not to mention email communications, Internet Relay Chat (IRC), the so-called "dark web" (Tor network of .onion sites) and so on. In addition, though a few major corporations control a large share of the web's traffic, many of the web servers, and they are almost exclusively our Internet Service Providers, the resilience of WikiLeaks, the existence of the TOR network and continued ease of obtaining copyrighted material through easily searched torrent networks, demonstrate that for

the most part, the internet continues to be an anomic space. Further evidence of the anomic character of the internet is the yearly alphabet bills (SOPA, PIPA, CISPA, CISA, etcetera) that seek to bring the internet under control of the government and the use of trade agreements, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (from the little that WikiLeaks, not the participating governments, has made available to read), to close off the internet and bring it under control.

The assault on the anomic space of the internet has also been paired with “ag-gag” laws in various states in an attempt to criminalize animal welfare advocates that document animal abuse on factory farms. The New York Times points out that these bills are extensions of the American Legislative Exchange Council’s, a massive pro-business lobby group, model bill, “The Animal and Ecological Terrorism Act.”⁴¹ The labeling of Animal Welfare advocates as terrorists simply for recording the abuse of animals seems like a hyperbolic reaction, however it is not just the recording of the abuse—it is the recording of the abuse combined with the ability to upload to the web and share via Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, or whatever platform is popular at the time, that is so threatening. Where powerful industry and government used to have control over the dissemination of information—especially video information—the internet has provided an anomic space outside the Sovereign(s)’ control. It is in these anomic spaces that possibility arises. Who knows what the results of millions of views of factory farming abuses will be. Maybe a child sees one of those videos and tells

⁴¹ Oppel, Richard. "Taping of Farm Cruelty Is Becoming the Crime." The New York Times. The New York Times, 6 Apr. 2013. Web. 31 Oct. 2015.

their parents that they are going vegetarian—maybe they illegally torrent Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* and then Derrida, and then Haraway—maybe they invent a vegan whole meal replacement designed to be cheap and ecologically sustainable, like Soylent. The point is that the possibilities exist because of the anomic space that is the internet. The attempts to criminalize and close the off the internet by various governments (and corporations) are attempts by the Sovereign to account for the anomaly and find a way to include the current exclusion.

Just as Critical Animal Studies is entwined with Technology/Information Studies, so too are the productive possibilities of literature and the internet. Literature can be a space of anomie in the same way that the internet is—they both serve as productive spaces of possibilities, as ways to go beyond, to think anew. They are spaces of pure engagement and possibilities of engaging otherness. Combined with the increasing freedom from publishers that the internet provides—anyone can publish anything now and get them before the eyes of millions of people—the anomic possibilities of literature have only increased. While many may take Kafka’s proclamation at the beginning of this chapter to be hyperbolic or the naiveté of a twenty-year-old writer, this dissertation takes it as a serious statement on literature. Literature must “affect us like a suicide” in the sense that we cannot, like Major Kusanagi, wish to remain what we are. The anomic space provided by literature and the internet are only useful if we are willing to sacrifice what we already are—to give up on previous paradigms, regimes and identities—to become “newborns.” If we take literature, our relationships with other species, and anomic space of the internet

seriously, then the possibilities of expanding the limit, multiplying its figures and challenging the current regimes become tangible—realizable achievements. The bleak vision of life on the precipice that Steinbeck alludes to in his Nobel speech, where humans have aligned themselves with the forces of unlife, is not the present reality. Instead of the inevitable nuclear apocalypse, our technology, particularly biotechnology, promotes and enhances life and promotes the possibilities of new life (a new evolutionary chain) like Project 2501. Instead of inevitable nuclear annihilation, we have Project 2501. Our possibilities are “vast and infinite,” we just have to decide where we newborns “go from here.”

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